GATHERING PLACES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SENSE OF PLACE:
EXPLORING SINGLE WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

By JEANETTE EBY, B.A.

A Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University, December 2012

MASTER OF ARTS (2012), School of Geography & Earth Sciences

TITLE: Gathering places and neighbourhood sense of place: Exploring single women's experiences across the life course

AUTHOR: Jeanette Eby, B.A. (McMaster University, Arts & Science Program)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Allison Williams

NUMBER OF PAGES: x, 168

ABSTRACT

Sense of place (SoP) at the neighbourhood scale is one phenomenon that can bring to light the forces that shape residents' experiences of living in urban neighbourhoods, and play a role in shaping their identity. At an even smaller scale are the gathering places of everyday life, where people can come together and spend time on a regular basis. This research is about single women's experiences of local gathering places and their neighbourhood SoP in Hamilton, Ontario, from a feminist perspective. Feminist research values the knowledge and experiences of research participants and has the goal of understanding the world in order to build a more just society. A qualitative case study was employed, with face-to-face interviews (n=15) being the primary method of data collection. Participants were single mothers and single older women living in a neighbourhood in central-east, lower city Hamilton. This thesis explores the themes resulting from the interviews, including: factors influencing neighbourhood SoP; types of gathering places; social and emotional qualities of gathering places; physical/spatial qualities of gathering places, and; the relationship between gathering places and neighbourhood sense of place. These themes highlight the importance of gathering places to neighbourhood SoP, and the potential for the perspectives and recommendations of the participants to be included in current efforts around neighbourhood development in Hamilton. The results also point to areas for further research around SoP, and next steps for Hamilton in terms of creating a safe and age-friendly city, and engaging in critical community development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD: Assets-based community development

FCR: Feminist community research

HCF: Hamilton Community Foundation

HCOA: Hamilton Council on Aging

HRPR: Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction

NAP: Neighbourhood action plan

NDS: Neighbourhood Development Strategy

ODSP: Ontario Disability Support Program

OW: Ontario Works

PAR: Participatory Action Research

P&L – Parenting & Literacy

SES: Socioeconomic status

SoP: Sense of place

SPRC: Social Planning and Research Council

TPT: Tackling Poverty Together

VAW: Violence against women

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before delving into the research paper, I want to acknowledge the people in my life whose support, encouragement, guidance, and care brought me this far, and who have helped me find my own sense of place in Hamilton.

Firstly, I want to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful friend Jen Marcheson, who passed away in August 2012. Jen, you were one of the very first friends I made in downtown Hamilton, and made me feel like I belonged. You saw the beauty in everything and made every person feel special. I only hope I can honour your creativity, generosity and love as I continue to engage in this city.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Allison Williams for working with me all these years, for your support and guidance and for persevering with me as my own life journey met unexpected turns. Thank you for believing in me. I have learned so much from you.

Thank you to the participants, for allowing me to enter into your lives and for sharing your stories and experiences about your neighbourhood. You have inspired me and taught me so much, and meeting you was the highlight of this research process. I am now attached to your neighbourhood and know my city and its people in a new light.

Thanks to the human geography ladies – Lily, Yui, Jenny, Kim, and Huyen - for giving me a community to be a part of, and for all the support and encouragement and wonderful memories.

Yui, I especially want to thank you for being my friend and research partner and sharing in this journey with me. What would I have done without you? There is a hole in my life and in the city now that you have moved away. Your dedication to your work and your passion for social justice continue to inspire me, and I am so grateful for our two years together.

Dirk, you were and still are an honourary member of our human geography crew, thanks for being there and encouraging me and brightening stressful times with our jam sessions.

To my roommates – Crystal, Michelle, and Will – for being such wonderful friends, for encouraging me through my stresses, frustrations, and late nights, and for creating a wonderful, caring home.

To my parents, Nadine and Randy, for believing in me and allowing me to find my way and be able to pursue things that I care about. Thank you to my siblings, Craig and Tara, for reminding me to rest and for being my friends.

To Jeff, Jane, Sheila, Jean, Carol, and Daniel for reminding me why I am proud to be a part of the university, for teaching me how to be in the hyphen of "community-university", and encouraging me to keep going.

To Matt, for your constant love support. You introduced me to this wonderful city and what it means to have a sense of place. You are always there – my gratitude is beyond words.

Finally, to the Beasley Neighbourhood Association and the Freeway for making me feel at home in Hamilton and inspiring this research in the first place. You have made Hamilton home for me.

1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction to Research Questions and Objectives

Sense of place (SoP) at the neighbourhood scale is one phenomenon that can bring to light environmental, social and psychological forces that shape residents' experiences of living in urban neighbourhoods, and impact their sense of well-being (Demiglio & Williams, 2008). The neighbourhood is "place" at the scale of the very local, and peoples' experience of and connection to their neighbourhood, and how that impacts their overall quality of life, will depend on a variety of factors. At an even smaller scale are the gathering places of everyday life, where people can come together and spend time on a regular basis, and which can include public places. Literature about women's experiences in urban space has commonly addressed the gendered nature of socio-spatial experience in urban settings, such as fear, social isolation, mobility, care work, and other factors (Day, 2000; Dyck, 2005; McDowell, 1999; Pain, 2001). This research is about women's experiences of gathering places and their SoP at the neighbourhood scale in Hamilton, Ontario.

This research project is coming from a feminist geography perspective and is driven by two main questions: *What meaning do neighbourhood gathering places hold for single women across the life course,* and *what is the relationship between gathering places and neighbourhood SoP for these women?* These questions are accompanied by the following objectives: 1) to explore the relationship between gathering places and SoP for single female residents of a Hamilton neighbourhood; 2) to better understand the qualities of gathering places and the meanings they hold for single women; and 3) to identify possible barriers to participation in, and/or the existence of neighbourhood gathering places for single women throughout the life course. Achieving these objectives will contribute to the broader goal of understanding and

communicating these geographical experiences of single women across the life course, in order to include their voices in local discussions of neighbourhood health and community development, and ultimately inform policy.

1.1.2   Reader's Guide

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature and key concepts related to my research questions and objectives. I first situate myself and explain my own motivations for doing this research. Next, I provide an overview of feminist urban geography and key themes that have been the focus of feminist geographers. I then focus on the specific concepts in my research: the neighbourhood, SoP, and gathering places, and highlight related feminist scholarship.

Chapter 2 is all about the research context, which is Hamilton, Ontario. In this chapter, I highlight Hamilton's social landscape and recent local research that has been done regarding poverty and vulnerable groups in Hamilton. I also describe the research neighbourhood and developments that are currently taking place there.

Chapter 3 is the Methods and Methodology chapter, which describes the principles behind the feminist community research approach that I have adopted for this case study. It also describes the methods I employed throughout the research process, from getting to know the neighbourhood through to the writing and dissemination.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the results of my research, including the factors that influence neighbourhood SoP, the types of gathering places, qualities of gathering places, and the relationship between gathering places and neighbourhood SoP. Chapter 4 then leads into Chapter 5, the Discussion and Conclusions, where I bring together insights from the results and the literature and their implications for research directions and next steps in Hamilton. I also reflect

on the limitations of my research, on my praxis, and conclude with a discussion of critical community development.

1.2   Placing Myself in the Research

Before delving into the background of my research, it is important to situate myself and share where I am coming from and why I have chosen to embark on this particular research endeavor. The city in which I have chosen to do my research is one that I love and am committed to for the long-term. I have lived in Hamilton for over seven years, and originally came here to study Arts and Science at McMaster University. As I immersed myself into undergraduate life, I also began to immerse myself into the city, specifically the downtown core. I did some exploring on my own and I also met people who invited me to see the city from a fresh perspective, and to see it for its potential.

On a snowy day in early 2007, when I was running an errand downtown, I came across *The Freeway Coffee House*, at the corner of King and Wellington streets. I met the coffee house manager at the time, who explained to me that the café was a "third place", with the goal of being a safe and welcoming place for anyone who walked through its doors. It was a place for all types of people regardless of their capacity to spend money as consumers. I had a positive sense of place in the coffee house from the very beginning. Within a couple of months I began to volunteer there and eventually started a monthly Community Night and bi-weekly Senior's Social. Engaging with people at the Freeway was really an entry point for me into Hamilton, which allowed me to slowly build unlikely relationships and become rooted in the neighbourhood. I became friends with people who were different than me, who faced a variety of challenges in their lives but who felt at home and had a sense of belonging at the Freeway. These

friendships enabled me to feel like I, too, belonged in a neighbourhood where I could easily be "out of place" as a young university student, coming from a middle-class, suburban upbringing.

I decided to move downtown in my third year of undergrad and become a resident of the Beasley neighbourhood. I joined the Beasley Neighbourhood Association, and in my fourth year of undergrad I was able to bridge my academic life and passion for the community through an experiential education thesis focused on community resilience and relationships in Hamilton. I have been questioned by many people who wonder why I chose to live in downtown Hamilton. Many people, both residents and non-residents of Beasley, still prominently see the neighbourhood as a poor, "high-needs" neighbourhood, as an unsafe place full of problems and hurting people. There may be partial truths in that depiction, but it disregards the many strengths of the neighbourhood, the contradictory senses of place that people hold, and the unique gifts of the residents. It is also a way of "othering" people living in poverty, whose story and circumstances are often misunderstood, and who are my neighbours.

Many people also speculate about my safety as a young, single woman vulnerable to violence and harassment in the supposedly dangerous "inner city". Interestingly, I have always felt safe downtown and have only felt safer as I come to know this place even more. I know the streets and the people; I know about some of the very sad and unsettling things that happen here, but I do not feel unsafe. It is true that I am connected, that I know many people who live or hang out downtown, and I do not feel threatened by people who appear to be struggling with mental health issues, addictions, or who look rough around the edges. I enjoy interacting with and learning from people who have different backgrounds and views of the world. Now that I am in my sixth year living downtown, I am able to see my community for its beauty and potential, as well as its darkness. I am in this for the long haul: I have seen the good and bad, the engagement

and empowerment that is happening through the Beasley Neighbourhood Association, as well as its struggles. I am learning that even our little "community" is shaped by and embedded in a web of power relations, in which I am implicated. My positive SoP in my own neighbourhood, and the value I see in gathering places such as the *Freeway*, inspired me to explore the experience of single women in another lower-city neighbourhood for my Master's research. Thus, the motivations behind this research project are very personal, as is my SoP, tied up with my identity and values and the way I live my life.

1.3   Introduction to Feminist Geographies

"Place matters" is the mantra of geography; while it is at the center of our work, geographers cannot seem to agree on a definition of the concept of place. Place has been defined in many ways, often contrasted with space, and is not such a straightforward, objective term as one would imagine. Doreen Massey (1995) defined places as "the location of particular sets of intersecting social relations, intersecting activity spaces, both local ones and those that stretch more widely... every place is, in this way, a unique mixture of the relations which configure social space" (p.61). She depicted places as shared spaces or meeting places that do not have fixed or coherent identities; every place, however, is unique in its particular set of intersecting, juxtaposing relations at a one location and time. This concept of "place" as a multi-faceted, dynamic space of interaction is the one I will use throughout this project. A place is not a bounded and neutral container where various events happen, or an objective point on a map; it is socially produced and in turn shapes how social processes unfold (McDowell, 1999).

Places exist at a variety of scales, from micro- to macro-, starting at the scale of the body, moving up to the home, neighbourhood, city, region, country, and the globe. In a world of time-space compression, of globalization and far-reaching linkages, of increasing mobility,

technological innovation and heightened interconnection, does place, especially at the local

scale, still matter? My answer, along with all geographers, is yes. Doreen Massey (1994) reminds

us that, "Much of life for many people, even in the heart of the First World, still consists of

waiting in a bus-shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes..." (p.163). We have

concrete experiences in specific locales that shape our sense of self and place. Human

geographers hold onto the importance of the local scale while challenging us to perceive

particular places with a consciousness of their links with the wider world (Bondi & Rose, 2003;

Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999; Williams & Eyles, 2008), as Isabel Dyck (2005) explains:

> *Much feminist geography has not lost sight of the everyday… We need close attention to the spaces of everyday life to keep women visible in rapidly changing world conditions, where their activities tend to slip into the shadows of dominant models in the literature… taking a route through the routine, taken-for granted activity of everyday life in homes, neighbourhoods and communities can tell us much about its role in supporting social, cultural and economic shifts – as well as helping us see how the 'local' is structured by wider processes and relations of power.* (p.234)

Gender, like place, is a relational and fluid concept. Both place and gender are deeply

linked and shape our identities as embodied human beings. The conceptualizations of gender as

social construction, social relation and difference are all important when it comes to gender-place

relations and feminist geography. Gender as a social relation recognizes that we are still

influenced by a dominant capitalist patriarchal structure that filters into women and men's daily

lives as they negotiate work, home, leisure and their various roles and responsibilities; feminist

geographers help make sense of the influence of this patriarchal gender regime with the

recognition that patriarchy is socially, historically and geographically specific (Dixon & Jones,

2006; McDowell, 1999). Considering gender as a social construction recognizes that different

spheres of life, and particular characteristics of human beings, objects and places (bodies,

buildings, and beyond), are socially constructed as 'masculine' and 'feminine' and have an

impact on peoples' sense of themselves and their place in the world. Gender as difference recognizes that gender *makes* a difference to many social processes, and that particular contexts influence men and women's lives in different ways; we see examples of this in gender variations in types of employment, wages, health, family roles, and a multitude of aspects of everyday life (Dixon & Jones, 2006).

Feminism has added substantially to the geographical disciplines, and many ideas that were introduced by feminist geographers on the margins of the academy are now much more widely accepted in the mainstream academic practises of research and pedagogy. Feminist scholarship values the expert knowledge of research participants, and place an emphasis on the importance of everyday experiences and how they connect to larger social structures and processes. Feminist scholarship challenges a singular, objective view of knowledge and truth, and has also played a key role in recognizing the role that emotion plays in knowledge, action and experiences of place (Sharp, 2009; Wright, 2010). Human geographers, whether they identify as "feminist" or not, have begun to explore the gendered basis of geographic patterns and processes and recognize the importance of situated knowledge and critical approaches to research and action. Place matters to geographers, and gender matters to feminist geographers insofar as the structure of our societies were and continue to be built based on power relations (such as patriarchy) that have put certain groups of people, such as women, at a disadvantage; as Bondi and Rose (2003) emphasize, place and gender mutually construct each other. Gender is a significant dimension of human experience that helps us understand how "Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. The boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience" (McDowell, 1999, p.4).

As illustrated in the above quotations from Dyck and McDowell, *power* is another key concept in feminist geography. There are various definitions of power and even feminist geographers do not all adopt the concept in the same way (Moss, 2002). Based on my own understanding of the literature and the world around me, I understand power to be relational, multi-directional, and connected to everything we do, which is how power is described in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009): "People both exercise power and are on the receiving end of power at different times every day, in all realms of life. More important than the fact that power is exercised is the way power is constructed and deployed. To what extent is power concentrated in certain institutions, relationships and agencies? How visible is it? What are the opportunities for power relations to be contested or rotated?" (p.575). These are the questions that feminist geographers engage with, and they seek to understand how power shapes socio-spatial relations (Staeheli & Kofman, 2003). Power is not only negative or oppositional; it can be positive, it can be collective, it can be among people on the ground as well as within large institutions. It can be enabling as well as disabling; it can be visible through the construction of boundaries that express ideas of inclusion and exclusion; it operates in places.

I would like to devote some attention to geographies of care and caregiving, which have been a focus of feminist geographers, and have entered other geographic sub-disciplines. Feminist geographers have critically explored the spatiality of formal and informal care and the roles that gender and emotion play in care work. Women predominantly bear the burden of caring for children, the elderly, the disabled, and the chronically ill, and the dying, and most low-wage care work is also undertaken by women, for example the work of personal support workers or foreign nannies who work for middle-class families. Such examples help illustrate how care

activity is impacted by market-driven ideology, globalization, and welfare reform, including the heavily documented shift from institutional to "community" or home-based care in Western nations (Dyck, 2005; Lawson, 2007; Williams & Crooks, 2008). Victoria Lawson (2007) has introduced the geographies of care within our neoliberal, market-driven context: "We live in times defined by the relentless extension of market relations into almost everything. This deepening of market relations is reaching into arenas where the social good should (but often does not) take precedent over profitability and the efficient operation of markets… arenas such as health care, elder care, support for the working poor, environmental protection, and education" (p.1). Although the private and public spheres, or labour and household are intimately interconnected, the work that goes on outside of the paid labour force is devalued, along with mutual responsibility, self-sacrifice and social solidarity. On the other hand, individualism, competition, rationality and self-sufficiency are lauded under neoliberalism (McDowell, 2004). Market-driven ideology constructs care as a private affair, occurring in the home and within the family, when in reality, we all give and receive care and depend on it to sustain our lives and relationships (Lawson, 2007).

Feminist geographers have also used the theoretical framework of an "ethic of care" in terms of our responsibility, (as geographers, feminists, and citizens) to near and distant 'others', as well as to explore women's experiences of place and its relationship to work and caring. In Victoria Lawson's words:

> … a feminist ethic of care begins from the centrality of care work and care relations to our lives and societies. Care ethics begins with a social ontology of connection: foregrounding social relationships of mutuality and trust (rather than dependence). Care ethics understands all social relations as contextual, partial, attentive, responsive, and responsible… care ethics is concerned with structuring relationships in ways that enhance mutuality and well-being. Care ethics also demands attention to emotions and affective relations (of love, concern, and connection) because of the complex ways in which power is embedded within them. (2007, p.3)

Kristen Day (2000) and Linda McDowell (2004) both reference Carol Gilligan in their descriptions of an ethic of care. Gilligan argued that women make decisions based on their responsibilities and relationships, related to practical and material circumstances in their everyday lives and affective relations, rather than on abstract, disembodied notions of justice or right and wrong. Her work was influential in the development of an ethic of care, which not only calls for responsibility to others but also a responsibility to care for oneself. McDowell (2004) argues that, "instead of a normative commitment to independence, promoting greater equality requires a system of social support that will encourage and facilitate forms of social interaction that are not based on individual competitiveness" (p.156), and instead based on an ethic of care. This ethic of care and the actions that result from it will be different depending on the context, and would have implications in the labour market, in leisure spaces, and in the home. In terms of space, environments may both support women in their caring work or marginalize them further; whatever the outcome, care, while rarely acknowledged in the public realm, sustains life in various ways and impacts each of us, men and women.

As feminist scholarship has evolved, feminists have recognized that the social construction of gender also relates to other aspects of identity such as race, class, age, ethnicity, employment status, ability, sexuality, and family status, to name a few, and that it is important to deconstruct an essentialist view of what it is to be "Woman". We must acknowledge that significant differences and inequalities also exist *between* women and play out in specific ways in different places (McDowell, 1999; Moss, 2002). Feminist geographers are now employing intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and a methodology to take these various identities into account and consider how they interact at particular times and places to shape someone's sense of self and their experience of being in the world (Valentine, 2007). The

intersections of these aspects of these identities are fluid and unstable, and determining which identities are more dominant depends on how someone is situated in time and space. Feminist geographers now use the term *feminist geographies*, emphasizing the plural, to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives and approaches that are used in the discipline (McDowell, 1999; Moss 2002). McDowell (1999) reminds us that across the globe it remains an undeniable fact that women continue to be socially, economically and politically marginalized, and this a unifying motivation in feminist scholarship, as feminist geographers seek to uncover, understand and dismantle sources of oppression as it plays out in different places and across different scales (Dyck, 2005; McDowell, 1999).

1.4   Gender and Urban Space Across the Life Course

> *"... the built environment and the uneven spatial distribution of opportunities, goods and resources through the city and between localities, neighbourhoods and villages have a significant impact not only on the life chances of urban residents but also on their sense of themselves as women and as men."* (McDowell, 1999, p. 117)

To further illustrate how feminist geographies may inform and enhance the notion of SoP, with respect to my research interest in women's experience of urban neighbourhoods, it is important to explore a bit further feminist ideas about gender and urban space. Bondi and Rose's (2003) review of feminist urban geography highlights the common themes in this realm of scholarship, and the commitment since the early 1970s that feminist geographers have had to include women and value their knowledge in research, and to challenge "geographers' taken-for granted gendered assumptions about the worlds we inhabit and study" (p.230). They pointed out that there are feminist geographers that focus on the constraining and oppressive forces that women face, seeing them as primarily disadvantaged in urban life; others explore the city as a place of possibility for women, where space is appropriated and contested and where they have the opportunity to challenge social norms and exercise their agency as citizens. Bondi and Rose

asserted that these seemingly oppositional stances on gender and the city exist simultaneously; the city is a paradoxical place, and can be the site of opportunity and constraint for various groups. Feminist geography thus continues to be an important discipline that strives "to work across analytical divides that would otherwise tend to obfuscate crucial aspects of the mutual constitution of gender and the urban" (p.229).

Suzanne Mackenzie's (1988) work demonstrates how women are at the interface of production and reproduction, blurring public/private boundaries and disrupting neat and fixed roles and categories. She explained how changes in the city and in women's activities are inseparable, taking us on a journey across space and time exploring women's role in the city, from their participation in industrial work of the 19th century with significant class differences, to the separate spheres and socially invisible work of women of much of the 20th century, followed by the breakdown of separate spheres where women are involved in multiple roles, and dealing with these demands in creative ways. We see how every day, apparently insignificant and disconnected actions of women in cities in fact underlie the dynamics of cities. Mackenzie explained how women were integral to the development of the third sector which drastically altered urban life, creating services to enable dual roles of work and caregiving, as well as the growing self-employed sector and inventing paid employment in the home. Women can be seen as "creative urban actors" (Dyck, 2005) who shape and are shaped by the city.

Gurstein and Vilches (2010) used the concept of a 'just city' in their work examining how lone mothers exercise their right to the city and their citizenship amidst social policies and governance structures that are disabling in their ability to meet the needs of themselves and their families, and to exercise control over their lives. A 'just city' is a "normative concept that combines equity and material well-being with diversity, participation and sustainability to

12

encourage a better quality of urban life" (p.422). The concept is helpful in exploring how different levels of governance are implicated in creating a just or unjust city based on social policies related to affordable housing, food security, child care and social assistance, and how these policies impact the everyday lives and choices of citizens. Neo-liberal, or market-driven, definitions of citizenship, which focus on participation and measured "contributions" to society ignore the so-called "private" realm, where much of the care work that women engage in takes place. Gurstein and Vilches pointed out that amidst structural and personal barriers, the lone mothers in their research strategize and exercise their agency, finding different support networks and ways to cope. They argued that "recognizing and interacting with women's activities is a signal of the legitimacy of women as citizens of the city and their significant contribution to urban life, both in the present and through future generations" (p.432). The authors urged municipal leaders to recognize and attend to the contributions and needs of lone mothers; when these are not recognized, the message to lone mothers is that they are not valued. In a similar vein is Melissa Gilbert's (2000) study of working poor women's survival strategies in Worcester. She demonstrated how specific identities, such as being a "single mother", were located in sets of power relationships that influenced women's strategies and shaped the boundedness of their lives. Gilbert highlighted both commonalities and differences between black and white women, acknowledging racial and class-based influences and the importance of spatial rootedness: "Understanding how women participate in the creation of boundaries as well as challenge them, and how such boundaries may be enabling as well as constraining, is an important part of constructing a feminist politics based on coalitions and affinities that acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences" (p.82). This work by Gilbert, Gurstein and Vilches approaches gender

and urban space in terms of the politics of redistribution, difference, landscapes of care, and how structural forces impact everyday lives and the micro-scales of the home and neighbourhood.

"Affective urban geographies", one example being the geography of fear, are also a consistent focus of feminist geographers. Fear of violence and crime is often a characteristic attributed to women's experiences in urban places, especially in public space, and feminist geographers have increasingly problematized generalizations regarding gender, fear, crime, and urban space (Bondi & Rose, 2003). Rachel Pain has done extensive work in this regard, and proposes a framework for exploring fear of crime, recognizing the complexities and intersections of race, gender and age. She asserted that it is problematic to create dichotomies between "feared" and "fearful", and to assume that white women and the elderly are passive victims, or that young, black men are likely to be perpetrators of crime (Pain, 2001). Even though violence is much more prominent in the domestic, and thus invisible, sphere, someone's experience of violence in private places such as the home or workplace will influence their experience of public space and whether or not they feel included or excluded (Pain, 2001; Warrington, 2001; Whitzman, 2006). Pain challenged the social construction of women as "weak" and public space as being exclusively dangerous for women: "women also actively reclaim those spaces and thus exercise a form of power: By their presence in urban space women produce space that is more available not only for themselves but also for other women. Women's spatial confidence can be interpreted as a manifestation of power." (Koskela quoted in Pain, 2001, p.904). Pain used the concept of gender as a social construction to highlight how assumptions about masculinity/femininity and related dichotomies, to predict who is more at risk, are problematic and often used for political ends. Men are in fact more often victims of violence; they are also most often the perpetrators of violence.

Pain (1997) has also done work on ageing and fear of crime, and critiqued how the elderly as a population has also been essentialized and assumed to be more vulnerable and fearful. She argues that the subjective and geographic aspects of fear and safety have not been considered in large-scale crime surveys or in social policy. In academia and other social institutions, the elderly, similar to women, have been wrongly portrayed as "victims". Pain pointed out several areas of neglect that must be explored in order to better understand the relationship between ageing and fear of crime: first of all, the differences between men and women in the reasons for and their responses to fear of crime; secondly, a consideration of the meanings attached to places that the elderly occupy, for example their relationships with people and sense of belonging; and third, how gender relations can play a role in peoples' reactions to the threat of crime and the constraints they impose, and how fear relates to power, inequality, and social exclusion.

The issue of community safety and crime prevention has often been explored and solutions proposed in relation to the built environment. Characteristics of the built environment have a role to play in community safety, for example in increasing sense of ownership and surveillance in public space, and creating opportunities for social interaction. Koskela and Pain (2000), however, argued that social processes cannot be separated from physical space, and that there are social causes of fear that are embedded in gendered power relations. Fear of crime is another multi-faceted and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by individual circumstances and life courses, aspects of identity such as age, class, motherhood, disability, sexuality, and spatial and temporal contexts. In their work exploring fear of crime among women in Edinburgh and Helsinki, Koskela and Pain (2000) found that women commonly feared violent crime in public space, and the authors explored several dimensions and implications of this fear. They saw a

relationship between fear and ageing, and between fear and having children, as well as finding

that all of the women who had experienced violence, either in public or private space, were more

fearful than those who had experienced minor harassment. While their participants pointed out

aspects of the environment that contributed to their fear, there were contrasting characteristics

that they described, for example, some women felt unsafe in dark, enclosed spaces while others

felt unsafe and exposed in open, bright spaces. This creates practical barriers to "designing out

fear". The research also pointed to the relationship between social and physical aspects of space,

and how the reputation of places also impacts whether or not women feel safe and which places

they choose to avoid – for example, places known as "bad" or "rough" areas, or where crime has

been publicized. Koskela and Pain also described how fear is developed throughout the life

course and "is affected by and responds to a whole range of social and personal experiences"

(p.278). They recommended that geographers and planners consider the complexity of fear, and

the ways in which, more important than physical characteristics influencing fear, "fear shapes

our understanding, perception, and use of space and place" (p. 269-280).

Building on geographies of fear and ideas of intersectionality and privilege, Leslie Kern

(2005) explored the experience of belonging for young women in the city of Toronto using an

analytical framework of interlocking systems of oppression. She asked why herself and her

white, middle-class, university-educated and now professional acquaintances, who moved from

outer Toronto suburbs to the downtown, are able to navigate the city with confidence and feel at

home. She highlighted how aspects of identity such as race and class allow some women to

move freely and securely, for example, being the "invisible norm" in the Canadian context as

white, middle-class women, and being able to distance themselves from violence and undesirable

or dangerous places. The act of distancing, and dis-identifying with activities associated with

violence is connected to privilege, in that these women, being white and financially secure, have chosen where to live and make a home for themselves, and they consciously avoid specific areas. They have the choice to dissociate with those areas. Kern argued that race, class, and gender intersect and produce different senses of place in the city, and that a gendered analysis of fear in public spaces must acknowledge the salience of privilege. Evidently, from exploring the work of Pain, Koskela, and Kern, fear in urban space is a complex phenomenon with social, physical, psychological, emotional, and political dimensions. Whether or not there are real risks, perceptions of safety, social location, and life experiences impact whether or not someone is able to feel safe and "in place" in different settings.

From these feminist readings of gendered urban space, we may begin to formulate ideas about what factors may influence women's SoP and experience of particular places in their neighbourhood: aspects of identity such as race, class, ethnicity, age, ability, family and employment status; past experiences such as sexual violence or physical abuse; feelings of fear or confidence; informal and formal labour including paid work and unpaid caregiving responsibilities; social support networks; financial security and housing; and the list goes on. A common thread that characterizes the myriad of geographical work is *power*: "power operates to systematically define ways of being, and to mark out those who are in place or out of place" (Valentine, 2007, p.18). We see the harmful impacts of inequalities and how various manifestations of patriarchal social relations and neoliberalism create disabling situations for different groups of women; we also see women take hold of their own power to mark out their own emancipatory spaces in unexpected ways. Feminist urban geographers have used concepts such as the just city and an ethic of care to make connections between micro and macro scales

and processes, and to understand the everyday lives of diverse women as they navigate their neighbourhoods and city.

1.5   Understanding Neighbourhood

Across subfields of human geography, there has recently been a surge of interest in neighbourhood research, and how "everyday landscapes" and "ordinary places" impact peoples' lives both positively and negatively (Cattell, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008; Wakefield & McMullan, 2005). In human geography, scholars have explored the relationship between neighbourhood of residence and health/quality of life, as well as neighbourhood-based participation and planning. Kearns and Parkinson (2001), in their article about the significance of neighbourhood, highlighted some of the different notions, interpretations and meanings associated with the term "neighbourhood" in geography. Following a scalar framework, they conceptualized the neighbourhood at three levels: the home area, associated with belonging, familiarity, and community; locality, associated with social status, residential activities, and planning; and the region, associated with economic and political activities. The neighbourhood is thus a "multilayered phenomenon within an urban regional context" (p. 2104). It is multilayered with an unpredictable impact on individual lives and communities, as it can be subject to processes of discrimination and social exclusion, a place of predictable encounter, a place of belonging and empowerment, as well as a place of fear and disdain. A neighbourhood has a specific combination of resources, it influences our lifestyle, shapes our identity, and can be an arena for public policy intervention, among its many functions. Kearns and Parkinson articulated the neighbourhood's complex role: "In an increasingly competitive and uncertain world in which people seek to establish themselves either alongside or over and above others, the neighbourhood can play an important role in people's personal and social identity and social position, but with

highly varying outcomes" (p.2105). In health geography, the neighbourhood is increasingly becoming a site to explore differences in health and quality of life outcomes as they relate to characteristics of the local environment including the built environment, socioeconomic status, resident perceptions, social capital, access to services and resources, and more (Frumkin, 2003; Veenstra et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 2004; Ziersch, Baum, MacDougall, & Putland, 2005).

Feminist geographers help push this idea of neighbourhood a bit further, by reminding us of the "interlocking scales" that stretch everyday, local matters to wider relations (Dyck, 2005); that neighbourhood is "place" at the small, local scale around one's home base, but whose boundaries are not concrete. The objective physical neighbourhood boundaries set by governments for planning purposes only establish one definition of "neighbourhood", which may or may not resonate with people actually living within those dictated boundaries. As we have learned from Massey, Dyck, and other human geographers, boundaries are fluid, and scales interact with each other via social processes. We have learned that place is not static, that it is "open to contestation and to different readings by individuals and groups who have differently constructed boundary experiences and preoccupations" (Vaiou and Lykogianni, 2006, p.738). Thus, neighbourhood will mean different things to men and women who identify with and relate to their home place in different ways, depending on their various categories of identity, their life history, their relationships, and forces beyond direct observation.

The neighbourhood can be an important scale where processes of inclusion and exclusion, and politics of redistribution and recognition, are manifested. Scholars have paid considerable attention to the impact of social exclusion on peoples' well-being and capacity to be active citizens, and its relationship to place. Where we live can have an important impact on the resources available to us as citizens and the extent to which we feel welcomed, valued, and able

to participate in civic activities and opportunities (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001; McDowell 1999).

Research has explored the role of neighbourhood opportunity structures that engender supportive

and safe environments and enable residents to enjoy the benefits of citizenship (Baum & Palmer,

2002; Murie & Musterd, 2002). Critical questions that must continue to be explored relate to

how and why some neighbourhoods become ghettoized with disadvantaged households, and how

economic, social welfare, and labour policies determined at the scale of the province or nation,

play a role in neighbourhood health and composition. Social inclusion/exclusion is related to the

concepts of social cohesion and social capital which are also increasingly being explored at the

neighbourhood level. Forrest and Kearns (2001), in their work on social cohesion, social capital,

and neighbourhood, explored how macro-level issues within society are contributing to the

decline in social cohesion and the overall health of communities, for example: increasing income

inequality, social fragmentation, crime, unemployment, underemployment, divorce rates, and

lone parenthood. They, too, assert that the neighbourhood matters: "Who and what we are

surrounded by in a specific locality may also contribute in important ways to both choice and

constraint, and, less tangible and more indirectly, to notions of well-being and social worth" (p.

2130). For example, having neighbours know and look out for each other can be extremely

beneficial in contrast with a decaying and unattractive physical environment surrounding them.

The external perception and identities that people impose on neighbourhoods from the outside

can also impact the behaviour of residents and their relationship to their environment. Forrest

and Kearns warned us not to take social cohesion as an absolute "good", for when people come

together based on common interest it can also feed into processes of exclusion, with the "Not In

My Backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome as a prominent example of groups of residents banding

together to exclude something from their neighbourhood, such as a group home. All in all, they

asserted that neighbourhood intersects with other dimensions of opportunity and constraint, such as education level, income, employment status, family structure, and ethnicity.

There have been a variety of neighbourhood-based studies focused on the experience of women, with attention to intersecting categories of identity such as age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, family status, employment, and more. Walker and Hiller (2007) explored how older women living alone perceive the social and physical dimensions of their neighbourhoods; they found that the neighbourhood boundaries were perceived differently between participants, that there was generally a strong sense of emotional attachment to the neighbourhood as well as attention and concern related to changes happening there, and that social capital was fundamental to the women's neighbourhood satisfaction. In Airey's (2003) exploration of the relationship between neighbourhood incivilities and well-being, she interviewed women living in a neighbourhood in Edinburgh, Scotland characterized by a low socioeconomic status. The women, all between the ages of 45 and 59, described and identified how the quality of social relations in the area was an important element of their experience with the neighbourhood, and noted the change in the local population over time, with the entry of 'undesirable' residents with problematic behaviour. They actively distanced themselves physically and socially from such people and incivilities, and there was an "othering" of certain people and areas which the women perceived as worse than their own immediate neighbourhood. In their study of women's experience of neighbourhoods and everyday life in Athens, Vaiou and Lykogianni (2006) asserted that neighbourhood is a spatial scale of importance for women with young children, as they make the best of what is available in their evolving everyday lives, and that, in a potentially unfriendly or disabling environment, they find ways to appropriate spaces, find safety and create home. They found that informal social networks among women were important for building

21

familiarity and community, and could become a starting point for collective action; they also highlighted how the neighbourhood was not a bounded space, but rather a "meeting-point of constellations of relations, some of which extend far beyond their 'local' area..." (p.741). These authors have explored the neighbourhood experience of women across the life-course, including those living in areas characterised by a low socioeconomic status, and my own research may resonate with their findings.

Vaiou and Lykgoianni defined neighbourhood as the "collective activities and practices of people living in a specific place, their social networks, face-to-face contacts, ideas of belonging…" (p. 733). This sounds, to me, like one way to define the concept of "community", a term often used to refer to a specific geographic location and the people in it. It is also an important term when it comes to understanding SoP (Butz & Eyles, 1997). McDowell (1999), while emphasizing the important role of community in the everyday life of women, stressed that the word is often taken for granted and used normatively as an unproblematic and inherently positive concept signifying solidarity and belonging (similar to Forrest and Kearns' warning about social cohesion). Members of a particular place-based community may be unified by their residential location, but certain members may feel in place while others may feel alienated and insecure. Community involves both inclusion and exclusion, and the construction of a particular community will inevitably create division between the inside and outside. McDowell (1999) expressed that community "remains a useful term as long as its construction through unequal relations of power is remembered... the complexity of its construction and purpose should be the subject of analysis" (p.101). Ideas of community may come into play with regards to gathering places and neighbourhood SoP, and thus McDowell's warning must be heeded in my own research.

1.6   Understanding Sense of Place

SoP is a concept that has been used in a variety of disciplines and through a variety of approaches; scholars have tried to measure and "make sense of" SoP through surveys and scales, and have explored SoP through forms of art and historical perspectives, from a phenomenological approach, community and environmental psychology, sociology, forestry, anthropology, public health, and geographical disciplines. It is often associated with ideas of place attachment, sense of community, and sense of belonging. It is difficult to provide an all-encompassing, absolute definition of SoP due to its multiple meanings and conceptualizations. An overarching, broad way to define SoP, that incorporates the various work done in human geography exploring the concept, is as the outcome of the relationship that people develop with places (DeMiglio & Williams, 2008) including "the way in which humans invest their surroundings with meaning" (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004, p.351). Whatever product results from a people-place relationship will be influenced by numerous factors.

In his work exploring a neighbourhood in Townsend, England, John Eyles (1985) defined SoP as an interactive relationship between daily experience of a (local) place and perceptions of one's place-in-the-world. SoP encompasses "the totality of one's life", which means that in conceptualizing SoP we must account for the experiential aspects of place, such as our feelings about and the personal significance we ascribe to a place, the social aspects, as well as larger structures, mechanisms and forces that are not directly accessible to the human experience, imbued with unequal relations of power, that shape our lives and thus our SoP (Eyles, 1985). This interactive relationship makes SoP a complex concept that can never be definitively articulated. Despite its complexity and the variety of ways it had been defined and approached, Butz and Eyles (1997, p.6) proposed three general characteristics of the SoP concept:

1) "social interaction, place and sense of place are mutually constitutive. They are all necessarily implicated in one another…"

2) "senses of place are never purely individual or purely collective… place meanings may be highly private, but they are nevertheless grounded in a communicatively rationalized life world"

3) "an individual's senses of place are unlikely to be stable or unitary… the places and social processes through which they are constituted are continuously changing"; the various communities people are a part of and subjectivities they hold may result in different, overlapping or even contradictory attitudes about a place.

Thus, SoP is a socio-spatial phenomenon, it is both personal and communal, and it is dynamic and multifaceted. Some scholars have argued that a local SoP does not matter in a world that is in flux, where there are high levels of mobility and global movement of capital, and where few places are left unmarked by these global forces. People often still do, however, "commonly have a single local place with which we live out the majority of our lives and with which we most identify" (Eyles & Williams, 2008, p. 203). For most of the world's population, everyday life is very much concentrated in their locale and involves direct, face-to-face encounters; there are many forces, however, at scales above the neighbourhood, that shape peoples' everyday lives in their particular place, such as labour patterns, migration, the formal and informal economy, and policies that dictate how resources are distributed and what opportunities and supports are available to people (Dyck, 2005; McDowell, 1999). Having a "strong" or "positive" SoP has been associated with health and quality of life, and as an important aspect of an individual's identity (DeMiglio & Williams, 2008). People can identify positively or negatively with a place, not identify at all with a place, thus there are varying

degrees to which people experience SoP (Rose, 1995). It is also important to note that an individual's SoP changes over time, along with one's life experiences and circumstances, and as the places themselves change. By exploring neighbourhood SoP, we can begin to understand environmental, psycho-social, emotional, and political forces that shape residents' experience of living in urban neighbourhoods, how people find meaning in the landscapes of their daily life, and how it contributes to their identity, actions, and well-being.

There is limited research focused on SoP at the neighbourhood scale. In her research regarding neighbourhood revitalization, Billig (2005) described SoP of the residential environment as an inter-subjective construct, affected by perceptions of physical characteristics, feelings and behaviours of residents and the interactions between them. She explored the relationship between different senses of place in areas of revitalization where older and newer housing complexes existed side-by-side. Williams et al. (2010) conducted a neighbourhood-based survey exploring neighbourhood SoP in Hamilton in different areas of the city, which highlighted the importance of age and residential longevity, as well as socioeconomic status, to SoP. Those living in a neighbourhood with a higher socioeconomic status, who were older and who lived in a neighbourhood for a long time had a stronger SoP. Williams and Kitchen (2012) also conducted a more recent quality of life survey in three different neighbourhood clusters in Hamilton, which included questions related to SoP at the neighbourhood scale. Similar to the results of the earlier study, SoP was higher among older residents and those who had lived in their neighbourhood for 5 years or longer and had a significant relationship to self-perceived mental health (Williams & Kitchen, 2012).

Graham Rowles (1978) explored the geographical experience of older people by following five residents of a working-class inner-city neighbourhood over a period of two years,

and his study illustrates some of the principles of SoP highlighted by Butz and Eyles. Each individual's experience and response was unique despite their shared environmental context; there were, however, common underlying themes including a vicarious participation in distant locations such as the homes of their children, or in places of the past. Rowles asserted that there is a subtle complexity making up the totality of older people's experience, and various interwoven themes that help us understand their relationship with their environment. For Rowles' participants, their neighbourhood was both a physical setting and a social entity; their geographic experience of it depended on their biographies, their involvement in the history of the place, their relationships and daily activities. He proposed a framework that considered older people's geographical experience, or SoP, "in terms of the whole integrated person, recognizing the uniqueness of the individual, but at the same time seeking to express the interrelatedness among the various dimensions of geographical experience which is common to all individuals" (p. 37). He proposed four modalities of their SoP: action, orientation, feeling, and fantasy, which highlighted the importance of imaginary places or places of the past. This framework is important to consider in terms of the common themes as well as unique differences between my own research participants' experience of their neighbourhood.

A feminist lens of the SoP concept challenges us to explore it with an appreciation of diversity of experience, a recognition of power relations across scales and how those impact peoples' relationships with places (McDowell, 1999; Rose, 1995). In a global culture characterized by interconnection and change, SoP is not necessarily grounded by rootedness and stability, and there can be problematical senses of place that lead to division and antagonism (Massey, 1994). Gillian Rose (1995) raised some challenging questions in her exploration of SoP as being constructed by underlying power structures, with boundaries as a distinct functional

characteristic. Senses of place, like the concept of community, can involve the establishment of spatial boundaries that mark social difference, which is related to scholarship around place and social exclusion. SoP can have a dual function of establishing insiders (those who belong to that place) and outsiders who do not belong. Rose asked questions that link SoP with power: "Whose sense of place is more powerful in a particular situation? Whose sense of place has to fight to be expressed? Why are some senses of place negative for some people?" (Rose, 1995, p.99). Earlier on, I explored geographies of fear, and how fear has a significant impact on social interaction, use of space and quality of life. It is likely to be one of those aspects of "the totality of one's life" (Eyles, 1985) that impacts women's SoP, and perhaps results in a negative SoP.

An example of how senses of place are constructed by power relations is when "one sense of place becomes so dominant that it obscures other, perhaps more important, understandings of that same place" (Rose, 1995, p.100). How does an urban planner or developer's SoP of a particular neighbourhood impact decisions that are made with respect to resources allocated and housing development? Would this SoP interfere with the SoP of local residents, and result in potentially harmful outcomes? How do representations of places by the media, or widespread reputations of places, impact the SoP of those living in that particular area? These are questions I hope to be able to explore in my research. While senses of place are intertwined with power relations and can exclude and alienate those who are deemed "other", they are also extremely personal and may be linked with someone's history in a certain area, their attachment to specific people or places, and the activities they do or do not participate in. This brings us back to Eyles' definition that links SoP with the totality of one's experience, and the importance of considering the relationship between individual and social/political forces in shaping SoP.

1.7   Understanding Gathering Places

The concept of the "third place" was introduced by Ray Oldenburg in the 1980s, and has since been adopted by urban planners, business people, sociologists, and others, to give a name to the everyday, informal public places that are away from one's home (the first place) and work (the second place) environments (Oldenburg, 1989; Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Third places are sites of sociability, and in their ideal form, they are equalizers for people coming from different walks of life. Community centers, libraries, cafes, pubs and public parks can be third places, and they are ideally located in one's neighbourhood within walking distance of where they live (Oldenburg, 1997). Third places provide an accessible, welcoming space for people of different backgrounds to engage with each other regardless of their age, background, abilities or social status; thus they can be key sites of social support, spontaneous encounter and community engagement. (Oldenburg, 1989; Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Oldenburg's later work (1997) warned us of the decline of such places, caused by the development of post-war suburbia. He emphasized the many reasons why third places continue to matter and their various functions in neighbourhoods: they help unify neighbourhoods; they can be points of entry for visitors and newcomers; they are places where people with common interests can find each other; they help care for the neighbourhood, specifically due to the people who run them and are invested in the community; they can provide forums for political discussion; they can form natural support groups and networks of mutual aid, and; they foster friendship (Oldenburg, 1997).

While my initial research plan began with Oldenburg's notion of the third place as an informal public place outside of home and work, I have decided to use the term *gathering place* to replace and expand upon it. The Dictionary definition of gathering place is "a favourite haunt (frequently visited place) where people gather" (www.thefreedictionary.com). Gathering places

can include the informal public places that Oldenburg describes, but are not limited to such places. There are many people who may not have a workplace outside of their place of residence, who may not have a stable home, or may feel excluded from certain places deemed "public", which is a contested term in itself. People may also create their own gathering places independent of commercial or public infrastructure. I am interested in learning about what types of gathering places exist for the participants in my research. They may adhere to the qualities of "third places" outlined by Oldenburg, they may have some qualities but not others, or additional qualities that are unexpected or that have not yet been documented.

There is little scholarship, however, that has focused specifically on peoples' experiences of gathering places and how they impact the everyday lives of individuals in their neighbourhood, especially from a feminist perspective. Scholars have described how neighbourhood gathering places such as cafes, libraries, community centres, community gardens, and parks, can foster social capital and social support, build community and impact quality of life (Jeffres, Bracken, Jian, & Casey, 2009; Rosenbaum, Ward, Walker, & Ostrom, 2007). Baum and Palmer's (2002) study of 'opportunity structures' in Adelaide, Australia revealed that common community space, or the availability and accessibility of places for people to meet with each other are an important need for residents. Gathering places have also been described as alternative therapeutic landscapes, or places of care with therapeutic attributes, for example, in the form of a drop-in centre for cancer patients (Glover & Parry, 2006) or a community drop-in centre for people on the margins where supportive relationships are fostered (Conradson, 2003). Another unexpected gathering place with therapeutic attributes was explored in Laws' (2009) work with an 'alternative' psychiatric survivor group that intentionally gathered in a city park. While that park had a reputation of being dilapidated and dangerous, the members of the group

saw it as a safe place where they could gather on their own terms. Johnson (2010) explored the Kitchener Farmer's Market, and its function as an everyday place of consumption, a place of leisure, and a third place. She found that the market was a meaningful gathering place for its regulars, who felt connected to the people, to the place itself, and the activities that happened there. Johnson noted that "spaces the community collectively values (whether private and consumption-based or public and "community" based) become meaningful places where community is enacted and created" (p. 179). Her argument was that while the physical space of the market originally brought the people there, the social connections, ideas, and activities were what formed the community and made the market a meaningful place for its patrons.

It is also important to explore the concept of public space for this research and its relationship to gathering places and neighbourhood SoP. Public space has been the focus of many urban geographers, who have explored its role in enhancing democracy and promoting freedom of expression, as sites that bring people together across difference, that foster social interaction, active citizenship and resistance, and as an essential component of a healthy civic life. There is a wealth of literature about public space as it relates to urban design, issues of access and inclusion/exclusion, the increasing privatization and governmental control imposed on the use of public space, and the capacity to reclaim urban space for the public good. Public space is contested, but is still meaningful in terms of human, social and environmental development in communities (Amin, 2008; Bonilla, 2013; Mitchell, 1995). Critical questions about public space have also been raised, such as: *Who* are these spaces created for? Which bodies are not welcome? What are some constraining factors related to women's, and marginal groups', participation in the public sphere? Bondi and Rose (2003) described public space as "constituted by impositions, negotiations and contestations over which groups comprise the

public that has access to these spaces, for what purposes these spaces are used, and what visions of society urban public space embraces, enforces, produces and promotes" (p. 235).

One of the few studies I have come across that connects gender, public space and SoP took place in the Ravel in Barcelona, Spain (Ortiz, Garcia-Ramon, & Prats, 2004). The "Ramble de Ravel", a public plaza, was created by local authorities to project an image of an up-and-coming global city. This was constructed in the Ravel neighbourhood without a consideration of the interests of local residents, specifically women. The dominance of men in the plaza influenced women's experiences and use of the space, and few women spent extended amounts of time there. While the beautiful space and other revitalization initiatives in the neighbourhood engendered feelings of pride for female residents, there were also expressions of fear of gentrification, and insecurity on the part of long-term residents regarding the changing dynamics and middle class "newcomers" moving in. This research provides an example of gender as difference, how power operates at a local level, and how women can simultaneously experience contradictory senses of place. Scraton and Watson (1998) explored women's experience of public leisure space from a feminist perspective, implicitly "doing" intersectionality, by using difference as an analytical tool and exploring power relations regarding race, gender, class and age. They recognized that such differences lead to differences in levels of access and experience among the women. They explored the experience of both young mothers and elderly working class women in Leeds, England. Some of the shared experiences for both groups of women were that they associated leisure with friends, family, and local venues. Scraton and Watson summarized that "Women have multiple identities, at times sharing experiences as women, at others experiencing a group identity (for example as 'older women' or 'mothers') and often developing or experiencing very individual responses to specific historical, localized contexts

and within individual subjectivities" (p.135). Both of these studies highlight various aspects of identity including gender, race, class and age, the changing nature of cities, and how these impact women's experiences of urban space.

Kristen Day (2000) used the framework of an ethic of care to analyze women's experiences of public space, and to explain women's constraints as well as opportunities for enhancing well-being in public space. The ethic of care may generate constraints in women's experience of public space in terms of limited resources such as time, money, mobility, social interaction opportunities, and services; these constraints may be related to child-care responsibilities, inadequate and undervalued work, and prioritizing the needs of others. There are also constrained emotions such as fear and stress, constraining responsibilities of caregiving and domestic work, and constraining social norms and conditions such as oppressive urban design and planning, inequitable social conditions and oppressive public policy. In terms of possibilities and opportunities in women's use of public spaces, these include: giving care to and receiving care from friends and family; self-care through exercise, recreation, and rest; enhancing sense of community, for example through participation in women's groups or environmental activism, and; caring as a basis for feminist utopian environments that emphasize places that promote mutual care. Day's framework provides some insight for my own research in terms of potential qualities that women associate with gathering places and potential barriers to their participation in gathering places. Day also proposed how an ethic of care can contribute to community safety and address the issue of fear in urban spaces, which was explored above.

In this section, I have highlighted a variety of work in different disciplines that has explored the role and importance of gathering places in neighbourhood and community life, and the gendered experience of urban public space, both of which can inform my own study. What is

lacking is an in-depth, feminist exploration of what gathering places mean to specific groups of people in particular neighbourhoods, in order to better understand their role in individual and neighbourhood life and in relation to SoP; this is the focus of my own work.

1.8   Chapter Summary

I am interested in women's everyday experiences of their neighbourhood, particularly their participation in gathering places; while this literature review goes beyond the scope of my specific research questions, it provides a context and feminist understanding of urban geography and how women, with their various intersecting categories of identity, experience place. I have focused on the importance of the neighbourhood scale to the SoP concept, and reviewed the relevant literature on gathering places and public space. In my own research, there is much room for exploration, and the potential to bring forward women's voices in neighbourhood development and in larger policy discussions.

2. CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1   Introducing Hamilton, Ontario

Hamilton is a mid-sized city located in Southwestern Ontario, next to the Niagara Escarpment. The city has a waterfront and industrial sector to the north, a ''mountain'' to the south (which is really a section of the escarpment that is more elevated than the northern part of the city), a burgeoning arts community, a tough and dynamic inner city, expanding suburbs, a multitude of educational, health and social services and an abundance of nature trails and waterfalls, to name a few of Hamiton's features. Hamilton has many nicknames that are known by the general public both inside and outside of the city, some more appealing than others, such as: "Steeltown", "City of Waterfalls", and "The Hammer". Whatever identity people place on the city, it is one of great diversity, in terms of both its physical, social, and economic landscape. Hamilton, like other post-industrial cities, has seen the shrinking of its manufacturing workforce in recent years, specifically in the steel industry, and the economy is shifting. Hamilton is now a hub for health, education and social services. The city has also seen a surge in the arts scene in the lower city, and certain parts of the city reflect the globe as more new immigrants and refugees enter Hamilton.

The diversity of the social, physical and economic landscape in Hamilton also contributes to a somewhat divided city, where the "mountain" is seen by many as a very different community from the downtown, and the west end as a world apart from the east end. McMaster University, which is harboured in the west end, is both physically and culturally separated from Hamilton's downtown and east end, but is in the process of becoming an institution that engages with the broader Hamilton community (Deane, 2011). Little by little, the gaps between these various areas of our city are beginning to lessen. There has been both political talk and action

around "downtown revitalization", and Hamilton is being recognized by a place to invest in by other cities (Grover, 2012). Hamilton is evidently in a period of transition, and there is the potential to shape a future that improves the quality of life for everyone living here. I have already claimed my own attachment to Hamilton and commitment to living here and engaging with my community; thus, I am attentive to social research that takes place in the city, and to the changes that are happening in the downtown core and city at large. In this section I highlight local research and activities that are relevant to my research project.

2.2   Hamilton's Changing Social Landscape

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) released its social landscape report in the spring of 2011, which provides an analysis of recent social trends in the city. The report focused on significant socio-economic variables that are of concern to planners and social service organizations, placing specific emphasis on the issue of social exclusion, highlighting the increasing population of many of Hamilton's marginalized and vulnerable groups. These include: youth; seniors (specifically seniors living alone); families led by female lone parents; Aboriginals; visible minorities, and; recent immigrants (Mayo et al., 2011).

The social landscape report also discussed the state of various social indicators in Hamilton: incomes and poverty; health; housing; and civic engagement. Socioeconomic status (SES), housing conditions, and access to different resources and amenities vary greatly across the city. Overall, Hamilton has one of the highest poverty rates in Canada at 18.1% (Mayo & Fraser, 2009) and this is mainly concentrated within certain areas of the city, including but not limited to the downtown core, central east Hamilton, and the north-east industrial neighbourhoods. There is a great disparity between the highest and lowest income neighbourhoods, and certain groups are more vulnerable than others, including women. In light

of these inequities, social inclusion has been a priority at the City level (Hamilton Community Services, 2010) and there has been ongoing action and advocacy from various organizations in Hamilton, including the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR), the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI), the SPRC and the Hamilton Council on Aging (HCOA).

In terms of poverty and health, the link between the two and the inequities between neighbourhoods in Hamilton were clearly presented in the Hamilton Spectator's *Code Red* project (Buist, 2010). A work of health geography, *Code Red* looked at key health and social outcomes in Hamilton and analyzed them by neighbourhood. These outcomes included life expectancy, cardiovascular emergencies, use of acute-care hospital beds, birth weights, emergency room visits, mental illness, access to a family physician, education level, dwelling values, and more. There were striking disparities between the neighbourhoods of higher and lower socioeconomic status. For example, the data demonstrated a 21 year difference in life expectancy between the highest and lowest-ranking neighbourhoods. In the neighbourhood with the highest number of emergency room visits, there were 1291 visits/1000 people, compared to 97 visits/1000 people in the neighbourhood with the lowest number. In a lower city neighbourhood high school dropout rates were 267/1000 students compared to 3/1000 students in a suburban neighbourhood. These are only a few examples highlighting inequalities across our city. Figure 1 demonstrates how the "red" zones are mainly concentrated in Hamilton's lower city.

Overall Rankings Based on Cumulative Scores for 24 Health, Social and Economic Variables

Highest 20%

Middle 20%

Lowest 20%

no data

View All Rates/Rankings
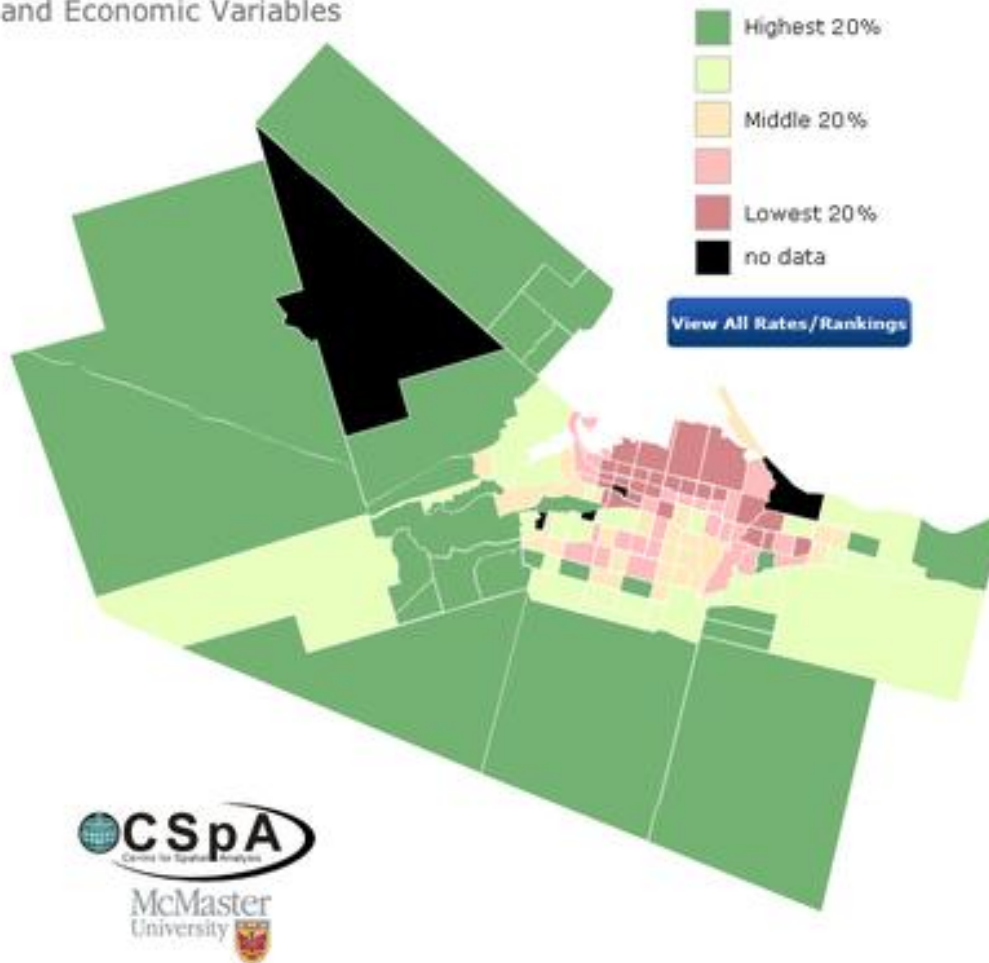
Figure 1: Code Red Map exhibiting cumulative neighbourhood rankings (Hamilton Spectator, 2010)

2.3   Issues Facing Single Women in Hamilton

In the fall of 2010, McMaster's School of Medicine held an Inner-City Health

Conference on campus and invited guest speakers from the *Code Red* project. After their

presentation, one of the audience members, who ended up facilitating a workshop I went to about

gender and poverty, asked if they had considered looking at *Code Red* using a gender-based

analysis. The speakers had no response, and gave no indication that they thought this would be

an important lens from which to explore inequalities in Hamilton. Figure 2 demonstrates the

poverty rates of selected groups in Hamilton by sex, and women's rates are higher in every group except for recent immigrants.
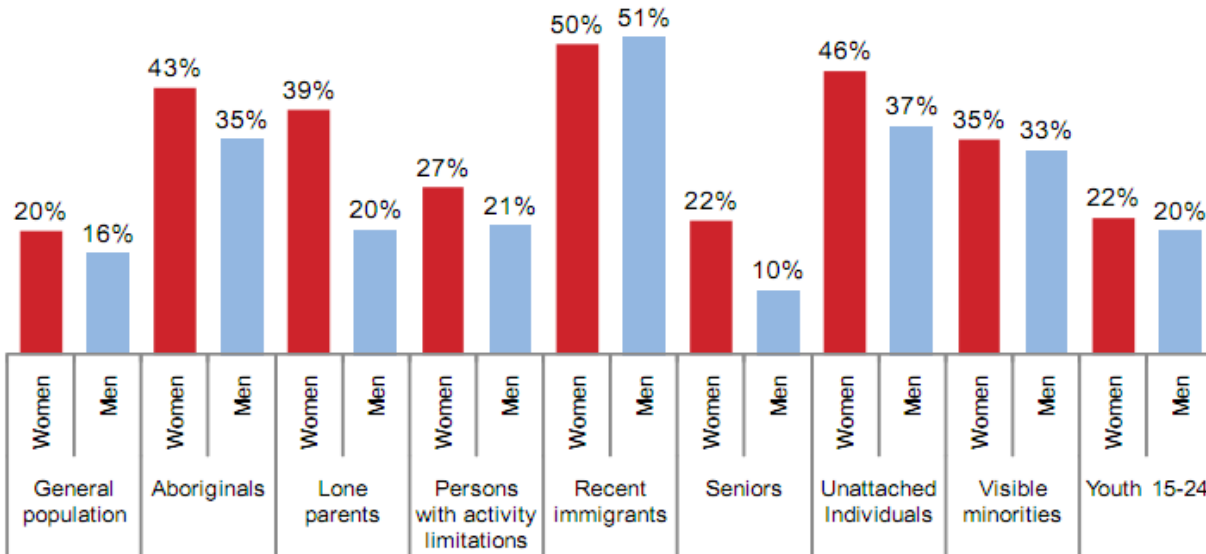
Figure 2: Percentage of persons living on incomes below the poverty line, by sex and selected groups, City of Hamilton, 2004 (Mayo & Fraser, 2009)

Issues of gender and inequality, however, have been recognized and acted on in a variety of ways in Hamilton. In May of 2010, the SPRC released another report about poverty in Hamilton, this time focusing on women. Women and children are more likely to be living with a low-income, and the "Women and Poverty in Hamilton" report explores some of the statistics and potential reasons why women are more vulnerable to poverty (Mayo, 2010). Women older than the age of 15 represent 43% of Hamilton's total low-income population, while men represent 32%. Hamilton's single women have the highest poverty rate in Ontario at 46%, as indicated in Figure 2 above. Single mothers have even higher poverty rates, which vary with the age of their children. Fifty-seven percent of single mothers with children under the age of 18 are living in poverty, compared to 30% of men. The poverty rate of single mothers with children under 6 years of age is even more striking at 71%. The SPRC made it clear that the links between gender and poverty are complex, and that different groups of women are affected in different

38

ways, which resonates with the feminist urban geography literature. For example, the racialization of poverty is also evident in Hamilton with 50% of new immigrant women and 51% of new immigrant men living in poverty. Some contributing factors to women's poverty are the provision of unpaid caregiving, lack of affordable and accessible child care, and low-wage, precarious work. Many women cannot acquire full-time jobs and part-time work may barely cover child care costs. Social assistance rates are also inadequate and do not reflect the cost of living (HRPR Social Assistance Reform Working Group, 2012).

Women are also much more likely to be victims of domestic violence, as was discussed in the literature review. Violence against women (VAW) is a global issue and one that impacts all of us here in Hamilton, although it is rarely discussed beyond a select group of front-line workers and advocates in the community. This issue was brought to light in the SPRC's report "Not to be Forgotten: Homeless Women in Hamilton" (Mayo, 2011a), and more recently in the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF)'s 2012 "Vital Signs" report (HCF, 2012). In Hamilton, women's shelters are constantly operating at or close to capacity and shelters often have to turn women away; there are also many women amongst the hidden homeless staying with friends or family members, or at risk of homelessness because of the proportion of their income that they are paying on rent, and trying to provide for their children. Single women and women who work in low-wage service jobs are included the groups in Hamilton that have a greater economic risk of homelessness.

2.3.1   Seniors in Hamilton

In 2011 the SPRC published their report entitled "A Profile of Vulnerable Seniors in Hamilton". Hamilton's proportion of seniors tends to be higher than other similar cities in Ontario, and the senior population is only continuing to rise. While the poverty rate of seniors

has declined between 2001 and 2006 (Mayo & Fraser, 2009), the actual number of seniors in

poverty continues to be high, especially in more densely-populated neighbourhoods in the lower

city. The SPRC identified certain groups of seniors as being more vulnerable, including

unattached seniors and senior women (Mayo, 2011b). The percentage of women living alone is

much higher than men and the gap increases as they age. For example, 28% of women between

the ages of 65 and 74 live alone and 14% of men; 52% of women between 80 and 84 live alone

and 21% of men. Senior women are also more vulnerable in terms of poverty, as they are more

likely to earn less than $15,000/year.

Contributing factors for these inequities could be that women receive less of a pension

due to having lower wages or less involvement in the paid labour force, as well as due to

providing unpaid caregiving. In terms of poverty rates, although the overall poverty rate of

seniors has decreased, the greatest gender gap among various groups of Hamilton living in

poverty is between seniors, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Senior women have a poverty rate of

22% while senior men have a poverty rate of 10%; the rates increase with unattached seniors,

where 43% of women and 10% of men live in poverty.

Other vulnerabilities of seniors in Hamilton include social isolation, chronic health

problems, and activity limitations. With the built form of cities catering to the automobile, and

the decline of public space, cities have become less senior-friendly, and the environment thus can

create a barrier to the social participation of seniors (Mayo, 2011b). Social isolation is linked

with poverty as well as negative health outcomes; thus, the vulnerabilities of seniors, like any

select group, are complex and interlinked. The HCOA has set out recommendations and action

steps for Hamilton to become an Age-Friendly City (HCOA 2010), and hopefully some of the

recommendations that come out of my own research will complement their efforts.

2.4   Hamilton's Response to Poverty

In 2005, following the release of the SPRC's 2004 report "Incomes and Poverty In

Hamilton". the HRPR was born, and came up with the motto "Making Hamilton the Best Place

to Raise a Child". The HRPR is comprised of a variety of individuals and organizations in the

community, including City staff, anti-poverty activists, individuals living on a low-income,

health care professionals, educators and more. They are local leaders in pushing for policy

change related to poverty reduction. A recent example of this is the key role they played in

advocating for Social Assistance Reform (HRPR Social Assistance Reform Working Group,

2012). Other action priorities include advocating for a living wage, tracking poverty reduction,

school nutrition, a National Poverty Plan, social inclusion, and shifting attitudes about poverty

(HRPR, 2012).

Another high-level response to the issue of poverty in Hamilton came from the HCF, who

initiated *Tackling Poverty Together* (TPT) in 2004, which promotes an assets-based community

development (ABCD) approach to poverty reduction, focused on neighbourhoods. Through TPT

the HCF provides grants related to the prevention, alleviation and reduction of poverty. The HCF

is currently supporting "neighbourhood hubs" through *TPT Part 2: Building Strong*

Communities. A neighbourhood hub is "a local collaborative with a strong resident voice. It is an

existing structure focused on centralized community work to reduce and prevent poverty" (HCF,

2010). The hubs represent areas of the city marked by high levels of poverty and other

socioeconomic challenges. Each hub has a team of residents and service providers and they act

according to the unique needs of the area, using an asset-based and capacity-building framework

for community development. The hubs are not all official neighbourhoods planning units as

defined by the City of Hamilton (City of Hamilton, 2010), however, they are all centralized

around one or more neighbourhoods or a significant community site such as a school or community centre.

Poverty is complex, and while it is most popularly defined by income, it is also connected to housing, employment, social inclusion, education, health, and migration, all of which are also interconnected. The City has recognized that a collaborative and multi-sectoral approach is required to address poverty and improve the quality of life for all residents in Hamilton. In response to the results of the *Code Red* study, the City of Hamilton hired a Director of Neighbourhood Development in the fall of 2010, whose role was to design and facilitate the implementation Hamilton's Neighbourhood Development Strategy (NDS). The initial proposal for the NDS was released by the City of Hamilton in the summer of 2011, and the NDS will serve to better coordinate staff and resources across City departments to improve service delivery in local neighbourhoods and help the City develop stronger relationships with neighbourhood residents and stakeholders (Johnson, 2011). In concert with the NDS, door-to-door surveys tracking quality of life outcomes are being conducted in partnership with McMaster University to track how residents are doing in the various neighbourhoods. The NDS is working closely with the HCF, in order to build on and complement their existing TPT Part 2 project. The strategy has involved hiring a team of community development workers who are working with residents and key stakeholders in neighbourhood planning. Residents and stakeholders will identify priority projects to be supported by increased investment in the community and a variety of indicators will by tracked by research and evaluation. Finally, the NDS will attempt to align these projects with funding from higher levels of government and with other partners in the City (Johnson, 2011). In addition to the neighbourhood hubs originally supported by the HCF, the

other areas included in the NDS are the Beasley and Stinson neighbourhoods. All of the priority

neighbourhoods are illustrated in the map below in Figure 3.
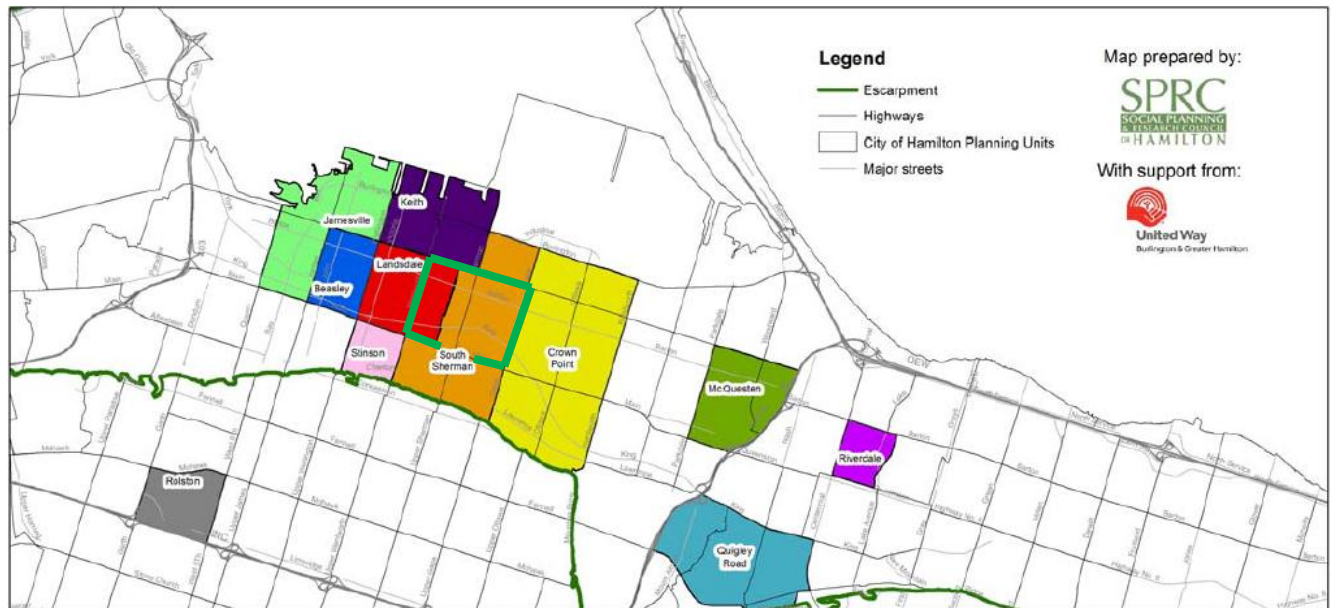
Figure 3: Hamilton's Neighbourhood Development Strategy Boundaries (SPRC, 2012)

Larger institutions and organizations are often recognized over and above the daily on-

the-ground advocacy of committed citizens. It is also important to recognize the work of

grassroots advocacy groups and individuals who have been working for years and attempting to

build awareness about poverty in Hamilton, and strategize to reduce poverty rates and create an

adequate standard of living for everyone. Such groups include the Campaign for Adequate

Welfare and Disability Benefits (CAWDB), the Income Security Working Group, and the Living

Wage Coalition, to name a few (Eby, 2008); some earlier groups have evolved into other

coalitions such as Hamilton Organizing for Poverty Elimination (HOPE).

2.5   Research Setting: The Gibson and Stipley Neighbourhoods

My own research is set in the City of Hamilton's Gibson and Stipley neighbourhoods,

which, for convenience, I will refer to as "the neighbourhood" or "Gibson-Stipley" in the

majority of this thesis. One of the main landmarks of the neighbourhood is the Ivor Wynne

43

Stadium, which hosts the games of our iconic local football team, the Hamilton Tigercats, or the "Ticats" for short. Much of Gibson-Stipley is residential, with several schools and parks scattered throughout, and industrial lands dominating the landscape just north of the train tracks. The map in Figure 4 below, designed by local artist Matt Jelly (2011), features the Gibson (blue) and Stipley (yellow) neighbourhoods. Barton Street is a well-known main street that crosses through the neighbourhood headed east and west, where there are a variety of three-storey buildings with second-hand stores, delis, restaurants, bakers and variety stores at the street level, along with many abandoned storefronts. Gage Park is just to the south-east of the neighbourhood, at Main and Gage, and is a popular destination for residents all over Hamilton, especially those who live in the lower city. There is one grocery store, *Fresh Co*, located at the corner of Gage and Barton. There are also a couple of recreation centres and non-profit agencies, such as food banks, located in the area. While the neighbourhood is often characterized as a "poor, inner-city neighbourhood", or more recently a "Code Red neighbourhood", there are many assets to the neighbourhood. Local journalist Joey Coleman (2012), based on his own experience of growing up in Gibson, decided to write about its strengths on his website, in response to a surge of media coverage early in 2012 that narrowly focused on violent crime in the neighbourhood. Among the many positive aspects of the neighbourhood, he highlighted the Barton Library and the various parks as integral to the community.
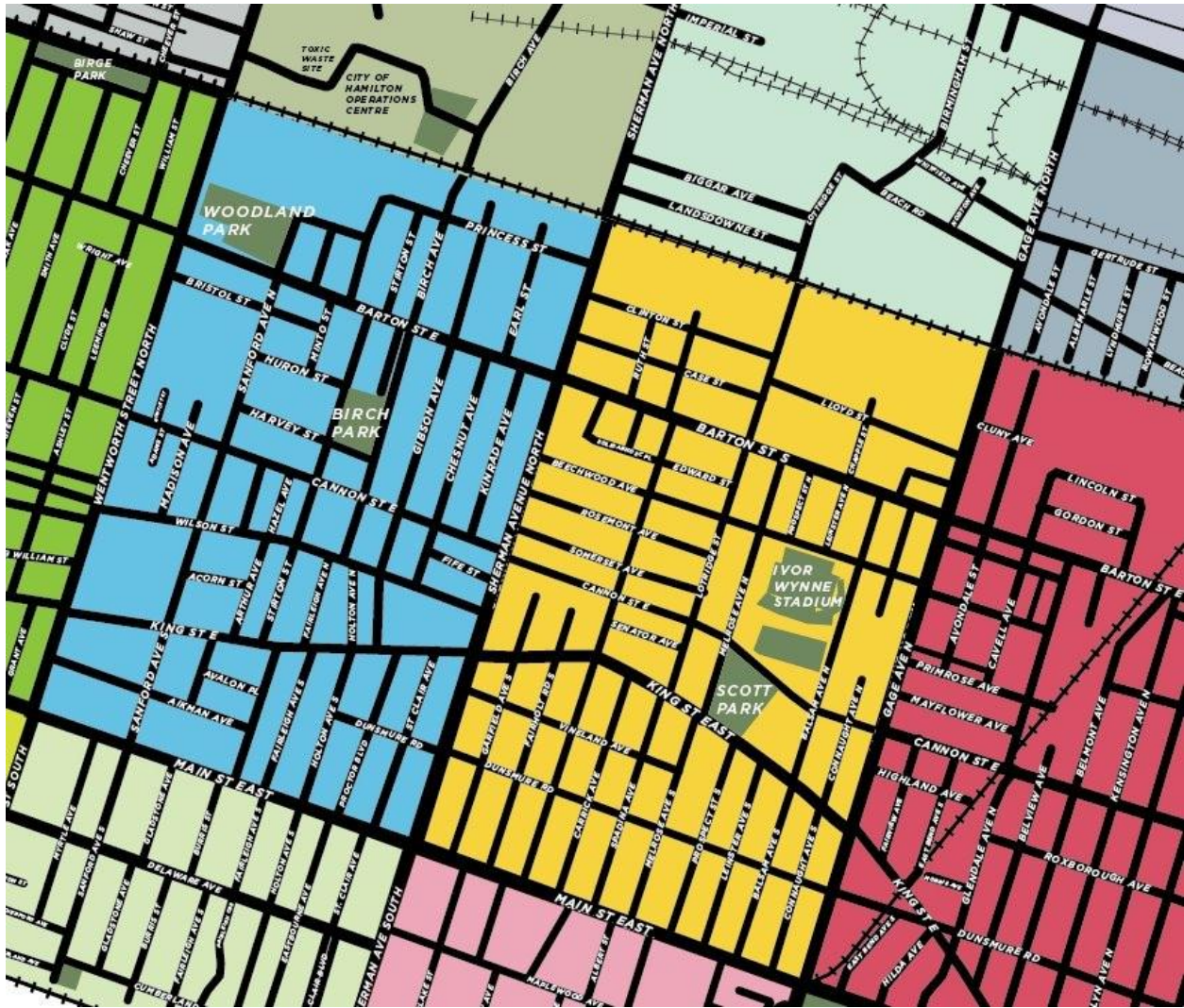
Figure 4: Map featuring the Gibson and Stipley neighbourhoods (Jelly, 2011)

Gibson-Stipley is considered to be a part of one of the neighbourhood "hubs" that has become a priority neighbourhood in the City of Hamilton's NDS, the South Sherman Hub. The boundaries of this hub have evolved over the years, and the South Sherman Hub boundaries have now extended north beyond Barton Street and the CN tracks, as indicated in the Figure 3 above, where Gibson-Stipley is outlined in green. Table 1 below highlights some of the neighbourhood statistics (comprised of four census tracts) based on the 2006 Census data from Statistics Canada. While the data comprises four relatively small census tracts, it is important to note that there are some disparities even between those bounded areas.

	Hamilton	Gibson-Stipley
Population in 2006	692,911	14,748
Population Change (%)	4.6	-4.3
% lone parent families	16.4	32.0
% lone parent families led by female	82.5	84.1
% seniors living alone	27.5	42.1
% 5-year Movers	38.2	47.9
% Aboriginal Identity	1.3	3.3
% Visible Minority	12.3	19.8
% Recent Immigrants	3.0	3.3
Unemployment Rate (15+)	6.0	10.3
% college or trades (25+)	32.5	25.0
% University (25+)	20.7	9.1
Median family income	$74823	$42706
Median individual income (15+)	$28416	$18396
Median individual income for Females (15+)	$24557	$15855
Median family income lone-parent families	$39223	$22762
Prevalence of low-income families	12.3	33.6
Prevalence of low-income unattached individuals	37.6	56.5
Prevalence of low-income families led by female lone parent	36.1	67.7
Prevalence of low-income unattached females	42.3	64.9
% occupied private dwellings owned	71.6	50.2
% occupied private dwellings rented	28.4	49.8

Table 1: Selected Census Data for Gibson- Stipley, compared with the City of Hamilton (Statistics Canada, 2006)

As indicated in Table 1, there are high levels of poverty, high rates of lone parent families, low rates of post-secondary education, and high rates of mobility in the neighbourhood of study. The median individual income is much lower in this neighbourhood than Hamilton as a whole, and a high percentage of individuals live below the poverty line, especially female lone parents. The map below in Figure 5 provides a visual example of the differences in poverty rates among women in Hamilton by neighbourhood, with the research setting outlined in green.
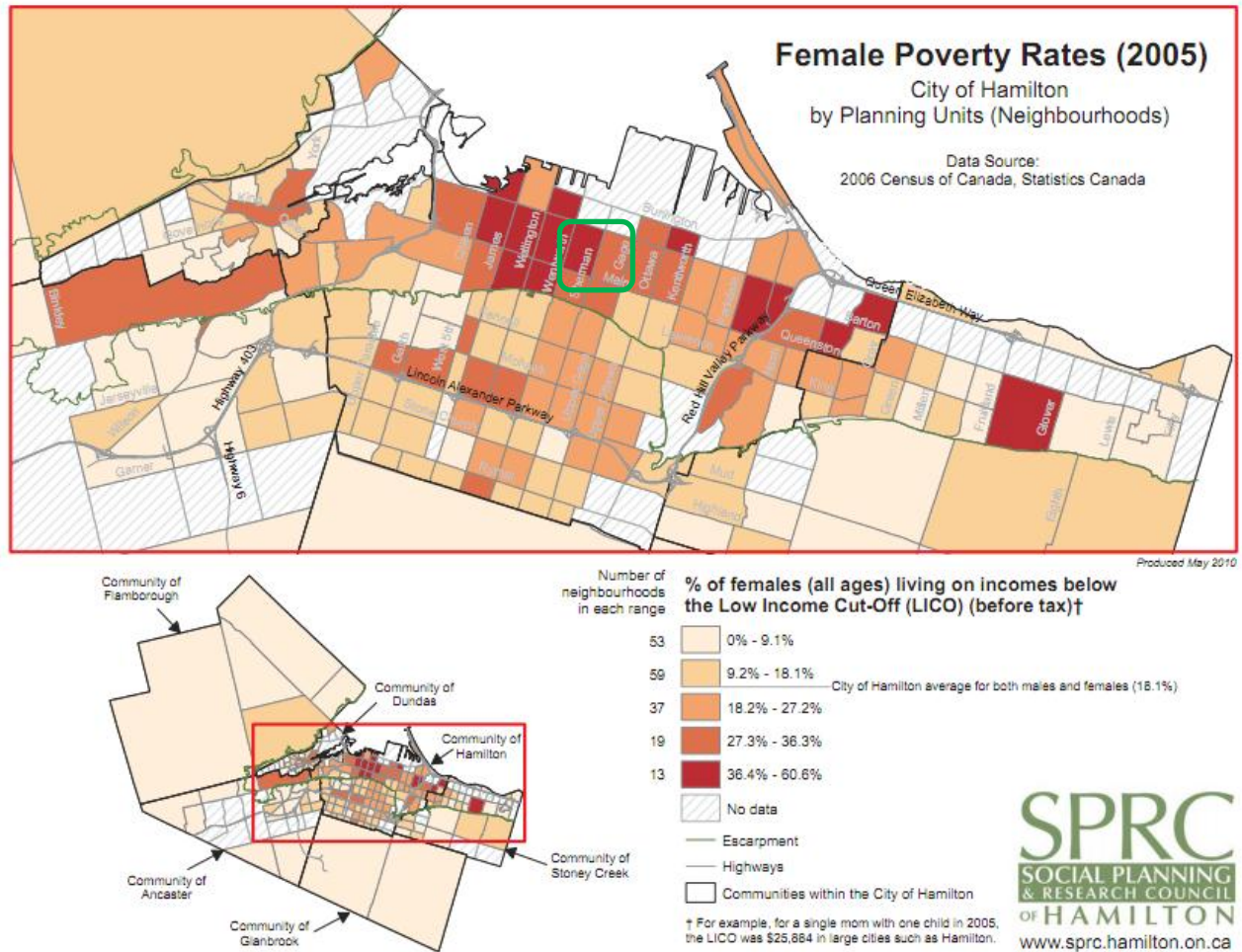
Figure 5: Female Poverty Rates in Hamilton (Mayo, 2010)

Another issue impacting the research neighbourhood is school closures. As indicated in

the SPRC's Social Landscape Report (Mayo et al., 2011), school closures have been on the rise

in the City, due to a decline in the population of children in Hamilton, thus leading to declining

school enrollment. Due to limited school board budgets, closing down schools with declining

enrollment is a mathematical decision which leaves a large impact on neighbourhoods

surrounding those schools. Hamilton now has twenty fewer schools than it did a decade ago.

Many school closures have occurred in the east lower city where the majority of the

neighbourhoods with higher poverty rates are located. Schools are seen as ''hubs'' themselves where children, youth and adults are able to connect and find a place in the community. Whether it is informal socializing or participation in after-school and day programming, schools are strategic assets that can keep existing residents and attract new residents to neighbourhoods. Thus, school closures have an impact that reaches beyond the building and the teachers and students (Eby, Kitchen & Williams, 2012; Mayo et al., 2011).

In the last 10 years, Gibson-Stipley has seen the closure of three elementary schools: Sanford Avenue School, Gibson School, and King George School. In 2015, they will also see the closure of Parkview Secondary School, which offers a hands-on, innovative and supportive learning environment for students with special needs, such as learning disabilities. Scott Park is another neighbourhood high school that closed in 2001, and for the most part sits empty with the exception of the attached Jimmy Thompson pool and the Scott Park arena. In May of 2012, after a long Accommodation Review process initiated by the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), the HWDSB Trustees accepted the recommendation of the North Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) to close Parkview along with two others in the lower city. This decision was met with disapproval by the students, parents, and residents in the neighbourhoods surrounding the schools, but the decision had already been made. It is a decision that was seen by many as short-sighted, and that went against the City's current efforts to "revitalize" the lower city and "Make Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child". That being said, the schools that do remain open in the neighbourhood – Prince of Wales, Cathy Wever, St. Ann's, and Parkview – are vibrant, active schools that offer programs and civic engagement opportunities to students, their parents and the wider neighbourhood. Table 2 provides a summary of the neighbourhood schools and their current status.

Name of School	Current Status
Cathy Wever Elementary School	Open
Gibson Elementary School	Closed (2009)
King George Elementary School	Closed (2012)
Parkview Secondary School	Open (slated to close in 2015)
Prince of Wales Elementary School	Open
Sanford Avenue Elementary School	Closed (2010)
Scott Park Secondary School	Closed (2001)
St Ann Catholic Elementary school	Open

Table 2: Summary of the status of Gibson-Stipley schools

Several research projects out of McMaster University have taken place in these and surrounding neighbourhoods. Dr. Allison Williams and Dr. Peter Kitchen of McMaster University recently implemented a Quality of Life telephone survey in three different neighbourhood clusters in Hamilton representing low, mixed and high SES. The results of their research can be found in the special issue of *Social Indicators Research*, Volume 108, Issue 2 (2012). The survey included a set of questions related to neighbourhood SoP. Gibson- Stipley was a part of the low SES cluster, and this cluster was found to have the lowest SoP score out of the three different clusters in the city. In this cluster, SoP was higher among older residents and residents who had lived in the neighbourhood for 5 years or longer. SoP scores also had a significant relationship to self-perceived mental health, with the mean SoP score highest for those who perceived their mental health as "Excellent/very good" (Williams & Kitchen, 2012).

In 2010, the School of Nursing spearheaded a community-based research project in partnership with three neighbourhood hubs, entitled *Health in the Hubs.* Phase 1 of *Health in the Hubs* explored the main issues affecting the health and happiness of people living in the

neighbourhoods. For the South Sherman Hub, they identified illegal activities (including crime, drugs, prostitution, theft, and break and enter), quality of neighbourhood life (including needing a sense of community, better pet ownership, access to amenities and air pollution), property issues (such as irresponsible landlords, unregulated multi-unit dwellings and access to safe and affordable housing) and cleanliness as their main issues (Semogas et al., 2011). *Phase 2: Street Smarts – Book Smarts* has moved the project further, and efforts in South Sherman are currently underway to focus on the priorities of beautification and community safety.

The South Sherman Hub has been active for the past four years and have been developing a NAP along with the other NDS priority neighbourhoods. Not included in the map, but also part of the NDS, is the "Stadium Precinct", which is a defined area surrounding the Ivor Wynne stadium, and located within the South Sherman hub, that will be developed for the Pan Am games in 2015 (City of Hamilton, 2012a). The NDS is responsible to ensure that the stadium development has a long-term, positive impact on the local community, and that residents have a say in how the stadium development unfolds. All of these local issues and initiatives – poverty reduction, community development, school closures - are relevant to my research, as my participants are single women, both single mothers and older women, who are part of identified vulnerable groups, and who live within the area that currently has the City's attention and where community development efforts are happening.

This chapter has provided contextual information about the social landscape of Hamilton and current local efforts in poverty reduction and neighbourhood development. My research is timely in that it has coincided with the launch of the NDS, the Accommodation Review process for local schools, and the Pan Am Stadium development. I will now move on to Chapter 3, the Methods and Methodology.

3. CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

"For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" – Audrey Lorde (1997, p.54)

3.1 Introduction to Practising Feminist Research

Two years ago, I would not have described myself as a "feminist"; learning about the geography of gender and reading the work of various feminist scholars has convinced me, that I am, in fact, a feminist, and has challenged me to employ a feminist politics and way of relating to the world in my scholarship and actions outside of academia. "Feminism requires a commitment to expose and challenge the web of forces that cause and sustain all and any forms of oppression, for both our sisters and brothers, our daughters and sons," wrote Patricia Maguire (2001, p.60), in her chapter on feminist-grounded action research. Whether labelled as feminist, participatory, action-oriented, or critical scholarship, a basic principle is that such scholars seek not only to understand the world, but to change it for the better, and to create a more just world for everyone (Askins, 2009; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2010; Maguire, 2000). My own understanding of feminist geographies and of what feminism means in my everyday life continues to evolve as I am exposed to additional perspectives and experiences. This means I will always be thinking about how I am living out feminism and staying true to a feminist methodology; there will always be tensions and uncertainties.

Pamela Moss's (2002) chapter about approaching and doing feminist research reiterates helpful definitions of methodology and method. A *methodology* is "a theory and analysis of how research should proceed", thus has to do with *approaching* research; *Methods* are "techniques used in gathering evidence", and thus have to do with *doing* research (Moss, 2002, p.2). I have taken on a feminist methodological approach for my research, and such a methodology can

encompass a wide variety of methods. There is no method that is inherently feminist; the values

and ethics we adhere to, however, and the way we analyze our research, relate to our

participants, and disseminate our research can align with a feminist ethic and a feminist politics.

This is what I have tried to do throughout the entire research process. As Moss (2002) asserted:

> *Being feminist matters when taking on research in geography in that a feminist politics –*
> *whether it be based on pro-woman, anti-oppression, or based on social justice –*
> *influences all aspects of the research process. Thinking about feminist research tends to*
> *sharpen an approach to a project in that understanding power and knowledge brings*
> *into focus the varied contexts within which research takes place. Doing feminist research*
> *means actually undertaking the task of collecting and analyzing information while*
> *engaging a feminist politics.* (p.3)

My research, which I have already labelled as feminist research, was also highly

motivated by a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. PAR encompasses various

participatory approaches to action-oriented research, and thus, like feminist research, can include

a variety of methods. Geographers Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2010) define PAR as involving

"researchers and participants working together to examine a problematic situation or action to

change it for the better… challenging the traditionally hierarchical relationships between

research and action, and between researchers and 'researched'" (p.18). PAR advocates for

research to be a process that involves shared ownership, and where the communities involved in

the research see its benefits. PAR, like feminist research, has a political commitment to seeking

just processes and outcomes, and it sees non-researchers (or community members) as equal

partners in all phases of the research process. The project is introduced, planned and

implemented by the researcher along with the community (Staggs, 2008). I cannot claim that

mine was truly a "participatory" project, because the research design, data collection and data

analysis were highly controlled by myself. Participatory principles, however, have informed my

way of engaging in research. PAR pays attention to the community as a holistic entity; it is

collaborative; it involves the sharing of knowledge and skills; uses an ecological perspective; it is intimately informed by real-world concerns; and it carries a long-term commitment to giving back to the community (Staggs, 2008).

From herein, I will describe my research as a work of feminist community research (FCR). This way of describing my methodology will help me bring together principles of both feminist research and PAR, and explain how I employed them in my own work. Wendy Frisby and Gillian Creese (2011) stated that FCR has the aim of "producing knowledge that will contribute in some way to creating a more just society" (p.1). This is a very broad aim in my own research exploring neighbourhood SoP and gathering places from a feminist perspective. This in-depth, qualitative case study approach brings forward the perspectives of single women who may have been unheard and/or excluded in neighbourhood planning processes or community development initiatives thus far. I have learned and am sharing what gathering places matter to this specific group of women and why, and of their vision of the neighbourhood they want to live in.

This chapter outlines both my methodological approach (FCR case study) and the research methods I employed. I will first explore key concepts of FCR in relation to myself and my research, and then describe the research methods and how I attended to rigour in qualitative research. Because of the my attention to principles of FCR and the efforts I have taken to write myself into the research process and reflect on my positionality, this chapter is longer than a traditional Methods chapter would be.

3.2 Core Principles of Feminist Community Research

3.2.1 Reflexivity

In FCR, reflexivity as a core principle and an ongoing process. Kim England (1994) defined reflexivity as "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher" (p.244). Reflexivity is about interrogating how differences in power and privilege shape research relationships in diverse contexts, and about critiquing and changing our own research practices (Frisby & Creese, 2011; Maguire, 2001). It involves claiming our positionality, because we see the world from specific embodied locations, and asking questions around *who* defines knowledge and *who* benefits from the research (Maguire, 2001). Since deciding on my research questions two years ago, it has been of utmost importance to me to conduct research that is not only relevant in academia, but relevant and, hopefully, beneficial to the participants, to the Gibson-Stipley neighbourhood, and to Hamilton.

Feminist geographers such as Kern, McDowell, Moss, and Valentine have challenged me to take into account my positionality, including my privilege. I cannot ignore where I have come from and how it has shaped my experience of Hamilton and sense of myself, and how it has also shaped my research. I have engaged with a neighbourhood I was initially less familiar with, and with female participants whose senses of place and feelings of safety and belonging (or perhaps fear and isolation) may have been quite different from mine for a multitude of reasons. The notion of the "postmodern city" - as a place that welcomes difference and multiple perspectives and as a democratized space characterized by choice and freedom - is appealing as well as misleading. There remain persistent power differences that render some people and bodies as "other" and "unwelcome" (Scraton & Watson, 1998). I must admit that I am one of those young, middle-class, educated, white heterosexual women that Scraton and Watson referred to, who is more dominant and welcome in the postmodern city. Indeed, I enjoy what the city offers in a

global era, in terms of new experiences and opportunities, but I must acknowledge my privilege and what allows me to live independently and confidently.

In my own neighbourhood downtown Hamilton, where I have chosen to live, I feel that I belong and that I have a voice. There are many men and women, however, who feel stuck here, and who do not participate in community meetings or events. There are women who experience violence in the home, women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and thus at risk of more violence and of death (Mayo, 2011a). There are senior women who live alone and struggle with illness and income insecurity, who are afraid to go out after dark, even if only to cross the street. How do they negotiate their neighbourhood? What factors are shaping their SoP that makes it different from mine? I have chosen a life in downtown Hamilton; I live in a comfortable apartment and am healthy and mobile, and I have friends nearby. I am at a stage in my life where I mainly see opportunities and openings, and I have a certain degree of control over what I do and my own well-being. While I am quite self-aware and sensitive to my power and privilege, this does not remove the tensions of unequal power dynamics or make my research any more "just". I can only act in recognition that I am an integral part of the research setting and the process, and produce "an account of the between-ness of their world [the participants] and mine" (England, 1994, p.251).

Valentine (2002) has drawn from other feminist scholars in her reflection on the research process. She wrote how the research process is always complex, uncertain and incomplete; as interviewers/researchers, "our performances can always be read against our intentions… we can never fully understand ourselves or the research process" (p.123). In my own everyday life in downtown Hamilton, my identity as a "Masters student" or as an "academic/researcher" plays much less of a role as I engage in community activism, participate in neighbourhood events,

volunteer, go to work at my part-time job, and shop at the market. I had to acknowledge that my student/researcher/academic identity – the one that I am least comfortable with *because* of its association with a powerful institution and with a hierarchy of knowledge- would likely be most prominent when I engage in this research. Just as I may have held certain notions in my mind of what it means to be a single mother living in a neighbourhood characterized as "low-income" and "inner city", which can be stigmatizing labels, they may have made their own assumptions about me as a young, privileged academic entering their lives, or as Kim England (1994) would say, intruding in their lives, and asking for their trust and cooperation.

I understand that the categories I have assigned to my research participants (single, mother, elderly, woman) are only a few of many intersecting categories of each woman's complex identity that will play out at a certain place and time. Identities are dynamic and contested – if I can never fully understand my *own* positionality, how will I be able to understand that of my participants (Moss, 2002; Valentine, 2002)? The multiple layers of their life experience would not be revealed in a one-hour interview, so, like my own knowledge, the knowledge they revealed would also be partial. I also must acknowledge that there are a whole range of emotions during the research process that shape it, and can both contribute to or create barriers to meaning-making (Askins, 2009; England, 1994). Reflexivity also involves being cognizant of how my emotions may be impacting my research relationships and data analysis.

I had concerns about entering a community that has already been a target for research and neighbourhood intervention, and a place where many of the residents who have participated in such research have not seen its benefits and feel overstudied (England, 1994; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2010). I asked myself certain questions at the beginning of the research process. Have I imposed an assumed place identity on the neighbourhood I will be conducting research in, with

its label of "low SES"? Have I made assumptions about the vulnerabilities and experiences of "single mothers" and "elderly women"? I have tried my best to refrain from both, to learn through the research process about the various senses of place that they possess and validate their knowledge and experience. I have tried to build relationships in my research that help break the academic/community divide, and relationships that honour the participants and the community throughout and beyond the research project. Yes, I hold a position of privilege, but I am also an active citizen of Hamilton committed to promoting the well-being of fellow residents, to social inclusion, and to grassroots neighbourhood development. I have seen how various injustices play out in the city and impact those with less material resources and less political power, and I strive to create more just relationships in everything I do. This passion for justice and my personal commitment to Hamilton and its people are strengths that I bring to the research.

3.2.2   *Voice and Silence*

FCR often focuses on the theme of "voice"`, or "giving voice" to those who are often silenced and on the margins of society, whose needs are not addressed and whose contributions are not valued. In FCR, participants are able to speak from and about their own experience (Maguire, 2001). The concept of "giving voice", similar to that of "empowerment" has been critiqued as being paternalistic and arrogant. I will not claim to "give voice" to the participants in my study, but I can listen to their voices and use my own to bring their stories and perspectives together and share them with the broader community. Doing FCR also involves recognizing and disrupting the silencing mechanisms that are prevalent in the everyday lives of our participants and communities, and in which we may even be implicated. Silencing mechanisms are at work in various forms of discrimination, and in policies that dictate what entitlements people are deserving of, for example, in social assistance policy, labour regulations, and the refugee

claimant process. We can participate in silencing through the way we produce knowledge or choose to only hear certain voices. Silencing mechanisms can also be the *lack* of accountability and transparency between decision-makers and the communities they work for. According to Maguire (2001), "we must see ourselves as part of the process of breaking apart the barriers for speakers and listeners, writers and readers, which are perpetuated through and act to support our privileged positions" (p. 62).

Silence breaking can be facilitated through supportive and challenging relationships, and Andrea Cornwall (2008) articulated this difficult and delicate possibility in her article on unpacking participation:

> *"Being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice. Voice needs to be nurtured. People need to feel able to express themselves without fear of reprisals or the expectation of not being listened to or taken seriously. And this, of course, cannot be guaranteed no matter how well-meaning the instigators of the process may be. While those who initiate participatory processes at the community level may create space for people to speak up and out, they have no control whatsoever over what may happen as a consequence"* (p.278).

In deconstructing the concept of voice, we must also be careful about appropriating and/or misrepresenting the voices of others. England (1994) asked whether or not appropriation is inevitable, because our participants share with us intimate details about their lives and we use their stories as "data". It is an ongoing process of negotiating and working within the tensions of representation and interpretation in research; as the researcher I have the final say around what questions get asked and what gets included in the research results. Through my research questions I have tried to uncover some of the silencing mechanisms that may be present in the lives of the participants and in the research context, and challenge them in the ways I have engaged with the participants and how I communicate my results.

3.2.3   Knowledge and Power

As explained in Chapter 1, power is relational and we are all tied up the webs of power relations that impact our agency in particular places and situations. Knowledge is intimately tied to power, as it is "embedded and reinforced in the dominant (i.e. positivist) knowledge production system" (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001, p.74) which maintains dualisms and hierarchies and displays certain ways of knowing and certain knowers as more valuable. FCR disrupts the hierarchy of knowledge that has placed so-called objective and universal knowledge at the top, and other types of knowledge, such as knowledge from feelings and experiences on the bottom. FCR has us questioning and reframing what counts as knowledge, who is "knowledgeable", and what knowledge is valued; it "seeks to connect the articulated, contextualized personal with the often hidden or invisible structural and social institutions that define and shape our lifes. How *do* things work? How do we contribute to the workings? How can we collectively change them?" (Maguire, 2001, p.65). One way of doing this is beginning with prioritizing womens' everyday experiences and feelings as a legitimate source of knowledge, and linking these with an understanding of the wider social relations that we participate in.

Part of my role as researcher is to effectively integrate the various knowledges that contribute to my research project: my own knowledge of the literature as well as my knowledge from experience and relationships in Hamilton; my own and the participants' knowledge about the study context; the participants' experiential knowledge; and my knowledge of policy and municipal processes. By integrating these knowledges, FCR can illuminate the relevancy of policies to everyday life, and contribute to progressive social change. I have tried to produce knowledge, which really has been co-constructed by myself, the participants and my peers and mentors, that is both valuable to the participants and to decision-makers who can influence policy.

Kim Askins (2009) reminds us that we must "recognize our own roles within unequal power relations and the practices that emerge from them, and are aware of our part in reiterating social and spatial injustices as part of trying to tackle such injustices" (p.6). FCR does not come without its tensions and challenges, and it is often a messy and non-linear process because of its commitment to share in the process of knowledge creation, and to do research differently to disrupt dominant frameworks, disciplinary silos, and assumptions that maintain the status quo (Frisby & Creese, 2011). Despite our good intentions, we always run the risk of perpetuating unequal power relationships and, as Cornwall (2008) articulated, we cannot control how people respond to the knowledge we produce. I hope that my research results, as well as how I engage with the participants and other stakeholders, can disrupt the status quo in small ways. I am aware that more marginal but equally important understandings of a place often remain uncovered because of power dynamics and silence. My hope is that I can present the participants' particular understandings of their neighbourhood and gathering places in a way that honours the perspective of each participant and disrupts dominant senses of place and approaches to neighbourhood development that fail to acknowledge and respond to the experience of single women at different life stages, with different identities, responsibilities, needs and gifts.

3.3   The Case Study

I employed a qualitative case study approach for this research, in order to produce a context-dependent, in-depth analysis of the phenomena of study: neighbourhood SoP and the experiences of gathering places among single women in lower-city Hamilton. Case studies are especially conducive to research in human geography because they are attentive to contextual influences and scale (Baxter, 2010). Robert Yin's (2003) widely-accepted definition of a case study is a form of inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life

context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Neighbourhood SoP is the product of a relationship between a person and a place, and is shaped by subjective perceptions and feelings about a place, collective understandings of a place, physical and social aspects of a place, and other outside forces (Butz & Eyles, 1997). It is a complex concept, which requires the in-depth exploration that a case study provides. A case study allows us to delve into under-explored and under-theorized phenomena, and should result in a thick description of the case of interest and its context (Baxter, 2010). Flyvbjerg (2006) asserted that a case study is not only invaluable in terms of understanding real-life situations, it also enables the development of research skills since the researcher is involved in concrete experiences, "via continued proximity to the studied reality and via feedback from those under study" (p. 222). A case study is also conducive to FCR in geography. Rachel Pain (2004) explained how PAR and feminist research are significant in geography, since such approaches "lend themselves to research where people's relations with and accounts of space, place and environment are of central interest… participatory research is designed to be context-specific, forefronting local conditions and local knowledge, and producing situated, rich, and layered accounts" (p.653).

My own research is an exploratory single-case study, the "case" being the SoP and experience of gathering places of a group of single female residents living in the Gibson-Stipley neighbourhood. I specifically sought out two groups of single women living in the study context: older women and single mothers. I hoped to provide a thorough understanding of the meaning that gathering places hold for these women: their qualities, the feelings and experiences they attach to them, and how these places relate to their neighbourhood SoP. Single mothers and single older women were selected because of their vulnerability in terms of poverty rates and

61

quality of life outcomes, as demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2. I hoped to get a range of perspectives to contribute to the case by focusing on experiences across the life course.

The research setting was chosen based on an urban Quality of Life study that was lead by Dr. Allison Williams and Dr. Peter Kitchen in 2010 and 2011, which was referenced in Chapter 2. In the fall of 2010, a telephone survey was implemented in three neighbourhood that were selected based on socioeconomic and population characteristics from the 2006 census data. I selected the neighbourhood cluster of low SES for my study, narrowing that cluster down to the Gibson- Stipley neighbourhood, as the area has defined, easily-identifiable boundaries set by the city and is also prioritized in the NDS. Although my own research does not utilize any of the quantitative data from the Quality of Life study, the results of the study did help provide an overall sense of how residents rated their SoP. Along with other social research documents from the SPRC, the Quality of Life study helped provide a macro-understanding of the neighbourhood context; I was then able to go out and experience the neighbourhood first-hand, and hear the stories and explanations that a quantitative survey would not be able to deliver. Although my research is focused on so-called "vulnerable" population, in a "vulnerable" neighbourhood, I conducted this research in order to learn from the experience of the participants and challenge any pre-conceived notions I may have held. I did not want to label participants as marginalized/vulnerable/oppressed, or to attach stereotypes to the labels of "single mother" or "older/elderly". I wanted to give them a chance to speak for themselves as individuals, and to convey their own narrative about their community.

3.4   Methods

In line with a case study approach, I employed more than one method of data collection. The methods I used included neighbourhood exploration, document analysis, key informant

interviews, participant interviews, and mental maps. In this section I will narrate the various stages of my research, beginning with neighbourhood exploration and recruitment. Data collection, data analysis, and the writing and dissemination processes are then discussed.

Baxter and Eyles (1997) have outlined a helpful set of criteria for establishing qualitative rigour, and have adapted terms from scientific research methods, such as "validity" and "generalizability", to apply to qualitative methods. They noted credibility as the most important principle, defined as "the connection between the experiences of groups and the concepts which the social scientist uses to recreate and simplify them through interpretation" (p.512). Thus, it is important that the concepts derived in the results of my research resonate with my participants, regular citizens, as well as to the broader academic community. Qualitative researchers assume that there are "multiple realities, mentally constructed by ourselves", and that the goal of the researcher is to "represent adequately the realities of groups in such a way that not only does the scientific community but also the people who constructed the reality in the first place understand the (re)construction of that reality" (p.513). Other principles of rigour in qualitative research are: transferability, concerning how the study fits in other contexts; dependability, concerning how design-induced change is dealt with and documenting the context, and; confirmability, "the degree to which findings are determined by the respondents and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests of perspectives of the inquirer" (Lincoln & Guba quoted in Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p.517). My supervisor, Dr. Allison Williams, assisted me in my research design and throughout the research process. Her expertise in qualitative research and her work around SoP and urban quality of life added valuable insight to my research design and execution. Ongoing consultation with her enhanced the credibility and confirmability of my work.

In June of 2011, I obtained ethics approval from the McMaster University Research and Ethics Board (see certificate in Appendix A). In order to eliminate the risk of harm to the participants as much as possible, I took several measures to make sure they were properly informed, that I had their consent to participate, and that they were compensated for their participation. I will highlight specific ethical protocols throughout my description of my research methods. While I adhered to the ethical protocols that were approved by the University, I also want to reflect on the deeper ethics that are implicated in FCR. Ideally, research will not only "do no harm" to the participants, but will actually contribute meaningfully to the community and lead to actions that can enhance their lives. FCR has a "relational ethics" and has a commitment "to produce scholarship that is accountable to the communities most affected by it and to contribute towards social change" (Cahill, Pain & Sultana, 2007, p.367). I had my own ethical commitment to keep in touch with my participants, to be accountable and follow through on my commitment to them and to my community partners. As I go through the methods, I will reflect on FCR principles and ethics, and draw attention to the steps I took to ensure rigour throughout the research process.

3.4.1   *Neighbourhood Exploration and Recruitment*

A significant aspect of the research process was developing an understanding of the research context, both in terms of the target population and the research setting, the Gibson-Stipley neighbourhood. I call this the "neighbourhood exploration" phase of my research. I also developed an understanding of the research context by reviewing the many research publications by the SPRC (described in Chapter 2) and news articles about the study neighbourhood. To describe this phase of the study, I will often use the term "we", because much of this phase was done alongside my colleague, Yui Hashimoto. We had different research questions, but both of

us were planning to interview single mothers living in the Gibson- Stipley neighbourhood. We navigated and got to know our research setting as a team, and used similar strategies and venues to recruit our participants.

In the spring of 2011, we spent several mornings walking the neighbourhood and getting to know the physical landscape and the amenities that were in the area, such as community centres, parks, schools, stores, restaurants, cafes, etc. Yui was specifically interested in what food outlets existed, whether they be grocers, variety stores, food banks, community kitchens, etc. I was particularly interested in identifiying potential gathering places. We ate at some of the local restaurants and visited the schools and community centres, where we had a chance to meet some of the staff, who ended up being important gatekeepers in helping us recruit participants. They also gave us permission to post our recruitment flyers (see flyer in Appendix B). By walking the neighbourhood and meeting residents and community workers, we both developed a better understanding of the physical environment and social landscape while beginning the important relationship-building with community partners that would contribute greatly to our research endeavours. We also arranged casual meetings with several people whose work was either directly implicated in the neighbourhood or in local women's issues, including recreation, VAW and municipal politics. Through these meetings we learned about some of the opinions and concerns that potential stakeholders had about the neighbourhood.

In getting to know the research context, we also attended several neighbourhood planning meetings and were welcomed by members of the South Sherman Hub. I am so grateful for the acceptance and support of both residents and staff working in the neighbourhood, who not only invited us to their meetings and programs but kept in touch and supported our research in multiple ways. It was encouraging to see that they saw the value in our research, and that they

trusted us. One event we attended was a presentation that the School of Nursing put on regarding their *Health in the Hubs* project, where residents of South Sherman identified "Beautification" as a priority. This event allowed us to see what other research had been done in the neighbourhood and what some of the residents prioritized in terms of their health and quality of life.

One of my key informants, a resident of the neighbourhood and volunteer at one of the local schools, had recommended connecting with the elementary schools to recruit single mothers for our research. She introduced us to the facilitator of the Parenting and Literacy (P&L) program at one of the schools. We had a chance to tell her about our research, and she was willing to post our flyers and contact information. By this time, it was late in the school year and we realized that it would be difficult to engage mothers, as well as community partners, over the summer. At the beginning of the school year, in the fall of 2011, we returned to the P&L program and were able to tell the mothers about our project in person, and they could choose whether or not to participate.

I used purposeful sampling in my recruitment, seeking the information-rich perspectives of single mothers and single older women living in the study neighbourhood who were willing to participate. The participants self-identified as a single mother or single older woman, and I did not place a restriction on length of time living in the neighbourhood. I used a diversity of recruitment tactics in order to recruit a diverse group of women; this was successful in terms of their ages, backgrounds and amount of time living the neighbourhood. Yui and I put up flyers in the schools, recreation centres, and churches, and a few random locations such as a laundromat, as part of our recruitment efforts. We also had a table at an open house at Parkview Secondary School where we had flyers and information about our research projects. I also connected directly with a staff member of one of the neighbourhood churches, who invited me to come to

their weekly drop-in where they serve lunch and have a food bank and social time for community members. Recruitment turned out to be most effective through these direct contacts with community partners and programs. It was a challenge to connect with older single women, because they did not have kids attending the elementary schools and perhaps did not use the community amenities as often as the mothers did. I relied on both snowball sampling and my own community relationships, for example through a church network, to find older participants.

Baxter and Eyles (1997) introduced "prolonged engagement" as a tactic to enhance credibility. It involves "spending sufficient time in the field to build trust and rapport with the respondents, to learn the 'culture' of the relevant group(s) and to investigate for possible misinformation/distortions introduced by self or respondents" (p.514). While Yui and I did not have prolonged engagement directly with the participants, we spent many hours exploring the neighbourhood, meeting with key informants and community partners, and attending neighbourhood events and meetings. I felt more connected to the neighbourhood by engaging in it and with the people, as an extension of my ongoing engagement in downtown Hamilton. Residents and community partners became familiar with me as a person, rather than as a distant researcher.

3.4.2   *Key Informant Interviews, Pre-Analysis (n=3)*

I conducted two key informant interviews before recruiting participants, and one while I was already in the midst of conducting participant interviews. The first key informant was a friend of mine and a resident of the study neighbourhood. She is married with two kids, has lived their current house for 10 years, and is actively involved at her kids' school. I wanted to understand her sense of the neighbourhood in terms of the social and physical landscape, the resources and gathering places available to residents, and I invited her to recommend potential

questions to ask my participants and places to visit. The second key informant is a social researcher who has done extensive work around poverty in Hamilton and different population groups in Hamilton, including women and seniors. She not only had a wealth of knowledge from the research she has done, but also was well-informed about the needs of service providers in the city, the launch of the NDS, the role of women in neighbourhood development, and potential challenges that single mothers and single older women face in Hamilton. She provided more of a big-picture of the social and political landscape in Hamilton and its relationship to neighbourhood development and vulnerable populations.

I conducted the third key informant interview partway through the data collection process, with a woman who has expertise in grassroots neighbourhood organizing and who had opened up a community café in the study neighbourhood. She is also actively involved in neighbourhood planning as a resident of the neighbourhood. She was able to speak to the value of gathering places, as well as provide an update on the community planning and visioning that was happening at the neighbourhood level, the relationship between the neighbourhood and the City, and the perception of the neighbourhood from both neighbours and outsiders. I provided all key informants with a letter of information (see Appendix C) and received their informed, written consent to participate and audio-record the interviews. They agreed to do a second interview if needed after data collection, and were interested in seeing the results of the research.

3.4.3 Participant Interviews (n=15)

Before I conducted any interviews of my own, I attended Yui`s focus group at a local elementary school, with some of the mothers who were involved in a nutrition group, who met regularly to prepare snacks for the students. I was there to assist Yui in passing out the study information and gift certificates and in taking notes while she facilitated. I remember one of her

participants saying how they have seen researchers come in and "research them" countless times and they never saw the results or any benefit to them that stemmed from such research. She was not dismissing Yui or her research, but was challenging her to use her power and voice as an academic, to share the stories of her participants and really make a difference in their lives and community. I heard this loud and clear and did not forget it as I went about my own research. This participant saw the potential for research to create positive change, and was holding us accountable to that vision. As I encountered my participants, I wanted them to know that I was doing this research because I cared and wanted to see their perspectives accounted for in neighbourhood and city-level conversations about "development" and "revitalization".

Feminist geographers and other qualitative researchers highlight the importance of the dynamics between the "researcher" and the "participants", and how the multiple aspects of our identities interact at that particular time and place to shape the research encounter and the knowledge that is produced. Baxter and Eyles (1997), echoing the feminist call for reflexivity, drew attention to how "power relations and the presentation of self in the interview are crucial determinants" of the outcome (p.513). I need to constantly check myself to see what assumptions and biases I could be bringing with me to the interviews, to keep an open mind, and to be open to surprise and having my ideas reshaped by the interview. Baxter and Eyles called this "disciplined subjectivity". In my everyday life, the role of "student" or "researcher" is much less a part of my identity compared with my identity as a Hamilton citizen and community activist. In my interviews however, my assumption was that my role as a "researcher" would be the most prominent, and I wondered how the women would perceive me, or "read" me. Would they see me as more knowledgeable or less accessible? Would they see me as far removed from their situation? Would they trust my intentions? I could not predict or fully control how the interviews

would go, how participants would "read" me and respond, or how we would both fashion "particular performances of self in interaction" (Valentine, 2002, p.120).

In her discussion of negotiating sameness and difference in the research process, Gill Valentine (2002) challenged me to rethink such concepts of "sameness" and "difference"; just because I am a woman interviewing a woman did not mean participants would relate to me and open up; just because I am quite different from my participants in terms of my social location does not mean, on the other hand, that they would *not* open up to me. My social location does not explain everything about me, and simple dualisms of insider/and outsider cannot capture my multifaceted identities. My life experiences and my values also come into play, as do those of my participants, and neither of us can be fully conscious of how these pieces of ourselves come together and impact the outcome of the interview. We must locate and acknowledge our difference, and be as open and transparent as possible in the research encounter, in order to find spaces that facilitate trust and cooperation.

Although the participants and I were coming from different social locations, the interviews went well. I think that a combination of my own openness and eagerness to learn from their experiences and their knowledge, and their openness to tell their stores, made for fruitful interviews and allowed us to trust each other even in a short period of time. While I was open and willing to share about myself, I did not want to impose my own opinions about the participants' neighbourhood or local politics, as their perspective needed to be at the forefront of the conversation.

I interviewed a total of fifteen participants, including ten single mothers and five single older women. By "older" women, they are in the category of older than 55 years of age. Although I interviewed two groups of women, some of the older women were single mothers

with grown children, and some of the single mothers were in their 40s. Thus, there was not a fixed boundary distinguishing between the two groups of women. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours, with the typical interview duration being about 45 minutes. Interviews took place for the most part in the research neighbourhood, in a location of the participant's choice; I invited them to choose a location that was both convenient and comfortable for them, and almost all meeting locations were in the study neighbourhood. The most popular location of choice was in the home of the participants. Others were conducted in a school meeting room, at *Tim Horton's*, at the Barton Library, and at *the Freeway Coffee House* (which is not in the study neighbourhood but which was a convenient place for two of the participants to meet). Interviews took place between September of 2011 and March of 2012, with the majority completed in the fall of 2011.

At the beginning of the interviews, I explained the purpose of my research to the participants and about my own motivations for doing the research. I told participants that their stories and experiences regarding their neighbourhood SoP and local gathering places were important, and could play a role in ongoing neighbourhood development initiatives. In accordance with my ethics protocol, I verbally shared with them information about my study and assured them that their participation would be confidential, but that I could not guarantee anonymity due to their own social networks and connections that existed in the neighbourhood. I told the participants that they could refrain from answering any questions, and that they could change their mind about participating at any time without consequence. All of this information was included in the letter of information (see Appendix D) that the women received. For compensation, I gave the participants a $20 gift card to *Fresh Co* at the very beginning of the

interview, so that they did not feel coerced or bribed into completing the interview in order to receive the gift card.

Thirteen out of fifteen women signed a consent form that was attached to my letter of information. Two of the women preferred to provide verbal consent, which was an option for those who were not comfortable signing or perhaps were not comfortable reading all of the text. I gave all participants the option of receiving a copy of their transcripts, and to provide feedback on the results and the creation of a community report. Five participants requested their transcript, which I either sent by email or printed a hard copy and delivered it to them. All of the women except for three said they were willing to provide feedback on the results, which I will discuss when I describe the data analysis phase of my research.

I used a semi-structured interview format in order to have a shape and direction to the interviews but enough flexibility that the participants could elaborate and expand upon their ideas and to have a more informal and conversational interaction (Dunn, 2011). To evaluate the flow of my interview schedule and to make sure the questions made sense and gleaned rich information, I pilot-tested the interview with a single older woman who I know from various events and programs in the community. Had she lived in my research neighbourhood, she could have been a participant, and thus her feedback helped confirm that the interview schedule was appropriate. She told me that she enjoyed participating in such a conversation, and provided some suggestions around the ordering of my questions. I brought my interview schedule (Appendix E) to each interview, and made sure that the core questions were covered, although the order of the questions could change, and I could add probes or additional questions as needed. After asking most of the questions, I asked the participants to draw a mental map of their neighbourhood, as they defined it, highlighting the gathering places that mattered to them. All of

the women except two drew a map, and the process of drawing helped prompt them to identify additional gathering places or share stories about them. The participants also had a chance at the end to share anything else they thought should be included. I found that many of my interview questions naturally flowed into each other, so when I asked the women to describe their neighbourhood, they would also end up talking about what they liked and did not like about it; then, they would mention specific places which provided a segue into a discussion of gathering places. It was important for me to remain attentive and flexible as the conversations evolved, and to give the participants time and space to reflect on their responses as needed.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants, and I transcribed them manually following the interviews, which is recommended in order to be fully immersed in the data (Dunn, 2011). The act of transcribing was very helpful in beginning to identify some of the macro-themes and commonalities, which was a significant step in creating a framework for my coding and analysis. It was important to begin the data analysis as the interviews occurred, in order to recognize when I had reached saturation. While there was lots of diversity among my participants, common themes came out in their interviews which I began to recognize after conducting only a few. I interviewed five women over the age of 55 in the latter months of my data collection process (January-March 2012) and found that I could pull out common themes both within that group as well as with the larger sample. There were already ten participants and a range of ages within the "single mothers group". Having reached saturation, I was satisfied with the breadth of data from 15 interviews. The interviews themselves were one of the most enjoyable and enriching parts of the research process, and it was an honour for me to hear the stories of my participants, learn from them and see their neighbourhood through their eyes.

3.4.4   Description of the Participants

Participants ranged from the age of 24 to 84, with two participants in their 20s, four in their 30s, three between 40 and 55 and five older than 55 (the single older women). Most of the women rented a house or an apartment, and most did not have paid employment. The range of how long they had lived in the neighbourhood spanned from 4 months to 65 years. Many of the women perceived themselves to have a "fair" level of health, whether due to disability, ageing or chronic health issues. Each of the women had their own story and their own personality; some lived in the neighbourhood by choice and others by necessity. Some of the demographic characteristics of the participants are highlighted in Table 3 below. The participants' names are pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality, and will be used throughout Chapters 4 and 5 (the Results and Discussion and Conclusions chapters). I want to emphasize that the presentation of these demographics are limited in their ability to fully speak to the participants' lives and identities. For example, the label "unemployed" does not convey that these women are active participants in their neighbourhoods and the lives of their families.

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Time in Canada	Time living in neighbourhood	Employment Status	Perceived Health	Dwelling type
Diana	35	Always	7 years	temporary work leave, caregiver	good	Rent house
Roseanne	33	Always	1 year	unemployed, caregiver	fair	Rent house
Jill	35	Always	over 25 years	Unemployed, caregiver	good	Rent house
Kristin	24	Always	4 months	unemployed, caregiver	good	Rent house
Michelle	28	Always	5 years	unemployed, caregiver	good	Rent apartment
Rebecca	33	Always	17 years	unemployed, caregiver	fair	Rent house
Linda	60	Always	1 year	former social worker	fair – disability	Rent apt
Beth	47	Always	2 years, early	ODSP,	fair -	Rent

			childhood	caregiver	disability	house
Alanna	42	Always	15 years	unemployed, caregiver	poor	Rent apt
Lisa	56	Always	25 years	ODSP, part-time work	fair - disability	Rent house
Rachel	48	Always	9 years	Unemployed, caregiver	good	Own house
Cathy	56	Since 1973	15 years	full-time work	good	Rent apt
Gladys	84	Since childhood	65 years	Retired	fair	Own house
Marjorie	60	Always	Over 40 years	Retired	good	Own house
Emily	52	Always	22 years	ODSP, former teacher	fair	Own house

Table 2: Participant characteristics

3.4.5   Data Analysis

I knew from previous experience and from research methods literature that there is no linear, formulaic way to code qualitative data, and thus I was prepared to engage in a somewhat scattered and messy process: "coding involves reading and re-reading , thinking and rethinking, and developing codes that are tentative and temporary along the way… coding is also really rewarding in that it enables the research to know his or her data intimately and see patterns and themes emerging in a way that would not be possible otherwise" (Cope, 2010, p.445). As I already indicated, the phase of data analysis began as soon as I conducted the first interview. I kept a research journal where I would write down ideas, thoughts, questions and common or remarkable themes that came from the interviews, and tried to take some time after each interview to write them down. As I mentioned above, a high-level analysis was occurring during transcription, because I was thinking about potential macro- and micro-codes and taking in the participants' words and the meanings they held as I typed.

To begin the formal coding process, I first read through each transcript twice and engaged in open coding (Cope, 2010). In the margins of the transcripts I would write potential

codes and key words, for example, "*good people*", "*maintenance of property*", "*walking*", "*convenience*". After reading through and making notes for each interview, I derived some macro-themes, which were: *Factors influencing sense of place*; *Types of gathering places*; *Qualities of gathering places*, and; *Larger forces shaping sense of place and participation*. The fourth macro-theme ended up informing Chapter 5. Once I had the macro-codes, I read through the transcripts again and highlighted sections based on which macro-code the data belonged too. I then began to solidify some of the micro-codes that I had started to develop, based on common themes across the participant transcripts. I moved from descriptive codes to more analytic codes as I linked the codes from the various transcripts together, and wrote out the code lists in my research journal. I then went back and found quotations that supported each theme. I engaged in source triangulation by selecting themes that came up in multiple interviews and by selecting quotations from a variety of respondents to support the themes (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). As I was working through the analysis, I engaged in peer debriefing with my colleague, Yui, to talk through some of the emerging themes.

Once I had completed the data analysis and had my thematic categories and sub-categories, I wrote a draft summary of the research results. I shared my results with my supervisor, Dr. Williams, who agreed with the themes I had already discovered, and who also encouraged me to dig a bit deeper in my analysis to explore more explicitly the relationship between gathering places and neighbourhood SoP. While I was already convinced that participation in gathering places played a role in shaping SoP, I needed to return to the words of the participants to illustrate *how*, and to make sure that I was not just making this conclusion based on my own biases. I already had some ideas based on the existing themes and my

memories of the transcripts, but I went back through the transcripts yet again and was able to uncover the common narratives around how gathering places matter to SoP and vice-versa.

After updating the results based on consultation with Dr. Williams, I produced a point-form summary of the results incorporating all of the themes and supporting evidence. I contacted the twelve participants who had indicated at the time of the interview that they wanted to provide feedback about the results. Four of the participants chose to review the summary of the results by email, and five chose to meet face to face and talk through the results and get their thoughts and feedback. The other three participants did not answer their phones after multiple tries, or their numbers had changed. Three participants emailed me after reading the results, and found the results interesting and recognized some of their own words and perspectives. The five that I met with in person could make sense of the themes, and recognized where their experiences and opinions were highlighted. Engaging in this "member checking" (Baxter and Eyles, 1997) helped confirm that my (re)construction of the meanings from the interviews resonated with the participants, and provided an opportunity to elaborate on some of the themes, such as fear and safety, while updating me on new developments in the neighbourhood since the interviews had happened. Member checking not only confirmed the results but allowed me to stay true to the ethical imperative to share with the participants how I was using the content of their interviews.

3.4.6   *Key Informant Interviews, Post-Analysis (n=2)*

After the data analysis was completed, and the results were drafted, I conducted two more key informant interviews. I interviewed one of my original key informants, the social researcher, to reflect with her on my results and learn about any updates in terms of the NDS and other local developments. I also interviewed the director of an organization in Hamilton that supports women fleeing violence and has been working on a project to improve community safety and

reduce VAW. I was able to discuss my results with her in relation to what makes safe communities and how gathering places may play a role in women's safety and community engagement. These interviews were more informal and in a conversational format, so I took notes but did not use an audio-recorder. They took place at local cafés and lasted approximately 75 minutes in length; both provided insight into the implications of my research locally and the recommendations I made in Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions.

3.4.7   Writing and Dissemination

Although I have left the description of the "writing" phase to the end of this section, the process of writing has been occurring throughout the entire research process, as I have engaged in the academic and grey literature, as I have written down my thoughts and observations about the study neighbourhood and my research activities, and as I have struggled to represent my research in a way that captures what matters to my participants and their understanding of their neighbourhood. I have chosen to reflexively write myself *in* to the research, rather than simply write it "up" which has often been described as a neutral activity and a phase occurring at the end of the research process (Mansvelt & Berg, 2010). Mansvelt and Berg (2010), in their discussion on writing qualitative geographies and constructing geographical knowledges, asserted that:

> *"Research and writing are iterative processes, and writing helps to shape the research as much as it reflects it... the way we conceptualize the author (as distant and impartial or as involved and partial, for example) has significant implications for the ways that the very processes of research itself can be understood... writing involves very clear decisions to include some narratives and to exclude others... Writing is not devoid of the political, personal, and moral issues that are a feature of undertaking research, nor is writing devoid of our embodied emotions as we sense and feel the narratives we construct"* (p.342).

Writing is the medium I have used to convey my research. This thesis conveys my research to the academic community and to anyone else who wants to read it in this format. Besides producing this thesis, I have begun to disseminate the results and will continue to do so

in a variety of other ways. I have already had the chance to present my preliminary research findings at McMaster in March 2012, alongside Yui, at an event organized by the McMaster Community Poverty Initiative. I have produced an article for the South Sherman Hub newspaper (Appendix F) and a lay report (Appendix G), which will be distributed at the community workshop where I will present my results to my participants, community partners and other stakeholders in the university and broader Hamilton community. During this workshop, I hope to spark dialogue around why this research matters and what the implications are, in terms of neighbourhood development and municipal policies. There have been other indirect ways that I have shared this research and gotten involved through direct action, which are described in Chapter 5. I am planning to stay in Hamilton for the long-haul, and so I will be eager to participate in ongoing conversations around neighbourhood development, social inclusion and policy change.

3.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter has chronicled the methodology and methods I have employed in this FCR case study. I began by highlighting key principles and ethics of PAR and feminist research, under the label of FCR. I then described the case study approach and the methods I used during neighbourhood exploration, recruitment, key informant interviews, data collection, data analysis, and writing and dissemination. I addressed rigour and feminist principles in each step that I described. I will now move on to Chapter 4: Results.

4. CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In order to address the three main research objectives, it is important first to distinguish the various factors that influence and shape the participants' neighbourhood SoP. Next, I will share the various gathering places that were mentioned and the important physical/spatial and social and emotional qualities of these places. Finally, I will explore the relationship between the participants' experience of gathering places and their neighbourhood SoP.

4.1   Neighbourhood Sense of Place

There were various factors that shaped the participants' neighbourhood SoP, namely: neighbourhood boundaries; the people; care of place; safety; accessibility; knowledge of place; and reputation of place. Some described their neighbourhood using facts and characteristics; other participants, particularly the older participants, described their neighbourhood through recounting stories and events.

4.1.1   Boundaries

Each participant defined their neighbourhood differently, and their perception of their neighbourhood boundaries was mainly based on the locations of the places where they regularly went. For most, it was the few blocks surrounding the place they lived, or as far as they were comfortable walking. Some participants considered themselves to be living in the "downtown" (n=3) while others considered themselves as living in the "east end" (n=3).

The boundaries the participants placed around their neighbourhood related to where they spent their time, as well as where they felt comfortable. For example, several participants drew clear divisions between living east versus west of Sherman Street (n=6). Kristin, for example, explained her reasoning for her preference in living east of Sherman:

> This whole area, I mean, I grew up at Parkdale and Barton so this whole east end is my
> area. This is my comfort zone, yeah. I wouldn't move any further past Sherman. No

way… I have never had any problems with anyone on this side… a lot of people around here are more family-oriented, they're all family right so they have that respect. So I wouldn't move any further that way. That's my boundary.

Placing boundaries around the neighbourhood was thus practical, in terms of the area where the women spent much of their daily life; it also had to do with where the women identified with, for example Kristin and her east end comfort zone, or Marcella who identified with her side of the street and the connected park. No one defined their neighbourhood based on the City of Hamilton's official neighbourhood boundaries (City of Hamilton, 2010) or with the official names of the neighbourhoods.

4.1.2   The People and Being Known

First and foremost, the participants talked about the people as one of their favourite features of the neighbourhood: that there are "good people" and "good neighbours", that the neighbourhood is friendly, and that people look out for each other. Beth, who did not move into the neighbourhood by choice, spoke fondly of the people who were making her want to stay in the neighbourhood:

> *I've come to like it because my neighbours and everything are great, they're great neighbours I couldn't ask for better. And I've lived in some way nicer home areas like you know on the Mountain and that but I mean, they didn't wave to you or nothing, everyone minds their own business and I don't like that. Like I like you to mind your own business to a certain extent, but you see someone trying to kill me or take my money, call the police you know! Up there you don't see nothing, you shut the door. And down here people aren't like that ,they'll help you.*

Participants generally had positive things to say about the people in their neighbourhood, and it was important to many of them (n=8) that they had friends and family close by whom they could visit. Rachel described her neighbourhood as a "front porch community" where people hang out regularly and gather informally on front porches. The social networks contributed to the sense of belonging and connectedness that many of the participants felt.

Being known by individuals such as their neighbours, business owners, and teachers at the school mattered to the participants. The older women who were, for the most part, long-time residents of the area talked about being known and recognized over the years. For example, Marjorie is a retired schoolteacher and principal, who has gotten to know many neighbours over the years, and being known enhances her sense of belonging in the neighbourhood:

> *It's just nice, it's nice and there's one older gentleman, not that old but I guess he's in his mid-thirties, and he often walks down the street and when he sees me he says "Hi, Miss" because he remembers me as his Principal [laughter]. So that's funny, where they still call you "Miss"... So when I came into the neighbourhood I was known. And because my grandparents lived here, and my cousins, I was known already which made it easier.*

Emily has had people recognize her on the local bus line from her years of traveling on the bus with her daughters. Another participant, Marcella, is known as "Grandma" or "Ma" to the kids and adults in the neighbourhood and this identity has been sustained over the years. Many residents who regularly spend time in the park or walk by her house know her and this gives her a great sense of purpose. She also shared how she is grateful for acts of kindness that she notices and appreciates even more as her mobility declines, for example:

> *I'd get to the door here and I'd sit down and think, now how am I going to get these groceries up the stairs in my wagon? Because I can't lift it, they're heavy. So I turn around and as if the good Lord would send somebody come around the garage here, 'Do you need any help honey?' 'Yes dear could you help put my wagon…' 'Sure dear… Anytime, just give me a call'. And when he goes I was wondering, how am I going to give him a call I don't even know his name? So I turned around and said, 'the Lord will bless you for all your goodness.' He said Thank you, just keep praying for me. I said I always do, because I see him walking down here. I don't know them by name but, and everytime they go by, I sit on the verandah all summer doing my knitting…*

The participants also appreciated the presence of kids in the neighbourhood and generally described it as a family-friendly place. Having kids around also meant there were parents around, and that the parents could get to know each other, as Diana described:

You know what, for the most part I would say, I like living down here, cause there's a lot of kids and for me, at this point in my life with my children, that's a good selling feature for me, that there's a lot of school-age kids and you know a lot of parents.

There were several categories of people that participants spoke of in a negative light, namely, sex trade workers, drug users, drug dealers, slum or absentee landlords and renters who do not care for their properties. While some participants spoke with empathy for their neighbours who may be struggling and living on the margins of the community (n=4), others (n=5) made clear distinctions between the "good people" of their neighbourhood and the "undesirable" or "bad" people.

4.1.3   Care of Place

The general appearance of the physical landscape mattered a lot to the women and contributed to both positive and negative feelings about the place in which they live. Whether it was a house, an apartment building, a storefront, or a park, participants noticed whether or not a place was cared for and desired to see more of a community effort in maintaining the beauty of their neighbourhood. Emily walks her dog daily and pays close attention to the appearance of her neighbourhood:

I'm walking everyday so I see you know a lot of garbage being dumped, that's a sign too of people not caring here… you don't know who's doing it, and you know broken windows, things being papered over and boarded up , it's just kind of depressing… you just wish you could see a pretty flower or… So I like to see when people fix their house up, it just makes everything look better.

Numerous participants (n=7) took pride in their home and identified it as a safe place. While my interview questions did not focus on home, the participants discussed their homes on their own initiative, speaking of them as places that contributed to their SoP and identity in the neighbourhood. Those who took pride in their home and worked on its outer appearance all

commented on the lack of care shown with respect to some other properties, whether it be due to

absentee landlords or the tenants themselves. For example, as Rebecca stated:

> *If I could have chosen where I was living I think I would not be living there. I've been told that it's not really the best of neighbourhoods, it's busy cause we're off a busy street, so it's more or less just for people like me who don't really have a lot of money, it's kind of a run-down neighbourhood. But we did the best we could, we made the property look pretty… so it shows that a nice family lives here.*

Rachel noted that when residents and outsiders expect a place to be rundown or

unattractive, that can perpetuate a lack of care throughout the neighbourhood, and she had

experienced this attitude herself, as reflected in her comment below. She wanted to see a larger

community effort in making the neighbourhood beautiful in order to build a positive SoP:

> *The problem becomes when the landlord's not there or people move out and there's a lot of garbage that's left behind, or the place is just not cared for. And it's sort of like that broken windows theory, where if there's a broken window or there's garbage it will tend to accelerate that because there's no one that's interested or caring. And I think almost every human loves to be surrounded by things that are beautiful, or at least pleasant or pleasing, right… You shouldn't have to feel like, oh this is the best I can do and just live with the graffiti. And I speak from experience because for a while when I lived here that's sort of how I felt. Well I can't do any better so there's no point even trying so you just see something happen and it's like ugh, can't be bothered. But I realize that with a little bit of effort from everyone or if we all say ya, you know what we can have a nice looking place, there's no reason why we can't right? Everybody can make that happen.*

4.1.4 Safety

When asked to describe and share how they feel about their neighbourhood, participants

consistently mentioned whether or not they feel safe. Safety was one of the prominent factors

that participants discussed in relation to their neighbourhood SoP. Most participants (n=8) stated

that they felt safe in their neighbourhood, at least during the day. When they did feel afraid, it

was usually at night or due to events they believed occurred in their neighbourhood, such as

drug-related and violent crime. Participants also commented on the high volume and rapid traffic

on the through streets running east to west, which both the mothers and older women saw as

84

taking away from the safety of their street. Almost all of the women said they did not like going out at night, or that parks at night made them nervous because the lighting was inadequate. Several of the women (n=4) had been the victims of a robbery which contributed to their feelings of insecurity.

Two of the participants who lived on the westernmost edge of the neighbourhood explicitly described how afraid they are to go out and that they mostly stick to themselves. A few of those (n=3) who lived more towards the eastern edge of the neighbourhood described it as being more "family-oriented", and thus safer. Michelle mostly stayed in her apartment because of her belief that crime occurred frequently in her neighbourhood, and she also sometimes felt judged and insecure when she walked around in public with her three kids. In describing her neighbourhood boundaries, she said:

> *Well it's very small because I'm scared to go too far… I don't really, there's too much going on so I always get kind of scared… Cause I've seen so much right, growing up and stuff, I mean it's like ah I don't know what would make me feel safe? Maybe if the streets were patrolled just a tad bit better, or maybe a little more.*

Cathy also talked about feeling afraid at night in her neighbourhood, especially around the bars, and feeling more comfortable in the east portion of the neighbourhood where she worked. She did not trust her immediate neighbours in and around her apartment building.

> *Just the bars really, bars kind of scare me. There's been a lot of stabbings and things, so that's why I don't go out at nighttime, unless someone picks me up. I'm frightened to go… So that would be a negative thing, maybe because I'm older… in summertime I don't feel scared at nighttime because there's lights. Isn't that weird? The light, so I don't feel scared at all. I love summer.*

Participants also made a distinction between feeling safe in their home versus feeling safe in their surrounding neighbourhood. There was a sense that staying inside with the doors locked meant that you were "safe", and two mothers mentioned that they kept their kids inside due to fear. Some participants (n=4) also said that they would likely feel safer if they had more police

presence in the neighbourhood, and noted that they had seen more police on foot, bicycle and on the horses in recent months which they saw as a positive. A few participants (n=3) also mentioned walking their dog in the neighbourhood, which increased their sociability with neighbours and gave them a sense of security. There was thus a mixed perception of safety, and those who knew their landscape and neighbours well, and felt that they had people looking out for them, felt safer.

4.1.5   Accessibility

The overall accessibility of their neighborhood, and places to go in their neighbourhood, contributed greatly to the participants' SoP. Accessibility meant that important places to go were easy to get to on foot or by bus. Roseanne loved being close to her kids' school and the local recreation centre, and put it simply when she said:

We're lucky cause this neighbourhood is great. So many things are close.

The majority of the participants (n=10) walked as much as possible, so the walkability of their neighbourhood was a selling feature. Many participants (n=10) mentioned all the conveniences that were available to them mostly within walking distance: the schools, parks, recreation centres, churches, bus lines, restaurants and bakeries. They could also easily take the bus to lower city shopping centres such as Jackson Square, Centre Mall and Eastgate Square. Some of the participants (n=4) did not mind taking the bus with their kids, but others (n=4) found buses to be too crowded, as well as bus fare being too expensive, as Lisa explained:

> *Being a single parent, living on a disability pension, you don't have bus fare. So you have to rely on your legs and rely on walking all the time and when you have small kids, they don't want to walk. So, if you have to walk farther distances, you get problems, right. SO that's good about this neighbourhood, is all these things around you is really close, right packed in the middle. And there's a lot of churches to choose from. So I like all that.*

Several women (n=3) did complain of the lack of grocery stores in their neighbourhood. Within the boundaries of the neighbourhoods of study, there is only one grocery store located at the corner of Gage and Barton, which many mentioned. The participants also discussed busy streets as a barrier to accessibility, closely intertwined with safety, especially in terms of having to cross heavy traffic, one-way streets with children or with their own mobility issues.

Participants also talked about the affordability of different services being important to them, which is another aspect of accessibility. Free programs such as those offered at the recreation centres and the schools were very much appreciated. Lack of money, however, was a barrier to many for the participants who wanted to get out and enjoy things, for example, to be able to go to the movies or to a theatre production, neither of which were available in their own neighbourhood. Even if they were, such entertainment is costly especially as a single person on social assistance with an extremely constrained budget. Most of the participants did not go into detail about their financial situation, but described free programs and affordable leisure opportunities as being especially important for themselves and their kids (n=12). Several participants (n=4) noted that local leadership seemed to lack a concern for the poor, specifically in their neighbourhood, and that those with less resources lacked access to important services and opportunities. This was also connected to their overall neighbourhood SoP.

4.1.6   *Knowledge of Place*

The participants' SoP was also shaped by what they knew about it. This included knowing street names, bus routes, the use of various buildings, and the community resources that were available. Some women actively sought out such knowledge (n=3) and others (n=4) felt that there needed to be more communication about what was happening in the neighbourhood. Word of mouth was one of the most important ways for participants to learn what was going on

in their neighbourhood. Knowing where to shop, eat, relax, and socialize meant a lot to the

participants who talked about their favourite locations with a sense of pride and enthusiasm.

Knowledge of place is connected to feelings of safety, and included knowing where to avoid,

such as the local bars. I was impressed by the participants' knowledge of all of the little bakeries,

their description of paths and shortcuts to get from one place to another, and their insight into

how the neighbourhood was evolving. This knowledge did not necessarily depend on the amount

of time living in the neighbourhood, although those who grew up in the neighbourhood or had

been there many years drew on their memories and described, for example, the names of stores

and storeowners that have since left Barton Street, or the names of and experiences they had with

their old neighbours.

Place-based knowledge came from both past and present; long-term residents described

the places they knew and how the neighbourhood has changed. Marcella remembered many

details about people and places:

> *I've lived around here all my life… I have friends down Barton street, everywhere. Every store… well there used to be E's it was a dress shop… I was her first customer, 1952 they opened up the store on Barton street… There's always the barber shops… well there's the Polish store, I used to always go there and I still go there… there used to be the Balair, the restaurant, there were polish people there... still there but it's not run by the same people. And then there used to be Chesters, used to be there…*

Marcella had endless stories to tell about her old neighbours, her neighbours that have stayed,

stories about her children and grandchildren, her husband, and their interactions in the

community. Marcella's knowledge connected past and present and demonstrated the wealth of

stories that the neighbourhood holds and that contribute to her SoP.

Based on the interviews, there was an apparent link between walking a place and

knowing a place. Most of the women (n=12) walked the majority of the time and only two

participants owned cars, and so they got to know the routes to walk to different locations and

knew landmarks and important intersections. The more they walked, the more they would be familiar with the neighbourhood, and it was also a way to connect to other people in the community. Emily mentioned how having a dog has made a difference in her knowledge of and connection to the community, because she takes different routes on her walks, and people make an effort to say hello to her and her dog. Kristin attributed her knowledge of the neighbourhood to walking and growing up in the area:

> *People over here, you walk by and it's like, "Hi!" Like it just makes like a huge difference, like the people in the community makes a huge difference, it really does. But I like it. I prefer it… Like I can walk down alleys here and I'm not afraid. As weird as that sounds… But it's also just the time of day, the time of night, you know where to walk and when to walk too. It's all like you know you'll learn by walking around the community who to talk to, where to go at what times of the day and stuff. You learn.*

4.1.7   Reputation of Place

It became apparent through the interviews that participants are aware of and influenced by the reputation that is often attributed to their neighbourhood, which is that it is a "working class", "inner city", "poor" area, that it is run down and in decline, that it is near the factories and undesirable to live in, that it is a place where crime and delinquency is prominent. For years I myself had heard about the infamous "Barton and Sherman" area, which was often described with a tone implying that it is a rough or dangerous place. While the participants were aware that outsiders and the media portrayed their neighbourhood in this manner, they did not feel the same way about it. A few (n=3) of the participants distanced and dis-identified their neighbourhood from the "downtown", which they thought was more unsafe. Participants, for the most part, liked where they lived even if they had not moved there by choice, and even though they recognized the challenges facing the neighbourhood. For example, as Beth described:

> *You know, cause, and this is kind of known as, to me and my group of friends and people, we used to call this the scummy part of town so to speak, cause you're so deep into the factories which causes noise and dust and pollution and you know, stuff like that. I never*

thought I could live here, I really didn't… And now that I live here and that, I just assumed that I'm gonna live here and shut my doors and talk to nobody and I'm gonna get outta here as soon as a one year lease is up. And now you know I like it here, I love my neighbours, we'll help each other out and that. The gentleman here across the road will snowblow for us and, I don't know, if I need a ladder or if I have trouble with my car he comes over to help…

Marjorie, on the other hand, grew up in the neighbourhood and after moving away and living on the Mountain for several years intentionally moved back to the place where she had grown up and where she felt where she belonged. Despite what others said, she had a different perception of her neighbourhood and felt rooted and committed to being there:

I think the sense of community, the friendliness, much more friendly than where I lived on the mountain, we lived there for years and you never knew who your neighbour was. It's a walking community, which I think contributes to the friendliness. Most people care about their places and care about their families and their children… there's a lot of misconceptions about down here, a lot of people really questioned me when I said I was going to redo the house and move down here… I think this neighbourhood, this immediate neighbourhood, has had its decline but I see it coming up…

These contradictory place identities coexisted for the participants and while they did not shy away from acknowledging and facing some of the challenges affecting the neighbourhood, they also saw it as a neighbourhood full of potential and opportunities to enhance the residents' quality of life.

4.2 Types of Gathering Places

A wide variety of gathering places were mentioned by participants, holding a variety of meanings and significance for them. It is difficult to order the places by importance, but I will attempt to do so based on the extent to which such places were discussed in the interviews. I will focus on the neighbourhood gathering places, but it is also important to note that participants also mentioned locations they liked to go outside of their immediate neighbourhood when they had the opportunity, one in particular being Bayfront Park in the summer.

The first type of gathering place is the *neighbourhood school*. There are three active elementary schools in the neighbourhood (St. Ann, Cathy Wever and Prince of Wales). Three public schools have already closed and their buildings sit empty, as indicated in Table 2, Chapter 2. The existing schools are meaningful gathering places and important landmarks to the mothers as well as to most (n=4) of the older women. Two specific programs were brought up when the single mothers talked about the schools: the P&L program for parents and their toddlers, and the a nutrition group facilitated by a public health nurse where the mothers volunteer and prepare the snacks for all the kids at the school and have their own social time. The participants who were part of those two groups in particular had only positive things to say about them. For the older women, they may have grown up going to those schools, working there as teachers, or had kids who went there. The schools were places that held memories and contributed to their place-based knowledge and attachment, and several of the older women (n=3) also worked or volunteered there on a regular basis.

A second type of gathering place is the *park*. Every participant loved the various parks in the neighbourhood and wanted to see more parks or to see improvements to current parks. Woodlands Park located off of Barton Street near the fire station recently received a makeover and the City put in outdoor exercise equipment for young people to use. The mothers were quite enthusiastic about the exercise park. Gage Park, a well-known park city-wide, was a favourite place or important landmark of many of the participants (n=7) who said that it was a place for all ages and all seasons. Participants especially liked the free festivals that happen at Gage Park in the summer, as well as the Children's Museum that is located there.

Another type of gathering place is the *restaurant/café*. While there was almost always a financial cost to spending time at such a place, restaurants and cafes were places of comfort and

connection for the participants. One such restaurant that was mentioned by several participants (n=4) is the *Big Top Family Restaurant*, located at Main and Sherman, which serves all-day breakfast and is a well-known place that residents walk to. *Tim Horton's*, affectionately called "Timmy's" by many of the participants (n=6), was also mentioned as an affordable and comfortable place to hang out with others or to relax on their own and have a treat, and there are several *Tim Horton's* in the neighbourhood. Other franchises were mentioned such as *McDonald's* and *Dairy Queen*. One participant described a café which was more of a communal space called *The Heart of the Hammer* that unfortunately has closed since the time of the interviews, and another participant happened to frequent *The Freeway Coffeehouse,* which is located just west of the neighbourhood in the downtown core. Participants also mentioned several local bakeries and independently owned food establishments as gathering places or places the participants were fond of.

Another type of gathering place is the *church*. Most of the older women (n=4) and a couple of the single mothers attended a local church regularly, and several participants (n=4) access churches for drop-ins and meal programs along with their Sunday worship times or bible study meetings. There are a group of churches located in the neighbourhood that residents would be able to walk to, and many do community outreach in addition to their regular worship services and programs.

Another type of gathering place is the *recreation centre*. There is one neighbourhood recreation centre in particular, Pinky Lewis, which has a variety of programs for all ages that several of the single mothers (n=4) attended with their children. Some of the women (n=3) also used the Pinky Lewis or Jimmy Thompson swimming pool for their own fitness and recreation and mentioned this as an important part of their weekly routine. Also appreciated were the free

skates at the Scott Park arena, and the free programs and recreation space that was formerly St. Peter`s Church.

The *library* was also a valued gathering place in the neighbourhood for both the mothers with young children and the single older women (n=5). There is one Hamilton Public Library in the neighbourhood, the Barton branch, which is at a convenient location and which hosts activities and programs for children and adults such as a women's group, a book club, music lessons, and movie nights.

Finally, *houses* are also gathering places, as places to connect with neighbour-friends and family. Although the focus of the interview questions were on places outside the home, and houses are traditionally considered to be "private" spaces, participants spoke of various homes as gathering places. They talked about visiting their friends and having family close by and being invited to each other's homes (n=8). They also mentioned that neighbours frequently gathered on each other's front porches (n=2). As mentioned in relationship to SoP, many of the participants also took pride in, and/or felt most safe in their own place of residence (n=7). It is important for me to include houses in this discussion even though they lie outside of the realm of the "public", because of the importance the participants placed on their own home and the homes of their friends and family. It also speaks to the false dichotomy between the public and private which is critiqued by many feminist geographers.

The following map is an amalgamation of the mental maps that the participants drew of their neighbourhood, where they marked down places that mattered to them and where they frequently spent time. This map does not include every single place that was mentioned, but it does include all of the places that participants described as gathering places.
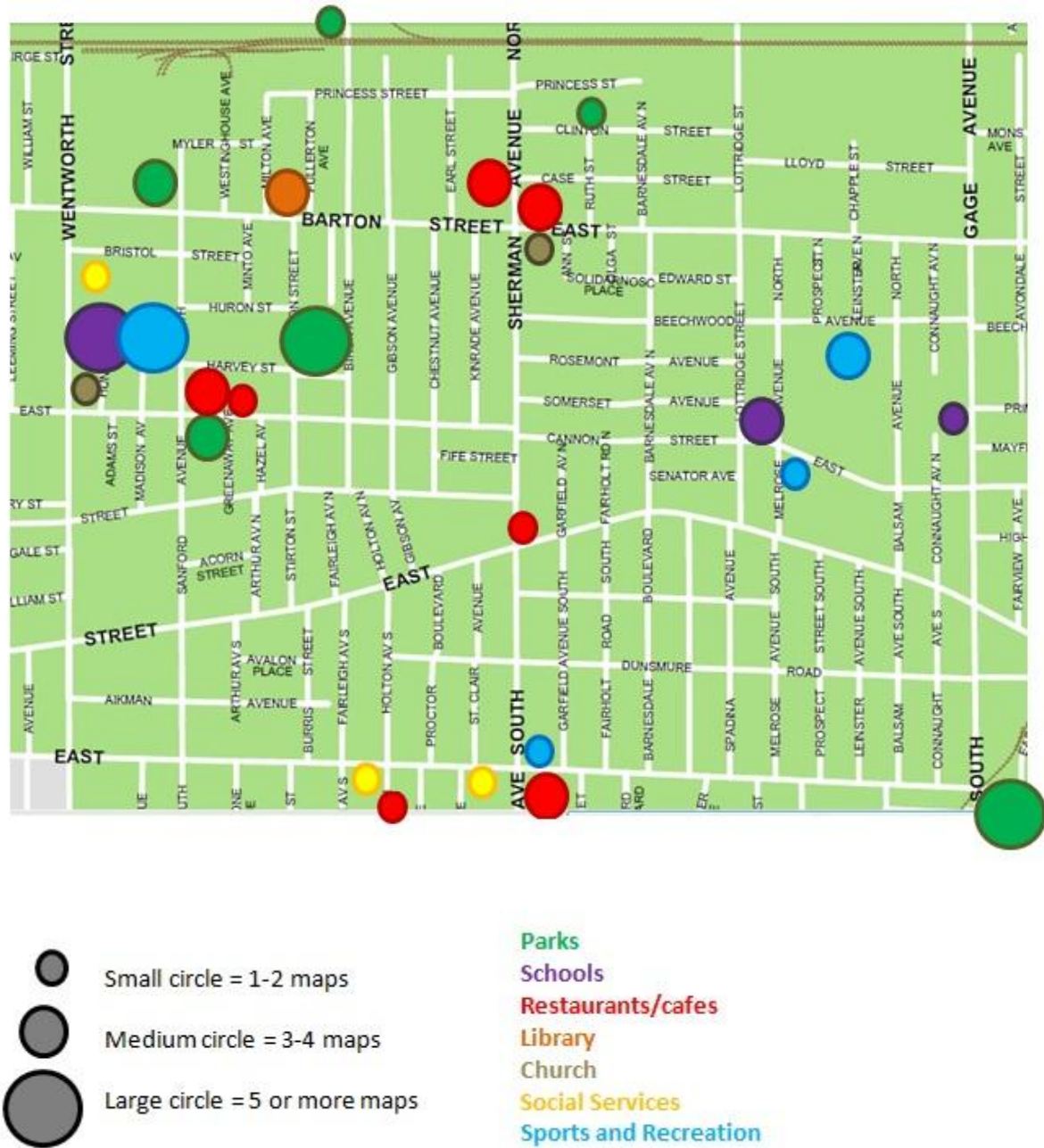
Figure 6: Neighbourhood Gathering Places: Amalgamation of Participant Mental Maps

4.3   Social and Emotional Qualities of Gathering Places

Many gathering places played a role in facilitating the women's involvement in their

community, and in beginning to feel connected and comfortable with their local neighbourhood.

When the participants shared the qualities that they associated with their favourite gathering places, they were most often related to the social nature of the place or how it made them feel.

4.3.1   A place of connection

The social aspect of SoP and gathering places is extremely important, and in different ways. Connection was a common feature that characterized the vast array of gathering places that participants mentioned. The women talked about feeling connected both to the people that they met and to the place itself. Some participants (n=5) loved places where a variety of people from different backgrounds and income brackets could hang out, for example, at a café like the *Heart of the Hammer* or at the local library. The older women who appreciated the library (n=3) liked to go and chat with the librarians, who they were familiar and comfortable with. Rachel really missed what had been a regular routine for her at the *Heart of the Hammer*, and said:

> *We used to call it our community living room because you could just sort of go there and meet up with people… it was sort of our neighbourhood café and the moms you know, we would drop our kids off and head over there for coffee... it was a real hangout.*

Others loved places where they could meet people with shared experiences, such as the groups based out of the elementary schools, primarily made up of mothers living in the same neighbourhood. The women were able to build friendships and meet other mothers who they otherwise would not have known. Their experiences in gathering places can then extend to their daily lives as they walk about the neighbourhood and see people they know, or as they invite friends over whom they met while volunteering or while at a program. Rebecca was pleased with the fact that she was developing friendships in the P&L program which then extended outside of the bounded program space into other aspects of life:

> *I'm making new friends. A couple of them are going to come to my son's birthday party. So we're kind of starting to see people outside of the group. It was nice for the first time going to my friend's birthday party for her daughter and then seeing the group from the parenting centre and it was such a different experience… it's nice.*

For Kristin, the fact that her kids were connecting with other kids was important to her and enhanced her attachment to the P&L program and the neighbourhood school:

> *I mean they absolutely love it. And they're already making friends which is good. Because there's gonna be kids in the community that, you know, they can actually go to the park when they're older and see someone they know and be like hey! But I like the fact that they'll make new friends in the neighbourhood by going to the school.*

For Jill, the nutrition group at her kids' school was a place where she connected with others and was able to develop mutual trust and understanding:

> *The first year I didn't really associate with many people because I'm very shy, and have troubles talking to certain people, I don't trust a lot, so. Now I'm comfortable with them and they understand me, so. We're all in the same boat, we all have children with similar issues so we all understand each other. And most of us are single moms so we can all talk, you know, there's no partner to really help out…*

Gathering places are thus critical places of connection which can foster friendship and understanding amongst their participants; this is how the women described these gathering places in the interviews, and illustrated the different ways they could be places of connection.

4.3.2   A place to just be

The gathering places that the women talked about also seemed to be places that they could spend time and participate in on their own terms, and without judgment. Some of the women (n=3)talked about feeling self-conscious when out on the street or having a void in terms of places where they felt comfortable. They thus valued places to "be", which Rachel articulated in her description of the *Heart of the Hammer*:

> *You always felt welcome you never felt rushed. And it was friendly for everyone, so kids could be there, you know even if it was in the evening or bands were playing there you never felt like oh it's just grownup time the kids shouldn't be here… you could just be there, you didn't have to sit down for formal dinner or anything like that you could just have cookies or cheese and crackers. So it was easy and comfortable… you knew everybody that was there, it was a safe place to be… it wasn't designed to be high-end or low-end it was just to be.*

Alanna, a regular at *The Freeway*, discussed the many ways in which the coffee house was a place for people to "be", that didn't have a particular type of clientele or expectation that came with it. She broadly described its various qualities and functions:

> *I would say it's a very quiet peaceful place where you're always welcome, you're never treated badly, it's a good place to hang out, a good place to listen to music, it's a good place if you just want to have a game of cards or play a game of monopoly, go on the computer, or if you want to sit down and talk to the staff he's always caring and understanding and friendly, helpful you know. It's a great place…*

For Roseanne, the school nutrition group was a place where she could just be herself and be honest amongst a group of women with shared experiences:

> *It's the place you can go and pound out all of your frustrations be screaming at someone and they're you know, they're not going to say nothing, they're going to listen and then scream back at you and then you're feeling better.*

It seems that certain gathering places could mould into whatever place the women needed at that time, and where they did not feel that they had to perform or carry themselves in a certain way, helping remove tension from their lives and facilitating comfort and belonging. Even in gathering places that were less intentionally social in nature, for example neighbourhood parks or the pottery studio, participants relished them as comfortable places to "be".

4.3.3   A friendly, welcoming place

Finally, the gathering places were generally described as friendly and welcoming places, whether the church, the local candy shop, the local restaurant, the school or the front porch. The idea of a friendly and welcoming place connects with the above qualities of having a place to "be" and a place of connection. Cathy liked the *Big Top* mainly for its friendliness:

> *Well it's mostly working class people that go there, it's not a posh restaurant it's just a nice little family restaurant and there's all types of different people who go there. It's very tiny. But there's a nice friendly, I like the waitresses there they're friendly.*

Marjorie talked about her favourite places, the local library and the school where she used to teach and currently volunteers:

> *Well both of them are like every place else in this neighbourhood, they're basically very friendly. And people know your name. Which is quite a bit different from the Mountain.*

On another note, Marcella's front porch was a friendly and welcoming place to the rest of the community, which I witnessed myself biking by it a few months after our interview. She said:

> *But everyone was welcomed in this house, and everybody to this day. Even our Alderman calls me Ma, from the City Hall. The police even had their lunches here, um, I don't know what else I can tell you… I see it, the way you want to be treated, that's the way you treat other people… I've never had trouble.*

She played an active role in creating that place of welcome, always willing to share what she had with whoever happened to come by. The children knew they could knock on her door and have something to eat; a young man could walk by and be greeted with a cup of coffee. Friendliness was an important social quality of most of the gathering places that the women mentioned.

4.4   Physical/Spatial Qualities of Gathering Places

In the interviews, I tried to tease out what physical characteristics of gathering places mattered to the women, but the social and emotional qualities were much more salient. Similar to the accessibility of the neighbourhood, which was a key aspect of SoP, the accessibility of gathering places in terms of convenience and affordability was the quality most related to the physical and spatial dimensions of gathering places.

4.4.1   *Convenient*

Convenient gathering places were easy for the women to get to on foot, and had consistent and/or flexible hours. For the single mothers, places were more convenient if they accommodated their kids. Their first priority was always the well-being of their children.

98

Mothers who attended the P&L program (n=3) appreciated the frequency of the P&L program, which took place every morning from Monday to Friday, as Michelle mentioned:

> *Those programs, cause I myself even met some friends, like the mothers, so meeting people and stuff… And it's something that's right there, it's always open, like Monday to Friday most of the time and we just, we go… Whatever my kids love, it's just something that we do.*

Linda, whose favourite place was a pottery studio, really appreciated the flexible times and the fact that she could get there on foot:

> *Everything is accessible on foot if necessary… I can go on weekdays up to the pottery studio, which I just live for, I love the pottery studio… if I had to pay for pottery, I couldn't go… I don't have to be there at a certain time for a certain time… I think the flexibility is important. Programs that are drop-in programs, that you don't have to sign up for or you don't have to notify people before you come.*

Rachel also mentioned the importance of consistent hours and the ability to drop in anytime; she appreciated that the *Heart of the Hammer* had been open early in the morning until late at night. The mothers who utilized the Pinky Lewis recreation centre also commented on how they could walk there and how there were programs going on at many different hours. Thus, flexibility was an important dimension of convenience and accessibility. Many participants preferred drop-in or flexible programs (n=5) rather than ones with strict membership, with narrow start and finish dates, and with limited hours.

4.4.2   *Affordable*

Almost all of the gathering places that the participants mentioned are free to participate in. An exception to this would be the coffee shops and restaurants, but places such as the schools, the library, the park, church, and the rec centre were available to the women free of charge. This motivated and enabled them to make use of these neighbourhood resources.

Cathy, still describing the Big Top restaurant, commented on its affordability and thus its accessibility to people of different incomes:

I like the food, the food is very good and it's not that expensive. That's the big thing, you know. Once in a while I'll go to a nice restaurant but that's maybe one I could go to that's affordable for different people of different incomes.

As noted in Linda's comment above, she would not have been able to go to the pottery studio had there been a cost. The women also talked about how much they appreciated the free festivals in Gage Park which were accessible to neighbourhood families. Lisa lamented the loss of the Festival of Friends from the park, which has moved to Ancaster where many of the local families cannot get to based on the distance and the cost:

Like I have gone to the Festival of Friends every single year since it started… Last year was the very first year that I had to miss it, because I had no way to get out there. And I know a lot of people in my neighbourhood, had no way to get there, and for this neighbourhood, that's a big deal. Because that gives people in this neighbourhood, which is a lot of very low-income people living here ok, that gives them an opportunity to spend time with their kids, to take their kids somewhere. If they can't afford the vendors or that, there's still free activities there for the kids, there's the music… and now it's gone.

Thus, the accessibility of gathering places, in terms of both spatial convenience and cost, was an extremely important quality of neighbourhood gathering places.

4.5 Making Connections: Gathering Places and Neighbourhood Sense of Place

Participation in gathering places, combined with having a history in the neighbourhood, contributed to the SoP of the women. Based on the feedback from the participants, it appears that participation in gathering places and having a strong SoP mutually impact each other. The nurturing of SoP, especially the social aspect of SoP, however, often starts at the gathering place or by meeting someone who invites one to a gathering place. While the women who had lived in the area for a long time had a thorough knowledge of the area and did not necessarily need gathering places to have a strong SoP, they needed gathering places such as church and the library to maintain their social connections. The women who were busy taking care of their kids as single mothers, and who maybe did not know the neighbourhood as well, relied on these

gathering places for social support and security, and as venues to build deeper connections in their local community.

4.5.1 Combatting social isolation

Gathering places play a role in combatting social isolation and in turn nurturing a stronger SoP. Nearly all of the participants shared stories that touched on how they felt more connected to people and their community because of the gathering places they were able to participate in (n=11). Beth, who was struggling with a sense of isolation, was introduced to the nutrition group through the school social worker and has not looked back:

> I was speaking to a social worker there one day and I said you know, I just feel so alone and I've got no friends you know… she told me that they have a group there, a nutrition group and all that and she took me in and introduced me to the ladies and I've been there ever since.

Rachel was quite explicit about how her life had changed since getting involved with her neighbourhood hub and discovering the *Heart of the Hammer*:

> So many things have changed for the positive in the last couple of years. I mean for me and for my family, because up until 2 years ago we didn't really know people in the neighbourhood. We didn't really connect with anyone, we would sort of come home, close the doors, that was pretty much it. But since getting involved with the community planning team and meeting other people in the neighbourhood who have similar values and who moved into the neighbourhood for the same reasons that I did and see the potential and the beauty in it, it's been really great. Because now we're actually connected… So that was like a turning point mentally for me, thinking, ok there's people that I would actually sort of like to hang out with… between the neighbourhood cleanup and then meeting people at the Heart of the Hammer and actually going there, that's when it really turned around.

Jill, also describing the nutrition group, emphasized the importance of the social nature of the group and the fact that it is neighbourhood-based, which allows the women to keep in touch with each other:

> That's where I spend all my time, it's where I'm sociable, it's where I actually get to see other adults not just my kids. It's nice to be with other moms. And it's comfortable there, you know we're all laughing and joking and just being ourselves, you know… And we all

live in the neighbourhood so even we could go to each other's houses if we wanted to. Because we all live close by. Within walking distance.

For the older women, whose risk of social isolation could be even more prominent because they no longer had kids to care for and thus a network of other mothers to connect with, having alternative places to spend time, such as at their church, kept them socially involved. Also, limited finances frequently reduced the geographical boundaries of the participants' everyday lives, making the availability of a variety of local opportunities even more important. This need for connection was emphasized in each interview, regardless of the age and background of the participants.

4.5.2   *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Purpose*

Related to combatting social isolation, participation in gathering places can contribute to providing people with a sense of purpose. This sense of purpose could be as simple as having a reason to leave the house each day, whether to volunteer at the local school or to pick up a book on hold at the library. It could also be something that was a grounding and meaningful force in the womens' everyday lives.

For example, Marcella described the importance of her church, which to her was like a second home, where she received social support and also found consistency in her week:

> *I mean if I don't have my church, I'm lost. I don't know what day it is, I don't know nothing… I can go there and I feel like all my troubles have been, well when I walk in there, it's all the children. I'm the Grandma… It's like home for me there, you know.*

Emily's membership at the local library was meaningful to her everyday life, and the accessibility of the library to her home made it easier for her to get out and participate. Here she described her favourite place, where she also noted the common qualities of friendliness and affordability:

The library. Because I know the staff by now and everything. I like to read and you can get movies here, it doesn't cost you any money to entertain yourself… Yeah, and it gives you something you know to do everyday too, especially if you're kind of shut in a little bit it's hard to make yourself go out.

Volunteering or contributing in some way can bring a sense of purpose to the lives of these women and can help them build confidence. This has a direct impact on their neighbourhood SoP, because they mainly access opportunities within their neighbourhood that are close by and convenient for them; they are thus investing in their neighbourhood. Jill experienced this through her involvement volunteering with the nutrition group:

Because they depend on the moms to come in and help out with the snack program at my kids' school. And if I didn't do that I probably wouldn't be doing anything. I need to volunteer, I need to do something. To get myself out in the community. It makes me feel better about myself, so…

Lisa, one of the older women, described similar feelings through her involvement volunteering at King George School, which has recently closed:

And we have a lot of people that are volunteering there that are retired. They don't have kids, right? Or single retired. And they need something to do with themselves. Like I'm talking about myself here, too. Cause my kids are grown up, and my kids are hardly ever around… I spend most of my time here, on my own. So King George is great because it helps, keeps me occupied… it keeps you busy, so you're not sitting around getting more depressed than what you are, right. So taking that school away is gonna case a lot of hardship in this neighbourhood, you know.

Lisa's comment touches on how the loss of neighbourhood schools is also a loss of neighbourhood gathering places, impacting the lives of many. In many interviews (n=10) the women described how much of their daily life was focused on meeting the basic needs of themselves and their families. They needed places where they felt valued and where they could contribute; gathering places provided meaningful ways for the women to engage and invest in their communities.

4.5.3   Place attachment and pride of place

Emotional attachment to specific places impacted the participants' everyday lives, which for the most part are lived in their local neighbourhood. While the link between gathering places and neighbourhood SoP is primarily social, certain places hold emotional and/or nostalgic significance to the participants. For example, Kristin described her love of Gage Park and the significant role it has played in her life, both past and present:

> *It's always been that, growing up, like hanging out at the fountain you know with everybody when you're teenagers or whatever, I like going for bike rides around it, I like going to the park, I've just always loved Gage park… If they ever took Gage Park out, I would be heartbroken. It's just part of a lot of people's lives. You know, even just taking the kids to the park or meeting your friends there as teenagers…*

Some of the participants (n=5) were proud to hold significant landmarks in their neighbourhood such as Gage Park, which hosts numerous festivals, and the Ivor Wynne Stadium. The stadium may not be a gathering place in the participants' everyday lives, but it was still a place that brought residents together across the city and contributed to the identity of the neighbourhood. Some (n=4) of the women also held emotional attachment to the neighbourhood schools, because they or their kids had gone there. Marcella, whose front porch was her main gathering place, was also very attached to the park that connected to her street. The park was how kids and neighbours got to know her. She told a story of how years ago she and her husband, along with other neighbours, mobilized to raise funds that were then matched by the city in order to improve the park:

> *Well we fought for that park, there was me and my husband, and P and her husband across the street… We had to have our first 500 dollars. Then the park would double it… we all turned around and we had bake sales, hamburgers, anything. We'd go to the different stores for different, you know they'd give us something as a gift. We went to the paint shop there down the street and got paint…*

As Marcella's story illustrates, when people care about a place and hold pride of place, they will more likely engage with it and take action to preserve and improve it. This can be a particular gathering place, or an entire street or a neighbourhood. Knowing a place's history, and seeing oneself as a part of that history and as contributing to its future, can deepen one's SoP.

4.5.4 Barriers to participation in neighbourhood gathering places

There were multiple barriers to participation in gathering places. By barriers, I mean factors that prevent or discourage women from accessing the gathering places available to them. As described above, the accessibility of local gathering places depended upon various factors, including: the walkability of their neighbourhood; the proximity of gathering places to their home, as many residents do not have a car or cannot go far due to mobility or health issues; the hours that these places were open; and the affordability of participating in such places. In relation to the latter point, Rebecca shared:

> *A lot of the parents I hear talk about they got their kids in this this this but all I hear is price price price and I can't do it. It's not an option at this point.*

Related to accessibility, on a more emotional level, is how welcome the women felt in certain places. Two of the older women commented that they feel "out of place" in some of the programs offered to women in the neighbourhood because they cater to young mothers, and happen during school hours. For a different example, there are two fairly new locations run by local non-profits which have the potential to be vibrant community spaces, and have the purpose of being open and accessible to the local community. These places, however, were not initially readily accepted by all of the residents because they, according to several of the women (n=4), appeared out of nowhere without introducing themselves to or building a relationship with people in the community. So, even though they may offer free and beneficial programs, they were not developed based on the terms of the residents, who thus may have felt uncertain about

accessing these new facilities. This point about creating spaces based on what the residents want and need will be emphasized again in Chapter 5.

Feelings of unsafety and isolation also presented as barriers to participation in gathering places. Some of the participants (n=3) may have felt confident walking around the neighbourhood, asking questions and seeking out ways to get involved in the neighbourhood. Others, such as Michelle, had more fear and stuck more to themselves:

> *I mean, some people might like it. But I guess because I don't really branch out to other people or other organizations around me, I just kind of stay close, I just look from the inside.*

The participants often did not expand on why they felt unsafe, beyond mentioning drug activity, theft, and the sex trade, and/or in Cathy's words, "*unsavoury people*". Cathy wondered if it was her age that made her feel unsafe, or the fact that she lived alone. The most common places where the participants felt unsafe or uncomfortable were bars (n=5). Others (n=2) made reference to events that had happened in their past, inferring that these events continued to impact them, but without explaining them any further. Feelings of isolation and unsafety seemed to mutually influence each other, and create a barrier to the women getting out and engaging in their neighbourhood. Fear, whether based on perceptions or material experiences, can be an immobilizing force in many peoples' lives, as indicated in Chapter 1, and evidently plays a role in the lives of these women. I chose to reiterate the theme of safety in relation to gathering places, since fear can both inhibit the use of gathering places, or, participation in gathering places can increase their sense of safety by getting to know their neighbours and neighbourhood, and thus increase civic engagement.

Caregiving responsibilities were paramount in the participants' lives, and all of the participants were caregivers in some way, whether caring for children and/or parents, being

housekeepers, and/or working with kids or adults with special needs. The single mothers always focused on their kids, and while they did not seem to mind, their caregiving responsibilities evidently shaped their everyday lives, including what places they were able to participate in. When I asked them what they did and where they went when they had time for themselves, a common answer was that they did not have time for themselves. Alanna described the struggles she faced caring for both her mother and her teenaged son:

> *Basically I feel right now that I've got the whole weight, the world on my shoulders you know, I'm trying to take care of my mom, trying to take care of my son, keep my place while helping her out, and meanwhile I have my own health problems, so it's not easy, sometimes I just feel like pulling my hair out, like ahh, but I gotta keep going.*

Michelle, who rarely had a break from taking care of her three kids, expressed a desire to participate in something for herself:

> *A women's group would be nice. Something where you're gonna talk about your kids but not. You know where it's just you as a person. Cause with me, like everything is me and the kids. Which I love, don't get me wrong. But sometimes it would be nice where like you know, it's just you. And you're not doing something for somebody else for that little time being.*

While caregiving responsibilities may have inhibited the women from spending time in certain places or finding time for themselves, they were also facilitators *to* participating in some of the gathering places. For example, the single mothers would not have encountered the school-based programs or built those friendships if they did not have to take their kids there. The volunteering that the women participated in is based on caring for and supporting kids, and thus, in this sense, caregiving contributed to their active participation in their neighbourhood and their SoP. Thus, the role of caregiving has a variety of influences, and it can both enable and constrain community participation and sense of belonging.

As much as gathering places enhance SoP by combatting social isolation, providing a sense of purpose, and fostering place attachment and pride of place, it is also important to recognize what barriers exist to participation in gathering places.

4.6   Chapter Summary

There is indeed a relationship of mutual influence between neighbourhood gathering places and neighbourhood SoP. There are examples of women who initially felt isolated and disconnected from their surrounding community, and needed a gathering place to connect with neighbours and get to know their neighbourhood. Other women, because of their many years of experience in their neighbourhood, their histories there and commitment to the neighbourhood, had a strong SoP and thus actively sought out opportunities in the community and found places to stay involved and connected. Neighbourhoods need local gathering places in order to fill a variety of social and material needs and strengthen a positive SoP. There are other factors, however, such as fear, lack of care of place and negative place reputation, which also impact SoP and need to be addressed, beginning at the neighbourhood scale and moving up to the city and higher levels. The participants were quite cognizant of some of the issues that pose a challenge to neighbourhood quality of life, such as drug-related crime, absentee landlords, a lack of affordable housing, a lack of job opportunities, and school closures. Having a strong SoP does not mean that everything in the neighbourhood is going well, but can inspire residents to fight for what matters to them. The participants were not ready to give up on their neighbourhood and were trying to make the best of what was available to them; they valued the safe gathering places where they spent time and which enhanced their feelings about their community. In Chapter 5, I will focus on the participants' suggestions regarding gathering places, and the messages they have to share with decision-makers and the wider Hamilton community about their

neighbourhood. I will relate the results to current neighbourhood planning and other local initiatives in order to inform their development from a feminist perspective, and discuss the wider implications of this research in the community and in the academy.

5. CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Living in a neighbourhood is a relational act. Neighbourhood SoP, while a very personal phenomenon, cannot be isolated from the social, political, and economic realms of a community, which are embedded in wider relations from the local to the global. This research was inspired by my own love for and commitment to Hamilton, and by the impact that neighbourhood gathering places have had on my own life and SoP in my neighbourhood. I did this research in the hope of contributing to my city and communicating some of the knowledge and experience of Hamiltonians that is too often under-represented. The results of this research have implications for the neighbourhood and the City of Hamilton, and hopefully can be useful to other neighbourhoods and cities that are exploring similar questions. There is now an opportunity for me to take this knowledge and use it to inspire action that may contribute to the lives of the participants and to their neighbours.

The participants valued a variety of gathering places, which, for many of them, were intrinsic to their daily life and their connection to friends and neighbours; they were also places where they felt they could contribute and had a sense of purpose. Participants valued the social fabric of their neighbourhood and felt most connected to it because of the people around them. The results of this research resonate with much of the literature exploring women`s experiences of urban neighbourhoods. It contributes to the literature in terms of providing an in-depth look at why gathering places matter and how they impact SoP.

Beyond imparting this valuable knowledge about their neighbourhood and experiences of local gathering places, participants also shared what they would like to see in their neighbourhood in terms of improving gathering places and, more broadly, the quality of life in the neighbourhood. They also imparted messages about their neighbourhood for local decision-makers and the broader community to consider. This Chapter focuses on what the participants want to see in their neighbourhood, beginning with possibilities for neighbourhood gathering place. I connect these suggestions to their ideas of SoP and gathering places, and to related literature. I also explore some areas for further research, including the relationship between housing and SoP, and between safety and SoP, followed by recommendations for a way forward in Hamilton to become a safe and age-friendly city. I then highlight the limitations of this research and reflect on my own praxis throughout the research process. Finally, I conclude by discussing the importance of engaging in critical neighbourhood development.

5.1   Possibilities for Neighbourhood Gathering Places

Ultimately, it is essential that a variety of gathering places be available to residents of this neighbourhood. I interviewed all single women, across a wide spectrum of ages, and while there were many common qualities that characterized their favourite gathering places, the types of gathering places were diverse. Many of the gathering places were actively created by the women themselves. The physical space of a school, park or library provided an opportunity for people to gather and build relationships with each other; the human relationships are what made them into "gathering places", which Johnson (2010) also found in her study of the Kitchener Farmer`s Market. The Tuesday drop-in at the Baptist church is not only a place to eat a homemade hot meal, it is a place to connect with neighbours and be welcomed no matter what your background. Marcella's front porch is an example of the blurring of private and public space, as it is not only

a part of her home, but an entry point for many children and adults in the neighbourhood, and a place that enables Marcella in her role as the neighbourhood "Grandma". *The Heart of the Hammer* was a place for shared conversations and for people from different backgrounds to "just be", to feel valued and to nurture sense of belonging.

The participants in my research were grateful for the gathering places that already exist, but wanted to see more of them. The older women in particular noted that their age group, especially those who are single, have a hard time finding places to go to meet people, since many programs cater to mothers of young children. The women also wanted to see more multi-use space with flexible hours and without a financial cost to participate. Lisa, who was grieving the loss of her volunteer role at King George School, shared her church community's vision of creating a neighbourhood centre for people of all ages:

> *I'm talking about things like, teaching single moms to cook proper nutritious meals, um, like a babysitting place too for parents who, like, there's single moms here that are just around their kids 24 hours a day and they need a break. So, a place to give them a break. A place for the seniors too, to be able to get together and do quilting or knitting or whatever they want to do. That kind of a centre. For people to do things, but not charge.*

I had entered into this project thinking that there were "ideal" qualities of gathering places, many that I had learned from the literature about third places: neutralizing places where people from all walks of life are included and on level ground; places of sociability; places that are accessible to people in the neighbourhood, and; places that are comfortable and welcoming (Oldenburg, 1997). These qualities showed up in the gathering places the participants mentioned, but not necessarily all at once, and they looked different depending on the context. One finding in particular that supports the feminist literature on the blurring of public and private space, and which the literature on third places and opportunity structures does not address, is the fact that the home was seen by many participants as an important gathering place. The Gibson-Stipley

neighbourhood has the special characteristic of being a "front porch community" that many

suburban neighbourhoods, or areas with concentrated high-rise apartments, do not have. To

gather with friends and neighbours in the home, however, one must first encounter them outside

of the home, in the public realm. This happened for the women through the programs they

attended at the library, the schools, rec centres, and at church.

The importance of neighbourhood gathering places was also highlighted by residents in

the "Stadium Precinct" community consultations regarding the Stadium redevelopment.

Consultants, hired by the City of Hamilton, came up with several recommendations related to

revitalizing the neighbourhood in conjunction with the construction of the new stadium. One

recommendation highlighted in the Hamilton Spectator was that Cannon Street, a busy east-west

corridor that runs from the east end all the way through downtown Hamilton, be closed off in the

blocks surrounding the stadium to become a pedestrian-friendly zone. They also recommended

that the area surrounding the stadium be prioritized for community use and recreation, including

the development of a seniors centre (Van Dongen, 2012). These recommendations that emerged

from the community consultations resonate with the results of my own research; some of the

participants mentioned the busy one-way traffic as a negative feature of the neighbourhood

(n=4), which a pedestrian zone would help mitigate, and they also mentioned the importance of

opportunities for older adults (n=5).

While there is a need for gathering places, and appreciation of those that do exist, some

participants (n=4) talked about organizations that showed up and took over underused buildings

in the neighbourhood, and although their intention was to serve the community, they did not

initially receive a positive response from residents. When something is imposed, even if it has

been imposed with good intentions, it may be received with mistrust and resentment; this was

expressed in several of my interviews. Well-intentioned organizations can learn from this warning and work to build relationships with residents before attempting to "help" the neighbourhood or implement a new initiative. As Rowles (1978) notes, better helping requires deeper understanding. Residents want to feel a sense of ownership, and want to trust the people who are introducing these opportunities to them. This will be of utmost importance in the Stadium redevelopment process. Rachel articulated the importance of resident-driven programs in her comment below:

> *…if there were things like an existing, I'll call it loosely, community centre, because I like to think more of… like rec-centres to me are just so limiting because you have to go at this time and you can only go for this long and even with Jimmy Thompson pool like it's only open for a few hours a day and some days it's not open at all… we need things that are more to what our schedules can be, it would be driven by the need of the community instead of the city or the province or the powers that be saying "we will insert this and this shall be for the people and you shall love it or leave it"… I think it limits how you interact with them or how you want to approach them, especially for communities that haven't had… it would be meeting the need of the community and not the other way around.*

Gathering places have the potential to create community associations, which is what has happened in the lives of many of the participants. John McKnight (1995), in his book *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits,* described the different kinds of associations that express and create community. He defined community as "more than just a place. It comprises various groups of people who work together on a face-to-face basis in public life, not just in private" (McKnight, 1995, p.118). One type of community association he identified is formal, which often involves official titles and elected leadership, such as a church or a neighbourhood association. A second type is what McKnight described as informal, representing "a gathering of citizens who solve problems, celebrate together, or enjoy their social compact" (p.119); examples of such associations could be a book club, a group of neighbours gathering on a front porch, or a drop-in community centre. A third type of community association takes place

in settings of enterprise such as restaurants, barbershops, and other places of business. *Tim Horton's,* the *Big Top* and other businesses that were mentioned in my research also fostered community association. Those who are often labeled and excluded based on being single mothers, disabled, or poor, were involved in community life through the gathering places which fit into McKnight`s three types of community associations. With the development of the Pan Am Stadium, and several empty buildings waiting to be purchased, demolished, or restored, such as Sanford Avenue School (Nolan, 2012), this is a prime opportunity for the creation and enhancement of different types of gathering places where more inclusive community associations can develop.

Moving from a discussion of gathering places to neighbourhood SoP, I now highlight the participants' visions for their neighbourhood in terms of how it is valued and represented, and how that impacts SoP.

5.2   A Community that is Valued

The gathering places that the women mentioned are clearly an important part of the fabric of the neighbourhood, and contribute to its vitality. The participants noticed what was happening in their neighbourhood, including a decline of the local economy and a lack of response from authorities when it came to issues such as poverty, crime, and the provision of safe, affordable housing. The gathering places contributed to the women feeling valued and a part of their neighbourhood; the participants also want to feel, however, that their neighbourhood is valued by those within - residents, businesses and property owners – as well as by outsiders and decision-makers.

5.2.1   *Neighbourhood Decline and Revival*

Many participants who have known the neighbourhood for a long time commented on how it has changed, and this change has often meant loss (n=6). Several women grew up there as children, then moved away and have now come back for various reasons; some by choice, and others due to the neighbourhood's affordability (n=4). *Care of Place* was one of the prominent factors influencing the participants' SoP, and a lack of care for properties on the part of tenants, landlords, businesses, and the City disheartened those who were trying their best to take care of and instill a sense of pride in their neighbourhood. Emily spoke poignantly to this:

> *I really think they need to have more stuff that people can feel that this community is important. So you need to have some programs, and you need to have incentives for businesses to open in this area, to give them a tax break or something, even people who are self-employed, businesses at home to help them with that. Try to help people beautiful their neighbourhood you know let's get some more trees planted, get that kind of thing going you know. It's usually not this neighbourhood that wins those neighbourhood awards…*

Not all of the participants were optimistic about where their neighbourhood is headed, and those who had lived there for many years especially lamented the decline of cornerstones of the community, such as the businesses on Barton Street and the many schools that had been closed down. Participants spoke frequently of the decline of Barton Street, and wanted to see the empty storefronts and spaces filled with things that would benefit the community. Some of the long-time residents (n=5) were realistic about the challenges of their neighbourhood, including the apathy and disengagement of some of the residents, and the neglect on the part of the City and landlords. They wanted to see investment in their homes, streets and parks.

On a more positive note, some of what the participants hoped for has begun to take place. Along with mentions of apathy and disinvestment, participants also shared some positive new developments they had noticed that inspired optimism for the neighbourhood's future and a more positive SoP. For example, the Barton Village Business Improvement Association (BIA) is

actively working to promote Barton's business district and show their neighbours that it cares. The BIA has adopted Woodlands Park through the City's Adopt-a-Park Program (City of Hamilton, 2012b), and has partnered with a local school and the City of Hamilton to do park clean-ups; it initiated a beautification project in the summer to plant flowers along Barton Street; it has also hosted a community barbeque and has plans to create a community ice rink. Some of the participants, both single mothers and older women (n=5), talked about this barbeque and the skating rink, because they noticed that someone was investing in their neighbourhood, and investing in one of the gathering places (Woodlands Park) they had identified. In December, the BIA has Santa walk the streets handing out candy canes. Jill had told me about this in our interview, and mentioned it as something she really appreciated as a friendly neighbourhood initiative. While there are still many empty storefronts on Barton Street, especially east of the Barton Village BIA, there are attempts to make the street more vibrant for those who live, work, and play in the area, as reflected in the BIA's mission statement: "The Barton Village Business Improvement Area works to develop relationships with the community to continuously build a safe, vibrant place to *live, shop, play, invest"* (Barton Village BIA, 2012).

Another recent development is that a group of residents got together and initiated a community garden in Powell Park for the first time this past summer. I was biking through the park in July to visit the Barton Library and passed by a garden which had not been there the summer before. I remembered how several of my participants had suggested that a community garden would be a great thing for the neighbourhood, and there it was. Two residents had been told that there was going to be a community garden in the park, and when nothing happened, they took action themselves. They connected with the City, the Hamilton Community Garden Network, and local community groups to get the support and resources required to build a

garden. The creation of the garden had a ripple effect, connecting residents to each other and to other neighbourhood initiatives (Brassington, 2012). Perhaps it, too, will become a cherished gathering place. Early this fall, Mission Services, a large social service organization in Hamilton, recently opened up a new Community Opportunity Centre in hopes of serving the unique needs of the neighbourhood. Their current services include food and clothing banks, addiction treatment programs and life skills training opportunities (Pecoskie, 2012). They moved to the Gibson neighbourhood from their James Street location to be more accessible to their clientele. The participants also discussed what they had heard about the Sanford School property and how it would be used to expand the Pinky Lewis Recreation Centre and provide the area with much needed green space. Thus, even over the past year and a half that I have been engaging with this neighbourhood through my research, there have been positive developments, which will hopefully continue to have a ripple effect and contribute to the residents feeling that their neighbourhood matters and has much to offer.

5.2.2   School Closures and Sense of Place

In Chapter 2, I highlighted how the issue of school closures has been a prominent concern in the study neighbourhood. This fact was emphasized in the participant interviews, and in my key informant interviews. One of the positive aspects of the neighbourhood that the participants described was the fact that it is a "family neighbourhood", and they liked the presence of children. Those who had lived in the neighbourhood for many years, or who had grown up there and returned later in life, commented on how there were fewer kids around than there used to be (n=5). These qualitative comments are evidenced by the recent closures, with more closures to come. The Gibson, King George, and Sanford School buildings now sit empty. The building that used to be the Scott Park also sits empty, with the exception of the attached Jimmy Thompson

Pool, and Parkview is scheduled to close in 2015. The decision to close Parkview was made as a result of the accommodation review process, which involved Accommodation Review Committees (ARCs) made up of students, teachers, community members, staff and parents, who worked together and engaged in a public consultation process in order to provide "recommendations to trustees that make the best use of location, space and programming" (HWDSB, 2012).

At the completion of the accommodation review process in Hamilton during 2011/12, many parents, students and community advocates were devastated when their mobilization against lower city school closures was ignored and their pleas for a different solution were disregarded by those with decision-making power, namely the Trustees. Closing neighbourhood schools seemed to go against the City of Hamilton's promotion of neighbourhood health, community development and civic inclusion. It is clear from the results of my research that schools play an integral role as gathering places in neighbourhoods, bringing neighbours together and contributing to SoP. The School Board had an opportunity to explore non-conventional ways of utilizing space, which Yui and I had proposed in a letter that we wrote to the Trustees earlier in 2012:

> *"Neighbourhood organizations, researchers, community services, recreation programs, church groups, etc. could rent space in the existing schools so that the building use is maximized and the benefit to local neighbourhoods increases. Schools could partner with training colleges and programs to provide the needed building repairs. Students, parents and neighbourhood residents could be part of determining strategies and solutions, in order to create an education system that is integrated with the social fabric of the neighbourhood."*

Senses of belonging and community are emotional ties to places, in this case, schools. In neighbourhoods that lack many community spaces and resources, such as the central-east lower city of Hamilton, the schools are important opportunity structures that combat social isolation. It

remains to be seen how the recent and projected school closures will affect the neighbourhood in the long-term. What was evident is that, by excluding considerations of emotion that tie into SoP - such as place attachment and belonging - in their decision-making, the ARC and the Trustees failed to fully understand the implications of school closures on the students and parents within and the neighbourhoods surrounding the schools.

The issue of school closures is not unique to Hamilton, nor is it a new one. Ontario as a province has experienced over 200 school closures since the late 1990s (Basu, 2007). Basu posited the contentious issue of school closures as one manifestation of neoliberal restructuring in education, where school closures were justified by declining school enrollment and surplus capacity, and deemed necessary in order to make efficient use of school board resources. Basu conducted a case study of ARCs in various neighbourhoods in Toronto, and highlighted the limitations and power dynamics that were illustrated through the ARCs. Basu argued that ARC members responded with acts of citizenship as they attempted to make decisions in a "zero-sum game framework" where an inevitable outcome was the closure of some schools. Many citizens in the recent Hamilton case felt as though the decision has already been made from the outset, and that any arguments they presented or actions they took had no bearing on the final decisions that were made by the Trustees. Basu clearly articulated the impact of provincial-level policy on the local scale, highlighting what I was left thinking after the accommodation review process in Hamilton concluded this year: "Policies formulated at the provincial level are interpreted differently at the local level whereby closure of a school facility (savings in education costs) entails the loss of other community ties (loss in social connections)." (Basu, 2007, p.123)

Scholars nationally and globally have explored the phenomenon of school closures from various perspectives, including from a neighbourhood health promotion perspective. Witten,

MacCreanor, Kearns & Ramasubramanian (2001) investigated the impacts of school closures on neighbourhood social cohesion in New Zealand. The authors identified schools as opportunity structures, which provide informal meeting places for neighbourhoods (i.e. gathering places) and function as health promotion venues. Opportunity structures impact the sense of well-being and community participation of citizens, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Baum & Palmer, 2002; Murie & Musterd, 2002); schools can serve their surrounding communities as informational, material and social resources that contribute to civic participation and quality of life. The school in this particular New Zealand neighbourhood was seen, similar to in my own research, as much more than a school; it was a meeting place where community goodwill was exhibited over generations. The parents perceived the school closure as an imposition of the state, and a loss of control of the community; parents felt that they were not given a choice in an issue so important to them, and experienced feelings of fear, apprehension and uncertainty. This feeling of powerlessness and loss of control, with school closures being a specific example of inciting such feelings, can significantly influence one's physical and emotional health, and can fragment communities.

I could write a whole thesis on the accommodation review process, but will leave the discussion at this, emphasizing its connection with my own research findings. My research findings suggest that schools matter, not only in terms of educating children but in terms of serving as neighbourhood gathering places and enhancing neighbourhood SoP. Residents want to know that their neighbourhood is valued, and for a neighbourhood that has already experienced so much loss, the school closures may have a negative impact on neighbourhood quality of life, including less attraction and retention of families. I had not expected to become so involved in the accommodation review process, but found it intertwined with my research on gathering places, and wanted to be engaged in the process not only because of my research in the

neighbourhood, but as a citizen of Hamilton. The upside for this neighbourhood is that the schools that do exist in the neighbourhood continue to play a vital role in the lives of the students, parents, and neighbours.

5.3   Changing attitudes and perceptions of the neighbourhood

> *In fact, it is important to note how little power local neighbourhood residents have to affect the pervasive nature of the deficiency model, mainly because a number of society's most influential institutions have themselves developed a stake in maintaining that focus… All of these major institutions combine to create a wall between lower income communities and the rest of society – a wall of needs which, ironically enough, is built not on hatred but (at least partly) on the desire to "help."* (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p.24)

As discussed in Chapter 4, the reputation of the participants' neighbourhood, especially the one imposed by outsiders, impacted their SoP. The participants were well aware of the newspaper headlines too often highlighting violent crime and problems in the neighbourhood; for example, in the late spring of 2012 several Hamilton Spectator articles highlighted a shooting and stabbings all within a few blocks of each other. When the general public, who do not know the neighbourhood first-hand, have only read about the neighbourhood in relation to its crime, its notorious reputation is perpetuated. Programs can also perpetuate negative perceptions. Those that target "at-risk" populations are often focused on the downtown core and other neighbourhoods with high levels of low-income, such as the research neighbourhood. Jill told me a story about how her son came home from school one day and said "Mom, did you know we live in an inner-city neighbourhood?" Jill was unsure how to respond to this in a way that did not make her son feel inferior These labels we impose on neighbourhoods and people are incredibly influential and can disempower entire communities. Jill appreciated the support that she received from her kids' school, for example, extra food and clothing in the wintertime, but she never felt

that she was looked down on or given things in a condescending way. Instead, she knew people were looking out for her and her family, and did not need the label of "inner-city".

While the *Code Red* series in the Hamilton Spectator (Buist, 2010) brought increased awareness of health and socioeconomic inequality within the Hamilton community, and motivated the City in particular to respond with concrete actions (for example, by implementing the NDS), the project also brought about a perhaps unintended consequence. Certain neighbourhoods, which generally were shown to be red on the map, including those in my research, became labelled as "Code Red" neighbourhoods, illustrated by an article in the Hamilton Spectator from September 2012, entitled "$2 million aimed at Code Red neighbourhoods" (Reilly, 2012a). The article did speak to the stigma that the Code Red label creates, and also highlighted the work being done in the City's neighbourhood development office. Local media also serves to sensationalize violent crime and paint an inaccurate picture of certain neighbourhoods, specifically this one.

To the participants, their neighbourhood meant much more to them than a collection of negative statistics, and they wanted to see outsiders and decision-makers give them a chance. This desire came both from those who intentionally chose to live in the area, and those who lived there based on life circumstances and affordability. The following statements are some of the participants' messages about their neighbourhood to the broader community:

> *Well I think they shouldn't underestimate the neighbourhood... there's a lot of misconceptions about down here, a lot of people really questioned me when I said I was going to redo the house and move down here... I think this neighbourhood, this immediate neighbourhood, has had its decline but I see it coming up...* - Marjorie

> *To the wider Hamilton community? I would say don't underestimate the lower city. Because it's beautiful, the houses are fantastic... these places were built to last... People in downtown are* not *scary, they have a lot of heart... I think we're just going to get*

bigger and better. We don't have to drive out of here... We can grow, work, play... right here. - Rachel

They need to give it a chance. Don't just assume because they live off Barton that it's a bad area and bad people and riff raff and violence and all that… You just gotta give it a chance. – Jill

Residents of the neighbourhood already struggle to create a different narrative other than the one that is often imposed on it from the outside – that their neighbourhood is poor, disadvantaged, rough, and in need of help. John McKnight has spent decades working with urban neighbourhoods in the United States who have been known for their deficiencies, and the result has been "client neighbourhoods" saturated with community services, with the absence of power, community and connection among the residents themselves. McKnight described how labelled people are made to be consumers of services rather than citizens, thus excluded from community life and are unable to recognize and use their gifts and capacities (McKnight 1995). He was a creator of the famous Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, which seeks to strengthen communities from the bottom up by recognizing and acting upon their assets, rather than their deficiencies. ABCD starts with the capacities of the residents and associations in the area; it stresses the primacy of local definition, investment, creativity, hope and control; and it is relationship-driven (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). The City of Hamilton lauds the ABCD model for their NDS and the community developers working under the NDS are hired to mobilize the capacities of the neighbourhoods they are working in under the model. ABCD provides an important re-framing of so-called "Code Red" neighbourhoods, as well as labelled individuals. Emily spoke to the importance of this reframing, of the need for neighbourhood pride and for success stories:

> *You've got to have some ways that people can have some pride in that they live here, and that's what's lacking. When you don't have pride you lose everything you know… there's got to be a sense of belonging, that's what's missing… I was thinking that it would be*

good to hear some success stories of people living in this neighbourhood. This could be inspirational to others… Some positive articles in the media about this neighbourhood, too, would be nice to see.

In the stories that my participants told, there were elements of sadness and despair, but there were also stories of hopefulness and possibility. This well-rounded narrative is what the broader community needs to hear, and also what residents need to believe in order to feel a sense of pride, belonging, and positive SoP. Now that I have explored the implications of the results and lessons learned regarding gathering places and neighbourhood SoP, I will now feature two research directions related to my research and the concept of SoP.

5.4   Research Directions: Housing and Neighbourhood Sense of Place

When I asked the participants what they wanted to see in their neighbourhood, related to gathering places and beyond, one of the most common responses (n=6) was that they would like to see more affordable housing, specifically to see residents able to afford to live in a safe, high-quality home. The participants' comments brought to light the important connection between housing, SoP and quality of life. They wanted affordable housing to include houses and smaller apartment buildings, rather than high-rises. Several of the participants credited the neighbourhood for its affordability (n=4), but did not think that there were enough options in their neighbourhood and the city at large. Linda strongly advocated for affordable housing and against gentrification, which is happening in certain parts of the city such as James Street North:

What I don't want to see is gentrification. Now, there is a charm in a blue collar neighbourhood. There is a charm, and the thing with urban planning is that you have to plan to include everybody. So, I vehemently oppose to the gentrification of neighbourhoods because basically what it's doing is saying 'this city only has room for the haves, the have-nots are not allowed'.

Like most other cities in Canada, housing remains a significant challenge in Hamilton. The SPRC's report on housing in Hamilton called attention to the lack of adequate and

affordable housing in the City (Wetselaar & Mayo, 2010). In terms of affordability, 73 % of low-income families and 80 % of low-income unattached individuals are spending more than 30 % of their income on housing. When someone is spending more than 30% of their income on housing, they are considered at risk of being unable to pay their rent or mortgage (Wetselaar &Mayo, 2010). Although Hamilton is known for its relatively low real estate prices and rental rates, social assistance rates and wages are not sufficiently supporting the cost of living. In terms of adequacy, many buildings in Hamilton are in need of major repairs and this percentage is higher for families and individuals living below the poverty line. Several articles in the Hamilton Spectator have highlighted the importance of and need for affordable housing in Hamilton, especially when it comes to options for unattached individuals (Pike, 2012) and for women. Hamilton's women's shelters are constantly over-capacity, and organizations are turning away women in need of shelter, many of whom are fleeing an abusive situation (Clairmont, 2012; Davy, 2012). As mentioned in Chapter 2, many women are part of the invisible homeless population who couch-surf at friends' houses or are coerced into unsafe situations in exchange for shelter; this population includes the young and old. Advocates have emphasized that the solution to this problem is not to build more shelter beds, but to offer more affordable housing and more transitional housing with supports.

I will not get into the complexities of the housing market, but will say that in a social and economic context that places housing as a commodity, rather than as a right, those who cannot afford to own a house and who require additional support get pushed to the sidelines. The home is seen as a private space, but housing is a public issue. As Mair and Trussell (2010), in their essay about our collective obligation to end poverty and homelessness in Canada, state: "An individual's right is only secured if society secures it, and thus the private and the public, the

individual and the social, are inexorably interconnected. Private troubles are public issues, and ensuring that every person has access to appropriate, safe, and secure housing is just one piece of the puzzle" (p.224). The provision of such housing, is thus, a collective responsibility requiring investment from levels of government beyond the municipal level. The home is embedded in the neighbourhood, and as discussed in Chapter 4, can be an important gathering place for women. Feelings of safety at home are intimately related to feelings of security and connection to the wider neighbourhood (Warrington, 2001). There is an ongoing role for qualitative research to illuminate the relationships between housing, SoP, identity and well-being.

5.5 Research Directions: Safety and Neighbourhood Sense of Place

I will also dedicate some of this discussion to the importance of fear and safety in relation to neighbourhood SoP. As indicated in the results, feelings of fear and safety played an important role in the participants' feelings and perceptions of their neighbourhood. Exploring the literature on feminist urban geography, where geographers have done extensive work on the geographies of fear, helped me contextualize and explore this connection further. Although my interviews did not focus on or deeply explore the women's experiences of fear and safety in their neighbourhood, the topic came up frequently. I would like to present some connections between fear, safety and SoP and make some recommendations around opportunities for further research and local action.

The literature explaining the complexity of fear in urban space – how it is influenced by our multiple, intersecting identities, our life experiences, and socially constructed ideas about gender and vulnerability (Koskela & Pain, 2000; Pain, 2001)– helps explain why the participants in my research, although all residents of the same neighbourhood, had varying perceptions of neighbourhood safety. Perception is also a critical word, because someone's perception of their

neighbourhood as an unsafe place – even if their perception of risk outweighs actual risk – influences their behaviour and where they choose to spend their time. When a place has a reputation of being dangerous, residents will respond accordingly, whether or not the reputation is warranted. Feelings of fear and perceptions of unsafety can limit movement and engagement in the wider community (Whitzman, 2007). It was clear from the participants' descriptions of their neighbourhood that safety impacted their mobility and engagement in their community. There were descriptions of moving about freely and without fear; moving about with caution and avoiding certain places, such as bars, and; having limited movement beyond their homes or "safe places" due to fear. Fear of crime was a large factor in the participants' perceptions of safety and feelings about their neighbourhood. Following a shooting in the neighbourhood that occurred right in the playground of an elementary school, the Hamilton Spectator quoted a resident: *"This is a family street even if it isn't the best street in the city, and I want (this stuff) off my street… If I could afford to live somewhere else I would… Nobody wants to do anything about this because it's the inner city"* (Arnold, 2012). This woman clearly wanted to live in a place that is safe and that is valued; she expected that the response would be inadequate because of the area in which she lives. No area should be deemed less of a priority than another.

Carolyn Whitzman is a feminist scholar who has done extensive work on fear of violence and community safety (Whitzman, 2007; 2008). She, along with other feminist scholars, emphasizes the importance of a feminist approach to community safety where those involved in community safety initiatives are cognizant of the complexity of fear and safety and the connection between fear and intersecting oppressions. In her work with migrant women in Toronto, Ontario and Melbourne Australia, the fear and violence the women experienced in their lives was complex and related to a variety of factors including racism, housing and employment

insecurity, language barriers, family pressures, and experiences in their homeland. The main message she found in her work was that "You can't put issues into boxes", and thus strategies and suggested solutions that perpetuated binaries of public/private, victim/offender, safe/unsafe were not helpful (Whitzman, 2007, p.2726). Important communication and discussions addressing fear and safety for these women often took place in informal settings such as swimming classes, ESL sessions, shopping malls, and grocery stores, rather than through formal services and programs. Whitzman thus illustrated how public space, including public gathering places, can be used subversively to bring up private issues, and that the women sought opportunities to network and learn from each other. As a synthesis of her review of the literature and the results of her own research and experiences, Whitzman (2007) brought forward the following recommendations for planning interventions to create safer space that is inclusive of gender and that goes beyond the public/private divide:

- improve access to a range of affordable housing

- provide a range of 'social spaces' that provide a venue for important conversations about safety, for example in schools, parent drop-in programs, community health centres, etc.

- promote social inclusion and social cohesion through public events and accessible programs

- provide opportunities for public discussion

- build partnerships between various sectors including the police, criminal justice, public health, education, and civil society

Nearly all of these recommendations tie directly to statements made by my participants. Gathering places can be important venues to create safer space – they are examples of accessible, informal settings or 'social spaces' where relationships are built and dialogue is fostered. One of

128

my key informants affirmed the role of neighbourhood gathering places in promoting community safety and reducing fear by connecting people's interests, so that they do not feel alone. This sense of connection can bring hope. Gathering places are different than social services, in that social services stratify the community and are often a stopping place where one comes to receive and leave, rather than a place to hang out. Social services often do not give community members a sense of value or agency, nor encourage relationship-building and mutual care among community members, as McKnight (1995) asserts in *Community and Its Counterfeits*. Rachel missed having a place to simply "hang out", which is what the *Heart of the Hammer* offered to residents; Alanna found her safe hangout at *The Freeway*, even when her own home was a place where she did not feel safe or cared for. Exploring the relationships between safety, gathering places and neighbourhood SoP should be an ongoing endeavour for scholars and advocates.

5.6   Next Steps: Creating Safe and Age-Friendly Cities

In relation to the above research directions, I would like to highlight two initiatives in Hamilton that are related to my own research and that should be supported by McMaster University and the NDS. These are the *Safe Cities Hamilton* and *Age-Friendly Hamilton* initiatives. *Safe Cities Hamilton* began as a project led by the Interval House, an anti-VAW organization that runs a women's shelter, in collaboration with a variety of individuals and organizations in the city that are committed to ending VAW and creating a safer community for everyone. This coalition, of which I am a member, is exploring community safety and violence prevention using a gender-based analysis framework, recognizing that violence is a gendered issue that requires a gendered response. Gender-based analysis challenges the assumptions that women and men are affected in the same way by research, policies and programs. As a group, we recognize what has been illustrated in the feminist literature on fear and safety, including the

relationship between domestic violence and violence in public places and the importance of

social location and intersecting identities. We also recognize that, in order to create a safety

community, issues much broader than crime need to be addressed, including social inclusion and

community engagement. Everyone must be a part of the solution. Interval House received a grant

from Status of Women Canada and through this grant several activities have taken place,

including: the formation of a Male Leadership group to involve men who are high-profile leaders

in Hamilton in addressing violence; the development of a community safety survey to explore

perceptions of safety across Hamilton; focus groups that explore various groups' perceptions of

and visions for community safety, and; focus groups specifically for women who have

experienced intimate violence in order to understand how their experiences have impacted their

lives and sense of safety. This is an ambitious research endeavour, and the hope is that *Safe*

Cities Hamilton is not only a time-limited project reliant on grant money, but that it becomes an

ongoing initiative that informs how we can build safe, inclusive communities for men and

women. *Safe Cities Hamilton* is doing crucial social research that addresses many facets of the

type of research that Whitzman (2007, p.2725) recommends in relation to creating safer space:

> "*In practical terms, research would involve disaggregating data and indicators for crime prevention planning and evaluation, and developing tools for analysis, implementation, and evaluation which are sensitive to gender; investigating masculinities and gender relationships, and recognizing male violence against men as gendered, as well as male violence against women; undertaking education and awareness with decision makers, and advocating for greater representation and inclusion of women at all decision-making levels; integrating gender into all aspects of strategic safety planning and design, including services and spaces for youth.*"

Hamilton should continue to engage in this research program through partnerships

between the City, community organizations, and educational institutions such as McMaster

University. Addressing crime and issues in the built environment are indeed a part of the solution

to creating safer communities, but the strength and challenge of *Safe Cities Hamilton* is that it explores violence and safety from an ecological perspective that takes into account the various environments we are part of, the identities we hold and the experiences we have had, and how those all matter when it comes to safety. Women's organizations are not the only ones who play a role in reducing VAW, and the police are not the only ones who are responsible for crime prevention and reduction. Having neighbourhoods where residents have a strong SoP can enhance community safety, and vice-versa.

Another initiative which complements my research results and provides policy direction, briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, is the HCOA`s work on making Hamilton an Age-Friendly City, based on the principles of the World Health Organization (WHO) (WHO, 2007). The HCOA believes that having an age-friendly city will be the most effective way to respond to our aging population and the changing needs in Hamilton. In 2009, the HCOA conducted focus groups with adults 60 years and older all across the city and from different walks of life. Participants were asked to comment on eight Key Features of an Age-Friendly City, as defined by the WHO (2007): outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; civic participation and employment; communication and information, and; community support and health services. Based on what older Hamiltonians had to say about these aspects of their life in the city, the HCOA came up with 92 "Recommendations for an Age-Friendly Future" (HCOA, 2010). The HCOA also shared some key themes that came out of their focus groups that will help build the foundation for an Age-Friendly Hamilton:

- as a community we must value older persons and their contributions to our city
- we must engage in responsive planning and development, involving older adults at the planning table so that the diverse needs of older people are accounted for

- we can make small changes and adaptations that will make a difference

- we can build trusting relationships with older adults and communicate what resources are available to them

- we must involve the whole community to make Hamilton an Age-Friendly City

Many of these themes are also crucial in building a safe city. The *Safe Cities Project* complements and enhances the Age-Friendly Cities initiative by exploring community safety from a gender-based perspective. A "Safe and Age-Friendly City" will not only benefit women and seniors, it will benefit everyone. Building a safe and age-friendly Hamilton will require an acknowledgement of differences in our population and the intersecting identities people hold besides age and gender, such as class, race, ethnicity, family status, employment status, and more. We must not only acknowledge these identities and differences but take action in ways that respond to their diverse needs, which is not an easy task. If research is to play a role in informing policy development, researchers must also be able to communicate their findings and recommendations using language that decision-makers will attend to and not feel threatened by. Unfortunately, naming something *feminist* or using the term *gender-based analysis* can inhibit the possibility for dialogue and subsequent action. Exciting and invaluable work is being done in Hamilton right now, mostly by volunteer citizens and community organizations who have limited resources but who have an unwavering commitment to social inclusion. Institutions with the resources and capacity to support this work should respond accordingly, including McMaster University.

Before sharing my concluding thoughts around critical community development, I will now explore some of the limitations of my research and reflect on my praxis.

5.7   Limitations and Reflections on My Own Praxis

A reality of any research endeavour is that it has its limitations; producing a work of feminist research is inevitably a piece of work that is situated and partial, and thus includes limited perspectives that may not be shared by folks coming from a different place and framework. It is important to note that the women I interviewed are fairly engaged in their communities, in that they actively participate in one or more gathering places. There are likely many single women in the neighbourhood who are not aware of these places or are not able to participate due to barriers such as those discussed in Chapter 4, the Results (inaccessibility, fear, caregiving responsibilities, health challenges, etc.). Additionally, I was only able to interview five single older women, and would have liked to be able to recruit a larger number of older participants to add important perspectives to the research. Having a larger group of older women may have enriched the analysis and given me the opportunity to analyze the groups of women separately, while also exploring similarities, differences and intersections between their experiences.

My research also did not include any newcomers to Canada, even though there is a fairly large percentage of newcomers living in the research neighbourhood, which is indicated in Table 1 from Chapter 2. Newcomers are a growing group in Hamilton, adding to the city's diversity, and there is also a lot of diversity amongst newcomers themselves. Issues such as language barriers and cultural differences may impact SoP, which were not explored in this research project. Future research could consider the perspectives of newcomers, as well as those born and raised in Hamilton when it comes to their experience of gathering places and neighbourhood SoP. The results of this research are also limited in that I did not include men or transgendered people in my study. It may have been beneficial to explore the phenomenon of SoP using a lens

of gender as difference, seeing where similarities and differences exist between men, women, and transgendered people, and what types of gathering places matter to each gender.

The nature of social research is that the research evolves along the way, and the research phenomenon also evolves, and so there will always be aspects that are missing or incomplete. Hamilton is in transition, as is the neighbourhood where I did my research. Since beginning my data collection just over a year ago, there have been school closures, the development of NAPs, changes in provincial political leadership and social welfare policy (Reilly, 2012b), and ongoing conversations around the Pan Am Stadium and its impact on the wider neighbourhood and city at large. SoP is also a dynamic concept, and thus the senses of place that I came to understand from the interviews could be different one year later, and will likely be different in the years to come. I have done my best to stay attuned to the changes happening in the neighbourhood, city and province that may have had an impact on the lives of my participants and the gathering places that matter to them.

Another limitation of my research is that real-time and academic timelines rarely coordinate, and due to the structure of my Master`s program as well as the other demands and responsibilities in my life, I could not make the research as participatory as I would have liked. Another tension that goes beyond the issue of timelines is the fact that participation is not always desired; many of my participants had a lot going on in their lives, and thus some did not respond when I offered to share the results with them, or indicated that they did not want to provide feedback. This research also is not longitudinal, and I could not spend an extended amount of time getting to know the participants and gain a more in-depth understanding of their neighbourhood SoP and experience of neighbourhood gathering places. It may have been useful to conduct participant observation and actually spend some time volunteering at the school

programs or accompanying the women to the gathering places they went to. I was, fortunately, able to visit nearly all of the gathering places that the participants highlighted and was able to verify my research results with over half of the participants even after many months had passed since our interviews.

Praxis is the cyclical practise of action and reflection, which is a characteristic of FCR and something that I try to engage in, in my role as researcher and in other aspects of my life. Sarah Wakefield provided a strong definition of praxis, as "giving life to ideas about the way the world is – and could be – by acting on one's convictions in daily (work and home) life" (Wakefield, 2007, p.331). Paulo Freire, a Brazilian popular educator, wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which has heavily influenced feminist approaches to research, education and action. I also resonate with his definition of *praxis* and its emphasis on reciprocity between a person and their situationality:

> *People, as beings "in a situation", find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own "situationality" to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings are because they are in a situation. And they will be more the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it* (Freire, 1970, p.90).

My praxis has looked different at different phases of my research, and some of my engagements, although not directly related to my research, have stemmed from my work as Master's student and what I have learned about the research neighbourhood. These include my involvement in advocating with Parkview Secondary School during the accommodation review process, my participation on the University's Community Engagement Taskforce as the graduate student representative, my membership on the McMaster Community Poverty Initiative, and my involvement on the Safe Cities Advisory Group, where my research results and my research skills have been useful. I have been able to merge my research and community development

skills by participating in such initiatives, and they are examples of my ongoing praxis. I have

also learned a lot about SoP and gathering places that is helpful to consider in my own

neighbourhood, Beasley. I have been inspired and challenged by the participants' stories. This

research project has motivated me to continue to critically engage in this work and act in

response to my ongoing learning as a citizen of Hamilton and the world.

5.8   Concluding Thoughts: Critical Community Development

This research has presented an in-depth look at the qualities and meanings that local

gathering places hold to the participants, and their importance in enhancing neighbourhood sense

of place and, in general, creating healthy places. This research has also provided a glimpse into

the complexity of SoP and the role it plays in the participants' lives. Where the women live

matters to their daily lives and their identities. From the outset, I wanted my research to honour

the knowledge of and seek the perspectives of single mothers and single older women, who may

be excluded in neighbourhood development discussions but who significantly contribute to their

families and the broader community.

The importance of the neighbourhood has been a central assumption in my research, and

it is to the process of neighbourhood development that I would like to return in concluding my

thesis. For two years now, the City of Hamilton, in partnership with McMaster University and

the HCF, has devoted resources and attention to the NDS and plans to continue to do so. They

have hired community development workers to work in their designated "priority

neighbourhoods" to engage in ABCD and build capacity among residents, and link the goals of

the residents to resources and opportunities at the City level. There has been a strong optimistic

tone to the NDS work, and although the NDS is a step forward in improving the relationship

between neighbourhoods and the City and providing a venue for residents to have a voice in

community planning, I am uncertain about the NDS improving health and quality of life

outcomes for these neighbourhoods. I wonder if the NDS is enough to make up for the negative

reputations that have been imposed on neighbourhoods and the harmful policies that have

contributed to residents to losing their pride of place and believing that their neighbourhood does

not matter. In speaking with community members, I understand that there is still a lot of trust that

needs to be built. Many people are not convinced that "resident engagement" is anything more

than tokenistic consultation that will not result in any meaningful change.

There is potential for the NDS to provide a living example of the inclusion lens that is

endorsed by the City of Hamilton, which is to be used to analyze programs, services, and

practices to ensure they promote social and economic inclusion (Hamilton Community Services,

2010); it must also be used "in practices that engage residents in meaningful activities to gather

feedback and become involved in decision-making," (Mayo et al., 2011, p.6). In other words, the

NDS can involve residents in practices that are more participatory and empowering. The concept

of empowerment has various definitions, and can unfortunately be used in a paternalistic way

where those with power seek to "empower" marginalized groups and feel better about

themselves without actually changing disempowering social conditions. I would like to refer to

Sarah Wakefield and Carla Klassen`s (2011) definition of empowerment as "a multi-faceted,

experiential process that ultimately strengthens individuals and communities by allowing them to

make decisions about things that affect their lives" (p.11). We *all* need to be engaged in

empowering and critical processes that help us break simplistic dichotomies and break the

divisions between people and places. Gathering places played an empowering role in the lives of

my research participants, who, through their participation in such places, experienced feelings of

137

connection with their neighbours and neighbourhood, who felt valued, and that they were contributing something meaningful to their community.

The connection between processes at the neighbourhood level and political processes at larger scales must also be considered to improve neighbourhood quality of life. An example of social policy that occurs at the provincial level, but which directly impacts the localized lives of residents, is social assistance policy which, in Ontario, is provided through Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Benefit Program (ODSP). Regardless of its use of ABCD and goal of empowerment, the NDS does not address the conditions, both personal and societal, that lead someone to require social assistance in the first place. OW and ODSP rates are significantly below the poverty line, and advocates in Hamilton have been pushing for an evidence-based approach to setting social assistance rates (HRPR Social Assistance Reform Working Group, 2012). Currently, single mothers are put in a situation where, if they are not working, they receive an income from which they can barely meet the basic needs of themselves and their children, and are living on the margins of a society in which work and consumerism are central to common definitions of what it means to be a "productive citizen". On the other hand, if they try and secure employment, they will most likely be working in precarious, low-wage jobs and unable to afford child care. This dilemma, to me, highlights that while capacity-building and the provision of safe, inclusive, accessible gathering places are essential to neighbourhood development and improving quality of life, the material circumstances that put people in poverty must be changed, and this requires political will.

While there are many positive outcomes and actions stemming from the NDS, it is too soon to see its impact in terms of the quality of life of residents or the sustainability of the NAPs that have been developed. ABCD is an important process that frames neighbourhoods and the

people in those neighbourhoods in a way that gives power and agency back to the people. When neighbourhoods are only framed according to their needs and deficiencies, they lack power, and residents, rather than having a voice, are mere recipients of services or targets of stigmatization. Graham Rowles (1978) reminded us, in his work with older adults who are often subject to unwarranted assumptions and condescension, that "Condescension often provokes us to offering unwanted "help"" (p.216). People need liberation from such condescension. In hearing my participants' hopes for their neighbourhood, it was evident that "stop gap measures" or "band-aid solutions" that do not address the systemic issues of poverty and social exclusion, are not the answer. No participant wanted to see more food banks or hot meal programs. They want opportunities to connect with people and to contribute to their neighbourhood; they want to be able to access good quality food within walking distance of their home; they want to see a vibrant Barton Street; they want to feel safe to walk around and take their kids out; they want affordable opportunities for their kids and their own learning; and they want to be able to afford to live in a safe and good quality home of their choosing. All of these things will contribute to developing a positive SoP, and thus care and investment in their neighbourhood. What is needed is evidence-based policy change that enables individuals, families, and communities "to not only survive but to thrive" in a just city. Social research plays an important role in uncovering such evidence, and demonstrating the different ways in which people are a part of their environment and are influenced by it. There is a role for FCR in community development to ensure that theory is integrated with practise, and to connect local goodwill and local issues to broader work that attempts to get to the roots of injustice.

Those of us involved in community development initiatives, and who think we are engaged in research and advocacy that leads to positive social change, must constantly question

our process and our motives. We must engage in critical praxis, being attentive to tensions and differences among those implicated in planning and engagement processes, and we must ask ourselves who is benefitting, who is being heard, and who is being ignored or pushed to the sidelines? We must also remember that power relations exist within communities and those power relations can be local manifestations of how power plays out in larger structures and systems. Feminist geographers dare us to imagine and create non-oppressive communities. What would a 'just' city look like? In this city, women, the disabled, the elderly, racial and sexual minorities, and other groups would be able to live together across difference. No group would dominate another, and everyone would feel valued. This is Iris Marion Young's vision of a politics of difference, that abandons the normative notion of a unified (and thus exclusive) community altogether: it must embrace "the concept of social relations that embody openness to unassimilated otherness with justice and appreciation" (1995, p.254). This may be an impossible vision to realize. A challenge in embracing a politics of difference is the common tendency to "other" people and places that are unfamiliar or threatening. For example, the women in my research distinguished their part of their neighbourhood to other, less desirable parts, and distanced themselves from sex workers, bad renters, and drug dealers who, to them, are the cause of many issues. How do we address such tensions? How do we create a 'just city' for everyone? I do not know the answer, but I will work towards a just city in my own praxis, as I strive to merge theory, critical reflection and action; as I engage in my own city both as a learner and activist, as a volunteer, employee and neighbourhood resident; where I constantly encounter people who are different from me, and, by coming to know them and learn from them, they are no longer "other".

A feminist geographic approach to research and action allows us to immerse ourselves in these tensions and in processes such as community development with a critical consciousness, an ethic of care, and and an understanding of the interrelatedness of the social world. Feminist researchers bear witness to different stories from everyday life in particular places, and can contribute to engaging those stories in processes of social change. Evident in this research is the fact that place matters, and people's relationship to their environment can play a pivotal role in their sense of self and their behaviours and actions. There are bodies in space that are not able to exist or flourish in the current structure of our society, where through mainstream policies and practices they are disallowed, pushed away or rendered invisible. I think of those who are often constructed as "other", such as those with disabilities, the elderly, single mothers, sex workers, people living with mental illness, refugees, and the homeless. I think of people I know who experience that kind of marginalization. These issues will remain central in the feminist pursuit of justice across space, where we will always be challenging ourselves and the social structures that shape us and that we shape. These structures can constrain us, but we also have the individual and collective power to resist and recreate. Nancy Fraser said that "feminists need both deconstruction and reconstruction, destabilization of meaning and projection of utopian hope" (quoted in McDowell 1999, p.25). We can find hope in particular places that *are* enabling for groups of people, and we can find impetus for change in stories of everyday life. Hopefully, this cycle of deconstruction, reconstruction and projection of hope continues and helps us create life-enhancing places, and that my research may be a small contribution to that process.

REFERENCES

Airey, L. (2003). "Nae as nice a scheme as it used to be": lay accounts of neighbourhood incivilities and well-being. *Health and Place, 9*(2), 129-137.

Amin, A. (2008). Collective culture and urban public space. *City, 12*(1), 5-24.

Arnold, S. (2012, April 9). Police continue manhunt for shooting suspect. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/701471--police-continue-manhunt-for-shooting-suspect

Askins, K. (2009). *'That's just what I do'*: Placing emotion in academic activism. *Emotion, Space and Society, 2*(1), 4-13.

Barton Village Business Improvement Area. (2012). Welcome to Barton Village. Retrieved from http://www.bartonvillage.ca.

Basu, R. (2007). Negotiating acts of citizenship in an era of neoliberal reform: The game of school closures. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *31*(1), 109-27.

Baum, F., & Palmer, C. (2002). 'Opportunity structures': urban landscape, social capital and health promotion in Australia. *Health Promotion International, 17*(4), 351-361.

Baxter, J. (2010). Case studies in qualitative research. In I. Hay (Ed.) *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 81-98). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Baxter, J., & Eyles, J. (1997). Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: Establishing 'rigour' in interview analysis. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *22*(4), 505-525.

Billig, M. (2005). Sense of place in the neighbourhood, in locations of urban revitalization. *Geojournal, 64*(2),117-130.

Bondi, L., & Rose, D. (2003). Constructing gender, constructing the urban: A review of Anglo-American feminist urban geography. *Gender, Place and Culture, 10*(3), 229-245.

Bonilla, M.H. (2013). The significance and meanings of public space improvement in low-income neighbourhoods 'colonias populares' in Xalapa-Mexico. *Habitat International*, *38*, 34-46.

Brassington, M.A. (2012, August 25). Powell Park community garden: Ripples. Retrieved from http://thisisourhamilton.ca/?p=2129.

Buist, S. (2010). CODE RED: Where you live affects your health. *The Hamilton Spectator*. Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/topic/codered.

Butz, D., & Eyles, J. (1997). Reconceptualizing senses of place: social relations, ideology and ecology. *Geografiska Annaler, 79B*(1), 1-25.

Cahill, C., Pain, R., & Sultana, F. (2007). Repositioning ethical commitments: participatory action research as a relational praxis of social change. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, 6*(3), 360-373.

Cattell, V., Dines, N., Gesler, W., & Curtis, S. (2008). Mingling, observing, and lingering: Everyday public spaces and their implications for well-being and social relations. *Health and Place, 14*(3), 544-561.

City of Hamilton (2010). Neighbourhood boundaries with names. Retrieved from http://map.hamilton.ca/Static/PDFs/General%20Interest%20maps/Overall%20City/NeighbourhoodBoundaries%20-%20ALL%20Named.pdf

City of Hamilton (2012a). Neighbourhood strategy for the Pan Am Stadium Precinct. Retrieved from http://www.hamilton.ca/ProjectsInitiatives/2015-Pan-American-Games/Community+Plan+for+the+Pan+Am+Stadium+Precinct.htm

City of Hamilton (2012b). Adopt-a-Park Program. Retrieved from http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/Parks/Adopt-a Park.htm?WT.mc_id=adoptapark&WT.hamilton_redirect_friendly=1

Clairmont, S. (2012, November 22). Homeless women in limbo. *The Hamilton SpectatorI.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/840383--homeless-women-in-limbo

Coleman, J. (2012, July 5). Gibson – one of Hamilton's great neighbourhoods. Retrieved from http://www.joeycoleman.ca/a-better-hamilton/gibson-a-great-hamilton-neighbourhood-i-miss-living-in/

Conradson, D. (2003). Spaces of care in the city: the place of a community drop-in centre. *Social and Cultural Geography 4*(4), 507-525

Cope, M. (2010). Coding transcripts and diaries. In N. Clifford, S. French & G. Valentine (Eds), *Key methods in geography* (2nd edition) (pp. 440-452) . London: Sage Publications.

Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'participation': models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, *43*(3), 269–283.

Davy, D. (2012, November 21). Few options for homeless single women in Hamilton. *CBC Hamilton.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/hamilton/news/story/2012/11/21/hamilton-homeless-women.html

Day, K. (2000). The ethic of care and women's experiences of public space. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 20*(2), 103-124.

Deane, P. (2011, September 21). Forward with integrity: A letter to the McMaster community. Retrieved from http://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/images/forwardwithintegrity.pdf

DeMiglio, L., & Williams, A. (2008). A sense of place, a sense of well-being. In J. Eyles &A. Williams (Eds.), *Sense of place, health and quality of life* (pp. 15-30). Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Dixon, D.P., & Jones, J.P. (2006). Feminist geographies of difference, relation, and construction. S. Aitken & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Approaches to human geography* (pp.52-56). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dunn, K. (2010). Interviewing. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 101-138). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Dyck, I. (2005) Feminist geography, the 'everyday', and local–global relations: hidden spaces of place-making. *The Canadian Geographer, 49*(3), 233-243.

Eby, J. (2008). *The voices of poverty in Hamilton: Mapping community relationships.* Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University.

Eby, J., Kitchen, P., & Williams, A. (2012). Perceptions of quality life in Hamilton's neighbourhood hubs: A qualitative analysis. *Social Indicators Research, 108*(2), 299-315.

Eyles, J. (1985) *Senses of place*. England: Silverbrook Press.

Eyles, J., & Williams, A. (Eds.) (2008). *Sense of place, health and quality of life.* Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(2), 219-245.

Forrest, R. & Kearns, A. (2001). Social cohesion, social capital, and the neighbourhood. *Urban Studies, 38*(12), 2125-2143).

Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: The Seabury Press.

Frisby, W. & Creese, G. (2011). Unpacking relationships in feminist community research: Crosscutting themes. In G. Creese & W. Frisby (Eds.), *Feminist community research: Case studies and methodologies* (pp. 1-15). Vancounver, BC: UBC Press.

Frumkin, H. (2003) Healthy places: Exploring the evidence. *American Journal of Public Health, 93*(9), 1451-1456.

Gaventa, J. & Cornwall, A. (2001). Power and knowledge. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (pp. 71-82). London: Sage.

Gilbert, M.R. (2000). Identity, difference and the geographies of working poor women's survival strategies. In K.B. Miranne & A.H. Young (Eds.), *Gendering the city: Women, boundaries and visions of urban life* (pp. 65- 87). Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Glover, T.D., & Parry, D.C. (2009). A third place in the everyday lives of people living with cancer: Functions of Gilda's Club of Greater Toronto. *Health & Place, 15*(1), 97-106.

Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M., & Whatmore, S. (2009) *The dictionary of human geography* (5th edition). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

Grover, R-A. (2012, August 22). Hamilton reigns as top place to invest. *The Hamilton Spectator*. Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/business/article/785060--hamilton-reigns-as-top-place-to-invest

Gurstein, P., & Vilches, S. (2010). The just city for whom? Re-conceiving active citizenship for lone mothers in Canada. *Gender, Place and Culture*, *17(4)*, 421-436.

Hamilton Community Foundation (2010). *Growing roots… Strengthening neighbourhoods.* Retrieved from http://www.hcf.on.ca/initiatives_neighbourhood_grsn.shtml

Hamilton Community Foundation (2012). *Hamilton's vital signs*. Retrieved from http://www.hamiltonvitalsigns.ca/

Hamilton Community Services (2010). *The playbook: A framework for human services planning in Hamilton.* Hamilton, ON: Hamilton Community Services.

Hamilton Council on Aging (HCOA). 2010. *Hamilton: A city for all ages. Age-Friendly Hamilton first report to our community.* Hamilton, ON: HCOA.

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR). (2012). HRPR's action priorities. Retrieved from http://hamiltonpoverty-ca.sitepreview.ca/

HRPR Social Assistance Reform Working Group (2012, March 16). Response to the Commission for the review of social assistance in Ontario: Approaches for reform. Retrieved from http://hamiltonpoverty-ca.sitepreview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/HRPR-response-to-Social-Assistance-Commission-Final.pdf

Hamilton Spectator (2010). CODE RED: Mapping the health of Hamilton. *The Hamilton Spectator*. Retrieved from http://media.metroland.com/thespec.com/statistics_flash/

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board. (2012). Accommodation Review Committees (ARC) Process. Retrieved from http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/schools/arc/

Hubbard, O., Kitchin, R., & Valentine, G. (Eds.). 2004. *Key thinkers on space and place*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Jeffres, L.W., Bracken, C.C., Jian, G., & Casey, M.F. (2009). The impact of third places on community quality of life. *Applied Research Quality of Life, 4*(4), 333-345.

Johnson, A. (2010). *Consumption communities: An examination of the Kitchener market as a third place.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10012/5279.

Johnson, P. (2011). Neighbourhood Development Strategy (CM11007). City of Hamilton. Retrieved from http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D4C2FAF38260-468A-9D97-A9A84DCD3498/0/Jun06EDRMS_n177317_v1_7_2__Neighbourhood_Development_Strategy.pdf

Kearns, A. & Parkinson, M. (2001). The significance of neighbourhood. *Urban Studies, 38*(12), 2103-2110.

Kern, L. (2005). In place and at home in the city: Connecting privilege, safety and belonging for women in Toronto. *Gender, Place and Culture, 12*(3), 357-377.

Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2010). *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Koskela, H. & Pain, R. (2000). Revisiting fear and place: women's fear of attack and the built environment. *Geoforum, 31*(2), 269-280.

Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J.P. (1996). Assets-based community development. *National Civic Review, 85*(4), 23-29.

Laws, J. (2009). Reworking therapeutic landscapes: The spatiality of an alternative self-help group" *Social Science & Medicine, 69*(12), 1827-1833.

Lawson, V. (2007). Geographies of care and responsibility. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *97*(1), 1-11.

Lorde, A. (1992). Age, race, class and sex: women redefining difference (p. 47-57). In Crowley, H. & S. Himmelweit (Eds.), *Knowing women: feminism and knowledge* (pp. 47-57). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Mackenzie, S. (1988). Building women, building cities: toward gender sensitive theory in the environmental disciplines. In C. Andrew & B. M. Milroy (Eds.), *Life spaces: gender, household, employment* (pp. 13-30). Canada: University of British Columbia Press..

Maguire, P. (2001). Uneven ground: feminisms and action research. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds)., *Handbook of action research* (pp. 60-70). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Mair, H. & Trussell, D. (2010). Restoring our collective obligation: exploring opportunities for addressing homelessness and social housing. In H. Mair, S.M. Arai, & D.G. Reid (Eds.), *Decentring work: critical perspectives on leisure, social policy and human development* (pp. 203-228). Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press.

Mansvelt, J. & Berg, L.D. (2010). Writing qualitative geographies: constructing geographical knowledges. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 81-98). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place and gender.* Great Britain: Polity Press.

Massey, D. (1995). The conceptualization of place. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world?* (pp. 45-86). New York: Oxford University Press, 45-86.

Mayo, S. (2010). Women and Poverty in Hamilton. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. Retrieved from http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/Poverty/WomenAndPoverty.php.

Mayo, S. (2011a). Not to Be Forgotten: Homeless Women in Hamilton. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. Retrieved from http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Not-to-Be-Forgotten-Homeless-Women-in-Hamilton-Full-Report-May-2011.pdf

Mayo, S. (2011b). Profile of Vulnerable Seniors in Hamilton. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. Retrieved from http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Profile-of-Vulnerable-Seniors-in-Hamilton-Full-Report-September-2011.pdf

Mayo, S., & Fraser M. (2009). Incomes and Poverty in Hamilton. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. Retrieved from http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/Poverty/Poverty.php

Mayo, S., Fraser, M., Jaffray, D., Klassen, C., McCormack, C.-S., McNaney, P., Pike, D., & Wetselaar, R. (2011). *Hamilton's Social Landscape*. Hamilton, Ontario: Social Planning and Research Council.

McDowell, L. (1999) *Gender, identity & place: understanding feminist geographies.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McDowell, L. (2004). Work, workfare, work/life balance, and an ethic of care. *Progress in Human Geography, 28*(2), 145-163

McKnight, J. (1995). *The careless society: community and its counterfeits.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Mitchell, D. (1995). The end of public space? People's Park, definitions and democracy. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 85*(1), 108-133.

Moss, P. (2002). Taking on, thinking about, and doing feminist research in geography. In P. Moss (Ed.), *Feminist geography in practice: research and methods* (pp. 1-17). London: Blackwell Publishing.

Murie, A., & Musterd, S. (2004). Social exclusion and opportunity structures in European cities and neighbourhoods. *Urban Studies, 41*(8), 1441-1459.

Nolan, D. (2012, December 5). Bid to save Sanford school a long shot. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/848547--bid-to-save-sanford-school-a-long-shot

Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The great good place.* New York: Paragon House.

Oldenburg, R. (1997). Our vanishing third places. *Planning Commissioners Journal, 25*, 265-284.

Oldenburg, R., & Brissett, D. (1982). The third place. *Qualitative Sociology, 5*(4), 265-284.

Ortiz, A., Garcia-Ramon, M.D., & Prats, M. (2004). Women's use of public space and sense of place in the Raval (Barcelona). *Geojournal, 61*(3), 219-227.

Pain, R. (1997). 'Old age' and ageism in urban research: the case of fear of crime. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 21*(1), 117-128.

Pain, R. (2001). Gender, race, age and fear in the city. *Urban Studies, 38*(5-6), 899-913.

Pain, R. (2004). Social geography: participatory research. *Progress in Human Geography, 28*(5), 652-663.

Pecoskie, T. (2012, October 19). New Mission Services facility offers up opportunity. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/820264--new-mission-services-facility-offers-up-opportunity

Pike, D. (2012, September 22). Affordable homes, pocket housing, gradually emerging in Hamilton. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/opinion/columns/article/803994--affordable-homes-pocket-housing-gradually-emerging-in-hamilton

Reilly, E. (2012a, April 9). Hamilton social assistance benefits at risk with provincial cutbacks. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/701941--hamilton-social-assistance-benefits-at-risk-with-provincial-cutbacks

Reilly, E. (2012b, September 24). $2 Million aimed at Cod Red neighobourhoods. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/805204---2-million-aimed-at-code-red-neighbourhoods

Rose, D. (1995). Place and identity: a sense of place. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds)., *A place in the world?* (pp. 87-134). New York: Oxford University Press.

Rosenbaum, M.S., Ward, J., Walker, B.A., & Ostrom, A.L. (2007). A cup of coffee with a dash of love. An investigation of commercial social support and third-place attachment. *Journal of Service Research, 10*(1), 43-59.

Rowles, G. (1978). *Prisoners of space? Exploring the geographical experience of older people.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Scraton, S. & Watson, B. (1998). Gendered cities: women and public leisure space in the 'postmodern city'. *Leisure Studies, 17*, 123-137.

Semogas, D., Rolfe, S., Derbyshire, D., Murray, N., Boundris, A., Harrington, M., Malott, A., Wahoush, O., & Valaitis, R. (2011). *Health in the hubs phase 1: Neighbours and nurses working together.* Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University School of Nursing.

Sharp, J. (2009). Geography and gender: what belongs to feminist geography? Emotion, power and change. *Progress in Human Geography, 33*(1), 74-80.

Staeheli, L.A., & Kofman, E. (2004). Mapping gender, making politics: toward feminist political Geographies. In L.A. Staeheli, E. Kofman, & L.J. Peake. *Mapping women, making politics: feminist perspectives on political geography* (pp. 1-14). New York, NY: Routledge.

Staggs, S.L. (2008). *Intergroup relations in participatory research.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. Order number: 700091070.

Statistics Canada. (2006). 2006 census of population. Retrieved from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/index-eng.cfm

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2012). *7+ ways your neighbourhood can improve your health.* Hamilton, Ontario: Social Planning and Research Council.
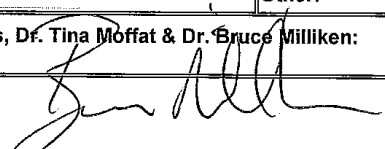
Vaiou, D. & Lykogianno, R. (2006). Women, neighbourhoods and everyday life. *Urban Studies, 43*(4), 731-743.

Valentine, G. (2002). People like us: Negotiating sameness and difference in the research process. In P. Moss (Ed.), *Feminist geography in practice: research and methods,* (pp. 116- 126). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Inc.

Valentine, G. (2007). Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography. *The Professional Geographer, 59(1)*, 10-21.

Van Dongen, M. (2012, July 10). Cannon street closure floated for stadium neighbourhood revamp. *The Hamilton Spectator.* Retrieved from http://www.thespec.com/news/local/article/757968--cannon-street-closure-floated-for-stadium-neighbourhood-revamp

Veenstra, G., Luginaah, I., Wakefield, S., Birch, S., Eyles, J., & Elliott, S. (2005). Who you know, where you live: social capital, neighbourhood and health. *Social Science & Medicine, 60*(12), 2799-818.

Wakefield, S. (2007). Reflective action in the academy: Exploring praxis in critical geography using a "food movement" case study. *Antipode, 39*(2), 331-354.

Wakefield, S. & Klassen, C. (2011). *From the grassroots to the boardrooms: Towards efficient, equitable and empowering human services in Hamilton*. Hamilton, Ontario: Unpublished paper.

Wakefield, S. & McMullan, C. (2005). Healing in places of decline: (re)imagining everyday landscapes in Hamilton, Ontario. *Health & Place, 11*(4), 299-312.

Walker, R.B. & Hiller, J.E. (2007). Places and health: A qualitative study to explore how older women living alone perceive the social and physical dimensions of their neighbourhoods. *Social Science & Medicine, 65*(6), 1154-1165.

Warrington, M. (2001). 'I must get out': the geographies of domestic violence. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 26*(3), 365-382.

Wetselaar, R., & Mayo, S. (2011) Adequate, Suitable and Affordable? Report on Housing in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. Retrieved from http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/Reports.php.

Whitzman, C. (2007). Stuck at the front door: gender, fear of crime and the challenge of creating safer space. *Environment and Planning A, 39*(11), 2715 – 2732.

Whitzman, C. (2008). *Handbook of community safety, gender and violence prevention: Practical planning tools*. London, UK: Earthscan.

Williams, A., & Crooks, V.A. (2008) Introduction: space, place, and the geographies of women's caregiving work. *Gender, Place and Culture, 15*(3), 243-247.

Williams, A., Kitchen, P., DeMiglio, L., Eyles, J., Newbold, B., & Streiner D.L. (2010). Sense of place in Hamilton, Ontario: Empirical results of a neighborhood-based survey. *Urban Geography*, *31(7)*, 905-931.

Williams, A.. & Kitchen, P. (2012). Sense of place and health in Hamilton, Ontario: A case study. *Social Indicators Research, 108*(2), 257-276.

Wilson, K., Elliott, S., Law, M., Eyles, J., Jerrett, M., & Keller-Olaman, S. (2004). Linking perceptions of neighbourhood to health in Hamilton, Canada. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 58*, 192-198.

Witten, K., McCreanor, T., Kearns, R., & Ramasubramanian, L. (2001). The impacts of school closure on neighbourhood social cohesion: narratives from Invercargill, New Zealand. *Health and Place, 7*(4), 307- 317.

World Health Organization. (2007). Checklist of essential features of Age-Friendly Cities. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf

Wright, M.W. (2010). Geography and gender: feminism and a feeling of justice. *Progress in Human Geography, 34*(6), 818-827.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Young, I.M. (1995). The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In P.A. Weiss & M. Friedman (Eds.), *Feminism and community* (pp. 233-258). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Ziersch, A.M., Baum, F.E., MacDougall, C., & Putland, C. (2005). Neighbourhood life and social capital: the implications for health. *Social Science and Medicine 60*(1), 71-86.

APPENDIX A: Certificate of Ethics Clearance

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)

McMaster University — *Inspiring Innovation and Discovery*

c/o Office of Research Services, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Application Status: New ☑ **Addendum** ☐ **Project Number:** 2011 078

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

Third Places and Neighbourhood Sense of Place: Exploring Single Women's Experience Across the Life Course

Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
A. Williams	Geography	24334	awill@mcmaster.ca

Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
J. Eby	Geography	905-870-0512	jeanetteeby@gmail.com

The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:

☐ The application protocol is approved as presented without questions or requests for modification.

☐ The application protocol is approved as revised without questions or requests for modification.

☐ The application protocol is approved subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:

COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing approval is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and approved before any alterations are made to the research.

Reporting Frequency:	Annual: Jun-28-2012	Other:

Date: Jun-28-2011   **Chair, Dr. D. Maurer/ Vice-Chairs, Dr. Tina Moffat & Dr. Bruce Milliken:**

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Flyer

How do you feel about your neighbourhood?

What do different places in your community mean to you?

- You are a single mother over 18 years of age
- (or) You are a single elderly woman
- You live in the east-central lower city of Hamilton

I am a student researcher conducting a study that aims to better understand single women's experience of their neighbourhood and local common spaces. I am doing this study as part of my Master's degree program in Human Geography at McMaster University. I live in downtown Hamilton myself and my own neighbourhood is very important to me.

You are invited to talk with me in a face-to-face interview about your feelings and experiences about your neighbourhood and the places you go to spend time in your local community. Your voice matters. Your participation may inform neighbourhood planning and community-building efforts in Hamilton. You will receive a $20 grocery card for your involvement in this project.

To find out more, or to arrange an interview, please contact me:

Telephone: 905-870-0512   Email: ebyj@mcmaster.ca

I look forward to speaking with you!

Jeanette Eby

APPENDIX C: Key Informant Letter of Information

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Gathering Places and Neighbourhood Sense of Place:
Exploring Single Women's Experience Across the Life Course

Investigators:

Principal Investigator:

Jeanette Eby
Department of Geography and Earth Sciences
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 28617
Cell: **905-870-0512**
E-mail: ebyj@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Allison Williams
Department of Geography and Earth Sciences
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 24334

E-mail: awill@mcmaster.ca

Who I Am

My name is Jeanette Eby. I am currently completing my Master's degree in Human Geography at McMaster University, and I live downtown and love the city of Hamilton.

What is the study's purpose?

You are invited to be a key informant in a research project about single women's experience of local common spaces, also known as 'third places' (for example, libraries, cafes, community centres, parks, etc) and their neighbourhood sense of place. I am interested in the experience of both single mothers and single elderly women who live in the central-east lower city of Hamilton. I hope to develop an understanding of the feelings women attach to their neighbourhood, the meanings that community spaces hold, and the relationship between these local places and neighbourhood sense of place. My hope is that this research will contribute to the broader goal of communicating the experiences of single women in local discussions of neighbourhood planning, community development and quality of life.

What is the extent of your participation?

You will participate in a face-to-face interview with me, in a comfortable and convenient location of your choice. Your input will not be used in the main data analysis, but your expertise will help provide a contextual understanding of neighbourhood planning and development, community resources, poverty, and the strengths and challenges of single women in Hamilton and contribute to the discussion of the research results. The interview will be no more than one hour in length. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview as well as take handwritten notes.

Here are some of the questions you will be asked:

154

How long have you been working in the city/this neighbourhood? What is your role?

From your perspective, what are some of the biggest challenges facing single mothers and single elderly women in Hamilton's lower city?

What are some places or resources in the neighbourhood that enable women to participate and find social support and belonging?

Are there any potential harms, risks or discomforts?

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You will be sharing your knowledge about women's issues, poverty issues and neighbourhood initiatives based on your role in the community. Issues of conflict or tension may come up and be frustrating or upsetting and you may worry about you or your affiliation's reputation.

Your comfort and safety is of the highest importance. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You can also choose to stop participating in the study at any time, with no consequences. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

How will I protect your your privacy?

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name, address or the affiliation that would allow you to be identified in the sharing of any results of the research. No one but my supervisor and I will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them or want to be identified.

Sometimes, however, we are identifiable through the stories we tell and information we provide and thus someone in the community who knows you and reads the final report of this research may be able to identify you.

The information/data you provide, both audio and written recordings, will be kept in a locked desk where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password, and located in a locked room. Data will be kept until 6 months after the study is completed, and then will be deleted and disposed of with care.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

This study will contribute in a new way to neighbourhood-based research, as it focuses specifically on single women's experiences of urban places. This research may not benefit you directly, but your stories and ideas, and those of other women in this neighbourhood, can together be shared to strengthen your neighbourhood. Everyone's voice matters, and if neighbourhoods and cities are to be welcoming places that can enhance the quality of life of individuals and communities, the voices of women such as yourself need to be heard. My hope is that through this research, participants will be able to both share knowledge and learn more about themselves and their community. Hopefully this research will be of help to the work you do in the city.

Payment or Reimbursement

There will be no payment for your involvement as a key informant.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, even after providing your consent or after your interview is completed, without consequence. If you decide at any point that you want to withdraw from the study, your data will be deleted and destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. You may also refuse to answer any particular question in the interview, and still remain a participant.

How will I know what was learned in this study?

When the results are available, I will work with any participants who are interested in creating a community report that can be presented to groups in the neighbourhood and city. Your feedback through the creation of this report is welcome. You will receive a copy of this report when it is available. If you wish, I will also provide you with any further academic publications that come from the study.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me by phone (905-870-0512) or e-mail (ebyj@mcmaster.ca)

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

> McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
>
> Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
>
> c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
>
> E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jeanette Eby of McMaster University.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

1. I agree that the interview can be audio- recorded.

… Yes.

… No.

2. …Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the report of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address or mailing address:

… No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

... Yes. Please contact me at: _____

... No.

Signature: _____

Name of Key Informant (Printed) _____

APPENDIX D: Participant Letter of Information

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Your Neighbourhood and Local Gathering Places: What Do They Mean to You?

Investigators:

Principal Investigator:	**Faculty Supervisor:**
Jeanette Eby	Dr. Allison Williams
Department of Geography and Earth Sciences	Department of Geography and Earth Sciences
McMaster University	McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada	Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 28617	**(905) 525-9140 ext. 24334**
Cell: **905-870-0512**	
E-mail: ebyj@mcmaster.ca	E-mail: awill@mcmaster.ca

Who I Am

My name is Jeanette Eby. I am currently completing my Master's degree in Human Geography at McMaster University, and I live downtown and love the city of Hamilton.

What is the study's purpose?

You are invited to take part in a research project about single women's experience of local common spaces, and their neighbourhood sense of place. I am interested in the experience of both single mothers and single elderly women who live in the central-east lower city of Hamilton. I hope to develop an understanding of the feelings women attach to their neighbourhood, the meanings that community spaces hold, and the relationship between these local places and neighbourhood sense of place. My hope is that this research will contribute to the broader goal of communicating the experiences of single women in local discussions of neighbourhood planning, community development and quality of life.

What will happen during the study?

You will participate in a face-to-face interview with myself, in a comfortable and quiet location of your choice. In this interview, I will ask you questions about your sense of place in your neighbourhood (this means the feelings and meanings you attach to your neighbourhood and how it matters to who you are) as well as specific local places that are important to you and that you visit frequently. You also will have an opportunity to create a personalized neighbourhood map that locates some of your favourite local places. The interview will be approximately one hour in length. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview as well as take handwritten notes.

Here are some of the questions you will be asked:

How do you feel about the neighbourhood? Likes and dislikes?

What is your favourite place to spend time in the neighbourhood?

What are some of the qualities of this place?

Could you share a story about a meaningful or memorable experience you've had in this place?

Are there any potential harms, risks or discomforts?

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You will be sharing your personal experience of the neighbourhood and local places that matter to you; reflecting in this way may bring up negative thoughts, memories or feelings. You may also feel stressed or uncomfortable about people finding out what you have said or what others will think of you.

Your comfort and safety is of the highest importance. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You can also choose to stop participating in the study at any time, with no consequences. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

How will I protect your privacy?

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name, address or any information that would allow you to be identified in the sharing of any results of the research. No one but my supervisor and I will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them. Sometimes, however, we are identifiable through the stories we tell and thus someone in the community who knows you and reads the final report of this research may be able to identify that you participated.

The information/data you provide, both audio and written recordings, will be kept in a locked desk where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password, and located in a locked room. Data will be kept until 6 months after the study is completed, and then will be deleted and disposed of with care.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

This study will contribute in a new way to neighbourhood-based research, as it focuses specifically on single women's experiences of urban places. This research may not benefit you directly, but your stories and ideas, and those of other women in this neighbourhood, can together be shared to strengthen your neighbourhood. Everyone's voice matters, and if neighbourhoods and cities are to be welcoming places that can enhance the quality of life of individuals and communities, the voices of women such as yourself need to be heard. My hope is that through this research, participants will be able to both share knowledge and learn more about themselves and their community.

Payment or Reimbursement

You will be given a $20.00 gift grocery card to Fresh Co for your participation in the interview.

Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, even after providing your consent or after your interview is completed, without consequence. If you decide at any point that you want to withdraw from the study, your data will be deleted and destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. You may also refuse to answer any particular question in the interview, and still remain a participant.

How will I know what was learned in this study?

With your permission, I will contact you once the results of the study are available. You will have a chance to read or hear the results and provide feedback. After this process, you will receive a brief summary of the study findings which should be ready for the fall of 2012. With the final findings, I will work with any participants who are interested in creating a community report that can be presented to groups in the neighbourhood and city. You will also receive a copy of this report when it is available.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me by phone (905-870-0512) or e-mail (ebyj@mcmaster.ca)

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

> McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
>
> Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
>
> c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
>
> E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read and understand the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Jeanette Eby of McMaster University.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

1. I agree that the interview can be audio- recorded.

2. I would like to receive a summary of the report of the study's results.

… Yes.

… No.

   I would like to receive a copy of my interview transcript.

 … Yes.

… No.

Please send them to this email address or mailing address:

3. I would like to be contacted to provide my feedback about the results of the study and work on a community report.

 … Yes. Please contact me at: _____

… No.

Signature: _____

Name (Printed) _____

APPENDIX E: Interview Schedule

What do you consider to be your 'neighbourhood'? (specific boundaries)

Tell me a bit about your neighbourhood. How would you describe it to people who aren't familiar with this area?

How do you feel about the neighbourhood? (Probes: What do you like about it? What don't you like about it?)

Where do you spend most of your time?
      Are there certain places you go to in different seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter)?
      For mothers with school-aged kids:
      Where do you go when your kids are at school?

What is your favourite place to spend time in the neighbourhood or surrounding local community? (Participants can name and describe more than one place)

What are some of the qualities of this place/these places? (Probe for both social and physical attributes)

Why do you go there? Are there any activities you take part in when you are there?

Could you share a story about a meaningful or memorable experience you've had in this place?

Are there any other places in your neighbourhood that are open to the community?

Is there anywhere that you feel out of place or that you don't belong?

If there are few or no places that the participant is aware of or that they go to:
      Why do you think there are so few common places in your neighbourhood?
      Are there any reasons why you do not go to these places?
      What kind of places would you want to see in your neighbourhood, where you would go to spend time?

*Mapping activity: Participants will be provided with a legal sheet of paper and markers, and asked to draw a mental map of their neighbourhood highlighting places they go to and places that matter to them. The mapping activity may serve as a prompt for additional description of favourite places and experiences of the neighbourhood.

If you could share a message about your neighbourhood to the wider Hamilton community, what would it be?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Demographic Questions:

How old are you?
How long have you lived in Canada?
How long have you lived in this neighbourhood?
What is your employment status? (full time/part time/retired/unemployed/disability/student)
How would you perceive your health? (poor/fair/good/very good)
What type of dwelling do you live in? Do you own or rent your place of residence?

APPENDIX F: Article submitted to the South Sherman Hub newspaper

Places That Matter: Neighbourhood Gathering Places and Sense of Place

"A sense of place means that where I am matters to who I am". This is the definition of sense of place that I came up with five years ago when I was writing a term paper about my experience in Hamilton. I live in the Beasley neighbourhood, right in the downtown core, which I have come to know and love in my seven years living in Hamilton. For my Masters research in Human Geography, I wanted to explore what sense of place means for others in the city who live in a different neighbourhood and have different backgrounds and circumstances than me. Over the past two years, I have explored the neighbourhood sense of place and experiences of local gathering places of single women living in the South Sherman neighbourhood. I have been welcomed and accepted by so many different people as I have come to know and appreciate this part of the city.

Sense of place is about the relationships that people form with places, and it encompasses a variety of factors such as someone's memories of a place, their social relationships, their knowledge of a place, and their sense of identity in relation to that place. It is a concept that touches on many aspects of individual and community life. Gathering places are basically defined by their name – they are places where people can come together. They can be, but are not limited to public places. My research questions were as follows: *What meaning do neighbourhood gathering places hold for single women across the life course,* and *what is the relationship between gathering places and their neighbourhood sense of place?* My hope is that the results of this research be included in discussions of neighbourhood planning and development.

The results you will read below are based on the responses of the fifteen women between the ages of 24 and 84 who participated in my research. They all live in or close by this neighbourhood and spend time in local gathering places which they identified and described. I recruited single mothers and single older women (self-identified). Some of the participants have lived in the neighbourhood for less than a year, while others have been here for decades. Given this diversity, the participants had different feelings and opinions about the neighbourhood, and there were a variety of factors that influenced their sense of place, including: the people; how the neighbourhood and buildings in the neighbourhood are cared for; their knowledge of the place; feelings of fear and safety; and the reputation of the place. The women described this as a neighbourhood where people are friendly and down-to-earth, where people know each other and look out for each other; they thought that it has an unfair reputation from the outside, and hoped that others would give it a chance, that a sense of pride and belonging would grow, as Emily shared:

> *You've got to have some ways that people can have some pride in that they live here… There's got to be a sense of belonging… it would be good to see some success stories of people living in this neighbourhood.*

In learning about the gathering places that matter to the participants, I heard many such "success stories" about accessible places that provide a sense of safety, connection and purpose for those who spend time there.

Gathering Places

There were a variety of gathering places that the participants frequented and that were meaningful to them. The important qualities of gathering places that participants described were that they were friendly and welcoming places of connection and social support, convenient in terms of a walkable location, they were affordable, and they were places where the women could just be themselves. The

164

following are the types of gathering places, listed in order of how often they were mentioned and discussed in the interviews: schools, parks, restaurants/cafés, churches, recreation and leisure spaces, and homes.

Schools

The existing elementary schools are meaningful gathering places and important landmarks to the mothers as well as to some of the older women, because they can participate in programs and volunteer there. Schools are community spaces as much as they are educational spaces. As Jill described:

That's where I spend all my time, it's where I'm sociable, it's where I actually get to see other adults not just my kids. It's nice to be with other moms. And it's comfortable there, you know, we're all laughing and joking and just being ourselves … And we all live in the neighbourhood so we could even go to each other's houses if we wanted to. Beause we all live close by, within walking distance.

Parks

Participants loved the various parks in the neighbourhood and were eager to see more parks or to see improvements to current parks. The mothers were quite enthusiastic about the recent makeover to Woodlands Park, which now has an outdoor exercise gym. Gage Park was a favourite place of many of the participants, with the festivals, the Children's Museum, and as a place for all ages. Powell Park was another popular park, which had its first ever community garden this past summer. Kristin explained her attachment to Gage Park:

It's always been that, growing up, like hanging out at the fountain you know with everybody when you're teenagers or whatever, I like going for bike rides around it, I like going to the park, I've just always loved Gage park… If they ever took Gage Park out, I would be heartbroken. It's just part of a lot of people's lives. You know, even just taking the kids to the park or meeting your friends there as teenagers…

Restaurants/Cafés

Restaurants and cafes were friendly and familiar places. Several participants mentioned the *Big Top Family Restaurant* at Main and Sherman, which was applauded for its friendliness and affordability. *Tim Horton's* was also mentioned as an affordable and comfortable place to hang out and have a treat. Rachel talked in depth about *The Heart of the Hammer*, which unfortunately has closed, but her description of it speaks to the importance of having a place to just be:

You always felt welcome, you never felt rushed. And it was friendly for everyone … you could just be there, you didn't have to sit down for formal dinner or anything like that; you could just have cookies or cheese and crackers. So it was easy and comfortable… you knew everybody that was there, it was a safe place to be… it wasn't designed to be high-end or low-end; it was just to be.

Churches

Most of the older women and some of the single mothers attended a local church, whether for Sunday services or for other activities like a weekly lunch/drop-in. Marcella did not know what she would do without her church and the sense of home and community it provided her:

I mean if I don't have my church, I'm lost. I don't know what day it is … I can go there and I feel like all my troubles have been, wel,l when I walk in there, it's all the children. I'm the Grandma… It's like home for me there, you know.

Recreation & Leisure Spaces

There is one neighbourhood recreation centre in particular, Pinky Lewis, which has a variety of programs for all ages that many of the women attended with their children. Many of the women also used the Pinky Lewis or Jimmy Thompson swimming pool for their own fitness and recreation and mentioned this as an important part of their weekly routine. The participants also appreciated the free skates at the Scott Park arena. The *library* was also a valued gathering place in the neighbourhood for a range of participants. The Barton branch hosts activities and programs for children and adults such as a women's group, a book club, music lessons, and movie nights. Marjorie talked about the library as one of her favourite places in the neighbourhood:

> *Well it's like every [other] place in this neighbourhood, they're basically very friendly. And people know your name.*

Homes

Homes are also gathering places, as places to connect with neighbour-friends and family. While houses are traditionally considered to be "private" spaces, the women talked about visiting their friends and having family close by and being invited to each other's homes. They also mentioned that neighbours frequently gathered on each other's front porches. Marcella's front porch was like a public space in itself, where children and adults alike would drop by and visit her, and where she welcomed anyone:

> *But everyone was welcomed in this house, and everybody to this day. Even our Alderman calls me Ma, from the City Hall. The police even had their lunches here, um, I don't know what else I can tell you… I see it, the way you want to be treated, that's the way you treat other people… I've never had trouble.*

Places that Matter

There is indeed a relationship of mutual influence between neighbourhood gathering places and neighbourhood sense of place. There are examples of women who initially felt isolated and disconnected from their surrounding community, and needed to encounter other neighbours and find a place where they felt comfortable in order to then have a relationship with their wider neighbourhood. Other women, because of their many years of experience in their neighbourhood, had a strong sense of place and thus actively sought out opportunities in the community and found places to stay involved and connected with neighbours. Neighbourhoods need local gathering places in order to fill a variety of social and material needs and strengthen a positive sense of place. The South Sherman Hub, as it moves forward with its Neighbourhood Action Plan supported by the City of Hamilton, can support existing gathering places and work to create more accessible, safer spaces that respond to the diverse needs of the residents.

*Note: The names of the participants have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

Jeanette Eby is completing her Masters in Human Geography at McMaster Universty, supervised by Dr. Allison Williams from the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. Her research has been supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and ECHO: Women's Health in Ontario's Institute of Gender and Health through Dr. William's Mid-Career Scientist Award. Feel free to contact her with any comments or questions: jeanetteeby@gmail.com.

APPENDIX G: Lay Report

Places That Matter
### Neighbourhood Gathering Places and Sense of Place in the Gibson and Stipley Neighbourhoods

Sense of place is about the relationships that people form with places, and it encompasses a variety of factors such as someone's memories of a place, their social relationships, their knowledge of a place, and their sense of identity in relation to that place. It relates to many aspects of individual and community life. Gathering places are places where people can come together. They can be, but are not limited to public places. This research explored the neighbourhood sense of place and experience of local gathering places of single women. The research questions were:

What meaning do neighbourhood gathering places hold for single women across the life course, and *what is the relationship between gathering places and their neighbourhood sense of place?*

Fifteen women between the ages of 24 and 84 participated in my research, who identified as single mothers or single older women. They all live in or close by the Gibson and Stipley neighbourhoods in Hamilton and spend time in local gathering places. The participants had different feelings and opinions about the neighbourhoods, and there were a variety of factors that influenced their sense of place, including: the people; how the neighbourhoods and buildings in the neighbourhoods are cared for; their knowledge of the place; feelings of fear and safety, and; the reputation of the place. The women described their neighbourhoods as where people are friendly and down-to-earth, where people know each other and look out for each other. They thought that their neighbourhoods had an unfair reputation from the outside; they hoped that others would give their respective neighbourhood a chance, and that a sense of pride and belonging would grow over time.

Gathering Places

There were a variety of gathering places that were meaningful to the participants. Important qualities of gathering places that participants described were that they were: friendly and welcoming places of connection and social support; convenient in terms of a walkable location; affordable, and; places where the women could just be themselves. Many of these places are featured in the map below. The size of the circles represents how often the places were mentioned and discussed, with the largest ones being most used.
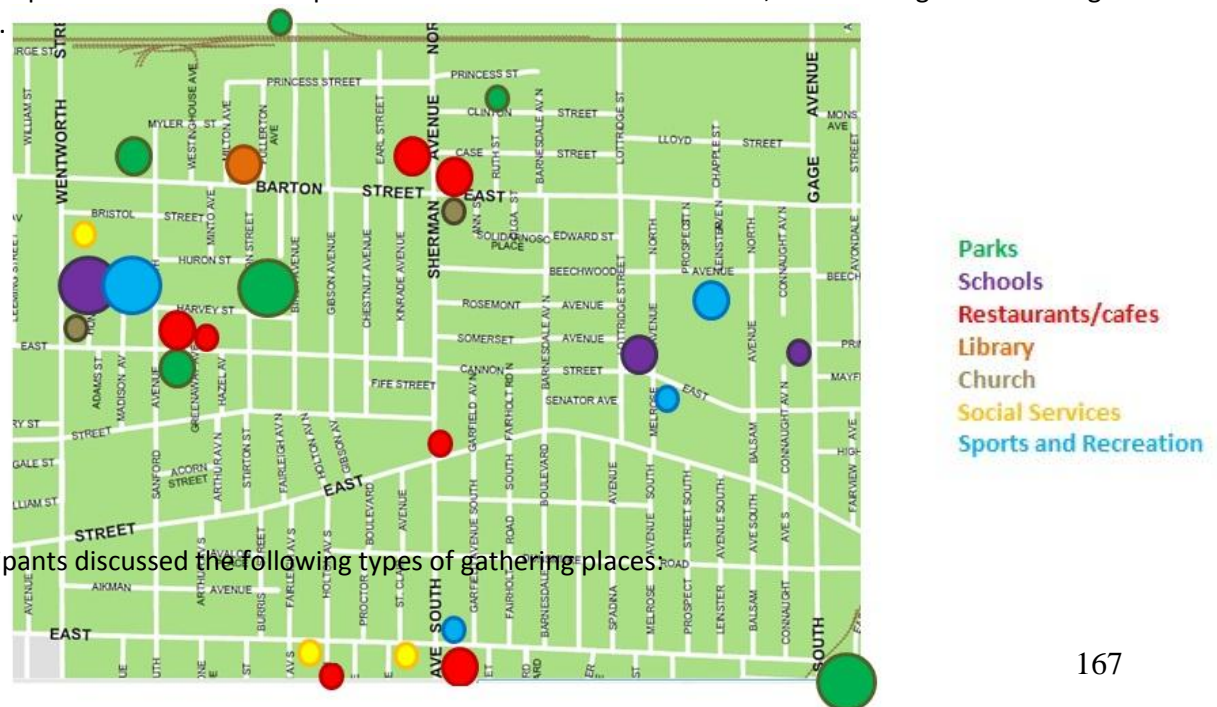
The participants discussed the following types of gathering places:

167

Schools: The existing elementary schools are meaningful gathering places and important landmarks to the mothers, as well as to some of the older women, because they can participate in programs and volunteer there. Schools are community spaces as much as they are educational spaces.

Parks: Participants loved the various parks in the neighbourhood and were eager to see more parks or to see improvements to current parks. The mothers liked the recent makeover to Woodlands Park, which now has an outdoor exercise gym. Gage Park, a favourite place of many of the participants, was described as a place for all ages. Powell Park was another popular park, which had its first ever community garden this past summer.

Restaurants/Cafés: Restaurants and cafes were friendly and familiar places. Several participants mentioned the friendly and affordable *Big Top Family Restaurant* at Main and Sherman. *Tim Horton's* was also mentioned as a comfortable and accessible place.

Churches: Most of the older women and some of the single mothers attended a local church, whether for Sunday services or for other activities like a weekly lunch/drop-in. Church provided a sense of community and a home-away-from-home.

Recreation & Leisure Spaces: Many of the women mentioned Pinky Lewis as a place they go with their children. They also used the Pinky Lewis or Jimmy Thompson swimming pool for their own fitness and recreation. The participants also appreciated the free skates at the Scott Park arena. The *library* was also a valued gathering place in the neighbourhood for a range of participants. The Barton branch hosts activities and programs for children and adults such as a women's group, a book club, music lessons, and movie nights.

Homes: Homes are also gathering places, as they operated as places to connect with neighbour-friends and family. While houses are traditionally considered to be "private" spaces, the women talked about friends and family close by, and being invited to each other's homes. They also mentioned that neighbours frequently gathered on each other's front porches.

Places that Matter

There is, indeed, a relationship of mutual influence between neighbourhood gathering places and neighbourhood sense of place. Some participants initially felt isolated and disconnected from their surrounding neighbourhood, and needed to meet other neighbours and find a place where they felt comfortable in order to then have a relationship with their wider neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods need local gathering places in order to fill a variety of social and material needs and strengthen a positive sense of place. This can provide a sense of safety, connection and purpose. Neighbourhood groups and the City's Neighbourhood Development Strategy can support existing gathering places while working to create more accessible, safer spaces that respond to the diverse needs of residents.