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**The Gendered City: The politics of violence against women in Mexico  
City's public transit system**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Amy Dunckel Graglia**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Sociology**

Stony Brook University

**May 2014**

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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**Amy Dunckel Graglia**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Sociology**

Stony Brook University

**2014**

According to the World Health Organization as of 2010 more people live in cities than ever before. And yet, also according to them, women are one of the least likely groups to control the wealth and power that is produced in these metropolises. How are women excluded from equal right to the city? Why is gender inequality in cities so persistent and difficult for women to overcome?

This research looks at the case of Mexico City –one of the largest cities in the world, hailed as an economic hub for Latin America– to answer these questions. In the last decade Mexico City, like many other cities around the world, has seen a rise of public violence against women, forcing it to segregate its public transportation system. The city is now filled with women-only buses, taxis, and underground metro cars. Both the violence and harassment against women in transportation and women-only transportation as a solution tell us something about the gendered nature of the city.

By analyzing violence against women and women-only transportation as a solution, this dissertation comes to three conclusions about the relationship between gender-based violence and women's equal right to the city. First, that the city is a highly gendered place and not a gender-neutral one, creating social systems that foster long-term gender inequality. Secondly, that public violence against women acts as a forms of gender discrimination, limiting women's equal rights to urban resources and opportunities. And, lastly that new forms of feminism in the city will emerge in reaction to this type of oppression, manifesting themselves into public, social movements for gender equality.

## **Dedication Page**

I dedicate this to my family who constantly remind me to reach higher. And to Professor Mercedes Barquet, at El Colegio de México, who passed away December 17, 2012. She was my friend and ally in Mexico City, and I will always do my best to make her proud.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CEPAL: Undécima Conferencia Regional sobre la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe (regional conference on gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean).

CONAPRED: Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (National Board for the Prevention of Discrimination).

CONAVIM: Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres (Federal Institute for the Eradication of Violence Against Women).

INMUJERES: Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Institute for Women).

TAPO: Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente (East Passenger Bus Terminal)

RINDE: Reporte de Índice Delictivo de la Ciudad de México (Criminal Report Index for Mexico City)

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the American Association of University Women (AAUW). This institution not only supports the work of women and fights incredible hard for equality, but believed in me and my research enough to give me the funding required to write this manuscript. With out them, and both the emotional and monetary support that they gave, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Secondly, I would like to thank all of the members on my dissertation committee. Together, you are the academic giants who lifted me to higher grounds. Separately you each devoted so much of your time and energy to this project that I need to express a separate gratitude to each of you.

Professor Michael Kimmel, you knew exactly the right type of guidance to give. You are one of the best leaders that I have ever had the pleasure of following. Your encouragement is subtle, but powerful. And any greatness that may lie within these pages is inspired by you.

Carlos Decena, thank you for always being there, both as my mentor and my friend. Sometimes dissertation questions arose, which need immediate attention and you were always there to answer them. Other times I simply needed to talk. In any case, you are always in my corner. You make me proud to know you and inspire me to do better.

Professor Daniel Levy, I was told by many students at Stony Brook that you would be my greatest asset on the dissertation committee. During the completion of this dissertation, you were much more, reading anything that I sent you, letting me call you with questions, and even willing to meet me in the middle of Brooklyn on your day off if it meant you could help. You are full of patience, great advice, and somehow, time which you always selflessly extend to you students.

John Shandra, you have helped me with so many things, including putting together questionnaires, databases, quantitative problems. You have shown extraordinary patience in having to constantly re-teach an ethnographer how to include statistics in her research. But more than that, you are a great friend. I trust and value your advice and opinions more than my own.

Professor Zsuzsa Berend, I have so many reasons to thank you, including that I never would have made it this far if you had not crossed my path. But even after you saw me through undergraduate school, you stayed with me, gave me advice, and shared life lessons. You are a true mentor from the beginning to the end. And I am very grateful to have you in my life.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank Stony Brook University and the Sociology Department for having the confidence in me and the patience to shape me into the sociologists that I am today. I hope that I make you proud.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Exploring the Gendered City

If there is one agreeable fact about urban spaces it is that they are constantly in flux, always having the potential to develop, change and be molded into something new. The noted urban sociologist Robert Park stated that it is within these spaces that we are able to organize our existence, arguing that the city cannot be separated from man's attempt to make the world and social relations into whatever he desires (Park 1967). While this somewhat utopian thought gives us hope that the city can be anything we desire, we must also keep in mind that, like any social institution, the development of the city is a socially stratified process, where very few have influence over the final product. As David Harvey puts it 'to have claim to the city is also to have power over the processes of urbanization, over the ways in which our cities, and therefore our societies and our identities, are made and remade (2012).'

There has been a recent recognition to understand these problems through a gendered lens, exploring how cities exclude women. Research today that focuses on building safe cities for women expands into areas of public violence and the ways in which that violence excludes women from equal right to the city. This research is grounded in a systemic rights-based approach to women's safety that recognizes diversity and emphasizes the need to work towards more equitable access to the opportunities that cities can offer for women.

But this is a growing research field that still needs considerable work. Unlike studying the marginalization of groups by race and class, gender has been a difficult indicator to measure. International organizations working towards building gender equal cities, such as the Inclusive Cities Project and United Nations Women, argue that we still need a lot of theoretical work in order to develop measurable and meaningful indicators that will help us understand and resolve issues concerning women and urban equality. This dissertation serves as a step in that direction. It starts by tracing our current understanding of urban inequality, and then extends it into work that has already been done by urban feminists.

***The Spatial Isolation Perspective: Urban inequality and the role of community***

How do we understand claim to the city? What are the social processes that let some groups decide what 'the world' and 'social relations' should look like, while marginalizing the rest?

Without setting out to answering these exact questions, in the 1960s the Chicago School set us on a path to explore urban inequality in terms of spatial segregation, where social differences are explained in spatial differences (Burgess 1967, McKenzie 1967, Spear 1967). They argued that separate communities naturally develop within the city, like organisms in nature. These separate communities foster the production of subcultures and differences between groups, ultimately creating an invisible wall where physical boundaries maintain and reproduce social boundaries.

The study of urban enclaves has since taken more elaborate turns. Urban scholars have dropped the analogy between organisms in nature and the human condition and instead have begun looking at the intrinsic relationship between urban resources and spatialized inequalities (Joseph 2008, Tonkiss 2006). Urban research covers many aspects of spatialized inequality, but can be generalized into two ways in which scholars have thought about urban inequality over the past four or five decades. One side puts the city at the center of the analysis with a Marxian perspective on urbanization, where the urban development intertwines with the general laws of motion of capital (Elliot and Urry 2010, Harvey 2012, Whitehead 2013). In general this research shows how minority groups fill a need in the urban economy, becoming systems of exploitation, where the city can both maintain a proletariat class to fulfill production needs, as well as have a consumer class to absorb production (Merrifield 2013). Here it is argued that these processes promote urban production and consumption at the cost of “exacerbating social inequalities” (Fainstein 2010) and “splintering urban life” (Graham and Marvin 2001).

The other side of this research looks at the spatialization of these social inequalities, showing how the spatial exclusion of marginalized groups is the main factor in the reproduction of an urban under class. These studies demonstrate the detrimental influence of residential segregation on poor inner-city residents (Massey and Denton 2010, Wacquant 2008). One's *membership in a community* either entrap sa person in generational cycles of inequality, or it can give them the key to the city, where they become a primary decision maker in its development. In this sense, communities are not only visual representations of the splintered city, but they are

also the key to understanding how social inequality is maintained and reproduced (Bourgois 2003, Klinenberg 2003).

Group exclusion from social communities is often represented in their exclusion from the place in which those communities formulate. We have seen plenty of examples of this in the United States, where African Americans struggle to legitimately enter white, upperclass spaces (Massey and Denton 2010). Take for example the case of Henry Louis Gates, an African American, Harvard professor who was arrested at his Cambridge home on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2009. Professor Gates arrived to his home around noon after returning from a trip to China to find his door jammed. Gates and his driver were struggling to unlock the door when a neighbor called the police. The authorities arrived and arrested Professor Gates without any inquiry. Even more tragic was the recent case of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American gunned down in a gated community where he was temporarily staying. In Trayvon's case, the mismatch a young black man *rightfully* belonging to a gated community was so strong in the minds of the public that a jury would later acquit his shooter, George Zimmerman, for second-degree murder.

Theory and practice suggests that the exclusion of a group extends beyond geography and community inclusion and into areas of political control (Olcott 2005), economic opportunities (Massey and Denton 2010), access to healthcare (Klinenberg 2003), and global opportunities (Elliot and Urry 2010). Urban scholars explain that communities are the sites for the production of social and cultural capital that grant individuals right to the city and access urban opportunities. Gated communities, unlike ghettos, are loaded with educational resources, job and networking opportunities. In this sense, the guardsmen of gated communities, like the one who shot Trayvon Martin, are not only the protectors of secluded lifestyle, but also of the social and economic opportunities provided by the city. By guarding that space and keeping it excluded he was practicing what Charles Tilly refers to as the basis for *durable inequalities*, where one groups seeks to maintain control over power and production, using exclusionary practices and hoarding resources (Tilly 1999).

This is a theoretical area where urban Marxists (Hayden 2002; Harvey 2012) agree with urban theorists who take a more Bourdieuan approach to urban inequality (Wacquant 2008; Bourgois 2003). Where Bourdieuan's look at the relationship between culture and spatial entrapment, Marxists look at how that culture is carried over into a segregated labor market,

which pays laborers in terms of valued cultures vs. non-valued ones. Take for example Philippe Bourgois's ethnography of an isolated black neighborhood in New York City. Bourgois shows how an inner-city street culture develops as a result of the isolation and alienation experienced in Spanish Harlem. In turn, the culture of selling drugs creates its own sense of respect and business skills that the men from this neighborhood were not receiving from society at large. A street culture, argues Bourgois, is non-transferable to the legitimate market, further isolating this group from the rest of society (2003).

Where this research has primarily been driven by racial and economic inequality in the city, the question of this dissertation is one of gender. Specifically, are these discriminatory practices, using urban community membership, also gendered?

The idea of valued cultures in the labor market was extended to women in 1980s when Dolores Hayden made a case for the spatial isolation of suburban housewives (1981). She argued that suburbia could be considered a place of spatial entrapment for women, where gender inequalities embedded in capitalism were maintained by devaluing the culture of suburban women. The suburbs not only geographically distanced women from good jobs that remained in the urban centers, but also fostered a culture that placed a premium on the nuclear family with the husband as sole breadwinner (Hanson & Pratt 1988, Hayden 1981, Villeneuve and Rose 1988, White 1988). The labor market praised the work of men, while using the culture of suburban women to drive down wages in jobs that were relabeled as “women's work.”

### ***The, Ever So Short, Shortcomings of the Spatial Isolation of Women Perspective***

The similarities between Bourgois's case in Spanish Harlem and Hayden's suburbia are astonishing, and an impressive achievement in moving gender issues into the urban discussion. Both demonstrate the powerful relationship between urban spatial isolation and access to the city's economy. First, they agree that the local community reproduces a “sub-culture,” which can then be used by the labor market to drive down wages. Secondly, they show how both minority groups fit a need in the urban economy, where the locally produced sub-cultures becomes systems of exploitation and a way for the city to maintain both a proletariat class to fulfill production needs, as well as a consumer class to absorb production (Harvey 2012). It making this connection, Dolores Hayden was one of the first feminist to demonstrate that the same urban

processes that oppressed racial minorities for the purpose of maintaining urban capitalist growth, were also oppressing women for the same reasons.

While this was one of the first and greatest breakthroughs in feminist thought on urban inequality, the “pink-collar ghetto”<sup>1</sup> theory does not hold up in the long term. Its greatest weakness is the inability to take into consideration the connection between all community resources and the production of a sub-culture. Resources are not only hoarded by some groups, but also the key to *durable inequalities* (in Tilly's sense of the term). To elaborate, if the sub-culture of a community is to be used as the backbone of explaining inequality, then the city must be viewed as a quilt, where each patch has a finite amount of power and resources. *Resources, such as good jobs, housing, schools, security, and medical care, refer the institutions that produce the culture of each community.* That culture is either a “normal” culture –a valued culture transferable to economic opportunities– or it becomes a sub-culture. As it is argued by Urban Marxists sub-cultures are devalued by the urban economy and help (re)produce the proletariat class (Hayden 2002, Harvey 2012). Communities which begin with very little resources or very little power to determine which cultural institutions are valued (be it the black ghettos in the US, favelas in Brazil, or Banlieue in France) are doomed to vicious cycles of poverty and powerlessness (Keith 2005; Massey & Denton 1993; Wacquant 2008).

The main problem with comparing a favela, for example, to suburbia is that these institutions are highly racialized and classed (even more so than they are gendered). Women in suburbia have access to cultural resources that women in the favela do not. Here, a Black woman and a white woman would have vastly different relationships to the city, where gender is subordinate to race and class in terms of how she experiences the city, and the culture and community in which she belongs.

It is for this very reason that “the pink-collar ghetto” does not reproduce long-term gender inequality that is comparable to racial ghettos. In fact, for suburban women it was not statistically true that their culture and their physical distance to high paying jobs rendered them in a position of spatial isolation that would later be difficult to overcome. When there was a shift

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The exploration of the sub-cultures of suburban housewives is later coined “pink-collar ghetto” by Kim England who evaluates the spatial-entrapment-of-women thesis (1993).



in the economy and women from the suburbs were forced to seek out higher paying jobs in order to maintain living costs, it was clear that the notion of spatial isolation was exaggerated (England 1993; Dowling 1998; Dyck 1989). This is clearly not the case with members from “outcast communities” (Wacquant 2008) who are proven to live in persistent cycles of poverty that are extremely difficult to overcome.

This dissertation rethinks the “gendered nature of the city” by exploring the “feminine sub-culture” in a place other than the community. It argues that *urban inequality should not be considered gendered unless women as a whole are denied access to the same place and resources located in that place*. Her exclusion from that place and her limited access to the resource are the roots for creating a sub-culture among women that then becomes the basis for understanding how the city discriminates against women.

It begs the question then, how do we consider urban inequality for women in a way where race and class (the defining characteristics of spatial segregation) do not trump gender? To put it in the context of Professor Gates and Trayvon Martin, *in what scenario would a poor, Black woman be excluded (even violently removed) from a valued, urban place because of her gender and not her race and class?*

### ***Transportation: The exclusion of women from places of mobility***

While there are dozens of places around the world where women as a group are systematically denied access (Spain 1992), this dissertation is specifically interested in places of transit. Today, women from different cultures, countries, class backgrounds, and racial heritages are all facing an unprecedented battle for equal right to transportation. In some of these countries, where gender superiority is enshrined in law, women find themselves in a violent battle for equal mobility.

At the beginning of 2013 the mayor of Lhokseumawe, in Aceh, Indonesia, announced that he would push for a law prohibiting women from straddling motorcycles or bicycles. “When you see a woman straddle,” Suaidi Yahya said in a press conference, “she looks like a man. But if she sits side-saddle, she looks like a woman.”<sup>2</sup> When Yahya made the announcement to have women ride side-saddle to *protect their femininity*.

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<sup>2</sup> Staff Writer, “Indonesia city to ban women 'straddling motorbikes.' BBC News Asia, January 3, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20896966>

Nearly 5000 miles away in Saudi Arabia, women fight for an equal access to transit on several levels. First, it is illegal for a woman to apply for a driver's license. This forces working women to rely heavily on public transportation, which has also proven to be extremely problematic. Mainly in terms of conflicts with their husband, or guardian, that emerge with the possibility of strange men staring at them while they travel. Private bus systems who cater to women have attempted to resolve these issues and keep women as their main clients by tinting their windows. While the tinted windows resolved superficial problems of Saudi women's mobility, it did not resolve the deeper issues of gender inequality which are at constant work to demobilize women. The result has been a ban on tinted windows on buses, giving transit authorities the power to stop buses carrying women and hold them for indefinite periods of time. Hamdan Al-Khudaidi, a bus driver who frequently picks up female teachers told the Saudi Gazette, "There has been a noticeable increase in inspections of buses carrying female teachers at checkpoints on both the Taif-Riyadh and the Southern roads which in turn causes teachers to be late for classes."<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the formal regulations banning women's access to transportation, there are plenty of cases where women are also violently removed from transit spaces. These include a series of attacks against women on public transportation, such as the horrific gang rape and death of an Indian medical student who was taking the bus home with her male friend last December of 2012. And the recent rise of attacks against women in Juarez, Mexico, who risk their lives every time they board a bus after a late shift in the maquiladora.

These attacks have led to a global recognition of violence towards women in public transit systems around the world. Within the last 10-15 years gendered crime in buses, subways, and taxis have greatly altered women's travel behaviors. In response, metropolises have begun to build, or are expanding, women-only transit services. In 2006, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo Brazil implemented women-only subway cars and buses because of the aggression.<sup>4</sup> Around the

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Awaal, Rabi, "Drivers denounce ban on tinted windows." Saudi Gazette. January 18, 2013. <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20130118149666>

<sup>4</sup> Associated Press Staff, "Brazil city ready to introduce women-only buses." NBC News. November 17, 2006. [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15772398/ns/world\\_news-americas/t/brazil-city-ready-introduce-women-only-buses/#.UQKweqHm5HI](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15772398/ns/world_news-americas/t/brazil-city-ready-introduce-women-only-buses/#.UQKweqHm5HI)

same time Lahore, Pakistan issued their first fleets of women-only public transportation.<sup>5</sup> And in reaction to the recent tragedy in Delhi, India has announced expanding their already existing women-only transportation systems.<sup>6</sup> And these are just a few of the dozens of cities who are adopting women-only buses, subway cars, taxis, and trains. Likewise, in Britain women's search for violent free mobility has led to the creation of a women-only taxi services, called Pink Ladies – a private club owning a fleet of bubble-gum cabs which are driven by women for other women.

### ***The Gendered City: An alternative perspective***

The violent removal of women from public places is an alternative perspective to studying the relationship between spatial inequality and urban inequality. That is, we do not have to study spatial segregation in its traditional sense in order to reach the same conclusion about the urban stratification of women. In fact, this trajectory has been proven slippery. It is for this reason that this research proposes an alternative perspective, looking instead at the spatial exclusion of women and the production of gender differences that are produced by excluding women from these places. With that in mind, this dissertation asks: how does the exclusion of women from a public place create gender differences that then lead to inequality between men and women's equal right to urban opportunities?

This question requires a three-fold research question. 1) How are women excluded or even violently removed from public places? 2) How does this exclusion produce a gendered culture that helps the city differentiate between men and women, where women are grouped as part of a subordinate class (or the undervalued, proletariat, or as 'the others'), and men on the other hand are cast as the dominant group (or the qualified or the ruling class)? 3) How do these distinguishing gendered cultures translate into urban inequality between men and women, where men have more of a right to the city and its opportunities than women?

### ***Gendered spaces***

In 1974 Henri Lefebvre wrote a 434 page manuscript, called *The Production of Space*, explaining how places have the potential to embody a 'culture' or a set of social guidelines that then guide the behavior of individuals within that space. The book argues that places are just as

<sup>5</sup> Sani, Saifullah, "Ladies-only buses launched in Lahore to save women from sexual harassment." Pakistan Defence, Discussion in 'Social Issues & Current Events.' January 7, 2012. <http://www.defence.pk/forums/social-issues-current-events/151677-ladies-only-buses-launched-lahore-save-women-sexual-harassment.html>

<sup>6</sup> Yardley, Jim, "Indian women find new peace in rail commute." New York Times. September 15, 2009.

social as human beings and therefore need to be included in any social analysis. Lefebvre gives us the tools to include places in our social analyses by refuting the notion that space is a strictly geometrical concept, arguing instead that 'space, is also a social concept constructed from human relationships' (1974), where the culture of place has the power to control people's behaviors and inform society. For example, the culture of a classroom develops from the interaction between student and teacher, creating a "norm" from which to guide the behavior of the actors. We act a certain way when we enter each place, because cultural precedence has been set that tells us what we are supposed to use that space for and how we should go about doing it. Each place is filled with cultural ideologies that are protected by the way we behave in each place. The *socialization of space* is a way of analyzing those ideologies.

Because the culture of a place develops from everyday interactions then social inequalities also become a part of that space. For example, if public spaces are defined by heterosexual norms, then public displays of homosexuality –two men holding hands, kissing, or hugging– are considered abnormal behaviors. Individuals from the gay community will alter their behavior in places that are cultural defined as heterosexual through a number of actions that are interpreted as "heterosexual," be acting differently, dressing differently, or refraining from showing any signs that might allude to their lifestyle.

In the 1990s feminist geographers applied this same logic to public places, creating an alternative perspective for analyzing the spatial exclusion of women. Their research has shown that women are excluded from urban activities via the masculinization of public places (Bondi 2005, Pain 2001, Valentine 1992). In this research the spatial representation of patriarchy can be found in women's fear of public places. Women's fear of rape and violence causes them to change their behaviors in places, either refusing to go into feared places alone –particularly at night– or to avoid them altogether. Women's inability to use public spaces in the same way as men creates a type of spatial exclusion, where women have less access and freedom in public places than men.

### *Production of gendered cultures*

It is not enough to look at the spatial exclusion of women in order to understand the gendered city. Rather one needs to explore how a gendered culture is produced by not giving women equal access to public places. This section discusses three cases where researches have

found that the spatial exclusion of women through the masculinization of public places, creates a feminine sub-culture.

The first example can be found in 1992 Daphne Spain published *Gendered Spaces*. Through a cross-cultural analysis of a range of spaces, from the Tibetan tent to the chemistry laboratory at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Spain shows how the spatial exclusion of women occurs at a much more micro-level than it does for racial minorities. For example, Spain shows how the Mongolian *ger* is organized with a female and male side. The female's side is equipped with kitchen aids, sewing machines, and family goods. The male side, on the other hand, holds the resources that are valued by society. "Because books," she says "contain religious and historical knowledge, Mongolian women historically have been forbidden to read them" (Spain 1992: 39). That is, in order to prevent women from accessing valued resources—in the same way that valued resources are housed in upper-class communities and denied to lower-class communities—resources should be kept in places that exclude women. It was only after the 'revolution *when female literacy was a goal* that the books were moved to the women's side of the parental bed' (Spain 1992: 40). By withholding books—i.e. valued resources—traditional Mongolia was able to categorically group women as illiterate, regardless of age, marital status, and skin tone. And with that, Spain gives us proof of that gender differences are reproduced in spatial differences.

Another example of this connection can be found in Jocelyn Olcott's history book, *Revolutionary Women in Post Revolutionary Mexico*. Her book shows how women's fight for public space became the field from which women's suffrage plays out in Mexico. The household was considered a "woman's place," reinforcing her role as mother, wife, and caregiver. Whereas politics and social decisions were discussed in more masculine places, such as cantinas (traditional Mexican bar) and billiard halls, two places that have traditionally banned women from entering. The exclusion of women from cantinas not only limited her ability to become a part of the political community, but it also reinforced a cultural difference between men and women, where women were seen as household figures and not political ones. Women's fight to enter traditionally all-male places, essentially was a fight to re-identify herself as more than just a mother and caregiver, but also a political and social leader.

Lastly, an article published by Jennifer Wesely and Emily Gaarder called, *The Gendered Nature of the Urban Outdoors*, shows how women's fear of gender-based violence in public parks limits women's ability to use outdoor recreation to build their confidence. Wesely argues that outdoors and recreational activities have been heralded as empowering for women. Yet women's feelings of vulnerability to sexual assault limits women's ability to places where she access natural spaces, such as parks, “temper[ing] the benefits and rewards of outdoor recreation for women” (2004:645). Denying women equal access to the urban outdoors disempowers her, which then of course can be extended into other aspects of her life.

### *The gendered city*

It is here where the urban perspective on inequality can now be applied to women. Once there has been a cultural difference produced in spatial differences between men and women, we can now analyze how that culture either grants or denies women access to urban opportunities. To recap, urban scholars who study the relationship between culture and spatial entrapment look at how each culture is carried over into a segregated labor market. Differences between groups are seen as either *valued cultures* vs. *non-valued ones*. Understanding the gendered city means exploring how the cultural differences that are produced in the exclusion of women also exclude women from equal right to urban opportunities.

### *A theoretical guideline for exploring the gendered city: gender-based violence in transit*

This research explores the three stages of urban inequality in order to understand how a city can be gendered. Specifically, the following 3 chapters look at:

- 1) Masculinization of transportation, where gender-based violence in places of transit is a symptom of gender inequalities that characterize that space.
- 2) Production of gender differences among transit users, where men and women experience mobility differently. Consequently each group alters their behaviors according to their experience, which in turn produces distinct cultures between them.
- 3) The worth of these cultures and the degree to which they are valued (or devalued) in the market place and transferable to other urban opportunities.

### ***Mexico City and the Plan of this Manuscript***

Gender-based violence in Mexico City makes women's daily travel patterns and behaviors more complex than men, where men prioritize speed and women security. According to the National

Institute for Women (INMUJERES) 9 out of every 10 women living in Mexico City will be sexually attacked while using public transportation (Zermeño Núñez and Plácido Ríos 2010: 10). Additionally, there is a widespread belief in Mexican society that women bring violence and harassment upon themselves through 'inappropriate' dress or behavior (Dunckel Graglia 2013). The hostility towards women commuters even extends into the household: a study conducted by the National Board for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) in 2010 found that 40 per cent of women in Mexico must ask their husband for permission to leave the house alone at night (Bucio Mújica and Fix-Fierro 2010: 72).

Gender-based violence in public transportation in Mexico City has a major impact on women. In this study, gender-based violence is defined as any form of physical or mental aggression towards women passengers. These include all acts of sexual harassment, from inappropriate staring or comments, to more violent attacks on women's bodies or ripping at their clothing. Within the last decade, gender-based violence in public transportation has reached unprecedented levels, forcing policy makers to create women-only sections throughout Mexico City's public buses, metro (underground), and recently in taxis. However, there were no significant nor positive results from this policy. In 2008 a study from National Board for the Prevention of Discrimination was conducted, showing that violence against women in public transportation was not decreasing. In fact, the report showed that 9 out of 10 women will have been a victim of some type of sexual violence in her lifetime. In the year the study was conducted, 8 out of 10 woman had been a victim of sexual crime, 43.8% having suffered 4 or more violent situations, and 10% having suffered 7 or more (Zermeño Núñez & Plácido Ríos 2010, pp 13).

In response to these findings, policy makers in Mexico City broadened its scope on how to address the issue of violence, taking heed from international discussions of public violence against women (Dunckel Graglia 2013). In the 1990s, the Mexican National Institute for the Protection of Women, including the federal women's body Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (INMUJERES) and the Federal Institute for the Eradication of Violence Against Women (Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres - CONAVIM) took part in two important global discussions on women's rights. These were the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995; the Convention of the Americas on

the prevention and eradication of violence against women, held in Brazil on June 9, 1994 (Convención de Belém Do Pará); and the CEPAL regional conference on gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean (Undécima Conferencia Regional sobre la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe). These conferences helped create impetus for reassessment of the problems of gender-based violence in Mexico City's public transportation.

At the turn of the new century, policy makers and feminist groups began formally recognizing public transportation in Mexico City as a dangerous place for women, affecting their equal right to participate in urban life. In the year 2000 a formal platform for women's equal right to mobility was created when the subway system dedicated two cars in each subway train for women; and women-only bus lines were launched. In the year 2008 a new campaign emerged that put women's equal right to mobility at the heart of the problem, launching *Viajemos Seguras* (We Women Travel Safely) as the driving program to recast gender-based violence in transportation as a form of discrimination. Today Mexico City battles an ideological battle, where gender-based violence as an acceptable form of action since women could be blamed for the attacks are crumbling under new possibilities of gender equal and women's equal right to the city.

In order to understand these issues, this research draws from ethnographical techniques, surveys, and interviews (discussed in the methodology section at the end of this dissertation). The primary data for this book is taken from three years of ethnographic research, journaling my experiences and conversations with other women in public transportation. During this time, I took detailed notes of how women taught me how to transform my own body in order to protect myself while traveling. I have accumulated countless commuting hours and conducted hundreds of short informal interviews with women, traveling from one edge of the city to the next. This portion of the research not only exposes the depth of the gendered boundaries of mobility, but also the degree to which women are held responsible for their own safety. Supplemental data is taken from interviews with policy makers, feminist groups, and women and men commuters. Additionally, I have collected and coded over 400 comments posted online by Mexican citizens on the use of women-only transit services as a solution to the violence against women. Survey data, crimes statistics, and interviews by INMUJERES between the years 2007-2011 are also



incorporated here. Lastly, a short survey about women's feelings and expectations of traveling in Mexico City was conducted among 125 women commuters.

The rest of this manuscript lays out that data to show how public transportation is a highly gendered and contested place for gender issues. Chapter two describes the masculinization of public transportation. It explores the ways in which traditional gender roles come to define the culture of places of transit, focusing on four ways in which women's access to transportation is limited: 1) her role as a wife and mother, 2) gender-based violence, 3) legal support for the violence, 4) and cultural support which blames women, teaching them to avoid travel rather than teaching men to respect women.

Chapter three discusses how gender-based violence in transportation and women's role as caregiver create perceived differences between men and women's ability travel. It argues that the inequalities and exclusion from places of transit create *sub-culture* among women that labels them as *immobile*. On the other hand, man-on-women violence allows men to reproduce their own masculinity, while defining transportation as hyper-masculine places – i.e. places not suited for women. Both the hyper-masculinization of transportation and the sub-culture of immobility among women reinforce gender differences in travel, making it easier to exclude women from greater urban opportunities.

Chapter four explores this connection more closely, looking at the relationship between women's immobility and gender discrimination. This chapter draws from cases where women's immobility is seen as a liability and fault in women. Consequently these women are systematically excluded from economic and social opportunities. To explore the relationship between women's immobility and discrimination, this chapter looks at the following three aspects of the “feminine sub-culture,” –the characteristics that are used to describe or justify women's immobility– which maintain differences between men and women and their access to new opportunities: 1) Women are more susceptible to criminal activity than men; 2) women and the *familia*; 3) Women are unable to protect themselves.

Chapter five concludes with a discussion on forms of resistance to both the violence and women's unequal right to the city. This chapter looks at how women and feminist groups are contesting the violence in a way that redefines women's relationship to the city. It assesses the

value of women-only transportation and the role that it has played in the current success of the fight for women's equality.

This dissertation concludes with a very short chapter, discussing women's right to the city and the how we should consider persistent gender inequality in future policies.

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# Chapter 2

## The Masculinization of Transportation

It's a hazy morning in October of 2010, throughout the day an estimated 16 million people will be boarding Mexico City's public transit, be it the metro (underground), bus, taxis, or commuter trains. Half them will be women, of whom 90% are bracing themselves for a mentally exhausting commute full violence and harassment that include anything from vulgar stares and comments to outright sexual assault. The other 10% are women who attest that they have never been violated on public transportation. After talking to several women within this group and hearing stories of them ducking behind walls to avoid “scary looking men,” I classify them as both lucky (for never having had a man rip at her clothing or reach under her skirt) and somewhat oblivious (for not acknowledging that she is motivated by the possibility). I however, having had my clothes ripped at, am without a doubt part of the 90% group. And consequently, I will follow the lead of the other women in preparing my mind and body for a fight to avoid as much harassment as possible.

On this particular morning the clock had just struck eight and I was already running late for a meeting that was still an hour and a half away, taking one metro (underground) and transferring to two buses. I ran to the nearest subway station and begin making my way down into the train tunnels, joining a hundred morning commuters. I and several other women rushed to the front of the platform, brushing past the guard who has been stationed there to make sure no men go into the women-only sections. While I am looking down the tunnel waiting for the train, I see a younger man slip by the guard who is looking down at his phone. I shoot him a dirty glance, hoping to guilt him into going back into “his” section, but he is not looking my way. Not that I think it would matter.

When the train pulls into the station it is already filled with people. So much so that when the door opens, a few people pop out like buttons that have just been waiting to free themselves from an over-stretched shirt. Waiting for the next subway will not make me late. They arrive every two minutes. But it will be just as full as this one, so there really is no point. I run to the

train car that has an opening and I push my body as hard as I can into the crowd. I wiggle around until I find a relatively comfortable space within the sea of people.

Our bodies loosen from each other a bit at the next station, where a considerable number of riders exit the train and free-up some space. There is still a lot of people, but at least now I can look around a bit and have a little breathing room. There should only be women in this train car, but I can see that there are quite a few men. These sections are never fully divided. The transit authority mandates that during rush hours the metro in Mexico City the first two cars will be reserved for women. However, culture has its own thoughts on the subject. There are always a few men who enter these spaces and a sort of acceptance among women that it will happen. Maybe women's passivity in the matter comes from the guards' lack of interest. Hoping that it is a woman behind me and that I am not spooning some random guy, I just take a deep breath, look down at the ground, and just think about how many more stations I have to go before I get to the office.

While I continue staring at the ground I feel something weird, like a stick poking my butt. It feels like I am standing in front of a dried-up tree, who has a branch poking me in the backside. I think about the feeling, and then realize that it is probably the corner of a woman's handbag. 'Yes,' I think, visualizing the object, 'that's exactly what it must be.' A few seconds later the corner of the bag pushed harder into my butt, pushing itself between my cheeks. 'Jesus!' I think to myself. 'I know it is crowded, but that woman can put her bag a little lower.' I used my body to push against the bag, hoping to free-up some space between me and her.

A few seconds later, the stick moved. Down my butt and right between my legs. It then began wiggling and stroking. It took less than a second for all the blood to drain out of my head, taking with it the image of the stick. In an instant a new image appeared as I began visualizing a strange man's finger between my legs. I whipped around and right behind me was a well dressed man in his thirties, casually smiling at me.

“GET!” I screamed. The women around me must have been surprised by my volume because they turned and looked directly at me. “You're not even so supposed to be here! This section is for women ONLY!” Just then the train pulled into the next station and the man got off. I looked around, desperately seeking words of condolences. Anyone? But there was nothing.

***The Spatial Exclusion Paradigm: Understanding the masculinization of transportation***

Not everyone has equal access to all places and the opportunities in which those places provide. The goal of spatial inclusion and exclusion research is to map and to understand those differences and its consequences in terms of social inequality. For example, when a group only has access to places with low opportunities, as we have seen with ghettos, the process of exclusion is studied in terms of *spatial entrapment* where these groups are trapped in long-term cycles of marginalization and powerlessness (Keith 2005, Massey & Denton 1993, Wacquant 2008). On the other hand, when a certain place offers economic, social, or cultural opportunities, but blocks groups from entering these places and therefore access to these resources then the exclusion of marginalized groups is studied as a process of *spatialized discrimination*, where their denied access to one place limits their opportunities in other places (Hayden 2002, Harvey 2012).

Spatial inclusion or exclusion, be it in the form of entrapment or discrimination, is made possible because of a process known as the *socialization of space*, where each place is defined by cultural norms (Lefebvre 1992, Soja 1996). The social norms which guide behavior and reinforce group differences are also embedded in geographically located places. These norms not only guide our behavior in that place, but also have the power to exclude or include different groups. The culture of a place can be studied in the everyday actions and interactions between individuals in that space, particularly in terms of who has freedom and control, and how are they attempted to exclude other groups.

Processes of exclusion can range from institutionalized rules of segregation where certain groups are simply banned from entering these places, to more informal processes of exclusion such as, violent interactions towards unwanted groups. This chapter focuses on the spatial discrimination of women and how men use gender-based violence to exclude women from equal access to places of transit.

#### *An analysis of the masculinization of urban transit in Mexico City*

The masculinization of transportation refers to the spatialization of gender norms, where women's access to transportation depends on the patriarchal values that define her mobility. To be brief, transportation is “masculinized” in the sense that it values men's culture over women's, where this skewed favoritism is reflected in differences in men and women's mobility. This was mentioned in examples in the previous chapter such as, the banning of Saudi women from

obtaining a driver's license, or banning women in Indonesia from riding two-wheeled vehicles. Like those examples, transportation in Mexico City is studied as a place that favors men, while reinforcing gender norms.

Unlike Riyadh, however, Mexico City does not outright ban women, however it does embrace other characteristics that foster gender inequality. While women are not banned from using transit in Mexico City, they are excluded from equal access to these places through traditional gender roles, or worse, violent interactions. The gender-based violence that characterizes transit in Mexico City is supported by legal and cultural institutions that blame women, while exonerating the offenders. These characteristics which define transit as masculine and hostile towards women are studied in the following:

- 1) Traditional gender roles and patriarchal values.
- 2) Exclusion of women through the use of gender-based violence.
- 3) A failing legal system and the lack of judicial support to help women in the fight against violence.
- 4) Cultural support, blaming women and teaching them how to modify their bodies and behavior in order to protect themselves, instead of teaching men to respect women.

### ***The Immobility of a Wife and Mother***

Family and marriage shape women's mobility. Although married women are not outright banned from places of transit (at least not in Mexico) they are expected to use it different than men, particularly a woman who has a *familia*. In Mexico, to say 'she has a familia' means that she probably has a husband, but definitely has children. The word implies responsibilities in the home, emphasizing her job in the house as a wife and mother. The role as primary caregiver is considered a blessing and a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. As Doña Mary, a friend and colleague in Mexico City once told me after I complained to her about household chores, “to cook, clean and care for your familia is something beautiful. We are lucky to do it.”

From a more feminist perspective the familia can also confine women to a stricter set of gendered rules that do not apply to men. Women do almost all of the housework, but they are not traditionally considered the decision makers in the house (Navarro Ochoa 2010). Women with familia are likely to be renounced in the labor market than women without (Terán Covarrubias 2012). And, as this section shows, women with familia must negotiate their mobility with their

husbands, especially when it interferes with her role in the home. In fact, a study conducted by the National Board for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) released studying in 2010, revealing that 40 per cent of women in Mexico must ask their husband for permission to leave the house alone at night (Bucio Mújica and Fix-Fierro 2010: 72).

The following is a case is an example of a woman who constantly negotiates the complex relationship between having a *familia* and her need to be mobile.

*The case Josefina and her husband Poncho: Part I*

On the outskirts of Mexico City, lives a small low-income family. The mother, Josefina is a young women with indigenous roots, from Guerrero: a state just west of Mexico City. She lives her with husband Poncho, a short trim man who works hard, sometimes two to three jobs at the same time, and her two kids Brian and Celeste: a 16 year-old boy and a 5 year-old daughter. Josefina's mom –no longer married– lives a few blocks down the road, and her in-laws live a 15 minute bus-ride away.

Josefina relies a lot on the help of her mom and her in-laws, but she also finds herself in the same position of most women with a familia – caught between a world which demands mobility and another binds her to the home. These forces keep her in constant state of negotiating the two worlds, which manifest themselves in arguments with her husband, which always come down to two main factors: being at home to cook and care for the family, and generating income.

A woman in Mexico is viewed as a the parent with the skills to raise children, whereas the man is largely seen as the one with the skills to financially provide for them. However, these roles do not fit neatly into reality. Consequently, Josefina's world is built out of contradictions, where what is expected of her is not always what she should be doing. On the one hand she must work. “We cannot survive on one income,” she says. “The money that my husband makes is not enough (el dinero no alcanza).” But on the other hand, she is expected to fulfill the social role of primary caregiver, putting her the emotional care of the *familia* above everything else.

The result is compromised mobility, where her ability to travel is directly shaped by her need to be at home. The negotiation largely takes place between her and her husband. Her arguing for more mobility and him taking the side of less. “Any job that goes late I have to discuss with my husband.” Says Josefina, “To me, it's not a big deal, because my mom can pick-up Celeste from school and make her dinner. And I think that it's ok. I don't see anything wrong



with my mom making Celeste her dinner and putting her to bed. “My husband and I fight a lot about it. He says it's not good for me to have my mom do that. That Celeste needs her mother.”

The two always settle on the same time frame which allows Josefina to work during the day, but be home in the mornings and at night with the children. This means that Josefina turns down jobs that require mobility outside of this framework. And consequently follows a pattern that many women in her position tend to take after children, moving from the formal labor market (where working hours are stricter) to the informal work sector.

While Josefina has told me that she likes being home with her kids at night, she also likes the option to make more money and to take more challenging jobs that give her pleasure in her work. When she become nostalgic about jobs that she had before having children, she always referred to her job at the bakery. It was not a high paying job, but one that gave her a sense of autonomy and pride. “I loved it. I ran the store by myself, opened and shut it. I even did some of the baking.” But not being able to travel late at night complicates these job options and she always turns them down when they are offered to her.

**Table 2.1: Josefina's Job History**

Before she had her children: jobs that require traveling late at night or very early in the morning		After her children were born: jobs with flexible travel hours or that only require minimal travel during the day.	
Catering	500-1000 per night (42-83 USD)	Selling fruit or fruit juices on the street	100 (8 USD) per day
Pastry shop	400/day plus tips and insurance (33 USD)	Housecleaning	250 (20 USD) per day

\*Figures are in Mexican pesos. The left column is a list jobs with incomes that Josefina has told me that she did make at previous jobs, (adjusted for time and inflation). The right column are the jobs that she ended-up working, which were more convenient for her familia. It should be noted that I talked to a dozen other women who also worked in service jobs in the formal economy before having kids, and then moved to the informal economy once they had children specifically because of problems between mobility and family life.

As the table shows, Josefina has had a range of jobs in the past. However, for the last 16 years she has been cleaning houses or selling juices in front of her house. Recently, she has set-

up a stand a tianguis –an open-air, street market that opens one day out of the week. Every Saturday she takes her tables down to the park to set-up her stand, selling baked goods, and anything that is thrown out by the women of the houses that she cleans that can be repaired and sold. She says that she does not make very much money, but it's hers to own and control and for that she loves doing it.

### ***Gender-based Violence in Places of Transit and the Implementation of Women-only Transportation***

In addition to traditional gender roles that see women as household figures and not mobile ones, women are also excluded from places of transit through outright violence that causes them to fear and avoid travel. Women have been protesting the violence in Mexico City's transit since the inauguration of Mexico City's underground metro system in 1970.<sup>7</sup> They have reported that men are not just touching and groping them, but are masturbating in front of them, ripping their clothes, and even raping them on moving buses or the metro (underground). In 2008 the National Institute for the Protection of Women published a study on the level of violence against women in public transportation. The results show that 9 out of 10 women commuters will experience some type of violence at least once in her lifetime while using public transportation in Mexico City, but more likely it will happen to her several times a year (Zermeño Núñez and Plácido Ríos 2010). In 2007 when the study was conducted they found that in that year alone 8 out of 10 women had experienced some type of sexual violence while using transportation in Mexico City. Of which, 43.8 per cent reported having had 4 or more incidences and 10 per cent having experienced 7 or more (pp. 13).

#### *Women-only transportation*

Despite the violent attacks against women commuters, women need mobility. According to INMUJERES 52% of the daily commuters are women, of whom spend between 4-8 hours a day on public transportation, twice as much time as men. Consequently, in the year 2000 transit authorities established the first women-only sections in the metro. In 2008 they increased the number of women-only transportation, demarcating more women-only subway cars in ever

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<sup>7</sup> This information can be found on the website of the Federal Department of Communications and Transportation, located here: [http://www.metro.df.gob.mx/comunicados/detalleComunicados.html?id\\_comunicado=608](http://www.metro.df.gob.mx/comunicados/detalleComunicados.html?id_comunicado=608)

single metro metro line, issuing women-only buses, and announcing the first ever women-only taxi services – a cab service driven by women, for women.

In Mexico City the metro (underground train) became the first mode of transportation to adopt women-only sections. The subway itself is composed of 11 different underground trains, with a cost that is heavily subsidized by the Mexican government. Each trip, regardless of the length, cost 9 pesos, but passengers only pay 3 of those 9. (A recent increase from 2 pesos, roughly 20 US cents). According to Mexico's Secretary of Transportation, the metro alone transports around 4.2 million people a day, with a train arriving at each station every 1-3 minutes. This inexpensive and rapid mode of transit is also one of the most crowded ones, making it difficult to control rampant groping and physical violence towards women commuters. In 2000, after much debate, 58% of the metro lines designated the first two cars in each train for women during peak hours of 6-10am and 4-9:30pm.<sup>8</sup>

Soon to follow this trend was the Metrobus, one of Mexico City's newest forms of public transportation that is growing faster than any other transit line. Since its inauguration in 2005, women only sections were built directly into the bus system. This double-length bus runs along the city's most prominent avenues, occupying its own lane. It is extremely fast, efficient, and clean, largely catering to upper, middle-class professionals. The Metrobus maintains the entire front of the bus for women, demarcated with signs, colors, posters, pictures of women, arrows, and, at busier stations, a gate that physically separates the men from the women. This is strongly enforced, both by metro police who are posted at each station and by women, of whom I have found are more vocal about protecting this space than any other form of women-only transportation, many times aggressively removing men from the section.

In addition to the Metrobus system, the city maintains a buses managed by the Passenger Transit Line (RTP). These buses cover far more places throughout the city than the Metrobus or the metro, reaching the far outskirts of the greater metropolitan area. In 2002, at the same time the metro was dividing its train cars, the RTP had also designated a small number their buses for women, where a sign used to hang in the front window of the bus, saying “Solamente Mujeres” (Women Only). However, these were so few and so difficult to spot that I had been living in

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<sup>8</sup> More information on this can be found on the website of the Federal Department of Transportation, located here: <http://www.sct.gob.mx/>

Mexico City for 3 years, before I ever saw one or ever knew of its existence. In 2010 the Department of Transportation received funds to issue new, clean-energy buses. Sixty-seven of these buses were set aside to develop a separate line within their system called Athena (Atenea in Spanish), named after the Greek goddess of war and courage. These buses are bubble-gum pink and run 23 of the 91 RTP bus routes. While they are few in numbers on any given day of the week in Mexico City one can easily spot bubble-gum, pink bus with the name “Athena” painted largely along its side.



**Figure 1 – Women-only public buses**

Photo by Lucía González El Universal<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, and perhaps most symbolically, a small fleet of bubble-gum, pink taxis were issued. Pink Taxis were first established in Puebla, Mexico, a city an hour south of Mexico City. These taxis embrace the image of the mobile woman, where they are only driven by women, and only stop for women and their children. Several years after Puebla established the Pink Taxi Co., Mexico City adopted their first fleet, putting 100 pink cabs on the road. These are commonly spotted in the urban center of the city, in areas surrounding Condesa and downtown.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/109075.html>



**Figure 2 – Women-only taxis**

Despite these efforts, only around 10% of the total amount of public transportation on the road is designated for women. In a city of nearly 20 million people, with less than 100 pink taxis on the road, and only a handful of women-only buses, this transit is far more of a symbol for women's mobility than a practical mode of transportation for them.

*The public's reception of women-only transportation*

In addition to being too few in numbers to have a strong impact, women-only transportation alone does not solve the deeply embedded differences between men and women's mobility, which promote gender-based violence. This is most evident in people's reaction to women-only transportation, where men tend to fall back on ideologies of the immobile housewife, and women tend to see it as an opportunity build a stronger case for her to increase her mobility.

In 2010, *El Universal* one of Mexico's largest newspapers, created an online forum, posting a question for women on the use of women-only transportation as a solution to the problem of violence: *should women be allowed to have their own transportation?* In general

women tended to rally behind a cry of “yes,” exclaiming, 'finally we can freely travel without fear of being attacked.' Men on the other hand almost unanimously leaned towards “no.” In the words of Alfredo,

*“No [women should not have their own transportation], because women have other important responsibilities, of which include the education and care of the children, making sure the house is running properly, etc. The woman cannot displace men, but rather complements him. Women have their sacred rights, but their role is not to displace or replace men, these are laws of nature that we should not, nor cannot change.”<sup>10</sup>*

**Table 2.2: Reaction to women-only transportation**

	Men		Women		Sex Unspecified		Total
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	N
	9	38	27	14	5	20	113
PERCENTAGE TOTALS	8%	34%	24%	12%	4%	18%	100%

N=Number of respondents.

As the following sections will demonstrate, gender-based violence in transportation is seen as a normal consequence of gender differences, where men are seen as more suited to travel than women. The following dialogues draw from online debate forums and conversations on gender-based violence in public transportation and the use of women-only sections as a solution and how these relate to women's *ability* to be mobility and men's *right* to it.

***Cultural Support for the Violence: Blaming the victim***

On November 24, 2010 *El Universal*, posted another question to their female readers: “Have you ever been 'manhandled' in public transportation?” Over the next two days 168 comments were posted online, creating one of the first in-depth arguments on an old debate in Mexico: who's to blame for the violence? During this forum two important aspects of this debate transpired. First was the number of women who shared stories of being attacked and how they were unable to find help, not even from the police. The second was the reaction to these stories, which came as a sharp and bitter response as a way of shifting the focus of this topic back onto women. Specifically, the main response among men was that women were either lying about the violence

<sup>10</sup> Posted online by Alfredo on 8/13/2010 in a conversation on people's opinions on the implementation of Pink Taxis in Mexico City, specifically having women drivers.

or exaggerating it. In the cases when they did believe the women, the comments were harsh, blaming women for the attacks. The following is a transcription of a representative sample of the comments posted, showing how these two events played out.

At 2:34pm a woman going by MC started the conversation, writing in all caps: “YES MEN GROPE ¡OBVIOUSLY!!” She goes on to tell of her experiences on public transportation, explaining that she is from Monterrey, a large, wealthy city in the northeast of Mexico. “I have seen men attacking young women. They take advantage of a full train car and find a woman sitting across the aisle where they can harass her...but nobody helps these young women. ...As a woman, I have been in various predicaments to intervene. I have daughters and if I can defend someone [now], then maybe tomorrow they will do the same for my family.”

Two more women posted similar stories about being attacked while on a bus or subway and after that the dynamic of the online forum changed with a reaction among men, shifting the conversation from violence against women to blaming women for the attacks.

Cristian Peralta: *“Yes, but this is women's fault.” Cristian explains. “Look there are a lot of women that even though they are grossed out [by the sexual aggression], they still go with their low necklines and miniskirts. I'm saying, if they do not want to be groped women should go in the women-only sections, and wearing the caps like they do in Pakistan. [The way they dress now] they seem wicked with signs that say: Touch me.”*

Ratenski: *“There are gangs of extorting women in the subway, the Metrobus, and minibuses that ask for 10,000-15,000 pesos (900-1100 USD) for each event. They don't stop when they make their threats towards the men. And they ask a police officer to make the accused give them the money. And that is the real reason behind the accusations.”*

Arturo: *“It's better to have the subway 100% separated for men and women. There are a lot of men who have been very badly mistreated and have traveled with broads who wrongly accuse men of touching them. Suggestions for the men: HANDS TO YOUR SIDES. KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR WALLET AND NO NOT MOVE YOUR HANDS. You don't want to give them any reason to falsely accuse you.”*

They also claimed that women were just as violent as men:

Anonymous Male: *“The Mexican woman has always been a victim, from the household to the street (metro), however, they too are part of the this 'sexual aggression towards each other.' In the metro there are cars assigned just to the women and what I see is that they violate each other.”*

And, a comment frequently heard, that the violence was the fault of mothers for not teaching their sons how to respect women.

Luis, “*And who in the hell is going to make laws to protect the masculine gender from ALL THE VIOLENCE from women. In the metro they are the same as men or worse. They go about in the street or the metro doing things without punishment, which is what they get just for being a woman and the men aren't even going to do anything to them. For years they have assaulted their boys, their younger brothers and their nephews and grandsons, screaming non-sense at them like, you're an idiot, useless, I'm going to teach you to death, a kid such as you. Yea, my mom used to tell me that I wasn't worthy (like she was so marvelous), however they [women] feel like they are martyrs, saints, teaching their children to hit and later to victimize. When are we going to put a stop to this type of violence by women???* This is why our country is just a joke, this is why we are full of criminals and corrupt people, because mothers are teaching their children to be this way: to trample whoever they want just to get some money, and this is why this country is taking a nose dive into its destruction.”

But perhaps the most common reaction was to fall back onto the *could have been* paradigm, claiming that women know that public transportation is dangerous. Women, therefore should not be traveling, especially alone or during strange times. And if they are traveling, then it must mean that they “enjoy” the sexual harassment:

Juan el Cachas: “*I want to tell you guys that there are a lot of perverts that devote themselves to groping women. But there are also women who like it. Such as this one time I was going [on the metro], the train was filled to the max, and so I got mashed against this chick who was pressing super hard into me, but what can you do, it [my penis] is there, so enjoy. I gave it a good shaking and she went super happy, enjoying her little gift. The truth is in what's obvious. You can't make this stuff up. And in fact this has happened to me several times.*”

Israel Rodriguez: “*Personally, I try never to be near any women in the metro, because every fat, horrible woman is always on the lookout, even if you are not doing anything to them. Truthfully, this isn't equality. If it was, there would be a section just for men, o no? Plus, as I see it there are a lot of women who like it...*” “*...If women don't say anything, then nothing will happen to them.*”

Fernando: “*If you don't like being touched, then go to the all women metro cars. I don't know why some women like to go with the men during rush hour and sometimes it is inevitable and other times they like it.*”

Luis Gandarilla Carrillo: “*The truth is, there are many sluts (especially college girls) who deserve to be manhandled. In fact, I love sticking my hand or finger between their legs. Until now no woman has complained. And there has been more than one who walked away happy.*”

*The majority of women like being manhandled in public transportation, and that's a fact. That's why they don't report and the next day they come back it. And the sluts even more.*



*So ladies, don't act all innocent. It's well known that the Mexican woman is the biggest slut in the world. They love being manhandled, abused, and all other types of aberrations. They were born to spread their legs."*

These comments illuminate the cultural reality of gender differences, where women are viewed as responsible for their own safety. Places of transit are seen as dangerous –i.e. not a place for women– and therefore women who chose mobility are seen as choosing to put themselves in harms way. Blaming the victim not only supports the use of gender-based violence in removing women from places of transit, but it also makes it difficult for women to confront their attacker.

Blaming the victim not only holds women responsible for their own security, but it also supports the gender-based violence that excludes women from equal mobility. The more women internalize violence as their own fault, the more they tend to self-regulate. They restrict their own mobility to times and places that are considered safe for women.

### ***Institutional Support of the Violent Removal of Women***

Blaming women for the violence that occurs in transportation extends beyond the cultural ideologies of the general public and into legal and political areas as well. According to Carlos Vilalta, a scholar of crime and corruption in Mexico, underreporting crime occurs for two main reasons –“the public has low levels of trust in the police and the judicial institutions; and the costs associated with starting a criminal process are high” (Vilalta 2011:173). Women have expressed that both of these are a concern. Additionally, they have also shown that mistrust in police and judicial institutions are problems that are much more gendered than previously thought.

In 2010, when *El Universal* posted their question to women commuters in Mexico City, asking if they had ever been manhandled, many women wrote in responses that demonstrated the gendered nature of Vilalta's claim. When women talked about not reporting the crime, it was for reasons of fearing the police, claiming that they could not be trusted. Their reasons can be summed up into three main responses:

1. The police are part of the problem of sexual violence. The police are perverts too, likely to violate women who seek their help.
2. Police support the behavior of men.

3. The police will not arrest the man, so what is the point.

The fear of police sexually violating women does not seem to come from actual cases of this happening, but rather from a dysfunction relationship that exists between women and police. To begin, the police force is largely made up of male officers, who do not show compassion towards women going through the emotional trauma of an attack. Margarita Argot, director INMUJERES and one of the figure heads behind the program called *Viajemos Seguras* (We Women Travel Safely) explains that there are specific consequences of being sexually harassed or violated. Of which, the police who handle these reports do not take into consideration. In her words, these include:

1. Traumatic Stress
2. Anxiety
3. Fear
4. Difficulties Breathing
5. Depression
6. Suicidal Thoughts
7. Anger
8. Distress
9. Insomnia

During the online forum women specifically expressed the need and desire to have the police to “on their side,” and to show that they take their reports seriously. As the following quote shows, women feel like the police treat their report like some random pickpocketing event. That they clearly do not understand the context of what women are going through or take them seriously.

Miramar: *“Of course I have been a victim, and not just once, but many times. But the one time that stands out the most is this one day in the metro, San Cosme. I started to feel on my back something weird and hot and upon turning around to my surprise was a man behind me with his penis out. I could not believe it! There with so many people around and him doing this, to let go unpunished just because nobody cared, no. I went to the police and the only thing that happened was them saying, TELL ME HIS CHARACTERISTICS. I headed to work and just had to deal*

*with the uncomfortable situation. Should I have to miss an entire day? All because, although a lot of people still don't know, we live in a shit country.”<sup>11</sup>*

Women also explained how the police force is a masculine institution, both in literal sense that it is composed of mostly male officers and in the cultural sense that it embraces a masculine ideology when addressing problems of sexual violence against women. The police view violence, groping, and sexual harassment on public transportation as normal and an inevitable consequence of men and women traveling together in cramped spaces. Consequently when women reported going to the police, they expressed an inability to be able to report the attack as a crime. Instead women felt forced to connive the officers to take their case seriously. That is, that they needed an argument, convincing enough to get the police on their side. As Isis commented:

*Isis1093: “It's humiliating. Over the last year I have had several horrible experiences going to work in public transportation. I have had just as many problems on minibuses as in the metro. From the classic barbarian who sticks to you and you can listen to him breathing on your neck, to the cheeky touches that they do without any shame, which send you running. And what is most frustrating is that nobody is able to stop them, even when you call for help. They just stand there looking at you and ask, 'but they didn't steal anything?' Didn't steal anything?? MY DIGNITY! Nobody has the right to touch me and for those who think that 'woman provoke men' it's a stupid backward thought. When you tell the police what happened they just laugh and say 'little lady, it was just a touch, he did not violate you.' So you have to be violated to be taken seriously? Because of these responses most women do not even report the abuse. It's a shame that men still see us as objects and not their equals.”*

In addition to the masculine culture of the police, the legal system itself is also discriminatory towards sexual violence against women in public transportation. Specifically, sexual harassment, groping, and manhandling are not specifically defined in the legal code, making it difficult for police officers and judges to define the violence as a criminal act.<sup>12</sup> Without the “right” legal definitions, judges and police have been known to drop cases. One of the last quotes posted online was from Guadalupe, who wrote an in-depth story of her case where the lack of legal definitions allowed the officer in charge to determine for himself how to define the sexual attack against the woman as a criminal act:

<sup>11</sup> This is the same online forum created in 2010 by *El Universal* mentioned above.

<sup>12</sup> This is currently not the case. Within the last 5 years there has been several amendments made to the legal system to correct for this problem. These will be discussed in the final chapter which discusses how feminists have begun to fight for women's equal right to the city.

Guadalupe: *“The worst enemy is the bureaucracy. Unfortunately I was a victim of sexual crime in a subway car in Mexico City. It is a shame that the help service that the auxiliary police in the Metro supposedly provide is so inefficient. Nothing worked when I went to report it and in the moment that they were helping me, the gentlemen didn't want to go make a statement as a witness. Later, the police dropped the charges against the sicko who touched me, arguing that it would be worse for him to go to jail than what he did to me [that the punishment would be worse than the crime]. Is it possible that the police take sides? I guess I expected some type of remuneration from the pervert. It's ridiculous to live in a country where the evidence comes more from the subjective parts than the actual facts, and that public defenders are handling 300 cases at the same time, obviously for neglect and extreme bureaucracy...” “..The only thing I got from this experience is that we should not trust our institutions and the supposed authorities. Obviously I learned to defend myself against social sickos and I don't let them just attack me without calling the attention of the people around me. I don't think that the failure of the justice system has to do with the bias of Marcelo Ebrard [Mexico City's mayor], but rather with the type of bureaucracy that we have had to live with forever in this country.”*

In Guadalupe's case, not only does the judicial system fail her, but also the officer chooses to favor with the male violator over her. Her story particularly disheartening as she explains the double-attack process: she is sexually violated on public transportation, and then again by the institution that was supposed to protect her.

The stories of these women illuminate two very dangerous consequences of the double-attack on women. First, it reinforces the culture that women are responsible for their own safety. That sexual violence is not illegal, nor wrong. Secondly, it systematically denies women a safe opportunity to confront their attacker. In doing so, it reinforces the ideology that violence against women is normal and that women are responsible for their own safety.

During all these comments by women, a male going by the online name of, “A Guy Who Does Not Manhandle Women,” explains:

*“To the ladies. You cannot have hope that the authorities will fix the problem. We do not live in an ideal world. Take action when necessary. IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SUSPECTS. Find an good place to be that isn't accessible [for people to touch you easily], like a corner, and I someone starts to touch you, SCREAM WITH ALL YOUR LUNG POWER. Have something ready to defend yourselves, take a Karate class or something like that. Better to be preventative, than later have to suffer humiliation and then to have to be brave. Each unpunished act is only an invitation for them to do it again.”*

Essentially women are caught in an ongoing interaction between the masculinized police force and transit system, the gendered nature of the legal system, and the ideology that women

are responsible for the violence. This position renders them powerless, making it extremely difficult to report sexual assaults that occur in public transportation.

### **Conclusion**

Rather than confronting, which as Vilalta says, “has high costs with very low returns,” women adapt to the game in the best way possible (2010). Within the context of traditional gender roles (la familia), gender-based violence in places of transit, and cultural and institutional support for the violence, women are constantly looking for ways to increase their mobility while keeping their risk towards violence as low as possible.

The next chapter looks at the consequences of this phenomenon, focusing on how these everyday violent interactions and the exclusion of women from places of transit create different cultures between men and women.

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# Chapter 3

## The Culture of Mobility and the Production Gender Differences

It's eleven A.M. and my friends are already showing up to help me pack for an upcoming trip to Guadalajara, a thriving metropolis 5 hours northwest of Mexico City. My husband is there covering the Pan American Games and my 6 month old daughter and I had plans to meet him for the weekend. The problem with this plan is that women traveling alone, and even worse with a baby, are seen as particularly vulnerable to crime. So even though we had a car, in the end we took a cross-country bus, leaving Mexico City at 7am and arriving in Guadalajara in the afternoon. My landlady, Maria Carmen, was the first to knock on our door.

“Did you get the tickets?” She asks, pushing out door open. “You have to get them for the Terminal Norte and not El TAPO.”

El TAPO was one of the main bus terminals in Mexico City. I was also most familiar with it. I had taken buses from it several times in the past, and preferred it for many reasons. First, it was close to my house, located just a few subway stations away. I had never been to Terminal Norte. And honestly did not even recognize the neighborhood in which it was located. In addition to being much further away than El TAPO, not a single bus or metro could take you in that direction. So you would have to arrive by taxi or private car.

So why was I taking a bus from the Terminal Norte instead of El TAPO? A couple of days before I left I had bumped into Maria Carmen in the hallway. I started talking about my upcoming trip and asked her if she knew the best way to go to Guadalajara, since she frequently took the bus that way to visit friends and family. Not only did she have a “perfect” travel plan, but she also had the website of where I can buy my tickets online, and had the phone number to a private car service. She was very insistent that if I was going to be traveling alone with a baby that I would need to leave from the Terminal Norte.

She explained to me how Terminal Norte was safer. For Maria Carmen, it was all about security, or rather 'the insecurity of a woman traveling alone with an infant.' In order to travel safely to Guadalajara I would need to change my normal travel behavior and take more precautionary measures. First, rather than taking public transportation, or a taxi from the street, I

should call a private car service to take us directly to the station. For her, having to leave my house before dark was unthinkable. The risks are too high. Calling a private car service not only had the added benefit of guaranteed security (a hot commodity in Mexico), but it also came with the benefit of the driver meeting me at my doorstep, escorting me, if you will, for the first part of the travel process. Secondly, Terminal Norte is a smaller station, so I could avoid crowds, and lower the risk of having someone take advantage of me. 'With all of these precautions,' she said, 'you shouldn't have any trouble.'

“Is that all the stuff you are taking?” She asks, looking over at my carry-on sized, wheel bag and the backpack that I was using as a diaper bag. “Remember you are much more vulnerable traveling with a baby, so try to not to carry too many things. It will just make you an easy target (*un blanco*).” The word, “un blanco” never ceased to amaze me. Throughout my years in Mexico City, women gave me 20 different scenarios, where we are “blancos” while traveling. They spent even more time trying to correct my behavior to reduce my chances towards attacks. Strangers would interrupt me in the middle of bus trip to make suggestions on how to position my body, which types of clothes I should wear to cover my body, where to keep my belongings, and which spaces in the buses and metro that I should stand. Everything that they taught me was about reducing the way I looked as a target. *No seas un blanco* [don't be a target], they would tell me. 'Try to be invisible.'

“I'm just going to be wheeling the one bag, which will go under the bus in the cargo section.” I said trying to ensure Maria Carmen that I was going to be safe. “Maia [daughter] will be strapped to my chest. And then that little backpack is full of diapers and provisions for the trip.”

Our conversation was interrupted however when two more of my friends arrived. I introduce everyone and then Maria Carmen parted, going back to her apartment.

I turned to the girls and asked, “She was telling me that we should leave from the Terminal Norte instead of El TAPO. She said that it is much safer. Is it?”

Neither of the girls knew. Neither had taken a bus from either station.

“Well, in any case,” I said, “it will probably be easiest just to avoid the metro. I'm sure we would be fine, but with Maia it will be easiest just to avoid the hassle altogether. Plus people are



so sleazy on the metro. The other week some guy was bothering me. He had no shame and was being so obvious, staring at my boobs then looking me up and down. I was getting so angry.”

They all nodded, agreeing that it happens.

“He was being so deliberate about it, so I yelled at him. Do you know what he does next? Licks his lips!”

Both Alejandra and Lidia gave a cringing look and then immediately start to explain what I did wrong.

“Yea you cannot say anything when they do that.” Says Tania in such a matter of fact tone. “It just encourages them. They like it. They get off on it.”

“Absolutely.” Repeats Alejandra. “The best thing to do is to walk away. This one time I was on the metro. It was almost empty. But this guy across from me was staring for such a long time. I was just ignoring him, but he kept doing things to get my attention. Then I see that he has his pants unzipped and is touching himself. You couldn't see anything, but it was obvious what he was doing. And he just stared right at me.”

“So what did you do?” I asked.

“Nothing. I ignored him. I waited until the next stop. And then I got off the train and waited for the next one. There is nothing that you can do. The best thing is just to exit the situation.”

### ***Producing Gender Differences in Mobility***

Women modify their behaviors, their clothes, and their reaction to violence in order to avoid danger and aggression. But what are the consequences of making yourself “less of a target?” What happens when women practice non-confrontational behaviors while traveling?

The simple answer to this question is that women's travel behaviors create a feminine culture of mobility. Feminist architects and geographers, who are interested in these exact same questions, give a more detailed answer. They argue that our behaviors in each place, be it bold and confident or non-confrontational, help develop distinct cultures in relation to that space (Bondi 2005, Bondi and Damaris 2003, Hayden 2002, Spain 1992). When women are excluded from equal access to places, then their behavior in that space is altered created a sub-culture that reinforces gender differences. As Daphne Spain notes, ‘...architectural and geographical spatial

arrangements reinforce status differences between women and men. They influence the little tactics of the habitat, and play a role in maintaining status distinctions by gender' (1992: 3-7).

This chapter explores the production of these distinct cultures as they develop through the interactions between men, women, and places of transit. It pays special attention to how men and women behave differently in transportation, and how those differences reinforce distinct *cultures of mobility* among the two groups.

Here the *culture of mobility* is framed in a Bourdieuan understanding of *capital*, where there the culture is either valued or devalued by other social institutions. In this sense, a mobility culture is understood as something that each group either possess and transfers to other forms of capital, or they do not. Drawing on data that shows how men and women relate differently to transportation this chapter explores how men's greater access to mobility and their harmonious relationship to places of transit gives them the opportunity to develop and possess a valued culture of mobility. Women's behavior, on the other hand, is shaped by gender-based violence in transit and consequently develops a sub-culture of mobility, which is devalued and non-transferable to other opportunities in the city.

If we remember from the previous chapter, the masculinization of transportation occurs when gender norms are embedded into these places of transit, creating a set of rules that help guide the ways in which men and women use transportation. To understand how men and women's distinct relationships to places of transit produce different cultures this chapter looks at men and women's travel behaviors. That is, how do they each alter their behaviors when they board a bus, train, or taxi? To answer this question, this chapter looks at the following:

- 1) Men and the production of a culture of mobility
  1. Men embrace “danger” in transit and normalize both the masculine nature of transit space and masculinity as a necessary, travel characteristic.
  2. Their use of violence against women to reproduce the masculine nature of transit and their own masculinity, validating that they possess the 'right characteristics' needed to travel, while simultaneously demobilizing women.
- 2) Women and the production of a sub-culture of mobility. In reaction to the violence targeting them while they travel, women:
  1. Defeminize their bodies.

2. Practice non-confrontational behavior (includes not reporting crimes).
3. Limit their mobility by staying within the hours defined by work at home.

### ***Producing a Culture of Mobility***

It's a hot and dusty late-afternoon in Mexico City when a sixteen year-old boy is just reaching his house on the way home from school. His hands are still shaking from his run-in with six guys on the walk home who jumped him for his cellphone.

“They took my cellphone!” He cries out to his mom the moment he steps in the door. “There were six of them. Two of them with guns and the others had knives. I wasn't afraid though. I was like 'fuck you'.”

“You don't say anything!” She says “You just give them what they want so they don't hurt you. Para que se vayan en paz!”

“It [his response] makes me afraid,” the mother told me later in an interview. “I always carry 100 peso bill in my pocket and an old cell phone so that if I am robbed, I just give it to them. So that they take off, and don't do thing. I always tell him that you have to travel like that. You have to be prepared.”

She goes on to explain to me that you cannot fight back. That it is best just to give them what they want and get out of their safely. And, as I sit on the couch, listening to her recount this story and explain to me 'how one should travel safely' I realize that she does not see mobility through the same lens as her son. Cautionary behavior is not how men are supposed to act in places of transit. *Unlike women, who use cautionary behavior to negotiate their mobility in the context of violence, for men it will not make them more mobile.* They are not supposed to fear traveling, but rather embrace the elements of danger involved and face them head-on. To do this men's relationship to transportation is based on two important elements: 1) understand that in Mexico mobility is risky, and 2) that they must develop a culture that will help them face that risk.

A culture of mobility in Mexico City requires a hyper-masculinize culture. This means that sometimes, particularly if you are a young man practicing your masculinity and developing a culture of mobility, you have to say “fuck you!” to the men who are holding you at gunpoint. But more than anything it means not showing any “feminine characteristics” such as, vulnerability, passivity, and gentleness. For a man, his role is not in the household caring for and nurturing the

children, but rather in the streets, working and running the city. And the easiest way for men to develop this culture and prove that they have these characteristics is by using women as a benchmark.

*Women's bodies and the production of masculinity*

There are several ways that men can use women to produce and demonstrate their own masculinity. As we will see in a bit, there is outright violence against women. And, violent attitudes towards groups that are perceived as having feminine characteristics. We see commonly when debates on women's equal right to mobility quickly turn into gay bashing sessions. As Ralph posted online during one of these debates: “For this [safe transit for women] they are hauling in our taxes, I am not paying any more, now they are going to give %\$/! their own purple car with rainbows. How disgusting of our government and these faggotty people.”<sup>13</sup> And, with more careful observation one can also see that men use everyday crime to reproduce their own masculinity, not just by confronting criminals with retorts, like our young teenage boy mentioned earlier, but also by arguing that women are vulnerable to this type of crime in a way that men are not.

So just how dangerous is transportation in Mexico City? Like most institutions in Mexico, rampant corruption, drug cartel activity, and political scandals also plague the transit industry, making it difficult for cities to properly regulate it. The most common example of this can be seen in the number of unlicensed taxi drivers in Mexico City, where private cars are often painted in the colors of taxis and act as taxis without ever registering with the government. While most of the unlicensed taxis are safe their presence on the street creates a space for unregistered taxis that are used to conduct *secuestro exprés* (fast kidnappings). Consequently, the *secuestro exprés* makes taxis the second most dangerous form of public transportation in Mexico City (Vilalta 2011). Microbuses (mini-van buses) are the first. According to Mexico City's Criminal Report Index (RINDE) around 7 violent and non-violent robberies are reported to the police each day in microbuses.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, in taxis, RINDE reports at least four “violent robberies” are reported each day in Mexico City. Additionally, every three months between 10-30 people report being kidnapped in a taxi. None of these statistics of which include the *cifra negra* (unreported

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<sup>13</sup> Posted online on August 10, 2010, during an online conversation on women-only taxis in Mexico City.

<sup>14</sup> See RINDE reports located at: <http://www.consejociudadanodf.org.mx>. Last checked September 2, 2013.

crimes), which the National Institute for Geography and Statistics (INEGI) estimates at 90 per cent – meaning, the crimes reported above only include 10% of the actual estimated number.<sup>15</sup>

While there is no statistical truth that women are more likely to be robbed or kidnapped during their commutes than a man, they are undoubtedly viewed as far more vulnerable (Pain 2001, Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2006, Vilalta 2011). Women are not only seen as more vulnerable to crime, but there is also a common perception that the types of crimes are likely escalate when women are involved. That is, a common robbery can easily turn into rape when the victim is a woman.

In his book titled, *First Stop in the New World*, David Lida, a U.S. journalist living in Mexico City, describes how him and his wife had just arrived to Mexico City. After a party at a friend's house, they went out into the street and flagged a taxi. Rather than going directly to their apartment, the driver took a short detour, picking-up two other people. One climbed into the backseat with them to hold them hostage, while the other took their credit cards and proceeded to withdraw money from their bank accounts. “And that's how we spent the next couple of hours. We drove in circles, presumably on the inner-city throughways, given that the car didn't stop during the trip. Adverse circumstances change one's notion of luck. *Chilangos* [people from Mexico City] would later tell us that we had been 'lucky' because our captors were reasonably professional and not drug-addled maniacs. They didn't manhandle Yehudit, [Lida's wife], let alone rape her” (Lida 2008:200).

In the moment where Yehudit *could have been* raped is where women's public lives become incredibly difficult, where her relationship to the city is called into question. Both David and Yehudit were in kidnapped for the purpose of being robbed, yet Yehudit's experience is framed within the potential of being raped. The consequences of this gendered framework means that there is more at stake for Yehudit, so mobility is reshaped through questions about her *ability* to travel, such as: Should she be allowed to travel alone? At night? Or, long-distances?

Despite the image of Yehudit as being more vulnerable, there is no real evidence that her kidnappers were going rape her. In fact, the criminal reports provided by the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) suggest that crime is not associated with violence against women.

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<sup>15</sup> See Boletín de Prensa número 339/12. Posted on September 27, 2012. Last checked September 25, 2013.

And in fact, the two transgressions rarely, if ever, occur in the same incident.<sup>16</sup> The women with whom I talked reaffirmed this statement. They told stories of either being a victim of robbery or are victim of sexual harassment or sexual violence, but never both at the same time.

Yet the fact that deep inside every criminal act lies a reminder to women that it *could have been* worse is one of the principal problems plaguing women and their ability to be mobile. In Yehudit's case it is not that she is more vulnerable, but rather that the image of her as more vulnerable to crime and the *could have been* framework creates an argument that she should not have been there in the first place. That is, that she “got lucky” for not being raped.

“Being lucky” shifts the blame from the perpetrators to the victims. In this sense, traveling entails a great deal of risk to women. Women who chose to travel and are sexually harassed or violated in the process are not considered victims, because victim would imply suffering harm from an adverse act or circumstance. Instead they are blamed for behaving in a risky manner, and for putting themselves in harms way, men on the other hand are not.

#### *Women-only transportation reinforces differences*

While women-only transportation intends to provide women with a safe method of transport, in many ways it reinforces gender differences. First, it supports the distinction between men and women's ability to possess a culture of mobility. Most often they describe traveling is a manly-man's activity, often referring to gender, youth, and sexual orientation as examples of characteristics of people who do not possess enough masculinity to survive in such 'dangerous conditions.' Take the following quotes as examples:

*“To me this [women-only transportation] seems like a good idea to have in a dangerous city. Now the wife, daughter, and grandma can travel safer. They should implement it in all dangerous cities, such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Culiacan, etc.”<sup>17</sup>*

*“Next to follow women-only transportation will be rainbow-painted buses for gays,”<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> This information can be found on the INMUJERES webpage. In particular, see statistical reports on crime against women and conference papers written about these crime that show how violence against women is motivated by feelings of gender discrimination and not everyday criminal activity, which can be found here under “publications”: <http://www.inmujeres.gob.mx>.

<sup>17</sup> This comment was posted by Gasper on August 11, 2010, during a forum on the use of women-only transportation in Mexico City.

<sup>18</sup> This comment was posted by Jorge on August 11, 2010. The comment was in response to a newspaper article published by *El Universal* on the implementation of women-only buses as a way to reduce violence against

*“Now gays too will want their own taxis so that they are not discriminated against, and their own minibuses, and so that they also don't get their 'parts' [sic] grabbed.”<sup>19</sup>*

Even women who drove their own car faced similar stereotypes. I am frequently told for example that women should not drive themselves late at night. “It's so dangerous.” They would tell me. And they would follow these statements up with somewhat dubious laws that were meant to protect the women traveler. One of my favorites included a red light conversion law, where if a woman was driving “alone,” and “late a night” (presumably anytime after dark) that she does not have to stop for the red traffic lights. 'It's dangerous for women to be sitting in their car, after dark, waiting for the light to turn green. If it's clear, she can go through the red light legally.'

Some months later, I had decided to explore this rule more closely. I found that like most transit issues that I had come across, it too was a real law that had been converted into the gendered perspective of vulnerability, which guided women's travel behavior. According to the traffic laws posted in the back of the *Guia Roji*, a the title of a series of paperback, spiral-bound atlases featuring detailed street maps of various large metropolitan areas in Mexico, this rule is in fact true. It goes something like this: 'For reasons of security, and in an attempt to reduce car jackings, after 11pm traffic lights convert into stop signs, where after making a complete stop and checking for on coming traffic the driver may continue through the light if the intersection is clear.' There is nothing about this rule only applying to women.

### *Violence against women*

There is perhaps no single better indicator of proving that the mobility culture is one defined by hyper-masculinity than in the intense levels of gender-based violence on transportation. “Violence,” writes Michael Kimmel, “is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” (1994: 215). Likewise, Matthew Gutmann, an anthropologist who studies masculinity in Mexico says that gender-based violence is a way of demonstrating “macho” characteristics. In his study on the machismo culture in Mexico City, Gutmann defines macho as “...a man who is responsible for providing financially and otherwise for his family” (pg 221). He goes onto say that while macho or

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women in public transportation.

<sup>19</sup> Posted online by Emilio on August 10, 2010, during an online conversation on women-only taxis in Mexico City.

machismo, both of which can connote different images for describing men, often manifest themselves in forms of violence against women.

On the one hand there is rampant violence against women, where again 9 out of every 10 women is sexually assaulted while using transportation. As the follow quote reminds us:

*“When I was going to school at the Escuela Comercial Cámara de Comercio, famous because then it was an all girls' school, I boarded the metro (underground train) at the station Centro Médico, where in this particular station there was a lot of abuse towards us women. This station was already famous for the large number of women who boarded there and with a lot of strength everyday we had to get on the metro. Everyday you could see women getting to the station crying because some guy had already stuck his hands down her pants, or because when she was taking the escalator they've already reached out and started grabbing you. A very good friend, and I cannot even image how disgusting this man must have been, but he got behind her when she was going down the escalator and I guess started to masturbate. I don't know if he already had his penis out or that it was hidden behind his case, but before they got off, he came all over this poor girls skirt and stockings!!! She noticed when she felt something wet on her backside and when she turned the guy had a sweater in front of him. She screamed, of course, the the guy took off running and the police never got him.”<sup>20</sup>*

On the other hand, there is the normalization of this violence. As the following table shows, men see gender-based violence and sexual harassment as less serious than women see it:

**Table 3.1: Perception of the seriousness of gender-based violence, comparing responses between men and women.**

		SEX			
		Men		Women	
		Number of respondents	Per cent	Number of respondents	Per cent
Using offensive and disrespectful words in relations to your gender.	Serious	24	41%	101	77%
	Not very serious	19	33%	22	17%
	Not serious	14	24%	8	6%
	Don't know	1	2%	0	0%
If they stare sexually at your body.	Serious	24	47%	149	74%
	Not very serious	19	33%	35	18%

<sup>20</sup> Posted online on November 25, 2010 by Linux during an online forum created by El Universal asking if you have ever been manhandled while using public transportation in Mexico City.



	Not serious	14	20%	10	5%
	Don't know	0	0%	1	1%
If you are touched or manhandled with sexual intentions	Serious	36	68%	116	95%
	Not very serious	5	9%	4	3%
	Not serious	9	17%	2	2%
	Don't know	3	6%	0	0%
If they touch their touch their own genitals in front of you.	Serious	34	61%	85	90%
	Not very serious	8	14%	5	5%
	Not serious	14	25%	3	3%
	Don't know	0	0%	1	1%

\* Source: CONAPRED study on gender-based violence in Mexico City's public transportation (Zermenño Núñez and Plácido Ríos 2010: 199-120).

When the violence is discussed in terms of it being targeted at women specifically, men tend to further downplay the level of seriousness. For example, when the media began publishing stories on women-only transportation as a solution to the violence it created a reaction among men changing the discussion of sexual violence against women to a non-gendered issue. These comments were coded and out of 125 responses by men 70% were against the idea of women-only transportation, claiming that violence is a normal part of traveling. As Rocio, one of the commenters, says:

*“This [the fight for women's right to travel free of violence] is a double standard, because the government allows pornography on the streets and on every corner, because there are so many sex-shops. The newspapers have pages of porn and models, prostitutes, and TV programs that promote sex. It is a hypocritical society that first sells sex and later wishes to control the human biological impulses. What's discussing is if a lesbian or homosexual touches you, now that yes is a psychological illness, that is depravity. And obviously there are many women in Mexico City that are total hysterical, and get crazy over whatever reason and poor men who have to stand close to these crazy women, all because they want to create some truly discriminatory and abusive laws [for women's right to travel free of violence]. In Mexico City and the State of Mexico out of every 100 women there are only 3 decent and pretty ones. It's true that many women if they are not fat or ugly, then they are hysterical and crazy. The poor men of Mexico*

*City, they are exterminating them, this is a theory by the gay conspiracy. Reprimand the man for liking women and create more lesbians and homosexuals.”<sup>21</sup>*

While at first glance Rocio's comment may seem un-feminist (at best), he bring-up several points that are worth discussing in greater detail. In some ways, men are victims. They are encouraged to behave in hyper-masculine ways and when they do so they are called “perverts” and “bullies.” But Rocio brings up an important issue on women's role in the production of a masculine culture of mobility. That there is a normalcy to men's sexual desire and aggression towards women. Like he says, 'we are given porn, then reprimanded for acting manly when we act out our sexual desires on a woman's body.' And that, 'women are being irrational and crazy when men touch them.'

Given this context, how are women expected to behave while traveling? Unlike men, their relationship to transportation and mobility is not in terms of trying to become more mobile by adopting a 'macho' culture. Instead she is put in a position of needing to survive it. Consequently, women's behaviors are shaped by her need to manage the violence and the gender norms which limit her mobility. In doing so, she creates a different culture, distinct from the hyper-masculine one that defines mobility. Instead her culture is built out of the routine actions of trying to avoid sexual violence and confrontation, starting with de-feminizing her body.

### ***Women and the Production of a Sub-culture***

It's sometime in early May when the girls from the office decide that eating our lunches outside would be more pleasant than at our desks. The sun hangs right above our heads and now has really begun to beat down on our shoulders. We are sitting on the grass, enjoying our lunch and growing increasingly convinced that we need to get up from our picnic and assemble the shade tent. Finally we jump up and start working together to hang some of our blankets across the trees in hopes of making new shade.

We hadn't noticed before, but when Lidia jumps up we see how beautiful she looks. She is the shortest of all of us, but her posture gives her an added length that none of the rest of us seem to have. The highlights in her hair glimmer gold under the sun and her dress falls just above the knees giving her an a warm summer look. Lidia is also the one who frequently tells me

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<sup>21</sup> Posted online on November 25, 2010 during a discussion on the use of women-only transportation as a way of combating violence against women in transportation.

to be careful when I travel, to not draw too much attention to myself. So when we comment on how gorgeous she looks, it gets us started on topic of “beauty.”

“Oh, no I'm not. Beauty is different.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Not like me,” she answers, fanning her hand over her dark and short body. “My family in the North are beautiful.” She squirms a little while longer on the subject, trying to define beauty without using the words we all hear her saying anyway: tall and light skinned.

“Anyway, it's much better not to be too beautiful. It draws too much attention. They [my family] used to travel to Texas a lot to go shopping. They don't go up there much anymore. It's too dangerous now.” Lidia explains. My cousin knows someone who was stopped on the highway, pulled out of her car and raped.”

“Is it too dangerous to drive up there?” I asked.

“Yea, it's possible. You can drive there, but you have to be much more careful.” She said. “My girl cousins went to Texas a few months ago with my aunt. It was just the girls. My cousin told me that on the way back, they dressed all in black, wearing tons of black make-up and messing-up their hair.” She laughs. “I'm serious! When you are traveling long distances you should dress in all black. *Make yourself look as ugly as possible.* That's what they did. They made themselves ugly so that nobody would want to rape them.”<sup>22</sup>

Was Lidia right? Does beauty lead to rape?

*Strategies for safe travel: #1 cover the body*

It has been shown that women are blamed for the violence that they encounter while using public transportation. These ideologies of blaming the victim are wrapped in phrases that start with, “if she wasn't...” or “if she hadn't have been...,” and end with “then she wouldn't have been raped, or violated.” The ideology of blaming women for the violence is so strong that even most that I talked to had no problem recalling these phrases when discussing a situation of violence against women. As Beatriz, a young 30-year old, research consultant once told me:

“Oh yes, women need to take care of how they dress so that they do not attract the wrong kind of attention.” She says without hesitation. “In fact, Guadalajara there is a law that women are not allowed to wear revealing clothing on public transportation.”

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<sup>22</sup> The italics are my emphasis.

“That cannot be true.” I respond, shaking my head in absolute disbelief.

“It is.” chimes in Jannine who has been standing beside us, listening while she prepares some coffee. “It's not meant to be bad. It's to help them. Keep them from being attacked while traveling.”

I never found any written law, nor anyone who could verify this supposed “dress code for women travelers.” But then again, I did not go to great depths to confirm or deny its validity. It was enough that women believed in it. And moreover, that women found it necessary to tell me – someone who is interviewing them on violence against women in transportation– about it, making it at the very least a cultural truth.

But even without an example of a law, women never seized to talk about how to cover your body in order to protect yourself while traveling. As “Cute Girl” says:

*“The first thing you should do before you get into the taxi is look at the plates, second sit in the back, if you are wearing a skirt or if it is a low-cut blouse make sure to cover it with a sweater so not draw too much attention, and have the money ready to pay so that you can get out and get your change, and lastly don't go anywhere until the taxi has pulled away. These tactics work most of the time.”*<sup>23</sup>

I'm explaining Cute Girl's comment to a colleague, and talking about the links that women must go in order to protect herself while traveling. She explains to me:

“You see, there are two sides to the machismo culture. One that is violent towards women. And one that seeks to protect 'the virgin,' 'the mother,' or the 'idealized Mexican women.’” She shrugs her shoulders holding them high while running her hands from the top of her head down to her chin as if to wrap a scarf around her face, and explains, “as long as you look like 'the good woman,' then men will protect you. Especially if you have to come home late at night. But if you don't embrace that image [of the Virgin Mary], then you are very likely to get harassed and no man will stick up for you if that happens.”

Part of embracing the traditional image of the woman, also means not traveling during precarious times, not putting your body in a dangerous place. Sara, a single mother of two, living just in a city just south of Mexico City, told me that ideally she would tend bar, because it gave her a chance work while her children were asleep and be there for them while they were awake.

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<sup>23</sup> Comment posted online on by Linda Chica on 15/12/2010 during a conversation on the use of women-only taxis as a means to increase security for women. In reference to the 'plates' she is describing a registered taxi vs. an unregistered one: an unregulated taxi.

She had tended bar in the past, but she was repeatedly harassed after closing when trying to return home. She said that she was afraid to take a taxi that late at night because men perceived her differently, they looked at her as someone with loose morals and deserving to be attacked. 'Besides,' they told her, 'a woman should be at home at night with her children, and not hanging out in a bar late with a bunch of drunk guys.'

These routine actions of de-feminizing the body, or avoiding certain places that are seen as particularly dangerous for women, are used by women to try to regain some power and to have some shield against extreme violence. But it costs women a piece of her identity as an individual with equal rights to mobility, reinforcing an image of her –particularly her body– as susceptible to violence and danger while traveling. Consequently, women negotiate their mobility by choosing the lesser of two evils, where if she does not hide her body and she is violated, then she is also blamed and told to accept the violence as a form of punishment for “asking for it.” On the other hand, if she hides her body, plays the part of the “virgin woman,” then she helps reinforce the very image that keeps her oppressed in the first place: women should not be mobile, because their bodies are too vulnerable and susceptible to the brutish culture required for travel.

*Strategies for safe travel: #2 practice non-confrontation behavior*

It is understandable why women would choose hiding their bodies over facing the possibility of being violated or harassed, particularly when there is very limited institutional support for confronting an attacker. In addition to being blamed for the attack, women also fear the police (or the police also blame them and belittle their claims). And there is a strong cultural ideology to delegitimize women's stories on being attacked while using transportation, claiming that she either provoked the attack or is lying about it to extort money.

The consequence of a place that delegitimizes violence against women, forces women to practice non-confrontation behavior. That is, they simply do not report the crimes. And when they are attacked, they very rarely say anything to their attacker, but instead find the safest and easiest way to exit the situation.

In the same tone that Lidia and Alexandra had always used on me, women repeatedly told me not to confront an attacker. 'If I do,' I was often told, 'it is likely to encourage the attacker to

do something more violent. I could cause the situation to escalate.' But worse, I will lose control of the situation.' Or at least the little bit of it that I had control over.

After every recount of being attacked, women had a conclusion that involved walking away. On two different occasions I heard the same story of a nonchalant escape from boorish taxi driver. In both cases, the women told me that after getting into the taxi, the driver proceeded down the street, masturbating while glancing back at them in the rear-view mirror. Once they had realized what the driver was doing, they waited for opportune moment, asked him to stop, *paid him*, and then got out of the taxi and proceeded to look for a new one.

There is a nonchalant calmness to which women recounted these stories. As if they were doing the right and most sensible thing. And men tended to agree with this practice, even when it was them who was put in a situation where a woman that they were traveling with was being sexually violated.

During an interview with a woman in her late 40s she told me how she would prefer to travel with her husband. "Absolutely." She says when I ask her if it is more comfortable.

"Have you ever been harassed while using public transportation?" I ask.

"Sure." She hesitates to give me the details, clearly not wanting to have to recall the whole incident. "This one time both my husband and I were on the subway. I felt the guy behind me reach up my skirt and grab me. He was just a dirty old, man. Disgusting fella."

"With your husband there?" I asked, a little surprised. "So? What did he do? Your husband?"

"No, nothing. He was just as shocked as me. He didn't know what to do, and he was a little afraid of confronting the man and starting a fight. You never know what can happen. So we just got off at the next station."

They did not report the incident to the police, nor did they talk about it. Under the suggestion of her husband they distanced themselves from the dirty, old man, and waited on the platform for the next train. The exact same strategy used by most women.

Non-confrontation responses to violence only allows women to practice submissiveness, indulgence, and docility. Whereas men on the other hand, are routinely practicing bold and confident behaviors while traveling. Women are not only seen as not possessing the right culture

to be bold and confident in a place that demands 'courage,' but through their own actions they also internalize these ideologies about themselves. As Doña Maria once told me in an interview:

“Pink taxis are a terrible idea. Attackers will know that it is just women in that car. So they are going to be a much greater target.”

Even though Doña Maria is in her late 60s and maintains a traditional view of women's role in the household, she expresses a commonly held belief about women and transportation. In fact, when the idea of women-only taxis was first introduced in Mexico the main question that arose among the public was: if women have their own taxis that are pink (making women more visible) then how will women protect themselves?

Of all the issues raised in response to women-only taxis, this one was so important to the public that it required special attention. The government assured the public that they would take extra measures to make sure that these women would be safe. Specifically, they required all women drivers who wanted to get their taxi license to take a course that included skills that could protect them such as, self defense classes and how to change a tire so that they would not be stranded on the side of the road alone. And secondly, the government publicly announced that all women-only taxis would be equipped with GPS systems and a panic button that would immediately alert the police if she “felt afraid.”

An obviously problem that arises with these types of policies are that they reinforce gender differences. The self-defense courses and GPS systems support the image of women as weaker than men, and more vulnerable towards crime. And, unless women use women-only taxis in counter-cultural ways –demonstrating that she is equally as capable as a man to drive a taxi – then these types of policies have the potential of increasing the gender division.

***Conclusion: Violence promotes masculinity among men, while controlling women***

This chapter has shown that men embrace the masculine culture of transportation, and reproduce it through bold, confident, and violent interactions. Women on the other hand, respond to the violence by hiding her body, and practicing non-confrontation behavior. If women were to attempt to be more bold and confident when they traveled, they would not only increase their likelihood towards being sexually violated, but they would have to bear the additional humiliation of being blamed for the attack. As if her 'bold behavior' was “asking for it.” Up against so much cultural and institutional sexism, women simply do not confront the violence.

Consequently, men produce a culture that is seen as capable and able to be mobile. Women on the other hand are seen as vulnerable and incapable of being mobile. And, as the next chapter will show, these different cultures and differences between men and women's mobility have great confidence when determining who has a right to the city and who does not.

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# Chapter 4

## Discrimination

Alma is a 26 year-old investigative journalist who spends most of her day in the office. Even though the quality of her work would benefit from tracking down sources and talking to people in the streets, Alma spends most of her time inside of the office, hammering away on keyboard and searching for data online. She is young and beautiful and a stylish dresser, with hair that is always neatly and purposefully fixed and a pair of high heels to go with every outfit. But while her stylish and feminine appearance gives her a professional look in the office, it also undermines her credibility as a reporter who can take to the streets. In the streets she is seen as too feminine, which means that she is seen as too vulnerability and susceptible to crime.

After following Alma case for nearly 3 years, I called her up for one last final and formal interview, during which I asked her about how she has become an investigative journalists who works from the office instead of in the streets. In short her answer was that women journalists are rarely chosen for work that requires travel. Journalism in Mexico is a dangerous, she explained, and women are a liability. The following is a brief excerpt from that interview:

*Alma: "I graduated 5 years ago from university with a degree in Communications, specializing in Journalism. In that time I have spent most of the time in the office, working as an assistant for other journalists, looking up information online and helping in that way. It was only in Expansión where Berto gave me my own column to write, where I frequently went out and conducted interviews.<sup>24</sup> But I never traveled alone. The companies that we covered sent a van or bus to pick a group of us journalists up and take us to their offices for press releases. I always traveled that way."*

*Me: "Are there differences in the way men and women report. If you were a guy would you travel more?"*

*Alma: "Definitely. It's easier for guys to travel. Women are put into more risky situations than men. Now with the situation in Michoacan, the majority of reporters there are men. Because*

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Expansión is a business magazine in Mexico, of which at the time Berto was the managing editor. Alma, followed her mentor and boss from El Universal, the first job that she had taken in Mexico, to two different magazines, eventually settling with her at a foundation that she created for investigative journalism, where she continues to work today.

*it's complicated to have a woman.<sup>25</sup> Men are sent much more to areas with high risk than women.*”

Me: *“Do you think that women want to go? If I was a reporter, I might want to go to Michoacan because it's a hot issue to cover right now.”*

Alma: *“Sure, sure. Actually the correspondent that El Universal sent to Michoacan is a woman. So a woman did go, but only because she was traveling with a man. She wanted to do it, and they didn't have anyone else to send, they only had her on hand. But she wanted to cover it, she asked them if she could go to Michoacan. So they said, ok, go, but you have to go with a guy so that you can feel like you have more support.”*

In addition to it being safer for men to travel to cover stories, Alma also explained to me that there are two additional assets which make you more mobile in journalism. First, not having a family.

“Women with *familias* are more complicated.” She explained. “They have to be home at certain times to take care of the children.”

Secondly, journalists who have street contacts are more likely to be chosen for reports that require mobility. Reporting in the streets requires having a set of trusted contacts. As Alma explains, “For reasons of security, you need to know people in the area that you are traveling to. Have them pick you up when you arrive. Introduce you to other people. And help you find interviews.”

The obvious problem with this system is that women never have an opportunity to develop those contacts. Most of these contacts are based on previous work in that area, and since men are preferred over women when it comes to stories that involve travel, they have had the opportunities to establish trustworthy contacts, whereas women have not. Consequently women are further trapped in a vicious cycle of immobility, which the office place can then use to legitimize discriminatory practices.

This chapter explores in greater detail the links between the culture of women's (im)mobility (as it was explained in the previous chapter) and women's urban opportunities. While many of women's opportunities in the city are thwarted, included social, political, global

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<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of 2014, vigilante groups in Mexico's western state of Michoacan took up arms and began fighting the drug cartels themselves. This battle has created a state of war, where the military and local police have joined in on a three-way armed battle between citizens, drug cartels, and government bodies. Reporters have been sent to cover the stories, but the area was declared extremely unsafe and Mexican citizens were advised not to travel through this state under any circumstances.

and economic, this chapter focuses on the latter, looking at how women are blocked from “good” urban jobs, because she is seen as incapable of being mobile.

### ***Gender Discrimination in Mexico City***

People talk about Mexico City like it is the heavy weight champion of Latin American metropolises. It has been referred to it as a global city (Parnreiter 2002) and an economic hub for international trade into the southern hemisphere (Lida 2008). Perhaps it is the potential of becoming someone better, richer, and more successful in Mexico City that draws people to it, making it one of the largest cities in the world with around 20 million inhabitants.

Yet, despite all the potential opportunities that a global city offers, women in Mexico City do not have access to positions of power. According to the Grant Thornton International Business Report published in 2012, the per cent of senior management roles in Mexico held by women stays at steady 18, with no signs of increasing.<sup>26</sup> A second report published a year later by, McKinsey & Company, supplemented this data, clarifying that the reason for the lack of women executives in Latin America en general has to do with their lack of mobility and household responsibilities.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, in 2013, 44% of women in Latin America reported the “double burden” syndrome of having to balance work and domestic responsibilities. Additionally, 39% reported that a persistent barrier to reaching top management had to do travel, where companies embraced “anytime, anywhere” models, even though most women struggle with mobility in ways that men do not. The report went on to specify that these barriers were particularly strong for women in Mexico, where even though companies in Mexico were particularly vocal about the importance of having women executives it was also the country with the smallest shares of women on their executive committees.<sup>28</sup>

While mobility and women's household responsibilities are certainly barriers, they do not tell us anything about why or how these barriers create persistent forms of urban inequality for

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<sup>26</sup> A link to this report titled, “Women in senior management: still not enough,” can be found at: <http://www.internationalbusinessreport.com/files/ibr2012%20-%20women%20in%20senior%20management%20master.pdf>. Last checked February 21, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> A link to this report titled, “ Why top management eludes women in Latin America,” can be found at: <http://www.slideshare.net/GaldeMerkline/women-matter-latin-america>. Last checked February 21, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> A link to this report titled, “ Why top management eludes women in Latin America,” can be found at: <http://www.slideshare.net/GaldeMerkline/women-matter-latin-america>. Last checked February 21, 2014.

women. Why do women stay immobilized? And how does her immobility relate to her household responsibilities and conversely her role as a public figure? This chapter unpacks the 'black box' of *mobility as a barrier*, linking the gendered cultures of men and women's travel –as discussed in the previous chapter– to the persistent nature of gender inequality. Specifically, it focuses on two important aspects in men and women's different cultures when it comes to mobility: 1) how the ideology that men possess the “right” culture to travel and women possess the “wrong” culture make the immobilization of women a persistent force that is difficult to overcome; 2) and how this gender differences in mobility affect women in terms of her right to the city, specifically economic opportunities.

The rest of this chapter lays out three scenarios, demonstrating these processes. The first two scenarios look at how the characteristics of women's *culture of mobility* reinforces discriminatory practices and reproduces her immobility. Here, women's *culture of mobility* really refers to the ideologies that demobilize her, where men are seen as possessing the right culture to travel and women the wrong one. By laying out how these characteristics are used in the workplace or the home, these scenarios show how women's *culture of mobility* is used to discriminate against women and reproduce her immobility. The last scenario thinks about violence against women in transportation as a form of urban discrimination, denying women equal right to the city.

***Characteristic One: Women are more susceptible to criminal activity than men, making them very bad candidates to work in the travel industry***

Sometime at the end of 2009, I spent a considerable amount of time trying to track down women taxi drivers, or any women who worked in public transportation for that matter. I had not actually seen a woman taxi driver, but I had heard that they existed. I had even heard of a city not too far from Mexico City which had a taxi company ran entirely by women. So, in Mexico City, I thought that I could find at least a few women drivers, even if this was a predominately male-driven industry. I was sure that a woman driver could fill-me-in on the dirty details that made the transit industry such a gendered place. How hard was it to get a job as a driver? Do you feel like being a woman makes it difficult for you to work there? But these questions were answered more in my search for a driver than in any interview that I ever conducted with one.

The first place that I decided to look was in the classified section of the newspapers, searching announcements for 'drivers wanted.' I thought that at least one of the dozens of taxi companies in the city's papers must have a female driver. If I could just track down some of these companies, then surely I am bound to find one who has a female driver. Or, in a pinch, I could apply for a position as a driver to do an ethnographical study of how women become taxi drivers.

This was my first, albeit short-lived, plan to find a woman taxi driver. At the bottom of each advertisement car service companies clarified the position with, noting: "male applicants only." I knew that it would be hard to become a female taxi driver, but I had not realized that there were actually company policies against hiring them.

So my second attempt was to go directly to the source by talking to some of these male drivers in person. Perhaps they could share their thoughts on women taxi drivers. Or maybe they even happened to know a woman who drove a cab. So the next morning I called one of the taxi companies and asked for a ride to work.

"Good morning!" I said, still fully optimistic that by the end of the day I was going to have an interview that could give me insight into world of women taxi drivers.

"So," I jump right in with my explanation, "I am looking into women taxi drivers. Are there any women who driver taxis at your company? Or maybe you know a woman who drives a cab for a different company?"

He shoots me a dirty look, like I was mocking him. But I wasn't trying to be argumentative. So I explained again, "I am looking into this idea of women as taxi drivers. It has to do with the women-only transportation that we have here in Mexico City. Pues..., I want to get a chance to talk to some of the women who are driving taxis."

He looks pissed. "No." He finally responds. "This is not really a job for women. And there are no women drivers in this company."

I knew what he meant, because I had heard the reason hundreds of times before. Literally, in interviews and surveys conducted on the subject of women driving taxis, hundreds of people, both men and women, responded that *women were too vulnerable when they traveled*. This meant that they could *never* be drivers of taxis because they made themselves a target for crime. And who would want to take a taxi with someone who is likely to get mugged or carjacked on the way to work?

When El Universal –one of Mexico City's largest newspapers– asked its online readers whether-or-not women-only taxis would be a good solution to violence against women, 130 people answered almost entirely in the negative, saying that it would never work. While most gave various reasons including 'women were bad drivers,' or 'women could be dangerous too', the most agreed upon reason (44%) specifically stated that it would never work because women are too vulnerable when they travel. And even though the women-only taxis offered “special security measures” for women, including a GPS system, a panic button that would immediately alert the police, and special training for the drivers, that women still would never be safe.

As some of the men noted:

*“Well, I think it is going to be easier for the attackers [referring to women-only taxis], because now they not only will rape the passengers, but they can also fuck the driver too, that's if she looks as good as the one in the photo.”<sup>29</sup>*

*“I think this could be counterproductive, they are possibly giving the attackers a target so that they can more easily identify the defenseless women to attack them. It wouldn't be necessary for them to search out women, if they see they taxi they know very well that it only has women inside and this is not a good method.”<sup>30</sup>*

*“There will be more assaults. I think that this will lead to more insecurity for women. I can imagine that in the middle of the night two women (driver and passenger) become targets at all the stop lights. What advantage is this? How are they going to defend themselves?”<sup>31</sup>*

*“That women drive them, good!! Will they be will safe?? Who knows?? If they are putting themselves out there for the 'delinquents' o there will be a police escort with each pink taxi. They should also learn Karate no? They are going to be out with all types of 'bad life !#@\*' and these women are going to be targets for certain types of attacks, like: secuestros express (taxi kidnappings), assaults, and rape... aguas (watch out) this could be a double-edged sword.”<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> Posted by Ralph on August 9, 2010 in response to an article released by the Gaceta Oficial (the Mexican government's official newspaper) made that same day, reporting that by the end of the month Mexico City would introduce a woman-only taxi program called, “Taxi rosa.”

<sup>30</sup> Posted by a guy going by the handle, “ciudadano” on November 10, 2009 to an article in Agencia EFE, “Presentan taxis exclusivos para ujeres en DF.” on the use of pink taxis.

<sup>31</sup> Posted by Juan on November 11, 2009 to an article in Agencia EFE, “Presentan taxis exclusivos para ujeres en DF.” on the use of pink taxis.

<sup>32</sup> Posted by Anonymous on November 11, 2009 to an article in Agencia EFE, “Presentan taxis exclusivos para mujeres en DF.” on the use of pink taxis.

*“What a joke these [pink taxis] are as a way to avoid the looks and touching. This only happens in mass transit, not in taxis. And the only thing they are going to achieve is that the attackers who focus on taxis are going to target pink ones. I do not understand the logic of creating an 'exclusive' service meant to increase security, when by contrast it is putting a sign above them saying, 'women aboard.' Let's see what you guys say when crime rates soar.”*<sup>33</sup>

The sentiment that women are incapable of driving taxis, because they are too vulnerable towards crime and incapable of protecting themselves, does not mean that women do not want this type of work, or need it. Later that year, I did find a woman taxi driver. Her name was Marisela and she did not work for a company. She owned her own taxi, and made a little business out of it, writing her cellphone number on little pieces of paper that she used as homemade business cards so that previous passengers could call on her for a ride anytime that they needed a cab. She said driving taxi was perfect for her. That as a single mother it gave her the flexibility that she needed to be with her kids and still work when they were at school or at other activities.

“Plus,” she told me, “I can go pick them up anytime I need to. I drop them off at school and immediately start working. When school is out, I turn off my sign and go there and pick them up. No conflict.”

In general people could not view women taxi drivers as a good idea. Their ideologies about the culture of women being too vulnerable, limited their vision of a woman capable of working in transportation. Instead they saw them as targets for criminal activity, and mothers as particularly selfish for putting their lives at risk and potentially leaving a house full of orphans behind. Even women had a hard time believing that they would truly be safer if they took a taxi with another woman.

As they stated when asked if they would feel safer:

*“On the contrary, I would feel worse, because in reality I don't know if I am going to be safe or not in these “pink” taxis. We are going to be a target for robberies and everything else.”*<sup>34</sup>

*“What purpose does this serve? Now we are going to be an easier target for them to find us.”*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Posted online by El Fantasma, on August 10, 2010, in response to an article posted by El Universal on the introduction of pink taxis in Mexico City: *Taxis rosas saldrán a la calle en septiembre*, by Johana Robles, August 10, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Susi November 8, 2010 to an article on the use of pink taxis.

Gender-based violence in transportation is so real that women find themselves asking how they can stay invisible. People fear the consequences of having a woman drive them around. And again, as mentioned earlier, in order to even introduce the idea of a fleet of taxis driven by women, public officials in Mexico City reassured the public that they are “safe,” by describing the required self-defense classes that women have to take, and how the GPS systems and panic button would immediately alert the police if something were to happen. Excluding women from work in the transit industry is predicated upon these ideologies and the belief that women are targets for crime, and their culture is too feminine –better mothers than fighters– to be mobile.

Defining women as better mothers than mobile figures makes it incredibly difficult for women to enter new industries, particularly ones that require mobility. As the next section will show, even when women do attempt to cross these boundaries, not only is her ability to be mobile called into question, but so is her ability to be a good mother.

***Characteristic Two: Women and motherhood. Women who need mobility are bad mothers***

*The case of Josefina and Poncho Part II*

Josefina is standing in front of the decrepit, one-story building which serves as a neutral meeting place for disputing couples. The mediator, along with Josefina's case worker are also there, waiting for Poncho. He missed the first two appointments and if he misses this one too, the case will have to go in front of a judge. Josefina is hoping that will not happen. She told me that judges are quick to take bribes from the fathers. She told me they will take full-custody away from the mother for just 200 pesos (18 USD).

Five days have passed since Josefina saw her daughter, Celeste. Poncho took her after sending Josefina to the emergency room to see if she had broken any ribs from when he attacked her. At one point, she took a pretty hard kick to the chest. Celeste had not been to school all week. Poncho refuses to take her, fearing that Josefina will be able to take her back. Josefina has called Poncho's mother's house, where Celeste has been, but of course they will not let the girl answer her mother's calls. And the police told Josefina that they really could not do anything without a warrant from a judge.

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<sup>35</sup> Posted by Joseph on November 10, 2009 to an article in Agencia EFE, “Presentan taxis exclusivos para mujeres en DF.” on the use of pink taxis.



So, she is standing in front of a old building hoping that her soon to be ex-husband will show-up and let her see her daughter again. And if not, then she is hoping that she is allowed to see a judge who has not been bribed and who give her warrant to enter the house where her daughter is being kept.

She looks down at the file in her hand, full of hospital and police reports. She brought them to show how violent her husband, and that he has a problem with alcohol. She has two other reports to go along with the last time he sent her away in an ambulance. Once when he was coming home from the bar belligerent, threatening to kill her, she locked herself in the room and called the police. Another time, when he actually did get his hands on her, sending her once again to the hospital. Everyone keeps telling her that those are private matters and will not help the two come to an agreement about the daughter. They have suggested that she leave the file in her bag and try to think about a comprise that the two can make.

Of course, Poncho has his defense too. He finally arrives to the building. Fifteen minutes late, but he is there. They all take their seats and he is the first to argue his side. He starts:

“Josefina is a bad mother, because... She works too much.” He argues in a matter of fact tone.

He goes on to explain how she is always taking jobs that are too far away, demanding too much time away from the child. There are nods of agreement.

She explains that Celeste could stay with her mother while she worked. That her mother could pick her up from school and make her dinner. The same would be true if Celeste lived with Poncho. That his mother would take care of Celeste while he was working. But she seemed to be making a different argument. Nobody seemed to see it that way.

So split custody was decided, based upon Josefina's work schedule. And oddly, the drinking and the violence never seem to enter the debate. “Celeste will stay with Josefina, except the days in which she works. And if she has to be home late, Celeste should stay the night with her dad.”

I asked Josefina if she was happy with the outcome. And when she told me that “it was a fair compromise,” I threw up my hands in exasperation. At that moment I knew that even if tomorrow every single woman in Mexico woke-up, believing that she was strong enough and capable enough to be as mobile as any man, then she would still find herself in an ideological

battle with motherhood, which flat out denies mobility to mothers. It strongly believes that care for the family and mobility can only exist in a seesaw relationship, where when one goes up the other goes down.

Of course all of this logic is reinforced through attacks against women, where the threat of violence against women in transportation significantly increases for women at night. Especially if women are traveling alone. Additionally, they are far more likely to be blamed for the violence, where both men and women often shame these women for “putting themselves in a dangerous situation.” And, if they are mothers than they seen as bad mothers who do not deserve to keep their children.

Several women with children had told me how they turned down jobs that required night travel. But one in particular, Luciana, a single mother of two, had one of the most paradoxical stories. She had an ideal job for a single mom, working as a bar tender. Her mother lived with her and her children, so while they slept she worked. Her shift ended 3-4 in the morning, giving her just enough time to arrive at home, wake her children, make them breakfast, and take them to school. She would sleep while they were away, and be there all afternoon with them when they returned.

But Luciana received a lot of threats leaving the bar late at night, and when she was “almost raped,” she said that had not choice but to quit. 'What kind of woman puts herself in that type of danger,' paraphrasing what people told her. 'Leaving a bar at that time, with a bunch of borrachos violentos (drunk and violent guys). You're just asking for trouble.'

Motherhood is a powerfully demobilizing institution, which uses a women's desire and need for mobility to classify her as either a “good mother” or a “bad mother.” A “good mother” refuses mobility during precarious times. Particularly at night, when she chooses instead to be at home, making dinner, tucking in her children into bed, and kissing them on the forehead. A “bad mother” breaks the rules of travel for women. Instead, she breaks-up a family to escape a violent marriage, is forced to arrange her schedule that requires working during later hours, and is therefore justifiably punished by making herself a target for criminal activity, rape, and violence.

This misty eyed view of the “mother as a gentle giver of life,” as Caitlin Moran puts it, and that they should “give and give and give, until they simply wear out” (2011: 266), makes mothers incapable of being mobile. The qualities that define a “good mother” –sensitive, caring,

soft, gentle, and selfless— run counter to the characteristics needed to be mobile. Mobility requires toughness, strength, fearlessness, a desire to fight, and ruthlessness. And, if a mother dare try to adopt the characteristics needed to be mobile, she would be held trial by her family and community as someone not deserving of her children.

It is these strong ideological ties that bind women to the house and demobilize her which make her liberation so complicated. She not only must find a way to overcome violence that excludes her from equal mobility, but also a way to do so without discrediting her as a mother.

The next section goes into greater detail about why more transportation will not increase women's mobility. Specifically, because the persistent nature of gender inequality for women in Mexico City is tied to differences between men and women, women's physical mobility can not increase with more available transportation. That is, women are not stifled by the lack of safe transportation, per se, but rather by cultural ideologies that reinforce her role as a household figure and not a public one.

### ***Why Women's Liberation from Immobility Cannot Happen in a Car***

In 1895 when Frances Willard wrote about the bicycle as a form of women's liberation. In 2010 Susan Hanson readdressed this idea, talking again about how women equal access to transportation can resolve issues of inequality between men and women's mobility. Much like this dissertation, both women were discussing the problem of gender inequality and mobility as it is tied to women's pursuit of new opportunities. Specifically, Willard wrote about finding her own form of feminism in learning to ride a bike. And Hanson extends this argument by showing how women's freedom to use transportation would give her a liberating confidence to explore new options.

This dissertation hopes to extend these ideas even farther, arguing that women have hit a different type of wall. Her fight for equal mobility is not with her trying to access transportation, but rather in being allowed to use transportation in the same way that men do. Only when men and women's relationship to transit is equal will the gender boundaries that restrict her mobility and her confidence to explore new opportunities begin to fall. To put it in the context of Willard's experience learning to ride a bike, it is not enough for women to learn to ride the bicycle, but

rather she needs to be allowed to use it exactly the same way that men are using it. And, her identity as a wife, mother, and “gentle person,” can not be used against her to shorten her ride.

This section explores this idea in more detail, focusing on women's use of the private car. Contrary to popular belief (Anand and Tiwari 2006 Babinard and Scott 2009, Odufuwa 2007, Schwanen 2011, Venter et al. 2007), the private car does not actually increase women's mobility. At least this is true in the case of Mexico City. Here, I observe Alma –the young investigative journalist mentioned at the beginning of this chapter with her own car. Her story demonstrates how she and her car share a unique relationship that is defined by gender differences, where the car's physical mobility can only be as extended to Alma's greatest weaknesses as a woman. That is her mobility, even in a private car, cannot go beyond where she is seen as vulnerable, such as: traveling long distances, at night, or alone.

When first observed Alma, she was working with a small, investigative journalism institute ran by a former war correspondent from New York, but with family roots going back to Panama. The director, Irene, is the kind of woman that is made out of tough stuff. She had spent time as a foreign correspondent in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, and had stories about dodging bullets in the late 80s early 90s when she covered civil wars in Central America and the drug war in Colombia. Yet, in Mexico she seemed bound by the same travel regulations as any other woman.

On an early afternoon, we were all sitting around the office. Alma and I were chatting about news in Mexico, when our conversation was interrupted. Irene slammed the phone down and let out a loud “UGGGHHH!” in frustration.

“This guy is totally blowing me off.” She says. “He has to work on Sunday so he can’t travel out to San Luis Potosí with me to do the interviews. And we really need to go this weekend.”

“Why don’t you just go alone?”

“No, it’s way to dangerous for a woman to be traveling alone. I need to go with a guy. I’m just going to reschedule for next weekend.”

I glanced over at Alma and wondered why she did not speak-up. “She could go.” I thought to myself. “Instead of a guy it could be two women. Wouldn't that also be safe?” But Alma was silent. She knew long before I did that she could not go on this trip. I on the other

hand, needed more convincing. And I started to feel angry towards Alma. Why is she is not demanding to go?

I remember back to a different time when I observed Alma in the workplace. It was in October of 2010, when she had a couple of weeks off from the journalism institute and freelanced her time to a small research company in Mexico City. The job was part of a nationwide evaluation of a government-operated, economic program to help stimulate small business growth. A small research team was assembled, where each member would pose as a small business owner, traveling to around 80 different offices throughout the country in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Being national, the project required a considerable amount of travel, where each person would be expected to cover one of four regions throughout Mexico. The “Northern Region” of Mexico included the states of Durango, Sinaloa, Nayarit, and Jalisco. This area was not only considered most dangerous because it was the furthest one away from Mexico City, but also was home to some of the most notorious Mexican drug cartel activity at the time. The second region called, “Mid-Region,” covered the states just north of Mexico City, and included the states of Guanajuato, Hidalgo, and San Luis Potosí. The third area, the “Southeast Region,” only consisted of two states: Veracruz and Puebla. It was considered the shortest route since it only required a one night stay in Veracruz. Finally, the last region was in Mexico City and only included the immediately surrounding areas.

Initially the project could only find two people available. Both of whom were women. One was Alma. The other was a mother of two who, when not at home taking care of the children, made money by picking up freelance work just like this one. As the only mother on the project, she was automatically assigned the local, Mexico City region, giving her time to work during the day and be home in the afternoon. Alma had her own car. Plus she did not have any kids, both of which made her an asset to the team. However, these assets were trumped by her gender, which put her at a “security risk, as a young woman traveling alone.” For this reason she was given the Southeast Region, so that she could be sent out and returned to Mexico City as quickly as possible.

What the project needed was men. Men who can be sent to the longer and more “dangerous” places. But there were no men looking for freelance work. So instead, the office

sacrificed two of their male employees and asked them to join this project for the week. One of them, Don, had both a car and children, but neither of these factored into his assignment. Instead Don took the Northern Region because he was the one that the office could spare the longest. Also, Don was comfortable with taking long-distance buses during the night. So his being able to sleep on the bus and wake-up in a new city made it easier for him to cover the longest routes in the shortest amount of time. The other one, Ricardo, did not have children or a car, but even if he did he still would have been given the Mid-Region for two important reasons. First, it was not considered safe or possible for either of the two women; and secondly, because he was desperately needed in the office, which meant he could not take a week off to travel to the North. In fact, he was expected to continue working on his current office projects, while also traveling through the Mid-Region to help with this project.

I was thinking about how these routes were divided, while I sat there looking at Alma, hoping that she would speak-up to Irene and tell her to take her to San Lois Potosi. When Alma was sent to the Southeast Region instead of the other places, I remember that at the time I was not angry. Even though the decision was clearly based on gender. But at this very moment, when she is being presented with an opportunity to advance her career, I was very angry that they had not even asked her if she would like to cover a different region. Maybe, if she had been sent to the Northern Region instead of Don, then she would be more willing to argue for her right to participate in this trip too.

Some time later, I asked her about both of these trips. First, I asked her about going to Veracruz, to which she replied:

“Thinking back on it, I cannot believe that I went there. I cannot believe that I drove there by myself, and part of the way was at night! In Veracruz!”

“Well what about at the journalism institute?” I asked. “Does Irene still travel with men?”  
“Oh Yea.” She says. “For example, right now there are four of us. And, Manual almost always gets chosen to go on the trips throughout the country, even though he has less experience. He is a guy and he can get around better.”

I nodded and said, “well, that's that.”

There are lots of women who drive cars instead of taking public transportation. Many of whom even believe that it is “safer” (Vilalta 2011). But the car does not liberate women from the

same boundaries that confine her mobility in public transportation. The car does not lessen women's role in the household, and it does not change the perspective of her as more capable of being mobile. Transportation, be it private or public, is gendered in Mexico City. And women are demobilized because they are feel and are seen as weak and vulnerable within these spaces.

***Conclusion: Violence and sexual harassment in the city as a form of discrimination***

A survey conducted by the Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED) in 2010 revealed that 74 percent of the women reported that while using transportation “men stared at them morbidly;” 73 per cent reported that men had pressed sexual parts of their bodies against their own with “intentions with sexual nature;” 63 per cent reported having received “obscene or offensive sexual comments;” and 48 per cent reported that men had “touched or fondled themselves in front of them” (Zermenño Núñez, Plácido Ríos 2010:100). Yet, when this violence is discussed among the general public, it never is in terms of how it limits women's opportunities, discriminates against them, and holds them back from being their true selves.

Shouldn't sexual harassment and violence against women in transportation be seen as a form of urban discrimination? It looks and acts exactly like sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace. Part of what makes sexual harassment in the workplace such a powerful form of gender discrimination is its ability to define men and women as possessing different abilities, and in doing so reproduce disparities in earnings, leadership roles, and occupational choices (Acker 1990, Gutek 1985). It creates horizontal segregation, where women are pigeon-holed into certain categories without the ability to rise to new positions, and they tend to lose the confidence to challenge those norms. But isn't that exactly what is happening to women in transportation?

Violence and harassment against women in the city makes women fear physical mobility and therefore avoid opportunities attached to it. We know that without equal rights to mobility, women lose their autonomy, agency, and a sense of freedom and ability to explore and create new opportunities (Wesely, Allison, and Schneider 2000). In 1895, when Frances Willard wrote about learning to ride a bike at the age of 53, she made mobility the centerpiece of feminist debate. When Hanson continued this discuss she describes how as a girl Willard had loved to roam the outdoors around her prairie home in the American Midwest and ‘ran wild’ until that moment when, at the age of 16 and in the name of becoming a proper middle-class woman, she

was reined in, ‘enwrapped in the long skirts that impeded every footstep’, and forced to abandon her ‘beloved and breezy outdoor world to the indoor realm of study.’ “Willard” she explains, “puts her finger on what has so interested feminists about gender and mobility: the two are completely bound up with each other, to the point of almost being inseparable” (Hanson 2010: 6).

Women are repeatedly stating this this type of violence and harassment limits them from being a more confident and able version of themselves:

*“Don't try to put the blame on anyone, just try to respect them. Just because a girl is wearing a skirt or tight pants does not give you the right to touch her, there is no justification [for it]. I have been through it and it is too humiliating and degrading, you feel horrible! And worse, because nobody helps you. Men blame women and feminism, but this has nothing to do with it. We are not demanding to be treated better than men, simply that we can travel as peacefully as we can while using transportation.”<sup>36</sup>*

*“They do not understand the shame. It's a pity to read the comments made by the men here [in the online forum], above all those comments that justify or try to justify why they do it. The comment by “señor” that says that we make ourselves the victims, or the other that says that more than that we like it. It's a disgrace. Now I understand why the day that it happened to me, and I hit the guy in response, that everyone looked at me like I was crazy, like I was the one who did something wrong. Nobody moved a finger; nobody asked me if I was ok, including the women who were there and yet did nothing. This indifference and commonplace that we live to see these events happen more and more frequently, harden us and make us indifferent... ...If we cannot even live together safely in transportation, [the thing] that is so fundamental for us to get from work, home, etc., we cannot ask that this country be a crime free one, we must start with ourselves.”<sup>37</sup>*

Gender-based violence in transportation is still very much seen as a woman's problem, where it is simply not talked about in terms of how it steals women's confidence, their freedom to travel, and their independence. Breaking free from this ideology must come from either allowing women to prove themselves capable as men, or by demasculinizing transportation altogether. In either case, women in Mexico City are in need a feminist movement to reduce these gender differences.

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<sup>36</sup> Women “X” posted this on November 25, 2010 in response to an online forum created by El Universal, asking women if they had ever been manhandled while using public transportation.

<sup>37</sup> Comment posted by Rafa on November 25, 2010 in response to an online forum created by El Universal, asking women if they had ever been manhandled while using public transportation.



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# Chapter 5

## Feminism

It's October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, and I'm standing on the corner of Reforma and Misisipi in Mexico City, waiting for a woman-only bus. I have now been living in the city for 5 years and can say that the women here have finally taught me how to be mobile. I still use the metro (underground train) and buses almost daily, but I have not been physically violated for over 18 months. The sexual harassment continues in a seemingly endless cycle of staring, lip-licking, and vulgar comments, but at least I have learned how to avoid a penis or a hand being jammed into my backside or between my legs. For the most part, I feel relatively safe.

Reforma is a powerful street, full of symbolic and revolutionary icons. On this particular corner, stands a 72 foot, statue of La Diana la Cazadora (Diana the Hunter). I was told that she was erected to remind the Spanish settlers that Mexico's indigenous women would not play the role of docile, Catholic woman. And, as I stand there staring at the poised, fully-naked Diana – muscles flexed as she stands in hunting position, fully extending her bow and arrow, ready to kill her prey at any moment– I see why she has also become so relevant today. And my mind starts to wonder to the other Diane, the one in the North.

On the Northern border of Mexico, in the city of Juarez, where they say one woman a day is raped and murdered on a bus –a phenomenon so great that it has recently received its own Wikipedia page<sup>38</sup>– another Diana the Hunter has emerged. Only this one is made from flesh and bones, and she does not hunt animals. In August 2013, on separate occasions she boarded buses on two different routes, spat words into the ears of the drivers, then shot them each twice in the head. Witnesses say, she is a middle-aged women with dyed blonde hair –or maybe it is a wig– wearing a cap, plaid shirt and jeans. And nobody seems to know (or will say) how she fled the scenes. Shortly after the shootings a news website from El Paso, called La Polaka<sup>39</sup> received this letter signed by *Diana, the Hunter of Bus Drivers*:

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<sup>38</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female\\_homicides\\_in\\_Ciudad\\_Ju%C3%A1rez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_homicides_in_Ciudad_Ju%C3%A1rez)

<sup>39</sup> A news website from El Paso, specializing in covering the political gossip of Juárez.

You think that because we are women we are weak, and that may be true but only up to a point, because even though we have nobody to defend us and we have to work long hours until late into the night to earn a living for our families we can no longer be silent in the face of these acts that enrage us. We were victims of sexual violence from bus drivers working the maquila night shifts here in Juárez, and although a lot of people know about the things we've suffered, nobody defends us nor does anything to protect us. That's why I am an instrument that will take revenge for many women. For we are seen as weak, but in reality we are not. We are brave. And if we don't get respect, we will earn that respect with our own hands. We the women of Juárez are strong.

As my bus pulls-up and I begin to take my eyes off of the statue, I wonder about the violence against women in transit here too. If one or two women disappeared each day while trying to take a bus home from work, would this Diana too climb down off of her perch and start to avenge the women here?

My bus is painted bubble-gum pink, and it has the portrait of Carmen Serdán Alatraste painted on its side. She is one of dozens of women revolutionaries who have been painted on the side of the pink buses that run throughout the city. Next to her profile is a short bio describing her role Mexican revolution against the dictator Porfirio Díaz. Right above her majestic portrait hangs, Homenaje a Las Mujeres del Bicentenario (Homage to the Bicentennial Women), standing as yet another reminder of women's great importance in the country's foundation and success. Although both have the same goal, La Señora Carmen is a calmer version of La Diana the Hunter of Bus Drivers. Instead, La Señora Carmen rides calmly on the side of the bus and is a gentle reminder that women too have earned the right to travel safely and without fear.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

But do either of these tactics actually work? Shooting bus drivers in the head? Or painting women revolutionaries on the sides of mass transit? Theoretically, there are two ways to fight the masculine culture of places, which foster the exclusion of women through the violent removal of

women. The first, is through counter-culture behavior. That is, rather than women adopting a separate culture to help her survive while traveling, she instead should use everyday forms of resistance (Duncan, et. al. 1996). In this perspective, gender-based violence would be combated through confrontational behaviors that ran counter to the perception that women are weak, docile, and susceptible. In this type of movement, women would not stand down in the face of violence, by exiting the situation, but rather would confront their attackers and report crimes to the police. Through these tactics women would changing the culture of the space by exerting their own culture of bold and confident behaviors. Something like we see with La Diana the Hunter of Bus Drivers.

La Señora Carmen Serdán Alatraste undermines this tactic by promoting equality through separation. The segregation of men and women increases the gender divide, by not allowing women to practice everyday forms of resistance and to confront their attackers. Gender segregation reduces opportunities for confronting the problem head-on, and for demonstrating boldness in the face of oppression. It is for this reason that women-only transportation as a solution to the violence is a highly controversial idea.

But then again, the argument for everyday forms of resistance has never been made within the context of extreme violence against women. Such as, in the case of Juarez, where women are disappearing by the hundreds. Nor in the case of Mexico City, where men are ejaculating on women's skirts, shoving their penises into their backsides, slipping their hands between their legs, and masturbating in front of them while they sit trapped on a moving bus, subway, or in a taxi. Resistance in the form of boldness has rarely been discussed in the context of extreme gender oppression, where women not only have to confront their attacker, but also justify her clothes and travel behaviors to a public who would quick to blame her for the violence.

No, the argument of everyday forms of resistance has given little to no instructions on how women should start a counter-culture movement against this type of violence and inequality. But if it did, I have very little doubt that those instructions would lead to counter-culture movements that look a lot like Diana the Hunter of Bus Drivers, who is fighting fire with fire.

There is, however, an alternative approach for women to mobilize against spatialized, gender inequality that is reinforced through violence. It has rarely, if ever, been discussed in

terms of gender, but has been commonly discussed in the literature on urban movements defined by: sexuality (Castels 1983), ethnic groups (Espiritu 1992), youth (Chatterton and Hollands 2003), and race (Wacquant 2004), where marginalized groups appropriate urban places and use them to redefine their position of power in the city. These places give them an opportunities to shape their bodies, political minds, and communities into tools for power and change.



**Figure 3 – Athena bus, in Mexico City, in front of the La Diana la Cazadora on the corner of Reforma and Misisipi.**

While each researcher has shared their own version of how spatialized social movements occur, they all share similar conclusions. First, by appropriating a geographical place a group can liberate it from the previous cultural constraints that had once defined that space. In doing so they not only redefine the area, but also can then use it in a way that benefits them and their movement. Take for example the collective movement in San Francisco among the gay community who settled together in one place. By opening businesses and owning properties this community was able to definitively control a piece of the city, making it one of the first gay-friendly urban spaces in the United States (Castels 1983). Once a place has been appropriated

and the culture of a place has been modified to fit the community's needs then they can use that place to link to other opportunities. Continuing with the example of San Francisco, the appropriation of a piece of the city landscape creating new political and economic opportunities for the gay community. Spatial appropriation creates new opportunities for power and change by allowing oppressed communities to mobilize through collective consumption (Espiritu 1992), the construction of a cultural identity (Chatterton and Hollands 2003), or even just modifying their bodies in a way that allows them to more safely cross into other spaces (Wacquant 2004).

This chapter argues that everyday forms of resistance in Mexico City are not sufficient for women to change their relationship to the city. Instead women use women-only transportation as an appropriated place in order to re-establish their position of power. In this sense, La Señora Carmen should be considered a form of positive social change for gender equality, where women-only transportation serves as a form of liberated space. This chapter describes three ways in particular, in which feminism in Mexico City has flourished in the wake of pink transportation. These include:

- 1) And new legal and political opportunities: formal recognition of violence against women as a form of discrimination, and legal and institutional support to contest violence.
- 2) Women's ability to change the culture of places of transit.
- 3) The construction of a cultural identity for women and the redefinition of her body as a mobile figure.

### ***Legal and Political Changes***

On March 8, 2007, Mexico City cabinet members, including the mayor, Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon, signed the *Decálogo por la Equidad de Género* (Pledge for Gender Equality) - a mandate that pledged to create programs and laws that would support equal opportunities for women. This measure was considered a format for promoting actions and policies that would begin building a city free of gender discrimination. Since its signing, the pledge has been instrumental in guiding the actions undertaken by the city government, including amending 18 of Mexico City's criminal laws, and the restructuring of the Department of Public Transportation.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> INMUJERES compiled a presentation of the legal changes. Using a table, the presentation shows the original law, the law after it was modified to include violence against women, and a commentary section, describing how the new law would help protect women's rights. This table, called, "Cuadro Comparativo Armonización Código Penal y de Procedimientos Penales" can be found at: <http://www.inmujeres.df.gob.mx> (last checked 18 April 2013).

This pledge differs from actions in the past, altering the traditional perspective on violence against women that was not considered 15 years ago when women-only transportation was implemented as a form of safe travel for women. Women-only transportation was adopted under the assumption that violence is normal, and is something that women could learn to avoid. In this sense, they could travel safely just by taking women-only transportation.

However, this was not the case. Feminist groups, including INMUJERES, began arguing that contrary to popular belief that women-only transportation would reduce violence. They showed that instead, violence and harassment against women commuters was rapidly increasing (Zermenño Núñez and Plácido Ríos 2010). Consequently, they began to rethink violence, seeing it instead as a similar to domestic violence, where it is a form of oppression against women. And, in 2007, with the implementation of the Pledge for Gender Equality, they won an ideological battle within the political system, declaring that violence is a form of oppression against women.

The actions that followed this pledge embraced this new ideology, reconsidering all future actions through the lens that violence against women in transportation is a form of discrimination, limiting women's equal rights to the city and chances for opportunities. This meant a restructuring of the legal and transit system to also reflect this perspective. Consequently, women-only transportation was converted into “pink transit” and used as a campaign to promote a feminine culture of mobility, women's collective consumption of transportation, and the demasculinization of places of transit. And the legal system, police included, needed to recognize violence and harassment on public transportation as equally as harmful as discrimination in the workplace.

A few months after the pledge was made, in May 2007, the ‘Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence Law’ was passed, which modified 18 articles in the existing legal structure, protecting women's security and emotional wellbeing during the entire legal process of reporting violent crimes.<sup>41</sup> The law was designed to cover a range of violence acts against women, including domestic violence, but it also forced policymakers to think about the protection of women who tried to report or confront their attackers. Its greatest contribution was to criminalize

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<sup>41</sup> A summary of this bill was written by INMUJERES, called “Programa General de Igualdad de Oportunidades y no Discriminación Hacia las Mujeres de la Ciudad de México,” and can be found online at: <http://www.inmujeres.df.gob.mx> (last checked 18 April 2013)

gender-based violence and harassment on public transportation, so that men, women, and the police could have a legitimate discourse that described violence as the problem and not women.

Two years later new actions were being mobilized, arguing for the restructuring of the public transit system, focusing on women-only transportation, security for women, and more women working and operating buses, taxis, and the metro.

### ***The Feminization of Transportation***

On July 9, 2009, the Director of INMUJERES Mexico City, Martha Lucia Mícher Camarena presented a paper to the Cámara de Diputados (Mexico's congress), summarizing their conclusions of the problem of violence against women in Mexico City's buses, subways, and taxis. She argued that, “access to justice for women who have been victims of violence is not easy. The problems are structural, including the public authorities, discriminatory practices, and the reproduction of social, cultural and religious stereotypes that have prevented women from exercising this right [the right to report violence]” (Camarena 2009: 1). In her paper, Martha Lucia Mícher Camarena discussed the connection between violence and discrimination, where violence does not just make women afraid to travel, but also prevents them from reaching their full potential. She concluded that Mexico City needed to strengthen and support the programs that it was developing in order to target a city-wide problem of public discrimination against women.

Mícher's appeal to congress marks a moment in time when feminist organizations in Mexico –particularly those linked to the government such as, INMUJERES– began formally recognizing the need to liberate women from the constraints that transportation currently imposed upon her. Here the problems with women-only transportation were growing increasingly evident as feminist groups began to see violence as only a symptom of gender inequality. Their biggest challenge was that public transportation was still very much a place dominated and controlled by masculine ideologies and behaviors. So, with this in mind, these groups began series of changes to *feminize public transportation* in Mexico City.

One of these included using iconic imagery that could show women as mobile and public figures. “We painted the buses pink,” says Margarita Argott, spokeswoman for INMUJERES and leader behind the implementation of Athena transportation,<sup>42</sup> “in order to give women visibility.”

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<sup>42</sup> The bus line in Mexico City is actually spelled Atenea, which is Athena in Spanish.



She goes on to describe how they called upon the Greek Gods once again, naming the women-only bus line, Athena, after the favorite daughter of Zeus, born a full-grown woman, armed to the teeth, and chanting war cries. She represents what women must prove that they are: a goddess of war, courage, and keeper of the city.

Around this same time that INMUJERES was recoloring the public transportation pink, painting women revolutionaries on the side, and evoking the Greek goddesses in the name of women's liberation, they were also working with the Department of Public Transportation in Mexico City to implement the *Viajemos Seguras* program. *Viajemos Seguras*, literally meaning “We Women Travel Safe,” is designed to give women a safe place where they can confidently report sexual harassment and violence in public transportation, embracing the message that women have the right to travel without fear and harassment. It includes five offices located in the most crowded subway stations in Mexico City, all painted with the same pink as the buses. In addition to the booths the program runs a 24 hour hotline to report crime, with stickers posted on buses, subway cars, and now you can frequently see them on taxis. Both the offices and the hotlines are ran by women officers, who have been trained to talk to women who have been sexually violated and to accompany them throughout the entire legal process, including linking them to medical and psychological services.

*Viajemos Seguras* complements pink transportation –or programs to “give women visibility”– by taking focus off women. This is a crucial step in the demasculinization of transportation by helping women feel confident while being visible. In general, women considered with the idea of “more visibility” as frightening. Particularly since their feminized bodies are “targets” in hyper-masculinized transportation. However, *Viajemos Seguras* blames the violence as the main problem so that when women are faced with any type of sexual harassment, they now have legitimate proof –in the form of institutionalized support– that says it was not their fault.

In addition to giving women more confidence, gender-based violence is the fundamental interaction that occurs in places of transit which maintain a hyper-masculine culture. By attacking it, *Viajemos Seguras* simultaneously begins to delegitimize masculinity as the “right culture” of mobility. And, as the program receives from support the public, they too begin to help demasculinize transportation and create a new space for women to travel. For example, it is now

common to see a Viajemos Seguras stickers –with the 24-hotline to report gender-based violence– on the windows of taxi cabs. A male driver who puts this sticker in his window is claiming, that *this is a violent free place for women to travel anywhere, anytime*.

The feminizing (or demasculinizing) public transportation does not, however, come without a certain amount of resistance. There has been a great deal of women bashing in response to pink transportation, claiming that they are sluts for wanting to travel more and that should focus on taking care of the kids instead of 'trying to segregate the city.' Although, it should be noted here, that there is little evidence of resistance to women-only transportation before it was converted to pink transportation. In fact, before pink buses and taxis and the program Viajemos Seguras, the opinion of women-only transportation tended to be positive, claiming that women were incapable of traveling safely and therefore needed special areas to help them. In general, pink transportation has been received with hostility that parallels anger towards affirmative action policies. For example, on November 25, 2011, 40 people responded to an article by El Universal on the implementation of Athena Transportation (the bubble-gum pink buses, with the women revolutionaries on the side).<sup>43</sup> The following quotes are a sample of those comments, demonstrating men's view of women-only buses *after* the buses were painted pink and renamed after Athena:

*They're correct, it is our right as human [to travel safely], so I ask for your support for to have transportation just for men, because we also have the right, don't we? And we should have one exclusively for whites, one for browns, one for bald people, one for skinny people, one for obese people, one gays, one lesbians, etc, on the understanding that all have the same right.*

*That's awesome that there's transportation for women. I'll help them. But just the same I would like to help us create transportation just for Men. It's true that some women, like some men, are sick and walk around looking... Others are members of criminal gangs, put that together with pseudo-police and you be easily ambushed for false accusations and they'll extort money from you.*

*Hello, and where is the gender equality? ... or is it only when it suits them?*

Men's reaction towards pink transportation as being “unfair to them” also frequently emerged in discussions. For example, a small group of colleagues in Mexico City asked me to describe the extent of women-only transportation and the travel programs for women. I talked

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<sup>43</sup> Gabriela Gutiérrez, “Lamentable, que deban existir autobuses rosas” in El Universal November 25, 2011. Can be found online here (last checked March 4, 2014) : <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciudad/109075.html>.

about all of it, focusing on Athena Transportation and the program Viajemos Seguras. Afterwards, one of the men asked me to think about how it was unfair to the men. “Don't you think it makes men look bad though?! I mean, we come off like assholes.”

“Of course it makes men look bad.” I responded. “That's the whole point. Men *have* kind of been assholes to women for using transportation. But, also,” I tell him “for the first time, women are not the ones being blamed. For the first time, people are starting to think that maybe men here are the assholes and not women for wanting to travel more.”

He listened, but did not fully agree. Instead, he responded like most people, “that not all men are assholes. Not all men grope.”

“Of course not, but there is also nobody challenging those who do.”

I went on to tell him that in my interviews with the directors of INMUJERES, it was clear that the point pink transportation was not to shame men into submission, but rather to change the message from “it's women's *responsibility* to travel safely” to “it's their *right*.” And to do that they are feminizing the transportation system, attempting to lift constraints on women's mobility that had been held in place by ideologies of gender differences, where women's bodies are seen as particularly vulnerable and susceptible to normal travel dangers. By appropriating public transportation and redefining its culture, they began to “de-normalize” the cultural of mobility that had once been defined by hyper-masculine behaviors.

While there is resistance to this ideological shift, there has also been acceptance. When the problem of gender inequality in transportation was discussed just in terms of violence, the public tended to look at women as the problem. For example, when El Universal posted the online question, “have you ever been sexually violated while using public transportation,” there was an overwhelming response to blame women for the violence. In fact, 98 per cent of the men who posted a comment said that women were either exaggerating the violence, they provoked it, or were lying to extort money. By contrast, when El Universal posted a question after an article discussing pink transportation and women's right to travel safely, the discussion of violence was open to topics of discrimination.<sup>44</sup> Take for example the following quotes:

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<sup>44</sup> This discussion was small. There was still a lot of resistance towards women-only transportation, particularly among men, who repeatedly claimed that women were more likely to be raped in women-only transportation than in regular transportation. However, unlike discussions that were just about the issue of violence, within these conversations also started to emerge discussions on gender discrimination and women's rights.

*If there wasn't so much machismo, if men cab drivers had never broke the law, if there wasn't so much inter-family violence generated by years of believing that men are the owners of women (allowed by those same women and by the Church, I can admit), we would not have to go to such extreme measures. Sadly while many men continue seeing women as an object, without giving her the value, nor the respect that she deserves, we will continue creating these types of programs. And I do not bother wasting time reading the classic machismo comments that women drive bad. In my 10 years of driving, I have never had an accident, nor provoked one, unlike young men, taxi drivers, and the microbus drivers, who I am sure are aaaalll men. When both sexes are respected we will not need "pink" and "blue".*

*This also occurs in the office. Once my boss sent me to look for documents in a file and later he arrived to "help me." The space was really small both of us didn't fit well and at that moment he gave me examples of the harassment with his little thinging, and honestly it was very little.*

*Since the topic of discrimination is in plain view, then let's talk about sexual discrimination, and how women receive lower salaries than men, although what is worse is that human resources is made up mostly of women. I have experienced this with my sister and I, who both do the same job, we are both engineers with the same ability, but they pay us different, it's outrageous. My sister is more professional and, I can say this without feeling embarrassed, a better engineer than me, she is a good example. (Anonymous Man, responding to other men's comments that women-only transportation is reverse discrimination.)*

While Athena Transportation and Viajemos Seguras are making a measurable impact, one of the most powerful tools and the closest thing to an actual affirmative action policy, has been the implementation of women-only taxis. As the next section will discuss, the taxis –driven by women for women– not only give women a 'safe place to travel,' but force a once all-male work sector to finally open its doors to women.

### ***Women as Mobile Figures and Not Household Ones***

In 2010, Mexico City had plans to release 100 women-only taxis onto the streets of the city. An official press conference was held and nearly every newspaper in the city printed an article on the city's new, bubble-gum pink taxis, called "Taxi Angel." The first only female operated cab service in Mexico City that would only cater to women.

I immediately started scouring the city for taxis. I asked for them on the streets. I asked other taxi drivers if they had ever seen one. I even went to the government office where women were lined-up to get their taxi license, but nobody including the women who were trying to get their taxi license had seen or heard of pink taxis. So I went back to Margarita Argot, director of INMUJERES, and asked why the taxis were never released?

“We couldn't find drivers. Women are signing-up to get their license, but they don't want to drive the pink cabs.”

It seems that just releasing the idea of women driving taxis to the public had opened a door that had previously been blocking women from pursuing this line of work. However, nobody could explain to me how this happened, or why. I wanted to know where the moment in history was when women started applying for taxi licenses. Who were they working for? How many women were now driving taxis as compared to 5 years ago?

But nobody seemed to know anything. I wrote to the federal government, asking for statistics on women drivers. I talked to directors of transit authority, and I tried to find women taxi drivers who could answer some of these questions, but nobody seemed to know. Even Margarita Argot, from INMUJERES –the institution that advocated for pink cabs– did not have any of these answer. She only knew that women were not driving the pink cabs.

My second option to find answers in a different city located just one hour south of Mexico City called, Puebla. Puebla was the first city in Mexico to introduce women-only taxis. There were a couple of minor differences between the two programs. In Mexico City, the pink cabs would be owned by women, where the drivers would be given special rates to buy the cars from the government. In Puebla, by contrast, the cabs were part of a private taxi company, of which the government would hire and train their drivers, under the condition that this company maintained the “women-only” element of the taxi service. Also, in Puebla, this one had stuck, opening the taxi company in October of 2009, with 30 bubble-gum pink cabs all driven exclusively by women. I had even found women in Puebla who had taken these cabs, and even passed me the phone number to the company. So I spent the next couple of weeks traveling down there to find more answers.

I first went to Puebla in August of 2010, just less than one year after the company had opened. As soon as my feet hit Puebla soil, I starting asking for the cabs. Where could I find one? Do I call the company? Or, flag one in the streets? Not one person knew. Although every one of them had heard of the pink cabs, they just had never seen one.

Puebla is considerable smaller than Mexico City, with a population of 1.5 million as compared to 18 million. So even though there were only 35 cabs, I was not too surprised that people had at least heard of the cabs. After all, Puebla was the 'test city' for women-only taxis.

But I was surprised that nobody knew how I could take one. And even more surprised that many people believed that they no longer existed, particularly since I had already confirmed that the company is still in operation. So I walked around the city for two more hours, and finally reached into my pocket and felt for the number to the company.

A woman answers the phone. “Yes, I am at the Starbucks at the roundabout in the Zocalo, and I would like a taxi please.”

“We are really booked right now. I won't be able to get one there for another hour.”

“It doesn't matter.” I say quickly, thinking she is about to hang-up on me. “I'll wait!”

She sighs and then pauses for what seems like way too long. “Ok, but it will be a while.”

“Ok, thank you.” I say before she hangs-up the phone.

So I order a coffee and wait for more than an hour. I ask some of the baristas if they had ever seen the pink taxis. They all tell me no. The guy tells me that it was “una gran cosa” (a big deal) when it first opened, but he is pretty sure that women did not use them and now they do not exist anymore.

I recognize the cab immediately when it pulls-up the coffee house. It is bright pink, just like in the photos. I hop in the back so excited to finally have found one and I jump right on a pile of kids' toys.

“Oops! There's some toys back here.”

“Oh,” she says frowning and turning around to push them to the side of the seat. “Those are from my last client. I pick-up kids from school. This is the time when they are all getting out and their mothers call me to have me pick them up. That's why I am so late. Where are you going to?”

“Uhhh.” I had really thought it through, but she is looking extremely irritated and tells me again that she still has some other kids that she needs to pick-up, trying to rush me along. “Um, the bus, I guess.”

I look around the cab for the make-up kits and mirrors. The papers all talked about these cabs being fully loaded with “make-up kits,” “panic buttons,” and “GPS systems.” There are definitely no vanity mirrors, so I ask her where the panic button and GPS systems are.

“What?” She glances back in the rear-view-mirror. All the windows are down, but she is sweating enough so that her mascara has already fallen off of her eye lashes and is now pooling

under under eyes, making her look even more tired. “There are no GPS systems.” She says looking puzzled.

I try to ask her more questions, but she looks very tired and irritated. It's only 1 pm, but she says that she has been working since 4am, when she picks-up her first regular client from her shift at the bar. She has a few more regular clients after that, and then between 12-2 she is required at three different schools, where she pick-up kids and takes them home. Today, I am a thorn in her side.

We arrive to the bus station much quicker than I had thought we would. She drops me off and I stand there trying to think quickly. Trying to figure out a way to get more time with her. But she speeds off, before I can think of anything. “Ok,” I think to myself, “I just need to try that again.”

It is one week later and I am on a bus, going to back Puebla. Only this time, I plan on going directly to the company's office. Perhaps I can talk to someone there.

It is a around five miles away, and I decide to walk. If there are pink cabs on the streets then I do not want to miss them. And it seems that spending time on the streets is the best chance I have for spotting one. I walk for 30 minutes when I realize that I am completely lost, and I am in some industrial area that seems desolate. There is a black taxi cab parked on the side of the road next to a small house. I run up to it, and begin asking for directions.

“Buenos días.” I say, popping my head through the passenger window. And, then I stop, frozen with shock. She is a woman! The driver is a woman!!

My social brain immediately shuts down as my researcher one overrides the system. I remove my head from the window and jump in the backseat of the car. And the only thought that enters my mind is, I need to talk to this woman.

“Um, I'm waiting for someone,” she says.

Shit. I had not thought of that. Of course she is. Why else would she be sitting here. “Oh, the thing is,” the words slowly leave my mouth, “I'm lost. And I think I need a ride. But maybe you can just give me directions.”

“No, don't worry.” She says. “It's my husband. I can take you, but we have to wait for him.”

“Sure, of course!”

“Where are you going?”

I'm so excited to see her that I have to think about the answer for a while. “Um... to the office for the pink taxis. I think they are around here somewhere. Have you heard of them?”

“Yea. I know them. The office is right up here. I can take you. It's not that far.”

Her husband returns with a bag full of snacks and a couple of bottles of coke. I am so eager to ask her about driving taxis that I do not even say hi to him. But after he gets in, she explains that they are going to take me to the Pink Taxi Co. office.

“How long have you been driving a taxi? Do you know a lot about the pink taxis?”

“I have always worked for the black taxis even though they [the Pink Taxi Co.] called me and asked if I wanted a job there. This job pays me 220 pesos a day. Pink taxis offered me 240. But the hours there are much longer and with this job, I have Sundays off.”

“Are there many women at your company?”

“Yeah, there are a lot of us. How many are we, mi amor?” She asks, turning towards her husband. “20?”

“15.” He responds.

“Yea, a lot.” She says again, “15 or 20. The only benefit to the pink taxis is that the company paid for the women's license. You see you must take a course and then pay for the license and their company paid for both. But I already had my license so it didn't matter.”

“What's the course like?” I asked, remember that I had read that women need a special course in 'how to change a tire,' and 'self-defense.'

“It's one day.” She says, and then turns again to her husband, “how many hours is it, mi amor?”

“8 hours.”

“Right, it's 8 hours. And they teach us the basics of driving. Road rules, we watch videos of accidents, what to do when there is one. They teach us to be responsible and respectful of the passengers and of other drivers on the road. Stuff like that.” Then she pulls the car into a dirt driveway in front of a huge tin warehouse. “This is it.” She says.

I pay her and then thank them both for the ride and information. And then I head towards a little window stuck on the side of the warehouse.



When I look in the window I see a young woman sitting at a desk with phones and papers. I try the door, but it does not open. So I knock on the window and gesture to the woman to open the door for me. Instead, she cracks the window.

“Can I help you?” She says, blocking my view as I am trying look around her to get a better look at the dozens of pink cabs parked in the warehouse.

“Uh, yea. I am doing research on women-only transportation and I was hoping to get a chance to talk to someone at your company about women taxis. Would you mind talking to me?”

“We are not supposed to talk to anyone.”

“Not about anything? I am only curious how the company works. How many women work here. What they are like? Things like that.”

“I can't.” And she slams the window shut.

“Maybe there were a lot of nosey reporters before me,” I think to myself. So I knock on the window again.

“The thing is, I am not a journalist. I am from a university. And, if I could just ask you a few questions about women...”

“No. I can't.” She says cutting me off. “And, I am a little busy right now.”

She does not look busy, but she also is very insistent on not talking to me. There is nobody else in the office, so I tell her that I will leave her alone if she can call one of the drivers to come pick me up.

I do not wait long this time, less than 15 minutes, but the driver pulls onto the dirt way too fast, kicking up dust and rocks along the way. I get in the cab and shout, “hey it's you, again!” It is the woman who picked me up from Starbucks the first time that I called a Pink Taxi. “What are the chances that you would be the one to pick me up both times!”

“Very good,” she responds. “The are only two of us, and the other one just got into an accident.”

Just like the other time, its around noon and she clearly does not want me in her taxi. “Look I explain. If you want you can give me a ride to the bus station again, but I really just need to talk to you for a few minutes. I need to understand more about these taxis.”

“Come in the front seat,” she says. “You can ride along with me today. “My clients are really nice, they wont mind.”

During the ride, I spoke to all of her clients. Why they preferred the pink taxis over black ones. And all agreed that the reason was one of respect. One woman, a mother of three, told me that she was willing to wait an hour for a pink taxi, because only with a woman driver did she feel comfortable enough to ask them to pull over at a store, while she buys some milk. Plus, she said, “they help me with the kids. They are more understanding.”

The desire for a woman driver also helped me understand why there were only two Pink Taxi drivers left. My driver told me that she stayed with the Pink Taxi Company because she liked what it represented. She liked that they had offered her a job, when no other cab company would.

“But,” she goes onto explain, “right after we opened the black taxis started losing a lot of their clients. All of their women clients were calling us instead of them. Anytime that I pulled-up to a taxi line, where people were waiting to take a black taxi the women would jump out of their cabs and come straight for mine. That really made them mad.”

She told me that it was only a couple months after they had opened, when the black taxis started calling drivers at the Pink Taxi Co. and offering them more money to switch jobs. She told me that she and her co-worker were the only two left. And that the owners were making plans to sell the company.

Even though the Pink Taxi Co. in Puebla was not the same as pink taxis in Mexico City, I began to see why neither one of them had drivers. For first time, the government of Mexico was making it easy for women to obtain their taxi license. The emergence of women taxi drivers, coupled with a pent-up demand for them, forced cab companies to change their policy on women drivers. And, with that has come one of the single most important factors in breaking the image of women as incapable of being mobile.

### ***Conclusion***

What makes the case of pink transportation in Mexico City so interesting is that it has the potential to produce feminist movements, by giving women a liberated space from which they can politically mobilize. On the one hand pink transit has shifted the conversation from blaming women for the violence to blaming men. This important shift gives women both the cultural and legal support that they need to increase their mobility, without being penalized for it. It also means that she can stop self-imposing restrictions on her own mobility.

Additionally, pink transportation has forced institutional changes that have created spaces for women to mobilize against the violence. Since 2007, when these changes first started to begin, INMUJERES and the program Viajemos Seguras began documenting and publishing police reports on violent crimes that occur while using public transportation. They have found that over the last 8 years women are steadily increasing confrontational behavior. Specifically, unlike 10 years ago, today more and more women are confronting their attacker and reporting violent attacks to the police.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, pink transportation raises some flags about the gendered nature of a city. Even on a fundamental level, women-only transportation is a type of affirmative action policy, where it has been implemented to counteract the fact that women find themselves at a persistent disadvantage. But unlike previously urban, transit programs that target working class women, or women of color, pink transportation is for all women. It targets a cultural problem of deeply embedded gender differences and not inequalities that are related to a woman's race or class. Because of that, it is essential that we rethink our previous assumptions about the gendered city.

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<sup>45</sup> This information can be found on the INMUJERES website under statistics reported by Viajemos Seguras. Last checked March 12, 2014.

[http://www.inmujer.df.gob.mx/wb/inmujeres/programa\\_interinstitucional\\_viajemos\\_seguras\\_en\\_el](http://www.inmujer.df.gob.mx/wb/inmujeres/programa_interinstitucional_viajemos_seguras_en_el)

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

Imagine that a woman is walking down the streets of Mexico City. She is walking towards a bus stop, when a man in a car pulls up beside her, opens their door just enough for her to see, then shows her his exposed genitalia while he masturbates in front of her. She quickly puts her head down and starts walking faster. She reaches the bus stop just as it is pulling-up. She climbs-up and takes a seat in the middle of the bus, sitting next to the aisle. The bus starts filling-up with over the next few stops and now there is a man standing next to her, facing towards her while holding onto the railing above her head. He stands quietly for a minute, but then he starts touching her arm with his pants. He is rubbing aggressively against her arm and staring at her while he licks his lips. She dies for a minute, frozen in shock and fear, and then moves to exit at the next stop. As she climbs off the bus, there is an underground metro station nearby, so she decides to go by train. On her way down into the metro a man is standing at the bottom of the stairs. He stands there, saying nothing, but he is staring at her. He winks and gives a low catcall whistle, phew phew. She turns and climbs back up the stairs and ducks behind a wall. She waits there hidden until he leaves, peaking around the corner every minute or two. And when he finally leaves, she starts back down the stairs. *Now imagine that this just happened at the office.*

Why is it so easy for us to imagine a gendered workplace, but not a gendered city? There is nothing false, nor exaggerated about the story told above. In fact, this is a short compilation of real stories from women in Mexico City. Yet we, the global society, do not instantly recognize this type of violence and harassment as a form of discrimination. We do not easily see, nor understand, how it limits women's right to the city. Consequently, unlike the workplace, there are no training classes to teach men about harassment. And, we cannot sue anyone for the way that this type of violence creates an urban, glass ceiling. But we know that it does limit women's opportunities. It destroys their confidence, teaches them to live in fear, and stay at home instead of pursuing more opportunities.

This dissertation has attempted to remedy this by showing how the same processes that create race and class boundaries in the city, are also creating gender boundaries. Women are excluded from public places, which just like other marginalized groups, creates a sub-culture

based on their inability to equally participate. This sub-culture also spills into other areas of opportunities, including social, economic, and political.

For women in Mexico City, their exclusion from equal use of public transportation created a sub-culture of immobility among women, where they were considered too vulnerable and susceptible to danger travel freely, as men do. It reinforced their role in the house as a mother and wife and not as a public figure. The labor market excluded women from good jobs and economic opportunities, by also turning towards this culture and justifying the exclusion of women.

The emergence of pink transportation and the redefining of “women's culture” gives us hope that not only may women in Mexico City be able to overcome these boundaries, but also that they can convince the world that public violence and harassment is discrimination. In doing so, I have hope that their stories will contribute to emerging models and theories about urban development and provide useful knowledge to policy-makers who hold the power to significantly improve the conditions for urban women in Latin American countries.

*Assessing women-only transportation within the context of the gendered city*

If we take gender-based violence at its face value then women-only transportation seems like a reasonable solution. It reduces violence against women by removing the immediate problem: men. However, there are several problems with solely relying on women-only transportation as a solution. A much closer look at the violence in Mexico City shows us that gender-based violence is produced and maintained through deeply rooted gender inequalities, which not only view women as incapable of being equally mobile as men, but also blame women for the violence. Women-only transportation is designed to target the violence alone, and does not reach some of these more deeply embedded problems, affecting women's mobility and their coping strategies towards violence. In fact, based on the data gathered for this paper, accompanied with previous research on women-only transportation it is likely that women-only transportation is likely to bolster “lingering attitudes that women require safe travel in the form of protectionism, whether that is closed circuit television (CCTV) or increased policing (Whitzman 2013:36).

On the other hand, women-only transportation coupled with a political intervention can have incredibly positive results. It allows women to negotiate the violence through an alternative

narrative: one that frees them from blame and responsibility for the violence. It also provides women with institutional support that makes it easier for them to confront the violence through bold and confident behaviors: what spatial feminist argue as key to breaking down hegemonic masculine norms (Duncan et. al 1996).

Because pink transportation and political reforms to criminalize gender-based violence in public transportation as a form of discrimination are relatively a new, there is still much more research needed to measure how much of an effect they have on changing gender inequality. However, this paper has shown that there is considerable evidence to suggest that women-only transportation and political interventions together can have a strong impact on improving women's access to mobility. And that we should continue in the direction of measuring the outcomes of these interventions.

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# Methodology

This dissertation is based on 3-year ethnography, which is an accumulation of experiences, interviews, interactions, and adaptation to life as a woman in Mexico City. In order to truly understand women's relationship to the city and how violence in public transportation affected that relationship, I needed to wholly submerge myself into the daily routines of life in Mexico City. For this reason, the data collected for this dissertation relies heavily on ethnographical methods, where evidence was accumulated in the routine moments of life where I become a woman who learned how to be mobile in Mexico City.

Specifically, this dissertation is filled with data that comes from participant observation and spatial ethnography, complemented with mixed methodological approaches.

## *Participant Observation*

Participant observation was the only way that I was able to successfully understand the complex culture of women-only public transportation, and the culture of violence against women. So much of this ethnography involves participant observation data that is based on my own experiences in learning how “use transportation safely.” For example, I used information from the fights that took place between myself and other men who felt that I should not be traveling at certain times and in certain places. As well as in the conversations that I had with hundreds of women throughout the years about their experiences, and their lessons to me on how to travel safely as a woman in Mexico.

Not only did these experiences help me understand women's mobility in Mexico City, but also helped me talk to the women about their experiences. I found that a one-on-one interview with another woman could be as violent as the attack itself. Instead I used my own experiences and then let women respond as much or as little as they wanted. In this way, I found that when women heard my stories their shame turned to anger, and they not only felt compelled to open-up to me, but also to teach me how they travel and protect themselves. Many of the stories presented in this dissertation are a product of those conversations where we vented, discussed our options for addressing the situation, and talked about some of the reasons behind the violence.

### *Conducting spatial ethnography*

To write about lived space means understanding “the process through which people think through and across difference to understand massive social and spatial transformations” (Chari and Gidwani 2005). Because so much of this dissertation is based on theories of space and the culture of places developed by Henri Lefèbvre (1991 [1974]), a major part of the ethnographical data used in this dissertation is based on approaches of studying social spaces. It does so by being attentive to several important characteristics in particular, including: power relations and practices between men and women, and the reproduction of inequalities produced in places of transit.

### ***Mixed Methods***

#### *Statistics*

The National Board for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) and the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) are two of Mexico's largest Federal institutions responsible for the collection of statistical data on violence against women. The statistics on the levels of violence against women is largely taken from the surveys and studies conducted by these two groups (see Bucio Mújica and Fix-Fierro 2011, and Zermenño Núñez and Plácido Ríos 2010 for more information on the details of the data collection methodology). These statistics are supported with testimonies from women who were sexually violated while taking a bus, metro, or taxi, giving a more personal and in-depth look at the levels of gender-based violence in Mexico City's public transportation system.

A second source of data came from a small survey conducted specifically for this paper and was designed to accumulate the following information from women riders: 1) What are women's attitudes towards public transportation? 2) How often and for what reasons do they choose women-only transit over mixed transportation? This survey was given to 125 members of our target audience, defined as female riders of public transportation in Mexico City. The participants were randomly selected using a convenience sampling approach. Around 20-22 participants were selected across 6 different transit points throughout the city, including bus and subway stops.

#### *Interviews*

Short informal interviews

The second indicator used in this research paper looks for differences in women's travel behaviors as they are specifically related to the masculinization of public transportation. This data is taken from two sources. The first is from long-term collection of ethnographic data, where I rode public transportation for 4 years and conducted short informal interviews with other women travelers. I conducted short informal interviews with 20 women and follow-up interviews with 5 of them.

#### In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted among some of the political leaders of the program, including directors of INMUJERES. After the ethnography was completed, two more in-depth interviews were conducted among women of whom I had followed in the workplace. These interviews allowed me to go back and address some of the issues that had emerged, but were never discussed in detail during the ethnographic data accumulation.

#### *Media's coverage on women-only transportation and the public's response*

Lastly, a supplementary source of qualitative data was collected from online comments posted by Mexico citizens on the topics of gender-based violence in Mexico City's public transit system, and the use of women-only transportation as a solution. Mexico's media did a vast online coverage on topics of women-only transportation and violence against women between the years 2007-2011, when Mexico City was increasing the number of women-only buses and taxis in response to the growing levels of violence. The newspapers in particular, including *El Universal*, *La Crónica*, *Animal Politico*, and *El Milenio* posted their online and created debate forums for readers to write in the comments and opinions on the topics.

I found that the comments reflected the same language and attitudes towards women's mobility as in my interviews among women riders. For this reason the comments are used as a form of supplementary data, giving more depth to the feelings and attitudes towards gender-based violence in transportation and women's mobility.

Additionally, in order to see differences between men and women's opinions on women-only transportation and gender-based violence in Mexico City's buses, taxis, and underground metro, the first 234 of these comments were coded and organized into cross-tabulation tables. The format for coding these comments can be found in Appendix A, showing how the sex of each person was determined and what type of information from the comment was put into the

database. While these comments did provide a more statistical look at differences in opinion, it was also used as supplementary data, helping to create a context of how public opinion is in Mexico City concerning these topics.

While these comments are used as supplementary, there are several methodological issues with the online data that should be addressed here. First, these comments were taken from people who have access to the internet and who read the news. It is likely that lower-class voices or more marginalized groups are not apart of the population sample. Additionally, these comments are not independent of one another, but rather each thread tended to work like a focus group, where one comment led others to make similar comments or responses. It is for this reason that these comments are primarily used qualitatively, in order to show feelings, opinions, and cultural justifications for violence against women in public transportation.



# Appendix A

## Coding Format for Online Comments

### **Determining the Sex:**

There were three principal ways for determining the sex. The first was if the person explicitly said they were a man or a woman. This accounts for around 15% of the comments coded. If the person did not explicitly say, “I am a man” or “woman,” then we looked towards the conjugations of the person talking: nosotras vs. nosotros for example. This accounts for another 30% of the comments coded. If neither of these two methods worked, then we used the name to determine the sex. Here we only used obvious male and female names (Diego, Jorge, Ana, Fernanda, etc.). Ambiguous names such as Ale (which would be Alejandra or Alejandro) were coded as “sex unknown.”

### **Favor or Against:**

Coded someone as in favor, against, not sure, or do not care if they specifically stated their viewpoint in one direction or another. For example: “I absolutely do not agree with this program.” Or “I think this is a wonderful program, that will help women feel more secure.”

4. “in favor” or
5. “against” pink transportation
6. didn't care either way.
7. Not sure if it was good or bad.

### **Reasons for the need of Pink Transportation:**

- 1) Women are weak, need protection, therefore need special space.
  1. Examples: nunca existira la igualdad para hombres y mujeres porque las mujeres son mas debiles en todos los sentidos, y la cordura es para los debiles ya lo dijo.
  2. Most common, women are more likely to be raped or violated, because they lack the presence of a man.
- 2) Men are violent and disrespectful to women.
  1. Two ways of assessing this variable:

2. Men are responsible for the level of crime and insecurity in Mexico. Women tend to be less likely to rob, rape, or kidnap passengers and therefore can change the current issues of security in taxis.
  3. Men are generally violent towards women.
  4. Men are the cause of women feeling insecure
- 3) Other. Here we looked for any comment that degendered the issue. Most of these comments were government oriented. That is, they believed that this is a dubious government intervention to make it look like they are doing something, or that the reason security is an issue at all is because the government can't control the streets. The second most common "other" was that it was neither because of women or men, but rather a general lack of education among mexican people. If there is any reference to one's sex, gender, or sexual orientation, we do not use this variable.
1. El problema de la delincuencia, e falta de educacion y de la ingobernabilidad en el pais no se resuelve pintando de colores ni el carro ni las corbats de los politicos.
  - 4) The greater population, elderly and children too.
  - 5) Combats discrimination against women
  - 6) Just a service for women and nothing more

#### **Resolves issue of security**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Was not sure, it could make things worse.

#### **Did they say why**

- 1) Offers security.
- 2) Women can be dangerous too, i.e. Pink Taxis assume that only men are dangerous
- 3) Women are weak, they will stand out as targets, and without the protection of men (ie women traveling alone) they become a greater target for rape, etc.
- 4) Because it has nothing to do with men and women, but the general level of security in Mexico.

- 5) Other

### **Women-only Transportation**

- 1) feels safer
- 2) is safer
- 3) stays the same
- 4) is more dangerous

### **Pink Represents**

- 1) Weak, gay
- 2) Independence for women and equal work opportunities
- 3) Greater inequality and difference between men and women.
- 4) Discrimination against men.
- 5) Women need to change to protect themselves, or women need to be segregated to stay safe. A form of blaming the victim
- 6) Making women a target

### **Sexualize/Objectification of Women**

Did the comment specifically include ways of sexualizing or objectifying the woman? These include any comment that made specific reference to a woman's body: that it draws attention, that she should cover her breasts, that her skirt was too short, etc.

- 1) yes
- 2) no