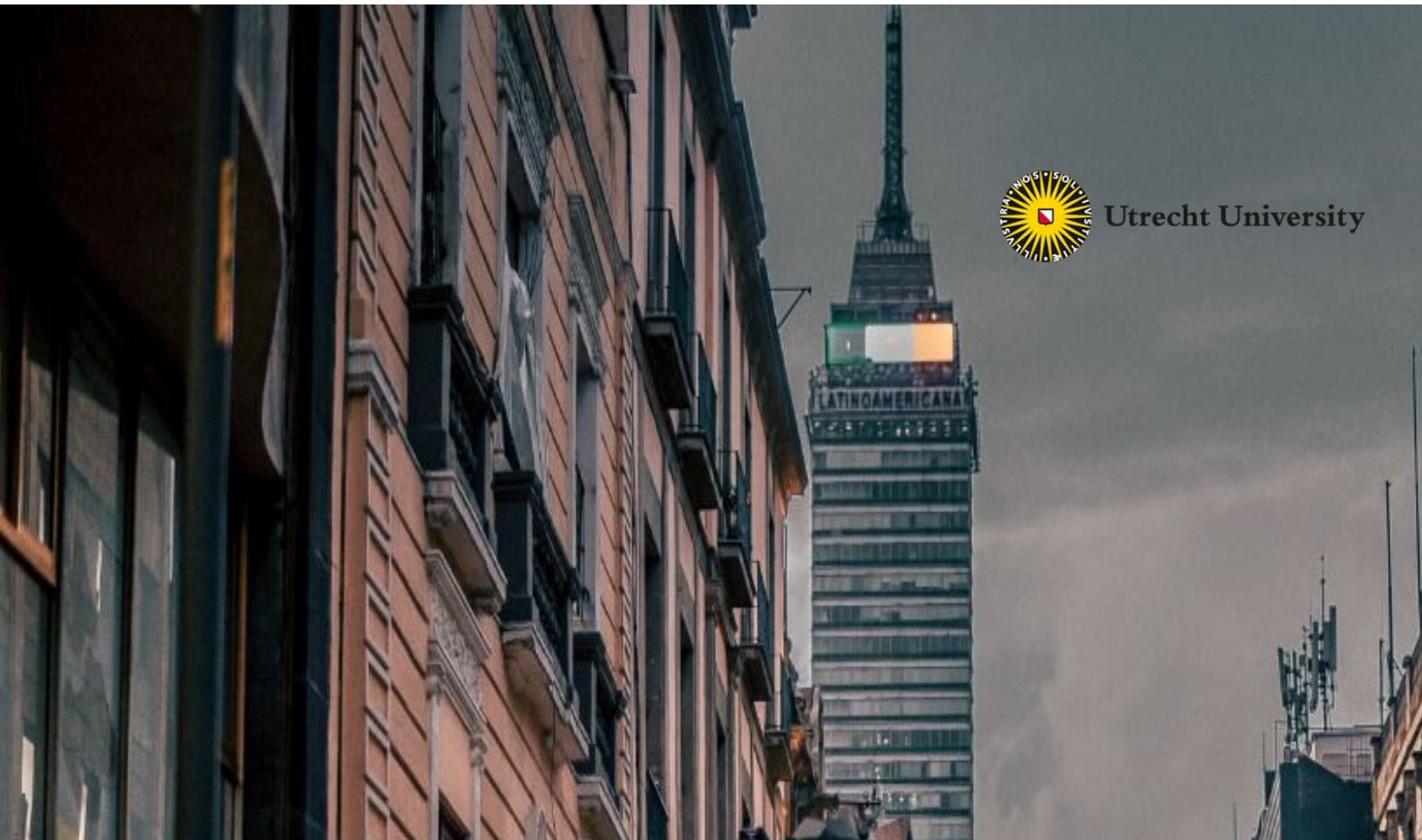




Utrecht University



Mex and the City:

WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF UNSAFETY IN THE STREETS OF MEXICO CITY





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Master Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to contribute to the existing knowledge on gender and urban space. It looks into the problem of women's perceptions of urban (un)safety in public spaces and the ways they address the perceived risk. The work further explores how women's urban routines are influenced by the security measures they introduce to feel safer. The case study of this research is Mexico City, specifically the streets of its Historic Center. Focus on the outcomes of the coping strategies for women's urban lifestyle was missing in the previous studies. Key techniques used were in-depth interviews, surveys, safety audit and participative walks, as well as collaboration with the local expert community.

Beyond discovering and describing women's experiences in urban spaces, this work produces empirical evidence on how their fear is constructed along the lines of gender. The female citizens of the city tend to introduce limiting and non-sovereign response strategies in order to decrease their vulnerability. This affects their use of public space and has implications for their everyday routine, with the perceived state of unsafety decreasing women's enjoyment of urban opportunities and engagement in city life. Moreover, zero-sum urban governance makes the distribution of services and security policy uneven to the disfavor of some groups of women. This fact is evident in the Historic Center, where street vendors and the homeless are seen as obstacles to touristification. Finally, employing a gender perspective, this thesis argues that gender and intersectional issues need to be considered in the spatial design and urban planning of Mexico City.

Keywords: Mexico City, gender perspective, urban design, coping strategies, gender-based violence, public security crisis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	10
1.1 Academic debate	10
1.2 Gender and city	11
1.3 Gender and public space	12
1.4 Behavior as an adjustment	13
CHAPTER 2. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT	16
2.1 Mexico	16
2.2 Mexico City	17
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	22
3.1 Research questions and operationalization of variables	22
3.2 Area sampling	25
3.3 Interviews	27
3.4 Survey	28
3.5 Mapping	29
3.6 Walking through space	29
3.7 Safety audit walks	30
3.8 Expert community	30
3.9 Positionality of the researcher	30
CHAPTER 4. WOMEN'S SAFETY-RELATED EXPERIENCES IN THE STREETS	32
4.1 Urban construction of fear	32
4.2 Urban gender-based victimization	35
4.3 Women's use of the city	42

CHAPTER 5. ARMING A STRATEGY: WOMEN ADDRESSING THE PERCEIVED STATE OF STREET UNSAFETY	49
5.1 Coping habits and tactics	49
5.2 Women's imageries of the Historic Center	55
5.3 The spatial factors of (un)safety	57
5.4 Homeless women as perceivers and as the perceived	60
5.5 Police and street commerce: ambivalent perceptions	61
CHAPTER 6. BIG CITY LIFE: PERCEIVED UNSAFETY AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN'S URBAN LIFESTYLE	64
6.1 Places and senses: how space invites and dismisses	64
6.2 The spatial dimension of perceptions	68
6.3 City Changing Women's Lives	74
CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION	79
7.1 What does the case of Mexico City teach us?	79
7.2 Urban Gender-Based Construction of Fear	80
7.3 Right to the Latin American City	81
CONCLUSION	82
REFERENCES	89
APPENDICES	98

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Conceptual model

Figure 2.1. Map of femicides in Mexico, from January 2018 to July 2019

Figure 2.2. Inner city (blue) and the Metropolitan Zone of Mexico City

Figure 2.3. The rate of victims of crime per hundred thousand inhabitants in 2017 in Mexico City and in the country

Figure 2.4. An example of a map based on the evidence from women in social media; the map demonstrates the kidnap attempts in the metro of Mexico City

Figure 3.1. Conceptual model on perceived insecurity of public space

Figure 3.2. Operationalization of variables

Figure 3.3. Perimeters A (red) and B (black) of HCMC

Figure 3.4. Corridors and axes in the HCMC

Figure 3.5. Pedestrian streets sampled for the research activities: Madero, Motolinia, 16 de Septiembre, San Ildefonso, Talavera, Regina, Echeveste

Figure 3.6. Municipalities and delegations of residence of the recruited interviewees within the Metropolitan Zone of Mexico City

Figure 4.1. The multiplicity of the factors that affect the urban construction of women's fear

Figure 4.2. Types of victimization found during the interviews; arranged by frequency of mentioning

Figure 4.3. Personal safety-related experiences of male and female survey respondents

Figure 4.4. Evaluation of feeling of personal safety while in the Historic Center

Figure 4.5. Types of offense that preoccupy women and men most while in the Historic Center

Box 1. Personal fearful urban experience in the streets of Mexico City

Figure 4.6. Layers of violence and layers of blame experienced by women respondents based on the analysis of the interviews

Figure 4.7. Women's average trajectories compared to the men's in Mexico City

Figure 4.8. Types of urban space where women experienced harassment or other forms of gender-based violence

Figure 4.9. Quality of the sidewalk compared to the roadway

Figure 4.10. Urban equipment preventing from sitting on the curb

Figure 5.1. Women's strategies for personal safety

Box 2. Example of habitualization of the security strategies

Figure 5.2. Evidence of collective strategies found during audit walks

Figure 5.3. An instance of another collective initiative

Figure 5.4. Factors associated with safety and unsafety

Figure 5.5. Examples of (un)safety factors demonstrated by an interviewee during a participatory walk

Figure 5.6. The number of pedestrians transiting via Madero street

Figure 5.7. Additional pedestrian lighting produced by street food establishments, Balderas street

Figure 5.8. A poster of an informal establishment offering help to women in case of danger

Figure 6.1. Main respondent narratives of safety categorized into three groups

Figure 6.2. Emotions experienced by women in the areas perceived as unsafe arranged by frequency of mentioning

Figure 6.3. Negative street safety-related emotions displayed in women's routines

Figure 6.4. Street art found in Historic Center during audit and participatory walks

Figure 6.5. Areas perceived as safe (green) and unsafe (black)

Figure 6.6. Streets perceived as safe (green) and unsafe (black)

Figure 6.7. Areas and streets characterized as safe (green), banks (red) and franchise coffee shops (blue)

Figure 6.8. Areas and streets characterized as unsafe (black), metro stations (blue), markets (purple) and churches (yellow)

Figure 6.9. Facade of San Ildefonso College in San Ildefonso street

Figure 6.10. Facade of Santander bank office in Palma Norte street

Figure 6.11. Combined surface of the Historic Center perceived as unsafe by more than a half on the interviewees

Figure 6.12. Specter of impacts in women's urban lifestyle

Figure 6.13. Evidence from women on changed in their urban routine

Figure 7.1. An example of the current municipal policy: posters located in metro and directed to women

INTRODUCTION

Gendered Nature of Urban Development

The main stage of urbanization—the contemporary city—is an arena where all three components of sustainable development meet: economic and social development and environmental protection (UN, 1992). Along with the benefits of city living come challenges in the form of insufficiency of urban services, exclusion, and rising public insecurity. The UN-Habitat recognizes the issue of the widening urban divide as there is an increasing gap in access to public spaces and services and other forms of exclusion among urban inhabitants (UN-Habitat, 2016). Gender is one of the factors that causes this urban divide. Cities are not gender-neutral. As constructed spaces, cities and their urban design tend to reflect, reinforce and challenge existing social relations and social practices.

Cities and gender are at the cutting edge of development strategies. Two decades ago, the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul (Habitat II) recognized support for vulnerable groups of women and the poor as one of the objectives within a framework of sustainable human settlements (UN, 1996). Another declared goal was gender equality in human settlement development and the incorporation of a gender perspective into urban governance. Since then, a wide range of top-down instruments has promoted the inclusion of gender in urban planning and governance.

Currently, these issues are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as Goals 5 and 11: achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and; making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (UN, 2015). The New Urban Agenda, adopted by the United Nations in line with Sustainable Development Goal 11, aims to make cities inclusive and violence-free by means of good governance (UN, 2016). The links between urban environment, gender equality, and safety matter for the development agenda and are further uncovered in this research.

Urban areas reinforce gendered patterns of insecurity, as men have historically dominated public spaces (Muggah, 2012). As a result, different experiences and opportunities exist within a single urban setting. The issue is multidimensional: it simultaneously comprises debates on gender, inclusive and safety. Bridging these three constructs, some studies have

discovered how low-quality public services, such as street lighting and police patrols, are gender-discriminative and leave women unprotected from violence (ActionAid, 2013).

Urban safety for women is a crucial element for their wellbeing. According to how safe or how unsafe a woman feels in the city, she has different urban opportunities when it comes to work, recreation and education. With this research, I intend to address the knowledge gap as to the factors and processes behind women's fear construction in the city environment. In other words, the wider debate is still unable to explicitly respond to what are the boundaries to women's urban safety, according to their own feelings and attitudes.

Specifically, this research examines the problem of women's safety on the streets of Mexico City. It seeks to discover whether women, as citizens, are full recipients of urban benefits. Mexico City is a particularly interesting case study, as it grapples with extreme urban violence, and is increasingly turning its attention to public policy that promotes women's wellbeing in the city. As such, Mexico City offers a valuable message for other Latin American cities with similar problems. Although the feminization of urban areas is observed in some parts of the world, women usually represent a vulnerable group with limited access to the fruits of "urban prosperity" (Chant, 2013). Hence, the issue of the *gendered nature of urban safety* is the particular focus of this research.

Research Objective and Main Research Question

The objective of this research is to understand female perceptions of (un)safety in Mexico City, to examine how women address the perceived state of unsafety, and to analyze how their methods of adaptation impact their urban routine. The study area of this research is the Historic Center of the Mexican capital. The main research question is:

What are the attitudes of Mexico City's women toward urban street (un)safety, how do women respond to perceived (un)safety, and how does it influence their urban lifestyle?

The structure of this thesis can be divided into theoretical and empirical parts. The former starts with the chapter *Theoretical framework*, which provides a brief review of the wider academic debate and relevant approaches to the topic and culminates with a developed conceptual model. The second chapter, *Geographical context*, reviews the profiles of Mexico

and Mexico City regarding issues such as urban development, urban safety, and gender-based violence. The following chapter, *Methodology*, deals with area sampling and techniques used in the research. Thereafter, the empirical half starts with the chapter *Women's safety-related experiences in the streets*, where the central problems are urban construction of fear and its factors, types of women's victimization in public space, and women's use of Mexico City. This flows into the chapter *Arming a strategy: women addressing the perceived state of street unsafety*, which deals with the coping strategies that women develop to feel safe in the streets and the spatial factors that cause safety and unsafety in them. The subsequent chapter, *Big city life: perceived unsafety and its effects on women's urban lifestyle*, explains the consequences of unsafety on women's urban routines. Finally, the findings are further analyzed in the *Discussion and Conclusion* section, which comments on the academic debate and presents several policy recommendations.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter covers, in essence, the knowledge that was previously produced on the topic of this research. It later mentions three main theories that frame the research: gender theory, socio-spatial theory and behavior theory. Making use of the academic debate, the chapter will conclude with an overview of the knowledge gap and a developed conceptual model.

1.1 Academic debate

With the inclusion of a gender approach in policy-making and urban planning, more academic works are produced about the interrelation of cities and women. There is a substantial body of studies revealing the gendered nature of public space (Jacobs, 1961; Fenster, 2005; Doan, 2010, Chant, 2013). What is more, much research has been conducted to explain the connection between gender, space, and safety (Dunckel Graglia, 2014; Koskela, 1999; Listerborn, 2015, McIlwaine, 2013). For instance, H. Koskela suggests that women's perception of space is a continuation of unequal social power relations. Women's feelings of fear have special consequences in the form of exclusion and are enhanced by a perceived lack of control, vulnerability and social estrangement (Koskela, 1999). Analyzing experiences of Muslim women in Western urban space, C. Listerborn addresses discourses on gender, fear and safety provision in cities. Listerborn states that safety is a commodity that is unequally shared according to gender, class and citizenship identity and calls the process of fear production "silent spatial politics of everyday life" (Listerborn, 2015).

There is a dominant view in the academic community that urban environments, observed from the gender perspective, offer different forms of belonging to a city, as well as varying practices, perceptions, potentials, and reclamations (Muxí Martínez et al., 2011; Zebracki, 2014; Beebeejaun, 2017). From a safety point of view, authors generally agree that the violence, risks, and fears associated with a city are of a gendered nature. While scholars have established a strong link between gender and security there is little knowledge about how women themselves perceive the urban context and how these feelings induce adjusting actions.

The interest of this research is women's perceptions of safety on the streets — a key part of the urban environment for everyday activities and mobility. Focusing on the urban streets as

public space is the innovative aspect of this paper. In Mexico City, there exist top-down policies to tackle the issue of women's safety in the public transport system (ONU Mujeres, 2017; CNN, 2017; Dunckel-Graglia, 2013). One of the findings of A. Dunckel Graglia is that security-related policies in the transport system of Mexico City reflect and reinforce long-term gender inequality and female immobility. Furthermore, though the UN-Women Mexico office collaborates with the municipal government in the "Safe Cities" Global Flagship Programme Initiative, its activities remain exclusively within the metro and metrobus systems. The situation on the streets, the main urban arena, remains invisible to public policy.

1.2 Gender and city

Urban planning is not gender neutral

—SASKIA SASSEN

This research studies women's attitudes about the city from a gender perspective, so gender theory serves as the umbrella approach. The process of *gendering* is another crucial element of the research. *Gendering* means attributing or depriving characteristics of a certain gender to a human or non-human phenomena—such as spaces, objects, or concepts—subsequently creating or reinforcing power relations and ascribing agendas, opportunities, or capabilities along the lines of sex or gender (Dye in Eds. Mills, Durepos, Wiebe, 2010). The process of gendering places particular expectations and behavior patterns on the object. In the case of the research, the concept of a *gendered city* is of specific focus to explore different experiences within single urban ecology. Scholars who study cities through the gender lens point out the contrast in notions of citizenship and belonging, drawing attention to gender-determined power relations (Fenster, 2005; Chant, 2013). This recognizes the wide range of gender identities and the importance of different experiences and focuses on those of women.

This work studies perceptions of urban (un)safety of Mexico City's female citizens. It is crucial to note that constraints to women's wellbeing in Latin America are linked to the phenomenon of gender-based violence. This type of violence is pronounced both in domestic and public spheres, including urban spaces. It can be defined as harmful behavior directed at individuals based on their gender and/or sexual identity—in this case, against women and girls because of the fact that they were born female (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottmoeller, 2002). As defined by the UN, violence against women is "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or

psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993). This concept is important to explain why risks and dangers faced by women in the city are distinct from other forms of urban violence.

1.3 Gender and public space

The socio-spatial theory was developed in the narrative on the production of *public space*, formulated by H. Lefebvre. The key finding of the author is that a city is a multilayered construction, as urban space is more than just its physical characteristics. Space has a strong link with society; it is a set of intertwined concepts of physical space, mental space and social space, which are respectively cited as perceived, conceived and lived spaces (Lefebvre, 2010). This three-facet model coincides with my research, since it seeks to observe space as a material environment (physical space), as a product of planning and policy implementation (mental space), and as a source of related feelings, meanings and practice (social space). Likewise, there is an ongoing academic debate about the link between public space, democracy, and inclusion (Parkinson, 2013).

Looking ahead, this study dedicates particular attention to *urban streets* as multifunctional gendered spaces. For some scholars, urban spaces of everyday life, such as streets, are of crucial importance for building a sense of belonging and ensuring civil rights (Beebeejaun, 2017). This is especially significant when bridging the gender theory and the socio-spatial theory. Space may be a subject of gendering, or acquiring gender-applicable features that tune the degree of inclusion or exclusion. P.L. Doan coined the term *tyranny of gendered spaces* to explain how urban places constrain or enhance exposure and engagement of a person based on one’s gender identity and how the liberties of the less powerful are being oppressed (Doan, 2010). Doan states in her work that the conventional public space exists within the traditional binary gender system and expulses those of other identities. Fenster (2005) elaborated on the gendered power relations within urban space that impact women’s access to urban resources. The scholar developed a thesis of the *boundaries of belonging* in a city that is found in the unequal distribution of urban security that limits women’s opportunities. Chant (2013) illustrates how gender-based access to space exists and functions in the Global South. The author argues that urban development in developing countries often fosters gender disparities due to a range of deficiencies: lack of access to public places, to education, land and housing rights and gender violence.

This study regards urban streets as a multifunctional space. Here space does not only play the role of a social “container” but also is full of meaning and interrelations with its inhabitants. J.Jacobs names urban streets “healthkeepers” of neighborhoods and a key mechanism for city functioning (Jacobs, 1961). This view is shared by other researchers that envisage streets as components of a city’s “livability” or “vitality”, generally defined as a success from the conventional social perspective (Ravazzoli & Torricelli, 2017; Jalaladdini & Oktay, 2012). Von Schönfeld and Bertolini (2016) describe urban streets as an urban phenomenon that embodies both urban space and space for mobility. The required multiplicity of street functions results in a struggle to meet urban aspirations for efficiency and safety.

1.4 Behavior as an adjustment

To be able to understand how human perception and external conditions affect one’s performance, a framework of behavior can be used. Current academic discussion struggles to rigidly formulate the concept of behavior. From the perspective of Descriptive Psychology, behavior is defined as one’s attempt to exercise some state of affairs, to cause a change from one state of affairs to another, or to maintain the matter’s status quo (Ossorio, 2006 cited in Bergner, 2011). This theory helps to understand how women’s perceptions, influenced by the external environment, are addressed and adjusted to. More accurately, this process is described by the Social Cognition Theory elaborated by A. Bandura. The theory suggests a model of reciprocal relations between environmental factors and personal factors that lead to behavioral consequences (Bandura, 2001).

The study of H.Koskela illustrates the link between gender, socio-spatial and behavior theories. It discovers the spatiality of fear and its gendered nature. The author suggests that women’s perception of space as dangerous is a continuation of unequal gendered power relations that, in turn, produce urban space. And this gendered space generates spatial behavior. As previously stated, women’s feelings of fear result in exclusion and are enhanced by a perceived lack of control, vulnerability and social estrangement. The findings explain how women’s personal urban experiences and changes in life situations transform their connection to space (Koskela, 1999).

Globally, the problems of gendered spatial design and gender justice in urban planning have recently become trends in the academic and policy agenda (Rendell et al., 2000; Horelli, 2017; Walker et al, 2012). Researchers as well have been discovering the factors that

generate fear in women and how space can be changed to be more inviting to them (Tandogan & Olhan, 2016; Valentine, 1990; Day, 2010). Academics around the world also have started investigating women's coping strategies in public space (Monqid, 2012; Casey, Goudie & Reeve, 2007; Gardner, 1990). However, the research lacked direct feedback from women about how their feelings and attitudes regarding urban dangers shape their routines. The knowledge gap this thesis identifies the effects of gendered safety perceptions for women's urban experience. The case study of urban streets was used both to extend comprehension of how women use cities and to approach the question of how women's feelings about unsafe space affect their urban lifestyle.

The research goal was to find out how women's conceptions of safe versus unsafe settings, as well as their emotional feelings, shape their engagement with the streets. The exploration of locally employed adaptation strategies that women produce to assure their safety served as a complementary piece to the existing knowledge of the problem.

The research takes a three-pillar approach, based on the aspects of the gender theory, behavioral theory, and socio-spatial theory. These pillars guided the data collection process towards discovering how women's perceptions of Mexico City street (un)safety leads to a transformed way of engaging with the city. The theories and related concepts inspired the conceptual model. Figure 1.1 illustrates the steps merged together for the research conduction. The below scheme reflects the social cognitive model of Bandura and the three broader theories. The four constructive elements subsequently mirror the sub-questions that will be discussed in the methodology section.

Figure 1.1. Conceptual model



A key concept of the study is *safety*. Safety in the context of this research is understood as freedom from physical and emotional violence against women and from the fear of these. Safety here is analyzed within public space: the link is explained by the fact that space may serve to enhance or to discourage violence due to its physical and social features. The human existential need for safety is seen as the second most important and most sought need from Maslow's pyramid of needs, following physiological needs (Maslow, 1943). Space may produce both fear and feelings of safety, and women often have to cope with the danger they feel in public space. Women address their vulnerability by introducing safety-related habits into their routines. Therefore, space can potentially condition women's degree of inclusion and mode of space use.

CHAPTER 2. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Mexico

Some 75% of the Mexican population lives in cities, which generate 85% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2002). As analyzed by the World Bank, Mexico has a relatively balanced urban system, with the urban population not concentrated solely in the capital. Studying the urban environment in Mexico presents a challenge given the country's longstanding public security crisis. The issue of drug trafficking overlays every aspect of the country's life, endlessly fueling organized crime, common crime and interpersonal violence (Rivera Alfaro, 2011; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). According to the Mexican Index of Peace, the years 2016–2018 saw escalating violence that raised Mexico's homicide rate to a record high of more than 29,000 victims (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018).

The situation of insecurity leads to the normalization of violence and decreases the value of human life. It is an additional factor that impacts Mexican women and deepens gender inequality. According to the official statistics, nine women become victims of femicide daily (Clarín, 2019). The independent project of M. Salguero looks into the cases of violent killings that were not officially classified as femicides, concluding that the actual number of victims is much higher (Figure 2.1) (Salguero, n/d). Mexico has become home to almost half of all femicides in Latin America (Matloff, 2017). Olivera states that the presence of femicides and violence against women is an element of a bigger structural crisis in Mexico (Olivera, 2006). This structural crisis is dynamic and associated with the general context of institutional violence, corruption, and impunity.

Figure 2.1. Map of femicides in Mexico, from January 2018 to July 2019 (total of 2822 deaths)



Source: Elaborated by M. Salguero on the basis of the official bulletins of local prosecutors and cases exposed in the media

In general, Mexico is an imbalanced country when it comes to the position of women. Mexican women make up more than half the population of their country, yet in terms of economic participation, almost 60% of women of working age are not involved in the formal labor market (INEGI, 2012). Structural exclusion of women is illustrated by the fact that only five women out of ten are provided with state services on par with men (CONEVAL, 2013). This problem, however, has not been wholly ignored: the National Institute of Women INMUJERES created the National Program for Equality between Women and Men as a part of the National Development Plan (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016). In sum, Mexico is characterized by the duality of institutional intention and economic drive on the one hand and of structural violence and inequality on the other.

2.2 Mexico City

Mexico City is an example of a contemporary global South megacity. It is inhabited by around 22 million people (UN, 2018) and is the most populated North American City of substantial economic and cultural value. Approximately nine million people inhabit the inner city that consists of 16 municipal delegations. The Metropolitan Zone consists of the inner city plus 60 municipalities of the states of Mexico and Hidalgo. The total population is more than 20 million people which makes the whole city the eleventh-largest agglomeration worldwide (UN, 2016; INEGI, 2016).

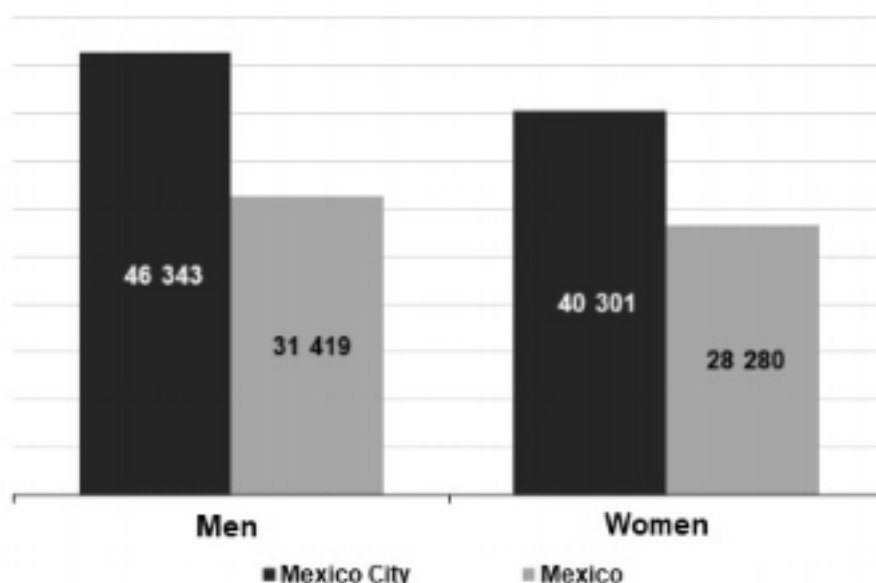
Figure 2.2. Inner city (blue) and the Metropolitan Zone of Mexico City



Source: Image by R.Lesniewski

In 2019 as compared with the monthly average of 2018, five types of major crime have seen increases of more than 100%, according to the Citizen Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice. These are: violent assaults, robbery with violence to individual public transport, robbery with violence to drivers carrier, robbery with violence to business and theft to passers-by on public roads. The number of victims of intentional homicide increased by 46% and the number of kidnappings skyrocketed by 114% (Expansión Política, 2019). However, types of crime suffered by men and women are different in the city and on the national level. As shown in Figure 2.3, in 2017 Mexico City had a higher rate of crime compared to the country's average and more men were victims of conventional crime like robbery, assault, and fraud. Moreover, men were the aggressors in 93% of delinquency cases in Mexico City in 2017 (ENVIPE, 2018).

Figure 2.3. The rate of victims of crime per hundred thousand inhabitants in 2017 in Mexico City and in the country



Source: ENVIPE, 2018

Gender-based violence exhibits other patterns in Mexico. Women may be targeted, for instance, for the purposes of forced prostitution¹ or as revenge for supposed sexual misconduct. Illustrating the motives behind femicide, a Mexican cardinal emeritus declared, “*With anyone they lay, that’s why they kill them*” (El País, 2017). The State of Mexico, which is a part of the Metropolitan Zone, has one of the highest crime rates in the country. In 2015, more incidences of femicide, disappearances, and violence against women were reported in that state than in any other (Welander, El País, 2017).

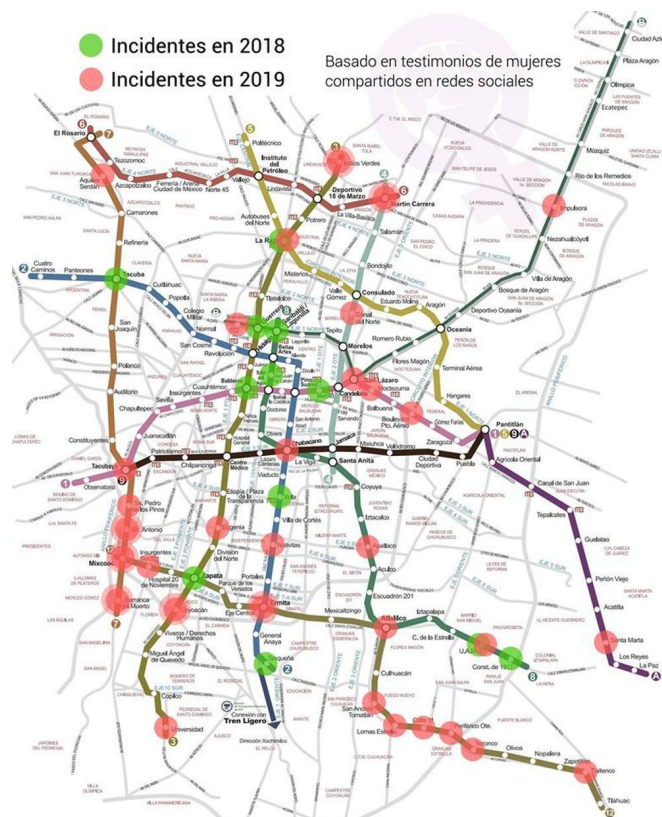
The urban environment is a significant factor in a country’s development process. The only knowledge collected to date on women’s negative experience in urban streets is sex-disaggregated data on victimization. More than 80% of women feel unsafe on the streets of Mexico City, while the city is the country’s entity with the largest proportion of women having experienced violence on the community level (ENVIPE, 2017; ENDIREH, 2018). Studies conducted in healthcare institutions of the capital revealed that almost 63% of

¹ Each year, 20,000 girls and boys, as well as 108,000 women, are victims of sexual exploitation through trafficking networks in Mexico, according to Laura Martínez González, secretary of the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies (La Jornada, 2018). The victims of white slave trade are forced to sell their bodies by the organized crime with deceit, psychological and physical violence.

patients have experienced violence in public places during the previous months, and about 27% of women have experienced it in physical form (Campos et al., 2017).

Unsafe public places can undermine rights and freedoms, such as freedom of movement. Around 77% of the capital's female population uses public transport on a daily basis (INEGI, 2007). However, Mexico City is the second most unsafe city for women using public transport: 90% of respondents claimed they at some point were the victims of harassment (Forbes, 2016; Zermeño & Plácido, 2009). The existing policy of pink, women-only transportation cars raises the question of whether separate services are what female citizens really desire. Do responses like women-only train cars solve the safety problem or do they reproduce social segregation and encourage victim blaming? Currently there is too little known about women's experiences with public insecurity and gender-based violence to answer this question.

Figure 2.4. An example of a map based on the evidence from women in social media; the map demonstrates the kidnap attempts in the metro of Mexico City



Source: Image by Z. Lascarín in M.Vargas, Mexico.com, 2019

In conclusion, while Mexico City embodies wishes for urban development, it gave rise to exclusionary urban processes (Delgadillo, 2016). It is a place where despite the introduction of ambitious policies on urban planning and public services—specifically security provision—a striking level of inequality and informality persists (Isunza Vizuet & Hernández Esquivel, 2001; Horbath Corredor, 2003). Mexico City was often described by the local participants of this study as a little mirror of what happens in the country. In many ways, Mexico City is a modern, prosperous metropolis, a leader in the region. At the same time, its urban dynamics reflect insecurity and uneven social relations. These are embodied in a highly heterogeneous urban landscape where urban planning does not apply to different parts of the city equally (Ziccardi, 2016). These characteristics make the case study of Mexico City useful to other cities in Latin America and the Global South, which often have similar urban problems.

The focus of this chapter is to draw a systematic connection from the theory to the measurement and data collection. This chapter presents the research sub-questions and operationalization of variables and discusses area sampling in detail. Moreover, it explains the research methods used: interviews, surveys, mapping, walking through space, and safety audit walks. Finally, the chapter describes consultations with the local expert community and the positionality of the author.

3.1 Research questions and operationalization of variables

The initial process of data collection in the field demonstrated the irrelevance of the anticipated research questions. The foregoing deskwork failed to correctly assume concepts and links most suitable for the field situation. Thus, the research questions were adjusted during the period of fieldwork; a detailed explanation of changes is disclosed in Appendix 1. The current research main question and subquestions are:

What are the attitudes of Mexico City's women towards urban street (un)safety, how do women respond to perceived (un)safety, and how does it influence their urban lifestyle?

How do women engage with the Historic Center (HC)?

How do they employ streets in the area?

What is their impression of the area?

What are women's safety-related experiences in the HC streets?

According to women, what factors make a street safe or unsafe?

What parts of the HC do they perceive as safe and unsafe?

How do women address the perceived state of street (un)safety?

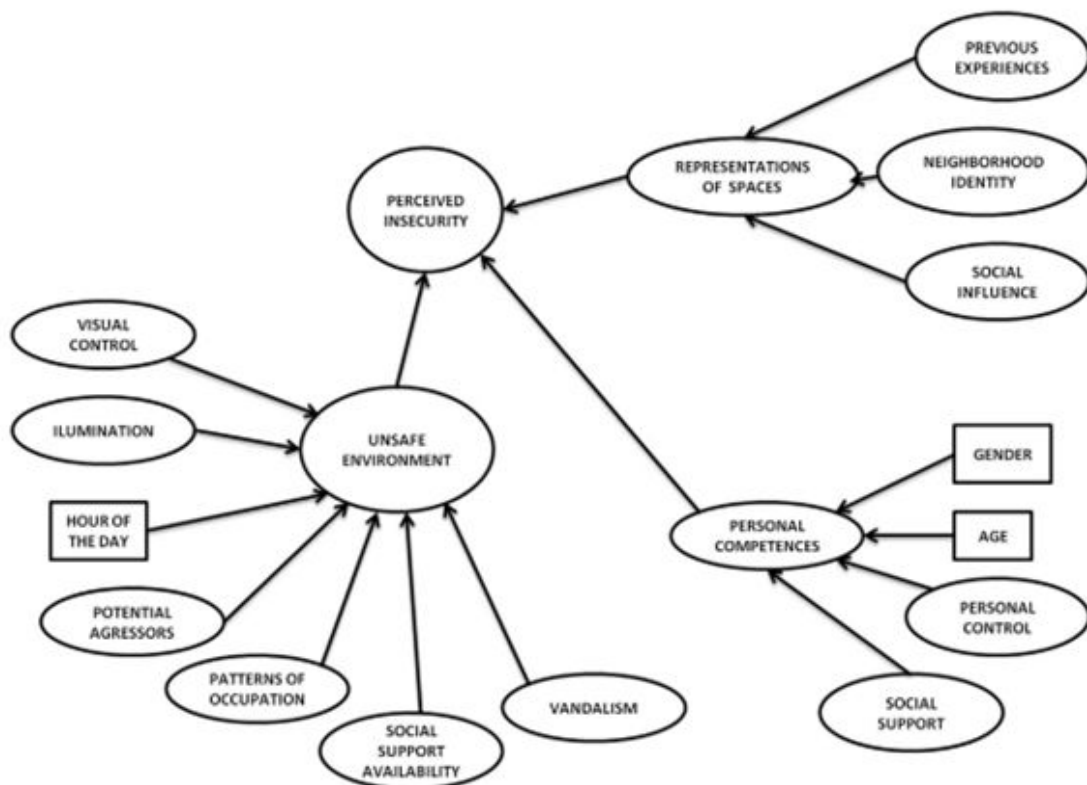
What are their individual and collective coping strategies?

What is the influence of these strategies on their routine?

How does the perceived level of (un)safety affect women's urban lifestyles?

Perceptions are hard to capture, measure and examine. The first trial interviews that were carried out in the field proved that the conceptual model of Carro, Valera & Vidal (2010) suited this research best. This scheme was designed to study perceived insecurity in public space. It allowed tracing the factors of influence to track down one's perceptions and the way they are formed (Figure 3.1). It comprises three main sources of personal perceptions: unsafe environment, representation of space and person characteristics of the women. The three-aspect model recalls Bandura's social cognitive theory framework: the dynamics of reciprocity between a person (in this case, female respondents), environment (urban streets) and behavior (response strategies).

Figure 3.1. Conceptual model on perceived insecurity of public space



Source: Carro, Valera & Vidal (2010)

The scheme molds further operationalization of the variables (Figure 3.2). Moreover, this sequence contributes to the way the questions were placed in the interview guide (the list of the covered topics of the interviews is shown in Appendix 2).

Figure 3.2. Operationalization of variables

Concept	Variables	Operational Definitions	Components
Women's Perceptions of Unsafety	Unsafe Environment	Environment that represents danger for women or/and produces fear in them. Environment where women cannot move or participate freely due to risk of harm	Vigilance, illumination, maintenance, hour of the day, crowdedness
	Representations of Spaces	Imageries of space that women produce and sustain. These views are personally and collectively constructed and influence women's decisions about space's safety	Previous experiences, area's reputation, social practices
	Personal Competences	Women's profiles and personal characteristics that influence their exposure to the risk and opinions about unsafety	Intersectional differences (e.g. age, income, residence), previous victimization, social support
	Coping Strategies	Women's ways of ensuring personal safety and feelings of safety while on the streets	Individual habits (e.g. decisions on clothing, accompaniment, hour and route) and collective actions (e.g. networks of support, activism)

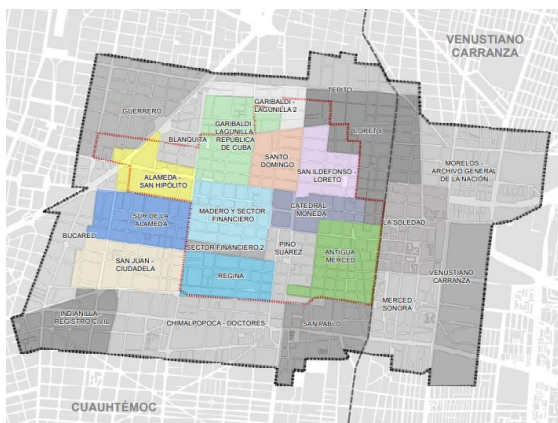
This research is based on qualitative techniques with a quantitative element to enrich findings. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, enabled the collection of detailed information about perceptions, experiences, and attitudes. The selection of several qualitative methods was needed to collect more thorough data about the connection between women's perceptions of unsafety and configurations of urban design. The quantitative aspect consists of surveys and the use of secondary data. Moreover, this methodology includes both researcher-led and respondent-led techniques. This research was conducted with the support of several organizations: *Instituto Mexicano de Urbanismo* (IMU A.C.), *Programa de Estudios sobre la Ciudad de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (PUEC-UNAM) and *El Caracol A.C.* The collaborators assisted in creating a

comprehensive research design fit for the local context, area sampling, participant recruitment, and other methodological aspects.

3.2 Area sampling

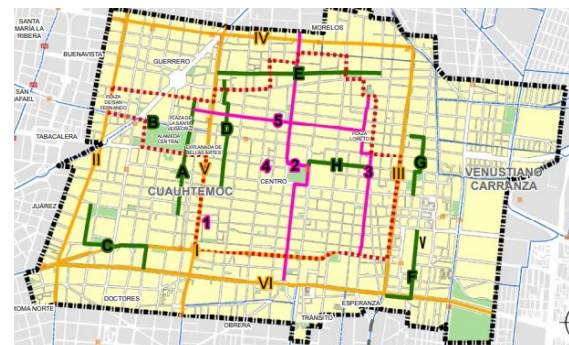
Choosing the area of study was one of the biggest challenges of the fieldwork. The wise choice would considerably impact the findings and the quality of the whole work. After consulting the host organizations and assessing the urban terrain, the Historic Center of Mexico City (HCMC) was selected as the zone of this research. HCMC is the focus of the city's urban policy as it is the intersection of historical and cultural heritage (hence, tourism), social participation, economic activities, transit, and political representation. The area concentrates formal commercial activity at a rate fifteen times higher than the city average, hosting 10% of the city's registered businesses (Autoridad del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México, 2018). This research will focus on Perimeter A of the HCMC, which encloses an interior area of 3.2 km², in which a significant number of buildings and public spaces recognized for their historical and cultural value are located (Suárez Pareyón, 2009).

Figure 3.3. Perimeters A (red) and B (black) of HCMC



Source: PUEC-UNAM (2016) cited in Autoridad del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México, 2018

Figure 3.4. Corridors and axes in the HCMC

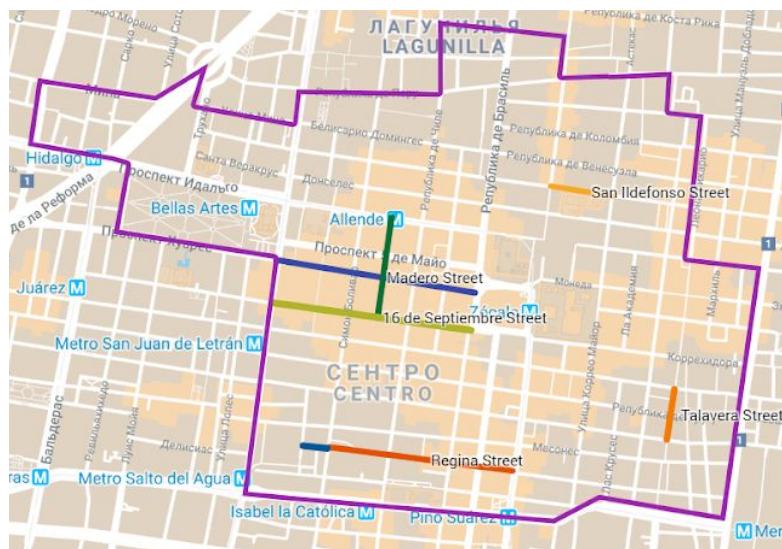


Source: Elaborated with the data of GODF, 1980, INEGI, 2010, 2000; PUEC-UNAM, 2016, cited in Autoridad del Centro

The embodiment of collective memory, on one side, and a directed project of “centrality”, on the other, makes the historical center a meeting point of citizenry and governance. Moreover, the Historical center is a major destination point and a corridor: as it was estimated in 2015, the place was visited by more than 2 million people daily and is the most transited area of the whole country. Every day around 170 thousand formal employees work in the area, with only a small minority actually residing there (Autoridad del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México, 2018).

The diversity of public spaces and streets is another strong point of this location. The pedestrian streets are chosen as locations for further research due to their accessibility, high levels of transit and functionality. Moreover, they are well-dispersed throughout the area and run in both directions, north-south, and west-east. Their connectedness to non-pedestrian streets allowed approaching users of different mobility modes: cars, public transport, and bicycles. 80% of daily mobility in the city involves public transport (Burdett & Sudjic, 2011 cited in Bray Sharpin, 2014). Since using public transport involves walking to access it or to reach a final destination, it is safe to state that the majority of the urban inhabitants are pedestrians, so the choice of pedestrian streets favored the study.

Figure 3.5. Pedestrian streets sampled for the research activities: Madero, Motolinia, 16 de Septiembre, San Ildefonso, Talavera, Regina, Echeveste

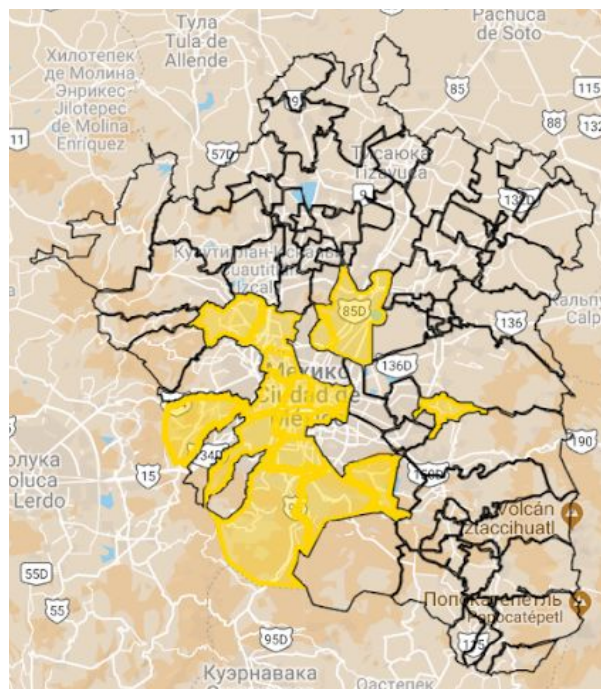


3.3 Interviews

The chosen type of interview is in-depth and semi-structured to allow respondents the freedom to mention other issues and for the researcher to cover crucial points. This research had within its focus women of the age 18 and older, transiting through the streets of the Historic Center, working on streets (as informal vendors), and those living on the streets of the area. It was expected that women present in the city center were engaged with the streets as public spaces and/or spaces for mobility.

Since the respondents were all chosen based on their presence within the area of study, their residence was not significant; they could come from Mexico City, the Metropolitan Zone, or neighboring states. In total, 47 interviews were conducted and the residence of the respondents were determined to be located in 11 municipal entities out of 16 of the inner Metropolitan Area of Mexico City and in 16 out of 76 entities of the Metropolitan Zone. The profiles of the respondents are listed in Appendix 3.

Figure 3.6. Municipalities and delegations of residence of the recruited interviewees within the Metropolitan Zone of Mexico City



It was assumed that women coming from different neighborhoods and backgrounds are a more representative sample as these women may have different experiences and diverse adaptation strategies. Discovering a variety of response strategies is crucial in this sense.

Clarifying this demographic sample simultaneously meant excluding women that do not transit through Historic Center. Another major limitation of this method was the unwillingness of women to be approached and to dedicate their time for an interview due to busyness and reluctance towards social interaction (since the area is popular with street vendors and promoters). As such, the interview time was expanded from 40 to 50 minutes in order to extract information of higher quality, rather than focus on the size of the sample. Respondents were recruited through simple random sampling, though not in its purest form, as many women refused to participate.

The research activities were mainly conducted within the sampled pedestrian streets. Time of the day was an essential circumstance here. Trial interviews showed that among the main factors influencing women's perceptions of safety were the presence of other people on the street and street illumination. The timeframe of 17:00-20:00 was chosen for conducting interviews as well as performing other methods in field for several reasons: these are peak hours of pedestrian transit, and this is the time of dusk when the quality of street lighting can be evaluated and referred to in the questions.

As for the data analysis, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed via NVivo software. Interviews with homeless women and more privileged women were coded separately as their narratives were extremely different. It seemed more reasonable to contrast them rather than group them together. Overall, the research questions and coding process reflected the conceptual model on the perceptions of public space. The codes were clustered into several themes: personal positionality; representation of the Historic Center; public space use; emotional connection to space; spatial factors of safety and unsafety; insecurity experience; habits and strategies; and influence on urban lifestyle. The expert interviews were analyzed independently as well.

3.4 Survey

The questionnaire followed the logic of the conceptual model and research questions. Although the main research question considers only women, the survey was also directed to men for several reasons. The male participation was used to illustrate that local men and women use public space differently and suffer from distinct crimes therein. The male/female contrast made it possible to address why women's experiences are qualitatively different and need to be considered. Pilot surveying led to the conclusion that the snowball sampling method most suited the context because it proved to be the most feasible way to distribute

the questionnaire, to reach a larger number of people (including those outside the Historic Center) and to get the responses back. The snowball method, in this case, was used as follows: female respondents who were interviewed personally received a link to a Google Form with the survey to later distribute among their wider social network. Major limitations of this technique were that it was not random and it was impossible to control the sample, so it was not truly representative.

Over a period of two months, 330 responses were received. The data analysis was done using RStudio, where the results were filtered and selected according to gender. String detection was used to capture the number of people who answered a question in multiple ways. Instead of analyzing the results by absolute numbers, proportional graphs were plotted.

3.5 Mapping

Every interview carried out was accompanied by a mapping exercise. Respondents were given a blank map of the Historic Center and its surroundings with the Perimeter A marked. They were asked to indicate different streets within the Center with different colors that signified different feelings. It was explained that their indication can be based on their own experiences, stories and rumors, news and other possible knowledge. They were asked to explain their choice of streets and colors along the way. The filled maps were later layered together using Google MyMaps, a feature to create personalized map views provided by Google Maps. This method gives shape to the emotional dimension of a person's relationship with space and is used to "spatially represent experience" (Griffin & Mcquoid, 2012). The method facilitated conclusions about how women experience this specific zone of the city and about the connection of fear with specific public spaces.

3.6 Walking through space

This participative method enabled exploring space from a community member's perspective. In this case, it stands for walking down streets with a participant and simultaneously discovering her stories, feelings, and uses associated with a street. Various factors that influenced the sensation of safety appeared in the process of moving from one point to another. Four executed walks repeated normal trajectories of the participants through the Historic Center at their habitual time of day. Five women with whom the rapport was best established were recruited after the interviews. The conversation process during the walks was unstructured and guided by configurations of urban space.

3.7 Safety audit walks

The study required tools as simple as observing the environment and developing visual aids. The researcher's capability of "being there" was important for understanding the context, to examine the urban space and to evidence the factors that make women feel safe or unsafe. The method of safety audit walks is usually a diagnostic and preventive tool used in research that deals with urbanism and safety. In this case, a questionnaire was inspired by similar walks done by ActionAid (2013) and Ciocchetto (2014) and further elaborated with a gender perspective (Appendix 4). The walks were carried out to examine every pedestrian street sampled on workdays during the selected hours 17:00-20:00 to be able to evaluate correctly the street illumination. Observational qualitative information retrieved was mostly descriptive including physical characteristics of streets and processes taking place.

3.8 Expert community

The research was supported by the experts of the host organizations that provided professional advice, introduced the researcher to a network of other colleagues and created space for discussion when needed. Additionally, the research was influenced by the knowledge derived from the events organized by academic and civil communities on the issues of gender and urban development. Seminars, conferences and public talks (a total of 22) were attended in the field (specified in Appendix 5). A crucial asset for this study was participation in the International Congress on Gender and Space that took place at the National Autonomous University of Mexico which enabled feedback from distinguished Latin American academics and insights on the research problem from other speakers. Six interviews with local professionals were arranged in order to gain a deeper comprehension of different elements of the topic. These professionals included recognized academics and practitioners in the fields of urbanism, architecture, sociology, psychology, civil activism, public policy and a UN-Women Mexico project coordinator (listed in detail in Appendix 6).

3.9 Positionality of the researcher

The ethical principles that were used in this thesis in relation to the participants and data treatment are explained in the ethical review form attached as Appendix 7. The central issue of my positionality as a researcher was my personal safety and its impact on the data collection. Being a woman myself and living in Mexico City, I fell into the category of the targeted population group. During the fieldwork, I was on a daily basis experiencing similar risks to those that my interviewees shared. My feeling of vulnerability was intensified due to

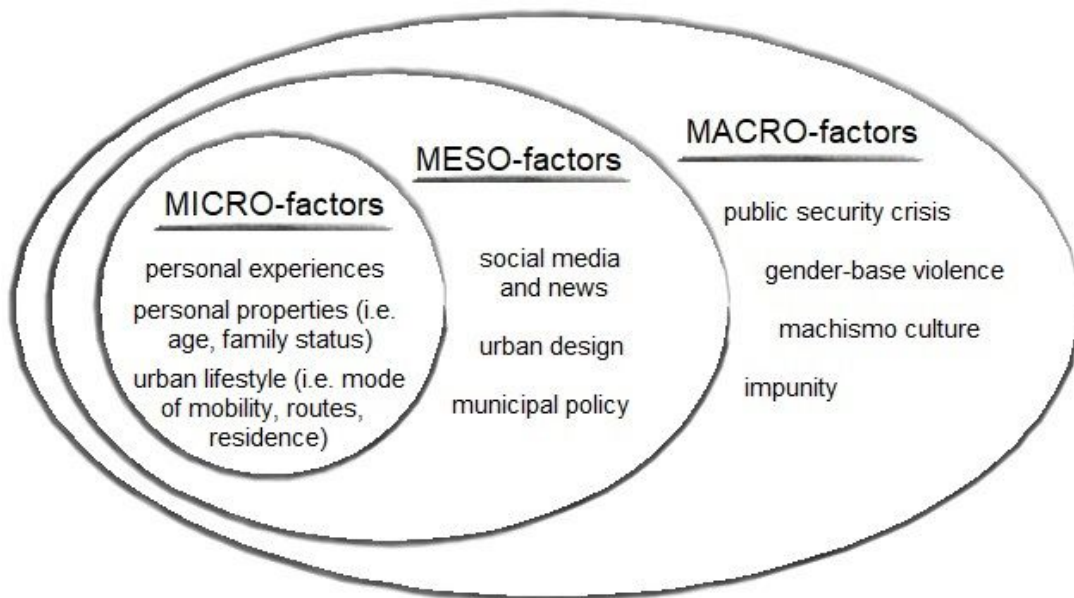
having a notably different *gringa* appearance, lacking social backup and knowledge about the city, and being quite exposed in the city streets due to the research activities. The daily data collection process involved significant interaction with local women, learning of their negative, sometimes brutal, experiences. Following persistent recommendations of local citizens, I produced my own coping strategies, which had a profound limiting impact on my routine. In order to stay neutral and avoid applying my own perceptions to the research, I scheduled regular breaks and discussed my findings with local supervisors so as to mitigate bias.

This chapter investigates the way women inhabit the streets of Mexico City, beginning with the concept of *urban construction of fear*. This notion includes a variety of factors and stands for the socially driven process of creating negative perceptions about one's safety while in public space. Later the chapter discovers kinds of offensive behavior women face on the streets and how gender-based victimization creates distinct patterns of violence and shame. The gendered nature of urban construction of fear is explained by the differences in the urban lifestyle of women and their increased exposure and vulnerability in the public space.

4.1 Urban construction of fear

As a result of the data collection and inductive analysis, I developed a concept of the *urban construction of fear*. This means both factors that develop women's personal feelings of vulnerability and the process of how they experience the city under the conditions of subjective perceptions of unsafety. V. Ceccato introduces the notion of *the urban fabric*—the material and ecological structure all the social activities of a city—as a concept to aid the study of crime and fear (Ceccato, 2012). Together with the architectural framework, these social aspects determine fear of crime in microenvironments of a city. This notion is explained by Lefebvre's Spatial Triad, which presents produced social space as lived space, conceived space and perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991). This research empirically verified that fear construction is not limited only to urban architecture but also includes other social features and dynamics. These factors vary in scope (as shown in Figure 4.1) and impact. The empirical part of this research mainly focuses on micro- and meso-level factors. The macro-level (particularly the, public security crisis) was partly described in the geographical context section; issues on the macro level remained present in the narratives of the interviewees throughout the data collection process and will be referred to in the sections of further chapters. This chapter will discuss micro-factors: the role of personal experiences and particularities of the women's urban lifestyle, and will mention macro-factors, impunity, and violence against women, as viewed by the interviewees. Chapter 5 will elaborate on a meso-factor, urban design. Chapter 6 will look back to personal characteristics and experiences. The discussion and conclusion sections will also allude to some meso- and macro-factors, especially when producing policy recommendations.

Figure 4.1. The multiplicity of the factors that affect the urban construction of women's fear



One of the macro-factors, the question of gender violence in Mexico, has a cultural and historical dimension. The phenomenon of *machismo* is a Hispanic psycho-cultural matter that consists of the masculinity exaggeration and the belief in the superiority of men over women (Giraldo, 1972; Moral de la Rubia & Ramos Basurto, 2016). The urban space, understood as a construction, is seen in feminist thought as a mediator between genders. In this sense, the contradiction between the feminine daily life and space is sharp; while the participation and needs of women are growing, the public space continues to reflect tradition (Añoover López, 2012). As stated by the architect Mariana Osorio Plascencia, the problem is rooted in the distinct division between feminine and masculine roles. From the architectural perspective of M. Osorio Plascencia, the modern city was built for necessities of a constructed neutral user, typically, a white bourgeois adult man, heterosexual and healthy. While men were supposed to be “public” actors, women could only occupy very limited private space. This is universally seen in architectural traits of residential houses, where men have workshops and offices and women’s space is a service-oriented kitchen.

As argued by McDowell, this domestic gender-space division is “*strong pressures exerted on women to physically restrict themselves to the domestic aspects of cities and urban life*” (McDowell, 1982), although contemporary scholars highlight the rising shift of domestic femininities and masculinities (Rezeanu, 2015). The old way was a starting point of how, by whom and for whom contemporary cities were designed and developed: the very idea of a

city was predominantly a “*masculine myth*” (Akkerman, 2006). Nevertheless, in Mexico, the problem of women in a city was intensified by the public security crisis followed by the War on drugs (Hernández Castillo, 2010). Women of the older generations interviewed continually claimed they started feeling even more vulnerable once the value of human life decreased and the phenomenon of femicides became more pronounced:

Lately yes, this has been very complicated [the situation with insecurity for women], very difficult, both in the city and in the state” (Respondent 1);

Yes... A woman here cannot be free anymore, you cannot safely leave to the street, because you do not know what you will find outside (Respondent 5);

This [the situation of gender-based violence in public space] is very, very important. Every time more and more stories are heard about kidnaps and kidnap attempts, femicides, harassment in diverse places (Respondent 3).

A crucial aspect of fear construction is information, the meso-factors of social media and news, which creates a level of visibility and representation in society and help to understand how the community and women perceive the problem. Although gender-based violence is currently getting more space in public media, there is still a lack of sensitivity to this type of violence both within the general public and the government. Though there are new authorities such as the Institute of Women (INMUJERES), the prosecution processes on charges of gender crimes remain stagnant and the number of daily femicides skyrockets (Gallegos, El País, 2017). Social media plays a crucial role for the local women in the construction of fear and discourses about urban violence. Facebook, in particular, hosts many publications about violence of all kinds against women and girls:

This [gender-based violence on streets] is something that has always been there but now, with the boom of information, we are seeing what is going on (Respondent 7);

Now everyone, or at least my girlfriends, are hysterical about the recent publications about kidnaps in the subway, things like that ... I'm afraid to be in the street (Respondent 8);

I think what happened before is that we did not have access to information, not immediately and not by so many means. And now you know what is happening here. Some still do not believe in the violence against women and it is because it is a man or a person does not see the reality in which we live here (Respondent 38).

However, the quality of social media content presents the question of whether it does more harm than good. According to the majority of the interviewees, this content does not warn or educate but rather intimidates and responsabilizes women:

This [gender-based violence on streets] has always been important but right now it's becoming more visible through social media, social networks, but I also worry that instead of informing, they terrify people, paralyze them... The cases [of violence against women] are not detailed, but at the end of the month, I see that there were 10 femicides daily — more depersonalized (Respondent 6).

Conteras Jiménez states that Facebook actually fostered normalization and justification of femicides (Conteras Jiménez, 2018). However, there is a new wave of feminist activity in social media that does the work of making gender-based violence visible, but in both cases, the content is directed mainly to potential victims — women. Most respondents agreed that their level of anxiety has risen significantly with the boom in social media in recent years.

4.2 Urban gender-based victimization

Women do not learn what happens on the city streets only from the news. Personal experiences, which are a micro-factor of the model, were found to occupy a considerable place in women's perceptions. All women interviewed and 96% of those surveyed admitted having experienced harassment or physical abuse in the Historic Center or outside it, personally know victims or witnessed violence against women in public space. The situation is

present in their everyday lives. In the in-depth interviews, all women mention that they suffer consistently from street harassment:

Sometimes you feel that they are watching you ... When there is a group of men, I do not want to pass by. You feel that they can stalk you and most of the times this is real. Why do I have to go through this? (Respondent 18);

There is something that is also very annoying: when you walk and they [men] wish a good afternoon. Because you know they are not greeting you. A certain tone, something lascivious, covered with a "good afternoon". They turn looking, they whistle, it does not matter the profile of a man (Respondent 38);

When I go to work, I walk down the street and it's always the same: looks, certain harassment, compliments, insults — obscenity that bothers me (Respondent 12).

There are multiple types of gender-based violence: verbal and non-verbal, physical and symbolic. There is also public discussion about whether behavior like street harassment can be considered "violence". Within the fieldwork, the local experts always referred to the phenomenon as violence. This perspective is also shared by Latin American academic texts:

"Street harassment is a violent practice, in the first place because it represents a penetration of private and intimate spaces of a person in a public situation and by someone who would not normally have access to them (...) At the same time, it is of a unidirectional act of power and imposition (...) Finally, because of its ability to produce psychological as well as social, emotional, symbolic, and even physical discomfort (...) It also produces its acceptance based on a hierarchical relationship of power, taking advantage, and at the same time reproducing, the differences between genders" (Arancibia Garrido, Billi & Guerrero González, 2017)

The “subtle” forms of gender violence without direct confrontation are often times normalized in Mexico as “*an invisible component of everyday interactions*” (Gaytan Sánchez, 2007). For instance, catcalling is referred to as *piropos*, a set of socially accepted verbal expressions, often of aggressive sexual connotation, that are expected to be complementary toward women. These are often unwanted forms of attention and a woman cannot know what to expect next. As express kidnaps (violent kidnapping of a short period for quick gain) become more common (UNAM, n/d), unpredictability is a key element of women’s everyday vulnerability.

Figure 4.2. Types of victimization found during the interviews; arranged by frequency of mentioning



Compared to men, women handle additional layers of risks, as specified by the local female citizens. While both are exposed to crimes associated with the forced withdrawal of personal belongings and physical violence in the case of resistance, women think that they undergo distinct and deeper victimization. Respondents highlighted that they are afraid that mugging can be followed by sexual violation or emotional trauma:

Assaulting a woman means not only that they take away your belongings but that they also rape you. They will not just hit you, there is psychological violence and it definitely crosses a great risk of sexual violence and death. If you are dragged into a car, almost certainly nobody will find you (Respondent 36);

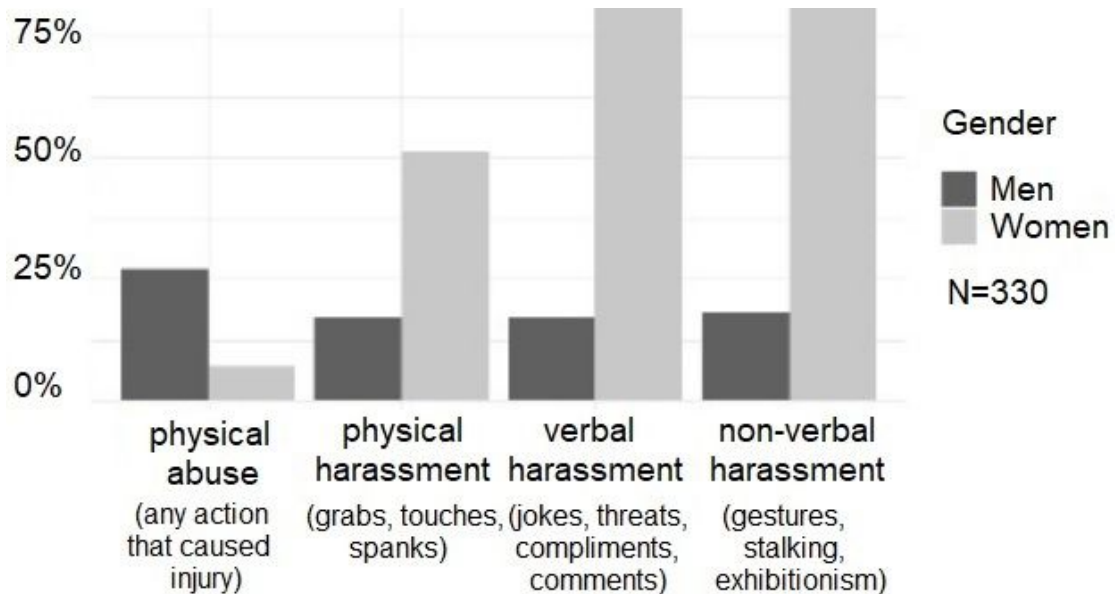
I was walking and I was dragged into a garage by several people... They only scared me, they finally laughed at my fear, they

approached me, they saw my face of fright and let me go. If they were going to kill me, they would kill me differently [from a man]. I do not know what would happen in between [capture and death]. I was talking to my mom and I told her not to look for me in case I disappear (Respondent 21);

The worst thing that can happen to a man is just that someone assaults him and hits him, that is it. And to us, it is always aggression plus humiliation. Submission always has to be very clear... It us going to sound really bad because I think it's already conformism: if we are lucky, they uull take our phones and wallets, but if something goes wrong, we will never appear (Respondent 17).

Analysis of the survey results at hand demonstrates that the percentage of women exposed to sexual violence was substantially higher, while significantly more men were victims of conventional physical aggression.

Figure 4.3. Personal safety-related experiences of male and female survey respondents

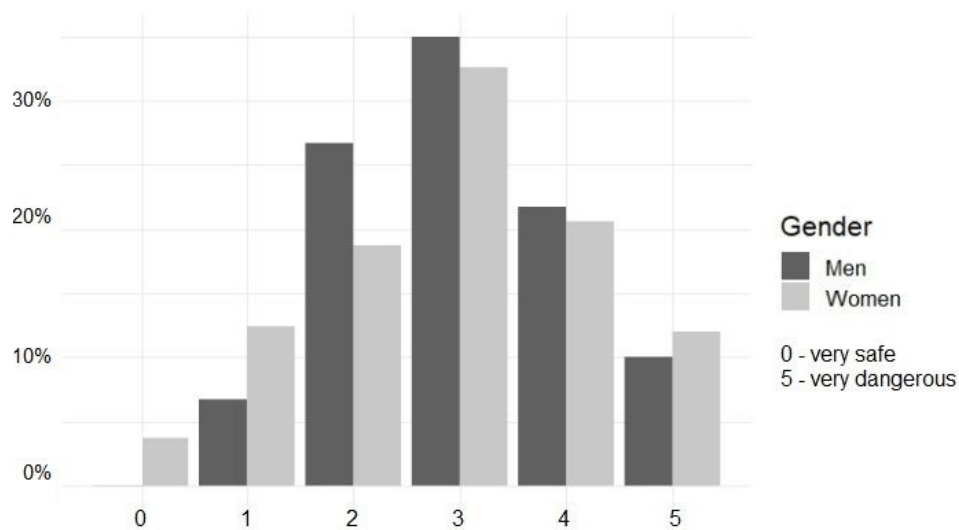


Source: Elaboration of the own survey data

In the case of the Historic Center of Mexico City, based on the survey, it is fair to say that women and men share similar feelings of personal safety. What is more, there is an

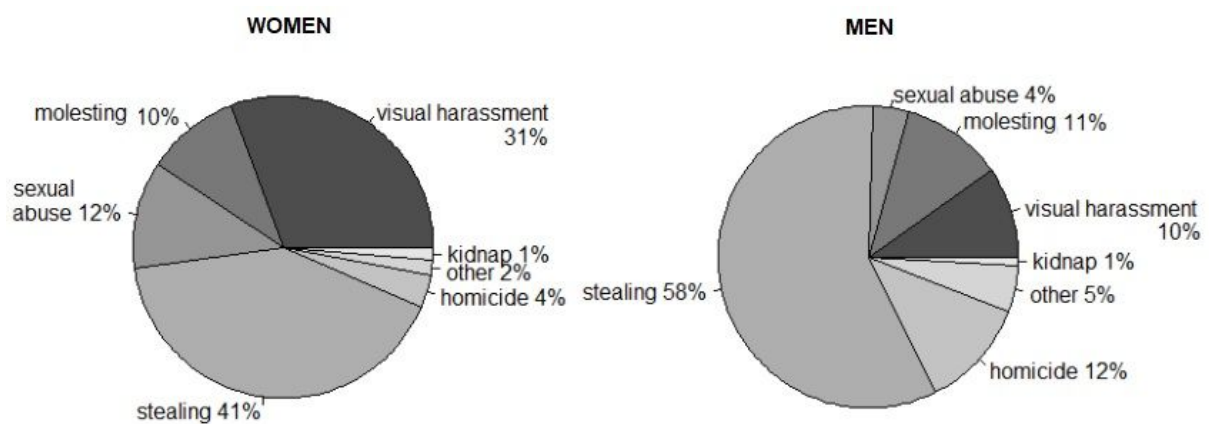
approximately equal number of people who feel averagely safe and averagely unsafe in the Center, while female respondents marked that they feel absolutely safe more times than male respondents. The risks that concern the two groups, however, are different as women worry about offenses of sexual connotation twice as often than men.

Figure 4.4. Evaluation of feeling of personal safety while in the Historic Center



Source: Elaboration of the own survey data

Figure 4.5. Types of offense that preoccupy women and men most while in the Historic Center



Source: Elaboration of the own survey data

Most interviewed women expressed their difficult feelings about living their bodies while in public space. Some of them feel deprived of their bodily freedom, receiving unwanted

attention as a form of control. These risks exist based on their vulnerability for being socialized as a women:

Sometimes men abuse their power. One way is using the bodies of women to control them — from compliments to discipline in a certain way because you are uncomfortable, you will not wear these clothes, you will not walk here anymore (Respondent 6);

I do not want my daughter to put tight pants ... I say no ... And there we go. One time I saw her stalked from a van. This is dangerous, they take our daughters from streets (Respondent 5).

Finally, since this symbolic violence is easy to exercise and is habitually left unpunished, it is a daily experience for the majority of respondents every time they enter the streets:

Sometimes I have to decide what clothes I am going to use this day to avoid attention and something serious like kidnapping or taking me somewhere and killing me... At any moment someone can appear and do something to me (Respondent 3);

I prefer that they kill me instead of doing something to me ... I feel that we [women] should not have this thought before leaving, but you get ready, you get upset (Respondent 23).

Box 1. Personal fearful urban experience in the streets of Mexico City

On one Tuesday evening, I was getting home after an interview. As it got darker, I checked my location via Google Maps and I was only nine blocks away from home. Normally this would take me some ten minutes walking but due to my personal perception, I decided to take a DiDi ride (popular local taxi application). Specifically, to feel safer. The car approached and it only had two front doors, which is prohibited, as I discovered later. These ten minutes of the ride were terrifying: the driver was telling me indecent lustful things and watched my reaction. This was followed by what I consider to be indirect threats. He told me how he lived in the state of Mexico and the police never appeared

there. So if he wanted to “marry me”... he knew my home address. Only playing along I could escape. The following I was feeling miserable every time I left home.

Finally, another crucial macro-factor to mention is impunity. The issue of responsibility is a substantial component in fear construction. Under social pressure, including social media, some women tend to blame themselves for attracting violence because they wore certain clothes or walked at a certain hour of the day. In case something does happen, some interviewees would prefer to stay quiet because of the probable accusations of others:

If he wants to violate a woman in the street, he knows that there is a system that supports him, legitimizes and reproduces that type of violence (Respondent 28);

When the man spanked me, I denounced him. There was no monitoring by the police. We have never received calls from them again, it was practically useless (Respondent 12).

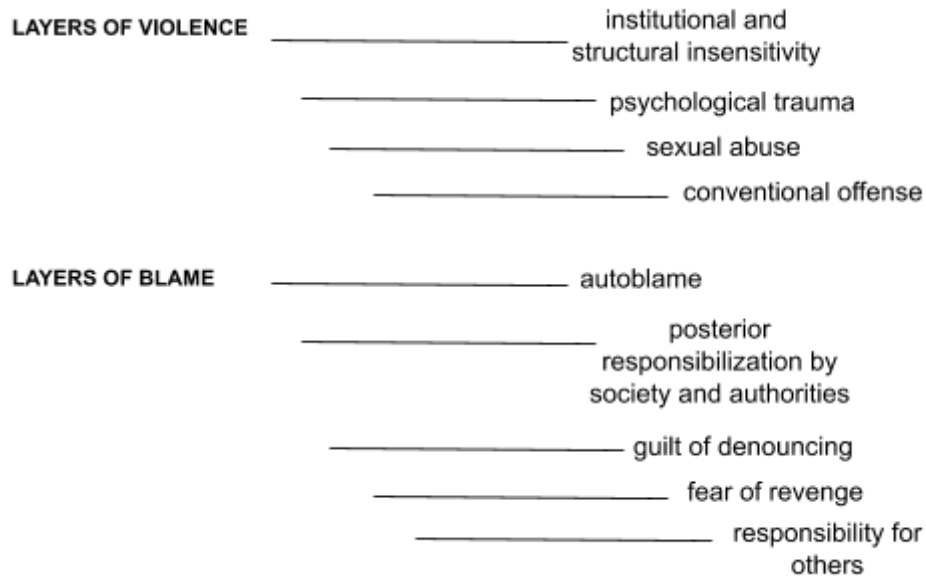
Even if a punishable action is denounced, women state that authorities may lack comprehension and blame it on the woman. Looking further into the formal statistics, it is still unknown how many gender-based crimes are not reported. However, the national survey on public insecurity reports that in 2017 in Mexico City only 9.9% of crimes were reported, of which just 66.9% of the reports reached the stage of preliminary investigation (ENVIPE, 2018). Even when cases are successfully prosecuted, the female victim may be labeled by community members as exaggerating, hysterical and a life ruiner. This is followed by a fear that an aggressor may seek revenge. Additionally, due to the traditional feminine role of caregiving, women are often assumed as responsible for the well-being of children and other family members which increases the psychological burden of responsibility:

I do not think about myself anymore, I think about my children, my nieces, the girls ... There were many cases [of gender crime on the streets] (Respondent 31);

From the family they tell that you have to put up with being a woman, from there we have a problem (Respondent 20);

Now that I am a mother, I have a one-year-old baby, I am worried about her safety and I feel more vulnerable, that's why I do not go out (Respondent 38).

Figure 4.6. Layers of violence and layers of blame experienced by women respondents based on an analysis of the interviews



Thus, the urban construction of fear is partly produced by society to reflect cultural norms and relations. Cities are spatial constructs and they are prone to reinforce socially established hierarchies and practices including those related to gender roles. There are specific types of victimization that women encounter in the streets of Mexico City due to their gender identity. Both personal experience and the broader cultural context contribute to women's elevated sense of unsafety in Mexico City's public spaces.

4.3 Women's use of the city

Fear has a profound connection to gender. Nevertheless, women are not a homogeneous group and they use and feel a city in significantly different ways. This section will deal with such micro-factors as personal characteristics and urban lifestyle — these aspects represent intersectional differences between women and their positionality with relation to the city. There is a variety of intersectional differences that matter for women's feelings of safety or vulnerability. An example of such differences is one's sexual orientation:

I avoid behaving gay in the hostile public space where I feel in danger
(Respondent 8)

Every person of female identity recruited for this research owned a set of specific personality traits that determined her positionality and exposure to urban risks. Some of these distinct characteristics are age, income, education, physical features (including skin color and health condition), civil status, family composition, sexual orientation, and housing condition. For example, the quotes below show differences in women's experiences based on differences in their transportation use:

I mostly walk and use buses: in my experience, at least once a week I receive insults in the streets for anything. Also I had physical abuse... I was waiting for a bus and suddenly someone came up and touched me (Respondent 3);

I commute to the city from the state of Mexico every week, it is 3.5 hours one way: walking, microbus, metro. There is not pavement on the way to the bus, no police. I choose a much longer way, with a better roadway, so I can walk faster and run (Respondent 5);

Economically speaking...It is not the same to pay 5 pesos for a bus and 200 pesos for Uber every day. With my wage, I have to compromise (Respondent 12);

We do not have a house nor stable money, day to day. I sell candies by the bars on the Regina street. My man gives me 10 pesos for metro every day. I go with my baby...On the street. And there is violence of all types, from all people. What do I do if I lose my 10 pesos? I am scared they can steal my little one (Respondent 41).

Area of residence is another vital factor, as urban mobility is one of the most complicated issues in Mexico City and other major Mexican cities: "Around 103 million people travel daily on Mexican streets, but not all of us have the possibility to choose the mode of transportation, nor do all cities offer affordable transportation alternatives for the most

vulnerable population" (SEDATU, 2018). The experiences of a woman traveling from the state of Mexico, a woman living in a central location, and a woman living on the street, contrast in time and economic resources required, aesthetics, convenience, and risks.

As noted from the in-depth interviews, mode of transportation also impacts the amount and type of risk: while women driving cars can be chased in exceptional cases, those traveling in *combis* or *micros* (irregular buses) are often exposed to harassment and theft. There are more cases known of kidnappings on the streets and in the metro (Zerega, El País, 2019). This, urban experience, victimization, and vulnerability are unique for every person within the generic category we call women:

[The car] lowers the risk a lot, even though I am exposed. But I feel more secure (Respondent 22);

There is a fear of public transport, that is, there are many factors, even in the same neighborhood, you know? Not being able to use public transport costs me so much money (Respondent 8);

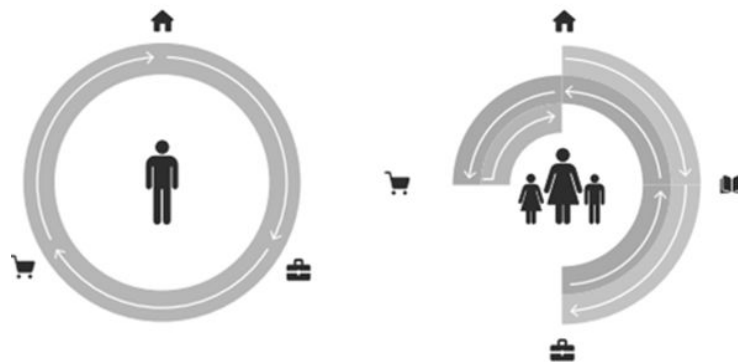
The way you move in the city entails risks, I'm a bicyclist, and I still have to take care of the cars, potholes, and also the followers with the intention of aggression (Respondent 35).

These different modes of urban mobility offer a glimpse of how women's economic status can facilitate or worsen their security situation. Recognizing that women have very different profiles means that perceptions of each female citizen and their manners of adaptation vary and only general lines can be drawn to describe them.

To show that women's urban lifestyle needs to be analyzed separately, this paragraph will touch upon the macro-factor of machismo culture. The difference in the ways women and men live in a city can be partly explained by the diverging gender roles. Men are conventionally seen as main providers for the family while women are supposed to be in charge of housework and the caretaking of children, elders, and other family members needing extra assistance (Gutiérrez Capulín, Díaz Otero & Román Reyes, 2017). These roles extend from the domestic dimension into public space. Because of all their chores and caregiving, interviewed women do not normally have arranged schedules or peak hours.

Their daily travels around the city tend to involve multimodal courses during shifting hours. Women's trajectories, as affirmed by the interviewees, are more diverse and unpredictable than those of male members of their families. These mobility patterns were previously discovered by the Secretary of Mobility. According to the state report, men in Mexico City are more likely to adopt routes of a single or few destinations with settled schedules (SEMOVI, 2019).

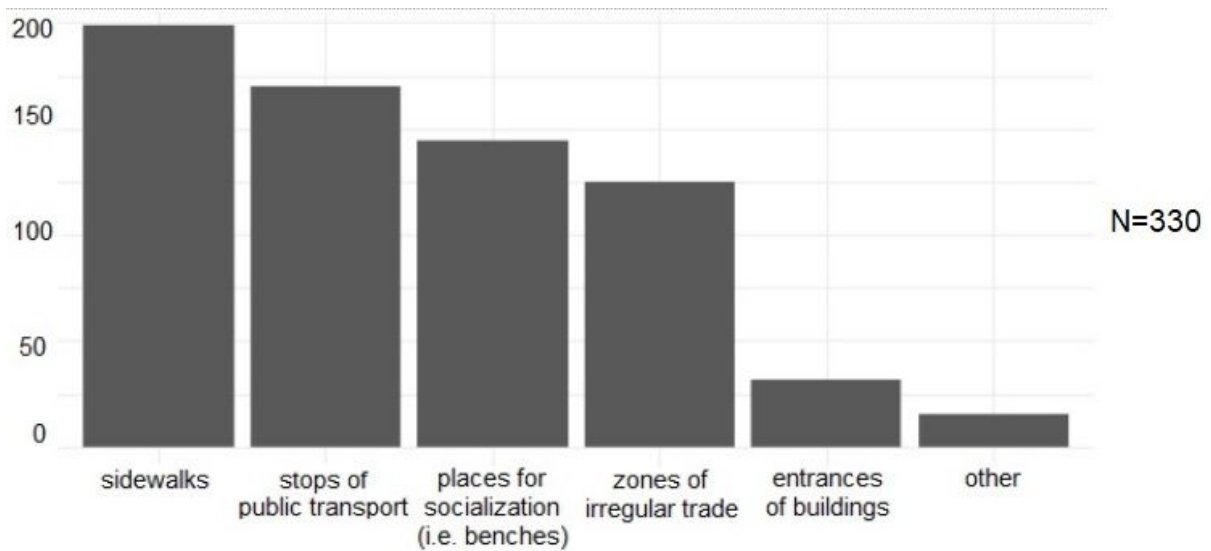
Figure 4.7. Women's average trajectories compared to the men's in Mexico City



Source: SEMOVI, 2019

Additionally, as confirmed by a quantitative study of INEGI (2017), female citizens of Mexico City employ considerably fewer private cars in their daily mobility as do men, although formally the causes of this remain unknown. As emphasized by Gisela Méndez, author of the book *"Anatomía de la movilidad en México"* (SEDATU, 2018), women in Mexico make up to twice as many trips around the city as men and the most vulnerable part of their trajectories begins as soon as they leave private space. The needs of women during their trajectories, demands for quality and safety, and the triggers that make them feel unsafe, were found by the research team of G. Méndez to be distinct. In fact, in this research, most interviewed women felt they were more exposed to urban risks compared to men in their close circle due to four elements: *different mobility mode* (higher engagement in different means of public transportation and subsequently more walking), *amplified timetables* (from taking a child to school early to doing late groceries), *wider territorial coverage* (workplace, markets, school, parental house, hospital), and *gender* itself with the associated risks. As observed from the survey data, gender-based violence oftentimes took place on public streets.

Figure 4.8. Types of urban space where women experienced harassment or other forms of gender-based violence



Source: Elaboration of the own survey data

Design of urban space, another macro-factor of fear construction, can both include and exclude particular groups of its citizens. Thus, the quality of public space can either facilitate or deteriorate women's daily experience in the city. According to Acoyani Adame, who works with issues of mobility in Mexico from the gender perspective, understanding Mexico City from the point of view of gender justice is "to understand that a city does not function for a universal subject of law" that before was the prototype for urban design and provoked inequalities of access. For Mariana Sánchez Vieyra, a scholar who works with city-wide plans of urban development, one of the most illustrative instances is the inaccessible pedestrian bridges that are present over almost every major street. These bridges privilege cars, which introduces class and gender issues. A woman in a skirt walking down a street after a workday with a stroller and groceries is conditioned to be particularly dependant on urban infrastructure. Instances of street inconveniences for women found in the Historic Center are shown in Figures 4.9 and 4.10. When one decides to transit, it is not only about where she arrives but also about what happens along the way:

There are spaces that clearly have priority in terms of pedestrian safety, but it should not be like that, a woman can not feel safe in one place and not in others (Respondent 7);

For example...I see women using the pedestrian bridges a lot more and spending much more time there. The bridges are not equipped and we have to deal with strollers, groceries for the family, vendors — with bulky equipment. And if something more serious happens, like kidnapping, something like that, there is no one, they can park trucks, they can grab you (Respondent 13);

In most occasions, I prefer to wear sneakers so I can run away, especially because of the broken sidewalks we have (Respondent 40).

Urban infrastructure matters for women's convenience and safety of transit (Figures 4.9 and 4.10). The particularities of urban design that may cause contrasting feelings of safety and danger will be investigated more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Figure 4.9. Quality of the sidewalk compared to the roadway. Example of the privilege of cars (more often driven by men) over the pedestrians (that are largely women)



Figure 4.10. Urban equipment preventing residents from sitting on the curb: a hostile environment to women with children, wheelchairs, bags



The streets are the arteries that enable a city to function. To understand the streets from a gender perspective is to acknowledge their power to facilitate or restrict a person's access to the city. For example, the urban concept of *Calle 30*, implemented in Madrid, stands for the idea that the speed of vehicles cannot exceed 30 km/h (Mayo, Expansión, 2018). It allows the healthy coexistence of drivers with other users of the streets, which is key to ensuring equal access to the many women who are pedestrians. Through gender-attentive street design, feelings of safety and objective safety can be induced.

CHAPTER 5. ARMING A STRATEGY: WOMEN ADDRESSING THE PERCEIVED STATE OF STREET UNSAFETY

A city can bring dissimilar feelings of safety to different groups of the population. While women feel particularly vulnerable, they respond to their perceptions by introducing new habits to their urban routines. In this chapter coping strategies are classified and the trends of digitalization and collectivization are explored. Finally, situational strategies change according to how safe a woman feels in public space and oftentimes physical configuration of space make women decide what behavior to choose. Hence, a range of spatial factors that define contrasting feelings about safety is studied.

5.1 Coping habits and tactics

To respond to the perceived state of unsafety, women develop strategies to feel and be safer. There were several trends discovered in the patterns of employment of various strategies. First, these various strategies become routine, habitual and normalized in women's everyday life. The defensive behavior demonstrated by women is continuous. This means that women start thinking and arming themselves with plans even before leaving their houses:

I am always, always accompanied. We [girlfriends and family members] take care of each other (Respondent 1);

I dress as ugly and as simple as possible, do not take bulky things not to call attention (Respondent 26);

I do not transit through the same place always, I try to slightly change streets and times. If they kidnap people, they are observing what you do, where you go, if it is a daily path (Respondent 31).

This also includes choosing to clothe according to the hour and modality of transportation, picking belongings to carry around depending on the area of destination, arranging the future route, travel objectives and stops along the way. For instance, the majority of women would choose comfortable shoes to be able to run if they plan on walking, and they would not choose skirts or low necklines if moving in public transport. Generally, the later in the day it

is, the more of these strategies are exercised. After foreshadowing risks and taking preventive measures, women can feel more confident initiating a solo trip around the city.

Figure 5.1. Women's strategies for personal safety

	PREVENTIONAL	SITUATIONAL	POSTERIOR
INDIVIDUAL	hour, route, transportation choice	avoiding unknown streets, changing routes	reinforcing already existing strategies
	choice of clothing and belongings	changing speed, direction, side of a street	adopting new habits (new schedules, defense classes, using taxis, changing the place of work)
	means (pepper spray, taser) and techniques of self-defense	being alert (watching around, listening to the sounds, watching shades, remembering faces)	growing mistrust towards strangers
	identifying a route, its objectives, and stops	readiness to defend (having keys in a fist, a stick in a hand, having one hand free)	relying less on a place's reputation and equipment
	slightly changing daily route and hour not to be tracked		
	FACEBOOK (inspecting news)	not stopping, not waiting	
	WHATSAPP (sharing location, group chats to share trajectories and plans)	avoiding interaction with strangers, putting on headphones	
	GOOGLE MAPS (checking places)	adjusting behavior (as not being explicitly gay/ not local/ not showing fear)	
		hiding, holding to valuable objects	

COLLECTIVE	accompaniment	helping others out	networks of psychological help; therapy
	asking for recommendations	reaching for help	
	creating networks of locals (acquaintance with neighbors, vendors)	staying over at a friend's house if late	creating own group of daily support (with classmates, family members, colleagues)
	neighborhood self-organized security	TALKING ON A PHONE	
	keeping privacy in social media	APPLICATIONS OF ALERT that notifies the list of contacts	activism in women's and feminist platforms (university assemblies)
	checking news	SHARING DETAILS OF TAXI RIDES	sharing experience in a personal circle and SOCIAL MEDIA (via hashtags)
	clothing with feminist symbols that indicate readiness to help (purple bracelets)	SHARING DYNAMIC LOCATION AND ROUTE	

Women continue taking care of themselves once they are in the streets. First and foremost, women are alert and careful in every situation when they are alone and this is put into their body language: women often look around, hold purses close, and have at least one hand free to be able to defend themselves. As demonstrated during the interviews and participatory walks, women tend to adjust their behavior to best fit the situation:

I am always focused. I try to be attentive to foresee attacks, to be alert and confront an aggressor (Respondent 2);

Not stopping even if not familiar with a way ... I prefer to make a long way to the metrobus because it is safer (Respondent 14);

Now I know: for me to suffer is to forget my headphones because you listen to everything that puts you in a bad mood. There are pros and cons: if something happens to you, you cannot hear it coming (Respondent 4).

Changing streets, switching sides of a street, direction, and speed of movement were popular strategies among the women. Avoiding any verbal interaction with strangers was important for the majority, while eye contact appeared to be helpful to make the other person aware that his appearance is remembered. Women would rather pretend to talk on the phone or demonstrate confidence in the way they move to lower the image of vulnerability. In cases of danger, the most utilized strategy was, on the contrary, reaching out for help to people who seem reliable: for example, workers, families, open businesses. All the situational strategies depend on how uncomfortable a woman feels in a specific situation.

There were several patterns found throughout the application of these multiple strategies. First, women adapt digital tools that originally were not created for purposes of security provision:

Always someone has to know where I am, who I was with and where was the last place where I was. I use Whatsapp, texts, share contacts, maps, location... Taxi ride printscreens (Respondent 3);

Using all the technology you can is the key right now: checking Facebook on the areas and crime, sharing location, Google Maps, Uber, good headphones (Respondent 5).

Even though there exist particular apps dedicated to safety, such as those that send alert messages to a contact list, hardly any respondent used them since these apps were found to function incorrectly. Women mainly employ the advantages offered by applications of everyday use: messengers, social media and maps. The messengers are utilized to maintain a constant connection with their personal circle, to share locations and routes, and to warn others of potential danger. Women tend to share their dynamic location with a person of confidence via special features on Google and WhatsApp.

Box 2. Example of habitualization of the security strategies

This is well reflected in the local culture of texting. A normal way to say goodbye to a woman would be “*con cuidado*” wishing her to be safe on the way home or somewhere else. Even though it is a quite universal phrase of politeness, in contemporary Mexico it has its specific meaning: I hope nobody does you harm on your way. This wish is later followed by “*¿legaste bien?*” which is a way to make sure a woman made it to the destination place. If not answered, measures are taken to locate a person.

What is very worrying to me is that if you are a woman, everyone tells you:

“cuídate” [take care of yourself]

—RESPONDENT 13

Taxi applications like UBER and DiDi that are popular among the locals have special functions to share ride details with a chosen contact. Social media and maps are used, among other ways, to check a place’s reputation. However, some respondents confessed reluctance to display their mobility patterns anywhere on social media apart from their nearest circle, as this makes a person easier to be tracked. Some young women even change the order of their names on social media to make it harder to be found and stalked.

... However, apps can be a tool to help delinquents too. Avoid putting too much information on social networks, avoid being so open with your life. Technology might not always be the best choice. But sticking together at least via messages is very important (Respondent 37)

Even though the confidence in other members of the society was generally demonstrated to be very low, a contrasting tendency was discovered. There is a precise distinction between one’s personal circle and “the rest”:

In my faculty, there are some feminist collectives. Students put on purple bracelets to signal that they can help girls in situations of aggression. But also the problem of treason persists: you cannot know everyone, you cannot believe everyone now (Respondent 34)

Women were found to be dependent on others in their personal safety planning. Their choice of strategy is determined based on whether they are accompanied or not. Having a close circle of relatives and friends and participating in bigger networks of support appeared to influence women’s feelings of safety at every stage. The bigger networks of economically privileged women included feminist groups in social media, psychological consultancies, and university communities. Some of the interviewees were involved in the system of psychological support of the state-run Institute of Woman; neighborhood initiatives (i.e. distribution of whistles); a highschool discussion group; a feminist assembly at university; shared maps of dangerous places via Google Maps; and social media hashtags to share experiences. However, participation in these communities also varies demographically. The interviews suggested that the older a woman is, the less she is engaged in such activities and the more she relies on her close circle of family and acquaintances. In other words, women are usually not completely autonomous in applying means of feeling and being safe.

Figure 5.2. Evidence of collective strategies found during audit walks: 1) Announcement from a feminist group of support with hashtags “we take care of each other [female]”, “I look after you, you look after me”, “everyone [female] is one”; 2) Advertisement of free defense classes “to survive”: from a military woman to all other women

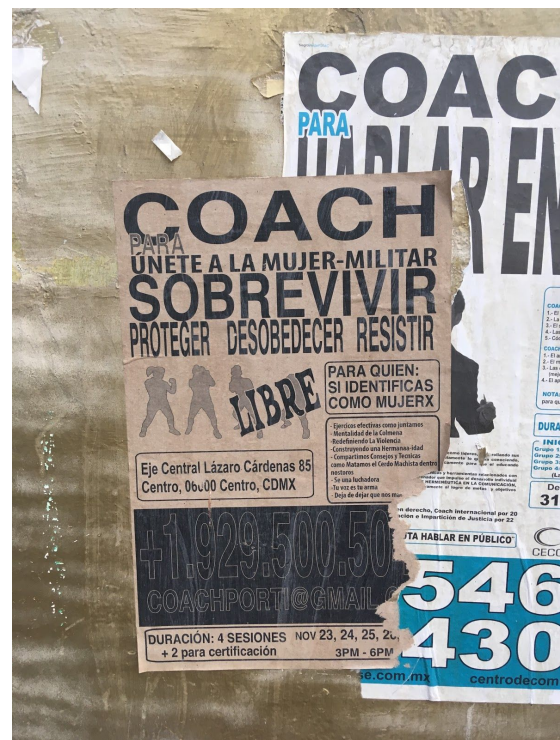
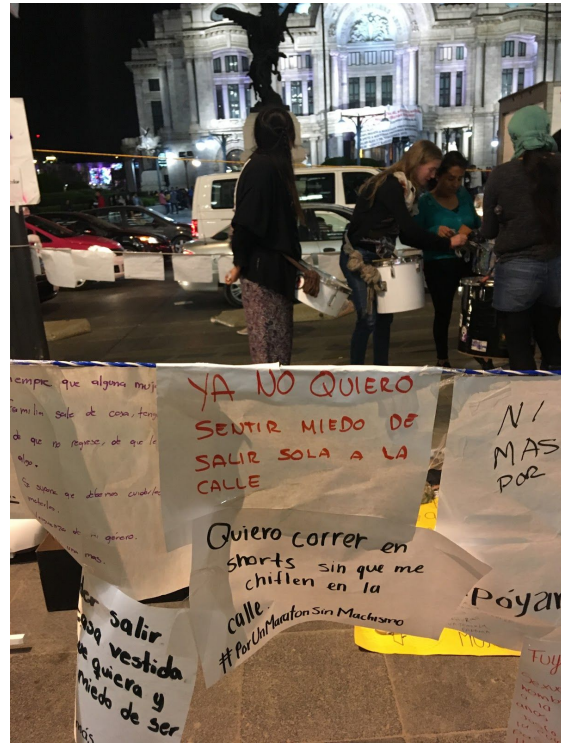


Figure 5.3. An instance of another collective initiative: a monument installed in front of the Bellas Artes palace at the march of women on March 8 to make visible the problem of gender-based violence in Mexico. It represents a feminist symbol “Ni una menos” (not one less [woman]). Some of the spontaneous notes around it say “I do not want to be scared to go alone on the street”, “I want to run in shorts without hearing whistles”



Once again, intersectional differences prevent the establishment of an unambiguous conclusion. Women who find their shelter on the streets cannot always rely on other people given that the street situation represents violence of different kinds, including intimate partner violence and organized crime. As expressed by Respondent 43, who lives on the street, “Nobody helps you, the street is a circle and you grasp vice after vice. You can trust your closest friends depending on their attitude and behavior. Being a girl you need to be careful with friends, to be close to someone you feel safe”.

5.2 Women’s imageries of the Historic Center

The set of safety strategies that women in Mexico City choose depends heavily on time of day, accompaniment and their situational feelings about a given space. In turn, emotions about space can be provoked by its physical characteristics and architectonic properties. The quality of the public space of the Historic Center, where the interviews took place, is crucial to

evaluate. According to one of the authors of the development plan of this area for the period 2017-2022 “Plan Integral de Manejo del Centro Histórico ” M. Sánchez Vieyra, the general aim of the public policy and investment strategy for Perimeters A and B was the rescue of urban space, or finance-led intervention to create public space of quality, usability and universal mobility.

The Historic Center is one of the most privileged and prioritized areas of the city when it comes to urban governance. The recovery of the Historic Center, according to Sánchez Vieyra, became a priority issue in the political agenda of the city starting in 1997, but the prolonged economic crisis has caused street trade to overflow much of the area. Although there are evident successes in pedestrianization and the aesthetics of the streets, there are some persistent problems. First, the interventions in Perimeter A were directed mainly to foment street transit but not social interaction and coexistence. Second, the Historic Center is still an unequal zone in terms of the distribution of maintenance, investment, and governmental attention. Walking from the street to street, there is a vivid contrast in terms of surveillance, commerce, maintenance, and other factors.

Streets are not independent entities — streets form neighborhoods and generate diverse feelings and attitudes towards them. Some streets make an area comfortable and appealing, while other streets foster a hostile and unpredictable image for citizens. Such perceptions are constructs that include several components: social dynamics and collective imagery, personal experience, and physical environment. Most of the local women interviewed gave a positive evaluation of the security of the Historic Center due to the police and constant flows of transit and tourism. For the majority of interviewees, the zone is associated with childhood and family time and contains their favorite cultural and recreational destinations in the city:

It has a bad reputation for what it really is ... I think it's true Mexico, if you come here, you will find characters, things that really happen in Mexico (Respondent 4);

There are so many layers of history, art, culture. You find lots of things: diversity, fun, learning (Respondent 11);

The Historic Center gives you what you want — it is an advantage. But it also has unpleasant things: dirt, a certain danger (Respondent 38).

The epicenter of perceived safety turned out to be the Zocalo square that hosts the Metropolitan Cathedral and the National Palace, in addition to many museums, restaurants and tourist attractions. Although social dynamics were priority factors for many respondents, physical factors were discovered to be equally important. The importance of maintenance and the presence of public services reinforces the hypothesis of the theory of broken windows, introduced into the field of criminology by Wilson and Kelling (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). This theory asserts that visible signs of space degradation enhance feelings of danger and discourage the use of such space: *“There are physical symbols such as graffiti, pee, that tell you that space is not taken care of and that if something happens to you there, nobody will realize”* (Respondent 12). A narrow street that looks dark, abandoned and dirty, with closed facades and without visible connection to the adjacent streets was a typical answer when women were questioned about the streets they tend to avoid.

5.3 The spatial factors of (un)safety

In order to find out why different places cause contrasting perceptions, female interviewees were asked about the physical factors of a public space that influence their sensation of safety. Their answers varied; some factors were risky for some respondents and comforting for others. The feeling of safety is an intersectional issue, which makes it difficult to generalize. The identity of each woman mattered to her experience. For instance, homeless women who live in the streets of Historic Center claimed that there are little to no factors that make them feel free from danger. Living in constant violence, they do not think in terms of aesthetics, whereas more privileged women tend to judge the appearance of space more thoroughly. Additionally, some homeless women use common factors of danger for their own safety strategies: i.e, staying and sleeping in blind spots. Both groups share the perspective that the key factors that can potentially produce safety are pedestrian lighting, maintenance, transit, vigilance, and commerce.

Circumstances mentioned that cause both feelings of safety and unsafety are the hour of day, crowdedness, police officials and commercial activities. Time of the day matters because the dark hours are perceived to be threatening due to the lack of both light and

people. This condition relates to the issue of space use. If space is used in multiple ways, has residential, commercial, recreational and other components, it does not become abandoned at certain hours. The presence of people—both the size of the crowd and the social profiles of its members— is among the top factors for feeling safe. The complete absence of people is perceived to be unsafe but a big crowd represents a danger too: *"It has to be in-between: enough people to see that you exist in that street and you are not alone but not so many people that something happens to you without anyone realizing"* (Respondent 8). Families, people walking dogs, or people with visibly defined activities are perceived as reliable and create a feeling of comfort. Vagabonds, on the contrary, are seen as a source of danger by the more privileged women: *"I feel a lot the stigma as people get scared when you ask them for money. They do not understand that we prefer to sell rather than rob them. That is what most of us think. To be completely honest, crime sometimes exists too, of course"* (Respondent 43).

Figure 5.4. Factors associated with safety and unsafety

Safety factors	Unsafety factors
<p>Conflicting factors (different for different respondents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> hour of the day people transit presence of police street commerce rent prices and reputation 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Street-related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> street lighting means of vigilance: panic buttons, cameras connectedness to public transport visible horizon and interconnection with other streets vegetation cleanness quality of sidewalks and priority for pedestrian mobility mixed use of the space & gentrification 	<p style="text-align: center;">Street-related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> darkness blind spots: closed kiosks, parked vans, voluminous objects construction sites, abandoned buildings lack of windows and entrances poor maintenance: garbage, dirty facades, graffiti stains, smells single use of space: exclusively commerce, residential houses, or offices without a clear way out, narrowness

<p>playgrounds, sites for dog walking signage</p> <p>Other factors</p> <p>familiarity with streets urban activities: events, fairs tourist sites</p>	<p>pedestrian bridges</p> <p>Other factors</p> <p>presence of a certain profile of people: intoxicated, groups of men illegal activities: prostitution, piracy</p>
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Figure 5.5. Examples of (un)safety factors demonstrated by an interviewee during a participatory walk: 1) unsafety image: an abandoned building with men loitering nearby, a parked car; 2) safety: a button of panic, people transiting, a woman with a stroller, open shops



5.4 Homeless women as perceivers and as the perceived

Women with economic means tend to feel threatened by the presence of stigmatized groups, such as those struggling with substance abuse or homelessness. Meanwhile, homeless women have a different set of concerns. For many, the formation of a social network is key in establishing security: the more people they know within a space, the safer they feel. According to Alexia Moreno from El Caracol, A.C., an organization that works with this population, creating networks of collective safety is an essential part of street culture. There are no official data on victimization of women who live in the streets but according to the organization, gender violence is a pronounced issue for these women, together with intimate partner violence, state violence, and extreme vulnerability due to the absence of tangible place of refuge. When women in this situation were asked if they ever felt safe in the streets, the majority answered that they never feel safe under any configuration. To cope, they develop unique strategies such as sleeping together with a woman/partner of confidence:

Now I have some little job... I feel happy, cheerful. I would like to know the city more, more streets. But in the street, there are many abuses, mistreatment... I do not feel safe at any moment. Maybe, only when I am with my partner. I try to always stick to him. As for friends, there are not many friends in the street — everyone is in their things. But if there are, they support, they take care of each other
(Respondent 44)

The silent government action present in the Historic Center is *social cleansing* (as named by El Caracol A.C.) which involves recovering public space via the forced displacement of the street population. This approach represents pro-wealthy governance and discriminates against the underserved. Urban planning in the Center has become a zero-sum development; the rescue of space serves the privileged majority and creates a fragile habitat for the urban poor. The centrally located Alameda park is a vivid example—its recent renovation introduced clear lawns and surveillance making it untenable for the street population due to the lack of shade and viable lodging space:

I almost do not feel safe in the center, just in the Zocalo square. In other areas it is all the same: litter, contamination, police, violence with no reason, uncontrolled intoxicated people, drugs...They

destroyed the Alameda park trying to make it look pretty: made it bald, cut down the trees and put scrap-iron so we do not stay anymore... The discrimination suffocates us (Respondent 43)

5.5 Police and street commerce: ambivalent perceptions

Police officials and other public authorities create dual attitudes among women. Regardless of extreme violence and the struggle to survive, for some homeless women, the street represents a place of freedom as it may be more dangerous for them to ask for help from their families or from a government that may take their children away. Some view the police as a guarantee of security and a source of help. Others lack trust in officials: *"The police in Mexico do not have a very good reputation so it is not like seeing a patrol gives me all the confidence in the world"* (Respondent 8). The police are sometimes known to be involved in criminal activities and generally speaking, the system of public security lacks sensitivity to gender-based violence. Homeless women's perception of policemen is also complex and informed by personal experience.

Respondents also noted a gender difference in the corporal use of public space; women tend to move faster and lack the confidence to stop and enjoy their surroundings if they are alone. Whereas men standing, waiting or observing represented a considerable risk for some female respondents (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.6. The number of pedestrians transiting via Madero street



Figure 5.7. Additional pedestrian lighting produced by street food establishments, Balderas street



This bodily difference has implications for street commerce in the Historic Center. During the participatory walks, local women showed me how the business on the streets often works. There are usually men standing on the corners and observing the situation; when either a police patrol or any other source of danger appears, they warn the vendors so they can grab their products and hide in nearby shops. Street vendors are engaged in informal economic activities so when the police approach, they shut everything down, creating a lot of chaos. Although their activity minimizes walking space for pedestrians businesses provide a street with additional lighting and security. In case of danger, street establishments or shops on the ground floor can serve as places of refuge.

Figure 5.8. A poster of an informal establishment offering help to women in case of danger: “Friend [female], if someone is following or bothering you, approach this establishment and we will help you. Not one [woman] more”



As noted by my informant, it is the system of personal interactions between smaller and bigger vendors, communicators, and customers. Sometimes the self-protection methods of street traders resemble techniques used by offenders (e.g. watching what type of people are coming and sharing this information) which generates fear in women, especially given the prominence of forced prostitution in some neighboring Historic Center blocks. Establishments involved in selling suspicious goods (e.g. arms, falsified documents) are associated with insecurity. Moreover, in those specific locations, trade establishments can be facades for illegal activities such as prostitution and drug dealing. In these cases the owners do not secure their income via commerce nor the confidence of the buyers, so they do not self-organize to resist street delinquency as genuine vendors do. Therefore, there is a strong connection between the type of commerce and safety perceptions.

Taken together, these traits of the Historic Center produce subjective levels of personal safety. The attitudes associated with a particular space make women modify their manner of engaging with the space. On one hand, having positive perceptions can intensify women's use of streets as a means of mobility or public space. On the other hand, women may abstain from threatening streets, reduce their practices or behave differently while there.

CHAPTER 6. BIG CITY LIFE: PERCEIVED UNSAFETY AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN'S URBAN LIFESTYLE

Conversely, the quality of life in cities is bad when its inhabitants are capable only of dealing with people like themselves... the sick city isolates and segregates difference, drawing no collective strength from its mixture of different people.

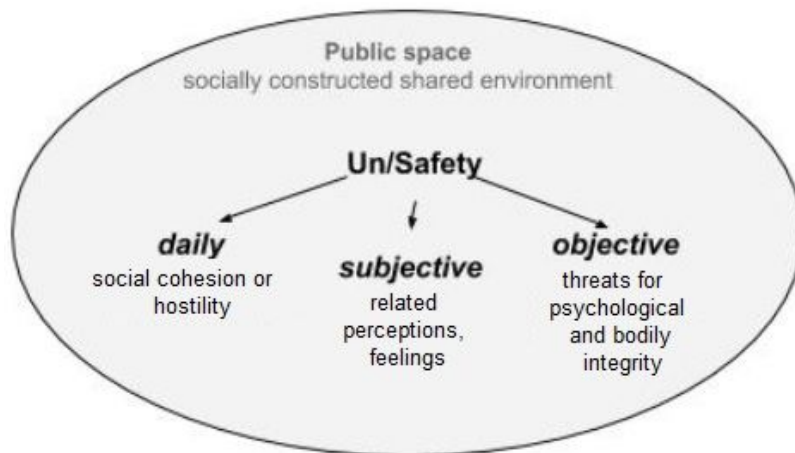
—RICHARD SENNET

Taking into consideration the security-related aspects of women's life in Mexico City, this chapter argues that women's perceptions of street unsafety have a profound impact on their urban engagement. Reviewing the emotional dimension of the relation between women and space, this chapter suggests that perceptions and feelings can influence women's use of space and applies this suggestion to the case study at hand by examining which specific areas of the Historic Center are perceived as safe and unsafe. Finally, this chapter looks into the wider effects that perceptions of safety can have on women's urban life.

6.1 Places and senses: how space invites and dismisses

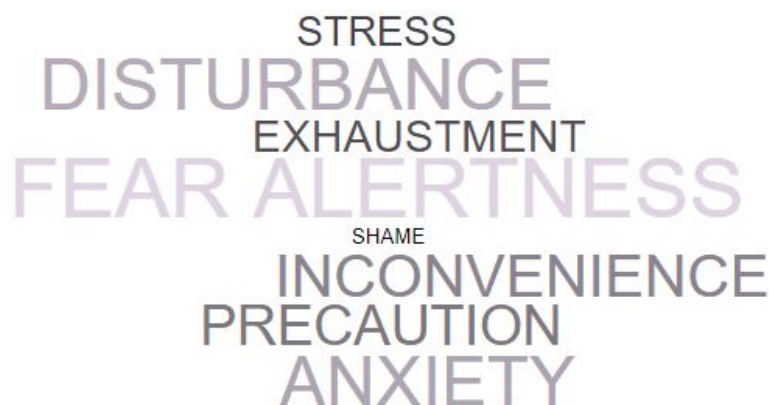
The female respondents were questioned about how they conceive of safety and unsafety. Naturally, each woman had her own factors of importance. These factors were encapsulated in the survey responses, which were used to construct an overview of how women narrate (un)safety. The narrative of (un)safety thereby consisted of three main pillars: as day-to-day practices and experiences (including the relation body-space-others), as a subjective emotional matter, and as objective obstacles and hazards. The following paragraph will look into the subjective aspect of the matter.

Figure 6.1. Main respondent narratives of safety categorized into three groups



Distinct physical factors, like good public illumination, make a street look harmless, while others, like illegal commerce, result in the sensation of insecurity. Thus, the material design of urban space can lead to spatial construction of comfort or fear. When the recruited female residents were asked about their associations with the Historic Center, their answers were generally positive: for many, this place makes them nostalgic for their childhood and proud of the touristic appeal of the neighborhood’s historic and cultural landmarks. The majority confessed they were fond of the diversity it offers as they could enjoy the vast variety of restaurants, shops, and museums. However, when the women were questioned about how they actually feel in the streets of this area, their emotions were mixed and fell repeatedly within the negative scale. When asked what exactly they feel in the areas they perceive as unsafe, the dismissive feelings were shared.

Figure 6.2. Emotions experienced by women in the areas perceived as unsafe arranged by frequency of mentioning



The perceived unsafety of the streets has emotional and psychological consequences for women. The findings of this research were contradictory: women do enjoy some places of recreation separately: Palace of Fine Arts, Cathedral, national museums, cultural centers, concerts, and festivals. Nevertheless, when asked how they feel walking down the street, women rarely chose adjectives with positive connotations or associations with freedom. The first emotions recalled were safety-related and unnerving. To some extent, this reaction can be explained by framing the research as being about (un)safety in the beginning of the interviews. Although the questions remained neutral (as “How do you feel?”), women were consistent in their negative answers. Their negative feelings were described as constant, often intense, relevant across other parts of the city , and significant in terms of daily routine. For the purpose of avoiding harm, women frequently build their schedules and activities around their feelings of unsafety . Ultimately, the persistence of this emotional state characterizes the problem as a public health issue:

I always have to be alert, noticing who is following me, who is in front ... very very alert, and you know, this fear ... is something permanent (Respondent 6);

It seems unreal ... Instead of being calm and getting home, I get very stressed... Because who knows ... It should be normal to get safely to my house (Respondent 13);

My perceptions directly affect my routine and my state of mind, which is something so common that we already see it as something normal. To be constantly aware that my life is in danger is what I think is not right anymore, it is not healthy, it is not life (Respondent 3).

Figure 6.3. Negative street safety-related emotions displayed in women’s routines

alertness	<i>“...at any moment, someone can show up and do something to me”</i> (Respondent 6)
precaution	<i>“...any route take I always go with caution”</i> (Respondent 17)

frustration	<i>"...I even feel bad about having worn this thing, having been distracted"</i> (Respondent 30)
fear	<i>"...fear is one of the most important elements of my vulnerability"</i> (Respondent 11)
anxiety	<i>"...and to be alert to the level that my life is in danger is what I think is no longer good, it is not healthy, it is not life"</i> (Respondent 23)
inconvenience	<i>"...it is impossible that the environment plays so much with my well-being and my discomfort"</i> (Respondent 18)
stress	<i>"...when you get home, any place ... it's like pffuuff, I arrived ... and nothing happened to me"</i> (Respondent 36)
disturbance	<i>"...I'm always afraid that something will happen to me"</i> (Respondent 12)
exhaustion	<i>"...always feeling ourselves in discomfort is something very emotionally exhausting"</i> (Respondent 20)

Moreover, the above listed feelings reach their highest point, are re-lived and further impact women's routines, when scenes of street violence happen anew:

...and something else happens again ... I go back to the panic, with fear, I feel like I'm going to leave home and it's going to be my turn again (Respondent 17)

Figure 6.4. Street art found in Historic Center during audit and participatory walks: 1) Definition of femicide: “crime of hate that consists of the murder of a woman for the fact of being a woman”; 2) “The fear does not paralyze me”



6.2 The spatial dimension of perceptions

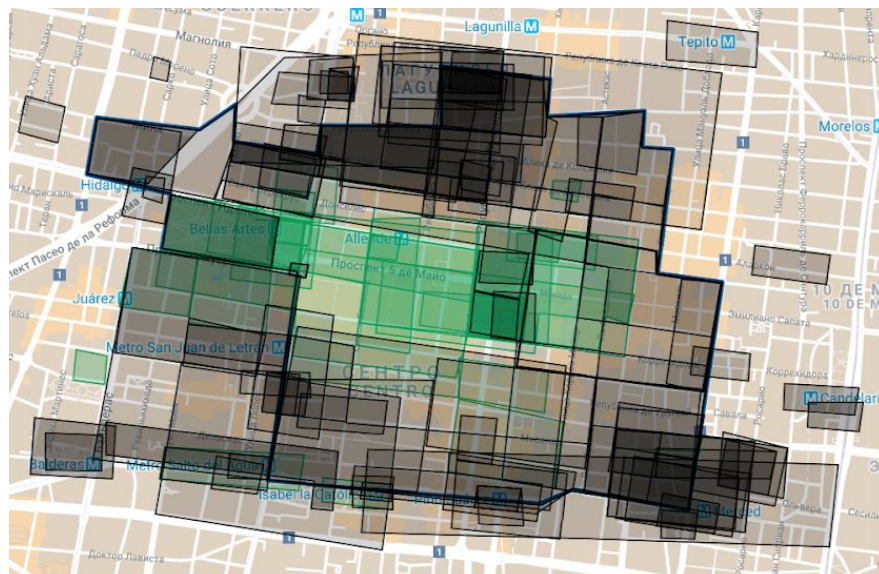
Previously, this thesis discussed how women’s perceptions of unsafety influence their routines via the introduction of defense strategies. This section will extend the knowledge of these effects on women’s overall lifestyle, including the use of specific spaces and urban areas. The perceptions of safety and unsafety of the interviewed women appeared to have a geographical representation. This is due to the fact that women’s strategies to secure themselves are also expressed spatially as women generally decide on their trajectories according to their understanding of safety. To discover how the strategies influence women’s mobility and the use of urban spaces, a map of fear was developed.

Streets are important to the impression of overall territorial safety: the way the respondents felt about the streets created an image of the locality. The female respondents were asked to signify safe and unsafe streets on the map of the Historic Center according to their personal opinions (Figures 6.6). However, they also marked specific locations and entire zones (Figure 6.5). These places were distinguished based on the streets they include or link to.

Streets were not imagined as detached spaces, but rather as part of more complex territories. Streets as urban webs interconnect and produce a continuum of public space.

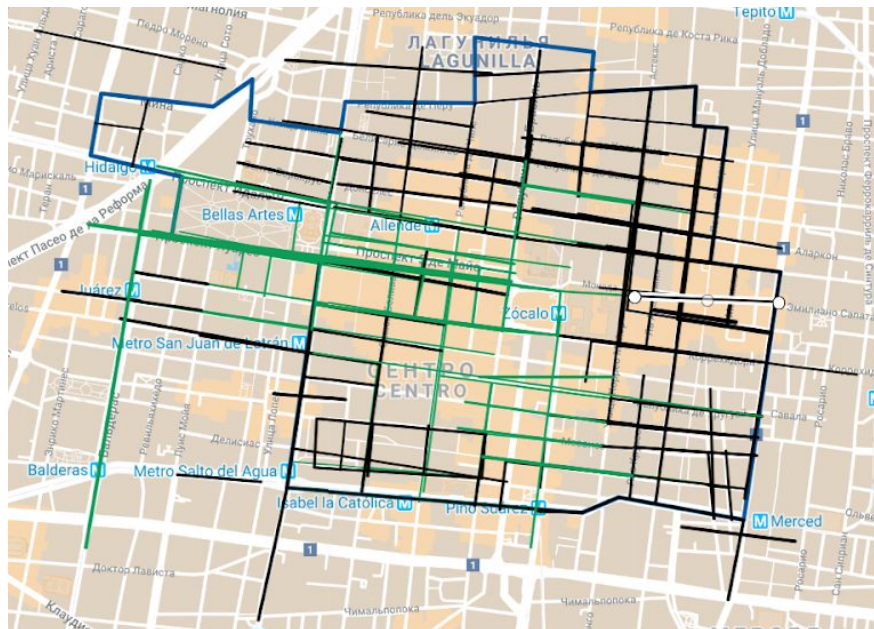
In many cases the respondents surpassed the pre-designated borders of Perimeter A of the Historic Center to accentuate the surrounding zones that they found to be of substantial importance to the topic of safety. This supports the conclusion that a street or neighborhood, being a dynamic space, can be perceived on the basis of safety only in relation to the larger territorial picture. The two maps of fear illustrate that there are more areas perceived as unsafe than safe. These zones are more dispersed and have various points of higher intensity. Moreover, they are concentrated around the officially designated Historic Center, Perimeter A (in blue), nearly replicating the contour and even surpassing it. In contrast, zones perceived as reliable are very much centralized, more homogeneous and have fewer points of density. Essentially, the “safe” green stripe of the polygon is spread horizontally along the Juárez street, the commercial pedestrian Madero street and semi-pedestrian 16 de Septiembre street terminating in the Zocalo Square. Finally, the area perceived as unsafe is significantly larger than the area believed to have lower danger.

Figure 6.5. Areas perceived as safe (green) and unsafe (black)



Source: In-depth interviews, N=47

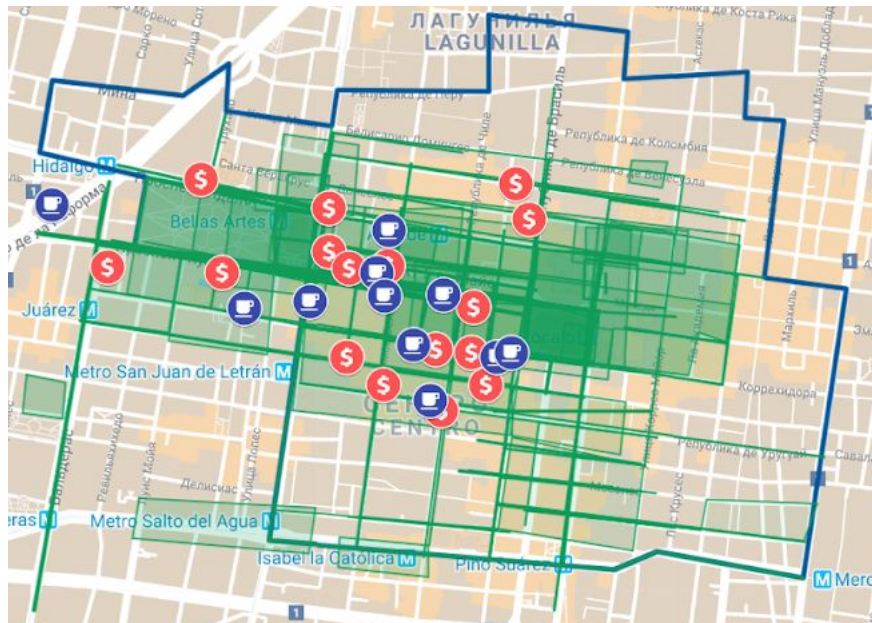
Figure 6.6. Streets perceived as safe (green) and unsafe (black)



Source: In-depth interviews, N=47

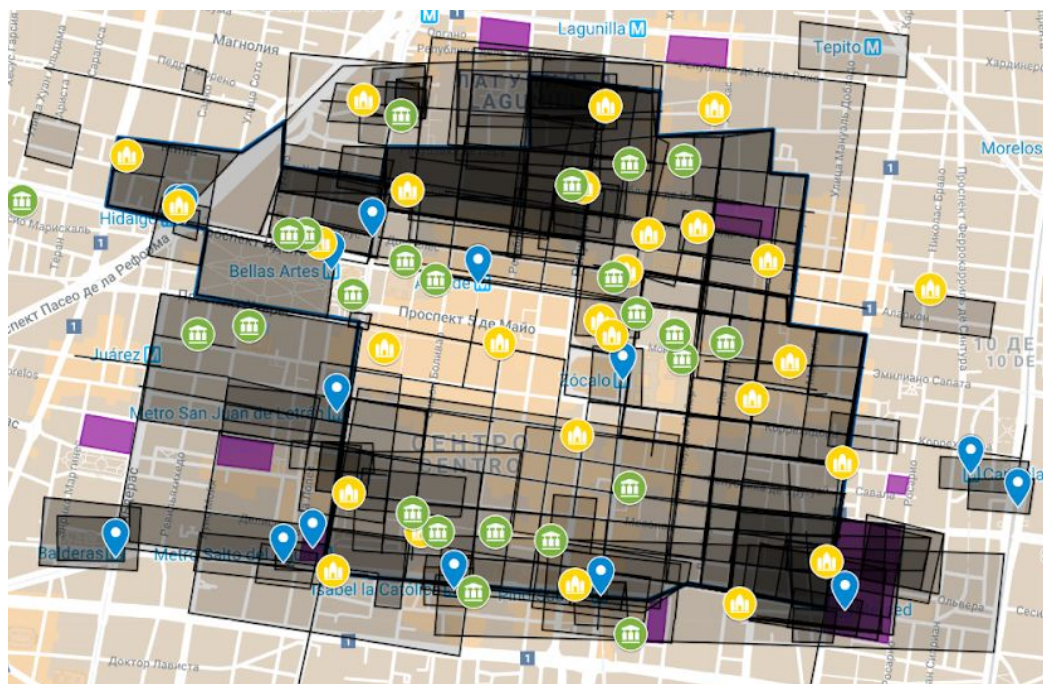
In addition, there was a link uncovered between the ambiguous perceptions towards safety and certain kinds of shared urban spaces. The comparative evaluation demonstrated that zones that generate the feeling of unsafety usually coincide with the spatial distribution of metro stations, markets, and churches. Zones described as safe often host banks and popular Mexico City coffee shop franchises: Starbucks, Cielito Querido, and Punta del Cielo. The case of historic buildings and banks are peculiar for the research. These are destination points of stays limited in time: one enters them and shortly exits back to the street. The difference in perceptions of these establishments can be explained through the notion of spatial design.

Figure 6.7. Areas and streets characterized as safe (green), banks (red) and franchise coffee shops (blue)



Source: In-depth interviews, N=47

Figure 6.8. Areas and streets characterized as unsafe (black), metro stations (blue), markets (purple), museums (green) and churches (yellow)



Source: In-depth interviews, N=47

As indicated by the survey results, physical factors, specifically design configuration, matter to women's perceptions of safety. The facades of banks are often made of glass and the entrances to offices are typically well-lit and protected by private security (illustrated by Figure 6.10). Historic buildings such as churches rarely employ these means of additional security and are frequently surrounded by gardens that if poorly lit or not taken care of may seem hostile to women. Buildings belonging to the city's architectural heritage are common in the Historic Center and are the source of the neighborhood's cultural value. The facades of such buildings normally have few windows and entry points (illustrated by Figure 6.9) and can rarely offer refuge in emergency situations due to limited hours of operation. Additionally, churches, in contrast with banks, attract stigmatized groups: beggars, ambulant vendors, and homeless persons. Churches may welcome these people and sometimes distribute assistance repelling more privileged residents:

In the Center, there are areas with old buildings that seem super nice to me. Whenever I use Uber, I want to see them, but then I think that no ... Better to restrain, even during the day (Respondent 13)

Figure 6.9. Facade of San Ildefonso College on San Ildefonso street, an example of a historic building with a closed facade with no points of refuge.



Source: Google Maps

Figure 6.10. Facade of Santander bank office on Palma Norte street, an example of the glass use in public space construction that creates a feeling of vigilance.

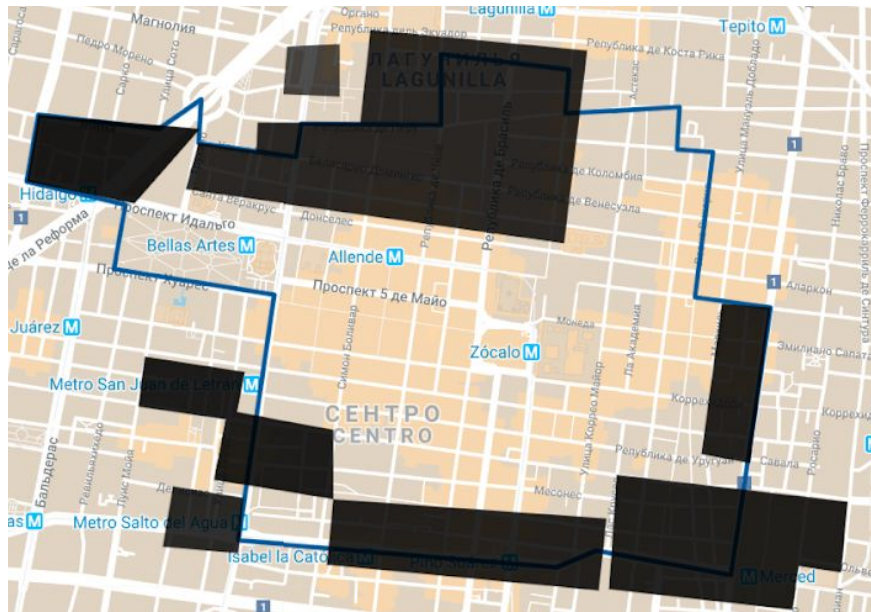


Source: Google Maps

Since the most popular strategies among the respondents to ensure personal safety were avoiding risky places or minimizing activities there, feelings of insecurity have implications for how women experience the entire urban landscape. The landscape reproduced in female citizens' perceptions becomes a patchwork of reliable and hazardous plots, different for each woman.

To distinguish if there are zones of danger for the majority of the interviewed women, all the zones that were marked as unsafe by at least 50% of women were emphasized. As a result, approximately 1.2 km² out of about 3 km² of the Perimeter A appeared to be collectively regarded as risky. This 1.2 km² accounts for about 40% of the Historic Center and even sprawls outside the contour. Ultimately this visualization (Figure 6.11) shows how much of the area women intend to avoid as the most common preventive strategy.

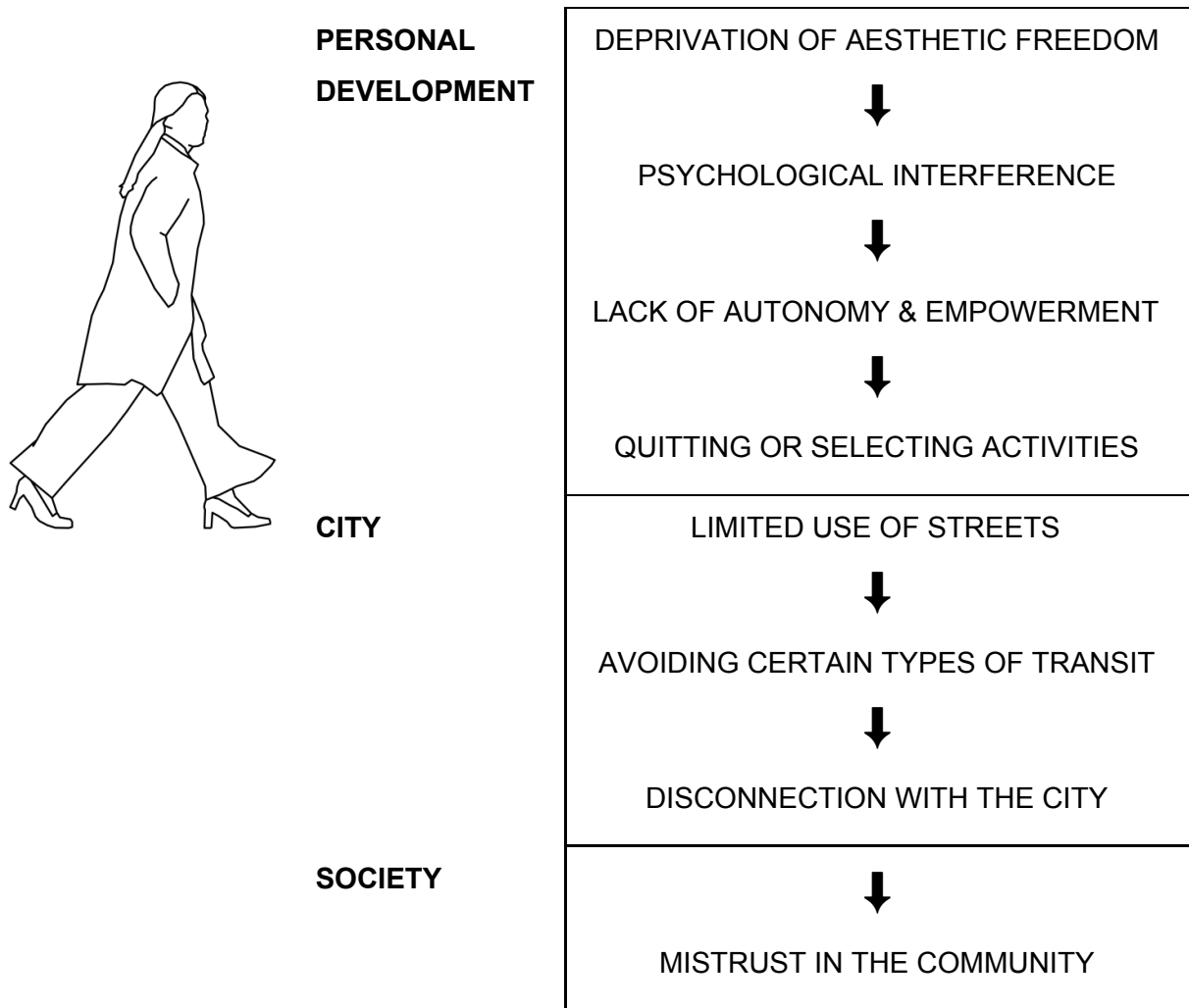
Figure 6.11. Combined surface of the Historic Center perceived as unsafe by more than half of the interviewees



6.3 City Changing Women's Lives

There are several manners in which Mexico City influences the lives of its female inhabitants. These can be divided into the impacts regarding the use of urban space, impacts on self-realization, and impacts on socializing. For many women, use of public space is constrained; female residents know precisely what they can and cannot do in the streets, how much time they can spend there, and how they should behave. This pattern is amplified and applied to the whole city, which becomes a sort of “gentle battlefield”: women still feel attached to the city but at the same time they see it as space where risks are present and every day is a lottery. Given the looming threat of danger, the interviewees often made their recreational, educational and labor choices on the basis of prioritizing safety.

Figure 6.12. Sequence of impacts on women's urban lifestyle



Women's perceptions of urban unsafety affect their social engagement and confidence in the community. To enhance their personal security, women generally prefer to avoid any encounter with strangers:

Not trusting anyone... It is a fact. I do not interact with people anywhere, if there are gentlemen who ask me something, I tell them to leave and I run (Respondent 8);

You do not know if a person who goes along and touches your shoulder is going to ask you something or not ... You already react instinctively and that is not right (Respondent 17).

Although the respondents do rely on communitarian help in case of danger, many female respondents confessed that their previous negative experience and media-led suspicion undermines their faith in the community and trust in authorities, including public security bodies. Since women are the majority of the local urban population, their distrust in society leads to a disruption of the entire social fabric.

Figure 6.13. Evidence from women on changes in their urban routine

Limited use of the streets, avoiding certain streets or walking mobility

One day I saw a map of the city and my life is limited to a mini triangular and from those areas, I don't leave (Respondent 33)

There are certain things that I try not to do in the streets, including the simple pleasure of stopping by a beautiful showcase... It is always a risk for a woman here (Respondent 4)

Quitting or selecting activities

But with all this, I'm already out of work. I'm limited and we only support the family with my husband's salary...I can not even leave home because of my children. What if something happens to me on the way... (Respondent 27)

I would be more focused on other things ... I could go to English classes, develop other skills in the night hours ... This limits my opportunities, my personal development (Respondent 12)

Lack of autonomy and empowerment

My life would be totally different in many ways: from being able to walk, to bike in the late hours of the

	<p><i>night ... not having to communicate to relatives to say where I'm going (Respondent 9)</i></p> <p><i>Up to the quality of life ... Using safer transport represents four hours of daily travel to work and it is a very large expense of what I earn. But as a woman, I see no other options (Respondent 19)</i></p>
Lack of self-expression while on streets	<p><i>I was with the bag that said feminist ... and I saw this guy that asked another man if he saw me and if they should kill me. There are times that you are vulnerable in such a symbolic way (Respondent 14)</i></p>
Psychological interference	<p><i>...sometimes the urban context directly affects me, even discouraging me by hearing something [comments about her appearance] in the street (Respondent 21)</i></p>
Disconnection with the city, lack of enjoyment	<p><i>In my case, I love to walk and when they assaulted me ... what I am angry about is that they took away that enjoyment, said that you can not walk at ease (Respondent 16)</i></p>
Degradation of the social fabric	<p><i>...in the end, this [the situation of fear while on the streets] even affects meeting new people (Respondent 30)</i></p>

These observations notwithstanding, it would be incorrect to state that women in Mexico City build their routines entirely based on their feelings of safety. Many respondents claimed that their perceptions and fear condition them in everyday life. At the same time, there were exceptions. Some women confessed that their needs play a more important role. They stated that the situation of urban insecurity for women makes them take preventive measures but not to the point of surrendering to the circumstances:

I cannot sacrifice a free life for a longer life. I know the danger but it does not restrain me (Respondent 19);

*I do not want to be the one that isolates herself to be safe. Yes, I feel more secure in my house, clearly. But I do not want to feel that it [the city] does not belong to me, **I want the street to be mine too** (Respondent 21);*

The whole situation we live affects me but also gave me many good things although it sounds strange... These circles of company, of protection with other girlfriends, of support... It opened me to a conversation with others, to find possible solutions (Respondent 18).

The coping mechanisms women use to deal with insecurity are habitual, normalized and internalized such that the interviewees found it difficult to articulate how their perceptions influence their way of living in the city. When asked how their lives would be different in the case of more favorable circumstances, many revealed that their strategies and alertness are at this point difficult to separate from their existing routine. This is particularly true for women who do not have the luxury to choose their lifestyle, who must work to support their families and use the metro daily. Socioeconomic status and other intersectional differences are major factors when it comes to attitudes about urban unsafety. Many young women who have not lived before the country-wide security crisis, nor traveled abroad, claimed that insecurity is so central to their mindsets that it is unconscious, “*like drinking water*”.

*Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody,
only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.*

—JANE JACOBS

7.1 What does the case of Mexico City teach us?

Mexico City is one of the biggest and most economically important cities in the Americas and indeed, the world. Women account for more than half of the city's population (INEGI, 2015). On a daily basis, this population works, studies, and moves around for various purposes in the circumstances that the city offers them. Mexico City cannot function in a healthy way if women, feel unsafe and their perceptions of unsafety are not taken into account. While the global community has agreed to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals, which include Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), questions remain as to whether the Mexican capital can fulfill its aspirations of being a safe city for everyone.

When women do not feel safe in public spaces, they lose their sense of belonging to the city and connection to the community—in this regard, this thesis reflects Koskela's research on women's perceptions of space and social inequality (Koskela, 1999). If public space expels people, it segregates its citizens and creates inequalities, including unequal distribution of security according to gender. This finding supports Listerborn's understanding of safety as a commodity unequally distributed along the lines of social differences (Listernborn, 2015). The case the Historic Center demonstrates a zero-sum approach to urban development, where some groups win from government interventions and some lose. While more privileged women may feel safer given an increase in police presence, tourism services and park renovation efforts, these actions disregard and displace underserved groups. This shows how the exclusion of some groups from urban policy action produces exclusive benefits, supporting Fenster's concept of *boundaries of belonging* in a city (Fenster, 2005).

Fenster's *boundaries of belonging* is also evidenced by gated communities, or *fraccionamientos*, which have sprung up in areas surrounding the Historic Center (i.e. Reforma Avenue). These condominiums develop their own security infrastructure, accentuating social inequality in the neighborhood. By contrast, when public space does not

have boundaries, the city is better able to promote inclusion. The renovated Monument of the Revolution, Zócalo square, and Madero street in the Historic Center offer examples of inclusive spaces that produce a shared identity across social classes.

7.2 Urban Gender-Based Construction of Fear

This research adds to Lefebvre's concept of right to the city by reflecting on gendered safety needs as a component of this right. Although men's experiences are crucial to the study of urban insecurity, as men are the majority of victims of conventional violence, women's urban victimization provides insights about gender-based facets of urban crime. Specifically, the case study of Mexico City illustrates the inductively-developed notion of the *urban gender-based construction of fear* and its constituent factors. Among these factors are personal positionality and victimization experience; space's physical and social configurations; discourses and practices of gender roles; exclusions and inequalities; gender sensitivity of governance; and urban public services and their distribution. On the broader structural level, urban design is also a component of the gendered construction of fear.

That Mexico City's women must personally adjust for urban gender-based dangers signifies that safety is a privilege and a commodity rather than a natural right. Safety is a basic existential need. When a woman lacks safety, she essentially loses the benefits and opportunities brought by urbanization. Given the intersectionality and socioeconomic dimensions of the problem, many women do not have the capacity to improve their safety and must either live with risk or limit their exposure to everyday urban hazards. While some female residents of Mexico City possess the economic and emotional resources to improve their safety situation, unprivileged women may have little or no choice when it comes to factors of security such as transportation and residence.

Women are personally responsible for exercising safety practices that are supposed to be inherent to public policy. Mexico City, by failing to provide adequate public security, decreases its social and economic potential and undermines societal well-being. Most of the women I have come across during the research look to reduce their vulnerability, often at the expense of their own interests. Some women had to sacrifice attending classes and working, or gave up hobbies like jogging due to the perceived unsafety. Although it's an open question as to whether women condition themselves to accept a constrained urban lifestyle or the city forces them to do so, one thing is clear: the perception of the city as dangerous is a key driver of women's limited urban routines.

7.3 Right to the Latin American City

Right to the city is a movement that calls for recognition that a city is space that belongs to all inhabitants, a space that is shared and reproduced. This thesis contributes to the Latin American tradition of feminist geography and urbanism from a gender perspective, represented by Ana Falú and Olga Segovia, among other researchers. The work of these scholars offers analytical tools that allow an understanding of urban diversity and the ways in which gender roles collide with and modify urban practices. Mexico City, in this sense, is a valuable example of a city with typical urban features for the region: It is a metropolis witnessing both negative trends—deepening inequalities and worsening crime and violence—and neutral tendencies—economic development, accelerating urban sprawl, and increasing inner and inter-city mobility.

The study of Mexico City reveals a direct relationship between urban gender-based violence and urban exclusion. To examine a city with the gender perspective, one must take into account the experience of women, particularly their need for safety. This approach is characteristic of the wave of feminism that is gaining ground in Latin America, where citizens are demanding that their voices be included in public policymaking. In this sense, Mexico City is similar to many growing Latin American cities: Lima, Bogotá, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, among others. The Mexican example shows the need to include women's rights and perceptions in the push for social progress. Embracing the gender perspective in city governance would mean guaranteeing that women have equal access to urban benefits and society-wide security policies.

Finally, it is important to note that Mexico City is not a universal example for the rest of the world to take into consideration. The city is an exceptional case of conventional urban violence and gender-based urban violence. Even though it may not provide a sufficient model for public policy elsewhere, the case of Mexico City raises awareness about the complex issue of women in the city and initiates a dialogue surrounding progressive policy solutions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is an effort to analyze the relationship between women and their cities through a gender lens. The research investigated the ways in which women of Mexico City change their urban lifestyle due to their perceptions of urban unsafety. The case study of this project was the streets of the Historic Center, where women were found to develop coping strategies of a defensive and often limiting nature. In order to answer the central research question, this section will briefly respond to the sub-questions that guided this study. After a general conclusion is drawn, some policy-related observations derived from this research will be explored.

What Are Women's Safety-Related Experiences In The Streets?

The overwhelming majority of female participants in this study had experienced or had feared gender-based violence in the public space of Mexico City. All the interviewees and more than 90% of those surveyed were victims, knew a victim personally or were aware of cases of street violence against women from social media. Moreover, certain attitudes about this type of delinquency were widely shared by participants. First, women tended to believe that they have additional layers of danger and shame, compared to the male citizens. While men are more likely to be victims of conventional crime, women experience greater risk of sexual violence and emotional abuse. Second, the interviews and participatory walks revealed that many women of Mexico City feel deprived of full ownership of their bodies while in the streets due to harassment. Finally, micro-factors, such as personal experiences, and other wider factors, such as booming coverage in social media, lead to the urban construction of women's fear, as represented by the central model of this thesis.

How Do Women Address The Perceived State Of the Street (Un)Safety?

Most of the encountered women develop defensive strategies as a response to their perceived state of urban unsafety. These strategies tend to be habitualized and often become unconscious. Moreover, they tend to be limitative and involve other people. An additional pattern found is women's tendency to employ non-specialized digital tools and social media to address the problem. The strategies that women use can be divided into preventional (before going to streets), situational (while in the streets) and posterior (after exiting the streets). The initiatives can be individual and collective, creating a network of people with a similar need for support. A woman's choice of strategy heavily depends on

factors like accompaniment and hour of the day. Furthermore, the adaptation methods differ among women and this difference is explained by intersectionality and individual needs, resources and routines.

How Does The Perceived Level Of (Un)Safety Affect Women's Urban Lifestyles?

The perceived situation of urban unsafety makes most women experience fear and anxiety when on the streets, especially when they are alone. This makes them introduce certain responsive strategies that transform their urban lives and condition them against trust toward others in public space. For some interviewees, the city environment is so hostile that they avoid studying, working, going out at night, or using public transport. This creates a gender gap in urban opportunities and has serious consequences for personal wellbeing and social cohesion. This said, there are certainly instances where women are able to enjoy public space regardless of the risk of gender-based violence.

What Are the Attitudes of Mexico City's Women Towards Urban Street (Un)Safety, How Do Women Respond to Perceived (Un)Safety, and How Does It Influence Their Urban Lifestyle?

Women of Mexico City for the most part evaluate their urban routine on the streets as risky and discouraging. A number of factors of different scale determine this situation of urban gender-based construction of fear: urban space design, previous experiences, media boom, and gender-based violence are notable examples. In order to feel less fear and to be more safe, women develop various strategies employed throughout their urban trajectories. These internalized action plans are often restrictive and tend to be non-autonomous. Nonetheless, due to intersectional differences, it is impossible to generalize women's experiences and attitudes. In the case of Mexico City, the benefits of urban governance and public security policy cover different groups of women unevenly and therefore produce different perceptions.

Zooming out, this research was built around the idea that urban design is a central characteristic that influences women's safety-related feelings and behavior. That said, urban design cannot provide not a complete solution. Space itself does not generate public insecurity—society does. But society also creates the space, so there is a clear connection; space can influence, foment or decrease, or reflect the current state of violence. The fear that results is a form of control that makes women transform their urban behavior. In sum, space is one of many interrelated factors that influence women's perceptions of public safety.

The main limitations of the utilized methods and thus, of the research, were lack of representative and random sampling, both for the interviews and survey. The answers of the respondents could be inclined to pessimism due to the initial introduction of the research topic and overall social and media tension. These limitations were attempted to be neutralized by including homeless women and maneuvering during the interview process to receive the least biased answers possible. Moreover, the sampled zone of the Historic Center had a predictable profile and was not representative of the city as a whole. However, the area represented a large variety of public spaces of different quality and an array of people from all over the city. This thesis proved that it is hard to make general conclusions about a city as diverse as Mexico City—to obtain more clear results, future research could focus on single specific neighborhoods or municipalities.

Remarks for Public Policy

To conduct urban planning with consideration for the gender perspective is to build an inclusive city. Currently, the design and operation of public spaces in Mexico City exacerbates feelings of vulnerability in women. The emergence of gender violence alerts in Mexico emphasizes an urgent systemic problem. In this sense, Mexico finds itself in a unique position. There are more and more public policies appearing, such as the installation of shelters and panic buttons (Zerega, El País, 2019; Peiro, El País, 2018). However, while public attention is drawn to women's safety in the city, the level of violence against women and girls climbs (Galván, Expansión, 2019). As noted by L. Villafañe, a UN-Women Mexico project coordinator, the office predicted the index of unsafety to radically drop or at least decrease during the action span of the UN-run Safe Cities Programme from 2015 to 2018. However, the numbers show that the problem continues to worsen. In the end, pink metro wagons are a palliative measure and not what female citizens really want. In the preference for gender segregation over measures that ensure the peaceful coexistence of men and women in public spaces, it is evident that the problem goes deeper than urban design. The majority of discussions on urban safety for women are targeted at women, who are seen as either potential or past victims. In this it is clear the importance of shifting the debate to rethink and reconstruct masculinity and raise awareness among men.

The ineffectiveness of government initiatives may be caused by the lack of truly participatory urban governance. One of the informants who took part in the development of some municipal urban programs noted that people in decision-making positions, both technical and

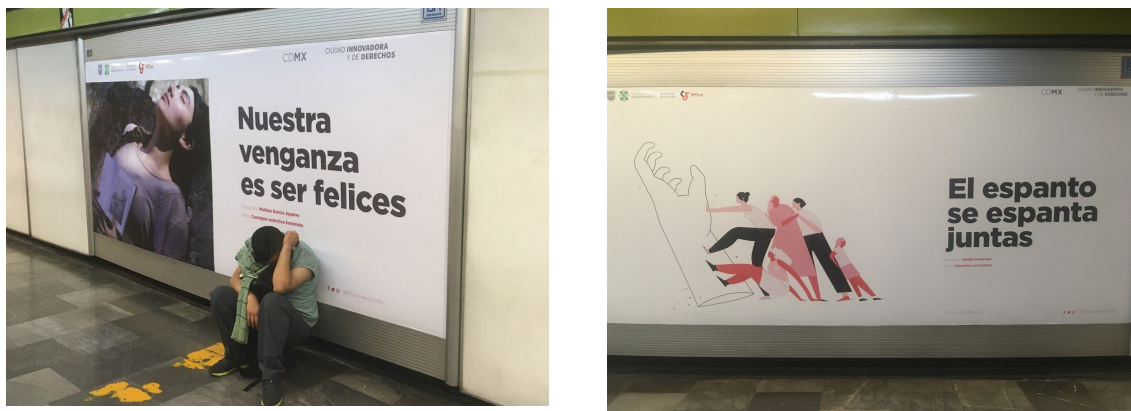
political, are typically men of a certain economic status. The relative homogeneity of decision-makers results in city planning for a narrow class of resident, namely the healthy male adult, Spanish-speaking and white, with a well-paid job and access to a car. There does exist a city-wide law of citizen participation in policy-making, including the process of urban planning (Ley De Participación Ciudadana Del Distrito Federal, 2004). Nonetheless, if diverse and vulnerable groups are not present in the decision-making process, their practices are not problematized from the outset but instead are added as secondary modifications in final drafts. Hence, there is little space left to introduce the construction of the city from a different point of view.

Mexico City's failure to ensure freedom of movement for all inhabitants is a well-traced phenomenon. The urban streets, the case-study for this research, form networks that unite the city and create space for social encounters. However, the focus of public policy is centered on public transport and not the streets. Many of the efforts to improve public transit do not seem inclusive. The fact that women have to move around Mexico City regardless of the deteriorating infrastructure and safety concerns, normalizes the poor quality of urban transit service. The absence of security along their daily trajectories makes women and those depending on their caregiving function less mobile and inhibits women's ability to work, attend school, and pursue leisure activities. Thus, the challenge for Mexico City is to enhance the mobility of female residents by considering women's perceptions of urban unsafety. This should be seen not only in terms of central districts, like the Historic Center, nor in terms of investment size, but in terms of the patterns of peripheries, periphery-center, types, and objectives of female mobility, its safety characteristics, costs and travel times. Finally, if women were viewed as valuable economic agents, the city would be made a much safer and more efficient place for them to move, profit, and contribute.

The use of statistics is crucial to the policymaking process. The statistical bureau of Mexico, INEGI, has only recently started disaggregating data by sex. However, the origin-destination survey of urban transit only includes travel to school and work and ignores other caregiving-related trips (INEGI, 2017). Hence, the government has still not prioritized the study of how female citizens inhabit the city. This conclusion is supported by the work of G. Méndez, who found that the subjective aspect of safety, although mentioned in the INEGI survey, is not usually taken into account in urban planning initiatives.

Via the gender violence alert—a tool introduced in different Mexican states to call attention to the problem (Ferri, *El País*, 2019)—the Institute of Women proposed that the issue should be studied more, but this recommendation has not led to structural change. This relates to another problem: focus on the transit system rather than the extension of policy action to all shared urban space. Though public transportation is a crucial component of urban living for women, they also utilize streets, parks, squares, and markets.

Figure 7.1. An example of the current municipal policy: posters located in the metro and directed to women that say “our shame is being happy”, “the fright is frightened together [female]”



There is a call for a paradigm shift in the public security system, for comprehensive and interdisciplinary policies to be implemented by the Secretary of Urban Development, Secretary of Mobility, and Institute of Women, among other authorities, and by the private sector and the media. However, it would be naive to champion this solution without taking into consideration the structural problems, such as corruption and lack of the rule of law, that altogether create a culture that invisibilizes vulnerable groups. In the generalized opinion of the female interviewees, this invisibilization is the reason why oftentimes it is useless for a woman to claim her rights or denounce an aggressor. Invisibilization and lack of sensitivity to gender-based violence at every level of public administration is responsible for the impotency of the legal system and ineffectiveness of the police, who are supposed to be a primary source of public safety.

Situational Prevention

Situational crime prevention is a strategy of crime reduction which alters spaces that attract delinquency to make them less conducive to criminal activity (Shariati & Guerette, 2017). The study at hand discovered an array of opinions on the role of urban design in violence and unsafety perceptions. Situational prevention was a complicated issue with two main points of view. There are optimistic people who believe that for certain crimes and contexts, transforming a space works quite well. Some people mentioned cases of gender-based harassment, rape and physical abuse that may be decreased by well-constructed spaces. However, for the Historic Center, situational prevention cannot completely eliminate the crimes that worried interviewees most: pickpocketing, assaults from motorcyclists and other types of opportunist gender-unrelated crime. In these cases, prevention methods must go deeper by creating economic and social opportunities for those who use crime to make a living..

One of the findings of this research is that many women in Mexico City are pedestrians first and foremost. Redesigning space from the gender perspective means protecting the physical integrity of pedestrians, who should be able to walk free from worry about other pedestrians, their pace of movement, vehicles, and holes in the walkway. Women's safety can be improved by promoting opportunities for pedestrians to listen and to be heard, to see and to be seen, to be able to flee fast, and to be helped. These abilities may be augmented by mixed use of space, illumination, maintained vegetation, and the elimination of blind spots.

Another key function of public space is to host social interactions, which urban design measures can hinder or facilitate. Sense of the community, as tracked by the study, decreases when women stop feeling safe in the streets because they are women. It might be easier for women to identify with public space when it meets their needs. In Mexico City, comfort in public spaces depends on the area and even the particular street in question. There are streets that are clearly made for transit (e.g. *Eje Central, Avenida Insurgentes*) and there are smaller neighborhood streets that have more of a social sense and can accommodate fewer cars. Elements as modest as street infrastructure possess an emotional dimension and can generate positive perceptions that favor safe human interaction.

Finally, linking situational prevention and public policy, a striking issue is the distribution of policy action. Throughout the paper, I had to repeatedly underline that Mexico City is so huge and unequal that it is nearly impossible to make any broad conclusion even within an urban area as small as the Historic City. Mexico City is certainly characterized by the center-periphery relationship, so investments, public budget, policy attention, and other resources are much more concentrated in the inner city. Within the inner city, resources are more visible in the central districts of Benito Juárez and Cuauhtémoc. M. Sánchez Vieyra shares the example of the *Ecobici*, a public bicycle-sharing project. Initially, two areas were recommended for the project: the peripheral eastern municipality Iztapalapa and the central Cuauhtémoc. Due to the political need for visibility of action and the area's convenient position, the latter was chosen. Generally speaking, the central zones of the city contain the highest quality amenities: beautiful parks, clean streets, and well-maintained bus stops. This implies that public security is also better in central areas, demonstrating once again the uneven distribution of urban services.

The findings of this research show that there is a need to reimagine the way Mexico City is planned to make the city truly safe for all. This challenge is not unique to Mexico City, as gender-sensitive planning is lacking in most urban spaces. Putting a feminist lens on urban governance means incorporating women but also those who depend on their caregiving function: children, people with disabilities and elders. For this reason, the policy approaches mentioned here are of critical importance to the development of Mexico City.

*We have to look for the enjoyment of the city. Although we have fear,
we need to live the city (Respondent 2)*

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Changes in the research questions

Initial Research Questions	Updated Research Questions	Explanation
<p><u>What are the attitudes of Mexico City's women towards urban street safety, how perceived safety is responded, and how does it influence the use of streets?</u></p> <p>How do women of the city make use of urban streets?</p> <p>How do they employ streets as space?</p> <p>How do they employ streets as space of mobility?</p> <p>What are women's safety-related experiences in the streets?</p> <p>According to women, what factors make a street safe or unsafe?</p> <p>How do women evaluate the chosen streets' security?</p> <p>How do women address the perceived state of street insecurity?</p> <p>What are their individual adaptation</p>	<p><u>What are the attitudes of Mexico City's women towards urban street un/safety, how perceived un/safety is responded, and how does it influence their urban lifestyle?</u></p> <p>How do women engage with the Historic Center (HC)?</p> <p>How do they employ streets in the area?</p> <p>What is their imagery of the area?</p> <p>What are women's safety-related experiences in the HC streets?</p> <p>According to women, what factors make a street safe or unsafe?</p> <p>What parts of the HC do they perceive as (un)safe?</p> <p>How do women address the perceived state of street insecurity?</p> <p>What are their individual and collective coping strategies?</p>	<p>Widening the scope to urban lifestyle allows to include not only changes in the use of streets but also other effects: preventive measures, feeling of detachment from the city in general and other.</p> <p>The HC was sampled as a case-study area.</p> <p>No great variety of space/ mobility uses were found, but different types of affiliations to the space turned out to matter more for respondents' safety perceptions.</p> <p>Due to the narrowing down the area sample to the HC.</p> <p>This allows to include all the streets and zones of the HC. The question is answered with the respondent-led mapping out method.</p> <p>The two types of strategies are put together since they are usually combined and their variance is not</p>

<p>strategies? What are their collective adaptation strategies? How does the perceived level of safety affect women's engagement with the streets?</p>	<p>What is the influence of these strategies on their routine? How does the perceived level of safety affect women's urban lifestyle?</p>	<p>the final focus of the research. This is a connection to the final question. Changes in daily activities make up a bigger picture of changes in urban engagement. As stated, perceptions of streets safety were discovered to influence much more things than just street use, including auto limitations in mobility, social interaction and others.</p>
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Appendix 2. List of the themes discussed in the semi-structured interviews

<p>Demographic data and positionality</p>	<p>Age, education, occupation, mensual wage compared to the city's minimal wage, civil status Place of birth and current area place of residence Daily trajectories and modes of transport</p>
<p>Engagement with the Historic Center (HC)</p>	<p>Frequency of transit, mode of transport, activities in the area, use of public spaces, modes of transport</p>
<p>Imagery of the HC</p>	<p>Associations, memories, experience of social interaction</p>
<p>Emotional dimension</p>	<p>Emotions related to the Historic Center, to routine activities, to different types of public space</p>
<p>Evaluation of the HC safety and unsafety</p>	<p>Subjective evaluation of the safety of the area, factors of safety, factors of unsafety Mental images of ideal safe and dangerous streets Mapping exercise: tracing safe and unsafe streets of the area</p>
<p>Insecurity experience</p>	<p>Awareness of the problem Experiences of victimization in the public space of the Historic Center</p>
<p>Habits and strategies</p>	<p>Individual habits, collective strategies Description of a routine day</p>
<p>Effects on the urban lifestyle</p>	<p>Subjective evaluation of the influence of the coping strategies on the urban routine Imaginary model of a routine day without security risks</p>

Appendix 3. Profiles of the recruited female interviewees

#	Age	Civil status	Education	Employment	Income (in minimum wages) ²	Frequency of transition in HC
R1	40	single	middle school	formally employed	2	2 /month
R2	26	single	university degree	formally employed	4	3/month
R3	31	single	university degree	formally employed	6	1/week
R4	35	single	university degree	formally employed	9	1/week
R5	46	single	primary school	informally employed	less than 1	2/year
R6	24	single	university degree	unemployed	-	2/month
R7	52	married	high school	formally employed	4	daily
R8	31	single	university degree	formally employed	15	1/year
R9	29	single	professional degree	formally employed	2	1/month
R10	34	single	high school	formally employed	more than 1	2/month
R11	24	-	high school	employed	more than 1	2/week
R12	28	single	high school	employed	1	2/year
R13	26	single	university degree	formally employed	3	5/year
R14	25	single	high school	formally employed	more than 1	1/week
R15	47	married	university degree	informally employed	3.5	1/month
R16	30	married	master's degree	formally employed	7	1/month
R17	32	single	master's degree	formally employed	6	1/week
R18	23	-	high school	-	-	2/month
R19	35	married	university degree	formally employed	9	4/year
R20	37	single	university degree	formally employed	5	1/week
R21	61	single	high school	employed	-	1/month
R22	26	single	university degree	formally employed	3	1/month
R23	19	single	high school	unemployed	-	2/month
R24	40	single	master's degree	unemployed	-	daily
R25	36	single	high school	formally employed	more than 1	1/month
R26	31	married	master's degree	formally employed	a lot more than 1	1/month
R27	36	single	university degree	formally employed	3	5/year
R28	25	single	university degree	unemployed	-	1/week
R29	33	single	master's degree	formally employed	-	1/month

² Compared to the minimum wage in Mexico City in 2019 — 3121,47 pesos (approx. 146 euros)

R30	22	single	high school	informally employed	-	3/week
R31	41	single	middle school	formally employed	1	4/year
R32	33	single	university degree	formally employed	4	1/month
R33	21	married	high school	informally employed	1	3/month
R34	24	single	university degree	unemployed	-	3/week
R35	49	single	university degree	formally employed	4	5/week
R36	29	single	professional degree	formally employed	2	1/week
R37	18	single	high school	unemployed	-	1/week
R38	23	single	university degree	formally employed	3	3/week
R39	28	single	high school	unemployed	-	2/week
R40	23	single	high school	unemployed	-	1/week
R41	34	single	primary school	informally employed	-	daily
R42	24	single	middle school	informally employed	-	-
R43	18	single	primary school	informally employed	-	daily
R44	33	single	primary school	informally employed	-	daily
R45	27	single	university degree	formally employed	6	-
R 46	55	civil union	primary school	informally employed	less than 1	daily
R 47	43	civil union	middle school	unemployed	less than 1	3/week

Appendix 4. Safety Audit checklist elaborated from the gender perspective

Name of Area/Street:

Date:

Time and Day:

Weather:

Duration of Walk:

Criteria	Questions	Comments
<i>Lightning</i>	How well is lit is the area?	
	Are there spaces poorly lit?	
<i>Maintenance</i>	How well is maintained the area (building facades,)?	
	To underline: Rubbish Graffiti of low quality Abandoned buildings Abandoned objects	
	Is there any vegetation present? How well is it taken care of?	

	Are there any irritative noises, smells or other sort of contamination?	
<i>Sidewalk quality</i>	What is the quality of the pavement?	
	How wide is it?	
	How is the space convenient for pedestrians, strollers, and wheelchairs? Are there any obstacles for mobility?	
	How big is the danger of traffic accidents?	
	How well is it equipped with street furniture (benches, trash bins, etc.)	
<i>Busy and Isolated spaces</i>	Are there a lot of people using this area?	
	What are they doing? How are they using the space?	
	How heavy is the transport transit?	
	Are there any buildings or spaces that seem empty and/or abandoned?	
	Are there any blind points where people can hide? Are the elements of urban furniture or vegetation that hinder the visibility of space?	
<i>Spatial use</i>	What are the uses of the area (formal and informal commerce, residential, etc.)?	
	In the moment of the walk, is there any space out of use?	
	Are there facilities adopted for children, senior persons and persons with special needs?	
	Are there any green areas?	
<i>Signage</i>	Is there a sufficient amount of street name and building number signs? How easy is it to orientate oneself?	
	Is it clear where the stops of the public transport are?	
	Are there signs to tell how to move around?	
<i>Surveillance</i>	How present is police?	
	How present are vigilance technologies (cameras, emergency buttons)?	
<i>Accessibility</i>	How easy is the access to public transport?	
	How well is the area connected with other streets?	
	How easy is it to find a place of refuge?	
<i>Social cohesion</i>	Is there any social initiative/movement visible?	
	Are there spaces that favor socialization in relation to the equipment?	
	Are there any works of art present?	
	Are there any forms of social deviation visible (disrespect towards women, public drinking, etc.)?	

Source: Personal elaboration based on ActionAid (2013) & Ciocchetto (2014).

Appendix 5. List of the events attended

Date	Type of the Event	Title of the Event
28.02	Seminar	La ciudad Latinoamericana en la coyuntura actual
07.03	Conference	Seguridad, espacio público y género
09.03	Conference	Los avances y retos en la situación de los derechos de las mujeres
10.03	Campaign launch	La violencia de género. Historias biográficas de la Ciudad de México
11.03	Second Cycle of Magisterial Conferences	Desigualdades de género. Género, cuerpo y salud
14.03	Round table	Videovigilancia en México: mitos y realidades
15.03	Presentation	Agenda Metropolitana para Frenar la Violencia contra las Mujeres
15.03	Seminar	Voces ante el feminicidio: Estrategias y resistencias
16.03	Participative safety audit walk	Cruzamos Juntas + La Calle Es Nuestra
16.03	Seminar	Discriminación en la búsqueda de las mujeres
20.03	Seminar	Intervenciones de vivienda social en edificios históricos
21.03	Forum	Libres y Seguras. Inclusión, Accesibilidad y Movilidad con Perspectiva de Género
24.03	Workshop	Estadísticas de género en México
27.03	Seminar	La construcción espacial del miedo
28.03	Public discussion	Aliadas frente a la Invisibilización de la Violencia
30.03	Public discussion	Mujeres vs el acoso callejero y violencias en el espacio público
08.04	Congress	Tercer Congreso Internacional sobre Género y Espacio
25.04	Conference	Espacio, Territorio y Ciudadanía en la Ciudad Neoliberal
27.05	Public lecture	Desaparición de mujeres en la CDMX. Análisis y aportes
04.05	Workshop	Las Ciudades que Somos: una Mirada Feminista
22.05	Seminar	Diálogos Intergeneracionales y Feminismos en América Latina

Appendix 6. Experts interviewed for the research

Lucía Villafañe	Coordinator of the Safe Cities Programme at UN-Women Mexico
Gisela Méndez	Founder of <i>Ensamble Urbano</i> , a consultancy company in the formation and strengthening of creative and collective urban solutions. Collaborated with Secretary of Agrarian, Land and Urban Development (SEDATU) coordinating the Mobility Technical Unit, author-coordinator of the book <i>"Anatomía de Movilidad en México"</i> . She was Secretary of Mobility of the Government of the State of Colima and Director of Research, Capacity Development at the Institute of World Resources in Mexico (WRI Mexico) and founder and general director of the Planning Institute for the Municipality of Colima.
Acoyani Adame	Architect, urban planner and activist that works on gender perspective applied in urban planning and mobility and on the specific issues of walkability with gender justice. Collaborator of the NGO <i>Liga Peatonal</i> .
Mariana Osorio Plascencia	Professor of the Faculty of Architecture, UNAM; founder of the academic course on gender perspective in architecture.
Mariana Sánchez Vieyra	Academic Secretary of the PUEC, UNAM. A sociologist with the line of research on gender issues and post-feminist policies in building the city, and on public space and security.
Alexia Moreno	A psychologist at El Caracol, A.C., coordinator of the projects "Women for a life free of violence", "People with disabilities"

Appendix 7. Ethical review form

Ethical issues	Approach
Access to participants	All participants were recruited by me within the chosen street locations. The respondents were adult women, so there was confidence that their consent is free and responsible. The research details and objectives were accurately explained in advance before every interview. Verbal description of the study, interview process, and other relevant issues were fully given. Any questions were answered in the most explicit manner at any stage of interaction. The participants were provided with contact details of the researcher in case of further questions or objections. The participants were free to stop interview at any moment. The approach of confidentiality was clarified and guaranteed.

Informed consent	<p>The nature of this research and purposes of an interview were made explicit prior to interviewing both verbally and written in the letter with contact details. Participants were able to ask any questions regarding me as a researcher, about the study and data treatment both before interviewing and on any other stage of it. The consent to participate was asked for verbally and recorded. Prior to interviews, the brief explanation included a description of the study, an explanation of the interview process, voice recording and data collection, data storage, and other relevant issues. I made my answers about the research as honest and transparent as possible, to make sure participants feel secure and open. Participants kept a letter of brief description of the study and my contact information for their reference.</p>
Potential risk to participants	<p>I guaranteed confidentiality for respondents since their personal information (except for the age) was not shared. No record of their personal details was exposed when producing and presenting the findings. The answers exposed make it impossible to trace personal identity.</p> <p>The research involved examination of issues sensitive for female respondents, as it dealt with previous experiences and emotional feelings about safety. The interview questions, interview process, and analysis of outcomes were treated in a conscious, careful and confidential manner. Comments and stories were used in an anonymized manner to support main points. I collected data on age and income, but it is impossible to match citations to a particular person.</p> <p>All the gathered data, including interview recordings and transcripts, is stored on my private computer and on my Google Drive. This data is secured and not shared.</p>
Sharing of findings	<p>The information collected is used particularly for academic purposes of the thesis. Sensitive, not anonymized and not analyzed data was not made public. As stated, primary data, such as voice recordings and transcripts are stored on secured platforms. Should the participants be interested in findings of the research, they will be provided with a copy of the final work via e-mail. Should the participants want their voice recordings and interview transcripts removed, they can also contact me at any moment.</p>
Conflict of interest	<p>The researcher, Daria Barsukova, declares that no conflict of interest is involved. The author is affiliated with Utrecht University and the research is a compulsory part of her master's programme. The research will be financed from personal means - there is no financial interest caused. Non-financial conflicts of interest, such as personal relations, do not apply.</p> <p>The research is entirely of academic purpose. The author is neutral regarding political and intellectual sides of the problem that may affect research outcomes. There is no interest in specific outcomes from the researcher or any other party. Interest in the work submission is solely the researcher's study-related responsibility.</p>