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## STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT: WOMEN'S FEAR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ON URBAN COLLEGE CAMPUSES

*Kristen Day*

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*Sexual assault and fear of assault plague women students on U.S. college campuses. This study investigates women's fear of sexual assault on campus, using findings from participant photography and open-ended interviews with 38 women students at two midwestern, urban universities. Personal, physical, and social cues for women's fear are described and explained. Three primary types of fear emerge: fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment; fear of strange people and places; and fear of incivil or norm-violating behavior. Disparities between fear and actual sexual assault support a model of fear as social control over women's use of public space. Recommendations address future research, campus planning, and crime prevention.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault has achieved dubious distinction as one of the most insidious problems on U.S. college campuses. Upwards of 43% of college women are victims of sexual assault (Koss, *et al.*, 1987).<sup>1</sup> Assault occurs irrespective of place, time, age of victim, or relationship to assailant; women are usually held responsible for preventing victimization (Johnston, 1992).

Fear of sexual assault is also significant, widespread, and detrimental. Women fear rape more than any other crime except murder (Brodyaga, *et al.*, 1975). This primarily "female fear" arises from actual and perceived risk of assault, as well as from victim blaming and sexual myths and taboos (Gordon and Riger, 1989). Ironically, considerable discrepancy may exist between women's fear and the characteristics of actual assaults — especially on campus, where the scope and nature of sexual assault may be intentionally obscured to preserve an image of "safety."

Colleges and universities increasingly acknowledge and attempt to prevent sexual assault and other campus crimes, counteracting historical tendencies toward denial and concealment.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, school and individual assault prevention strategies often implicitly reinforce gendered social norms for public behavior, hindering women's experience and use of the campus environment (Day, 1995).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although U.S. women have considerably reversed their historic exclusion from public activity and public space, social norms for appropriate behavior continue to restrict women's full and equal access (Day, 1994a; Franck and Paxson, 1989; Valentine, 1992). These social rules convince both women and men to internalize value constructs that demand women's self-restriction (Fox, 1977). Violating rules marks women as loose and as fair game for assailants. Thus, women often forego independent and free use of campus, from both the direct threat of victimization at a time or place where assistance is unavailable, and from the fear of being perceived as "asking for trouble" by ignoring gendered norms for self-presentation and activity (Deegan, 1987; Day, 1994a).

To the extent that danger of sexual assault on campus is constructed as exclusively stranger-related, outdoors, at night, especially without evidence of greater risk under these conditions, universities and individuals reinforce patriarchal domination of public space. This study investigates physical and social cues associated with women's fear and absence of fear of sexual assault on and near campus, and the ways in which such fear comprises gendered social control.

Research on fear of crime on campus has burgeoned in recent years (c.f., Fisher and Nasar, 1992a; Kirk, 1988; Kladawsky and Lundy, 1994; Leach, *et al.*, 1986; Lott, *et al.*, 1982; Marcus and Wischemann, 1983; Nasar, 1994; Nasar and Fisher, 1992a, 1992b; among others). Research on women's fear of sexual assault has also increased (Gordon and Riger, 1989; Gordon, *et al.*, 1980; Riger, *et al.*, 1978). Most existing research describes personal and micro-scale physical characteristics correlated with women's fear (Day, 1994a). Less well understood are the interrelationships between societal, personal, social, physical, and time cues for fear, and theoretical explanations for these associations.

## RESEARCH METHODS

A multiple case study was conducted at two urban university campuses in a midwestern U.S. city.

### *All Saints University*

All Saints University is a private, religious, liberal arts school of 12,000 graduate and undergraduate students.<sup>3</sup> All Saints' undergraduates are 50% female, and 86% Anglo American, 7% Asian American, 4% African American, and 3% Hispanic. Administrators characterize students as mostly

TABLE 1. Crimes reported to All Saints and CES Public Safety Department, 1991.

Crime	All Saints		CES	
	<i>On campus</i>	<i>Near campus</i>	<i>On campus</i>	<i>Near campus</i>
Homicide	1	1	0	*
Rape	0	7	0	*
Robbery	4	54	3	*
Aggravated assault	0	3	0	*
Burglary	21	54	0	*
Auto theft	11	30	11	*

\* Information not available.

upper-middle class and somewhat conservative. Roughly 30% of students live on campus, and most others live in nearby apartments or flats.

All Saints' 80-acre campus is bounded by the central business district, freeways, a mostly residential neighborhood, and a deteriorated commercial district. A four-block, contiguous green space and pedestrian mall form the "heart" of campus. School properties straddle both sides of the major downtown thoroughfare and city bus route (see Figure 2, p. 297). The campus's northern border — March Street — is under constant development and renovation to improve neighborhood appearance and safety.

All Saints' Public Safety Department strongly encourages students to report assaults and crimes both on and near campus. Crime rates on and near campus contrast sharply (Table 1).

#### *City Engineering School*

City Engineering School (CES) is a nonprofit, quasi-public institution, located near the same central business district. CES offers primarily undergraduate engineering education, with some graduate and related programs.

CES enrolls over 3,000 students: approximately 1,800 day students (all undergraduates) and 1,200 evening students. Significantly, almost 86% of students are male; 90% are Anglo American, 3% African American, 2% Asian American, 1% Hispanic, and 0.4% Native American. Administrators characterize students as mostly middle or upper-middle class and as "old-fashioned" or conservative. Nearly half the students are former small town or rural residents. Almost half the CES day students live on campus; others rent apartments nearby.

City Engineering School's 11-acre campus occupies part of six city blocks (see Figure 3, p. 298). It is surrounded by offices, retail, theaters, multi- and single-family homes, a large park, a vocational training center for people with disabilities, and a home for juvenile offenders.

At CES, no near-campus crime rates are systematically collected or reported. For the few years statistics are available, reported campus crime rates are low, except auto theft (Table 1).

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

*Data collection.* Data collection methods included participant photography, open-ended interviews, and a brief questionnaire.

Women students at both schools received packages containing the project description, instructions, a map, and one roll of color film.<sup>4</sup> Instructions asked participants to independently photograph scenes on and near campus, associated with fear and the absence of fear. Participants photographed whatever they wished (inside or outside, people or things, large or small), and marked each photo's location on the map. Throughout, "campus" was explicitly defined as properties owned or operated

TABLE 2. Student sample, at All Saints and at CES.

Characteristics	All Saints	CES
N =	19	19
Gender: Female	19 <sup>1</sup>	19 <sup>2</sup>
Student status		
Undergraduates	13	19
Graduates	5	0 <sup>3</sup>
Nondegree	1	0
Race/ethnicity		
Anglo-American	14 <sup>4</sup>	14 <sup>4</sup>
Hispanic	1	1
African-American	1	1
Other	3 <sup>5</sup>	3 <sup>5</sup>
Missing	0	1
International students <sup>6</sup>	3 <sup>5</sup>	1
Age		
Mode	21 yrs.	20 yrs.
Range	18-38 yrs.	19-24 yrs.
Average length of time on campus (mode) <sup>8</sup>	3 yrs.	2 yrs.
Marital status		
Single	14	18
Married/living with partner	2	1
Divorced/widowed/separated	3	0
Primary time of campus use <sup>8</sup>		
Daytime student	14	16
Evening student	2	0
Daytime & evening student	3	3
Live on campus	8	16 <sup>7</sup>
If live off campus, primary mode of transportation to campus <sup>8</sup>	Walk	Walk
Past victimization by personal crime or sexual assault <sup>8</sup>	5	5
Of these, victimization on or near campus <sup>8</sup>	2	2

<sup>1</sup>Approximately 50% of the All Saints student population is female.

<sup>2</sup>Women represent only 14% of the student population at CES.

<sup>3</sup>Only about 300 CES students are graduate students, and all attend part time in the evening. All participants were "traditional" day students, since no evening students volunteered to participate. Since most day students also took evening classes, women's night time use of the campus was represented, although the personal characteristics of (nontraditional) evening students were not.

<sup>4</sup>Less than student population.

<sup>5</sup>More than student population.

<sup>6</sup>Assessment based on appearance, accent, and information divulged during the interview.

<sup>7</sup>CES participants were more likely than the CES student population to live on campus in university housing — 84%, compared to 40% of all day students, reflecting participants' young age and their subjective definition of "campus." At least one woman living in a near campus apartment reported that she lived in university housing. Such responses demonstrate the complexity of defining campus, which, from the perspective of students, often has more to do with distance than with ownership.

<sup>8</sup>No comparable information is available for the student population.

by the school. "Near campus" included areas adjacent to and perhaps used by members of the school, but not officially owned or operated by the school.<sup>5</sup>

Participants returned film and maps through campus mail. I developed film and coded photos to maps. Individual sets of photos and maps served as the basis for 19 interview guide-based, open-ended interviews at each school. For each photo, I asked the student, "Why did you take this picture? What in the picture makes you feel safe or fearful? (If fearful), what would you fear in this situation or place?" I also asked about changes in perceived fear or safety over time; reputations of places for safety; and knowledge of sexual assault and crime on or near campus. Sexual assault was defined as attempted or actual sexual contact or intercourse, obtained through force or threat of force, or through impairment or control of one's judgment to prevent resistance. Included were unwanted touching between strangers, and between people known to each other (dating partners or acquaintances). Participants were assured of the confidentiality of individual and school identities.

Following discussion of photographs, I asked participants about strategies for assault and crime prevention (Day, 1995), and the consequences of strategies (Day, forthcoming). Earlier, I also interviewed key employees (at these schools and others) about assault and crime and their prevention on and near campus (Day, 1995).

Student interviews were tape recorded, lasting approximately 60 minutes each. Participants also provided demographic information in a one-page questionnaire.

*Sample.* All Saints' student participants were recruited through direct solicitation outside of the library and at a meeting of Resident Assistants, and through snowball sampling. CES participants were recruited through direct solicitation by mail, telephone, and in person at an orientation for new and returning women students; and through snowball sampling (Table 2).

*Data analysis.* Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and keyed to correspond to participant's numbered photographs. Data analysis incorporated modified versions of Patton's detailed coding (1990) and Strauss' memoing (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Before coding transcripts, I generated hypotheses about trends that emerged during data collection and transcription. Hypotheses were refined or dismissed through iterative, increasingly detailed coding and memoing. Emerging explanations were examined against detailed data collection notes, coded transcripts, existing literature, and earlier memos, and refined accordingly, back and forth. Analysis was sharpened through numerous discussions of successive memos with colleagues and other women students.

Analysis emphasized *participants'* perceptions of characteristics of places and situations.<sup>6</sup> After establishing explanations and corresponding characteristics for types of fear, I coded photos for the feelings exemplified, based on participants' responses. Locations of photos in which participants explicitly discussed the presence or absence of key characteristics were marked on composite maps (on more than one map when appropriate).

Following analysis at All Saints University, I conducted similar procedures for data from City Engineering School, and refined earlier explanations.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *What Did Women Fear*

Participants easily discussed feared social and physical cues, though they rarely used the word "fear."<sup>7</sup> Rather, women adopted various, often evasive expressions (e.g., "something could happen"), unless probed directly and repeatedly for specific violations.

Fear of assault, especially sexual assault by strangers, factored most prominently in women's feared violations. A few participants immediately and explicitly reported greatest fear of sexual assault.

*When I walk around campus, if I see a male, an adult male, I don't care what race he is, I guess that is always my first fear, would be like rape or sexual assault. Before getting mugged, before getting a gun put to my head.*

(21 year old All Saints student)

Many women seemed somewhat reluctant to verbalize fear of sexual assault.<sup>8</sup> Most, but not all, women reported fear of sexual assault, rape, similar offenses, assault/attack more generally, or characteristics conveying sexual assault (e.g., being victimized by a man because of a woman's physical attractiveness). All Saints women explicitly mentioned fear of sexual assault somewhat more often than did CES women. Women who did not seem to fear sexual assault usually thought assault unlikely on or near campus, or believed they avoided opportunities for assault.

Date and acquaintance assault were infrequently cited among feared violations, although participants at both schools knew of women students, including friends and roommates, who had been victims of date or acquaintance assault on or near campus. No All Saints women described fear of date/acquaintance assault. Several CES participants described some apprehension upon first entering the male-dominated school — apprehension that usually disappeared upon getting to know men students. Compared to other fears, apprehension of male students was mild and infrequently mentioned. Even one participant who was sexually assaulted in the dorms by a CES male student acquaintance, primarily feared rape by a stranger, outdoors, alone, at night.

More infrequently mentioned fears included property crime (e.g., car theft, burglary) and hassling (strangers' mostly sexual or evaluative comments to women). Overall, All Saints women perceived campus and especially near campus as relatively unsafe, and CES women perceived campus and near campus as safer than many other places downtown.

In summary, foremost among participants' fear was assault, including sexual assault and other forms of stranger assault, and conditions believed to be assault-related. Existing research (particularly Gordon and Riger, 1989) and informal conversations with women throughout this study, support this attribution.

#### ***Personal Characteristics Associated with Fear***

Findings on personal characteristics associated with women's fear largely supported existing research (c.f., DuBow, *et al.*, 1979). Most women's fear decreased over time, with growing familiarity with the city and neighborhood. Changes in fear over time generally reflected initial expectations. Women reported that unconfirmed, high expectations of danger lowered fear, and negative experiences, coupled with low initial apprehension, increased fear.<sup>9</sup> Participants consistently attributed high fear to former small town or suburban residence, and low fear with former urban residence or experience. As in existing literature, participants' fear reflected their experience or knowledge of particular crimes or incivilities (DuBow, *et al.*, 1979). For example, one woman felt safe having heard of no sexual assaults on or near campus, though she knew of other crimes.

Participants at both schools associated fear and vulnerability with being women.

*This is our common area, and when we're there we have great fun. I mean, especially when her [roommate] boyfriend's there, I feel so much safer [because] there's a guy there. Because you wouldn't think a guy would walk in and try to do whatever, steal stuff and everything. They're less likely to approach things when there's another male there than when there's four women there.*

(19 year old CES student describing a photo of her room)

These perceptions were often attributed to a sense of limited physical competence (compared to men). Awareness of male victimization on or near campus, or men's statistically higher criminal victimization, did not sway perceptions of women's greater vulnerability.

#### ***Physical and Social Cues for Fear and Safety***

Three primary types of fear emerged, each with accompanying physical and social cues: 1) fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment; 2) fear of strange people and places; and 3) fear of social and physical incivilities. Certainly, fears were interrelated, but initial separation facilitates theoretical explanation.

*Fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment.* Women most frequently feared being outdoors, isolated or alone, at night, under darkness or limited visibility, in a place or situation where a stranger hiding could surprise or attack.

*This area is not lit ... there are lights all around but it's like behind these huge bushes so you got to be careful and see if anyone's coming from either way ... it's bushes and it's trees along*

*there, and someone could hide underneath there ... so I'm worried about somebody just grabbing out at me and I couldn't even see them.*  
(37 year old All Saints student)

Also common was fear of enclosed or entrapping places, with no exit or a single way in and out — again, especially in darkness and isolation.

*I see most people avoiding them [pedestrian construction tunnels]. You can't get out of there. If someone comes at you from one way and there are people coming the other way or whatever, you just can't go anywhere ... I just don't like the feeling of being trapped.*  
(21 year old All Saints student)

Frequently feared places included alleys, tunnels, crevices in building exteriors, isolated stairways, long and narrow entrances or walkways, and parking lots. Physical features emphasized trees and bushes, dumpsters, and insufficient lighting (Figure 1). Other key characteristics included absence of others, isolation, and especially night time. (This fear was rarely reported during the day, especially on campus.)

Cues for this fear represented the most common reason for taking photographs. According to All Saints participants' descriptions, 86 unsafe places were photographed for these features, and 49 safe places were photographed for their opposite (e.g., good lighting, no big bushes). CES participants described 134 unsafe and 44 safe photos, respectively.

Feared and safe photo locations were split equally between campus and near campus. This pattern is easiest to observe at All Saints because of its large, concentrated campus (Figures 2 and 3).<sup>10</sup> Apparently, women fear assault by surprise or entrapment wherever feared cues exist.

Feared places on or near All Saints' campus vary much more across participants than do feared places at CES. All Saints photos reflect physical features encountered on each woman's individual rounds. No apparent patterns emerge. In contrast, CES's small and linear campus had fewer overall facilities. Most students use identical routes, suggesting encounter of the same physical features. Further, highly feared exterior features (e.g., "tunnel" entrances, hiding places) dominate the CES gym, field, science building, and nearby shopping center.

The CES athletic field represents one noteworthy example. At night, this field is isolated, with no lights and few users. However, the large, flat expanse of land is not enclosed, nor does it provide many conventional hiding places for assailants. Upon closer examination, however, the field affords many opportunities for hiding, jumping out, and even entrapment — explanations given for fear. Because the field is *very dark*, an offender can simply lie down and remain unseen. Women fear walking in the dark, exposed and alone, and being attacked by someone springing unseen from the grass. Additionally, the field is raised several steps above the surrounding area, removing it from view of passers-by. Because there are no nearby places to run, women fear being trapped, running in circles, easily prevented from exiting. Thus, a few prominent, feared features negate the absence of others. However, the presence of many "safe" others seems to overcome most feared physical features. For example, though they normally avoid the field at night alone or even in groups, *large* groups of CES students hold evening winter snowball fights here.

Fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment can be understood in terms of prospect/refuge theory, as a lack of control through insufficient information, and as social control over women's use of public space.

Feared micro-scale physical features are partially explained by an adaptation of Appleton's prospect/refuge theory (1975: in Fisher and Nasar, 1992). Fisher and Nasar suggest that offenders prefer places of prospect and refuge (or concealment; Nasar, 1994), where they can see without being seen by potential victims or passers-by, and in which offenders can hide, wait, and remove a victim from sight. Potential victims fear such places, recognizing advantages to offenders. Specifically,

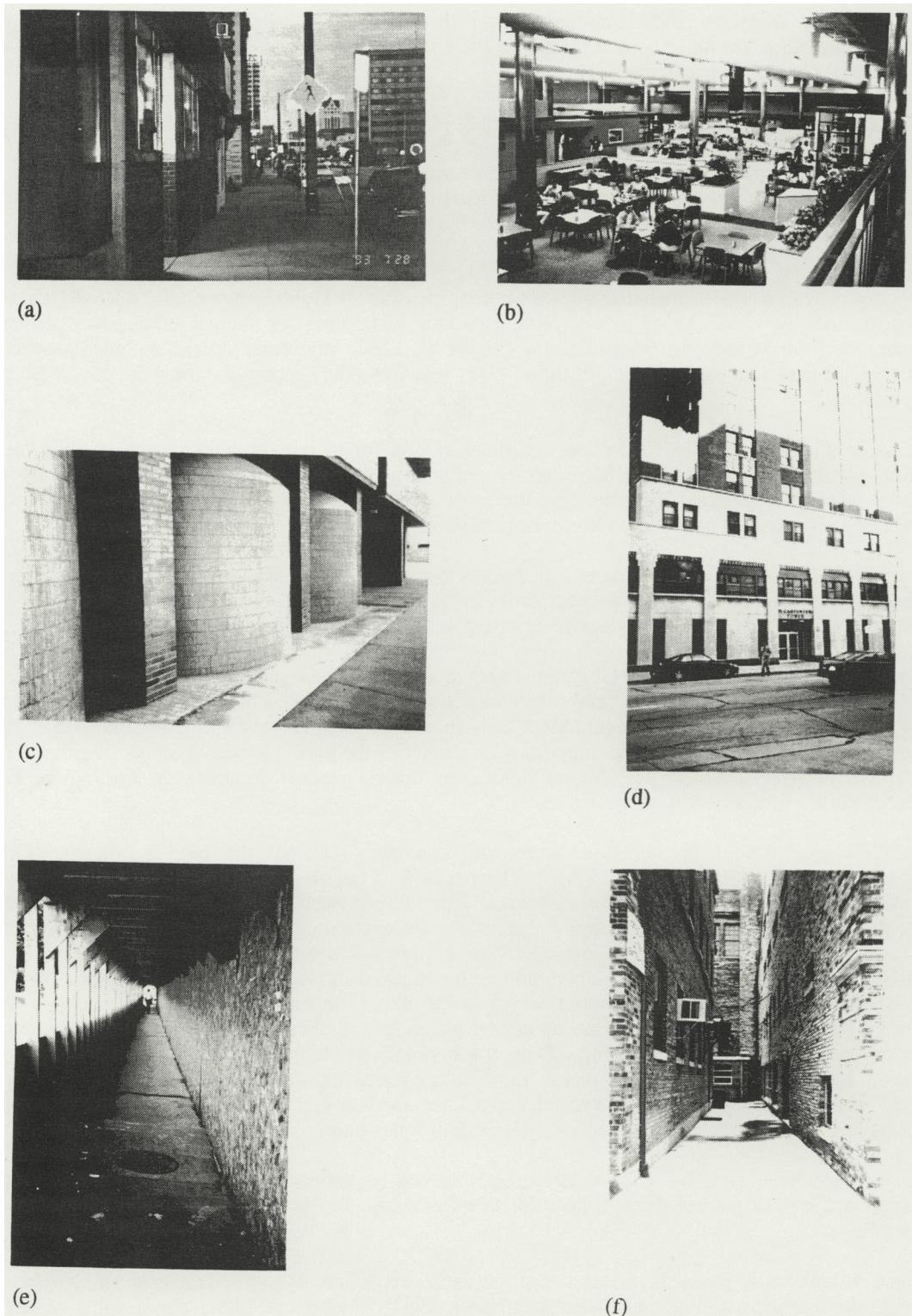


FIGURE 1. Photos: Fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment, All Saints University and City Engineering School: (a) feared: dark and deep entrances; (b) safe: open design of CES Student Union; (c) feared: crevices along exterior; (d) safe: flat building facade with hiding places; (e) feared: pedestrian construction tunnel; (f) feared: long, narrow entrance to gym.

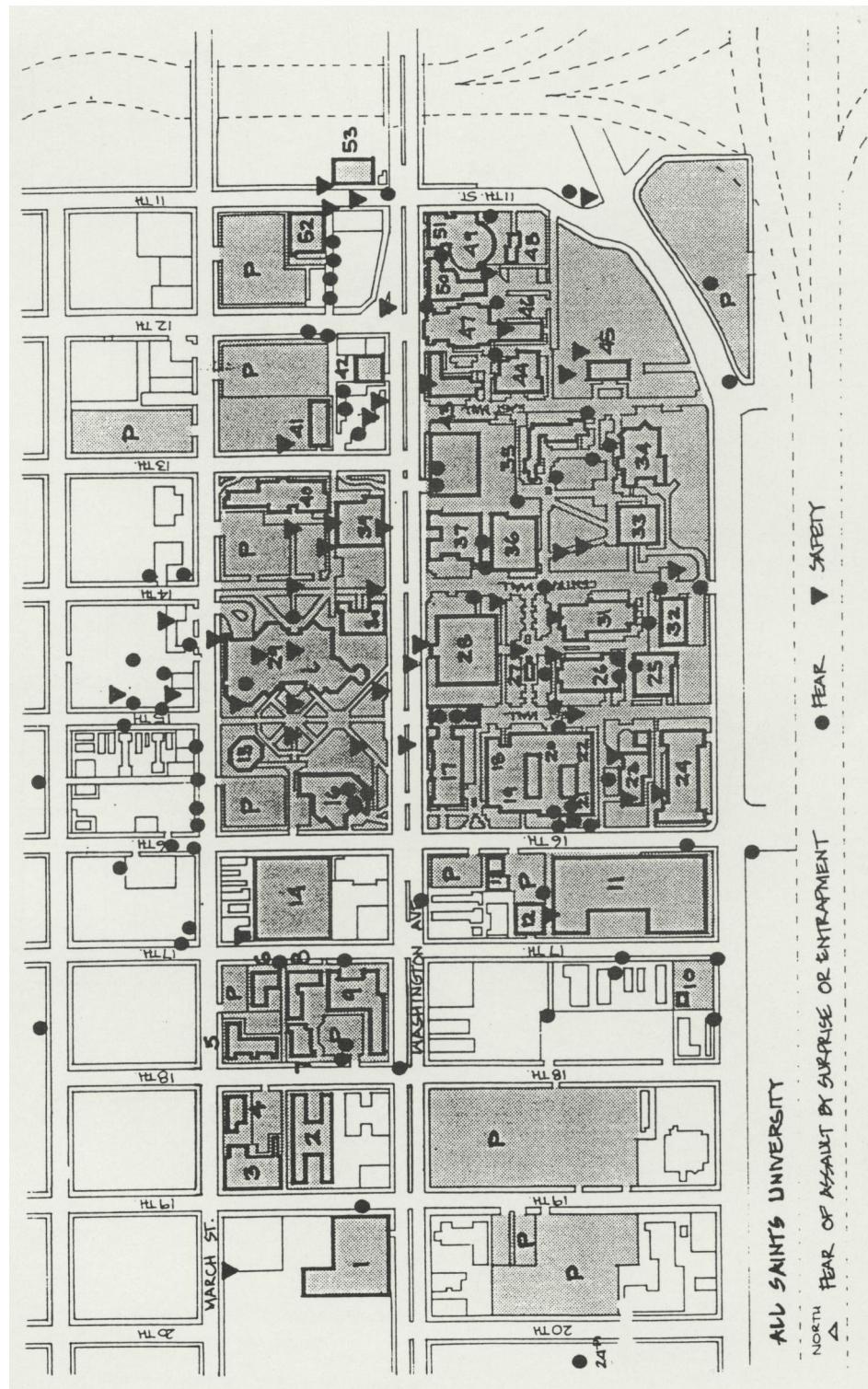


FIGURE 2. Composite plan: Fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment, All Saints University.

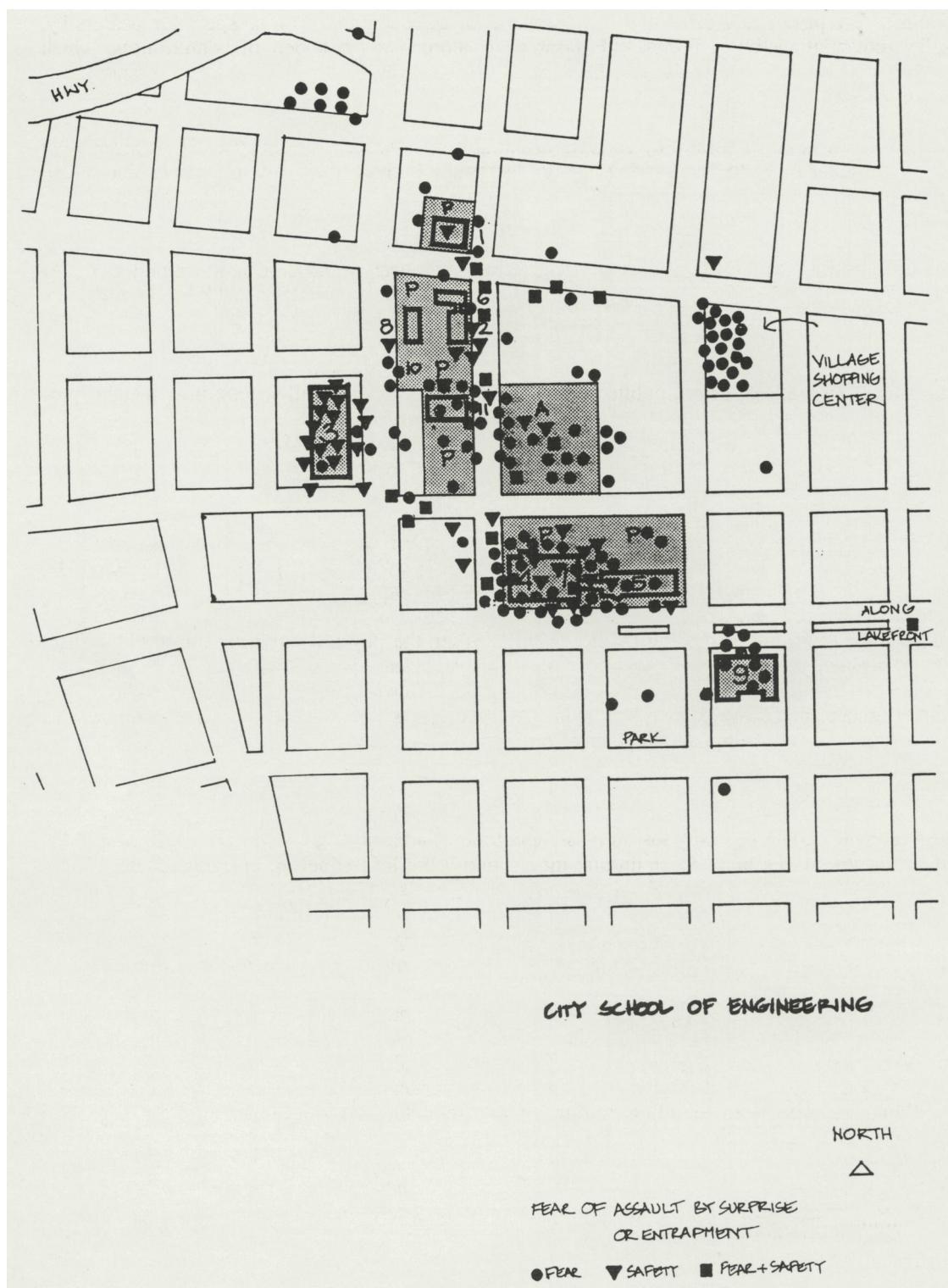


FIGURE 3. Composite plan: Fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment, City Engineering School.

individuals fear places that offer high concealment for offenders and low prospect for passers-by, including potential victims. Fisher and Nasar also incorporate the notion of boundedness, which limits potential victims' escape. Highly bounded places are likewise favored by offenders and feared by potential victims.

Places feared for stranger assault by surprise or entrapment consistently displayed high concealment and low prospect — due to low lighting, and to dumpsters, bushes, trees, and columns behind which assailants could hide unseen. Additionally, low escape potential explains dislike of construction tunnels, alleys, and enclosed pathways.

Fisher and Nasar's model characterizes physical features of places where assaults are feared, but does not explain women's implicit characterization of sexual assaults as occurring outdoors, at night, by strangers, through surprise or entrapment. Existing theoretical and empirical literature sheds some light.

Stranger rapes in outdoor, urban, public spaces do, in fact, occur in small spaces; near regular, predictable pedestrian movement; where physical and visual barriers obstruct views and constrain victims (Stoks, 1983). Thus, participants accurately perceived affordances favored by stranger assailants. However, stranger, public space rape constitutes only 30% of reported rapes (Stoks, 1983), and significantly less of total rapes (reported and unreported) — especially on campus.

Surprise figures significantly in fear, reflecting women's perceived lack of control under certain environmental conditions. Information about what to expect provides some control over situations of surprise (Berlyne, 1960, in Miller, 1980). When faced with unpredictability, individuals seek information to reduce conflict, surprise, and arousal. Information thus controls the impact of aversive events, making them less surprising (Miller, 1980). When the physical environment provided little information about what to expect (e.g., hid potential offenders, obscured views), participants experienced reduced control, and hence stress (i.e., fear). Likewise, when the physical environment prevented escape, perceived control was reduced. Participants confirmed the basis of their fear in "not knowing" and "not being able to go anywhere."

In contrast, information enhances perceived safety. Take, for example, the confusing CES Science Building. Women who understood its illegible layout identified this building as particularly safe, because offenders could be easily lost in twisting corridors and changing levels. Women confused by its layout identified this building as unsafe; they feared being lost, attacked, or trapped here. Thus, fear is conveyed by both objective physical design and by one's understanding of it.

More fundamentally, women's fear of sexual assault by strangers in public spaces, despite the low proportion of such assaults, reflects social and societal conditioning towards such associations.

According to Valentine (1992) and others, gendered social control of public space rests in the ideology of the family and its separation of spheres ideal, a vehicle of pre-industrial, white, Western society to ensure social order and patriarchal domination. Traditionally, separate economic and spatial realms allocate domestic roles and private spaces for women, and public spaces and activities for men. Capitalist economies (dividing production and reproduction) and suburbanization reinforce separation, *as does women's fear*.

*Therefore despite the crime statistics which suggest women are more at risk at home and from men they know, women are still encouraged to perceive the home (private sphere) as a haven of safety and refuge and to associate the public world where the behavior of strangers is unpredictable with male violence.*

(Valentine, 1992:23-24)

Women's experiences perpetuate this ideology through restricted spatial range and warnings in childhood; personal experiences of public space assault and harassment; emphasis on public space assaults and their characteristics in news media;<sup>11</sup> and social contacts who share warnings, experien-

ces of crime and fear, and crime rumors and news (Valentine, 1992). Participants in the present study confirmed Valentine's findings on sources of fear information, emphasizing especially social contact with peers and school personnel, and the media, including campus news sources.

Pranks also reinforced social control through fear. Several participants related stories of intense fear when scared by male friends jumping from behind trees or out of building entrances at night. Men may find such pranks harmless. However, women take from such pranks the perception (intended or not) of personal vulnerability to "dangerous strangers" in these situations. Participants often restricted their behavior following such "jokes."<sup>12</sup>

*Fear of strange people and associated places.* Women also frequently feared certain people and the places such others were found.

*The IHOP [International House of Pancakes] was the kind of thing that I really hated and that most students hated because it wasn't used by students. It was used by basically street people 'cause it's open 24 hours a day ... I'm glad they took it down ... . it was kind of threatening for most people and no one really went there.*

(21 year old All Saints student)

At All Saints, participants strongly feared people who were different from themselves, especially in terms of ethnicity and class. Feared others included "homeless" people — low income nonstudents, based on appearance or behavior, and "locals" — nonstudent, neighborhood residents, identified by the mostly white participants primarily on the basis of African American or Hispanic ethnicity. All Saints participants also feared apparently mentally disabled people, judged by behavior and location (e.g., near a home for developmentally disabled adults).

CES students feared people less frequently, but expressed fear of similar people and places. In addition, CES participants feared "delinquents," judged by appearance (ethnicity, gender, age, and location near a home for juvenile offenders) and behavior. Absence of feared others sometimes conveyed safety.

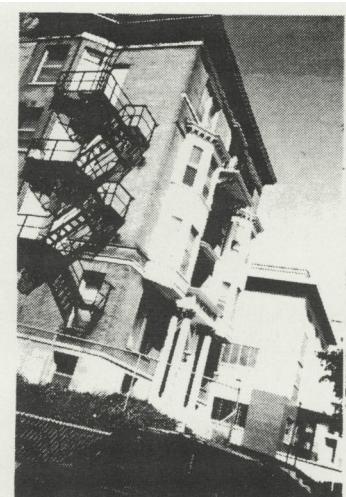
At both schools, safety accompanied school-related people (e.g., other students, faculty, staff) and places where school people could be found. Local office workers also conveyed safety.

In sum, feared strangers were primarily male, racial/ethnic minorities, of low income, conducting what was regarded as incivil or norm-violating behavior. Feared too were places associated with feared others (Figure 4). People, even strangers, who appeared to be students were strongly and consistently associated with safety. Male students figured significantly in women's feelings of night time safety outdoors, especially at CES (Day, 1995).

All Saints participants mentioned fear of people and associated places in 70 photos, and safe people and associated places in 40 photos (including fear based on incivil behavior, discussed next). In contrast, CES participants took only 35 photos of feared people and associated places, and 20 photos of safe people and associated places. To understand this difference, consider the two campuses. Extensive, nonstudent neighborhoods surround All Saints, comprising mostly African American, working class or low income residents (feared by participants). Nearby social services, retail, and busses serve working class and low income populations. In contrast, most nonstudents near the CES campus are business professionals (related to safety). Hence, CES women's fear was cued primarily by physical features, given relatively few feared people nearby.

Fear of strange people and associated places can be understood as a fear of strangers, as racial/ethnic and class conflict, and as an effect of unfamiliarity and experience of crime.

Lofland (1973) explains participants' fear of strangers. In modern cities, we substitute categorical for personal knowledge of others, utilizing appearential, behavioral, and spatial cues to gauge identities. Associations, learned in childhood socialization and later, prompt specific emotional responses and



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

FIGURE 4. Photos: Fear of strange and incivil people and places, All Saints University and City Engineering School. (a) feared: juvenile delinquent boys and their home; (b) safe: library; (c) feared: "locals" and homeless people; (d) safe: other All Saints students; (e) feared: bus stops; (f) safe: CES residence hall.

reactions. For example, adults tell children to ignore "crazy" people talking to themselves. Children learn to associate behavior with "danger," and to fear and avoid certain people. The media and personal and vicarious experiences of danger reinforce these associations (Lofland, 1973).

Nowadays, Lofland suggests, spatial associations overrule appearential and behavioral associations, though the latter provide "fine tuning." Contemporary appearance — especially dress — is too easily imitated to reliably reveal occupation, attitudes, etc., and behavior requires contextual information and time to interpret. Hence, fear is most dependably associated with particular locations.

Yet, in the present study, participants easily identified unsafe others primarily by appearance, especially of ethnicity and class. These "easy to read" appearential cues — of "unmistakable diversity" (Lofland, 1973) — readily classified certain strangers as unsafe. Behavioral cues required additional information to interpret, as Lofland proposed.

Spatial associations *were* extensively utilized, especially at All Saints. Safest places were located in the "heart" of campus (Figure 5), where one finds more "safe" students and fewer "unsafe" others. Fear increased with distance from campus, even into properties owned or operated by the school (e.g., outlying residence hall). Many All Saints students perceived the entire campus as safe from feared people (especially by day), and feared unsafe people in most near campus locations. Spatial associations facilitated easy avoidance of feared others.

CES participants' fear also increased away from campus (e.g., distant parking lot); differences were less dramatic on the small, linear campus (Figure 6). Women feared some places because of people along the path to a destination. For example, to reach the "dangerous" distant parking lot, one must pass feared others at the rehabilitation center and juvenile home.

According to Merry (1981), fear attaches to unknown members of groups perceived as unfamiliar, hostile, and potentially harmful — groups often formed along racial/ethnic or class lines. As a cultural construct, fear reflects shared prejudices about the characteristics of immoral, violent, and criminal people. Thus, fear of the unknown is reconstituted as fear of crime, masking racial and class conflict and prejudice.<sup>13</sup>

*Members of a dominant group may denounce a subordinate group for its criminality rather than denounce it for the real threat it poses to the perpetuation of the existing social order and continued elite dominance of that order. Concerns about crime thus justify and reinforce hostility that stems from class conflict and racial and ethnic differences.*  
(p. 15)

Merry argues that distinct social networks limit knowledge of individual members of different groups, forcing reliance on categorical information. Without personal information, one cannot differentiate the few potential criminals from all others in a feared group. Racially and economically dominant group members therefore fear all subordinate group members. This white assumption of minority hostility and danger is inherently racist. At the same time, it obscures the power whites hold over minority groups, shifting focus instead to the disadvantages of white fear (Hooks, 1995).

Many participants reported that, in their former small town and suburban residences, they rarely encountered ethnic minorities or homeless people. Participants drew no distinctions between their ethnic minority, nonstudent neighbors, and others passing through or hanging out in the area. Although anxious to avoid the appearance of prejudice, stereotypes often came out in discussing feared people.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, desire to maintain the existing social order did not consciously shape participants' fear, which reflected media exposure, personal and vicarious experiences, socialization, and many other factors (Frankenberg, 1993; Lofland, 1973; Valentine, 1992).

Participants never mentioned coming to know any "locals" or "homeless people" to any degree. In contrast to Merry (1981), decreased fear of unlike others followed more finely-tuned categorical, not personal, information. For example, one participant "learned" to differentiate between the "truly

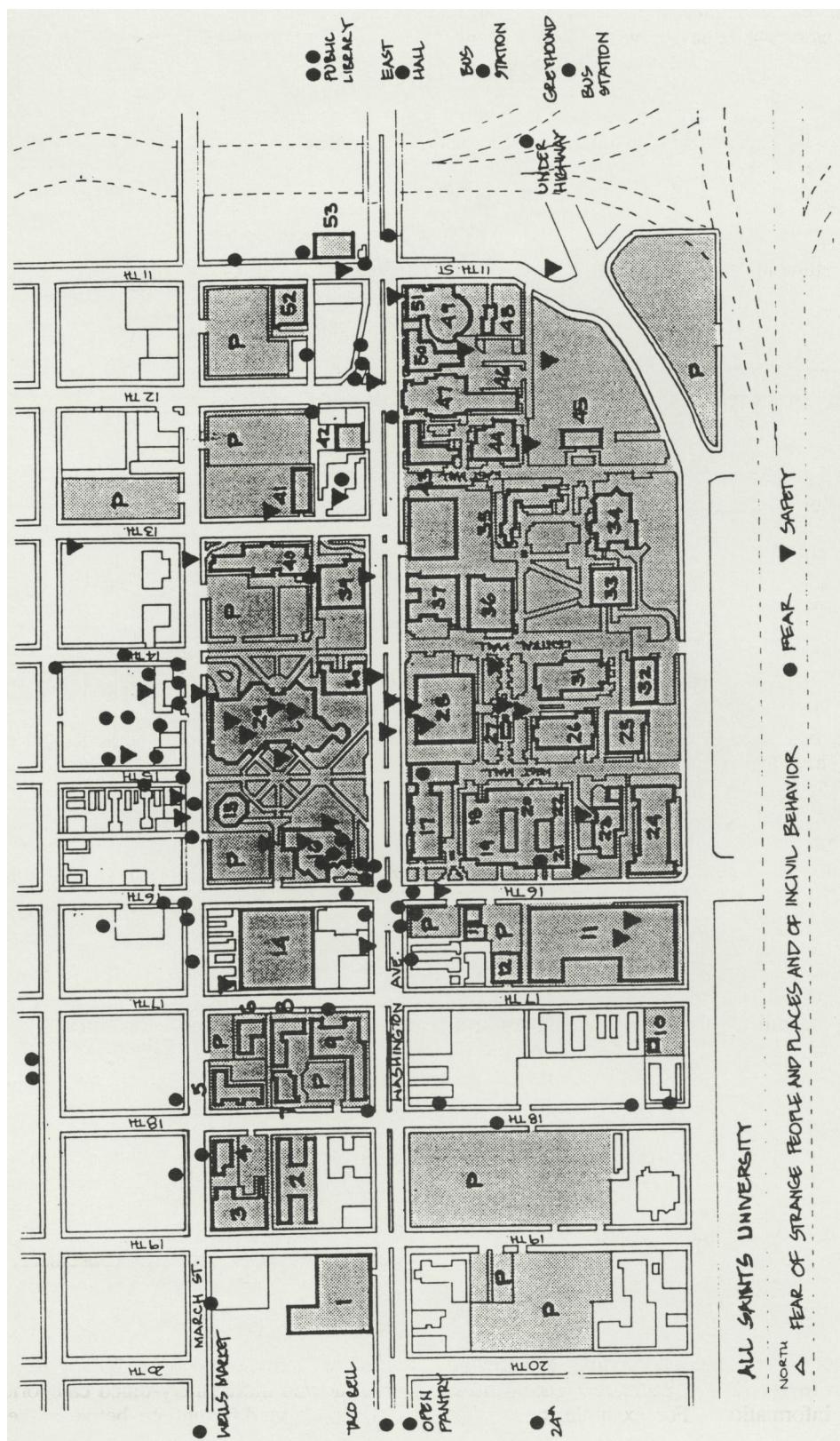


FIGURE 5. Composite plan: Fear of strange and incivil people and places, All Saints University.

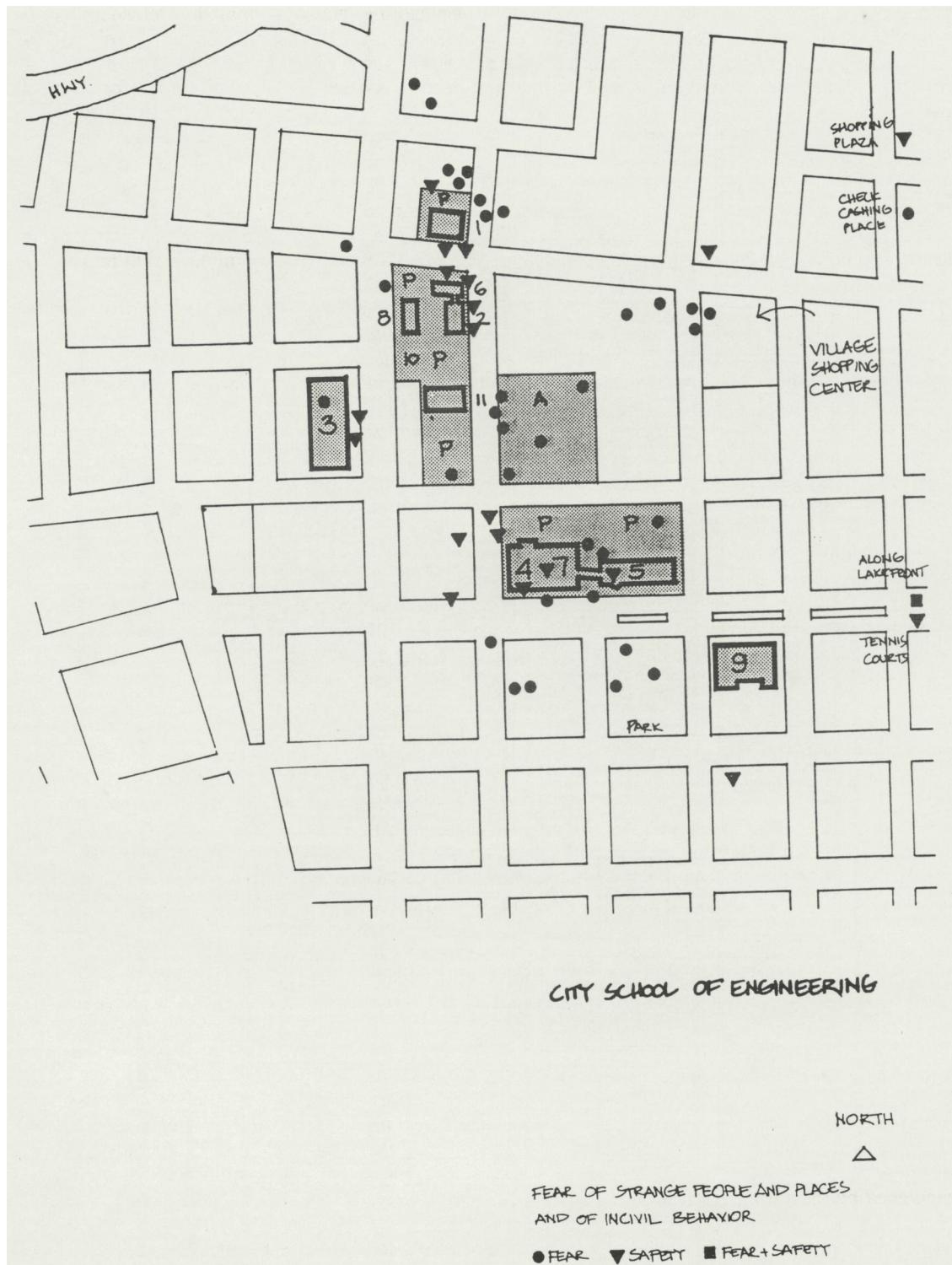


FIGURE 6. Composite plan: Fear of strange and incivil people and places, City Engineering School.

homeless," shabby clothes and somewhat meek in panhandling, and opportunistic pretenders, well-dressed and assertive, and feared only the latter. Unlike Merry's participants (housing project residents), students — as on-campus residents, or transient, near-campus newcomers — may not expect to know any nonstudent neighbors, and so may not depend upon personal relationships for reduced fear.

Familiar places were often safest. For example, a participant usually felt quite safe in the academic building where she spent the most time. Twenty-five photos depicted All Saints places perceived as safe due to familiarity — all on campus or on campus boundaries. One photo was taken of a place feared for unfamiliarity, located off campus. CES participants photographed four feared, unfamiliar places, and nine safe, familiar places, again demonstrating CES participants' limited spatial range.

Limited information about specific places often sustained fear of entire neighborhoods (DuBow, *et al.*, 1979; Merry, 1981). With more information, individuals linked reports of crimes or incivilities to particular places, disassociating fear with broader areas. With greater time on campus, participants reduced initially high fear by increasingly targeting and avoiding "dangerous" places, thus feeling relatively safe overall.

*When you come here, you go through an orientation and they stress safety ... I think that just left the impression that, boy, you're outside five minutes by yourself, you're gonna get jumped, you're gonna get raped, you're gonna have everything snatched from you. And when you see that it doesn't happen and that there aren't gremlins around every corner, and you see the areas that you feel safe in, you just stick to those areas.*

(38 year old All Saints student)

Hearing of crime in a particular place on campus often increased fear there (15 photos at All Saints; 20 photos at CES). However, crimes in known places, especially on campus, produced localized, not generalized fear. Women could rarely pinpoint unsafe places near campus, which they knew less well. Four photos at each school depicted feared sites of near-campus crimes.

Women feared strangers and associated safety with students, especially men they knew. However, women are at much greater risk of assault by dates or acquaintances than by strangers (Warshaw, 1988), especially on campus. Ninety percent of rapes of college women are committed by assailants known to victims, approximately half of whom are dating partners (Koss, 1985, 1988; Meyer, 1984).<sup>15</sup> Statistics for these two schools support these figures (Day, 1995). Several participants explicitly stated the belief that *most* sexual assault on or near campus occurred between two students. Yet no All Saints participants indicated any fear of date/acquaintance assault or associated cues, and CES students reserved real and widespread fear for strangers.

Data collection methods may have reinforced this disparity between feared and actual assault, as interview probes emphasized public places. However, participants' photographs of feared places or situations included no private spaces or male students at either school, although photography instructions were open-ended.

Shaped by social forces, stranger assault may be anticipated as more *frightening* than acquaintance assault, as well as more likely. Further, participants voiced strong feelings of student comradeship, feeling they could ask other students for assistance. This sense of comradeship may extend to the private places where date and acquaintance assaults occur (though some CES participants suggest otherwise). If so, women's feeling of violation in date or acquaintance assault must surely be heightened by the strong association of men students with safety.

*Fear of social and physical incivilities.* Women particularly feared strangers engaged in certain "in-civil" behaviors.

*A lot of times [in] this place, the black juveniles and some older blacks will call out to me and my girlfriends as we're passing by and say, 'Hey baby. Why don't you come up here and join*

*us?' And I just have a real hard time dealing with that. I don't have a problem with blacks. Just some that do things like that.*  
(20 year old CES student)

Much has been written about the effect of social and physical incivilities on fear (c.f. Skogan, 1990; Taylor, 1987). At All Saints, oft-mentioned, feared social incivilities included panhandling, drinking, and hassling. CES participants mentioned hassling most often, followed by loitering, talking to oneself, and panhandling. Physical incivilities, less often mentioned at both schools, included sleeping outdoors, graffiti, and poorly maintained buildings.

As Lofland (1973) suggested, incivil behavior is often defined by additional appearential or spatial information. For example, All Saints students feared shabbily dressed "homeless people" sleeping in a plaza on the campus border, yet did not fear young, typically dressed "students" napping on benches near the campus chapel. Unmistakably incivil behavior (e.g., sexual remarks by strangers) clearly violated social norms, sparking fear without additional cues.

Some incivilities were entirely symbolic. For example, one participant complained of the unsafeness of her apartment building by describing outdoor Christmas decorations still hanging in August — indicative of poor maintenance. Similarly, safety was symbolically attributed to "civil" places, such as libraries or churches. Norms of public conduct seemed inviolate here.

Fear matched subjective evaluation of the seriousness of crimes. Because of high fear of sexual assault, women strongly feared cues that seemed assault-related (e.g., sexual comments from strangers), although such cues might "objectively" pose little threat. Participants feared hassling for its own sake, avoiding locations where people regularly yelled or commented.<sup>16</sup>

Time of day figured less significantly in fear of behavior or appearance, than in fear of the micro-scale physical environment. Participants feared unlike and incivil people both day and night, though fear increased slightly at night. Some feared social cues were actually most visible by day (e.g., homeless people often stayed in shelters at night).

Fear of social and physical incivilities can be understood in terms of racial/ethnic and class conflict, as a form of social control through hassling, and as a violation of territorial control.

Although incivilities have been linked to increased actual crime (Skogan, 1990), participants rarely referenced crime rates or statistics. Sometimes, incivil behavior manifested race and class conflict, evidencing unease at challenges to continued white, middle class dominance (Merry, 1981).

*Usually, if students are going by ... it's kind of a nonrecognition of us (by locals), like we can't pass. If they're standing in the middle of the sidewalk, it's like 'Well, they (students) got to go around' or whatever. The common courtesy is not exchanged, and it doesn't feel comfortable ... And they expect students not to move for them. It's kind of like the 'hold-out' image of the neighborhood. It's the fact that the neighborhood usually thinks 'Oh, rich spoiled (All Saints) students,' and that's just kind of reinforced.*

(20 year old All Saints student describing photo of a bus stop)

Racial and class conflict may explain women's greater fear of incivilities near the edge of All Saints' campus, where white, middle-class students are a minority.

Some feared behaviors, not necessarily directed towards others, were nonetheless regarded as breaches of "citizenship" or moral order (Hunter, 1978, in Taylor, 1987; Skogan, 1990). Examples included panhandling and sleeping in doorways.

In contrast, hassling, or sexual remarks to women in the street, constitutes an intentional, overt form of social control in public space. Rules for public space behavior legitimate few occasions for street remarks to strangers (Goffman, 1963, 1971, in Gardiner, 1989). Street remarks are allowed, however,

as a mild reprimand to individuals acting outside of their proper roles. Recipients are obliged to receive such remarks graciously, to show willingness to assume proper roles. Gardiner (1989) argues that, in public space, women's very presence renders them "out of role," therefore subjecting them to reprimanding street remarks. Thus, women's presence in public space "justifies" the hassling they receive. Hassling also keeps women vulnerable by inappropriately introducing their sexual identities into public space.<sup>17</sup> This theory explains participants' particular resentment of hassling near campus, where women students perceive a legitimate claim to public space use. Participants' high fear and discomfort from hassling suggest that its intended effect was achieved.

Few feared physical cues were interpreted as incivilities, with the occasional exception of trash in alleys or on sidewalks. Typically, physical incivilities are feared as indicators of break-down in residents' territorial control (Taylor, 1987). As recent newcomers and transient renters, students may experience only limited feelings of territoriality, and so care little about its violation. For example, no students attempted to reduce physical incivilities in their neighborhoods, as one of their crime prevention strategies (Day, 1995), possibly indicating low territoriality. However, intact territorial control may partially explain All Saints students' feelings of safety on campus, and CES students' perceived safety in residence halls.

All Saints participants exhibited strong, proprietary feelings towards campus, easily distinguishing on- from off-campus,<sup>18</sup> and believing they could recognize strangers on campus. Women regularly remarked on the neatness and cleanliness of university properties as indicators of safety. In contrast, CES participants' perceived safety outdoors depended little on territorial control. The physical design of the CES campus may hinder territoriality, being small, with little well-defined space, and part of a larger business district. However, CES women expressed particularly strong feelings of territoriality towards their residence hall rooms. Many CES participants photographed their rooms, which they described as "comfortable" or "havens." Almost all who lived near campus also photographed their apartments as safe places. In contrast, no All Saints participants photographed room or apartment interiors.

Perhaps, being a small campus, CES offered few places to photograph. Alternately, if the campus provides few public spaces over which students feel territorial, CES students may have instead exercised ownership of bedrooms or apartments. Most plausibly, women's underrepresentation at CES fostered intense closeness and community among CES women students, manifested in the "safe havens" of residence halls, and sustained when women later move together off campus. Several participants' comments support this explanation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research literature often focuses on one particular set of cues and explanation for fear. These findings demonstrate, however, that women's fear on and near campus is complex and multidimensional — not one thing, but many, sometimes occurring together, but each with distinct cues and locations. Considered in total, fear of sexual assault and other crimes and incivilities compromises women's relationships with campus environments (Day, 1995). Findings bear implications for campus planning and crime prevention, and for future research.

Fear of stranger assault by surprise or entrapment, cued by the physical environment, was most directly related to sexual assault, and to social control of public spaces. Fear of hassling behavior had similar effects. These gender-specific fears undermined women's confidence and independence in public space, in ways specifically sexual. College women's fear of sexual assault was pervasive, yet bore little resemblance to the characteristics of actual sexual assault on and near campus. Findings suggest that schools must reexamine how campus sexual assault is depicted, especially through campus news reports and in school assault and crime prevention strategies. In particular, schools and individuals must reconsider misdirected crime prevention practices that overlook date rape, and that reinforce women's fear of assault by strangers, outdoors, at night. The goal of this shift is *not* to

increase women's fear of indoor environments and peers as well, but to prevent those assaults most likely to occur, and to increase women's comfort in the outdoors. Such changes may be politically contentious, as schools are often reluctant to raise the topic of sexual assault by students with current and prospective students and parents. On urban campuses, highly visible, outdoor-directed crime-prevention strategies (e.g., shuttle vans, emergency phones) can be popular with students and parents. Schools must balance strategic (long-term) and practical (immediate) crime prevention practices (Molyneux, 1985), and must sometimes choose between them. Universities can "fortress" the campus from surrounding communities, or they can integrate the campus and surrounding communities by investing school resources in local neighborhoods, to the benefit of both. The former strategy is more likely to remove women students from the outdoor environment, and to reinforce fear of unlike others.

Although most campus sexual assault is not conducted by strangers, outdoors, at night, there remains an important role for campus assault prevention strategies that target the outdoor physical environment. Macro- and micro-scale design and planning decisions that reduce opportunities for stranger assault may increase women's feelings of safety outdoors at night. Physical strategies such as increased lighting, trimmed vegetation, and fewer hiding places may facilitate women's independent and night time use of campus public spaces.

Race and class tension figured significantly in women's fear on and near campus. Women's fear of unlike others and of incivilities, often rooted in class and racial/ethnic prejudice, frequently manifested itself as fear of sexual assault by low income and ethnic minority men. Their fear adds impetus (hardly needed) to schools' and others' efforts to improve race relations. Additional research is needed on ways to reduce fear and prejudice on urban college campuses, and on strategies for integrating universities and their students into urban neighborhoods.

Finally, this research investigates the fears of young, mostly middle class and white, women college students. The problem of campus sexual assault partially supports this emphasis, but broader research is also necessary. Future studies should investigate the fear and safety of residents of near campus communities, including ethnic minority and low income and working class women and men. Gender-explicit research is also needed to examine men's fear in public space. Men are most likely to be victimized by all crimes except sexual assault, suggesting that men's experiences of fear and crime may significantly impact their relationships with public space. Such work will support a more comprehensive understanding of the social construction of fear, and its influence on gender, race, and class relations, and use of public space.

## NOTES

1. Twenty-eight percent of college women report experiencing completed or attempted rape since the age of 14; an additional 15% experienced unwanted sexual contact (Koss, *et al.*, 1987).
2. Factors motivating university assault prevention include concern for liability, rising insurance rates, the recent federal Students Right to Know and Campus Security Act (HR 101-883, 1990), competition for students, and concern for the welfare of the campus community (Smith, 1988).
3. All descriptions pertain to the 1992/93 academic year. Names and identifying information about both schools have been changed.
4. 35 mm, 200 ISO, 24 exposure film was provided, with alternate film and loaner cameras available on request.
5. Defining "campus" is contentious. Narrow definitions overlook users' perceptions of campus and the frequent crime occurring just outside schools' legal boundaries. Inclusion of places both "on campus" and "near campus" was intended to accurately represent women's experiences of campus, while allowing analysis based on legal ownership and operation.
6. Independent content analysis of photos would be misleading, as participants often photographed conditions other than those associated with fear or safety (e.g., photographed places in the day and described them as dark at night). Further, this study emphasized women's perceptions over "objective" measurement of physical and social features.

7. "Fear" is infrequently employed as a verb in spoken American English. Alternate words for fear also reveal distinct dimensions and levels of the construct.

8. A few women genuinely did not fear sexual assault more than other violations. More often, women were embarrassed to admit high fear of sexual assault, evident in nervousness describing violations, careful choice of words other than rape or assault, or the confessional tone of "admissions" of fear of sexual assault. Some characterized their fear of sexual assault as somewhat naive or irrational, or were anxious to avoid appearing sexually timid, "frigid," or boastful of personal sexual desirability.

Often women seemed to assume that I (as a woman) instinctively understood their fear of sexual assault. When probed as to why certain characteristics were feared (e.g., bushes, dark alleys), participants' responses suggested slight anger or suspicion as to why I would feign this ignorance. Interestingly, I also felt consistently sympathetic and embarrassed asking such probing questions, acknowledging women's responses as self-evident.

9. Several participants also mentioned a series of sensational crimes that had occurred nearby recently, which may have created perceptions of growing crime, hence greater fear (DuBow, *et al.*, 1979).

10. More near campus photos (feared and safe) at All Saints than at CES reflect All Saints' students more frequent travel off campus, due partially to the high representation of CES on-campus residents in the sample.

11. Media other than television news, such as TV programs and movies, undoubtedly also reinforce women's (and men's) associations of fear with public space, especially under particular conditions.

12. Similarly, male CES students' pranks sometimes reinforced women's sense of vulnerability and fear indoors, such as when men unscrewed overhead elevator light bulbs, to trap shorter women students in darkness during use. Such pranks increased women's feelings of being "out of place" in campus facilities.

13. Women's fear of sexual assault is more than fear of racial or economic others. However, race and class prejudice may determine *which* men are feared as potential assailants.

14. Anxiety was evident in participants' choice of labels and their attempts to evade describing feared others. Responses necessarily reflect data collection methods. Discussion of socially unacceptable attitudes, perhaps previously unexamined, may be more fruitful under circumstances that encourage growing trust between the researcher and participant, and opportunities for interim independent reflection.

15. It is unlikely that date/acquaintance assault remain high on campus as a residual of the prevention of most stranger assault. The effect of stranger assault prevention on campus assault and crime is unknown, yet both increases and decreases are likely. More importantly, there is no reason to expect rates of stranger assault to be higher on campus than elsewhere, while many factors predict high campus date and acquaintance assault (Erhart and Sandler, 1985; Koss, 1985, 1988; Martin and Hummer, 1989). Finally, there are no clear differences in sexual assault rates between schools with many and those with few stranger assault prevention programs (How schools made the grade on safety, 1990).

16. Hassling may sometimes be perceived as a physical threat, reflecting women's feelings of physical incompetence based on size or strength.

17. Hassling may occur less frequently at night, when it might be perceived and prosecuted as attempted sexual assault (Gardiner, 1989). The objective is "merely" to embarrass and undermine women, not to terrorize them.

18. Personal perceptions of campus boundaries differed.

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