

# THE GENDERED LENS



A Report on Women's Experiences with  
Video Surveillance and Urban Security in Toronto

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# About The Gendered Lens

## BACKGROUND

Making sure people are safe in cities is an important issue. It is also very much a gendered one, as women tend to report higher levels of fear of crime than do men. One response to public fear of crime has been Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras. But, it is not clear if this kind of surveillance decreases women's fear of crime and increases their sense of urban security. Our project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, set out to document and explain the relationship between CCTV cameras and women's sense of urban security.

## METHODS

To understand the gendered aspects of CCTV, we used a research method called Concept Mapping. This method encouraged our participants to share their ideas about CCTV and urban security through:

1. brainstorming;
2. rating the importance of the statements raised in brainstorming and sorting them into groups of related ideas; and
3. 'mapping', or describing how the statements are connected to each other.

These sessions happened between November 2011 and April 2012

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# PARTICIPANTS

In recognition that different groups of women probably experience video surveillance differently, our participants, who were recruited mostly from community-based organizations, served as self-identified representatives and cultural experts of the following populations:

- Club-going women
  - Women who go to clubs in Toronto’s entertainment district
- Low-income women
  - Women with a connection to Sistering: A Woman’s Place
- Racialized women
  - Women who identify as non-white
- Senior women
  - Women over the age of 65, most of whom had a connection to Silver Circle: West Toronto Services for Seniors
- Sex-working women
  - Women with a connection to Maggie’s: Toronto Sex Workers Action Project

We recognize that some of these groups overlap. For example, some of the sex workers were seniors and some of the club-going women were racialized.

Participants matched Toronto profiles based on ethnicity.

Women identified as:

- Aboriginal
- African
- Canadian
- South Asian
- Western European
- West Indian/Caribbean
- and “other”

In this study, “women” were people who self-identified as such, including trans women.

Participants had slightly lower levels of education than the Toronto average.

Most of the participants lived and worked in the city of Toronto.

Compared to Toronto averages, a larger number of women within our study were members of low-income households. This could be a result of the fact that 20% of the women involved in our study were retired seniors and another 20% of the women were members of the low-income group.

We would like to thank Maggie’s, Sistering, and the Silver Circle for helping with recruitment and for providing space for brainstorming sessions.

# PHASE 1: BRAINSTORMING

We held 5 brainstorming groups in November and December of 2011. Each of these groups was made up of 9-14 women, for a total of 51 participants. The women were asked to brainstorm as many ideas as possible to complete the following statement:

***“One way that video surveillance in Toronto makes me feel is...”***

They suggested ideas together and everyone’s voice counted. Across all of the groups, the women came up with a broad range of ideas that we shortened to 44 unique statements, which computer software then randomly numbered. (see below)

1. Surveillance cameras are an invasion of my privacy.
2. Surveillance cameras do not prevent crime, but they may help provide evidence to help solve it.
3. Installing surveillance cameras is a way to avoid finding real solutions to violence against women.
4. People who want to commit a criminal act can avoid being seen or recognized by surveillance cameras.
5. It is frustrating that only some people (e.g. superintendents, police) have access to video surveillance tapes.
6. Surveillance cameras are a waste of money.
7. Surveillance cameras make me worry about being caught doing something.
8. Cameras are used by employers to make employees follow the rules.
9. Surveillance cameras give people a false sense of security.
10. Police use surveillance cameras to discriminate against certain people (e.g. people of colour, sex workers, poor people).
11. Surveillance cameras give me an audience to perform for.
12. Surveillance cameras make me feel judged or labelled for looking poor.
13. Surveillance cameras are a useful tool for the watchers, but make life difficult for the people being watched.
14. I am uncomfortable with cameras because I do not know who is watching or what happens to my image after it has been recorded.
15. Surveillance cameras are not as useful for safety as having security guards, for example in a dance club or an apartment lobby.
16. The presence of surveillance cameras violates my civil liberties.
17. I try to stay in areas monitored by cameras because I feel safer.
18. When I see cameras, I feel like I am being suspected of doing something wrong.
19. The government should regulate or monitor the use of video surveillance.
20. I am less likely to engage in risky or problematic (including criminal) behaviour if I know cameras are there.
21. I find video surveillance frustrating because I don’t understand its real purpose or how it works.
22. Because surveillance cameras record everything, I feel safe and protected.
23. Being watched by surveillance cameras makes me feel ashamed and like I don’t belong.
24. Surveillance cameras are an extra pair of eyes in case somebody needs help.
25. Surveillance cameras make me feel anxious and self-conscious.
26. Because surveillance cameras are everywhere, I am never sure if someone is watching me do personal things (e.g. fix my bra, adjust my underwear).
27. When I see surveillance cameras, I try to blend in and look innocent.
28. Surveillance cameras are expensive, but save money in other ways (e.g. lower insurance rates, prevent shoplifting).
29. I feel angry and violent towards video cameras.
30. Surveillance cameras can help identify or keep track of dangerous individuals, for instance in apartment buildings, near schools or on the TTC. Surveillance cameras in stores are used to discriminate against certain people (e.g. people of colour, sex workers, poor people).
31. Surveillance cameras in stores are used to discriminate against certain people (e.g. people of colour, sex workers, poor people).
32. If a sexual assault takes place, videotapes can confirm the victim’s side of the story.
33. Video surveillance is a tool used to maintain inequality in Canada.
34. I notice cameras, but they don’t affect my daily life.
35. I am embarrassed to be caught looking back at the camera.
36. Having a lot of surveillance cameras in a neighbourhood sends a message that the people in that neighbourhood are worth protecting.
37. Surveillance cameras prevent crime.
38. I am uncomfortable with cameras because they are used without my permission.
39. Surveillance cameras make me feel afraid and vulnerable.
40. I don’t trust how police use video surveillance.
41. It is unclear how video surveillance cameras work and if the tapes are ever used.
42. I don’t notice video surveillance cameras.
43. Surveillance cameras make me feel like I’m a target.
44. Having a lot of surveillance cameras in a neighbourhood sends a message that there is something to fear.

## PHASE 2: RATING AND SORTING

In February of 2012, 52 women attended rating and sorting open houses. At the open houses, they participated in two activities.

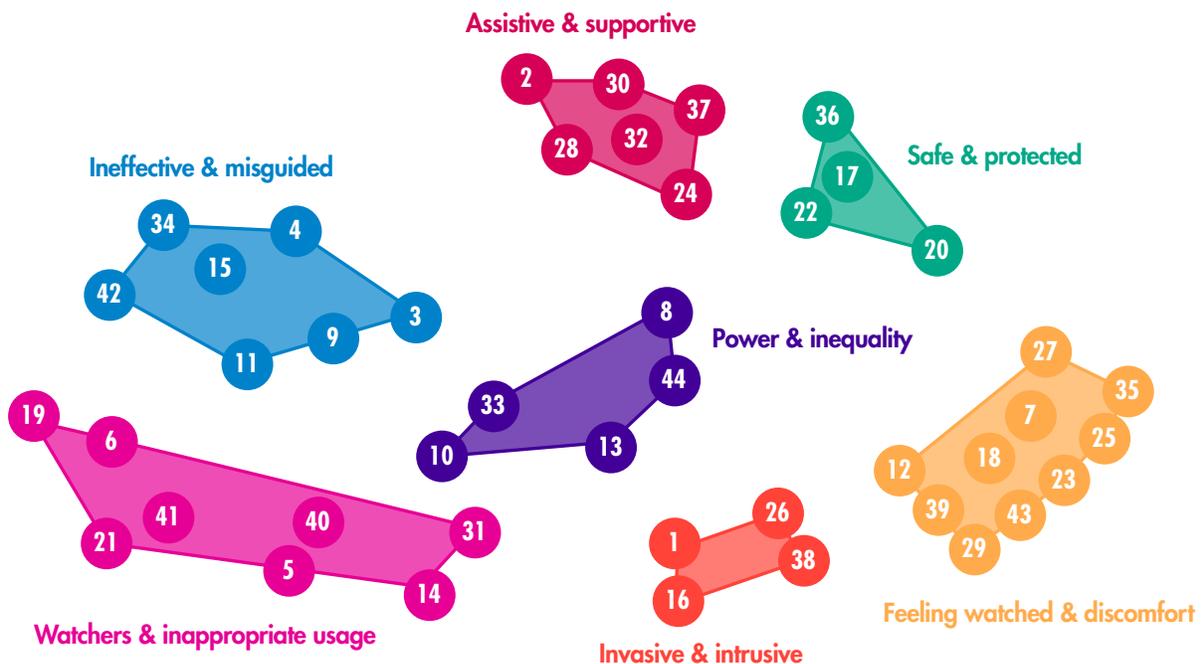
First, they rated how much they agreed with each of the 44 unique statements, on a scale of 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very much").

Second, they sorted all the different statements into groups they felt were related to each other. This helped us to understand how women connect ideas about video surveillance and which ideas were most important to them.

## PHASE 3: MAPPING SESSION

### Mapping the ways that women grouped ideas about surveillance

In April of 2012, we used special computer software to produce a "cluster map" of the rating and sorting information given by participants. This map shows how women put ideas into groups that make sense to them. Two women from each of the original five brainstorming groups were invited to the Mapping Session to look at the patterns in the map. They talked with us about what the patterns tell them about the priority areas related to women's experiences of video surveillance.



### \*HOW TO READ A "CLUSTER MAP":

Each number on the cluster map represents one of the 44 statements (as listed on the previous page - for example, "1" is "Surveillance cameras are an invasion of my privacy"). The cluster map shows:

- The ideas that are clustered together were most often grouped as related to each other in Phase 2. For example, "1" was often grouped with "16" ("The presence of surveillance cameras violates my civil liberties").
- The statements that are far apart were rarely grouped together. For example, "42" ("I don't notice video surveillance cameras") was rarely grouped with "35" ("I am embarrassed to be caught looking back at the camera").
- The names of the 7 clusters were based on participants' suggestions. For example, "Watchers & inappropriate usage" and "Safe & protected".

# Findings

## The ways that women talk about video surveillance tells us something about the different ways women do or don't feel comfortable in the city:

*"They're not going to stop a guy in a suit and tie. They see me... and I'll go on the ground."*

– LOW-INCOME WOMAN

*"... if you happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, it can be assumed that you are the person who is the perpetrator and literally you are judged before you even get a chance to prove that you are innocent."*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"Depending on your race or your class - mostly, and your gender as well, you are always at the wrong place at the wrong time, it seems."*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"It makes me feel a little nervous because sometimes I am doing things that people might say are wrong or against the law."*

– SEX-WORKING WOMAN

*"The camera is not going to save us half the time and it might not do anything afterwards either...Especially when you are drunk, you know, in a place."*

– CLUB-GOING WOMAN

*"[Cameras are there] to help the people that can't help themselves, and they are wandering or get lost... We know down deep they are going to be found and looked after."*

– SENIOR WOMAN

## All of the women we spoke with agreed that surveillance does not prevent crime, and in some situations, can even create unsafe conditions:

*"First of all, I really don't know of the purpose ...if it's prevention or to make sure that they catch the person after the fact. I don't know, but if it's for prevention it's not working."*

– CLUB-GOING WOMAN

*"I don't believe the video cameras prevent the crime. It's a reaction. I don't think it will actually prevent the crime."*

– LOW-INCOME WOMAN

*"It's good to have because after they do whatever, the police can see who did it and maybe the time that they did it or the day that they did it and track down a person. But the harm is already done."*

– SENIOR WOMAN

*"For people who really do the violent things, they don't care about video. It's like, 'Come and get me'."*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"It makes our work harder. It makes us more unsafe because...you have to find a place [to work] - the people are already having to work farther and farther out and in darker and darker corners or, you know, more at risk with clients or whatever in their spaces, and so you have to find more corner-y places that don't have a camera. So how does that keep us safer? "*

– SEX-WORKING WOMAN

## All of the groups, except seniors, also talked about surveillance cameras being used against them:

*"It can be used against somebody falsely."*

– LOW-INCOME WOMAN

*"It could be used unscrupulously by an evil super[intendent]."*

– LOW-INCOME WOMAN

*"Oh my God. I don't want to end up in like a magazine or a newspaper article [entitled] 'This is what your kids are doing.'"*

– CLUB-GOING WOMAN

*"It has an overall general dehumanizing aspect to it. It's not there for our protection."*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"[Cameras watch] people who are racialized or are from particular classes or are seen as criminalized bodies."*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"I think the video cameras are the [strip club] owner's fetish and I think he uses them to watch us."*

– SEX-WORKING WOMAN

*"It could be good for us but it could also be bad for us depending on how [your employer] feels about you or what you are doing."*

– SEX-WORKING WOMAN

## The majority of women actively changed their behaviour in order to protect themselves:

*"I have behaved in a certain way in the knowledge that there are cameras around. Yeah."*

– CLUB-GOING WOMAN

*"It makes you feel phony because you have to act in a different way..."*

– LOW-INCOME WOMAN

*"Yeah. Act normal when you walk in my lobby. Don't act like that when you walk in my lobby. Act normal. What's normal?"*

– LOW-INCOME WOMAN

*"In stores that are ridiculously expensive I perform class. So I feel like I have to act like I have a lot of money to feel like I'm even welcome in that space."*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"It's just painting people as guilty and they have to prove their innocence by behaving. Right?"*

– RACIALIZED WOMAN

*"I used to have a real edgy look but I found if you want to get away with stuff, you've got to blend in and look all innocent."*

– SEX-WORKING WOMAN

*"I will try to look more innocuous, is the right word. I will try to blend in and not be as noticed, especially when I am working. Like I am going to work in jeans and stuff like that. Still dressed up but not too dressed up, or otherwise I will dress really, really good... So I look like some person who has a legitimate job."*

– SEX-WORKING WOMAN

Some women said that they acted upper or middle class, "normal", and innocent to protect themselves. The senior group did not talk about acting in these ways. While some senior women said they don't notice the cameras ("I don't do anything different. You just forget that they are here."), other senior women had fun in front of the cameras ("I try to get new negligees so, you know, I can walk down the hall when I am throwing my garbage out.")

## A key finding was that different groups of women experience CCTV differently:

Things like age matter a great deal. Senior women – that is, women over the age of 65 – were the group most likely to see CCTV as “assistive and supportive”. For club-going women, sex-working women, racialized women, and low-income women, CCTV was much more likely to be seen as “invasive and intrusive”.

	Sex-working women	Low income women	Racialized women	Senior women	Club-going women
More	Invasive and intrusive	Invasive and intrusive	Power and inequality	Assistive and supportive	Ineffective and misguided
	Watchers & inappropriate usage	Assistive and supportive	Invasive and intrusive	Safe and protected	Assistive and supportive
	Ineffective and misguided	Watchers & inappropriate usage	Watchers & inappropriate usage	Power and inequality	Power and inequality
	Power and inequality	Power and inequality	Ineffective and misguided	Ineffective and misguided	Invasive and intrusive
	Assistive and supportive	Safe and protected	Assistive and supportive	Watchers & inappropriate usage	Watchers & inappropriate usage
	Feeling watched & discomfort	Ineffective and misguided	Feeling watched & discomfort	Invasive and intrusive	Safe and protected
Less	Safe and protected	Feeling watched & discomfort	Safe and protected	Feeling watched & discomfort	Feeling watched & discomfort

### HOW TO READ THIS TABLE:

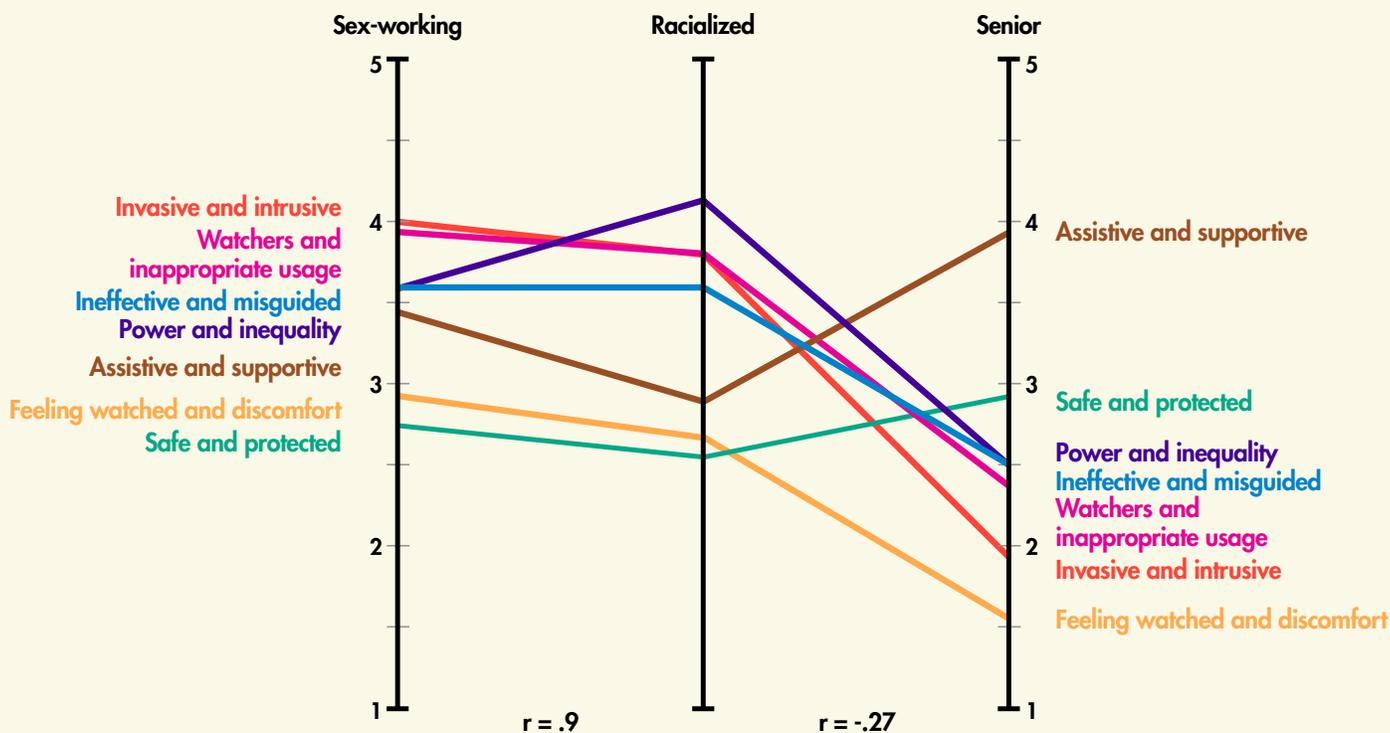
The themes at the top are the ones that women said best reflected their own feelings and thoughts about video surveillance. The ones at the bottom were the ones women said reflected their experiences the least.

## Another way to understand differences among these groups of women is by looking at a ladder graph:

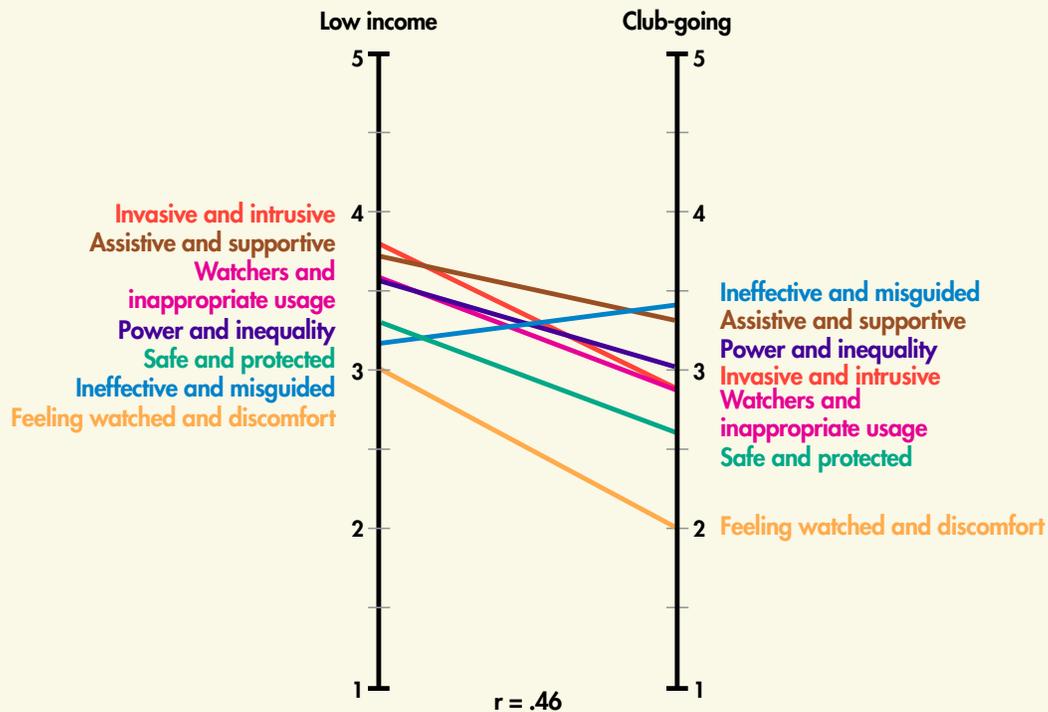
A ladder graph compares two or more groups. It shows how closely each group thought the statements matched their own thinking and feelings about video surveillance, on a scale of 1 to 5. A horizontal (i.e. flat) bar means that group experiences are more similar to each other, or are more in agreement. A sloped bar shows dissimilarity or disagreement.

The number at the bottom (the "correlation coefficient", e.g. " $r = .46$ ") is a measure of the similarity. It ranges from " $-1$ " to " $1$ ". Values near " $0$ " show the absence of similarity, or disagreement, whereas values closer to either pole show stronger similarity or agreement. A number higher than " $.7$ " means a very strong agreement.

As you can see below, the sex-working group and racialized group experienced surveillance in similar ways because the bars are fairly horizontal. The senior group, however, had experiences that were very different from both the sex-working and the racialized women.

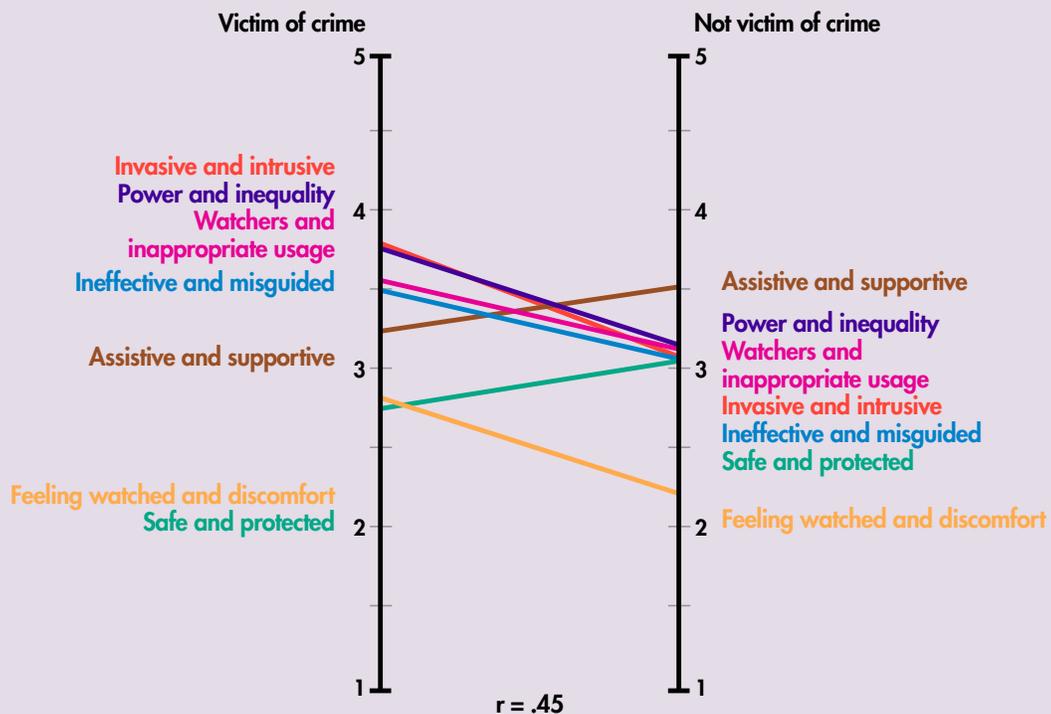


The low-income group and club-going group were also fairly different from one another.



**However, we also found many similarities across the groups of women:**

It didn't matter what group women were in, if they had been a victim of crime, they generally had more negative feelings about CCTV. Victimized women strongly identified with the experience of CCTV as "invasive and intrusive" and as being about "power and inequality", among other negative feelings.



# Conclusions

## 1. Differences between women matter.

Different groups of women had different experiences. When it comes to CCTV in the city of Toronto, these differences had to do with things like age, race, and income. Importantly, they also had to do with how women use the space in which they live, work, and have fun. CCTV matters based both on who you are and what you do in the city.

## 2. Women's sense of security in the city is more complicated than people think.

The women we talked to spoke not only about crime, but also about inequality and power differences, about physical well being and health, about motherhood, sexuality, and consumerism, and about income security. They also talked about control over their bodies, how their bodies are seen, and by whom. Women have a broad range of concerns related to urban security that can not simply be solved by CCTV.

## 3. We need to take better account of women's experiences when we talk about surveillance in the city.

Listening to women's voices tells us that we have a lot more to learn about the relationship between video surveillance and urban security for women in Toronto. We need to include women in discussions about CCTV.



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Everyone Makes a Mark