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**Discourses of Danger:  
The Construction of Gender Through Talk About Violence**

by

**Jocelyn Ann Hollander**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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Approved by Judith A. Howard  
Chairperson of Supervisory Committee

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University of Washington

Abstract

Discourses of Danger:  
The Construction of Gender Through Talk About Violence

by Jocelyn Ann Hollander

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee  
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Department of Sociology

Women report far more fear of violence than do men; however, crime statistics show that men are victimized more frequently than women. Explanations proposed for this paradox include the underreporting of violence against women, women's fear of rape, the effects of sexual harassment, and media sensationalization of violence against women. I argue that in addition to these factors, everyday conversations construct particular meanings of gender that sustain women's heightened fear of violence, as well as men's relative lack of fear in the face of substantially higher risk. I use survey data and transcripts of focus group discussions to address three questions. First, what is the social organization of fear and vulnerability? In other words, who is fearful, of what, in what situations, and with what effects? Second, are cultural conceptions of vulnerability and danger linked to particular social groups? Finally, how are these meanings constructed, transmitted, maintained, and transformed? I find that in general, women report being more afraid, perceive themselves to be more at risk, and have less confidence in their ability to defend themselves than do men. This gender difference tends to be greatest for those strategies that most limit one's normal life activities. Other less privileged groups (those with less education, lower incomes, and those in the youngest and oldest age categories) are also more likely to practice highly limiting strategies. On the conceptual level, analysis of the focus group transcripts demonstrates that women are consistently associated with vulnerability and men with invulnerability. Moreover, men are associated with potential danger, while women are believed not to be threatening to others. In both cases, gender interacts with other social statuses, including race, class, age, and sexual orientation. Finally, I identify five discursive strategies that are used to construct these conceptual associations between gender, vulnerability and dangerousness: story-telling, warnings, offers of and requests for protection, teaching and learning danger management strategies, and collective strategizing. I also note, however, that these tools can be used to challenge dominant conceptualizations of gender as well as to reinforce them.

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, Neil and Margaret Hollander, with love.

## Chapter 1

### Conversation, Fear, and the Construction of Gender

*Christine:* For me I guess it's more like daily things, like just my friends and I warning each other. We never let each other walk to their car alone, if we're out in the night or something, we'll always walk to the car, or wait til the person gets in the house and turns on the light, and... You know, I think most women have a pretty, like a checklist of ten things they always do that's just in their heads. They always lock their door, they always check behind the seat when you get in the car, you always have the lights on, you always have the automatic timers set for the lights, you always have the doors locked, you always have the windows locked—You've got this litany of things, and so you sort of do that to each other, you know, did you lock your window, did you lock your door. So kind of, just going through, not desperately but casually, you'll mention that you know, "oh your left your window open," or "did you lock your door," or "I came to visit you and your screen door was open and where were you," and "oh I was next door." You know this seems kind of paranoid but it's just become kind of a real thing, and so, those kind of warnings I guess we kind of give to each other. (*Group 4*)

*Richard:* One point...is like my mom would tell me, "Oh Richard, you shouldn't go jogging at night" and I said, "Oh mom, don't worry, I'm a guy, no one's going to bother me" and I don't know—is that a misperception or not because, from the media points of view that I see it's always, or not always, but usually a man assaulting a woman or something. That's the, the feeling or the thing that I see like a trend perhaps, and I always hear, like my ex-girlfriend's always like, "oh, you know, I can't do this, and I won't go here, come pick me up I don't want to walk..." or something like that and, if I were in her situation I wouldn't have a problem doing that... (*Group 1*)

*Bob [in response to woman's description of harassment by an ex-boyfriend]:* I keep thinking in my mind listening to you, like what anybody I know what would say, they'd say, well get your brothers, your old man, go over there, haul him up like that, go over pay him a visit and bust him up a bit, you'll be surprised, he'll shut up real good. (*Group P1*)

*Liz:* ...I was walking up an alley one evening, and it wasn't late at night or it was still light out, I think it was dusk. And because I felt so safe, and I hadn't heard of anything happening you know in a while anyway, and this woman said, did you hear about this woman who was in the alley last night and she was raped, or mugged or whatever. And I thought, I was in the alley last night. So, you know...then you do file that away.... (*Group 3*)

## Overview

Conversations such as those described in the quotes above take place every day, in a wide variety of situations. Warnings, cautions, strategizing about danger and discussions about violent events are all ordinary parts of individual and social life. On the surface, such conversations are straightforward: transmissions of information, expressions of concern, suggestions for prudent behavior. In this dissertation, however, I explore the subtext of these conversations. What do they accomplish? Why do they take place so frequently? Are they simply a manifestation of the pervasiveness of violence in everyday life, or do they serve other functions as well?

My contention is that these conversations are not merely informational. Rather, they are a way of constructing individual and group identity—and specifically, gendered identity. “Danger talk” is a way of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987), for both women and men. These kinds of conversations transmit and reinforce cultural expectations about gender, and at the same time provide opportunities for women and men to demonstrate their competence in the appropriate performance of gender. In this dissertation, I analyze the central role of gender in discourse about vulnerability and danger, and the role of vulnerability and danger in constructing gender. Using data from surveys and focus group discussions, I argue that vulnerability and danger are central to the meaning and experience of gender in U.S. society.

In its substantive focus on talk about violence, danger, and vulnerability, this dissertation also joins the scholarly conversation on the fear of violence. In particular, it addresses the following paradox. Both the risk of experiencing violence, and the fear of it, are gendered.<sup>1</sup> However, they are gendered in very different ways. Men are far

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<sup>1</sup>I use the word “gendered” to mean that “ideas about gender—assumptions and beliefs on both individual and societal levels—affect the thoughts, feelings, behaviors, resources, or treatment of women and men. Thus, to the extent that women and men dress, talk, or act differently because of societal expectations, their behavior is gendered.” (Howard and Hollander 1997: 11) The risk and fear of violence are gendered because women and men face different levels of risk and express different amounts and types of fear about victimization. In addition, women and men may be attacked differently and have different assessments of their

more likely to experience violence, but are on average not very fearful, while women are far less likely to experience violence but are far more afraid than men. Researchers have examined this paradox from a number of different perspectives. Some have focused on inaccuracies in the available data, contending (correctly) that women are victimized far more than official reports indicate. Others have studied the effects of daily harassment, experiences which men generally view as trivial but which many women perceive to imply a threat of more serious violence. Still others have analyzed the effects of media reports of violence on fear.

I argue that in addition to these factors, discourse plays a central role in constructing and sustaining fear. In particular, I analyze the contribution of informal, everyday conversation to individuals' sense of vulnerability and fear of violence. I argue that this type of conversation is central to the development and maintenance of fear, and analyze the processes through which discursive representations of violence and vulnerability are constructed, transmitted, and reproduced. At the same time, I examine differences among women and among men in the experience and expression of fear. How and why does fear vary by race, class, age, sexual orientation, and other variables? Why are some women unafraid, and some men very afraid? Conversations about violence and danger provide a rich site for studying differences among as well as between women and men. In the rest of this chapter, I discuss these questions in more detail. I begin with the gender / fear paradox, and then elaborate my argument on the role of discourse in explaining it.

### **The Paradox of Gender, Crime, and the Fear of Violence**

I have never been free of the fear of rape. From a very early age I, like most women, have thought of rape as part of my natural environment—something to be feared and prayed against like fire or lightning. I never asked why men raped; I simply thought it one of the many mysteries of human nature. (Griffin 1982: 39)

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ability to protect themselves because of their gender.

*Stacy:* Well, I think I'm definitely impacted by violence, or the implied threat of violence, just in the atmosphere. I mean, as a woman, I'm conscious of the possibility of being assaulted whenever I go out, I mean, I always am thinking about my safety and whether or not this is a safe area or not, and I'm very conscious about who and what is around me...I think that that affects me in every—unconsciously and consciously when I go out, when I make decisions, when I watch, you know, when I'm out and about...it's kind of that threat, hanging over me...I've never been physically assaulted but it's kind of that possibility, I'm always conscious of that. (*Group 5*)

*Elliot:* I think that men are, on average, men are physically stronger, in most cases, and you know if I was a woman, damn, I—

*Bill:* Would you feel vulnerable?

*Elliot:* I'm sure I'd feel vulnerable. Very vulnerable. Yes. (*Group 2*)

The fear of violence seems to be a feminine domain. Statements such as these can be found throughout social life—in film, in print, in political discourse, and in everyday conversation. The fear of violence is deeply associated with gender—it is expressed by women and associated with femininity by women and men alike.

Social science research shows similar patterns. The most consistent finding in research on the fear of crime is that women report experiencing far more fear than men do. For example, Gordon and Riger (1989) found that women's fear of violence is widespread and paralyzing. Fully 33% of the women they studied felt "very unsafe" when out alone in their neighborhood at night, compared with only 12.5% of the men. In all, 61.1% of women, but only 31% of men, reported they felt "very unsafe" or only "somewhat safe" in this situation. In contrast, 21.8% of the men they interviewed felt "very safe," compared with only 7.7% of the women (p. 10). According to Gordon and Riger, "women worry more than men do in the same situations: going to the laundromat, using public transportation, or being downtown alone after dark." (1989: 14)

What is particularly interesting about this gender difference is that, like rates of fear more generally, women's fear is not proportional to their reported risk of victimization. In fact, men's risk of experiencing violence is much higher than women's for every type of violence except sexual assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995; Koss

1993a, b). Riger and Gordon (1981: 78) compared women's and men's reported levels of fear with the reported rate of crimes against persons, and found that overall, and in every age, racial/ethnic, economic, and educational category, women's fear far exceeded men's, while their risk of experiencing violence was far lower.

This does not mean that women's fears are ungrounded. Violence against women—especially sexual violence—is widespread. Although reliable and accurate incidence rates are difficult to obtain,<sup>2</sup> it is estimated that one out of every five women in the U.S. will be raped during her lifetime, and one in every 3.5 will be the target of an attempted rape (Koss et al. 1990). Noting the discrepancy between risk and fear does not imply that women are unnecessarily afraid; rather, it suggests that fear is created by factors other than a purely rational calculation of risk. Although many women do experience danger and violence in their lives, the amount of fear they experience does not always mirror their objective risk. For example, older women, who are officially at a lower risk of victimization, are among the most fearful, while young women, who are at objectively greater risk, are far less afraid. This disjuncture between risk and fear is also evident in the types of situations and people that women report fearing. Women generally report feeling more fearful outside than inside their homes, and more wary of strangers (e.g., the stereotypical unknown rapist hiding in the bushes) than of intimates. However, numerous studies have shown that women are far more likely to be victimized by acquaintances or intimates than by strangers. For example, it is increasingly recognized that a majority of rapes occur between acquaintances: Koss and her colleagues (1990) estimate that the perpetrator is an acquaintance in 85% and a romantic partner in 57% of all sexual assaults. Moreover, Straus and Gelles (1990) found that one out of every eight husbands perpetrated at least one violent act against their wives during the year of their study, and Straus (1978: 154) estimates that as many as 60% of all married couples will experience at least one violent incident during their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> Thus women's reports of fear do not necessarily parallel their actual risk.

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<sup>2</sup>See Gordon & Riger (1989: 33–7) and Koss et al. (1987) for a discussion of the various sources of incidence data and their problems.

The fear of violence often affects other aspects of individuals' lives, and again, these consequences are borne disproportionately by women. The best documented of these effects are the strategies employed to manage fear and reduce the risk of violence. For example, Gordon and Riger found that 42% of women in their study regularly used "isolation tactics"—staying at home at night or avoiding activities such as shopping, errands, or visiting friends—to protect themselves, as compared with only 10% of men. Seventy-four percent of their female respondents used "street smarts"—such as asking repair persons for identification, dressing with an eye to safety, or avoiding eye contact with passersby—compared with 29% of men (1989: 114). Overall, men and women do not react to the threat of violence in the same way: according to Gordon and Riger, "men are more frequent victims of every violent crime except rape yet they do not react by restricting their behavior." (1989: 122)

Thus, women's greater fear serves to restrict their lives in a way that men generally do not experience. Because of their fear of violence, many women choose not to engage in both productive and leisure activities that they otherwise would. They also spend money, time, and energy monitoring their surroundings and fortifying themselves and their homes against possible predators. Fear may also limit women's opportunities for educational and occupational achievement. For example, women may forgo educational opportunities that might expose them to perceived dangers such as going out at night or travelling alone to unknown areas of the city. They might also choose jobs with conditions they perceive to be safer, even if these jobs are less desirable or lucrative.<sup>4</sup> Thus the fear of violence may help to maintain gender stratification by keeping women from pursuing potential economic and political opportunities and participating in the public sphere more generally. This position is expressed most strongly by Sheffield, who argues that "the subordination of women in all other spheres

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<sup>3</sup>Note, however, that Straus and Gelles' survey instrument, the Conflicts Tactics Scale, has been the subject of criticism for its insensitivity to the direction, severity, and consequences of marital violence (e.g., Dobash et al. 1992).

<sup>4</sup>These are important possibilities to examine, and it is curious that there is little research on these topics.

of society rests on the power of men to intimidate and punish women sexually." (1987: 171) At a minimum, the fear of violence may prevent women from making free choices about their lives. As Radford writes, "other freedoms...lose their impact when freedom of movement is denied." (1987:33)

### *Current Explanations for the Gender/Fear Paradox*

Why are women so much more afraid than men, even though their risk of violence is lower? It is also important to ask the corollary question: why are men so unafraid, when their risk of violence is so much higher? A number of explanations have been suggested by other scholars; I review these here, and then propose an additional explanation.

First, data flaws must be considered. It is well-known that the reported rates of violence against women vastly underrepresent the actual prevalence of violent crime. For example, while the Uniform Crime Reports (based on crimes reported to the police) reported a rape rate of 0.79 per 1,000 women in 1993 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1994), the National Crime Victimization Survey found a rate of 2.9 per 1,000 women (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995). Incidence rates may actually be far higher than those found by victimization surveys, which suffer from a number of methodological problems (Koss 1992): recent studies using representative samples and more sophisticated methods suggest that the actual rate of rape may be six to fifteen times greater than such surveys suggest (e.g., Koss et al. 1987; National Victims Center 1992). Most incidents of sexual violence, especially those perpetrated by intimates, are never reported to the police. This failure to report may be due to the fact that danger and crime are generally defined as coming from strangers:

Threatening events do not always fit into existing legal categories. If, as the data indicate, women's experiences of violence are primarily at the hands of known men, and at the same time, women are warned of their vulnerability as women in the public sector, then the concept "fear of crime," interwoven with women's private understanding and experiences of men's violence, ignores the contribution of private violence to women's anxiety about sexual violence. (Stanko 1993: 162-3)

Thus, women's fear may represent their *actual* risk of violence, a risk which is masked by official underreporting. These reporting problems, however, do not explain men's lack of fear in the face of risk. Moreover, they do not explain the fact that women tend to be afraid of strangers rather than acquaintances and intimates—the reverse of the pattern that would be expected based on actual incidence of violence.

Another possibility is that measures of fear that rely on respondent reports could be tapping some factor other than fear. For example, such reports could measure a respondent's willingness to admit fear to an interviewer. In this case, men's lower levels of reported fear could simply represent the constraints of masculinity: 'real men' aren't supposed to be afraid, and so male respondents might not report the fear they experience (Clemente and Kleiman 1977). However, research on behavioral indicators of fear (i.e., the safety precautions taken to prevent violence) show that women are far more likely than men to say they take such measures (Gordon and Riger 1989). While reports of behavior as well as of attitudes may be influenced by gender expectations, behavioral intentions are known to be more accurate predictors of actual behavior than reported attitudes (Ajzen 1985). The gender difference in reported safety precautions thus suggests that women are truly more afraid than men. Reported fear is also proportionate to women's and men's estimates of their own risk of violence (Riger and Gordon 1981: 86), a measure that is also likely to be less vulnerable to self-presentation biases than reporting of fear.

If reporting and data flaws cannot account for all of the variation in fear, then other factors must be at work. Actual incidents of violence—both those that happen to oneself and those that happen to family, friends, and acquaintances—are of course a major source of fear. If fear were simply based on the experience or observation of violent incidents, however, men should be more afraid than women. Thus, other factors must contribute to and amplify fear.

One possibility is that women and men feel vulnerable to different types of violence, with different degrees of perceived seriousness. As Griffin's quote above

indicates, women's fear is often tied to the threat of rape. Warr found that among U.S. women under age 35, "rape is feared more than any other offense, including murder, assault, and robbery." (1985: 241) This fear declines only slightly with age. Nearly a third of the women interviewed in each age group rated their fear of rape as 10 (highest level of fear) on a 10-point scale. Warr also found that women perceived the seriousness of rape to be very high, "virtually identical to the perceived seriousness of murder," and perceived their risk of experiencing it to be very high as well (1985: 242-3). In fact, women under age 50 perceived rape to be the most probable of all violent crimes. Gordon and Riger found that

About a third of women say they worry about being raped once a month or more often—many indicated more than once a day—and when they think about it, they feel terrified and somewhat paralyzed. Another third of women indicate they worry about rape more occasionally, but that the fear is 'one of those things that's always there,' part of the background. 'Things will be going along as usual' and 'then something will happen' that causes the fear to grip them very intensely until the moment passes and the fear subsides. About a third of the women say they 'never' worry about being raped, but even those women say they take precautions, sometimes elaborate ones, to prevent being raped.  
(1989: 21)

Similarly, Burt and Estep found that 67% of the women in their sample said they were worried about sexual assault, compared with only 7% of men (1981: 520). Warr remarks that "it may well be that [for women]...fear of crime *is* fear of rape." Recent research by Ferraro (1996) supports this hypothesis: he found that the fear of sexual assault explained much of the gender differences in fear of personal crime and, to a lesser extent, property crime.

Some researchers have suggested that women's fear is also increased by "signs" of violence: events and behaviors which, although not physically violent in themselves, suggest that violence—especially sexual violence—is possible or likely. For example, experiences of everyday harassment (sexual pressure in the workplace, catcalls on the street, or obscene phone calls in one's home) may serve to remind women of their

vulnerability in a variety of contexts and contribute to an atmosphere of generalized danger (McNeil 1987; Gardner 1989; Warr 1985; Sheffield 1989). These types of situations are often not taken seriously by researchers: “criminologists ignore the ordinary situations in women’s lives, such as receiving sexual comments, because these annoyances are assumed to be minor, innocuous events, not real crime.” (Stanko 1993: 157)

Other scholars argue that, in addition to these factors, mass media depictions of violence—the sensationalized news accounts of violent incidents, and the frequent use of often sexualized violence against women as entertainment in film and television—contribute to fear. Past research has shown that the media’s picture of violence is far from accurate. The 1967 Crime Commission Task Force, for example, concluded that “the media exaggerate both the prevalence and the seriousness of crime in general, and that their emphasis on violent crime prompts unrealistic fear.” (Crime and Violence 1967) More recent investigations have reached similar conclusions. For example, Gordon and her colleagues (Gordon and Heath 1981; see also Heath, Gordon, and LeBailly 1981; Gordon and Riger 1989) found that the most violent crimes are disproportionately represented in media reports, which are also biased toward the bizarre and the gruesome. This practice may make sense journalistically—after all, for something to be newsworthy, it must be at least somewhat out of the ordinary—however, its ultimate effect is to increase fear by implying that these cases are in fact the norm. Rather than acting as a source of objective information about violence, media coverage helps to construct a picture of reality in which violence is rampant and women, in particular, are powerless in the face of frequent, random, and extremely brutal crime. Burt and Estep report that 16.7% of their female respondents attributed their fear to first-hand experience, 15.4% to second-hand experience, and 32.4% to the mass media (1981: 518).

### *An Additional Explanation*

In this dissertation, I suggest an additional explanation for the gender/fear paradox. I contend that everyday talk is central to the construction and perpetuation of fear, and especially, differences in fear between women and men. Only a few studies have investigated the possibility that everyday discourse affects fear. For example, Burt and Estep (1981) report that both women and children receive significantly more warnings about their safety than do men, and argue that these warnings contribute to women's fear and sense of vulnerability, while suggesting that men are able to take care of themselves. I argue in this dissertation that other types of everyday discourse—such as discussions about current events or films, recountings of everyday experiences, or offers of assistance—similarly construct and reinforce the idea that women and men differ in their vulnerability to violence. This idea, in turn, fosters differences in fear.

### **Theoretical Framework**

My approach to these data draws from a number of traditions that can be broadly categorized as constructionist. According to constructionism, social reality is created through interaction and the social interpretation of those interactions. Any phenomenon can be interpreted in a multitude of ways; through interaction with others, particular interpretations are developed and agreed upon. This is not to deny the existence of material reality. However, how that reality is interpreted is negotiable. Thus I am particularly interested in the way that meanings are constructed, maintained, and modified through social interaction. I analyze not only actors' experiences, but the symbolic meaning those experiences have for them, and how those meanings vary over time and social context. I use the data I collect here not only as information about the thoughts and behaviors of the respondents, but also as a window on the process of the construction of meaning about oneself and one's place in the social world. In particular, two literatures form the theoretical framework for this project.

*The Social Construction of Gender*

Recent theoretical work in the sociology of gender centers around the idea that gender is a system of culturally constructed differences between males and females (Thorne 1990, 1993; Lorber 1994; Connell 1987, 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995). According to this perspective, gender is not “natural,” as is generally believed. Rather, what we as cultural members see as natural and immutable gender difference is actually the cultural interpretation and elaboration of sexual dimorphism. According to Ferree and Hess (1987), gender is a system for categorizing people, and is thus built around differences between males and females. The central element of this system, according to Rubin, is the “taboo against sameness of male and female, a taboo dividing the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, a taboo which exacerbates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby creates gender.” (1975: 178) The core of the gender system is the “incorrigible proposition” (Mehan and Wood 1975) that there are two diametrically opposed genders, corresponding to the two sexes. “This fact is not to be challenged by any data, but rather all data is to be fitted into this framework.” (Kessler and McKenna 1978: 74) The physical and symbolic segregation of the sexes—a process Bem (1993) calls “gender polarization”—emphasizes and perpetuates these myths of difference. According to Thorne, this occurs in two ways: first, through the “emphasis on gender as an oppositional dualism,” and second, through the “exaggeration of gender difference and disregard for the presence of cross-cutting variation and sources of communality.” (1990: 86) Note also that the categories masculine and feminine are not simply different, they are unequal: “hierarchy tilts the theme of opposition, with boys [and men] asserting spatial, physical, and evaluative dominance over girls [and women].” (Thorne 1990: 86)

Although the gender system is built into social structures and institutions, an important mechanism that perpetuates it is interaction. The belief that males and females are fundamentally different is created and reinforced through the everyday

talk and behavior of individuals. West and Zimmerman (1987) call this type of interaction "doing gender": individuals behave in ways that others perceive to be gender appropriate, and expect others to do the same. West and Zimmerman contend that this behavior is driven by the pervasive threat of being held accountable for one's behavior: "A person engaged in virtually any activity can be held responsible for performance of that activity as a woman or a man, and their incumbency in one or the other sex category can be used to legitimate or discredit their other activities." (1987: 136) Because of this threat, people tend to behave in gendered ways, and their behavior then reinforces ideas about gender.

Thus gender is not simply something that society imposes on individuals. Through their choices in everyday interaction, individuals themselves enact gender. These choices themselves create and legitimate gender, by making cultural ideas about males and females seem natural. These interdependent processes—the construction of gender differences, and their performance in interaction—maintain the gender system. People react to gender expectations with gender performances. These performances simultaneously reaffirm the conceptual relationships that comprise gender, and claim for the performer a particular identity within this system of relationships.

This is not to say that face-to-face interaction is the only mechanism that sustains gender. A major weakness of social constructionism is its tendency to neglect social structures and institutions, and therefore to neglect the forces of inequality, hierarchy, and power. These forces do exist, and their effects are very real. Social constructionism functions best as an explanation of the processes by which structured gender inequality is maintained. As Lorber writes, "the social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered social structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power." (Lorber 1994: 6)

### *Discourse Analysis*

The second theoretical framework guiding this study is that of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis grew out of Austin's speech act theory (1962), which argues that talk is not only a form of communication, but also a form of action. Linguists had long recognized that some forms of talk are "performative" in this way. A classic example of a performative statement is the talk that forms the heart of a wedding ceremony. By saying "I pronounce you married" in the appropriate circumstances, the celebrant actually changes social reality: new relationships among people are formed, both social and legal, benefits are transferred, and responsibilities are undertaken. Speech act theory expanded this insight, arguing that all talk is a form of action: "*all utterances state things and do things.*" (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 17) Even seemingly mundane statements such as "It's past twelve o'clock" may serve a variety of functions beyond simply conveying information; for example, such an utterance may serve as a reproach, a warning, or a summons to action. Every utterance helps to construct and maintain particular understandings of the social world. Discourse can therefore be analyzed not only in terms of what information it conveys, but in terms of what it accomplishes.

Discourse analysis combines these insights from speech act theory with other approaches to language. First, it includes the methodological insights of ethnomethodology, especially in its attention to how people actively use language in particular contexts to achieve particular goals. In particular, ethnomethodology's attention to how talk establishes and changes relationships between people and groups is an important addition to speech act theory. Second, discourse analysis also uses insights from semiology (Saussure 1974; Barthes 1964, 1972), which argues that meaning is not inherent in signs (words and their referent concepts) but arises out of the underlying system of relationships and differences in which the sign is embedded. These three foci—the idea that talk accomplishes action, the focus on how this action is accomplished, and the belief that talk must be understood in terms of its location in a system of meaning—are the hallmarks of discourse analysis.

These ideas are also common in the study of culture; according to theorists such as Giddens (1986), Bourdieu (1977), and Butler (1990), discourse is the location where central cultural ideas are created and reproduced. It is everyday discourse that replicates and sustains social institutions and social structure. Thus discourse is a link between the macro level of institutions and structure and the micro level of interaction and behavior. At the same time as it permits the exchange of information and interaction, discourse shapes and transmits particular interpretations of reality. According to Potter and Wetherell, "talk is not merely *about* actions, events and situations, it is also a potent and *constitutive part of* those actions, events and situations." (1987: 22; italics in original) " When they talk, "people are using their language to *construct* versions of the social world." (1987: 33; italics in original)

### **Focus of the Dissertation**

In addition to proposing an additional explanation for the gender/ fear paradox, I also make a broader argument about the social meanings that constitute gender. I contend that the notions of vulnerability and danger that foster fear are also primary organizing principles of gender. In other words, they are an integral part of what it means to be masculine or feminine in this society. Part of the construction of gender difference is the association of qualities of strength, invulnerability, dangerousness, and fearlessness with men, and weakness, vulnerability, dangerlessness, and fear with women (Broverman et al. 1972a, b; Deaux and Major 1990). Representations of vulnerability and violence found throughout everyday talk are deeply gendered: they suggest that women are vulnerable to danger, while men are able to take care of themselves. The polarization of males and females on these dimensions creates and reinforces perceptions of sex differences, and thereby constructs gender. In this study, I explore the processes through which gender is both constructed and enacted through discourse about violence and vulnerability. I suggest that while individuals are engaged in discussing issues of violence in society, they are simultaneously reproducing and transmitting ideas about gender in social life.

These messages about gender and violence are not necessarily explicit; rather, assumptions about gender and sex are built into the discourse itself. For example, when a male colleague or friend offers to walk me to my car late at night, that offer implies that women are vulnerable and unable to take care of themselves, and the protection of women by men is necessary. The subjective reality of threat, and the existence of a world in which women's fear is rational and expected, are reaffirmed in that statement because only in such a reality does the statement make sense. The fact that these representations of gender and vulnerability are implicit in discourse is one reason why they are so powerful: they form part of the taken-for-granted backdrop of everyday life.

Thus in this project, I explore the conceptual relationship between gender, vulnerability, and fear through an examination of everyday discourse about violence. Throughout the study, I also analyze the ways in which other cross-cutting statuses, such as age, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social class, modify gender differences in fear. As many scholars have noted, the tendency to dichotomize gender obscures the wide range of patterns of experience among men and among women (e.g., hooks 1984; Spelman 1988; Collins 1990). Classifying people on the basis of only two categories, male and female, reifies gender difference and gender polarization (Bem 1993). It obscures the social processes that transform the substantial overlap in abilities between the sexes into gender differences in perceived and actual behavior. Moreover, dichotomizing gender deemphasizes the effects of context.

One way out of this dilemma is to recognize multiple variations within genders. For example, Connell (1987, 1995) argues that we should talk not about "masculinity" and "femininity" but about multiple masculinities and femininities, some more dominant ("hegemonic masculinity" or "emphasized femininity") and others more marginalized. This strategy allows for the examination of differences within genders, while still suggesting that gender forms some basis for commonality among women and among

men. Thus I investigate the ways in which statuses such as race, class, age, and sexual orientation condition the relationship between gender, vulnerability, and danger. I expect that discursive representations of vulnerability will be gendered, but that other social statuses will also shape this relationship in systematic ways.

Specifically, I divide this project into three questions about this relationship. The first question focuses on the distribution of fear, vulnerability, and danger across individuals:

- (1) What is the social organization of fear and vulnerability? In other words, who is fearful, of what, in what situations, with what effects, and with what causes or correlates? Similarly, in what contexts do different people feel more or less safe?**

This question expands on previous research on the fear of crime in two ways. First, I examine not only feelings of fear but also its polar opposite, feelings of security. As I discuss in Chapter 3, not feeling afraid is not equivalent to feeling safe, and it is important to examine both feelings. I also investigate the related dimensions of risk and the ability to defend oneself; I provide a typology of these dimensions in Chapter 3.

Second, this project also expands previous research on fear by combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a rich and nuanced picture of fear and vulnerability. The vast majority of past studies have relied exclusively on quantitative survey data (e.g., Ferraro and LaGrange 1992; Janson and Ryder 1983; Skogan and Maxfield 1981); a few others have used only qualitative interviews (e.g., Stanko 1990). My use of both strategies allows me to measure fear and its correlates, compare my findings with those of other larger-scale surveys, and explore the complex meanings and consequences of fear in the participants' lives. For example, I use transcripts of focus group discussions to analyze the variability of fear across social contexts in a way that is impossible with conventional survey data.

The second question addressed in this study moves beyond the distribution of fear and safety among individuals and groups to focus on the social meanings and expectations tied to these concepts:

**(2) Are there cultural conceptions of vulnerability and dangerousness that link them to particular social groups? In other words, who is believed to be more or less afraid, dangerous, vulnerable, or safe?**

In this section of the dissertation, I shift from asking who is afraid and who feels vulnerable, to asking who is generally expected to be fearful or believed to be vulnerable, and who is expected to be dangerous. These questions tap not simply individual experiences but social expectations and understandings. I focus primarily on gender, exploring the ways in which vulnerability and dangerousness are central to defining what it means to be masculine or feminine in this culture. I argue that current conceptions of gender are incomplete without an understanding of the role of vulnerability and dangerousness.

In addition, I explore variation within as well as between genders, in two ways. First, I ask which women and men are believed to be more or less dangerous or more or less vulnerable. For example, are there race, class, or age variations in widely-held images of gender, vulnerability, and danger? Second, I ask whether different social groups vary in the images they hold and the expectations they have. For example, do members of various racial or age groups perceive women's and men's vulnerability or danger differently? Do they have different fears about members of their own or other groups?

Finally, the third question I ask focuses on the role of discourse in the formation of these beliefs and expectations about fear, vulnerability, danger, and safety:

**(3) How are these meanings constructed, maintained, transformed, and transmitted?**

In this section, I use transcripts of focus group conversations to demonstrate how meanings about gender and vulnerability are constructed through social interaction. I argue that conversation is a crucial but largely unexplored link between gender and the fear of violence: everyday talk both conveys beliefs about women and men's different risks of violence and transmits expectations about their different abilities to protect

and defend themselves against such danger. These beliefs and expectations form one basis for differences in fear. I examine representations of gender in five different types of talk—stories, warnings, offers of and requests for protection, accounts of the transmission of danger management strategies, and collective strategizing—and show how each of these serves to collaboratively construct and elaborate the meaning of gender.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The remainder of this dissertation follows the general outline of the three questions introduced above. Chapter 2 outlines the data sources and methods used in this project. I describe the characteristics and selection of the sample, and discuss why focus groups are a particularly useful approach to the study of social meaning. I also discuss the various types of analysis used in this study, with a particular emphasis on the principles of discourse analysis.

The next three chapters examine the social organization of vulnerability. In Chapter 3 I review past research on the fear of crime. I also discuss how other researchers have defined and measured fear and risk, and propose a new typology of fear, risk, and defensive ability. Chapter 4 reports findings from the present study on the distribution of feelings of fear and perceptions of risk and ability among social groups. As discussed above, I focus on gender differences (and similarities) and their interaction with other social statuses. In Chapter 5, I present findings from this study about the use of strategies to manage danger and prevent violence, using a new typology of danger management strategies.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the second question discussed above. In Chapter 6, I examine the association of vulnerability and gender in everyday discourse, using data from the focus group conversations to show that vulnerability and femininity and invulnerability and masculinity are closely entwined. In Chapter 7, I turn to perceptions of dangerousness, and show how this concept is linked to particular social groups,

especially men. In both chapters, I also explore the ways in which cross-cutting statuses such as race, sexual orientation, age, and social class interact with gender and modify its relationship to vulnerability and dangerousness.

In Chapter 8, I shift focus to the discourse itself, and address the third question above. I use the focus group conversations to show the interactional processes through which ideas about gender, vulnerability, and violence are collaboratively constructed through interaction. I also illustrate the ways in which people use talk about violence as a site for performing gender. Finally, in Chapter 9 I return to the questions introduced in this chapter, and summarize how this project has contributed to a more complete understanding of gender and its relationship to vulnerability, and fear.

## Chapter 2 Data and Methods

As discussed in Chapter 1, this dissertation focuses on three questions about violence, vulnerability, and fear:

- (1) What is the social organization of fear and vulnerability? In other words, who is fearful, of what, in what situations, with what effects, and with what causes or correlates?
- (2) What are the social meanings of vulnerability and danger? In other words, who is believed to be more or less afraid, dangerous, or vulnerable?
- (3) How are these meanings constructed, maintained, transformed, and transmitted through discourse?

Answering these kinds of questions requires several different types of data. The first question calls for reliable data that provide insight into individuals' feelings and thoughts, as well as their more concrete experiences and behaviors. The second question requires both individual and group level data, because meanings are shared by members of a culture but expressed both by individuals and at a cultural level. Finally, the third question requires data about communication processes, and therefore calls for information about interaction in groups.

These different requirements necessitated the use of multiple methods. I constructed an extensive survey, including both closed- and open-ended questions, to measure participants' fear of violence, use of safety strategies, experiences with violence, media consumption, and demographic characteristics. I also used a series of focus group discussions with a diverse group of participants in order to explore both how people understand and experience vulnerability and danger and how they talk about these feelings and experiences in conversation.

Despite their early use by Lazarsfeld and Merton (see Merton et al. 1990 [1956] for a description of this history), focus groups are not a traditional sociological method. Focus groups involve small groups of people with certain characteristics convened for a

focused discussion of a topic (Krueger 1988: 27). The disadvantages of focus groups are well-known, and stem principally from the dynamics of small groups.<sup>1</sup> For example, group interaction has been shown to produce biases (such as conformity) that might not be present in individual interviews (e.g., Janis 1972; Harvey 1974).

Participants might be more reluctant to disclose personal information in a group situation; on the other hand, the presence of others disclosing similar ideas might make candid responses more likely. Finally, in analyzing group data, the responses of individuals are not independent.

These are important concerns. However, for the type of study undertaken here the advantages of group interaction outweigh the costs. These advantages fall into two categories. First, focus groups dramatically increase the external validity of the data. Group discussions among similar types of people mirror as closely as possible the conditions of everyday interaction. Many people engage in group conversations every day with coworkers, family members, friends, and strangers encountered in a variety of mundane situations. Standard sociological methods, such as one-on-one interviews with an experimenter or written surveys, are far removed from these everyday experiences. Both interview and survey questions, even when open-ended, suggest answers to the respondents; while this is true to some extent as well for focus groups (as for many standard sociological and psychological methods), focus groups minimize this kind of experimental demand by allowing participants to interact more with each other than with the interviewer. For example, in the focus groups, facilitators took an average of 57 conversational turns (or 7% of the total turns) during the two-hour discussions; only 16% of these turns (an average of nine per discussion, or 1.2% of the total turns) substantially directed the discussion.<sup>2</sup> Unlike many surveys, focus groups allow participants "to respond in their own words, using their own

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<sup>1</sup> Another major problem with focus groups is lack of representativeness; this issue is discussed in the next section.

<sup>2</sup> The rest of the turns did not substantially change the course of the discussion. For example, these included turns in which the facilitator probed for more detail, restated the question, or asked if others wished to respond.

categorizations and perceived associations.” (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990: 13) According to Merton and his colleagues, the focus group technique “gives the interviewee an opportunity to express himself [sic] about matters of central significance to him rather than those presumed to be important by the interviewer. That is, in contrast to the polling approach, it uncovers what is on the interviewee’s mind rather than his opinion of what is on the interviewer’s mind. Furthermore, it allows his responses to be placed in their proper context rather than forced into a framework which the interviewer considers appropriate.” (Merton et al. 1990 [1956]:13-4)

A second advantage to focus groups is that they illuminate the phenomenon that is at the core of this project: the construction of meaning through conversation. My focus in this project is more sociological than psychological. I am interested not in an individual’s reaction to specific stimuli, but in the way that people make sense of the world and their place in it using tools present in their social environment, including media frames, personal experience, and “common sense.” This is fundamentally a social task; as symbolic interactionists have argued, individuals do not construct meaning in a vacuum but through interaction and negotiation with others (Blumer 1969; Mead 1934). For example, McLeod and his colleagues’ (1979) study of political beliefs found that discussion with others was crucial to participants’ interpretation of presidential debates: “exposure to presidential debates stimulated interpersonal political discussion which, in turn, had much greater impact on the political process than did the initial exposure.” (McLeod et al. 1991: 254) Focus groups are a particularly useful means of studying the collaborative construction of meaning, because they “allow us to observe the process of people constructing and negotiating shared meaning, using their natural vocabulary.” (Gamson 1992: 17) Conformity and other social influence processes may indeed take place in focus groups — but it is precisely these everyday social processes that are of interest in this study. The disadvantages of focus groups for other types of research are in fact advantages here.

I turn now to a detailed description of the processes of data collection and the

characteristics of the sample population. I then return to the questions with which I began this chapter, and discuss how I analyzed the various types of data in order to answer these questions.

### **Data Collection**

This study involved twelve focus groups,<sup>3</sup> varying in size from four to eight persons. The ideal size of focus groups is an issue of some contention. Morgan (1988) writes that the ideal size is six to ten participants; Stewart and Shamdasani suggest eight to twelve, and Merton et al. (1990 [1956]) suggest ten to twelve. Morgan suggests overrecruiting by 20% to account for no-shows. Based on pilot groups, I decided that a smaller group size was more appropriate for this study, because of two factors. First, the sensitivity of the topic suggested that smaller groups might facilitate comfort and disclosure. Second, the goals of this study differed from those of the majority of other focus group studies. Focus groups have been used in both marketing research and sociological research to gather a range of opinions on a particular topic or issue. My goal, in contrast, was to observe how people discuss issues of violence. Smaller groups are both more useful for this goal (because they are more likely to be focused) and more closely mirror everyday interaction. The target size for each group was therefore five to seven people; the actual size varied due to over-recruiting to ensure an adequate group size and to no-shows. My assessment after conducting the groups is that five to six people is an ideal group size for research of this type. With more participants, discussions can become chaotic (particularly if the participants are already well acquainted), conversations may have less depth, and not all participants are able to fully discuss their experiences and thoughts. Discussions with fewer participants, in contrast, seem to have a greater risk of domination by one or two people, and of stilted conversations.

Sample selection is a complex problem for focus group research. Morgan notes that

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<sup>3</sup>As discussed at greater length below, the analyses of the focus group conversations also include data from an additional pilot group that was very similar to the other twelve groups.

because the small number of participants used in a typical focus group study “are never going to be representative of a large population,” researchers should concentrate instead on selecting “theoretically chosen subgroups from the total population,” focusing on those groups expected to provide the richest information (1988: 44–5). For this study, I selected subgroups that I expected (based on others’ past research) to differ in their exposure to violence or their fear of violence. The primary focus of this study was gender, and several considerations suggested that conducting sex-segregated groups would be useful. For example, women and men report different levels of fear and different experiences of violence, in terms of both quantity and type (Gordon and Riger 1989). Moreover, in the types of violence that women most often experience, sexual violence and battering, women and men have different roles: the aggressors are overwhelmingly men, the victims are likely to be women. These differences may lead men and women to construct the meaning of danger and vulnerability differently, and may inhibit disclosure in mixed-sex groups. On the other hand, mixed-sex groups might foster disagreement, and thus encourage richer discourse as participants attempt to explain themselves to other group members. In order to explore these possibilities, and allow for the advantages of both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups, the groups were balanced by sex. One third of the groups were all-female; one third were all-male, and one third had participants of both sexes.

Other factors that might affect exposure to violence (including its commission as well as victimization), or the fear of it, include race, social class, sexual orientation, and age; these relationships are discussed in Chapter 3. While it was impractical in this project to try to have separate groups to control for these additional factors, I made an effort to maximize the race, class, sexual orientation and age diversity among the sample population by recruiting participants from a variety of different locations, as described below. However, I attempted to retain homogeneity within each group in order to facilitate disclosure and discussion (Morgan 1988; Merton et al. 1990 [1956]; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990).

### *Recruitment of Participants and Site Selection*

My main concern when recruiting participants was to obtain as diverse a sample as possible. I recruited participants through churches, community centers, workplaces, clubs, apartment buildings, university classes, community service organizations and other pre-existing groups in the Seattle–Tacoma area, chosen from the Seattle phone book and my own and my colleagues' connections in the community. Some of the groups were easy to organize; others required literally months of phone calls, preliminary presentations to potential participants, scheduling, and rescheduling. The total number of initial contacts made was three to four times the final number of completed groups.

In order to minimize self-selection biases, potential participants were not told the specific focus of the study until after they had agreed to participate. Instead, they were told that the study involved a group discussion on one of four issues in modern American society: politics, violence, the media, or welfare. After participants agreed to participate, they were sent a letter telling them the specific topic of discussion (violence in American society). In order to protect participants who might not feel comfortable discussing violence, this letter also informed potential participants that there was a second topic option: instead of discussing violence, they could join a group focusing on the role of media in modern life. No potential participants chose this option, although five people (6.7% of those who agreed to participate) did not attend the focus groups. Two people provided reasons for their absence (one moved, and the other went into a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program), one came to the discussion but left almost immediately because he was too drunk to participate, and two simply did not show up for the discussion, for unknown reasons. These patterns of no-shows are consistent with reports from other focus group research.

Approximately one to two weeks before the discussion took place, participants were mailed the confirmation letter, along with consent forms and a pre-discussion

questionnaire (see next section). Participants were asked to return the questionnaires by mail before the discussion session; if they had not been returned before the group took place, participants were reminded to bring the questionnaires when they were telephoned the night before the discussion to reconfirm their participation. A few participants did not turn in their surveys before the discussion, which in some cases necessitated numerous follow-up calls and letters. Four surveys (5.7% of the total focus group participants) were never turned in and proved uncollectible. One participant moved from his residence and left no forwarding address; three simply did not respond to follow-up calls and letters.

As much as possible, discussions were held at sites convenient to the participants. While using university facilities was appropriate for on-campus or nearby participants, I conducted groups in other areas at local facilities: churches, community centers, meeting rooms, workplace conference rooms, or participants' homes.

#### *Pre-Discussion Survey*

The goals of the survey were:

- To gather demographic data that would illuminate patterns in the focus group conversations.
- To gather systematic individual-level data on measures such as fear, safety precautions, and media exposure.
- To assess the similarity of study participants to locally- and nationally- representative samples on relevant dimensions (e.g., demographic variables, level of fear, exposure to violence).

The survey included basic demographic measures (e.g., age, race, education) as well as a number of questions about experiences with violence, fear, and media exposure. In order to assess the representativeness of the focus group participants, a number of the items in the survey were identical to questions asked on large-scale surveys such as the Fear of Rape Project (Gordon and Riger 1989) and the General Social Science Survey (Davis and Smith 1993).<sup>4</sup> The survey was pretested and revised three times before

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<sup>4</sup>The Fear of Rape Project interviewed over 4,000 residents of three cities (Chicago,

beginning the study. In addition, the discussions in a pilot focus group suggested additional important questions to be included in the survey. The full text of the final survey can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was divided into six sections. Section 1, "Attitudes About Safety," asked about the participants' overall level of fear and attitudes toward safety. Many of the questions in this section were taken from Gordon and Riger's (1989) survey, with additional questions added to make the questions gender-balanced<sup>5</sup>. In addition, questions were added to assess levels of fear in a variety of circumstances not studied in Gordon and Riger's study. As Stanko (1993: 156) notes, "generally, fear of crime is taken to represent individuals' diffuse sense of danger about being physically harmed by criminal violence...It is associated with concern about being outside the home, probably in an urban area, alone and potentially vulnerable to personal harm." However, this conceptualization of fear ignores the fact that a great deal of violence occurs among intimates or acquaintances. In particular, women are more often victimized by people they know and in places they frequent (especially their own homes) than by strangers in unfamiliar public places. "Women's wariness of men is not just a 'problem' for women in public space. For the most part, women find that they must constantly negotiate their safety with men they know, those with whom they live, work, and socialize." (Stanko 1993: 162) In order to capture these "private sphere" dimensions of fear and safety, questions about fear in one's home and school or workplace were included in the survey.

Section 2, "Safety Strategies," asked the participants to describe the strategies they use to protect themselves and others, both inside and outside of their homes. Again, many of these questions were taken from Gordon and Riger (1989). Section 3,

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Philadelphia, and San Francisco) by phone and in person about their fear of crime, and the fear of rape in particular. The General Social Science Survey is an annual survey that focuses on social issues, including violence, using a national sample and a standard questionnaire.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Gordon and Riger's survey asked "How worried or uneasy do you feel walking by groups of young men or boys after dark?" I added the question "How worried or uneasy do you feel walking by groups of young women or girls after dark?"

“Knowledge and Experience of Violence,” asked participants to report their exposure to violence, both first-hand experience and second-hand knowledge received from other people and from media sources. This section included several potentially sensitive questions. For example, one question asked whether participants had been the victims of sexual assault or other violent crimes; another asked whether they had perpetrated these behaviors.

Recent research has demonstrated that the way questions about sexual assault experiences are asked strongly affects the participants’ responses (Koss 1993b; Muehlenhard et al. 1992). For example, although the term “rape” has a specific legal meaning, studies have found that many women whose experiences meet the legal definition of rape do not consider themselves to be victims of rape (Koss 1985; Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski 1987). For example, some people are not familiar with the legal definition of rape; others may feel their experiences are ambiguous because they do not fit the common stereotype of being violently attacked by a stranger in a dark alley. Others may reject the label — and attendant stigma — of the term “rape victim.” The use of multiple, behaviorally-specific questions has been found to result in a more accurate estimate of sexual assault prevalence than asking respondents directly whether they have been raped (Koss 1993; Russell 1982). Multiple questions facilitate disclosure by giving the respondent more than one opportunity to discuss their experiences. Asking behaviorally-specific questions addresses these problems by specifying which experiences the researcher is interested in and allowing respondents to report their experiences without labeling themselves as rape victims.

Because of these concerns, the questions about rape and sexual assault used in this section were carefully worded. The term “rape” was used only when asking respondents if they knew of others who had been raped, and was clearly defined in the text of the survey as “the use of force to obtain sexual intercourse (genital, oral, or anal) with someone without their consent,” (adapted from the State of Washington’s definition of rape). When asking about respondents’ own experiences, multiple

behaviorally-specific questions were used to measure sexual assault:

32. Have you ever been in a situation where someone used physical force to make you have sexual intercourse with them when you didn't want to?
33. Have you ever been in a situation where someone used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to try to make you engage in kissing or petting when you didn't want to?
34. Have you ever been in a situation where someone used intimidation or the threat of physical force to try to make you engage in kissing or petting when you didn't want to?
36. Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone when he/she didn't want to because you used some degree of physical force?
37. Have you ever been in a situation where you used some degree of physical force (twisting someone's arm, holding someone down, etc.) to try to make him/her engage in kissing or petting when he/she didn't want to?

These questions were modeled on questions designed by Koss and her colleagues (Koss 1993, 1996).

The fourth section of the survey,<sup>6</sup> "Conversations About Violence," focused on communication about violence and vulnerability in participants' daily lives, and asked about the incidence of conversations and warnings about violence. Section 5, "Media Exposure," assessed the participants' exposure to various types of media, including television, newspapers, magazines, and movies. Section 6, "Personal Characteristics," assessed the participants' personality traits, using the short version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory, or BSRI (Bem 1981).<sup>7</sup> Finally, Section 7, "Demographic Information," collected demographic data, including neighborhood of residence, age, sex, race,

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<sup>6</sup>Section 4 was administered differently for the first five groups. Rather than being included in the pre-discussion survey, it was presented as a separate questionnaire about midway through the focus group discussion. After the first several groups, it became clear that this approach was not optimal, for reasons discussed at greater length below. As a result, the questions were integrated into the larger survey and distributed before the focus group meeting in the remainder of the groups.

<sup>7</sup>The BSRI, a 30-question inventory of traits and behaviors, is designed to measure the extent to which respondents use "cultural definitions as idealized standards of masculinity and femininity for evaluating their own personality and behavior." (Bem 1981: 18)

occupation, income, education, sexual orientation, and relationship status.

Conducting the survey before the focus group discussion had both advantages and disadvantages. The principal disadvantage was that the participants were alerted to the topic of the discussion before it began, and their conversation may have been influenced by the survey questions and how they framed the general topic of violence. Indeed, there was some evidence that this was the case: a few participants commented that they had thought a great deal about the topic after completing the survey and before coming to the discussion.

The most serious potential consequence of this exposure is the risk that the survey may have affected participants' conceptualization of violence (or their perception of the researcher's conceptualization), and that their conversation may have been influenced by these ideas. However, participants in the pilot focus group did not fill out the survey prior to the discussion, and their conversation was very similar to those of the later groups. Both pilot and non-pilot groups spontaneously discussed similar topics, made similar comments, and had a similar emotional tenor, suggesting that while the surveys may have provoked thought on the part of participants, they did not substantially alter the discussion data. Another potential problem is that participants may have discussed the topic with others, including other group members, after receiving the survey and before the discussion. However, there was no evidence that this had occurred.

The principal advantage of administering the survey before the discussion was that this design allowed data on the participants' ideas and experiences of violence to be gathered while their individual responses were still independent of each other. Had I collected these data after the discussions, the focus group conversations might have influenced the participants' survey responses, and I would not have been able to consider each response independent. I chose to follow this strategy because I judged that the independence of responses was more important than any possible effects of the survey in the discussion. Indeed, these effects might in fact be positive: for

example, they might facilitate participants' deeper reflections on the discussion topics. They might also more closely fit the course of daily interaction, in which conversations tend to be prompted by events or experiences, rather than emerging out of a vacuum.

### *Agenda for Focus Group Sessions*

Focus groups met once, for approximately two hours. To begin the discussion, the facilitator<sup>8</sup> made an opening statement, describing the general topic, assuring the participants of the confidentiality of their discussion, and setting the ground rules for the session. The facilitator asked the participants to introduce themselves and then asked the first open-ended question for discussion:

- 1) Do you feel that the issue of violence affects you personally, or affects your friends and relatives? If so, how?

When discussion on this question lagged (or after one hour, if it had not lagged), the facilitator presented the next activity. In the first five groups, this activity was a brief survey on communication about violence; in the remainder of the groups, the facilitator instead presented a series of vignettes to the group for discussion.<sup>9</sup> The survey took 10–15 minutes to administer; participants were provided with reading materials (current magazines and newspapers) with which to occupy themselves if they finished the survey before the rest of the participants. I originally decided to administer this

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<sup>8</sup>The sex of the facilitator matched that of the group participants: female facilitators conducted the all-female groups, and male facilitators conducted the all-male groups. Mixed-sex groups were also conducted by female facilitators. When possible, the facilitator also matched the subjects on other salient social characteristics such as race and sexual orientation. To ensure uniformity among groups, facilitators were provided with a detailed script for the focus group (see Appendix B), which they read essentially verbatim to the participants.

<sup>9</sup>The vignettes were not presented in one all-male group (Group 9) because one of the group members appeared to be in a crisis situation (unrelated to the focus group or the discussion topic) and the facilitator judged that the participant's mental health should take priority over the focus group agenda. This group spent approximately thirty minutes of the discussion time focusing on this participant's feelings before returning to the discussion topic after the crisis seemed resolved. The vignettes were also not presented in one all-female group (Group 11) because the length of the discussion was constrained by one participant's late arrival to the discussion and another's need to leave the discussion early.

survey during the discussion, rather than including it in the earlier mail survey, for two reasons. First, I wanted to minimize the length of the pre-discussion survey, which was already quite long. Second, I hoped to prompt more thoughtful conversation in the second half of the discussion by providing participants with time to reflect on their experiences before discussing them.

Although administering the survey in this way did seem to achieve these goals, I felt after the first five groups that it would be better placed within the larger survey. Administering the second survey in the middle of the discussion interrupted the flow of the discussion, and some participants were clearly frustrated by being asked to fill out yet another questionnaire. Moreover, time constraints seemed to reduce the quality of the responses and the participants' responses varied greatly in terms of length. Some participants completed the survey quickly and were irritated by the long wait until all the group members were finished; others wished they had time to write more. Therefore, these questions were included in the pre-discussion survey as Section 4 for the rest of the focus groups. They were replaced in the discussion by a series of vignettes, as described below. This change appeared to eliminate the problems experienced with the mid-discussion survey while still providing the participants with the opportunity to think about their experiences and reactions before discussing them with the group.

The goal of the vignettes was to explore how people individually and collectively construct the meaning of ambiguous but possibly threatening situations, and what they believe they are able and likely to do in such situations. Two vignettes were used:

*Vignette 1:* One evening you're at home on your own. It's late. There's a knock at the door, but you're not expecting anyone.

*Vignette 2:* You are having an argument with the person in your life you are closest to — your romantic partner if you have one, or a family member or a close friend. You are alone with this person, somewhere out of earshot of anyone else. This person suddenly becomes very angry at you and begins to yell.

For each vignette, the facilitator read the text aloud to the group, then passed out a worksheet to each member of the group. The worksheet repeated the text of the vignette and asked three questions:

- 1) How safe would you feel in such a situation? (5-point scale ranging from "very unsafe" to "very safe")
- 2) Please describe as completely as possible what kinds of thoughts and feelings you might have in this situation.
- 3) What kinds of things might you do in this situation?

Participants first answered the questions on paper individually. The facilitator then began a group discussion by asking, "What do you think might happen in this situation?" After the discussion, the completed worksheets were turned in to the facilitator, and the process was repeated for the second vignette.

After participants had completed the survey or vignettes, the facilitator returned to asking open-ended questions. The main questions asked were:

- 2) When do other people give you warnings about dangerous situations or people? How do these warnings affect the way you behave, or the way you think about your behavior? What kinds of warnings do you give others?
- 3) In what situations do you feel most vulnerable? (where/when/with whom?)
- 4) In what situations do you feel most safe? (where/when/with whom?)
- 5) (optional, if discussion lags) Why do you think there is so much violence in this society today?
- 6) (optional, if discussion lags) What do you think should be done to stop violence in our society?

Because groups differed dramatically in terms of quantity and quality of discussion, not all groups had time to discuss all the questions, although all groups answered Question 1. The use of the six questions and the two activities in the thirteen groups is shown in Table 2-1. Only two groups discussed the optional questions; in the

other eleven groups, the discussion was so animated that these questions were not needed. Overall, the participants seemed to enjoy the discussions; indeed, some participants suggested at the end of the session that the group should meet again to discuss other topics.

Table 2-1  
Questions Asked in the Focus Group Discussions

Group	Question						Survey	Vignettes
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
P1	x							
1	x	x		x	x	x	x	
2	x	x	x	x		x	x	
3	x	x	x	x			x	
4	x	x		x			x	
5	x	x	x				x	
6	x		x	x				x
7	x	x		x				x
8	x			x				x
9	x							
10	x	x	x	x				x
11	x		x	x				
12	x							

At the end of the discussion, participants were asked to give a final summary statement. The facilitator then thanked the group, passed out participant payments and a list of hotline telephone numbers and other resources relevant to experiences of violence, and answered any participant questions. A complete description of the focus group procedure can be found in Appendix B.

Although the facilitator sat at the table with the participants and set the agenda for the group discussion, the general strategy for the facilitator was one of low involvement. This was crucial because the goal of the focus groups was to explore the participants' understandings of violence, rather than their reactions to the facilitator's

ideas. Morgan (1988) suggests the use of “self-managed groups” in which, after an initial introduction to the general themes and ground rules of the discussion, the participants themselves help to facilitate the group interaction, while the facilitator says very little. This strategy was followed for the focus group discussions. The “ground rules” for the focus group, discussed at the beginning of the session, included statements that placed responsibility for the discussion on the participants as well as on the facilitator (see Appendix B for examples). This strategy was effective, and facilitator participation was minimal in all groups. The discussions were audio taped with the participants’ consent, and transcribed for analysis.

### Characteristics of the Sample

The final sample of participants included 70 people from diverse backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> Table 2–2, below, compares the demographic characteristics of this sample with 1990 U.S. Census data for the City of Seattle, King County, Washington State, and the United States.

Table 2–2  
Comparison of Focus Group Participants with Residents of the City of Seattle, King County, the State of Washington, and the United States

	United States	State of WA	King County	City of Seattle	Focus Groups
Total Population	248,709,873	4,866,692	1,507,319	516,259	70
Sex					
Male	48.7%	49.6%	49.3%	48.8%	42.9%
Female	51.3%	50.4%	50.7%	51.2%	57.1%
Age (of those 18+)					
18–24	14.4%	13.6%	13.0%	14.2%	22.9%
24–44	43.6%	46.0%	48.9%	47.7%	45.7%
45–54	13.6%	13.9%	13.9%	11.1%	10.0%
55–64	11.4%	10.6%	9.8%	8.8%	5.7%
65–74	9.8%	9.3%	8.4%	9.8%	10.0%
75+	7.1%	6.6%	6.0%	8.4%	5.7%

<sup>10</sup> In addition, the transcript of a pilot group was used in the analysis of focus group data. The conversation in this 6-person group did not substantially differ from conversations in the other groups; however, participants in this group did not complete the survey and are not included in its analysis.

	United States	State of WA	King County	City of Seattle	Focus Groups
<b>Race*</b>					
White	80.3%	88.5%	84.8%	75.4%	78.6%
Black	12.1%	3.1%	5.1%	10.0%	12.9%
Native American	0.8%	1.7%	1.1%	1.4%	5.7%
Asian/Pacific Is.	2.9%	4.3%	7.9%	11.9%	2.9%
Other	3.9%	2.4%	1.1%	1.3%	0.0%
Hispanic/Latino	9.0%	4.4%	2.9%	3.3%	4.3%
<b>Income (Household)</b>					
<\$10,000	15.5%	12.9%	9.9%	14.8%	27.6%
\$10,000–24,999	26.4%	26.3%	22.3%	27.6%	25.9%
\$25,000–49,999	33.7%	36.4%	36.1%	33.4%	24.1%
\$50,000–74,999	15.0%	15.8%	18.9%	14.2%	1.7%
\$75,000–99,999	5.1%	4.8%	7.0%	5.0%	12.1%
\$100,000+	4.4%	3.7%	5.9%	4.8%	8.6%
Student/Unknown					29.3%
<b>Education**</b>					
High school or less	54.8%	44.1%	34.5%	33.2%	17.2%
Some college	24.9%	32.9%	32.6%	28.9%	42.9%
College graduate	13.1%	15.9%	22.8%	24.6%	21.4%
Graduate degree	7.2%	7.0%	10.0%	13.3%	18.6%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>					
Gay or Lesbian	***	***	***	***	18.6%
Heterosexual					72.9%
Other/Missing					8.6%
<b>Relationship Status</b>					
Never Married	26.5%	24.3%	29.1%	36.8%	38.6%
Married****	57.8%	59.3%	54.1%	43.7%	28.6%
Widowed	7.4%	6.1%	5.6%	7.4%	4.3%
Divorced	8.3%	10.4%	11.2%	12.2%	27.1%
Missing					1.4%
<b>Housing Units</b>					
Owner-occupied	64.2%	62.6%	58.8%	48.9%	30.0%
Renter-occupied	35.8%	37.4%	41.2%	51.1%	54.3%
Missing*****					15.7%
<b>Household Type</b>					
Live Alone		20.3%	29.2%	39.7%	44.3%
Live with Others		79.7%	70.8%	60.2%	55.7%

\* For focus group sample, percentages for race do not sum to 100% because several participants identified themselves as belonging to multiple categories.

\*\* Census data on education is for age 25 and older; focus group data is for all respondents.

\*\*\* The Census does not collect data on sexual orientation.

\*\*\*\* For focus group sample, the category "married" includes those living with a romantic partner.

\*\*\*\*\* This question was not included in the first eleven surveys of participants.

As this table shows, the focus group participants generally approximated the characteristics of Seattle residents. However, there were more young adults (age 18–24), more highly educated people, more people with a yearly income of less than \$10,000 or more than \$75,000, more divorced people, fewer married people, and fewer Asians and Pacific Islanders than in the general Seattle population. Brief descriptions of each participant can be found in Appendix C.

Although the participants as a whole were quite diverse, each group was relatively homogeneous. Table 2–3 describes the sex, race, sexual orientation, age, and income composition, and source of recruitment of each group.

Table 2-3  
Demographic Characteristics of Focus Groups

Group	Sex	Race*	Age Range	Sexual Orientation	Household Income Range	Source
1	female & male	W, L, A	21-53	heterosexual	\$10,000 – 25,000	university evening class
2	male	W	31-63	gay	\$10,000 – 100,000+	athletic club
3	female & male	W	33-59	heterosexual	<\$10,000 – 75,000	outdoors club
4	female & male	W	30-38	heterosexual, lesbian	\$25,000 – 100,000	high-tech workplace
5	female	W, L, N	30-41	lesbian	\$25,000 – 100,000	athletic club
6	male	W, N	35-60	heterosexual	<\$10,000	low-income hotel
7	male	W	18-19	heterosexual	unknown (students)	fraternity
8	female	W, N, B	44-71	heterosexual	<\$10,000 – 25,000	low-income apartment
9	male	B, W	31-70	heterosexual	<\$10,000 – 25,000	low-income apartment
10	female & male	W	65-88	heterosexual	<\$10,000 – 25,000	apartment for elderly
11	female	B	30-44	heterosexual	\$10,000 – 50,000	church group
12	female	W, A	18-22	heterosexual	<\$10,000 – 50,000	university class
P1**	female & male	W, L, N	21-40	***	<\$10,000 – 50,000	university class

\* The order in which the racial categories are listed in the table indicates the relative number of participants from each category.

W = White    B = Black    N = Native American    A = Asian or Pacific Islander    L = Latina/o

\*\* Group P1 was a pilot group.

\*\*\* This group was not asked about their sexual orientation.

#### *Relationships Among Demographic Variables*

A number of the demographic variables were strongly intercorrelated. Some of these relationships were expected and are representative of the population more generally. Other relationships, however, were peculiar to this sample. These patterns were of

course shaped by the recruitment strategies described above. However, it is important to discuss these relationships here in order to understand the patterns in the survey and focus group data presented in subsequent chapters. The crosstabulations between the various demographic variables are reported in Appendix D.

### Gender

Gender was not significantly related to any of the other demographic variables. However, a few non-significant but still notable patterns were present in this sample. There were nearly three times as many women of color (13) as there were men of color (5), although there were nearly equal numbers of white men (25) and women (27). There were also more female homeowners (13) than male homeowners (8), while the numbers of male and female renters were similar (18 men and 20 women). In terms of education, 52.5% of women, but only 30.0% of men, had fewer than two years of college; 33.3% of men, but only 12.5% of women, had a four-year college degree. However, similar proportions of men and women had either a high school education or less or a post-graduate degree. Finally, 37.5% of men in the sample, but only 21.2% of women, reported a yearly household income of less than \$10,000. However, 12.5% of men, but 36.4% of women, reported a household income of \$10,000 to 25,000. Similar proportions of women and men reported incomes over \$25,000 per year.

### Race

Like gender, race<sup>11</sup> was not significantly related to any other demographic variables. However, there were some interesting, although statistically nonsignificant, patterns in the relationships between race and other variables. In this sample, participants of color were less likely than whites to identify themselves as gay or

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<sup>11</sup>Because the numbers of African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latina/o, and Native American participants were small, I was unable to analyze each category separately. I decided, therefore, to combine participants of color into a single group for the quantitative analyses. Three participants identified themselves as both white and Native American; I assigned these participants to the "nonwhite" category in order to privilege the experience of racial subordination.

lesbian: 22.4% of whites, but only 13.3% of people of color did so. No men of color — and no African American participants — identified themselves as gay or lesbian. People of color were also concentrated in the middle age ranges: they comprised approximately 30% of those in each age category between 25 and 64, but only 12.5% of those age 18 to 24 and only 18.2% of those over age 65. There were also racial patterns in education: 44.3% of whites had at least a college degree, compared with only 27.8% of people of color. Finally, 24.4% of whites, but only 12.5% of people of color, reported a yearly household income of \$75,000 or more. The men of color were particularly poor compared with the rest of the sample: 60% reported a yearly income less than \$10,000, and all reported an income less than \$25,000. Women of color, however, were somewhat wealthier than the average female participant: 54.6% of women of color, but only 36.4% of white women, reported an income greater than \$25,000.

### Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation was significantly related to all the demographic variables except gender and race. First, although the mean age of the heterosexual and the lesbian or gay participants was nearly the same (38.6 for the heterosexuals and 38.5 for the lesbians and gay men), the range of ages was quite different. All but one of the lesbian and gay participants were between ages 25 and 44. In contrast, only 52.9% of heterosexual respondents fell into this age range: 31.4% were age 18–24 and 15.7% were over age 65. This relationship between age and sexual orientation was significant ( $\chi^2 = 17.25$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .005$ ). Lesbian and gay participants were also much more highly educated, on average, than heterosexual participants: 69.2% of the lesbian and gay respondents had a post-graduate degree, compared with only 7.8% of the heterosexual respondents. Moreover, 17.6% of the heterosexual respondents, but none of the gay and lesbian respondents, had a high school education or less ( $r = -.54$ ,  $p < .00000$ ). As noted below, education translates into higher income: 91.7% of the lesbian and gay respondents reported an annual household income of more than \$25,000, and 66.7% reported a

household income of over \$75,000. In contrast, 34.2% of heterosexual respondents earned more than \$25,000, and only 9.8% earned more than \$75,000. This relationship between sexual orientation and income was highly significant ( $r = -.56$ ,  $p < .00001$ ).

### Age

In addition to the relationships discussed above, age was also related to education in this sample: the oldest (over 65) and youngest (18–24) age groups had less education than the middle categories ( $\chi^2 = 29.33$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .005$ ). For the youngest group, this was partly because many were still attending college at the time of their participation in the study. Age was related to income in a similar way: the majority of those 18–24 and over 65 reported making less than \$25,000 per year, while the majority of those in the middle age categories reported a household income of more than \$25,000 ( $\chi^2 = 23.62$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### Education and Income

As noted above, there were significant relationships between education, sexual orientation, and age. As in the general population, there was also a strong correlation in this sample between education and income: those with more education tended to report higher household incomes ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Because the measure of income assessed participants' household rather than individual income, those who lived with others also tended to report significantly higher incomes than those who lived alone ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

The three questions with which I began this chapter drove the analysis of the data collected from the focus groups and the survey. Answering each question involved multiple sources of data. Below, I review the overall approach to the data suggested by the principles and methods of discourse analysis. I then describe how I went about the

data analysis for each question.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the central issue for discourse analysis is what talk achieves. Talk may have many functions, depending on the speaker's goals: these might include providing information, persuading others, making requests or demands, presenting oneself in a particular light, or ingratiating oneself with others. Understanding the functions of talk entails an examination of its consequences, most obviously. However, it also requires an examination of the context, because goals and achievements occur only in particular contexts and so the meaning of talk cannot be understood apart from the social context in which it occurs. Thus discourse analysis is a profoundly sociological endeavor.

Practically, discourse analysis relies on the analyst's skill at analyzing and interpreting the data, rather than on any fixed procedure or specific tools. As Potter and Wetherell argue, "Analysis of discourse is like riding a bicycle compared to conducting experiments or analysing survey data which resemble baking cakes from a recipe. There is no mechanical procedure for producing findings from an archive or transcript. There is no obvious parallel to the well-controlled experimental design and test of statistical significance." (1987: 168) The process of doing discourse analysis can be described as consisting of two related phases:

First, there is the search for pattern in the data. This pattern will be in the form of both variability: *differences* in either the content or form of accounts, and consistency: the identification of features *shared* by the accounts. Second, there is the concern with function and consequence. The basic theoretical thrust of discourse analysis is the argument that people's talk fulfils many functions and has varying effects. The second phase of analysis consists of forming hypotheses about these functions and effects and searching for the linguistic evidence.

(Potter and Wetherell 1987: 168; italics in original)

Thus discourse analysis is in some ways more of a theoretical framework than a specific method. Because of the lack of widely-accepted and standardized techniques — and because of the challenges of summarizing large quantities of discourse into a relatively brief analysis — it is particularly important for discourse analysts to

interrogate their own assumptions and biases, and take steps to assess and improve the validity and reliability of their data and findings. I discuss some of these steps in the next section.

### *Issues of Reliability and Validity*

In order to increase the external validity of the findings, I used a number of strategies suggested by Becker and Geer (1960) and Silverman (1993). As discussed above, I compared the demographic composition of my sample with that of the City of Seattle, King County, the State of Washington, and the United States as a whole, to assess the degree to which the participants in this study were representative of other populations. I also compared their responses on a number of survey questions to the responses of nationally-representative samples in other surveys. I compared participants' survey responses to the comments they made in the focus group interviews to see whether their descriptions of their own beliefs and experiences were consistent. Inconsistencies were noted and flagged for further analysis; I made a point of analyzing these deviant cases rather than discounting them. The coding scheme used for the transcripts was tested by multiple people, as described below. I used simple tabulations and correlations to test my interpretations of the focus group data. For example, when I compared ideas about the relative vulnerability of women and men, I coded every instance of people being described as vulnerable, and then counted how many referred to women and men. Finally, I provide a great deal of 'raw' data in the chapters that follow so that readers can assess for themselves whether my conclusions are warranted.

I do not suggest that inconsistencies between the participants' survey responses and later comments during the focus group discussions necessarily mean that the participants were lying. Indeed, the theoretical approach I use here suggests that such inconsistencies provide clues to the effects of social context on interaction. Participants may have had different motivations when filling out the survey and participating in the

discussion. Honesty is only one possible motivation; others could include giving off favorable impressions to others or concealing illegal behavior. Similarly, different contexts may have made participants' experiences and thoughts seem more or less salient, and so relevant experiences may have been emphasized, exaggerated or ignored. It is impossible in most cases to ascertain whether participants were lying, although two factors provided an incentive for truthfulness. First, because participants both completed the survey and took part in the discussion, I had the ability to check the consistency (if not the accuracy) of their statements. Second, most groups were conducted with individuals who were connected in some way: as friends, neighbors, colleagues, or members of a single organization. Thus while participants may have had an incentive to present themselves in a favorable light, because they anticipated interacting with each other in the future, they had a disincentive to lie in ways that might be recognized or discovered by the other group members.

If participants did lie on the surveys or during the group discussions, what consequences would that have for the findings discussed here? Dishonest statements might affect the findings regarding fear and danger management strategies I describe in Chapters 4 and 5 — but of course, this is a danger of any survey or interview method. However, the veracity of participants' statements does not affect the central conclusions I draw in Chapters 6 through 9 about the construction of gender, vulnerability, and danger. These conclusions rest on what people say to each other, not necessarily what they actually experience or do. While experiences and behaviors are important, I focus on how discourse affects people's shared ideas about themselves, others, and the social world. Even if a statement is inaccurate, it is nonetheless a statement heard by others that may affect their thoughts and feelings. Regardless of their truthfulness, then, the kinds of conversations I analyze below are consequential.

### *Data Preparation*

Preparation of the data for analysis involved several steps. First, the survey responses were coded and entered into SPSS. Masculinity and femininity scores were calculated for the BSRI items using the procedures described by Bem (1981).

Next, the focus group transcripts were coded. An initial review of the first transcript yielded a preliminary coding scheme. This scheme was used to code sections of five additional transcripts, and modified based on these. Five coders (myself and four others) used this revised coding scheme to code a section of a sixth transcript, the results were compared, and the coding scheme was again modified on the basis of these results. Finally, reliability testing was performed. A new section of transcript was coded by two people (myself and an assistant). Inter-coder reliability was calculated by using the formula:  $reliability = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of agreements and disagreements}}$ , as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994: 64), and was 84.1%. The final coding scheme (see Appendix E) was used to code the thirteen transcripts. The unit of analysis for coding purposes was the speaking turn; as many codes as necessary were attached to each turn, as well as codes designating the speaker, the speaker's demographic characteristics, the group number, and the question being answered. After coding, the transcripts and codes were entered into the NUDIST qualitative data analysis program.

### *Analyzing the Social Organization of Fear and Vulnerability*

The first set of questions guiding this study addresses the patterning of fear and vulnerability across individuals and social groups. Who is more (or less) fearful? Who feels more (or less) vulnerable? What people, places, situations, or behavior provoke fear? What people, places, situations, or behaviors inspire feelings of safety? What experiences, beliefs, or communications increase or decrease fear? Finally, what are the effects of fear? How do people organize their lives because of their feelings of vulnerability?

To address these questions, I began by analyzing responses to the survey. In order to provide additional evidence for the patterns found in the survey data, I compared these patterns to those found by other researchers using large-scale and/or nationally-representative samples (e.g., Gordon and Riger 1989; Davis and Smith 1993). Finally, I examined the focus group transcripts for additional information about the participants' feelings of vulnerability and fear. The transcripts also suggested additional hypotheses to be examined in the survey data. For example, one focus group was clearly divided in levels of fear based on whether the respondents had grown up in an urban or rural area; another group suggested that fear might be conditioned by both personal experiences of violence and athletic skill. Moving back and forth between the survey and focus group transcripts in this way enriched the analysis considerably.

#### *Analyzing the Social Meanings of Vulnerability and Danger*

The second set of questions investigates the social meaning of vulnerability and danger. Thus the focus of this part of the analysis was not the participants' experiences of violence or expressed levels of fear, but rather their broader conceptualizations of events, people, or feelings. What kinds of people are perceived to be vulnerable? Invulnerable? Dangerous? Safe? Individuals' experiences with violence and danger, of course, overlap with their ideas about it, so this analysis is related to the first set of questions above. Nonetheless, they are distinct inquiries: the first centers on individuals and their feelings and experiences, while the second revolves around societal-level meanings that are collectively shared, although expressed by individuals.

To explore these social meanings, I began with the focus group transcripts, which had been coded for any utterances related to danger, victimization, fear, safety, and vulnerability. I extracted these segments from the transcripts, and looked for patterns in the speakers' ideas based on social statuses such as gender, race, class, age, and

sexual orientation. I also examined the survey questions related to these issues (e.g., those about the characteristics the participants believe make them more or less vulnerable, their faith that they could defend themselves, their beliefs about the proportion of rape attempts that are completed, the proportion of rape victims who are beaten or murdered, and warnings received about violence.)

One of my central goals in this analysis was to uncover patterns in these meanings. I continually asked whether the representations varied by the speakers' gender, race, sexual orientation, class, or other socially meaningful variables. At the same time, I looked for examples that did not fit these patterns (for example, people who interpreted violence differently than most others in a given social category), and asked how such exceptions and contradictions might be explained.

#### *Analyzing the Social Construction of Meaning*

The final analysis addressed the processes through which meanings about gender, vulnerability, and danger are formed, changed, stabilized, and communicated. Meanings are not pre-determined and stable; they are created and reproduced through the talk and behavior of social actors. My final goal in this project was to show how these meanings are constructed in interaction. The focus group transcripts provided a useful window on this process, as they showed people communicating and negotiating meaning through talk. In addition, the survey questions about warnings and other kinds of conversations addressed the communication of ideas about violence.

I began by examining the focus group transcripts closely to see how individuals and groups use various sources of information (media representations, personal experience, second-hand knowledge, warnings from others, and so on) to construct, maintain, change, and transmit ideas about danger and vulnerability. I examined the places in the discussions where danger and vulnerability were associated with particular social groups, and looked for regularities in the types of discourse used to construct these associations. In this section I looked at the patterns in the talk itself: how do people

discuss violence, identify and communicate danger and vulnerability, and strategize about safety? The tools of discourse analysis were particularly useful in this section of the analysis.

### **Summary**

In summary, in this dissertation I approach the issues of vulnerability, danger, and gender from a number of perspectives. I examine the social organization of fear and danger-related behavior, the social meanings of vulnerability and danger, and the construction and communication of these ideas in conversation. I use both surveys and focus group discussions to examine these topics. This array of questions and strategies allows me to paint a more nuanced picture of these issues than would be possible using only a single question or method. The result is a rich and detailed analysis of the construction of social meaning through interaction.

I turn now in Chapter 3 to a discussion of how the central concepts related to danger and safety have been conceptualized by other researchers. Then in Chapter 4, I begin the analysis of the data collected using the strategies described above.

## Chapter 3 Conceptualizing Danger and Safety

This chapter provides the conceptual and empirical background for the findings presented in subsequent chapters. I begin by reviewing past research on the fear of crime and its consequences. I then discuss a central issue in recent research on this domain: the distinction between perceptions of risk and feelings of fear. I also discuss a third related dimension, perceptions of one's ability to defend oneself. I evaluate how these concepts have been measured in past research, and conclude by illustrating how I have measured them here using examples from the survey and focus group questions. The result of this discussion is a new typology of dimensions of danger and safety.

### **Past Research on Fear of Crime**

There has been a great deal of research on the predictors of the fear of crime or violence. These predictors fall into three general categories: individual and group characteristics, media exposure, and environmental factors.

#### *Predictors of Fear: Individual and Group Characteristics*

Many individual and group characteristics have been investigated as possible sources of fear. The two factors most consistently associated with fear are gender and age; others with weaker relationships to fear include race, social class, sexual orientation, residential configuration, health status, prior victimization, and social psychological variables such as sense of control and attributions.

#### Gender

Nearly every study on the fear of crime has found women to be far more afraid than men (a partial list of such studies includes Smith and Hill 1991a, b; Gordon and Riger 1989; Clemente and Kleiman 1977; Garofalo 1979; Parker et al. 1993; Toseland

1982; van der Wurff et al. 1989; Gordon et al. 1980; Riger 1978; Warr 1984, 1985; Biderman et al. 1967; Conklin 1975; Ennis 1967; Erskine 1974; Sundeen and Mathieu 1976; Gomme 1986). The extent of fear varies depending on other characteristics, such as race, age, and social class; however, in every category, women report being far more afraid than men (Gordon and Riger 1989), even though their risk of victimization is lower, at least according to official reports. As discussed in Chapter 1, women's greater fear has been attributed to a number of different factors, including perceptions of physical vulnerability (Hindelang et al. 1978) and the fear (and actuality) of rape and other kinds of sexual violence (Pain 1991; Riger and Gordon 1981; Stanko 1987; Warr 1985). Ferraro (1995, 1996) empirically tested this hypothesis, and found that, indeed, women's higher fear of crime is largely accounted for by their fear of rape. "Once one controls for fear of rape, women are not more afraid of other types of crime... Women are more afraid of nonsexual crime but it is principally due to their perceived risk of such crime and their fear of rape." (1995: 91)

### Age

Many studies have found that the elderly tend to be more fearful than younger people (Smith and Hill 1991a, b; Clemente and Kleiman 1977; Garofalo 1977, 1979; Hindelang 1978; Toseland 1982; van der Wurff et al. 1989; Antunes et al. 1977; Baldassare 1986; Yin 1980, 1982; Hindelang et al. 1978; Lewis and Salem 1986; Parker et al. 1993). Like women, however, elderly people are less likely than younger people to be victimized than younger people. This greater fear in the face of smaller risk has been attributed to the loss of strength, agility, and perception that often accompanies the aging process or to the fact that older people tend to take more precautions to prevent violence.

The elderly are not uniformly fearful, however. Clemente and Kleiman (1986) found that physical location is important: elders are more fearful in metropolitan areas, less fearful in smaller cities, and not at all fearful in rural areas. Lebowitz (1975) similarly

found that city size is important, and also found that income and residential configuration (i.e., living alone) condition the relationship between age and fear. Jeffords (1983) found that elderly people are more afraid in urban areas, neighborhoods perceived to be dangerous, and poor neighborhoods, but are less afraid than younger people when in their own homes. In contrast, Maxfield (1984) found that elderly people are more afraid than younger people in areas with relatively low crime rates, but found no age difference in fear in high-crime areas.

In dramatic contrast to previous findings, the most recent and methodologically sophisticated studies (e.g., Yin 1980, 1982; Ferraro and LaGrange 1988, 1992; LaGrange and Ferraro 1987, 1989; Ferraro 1995) have found that older people are *not* more afraid of crime than younger people. According to Ferraro's research, the age group with the greatest fear of both property and personal crime is young adults aged 18 to 24; older groups report much less fear. Fear of personal crime decreases slowly over the life course, while fear of property crime fluctuates with increasing age. Ferraro suggests that these surprising findings are due to the fact that previous studies measured fear of crime by asking about feelings of fear at night when walking alone outside: "Because [these studies] force respondents to report safety or fear at night, those items may trigger higher 'fear' among older people. Yet, most older people simply do not engage in the activities mentioned in these questions—walking alone in their neighborhood at night. Indeed, older adults have less need to be out at night for whatever reasons and, therefore, are not as afraid." (1995: 82) This begs the question of why they do not engage in these activities: is it because they do not want to do so, or because they refrain from doing so because they feel vulnerable?

### Race

Most of the research on race and fear has compared whites and blacks (or occasionally, whites and "non-whites"). Consistently, blacks have been found to be more afraid of crime than whites (Clemente and Kleiman 1977; Erskine 1974; Garofalo

1977; Hindelang et al. 1978; Parker 1988; Parker and Ray 1990; Rao and Rao 1988; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Baumer 1978; Belyea and Zingraff 1988; Braungart et al. 1980); they also perceive their chances of being victimized to be higher (Ferraro 1995: 48). This association between race and fear is often attributed to poverty: "because they tend to live in high crime areas, blacks and the poor are more susceptible to crime. This susceptibility leads to fear even when they have not been victimized. In addition, medical costs resulting from injuries or other costs relating to property damage, will consume a larger portion of the income of the poor." (Donnelly 1988: 70)

A few scholars have noted, however, that simply comparing blacks and whites, and attributing any differences found to poverty, is not sufficient: "Black-White comparisons of victimization and fear provide limited information beyond the fact that Blacks manifest a higher level of fear than Whites do. Because analyses limited to these comparisons fail to demonstrate the heterogeneity in the perceptions of ethnic minority groups, they mistakenly imply homogeneity in the perceptions and attitudes toward victimization and fear of crime between ethnic groups." (Parker et al. 1993: 724) Parker and his colleagues (1993), for example, studied black and Latino subway riders in New York City, and found that Latinos reported higher levels of fear (and higher perceived likelihood of victimization) than blacks did. Similarly, Walker (1994) notes that race and social class are often confounded in fear of crime studies, and argues that lumping all people of color together as "non-white" obscures important differences between and within groups.<sup>1</sup> Her research, which examined fear among males aged 16 to 35 in one mostly "socially deprived" area of Leeds (U.K.), found clear differences between blacks, Asians, and whites. In general, Asians felt most unsafe, blacks felt least unsafe, and whites reported an intermediate level of fear. Parker and Onyekwuluje (1992) studied African-Americans in Atlanta and Washington, D.C. and found that within this racial category, neighborhood crime rate,

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<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately, the small sample size in this study forced me to combine all people of color into a single group for some analyses. Where possible, however, I have also looked for patterns within this composite group.

income, and sex were significant predictors of fear of crime during the day, and that sex, age, income status, and neighborhood crime rate were significant predictors of fear of crime during the night.

### Social Class, Income, and Education

The observation that social class and the fear of crime are closely related has been supported by numerous studies (e.g., Biderman et al. 1967; Ennis 1967; Gomme 1986; Clemente and Kleiman 1976, 1977; Erskine 1974; Hindelang 1974; Lebowitz 1975; Ragan 1977; Sundeen and Mathieu 1976), although a few studies have found no association (Conklin 1975; Erskine 1974; Toseland 1982). The relationship between class and fear has been attributed to the higher susceptibility of the poor to crime (because they tend to live in areas with higher crime rates), their lesser ability to prevent crime (by, for example, moving to a wealthier neighborhood, choosing less risky employment, or installing security devices in their homes), and their lesser ability to cope with its aftermath (e.g., medical costs or property damage).

A few writers, however, have suggested that the term “social class,” generally understood to include both education and income, is too broad. Smith and Hill (1991a) found that education and income have distinct effects on fear: income, they found, was negatively related to victimization and had no direct effects on fear, while education was unrelated to victimization and had negative effects on fear. They hypothesized that the less educated have less efficacious self-images—i.e., a lower sense of personal control over their environment and actions. Similarly, Clemente and Kleiman (1977), Erskine (1974), Garofalo (1977), and Hindelang (1974) all found that those with the least education reported the most fear of crime.

### Sexual Orientation

Little work has been done on the relationship between sexual orientation and fear. However, D’Angelli (1992) found high levels of fear among lesbian, gay, and bisexual

undergraduates, although this study did not compare their degree of fear to that of heterosexual students. However, as these students reported numerous incidents of harassment and a high degree of awareness of the smaller number of physically violent incidents that had occurred, it is plausible that they would experience more fear than heterosexual students.

### Residential Configuration

Those people who live alone have been found to be more afraid of crime and violence (Antunes et al. 1977; Braungart et al. 1980; Ward et al. 1986; Hartnagel 1979; Toseland 1982; Gomme 1986). This greater fear has been attributed to the fact that those who live alone may have no one to call on for assistance during an attack, and no one to support them during the aftermath of violence.

### Health

Health status also plays a role in fear. People in poorer health have been found to be more afraid of crime, according to Braungart et al. (1980) and Sundeen and Mathieu (1976). Again, this heightened fear is probably due to increased physical vulnerability and decreased ability to recover from assault.

### Social Psychological Variables

A number of studies have shown that individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs affect their fear of crime. Warr and Stafford (1983) concluded that the perceived seriousness of an offense and the perceived likelihood of being victimized are important determinants of fear. Along the same lines, van der Wurff et al. (1989: 144–5) identified four social psychological variables that predict fear of crime: "attractivity" (the "extent to which people see themselves or their possessions as an attractive target or victim for criminal activities"), power (the "degree of self-assurance and feeling of control that a person has with respect to possible threat or assault by

another”), evil intent (the “extent to which a person attributes criminal intentions to another individual or to a particular group”), and criminalizable space (the “extent to which a situation lends itself to criminal activities in the eyes of a possible victim”). In addition, they found that a model including these four variables predicted fear better than a model containing only sociodemographic variables (e.g., age, gender, and socioeconomic status). They did not speculate, however, on the relationship between the two sets of variables. Several studies have found that those who have more faith in the efficacy of police tend to report less fear (Baker et al. 1983; Krahn and Kennedy 1985). Finally, one study found political conservatives to be more fearful than others (Gomme 1986)

### Victimization

It seems logical that prior victimization would increase one’s fear of crime. Indeed, Balking (1979), Liska et al. (1988), Skogan (1986) and Yin (1981) all found that victimization increases fear. However, “the relationship between victimization and fear of crime is not a simple one. While many victims of crime are fearful, so are many non-victims.” (Donnelly 1988: 70) A number of researchers have reported no significant differences in fear between those who have been victimized and those who have not (Biderman et al. 1967; Block and Long 1973; Hill et al. 1985), and many others have found a significant but very weak relationship (Hindelang et al. 1978; Garofalo 1979; Braungart et al. 1980; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Smith and Huff 1982; Gomme 1986). Thus there does not seem to be a simple relationship between victimization and fear.

The type of crime one has experienced likely affects one’s subsequent degree of fear. Baumer’s review of past research (1978) concluded that being the victim of a personal crime increased fear, but that victimization more generally did not. On the other hand, Smith and Hill (1991a) found that when other variables were controlled, individual fear of crime was tied to property victimization. However, the failure to find a relationship between personal victimization and fear may be due to the fact that

these authors measured victimization based on households rather than individuals. Smith and Hill suggest an additional explanation (based on Skogan 1986): while both property and personal victimization affect fear, "the relative infrequency of personal victimizations may diminish its effects relative to property victimizations." (Smith and Hill 1991a: 219) A subsequent article by the same authors (Smith and Hill 1991b) suggests that both personal and property victimization increase fear; however, the processes through which they do so differ. For personal crimes, the effect is indirect, via perceived crime seriousness. For property and combined property / personal victimization, effects are both direct and indirect.

An individual's reaction to victimization is also influential, according to some writers. "Victims who readily accept their own culpability, or who believe they have learned effective ways of avoiding further victimisation, or who believe they pursue a higher loyalty, like protecting a friend, will probably experience less fear than those unable to neutralise their experiences." (Box et al 1988: 342) In other words, the meaning that the victim attributes to the crime is important.

Finally, Smith and Hill's recent work points out that problems with common measures of both fear and victimization may impede any understanding of the relationship between these variables:

Fear of crime is typically measured as a dichotomous variable and as such disallows measurement of the degree of fear. In assessing the effects of victimization experience, we encounter much the same limitation in the literature, where typically a simple count of the number of experiences with crime is measured and used as an index of the degree and seriousness of prior victimization. But it is quite reasonable to suppose that one rape will result in more fear than will several thefts from the yard. (Smith and Hill 1991: 221)

They suggest that measures of the frequency of victimization should be weighted by the seriousness of the crime in order to more accurately capture the experience of victimization.

*Predictors of Fear: Media Exposure*

The media's effect on the fear of crime has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Twenty years ago, Gerbner and his colleagues (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner et al. 1977) estimated that television depicts the world as more violent than it actually is. More recent research, such as the National Television Violence Study (1994–5) confirm that television continues to show an extraordinary amount of violence. Both print news and television news tend to focus on the most sensational and violent crimes (Gordon and Heath 1981; Heath et al. 1981).

It seems plausible that viewing enactments of violence in entertainment media, or hearing reports of violence in the news media, would increase the fear of crime by increasing viewers' perceptions of crime prevalence. As Gordon and Riger argue with respect to rape,

Most people do not know—or do not know they know—a rape victim. Most people do not even know someone who has been the victim of any serious personal assault. Therefore, given the dearth of firsthand information most people have about violent crime, the media play a vital role in creating for the public the vicarious reality about criminal victimization, and about the capacity (or incapacity) of American society's institutions to deal with it. (1989: 67)

Research results are mixed, however. Some studies have found that exposure to the mass media increases the fear of crime (Baumer 1979; Gerbner and Gross 1975; Sparks and Ogles 1990), and that, in particular, sensationalized news accounts increase fear (Baker et al. 1983; Garofalo 1981; Heath 1984; Liska and Baccaglini 1990). However, these findings have been challenged by other research. For example, Gomme (1986) found no relationship between exposure to the news media and fear after controlling for demographic variables. Donnelly argues that media exposure may be only weakly related to fear because “people tend to view crime that is reported in the media as something that is “out there” which does not affect them personally. This is because most media accounts of crime are about offenses committed outside of one's neighborhood and immediate area.” (1988: 70) Indeed, recent studies have found that

the relationship between media exposure to violence and fear of crime is mediated by a number of factors. For example, Williams and Dickinson (1993) found that for newspaper reports of violence, the type of crime reported, its placement in the newspaper, and the relationship between the reader's neighborhood and the area in which the crime was committed all mediated the relationship between media exposure and fear. Gordon and Heath (1981; Heath 1984) found that reports of local, sensational, and seemingly random crimes had stronger effects than nonlocal or nonrandom crimes. Heath (1996) reports that the more methodologically sophisticated studies, using multiple measures and methods, have tended to find stronger relationships between media consumption and fear.

Most research to date has assumed a unidirectional causal relationship from media exposure to fear. Some researchers (e.g., Bryant, Carveth, and Borwn 1981; Wakshlag et al. 1983; Zillman and Wakshlag 1985), however, have begun to question this assumption, asking whether people with high levels of fear might in fact "seek out crime drama as some sort of coping, calming, or information mechanism." (Heath 1996: 380) Preliminary research on this question has produced mixed results; however, it remains an intriguing possibility.

### *Predictors of Fear: Environmental Factors*

#### City Characteristics

A variety of environmental factors have also been found to influence the fear of crime. For example, population size is directly related to fear; residents of large cities are more afraid than those who live in smaller cities or rural areas (Baumer 1978; Clemente and Kleiman 1977; Ficher 1981; Gallup and Associates 1983; Hill et al. 1985; Lawton and Yaffe 1980; Lebowitz 1975; Stinchcombe et al. 1977). A city's crime rate is also related to fear, but in a complicated way. Janson and Ryder (1983) and Lawton and Yaffe (1980) both reported a significant positive relationship between "official" risk and the fear of crime, and Ferraro (1995) found that perceived risk is higher in

communities with higher official crime rates. Other studies, however, do not show such an effect when other factors are controlled (e.g., Miethe and Lee 1984; Taylor and Hale 1986). Lewis and Maxfield's (1980) study of four Chicago neighborhoods found that "residents in an area with a lower overall crime rate, and particularly a lower violent crime rate, expressed more concern that crime was a major problem and more fear of crime than residents of more crime-ridden areas." (Donnelly 1988: 70-1)

### Incivilities

Another environmental factor that has received considerable attention is "incivilities," which Donnelly defines as "disorder, disorderly people and distasteful, worrisome, though not unlawful, encounters." (1988: 71). Similarly, La Grange and his colleagues define incivilities as "low-level breaches of community standards that signal an erosion of conventionally accepted norms and values. Included in this definition are (a) disorderly physical surroundings (e.g., trash, litter, unkept lots, condemned houses, burned-out storefronts, graffiti, abandoned cars) and (b) disruptive social behaviors (e.g., drinking, rowdy youth, loiterers, beggars, inconsiderate neighbors)." (LaGrange et al. 1992) These incivilities serve as cues that the crime rate in a particular area may be high.

Nearly every study of incivilities has found that they have a significant and positive relationship to the fear of crime (e.g., Box et al. 1988; Covington and Taylor 1991; Gates and Rohe 1987; Lewis and Maxfield 1980; Lewis and Salem 1986; Maxfield 1984, 1987; Pate et al. 1986; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Taylor and Hale 1986; Taylor et al. 1985). Moreover, Ferraro (1995) found that neighborhood incivility is the variable with the strongest effect on the perceived likelihood of crime. Both Skogan and Maxfield (1981) and Lewis and Maxfield (1980) suggest that incivilities may be as important as the actual rate of crime in determining the rate of fear in a neighborhood or city. Taylor and Hale (1986) argue that "incivilities are fear-inspiring not only because they indicate a lack of concern for public order, but also because their

continued presence points up the inability of officials to cope with these problems.” (1992: 154)

Some researchers have attempted to delve deeper into the relationship between these incivilities and the fear of crime. Which have a greater effect on fear: physical or social incivilities? What are the processes by which incivilities affect fear? Do they affect fear of property crime, of personal crime, or both? Rohe and Burby (1988), for example, found that both types of incivilities are correlated with the fear of crime, but that social incivilities are more predictive of fear. LaGrange et al. (1992), on the other hand, found that both physical and social incivilities affect the fear of crime equally. However, they also found that incivilities predict fear of property crime better than fear of personal crime, and predict perceived risk better than fear. Moreover, “although social and physical incivilities play a role in generating feelings of fear, the role is modest and almost entirely mediated through perceptions of risk.” (1992: 327) Finally, Covington and Taylor (1991) found that perceptions of incivility are more influential than their objective reality: they found that both objective incivility (measured by trained observers) and perceived incivility were correlated with fear, but that perceived incivility was three times more predictive of fear than objective incivility.

#### Other Neighborhood Variables

A cluster of other variables, all related to perceptions of one’s neighborhood or community, has also been found to predict fear. For example, Fischer (1982) found a strong relationship between distrust of one’s neighbors and the fear of crime. Both Lewis and Salem (1987) and Merry (1981) found that the “ability to recognize strangers and to know teenagers in the neighborhood” was associated with lower levels of fear. Skogan and Maxfield (1981) and Riger et al. (1981) found that residential ties (such as the length of residence in the neighborhood and homeownership) were strongly and negatively related to fear. Similarly, Kennedy and Silverman (1985a, b; Silverman and Kennedy 1985) found that a sense of “neighborhood cohesion and community”

was associated with lower fear. Donnelly argues that all of these factors are related to “a community’s sense of control over its own fate” (1988: 71); both Lewis and Salem (1987) and Wilson (1985) agree that this factor is important in predicting levels of fear among community residents.

Thus a variety of factors, including individuals’ social statuses, experiences, or characteristics, their media exposure, and the features of the environments in which they live and travel, have been found to affect fear of crime. I now turn to the question of how these studies have defined and measured fear and related concepts.

### **Defining Fear, Risk, and the Ability to Defend Oneself**

#### *Fear*

The literature on the fear of crime is extensive. However, much of this work is notable for its loose and unfocused use of this concept. According to Warr, “the phrase ‘fear of crime’ has acquired so many divergent meanings that it is in danger of losing any specificity whatsoever.” (1984: 681) According to Stanko, fear of crime is generally “taken to represent individuals’ diffuse sense of danger about being physically harmed by criminal violence” (1993: 156), and this definition fits the general conceptualization of fear as a sense of anxiety about victimization.

In empirical studies, the most frequently-used indicator of fear has been an item from the General Social Science (GSS) survey: “Is there any area right around here—that is, within a mile or so—where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?” Possible responses are limited to “yes,” “no,” and “don’t know.” (Davis and Smith 1993). Two other common measures are drawn from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS): “How safe do you feel or would you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night (during the day?)” (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1994). Despite their frequent use, these indicators suffer from a number of problems.

First, the questions have been criticized as conceptually ambiguous (Lee 1982; Taylor and Hale 1986; Smith and Hill 1991). A number of writers (e.g., LaGrange et al.

1992; Ferraro 1995) have noted that the questions confuse feelings of fear with perceptions of risk. Whereas risk is a cognitive judgment, fear is an emotional reaction to that judgment. For example, a judgment of risk might involve recognizing that one's likelihood of being victimized is high; this recognition could occur without an emotional reaction of fear. According to Ferraro, only the "emotional reaction of dread or anxiety to crime or symbols that a person associates with crime" (1995: 23) is properly labeled 'fear.' Studies that use the GSS and NCVS measures are therefore examining respondents' perceptions of their likelihood of victimization, rather than (or as well as) their feelings of fear.

Another problem with the GSS and NCVS measures is that they may not tap actual experiences in individuals' lives. Both measures ask respondents to imagine their reactions to being outside in their neighborhoods, alone, after dark. However, as Jeffords notes, "the vast majority of most people's time is undoubtedly not spent out alone in one's neighborhood," especially after dark (1983: 104). This is probably especially true for women and the elderly, who often limit their outside activities after dark. Thus these questions measure "imagined fear" about an atypical situation, not actual fear about everyday occurrences (Ferraro 1995). Asking respondents to assess their fear in situations they do not themselves experience could elicit stereotypes about others' presumed behavior in such situations, rather than experience-based judgments of their own behavior. Moreover, these measures ignore fear experienced in ordinary places (at home, at work), at ordinary times (during the day), and of ordinary people (parents, intimate partners, or acquaintances), and mirror cultural myths about violence—that it is perpetrated outside one's home, after dark, and by strangers. Given that a majority of violence against women, in particular, is committed by people known to the victim and in places they frequent, this is a serious gap.

Finally, measuring fear as a dichotomous variable (as, for example, the GSS does) means that the degree and sources of fear are not explored (Smith and Hill 1991). Using this type of question, an individual who is occasionally worried about being

pickpocketed or mugged in a particular area of the neighborhood will receive the same ranking as an individual who has a perpetual and immobilizing fear of leaving home because of the threat of rape or death.

Designing better measures of fear, then, entails several improvements upon previous research. First, it is important to distinguish between cognitive judgments (such as perceived risk or the perceived ability to defend oneself, both discussed at greater length below) and the emotional reaction of fear. Multiple questions intended to tap these various dimensions should be more effective than a single, conceptually ambiguous question. Second, questions should be specific and should ask about everyday situations actually experienced by the respondent, rather than about general or hypothetical experiences. While respondents' everyday situations vary considerably, even a rough specification of types of situations—e.g., distinguishing between home, work or school, and public space, or between day and night—would represent a significant improvement over past research. Finally, fear should be measured on a continuous scale, not as a dichotomous variable, and should be explored qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Only measures that address these concerns can capture the cognitions and emotions that have been subsumed under the label “fear of crime.” Below I describe how fear was measured in this study. First, however, I discuss the related concepts of risk and the ability to defend oneself in more detail.

### *Perceptions of Risk*

If fear and risk have been conflated, then it is important to understand precisely what is meant by risk. Ferraro defines risk as “exposure to the chance of loss or injury.” (1995: 11) The objective risk of victimization—an individual’s actual chance of experiencing violence—can be imperfectly estimated by official crime statistics. Many crimes are not reported, and so the number of crimes known to law enforcement authorities is only a subset of all crime. However, reported crimes generally are correlated with the crime rates found by victimization surveys, which measure

unreported as well as reported crime (Ferraro 1995: 38–9). Thus it is possible to use official crime rates as a proxy for the objective risk of crime.<sup>2</sup>

Perceptions of risk are more important for this study than the objective risk of crime, however.<sup>3</sup> Perceived risk is based not simply on the individual's actual likelihood of victimization, but also on the individual's beliefs about this likelihood. As Ferraro notes, "one can never be sure of the risks of victimization; one can only gather the relevant information and make a judgment about victimization risk." (1995: 11) Thus an individual might have a low objective risk of crime, yet perceive her or his risk to be high. In general, however, perceived and actual risk are positively correlated (Ferraro 1995; Warr 1980, 1982; Lewis and Salem 1986). As discussed above, Ferraro criticizes most previous research for failing to distinguish between fear of crime and perceived risk of crime.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Perceptions of the Ability to Defend Oneself*

Another concept related to fear is the perceived ability to defend oneself from attack. Whereas the concept of risk emphasizes the dangers of the environment surrounding the individual, the concept of defensive ability emphasizes the individual's own strengths and weaknesses. Thus two people in the same situation might have an equal risk of being attacked, but vastly different abilities to protect

<sup>2</sup>Note, however, that crimes may be differentially reported on victimization surveys as well as to the police. For example, it is well-known that rape is more underreported than other violent crimes (Kilpatrick et al. 1987). As a result, both the rates of crime reported to the police and on victimization surveys are likely to be biased. However, better measures are very difficult to obtain.

<sup>3</sup>Ferraro argues that perceived risk is the most important variable affecting fear of crime. He writes that "to produce a fear reaction in humans, a recognition of a situation as possessing at least potential danger, real or imagined, is necessary." (1995: 4) In other words, recognizing risk is a necessary prerequisite for feeling fear. However, it is difficult to assess the direction of the fear-risk relationship using only survey data. It could be argued that the emotion of fear in fact precedes the cognitive judgement of risk. Schacter and Singer's two-factor theory of emotion (1962), for example, posits that individuals experience emotional arousal and then search for a cognitive interpretation of their feelings. The exact nature of the relationship between risk and fear, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>4</sup>The few studies that have distinguished between risk and fear include Giles-Sims (1984), LaGrange and Ferraro (1989), Miethe and Lee (1984), and Warr and Stafford (1983).

themselves from attack. Although few studies on fear of crime have focused on this kind of ability, those that have suggest that it may be an important determinant of fear (e.g., Gordon and Riger 1989; McDaniel 1993).

The ability to defend oneself, like risk, is both objective and subjective: while some people are objectively less able to defend themselves than others (for example, as the result of injury, disability, or physical weakness), individuals' perceptions of their abilities may be more important for determining their feelings of vulnerability. For example, one may judge one's risk of violence to be high but feel relatively invulnerable because of confidence in one's ability to defend oneself, due to one's status characteristics (e.g., being male, young, or white) or resources (e.g., being strong, possessing a weapon, or being protected by others). Alternatively, one may feel relatively unable to defend oneself (e.g., one may be weak or disabled), yet feel safe in a particular environment (at home with the doors locked or near a police officer). Thus like perceived risk, the perceived ability to defend oneself is a cognitive judgment.

Actual and perceived defensive ability are often impossible to distinguish, because they mutually influence each other. For example, women are widely believed to be unable to defend themselves from violence. This perceived inability is often attributed to biology: women are believed to be much weaker and less physically capable than men. However, while these gender differences may exist, they may be as much a consequence as a cause of these beliefs. In other words, the belief that women cannot defend themselves may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The general perception that women lack strength and ability, for example, may lead an individual woman to believe that she would be unable to defend herself in the event of an assault. This belief may keep her from attempting to do so if attacked—thus fulfilling the original expectations. Men, on the other hand, may develop self-defensive skills precisely because they believe they can defend themselves. These patterns exaggerate any existing differences in strength, and may create the perception of large gender differences in ability in the objective absence of any significant differences in underlying ability.

### Measurement of Fear, Risk, and Ability to Defend Oneself

Above, I discussed feelings of fear, perceptions of risk, and perceptions of one's ability to defend oneself. Note again that risk and ability refer to individuals' cognitive judgments about their probable victimization or capabilities, respectively, whereas fear refers to individuals' feelings about those judgments, as shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1  
Dimensions of Danger and Safety

Judgments		Emotions
Perceived Risk	Perceived Ability to Defend Oneself	Fear

Note also that I am concerned only with *perceptions* of risk and ability. Individuals do have an objective risk of victimization, and they do possess greater or lesser objective abilities to defend themselves. However, in this project I am primarily concerned with their subjective judgments of these factors, because I believe that these perceptions are often more important than actual risk and ability in determining individuals' levels of fear, precautionary measures, experiences of violence, and responses to victimization.

Each of these three dimensions can be conceptualized as a continuum, with one pole designating perceptions related to danger (high fear, high risk, and lack of ability) and the other designating perceptions related to safety (security, low risk, and high ability), as shown in Figure 3-1.

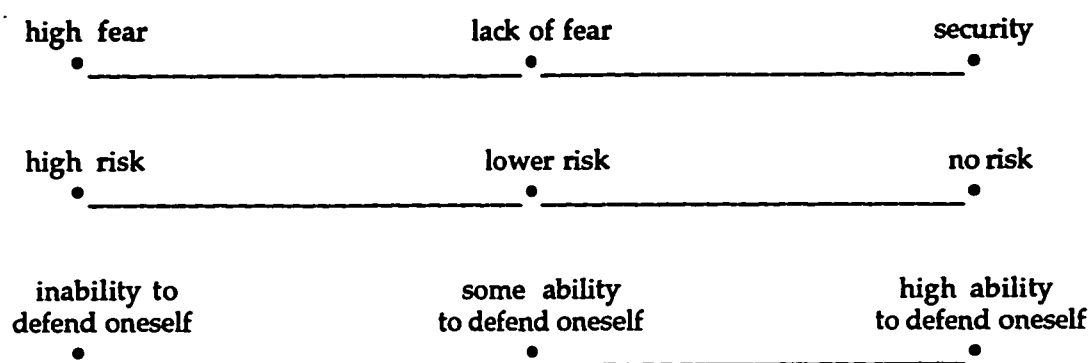


Figure 3-1  
Continuua of Fear, Risk, and Ability

I argue that it is equally important to examine feelings of safety as it is to analyze perceptions of danger. Researchers have rarely studied safety, perhaps because feelings of danger are more salient. However, I argue that the absence of danger is not the same as the experience of safety. For example, one can easily imagine situations in which one might not feel fearful, but still would not feel actively safe. When I am working in my office late at night, for example, I usually do not feel fearful. Nonetheless, I also usually do not feel secure. I tend to close the shades so passers-by cannot see that I am working alone in a deserted building, and I am wary when walking from one room to another through the public hallways. Yet I do not feel actively afraid as I do in some other situations. Thus simply because an individual reports a lack of fear does not mean that she or he feels secure. In other words, the absence of fear is only a midpoint on a continuum whose ends are high fear and an active feeling of security.

A similar argument can be made for the other two dimensions of ability and risk. Therefore, I explore both ends of each continuum throughout this project.

Finally, I am also not concerned in this project with two other dimensions that other researchers have discussed. I do not explore individuals' concern about crime, in other words, their belief that crime is a serious social problem (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987, 1988; Ferraro 1995). Second, I do not focus on individuals' abilities to cope with the physical and social aftermath of an assault, which Donnelley (1988) terms "social

vulnerability.” Neither of these factors is directly related to my principal concern, which is individuals’ experiences of and reactions to the possibility of violence in their own lives.

The survey questions used in this study were designed to measure the dimensions of fear, risk, and ability defined above. Table 3–2 shows how the survey questions map onto these dimensions.<sup>5</sup> As this table makes clear, the survey taps all three of these dimensions. All questions also allowed participants to respond on a continuous scale, not simply indicating the presence or absence of the judgment or emotion. Most questions asked about specific, everyday situations, rather than generalized or ambiguous situations. Respondents were also asked to describe any frightening situations not specifically referred to in the survey.

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<sup>5</sup>Note that this table is modeled after Table 3-1 in Ferraro (1995). However, Ferraro’s table deals only with what he calls “crime perceptions” and not with perceptions of safety. His table also includes both general (societal-level danger) and personal (danger to self) perceptions; I focus only on personal perceptions. Finally, his table includes questions from a range of other studies, whereas mine focuses on the current survey.

**Table 3-2**  
**Survey Questions Measuring Fear, Perceived Risk, and Perceived Ability**

Judgments		Emotions
Risk	Ability to Defend Oneself	Fear
<p>2. How safe do you feel when you are out alone in your neighborhood after dark?</p> <p>9. If you work outside the home, how safe do you generally feel when you are at work during working hours? After hours?</p> <p>10. If you attend school, how safe do you generally feel when you are at school during school hours? After hours?</p>	<p>12. Do you feel that your risk of being a victim of violence is <i>increased</i> because of any of the following personal characteristics? (sex, disability, age, etc.)</p> <p>13. Do you feel that your risk of being a victim of violence is <i>decreased</i> because of any of the following personal characteristics? (sex, disability, age, etc.)</p> <p>14. On a scale of 1-10, how effectively do you feel that you would be able to defend yourself against an attacker? To the extent that you feel you would be able to defend yourself, what would you do? To the extent that you feel you would not be able to defend yourself, what factors do you think would prevent you from doing so?</p>	<p>1. Is fear for your own safety something you think about... (All or most of the time/ Fairly often/ Seldom/ Never)</p> <p>3. On a scale of 0-10, please rate how worried or uneasy you feel in the following situations after dark. (At home alone, at home with others, etc.)</p> <p>5. If you live with other people, do you worry about their safety?</p> <p>6a, b. Do you ever fear that someone you live with might hurt you? If, so, how often?</p> <p>7. Have you ever been afraid that a spouse/ lover/ partner could physically hurt a child in anger?</p> <p>8. Have you ever been afraid of... (spouse or partner, stranger, boss, etc.)?</p>

In addition to these survey questions, the focus group discussion also tapped these three dimensions, and allowed respondents to present richer and more nuanced descriptions of their perceptions and feelings than they had in the survey. In responding to the first focus group question, "How does violence affect your life, or the lives of your friends and family?" many respondents discussed their feelings of fear and perceptions of risk, both for themselves and for others. The subsequent questions, "In what situations do you feel most safe?" and "In what situations do you feel most vulnerable?" allowed respondents to provide detailed descriptions of the

circumstances (places, people, times, and behaviors) that provoked feelings and perceptions related to fear and vulnerability. In addition, the focus group discussions facilitated the analysis of how people understand the relationships among the three dimensions. Thus both the survey data and the focus group data enriched each other, providing more information than either could capture alone.

### Summary

I opened this chapter by summarizing the various factors that have been shown to affect the fear of crime and violence. These included individual and group characteristics (especially gender), exposure to media violence, and environmental factors such as population size and incivilities. I then turned to conceptual issues. In much past research, fear has been fuzzily defined. However, there is a new trend toward distinguishing between feelings of fear and perceptions of risk. I suggest that in addition to this distinction, a third dimension is necessary to capture individuals' experiences in this domain: the perceived ability to defend oneself from victimization. I also argued that it is critical to analyze safety as well as danger, and that it is important to examine these perceptions in a range of mundane situations, including home, and work or school as well as situations that fit stereotypes about danger, such as after dark on the street. I concluded by discussing the measurement of fear, risk, and ability in this study.

I turn now to the findings of this study. In Chapter 4, I discuss the distribution of fear, perceived risk, and perceived ability among the participants; in Chapter 5, I turn to one of the consequences of fear and risk: danger management strategies.

## Chapter 4

### The Social Organization of Fear, Risk, and Ability

In Chapter 3, I discussed conceptualizations of fear, risk, and ability, and summarized the findings of other research. In this chapter, I turn to the findings of this study and address the question of the social organization of fear, risk, and ability. More specifically, who is afraid? In what contexts do different people feel more or less safe? And who feels more or less able to protect themselves from danger? Here I discuss each of these dimensions in turn. I begin by examining fear: reports of the participants' overall frequency of fear, fear in particular situations, fear of other people, and fear for others. I then turn to perceptions of risk, which I also examine in a number of social contexts. Finally, I turn to defensive ability, and look at participants' self-ratings of ability, their projections of what they would do if attacked, and their assessments of what factors would keep them from defending themselves effectively. In Chapter 5, I turn to a discussion of findings about the consequences of fear, with particular attention to the safety strategies used to prevent violence. These chapters together set the stage for the broader argument I make in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, that discourse about violence contributes to gender differences in the fear of violence by constructing differences in their perceived risk of victimization and ability to defend themselves against attack. However, it is necessary to establish that such differences exist before examining how they are constructed; establishing this baseline is the role of this chapter.

Before beginning, one observation is in order. As I discussed in Chapter 3, recent literature on fear of crime makes a theoretical distinction between the emotion of fear and the cognitive judgement of risk. The survey mirrored this distinction, asking some questions related to fear and some more closely tied to risk. When coding the focus

group transcripts, however, it became clear that these dimensions are not so easily distinguished in everyday talk. For example, one woman said, "I feel completely safe at home with my fiancé...I've never felt threatened or unsafe. I have when I've been alone at home, but never when he's there." (*Lori, Group 1*) Is this comment about risk or fear? She is clearly communicating that she feels endangered in this situation, but it is not obvious whether her sense of unease stems from her perception that there is a greater risk of harm when alone, or from her feelings of fear at being alone, or both. This ambiguity in her (and many other participants') talk also brings up the question of whether the participants themselves distinguish between these dimensions in their speech—or even if they do so conceptually. Social psychological research on emotion and cognition (see Smith-Lovin 1995 for a review) suggests that these dimensions are not in fact separable: cognitions may activate emotions, but emotions may also trigger particular cognitions. Because the emotion-cognition distinction was rarely obvious in the focus groups, it proved impossible to reliably distinguish between these dimensions when coding the focus group transcripts. Therefore, the codes for fear and risk were eventually combined into a single code, "danger."

This unexpected disjunction between the research literature and the focus group data suggests that those scholars who insist on differentiating between risk and fear may be imposing a forced distinction on their research respondents that does not naturally occur in talk or even in thought. Further research is needed to explore these concepts and their meaning to individuals: are they really distinct, or are questions about risk and fear actually multiple measures of a single underlying dimension? This question is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however. In the discussion of the focus group data, then, I use the term "fear" to refer to statements clearly about emotion, the term "risk" to refer to statements clearly about perceptions of the likelihood of victimization, and the term "vulnerability" to refer to the general domain

of unsafety, including those statements that are not easily categorizable as fear or risk.

### **The Social Distribution of Fear**

#### *Who is Afraid?*

As discussed in Chapter 3, “fear” refers to feelings of anxiety or terror about being victimized. The first question on the survey<sup>1</sup> asked how often respondents think about fear for their safety; possible responses were “all or most of the time,” “fairly often,” “seldom,” and “never.” The responses of the focus group participants, by various social categories, are shown in Table 4–1:

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<sup>1</sup>See the full text of the survey in Appendix A.

Table 4-1  
Mean Reported Frequency of Fear

Social Category	Men			Women		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
<i>Gender</i>	2.67	.55	30	2.55	.78	40
<i>Race</i>						
Whites	2.72	.46	25	2.67	.78	27
People of color	2.40	.89	5	2.31	.75	13
<i>Age</i>						
18-24	3.00	.00	6	2.40	.70	10
25-34	2.80	.42	10	2.29	.76	7
35-44	2.25	.50	4	2.64	.67	11
45-64	2.83	.41	6	3.20	.84	5
65+	2.00	.82	4	2.43	.98	7
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>						
Gay/Lesbian	2.60	.55	5	2.88	.64	8
Heterosexual	2.78	.42	23	2.54	.69	27
<i>Live Alone or with Others</i>						
Alone	2.53	.64	15	2.69	.87	16
With Others	2.80	.41	15	2.46	.72	24
<i>Education</i>						
High school or less	2.67	.82	6	2.17	.98	6
Some college	2.67	.50	9	2.62	.80	21
College graduate	2.60	.52	10	2.60	.55	5
Post-grad degree	2.80	.45	5	2.63	.74	8
<i>Income</i>						
< \$10,000	2.56	.53	9	2.86	1.07	7
\$10,000-25,000	2.33	1.15	3	2.33	.49	12
\$25,000-75,000	2.67	.52	6	2.38	.92	8
\$75,000+	2.67	.52	6	2.67	.52	6

Note: 1="all or most of the time," 2="fairly often," 3="seldom," 4="never"

Interestingly, there were few statistically significant differences between social categories in terms of fear. However, nearly all the differences that approached significance occurred among groups of men. For example, men of color reported more frequent fear than white men ( $\chi^2=5.19$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.07$ ), and older men reported more fear than younger men ( $\chi^2=17.06$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p=.07$ ). The relationship between education and fear approached significance for both women and men; in both cases, more

education was associated with less fear (for men:  $\chi^2=17.96$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p=.11$ ; for women,  $\chi^2=29.78$ ,  $df=21$ ,  $p=.10$ ).

As the table shows, the difference between women and men's mean reports of fear was quite small, and not statistically significant.<sup>2</sup> The lack of statistical significance was due at least in part to the small size of the total sample. However, the distribution of men's and women's responses across the four response categories was quite different, and tended toward significance ( $\chi^2=6.80$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.08$ ), as shown in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2  
Percent Distribution of Responses to Fear Question, by Gender

Reported Frequency of Fear	Men (N=30)	Women (N=40)
1: All or most of the time	3.3%	7.5%
2: Fairly often	26.7	40.0
3: Seldom	70.0	42.5
4: Never	0.0	10.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Specifically, 47.5% of the women said they feared for their safety "fairly often" or "all or most of the time,"<sup>3</sup> compared with only 30% of the men. In contrast, 70% of men, but only 42.5% of women said they "seldom" experienced fear. In other words, men seem to worry less about their safety than women do. Interestingly, however, the only four people to say they "never" experience fear were women.

Although the mean responses of women and men to the survey questions were only slightly different, their comments during the focus group discussions were strikingly

<sup>2</sup>One-tailed tests were used when gender differences were examined because the direction of the effect was predicted in advance: I hypothesized that women would feel more fearful and less safe than men. Unless indicated otherwise, all other tests of significance in this report are two-tailed.

<sup>3</sup>This proportion is somewhat higher than that reported in Gordon and Riger (1989). In their study, 40% of the women responded "fairly often" or "all or most of the time" to this question.

different. First, they differed in the quantity of references to fear: in the thirteen discussions, women made 129 comments that directly indicated they felt fearful, while men made only 43. Moreover, men and women made different kinds of comments. In Table 4-3, I show the frequencies, by gender, of three types of statements of fear.

Table 4-3  
Frequency of Different Types of Fear Statements, by Gender

Type of Statement	Percent of Total Statement (Number of Statements)	
	Women	Men
Minimizing	24% (31)	42% (18)
Unmodified	48% (62)	40% (17)
Maximizing	28% (36)	19% (8)
Total	100% (129)	100% (43)

The first type of statement expresses fear, but minimizes it, making it seem trivial or unimportant. This can be accomplished in four ways: by using minimizing modifiers (e.g., "little" or "kinda"), by using words that imply a small degree of fear (e.g., "concern" or "leery" or "uneasy" rather than "fear"), by combining a word indicating safety with a negative (e.g., "not safe" or "not relaxed"), or by making the situation described seem unique (e.g., "the only place I've ever felt scared..."). Overall, 42% of the men's comments were of this type, as compared with 24% of the women's. For example:

*Jerry:* I've done a fair amount of walking in San Francisco, and the only place I've ever felt scared was when I walked down a block where there was open drug dealing going on. I wanted to get through that block pretty quick. [laughs] (Group 3)

*Sean:* But my neighborhood's pretty calm. There was once, down the street there was a rapist I guess going around, you know, just some

rapist in our, in the Lynnwood area right around out houses, just raping women at random. And one woman about three houses away just went out to start her car in the morning, you know, start her car and go back in and get her stuff or whatever and come back when the car had warmed up and go to work, well, she left the car unlocked, of course, and when she got back the rapist was I guess laying down in the back seat and so she got in and she got pretty badly raped, and beaten up, so. So that was kinda scary for a while there. (Group 7)

The second type of statement is unmodified. These are direct statements of fear: "I feel scared," "That frightens me," "That's a scary situation," or "I was afraid."

Approximately 48% of the women's statements, and 40% of the men's, were of this type. For example:

*Jill:* Well, I drive everywhere, so that's the place that probably I feel the most vulnerable, especially when you're driving somewhere you've never driven before. That's scares me, because I'm just always afraid I'll get lost, and I won't get out of my car because that scares me, too. And I don't have a cell phone. (Group 12)

*Marcia:* I didn't really know her, but just the fact that it was by where I live and by where I catch the bus was what scared me. (Group 12)

Finally, the third type of statement emphasizes the fearfulness of the speaker. This too is done in four ways: by using maximizing modifiers ("really," "so," "pretty," "incredibly," "totally"), by using extreme fear words ("terrified," "panicked," "freaked out"), by using profanity ("shit scared"), or by using metaphor ("just frightened me to death"). Thirty-five of the women's statements, or 28%, were of this type, as compared with eight (19%) of the men's. For example:

*Katrina:* I remember one time I was babysitting at a house and they had surround-sound but I didn't realize it, but their stereo was screwed up so it came after the actual—like, from the TV, the sounds would come after, so it didn't match with the TV at all, so I'd just hear all these noises of people talking and I didn't even realize it until I was just totally, totally scared. I just thought I was going to die. (Group 12)

*Jack:* ...It's the way I felt. It really was a hazard I felt shit scared, I should not walk close to those people at all... (Group 4)

*Karen:* I've been so scared that I've not been able to talk and I felt like my hair was turning colors. (Group 5)

*Tina: ...And then I was also in the proximity of two rapes, and, those were incredibly, incredibly scary. And fortunately I was not the victim, but I felt just frozen in fear. (Group 5)*

Thus, men tend to minimize their fear in conversation more than women do, while women tend to maximize their fear more than men. This suggests an alternate explanation for men's and women's responses to the survey questions on fear: rather than actually being less afraid, men may simply be more likely to minimize their fears when talking to others. Similarly, rather than being more fearful, women may simply be more willing than men to express their fears because fear is more consistent with femininity than with masculinity. Indeed, research on emotions has found that women tend to be more emotionally expressive than men (Stapley and Havilan 1989; Saurer and Eisler 1990) and that these differences develop in childhood as children learn societal expectations for gender and emotion (Eisenberg et al. 1989). This possibility is discussed at greater length in subsequent chapters.

### *The Social Context of Fear*

For most people, fear is not a constant emotion. Rather, it varies across different social contexts: different physical locations, different times of day, different activities, and different social interactions. Both the survey responses and the focus group discussions showed these distinctions clearly.

One of the most frequent distinctions made by the participants was between day and night.<sup>4</sup> Many participants said that their fear of violence was particularly

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<sup>4</sup>It is not always clear how participants distinguish between day and night, although the most salient feature of night seemed to be darkness. In general, the terms "at night" and "after dark" were used interchangeably by participants. One participant, however, did point out an ambiguity in the survey in this regard: "Well, I was going to say one thing about a lot of that questionnaire and all that, they used night and day?...I don't go out at night, that's because I'm not afraid of going out or that sort of stuff...But I go out in the morning, if I want to have a few beers. And half the time when I go out, it's dark out in the morning when I go out. So when you say it that way, you think I don't go out because it's dark, but I go out in the morning to socialize, and it's dark then, too." (Henry, Group 6)

pronounced after dark:

*Mae:* I would never go out in the dark.

*Tony:* Well, see, then it has affected you. You're scared a lot after dark.

*Mae:* It has affected me, uh huh. (Group 10)

*Frances:* [responding to a question about whether she consciously tries to park in lighted areas after dark] You know, I usually do park where it's lighted and that sort of thing, so it never really occurred to me that other people didn't, because I would think, "Well, who would park in the dark somewhere and walk?" I mean I guess people do, but it didn't occur to me because I never—I think I would drive around for ten minutes looking for a lighted spot before I would get out and walk somewhere. If I did have to, I would be shaking in my boots the whole time trying to get there. (Group 11)

*Anna:* And then, the other weekend me and my friend drove down to Oregon and we went to her grandfather's house before we came back up here, and it was like 9:00 at night, and he was like, "Well, you guys can't leave, it's dark now, you have to stay the night." (Group 12)

Even daylight was not always seen as a safe time:

*Jane:* Yes, even daylight I'm careful. (Group 10)

*Lisa:* I was walking to work one day, and it was a very quiet neighborhood, seemed very peaceful, and birds in the sky, not too many cars, very sunny, it was spring or something like that. And...I noticed that a fellow started walking behind me. And mind you, this is something like 7:30 in the morning, and no one around, and...Well, he flashed me, and I didn't have to yell, or he didn't grab me or shove me or anything like that, I just said no really firmly and crossed the street, that was the end of it, he turned and walked the other direction. And I realized afterwards when I thought about it, my word, [laughs] I just got a chance to gather my thoughts about that, and you know, it just kind of made me aware that this is a town, I mean this is a big city of how many hundred thousand people, and even if you think the surroundings are quiet and peaceful, don't let yourself get too complacent, because, there's danger lurking around any corner. And, as a result of it, I never walked, I don't think I ever walked to work again, and maybe a year after that I ended up moving. (Group 3)

However, comments about the perceived danger of night far outnumbered those about day: over 90% of the comments that mentioned time of day talked about night or darkness.

### *Fear and Risk After Dark*

Because darkness is such a strong marker of danger, a number of questions on the survey asked specifically about fear or risk after dark. Question 3 asked participants to rate "how worried or uneasy" they feel in sixteen different situations, all after dark. Factor analysis with varimax rotation demonstrated that there were three underlying factors that explained 70.6% of the total variance. The factors and the survey questions they are based on are reported in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4  
Factors Underlying the Fear Scales

Factor	On a scale of 0-10, please rate how worried or uneasy you feel in the following situations <i>after dark</i> ...	Item Means	Eigenvalue	$\alpha$
1 Fear Away from Home, Near Other People	Accepting rides from men you don't know after dark?	8.89	8.18	.90
	Accepting rides from women you don't know after dark?	7.60		
	Going to movies, plays, or other entertainment alone after dark?	4.75		
	Going to social bars or clubs alone after dark?	5.36		
	Giving rides to male strangers after dark?	8.59		
	Giving rides to female strangers after dark?	7.56		
	Going to laundromats or laundry rooms alone after dark?	5.93		
2 Fear Away from Home, Outside and Alone	Walking alone on the streets of your neighborhood after dark?	4.71	1.99	.87
	Using public transportation alone after dark?	5.50		
	Walking around downtown alone after dark?	7.04		
	Walking by vacant lots or parks anywhere in the city alone after dark?	6.97		
	Walking through parking lots or garages alone after dark?	7.06		
	Walking by groups of young men or boys alone after dark?	6.77		
	Walking by groups of young women or girls alone after dark?	4.93		
3 Fear at Home	At home alone after dark?	1.90	1.12	.75
	At home with others after dark?	0.80		

Note: Possible responses to each question ranged from 0 ("not uneasy at all") to 10 ("very uneasy").

Factor 1 focuses on activities that take place away from home in situations where

interaction with others is likely; Factor 2 focuses on walking alone outside and taking public transportation, and Factor 3 includes measures of fear when in one's home. The scores for the sixteen questions were averaged<sup>5</sup> to create the three new scales; each scale ranged from 0 ("not uneasy at all") to 10 ("very uneasy"). Mean scores on the three scales are shown in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5  
Mean Responses to the Fear Scales

Group	Fear at Home		Fear Away from Home, Near Others		Fear Away from Home, Outside Alone		N
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	1.48	1.89	6.86	2.46	6.15	2.58	69
Men	1.25	2.00	5.41	2.12	4.81	2.29	30
Women	1.42	1.76	7.84	2.17	7.11	2.30	39
Whites	1.27	1.64	6.54	2.55	5.94	2.68	52
People of color	2.11	2.34	7.82	1.94	6.76	2.20	17
Live Alone	1.03	2.28	6.70	2.73	6.57	3.03	30
Live with Others	1.82	1.47	6.97	2.27	5.82	2.16	39
18-24	1.69	1.66	6.94	2.54	5.81	2.54	16
25-34	1.94	1.48	6.35	2.42	5.71	2.73	17
35-44	1.13	1.06	7.13	1.81	5.80	1.70	15
45-64	1.40	3.06	5.90	3.28	6.20	3.43	10
65+	1.00	2.41	8.00	2.24	7.73	2.37	11
Lesbian or Gay	1.08	1.04	6.08	1.50	5.50	1.94	13
Heterosexual	1.45	1.87	6.88	2.66	6.08	2.70	51
< \$10,000	1.75	2.59	6.69	2.89	6.19	2.71	16
\$10,000-25,000	.80	1.37	8.00	2.20	7.73	2.37	15
\$25,000-75,000	1.64	1.55	6.71	2.52	5.50	2.59	14
\$75,000+	1.67	1.23	6.33	1.56	5.92	1.83	12
High school or less	1.50	2.50	7.00	2.59	7.00	2.92	12
Some college	1.76	2.20	7.34	2.54	6.45	2.37	29
College graduate	1.27	1.22	6.67	2.47	5.33	2.85	15
Post-grad degree	1.08	1.04	5.85	2.08	5.62	2.29	13

Note: 0="Not uneasy at all"; 10="Very uneasy"

<sup>5</sup>Scores on these questions were averaged rather than summed in order to account for the fact that some participants did not answer all the questions.

Overall, participants reported being far more afraid when away from home than they were within it. Interestingly, nearly all groups reported being more afraid when away from home in situations where interaction with others was likely (e.g., giving or accepting rides, going to bars, movies, or laundromats) than they did away from home but outside alone (e.g., walking alone in various situations or using public transportation). This difference was due to the very high levels of fear associated with accepting rides from or giving rides to strangers, whether male or female. All of these questions produced mean responses of at least 7.5, while the other questions in the scale of fear away from home but near other people resulted in mean responses of less than 6.0.

Women were significantly more afraid than men, both outside ( $t=-4.13$ ,  $df=67$ ,  $p<.000$ ) and inside ( $t=-4.67$ ,  $df=67$ ,  $p<.000$ ). However, this difference was not significant when participants were asked about being at home, where both women and men had very low levels of fear. Indeed, fear at home was consistently low across all social groups; no group had a mean fear level of 3 or more on the 11-point scale. There were also differences between the two items in the Fear at Home scale. Overall, participants' fear levels were higher at home when alone (mean=1.90) than when with others (mean=.80); 64% of participants reported feeling "not uneasy at all" when home with others, but only 36% felt that way about being home alone.

This difference between low levels of fear at home and high levels of fear outside is ironic given the fact that much violence, especially against women, occurs inside the victims' homes (Gordon and Riger 1989: 14). Interestingly, women who lived alone reported a *lower* mean fear level while at home (0.73) than those who lived with others (2.08); this difference was significant ( $t=-2.41$ ,  $df=37$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This was not true for men (means of 1.33 vs. 1.40). Since the respondents were not asked the sources of their fear, it is impossible to know why women who live with others feel less safe alone. The

difference might stem from a selection effect—in other words, those women who are more afraid to begin with may seek out living situations with others, while those who are less fearful may choose to live alone. Lower fear might also be an effect of living alone, if women who live alone develop a history of safety and as a result cease to associate solitude with danger. Or it might be an indication that women who live with others are fearful of those others; however, only one woman answered “yes” to a later question that asked whether the respondents feared those with whom they lived.

The differences between whites and people of color tended toward significance only for fear away from home but near others: people of color were more afraid in these situations ( $t = -1.90$ ,  $df = 67$ ,  $p = .06$ ). This category is distinguished by the possibility of interacting with strangers: when giving or accepting rides, going out for entertainment, going to bars or clubs, or going to laundromats. Although the mean scores for people of color were higher than those of whites on all the questions comprising this scale, the differences were most extreme for two items: going out for entertainment and going to laundry rooms alone. These differences were significant at the .05 and .01 levels, respectively. Thus for people of color, danger seems particularly salient when outside of one’s normal circle of interaction. This effect was not present for whites.

Age was negatively correlated with the scale of fear at home (Spearman  $r = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and approached significance for fear outside alone, but in the opposite direction (Spearman  $r = .20$ ,  $p = .10$ ). In other words, older people were more uneasy than younger people outside when away from their homes, but *less* uneasy than younger people inside their homes. (Note, however, that most of the older people (over age 65) in the sample were in a single focus group drawn from a subsidized apartment building for the elderly; this group was very vocal in their assessment that their

particular building was very safe.) Differences among income groups for fear outside and alone tended toward significance ( $F=2.34$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.08$ ); wealthier people tended to feel less uneasy than poorer people.

Several survey questions investigated the participants' fear of particular other people. For example, Question 6 asked respondents, "Do you ever fear that someone you live with might hurt you?" If they answered "yes," they were asked to specify which person. Only five participants answered "yes" to this question; of these, four were male. One respondent (*Lisa, Group 3*) specified that she was afraid of her husband, two (*Harold, Group 4*, and *Irving, Group 9*) said they were afraid of their wives, and two (*Timothy, Group 1*, and *Joe, Group 3*) said they feared other adults they lived with. Responses to this question were not significantly associated with reported fear while at home.

Another survey question asked whether the respondent had ever been afraid of various different people. The proportions of men and women answering "yes" to this question are shown in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6  
 Percentage of Men, Women, and Total Sample  
 Answering "Yes" to the Question "Have You Ever Been Afraid Of..."

Social Category	Percent Answering "Yes"		
	Men	Women	All Participants
Spouse or partner	16.7%	22.5%	20.0%
Father or stepfather	30.0	7.5	17.1
Mother or stepmother	20.5	12.5	15.7
Another relative	16.7	7.5	11.4
Coworker	20.0	12.5	15.7
Stranger	73.3	62.5	67.1
Adult son or daughter	3.3	0.0	1.4
Date	3.3	20.0	12.9
Sibling	6.7	7.5	7.1
Friend	13.3	10.0	11.4
Boss	13.3	7.5	10.0
Teacher	10.0	5.0	7.0
Acquaintance	20.0	20.0	20.0
Other	6.7	5.0	5.7
None	10.3	7.9	9.0

There were two significant gender differences in responses to these questions. Twenty percent of women, but only 3.3% of men, reported that they had been afraid of dates ( $\chi^2=4.25$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). For example, this 22-year-old woman said:

*Marcia:* Well, it's not always true that the person you're closest to is not going to be violent. I'm not with anyone now, but I dated someone in high school who was. He wasn't like completely physically abusive, but he was very verbally abusive to me, and whenever we'd get in fight like this I would be really scared. He would push me and do stuff like that, so I thought—you can be deceived when you fall in love with someone who's like that. You can really think you can change them or something, but you really can't. (Group 12)

Men, however, were more likely to report that they had been afraid of a father or stepfather (30% of men, but only 7.5% of women;  $\chi^2 =6.11$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The most vivid example of this in the focus groups came from a 35-year-old white man who reported he had been seriously abused by his father as a child:

*Frank: ...And like I said, my dad was a violent alcoholic, he liked beating people up. Grabbing people by the throat and haul them up against the wall and beat the hell out of them. I mean suspended and tortured above the ground. you know, or tying people up and leaving them for hours on end. Little caustic type crap, little torturous type things. He read a book one time that said the people, Asians had punished people by making them kneel on their bare legs on beds of rice. For hours. And the rice would get into the skin. Now my old man tried that once. It was really, really stupid because we kind of shuffled the knees for a while til the rice was out of the way and then just, you know—like he never figured out what was going on, it's like you're not too bright either. But his idea of a good time was stripping us all down and then walking among us with a stick and just every once in a while smack, you know? ...My first broken bone was my collarbone, my dad did that, I was four months old and crying for no reason. I wouldn't shut up so he tried to shut me up by hitting me. A four month old child! And at the hospital they found out why I was crying, I'd been stung by a bee. Kinda wonder why I was crying ...But anyway, one of the reasons why [I feel vulnerable in certain situations] is that a lot of the situations take me back to that, where I'm hiding in a corner trying to escape his wrath. (Group 6)*

Although the differences were not statistically significant, a higher proportion of men than women said they had been afraid of mothers, other relatives, coworkers, bosses, and teachers. In contrast, a higher proportion of women than men said they had been afraid of spouses or partners and acquaintances. Both women and men, however, said their most frequent fear was of strangers (73.3% of men and 62.5% of women).

### **Perceived Risk**

In addition to the questions about the emotional reaction of fear, the survey also asked about perceptions of risk (or judgements about one's chances of victimization) across a variety of situations. First, it replicated the National Crime Survey (NCS) measure, which is the most widely-used measure of risk. The NCS question asks, "How safe do you feel or would you feel out alone in your neighborhood during the night?" Possible responses are "very safe," "reasonably safe," "somewhat unsafe," and "very unsafe."<sup>6</sup> Following Ferraro and LaGrange (1992: S236), I omitted the

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<sup>6</sup>As discussed in Chapter 3, there are a number of problems with the NCS measure. For

phrase “or would you feel” to avoid a “double-barreled” response. I also added a response possibility, “I never go out alone after dark” in order to avoid the mixing of hypothetical responses from those who do not in fact venture out with the experiences of those who do go out.<sup>7</sup> Finally, I changed the phrase “during the night” to “after dark” in order to more accurately distinguish between day and night. This was especially important given that a number of the surveys were completed in Seattle during the summer, when darkness does not fall until approximately 10 P.M.

Table 4-7 reports the responses of the focus group participants to this measure.

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example, it does not specify the source of the implied dangers from which the respondents feel safe or unsafe; the cause of feelings of unsafety could as plausibly be reckless drivers as interpersonal violence. The measure also leaves the meaning of the term “neighborhood” unspecified; respondents may also spend varying amounts of time outside (Garofalo 1979). Despite these weaknesses, I use the NCS measure here (as other researchers have also used it) in order to be able to compare the results of this study with those of other research. Replicating the NCS measure also allows me to assess the representativeness of my sample.

<sup>7</sup>Interpreting this response category proved problematic, since it was unclear whether respondents who chose this option stayed indoors because of perceived risk or because of some other factor. Inspection of responses by these respondents to other questions showed that all but one expressed very high levels of fear, so these responses were interpreted to mean very high perceived risk.

**Table 4-7**  
**Mean Reported of Feelings of Safety**  
**When Out Alone in One's Neighborhood After Dark**

Social Category	Men			Women			Total		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
<i>Gender</i>	2.23	.82	30	2.85	1.37	40	2.59	1.20	70
<i>Race</i>									
Whites	2.08	.64	25	2.96	1.40	27	2.54	1.18	52
People of Color	3.00	1.22	5	2.61	1.33	13	2.72	1.27	18
<i>Age</i>									
18-19	2.00	.63	6	3.40	1.34	5	2.63	1.21	11
20-24	.	.	0	2.80	1.30	5	2.80	1.30	5
25-34	2.00	.47	10	2.57	1.27	7	2.24	.90	17
35-49	2.40	.89	5	1.85	.80	13	2.00	.84	18
50-64	2.20	.83	5	3.33	1.15	3	2.63	1.06	8
65+	3.00	1.41	4	4.43	.98	7	3.91	1.30	11
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>									
Gay or Lesbian	1.80	.45	5	1.75	1.04	8	1.77	.83	13
Heterosexual	2.17	.65	23	3.00	1.19	28	2.63	1.06	51
<i>Household</i>									
Live Alone	2.60	.91	15	3.13	1.59	16	2.87	1.31	31
Live with Others	1.87	.52	15	2.67	1.20	24	2.36	1.06	39
<i>Income</i>									
< \$10,000	2.56	.73	9	3.57	1.27	7	3.00	1.10	16
\$10,000-25,000	3.00	1.73	3	3.50	1.19	12	3.40	1.24	15
\$25,000-75,000	2.00	.63	6	2.38	1.19	8	2.21	.98	14
\$75,000+	1.83	.41	6	1.83	1.17	6	1.83	.83	12
<i>Education</i>									
High school or less	2.67	1.37	6	4.00	1.55	6	3.33	1.56	12
Some college	2.44	.53	9	2.86	1.31	21	2.73	1.14	30
College graduate	2.00	.67	10	3.00	1.00	5	2.33	.90	15
Post-grad degree	1.80	.45	5	1.88	.99	8	1.85	.80	13
<i>Relationship Status</i>									
Never Married	1.93	.47	14	2.92	1.44	13	2.41	1.15	27
Living With	1.50	.71	2	2.17	.98	6	2.00	.93	8
Married	2.25	.50	4	2.63	1.19	8	2.50	1.00	12
Separated	2.33	.82	6	3.20	1.62	10	2.88	1.41	16
Divorced	4.00	1.41	2	2.00	.	1	3.33	1.53	3
Widowed	3.00	.	1	4.00	1.41	2	3.67	1.15	3

Possible responses were: 1=very safe; 2=reasonably safe; 3=somewhat unsafe; 4=very unsafe; 5=I never go out alone.

Women tend to feel significantly less safe than men when outside in their

neighborhoods at night ( $t=-2.34$ ,  $df=65.10$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The relationship between perceptions of safety and age was also significant (Spearman  $r=.36$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Note, however, that the shape of the relationship between age and safety differed for women and men in this sample. For men, the curve is roughly linear: younger men tend to feel safer than older men. For women, however, this relationship is curvilinear. Young women generally say they feel quite unsafe (3.40 on the 5-point scale for 18–19 year old women). Thereafter, their average level of fear drops steadily to a low of 1.85 (for 35–49 year old women) and then rises sharply to a high of 4.43 for women over age 65. It is also notable that the standard deviations for ratings of safety are in nearly all cases larger for women than for men, indicating that women's feelings of safety are more variable than men's. Levene's test for equality of variances confirms that the variances are significantly different ( $F=16.72$ ,  $p<.000$ ).

The difference in neighborhood safety by relationship status was significant for men, but not for women: men said they felt safer if they had never been married or were currently married or living with a romantic partner; divorced and widowed men said they felt less safe ( $\chi^2 =22.47$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p<.05$ ). However, it is likely that this association was an artifact of age, since age and relationship status were highly correlated ( $r=.51$ ,  $p<.000$ ), as were age and the probability of living with others: older people were much more likely to live alone than younger people (Spearman  $r=-.65$ ,  $p<.000$ ). People who live alone also tend to feel less safe; this relationship approached significance ( $t=1.81$ ,  $df=68$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Note that this pattern is not consistent with the relationship between living alone and fear. As reported above, women who lived alone reported feeling less fearful; here, however, they report feeling more at risk. The relationship between income and feelings of neighborhood safety was significant (Spearman  $r=-.46$ ,  $p<.000$ ), as was the relationship with education (Spearman  $r=-.37$ ,  $p<.005$ ); poorer and less educated respondents were more likely to feel unsafe.

Sexual orientation was also related to neighborhood safety. Sexual orientation was not associated with feelings of safety for men; however, lesbians were significantly more likely to feel safe than heterosexual women ( $t=-2.71$ ,  $df=62$ ,  $p<.01$ ). These differences cannot be attributed solely to sexual orientation, however. Lesbians in this sample differed from heterosexual women in several ways. On average, they were younger, more highly educated, and had higher incomes than the female sample as a whole. In addition, they felt more physically capable than average, as I discuss at greater length below.

#### *Perceived Risk at Work or School*

Four other questions on the survey were designed to supplement the NCS measure. The wording of these questions mirrored the NCS question, except that they focused on two other situations: work and school. Participants who were employed outside the home and/or attended school rated their feelings of safety on the modified NCS scale (Very safe/ Reasonably safe/ Somewhat unsafe/ Very unsafe/ I am never in this situation) for up to four situations: being at work during working hours, being at work after hours, being at school during school hours, and being at school after hours. Factor analysis (using varimax rotation) found that two underlying factors (shown in Table 4–8) together explained 76.2% of the variance in these four measures.

Table 4–8  
Scales of Perceived Safety at Work and School

Factor	Survey Questions: How safe do you feel...	Eigenvalue	$\alpha$
1 Safety After Hours	...when you are at work after hours? ...when you are at school after hours?	1.75	.72
2 Safety During Normal Hours	...when you are at work during working hours? ...when you are at school during school hours?	1.29	.56

One factor represented perceived safety after hours;<sup>8</sup> the other represented perceived safety during regular hours. Scores for each item ranged from 1 (very safe) to 4 (very unsafe).<sup>9</sup> The respondents' scores on each set of questions were averaged<sup>10</sup> to form two scales, corresponding to the two factors, each with a range of 1 to 4, with higher numbers indicating lower self-reported feelings of safety. Mean scores for various social categories on the two scales are reported in Table 4-9.

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<sup>8</sup>Note, however, that "after hours" might mean during daylight hours for those respondents who attend night classes or work at night.

<sup>9</sup>The category "I am never in this situation" was not used in this analysis, because it did not distinguish between those who did not remain at work or school after hours due to fear, and those who did not do so for other reasons.

<sup>10</sup>Scores on these questions were averaged rather than summed in order to account for the fact that some participants worked, some attended school, and some did both. Had the responses been summed, some participants would have received scores on all questions whereas others would have received scores on only some of the questions. To minimize these differences, the scores were averaged, not summed.

Table 4-9  
Mean Scores on the Safety Scales

Social Group	Safety After Hours			Safety During Normal Hours		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Total	1.84	.73	53	1.30	.48	56
Men	1.46	.46	24	1.15	.35	24
Women	2.16	.77	29	1.42	.54	32
White	1.76	.76	40	1.19	.38	42
Non-white	2.08	.61	13	1.64	.60	14
Live Alone	1.76	.73	17	1.26	.42	19
Live with Others	1.88	.74	36	1.32	.53	37
18-24	2.09	.82	16	1.19	.36	16
25-34	1.75	.75	16	1.47	.62	16
35-44	1.77	.61	11	1.38	.48	12
45-64	1.61	.70	9	1.11	.33	9
65+	2.00	.	1	1.33	.58	3
Lesbian or Gay	1.65	.62	13	1.31	.48	13
Heterosexual	1.89	.76	37	1.28	.42	40
< \$10,000	2.43	.73	17	1.19	.37	8
\$10,000-25,000	2.10	.61	10	1.40	.46	10
\$25,000-75,000	1.62	.62	13	1.46	.63	14
\$75,000+	1.58	.63	12	1.25	.45	12
High school or less	1.87	.79	8	1.00	.00	8
Some college	2.18	.71	20	1.57	.56	22
College graduate	1.42	.47	12	1.15	.38	13
Post-grad degree	1.69	.75	13	1.19	.38	13

Note: 1="Very safe"; 4= "Very unsafe"

In general, the participants reported feeling safer during normal work or school hours than they did after hours; this difference was significant ( $t=-6.07$ ,  $df=51$ ,  $p<.000$ ). For example, one woman said,

*Mona:* And we're also open extended hours, we open at seven o'clock at the morning and see patients til seven o'clock at night. So I don't necessarily worry, a lot of times I'm the only provider in the entire building. I don't worry during daylight hours, but as winter comes on and then it starts to get dark, the parking lots are dark, and if I'm the only person walking out at night time then it's, you know, it does make you think. (Group 5)

The difference between women's and men's mean scores were significant on both the night-time safety scale ( $t = -3.89$ ,  $df=51$ ,  $p<.000$ ) and the daytime safety scale ( $t=-2.33$ ,  $df=52.83$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In both situations, women feel more afraid than men. For example, one woman said,

*Nora: I work in a pretty secure building too, but our bathrooms are on the floor, but they're not in the office, so we have to share them with the other people who share our floor, and so they give you a key. And when I first started there I was like, why would they give you a key to the bathroom, why can't you just go to the bathroom, it's a pretty secure building and they're like, "oh, well we had like one instance where one of the girls went to the bathroom and there was a guy in there and we don't know, he'd just gotten in, and..." So now they lock the doors and stuff... And so it's kinda scary because you think, cause, it's like a seven, six-story building, and you have to take the elevator, I mean why would anyone take the trouble to go all the way upstairs, and go into the women's bath—I mean, it's just, it's dumb, it kinda makes me mad, cause you gotta get the key to go to the bathroom. So yeah, when you think about that it's like, it's not just on the streets any more, it's where you work now, you've got to be careful. (Group 1)*

In terms of race, people of color felt less safe than white people at work or school during normal business hours ( $t=-2.64$ ,  $df=16.62$ ,  $p<.05$ ). However, there were no significant differences across racial categories after working hours.

Poorer people were significantly more fearful than wealthier people when at work or school after hours ( $F=3.68$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ), but there were no significant differences during the day. Education was related to feelings of safety both during the day and after hours; in both cases, those with a moderate degree of education (more than high school but less than post-graduate work) were more fearful than those with more or less education (for daytime safety:  $F= 4.68$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.01$ ; for safety after hours,  $F=3.30$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The relationships between these two scales and age, sexual orientation, and living at home or with others were not significant.

### Perceived Ability to Defend Oneself

An important factor contributing to feelings of danger is the belief that one can defend oneself from attack. The survey contained three questions addressing this ability. The first asked respondents to estimate, on a 0 to 10 scale, how effectively they feel they would be able to defend themselves against an attacker.<sup>11</sup> Table 4-10 shows the mean ratings of ability given by people in various social categories.

Table 4-10  
Mean Rating of Ability to Defend Oneself

Social Category	Men			Women		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
<i>Gender</i>	5.3	2.5	30	4.3	2.4	37
<i>Race</i>						
Whites	5.2	2.7	25	3.8	2.5	25
People of Color	6.2	.9	5	5.3	2.1	12
<i>Age</i>						
18-24	6.2	1.8	6	4.6	1.5	10
25-34	4.5	2.5	10	5.0	2.6	7
35-44	7.8	2.1	4	5.0	2.6	10
45-64	4.7	2.3	6	4.8	2.6	4
65+	4.8	2.6	4	1.8	2.6	6
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>						
Gay or Lesbian	5.8	2.8	5	5.6	3.4	7
Heterosexual	5.1	2.5	23	4.1	2.1	27
<i>Education</i>						
High school or less	5.67	1.51	6	3.50	3.21	6
Some college	6.44	2.24	9	4.37	2.19	19
College graduate	5.20	3.12	10	4.00	2.35	5
Post-grad degree	3.20	1.30	5	5.00	2.77	7
<i>Income</i>						
< \$10,000	5.2	2.9	9	4.1	2.6	7
\$10,000-25,000	4.7	1.5	3	3.6	2.1	11
\$25,000-75,000	5.5	2.0	6	3.8	1.6	8
\$75,000+	4.8	3.0	6	6.3	3.0	6

Note: 0="Not Effectively at all," 5="Moderately effectively,"  
10="Very effectively."

<sup>11</sup> Gordon and Riger (1989) ask an identical question; however, possible answers to their question consisted only of "Yes," "No," and "Depends." The 0-10 scale used here allows participants to provide a more nuanced response.

Perceptions of ability were significantly correlated with feelings of safety when outside in one's neighborhood at night (Spearman's  $r = -.33$ , 1-tailed  $p < .01$ ), with fear away from home and outside alone (Spearman's  $r = -.21$ , 1-tailed  $p < .05$ ), and with fear away from home but near other people (Spearman's  $r = -.27$ , 1-tailed  $p < .05$ ). In each of these situations, those who feel more able to defend themselves also feel more safe. The difference between men's and women's perceptions of their own ability was significant: men reported they felt they could defend themselves more effectively than did women ( $t = 1.71$ ,  $df = 65$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Men's mean response (5.3) was slightly higher than the midpoint marked "moderately effectively"; women's mean (4.3) was below this midpoint. The difference between age categories was also significant: on average, younger people felt better able to defend themselves than older people ( $r = -.31$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Differences between whites and people of color tended toward significance ( $p = .06$ ); among both women and men, people of color rated their ability to defend themselves much more highly than did whites. In fact, women of color's mean self-rating was slightly higher than white men's. Differences between income groups and education categories were not significant. However, note that the male participants' mean assessment of their self-defense skills fell with increasing education, while women's assessments rose with more education.

The difference between heterosexual and lesbian/gay participants is particularly interesting, although not statistically significant. Lesbian and gay participants had a mean self-rating of 5.7, and a difference of only 0.2 between the men and women in this category. Contrast this with the straight participants, who had a combined mean of 4.5 and a 1.0 gap between the women and men. This pattern may reflect the fact that almost all the lesbian and gay participants were drawn from an athletic club; it is possible that these participants perceived themselves to have greater defensive abilities

simply because they were more physically fit. For example, one of the women commented, "I guess maybe athletics makes me feel safe and strong and powerful."

*(Tina, Group 5)*

Answers to the questions on physical ability provide support for this interpretation, at least for women. Gay and lesbian respondents were no more likely than straight respondents to say that their risk of being a victim was increased by their physical condition, and gay men were no more likely than straight men to say that their risk was *decreased* by their physical condition. However, lesbians (62.5%) were significantly more likely than straight women (9.5%) to say that their physical condition decreased their risk ( $\chi^2=8.88$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.005$ ).

The focus group discussions provide additional insight into these patterns. In general, women talked about their abilities more than men. Of the 37 statements made about ability across eight groups, only six were made by men. Of these six, three were made by a single man.

In part, this gender difference occurred because women tended to get into extended discussions of their ability (or inability) to defend themselves. This occurred mainly in the all-female groups, although there was also a prolonged discussion in one mixed-sex group. None of the all-male groups had such discussions. These patterns are shown in Table 4-11.

**Table 4-11**  
**Statements About Ability to Defend Oneself During Focus Group Discussions**

Gender Composition of Group	Group #	Number of Statements about Defensive Ability		Average Number of Statements per Type of Group
		Men	Women	
All-female	5		4	6.3
	8		8	
	11		0	
	12		13	
Mixed-sex	P1	1	5	1.4
	1	0	0	
	3	0	1	
	4	0	0	
	10	0	0	
All-male	2	1		1.2
	6	3		
	7	0		
	9	1		
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>2.9</b>

Note: The gender composition of the mixed-sex groups was as follows: Group P1 (2 men, 4 women), Group 1 (3 men, 5 women), Group 3 (2 men, 3 women), Group 4 (4 men, 2 women), Group 10 (2 men, 6 women)

Of the six statements made by men, four indicated that the speakers felt very able to defend themselves. For example, this 35-year-old man described his reaction to an assault by another man:

*Frank:* I took one step toward the guy and he backed off real quick. It's like "oh shit, I guess he didn't go down, he's gonna kill me if he catch me." You damn right, I catch you I'm gonna do you some serious injury...Like I said earlier, if I'd had a gun, I would have shot 'em both. I'll be honest. I wouldn't have killed them either. I got a bad knee now, it's been broken once before, it's been dislocated twice. First thing I'm gonna do is aim at a knee, because the damn things never heal. You gonna put me in pain? Fine. Bam! (Group 6)

Similarly, this 35-year-old man described his feelings about his ability to defend himself:

*Bob:* Like the only time I ever, someone tried to mug me, I was over in Bremerton, and two guys tried to hit me up for some money, and I just smiled, you ain't getting none of my money, and they just walked on off.

And I had a pistol, I carry a pistol if I'm in a bad neighborhood, my mom carries one, my dad did, everyone down there [*in Missouri, where he grew up*] carried one, if I'm in a bad neighborhood I carry one, otherwise I don't like to lug it around, I've shot all my life. But because I knew I could take care of myself, it never occurred to me to draw that, because both of them, I figured I'd whoop them both if I had to. (*Group P1*)

Only two statements by men indicated that they felt unable to defend themselves; both of these attributed their perceived lack of efficacy to specific causes. For example, this man pointed to his lack of weapons:

*Rick:* Well, I would say the thing that concerns me most is the number of degenerates that have guns and I don't, I feel it's a little bit unequal. And I think my biggest fear is being struck down by a stray bullet intended for somebody else. Because it happens all too frequently. And... we have ten times the number of people that die of gunshot wounds than any country I can name, and it just concerns me, because I feel like I'd have half a chance with a knife, or maybe even a baseball bat, if I saw it coming, but a bullet you don't see coming it could be fired from another house, another unit in the apartment building, and you could end up dead, or crippled for life or what have you. (*Group 2*)

Note that although he feels his defenses are weakened by his lack of guns, he still has confidence in his physical abilities, even if an attacker had a knife or a baseball bat.

This man, in contrast, specified his age and disability as well as his lack of weapons as the source of his vulnerability:

*Henry:* Well, like me, I'm easy prey. I'm 60 years old with arthritis, and they ain't gonna have no problem because I ain't gonna put up much of a defense, I don't carry no guns or no knife or anything. (*Group 6*)

In contrast, women talked at much greater length, and with much more ambivalence, about their defensive abilities. Some women said they felt able to defend themselves because of their verbal abilities:

*Leeanne:* ...And usually, I have a mouth. When I'm confronted, I am a good defender. It's been said I should go be a judge. (*Group 8*)

In other cases, women said they felt they could protect themselves because they could

run quickly. For example, when asked whether she carries pepper spray to defend herself, this woman responded:

*Liz:* No, and I don't carry a whistle or anything, I've thought about that stuff. But I run pretty fast. And I don't let anybody get near me, you know, I just, you know, if there's any doubt, or if I feel any apprehension at all, I would go back to my car and lock my car, or take another route, or something. (Group 3)

Other women said their physical fighting abilities would protect them, as in these quotes:

*Barbara:* We were raised in Oregon, but we grew up on the farm. And I had three brothers, three brothers, you need four for football, basketball, baseball. I never got to play you know, tea, dollies, we always ended up playing baseball and stuff, and I mean, I know, I could beat up anyone in grade school, when I was a kid, I was a tough little kid. (Group P1)

*Stacy:* I have to agree with what Karen said, is, I've never been physically attacked when I was under threat. But my underlying instinct or intuition is that they'd better be damn good, cause I've got enough anger and rage from what happened as kids and that kind of thing, I'm not going to tolerate it, I'm not going to roll over and just give in. I think I probably am intellectual enough that I would definitely weigh benefits and consequences. But if somebody came up from behind, I would fight and fight hard. (Group 5)

Other women, however, stated that they felt their defensive ability to be low:

*Louise:* I always assess what I'll be able to do, if something goes wrong, what could I do. And could I beat up two guys? No way. Could I beat up one guy? Maybe, you know, if it is with a weapon. So it's always—I tend to assess what—if something happened, if I was attacked, what would I be able to do? What are my chances of surviving, how well can I survive, or getting away, just hitting or running or something, anything? What are my chances? (Group 8)

*Stacy:* I had an experience, I had a male friend that was, it's not a politically correct term, but he was a midget, he was about 4-8, 4-6. And we were wrestling around, and I was about the same height and weight as I am now, and he pinned me. And granted I was just fighting for fun, I mean, we were just wrestling, so I did not fight back the way I would if I was being attacked. But it definitely gave me a start, and something to think about. Because this guy pinned me. He was much smaller, weighed a lot less, but he still had some strength that, even at his size, he was able to pin me. Would have I been able to get away if he

was threatening me? Yes, I probably would have been, because I would have been a lot meaner. But you know, he did. [laughter]

*Susannah:* Chances are he wasn't exerting himself either, if you're just playing and you know, being friends and hanging out.

*Stacy:* Yeah, we were just playing. And that really gave me cause to think that you know, I—and I consider myself in good shape and fairly strong.

...*Mona:* So do you think you could escape a violent act?

*Susannah:* Probably not. I mean, that's the thing, I'd rather be out of range. (Group 5)

In many of the conversations among women, the notion that women can (or cannot) defend themselves was challenged and debated. For example, note the ambivalence about women's strength and ability in this discussion among seven young (18–22 year old) women:

*Sarah:* Well, just like you know how we were talking about how as girls for instance we feel more threatened, like we can't defend ourselves against guys as well and things like that...

*Facilitator:* Do you all feel sort of the way Sarah was just saying about being girls and not being able to defend yourselves?

*Sarah:* Well, there's things we can do to defend ourselves, but naturally we're not as strong.

*Facilitator:* Do you all feel the same way?

*Belinda:* Yes. [other participants nod their agreement]

*Facilitator:* Does anybody feel differently about that?

*Anna:* No, I don't think it's that we're not as strong, it's that we're...

*Belinda:* We're perceived as the weaker sex.

*Anna:* Yeah...

*Katrina:* Yeah, it's just kind of the position that society puts us in, because it's what we grew up with, you know, girls are like this, girls are weaker and can't defend themselves, or don't go there by yourself if you're a girl, and it's just what we grew up with, so.

*Sarah:* But I also think physically I mean we're structured a lot differently—I mean, I know there's a lot of strong girls and we're probably stronger than a lot of them, but I mean just, I've arm wrestled a few guys who I thought were wimps, and it just —

*Mia:* Yeah. It's true that biologically we are weaker.

*Sarah:* But biologically, it's just, we are. (Group 12)

These kinds of conversations never took place among men; men's defensive abilities were not contested and never challenged.

Other studies have also found perceptions of physical efficacy to be important. For example, Gordon and Riger (1989) write that,

Women's perception of their own physiques are also important in accounting for their level of fear. When asked how strong they thought they were and how fast they thought they could run compared to the average woman and man, 63 percent of women thought they were less physically competent than both the average man and the average woman; only 28 percent perceived themselves to be better or even similar in speed and strength when compared to the average woman. These perceptions of physical competence are significant predictors of women's fear levels; women who perceive themselves as less physically able are more likely to say they are afraid. However, after taking self-defense training courses, women reported feeling stronger, braver, more active, more in control, bigger, more efficacious in a variety of arenas—and less afraid. (Gordon and Riger 1989: 54; italics in original)

The second survey question dealing with defensive ability asked, "To the extent that you feel you would be able to defend yourself, what would you do?" Sixty of the 70 participants mentioned at least one strategy they felt they would use in an attack. The distribution of these strategies across women and men is shown in Table 4-12.

Table 4-12  
Self-Defense Strategies Mentioned, by Gender

Strategy	Women	Men	$\chi^2$	p<
Yell	61.8%	23.1%	8.91	.005
Fight	52.9	46.2	.27	rs
Run	29.4	38.5	.54	rs
Anything necessary	20.6	26.9	.33	rs
Use alarm, call for help	14.7	7.7	.70	rs
Other	5.0	3.3	.12	rs
It depends	2.9	15.4	2.99	.08
Use weapon	2.9	7.7	.70	rs
Talk my way out of it	2.9	3.8	.04	rs
Don't know	2.9	3.8	.04	rs
Play dead	0.0	3.8	1.32	rs
Give in	0.0	7.7	2.71	rs

Note: Percentages are of the 60 participants who mentioned at least one strategy.

The most frequently-mentioned strategies involved yelling, fighting, running, and calling for help. Smaller numbers of participants said they would use a weapon, try to talk their way out of the situation, play dead, or give in and do what the assailant wanted. There was only one significant gender differences in these strategies: women were much more likely than men to say they would yell or scream. Because the participants didn't specify the motivations behind the strategies, it is impossible to know whether yelling is an attempt to attract attention and help or scare off the attacker. Two other gender differences were notable, although not statistically significant: women were more likely to say they would use an alarm or call for help, and men were more likely to say their response would depend on the situation. Note that no women said they would play dead or give in and do what the attacker wanted; in this sample, at least, women do not fit the stereotype of feminine passivity. Indeed, many women said they would respond assertively to an attack. For example, this conversation took place in an all-female group:

*Louise:* ...And at this point in my life, I would fight to the death. I would. I mean, if they tried to steal my purse—they always say, "Give up your purse." I ain't giving up nothing. They're going to knock me out or something. I mean it. I won't have it. I'm to that point in my life.

*Leeanne:* I am kind of like you like that, you know...If they can't get it off me in the first move, the initial, whatever, I would be too scared not to fight.

*Louise:* Exactly. Too scared not to fight. That's exactly it.

*Leeanne:* Why should I just let them do me?

*Louise:* It's not that I'm so brave, you know, exactly.

*Leeanne:* Chopping and dicing, slicing me—no!

*Louise:* They're going to do something to me, yeah, that's it, they're going to get hurt in the bargain. (Group 8)

There were also significant differences among other social categories. For example, 57.1% of the heterosexual participants but only 23.1% of the gay and lesbian participants said that they would fight ( $\chi^2=4.61, p<.05$ ). Members of the oldest and youngest age categories were the only participants to say they would use a weapon:

6.7% of 18 to 24-year-olds, and 28.6% of those over 65, said this. Younger people were more likely to say they would do whatever was necessary: 30.2% of those under age 45, but only 5.9% of those over age 45, said this ( $r=-.26$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Interestingly, those with post-graduate degrees were the least likely to say they would fight: only 23.1% of this group mentioned fighting, compared with between 45% and 75% of every other group. Those with more education were more likely to say they would run, however: 53.8% of those with post-graduate degrees, but only 9.1% of those with a high school education or less, mentioned this option. These differences approached significance ( $p=.05$  for fighting and  $p=.08$  for running)

The final question about self-defense asked, "To the extent that you feel you would not be able to defend yourself, what factors do you think would prevent you from doing so? Here too, the participants provided a wide range of reasons why they felt they would be unable to defend themselves effectively. These fell into two general categories: characteristics of the respondent (e.g., physical condition, age, or disability), and characteristics of the attack (e.g., a surprise attack, multiple assailants, or an attacker with a weapon). The reasons, and the percentage of women and men who mentioned them, are reported in Table 4-13.

Table 4-13  
Reasons Mentioned for Not Being Able to Defend Oneself, by Gender

Reason	Women	Men	$\chi^2$	p<
My own physical condition	53.1%	26.1%	4.02	.05
If the attacker had a weapon	21.9	26.1	.13	ns
I don't know self-defense	15.6	13.0	.07	ns
I would be too afraid, I would freeze	15.6	4.3	1.75	ns
My age	12.5	0.0	3.1	.08
Attacker's physical condition (strength or size)	9.4	8.7	.01	ns
Multiple attackers	9.4	13.0	.19	ns
I'm not a violent person	3.1	17.4	3.3	.07
If I were injured	3.1	4.3	.06	ns
My own disability	6.3	17.4	1.71	ns
If I were taken by surprise	6.3	13.0	.75	ns
Don't know	6.3	4.3	.09	ns
My sex	3.1	0.0	.73	ns
Other	3.1	4.3	.06	ns
Don't own a weapon	0.0	8.7	2.89	.09

Note: Percentages are of the 55 participants who mentioned at least one reason.

The reason most frequently mentioned by both women and men was the respondent's own physical condition. However, significantly more women than men mentioned this: 53.1% of women, but only 26.1% of men. Both women and men noted that an attacker with a weapon would inhibit their ability to defend themselves, as would their lack of self-defense knowledge. Although the difference was not statistically significant, women were more likely than men to say that they felt they would not be able to defend themselves because they would be too afraid, or because they would freeze in fear. Several gender differences approached significance: women were more likely than men to say that their age would keep them from defending themselves ( $p=.08$ ), while men were more likely to say that their non-violent

personality ( $p=.07$ ) or their lack of a weapon ( $p=.09$ ) would prevent them from effectively defending themselves.

Other social statuses were also associated with particular reasons. Gay men were the only participants to mention not owning a weapon as a liability ( $\chi^2=7.57$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Lesbians and gay men were more likely to mention that their physical condition would keep them from defending themselves ( $\chi^2=4.84$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Half of those over age 65 said that their age would prevent them from defending themselves effectively; no other participants said this ( $\chi^2=25.34$ ,  $p<.00005$ ). Finally, those with more education were more likely to say that not knowing self-defense would handicap them: more than a third of those with post-graduate degrees, but none of those with a high school education or less, said this. This difference approached significance ( $p=.09$ ).

### Summary

The major findings of this chapter can be summarized as follows. First, men's and women's mean responses about the frequency of their experiences of fear tended toward significance in this sample. Moreover, the distribution of responses among the various categories designating frequency of fear differed significantly. Surprisingly, four women, but no men, said they were "never" afraid. However, women were also more likely than men to say they experienced fear "all or most of the time" or "fairly often," while men were more likely to say they "seldom" experienced fear. Thus women do seem to be more afraid than men, in general. Women and men also tend to express their fear in different ways. Men tend to use more "minimizing" statements, while women tend to use more "maximizing" statements." This suggests that the differences in reported fear might be a result of presentational strategies, rather than actual fearfulness. This possibility is explored in Chapter 5 by examining fear-related

behaviors, not simply reported emotions.

Social context is also important for both fear and risk. Overall, respondents said they felt more fear at night than during the daytime, and felt more at risk at work or school after hours than during normal hours. At night, physical location made a difference: they reported that their fear when away from home was far greater than their fear at home. Thus there were gender differences in both the fear of violence, and the perceived risk of it, across a variety of situations. Age also affects the perceived risk of violence, but in different ways for women and men. Both income and education were positively associated with perceived safety. And both women and men reported fearing strangers more than any other category of person, although women reported fearing dates more than men did, and men reported fearing fathers more than women did.

There were also significant differences in perceptions of the factors that increased or decreased risk. The largest difference was between women and men: women said their risk was increased by their sex, while men said that their risk was *decreased* by their sex. African Americans tended to report that their risk was increased by their race, and older people believed that their risk was increased by their age. Finally, lesbians and gay men reported that their sexual orientation increased their risk of violence, while heterosexuals did not.

The final section of this chapter examined the respondents' perceptions of their ability to defend themselves. In general, men felt they had greater ability than women did, and younger people felt they had greater ability than older people did. In the focus group discussions, women's assertions of their strength or ability were often contested and discussed, while men's never were.

Thus there were systematic gender differences in the participants' reports of their feelings of fear, perceived risk, and perceived ability to defend themselves. This is

consistent with the findings of other, more nationally-representative samples. In addition, other social statuses, particularly age, income, and education, were associated with fear and risk, but these associations were not as consistent as those with gender. In the next chapter, I turn to one way these differences in perception and emotion can manifest themselves in daily life: through the practice of danger management strategies.

## Chapter 5

### The Practice of Danger Management Strategies

Well, I think of it in terms of all the things I don't do, out of fear of violence, and all the things that we do, like, always locking the doors of our house, you know. Where I grew up we never locked our door, not anyone I know normally locked their doors, but since I've lived in the city, I couldn't imagine not locking the doors of my house. And if we go out and discover we've left a window open, I kind of look around the house and I look, you know, in the bathtub, and I always half expect someone to be there. And it's totally ridiculous, it's really unlikely that anyone ever would be, but there's still that image. So I think of it in terms of all the things we don't do or the things we do differently. And I think that, you know there are some statistics that the rate of violent crime is going down, and I don't, I think that one large reason for that is that people are so much more cautious now, about exposing themselves to crime, than they used to be. You know, they don't go out at night, they do lock their doors, they install security systems, and on and on. So it's not like the quality of our lives has really improved, because of that, it's just always lurking back there, in our minds. (*Evan, Group 4*)

The fear of violence has far-reaching consequences for the everyday lives of individuals and communities. As Gomme argues, "the real costs of crime...exceed the economic deprivation or physical injury incurred by immediate victims." Perceptions of danger produce changes in individuals' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that "erode the overall quality of social life." (1986: 250) For example, Box, Hale and Andrews write that the fear of crime

...fractures the sense of community and neighborhood, and transforms some public places into no-go areas (Morgan 1978; Wilson 1975); because fear leads to more prosperous citizens protecting themselves and their property, or moving from the neighborhood (Sampson and Wooldredge 1986), the incidence of crime may be displaced onto those already suffering from other social and economic disadvantages (Lea and Young 1984); it reduces the appeal of liberal penal policies, such as decarceration and rehabilitation, thus paving the way for more incarceration and punishment (Cullen et al. 1985; Hough 1985; Langworthy and Whitehead 1986); it creates a seed-bed of discontent from which vigilante justice might flourish and thus undermines the legitimacy of the criminal justice system, particularly when courts are seen as being soft, displaying more compassion for the offender than the victim (Scheingold 1984). (Box et al. 1988: 340-1)

On an individual level, feelings of vulnerability result in a wide variety of strategies intended to manage danger and fear. For example,

People afraid of being criminally victimised change their habits...They tend to stay at home more, in surroundings they have made safer (income permitting) with locks, chains, bars, and alarms. When they do go out, they tend to avoid activities which they perceive as dangerous, including walking down some streets, getting too close to particular 'types of people,' travelling on public transport, or going to certain forms of public entertainment. For those fearing victimisation, each excursion beyond the relative safety of home is like walking through a minefield—at any moment, a purse may be snatched, a body assaulted, a sense of dignity affronted. (Box et al. 1988: 340-1)

### Measurement of Danger Management Strategies

Other researchers have categorized and measured people's use of these types of strategies in a variety of ways. For example, Gordon and Riger (1989) divide such strategies into two basic categories. First, "self-isolation" involves "a range of tactics designed to prevent victimizations by avoiding risk" (pp. 113-4), and includes strategies such as staying inside or avoiding certain parts of town. The second category, "street smarts," includes "a range of tactics women believe will reduce their risk when they do go out on the streets or believe themselves to be in a potentially dangerous situation." (pp. 114-5) Examples of these strategies include clothing choice and monitoring of surroundings for potential danger.

While the distinction between isolation and street smarts is a useful one, it does not fully capture the variety of strategies people undertake to protect themselves and manage their fear. For example, how might tactics such as installing burglar alarms or choosing a home based on safety concerns be categorized? After a preliminary analysis of the data, I decided that eight categories would better represent the range of tactics the participants discussed: monitoring, avoidance, fortification, obfuscation, pattern change, isolation, reliance on others, and community action. *Monitoring* involves awareness, watchfulness, and assessment of one's surroundings. This includes both

general and specific practices: for example, one might assess the security of a prospective home or neighborhood before moving in, make a point of being alert when walking outside, or asking a repair person for identification before allowing them to enter one's home. *Isolation tactics* are methods of keeping oneself away from potentially dangerous people and situations. This category involves constraint: things one stops oneself from doing in order to protect oneself. For example, one might refrain from going outside after dark, talking to strangers, or engaging in one's customary activities because of fear of victimization. In contrast, *avoidance* involves maintaining one's usual activities but staying away from specific people, places, and situations one perceives to be potentially dangerous. For example, one might change seats in a bus or avoid certain parts of town because of safety concerns. *Fortification* refers to efforts to make one's home, car, or person less vulnerable to attack. For example, people might install alarm systems or carry weapons to prevent or deal with danger. *Obfuscation* involves an attempt to present oneself or one's home as different than it is; for example, one might modify the message on one's answering machine to imply that one lives with others, rather than alone. *Pattern change* refers to the active modification of one's ordinary life patterns specifically to avoid danger, such as changing one's work schedule or transportation choices because of safety concerns. *Reliance on others* means depending on other people for protection. For example, one person might ask another for an escort in a situation she perceives to be threatening. Finally, *community action* involves cooperating with others in one's community to prevent danger; for example, by participating in a block watch program. These categories are illustrated in Table 5-1, below, using the questions from the survey used in this study that fall into each category. In addition, the table reports the percent of respondents who report practicing each strategy and the percent of respondents who report practicing at least one strategy in the category.

Table 5-1  
Categories of Danger Management Strategies

<u>Category</u>	<u>% Using</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Relevant Survey Questions</u>
<i>Monitoring</i>	100%		<p>16b. Have you ever considered the safety of your neighborhood before moving in? (52.9%)</p> <p>16c. Have you ever considered the safety of your building before moving in? (55.7%)</p> <p>16d. Have you ever considered the safety of the area where you would be working before taking a job? (30.0%)</p> <p>17c. How often do you check to see who is at the door before opening it? (85.1%)</p> <p>17d. How often do you ask sales people or repair people for identification before opening the door? (35.4%)</p> <p>20p. How often do you make a point of being alert and watchful when you are out walking on the street? (91.3%)</p> <p>24b. How often do you think about personal safety when looking for parking places? (58.0%)</p> <p>24d. How often do you check the back seat for intruders before getting into the car? (53.1%)</p>
<i>Avoidance</i>	100%		<p>20c. How often do you choose a seat on a bus or in a movie theater with an eye to who would be sitting nearby? (49.2%)</p> <p>20d. How often do you avoid looking people in the eye when you walk down the street? (46.3%)</p> <p>20f. How often do you avoid walking through poorly-lit alleys or streets when you are out at night? (88.2%)</p> <p>20j. How often do you stay out of parts of town you think are dangerous? (73.5%)</p> <p>20q. How often do you cross the street when you see someone who seems strange or dangerous? (55.8%)</p>
<i>Fortification</i>	98.6%		<p>15c. Have you installed or made sure there were special locks or bars on the doors or windows? (30.0%)</p> <p>15d. Have you installed or made sure there were bright lights outside the house? (30.0%)</p> <p>15e. Have you installed or made sure there was a burglar alarm? (12.9%)</p> <p>15f. Have you kept a dog for protection? (5.7%)</p> <p>15g. Have you kept a weapon for protection? (11.4%)</p> <p>16f. Have you ever taken a self-defense class? (12.9%)</p> <p>17a. How often do you lock the outside doors when you are home alone during the day? (73.5%)</p> <p>17b. How often do you lock the outside doors when you are home alone at night? (90.9%)</p> <p>20g. How often do you take something along for protection (such as a dog, a whistle, mace, pepper spray, etc.) when you are out alone? (16.7%)</p> <p>20h. How often do you take a weapon for protection when you are out alone? (4.5%)</p>

		20k. How often do you get your housekeys out so they are in your hand before reaching your door? (84.2%)
		20r. How often do you consider safety concerns when choosing clothes if you are going out alone? (26.9%)
		20s. How often do you wear shoes that are easy to run in, in case of danger? (34.8%)
		24a. How often do you lock the doors while you are in the car? (68.6%)
		24c. How often do you carry your keys in your hand when going to the car, instead of waiting to get the keys out after reaching the car? (88.0%)
		24e. How often do you lock your car when it is parked? (98.0%)
<i>Obfuscation</i>	77.1%	15a. Have you gotten an unlisted phone number? (20.0%)
		15b. Have you used initials or last name only instead of your first name on your mailbox or in the telephone directory? (30.4%)
		20a. How often do you deliberately leave on lights, TV, or a radio (or use a timer to turn these items on and off when you are not home)? (49.3%)
		20b. How often do you ask a neighbor to watch your home, bring in mail, etc. when you will be gone for several days? (56.7%)
<i>Pattern Change</i>	72.9%	16a. Have you ever moved because of fear for your safety? (11.4%)
		16e. Have you ever arranged your work or school schedule with an eye to safety? (20.0%)
		20n. How often do you drive or take a taxi, rather than walk, when you go out because of fear of being harmed? (20.9%)
		20o. How often do you choose transportation routes (bus lines or stops, driving or walking routes) because of safety concerns? (37.3%)
<i>Isolation</i>	24.3%	20i. How often do you restrict your going out to only during the daytime? (21.7%)
		20l. How often do you avoid doing shopping, errands, laundry, or other things you have to do because of fear for your safety? (6.0%)
		20m. How often do you avoid leisure or pleasure activities (things you want to do, but don't have to do) because of fear for your safety? (10.4%)
<i>Reliance on Others</i>	34.3%	20e. How often do you go out with a friend or two for protection? (34.3%)
<i>Community Action</i>	7.1%	15h. Have you participated in a neighborhood block watch program? (7.1%)

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In addition, the central focus group question, "How does violence affect your life?"

almost always provoked detailed descriptions of these various strategies.

Note that these eight categories of danger management strategies are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, people often practice numerous strategies, either simultaneously or sequentially. For example, if there is a knock at the door, one might check to see who is at the door before answering it (monitoring), ask the repair person for identification before allowing him or her to enter the house (monitoring), imply that one's spouse or partner is home (obfuscation), and keep a weapon at close reach (fortification). Or, when travelling home from work, one might walk with a coworker to one's car or bus stop (reliance on others), choose a route one perceives to be safer (pattern change), remain alert and watchful throughout the journey (monitoring), and carry one's keys in one's hand as a potential weapon when approaching one's door (fortification). Many of these strategies become so taken-for-granted that they are almost invisible and go unnoticed in daily life.

### **Construction of the Danger Management Scales**

For each category described above, I constructed a scale that represented the number of strategies in this category used by the respondent. Respondents were asked two different kinds of questions about the strategies they use. Half of the questions involved "one-shot" strategies: things an individual might do once or very rarely (such as installing lights or taking a self-defense class). In these cases respondents were asked whether they had ever used the strategy; "yes" answers were coded as '1'; "no" answers were coded as '0.' The other half of the questions involved activities that are likely to be regularly repeated (such as locking one's door or checking the back seat of one's car); for these questions, respondents were asked to estimate on a 4-point scale how frequently they used the strategies. For the purposes of the analysis below, responses of "all or most of the time" or "fairly often" were coded as '1'; responses of "seldom" or "never" were coded as '0.' This coding method captured the distinction between those who practiced the strategies regularly and those who might have used

them rarely in an unusual situation. The respondents scores on the questions comprising the eight categories were summed to create the eight danger management scales.

On average, participants practiced the greatest number of fortification strategies (an average of 6.1 strategies per person). Monitoring strategies (mean=4.2) and avoidance strategies (mean=3.03) were next most frequently practiced, followed by obfuscation strategies (mean=1.5), and pattern change strategies (mean=1.3), and isolation strategies (mean=.37). The two categories with only one item, relying on others and community action, were practiced by 32.9% and 7.1% of the participants, respectively.

There were significant correlations among a number of the types of strategies; these are reported in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2  
Intercorrelations Among Types of Strategies

	Monitor	Avoid	Fortif	Obfus	Pattern	Isolate	Rely
Avoidance	.45****						
Fortification	.75****	.35***					
Obfuscation	.48****	.14	.46****				
Pattern	.61****	.40****	.45****	.31***			
Isolation	.14	.26*	-.01	.13	.28**		
Reliance	.14	.52****	.05	-.09	.15	.10	
Community Action	-.06	.16	.33***	.17	.23*	-.06	.04

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.005, \*\*\*\*p<.001

The strongest correlations were among monitoring, avoidance, fortification, and pattern change strategies. Obfuscation was highly correlated with monitoring, fortification, and pattern change, but not with avoidance. Isolation was less strongly associated with avoidance and pattern change strategies. Finally, reliance on others

was associated only with avoidance, while community action was associated with fortification and pattern change.

### **Social Groups and Danger Management Strategies**

There were significant differences in the number of danger management strategies practiced by the members of various social groups distinguished by gender, race, age, sexual orientation, education, income, homeownership, and living alone / with others. Table 5-3, on the following page, summarizes these differences. As this table demonstrates, women practice more strategies in every category except community action than men do. Other statuses are related to the different types of strategies in various ways. In the sections below I discuss each type of strategy and its relationship to these social groups in more detail.

Table 5-3  
Relationships Between Types of Strategies and Social Groups

	Avoidance	Monitor	Fortification	Obfuscation	Pattern Change	Isolation	Reliance on Others	Community Action
Gender	Women use more strategies than men	Women use more strategies than men	(Women use more strategies than men)	Women use more strategies than men	Women use more strategies than men	Women use more strategies than men	Women use more strategies than men	ns
Race	ns	ns	ns	(people of color use more strategies)	ns	ns	ns	ns
Age	Younger people use more strategies	People age 25-34 use more strategies	People age 25-34 use more strategies	People 25-34 and 65+ use more strategies	ns	People age 65+ use more strategies	People 18-24 and 75+ use more strategies	ns
Sexual Orientation	ns	Gays/lesbians use more strategies	Gays/lesbians use more strategies	Gays/lesbians use more strategies	ns	Heterosexuals use more strategies	(Heterosexuals use more strategies)	Gays/lesbians use more strategies
Live alone vs. with others	People living alone use more strategies	ns	People living with others use more strategies	ns	ns	People living alone use more strategies	People living with others use more strategies	ns
Education	ns	People with more education use more strategies	People with more education use more strategies	ns	ns	ns	(People with less education use more strategies)	ns
Income	ns	People with higher incomes use more strategies	People with higher incomes use more strategies	People with higher incomes use more strategies	ns	People with lower incomes use more strategies	ns	People with higher incomes use strategies; others don't
Home-ownership	ns	ns	Homeowners use more strategies	Homeowners use more strategies	ns	Renters use more strategies	ns	Homeowners use strategies; renters don't

Note: Items in parentheses approach significance.

### Monitoring Strategies

Monitoring strategies involve keeping watch over one's physical and social environment in order to avoid danger. Eight questions about monitoring were included in the survey; all participants reported practicing at least one such strategy, most frequently making a point of being watchful on the street (90%) or checking to see who is at the door before opening it (85%). The mean number of monitoring strategies used by members of various social categories is shown in Table 5-4.

Table 5-4  
Differences in Mean Number of Monitoring Strategies  
by Social Category

Social Category		Number of Strategies (Maximum=8)			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t (F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	3.37	1.96	30	-3.20	68	.001
	Female	4.85	1.89	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	4.00	2.05	52	-1.51	68	ns
	People of Color	4.83	1.95	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	3.06	1.34	16	(3.27)	4	.05
	25-34	5.18	1.78	17			
	35-44	4.93	2.05	15			
	45-64	3.82	2.79	11			
	65+	3.82	1.60	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	5.31	1.97	13	2.16	62	.05
	Heterosexual	3.94	2.05	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	3.97	2.14	31	-.90	68	ns
	With Others	4.41	1.97	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	2.75	1.29	12	(3.29)	3	.05
	≤ 2 years college	4.20	1.97	30			
	4-year college grad	4.80	2.08	15			
	Post-grad degree	4.92	2.22	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	3.25	1.99	16	(3.37)	3	.05
	\$10,000-25,000	4.80	1.61	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	4.93	1.90	14			
	\$75,000+	5.33	2.19	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	4.05	2.04	38	-.99	57	ns
	Own	4.62	2.20	21			

## Gender

The mean number of monitoring strategies used by women and men was significantly different: men used 3.37 such strategies, on average, but women used 4.85. The difference in the distribution of responses was even more striking: 60% of men, but only 22.5% of women, practiced three or fewer monitoring strategies. Conversely, 55% of the women, but only 20% of the men, practiced five or more such strategies.

There were also gender differences in the use of particular strategies. For example, 67.5% of women, but only 40.0% of men, said they had considered the safety of their building before moving in ( $t=-2.35$ ,  $df=68$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women also said they think about personal safety when looking for a parking place more than men do ( $t=5.17$ ,  $df=47.46$ ,  $p<.000$ ). Over half of women said they do this all or most of the time, compared with less than five percent of men, whose modal response for men was “seldom” (67%). Finally, 43% of women say they always or nearly always check the back seat for intruders before getting into their car,<sup>1</sup> but 52% of men say they never do ( $t=3.63$ ,  $df=47$ ,  $p<.001$ ). However, men and women reported being alert and watchful on the street equally often (91.3%).

The focus group discussions also showed patterns of gender differences. There were 72 mentions of monitoring strategies made by women, compared with 35 by men.

*Tanya: ...I think it's part of your everyday life, especially as a woman, to be aware of your surroundings and the things around you, and, you know, just the lighting and where you park and everything. You constantly have to be thinking about it. Because that's the type of person—the type of person who is not aware is usually the one that gets preyed on, but that doesn't mean that somebody who is aware doesn't get...(Group 11)*

In addition, women made 12 comments about monitoring children to protect them, whereas no men made such statements. This women talked about protecting her

<sup>1</sup> Thirty-seven participants, or 52.9%, indicated that they owned or drove a car. Car ownership or use was more likely for wealthier participants ( $F=4.40$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and younger participants ( $F = 4.40$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Homeowners were more likely than renters to own or drive a car: 76.2% of owners said they did so, compared with 50% of renters ( $\chi^2 =3.78$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). No men of color reported owning or driving a car; however, 76.9% of women of color did, compared with 57.7% of white women and 52.2% of white men.

preschool daughter:

*Alissa:* Right now, I know my neighbor on the other side, she's got two little kids just a year and two years older than my daughter—my daughter is two, so hers are three and four—and they are always out here playing by themselves, I mean, up and down the street, just running up and down, playing on their Bigwheels and having a great time. And my daughter sees them out there and she wants to go play, but I don't let her go outside unless I'm with her. (Group 11)

And this woman talked about using monitoring strategies to protect her older children when they go out with friends:

*Angela:* ...So I don't ask for drivers license, but I come pretty close to that list [laughter]—name, address, or phone number, at least put it somewhere so that we know. These are considerations that are necessary. (Group 11)

Men also reported using monitoring strategies, although less frequently than did women:

*Eric:* And [if you go into a dangerous neighborhood] you just need to know where you are, how to get out of there, don't get lost, and try to park in a safe place if you've driven, you know, just don't go park off in an alley somewheres, that's not the best place to be, but I think that, you just need to be aware of your surroundings, and you'll be a lot safer. (Group 7)

In addition, one man noted that he monitored his female dates to protect them.

*Richard:* I know when I'm out on a date or something, I'll tell my date to carry her purse somewhat safely...or we're in a club that's really crowded and potentially dangerous or something, I'll, I usually want her in my sight, I don't want her you know, off dancing with some other guy or something, potentially dangerous. (Group 1)

Note the parallels between this comment and the remarks made about children, above.

One striking difference between the men's and women's comments was the obvious pervasiveness of women's monitoring practices. Many women made comments like the following:

*Stacy:* Well I think I'm definitely impacted by violence, or the implied threat of violence, just in the atmosphere, I mean, as a woman, I'm conscious of the possibility of being assaulted whenever I go out, I mean, I always am thinking about my safety and whether or not this is a safe area or not, and I'm very conscious about who and what is around me... I think that that affects me in every—unconsciously and consciously when I go out, when I make decisions, when I watch when I'm out and about, because I think what Kim said, it's kind of that threat hanging over me... I've never been physically assaulted but it's kind of that possibility, I'm always conscious of that. (Group 5)

*Fiona:* For me it's always, I mean that's in the forefront. ... And I've never been assaulted or anything like that, I haven't had any real violence in my life. But I know it's there, and I don't want to be a victim. So I'd rather prevent. So I'm always watching out for myself, I look around when I park, or—all kinds of things, it's just sort of in

the forefront, and yet it's just a part of my life, and how I live in the—and sometimes I think wouldn't it be so nice if I didn't have to worry... (Group 5)

*Desiree:* And it's just every little thing. You have your keys in your hand before you get off the bus. You know, I look for all these men fumbling for their keys outside their building, it's like, mine are there, and I have, my little—

*Linda:* I've got my, my hands on them in my pocket.

*Barbara:* You always park right under the street light when you have a car, you know—

*Marie:* You always put the seat down.

*Barbara:* You always put the seat down, you always check the car before you get in. (Group P1)

These comments reveal just how constant monitoring is in these women's lives. In contrast, men rarely made comments that demonstrated such omnipresent concern and monitoring.

### Other Social Statuses

The use of monitoring strategies was also related to age, sexual orientation, education, and income. For example, lesbian and gay participants reported using an average of 5.31 strategies, compared with 3.94 for heterosexual participants. Fewer than 8% of lesbian and gay participants, but more than 30% of straight participants,

reported practicing only one or two monitoring strategies. In contrast, 30.8% of lesbian and gay participants, but only 13.7% of straight participants, reported practicing seven or eight such strategies. In at least some cases, this monitoring was the direct result of sexual orientation. For example, this woman reported monitoring both the environment and the impressions she and her female partner give off:

*Joyce: I'm careful about the clothing I wear, and where I go, and who I'm with, and how we present ourselves. Because I know from experience, I can just walk down the street, and someone can just punch me in the head, cause they feel like it. So, I have a very guarded look about where I go and how I look, and what other people might be there. (Group 4)*

Gay and lesbian respondents were more likely than straight respondents to have considered the safety of their neighborhood before moving in: 92.3% of gay and lesbian participants said they had done this, as compared with only 43.1% of heterosexual participants ( $\chi^2=10.06$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Gay and lesbian participants also reported checking to see who is at the door before opening it more frequently than did straight participants: 92.3% of this group said they did this all or most of the time, compared with only 53.1% of straight participants ( $t=-2.48$ ,  $df=60$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Age was also associated with the use of monitoring strategies. None of those aged 18–24 or 65 and over but over 20% of those aged 25–64 used more than six strategies. Participants age 25–44 (those most likely to own homes) were more likely to say they had considered the safety of their neighborhood before moving in ( $F=4.4$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Older people were more likely than younger people to ask sales or repair people for identification before opening the door. Sixty percent of those age 65 to 74, and 100% of those over age 75, said they did this “all or most of the time”; however, 94% of those age 18–24, and 65% of those age 25 to 34, said they “seldom” or “never” did this ( $F=4.59$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Two strategies had a relationship with age that approached significance: making a point of being alert when walking on the street ( $p=.09$ ) and crossing the street when someone who seems strange or dangerous approaches ( $p=.07$ ). People in the oldest age categories were the most likely to practice

both of these strategies.

Although the relationship between race and the number of monitoring strategies used was not significant, there were a number of relationships with individual strategies that were significant or near significant. For example, people of color reported making a point of being alert and watchful when walking on the street more than whites did (means of 1.59 vs. 1.28); this difference also tended toward significance ( $t=1.98$ ,  $df=52.55$ ,  $p=.053$ ). Women of color reported checking to see who is at the door before opening it more than did white women (83.3% of women of color said they did this all or most of the time, compared with 60% of white women ( $t=2.02$ ,  $df=34.75$ ,  $p=.05$ ). Women of color reported that they had considered the safety of their neighborhood before moving in more than white women had (76.9% of women of color, vs. 48.1% of white women); this difference tended toward significance ( $\chi^2 =2.97$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Women of color were more likely to think about personal safety when looking for a parking space; 70% of women of color said they did this "all or most of the time," compared with 42.1% of white women ( $t=2.26$ ,  $df=427$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women of color were also more likely to check the back seat of the car for intruders before getting in ( $t=2.09$ ,  $df=25.39$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Only 33.3% of white women said they did this all or most of the time, compared with 60.0% of women of color. In fact, 38.9% of white women, but only 10% of women of color, said they *never* did this.

The use of monitoring strategies increases with education: all of those with a high school education or less used five or fewer such strategies. In contrast, 33.3% of those with two or fewer years of college, 33.4% of college graduates, and 38.5% of those with post-graduate degrees reported using six or more such strategies.

Finally, monitoring strategies were significantly related to income: 72.7% of those practicing only one or two such strategies reported an income of less than \$10,000 a year. In contrast, 72.7% of those practicing seven or eight monitoring strategies reported a yearly income of \$25,000 or more. Indeed, only 12.5% of those with a yearly income under \$10,000 reported practicing five or more strategies, compared with more

than half of those in every other income category. Wealthier people reported that they checked who was at their door before opening it more than poorer people did: on average, those making over \$75,000 said they did this "all or most of the time," while those making less than \$10,000 said they did this "fairly often." It is possible, however, this may be a result of the different types of living situations that are normative for people in different income strata. Wealthier participants were also more likely than poorer participants to have considered the safety of their neighborhood before moving in ( $F=4.48$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The same held true for homeownership: 71.4% of owners but 39.5% of renters said they had done this ( $t=-2.48$ ,  $df=48.83$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

#### *Avoidance Strategies*

Avoidance strategies involve maintaining one's usual activities but avoiding dangerous people, places, and interactions. Participants were asked about five such strategies; all participants reported using at least one of these. The mean number of avoidance strategies practiced by members of various social groups is reported in Table 5-5.

Table 5-5  
Differences in Mean Number of Avoidance Strategies  
by Social Category

Social Category		Number of Strategies (Maximum=5)			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t (F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	2.60	1.38	30	-2.46	68	.01
	Female	3.35	1.17	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	2.98	1.31	52	-.52	68	ns
	People of Color	3.17	1.34	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	3.38	1.45	16	(1.19)	4	ns
	25-34	3.12	1.32	17			
	35-44	3.27	1.10	15			
	45-64	2.55	1.13	11			
	65+	2.55	1.44	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	3.00	.82	13	-.13	32.76	ns
	Heterosexual	3.04	1.41	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	2.65	1.25	31	-2.25	68	.05
	With Others	3.33	1.28	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	2.67	1.56	12	(.47)	3	ns
	≤ 2 years college	3.17	1.34	30			
	4-year college grad	3.13	1.36	15			
	Post-grad degree	2.92	.95	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	2.81	1.64	16	(.29)	3	ns
	\$10,000-25,000	3.20	1.42	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	3.21	1.05	14			
	\$75,000+	3.08	1.16	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	2.95	1.34	38	-.41	57	ns
	Own	3.10	1.30	21			

### Gender

The use of avoidance strategies was strongly related to gender: on average, women reported using more such strategies than did men. For example, 90% of women, but only 40% of men, said they avoid walking through poorly-lit alleys or streets at night "all or most of the time" ( $t=4.61$ ,  $df=33.98$ ,  $p<.000$ ); note the relevance of this item to the stereotypes of rapists lurking in dark alleys. Similarly, 51.3% of women, but only 20.7% of men, said they stay out of parts of town believed to be dangerous "all or most of the time" ( $t=1.66$ ,  $df=66$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women were also more likely to cross the

street when someone who seems strange or dangerous approaches: 45% of women, but only 23% of men, reported they do this “all or most of the time” ( $t=2.14$ ,  $df=66$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Overall, 77.5% of the women, and 50% of the men, practiced three or more avoidance strategies. There are some strategies, however, that men and women report practicing equally often: choosing a seat on the bus with an eye to who is sitting nearby<sup>2</sup> (although this does not mean that men’s and women’s ideas about who makes a fit seat companion are the same, as I will discuss in Chapter 7), and avoiding looking people in the eye.<sup>3</sup>

While women consistently practice more avoidance strategies than men, it is important to recognize that men do use a substantial number of these strategies as well. Gender stereotypes would suggest that men rarely avoid dangerous situations, but in this sample, some men reported doing this quite often. Although the gender difference is notable, the widespread use of these strategies by both women and men is also important.

Gendered patterns were also clear in the focus group discussions. In the thirteen discussions, there were 108 mentions of avoidance strategies. Of these, 74, or 68.5%, described strategies used by women, as in these examples:

*Jane:* I [walk downtown] all the time....Now, I don’t cut through that park...

*Louisa:* Oh, I never go, no no no.

*Jane:* It can be quite bad. And I don’t cut through things like that, my kids don’t want me going by that convention center with the cement wall because even though they’ve got buzzer things, you could be attacked there. (Group 10)

*Becky:* The other place I would feel unsafe is any place where there was active drug abuse going on, like the park, wherever the park is, there’s always a park, where they do the heavy duty drugs, or even a bar where there’s a lot of heavy drinking, those are places I find to be real common places where I feel highly unsafe. And I avoid them. (Group 3)

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<sup>2</sup>However, 24% of women said they do this all or most of the time, compared with only 14% of men.

<sup>3</sup>However, 21% of women said they do this all or most of the time, compared with only 7% of men.

*Sandy:* Even when I'm out on the bus, I hate to just, I don't want to stare at anyone, I just read my book, or don't want to talk to anyone because you don't know! I mean, you're always thinking...if you're staring at them, they might pull out a gun or...(Group 1)

In contrast, 34 of the 108 mentions of avoidance strategies, or 31.5%, described strategies used by men:

*Harold:* You mentioned driving in traffic, I do recall that I have given up the habit of making gestures to drivers who I don't care for, tailgaters, after a guy in a big truck took a swerve at me one time after I had done something like that. (Group 4)

In addition to these kinds of comments, which were similar to those made by women, men also made five comments about strategies that involved avoiding particular situations, but for quite different reasons. For example, these quotes, both from men who lived in a low-income apartment building, describe strategies that seem motivated by the desire to avoid returning to prison or by the fear of their own uncontrollable violence, rather than by fear of being victimized:

*Keith:* And when I got out of the penitentiary the last time I made myself a promise I was not going to do anything that jeopardized me going back. Bottom line. Okay, so if I'm walking downtown and somebody hits me, I'll want to really stomp them, but I know if I do the police are going to come, and if they show up, they're not going to see that he hit me first, they're going to see me hitting him with a beer bottle or brick or whatever that's around, and they're going to see that, and I'm going to go to jail. So I gotta to stay away from situations like that. (Group 9)

*Franklin:* It's really scary that I still carry that intensity. And I know violence, most of all, is what I always work on. I never put myself in situations. Because once I commit myself, I like to humiliate the person. I don't believe in just stopping and shaking their hand, and stuff like that. I take it to extremes. Because it's like a high to me. I don't care if he's crying, he's asking for help or anything. Matter of fact he used to fuel me even more when I would hurt, hear because he say "help" or "stop" or anything. I would just keep going. And I always just went out of it. (Group 9)

For these men, fear of victimization does not seem to be the driving force behind their avoidance strategies.

### Other Social Categories

Although the mean number of avoidance strategies used by members of different age groups was not significantly different, there was a negative linear relationship between the two variables. Older people tended to use fewer such strategies than younger people; this relationship tended toward significance ( $r=-.23$ ,  $p=.06$ ). The youngest and oldest age categories (age 18–34 and 65 and over) reported being more likely to stay out of parts of town perceived to be dangerous than did those in the middle age categories ( $\chi^2 =34.02$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p<.05$ ). People in the oldest age categories were more likely to say they would cross the street when someone who seems strange or dangerous approaches; this difference approached significance ( $p=.07$ ). The use of avoidance strategies was also significantly related to living alone rather than with others: those who lived with others were likely to use more such strategies than those who lived alone.

Finally, although the mean numbers of avoidance strategies practiced by homosexual and heterosexual participants were not significantly different, there were interesting gender differences within these categories. The mean number of strategies reported was 3.0 for both gay men and lesbians. Straight men reported practicing fewer strategies (2.39), while straight women reported practicing more (3.57).

### *Fortification*

Fortification strategies involve strengthening one's home, car, or person in such a way that it makes them less vulnerable to invasion or attack. For example, one might use locks or bars on doors and windows, bright lights outside one's home, or alarms on one's home or car. One might also keep a weapon or dog for protection, take a self-defense class, or dress with an eye to safety. There were sixteen questions about fortification tactics; 98.6% of the respondents said they use at least one of these, most frequently locking the doors of a parked car (98.0%), locking the doors to one's home at night (90.9%), and carrying one's keys in one's hand when approaching one's car

(88.0%). The mean numbers of fortification strategies used by respondents are shown in Table 5–6.

Table 5–6  
Differences in Mean Number of Fortification Strategies  
by Social Category

Social Category		Number of Strategies (Maximum=16)			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t (F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	5.50	2.60	30	-1.57	64	.06
	Female	6.50	2.66	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	5.92	2.71	52	-.79	68	ns
	People of Color	6.50	2.55	18			
<i>Age</i>	18–24	4.94	1.88	16	(7.12)	4	.0001
	25–34	7.24	1.92	17			
	35–44	8.07	2.69	15			
	45–64	4.73	2.49	11			
	65+	4.55	2.54	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/Lesbian	8.08	2.43	13	2.96	62	.005
	Heterosexual	5.75	2.56	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	5.26	2.67	31	-2.35	68	.05
	With Others	6.72	2.50	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	4.42	1.98	12	(4.16)	3	.01
	≤ 2 years college	5.70	2.38	30			
	4-year college grad	6.73	2.94	15			
	Post-grad degree	7.70	2.63	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	4.13	2.16	16	(12.52)	3	.000
	\$10,000–25,000	5.67	1.91	15			
	\$25,000–75,000	7.29	2.58	14			
	\$75,000+	9.00	2.13	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	5.61	2.53	38	-2.88	57	.01
	Own	7.62	2.66	21			

### Gender

The gender difference in the practice of fortification strategies tended toward significance ( $p=.06$ ): the mean for both women and men was between five and seven of the sixteen strategies. However, the modes of the two distributions were different: 30% of men said they practiced six strategies, whereas 25% of women reported practicing eight strategies. Indeed, 42.5% of the women practiced eight or more strategies,

compared with only 26.7% of the men.

The types of fortification strategies practiced by women and men were also different. There was little difference in strategies involving fortifying one's home: approximately one third of both women and men said they had installed or made sure there were bright lights outside the house and installed or made sure there were special locks or bars on the doors or windows. Fewer than 15% of both women and men said they had installed a burglar alarm or kept a dog or weapon for protection. Men and women also reported similar patterns of strategies intended to fortify their doors: the majority of both men and women reported locking their doors both during the day and at night. There were also similar reports for a number of strategies used when away from home: carrying a weapon for protection (5.7% of all respondents) and considering safety concerns when choosing clothes if going out alone (26.7% of all respondents).

The major gender differences occurred in five strategies, all related to danger when away from home and/or in one's car. Women were more likely to report they carried something other than a weapon for protection: 24% of women, but only 7% of men, said they did this at least "fairly often" ( $t=2.17$ ,  $df=58.55$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women were also more likely to get their housekeys out before reaching one's door: 67.5% of women, but only 33.3% of men, said they do this "all or most of the time" ( $t=2.71$ ,  $df=68$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Finally, the gender difference in wearing shoes that are easy to run in in case of danger approached significance ( $p=.08$ ): 32% of women, but only 14% of men, did this "all or most of the time." (Of course, this difference may be due to the fact that many men ordinarily wear shoes that are easy to run in, and thus have no need to consciously select such shoes.) In addition, women are significantly more likely to lock the doors when they are in the car ( $t=2.90$ ,  $df=49$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Nearly 60% of women reported that they do this "all or most of the time," compared with fewer than 20% of men. In contrast, 45% of men say they do this "seldom" or "never." Women also say they carry their keys in their hands when going to the car more than men do; 79% of women, but only 38% of men, say they do this "all or most of the time" ( $t=2.81$ ,  $df=48$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

The focus group discussions also included similar numbers of comments about fortification strategies by women and men: men provided 53 descriptions, while women described 64. However, these strategies fell into quite different categories, as shown in Table 5-6.

Table 5-6  
Frequencies of Fortification Strategies Mentioned in the Focus Groups

Type of strategy	Men	Women	Total
Locking doors or windows	21	30	51
Sirens, alarms, security systems	7	3	10
Mace/pepper spray	0	5	5
Guns	16	1	17
Other weapons	5	0	5
Keys in hand	0	5	5
Security building, upstairs apartment	1	4	5
Self-defense class	0	4	4
Clothes/shoes	0	2	2
Dog	2	5	7
Other	2	7	9
Total	53	64	117

Both men and women reported locking their doors and windows:

*Becky:* ...But I also feel safest in a security building, and around people ...And I like secure buildings though, I love being locked in, like that. (Group 3)

*Tanya:* I think it's sad that you can't trust everybody and that you have to, you know, lock your doors, and before you leave the building you have to make sure to have your keys in your hand and your mace and everything else. (Group 11)

*Rick:* I'm at least more cautious, of making sure my car is locked whenever I leave it, of turning on the alarm at home, of locking the doors, of walking down the lighted side of the street, walking in the street, and not going places after dark that I think would be of concern. Even probably my views of other people are affected by warnings. (Group 2)

*Alissa:* That's what I mean when I say it's not that I don't feel safe in my house, but I do make sure that the doors are locked and everything, and then I can relax. If I'm in bed and I'm thinking, "Did I lock that door," I have to get up because I can't go to sleep because I may or may not have locked the door. (Group 11)

However, men tended to report using security systems more than women did:

*Bill:* Oh definitely, the house has a security system now, the next car will have an alarm, I'm afraid, the old car doesn't but the new one will. (Group 2)

Men also reported using guns and other weapons far more often than women did. Men made sixteen such comments, while women made only one.

*Frank:* ...Within my reach right now there are so many weapons that I wouldn't have to worry about it, everything from the glass to the table itself to a pen or whatever. In my apartment it's the same thing. About a year ago I found a two-foot long screwdriver in the street. It's got five pounds of steel and a good-sized plastic handle. I don't know what they're used for, I have no *idea* what they're used for, but it's mine now. And it's right next to my front door. (Group 6)

*Bill:* Oh definitely, the house has a security system now, the next car will have an alarm, I'm afraid, the old car doesn't but the new one will. (Group 2)

*Christine:* Like I'm thinking of my brother. He lives in a small town in northern Wisconsin, and I mean, he's armed to the teeth, I mean, he's got lots of guns, and handguns, and he's learned how to shoot them, and he teaches self-defense, and you know, he goes to the 7-11 and circles the parking lot, does it look suspicious? (Group 4)

*Keith:* ...But my cousins up in Anchorage used to be the biggest pot dealers, and around there's drugs there's always violence. And my cousin had to shoot somebody one time—or, he didn't have to, but at this point, he had to shoot somebody over a debt to prove his point, you know, you gotta pay your drug deals. And I found out nothing happened about that, then shit, you know, hell, I started carrying a gun, because I'm not going to get beat up. I'm going to shoot somebody, and if nothing's going to happen, nothing's going to happen...And a lot of weapons, like Leroy said, he wouldn't have them except in a war. I was fascinated by them. I was, man, because I was somebody. When I carried a pistol, I was somebody. It was power to me, because nobody was going to hurt me. Nobody. I don't care who you are, I'd shoot you. (Group 9)

This emphasis on guns and weapons by men during the focus group conversations is particularly surprising given the non-significance of the gender difference in carrying guns found in the survey.

In contrast, women tended to report using mace or pepper spray, carrying their keys in their hands, living in a security building, contemplating learning self-defense, wearing shoes or clothes that do not hinder defense, and keeping a dog for protection:

*Belinda:* ...But the only other kind of final thing that I want to say is that I've always wanted to take one of those classes where they bring in that big, that guy covered in the foam suit and you just beat him up, and they try to attack you from the back, and then you just beat them up. I don't know, I would just love to do one of those some day. If they came on campus I would go, and I would volunteer, and I would probably make a fool out of myself, but it would be fun. And I don't know, it would show me what I needed to do to get an attacker away or something. I don't know, I think it would make me feel stronger about what would need to be done or something. (Group 12)

*Mona:* I made a conscious decision when I first moved to Seattle to get the very top apartment...and that was a conscious decision, to even pay a few more dollars to get it. (Group 5)

*Joyce:* I walk around all the time with my dog, and I totally trust my dog's intuition. If we're walking down the street and she growls at somebody, I'm out of there. If she goes up and wags her tail and likes them, they're okay. She's never let me down yet, and I totally trust her. (Group 4)

Thus women's strategies are much more varied than men's are, and rely much less heavily on weapons. Indeed, the one woman who said she had kept a gun reported that "I tried that, but it didn't work, I stayed a nervous wreck," (*Leanne, Group 8*) and so she removed the gun from her home.

### Other Social Statuses

The use of fortification strategies was significantly related to all the other social categories except for race. For example, those age 25–44 practiced the most such strategies (between seven and eight strategies per person), while those in younger and

older age categories practiced fewer (between four and five per person). The oldest and youngest age categories were less likely to have installed bright lights around their home ( $F=6.18$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.0000$ ) or installed a burglar alarm ( $F=2.38$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ). As discussed below, this pattern was likely the result of homeownership, which was concentrated in this age group. Age was also significantly related to the frequency of having one's housekeys out before reaching one's door: again, those age 45–54 were least likely to do this, while those age 75 and over were most likely to do this ( $F=3.20$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The likelihood of wearing shoes that are easy to run in in case of danger ( $p=.08$ ) also approached significance. However, people age 25–44 were more likely to have taken a self-defense class than those younger or older ( $F=2.74$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Fortification strategies were also significantly different for homosexual and heterosexual respondents. All the gay men, but only 34.8% of the straight men, said they practiced at least six such strategies. For women, 87.5% (or all but one) of the lesbians said they practiced eight or more fortification strategies, compared with 35.7% of the straight women. This difference is particularly interesting given the fact that lesbians tended to say they felt less at risk than straight women. However, this difference may be due to the greater likelihood for lesbians in this sample to be wealthy and own homes.

Lesbian and gay participants were more likely than heterosexual participants to say they had installed or made sure there were special locks on the doors and windows: 53.8% of lesbian and gay participants said they had done this, compared with only 27.5% of straight participants. This difference approached significance ( $\chi^2=3.27$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.07$ ). Similarly, 61.5% of gay and lesbian participants, but only 25.5% of straight participants, said they had installed or made sure there were bright lights around the house ( $\chi^2=6.11$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Similar differences were found for installing a burglar alarm (30.8% vs. 9.8%;  $\chi^2=3.77$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.05$ ), keeping a dog for protection (23.1% vs. 2.0%;  $\chi^2=7.88$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Lesbian and gay participants also reported carrying their car keys in their hand when approaching their car more frequently than

did heterosexual participants: 69.4% of lesbian and gay participants said they did this all or most of the time, compared with only 38.5% of straight participants ( $\chi^2 = 6.58$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Finally, lesbian and gay participants were more likely to report wearing shoes that are easy to run in in case of danger: 58.3% of these participants said they do at least fairly often, compared with 24.5% of straight participants; this difference tended toward significance ( $t=-1.91$ ,  $df=59$ ,  $p=.06$ ).

A number of these relationships were likely tied to homeownership, which was positively related to the use of fortification strategies. Only five of the renters, or 13.2%, said they practiced two or fewer fortification strategies; in contrast, 23.8% of the homeowners said they practiced 10 or more fortification strategies, compared with 5.3% of the renters. In terms of specific strategies, 57.1% of owners, but only 27.1% of renters, said they had installed or made sure there were bright lights outside the house ( $t=-2.79$ ,  $df=34.83$ ,  $p<.01$ ), installed or made sure there was a burglar alarm ( $t=-3.17$ ,  $df=22.38$ ,  $p<.005$ ), or kept a dog for protection ( $t=-2.17$ ,  $df=20$ ,  $p<.05$ ). These strategies are all more easily engaged in by owners than by renters. Those who own their own homes can make modifications to their windows and doors (and are more likely to have the money to be able to do so), and are more likely to be able to keep dogs because they have no landlord to restrict pet ownership. Owners also reported that they locked their doors when they were home alone at night more than renters did: the mean score for owners was 1.09; the mean for renters was 1.50 ( $t=2.06$ ,  $df=40.75$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This difference may be due, however, to the fact that many of the renters lived in relatively secure buildings where they felt they had some sort of community, such as in a fraternity, sorority, dormitory, or retirement community.

Whether the respondent lived alone or with others was also associated with the number of strategies they reported: 19.3% of those who lived alone, but none of those who lived with others, reported practicing two or fewer fortification techniques. In contrast, 43.6% of those who lived with others practiced eight or much such techniques, compared with only 19.4% of those who lived alone. These patterns are

likely due to the association between living alone, income, and homeownership: those who live alone tend to be less wealthy and are less likely to own homes.

Fortification strategies increased with education: 91.7% of those with a high school degree or less reported practicing seven or more such strategies, compared with only 53.8% of those with a post-graduate degree. Fortification strategies also increased with income: only 12.5% of those with a yearly income of less than \$10,000 reported using seven or more such strategies, compared with 83.3% of those with a yearly income higher than \$75,000.

The income difference can be clearly seen in the frequencies of using specific strategies. For example, those with higher incomes were more likely to install or make sure there were special locks or bars on the doors or windows ( $F=4.84$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.005$ ). The same relationship held for installing or making sure there were bright lights outside the house ( $F=14.13$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.000$ ) and installing or making sure there was a burglar alarm ( $F=5.37$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Wealthier people were also more likely to report keeping a dog for protection ( $F=3.01$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and participating in a block watch program ( $F=4.75$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.001$ ); as noted above, these differences may be the result of the greater likelihood for wealthy people to own their own homes. Finally, locking car doors when inside the car had an interesting relationship with income: both poorer respondents (reporting a yearly income of less than \$10,000) and wealthier respondents (reporting a yearly income of over \$75,000) said they did this *less* frequently than those in the middle income categories. This difference was nearly significant ( $F=2.73$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.06$ ).

Although the difference between whites and people of color in the number of strategies was not significant, there were some racial differences in individual strategies. For example, white men were more likely than men of color to have installed or made sure there were bright lights outside the house (36% vs. 0%;  $t=3.67$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<.001$ ), installed or made sure there was a burglar alarm (16% vs. 0%;  $t=2.14$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<.05$ ), or kept a weapon for protection (16% vs. 0%;  $t=2.14$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women

of color reported considering safety concerns when choosing clothes more frequently than did white women; 38.5% of women of color, but only 4% of white women, reported doing this all or most of the time. This difference was also close to significant ( $t=2.09$ ,  $df=18.38$ ,  $p=.051$ ).

### *Obfuscation*

Obfuscation involves presenting oneself, one's house, or one's car as other than it actually is. For example, one might pretend one lives with others, rather than alone, or pretend one is home when one is not. Four survey questions asked about obfuscation strategies; 77.1% of respondents said they used at least one of these. Mean differences in the use of these strategies are shown in Table 5–8.

**Table 5-8**  
**Differences in Mean Number of Obfuscation Strategies**  
**by Social Category**

Social Category		Number of Strategies (Maximum=4)			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t (F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	1.23	1.01	30	-2.04	68	.05
	Female	1.75	1.08	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	1.39	.96	52	-1.95	68	.06
	People of Color	1.94	1.31	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	.94	.85	16	(3.20)	4	.05
	25-34	1.71	1.10	17			
	35-44	2.13	1.13	15			
	45-64	1.18	1.08	11			
	65+	1.84	.81	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	2.15	.99	13	2.47	62	.05
	Heterosexual	1.35	1.06	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	1.35	1.17	31	-1.21	68	ns
	With Others	1.67	.98	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	1.42	.90	12	(1.11)	3	ns
	≤ 2 years college	1.37	1.16	30			
	4-year college grad	1.53	1.19	15			
	Post-grad degree	2.00	.82	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	.94	1.00	16	(4.03)	3	.05
	\$10,000-25,000	1.60	.99	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	1.57	1.09	14			
	\$75,000+	2.25	.87	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	1.32	1.02	38	-2.26	57	.05
	Own	1.95	1.07	21			

### Gender

On average, women reported practicing 1.75 obfuscation strategies, while men reported using 1.23. Although the modal number of obfuscation strategies practiced by women and men was the same (two out of a possible four), the distributions were different: 22.5% of the women, but only 6.7% of the men, practiced three or four strategies; 50% of the men, but 37.5% of the women, practiced one or no strategies. Women were more likely than men to have gotten an unlisted phone number ( $t=-1.93$ ,  $df=67.35$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women, far more than men, tend to use their initials or last name

alone on the mailbox or in the telephone directory ( $t=-4.50$ ,  $df=58.66$ ,  $p<.000$ ): nearly half of the women said they do so, compared with fewer than 10% of the men. Two obfuscation strategies were not gendered: men and women reported leaving the television on and asking neighbors to keep an eye on the house when away from home equally often.

The focus group conversations supported the patterns found in the survey data. Women mentioned obfuscation strategies seventeen times, and these mentions described a wide range of strategies: for example, keeping a separate stash of money to hand over to muggers, hiding oneself while monitoring others, keeping the lights on to suggest someone is home, and looking confident when walking down the street:

*Katrina:* Usually when I'm in situations like that [when there is an unexpected knock at the door late at night], my stomach jumps to my throat and I start to panic because I'm like a very apprehensive and nervous person, and my immediate thought—thoughts would just race through my head trying to figure out who it could be. And then, usually, I'll figure it's someone coming who's not supposed to be there. And so I would either just not answer the door, or I would try to look through a window to see who it was, but not let them see me, not let them know I'm in the house. And if it's someone I don't recognize or who looks questionable, then I won't be in view at all in the window so they won't know unless they've already seen me—so they won't know that I'm in there. And hope that the door's locked. (Group 12)

*Marie:* I'm not listed in the phone book...I'm married, we don't put our phone number on our checks. We don't give out, you know, we don't participate when people call us for surveys or whatever, we just don't. There's a way I run my life that constrains me and it's just part of my everyday existence... (Group P1)

Men, however, mentioned obfuscation strategies only four times; two of these mentions involved hiding oneself (e.g., not answering the door), and two involved making oneself appear confident, as in this example:

*Harold:* ...Something that David was saying earlier, which I remember from my childhood, was learning how to present, almost an acting point of view, but being taught how to present myself in a way that would discourage attack. For example, learning that if you keep your shoulders relaxed and let your arms move opposite to your legs, just the way they would naturally fall, studies show

that muggers consider you to be more likely to be able to defend yourself, more relaxed and comfortable, and therefore less likely to choose you as a target. And so even if I am not in that way, not relaxed, if I am in a situation where I feel a immediate physical threat, from for example a group of individuals that I don't know, one thing that I'll do is either make myself relax or act the relaxed look that I am not actually feeling. (Group 4)

### Other Social Statuses

The use of obfuscation strategies was also significantly related to age, sexual orientation, income, and homeownership. For examples, these strategies were used more frequently by people aged 25–44 and 65 and older than by those in other age categories. For example, this elderly woman discussed her response when followed by three men:

*Louisa:* Three guys followed me. [They came up the] steps, so I pretended that I forgot something and looked really stupid. But what they wanted, they wanted to get in, and I turned around and went back down the steps. (Group 10)

Older people were more likely than younger people to report using their initials or last name only on their mailbox or in the telephone directory. Only 6.3% of those age 18–24 said they did this, compared with 43% of those age 65–74 and 75% of those over age 75 ( $F=2.40$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Those aged 35–44 were most likely to leave a TV, radio, or lights on when away from home; the other age groups where homeownership predominated (25–34 and 55–64) were also likely to do this ( $F=3.55$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.005$ ).

The use of obfuscation strategies increases with income. Those with a reported income of less than \$10,000 per year said they use an average of .94 such strategies, those who report an income between \$10,000 and \$75,000 said they use approximately 1.6, and those with an income above \$75,000 reported using 2.25. The relationship between using initials or last name only on the mailbox and in the telephone directory had a particularly interesting relationship with income. Poor people—those making \$10,000 a year or less—said they did this least frequently (12.5% said they did so), followed by those with the highest incomes, over \$75,000

(25.0%). Those in the middle income categories did this the most (53.3% of those with an income between \$10,000 and \$25,000, and 35.7% of those with an income of \$25,000–\$75,000). This relationship approached significance (anova,  $f=2.21$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.10$ ).

Differences between owners and renters paralleled the differences in income: owners were likely to use more strategies than renters. Owners reported leaving on lights, TV or radio when not home more than renters did: 52.4% of owners, but only 21.6% of renters, said they do this “all or most of the time” ( $t=2.10$ ,  $df=56$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Owners also reported asking neighbors to watch their home and bring in mail when they are gone more than renters did: 75% of owners said they did this at least “fairly often,” but only 47.3% of renters did. This difference tended toward significance ( $t=1.89$ ,  $df=46.17$ ,  $p=.07$ ).

Because of the collinearity of homeownership, sexual orientation, and income, similar differences were also found for sexual orientation. For example, 61.5% of gay and lesbian participants, but only 19.6% of straight participants, reported that they left on lights, TV or radio when away from home ( $\chi^2 =13.19$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Overall, sixty percent of the gay men reported practicing two or more obfuscation strategies, compared with 47.8% of the straight men. The bigger difference, however, occurred for women: all of the lesbians said they practiced two or more obfuscation strategies, but only 50.0% of the straight women said the same. For example, this lesbian woman commented:

*Stacy: It's interesting, because we went to New York too. And I was extremely hyper-vigilant the whole time I was there, but I never felt particularly endangered. And I don't know that I feel like a sense of impending doom, but I also did a lot of things you know, I didn't make eye contact, if I did I looked mean, you know, and I kept going. (Group 5)*

People of color reported using more obfuscation strategies than white people. This difference was most pronounced for women: on average, women of color reported

using 2.38 such strategies, compared with the average of 1.44 reported by white women ( $t=-2.79$ ,  $df=38$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This difference, however, was not apparent in the focus groups; the only obfuscation strategy discussed by women of color involved maternity patients who registered in a hospital using false names:

*Frances:* I work on a mother-baby unit, we do get some mothers in there who don't want the fathers of the baby anywhere around them, and some women come up and they come under an alias and that sort of thing because the father is a drug dealer and a gun-toting mobster or something, so they make sure they have an alias and stuff like that. (*Group 11*)

The strategy with the biggest racial difference was getting an unlisted phone number: people of color were far more likely than whites to have done so ( $t=-3.79$ ,  $df=20.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This held true for both women and men: 61.5% of women of color, but only 11.1% of white women, had obtained an unlisted number. Similarly, forty percent of men of color, but only 4% of white men had done so. White men also reported asking neighbors to watch their home when away more than men of color did: the median response for white men was "all or most of the time" (45.8%) while all the men of color responded "never" ( $t=-8.56$ ,  $df=23$ ,  $p<.000$ ).

#### *Pattern Change*

This category involved making both major and minor changes in the respondent's life patterns in response to fear or safety concerns. The survey asked four questions related to pattern change: whether the respondent had moved, arranged their work schedule, or selected transportation modes or routes because of fear. Overall, 72.9% of the respondents said they used at least one of these four strategies; however, none was practiced by more than 40% of the respondents. Results from the survey are shown in Table 5-9.

**Table 5-9**  
**Differences in Mean Number of Pattern Change Strategies**  
**by Social Category**

Social Category		Number of Strategies (Maximum=4)			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t (F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	.80	.85	30	-3.53	67.95	.001
	Female	1.65	1.17	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	1.17	1.12	52	-1.44	68	ns
	People of Color	1.61	1.09	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	.94	1.06	16	(.84)	4	ns
	25-34	1.35	.93	17			
	35-44	1.60	1.18	15			
	45-64	1.09	1.14	11			
	65+	1.45	1.37	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	1.69	1.11	13	1.63	62	ns
	Heterosexual	1.14	1.10	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	1.29	1.19	31	.03	68	ns
	With Others	1.28	1.08	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	.75	1.22	12	(1.55)	3	ns
	≤ 2 years college	1.33	1.15	30			
	4-year college grad	1.27	.80	15			
	Post-grad degree	1.69	1.18	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	1.13	1.20	16	(1.20)	3	ns
	\$10,000-25,000	1.73	1.16	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	1.21	.70	14			
	\$75,000+	1.67	1.15	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	1.18	1.21	38	-.77	57	ns
	Own	1.43	1.08	21			

### Gender

The use of pattern change strategies was significantly related only to gender. The differences in the number of pattern change strategies practiced by women and men were very large: fully forty percent of men said they practiced no such strategies at all, compared with only 17.5% of the women. In contrast, 52.5% of the women, but only 13.4% of the men, practiced two or more such strategies. For example, 27.5% of women said they had arranged their work or school schedule with an eye to safety, compared with only 10% of the men ( $t=-1.93$ ,  $df=67.35$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Women were more

likely to say they drive or take a taxi rather than walking because of fear of being harmed: 32% of women said they do this at least fairly often, compared with 7% of men ( $t=2.33$ ,  $df=62.56$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Choosing transportation routes because of safety concerns was also practiced far more by women than men: 53% of women did this at least fairly often, compared with 17% of men ( $t=3.06$ ,  $df=64.86$ ,  $p<.005$ ).

These patterns were also seen in the focus group discussions. Of the fourteen descriptions of pattern changes in the discussions, all but one were mentioned by women. For example, this 65-year-old white woman described how she had stopped using a particular elevator ("P-1") in her apartment building because of fear:

*Jane:* I don't use P-1 anymore. Does anybody? Are you frightened of that, the other women? I don't—I have a key to come into P-1 because of the car situation, but I do not use it...No, I feel safer going out this way and going in the front door. Ever since Angelo invites these crazy people in the building, I don't want to be in that area...because I keep thinking somebody's going to grab my purse...I mean, if you're stuck in that P-1 elevator you're stuck.  
(Group 10)

Other respondents spoke of moving to a new residence because of fear, as did this woman, who moved from Los Angeles to Seattle:

*Angela:* Because of that is why I moved, because I felt as if I always had to—there was more of an animalistic nature that I felt that people had there. They lived behind bars, they were always afraid. You know, to be secure, you put bars on your windows, you had bars on your doors, you had double and triple locks and that sort of thing. It is as if you are in a zoo as opposed to being free as a human being. And I didn't want to raise my kids around [that]...(Group 11)

The single focus group comment about pattern changes made by a man also involved moving for the sake of children. This 55-year-old white man described his parents' decision to move so he could go to a school they perceived to be more safe:

*Jerry:* My parents actually relocated the whole family so I wouldn't have to go to a particular junior high and high school in Philadelphia. It was not a big relocation, it was like 5 miles into the suburbs...Even back in the days a long time ago when I was in high school, there were police patrolling the halls for the protection

of the teachers, I guess, but actually more for the protection of the teachers than the students, and so, pretty mean place. (Group 3)

Another woman also described her father's deciding to move from the city to a suburb for the protection of the children. Indeed, protecting children was the only reason given for men's use of pattern change strategies.

### Other Social Statuses

Although none of the relationships between pattern change strategies and other social statuses were statistically significant, there were a number of interesting patterns in the data. For example, gay and lesbian participants tended to report using more such strategies than straight participants. Indeed, 33.3% of heterosexual participants, but only 7.7% of gay or lesbian participants, reported using no pattern change strategies at all. In contrast, 23.1% of lesbian and gay participants, but only 11.8% of straight participants, reported using three or four such strategies. Interestingly, however, none of the gay or lesbian participants talked about using such strategies during the focus group discussions.

Another interesting, although nonsignificant, pattern involved income: wealthier people were less likely than poorer people to have arranged their work or school schedules with an eye to safety ( $F=3.13$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Interestingly, wealthier people were also less likely to practice some of the strategies that involve financial outlay, such as driving or taking a taxi instead of walking.

Finally, there were a number of significant differences among racial groups in individual items. Forty percent of men of color, but only 4% of white men, reported having moved because of fear for their safety ( $\chi^2=6.00$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Men of color also reported arranging their work or school schedule with an eye to safety more than white men did (40% of men of color vs. 4% of white men;  $\chi^2=6.00$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Neither difference was present for women.

*Isolation*

Isolation strategies involve keeping oneself away from potentially dangerous situations and people by not doing the things one might ordinarily do, such as going out at night or engaging in work or leisure activities. There were three survey questions about isolation tactics; however, only 24.3% of the respondents said they used any of them. Differences in the mean number of these strategies practiced by members of various social statuses are shown in Table 5-10.

Table 5-10  
Differences in Mean Number of Isolation Strategies  
by Social Category

Social Category		Number of Strategies (Maximum=3)			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t (F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	.17	.59	30	-2.08	67.72	.05
	Female	.53	.85	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	.33	.48	52	-.83	68	ns
	People of Color	.50	.99	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	.19	.54	16	(4.45)	4	.005
	25-34	.18	.39	17			
	35-44	.27	.46	15			
	45-64	.27	.90	11			
	65+	1.18	1.17	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	.00	.00	13	-3.67	50	.001
	Heterosexual	.35	.69	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	.61	.99	31	2.26	39.89	.05
	With Others	.18	.45	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	.75	1.14	12	(2.40)	3	ns
	≤ 2 years college	.47	.82	30			
	4-year college grad	.13	.35	15			
	Post-grad degree	.08	.28	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	.56	.89	16	(2.91)	3	.05
	\$10,000-25,000	.73	.96	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	.21	.53	14			
	\$75,000+	.00	.00	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	.61	.95	38	2.69	52.22	.01
	Own	.14	.56	21			

## Gender

The use of isolation strategies was significantly associated with gender: 35% of women, but only 10% of men, said they practiced at least one such strategy. For example, women were more likely to report restricting going out to only during the daytime: 30% of women said they do this at least “fairly often,” compared with only 10.3% of men ( $t=1.88$ ,  $df=66.90$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Men were less likely than women to avoid doing shopping, errands, laundry, or other errands because of fear; 76% of men, compared with 58% of women, said they never do this ( $t=1.78$ ,  $df=62.47$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Similarly, men were less likely to say they avoid leisure or pleasure activities because of fear: 66% of men, but only 47% of women, said they “never” do this, and 16% of women, but only 3% of men, said they do this at least “fairly often” ( $t=2.12$ ,  $df=62.47$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

The focus group discussions mirrored these differences: there were four times as many mentions of isolation strategies by women (25) than by men (6). For example:

*Fiona:* I don't go out running at night, in wintertime when it starts getting dark, that's like, gone. If I don't have a partner to run with, then I don't run. Early in the morning, if it's enough light I'll go out running, but if it's dark I will not go out running, you know, because I just think it's too dangerous. (Group 5)

*Stacy:* I had a situation, and it was around exercise, and you know I was talking about I didn't know when I was going to exercise and that sort of thing, and my boss who was male and about 6-2, says, “well, why don't you go run in the morning?” And I don't, because I don't feel safe at that time. And it never crossed his mind. I mean, it never—he runs in the dark, early in the morning, his safety never crossed his mind, of whether or not he was safe doing that. (Group 5)

*Desiree:* So I think more of that, and just the anger of knowing I've changed so much in my life to avoid those situations, where I just don't go out by myself, I don't go out and study in a coffeshop in the evening cause like, I have to get home from it, so I stay home. (Group P1)

### Other Social Statuses

The use of isolation strategies was significantly related to all the other social statuses except race and education. However, many of these relationships were quite different than the patterns seen with other types of strategies. For example, isolation strategies were used more by those over age 65 than by any other group. Of the respondents in this age group, 63.6% used at least one such strategies, compared with 9 to 27% of the respondents in every other age category. Those in the oldest age categories (65 and older) were likely to say they restricted their going out to the daytime much more frequently than younger people: for those 65–74, the mean response was “fairly often”; all of those age 75 and older said they did this “all or most of the time.” For example, this conversation occurred among three elderly respondents:

*Sadie:* ...I just stay close to home all the time, we don't venture out at night...

*Sam:* Not alone.

*Sadie:* No, not alone.

*Ida:* I never go out at night. (*Group 10*)

The mean response for those in younger categories, however, varied between “seldom” or “never” ( $F=7.21$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.0000$ ). Those in the oldest age category were also more likely to say they avoided doing errands or leisure activities because of fear (for errands,  $F=2.45$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ; for leisure,  $F=2.91$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Isolation tactics were also practiced much less frequently by lesbian and gay participants than by straight participants. This was particularly true for lesbians, who reported practicing no isolation strategies; in comparison, only 57.1% of straight women reported using no isolation strategies. Only one man, who identified himself as straight, reported practicing a single isolation strategy. 91.7% of lesbian and gay participants, but only 49% of straight participants, said they never restricted their going out to the daytime hours ( $t=4.56$ ,  $df=57.32$ ,  $p<.000$ ).

Homeownership was also significantly related to the number of isolation strategies practiced: those who own their own homes reported practicing fewer such strategies than those who rent. None of the male homeowners reported practicing any isolation strategies, while 16.7% of the male renters did. Similarly, 45% of the female renters, but 76.9% of the female homeowners, practiced no isolation strategies. 25% of the female renters, but none of the female homeowners, said they practiced two or more isolation strategies. Renters also said they restricted their going out to only during the daytime more than owners did: 85.7% of homeowners, but only 40.5% of renters, said they “never” did this ( $t=-3.83$ ,  $df=55.92$ ,  $p<.000$ ). Because of the collinearity of homeownership and income, these relationships also held for members of different income categories (leaving on lights, etc:  $F=3.75$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ; for having neighbors watch one’s home:  $F=5.68$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.005$ ), for restricting going out to daytime hours:  $F=5.05$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Those who live alone also used more isolation strategies.

The use of isolation strategies decreased with education: 41.7% of those with a high school education or less, but only 7.7% of those with a post-graduate degree, reported practicing one or more such strategies. Finally, although the relationship between race and the use of isolation strategies was not significant, people of color reported using such strategies more than did white people (for people of color, mean = 3.65; for whites, mean = 3.28); this difference tended toward significance ( $t=1.86$ ,  $df=65$ ,  $p=.07$ ).

#### *Reliance on Others*

Reliance strategies entail depending on someone else to provide protection. For example, one might ask another person for an escort when walking home, or purposefully stand near a police officer or security guard to ensure protection in case of danger. Only one question on the survey measured this form of strategizing: participants were asked how often they went out with a friend or two for protection after dark. Overall, 34.3% of the respondents said they did this. The proportion of

respondents in various social groups who reported using this strategy “all or most of the time” or “fairly often” are shown in Table 5–11.

Table 5–11  
Percent of Respondents Using Reliance Strategies  
by Social Category

Social Category		Percent of Respondents		Significance		
		%	N	$\chi^2$	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	13.3	30	9.07	1	.005
	Female	47.5	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	32.7	52	.002	1	rs
	People of Color	33.3	18			
<i>Age</i>	18–24	68.8	16	13.25	4	.01
	25–34	23.5	17			
	35–44	26.7	15			
	45–64	9.1	11			
	65+	27.3	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	15.4	13	2.25	1	rs
	Heterosexual	37.3	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	16.1	31	7.06	1	.01
	With Others	46.2	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	50.0	12	7.48	3	.06
	≤ 2 years college	43.3	30			
	4-year college grad	13.3	15			
	Post-grad degree	15.4	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	37.5	16	1.75	3	rs
	\$10,000–25,000	26.7	15			
	\$25,000–75,000	35.7	14			
	\$75,000+	16.7	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	36.8	38	2.02	1	rs
	Own	19.0	21			

### Gender

Gender was significantly related to reliance on others: 47.5% of the women, but only 13.3% of the men, said they relied on friends when going out at least fairly often. This difference was also apparent in the focus group discussions, in which women made fifty comments that discussed reliance strategies, while men made only seventeen. The majority of these comments fell into three general categories: relying on

specific other people, relying on general others, and calling for help. In addition, two participants said they relied on their dogs, and two said they relied on God to keep them safe. The distribution of these types of comments is shown in Table 5-12.

Table 5-12  
Patterns of Reliance on Others

Gender of relier and person relied on		Type of reliance			Total
Relier	Relied on	Specific other	General other	Calling for help	
F	F	5	0	0	5
F	M	12	0	0	12
F	*	18	7	8	33
M	F	1	0	0	1
M	M	3	0	1	4
M	*	6	4	2	12
*	*	2	1	1	4
F	M & F	1	0	0	1
Total		47	13	12	72

\*=gender not specified

The most common type of statement involved relying on specific other people (e.g., a friend, a relative, or a police officer) for protection. This category mirrored the question asked in the survey. There were 47 comments of this type. Of these, 35 involved women relying on others, while 17 involved men relying on others for protection. Who these others are is also gendered: six of the others were identified as female, 15 were identified as male, and 23 were not identified. Note that the one instance in which a male was described as relying on a female for protection involved a small boy who relied on his older sisters; in no other cases were men described as relying on women. Instead, they reported relying on other men or, more frequently, on unnamed others.

Women frequently said they relied on men to keep them safe:

*Linda:* I have a friend who's a really big guy. I don't think he's ever been in a fight, I think I've been in more fights than he has, and he's really gentle, but because of how he looks people never mess with him? And I love walking down the street with him, I mean no one even looks at me, people don't even see me, and it's wonderful. It's like, sometimes I feel like I hang out with, I have some male friends who are really kind of scary looking, and I feel like, I mean once I was in 7-11 with this very scary-looking male friend of mine, who looks like he's crazy, like his eyes are crossed, and he's just like always kind of out of it, and he's not, but he looks really crazy? And I was in 7-11 and someone started bothering me, and for a moment I was scared, and then I'm like, what am I thinking? and I just walked over by my friend, and the guy suddenly didn't seem to have anything to say to me at all anymore. (Group P1)

To a lesser extent, women relied on other women, as in this comment from a 40-year-old white lesbian:

*Tina:* When we were in New York for the Gay Games, we were walking one night from Broadway to about 42nd street, and we were on 9th Avenue, if anybody knows where that is. And there were some pretty weird people, and it was about eleven, twelve, one o'clock at night, and I was feeling pretty nervous. And, we didn't make any eye contact, but I did feel safe because, [sappy voice, to partner] I was with you. (Group 5)

Both women and men also reported relying on unidentified others, as in these comments:

*Sarah:* Whenever I go to a party, you go with like friends... (Group 12)

*Tom:* Well, I know like this last opera that we did, we were leaving churches at ten o'clock at night on Capitol Hill, where we were rehearsing at. And we would always say if there was someone walking alone to their car, you know, let me walk you...(Group 2)

*Linda:* I've noticed that usually I feel safer with someone else, even if the someone else isn't someone who could really help me, it's just that there's another person there. (Group P1)

*Stuart:* Most of the times I figure if I have, if I'm with people I know I have protection also. Especially in our society these days. I mean if you're, if something happens and you're in a group of people that nobody knows you or cares about you, who's—they're

going to be on the other guy's side. Most times, because he's their friend, you know. you know, it's like in high school, in the cliques. If you're in the hallway and something happens, the clique's going to be on their friend's side and they're gonna be against you. If you have no one to defend you, you're kind of in the soup. (Group 6)

This young woman's comment was particularly poignant, showing how deeply the strategy of reliance was ingrained:

*Jill:...*I don't really think it affects me everyday because I guess I don't really think about going places by myself anymore because it's so much of a habit that I just don't, or I'm always too busy anyway to go by myself. And plus I never go by myself because I don't want to. It's like, boring to go places by myself, [laughter] so I mean I don't really think of it as affecting me very much everyday...(Group 12)

Other categories of reliance on others were also mentioned in the focus groups, although not explicitly measured in the survey. Participants reported relying on other people in general, rather than on specific individuals, to keep them safe. In this case, it is the presence of others in the vicinity, rather than being accompanied by specific other people, that conveys safety. Women and men made these kinds of comments in nearly equal numbers, as in the following examples:

*Marcia:* The Ave might not be that safe, but when there's a lot of people there I don't think about it. Which is kind of weird, because then you hear the reports that they've done with people who have been around many people, and they don't do anything when someone's actually getting hurt. But for some reason, in my mind, I keep thinking, "Well, there's all these people here. If someone comes up and steals something or tries to mug me or whatever, I'll scream, you know? (Group 12)

*Charlie:* There are enough people that live around, feel close enough that, if anything were to happen, I'm sure they would probably realize it. (Group 7)

Participants also talked about relying on their ability to call for help, either on the telephone, by yelling or screaming, or by using some sort of device such as an emergency buzzer. Women made these comments more frequently than men did. For

example, one woman said she would carry the phone to the door if there was an unexpected knock at the door:

*Sarah:* I'd carry the phone to the door with me in case I didn't know them. Better safe than sorry. (Group 12)

This man described using a two-way radio to protect him while on the job as an apartment manager:

*Ernie:* I used to walk down the alleyway, I wouldn't go down and check the dumpsters and check those alleyways for, no way. And I told my boss that, I just said, I, and now I started carrying a radio, why if something happens I can get hold of the office anyhow, cause I, just it's still dangerous around here, I mean you have to really watch yourself. (Group 6)

Several participants reported relying on dogs for protection:

*Belinda:* I have this ten pound little mutt, he couldn't do anything, but I feel so much safer when he's there. It's like, okay, if my dog is here, and he's like still running around the house, then everything's fine, but if he's barking at a window or if I can't hear him, you know maybe he locked himself in the closet, you know, I think, "Okay, a murderer's upstairs, he has my dog and he's muffled him, and I'm going to die." (Group 12)

Finally, two women reported relying on God to protect them:

*Angela:* I think my faith has a lot to do with my security and my peace, too, that I have in terms of feeling safe...[I say] "Okay, Lord, if I'm going to turn all of this over to you, then I want to be able to walk in peace." I don't want to worry about my car, if it's unlocked. I lock it now because my insurance doesn't cover it if it isn't locked. [laughter] Really, it's the truth, that I don't worry about it. And my husband gets a little perturbed about it sometimes. I don't worry about my house, I don't worry about the doors, I don't worry—I just don't want to do that anymore. I don't want to do it. And so I opted to, through my faith in Christ, to let him carry me because he said he would. And I have a total peace doing that, and I trust him, that's he's faithful in allowing that peace to reign in my life. (Group 11)

### Other Social Statuses

Reliance on others was also significantly related to age, sexual orientation, and whether a person lived alone or with others. The oldest (75 and over) and youngest

(18–24) age categories were said they went out with a friend or two for protection significantly more often than those in the intermediate age categories. 69% of those age 18–24 said they did this at least “fairly often,” and all of those age 75 and over said they did this “all or most of the time.” Those age 45–64 said they did this least frequently; for these groups, the mean response was “seldom” ( $F=4.87$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0005$ ).

Although the relationship was not statistically significant, 15.4% of lesbian and gay participants, but 37.3% of straight participants, reported going out with others for protection. In addition, the relationship with education approached significance ( $p=.06$ ): 45.2% of those with less than a college education reported using reliance strategies, compared with 14.3% of those with at least a college degree. Finally, 16.1% of those who lived alone, but 46.2% of those who lived with others, used strategies involving reliance on others; this difference was statistically significant. However, the substantive significance of this difference is not clear, because those who live with others may have chosen to do so in order to protect themselves.

### *Community Action*

Community action involves cooperating with others in one’s community to mutually strategize about danger. In the survey, participants were asked whether they had ever participated in a block watch program; additional forms of community action might involve forming a neighborhood patrol or jointly lobbying for a greater police presence in the neighborhood. Only 7.1% of the respondents had participated in a block watch program; the percentages of those in particular social groups who had done so are shown in Table 5–13.

Table 5-13  
Percent of Respondents Who Reported Participating in a Block Watch Program  
by Social Category

Social Category		Percent of Respondents		Significance		
		%	N	$\chi^2$	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	3.3%	30	1.15	1	ns
	Female	10.0	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	5.8	52	.58	1	ns
	People of Color	11.1	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	0.0	16	7.21	4	ns
	25-34	11.8	17			
	35-44	20.0	15			
	45-64	0.0	11			
	65+	0.0	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	23.1	13	5.28	1	.05
	Heterosexual	3.9	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	3.2	31	1.29	1	ns
	With Others	10.3	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	0.0	12	2.27	3	ns
	≤ 2 years college	6.7	30			
	4-year college grad	6.7	15			
	Post-grad degree	15.4	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	0.0	16	12.07	3	.01
	\$10,000-25,000	0.0	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	7.1	14			
	\$75,000+	33.3	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	0.0	38	9.89	1	.005
	Own	23.8	21			

Using community action strategies was significantly related only to income, homeownership, and sexual orientation; as discussed above, these three variables were highly collinear. None of the renters, but 23.8% of the homeowners, had participated in a block watch program. This kind of activity is presumably easier for homeowners; those who live in stable neighborhoods are more likely to have the interaction with their neighbors necessary to form a block watch program. Of those with incomes above \$75,000 per year (who are also more likely to own homes), 33% had participated in block watch programs; none of those with a yearly income of less than \$25,000 had

done so. This relationship between community action and social class was also noted in the focus groups. For example, this 34-year-old man described the difference between his former neighborhood in Los Angeles and his mother's more wealthy Seattle neighborhood:

*Tom:* I mean, Venice Beach is a pretty poor area in Los Angeles. There are a lot of gangs, you know, and...there's a lot of street crime, there are a lot of drugs. It's the type of environment where people go to seek drugs in that area, and where gangs can survive because there's lack of police due to the amount of money that the neighborhood can afford, and it's not like single dwelling homes where you don't really like, cruise around, it's all apartment areas and commercial areas at night, where you can go park your car, and other kids can hang out with you, and there's not really a block watch program. But I think that where you get into, like, my mom's neighborhood which is a middle class neighborhood, you know, all of a sudden you have block watch program, single dwelling homes, you've got police who know the people who live there. And you also have a place where people know each other, you know? I mean, they not only have Block Watch, but everyone knows each other, and knows, I mean, this sounds bad, but knows who belongs and who doesn't. But when you get in the more poor areas, people are moving in and out all the time...(Group 2)

#### *Total Strategies Practiced*

To assess the relative use of all kinds of strategies, I computed the total number of strategies practiced by each respondent by summing the indexes for the eight types of strategies. The total number of possible strategies was 42; the actual number practiced by the respondents varied from 3 to 32, with a mean of 16.9. The mean number of strategies practiced by members of various groups, together with the significance of the differences within social categories, is shown in Table 5-14.

**Table 5-14**  
**Differences in Mean Number of Danger Management Strategies**  
**by Social Category**

Social Category		Total Strategies			Significance		
		Mean	SD	N	t(F)	df	p<
<i>Sex</i>	Male	13.83	6.52	30	-3.57	68	.001
	Female	19.20	6.01	40			
<i>Race</i>	Whites	16.17	6.47	52	-1.55	68	ns
	People of Color	19.00	7.26	18			
<i>Age</i>	18-24	14.13	4.70	16	(3.54)	4	.05
	25-34	19.12	5.17	17			
	35-44	20.73	7.25	15			
	45-64	13.73	7.94	11			
	65+	15.45	6.70	11			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	Gay/ Lesbian	20.62	6.60	13	2.25	62	.05
	Heterosexual	15.98	6.64	51			
<i>Live Alone or With Others</i>	Alone	15.32	7.27	31	-1.77	68	.01
	With Others	18.15	6.09	39			
<i>Education</i>	High school or less	13.25	5.69	12	(2.06)	3	ns
	≤ 2 years college	16.73	6.82	30			
	4-year college grad	17.80	6.56	15			
	Post-grad degree	19.62	6.81	13			
<i>Income</i>	< \$10,000	13.19	7.19	16	(4.63)	3	.01
	\$10,000-25,000	18.00	5.15	15			
	\$25,000-75,000	18.86	6.20	14			
	\$75,000+	21.83	6.44	12			
<i>Homeownership</i>	Rent	16.08	6.99	38	-1.72	57	ns
	Own	19.29	6.67	21			

Overall, the groups who practiced the most strategies were women, people of color, those aged 25-44, gays and lesbians, those who live alone, those with more education, those with higher incomes, and those who own their own homes. Note, however, that all the groups identified here practiced a substantial number of strategies (at least 13 of the 42 strategies); given the differences identified in the literature on fear of crime, one might expect the range to be broader.

### **Strategies to Protect Against Acquaintances and Intimates**

All the questions described above measured the strategies respondents use to keep themselves safe from victimization by strangers. These questions mirror the questions asked by most surveys of fear of violence. However, people are also at risk of violence from those they know. Indeed, for most people, violence from intimates is a greater risk than violence from strangers (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995). To assess the effects of this kind of danger, the survey also asked about strategies respondents might use to protect themselves from violence from people they know.

For example, one question asked whether respondents had ever avoided any of the following behaviors because of fear of violent consequences: disagreeing with one's spouse or intimate partner, talking back to one's father, talking back to one's mother, arguing with one's adult sons or daughters, arguing with one's boss or teacher, or drinking alcohol on a date or in other social situations. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they had avoided each behavior on a four-point scale. Only avoiding talking back to mothers was significantly associated with gender ( $\chi^2 = 9.18$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Women were more likely than men to say they had avoided doing this frequently (15.2% vs. 0%), and men were more likely to say they had done so "once or twice" (29.6% vs. 6.1%).

Few participants talked about these kinds of strategies during the focus group discussions. There were occasional acknowledgements that violence could come from intimates as well as from strangers:

*Becky: I think that the violence is just, can be potentially anyone, anyone that I know...Someone in this room. I mean, I don't look at it as being out there so much as it could be anybody at any time, if they perhaps snap, or have got a mental illness, or whatever. So, I guess I don't look at it always as being always that far away.  
(Group 3)*

Participants also occasionally talked about their own experiences with this kind of victimization or strategized about how to prevent it. For example, the following quotes provide a flavor of the discussions:

*Frank:* ...I was afraid to talk to people, I never had a date in high school, because I was so afraid to talk to people and I was afraid of bringing them home, because my old man would do something stupid. And he did so I learned, don't bring your friends home. . Don't make friends, you know, because they're going to be destroyed, stuff like that. (*Group 6*)

*Desiree:* ...Fortunately none of my relationships have been with any, in any way violent, never even a shove or a threat of it, so, even though statistically I know what the odds are, I could be attacked by someone I know, it just has never happened to me, and I, like, my second date, I always say, if you ever hit me, I will bludgeon you to death in your sleep, so [laughter]...I will never tolerate that. And I always pick men who are not control freaks, or tough guys, or anything like that. (*Group P1*)

*Alissa:* [My ex-husband would] run from his own shadow except, you know, when they come to deal with me, because it was totally opposite with me, because he was violent with me. But to everybody else, he was just a sweetheart, just a wonderful guy. (*Group 11*)

However, these kinds of comments were very infrequent. In general, violence among intimates was not discussed in the focus groups: it was invisible in these conversations as it often is in everyday life.

### **Not Strategizing**

The analyses above have demonstrated the wide variety of strategies people use to protect themselves from danger and control their fear, and has provided a sense of how pervasive such strategizing is. It is also revealing, however, to examine who does *not* practice danger management strategies, and under what circumstances.

The survey asked five sets of questions about strategies undertaken in various sets of circumstances. Two of those sets, one that focused on "one-shot" strategies related to one's home (e.g., installing a burglar alarm or obtaining a dog for protection), and another that involved strategies oriented toward assessing the safety of one's environment (e.g., considering the safety of one's building or neighborhood before moving in) included a final item that read, "None of the above," which participants checked if they had taken none of the other precautions in the set.

For the first set of items (one-shot strategies related to one's home), there were significant gender differences: fifty percent of the men in the sample, but only 20% of the women, said they had not practiced any of the strategies in their present home ( $t=2.66$ ,  $df=54.06$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Thus, although some men do practice danger management strategies, men are far more likely than women to practice none at all. Participants who were aged 25–44 and 65 or older were also less likely than those in other age categories to say they had used none of these strategies ( $F=2.39$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Those who were poorer were also more likely to say they had used none of these strategies; 56.3% of those who earned less than \$10,000 per year, but 19.5% of those who earned more than \$10,000, said they had used no such strategies. This difference tended toward significance ( $F=2.67$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.06$ ). Similarly, those with less education were more likely to report using no strategies in this category ( $F=2.87$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

For the second set of strategies, related to one's home and work environments, 30% of men, but only 15% of women, had used none of the strategies; this difference approached significance ( $t=1.46$ ,  $df=53.05$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Sexual orientation was also associated with using none of these strategies: 25.5% of heterosexual participants said they had done none of the strategies listed above, as compared with only 7.7% of gay and lesbian respondents. This difference tended toward significance ( $t=-1.81$ ,  $df=29.44$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Less educated respondents were much more likely to say they had used none of these strategies: 50% of those with a high school education or less said this, compared with 15.5% of those with at least some college ( $F=2.87$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

The focus group discussions were also coded for comments indicating that strategies were not used. In total, there were 94 such comments made during the 13 group discussions. Of these, 38 were made by men, and 56 by women, suggesting that the experience of not using strategies may be more salient to women than to men. Even more different than the number of comments, however, was their content. Table 5–15 reports the frequency of five different types of comments for both women and men.

Table 5-15  
Types and Frequencies of Comments Reporting Not Using Strategies

Type of comment	Speaker		
	Men	Women	Total
Simple	20	6	26
Qualified	6	17	23
References to Past	6	12	18
Particular Context	1	9	10
Mistake	5	12	17
Total	38	56	94

Men most frequently made “simple” comments—unqualified statements that they did not use danger management strategies. For example, this 18-year-old man noted his lack of concern while travelling abroad:

*Eric:* I’ve spent a lot of time in various places I’ve been, to other countries, walked around at night, like in Athens, and Lisbon, no real regard for myself ...I was 14, 15, 16 at the time, I just, I don’t have a lot of fear for my safety. I generally think I can protect myself. And that’s my experience with violence and stuff. (Group 7)

*Bob:* The whole thing kind of hits me as kinda weird in a way. It’s like listen to women talk about how they’re afraid and I, it’s just strange, I’ve never had to feel that way, and I guess that’s what is hitting me, hearing that for the first time, I’ve never had to consider, walking down the street, if I’m going to get whooped or not. And, and I guess, I guess that’d be a damn hard feeling to have to take. (Group P1)

*Elliot:* I leave my door unlocked a lot of times, in the house. I feel very comfortable in my neighborhood. I usually do lock it at night, but there’ve been times it’s unlocked...I feel pretty comfortable. (Group 2)

Women, on the other hand, were more likely to make “qualified” statements about not using strategies. For example, the speaker might follow the comment with extensive talk about danger management strategies or indicate that the choice to not use a particular strategy was based upon a calculated risk, rather than on a feeling of safety.

These quotes illustrate this type of comment:

*Linda:* I still go out alone at night, and...what I try to think about is, do I feel like I'm really risking my life, or do I feel like I'm worrying more than I should. And I try to be careful with it, but I also realize, I'd rather get attacked than stay inside sometimes, cause sometimes it's too aggravating to stay at home. (Group P1)

*Lori:* ...I've never, I enjoy walking up and down Broadway. And I live in Queen Anne and it's not nearly as...I guess, in the media and what everyone thinks about it it's not as a dangerous place but it's in the downtown area. So, there's, people people are still more afraid than if they were in Bellevue, say, but I go, I walk at night, I don't go far from my house, I stay, like you know, convenience store right across the street, but I don't even think twice about going out at night by myself just, there, and I think a lot of people would. (Group 1)

Interestingly, some of the comments in this vein came from very young men (in the group of 18–19 year old fraternity members) who seemed intent on highlighting their bravery by contrasting their lack of precautions with the surrounding environment of great danger, as in this remark:

*Eric:* ...I have friends that live in houses and stuff up there [in the Central Area], and I know that's kind of a violent area, around Seattle, [I've been] downtown, Pike Place Market area, I've been to the International District here, several times, I haven't spent a lot of time there but I've been there at night...(Group 7)

Many participant also commented that they did not use safety strategies at some point in the past, generally when they were growing up. This was an ongoing theme in the focus groups: the transformation of their environments over time from places of unquestioned safety to places of danger where constant attention to preserving one's safety is necessary. For example, this elderly white woman recalled her youth in Seattle:

*Sadie:* Having been born and raised here...we would never lock our doors, we could go anywhere we wanted without ever once thinking about being attacked or anything, and if there was a murder in the city, which happened maybe once every five years, it was the talk of the town forever how horrible it was. Now, you pick up the paper and there are two or three every day, this one is getting mugged, that one is getting killed or getting stabbed... (Group 10)

This African American woman, who was considerably younger, made a similar comment:

*Frances: ...this world is not like it was when I was 19. Or when I was 15, we could be out until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, when I was 14, 15 years old, running from the park and here and there and everywhere. And it just was not like it is now, you know. You didn't hear about predators when I was 14, 15, 16 year old, people stalking kids and going here and there. But now, it's like an everyday thing. People that went to jail went to jail, you know, and stayed in jail. They didn't go to jail like they do now and get out a few months later and work release and all that...(Group 11)*

Some participants commented that they did not use safety strategies only in particular contexts; for example, with their families, at church, during daylight hours, or in places they frequented and had therefore become accustomed to. Women, far more than men, made these kinds of statements, as in this example from an 18-year-old woman:

*Katrina: ...But when you're at home with your family, or you know, where you grew up, then you just feel so much safer there, and you don't really think about it. You hear on the news and it sounds like somewhere so far away, but I think when I moved here, especially into a big city, that it just—you think that it affects you more, just taking the bus and going into the city and walking around at night. I think that it affects you a lot more when you're independent and on your own. (Group 12)*

Finally, there were a number of remarks that referred to the speaker's or another person's failure to take safety precautions but coded these as mistakes that could or did result in great danger. There were seventeen of these cautionary tales; twelve from women and five from (or about) men. For example:

*Jane: A lot of the tenants [left their doors unlocked] when we first moved in, and one woman was in the kitchen and she had the door open—I can't remember her name—she was cooking in the kitchen and she had her purse in the living room, and this person came in and took her purse. (Group 10)*

*Linda: I've tried to talk to him about it, and talk to him about his risk, because, he'll walk alone at night with headphones on, and I've tried to talk to him about that. And he's also walked home at*

night when he was drunk to the point of not remembering walking home. I've tried to get across to him that he should be more worried too...(Group P1)

These kinds of comments serve to highlight danger and the necessity of working to preserve safety, rather than providing examples of how one might live a life without constraint.

### Summary

The analysis above shows that the practice of danger management strategies largely parallels the distribution of reported fear discussed in Chapter 4. Overall, women report feeling more fearful and at risk than men do. Similarly, women report practicing more danger management strategies than do men, although men do use a considerable number of strategies. On average, women used a total of 19.2 strategies, while men used 13.3. This difference is particularly acute for the most limiting types of strategies, such as pattern changes, self-isolation, and relying on others. Strategies that intrude less into one's daily routines, such as fortifying one's home or car or participating in a block watch program, are shared more equally by women and men. In addition, as noted at the end of the chapter, men are more likely to practice *no* strategies at all than are women. Overall, then, it is clear that on average, women's daily lives are more affected by perceived danger than are men's.

Other social statuses are also associated with a heightened use of strategies. For example, those age 25–44 report using more strategies (especially monitoring, fortification, and obfuscation) than those in other age categories. Because these age groups report *less* fear and perceived risk than do younger and older groups and are much more likely to own homes, I hypothesize that this heightened use of strategies is related to homeownership, not fear. Those over age 65 say they use obfuscation and isolation more than other groups do; those age 18–24 report relying on others for protection more than others. With the exception of men age 18–24, these groups report more fear than other age categories do.

As discussed in Chapter 4, people of color reported feeling more fearful than whites when interacting with others outside their homes. Men of color also reported greater perceived risk than did white men. It is interesting, then, that race was related only to obfuscation strategies, and in particular to having an unlisted phone number. Apparently, fear and perceived risk do not translate into an increased use of safety strategies for people of color in this sample; this may be due to the significantly greater confidence in their ability to defend themselves reported by people of color.

Sexual orientation is significantly related to a number of kinds of strategies. Gays and lesbians report using more monitoring, fortification, and obfuscation strategies than heterosexuals, but fewer isolation and reliance strategies. Overall, however, gay and lesbian participants reported using an average of 20.62 strategies, compared with 15.98 for heterosexual participants. This finding is particularly surprising given the relationships between sexual orientation, fear, and risk discussed in Chapter 4. Gay men and lesbians reported feeling consistently *more* safe and better able to defend themselves than straight participants did. Again, income and homeownership may be responsible for these patterns, since gay and lesbian participants in this sample had much higher incomes and were much more likely to own homes than heterosexuals.

Income was related to a number of strategy types. Monitoring, fortification, obfuscation, and community action were all positively related to income; isolation was negatively related. Overall, however, income was positively related to the use of strategies. Education was also positively related to monitoring and fortification. The strength of these relationships was interesting given the negative association between income, education, and perceived risk found in Chapter 4. The use of many strategies by wealthier and more highly educated respondents may stem from other factors besides risk and fear, however. For example, they might be tied to normative pressures to take precautions, to having more information about crime or strategies, to having more resources or leisure to devote to self-protection, or to simply having more

property to lose.

The configuration of one's household also seems important. Living alone was associated with a more extensive use of isolation strategies. Living with others, on the other hand, was associated with the use of avoidance, monitoring, and reliance strategies. Overall, those who lived with others used an average of 18.15 strategies, compared with an average of 15.32 for those who lived alone. Again, this was surprising given the fact that those who live alone reported feeling less safe than those who live with others, as discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, homeownership was significantly related to using fortification, obfuscation, and block watch strategies. In contrast, renters were more likely to use isolation strategies than homeowners.

In addition to these patterns by social groups, there are also notable patterns by type of strategy. One cluster of strategy types—monitoring, fortification, obfuscation, and community action—are used by those people who have higher incomes and own homes. Because of the collinearities in the data, people with more education and gays and lesbians are also more likely to practice these strategies. Note that these strategies are among the least intrusive into one's daily life, and the least limiting of normal activities. Isolation tactics, on the other hand, are the most intrusive and limiting strategies in the set. These are used more by those people who are less privileged: people with lower incomes, renters, and those over age 65. Those with less social power—the youngest and oldest age groups, and those with less education—also rely on others for protection more frequently. Avoidance strategies are used by younger people and those living alone, while pattern change tactics are used only by women. Thus those with the fewest resources and the least societal privilege and power tend to use the most burdensome strategies more frequently. Again, women use all strategies but community action more frequently than do men.

How do these types of strategies affect the lives of those who practice them? Using these kinds of strategies may protect people from danger, or at least make them feel more safe. On the other hand, they may simply function to heighten perceptions of

danger. For example, Liska et al. (1988) have suggested that there is an escalating feedback loop between fear and constrained behavior, although there has been little research on this question.

Aside from their relationship with fear and safety, however, the kinds of defensive actions discussed in this chapter may have other effects on individuals' lives. They may drain financial resources: for example, installing special locks or alarms is expensive, limiting other possible expenditures. Monitoring the environment for danger saps energy and attention and prevents people from fully engaging in their other activities. Reliance on others limits individuals' experience of solitude. Avoidance and isolation strategies keep those who use them from full involvement in public and social life. Because women tend to practice these strategies more than men, they incur greater costs. Overall, the precautions women take "cost many, if not all, of them lost work and leisure opportunities, and cost the nation the full participation and involvement of more than half its citizens." (Gordon & Riger 1989, p. 123)

These kinds of losses—of experiences, opportunities, and feelings—were particularly vivid in the focus group discussions. Women, in particular, spoke poignantly of what is lost because of their perceived vulnerability to violence, as in these comments:

*Louisa:* I feel like it's affected my freedom in many ways. You can't walk down the street just to...have a drink or a bite to eat. You can't walk up here and mail a letter. You can't go to the movies...It's really hurt my freedom. I don't even get out and drive at night. (Group 10)

*Anna:* I'm really upset with the whole safety issue. I want to feel safe all the time. I wish I could just like, one night, just go for a walk if I felt like it. (Group 12)

*Desiree:* And I don't consider it violent, but I think more, what controls my life? And it's like, if I walk around Greenlake alone, some guy's gonna walk with me or say something rude, if I'm on the bus, and guy's gonna spread out and lean, and try to look down my shirt. (Group P1)

*Jane:* I was driving down to Madison Park the other day after using my son's truck for a little while, and I wanted so badly to go

and sit by the water on a bench. I was afraid to, even though it's the place to do that. I was going to go and park the car and sit on this bench and watch the water...And I felt uncomfortable by myself, and I said, "Oh, come on, Jane." (Group 10)

Men also commented on the effects of fear, although their remarks focused more on the inconvenience of danger management strategies, rather than more far-reaching effects:

*David:* It seems to me that this is the biggest effect by far is all this time we spend preparing for violence. (Group 4)

*Jack:*...Because I guess when I look at myself, and I look at the way I've responded to situations I would describe as higher risk, I guess the, what I feel when I think about those things is there's a frustration in terms of the compromises to my autonomy. And I guess when I think about my car being broken into, or house being broken into, when I think about it in terms of other people, I more think about it in terms of their physical well-being. I don't have a self-image of myself in terms of that's the way that I think about violence's effect on me. It's more a frustration in terms of someone intruding into my space, forcing me to do something I would not otherwise choose to do. (Group 4)

These comments provide a more eloquent description of the true costs of vulnerability—the loss of freedom and security—than any survey could.

## Chapter 6

### The Social Construction of Vulnerability

In chapters 4 and 5, I examined people's sense of their own vulnerability to violence, and the specific strategies they employ to protect themselves from danger. Thus I focused on people's ideas about themselves. In this and the following chapter, I turn to people's ideas about others, and about the social world in general. I ask whether cultural conceptions of vulnerability and dangerousness link these feelings and perceptions to particular social groups. In other words, who is believed to be more or less dangerous or vulnerable? Is there variation in these meanings across different social groups? I thus move from examining individual-level experiences and perceptions to examining the cultural level of societally-held ideas about vulnerability and danger.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that day-to-day conversations, such as those in the focus groups, construct certain groups of people as vulnerable to violence, and other groups as able to take care of themselves. In other words, through everyday talk, people interactively build and maintain shared ideas about the vulnerability of particular social groups. While these ideas may be related to individuals' ideas about themselves, the two need not be identical; one might see oneself in a particular way, yet see the social groups to which one belongs in a very different way—in other words, one might view oneself as an exception to the general beliefs one holds about social groups.

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<sup>1</sup>Note that examining the cultural level of ideas about social groups does not necessarily entail excluding discourse about individuals. At times, individuals are discussed in terms of their social statuses (race, gender, and so on); in these cases comments about individuals can be examined as examples of beliefs about social groups. At other times, it is clear that an individual is being discussed as an exception to the social groups to which he or she belongs; in such cases, it is appropriate to treat the comment as referring only to an individual, not a group. Thus many of the quotes used in this chapter (and the next) make reference to individuals, and occasionally to the speaker's self. They are included here because I interpret them as having a context either explicitly or implicitly marked by group positions.

I show below that vulnerability is most deeply associated with gender: women are believed by themselves and others to be inherently vulnerable to violence, both as individuals and as a group. Men, however, are viewed as vulnerable only in specific cases and for specific reasons; as a group, they are viewed as not vulnerable. I argue that talk such as that observed in the focus groups creates and reaffirms the belief that gender is polarized. In other words, it constructs women and men as inherently and deeply different on the dimension of vulnerability.

Gender, of course, is not the only social position that structures the experiences of women and men. Individuals do not experience themselves as having gender as separable from race, class, age, religion, or a host of other statuses and group positions. For individuals, gender is never separable from other statuses. However, at times one or another status may be more salient in a given situation, either to the individual experiencing the situation or to others witnessing it. In these cases, one status may seem to be separable from others. At other times, multiple statuses may jointly influence perceptions of a situation. For example, other statuses and characteristics sometimes interact with gender to make individuals or groups appear more or less vulnerable in the eyes of others. As I demonstrate below, age, race, social class, and sexual orientation all contribute to perceptions of vulnerability. Among my sample of participants, however, gender was the status most frequently associated with perceived vulnerability and therefore the ongoing focus of this analysis.

The salience of gender and other social statuses in the talk described below is particularly remarkable in light of the fact that the participants were never asked about specific social statuses. As noted in Chapter 2, each group was asked some subset of the following questions:

- Do you feel that the issue of violence affects you personally, or affects your friends and relatives? How?

- When do other people give you warnings about dangerous situations or people? How do these warnings affect the way you behave, or the way you think about your behavior? What kinds of warnings do you give others?
- In what situations do you feel most vulnerable?
- In what situations do you feel most safe?
- Why do you think there is so much violence in this society today?
- What do you think should be done to stop violence in our society?

This means that the participants' frequent association of vulnerability with gender and other social statuses, was spontaneous and represents their actual ideas, rather than their beliefs about what the facilitator hoped to hear.

I develop and illustrate this argument by examining four features of the talk in the focus groups:

- (1) representations of people perceived by the participants to be vulnerable to violence;
- (2) representations of people perceived by the participants to be not vulnerable to violence;
- (3) participants' descriptions of themselves and others as protectors;
- (4) reports of warnings given to others and received by the participants;

The first two are straightforward indicators of who is considered to be vulnerable and not vulnerable. The third, descriptions of protectors, is more indirect. I examine what categories of people are seen as protectors, and what categories are seen as needing protection. Presumably, only those people believed to be relatively invulnerable would be seen as capable of protecting others, whereas those who are believed to be vulnerable would be seen as needing protection. Finally, warnings provide another indirect measure of who is considered vulnerable: presumably, individuals are not warned of danger unless the warner believes them to be at some risk. I begin with an analysis of representations of vulnerability.

## Representations of Vulnerability

### *Gender*

In the thirteen focus group discussions, there were 69 references that identified individuals (other than the speaker's self) or groups as vulnerable to violence. The most salient feature of these references was that they referred much more frequently to women than to men. Overall, only thirteen of the 69 statements, or 18.8%, referred to men, while 56, or 81.2%, referred to women. Three references were ungendered: in one case the speaker stated that both men and women are vulnerable, in the second, the speaker was referring to social class (both rich and poor are vulnerable), and in the third, the speaker commented that "naive people" are vulnerable.

There were two kinds of references made about people perceived to be vulnerable. The most frequent kind identified specific people as vulnerable for specific reasons—because they had certain characteristics or chose to engage in certain behaviors. For example, this speaker perceived her mother to be vulnerable because she did not take proper safety precautions:

*Janet:* Yeah, well, my mother just moved here from Eastern Washington... she was in the habit of going out in her garden late at night, or leaving the door open late at night, ...[I told her that ] after dark she shouldn't walk the dog on Capitol Hill, she should just stay in ...and she shouldn't have the door open. (*Group 1*)

This same participant later made a similar kind of statement, this time about her sons:

*Janet:* ...And I worry about my kids a lot more than I used to. They're eighteen and twenty, boys, and they're out late a lot, and I'm concerned about the sorts of things that are happening to them... (*Group 1*)

Here, these young men are seen as vulnerable because of their tendency to stay out late. These kinds of comments, attributing vulnerability to specific behaviors and characteristics of individuals, were made about both women and men, although there were more references to women.

However, there was a second type of statement made about women that was almost never made about men. In addition to specific women being identified as vulnerable, women as a group were consistently associated with vulnerability. Twenty-four (42.9%) of the 56 references to women's vulnerability were of this nature; an additional eight (14.3%) identified large sub-groups of women (e.g., lesbian women, older or younger women) as particularly at risk. Thus more than half of the references to women's vulnerability identified women (or some subgroup thereof) as being by their very nature vulnerable.

Many of these kinds of references simply stated in a taken-for-granted sort of way that women were vulnerable. For example:

*Joe:* I would feel vulnerable, more vulnerable if I were a woman, first of all. (Group 3)

*Elliot:* I think that men are, on average, men are physically stronger, in most cases, and you know if I was a woman, damn, I —

*Bill:* Would you feel vulnerable?

*Elliot:* I'm sure I'd feel vulnerable. Very vulnerable. Yes... (Group 2)

*Richard:* ...But as far as like a sexual type assault or a violent crime, I don't hear too much about men being assaulted sexually in the street or in a parking garage or something, where you think of a woman, that happening more often.

*Nora:* Yeah, I think women are much more vulnerable to that type of crime than men are. I go jogging at night too, but it's my two roommates and I go like on the Burke-Gilman trail, we jog to Gasworks, and I was like really hesitant to jog at night when they started this, they're like, "Yeah we're going to go jogging" and I was really hesitant at night I was like, "Yeah, I'm with the two of them, but still, we're only girls... (Group 1)

Only once was a general statement like this made about men, in response to the last conversation above:

*Marcia:* But you never know, because then if you get in that situation your adrenaline is going...you're not fully aware of what you probably could do. I always had this plan in my head, if anything were to happen like that, because men do have a weak spot, and if you know where it's at... [laughter] (Group 12)

This comment, however, occurred in the context of an extended discussion of women's vulnerability and weakness relative to men.

Interestingly, nearly all of the mentions of male vulnerability occurred in either all-male or mixed-sex groups; only one of the four all-female groups discussed men or boys as vulnerable to violence. In contrast, mentions of female vulnerability occurred in all the all-female and mixed-sex groups, but in only two of the four all-male groups.

Table 6-1 shows these patterns:

**Table 6-1**  
**Mentions of Male and Female Vulnerability**  
**in All-Male, All-Female, and Mixed-Sex Focus Groups**

	All-Male Groups				Mixed-Sex Groups					All-Female Groups				Total
	2	6	7	9	1	3	4	10	P1	5	8	11	12	
Mentions of Female Vulnerability	5	0	2	0	10	3	5	1	4	9	3	5	9	56
Mentions of Male Vulnerability	5	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	13

Thus in this sample of discourse, men are constructed as vulnerable more by men than by women, and women are constructed as vulnerable more by women than by men. In addition, however, men construct women as vulnerable more than women do men.

Thus there were two major differences between representations of women and men as vulnerable. First, participants made many more comments identifying women as vulnerable than they made about men. Second, comments about men identified them as vulnerable because of specific characteristics and behaviors; in only one case did a speaker ever identify men as a group as vulnerable, and this comment was in the context of men's overall invulnerability. Women, however, were identified as vulnerable

as a group as frequently as they were identified as vulnerable as individuals. Thus whereas for men the unmarked case is invulnerability (i.e., men are generally invulnerable, and only exceptions are vulnerable), the opposite is believed to be true for women: the default is inherent vulnerability.

### *Cross-Cutting Statuses*

As discussed above, gender is not the only social status that affects perceptions of vulnerability. The association of vulnerability with other statuses, especially age, race, social class, and sexual orientation, was also evident in the focus group conversations. Although I discuss them separately here, it is important to recognize that these factors are in fact not independent of gender or of each other. As I demonstrate below, they interact with gender in the construction of vulnerability.

### Age

Age is closely related to perceived vulnerability. However, the relationship between age and vulnerability varies depending on gender. Children of both sexes are perceived to be vulnerable:

*Alissa: ...I would be afraid that if I turned my back for one second that [my daughter is] just going to run out in the street and either get hit by a car or someone's going to snatch her up and I'm never going to see her again. And so at that point I feel like I'm an overprotective mom, but it's at least to her benefit. Cause I know she'll be here when she's sixteen. (Group 11)*

As young children, individuals are seen as at least partially ungendered—they are believed to be vulnerable because of their physical and/or mental immaturity, not simply their gender. As they grow older, however, the perceived vulnerability of boys and girls diverges. Both sexes become more mature; however, maturity conveys

different changes on boys and girls. Boys become larger and stronger, and are consequently seen as less vulnerable:

*Barbara:* I know that one thing that's really changed, my son's 14 now, and I never used to go out until he got, about a year ago he grew past me in height...I was concerned about outside until my son got old enough that he could—you know, he's not really much of, any particular, real huge towering person but just the fact that he's male and is taller, you know... (Group P1)

In essence, as boys grow older they become identified with stereotypes of masculinity, which center around strength and invulnerability.

While girls also become larger and stronger as they age, these changes are interpreted in quite a different way. Girls and women are seen as being weak, regardless of their actual strength and abilities. Moreover, older girls and young women are seen as being at a peak of sexual desirability. Because of the widespread misconception that sexual assaults are motivated by sexual desire, girls and young women are perceived to be at risk because of this intersection of gender, age, and sexuality. In this example, a 44-year old African-American woman describes the difference she sees between her own and her college-aged daughter's vulnerability:

*Angela:* When [my daughter] came home this summer that was one of the first things I did when she said, "Well, Mom, I'm going to be running up and down the street in the morning or whatever", [I said] "Well, you need to have this." [a defensive spray that marks an attacker with green dye] Because I'm walking I'm not worried about people attacking me. It's just something. It's like young people, I have a feeling for young girls, when they're running, and they wear this little provocative stuff, you know, or whatever. And I make her cover up, but you know what I'm saying? I know I don't feel in my experience that somebody's going to come and attack me. But I told her stories of attacks that I knew of here in University Place that weren't publicized and that she needs to be aware of, and then I gave her this spray...And since we had had that experience a couple of times before with the girls being followed, I'm aware of that. So whereas I do know that I feel comfortable going down the street, I am always wanting to make sure that they are equipped when they leave because they're a lot younger than I am and people are looking at them, and I'm aware of that, too, because I was young. Used to be... (Group 11)

Thus at the same moment that young men are seen as least vulnerable, young women are seen as most vulnerable.

As women grow older, however, they move past this peak of vulnerability. As in the quotes above and below, middle-aged women are perceived to be less vulnerable than young women, although they are still seen as more vulnerable than men:

*Barbara: I've, being older, I have the advantage of, not having to put up with the crap from a twenty-two year old that an eighteen or nineteen year old would have to. It doesn't bother me to play kinda mother to people, say you know, don't worry, "Back off!" ...But, by being older and assuming a matronly attitude that, you know, I'm just not going to mess with any of this macho stuff...just get out of here. It's like, they'll just kind of fold their tents and they'll go away. And it is an advantage being older, I think that's kind of given me a lot of security. (Group P1)*

Finally, as individuals grow into old age, women's and men's perceived vulnerability converges again. For example, in the quote below, the speaker identified her elderly father as vulnerable:

*Barbara: And it's also like, my dad's seventy, I could beat my dad up. [laughter] (Group P1)*

Note in particular the group laughter that followed her comment. In order to emphasize her father's vulnerability, she contrasts him with herself: he is so vulnerable that even a middle-aged woman could victimize him. The group's laughter confirms the absurdity of a woman's being seen as capable of victimizing a man. Note again, however, that this quote refers to a *particular* old man. Although *specific* old men like her father are perceived to be vulnerable, older women *as a group* are seen as especially vulnerable, as in this statement by a 71-year-old woman:

*Meg: ...I've noticed since I got older, particularly, that I'm much more of a target; you think as a woman you're a target, but as an older woman, you really become much more of a target than you realize. (Group 8)*

Even though men's vulnerability increases in old age, women are still believed to be

more vulnerable than men. Aging makes women seem *more* vulnerable, while men move from being perceived as invulnerable to being seen as vulnerable.

Thus at every age, women are seen as more vulnerable than men. However, the size and shape of this difference varies. These shifting differences provide an excellent example of how multiple social statuses—in this case, gender, age, and sexuality—intersect both in experience and in our perceptions of others. Vulnerability cannot be understood by considering any single status alone; they work together and are inseparable.

### Race and Ethnicity

A number of participants made comments that demonstrated an association between race or ethnicity and vulnerability. The majority of these comments, made by participants who identified as white, associated whiteness with vulnerability and people of color as a potential danger:

*Janet:* Well, my children were raised in the Rainier Valley where I lived for twenty years, so their friends are multi-ethnic. And my oldest son is actually a rap DJ. And so they get into a lot of situations that are fairly unusual for white kids. And I try to warn my older son, particularly, about being in situations where late at night or someone has too much to drink they might be angry, just because of his appearance, and he needs to be aware of that...I work real hard on that with him. (Group 1)

*David:* I have to say that I think that race is a relevant factor...in that I think that one of the things that allows somebody to perpetrate violence against another person is if they believe that they're not like them, that they're different. If I'm travelling in a neighborhood that I clearly don't live in, you know because it's an Asian neighborhood, or a black neighborhood, and I see somebody walking down the street and they belong, you know, they live there, and I don't, and I know that right away because they're black and I'm not. I'm going to feel more threatened. I hopefully, you know, we'll be able to make eye contact, and that person is going to give me some kind of indication that they're not a threat to me, through their expression or whatever. But if someone looks at you with a blank stare, you know, plus coupled with the idea that you're immediately aware that you're a stranger in their domain. That's a threatening situation for me... (Group 4)

*Keith:* It's pretty violent out there, I think the in cities it's really violent, because I've lived in some major cities, Birmingham Alabama, just came up from there 2 years ago. And there's places there that a white person don't go, just because they're white. But you know, on the other hand, I don't think that's right. Because I lived out in a rural area, and that was the place where you didn't come because you were black. I mean to me, I have no problems with race, but that's just the way it was. And it kinda pissed me off because I couldn't go into this neighborhood because I was white. So what, you know? And sometimes I'd just go there, you know, because they said I can't be there because I'm white, well, I'm going to prove I can walk through there, which was pretty stupid of me, you know? After several beatings I found out, maybe I *don't* belong there.  
(Group 9)

*Meg:* ...Just around the corner of Virginia and First, right near the corner there was a young girl sitting, white girl, sitting on some steps with a crowd of young boys, a mixed crowd of young boys around her. And they sounded like they were making problems for her—"when's your friend coming" and all this. So I sort of stood there trying to get her eye to see if she wanted help, but she shook her head at me, so I kept going... (Group 8)

Although participants are discussing the experiences of individuals (themselves or others) in these quotes, they clearly see their vulnerability as stemming from their social status as white people. In the last quote, for example, the speaker obviously perceives racial group membership to be important in defining the situation: she backtracks twice—when describing the vulnerable girl and when describing the threatening group of boys—in order to specify the racial categories to which they belong.

Interestingly, only one participant of color noted that she believed her race made her more vulnerable. This woman, a 30-year old African American woman, commented that her race became a liability after moving from the city of Tacoma to an all-white suburb:

*Alissa:* It was totally different for us because we didn't lock the doors when we moved to Lacey. We left Tacoma to go to Lacey... That's actually where I first experienced violence, but —

*Tanya:* In Lacey?

*Alissa:* Yeah, but that's when I thought I was different. I was black, everyone else was white ...But I know my dad moved to Lacey because of the violence here, in Tacoma he didn't want us to grow up that way. But then this opened up a whole another set of issues, you know, when

we don't realize that you're different and you suddenly move somewhere else and they let you know you're different... Well, especially—where we went to school, when I found out that I was black, it was just because we were—there was only one other black family—in the whole Olympia-Lacey area there was only one other family there. And so when I would go to school and I'd get beat up—I mean, I'd never even had to fight before, you know, and everybody was everybody. I remember one girl asking me why this part of my hand was white and not the rest of me. And I couldn't answer it, "I don't know, I'm only in third grade!" (Group 11)

As a number of the quotes above make clear, it is not simply race, but race *salience* which causes vulnerability. The effects of race are contextual: both white and black participants felt vulnerable only when in a context that highlighted their racial identity. The last quote also makes clear the interaction between race, gender, and age; the girl is vulnerable not simply because she is young, or black, or female, but because she is all three of these together, in a social context that makes these characteristics salient.

The lack of comments about the vulnerability of people of color is particularly significant given the fact that people of color are at substantially greater risk of victimization than whites (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995). It is important to note, however, that the fact that the participants were drawn from the Seattle area may have resulted in less talk about race—and especially about the vulnerability of people of color—than might occur in other areas. Seattle has a relatively small number of African Americans and Latinos, and less visible interracial conflict than many other large cities. It does have a larger Asian and Pacific Islander population than most cities, but men from these groups are not perceived to be as dangerous as other men of color. Had I conducted these focus groups elsewhere, the results with respect to race might have been quite different.

It is the appearance of belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group, rather than actual membership, that makes one vulnerable, as this white man's comment suggests:

*Jack:* Well, when I was in Massachusetts... Boston is in many ways a very judgmental place, and the rules of compartmentalization are really strong. And I always found ways to run afoul of it, because my hair would be too long, or look too Jewish, or suggest Jewishness to too many people. Or if they couldn't think of anything else, it would be faggot. Or if it wasn't that, it would be that I was white, or that I wasn't Bostonian, or I wasn't Irish, or something. But there were amazing ways that I found to communicate my wrongness across the ways. (Group 4)

Another participant in a different group made a similar comment about appearing Jewish. She describes her uncle, whose similarity in appearance to stereotypes of Jews made him vulnerable during the Second World War:

*Lisa:* ...Her brother had to hide in the woods, because, I hope I don't offend anyone here, but even though the family isn't Jewish, we all have large noses, especially my uncle, and he had to hide in the woods so that the Nazis wouldn't catch him and think maybe he was Jewish. (Group 3)

Jewishness was also a theme in another comment, in which a public defender elegantly stated the relationship between race, power, and vulnerability:

*Tom:* Well I think even in the thirties if I were, if I were German and I were around the Nazis, I would probably feel safe because I felt I was part of their society, but had I been Jewish I would have felt differently. But I feel like I'm part of the general society that the police look out for, yeah. Maybe, if I were black I think I'd feel differently, or if I had some prior situation, because I know like a lot of my black clients had no regard for the police whatsoever. And I often feel that's due the the fact that they probably had incidents with the police where the police didn't handle the situation in the way that they might have handled it had it been a white person. (Group 2)

Thus ethnicity, as well as race, can convey vulnerability. However, as the quotes above make clear, these effects are contextual: whiteness is perceived to be a vulnerability in situations where people of color are the majority; being a person of color is perceived to be a vulnerability in contexts where whiteness is the norm. And, Jewishness is perceived to be a vulnerability in places where Jews are in the minority or are persecuted. Thus racial or ethnic salience is the basis for vulnerability in these comments.

### Class

Only a few participants directly commented that social class affected perceived vulnerability—perhaps because of the relative invisibility of issues of class in the U.S. (Mantsios 1996). Most of the comments relating to class (as well as most of those relating to race) referred to the speaker's own vulnerability;<sup>2</sup> class and race did not seem as salient a marker with respect to other people as was gender. In general, comments about social class were made by middle- and upper-middle class participants who felt that their apparent wealth made them attractive targets for violence. For example, one man said,

*Elliot:* So I do feel vulnerable being that I am white, you know, when I am in situations, if I am downtown, Capitol Hill, Chinatown, wherever you know, there is racial diversity, I am looked upon as, oh, that's the other side, that's the one that's got it, and I don't got it, and I'm gonna get it. You know, I feel the potential victim, so, alert. (Group 2)

Later, he commented:

*Elliot:* Now some of my Asian friends? they would respond totally different to that. "Nobody bothers me. I look like hell, and they don't give me two looks," you know? But this guy, this caucasian white guy, you know, he dresses in a Gap shirt or whatever casual stuff, oh, he's got money, you know, let's get him.  
*Rick:* Yeah, he could be panhandling when I'm going for a job interview, just because I have a suit on they assume I have money. (Group 2)

As the final quote above illustrates, it is not so much *actual* wealth as the *appearance* of wealth that makes one vulnerable. And in many cases, simply being white is perceived (by whites, who made all of the remarks above) to be associated with wealth; race and class are not separable in these comments.

In addition, a poor man commented that money would not protect the wealthy from the rising violence he perceived in the U.S.:

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<sup>2</sup>Although they referred to the speakers' own vulnerability, they identified the speaker as a member of a social class, and are therefore relevant for understanding the meanings associated with social groups.

*Franklin:* I don't know, it's just, it's very confusing, it's a lot of different issues, if America is going to come together. I believe they should never let Republicans run this country. If they don't want a level of violence to come to their backyard, they I suggest they don't take over this country again. Because they not going to be able to recover again from what happened that time. I'm not saying Clinton deserve much [credit] but he does know how to come out to people and he, they need to start looking at greed and money, they can't build that space station in the sky fast enough to get up there. All the big-uns are not going...Gates and everyone else, he's susceptible to be driving down the street and get shot and killed too. He don't have no force field around his house. Rockefellers, none of them. And then start putting these Third World countries in debt and stuff, and bringing out that free cocaine and shit to pay off their fucking debts, and see what the fuck they got. (Group 9)

Only one participant noted that lower social class might increase one's vulnerability. This participant, a wealthy white man, made this comment in a group made up of young professionals in a high-technology company:

*David:*...And I also have to say that I also think the socioeconomic class that we probably all belong to here is one that's not going to experience violence in the way that a lot of folk—the people who are at lower socioeconomic classes are likely to experience it, and I also think that's an important thing to remember... (Group 4)

Interestingly, no participants who were members of lower-class categories made such comments—even in those focus groups whose members lived in low-income housing and those individuals who reported very low incomes. This is particularly notable in light of the fact that other research has found that people with lower incomes are at greater risk of violence (Smith and Hill 1991a). However, a number of oblique comments, generally about the danger level of the communities in which the participants resided, provide evidence that social class does affect perceived vulnerability in this way. For example, in these comments, two poor men who lived in a low-income residential hotel discussed their neighborhood. The hotel is located in the Pioneer Square area in Seattle, which has one of the highest crime rates in the city:

*Ernie*: ...It's still bad out there, and they've still got a lot of dealers out there and, still bad. You know like I tell everybody, they shouldn't go out there alone, they should always have a friend with them...

*Henry* : Yeah, it's a high-risk area, yeah. (Group 6)

In contrast, this middle-class man discussed his mother's neighborhood:

*Tom* : But I think that where you get into, like, my mom's neighborhood which is a middle class neighborhood, you know, all of a sudden you have block watch program, single dwelling homes, you've got police who know the people who live there. And you also have a place where people know each other, you know? I mean, they not only have Block Watch, but everyone knows each other, and knows, I mean, this sounds bad, but knows who belongs and who doesn't... (Group 2)

Thus social class does make a difference in perceived vulnerability, although these comments were more implicit than those about race or gender.

### Sexual Orientation

Although sexual orientation was not a major topic of conversation in the focus groups (even in the two groups in which all of the participants identified themselves as lesbian or gay), several comments associated sexual orientation with vulnerability. One woman, who identified herself as lesbian, said:

*Joyce*: Well, I sort of hesitate to bring this up, but I think I will, because I think everyone will be confidential about this stuff. If I'm in a group of gay people I feel safe. Because I know they're not going to beat me up. But anywhere else, that's where I've experienced the most violence, where I've been assaulted....And I expect most people to be violent towards me. That's sort of my feeling. And I feel like I have a double whammy because my partner, not only is she a woman, but she's Jewish, and we make these little jokes like, "okay, we're going to this town, act as married, and as Christian as you can, and maybe they won't notice." [laughter] ... Yeah, you know, get out the big crucifix. Because, you know, we are targets. We are targeted people, and we know that. And we're not stupid. We read the reports, and we see things. (Group 4)

In this case, gender interacts with sexual orientation and ethnicity to multiply the women's perceived vulnerability. This same interaction is also evident in this comment, also made by a lesbian:

*Karen:* But what I take really personally is when, like, one of the lesbians on Capitol Hill is beaten and dragged and left in a parking lot in Kent. I get angry. Because...she was just a person breathing in and out. And there's men who target lesbians that way. And when it's, just a woman, just beaten because she's a woman, that makes me mad too. And that—part of it is my childhood, part of it is because it's just so... If you're gonna—to me, pick on somebody your own size. Pick on somebody who can at least defend themselves. Have a reason for it. Have —

*Stacy:* If you want to beat up somebody, why don't they pick a man. If they're that angry, why didn't they pick a man to do that.

*Karen:* Yeah, exactly. And it's because they, they know they probably can do more to a woman. (Group 5)

The intersection between gender and sexual orientation is clear in these comments: women are perceived to be vulnerable because of their gender, but heterosexual and lesbian women are perceived to be vulnerable to different degrees.

Being gay is also perceived to make men vulnerable, however. For example, Elliot, a 41-year old gay man, notes that he perceives one of his friends to be vulnerable because he frequents a park known for anonymous sexual encounters:

*Elliot:* ... This guy, good friend of mine, he likes to go to Volunteer Park at night. And I try to impress upon the fellow, hey, you know, it's not the safest thing to do, there's a lot of crazies out there who would just as soon hit you over the head as... you know, run down the street... And [the warning is] not particularly well accepted. I mean, "I am a man, who are you telling me what I can and can't do" and... kinda taking on that attitude. I mean yes, I've gone to Volunteer Park, but usually it's with a team, you know, [laughs] we've got our defenses. (Group 2)

This man's perceived vulnerability is in part due to his sexual orientation and the consequent risk of gay-bashing. However, note again that this speaker is identifying a specific man as vulnerable for a specific reason: the friend's risky behavior is the main reason why he is seen as vulnerable. It is by going to Volunteer Park alone, instead of with a "team," as the speaker himself does, that his vulnerability is magnified.

As with race, one need not identify oneself as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in order to be perceived as vulnerable; simply not meeting the expectations for heterosexual

appearance can be adequate to increase perceived risk. This was made clear in comments by a straight man who felt others had believed him to be gay:

*Jack:* It really was a hazard I felt shit scared, I should not walk close to those people at all. Because someone will have something to show to someone else. Some macho thing, where they'll want to show that they can, you know, say "fuck you" to the faggot and what's he going to do, because I'm such a stud. And there was a lot of that. (*Group 4*)

Because this man did not meet the expectations for masculine appearance and behavior (at the time, he had long hair), he was labelled a "faggot" and targeted for violence. Thus men are perceived to be invulnerable as long as they fit the appearance of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., young, straight, and able-bodied). Once they stop meeting these expectations, they are perceived as feminized and therefore at a higher perceived risk of violence.

### *The Body*

Note that many of the sources of vulnerability described above are inscribed in physical bodies in some way. Although social scientists generally consider gender to be a social, rather than biological characteristic, gender is popularly believed to stem from physical differences between the sexes. The process of aging is manifested in bodily changes, as well as mental changes—young children and the elderly are perceived (and in many cases are) less able to defend themselves:

*Liz:* Well because, when you get to that [old] age, people start having physical problems, and you're easily, more easily taken advantage of? And if somebody pursued you, you can't run as fast, and...

*Jerry:* You're more susceptible to injury, even a simple thing like being pushed down.

*Liz:* And the ability to fight back, and—

*Jerry:* Yeah. (*Group 3*)

*Frances:* I said you know, "People take children, they cut their heads off, they cut their arms off, you know, they cut their body parts off and just lay them out. I said, they take the out in the woods, they use them for sacrifices and stuff. I said, you might not believe that, but people will do those sorts of things, you know. (*Group 11*)

In a different way, race and ethnicity are translated into vulnerability through the body: they are a source of danger only insofar as they are visible to others. If one can pass as white, one is perceived as vulnerable in a different way than those who are obviously people of color. The same can be said for sexual orientation: those who are obviously lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered are perceived to be more vulnerable than those who can pass as straight. Moreover, even those who are not members of targeted groups may be at risk because they look like they are members. Social class is in some cases signaled through appearance, such as dress—again, regardless of actual class level.

Other aspects of appearance are also associated with vulnerability. Bodily size—height, weight, and build, in particular—are believed to increase or decrease one's vulnerability:

*Tina:* If you're 5 foot 1 and 110 pounds you can be sized up and you're a decent target. (Group 5)

*Stuart:* I witnessed him attack six women. And they were small, you know, Orientals I guess you can call them? I don't like using the label like that, but Asian? Yeah, Filipinos and Japanese and you know, anyway, Korean, whatever they were. But they were small women, you know, and he attacked all of them. (Group 6)

In this case, race and ethnicity interact with gender and bodily size to produce perceptions of vulnerability.

Strength is also seen as an inherent source of vulnerability for women:

*Karen:* ...I had a girlfriend who was a very thin woman and she was fairly strong, and when we would wrestle around, she like had no strength. With one hand I could pin her. And it like dawned on me that if she were to be in any situation with someone stronger than her, and a lot of women who are that size, they have, they have nothing... They're totally defenseless.

*Susannah:* And I suspect that you have a lot more upper body strength than most women...and a lot of men. (Group 5)

Note too that smallness and weakness (and therefore vulnerability) are considered normative for women, but the exception for men; women are believed to be inherently weak and vulnerable.

Being overweight can also be a vulnerability, however, as for this man:

*Frank:* I get sick and tired of getting singled out. I can be walking back here, and because of my size... People don't come near enough to touch. "Hey fat boy, whatcha doing?" "Hey, give me some money, fat boy!" I get tired of this crap. I get tired of this shit. I get really tired of it.  
(Group 6)

However, in general, being large protects men:

*Linda:* I have a friend who's a really big guy. I don't think he's ever been in a fight, I think I've been in more fights than he has, and he's really gentle, but because of how he looks people never mess with him?  
(Group P1)

In this case, size and gender interact to create the perception of invulnerability.

Other people are perceived to be vulnerable because of disability. Here, a white man describes a situation in which he gave a blind woman a ride, contrasting it with others' experiences of picking up hitchhikers:

*Jack:* I've only given one person a ride in the last couple years who was a stranger... and that was a blind woman who was having some problems in a huge freak rainstorm. So I pulled over and asked if she needed any help, and she said yes. So it was more a matter of her showing faith in me than she didn't, she obviously didn't represent any threat to me that I could recognize at the time, and triggered all my sense of, look, here's someone in need. And I gave her a ride, she ended up needing a ride to Bellevue, which was where I was going, so it was fine. But I don't think it was motivated by a sense of risk, of risk assessment, I just impulsively went into it because someone was themselves at risk, I mean she was floundering around on the Montlake overpass. (Group 4)

While others in the conversation had discussed picking up hitchhikers as risky, this woman's blindness caused him to perceive her as vulnerable, not dangerous.

Finally, the way in which one presents oneself to the world—one's body language—also affects perceived vulnerability:

*David* : ...I think that, occasionally there are situations where somebody will assess you up, look at you and decide whether you're a likely successful target. I don't think that happens a lot, but I imagine that it happens. It feels like it's happening much more often than I think it really is happening, but yeah, there's kind of a feeling out there, are you willing to look 'em back in the eye, you know, if they have an angry, I wouldn't even say angry but a determined look on their face, how do you deal with that? Do you start to look fearful? If you do, you know, you may be in trouble. So there's a lot going on, very quickly. And people's physical appearance, what their race is, how they wear, what kind of clothes they wear, all figure into that. Real clear. (Group 4)

Although representations of vulnerability are centrally concerned with ideas—about gender, race, age, and so on—the statuses that convey vulnerability are located in physical bodies.

Thus gender interacts with a variety of cross-cutting statuses in the construction of vulnerability. Men's gender is perceived to protect them from danger, while women's gender is perceived to be a sign of inherent vulnerability. However, as the quotes above make clear, race, class, sexual orientation, and age interact with gender to increase or decrease vulnerability. Although women are generally considered to be more vulnerable to violence than men, youth or old age is believed to make one more vulnerable, regardless of gender. Those in young or mid-adulthood, however, are not marked as equally vulnerable: young adulthood maximizes women's vulnerability, because of their perceived sexual desirability, but minimizes men's vulnerability, because of their perceived strength and power. Similarly, some participants believed that being white and appearing middle or upper class—the signs of privilege—make both women and men more vulnerable. Others noted that lack of privilege (being a person of color in an all-white context, or being poor in a world where wealth allows one to protect oneself more effectively—increases perceived vulnerability. Thus race, class, age, and gender interact in particular social contexts in the construction of vulnerability. Despite these interactions, however, gender was mentioned far more frequently than other statuses

with respect to vulnerability. Unless there are specific extenuating circumstances, such as old age, youth, race salience, or a proclivity to engage in behaviors perceived as dangerous, men are not understood to be as vulnerable to violence as women.

### **Perceptions of Invulnerability**

Discourse about those who are believed to be *not* vulnerable provides another window on vulnerability. Who is believed to be relatively safe from victimization? Although invulnerability was mentioned far less than vulnerability in the focus group discussions, analyzing these comments yields conclusions similar to those drawn in the previous section.

There were only four cases in all of the focus groups in which women were specifically identified as not vulnerable. In all of these cases, the statements were highly qualified: it was only some special characteristic of the woman that made her safer than other women. For example, this woman's daughter was perceived to be less vulnerable than average because of her "sensible" nature:

*Jane: My daughter is a single parent. I do worry, but not to the degree because she is sensible, and you know, those things, but... (Group 10)*

Two other cases involved being experienced in fighting or self defense. For example, this man perceived his sisters to be "pretty tough" because their mother had specifically trained them to respond aggressively to a fight:

*Bob: Both of my sisters were pretty tough, and my mom would not let my sisters back in the house until they'd won, and they would do it. (Group P1)*

Participants were more likely to construct men as not vulnerable than women: there were twelve mentions of men's invulnerability (several of which were extended discussions) but only four brief, isolated statements about women. Some of these statements referred to specific men; in several cases, these men were seen as

particularly invulnerable because of their size. Note again the relevance of invulnerability to the physical body:

*Kevin:* I feel safe with [name]. [laughter]

*Rob:* [name] is a scholarship University of Washington football player, big guy.

*Kevin:* Offensive lineman.

*Rob:* Yeah. 279 pounds.

*Kevin:* Six foot.

*Rob:* Six foot four. (Group 7)

However, more comments identified men in general, rather than specific men, as not vulnerable to violence:

*Richard:* One point [that] interests me is like my mom would tell me, "Oh Richard, you shouldn't go jogging at night," and I said, "Oh mom, don't worry, I'm a guy, no one's going to bother me." ... (Group 1)

*Louise:* Yeah, you need a weapon to beat up a guy. (Group 8)

*Carl:* ...I don't have to worry for the most part, I mean, people don't mess with me, for the most part, unless I'm like on the Ave....There's very subtle differences between what men have to worry about and what women have to worry about. Women I think have to worry about far greater violence than men do. (Group P1)

*Frank:* Besides the point that he seemed to get some sort of special kick out of beating people up. Smaller people than him. Children, women. Guy never got in a fight with a man in his life. Only women and kids. (Group 6)

Thus these comments bolster the findings on vulnerability, described above. Men, both individually and generally, are considered to be safe from violence unless some specific characteristic or behavior endangers them; women are considered invulnerable only if some special characteristic—such as training in how to respond to aggression—protects them.

### Factors Perceived to Contribute to Risk

The associations between vulnerability and particular social statuses discussed in the focus groups were mirrored by the participants' survey responses. One set of questions in the survey asked participants to indicate whether they felt their risk of being a victim of violence was increased or decreased by any of a list of characteristics: sex, age, physical condition, disability, sexual orientation, height, weight, occupation, race, religious affiliation, people they live with, financial situation, or neighborhood of residence. There were a number of strong associations between the answers to these questions and some of the demographic variables, as shown in Table 6-2.

Table 6-2  
Percent of Respondents Who Feel Their Risk is Increased or Decreased  
Because of Their Personal Characteristics

Characteristic	Percent of sample who say risk increased				Percent of sample who say risk decreased			
	Men (N=30)	Women (N=37)	$\chi^2$	p<	Men (N=30)	Women (N=32)	$\chi^2$	p<
Sex	20.0	81.1	24.86	.000	56.7	0.0	24.98	.000
Age	26.7	43.2	1.98	rs	36.7	6.3	8.64	.005
Occupation	0.0	13.5	4.38	.05	13.3	3.1	2.18	rs
Sexual orientation	23.3	16.2	.53	rs	16.7	3.1	3.25	rs
Race	26.7	8.1	4.15	.05	16.7	12.5	.22	rs
People you live with	13.3	2.7	2.71	rs	16.7	9.4	.73	rs
Financial situation	23.3	2.7	6.71	.01	13.3	9.4	.24	rs
Physical condition	20.0	8.1	2.01	rs	46.7	21.9	4.25	.05
Disability	16.7	8.1	1.15	rs	16.7	25.0	.	.
Height	10.0	13.5	.19	rs	30.0	21.9	.53	rs
Weight	10.0	8.1	.07	rs	16.7	3.1	3.25	rs
Neighborhood	20.0	24.3	.18	rs	43.3	31.3	.97	rs
Religion	10.0	0.0	3.87	.05	3.3	3.1	.00	rs
None of the above	20.0	5.4	3.36	rs	16.7	25.0	.65	rs

Note: The questions read: "Do you feel that your risk of being a victim of violence is *increased* (*decreased*) because of any of the following personal characteristics?" Participants were asked to check boxes next to all the characteristics that applied to them.

A number of factors were perceived to increase the participants' risk of victimization. First, women were much more likely than men to report that their risk was increased by their sex: 81% of women, but only 20% of men, said this. In addition, 13.5% of women, but no men, said they felt their risk was increased by their occupation. However, men were more likely than women to say that their risk was increased by their race, their financial situation, and their religious affiliation. More blacks than non-blacks said that they felt their risk of being a victim was increased by their race (37.5% vs. 13.6%); this difference tended toward significance ( $p=.09$ ). None of the three Latinos or two Asian-Americans in the study reported that they felt their risk was increased by their racial group membership; only one of the four Native American respondents did. Men were also more likely than women to say that none of the factors on the list increased their risk; this difference approached significance ( $p=.07$ ).

Older people were more likely than younger people to say that their risk was increased by their age ( $\chi^2=24.74$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.0005$ ): approximately 23% of those under age 55, but 86% of those age 55 and older said that they felt their risk was increased by their age. Interestingly, younger women responded the same way: 60% of the women age 18 to 24, but only 20% of men in the same age group, said that their age increased their risk. Of course, the likely reasons behind these responses are quite different. As discussed above, older people are more likely to feel vulnerable because of the decreasing agility and strength that accompany old age; young women are more likely to feel vulnerable because of their perceived sexual attractiveness and physical weakness.

Gay and lesbian respondents were much more likely than heterosexual respondents to say that their risk was increased by their sexual orientation ( $\chi^2=40.21$ ,  $df=1$ ,

$p < .0000$ ); indeed, only two of the thirteen gay and lesbian participants (both women) answered “no” to that question, compared with all but two of the 49 heterosexual participants. Interestingly, income was not associated with the belief that financial situation or neighborhood of residence affected risk.

Some participants also reported that they felt their risk was *decreased* by their personal characteristics. Most notably, 56.7% of men reported that they felt their risk was decreased by their sex. In contrast, *no* women said this. Men were also more likely to say that their risk was reduced by their age, their weight, or their sexual orientation. No gay or lesbian participants said their risk was decreased by their sexual orientation; six heterosexual participants (five men and one woman) said this.

Also interesting were the factors that were *not* perceived to increase or decrease the risk of women and men. For example, focus group participants often stated that women are at a greater risk of violence because of their lower average height and weaker physical condition, as in the following quotes:

*Susannah*: I basically don't ever want to be in a situation where a man is close enough to put his hands on me. Cause I just —I sort of have that basic level of expectation that there will be, it's a pretty rare instance that I would be stronger, or faster, so I don't want to be in range.  
(Group 5)

*Rick*: Most of my relatives are women. I have a mom and four sisters, and ...they've never been able to resolve any conflict they've had by choosing violence, because not one of them is over 5'5", and not one of them weighs more than probably 115 pounds. And I think about when I was younger and they would, my sisters would be dating and they'd get into situations where, if it was a guy he might resort to violence and they had to choose some other way to get around it... (Group 2)

However, in the survey there were no significant gender differences in perceptions that risk was affected by one's height. For physical condition, results were significant, but in the opposite direction as these quotes would suggest: 20% of men, but only 8% of women, said that they felt their risk was increased by their physical condition.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Note that the term “physical condition” is ambiguous; it could encompass other categories

However, men were also more likely than women to say that their risk was *decreased* by their physical condition.

Thus the participants' survey responses in many cases mirrored the focus group discussions. In both, vulnerability was strongly associated with gender. Other social statuses and characteristics had systematic relationships with vulnerability, but none as consistent as the association of vulnerability with femininity and invulnerability with masculinity.

### **Protection**

Another way to assess cultural ideas about vulnerability and invulnerability is to examine which groups are perceived to be capable of protecting others, and which groups are perceived to be in need of protection and/or incapable of protecting others. Presumably, only those believed to be relatively invulnerable would be seen as protectors, whereas those who are believed to be vulnerable would not be seen as protectors and would be seen as especially in need of protection. I examined two kinds of statements about protection: statements in which the speaker perceives him or herself as a protector of others, and statements in which the speaker perceives others as a protector.

#### *Self as Protector*

These findings follow the same general pattern as the discussions of vulnerability and invulnerability above. Most obviously, men view themselves as protectors much more frequently than do women. In the 29 statements of this type, eighteen were uttered by men, and only eleven by women. In these same statements, women were identified as needing protection a total of sixteen times, but men only two times. (Two 

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on the list, such as disability, weight, and height.

statements identified children as needing protection, six statements referred to the protection of other people in general, and in three statements, the gender of the specific people being protected was unclear.) Even more telling is the relationship between the protector and the protected. As the table below shows, men were most frequently seen as capable of protecting women, whereas women were never seen as capable of protecting men.

Table 6-3  
Relationship Between Protector and Protected  
in Statements about Self

Protected	Protectors		
	Male	Female	Total
Male	2	0	2
Female	12	4	16
Children	0	2	2
General other	3	6	9
Unspecified	1	3	4
Total	18	11	29

Women are seen as capable of protecting other women, children, and unspecified "other people"; they do not speak of themselves as protectors of men. Interestingly, men never spoke of themselves as protecting children, perhaps because of cultural stereotypes that assign women responsibility for children.

Instead, men most frequently saw themselves as responsible for protecting women. For example, men in the focus groups tended to make statements like the following:

*Tony: ...Just the other night, Jane here, she has a parking spot up here, and at 8:00 at night she says, "Tony, would you watch me when I go to park my truck?" And I said, "Jane, I'm not going to watch you, I'm going to go with you." [laughter] (Group 10)*

This quote shows succinctly that both women and men see men as protectors. The woman requests protection from the man; the man takes this request matter-of-factly,

thereby confirming her perceptions of herself as vulnerable and of him as a source of protection. Other men made comments that revealed similar beliefs. For example, one 32-year old man described his reactions upon witnessing a man assaulting a woman:

*David:* Yeah, thinking back on the situation that I remember when I was visiting New York. I know that the guy that was beating up on this woman would not have been somebody that would have listened, I mean, there were—tempers were flying. The only choice there, really, was whether you were going to jump in and assault him, to prevent him from assaulting her. (Group 4)

This same man describes his frustration at being unable to effectively help a prostitute who had approached him at a gas station and who seemed in some sort of trouble. He comments that:

*David:* ...I felt a little bad that I couldn't think of any other way to act in this situation besides give her a ride to another sleazy gas station...I felt like I was doing my best to reduce violence in the circumstances, but I mean where she was... And I asked her several times, "you seem pretty upset, are you okay?" And I couldn't get a response out of her, so. (Group 4)

Another man in the same focus group (a group of wealthy white professionals) commented that the ongoing remodeling of his newly-purchased house had caused problems with trespassers:

*Jack:* But the issues that have come up quite a bit in terms of, I've had to confront about nine people in the last four weeks walking around our house or our property, some drunk, some just stupid, some not stupid at all but just walking around because they thought they could. And feeling like I want, I needed to, as much for my wife, out of a recognition of my wife's priorities as well as my own, to get them off the property as soon as possible... (Group 4)

In the next example, the speaker, a young man, notes that he feels protective of the woman he dates:

*Rob:* My girlfriend, I'm pretty protective of her, and she's a runner? And she's on, like All-American... but she's a really attractive girl, and she's fairly small... But I just really fear for her safety and stuff, so I'm always

warning her, "don't run, if you're gonna run, make sure it's in daylight hours and go with somebody and stuff like that, because I'm afraid something could happen to her. I feel like her parent, but you know... I'm afraid for her. (Group 7)

Note that even though this woman is an All-American athlete, this ability is not seen as enough to protect her.

Finally, a middle-aged white man describes his concern for his female employees:

*Bill:* I've given warnings quite a few times in work situations where, typically where it's involved female employees, usually younger female employees who might work late, or again need assistance in getting to their cars, warning them to be sure that doors are locked and that sort of thing. Pretty much along the same lines as we talked about earlier. And those warnings are usually well received. (Group 2)

In this case, the speaker apparently feels that he is responsible for protecting the young women with whom he has the paternalistic relationship of employer.

In contrast, only a few women made statements about protecting others:

*Joyce:* I used to live in a fairly marginal neighborhood in San Francisco, and there was a lot of prostitution on the corner, a lot of drug dealing, a lot of this and that. And I lived in a house with three stories, and we all—three sto—families, the three units? Met and agreed that we'd have this strategy that if we heard women being beaten up we would intervene, and we formed this little intervention system, where someone would call the cops, and other people would go out, and we would try to talk to them, and we did this for a few years, and then, my apartment was ripped off, and everything was destroyed, and I got out of the neighborhood. Looking back on it, I can't believe I did that. You know, to go out and confront people who were drug crazed and beating up somebody, and trying to talk to them like they were a rational human being—I was crazy, you know, but that was like my response to it at the time. (Group 4)

*Frances:* You feel a lot more aware of what's going on around you when you have [children] because I mean this person, this little tiny person, you are responsible for. And that's what I tell my kids: "You may not like what I'm telling you, but I'm responsible for you, and I'm held accountable for you." And so yeah, I see things in a whole different light [now that I have children], whereas if someone else's child is walking down the mall by itself or whatever, I'm like, "Where's the mother?" If it was my child, it'd be, "You get back here, you're not going anywhere." And I can see why people put their kids on those

little leashes and things like that, because people will snatch your child and not think anything about it. (*Group 11*)

*Linda:* I've seen guys on the bus, it's always on the bus, some guy, some guy's hassling a woman, and I like traded seats with her cause she was like really shy and couldn't get away from him, and I'm like, "you wanna trade seats?" and she's like "no," and I'm like, "you wanna trade seats!" [laughter] And she's like "oh! oh!" [laughter] and so I'm standing there glaring at this guy the whole bus ride to keep him from bothering her, and the minute, the minute he gets off, three guys go, "are you okay?" to her, and it's like "where were you?" when he's bothering her? (*Group P1*)

Note that these comments all refer to women's protection of other women or of children; no women talked about protecting men. Moreover, in the first comment in this set, the woman now identifies her strategy for the protection of other women in danger as "crazy"; she no longer sees this role as a viable one for her.

In contrast, the last comment in the set above illustrates the belief that men, not women, have a responsibility to protect others; the female speaker clearly feels that the role she has stepped into should have been occupied by one of the men on the bus. However, these beliefs are also contested. The last comment above provoked an exchange among the participants that demonstrated some of the stresses generated by societal expectations about male protection:

*Carl:* Well, because we're not supposed to intervene. We're taught to intervene, but we're not supposed to because, okay like, well, like my little sister, her boyfriend was hitting her and stuff, and I was like, "okay I'm gonna kick his ass" and she's like, "no."

*Linda:* Well there's ways to intervene without kicking someone's ass.

*Carl:*—No, here, here. I'm not supposed to intervene, I'm not supposed to, in those situations...I'm supposed to respect her autonomy, and I'm supposed to, you know, let her handle it herself, and it's not right for guys to always go around...intervening all the time, and in the first place—and sometimes I don't wanna deal with it, you know,

*Linda:* Yeah, of course.

*Carl:* It's, it's really dangerous to walk up and it's like, there's this guy, one time I saw slapping this girl around behind Minute Lube, and that's a real dangerous situation to just walk in and go, "hey you, stop that!" you know...I mean I'm saying like, we want to be like that, you know, we want to intervene, we're always supposed to, we're socialized to be the protectors, whatever that means, and it's like, due to the changing of

society right now, that word, that definition is changing, you know, and things that go along with that, how do we act, is changing, and so, I mean, it's just, I don't know, I guess, I don't want to get involved as much any more because I don't want to step on anybody's toes, especially the woman's, if, in such a situation, because, I mean, I might not necessarily know the best thing to do, and I might not know everything about the situation, and it's best to just let her probably handle it, and then make sure she's okay. Like those guys, I don't think were, you know, that that let that happen, I think that they were trying to, you know, hassling a girl is one thing, you know, and they're not going to get involved in that. But I'm sure if he woulda tried to strike somebody, you know, that they probably would have maybe done something, I hope. (*Group P1*)

This man clearly feels ambivalence about the male role of protector. In addition to noting the dangers inherent in the protector role, he also notes that gendered expectations about protection are in flux: he is expected to both protect women and allow them the right of self-determination. How can he do both? Negotiating this terrain is difficult because of these contradictory expectations.

In addition to these gendered statements about protection, a few participants made more general statements about protecting others:

*Joyce:* I have a very interesting relationship to violence, I think, because I grew up in New York and my father was a policeman, and a lot of people in my extended family are somehow connected to being a cop, or a prison guard or something. So, there's always been this undercurrent of, you know, look out for everybody... (*Group 4*)

*Stuart:* I'm never afraid to answer the door for anybody, I mean, because I figure, if they need my help, I'm glad to help people find something. Because most times if I have someone knock on my door that I don't know, or that's strange and different to me, he's asking me for help, or directions. (*Group 6*)

*Karen:* I've found that I [fight] for someone I care about as well. I won't put out as much effort if it's someone I don't even know, but I will put out an effort. But if it's someone I care about I'll fight tooth and nail just like it's—almost myself. (*Group 5*)

These kinds of statements, suggesting a general responsibility to others, were made equally frequently by women and men.

*Others as Protectors*

Similar patterns occurred in statements that identified other people as protectors, either of the speaker her- or himself, or of others. Men were again seen as protectors, often of women:

*Linda*: ...Sometimes I feel like I hang out with, I have some male friends who are really kind of scary looking, and I feel like, I mean once I was in 7-11 with this very scary-looking male friend of mine, who looks like he's crazy, like his eyes are crossed, and he's just like always kind of out of it, and he's not, but he looks really crazy? And I was in 7-11 and someone started bothering me, and for a moment I was scared, and then I'm like, what am I thinking? And I just walked over by my friend, and the guy suddenly didn't seem to have anything to say to me at all anymore. And it was like, at first I was like oh, it's great that I can hang out with you and every thing's okay, that's wonderful, but then it just made me pissed off, like what is this, what is it that I'm suddenly safer if I'm with somebody, I mean, what is this???(Group P1)

Expectations for protection of women are particularly strong for men in the roles of father, husband, boyfriend, or brother:

*Marie*: My husband comes to pick me up, well, when I used to work on Capitol Hill, my husband would come to pick me up, not because, I think he was sometimes, I think sometimes my husband's more afraid than I am, but yeah, I've had that, where you've got people waiting outside the back and you have to exit...through the back alley, and there's people waiting there.. (Group P1)

*Tanya*: My mom still lives in Detroit, and this was a couple of years after they had got there. Somebody broke into their garage and just took some meat out of their freezer, you know. Didn't try to get into the house or anything, you know, took the meat out of the freezer. Her husband was more upset than she was and wanted to run out and get a gun and everything. She said, "It's just meat. We can go to the store and get some more meat."

*Angela*: But he's the protector, see. That's the man.

*Tanya*: Yeah, that's what it was, that's probably what it was. (Group 11)

*Tanya*: I do know that if I am with my father I feel safe, because of anybody in the world, my father's not going to let anybody hurt me. I guess that's the first thing that comes to my mind. (Group 11)

*Frances*: Yeah, I do feel safe when I am with my husband. I do feel safe, probably because he is kind of big in stature, he's six feet tall—he's kind of broad, so I feel a little—I feel safe with him. And I can honestly say I think if I had a short husband, I probably would not feel too safe, you know, out, unless I knew that he could really could kick some behind or

something. [laughter] But, you know, I mean, I'm just being honest, I probably would not feel—because I've thought about that too, why did I marry a 6' man versus a 5'5" man, which I had an opportunity to do...now that I reflect on it, I know that that was part of the reason why I chose to marry the man that I did, it's cause he was tall, and dark and handsome, but tall has something to do with it.

*Alissa:* As she was saying that I was thinking—because my husband, he's not all that tall, he's only 5'10", but he is pretty big, considering. But I don't know that I married him—I guess I married him, I could have, for that security or to feel safe, but he's a chicken. [laughter] He'd run from his own shadow except, you know, when it come to deal with me, because it was totally opposite with me, because he was violent with me. But to everybody else, he was just a sweetheart, just a wonderful guy. So I don't—But I mean, I have dated smaller men, and I don't feel as secure with them out in public as I would with my husband even though he is a chicken. (*Group 11*)

In the first two quotes above, note that the women comment on the men's feelings about their roles as protectors; the motivation for their behavior clearly comes from the men themselves. In the last quote, both speakers note that they feel that their husbands' physical stature protects them. Alissa's comment makes it clear that actual behavior is not necessarily at issue in this regard: her husband was perceived to be able to protect her from other people despite the fact that he was "a chicken"—and despite the fact that he abused her himself.

Women, however, were infrequently seen as protectors. When they were, it was always in reference to other women:

*Desiree:* My girlfriend waits til I get inside before she drives away.  
(*Group P1*)

*Nora:* I feel safe at home also when both my roommates, when we're all home... (*Group 1*)

However, women were also discussed as being ineffective protectors, as in these comments from young women:

*Sarah:* Even with another girlfriend somewhere in a foreign land or something, it's still not [safe] though.

*Katrina:* And even if you're like ten girls, you're still [not safe].

*Jill:* No, you're not... (*Group 12*)

These patterns are clear in Table 6–4, below. Men were often identified as protectors, but infrequently discussed as needing protection; women were frequently seen as needing protection, but never seen as potential protectors.

Table 6–4  
Relationship Between Protector and Protected  
in Statements about Others

Protected	Protector						Total
	Males	Females	General	Unspecified	Police	Parents	
Males	4	0	9	1	1	0	15
Females	18	6	15	5	1	2	47
General Other	2	0	4	1	0	0	7
Unspecified	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	24	6	28	7	3	2	70

Two other patterns are also notable in this table. First, police are sometimes identified as protectors; however, this category may simply be a subset of males as protectors, since the stereotype of police officers is male. Second, the generalized category “other people” is seen as a source of protection almost as often as men are. As discussed in Chapter 5, a large number of respondents said that they felt protected by being in groups, by living in areas where everyone knows their neighbors, or by being in busy areas of the city. As three women noted, “there’s safety in numbers” (*Fiona, Group 5; Frances, Group 11; Sarah, Group 12*):

*Rick:* I usually feel safer in a crowded area, if there are a lot of people on the street I don’t feel as threatened as I do if I’m walking alone in my car on a dark street. (*Group 2*)

*Joyce:* I feel safe in my neighborhood. I feel like —We just moved there three months ago, and we carefully picked a neighborhood based on safety. We know our neighbors, we like our neighbors, our neighbors know us, they like us. We look after each other, it’s already been demonstrated. So I feel fine walking in my neighborhood at night. (*Group 4*)

*Janet:* ...I feel safe walking around Capitol Hill on the weekends during the day, I think because there are so many people around. (Group 1)

*Richard:* Another thing I was about to say but I didn't get a chance, was, I don't know whether you guys came from small communities or not, but, growing up in a small community, there's a sense of community which I don't feel living in a city, and a sense of community is kinda a hard thing to describe, but you kinda know everyone, and people look after each other, even if you're just an acquaintance, they'll help you out and you know can trust them, there's not that same social feeling in a city. Perhaps if we could get more of a sense of community in the city, it would be a helpful thing but, I don't know how. (Group 1)

Although gender was by far the most salient characteristic distinguishing protectors from protected, one participant commented that gender was not always a good indicator of protection:

*Linda:* And its, I've gotten into some situations, where, with some people I feel totally safe, and with other people I don't? And it really depends, it's not so much gender it's more, like who the person is and how they carry themselves... (Group P1)

Note, however, that even mentioning gender in this way suggests that there is an expectation that members of one sex are the more competent protectors.

One woman also noted that she found her faith a source of feelings of safety, because she believed that God would protect her:

*Angela:* I think my faith has a lot to do with my security and my peace, too, that I have in terms of feeling safe, and I know oftentimes I'm saying, "God will give us perfect peace... Lord keep my mind on you, so that I can walk in peace, so that I can hear, so that I can see, so that I can perform and do what it is that you're calling upon me to do without being upset or nervous or frustrated or frantic or anxious. And that peace that passes all understanding is the peace that I want—not as the world gives, Lord, but just as you give—as you promised you'd give." (Group 11)

Another woman in the discussion agreed, but noted that she still advises her daughters to take precautions:

*Frances:* And I tell her that it's not that I don't trust the Lord to watch over you, but this world is not like it was when I was nineteen. (Group 11)

### Warnings About Danger

As a final strategy for understanding cultural ideas about vulnerability, I examined reports of warnings about danger. Warnings are a useful way of exploring the concept of vulnerability, because they provide an indirect measure of who is considered vulnerable: presumably, individuals are not warned of danger unless the warner believes them to be at some risk. And as I will discuss at greater length in the next chapter, warnings also provide a way of examining who or what is considered dangerous.

Two categories of warnings occurred in the focus groups. The most frequent type of warnings were those described in response to the facilitator's direct questions about warnings given to and received from others. In addition, however, there were a number of spontaneous descriptions of warnings received and given, which occurred either before the facilitator brought up the topic of warnings or well after he or she moved on to the next topic. Here I analyze only spontaneous descriptions of warnings. I do so in order to avoid the problems of experimental demand—participants generating descriptions of warnings because they believe the interviewer wants to hear them, not because they are important or salient to the participants themselves. As Becker notes, "volunteered statements" are more credible than responses to an observer's question (1970: 30).

There were a total of twenty-six such spontaneous descriptions of warnings in the thirteen focus groups. One involved a participant giving a warning to other group members during the focus group discussion about a panhandler she had encountered in the area:

*Jane:* Well, there is one couple, you know, who stay there, and he acts real excited, "Oh, ma'am, ma'am, can you help us, my wife and I are here, we need money for gasoline!" Have you ever run into that one?  
*Sadie:* No.

*Jane:* And I keep telling them to go over to your church and he can get a gas voucher and he said no, he checked, and they were out of gas vouchers. Nobody has a gas voucher! [laughter]

*Tony:* There's no such thing.

*Jane:* I said, "Go to your church," and he said, "I've already tried there." But no, he acts real frantic—and watch out, he's very dangerous. (Group 10)

The remaining cases involved a description of warnings given or received by participants in the past.

The most salient pattern in these warnings is that the majority—approximately 85% of them—involve women, as either the person doing the warning or the person being warned. In contrast, only 38.4% of them involved men.<sup>4</sup> Table 6-5 shows this pattern clearly.

Table 6-5  
Relationship Between Providers  
and Recipients of Warnings

Recipients	Providers of Warnings					Total
	Male	Female	Parents	Unspecified	"Everyone"	
Male	0	2	1	1	1	5
Female	2	8	2	2	1	13
"Everyone"	1	3	0	1	0	5
Children	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	3	14	3	4	2	26

Only five of the twenty-six descriptions (or 19.2%) involved men as the recipients of warnings; note that none of these involved a man warning another man. One of the five descriptions involved a man being warned by unspecified others not to "take in street people" into his apartment. The content of the warning was unclear in the description; the warning could have been about breaking apartment rules rather about potential danger. If this ambiguous case is removed, the number of warnings involving

<sup>4</sup>These percentages do not sum to 100% because the category "parents" is included in both calculations.

male recipients drops to four (or only 16% of all warnings), and the number of warnings involving men in either the provider or recipient role falls to nine (or 36%). Note also that while only two of the four all-male groups had spontaneous descriptions of warnings, three of the mixed-sex groups, and all of the all-female groups, had such descriptions.

Nonetheless, some of the warnings did involve men. For example, men sometimes receive warnings from their parents or from female friends:

*Jerry:* And I guess that goes all the way back to growing up in Philadelphia, when my parents used to tell me when you're in this this part of town, make sure your doors are locked, and look around you when you come to a stop sign... (Group 3)

*Joe:* My mom warns me all the time and I'm sick of it...

*Lisa:* About what, because I'm a mom, and I warn my kids.

*Joe:* Everything. It's usually... I would describe it, warning as her style of communication. [laughter] At least with me. Everything is a warning. "Joe, you should go out with thus and such a woman, or you know, whatever, get thus and such a job." It's always a warning. (Group 3)

More often, however, warnings involving men entailed men warning women. This woman, a 71-year-old white woman, described a situation that occurred when she was a young adult:

*Meg:* And I was coming home on the bus, I lived at the top of this enormous steep hill. And I know the driver came forward one night, and it was about two o'clock in the morning, and he said, "I am going to stop the bus and I want you to get out and I want you to run like hell," because he said, "there's somebody sitting at the back of the bus and I don't like the way he's looking at you." (Group 8)

Women also report receiving warnings from parents or other relatives:

*Meg:* When I went off to college, and when I began to date in high school and things like that, [my brothers] were showing me how to knee somebody, and don't go with this one, and don't go to this place, and all that. They really did a lot of that. (Group 8)

*Tina:* But on the other hand because I grew up in New York City, and my parents were always telling me to be careful, and don't talk to strangers and all that kind of stuff... (Group 5)

Most of the descriptions, however, involved women (including mothers) warning other women about danger:

*Fiona:* ...I grew up in a big city, in Mexico City with millions of people and my mother taught me since I was little like to be careful, because I played outside in the streets that were always very busy and... since I was little I remember my mother always telling me to be careful, and I was always, I always remember seeming to be aware about crime.. Maybe not crime when I was little, but what I can remember of any grade school, that I was aware that there were bad people out there that would do things to kids, and my mother was one of those like, "Don't talk to strangers." And I used to sometimes walk home back from school and she would always say, "Don't talk to anybody, don't do this, don't do that," I mean she'd just go over this list of things that I wasn't supposed to do. [laughter] I always thought they were silly, but you know they have stuck with me.... (Group 5)

*Nora:* Because I used to work in Federal Way, I used to work at SeaTac mall, and, and I would get out, I'd close the store 9:30, 10, I'd leave the store. And I remember my mother called me like right before I left and said, "don't —if you see a car driving by, don't flash your lights at it if it has its lights off because, there's this thing going on, and I'll explain when you come home, just don't do it, whatever you do don't flash your lights on." And I'm like, "okay." And I came home and she told me that and I was like, "Really! Oh my god! That's scary." But I don't remember if any people really got shot or anything, but I remember telling, it was like a whole week, telling everybody, "Don't flash your lights..." (Group 1)

*Mia:* That's what my mom was talking to me about, that somebody got raped around here, because we live in Tacoma, and she's like, "You watch out." (Group 12)

In some ways this pattern resembles a chain of warnings between women: a woman is warned of danger by her parents (especially her mother) while growing up, and then as an adult, she passes these warnings on to other women. This pattern is discussed further in Chapter 8.

### Summary

The overall patterns of cultural ideas about vulnerability and gender are clear in the quotes above. Unless there are specific circumstances that warrant an exception, women are viewed as far more vulnerable to violence than men. Men are generally seen

as capable of protecting themselves and others; women are seen as in need of protection, or at least warnings about danger. This difference is clearly visible in the brief exchange below. In this discussion, the facilitator had just asked the group (of gay men) what kinds of warnings they receive from others. The men were clearly at a loss when faced with this question:

*Rick:* The only one I can think of is basically my mother, always saying "Be wary of strangers, don't pick up strangers." I can't remember anyone else giving me a warning about dangerous situations in Seattle, unless my neighbors will and very very infrequently, but we've had car break-ins and they might say that they were broken into or was I broken into. But really that's not even a warning that's an after the fact thing, and not likely to do anything about it at that point. Those are the two that come to my mind.

*Tom:* Well, I don't know, I—I find that question kinda difficult...

[pause]

*Bill:* I don't think I get very many explicit warnings. Maybe I'm not alert to them, but... I think I give more than I receive. [pause]

*Elliot:* My friends don't know what I'm up to to even give me the warning, let alone, I mean if they knew, then they would, but they don't so they don't... [pause]

*Facilitator:* So you can't think of any situations when people...

*Elliot:* No, I —One, long, years and years ago, there was some axe murder on Queen Anne, they said, "Watch when you go out the door tonight, Elliot, there's an axe murderer in your neighborhood." ...I don't know, if people think I can take care of myself, or maybe I'm mature, I'm an adult. (*Group 2*)

The last speaker has to think back "years and years ago" to a neighborhood axe murder in order to come up with a situation in which he was warned. One of the men finally offered this explanation for their evident perplexity with the question:

*Bill:* Maybe women are more in tune with that sort of thing. Probably more accustomed to receiving warnings and have a higher awareness because of perceived greater vulnerability. Whether that's true or not.

*Elliot:* I think that men are, on average, men are physically stronger, in most cases... (*Group 2*)

Contrast this with the response of a woman in another group:

*Christine:* For me I guess it's more like daily things, like just my friends and I warning each other. We never let each other walk to their car

alone, if we're out in the night or something, we'll always walk to the car, or wait til the person gets in the house and turns on the light, and...you know, I think like most women have a pretty, like a checklist of ten things they always do that's just in their heads. They always lock their door, they always check behind the seat when you get in the car, you always have the lights on, you always have the automatic timers set for the lights, you always have the doors locked, you always have the windows locked—You've got this litany of things, and so you sort of do that to each other, like, you know, "did you lock your window, did you lock your door." So kind of, just going through, not desperately but casually, you'll mention that you know, "oh your left your window open," or "did you lock your door," or "I came to visit you and your screen door was open and where were you," and "oh I was next door." You know, this sort of, it seems kind of paranoid but it's just become kind of a real thing, and so, those kind of warnings I guess we kind of give to each other. (*Group 4*)

In addition to gender, participants identified other statuses, particularly age, race, sexual orientation, and social class, as signalling vulnerability. Although these have some independent effects (e.g., children and the elderly are considered to be vulnerable regardless of gender), they more often interact with gender in participants' talk, and cannot be separated in understanding vulnerability.

The strong association between gender and vulnerability is particularly fascinating in light of the wealth of contradictory empirical evidence. The National Crime Survey reports that men are much more likely to be victimized than women. Even the participants themselves discussed incidents where men were victimized nearly as often as incidents with women victims; however, they still perceived men to be relatively invulnerable. Table 6–6 compares victimization data from the NCS with focus group references to victims and vulnerable people.

**Table 6-6**  
**Comparison of Victimization Rates**  
**and Focus Group References to Victimization and Vulnerability**

Data Source	Men	Women
NCS 1995* (victimizations)	58%	42%
Focus group references to victims	41%	59%
Focus group references to vulnerability	20%	80%

\*Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995: 231 (Table 3.2)

The National Crime Survey reports that men were the targets in 58% of all violent victimizations in 1995. However, in focus group conversations about victims of violence, only 41% of the victims discussed by the participants were male. And of the references to vulnerability in the focus groups, only 20% referred to men. Thus our ideas about vulnerability do not derive directly from actual experiences of violence. A similar observation can be made for the relationship between race and vulnerability: in the focus group discussions, whiteness was perceived as a source of vulnerability (in black areas and/or to people in other racial categories) far more often than other racial statuses, but crime and victimization reports show that people of color—and especially men of color—are at greater risk of victimization than whites (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995).

The different emphases on gender and race in the focus group discussions may stem from a variety of factors. First, as discussed above, Seattle has a lower proportion of blacks and Latinos (groups that tend to be associated with danger, as discussed in the next chapter) than other large cities. Moreover, Seattle has a relatively high degree of racial segregation: African Americans, Latinos, and to a lesser extent

Asians and Asian Americans tend to live in distinct neighborhoods. This means that individuals (and especially whites) may have very limited contact with members of other racial categories and may spend most of their time in racially homogeneous contexts. This is a very different situation than exists with respect to gender: because gender groups are not spatially segregated, individuals are much more frequently in cross-gender contexts. In addition, Americans tend to talk about gender, more than race, in terms of personality characteristics. While sensitivity to issues of racism has made it less acceptable to talk publicly about race in this way, the same is not true for gender.

Together, I believe this evidence shows that vulnerability is socially constructed quite independently from actual experiences (or knowledge of others' experiences) with violence. Ideas about women's vulnerability (and men's invulnerability) persist even when men's victimization is discussed. The focus group discussions provide a useful window on this process of construction; in the talk of the participants, we can see how women become and remain identified with vulnerability, and men with invulnerability. These kinds of associations, I argue, may help to explain the gendered patterns of fear and vulnerability discussed in the previous chapters.

## Chapter 7

### The Social Construction of Dangerousness

Vulnerability does not occur in a vacuum; one is vulnerable to other people and to particular kinds of harm. In this chapter, I turn the flip side of vulnerability: dangerousness. I use the same kinds of strategies here as I did in Chapter 6 to explore the focus group participants' conceptions of dangerous people: what groups of people do they consider to be dangerous? Conversely, what groups of people do they consider to be *not* dangerous? As I demonstrate below, some groups are perceived to be inherently dangerous, while others are seen as benign.

I believe that the concept of dangerousness is crucial to the meaning of gender. It is frequently argued that stereotypes of masculinity involve aggressiveness, while stereotypes of femininity involve passivity. I suggest here that this dichotomy of aggression and passivity does not fully capture the way that issues of violence and danger are experienced in everyday life. Although aggression does of course occur, it is relatively infrequent. Indeed, most people do not witness physical aggression in their daily lives. What is experienced in daily life, however, is men's presumed *potential* for aggression, which I term perceived dangerousness. Even if men are not always aggressive, cultural beliefs paint them as having the capacity to be so. Moreover, particular types of men—identified by race, class, or age—are perceived to be more threatening than other men. In everyday life, it is impossible to tell from outside appearances whether an unknown (or even a known) man may be aggressive. What is important to others around him—for example, to the woman walking past him on a dark, deserted street—is the cultural equation of masculinity with dangerousness.

Similarly, the concept of passivity does not entirely capture the daily experiences many women have with violence. I suggest that another concept is needed to capture

the reality of the everyday experience of femininity: vulnerability. Indeed, the focus group discussions showed little evidence of women passively accepting men's aggression; what they did show (as illustrated in Chapter 6) was both women's and men's *beliefs* that women are vulnerable to men's violence. Women are not perceived as potential threats, as men are; instead, they are seen as inherently vulnerable to violence.

I begin this chapter by analyzing comments in the focus group discussions that identified particular people or groups of people as dangerous. I then return to the issue of warnings, which I began to explore in the last chapter, and analyze the content of warnings: what kinds of people are the subjects of warnings?<sup>1</sup> Throughout the chapter, I contrast participants' ideas about people considered to be dangerous with their ideas about who is *not* dangerous; this comparison highlights even more the association of danger and gender.

## Representations of Dangerousness

### *Gender*

There were 136 mentions of dangerous people during the focus group discussions.<sup>2</sup> Of these, 105 specified the gender of the people identified as dangerous. Of these, 99 (or 94.3% of the comments that specified gender) identified men as potentially dangerous, either individually or as a group:

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<sup>1</sup>Note that there is considerable overlap between warnings and the identification of people perceived to be dangerous. In many (although not all) cases, warnings identify people perceived to be dangerous; thus these kinds of statements could be coded in either category. Twenty-two comments in the focus group discussions were of this type. These cases were included in the analysis of warnings at the end of this chapter, but not in the analysis of representations of dangerousness, below. This decision did not substantially change the analysis of either category.

<sup>2</sup>52 of these comments referred to specific individuals and 84 referred to general groups of people (men, poor people, etc.) After analyzing these two categories separately, I concluded that there were no significant differences between the two. Therefore, specific and general references are considered together in this analysis.

*Janet:* I feel the most threatened I've felt in the last year is on campus when I'm going to my car after a night class, and there's nobody in sight except one guy, and I can't see him. (Group 1)

*Nora:* ...I'm always careful to cross the street, even like, you know, two guys walking down the same street that I'm walking I'll cross the street, even if it's a girl with them I'll cross, I'm like super-careful, I think I exaggerate sometimes, but I prefer it that way to anything you know happening bad or...better safe than sorry. (Group 1)

*Carl:* ...But I have to be careful, especially on the Ave, cause there are guys down there that just look for fights, and if you don't have the right expression on your face, if you don't do the right amount of eye contact, I mean, I've seen them step from like, they're hanging out right in front of McDonald's, they just stepped out and popped this guy in the face, I'm going, okay, you know, that could have been me, or they just, people screaming at each other, and, it's male against male violence, cause it's, they're looking for a fight, you know, they want to, I don't know, maybe dominate another male, or they're real insecure or something like that... (Group P1)

*Linda:* ...I mean, I've really had guys like...How often something happens that really scares me, is like, once a month. How often something happens that reminds me that I should be more alert is like, every day to every week. And I think that sometimes, like I feel like there's a difference between someone trying to hit me and someone like, just bothering me, but sometimes I wonder how much of a difference there really [is], I mean, obviously I'd rather have someone just try to talk to me than try to hit me, but sometimes the bothering, it's like, if someone's trying to talk to me and I don't know him, and I don't want to talk to him, if I try to say "look, just leave me alone," what if he *does* start hitting me? You know, I mean, what if someone is trying to follow me off the bus, and I say "look, please leave me alone," tries to attack me? He's right next to me, he's talking to me, he's doing something that I don't want already, and the whole issue for me of how to get away from a bad situation without having it turn into something violent is constant, I mean, that's always there. (Group P1)

In some cases, family members and other intimates were described as potential dangers:

*Anita:* One thing I think is really interesting, I learned this in class a while ago, is that it's not even so much if you're running, out with some friends, but usually, a lot of times violent crimes happen as a result from your boyfriend, your husband or something...isn't it more so that rather than just some stranger. (Group 1)

However, the majority of the comments about dangerous people did referred not to intimates but to strangers. This is particularly interesting given the fact that violence is as likely to occur between people who know each other as it is between strangers (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995).

In contrast to the 99 mentions of men as dangerous, only six comments in the thirteen focus groups (or 5.7% of those comments that specified gender) identified women as dangerous. Moreover, of these six comments, two were meant (and received) as jokes, highlighting the perceived absurdity of a woman being seen as dangerous. Two comments involved the danger not simply of physical violence but of a man's being falsely accused of rape. For example, a 30-year-old white man described his emotional reactions to picking up a female hitchhiker who subsequently threatened him:

*Harold:* I felt that there was a risk of harm to myself, but not so much that she was going to physically injure me more than scratching me or something like that. It was more the fact that I could end up in the newspaper, I could have harm to my reputation, people could become aware of me, the only thing they know about me was that I was accused of rape by this woman. (Group 4)

Of the two remaining cases of women perceived as dangerous, one involved a woman wielding a gun—perhaps indicating what it would take for a woman to be considered a danger. The final comment referred to young black women encountered in an area the speaker believed to be the most dangerous in Seattle. Thus women are seen as dangerous only in extraordinary circumstances: when they are armed or when they are members of groups perceived to be dangerous (as discussed at greater length in the next section) and in a context perceived to be especially dangerous.

### *Race*

Race was also seen as a marker of dangerousness, although to a much lesser extent than gender.<sup>3</sup> Of the 136 comments, 27 associated race or particular racial groups with danger in some way. Sixteen of these identified black people as dangerous, two identified white people as dangerous, two referred to Asians or Latinos as dangerous, and seven referred to “race,” a “mixed group,” “other cultures,” or “immigration” as potentially dangerous. For example, this conversation took place between three young white men:

*Sean:* ...Like if I drove through one of the really, darker-skinned areas of Seattle, then I get a lot of looks. I’ve been through there and everyone’s looking at you, and they don’t look like they’re happy to see you.

*Rob:* “Whitey, get out of here.” That’s what I heard.

*Andrew:* They either think you’re a chump, or they think you’re such a bad-ass that you can afford to go through there. (*Group 7*)

These men’s projections of what people of color think about them say a great deal about their ideas about people of color—and about themselves.

Note that while the exchange above identified race by itself as a sign of danger, race was usually cited in combination with other statuses. Examples of these status combinations are discussed in a later section of this chapter.

### *Social Class*

Poverty is another potent symbol of danger. In eleven comments, poor people were perceived to be particularly dangerous; in contrast, danger was never associated with wealth:

*Tom:* Well, that’s another violent, could be a potentially violent situation, are panhandlers because some of them can be pretty aggressive. Even when the answer is “sorry” you can get a response from someone that you would be better off just walking on the other side of the street and I don’t know, I tend to think the people I fear the

<sup>3</sup>As discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, the small number of such comments could be due to the relatively small African American and Latina/o populations in Seattle.

most would be the people that really have, I would perceive as not having as great a risk of losing anything by resorting to violence. If the panhandler did go after you if you didn't give him money, well, what's going to happen to that person? Not very much. But they might be able to satisfy some urge to beat up the 50th person who said no to them.  
(Group 2)

*Tom:* I think if you look at who you're getting the locks to lock out, I mean, say the neighborhood I grew up in, I mean I felt totally safe in that area, the church—I mean the school was a block away, a Catholic church, and a great community within the church, as far as—But you're not putting locks on your doors to keep out your neighbor down the street or the neighbor two blocks away. It's, the person from, those, the lesser income bracket who lives 2 miles away. So—I mean I felt growing up that I was very safe in the community, and I think that community at least where I grew up is still there. But it's funny because like in my answers I was thinking well, I guess the more diverse I allow my situation to be, the more unsafe I start to feel about my own situation...  
(Group 2)

*Meg:* ...I have a car, so basically I have to be in my parking lot by 8:00 because if I am not I have to go in the back door, and that is just a parking lot that is filled with a lot of homeless sleeping in the trash barrels and the dumpsters and things like that, and I am not crazy about that... (Group 8)

### *Groups*

Groups of any of the above people—men, people of color, or poor people—were also perceived to be dangerous. Overall, 25 comments identified groups of particular people as potentially dangerous:

*Joyce:* ...I see a bunch of guys, any age, any group, more than two and I'm scared. I don't care what color they are, what age they are, even if they're like twelve, it's like, uh oh, trouble. It's either going to be verbal assault, or it might physical assault, or whatever. And it's just something unpleasant, and I don't want to be around it, so I try to avoid it... (Group 4)

*Meg:* ...But the one thing I don't like is to get into a taxi at 9:30, 10:00 and have the driver have his pal riding with him. I am never comfortable with that. (Group 8)

*Meg:*...I came out of the theater, and I was going under a streetlight when I heard this, "Hey, lady, hey lady." And there was a gang of kids about a half a block away. And I thought, "That's not as friendly as it sounds." (Group 8)

Groups of people seem to magnify the perceived dangerousness of others. Indeed, this perception may be warranted given the well-documented finding that individuals in groups will behave in ways that they might not if alone.

### *Interacting Statuses*

In about two-thirds of the cases considered here, the participants identified dangerous people by reference to a single status—most often, gender. In a minority of cases, however (35 of 136), the dangerous people or group were identified using some combination of statuses. As discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, multiple statuses often work together to determine perceptions of a situation or person. In the cases described here, an individual or group's racial, class, or age status interacted with gender to jointly produce perceptions of dangerousness. The various combinations, and their frequency in the discussions, are described below:

Table 7-1  
Frequency of Status Combinations Identified as Dangerous

Combination of Statuses	Frequency
<i>Gender &amp; Race</i>	
Black men	6
Asian men	2
White men	1
Latino men	1
Black women	1
<i>Gender &amp; Age</i>	
Young men	7
Male children	1
Adult men	4
Old men	1
<i>Gender &amp; Class</i>	
Poor men	2
<i>Gender, Race &amp; Age</i>	
Young black men	7
Young white men	1
<i>Gender, Race, Class, &amp; Age</i>	
Old poor black men	1

Note that gender was mentioned in all of these combinations, and that only one mention involved women. Masculinity seems to be a precondition for dangerousness in all but a very few cases. In addition, seventeen comments involved men of color, and fifteen comments involved young men.

Social class, however, was rarely mentioned in combination with other statuses. This does not mean that class is unimportant in the assessment of danger, however. Rather, the larger number of people perceived to be dangerous that were identified only by their class status suggests that being poor, like being male, is sufficient to be seen as dangerous. In contrast, for this sample of participants, race and age require combination with other statuses to produce perceptions of danger.

A number of participants made comments that identified men of color as particularly dangerous. In this comment, a 39-year-old white man describes his feelings when he worked as a bartender:

*Rick: If a group of black men had come in, I would feel more more uneasy than had it been a group of white men. (Group 2)*

This woman describes a different situation perceived as particularly dangerous:

*Lori: I have a story, something my fiancé was telling me that happened to him yesterday on Broadway at the Baskin-Robbins. He was standing there in the parking lot and this guy pulled up in a low-rider, with his music, with Tupak blaring, all the cussing and a lot of little kids around and everyone was afraid to go up and, and say something to him... And I don't know, I guess he described this guy as Hispanic, kinda thuggish-looking guy, and I'm sure that had, I'm sure that had a lot to do with the fear, because of the stereotypes. (Group 1)*

Sometimes the perceived dangerousness of men of color was attributed to their cultural background, as in this comment:

*Elliot: Yeah...I have contact with a lot of the Asian cultures, and...there's the gang stuff, there's all sorts of stuff going on. Economically they seem very persevering, they're in the land of opportunity and god they bust their butt and they make headway, but*

they bring all their cultural stuff and how they deal and their family situations and all that...a lot of of it is very patriarchal and so what the man says, you better or else, and it gets pretty violent, or very abusive, but then I mean god, we certainly still see that in our you know, American born and bred families here too...it's not all *Leave it to Beaver*.... (Group 2)

Interestingly, this was the only comment made in the focus groups about the perceived dangerousness of Asian men or women. This is notable given the large Asian population in Seattle, and the increasing media attention to Asian gangs. It is also notable that this comment identifies Asian men as potentially dangerous in the context of their own families (presumably an intraracial context) rather than in the public arena; black men, in contrast, were discussed only in terms of public interaction.<sup>4</sup>

In Chapter 6, I discussed the importance of racial salience for perceptions of vulnerability: both white and black focus group participants noted that they felt more vulnerable in contexts where their racial category was highlighted. Although racial salience was also a factor in perceptions of dangerousness (as in the above example where the “Hispanic, thuggish-looking guy” seemed unusual in the situation), it was much less frequently mentioned. Intraracial contexts were also seen as potentially dangerous, as in this quote from an African American man:

*Franklin:* ...That Million Man March, for over a million black men to get together and not kill each other? That's a miracle. I mean we talking about the East Cost where high crime rate, fast, I mean, you see your enemy next to you and not shoot him, no matter what? That's a miracle. You never see that, you probably never see that in your life. I've been places where you get sixty or seventy black males together, and all hell break out. (Group 9)

In this example, as in the one that follows, it is not the racial salience of either party that is highlighted, but the racial category to which the potentially dangerous person belongs, as well as the social context of isolation:

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<sup>4</sup>Again, the racial/ethnic composition of the focus groups could be responsible for these patterns.

*Elliot:* ...But like you say, this xenophobia or whatever it is, this conscious picture you get when you're walking down the street and you see that big black man and he's got three other guys with him, and they've got the grunge look, all right? You know, and they're jiving, you know, and, and it's night time, and maybe it isn't well lit, well god, what would you do, you know, and it's not a real big sidewalk, and you're by yourself, and there's not a whole heck of a lot of other people around, are you going to go to the other side of the street?

*Bill:* Probably. [laughter] (*Group 2*)

Note that both these examples identified the intersection of race and masculinity as particularly dangerous.

Another frequently-mentioned combination of statuses involved age and gender, usually with reference to young men:

*Evan:* I don't know if it's been explicitly stated tonight, but kind of underlying a lot of the conversation is... The perpetration of violence, I think, is mostly an issue of men, and mostly of young men... (*Group 4*)

The combination of race, gender, and age was also common. Young black men were identified as particularly dangerous, although a number of respondents stated that they also perceived young white men to be dangerous. For example, the following comment was made in a group of white and Native American men living a downtown residential hotel. The speaker had been victimized some time before by a black man who struck him with a bottle:

*Frank:* I've learned not to [talk to people]. I mean, people get up in your face, "What you gonna do" is the easiest line you'll hear. You know? And there's the motherfucker this, and the racial slurs, and you're only one person, there's like five or six or eight of them, and they're gonna circle you like a pack of hyenas. It's cowardly, you learn to get away from the situation and don't get near it. And you start to judge people, you start to prejudice them, you start to, it starts to where you see a group of people that had nothing to do with the people who were messing with you, but happen to be of the same race, you judge them as harshly as you judge the person that was messing with you. Then you start building up, what's the word I'm looking for.

*Facilitator:* Prejudices.

*Frank:* Thank you. That's it. You start to build up a prejudice against that specific race, or that specific clique of that race, what age group. Men, nineteen to—actually nowadays it's males anywhere between

twelve and thirty years old. Which is like 80% of that race. Which is ridiculous. Which is rude, which is unconscionable. But it's happening. It's happening to me and that makes me sick. The fact that because of what some people have done to me I'm now looking at that entire race and thinking what I never thought for thirty years. And using terms that I haven't spoken yet, but terms up here that I have never used in thirty years, thirty or more years. And that makes me sick. That these people can push me into a situation where I don't want to be and now I'm stuck in it. (Group 6)

This conversation took place in an all-white group, in response to the facilitator's question about when they feel most vulnerable:

*Becky:* That one, I'll go first. That one's easy. [laughter] I think when I'm alone, and I walk by a group of...probably young black men, I would say, that would—and I know it's a stereotypical prejudiced scenario, but it still happens. It's still the first instinct, is, heart starts to go a little faster. And the second would be young punky males of any race, but that, those are the two. And maybe they're equal. I'm not sure. I haven't tested it. [laughs]

*Liz:* I'd like to think that they were equal, but in the questionnaire, I had the same reaction and I thought, oh God, I really feel prejudiced, and I didn't like it, but it's young black males.

...*Lisa:* I guess I have to say that I'd probably be most afraid of walking past those two groups. Probably more so than other situations, I mean other types of people that I might run into... I guess in my mind, and this itself might also be kind of...a racist attitude, but very often even if the people aren't in gangs, like, you know, young black guys, or just young guys, and they way they dress, kind of hits you as maybe they've got some of that gang mentality in them... (Group 3)

Another man in this discussion concurred with this association of young black men with danger, but identified the racial segregation that is prevalent in this country as the likely source of these feelings (Massey and Denton 1993). He contrasts his perceptions of African American men with his changing perceptions of Latino men:

*Joe:*...I think before I lived in Latin America, I had the same impression that you have a gut response about groups of black men, young black men, and I used to have the same impression about groups of young Hispanic men, but now I don't have that impression any more about young Hispanic men, because I know more about it, [I know] Spanish, and, I've confronted a lot of situations, I've had to confront situations where I was fearful, and I realized, really there's no reason to be fearful. And there is, there is some reason to be fearful, but it's put into a better context, I think that's the important thing to say. So, for young black

men I do have a gut response, but I recog—think about what I just said, that I don't have much experience living around blacks in my life, so I am pretty ignorant about black culture and so forth. (*Group 3*)

Young white men were also identified as dangerous by some participants. For example, this comment came from another all-white group of young professionals:

*Jack:* ...I guess my main categorization was, and still to this day is, a bunch of young white guys standing around with nothing better to do...are a threat. And people loitering. Purposelessness. I mean...you can tell when someone is loitering, as opposed to someone just enjoying being where they are, zoning out, admiring the view, doing something. There's a difference there, where someone's just hanging out, just waiting for something to happen, that they're looking for some catalyst. In Boston more often than not where I lived that was represented in the towns I lived in by a bunch of white guys standing around. I mean, I lived in other multiethnic communities, but it always came back to the same thing. It was like in Southie or Summerville, it was a bunch of guys sitting around...but they stand around the corner and sort of eye everyone, and there's some territorial pissing sort of going on, sort of going on, sort of showing their thing...But inevitably people who chose to respond to that the most, and who sort of became a hazard to me were just a bunch of guys standing around. It's just sort of like they figure out ways to lower their collective IQ and just be reactive to things...  
[laughter] (*Group 4*)

The next conversation took place among a group of lesbians who identified themselves as white, Latina, and Native American. The area they discuss is in the heart of the Central District, a mostly African American neighborhood, and the intersection they mention is the site of frequent violence:

*Stacy:* Fiona and I were driving down, we were coming down Union, and there are these 2 or 3 black teenagers sauntering across the street. I was driving, she went to blow the horn, and I grabbed her wrist, I didn't want her to blow the horn.

*Tina:* They'll shoot you.

*Stacy:* And that was my thought. I don't think it's safe. It's just like flipping somebody off. (*Group 5*)

Finally, a 35-year-old white woman commented on the intersection of all these statuses:

*Christine: ...One time I was walking downtown back up to Capitol Hill, and this man was coming at me, and he looked homeless, and he didn't have any teeth, and he was black, and he was old, and he had this stick in his hand, and he was kind of wobbling, and I thought, "he's going to push me off the bridge, he's going to hit me with the stick. you know, I was thinking "what is he going to do to me."... (Group 4)*

All of the above comments were made by white participants. Their self-consciousness about talking about race was clear in the discussions—as was the strength of their associations between people of color, especially black men, and dangerousness. This consciousness about talking about race was also evidenced by the fact that there were may fewer comments made about race and dangerousness in mixed-race groups than in single-race groups. Only four such comments were made in the three groups that included African Americans (and one of these was made by a black man about other black men); white participants were clearly more comfortable identifying other racial groups as dangerous when in all-white contexts. The one all-black group, however, made no comments associating race with dangerousness, although they did talk about race in terms of vulnerability.

### *Physical Characteristics*

A number of participants also mentioned physical size or strength in their comments about danger. In two cases, the participants described others' large size or great strength as making them seem particularly dangerous, as in these examples:

*Todd: ...But I mean recently, the only thing that's ever happened to me was, supposedly I had, after I had broken up with my ex-girlfriend, and supposedly she was all upset or something, and I don't remember what the circumstances were, but I supposedly had said that if she said something or did anything, I would hit her, and which I would never do. And supposedly she told this guy, and he told this other guy, and he threatened to beat me up if I ever did anything. And this guy was not a man to mess with. [laughter] He had too many friends and he was too big... (Group 7)*

*Elliot: Yeah, my, god, my father? Jeesh, he was incredibly violent, I mean, very strong man. He was short of stature but he set chokers. A*

logger? And he could, I mean, he could put 300 pounds up on his shoulder, real strong guy, you know? And that kind of person is very intimidating. (Group 2)

However, in six cases, a man's *small* size was emphasized, as in this quote:

*Stacy*: I had an experience, I had a male friend that was, it's not a politically correct term, but he was a midget, he was about 4-8, 4-6. And we were wrestling around, and I was about the same height and weight as I am now, and he pinned me. And granted I was just fighting for fun, I mean, we were just wrestling, so I did not fight back the way I would if I was being attacked. But it definitely gave me a start, and something to think about. Because this guy pinned me. He was much smaller, weighed a lot less, but he still had some strength that, even at his size, he was able to pin me. Would I have been able to get away if he was threatening me? Yes, I probably would have been, because I would have been a lot meaner. But [laughter] you know, he did.

*Susannah*: Chances are he wasn't exerting himself either, if you're just playing and, you know, being friends and hanging out.

*Stacy*: Yeah, we were just playing. And that really gave me cause to think that you know, I—and I consider myself in good shape and fairly strong. (Group 5)

These kinds of comments served to emphasize the association of masculinity with danger: even small men are perceived to be dangerous to women.

Simply looking unusual was also perceived by some participants as a sign of danger:

*Sarah*: When I first was here, I remember the first time I saw the Ave I was kinda freaked out because I had never seen anything like it, you know, like you were saying, people with tattoos and, I don't know, chains and leather everywhere, dreadlocks, you know, up close and personal. Not that those necessarily are bad people, but when you come from somewhere where everyone dresses kind of casual and the same, and you walk the Ave – I felt very scared, and now I'm like, "whatever". It's just the atmosphere.

This comment suggests again that familiarity tends to reduce perceptions of dangerousness.

### **Speaker Characteristics and Comments About Danger**

As is clear from the discussion above, gender is an important basis for perceived dangerousness: both individually and in groups, men are perceived to be far more dangerous than women. However, there were also gendered patterns in the perceivers themselves. For example, of the 136 comments about dangerous people, 88 (64.7%) were made by women, and only 48 (35.3%) by men. Upon closer examination, it became clear that this difference was due to the fact that women and men made different kinds of comments about dangerous people. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, some comments about dangerousness identified specific people as dangerous (e.g., "I passed a man on the street today who seemed dangerous"), while others focused on social groups (e.g., "men are dangerous"). Women made somewhat more comments about groups than men did: of the 84 general comments, 50 (or 59.5%) were made by women and 34 (40.5%) by men. However, specific comments were made more than twice as frequently by women as by men: of the 52 comments of this type, 38 (or 73.1%) were made by women, and only 14 (26.9%) by men. The cause of this difference is an interesting issue for speculation. One possibility is that while both women and men share similar ideas about potential danger, women may have experienced more frequent specific situations perceived to be dangerous. In other words, while danger may be theoretical or potential to many men, it is a reality to many women.

These patterns are evident in comments about every type of social status. The table below summarizes participants' comments about men, poor people, people of color, young people and dangerousness:

**Table 7-2**  
**Specific and General Comments**  
**Identifying Members of Social Groups as Dangerous**

Social Group	Type of Comment	Speakers		
		# by Men	# by Women	Total Comments
Men	Specific	11	34	45
	General	20	34	54
	<i>Total</i>	31	68	99
Poor People	Specific	0	3	3
	General	5	3	8
	<i>Total</i>	5	6	11
People of Color	Specific	0	6	6
	General	13	6	19
	<i>Total</i>	13	12	25
Young People	Specific	0	6	6
	General	5	9	14
	<i>Total</i>	5	15	20

In all categories, women made more specific comments about dangerous people than did men. Note, however, that there were some differences in the ways men and women talked about various social groups. For example, women identified men and young people as dangerous more than men did, but men and women discussed poor people and people as color as dangerous in nearly equal numbers. Also note that *all* of men's comments about poor people and younger people were general; they recounted no specific experiences with these groups.

### **Representations of Dangerlessness**

Another way to assess dangerousness is to examine who is considered to be *not* dangerous. In the focus group discussions, speakers made a total of 16 comments that identified a person or group as not dangerous. Eleven of those comments (or 68.8%) referred to women (seven specific women, and three mentions of women as a group),

while five (31.3%) referred to men (three specific men, and two mentions of specific groups of men: older men and freshmen in college). One comment, discussed in Chapter 6, identified sexual orientation as a relevant factor: a lesbian commented that "If I'm in a group of gay people I feel safe. Because I know they're not going to beat me up."

*(Joyce, Group 4)*

The most salient difference (besides number of references) between the descriptions of non-dangerous men and women was that women were usually identified only by their gender:

*Becky: ...I'd rather walk down the street with another woman down the street going the other way in a dark alley. (Group 3)*

*Mona: Yeah, I don't talk to men at all, hardly. But [I'll talk to] any woman within a 10-yard radius of me, anywhere that I am. (Group 5)*

A few women were assessed as non-dangerous because of their size or lack of strength as well as their gender:

*Rob: I don't get angry at all, but even I did, my girlfriend is 5 foot 1, about 110 pounds sopping wet, so I don't think there is any fear of violence. (Group 7)*

*Charlie: My girlfriend's not very big either, so there's no way I would feel threatened at all unless she pulled a gun on me or something like that. [laughter] that's a different story, but—*

*Sean: there's no way she would ever be like that. She'd be like, [in high voice] "I love you, man!" [laughter] "Oh give me a hug!" [laughter] (Group 7)*

*David: ...I didn't perceive her as a threat, because she was slight, and didn't look like she could knock down a tent pole, you know? (Group 4)*

In contrast, all the references to men specified some characteristic other than gender that made the men non-dangerous. For example, in this discussion among three older participants, the African American man under discussion is constructed as safe because of his role as a policeman and because of his characterization as "nice":

*Tony: Well, to cut down violence around here, over here at the church on Sunday they have a policeman on duty at every mass.*

*Jane:* They do? I didn't know that.

*Sadie:* In the church?

*Tony:* In the church. Greg's his name. He's a real nice colored guy.

*(Group 10)*

In this quote, uttered by an older white man, note the racially-loaded language. The police officer is identified by his race, but the speaker emphasizes that he is “real nice”—as if to counteract the stereotype of black men as dangerous.

In the next example, old age is seen as making men non-dangerous:

*Becky:* And also, I don't know. I don't fear older, older men, but once in a while, I mean I check out, I check out where they're coming from, mentally, I mean I just make a mental note where they're coming from.

*(Group 3)*

Here, age essentially invalidates gender: older men are not to be feared. However, the comment that follows, in which the speaker notes that she “checks out where they're coming from,” underscores the association of masculinity and danger. Regardless of age, she still feels compelled to monitor the intentions of even elderly men.

Finally, this speaker notes that the men she works with are not dangerous to her because of their mutual occupation and her status as an out lesbian:

*Karen:* I spend a lot of time in truck stops, and I am literally with men, many hours of the day, all day—

*Fiona:* What a drag.

*Karen:* Different cities. And some have absolutely no social skills. But—

*Fiona:* Animals driving trucks. [laughter]

*Karen:* But I've not ever had a problem with this guys, I've never had a problem, I've never been attempted to be assaulted. In a snowstorm they're there to help you and it's, it's kind of an etiquette thing with truck drivers. But—

*Susannah:* If you weren't a truck driver, and you were with them, would you be safe, or would you be outside the clan.

*Karen:* Personally I would, but perhaps someone, another woman wouldn't. But I'm able to look at these men and see that they are just a hurt little boy and don't know what's going on with them, themselves. And actually I've met a lot of very nice people. And have become friends with a lot of the—some of the guys that I work with. And it's because I'm totally out, I'm totally what I am, I'm totally who I, I mean there's no mistake. And I think in the long run they've respected that. That I'm right upfront. *(Group 5)*

Another woman said she felt safe with a male friend because she'd "known him a long time." (*Jill, Group 12*) Although the number of cases here is small, the pattern is clear: men's perceived innate dangerousness must be neutralized by some other characteristic (occupation, age, or "niceness") for them to be perceived as non-dangerous. Women, however, are perceived as non-threatening unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as wielding a gun. This perceived relationship between women and non-dangerousness—and the dissonance produced by evidence that women can indeed be violent—is clear in this woman's comment:

*Joyce: ...I think there's a myth that women aren't violent, or don't have those capabilities or tendencies. No one wants to talk about it, it's such a taboo...Somehow, it's okay—In some sense I've internalized that it's okay for men to be violent, but a violent woman...Like Susan Smith.<sup>5</sup> It just goes against all our sensibilities about what women should be, that there's a particularly strong revulsion against it, at least for me. (*Group 4*)*

The strong association between women and non-dangerousness in these focus groups parallels the literature on women and aggression. As I have discussed in previous chapters, gender stereotypes polarize men and women on the dimension of aggression: men are seen as aggressive and therefore dangerous, while women are painted as nonaggressive (unless in defense of their children) and therefore not dangerous. As a result of these stereotypes, women's aggression, when it does occur, "seems more unexpected, becomes labeled irrational, and is denied legitimacy." (White and Kowalski 1994: 488) And as a number of authors have recently argued, these stereotypes may ultimately make women's aggressive invisible (Sikes 1997) even when it does occur.

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<sup>5</sup>Susan Smith is the woman who drowned her two young sons by strapping them into their car seats and submerging the car in a lake.

## Warnings About Danger

Warnings about danger can also provide insight into conceptions of danger. In Chapter 6, I discussed who tends to give warnings, and to whom. In this chapter, I focus instead on the subjects of these warnings. In other words, what kinds of people are perceived to be dangerous? Although in the last chapter I focused only on spontaneous descriptions of warnings (i.e., excluding those mentioned in response to a facilitator query), in this chapter I include all warnings mentioned during the focus group discussions. I do so because while the discussion of warnings as a category were prompted by the facilitator, the content of the warnings was not.

There were a total of 104 warnings (26 spontaneous and 78 elicited by facilitator questions) discussed in the focus groups. Of these, 47 were warnings about people perceived to be dangerous, 23 were about places or times of day perceived to be dangerous, 9 were about events (e.g., break-ins that had occurred in the speaker's neighborhood), one was about behavior (looking at others), and the remaining 24 were general warnings, for example, to be careful or keep one's doors locked. Here I discuss only the warnings about people.

Twenty-two of these 47 warnings about people were non-specific in terms of social statuses: they advised the person being warned to be wary of "strangers," "crazies," "certain types of people," "axe murderers," and the like. The remaining 25 comments warned about particular people or groups of people, identified by gender, race, or social class.

Twenty-one of these 25 warnings, or 84%, identified the dangerous people by gender. In all cases, these warnings referred to men; none referred to women. For example:

*Virginia:* My son gives me a lot of warnings, yes, because we were driving down at Greenlake one day, and this guy cut us off, and I was

getting ready to say something, and he said, "Don't you say a word, mother. You be quiet. You don't do that." (Group 10)

*Andrew:* I remember being told when I was a freshman in high school, don't mess with the football players. [laughter]... (Group 7)

*George:* About the only time I really get involved in any kind of warning situation where it could or does affect behavior, or change behavior, is a work situation. I happen to work in claims, industrial claims. And, occasionally you get a claimant who's so aggravated, so angry, so furious with some outcome that he threatens life and limb. And so when those situations arise, or the potential for those situations, then the issue of whether we lock down the building, and that sort of thing... (Group 1)

*Sandy:* Yeah, I went out with some friends, and one of them had a little bit too much to drink and she met some guy, and she goes, "oh we're going to go out to breakfast," and it's like 1:30 in the morning, and we're like, "you just met this guy you've had too much to drink." And we couldn't talk her out of it, I mean, we could have like dragged her into the car, but...it's like, "you can't just go out"...The next day when she was finally sober and stuff, I'm like, "That was really stupid, because you just met him, and you don't know who he is, and you can't go out, go with someone who you don't even know, so, I just tried to, I told her that that was a really stupid move. (Group 1)

Three comments described warnings about people of a particular race or ethnicity.

For example:

*Stuart:* Well you know, when I went down to Mexico, everybody up here was warning me, be careful, because there are a lot of crooks down there in Mexico? You know, watch your back, and don't go out after dark, and don't talk to people... (Group 6)

Four comments focused on the class status of the dangerous person or people:

*Tony:* But we do have one tenant here that does let—I don't know if you would call them riff raff or what would you call them?

*Sadie:* Street people.

*Tony:* He takes in these street people, and he's been warned many times not to take in street people...

*Facilitator:* Takes them into his apartment?

*Tony:* Yeah, he lets them in. (Group 10)

*Jane:* Well, my son says I have a terrible—one of the boys says I have real bad expressions, and I think I do squint in the car or something, and he says, "Mother, someday that's going to get you in trouble." And I said, "Now what did I do, I can't help it, it's the expression, you know."

But I think sometimes if I do see somebody on the street who looks dirty or this, maybe I'm talking nonverbally and they understand it, you know. I can't help it. (*Group 10*)

*Rick*: I gave some friends a warning the other day. We went up Sunday morning for breakfast at Charlies on Broadway, and they were going to their bank machine, and I had just encountered on the street a very aggressive panhandler that not only yelled and screamed but followed me, yelling very vulgar language. And I just warned them, I said there's a very aggressive pan handler down the block, I would go across the street if I could find a restaurant...Don't go down the block in front, go, and I guess they did. But they did see him and he was, what I said he was. (*Group 2*)

Note that in the last two of these warnings, poverty and masculinity are both salient characteristics of the people perceived to be dangerous.

### Summary

In dramatic contrast to representations of vulnerability, representations of danger in the focus group conversations identify men as the source of potential violence. In some cases, masculinity is identified along with other statuses, including race, class, and age; in the majority of cases, however, simply being a man is enough to render a person potentially dangerous in others' eyes. The implicit association of men with danger can be neutralized by other characteristics, such as old age or a legitimate role as a protector (such as a policeman or security guard). However, the default category for men is dangerousness. Women, in comparison, were only identified as dangerous in a very few, particular cases and situations; as discussed in Chapter 6, the default category for women is vulnerability.

These kinds of constructions are not trivial; they have consequences for daily life. White and Kowalski argue that the myth of women as non-aggressive (and the corollary belief in men's potential dangerousness) perpetuates men's power over women, in several ways. It "maintains women's subordination to, dependence on, and fear of men. If women are weak and non-aggressive, they must depend on men for

protection and fear harm from men against whom they cannot defend themselves.” (1994: 492) This power difference makes intimacy between women and men difficult, which Campbell (1993) argues makes abuse more likely. Finally, “because aggression is assumed to be correlated with assertiveness and competitiveness, women conventionally are denied access to arenas in which these attributes are valued—not surprisingly, those most associated with power such as politics, business, and the military.” (White and Kowalski 1994: 492) Thus the kinds of systematic and repeated associations between gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness that I have illustrated in this and the previous chapter may have effects that go far beyond the discursive arena. In the next chapter, I turn to the question of how these associations are built in talk.

## Chapter 8 The Collaborative Construction of Gender, Vulnerability, and Dangerousness

In Chapters 6 and 7, I showed how vulnerability and dangerousness are consistently associated with particular social groups. I argued that these associations form part of the social construction of gender: through interaction, we come to perceive women as vulnerable and men as not vulnerable, men as potentially dangerous and women as relatively non-dangerous. These repeated associations help to construct and reconstruct the cultural meaning of gender; when people hear that “women are vulnerable,” “men can take care of themselves,” “men are dangerous,” or “women are not a threat” over and over again, with little contradictory information and few challenges, then those words begin to define reality. We literally build the reality we see through interaction, and especially through conversation. However, the question remains: how, specifically, are these associations between gender, vulnerability, and danger constructed and performed? In what social contexts and through what interactional processes do these associations happen? To use the metaphor of construction: any kind of building must happen in a particular location and with particular tools and methods. My goal in this chapter is to illuminate what some of these locations and methods are for the process of the social construction of gender, specifically through the discussion of vulnerability and danger.

There are numerous ways that these associations between gender, vulnerability, and danger can be built. The most straightforward is through simple, descriptive statements, focusing on individuals or on social categories as a whole. Many examples of these kinds of descriptive statements were presented in the last two chapters. These direct associations, however, are not the only way that gender is constructed. There are a host of more subtle and complex methods that construct the meaning of gender. Through careful analysis of the places in the focus group conversations where gender was associated with vulnerability and danger, I found that five methods of

construction were used repeatedly: storytelling, warnings, offers of or requests for protection, the transmission of danger management strategies, and collective strategizing. Note that each of these processes may occur at several levels of discourse: at the level of individual talk, collective conversation, or public discourse such as media or politics. For example, one might think over or write a story about violence, discuss the story with others, or hear about it in a news report. In this dissertation, I discuss only the face-to-face level of conversation, although the same arguments could be made about private and public discourse as well. And note also that because this construction is not a single, static event, but happens in multiple, everyday interactions, resistance is also possible: in these same ways, constructed ideas about gender can be challenged, and new structures can be built.

In the sections below, I discuss each of these five methods of constructing the association between gender, vulnerability, and danger, using examples from the focus group discussions to illustrate my arguments. Following the principles of discourse analysis, I pay particular attention not only what is being said, but to what is being accomplished through the saying: the collective construction of gender. I begin by looking at stories.

### Stories

Stories are a fundamental feature of social life. According to Plummer, who has written extensively about the functions of stories in society, “society itself may be seen as a textured but seamless web of stories emerging everywhere through interaction: holding people together, pulling people apart, making societies work.” (Plummer 1995: 5) Stories not only transmit descriptions of incidents that have happened in the world, they frame those incidents and provide an accepted cultural interpretation of them. What is said in stories—and what is not said—is therefore an important window on cultural systems of meaning.

This view of stories fits neatly with the assumptions and goals of discourse analysis, as described in Chapter 1. Like discourse more generally, stories do things in the world, and they do these things in relation to particular social contexts. Stories are part of “habitual or recurring networks of collective activity. Stories do not float around abstractly but are grounded in historically evolving communities of memory, structured through age, class, race, gender, and sexual preference.” (Plummer 1995: 22)

Many disciplines within the humanities and social sciences have lately turned to discourse and texts as important objects of analysis. However, like Plummer, I eschew the direction that has been taken by many literary theorists, who examine texts in isolation from their social and political contexts and their real import for human lives. Instead, my goal here is “to push away from the dominant interest in stories simply as texts awaiting analysis and instead to see stories as *social actions embedded in social worlds*.” (Plummer 1995: 17; italics in original) Important questions to ask about stories, then, are how they describe the world, on the one hand, and what kinds of functions they serve within a particular social context, a relationship, and a culture, on the other. Stories may or may not tell “the truth,” but they do tell us something important about what people perceive to be important.

Stories are not constructed in a vacuum. Patterns of story-telling and story-receiving are widely shared among members of a culture. In his book on sexual stories, for example, Plummer identifies several recurring types of stories around sexuality: the coming-out story, the rape story, and the recovery story. An equally important question is what kinds of stories are *not* told: what varieties of experience are taboo, are silenced, are shared only among particular groups or in particular social settings. And finally, what roles do stories play in societies? “Once told, what functions might such stories serve in the lives of people and societies? How might stories work to perform conservative functions maintaining dominant orders, and how might they be used to resist or transform lives and cultures?” (Plummer 1995: 25) In this section, I examine stories that are dominant and support gender expectations and stereotypes.

At the end of this chapter, I return to the issue of stories and examine those that challenge the status quo. I begin by analyzing stories that tell traditional tales about masculinity.

### *Stories of Hegemonic Masculinity*

According to Connell (1987, 1992, 1995), the “main axis” of Western masculinity is “the social subordination of women, and men’s general interest in maintaining it.” (1987: 178) This “hegemonic masculinity” is supported by violence, especially against women, but also against men who do not fit this model of masculinity. Thus a central component of hegemonic masculinity is the capacity for violence. However, “the masculinity built on that bedrock [of female subordination] is not necessarily violent—most men in fact do not bash women—but it is constructed, so to speak, with a door open toward violence.” (1992: 180) Connell calls this a “cult of masculine toughness”: hegemonic masculinity entails the ability and willingness to respond forcefully to threat.

Many stories told in the focus groups constructed this type of masculinity. Participants—both male and female—told stories in which men engaged in violence or otherwise displayed “toughness.” This pattern was particularly prominent in three of the four all-male groups; one was a group of young fraternity members, and two were groups of somewhat older men living in low-income housing. This pattern was less pronounced, although still visible, in the group of gay men and in the mixed-sex groups.

In the fraternity group, the pattern of claiming hegemonic masculinity through storytelling was established very early in the discussion. After the participants introduced themselves, the facilitator asked them to discuss how violence had affected their lives. Unlike some of the other groups (especially the groups where women were present), which focused on the negative effects of violence on the participants’ lives, the discussion in this group turned immediately to the speakers’ own participation in violence, generally in fights with other boys and young men. As each person spoke, this

pattern became increasingly pronounced. The first speaker talked about violence he had witnessed in his family, then described a fight he had recently had with his father which resulted in his breaking his father's arm, and ended by discussing a fight he had in sixth grade had with the school bully, which he described as "pretty fun, cause I won." (*Rob, Group 7*)

These stories seemed to set the tone for the subsequent discussion, establishing a certain expectation for aggressive masculinity to which the other men felt accountable. For example, the second speaker began by saying:

*Sean:* Okay, I'm Sean, I don't have that much experience with violence, I guess I come from kind of a pacifist background or something, but... [laughter], um, experiences, I had one experience, or I heard actually, one of my friends was just, came out of his house and was just walking down the street not a block away from his house, and these 10 or 15 gang members came out of some apartments and just beat the you-know-what out of him, and he was in the hospital and stuff, so that was my worst experience of, as far as my friends with violence and stuff. (*Group 7*)

This speaker accounts for his lack of experience with violence by saying he comes from a "pacifist background"; this comment produced laughter from the rest of the group. He then goes on to discuss his "worst experience" of violence, which actually turns out to be his friend's experience, not his own experience. The impression here is that he is searching for any experience with violence he can claim to satisfy the demands of hegemonic masculinity.

The third speaker in this group also seemed to feel the pressures of masculinity. He began by saying,

*Charlie:* Well, I mean, I've been pretty sheltered, I've never really had fights with, I've never had big fights with anybody. I've been the person who happens to miss all the fights, so I don't—But I mean, I had one of my friends who told me about how...he had a friend that was in a gang, and he had him, this guy, beat up this kid for I can't remember what reason ...I don't know, I think he told me what it was, but, just kinda stupid, but, just kinda weird. And then another time, this shooting that happened in Moses Lake, the teacher that was killed, I found out was, she has two kids, and they're both are [name of fraternity] at [name of university], and it was during their initiation week, so I heard, my mom told me how she heard from my friend who goes there, he's in the same

house, so I guess it was really tough for everybody down there, and, but, so I thought that was kinda bad, but, I don't know, I just, I the only real fight I've ever had, this one kid I think I was in 5th grade, and this kid was like, 3rd grade or something... (Group 7)

Like the previous speaker, this young man seems to be fishing for any experience he can report to the group that will legitimate his experience with violence. He provides an account for his lack of fighting experience ("I've been pretty sheltered... I've been the person who happens to miss all the fights"), and he then reaches back to grade school to find any qualifying experience. The other group members continue on in this vein, each recounting the fights and other incidents of violence they had been involved in.

In the few circumstances in which they discussed victimization, this group's conversation had two characteristics. First, they were generally discussing other people's victimization, as with the example of the teacher in the last quote. Second, when they did discuss victimization, they did so entirely without reference to fear or other emotion; some even said explicitly that they were not afraid. This quote provides an example of the general emotional tone of these conversations:

*Kevin:* ...The only time I ever armed myself is when I'd go cruising down in Vancouver [Washington], in a bigger town. We'd go cruising, and there'd be lowriders, gangbangers around, so pretty much the norm was to keep at least a baseball bat or a good size knife in your car with you, just in case your friends got into a fight and you had to back them up. And fights were pretty common at parties. People would get drunk and get courageous and get arrogant and start shoving each other... (Group 7)

Here, even the threat of "gangbangers" is not enough to induce fear; instead Kevin reports preparing himself to engage in violence. Note that what is being constructed here is not necessarily these men's aggression. Indeed, although they talked about getting into fights and engaging in pranks, the assertion that underlies these stories is really about their lack of vulnerability to violence, on the one hand, and their "toughness" and ability to defend themselves should a threat arise, on the other.

A variant of this form of masculinity involved men as the protectors of others, especially of women. These two identities—of toughness and of protection—are not

unrelated; in order to be a competent protector, one must be able to defend oneself from threat. Indeed, aggression and protection are two sides of the same coin, two different expressions of what is believed to be men's "toughness": their invulnerability and their ability to harm others. Some men choose to use this ability to threaten or hurt others; other men instead use it to protect those they believe to be weaker and more vulnerable. Indeed, the same men can play different roles at different times, in different contexts, or with different people. Regardless of which role is played, however, men are enacting the same underlying dimension of physical efficacy. In the stories above, the emphasis was on men's physical competence and potential dangerousness. In contrast, the focus in the stories below is on their non-dangerousness. Other people (generally men) are defined as threats, and the role of protector is constructed in opposition to these others.

One story that was told by a number of different men involved men's efforts to avoid being perceived as threats to others. For example, this 32-year-old white man described his experience walking behind a woman on a street:

*David:* ...I was walking along near Broadway, along Pine, and, as I was walking along the street, a woman crossed the street in the middle of the block and then was walking in front of me. And she was pretty close in front of me, maybe two paces, and as it worked out I was walking about the same pace that she was walking, so we stayed pretty much this constant distance, as we proceeded down the street. And probably walked about a half a block. And I'm thinking well, what should I do, should I slow it down, no, I'm not going to do that. Should I speed up and try to pass her, no, that would probably be worse. So I'm just walking along and all of a sudden she goes, she lets out this obviously angry sigh, you know, [sighs]. And stops for a moment, just freezes in her tracks. Doesn't look at me or anything just [sighs] stops, waits for me to walk by. And I'm, okay, I'd better just keep going at exactly the same pace here, don't want to make this any worse than it is, and, and you know, I got a little angry too, because you know, what the hell, I'm not, I'm not dangerous, I'm not a threat—

*Christine:* She doesn't know that.

*David:* Well, yeah, she doesn't. I understand that. (Group 4)

David acknowledges that men can be perceived by others as threats, but he resists this identity for himself. Instead, he actively strategizes how to circumvent such

perceptions, and then later, in the group discussion, he asserts his non-dangerousness. In both situations, he is attempting to construct a non-dangerous self. At the same time, he constructs women as vulnerable and fearful of men.

One of the characteristics of this non-dangerous self is that it is available to protect others; instead of using one's "toughness" to hurt others, one can use it to keep them safe. This comment from Tom, a 34-year-old white man, illustrates this type of masculinity:

*Tom:* When I was living in Hollywood, every once in a while you'd hear gunshots, and I lived about three houses away from Sunset, and there was prostitution right on the corner and, you almost felt a little safer because you knew that they'd want to keep their businesses going, so they weren't going to resort to any other kind of violence. But you'd hear a woman screaming, you know, I know I went outside—well here was, I guess I did witness violence, cause I went outside, and there was one kid holding another kid up to a car, and I told him to let him go, and he said he had a gun, I don't know if he did or not...but he did let him go and told me to stop bothering him. And then one time when one guy was beating up another guy, and then, like the times that you hear a woman screaming and so you go outside and you just stand there until the pimp would like get away from her and then she'd go run off. (*Group 2*)

Here, Tom's description of his behavior both helps to construct a particular version of masculinity—strong, but in the service of good, not evil—and claims this identity for himself. Again, women are constructed as vulnerable and in need of protection: it is "a woman screaming" that is the cue for him to go outside and intervene.

### *Constructing Dominant Femininity*

Corresponding to hegemonic masculinity is what Connell calls "emphasized femininity," which "is defined around compliance with this subordination [to men] and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men." (1987: 183) In the arena of violence and danger, this dominant form of femininity involves the inability to defend oneself from men's aggression, as discussed in Chapter 6. Rather than being perceived as powerful and efficacious, women are perceived as vulnerable and in need of men's protection.

This vulnerability is also often constructed through stories. In the focus groups, for example, women told many cautionary tales of victimizations they had experienced, heard about, read about, or witnessed. These stories almost invariably involved women as vulnerable potential victims, and men as potential or actual dangers. This story, told by a woman in a mixed-sex group, is typical of this genre:

*Liz: ...A woman in our building actually got mugged right out in our alley. A black man was coming towards her, and she was coming this way on the block, and so she crossed over because of him, and then she heard footsteps behind her, and he had crossed over, and I guess he grabbed her purse, but he also knocked her to the ground, and she held onto it, I don't know. But that's when, that was right in our building, and I knew the woman, and the police came, and—I saw, I actually heard her screams from my fourth floor apartment, I mean I'm in the front of the building and she was screaming in the back and my windows were closed and I heard her screaming, I mean she really screamed, everybody scream, because it's a good idea, and then I saw the guy run. But I didn't know what was happening, so, but it turned out to be someone in my building. That's the closest I've ever been to violence, and it just made me think you have to keep being alert, and don't be pacified by not having anything happen to you. (Group 3)*

This story accomplishes a number of things. Most transparently, it reports an incident of violence relevant to the speaker: the mugging and assault of a woman outside her own apartment building. In addition, it constructs women as vulnerable to violence, and men—especially black men—as potential dangers. As discussed at greater length in Chapter 7, African American men are particularly likely to be perceived as dangerous; stories such as this perpetuate those perceptions. The story also transmits information about safety strategies: the woman who is the subject of this story resisted being robbed and screamed for help; apparently these strategies were at least somewhat successful, because the man ran away, although it is unclear whether he succeeded in stealing her purse. Finally, however, this story serves as a caution for others, and because the victim here is a woman, it serves as a special caution for other women. The speaker makes the connection between the story and her own life explicitly, when she articulates the lesson she draws from this story: “it just made me

think you have to keep being alert, and don't be pacified by not having anything happen to you."

My contention is that stories such as these are used as templates to teach others about safety and danger. It is not this single story by itself that establishes women as vulnerable and men as dangerous; it is the fact that this story occurs in a social context that contains many similar stories—stories that, although the particular actors are different, involve women who are vulnerable to violence and men who try to violate those women in a variety of ways. In this context, each telling and retelling of this story serves to reconstruct and reaffirm these beliefs and expectations about women and men.

Another component of dominant femininity involves relying on men for protection. Here again, femininity is accomplished in relation to masculinity; these comprise a system of oppositions. As noted in Chapter 6, women in the focus groups repeatedly reported feeling safer when in the company of men. At times, they specifically requested protection from men, as in this example from a young woman living in a sorority house:

*Belinda:* I remember one situation where there was, like the way we have the kitchen set up, you can kinda see out to where the front door is, and there's probably like ten people or something, you know, it's 2:00 in the morning when we come in from wherever, and we're sitting around eating, talking, whatever, and this really odd looking guy comes up to the door, and he just starts ringing the doorbell and knocking, he's like peering in different windows on the other side of the house, and we're just like, "What the hell is this guy doing?" But nobody wanted to go — because we knew we didn't know him, and he just looked like some bum off the street who like wanted in, and we're like, "No, we're not even going to open the door and talk to you, or whatever." And so we're just kinda looking around, you know, trying to figure out what we should do because he wasn't leaving. And so eventually we kinda walked in the TV room and there were a couple of guys in there, so we pulled the guys off the couch, we said, "You're going to go answer our door." (Group 12)

Despite the fact that there are ten young women inside the house and only one man outside, the women do not feel competent to deal with this potentially dangerous situation. Instead, they ask two young men to answer the door for them. This request—

and the men's ready compliance with it—confirms the women's sense of their own vulnerability and the men's invulnerability, and claims for each of the participants a particular kind of masculinity or femininity.

### Warnings

Another process through which gender is constructed involves warnings. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, there are persistent patterns of warning: certain categories of people (notably children and adult women) are given many warnings, while other groups (notably adult men) are not. Similarly, warnings tend to identify certain groups of people (men, especially young men, men of color, and poor men) as particularly dangerous; other groups (women, the wealthy, and white people) are much less frequently the topic of warnings. At one level, these warnings function quite straightforwardly to transmit information about danger: what kinds of people or situations should be viewed with caution. At another level, however, they also help to construct notions of dangerousness; the people and places one is warned about come to stand for entire categories of people and places that acquire a meaning of danger. Warnings also create ideas about vulnerability: as discussed in Chapter 6, the systematic patterning of warnings between people helps construct notions about what categories of people are vulnerable to danger and must therefore be careful, and what categories of people are less vulnerable and either need not be warned or may be relied upon for protection. Thus warnings help construct and maintain the relationship between vulnerability, danger, and social categories, especially gender.

In terms of interaction, this process involves not only the giving of warnings, but also the reactions of the recipients of warnings. For example, those who are warned might respond gratefully, if they believe the warning to be justified (i.e., that they are indeed vulnerable to violence and/or in need of advice on how to protect themselves). However, they might instead respond angrily or defensively, if they believe they are not at risk or well able to take care of themselves, or if they do not wish to be reminded of

their own vulnerability. In addition to these emotional reactions, behavioral reactions are also possible: one might follow the warning, ignore it, or actively choose to engage in the behavior one is warned about. Warnings are thus a form of interaction, not simply a unidirectional transmission of information. The construction of gender through warnings is a negotiated process.

These processes were clearly visible in the focus groups. There were twenty-five descriptions of such reactions in the focus group discussions.<sup>1</sup> Table 8-1 analyzes the content of these reactions, categorized by the sex of the warner and the recipient of the warner and the relationship between them. Positive reactions are indicated by a plus (+) sign, negative reactions by a minus (-) sign. As the table shows, seven of these comments provoked a generally positive reaction (gratitude, concern); in the remaining eighteen, the response was generally negative (defensiveness, trivialization, dismissal).

Table 8-1  
Reception of Warnings

Recipient	Warner					Total
	Male (not father)	Female (not mother)	Mother	Father/ Parents	Not specified	
Male	--	+---	---	-	-	11 (+-----)
Female	+	+++	++--- -	--	-	13 (++++-----)
Both male & female	0	0	-	0	0	1 (-)
Total	3 (+--)	7 (++++---)	10 (++--- -----)	(---)	(--)	25 (+++++----- -----)

Note: + indicates a positive reaction to a warning; - indicates a negative one. The number of symbols in a cell indicates the number of such reactions described by the focus group participants.

<sup>1</sup>Participants were not asked directly about their or others' reactions to warnings; their discussion of this topic was spontaneous even when their mention of the warnings themselves was prompted by a facilitator's question. Therefore, I have included all mentions of reactions to warnings in this analysis.

Eleven of the recipients of these warnings were male and thirteen were female; one warning was given to the participant's children of both sexes. However, the content of men's reactions was substantially more negative than that of women. Ten of the eleven descriptions of male reactions were negative, as the following comments illustrate:

*Richard:* That reminds me, my mom just recently warned me about going to the laundry room, cause I, she called late and I said "Well, I gotta to go check my laundry", she's like "You're doing laundry this late at night?!" Cause she knows the laundry facilities in my apartment are in the basement. She's like, "You shouldn't do laundry at night, you should only do it during the day on weekends when there's a lot of people are around." I'm like, "God." (Group 1)

*Tom:* I've warned a friend because he told me that he met a guy at a bar, brought him home that night. I said, "You don't know anything about this person" and you know the potential maybe even not that night, but now you've opened up your home to somebody you totally don't know. And to you the night may have gone really well, but to the other person, you know, maybe they're sick, or maybe they want to come back and rob you later or maybe they're going to beat you up that night, you know, and granted if you went out with him a couple of times, and then decided, maybe you wouldn't know that much more about him, but at least you'd have a little more chance to pick up on things and to find out, you know, where they work, if they work, if you have anything in common. But, I mean I know my warning wasn't followed, [laughter] you know, but, and I think it was more in terms of maybe asking this person, you know, are you sure you really want to be doing stuff like that.... (Group 2)

*Jack:*...Over the last 10 years or so, my parents have become quite concerned with the issues of violence and crime... And since my wife and I are pretty much building a new house, they've just become really outspoken and telling us all the things we should do to make our house, and I guess I just disqualified so much what they're saying so fully that I didn't, it's in one ear out the other, it's like yeah yeah yeah... (Group 4)

*Mia:* I usually find myself giving advice to my little brother. He's in high school now and he's a freshman, so he just started, and after I left there was like a lot of gang activity that started going on, so I always tell him to watch who you hang with, and watch who you become friends with, because you never know what kind of dangerous situations you can get into, and he's always like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know what you're talking about, whatever." And I'm like, "No, just watch yourself." (Group 12)

*Richard:* I remember at like an earlier age, I don't know if this is a guy thing, or a group of guys things, we were warned not to go somewhere, not to do something, we kinda wanted to do it more, like it had a reverse effect. (Group 1)

Note that in the last example, the men's negative reactions are explicitly related to gender. These kinds of reactions, as Richard suggests, may be "a guy thing." Because of the expectation that men will be able to take care of themselves, and the corresponding feminization of vulnerability, men may respond negatively to warnings as a way of resisting the notion that they may be vulnerable.

Only one comment described a man responding positively to a warning:

*Evan:* I get warnings from my wife about specific people who show up in the neighborhood. We have a dog and we'll go out and walk the dog a fair amount, so we're out, we're often out walking around a lot. And we notice new people hanging out in the park, who appear to be homeless, or...and there's this seasonal, sort of rise in the number of people who are living in parks, near our house. And my wife is much more security conscious than I am, and I used to think to the point of paranoia, but I don't think so anymore. I've really taken a different perspective on it since living in the city. Or maybe I'm paranoid myself now, I don't know... (Group 4)

Note that in this case, the man's initial response was negative; only over time did he begin to perceive his wife's fears as legitimate.

In contrast, women responded much more positively to warnings than did men:

*Becky:* I was warned later in life as an adult and I think it depended who it came from, but when it came from someone I really trusted, they picked the right moment, and I listened and I think it changed my life... (Group 3)

*Lisa:* I did live by myself on Beacon Hill, and moved shortly after a friend brought it to my attention that it was a really dangerous apartment situation, because of this big window on the door, and it was a rough neighborhood, and all that... (Group 3)

In this last case, the warning was so effective that it resulted in the woman's moving out of her apartment. Women, then, are much less likely than men to resist being associated with vulnerability, and they are more likely to take these warnings seriously, although, as Becky says above, the source of the warnings is important.

A few women were described as reacting negatively to warnings. In all cases, these warnings came from mothers, fathers, or grandfathers:

*Lori:* My mother still warns me about my fiancé, about, you know, being, abused. She can't get over it. [laughter] (Group 1)

*George:* But recently...I did give a very specific warning to my daughter who wants, she's had aspirations to become a model, has done some actually. And she had some idea that after she graduated high school she wanted to go into this program where, the girls are taken over to East, to Asia and go through a six-month cycle where they do modeling in Japan and that kind of thing. And there have been a considerable number of... articles in the paper, in the media about girls who get into those programs, and what, they can actually sell them to slavery and that sort of thing for instance. So I had given some very specific warnings to her about some of these dangers, and the dangers kind of incumbent in that occupation anyway. And, she didn't listen to any of it, wouldn't hear any of it. And, like so many other of the, so many other warnings, you just kind of believe that your kids aren't going to listen, no matter how often you do warn them. So that was one warning that I'm sure went on deaf ears. (Group 1)

*Lisa:* What I was saying about my mom there, I think I pretty much take what she says with a grain of salt, because I don't want to cause any problems between us, or any friction or anything like that, very often, most of the time I'm thinking "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah" but I just go along with it, let her know that I'm listening to her, but then I just kind of file it away on a back shelf. (Group 3)

*Jill:* I think the only warnings I get are from my mom, and I don't even listen anymore. Because she just says, like I'll leave the house and it'll be raining or whatever, "Drive carefully." Or, you know, "Be safe." But I don't think she says, "Be safe." I don't know what she says, because I don't listen. She says, you know, something along those lines, but I don't hear it anymore because it's like...

*Sarah:* It doesn't mean anything because you've heard it so much?

*Jill:* Yeah, and even if she does say it again it's not going to prevent me from—from anything happening to me, because I'm careful as it is, and those three words or four words or whatever she says aren't going to affect what happens to me as soon as I leave her house. (Group 12)

Indeed, eleven of the thirteen reactions to parents' warnings in this sample were negative. It seems that there is a different dynamic operating when warnings occur between parents and children: children of both sexes resist being seen as vulnerable by parents.

As discussed in Chapter 6, warnings tend to be directed more toward women than toward men. When men are the recipients of warnings, however, they tend to respond more negatively to them than do women. Both of these processes—the giving of

warnings, and the response to them—contribute to the construction of gender. Specifically, they reinforce the notion that women are more vulnerable—and therefore more in need of warnings—than men. Together, these processes show how the construction of gender is negotiated through interaction.

### **Offers of and Requests for Protection**

In a similar way, offers of and requests for protection also construct and enact gender through interaction. As discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, ideas about who needs protection and who is qualified to be a protector reflect cultural notions about vulnerability and defensive ability. These ideas are perpetuated through actual protective behavior (e.g., rescuing someone from danger, or accompanying someone into a dangerous situation in order to protect them) and through talk about such protective behavior. For example, this woman described her reliance on her father for protection:

*Barbara: I've had people wait for me when I got off work, I've had to sit and call up my dad and say, "Dad, will you come down and drive me home?" And that's a really frightening thing for a young person. (Group P1)*

Barbara requests protection from her father when she feels endangered; this request, and his fulfillment of it, confirms her identity as vulnerable and his identity as capable of providing protection.

These kinds of interaction need not involve specific requests; over time, they become taken for granted and are visible only in their absence. In this excerpt, three women are discussing the precautions they normally take:

*Desiree: My girlfriend waits 'til I get inside before she drives away.  
Linda: I'm always shocked when people don't do that? When people just drop me off and drive away, it's like, what are you thinking?  
Marie: Yeah.  
Linda: Like, can you at least wait until I get in the building. I have other friends who just automatically walk, like male friends who automatically walk me home, you don't even have to say it, they'll just walk me home.  
Desiree: Yeah, I have friends who do that.  
Linda: And that's, that's nice. (Group P1)*

Offers of protection also occurred during the focus group sessions themselves. For example, after one discussion had ended, a male participant commented to the female facilitator that after hearing the discussion, and especially the women participants' fears, he thought he might "...volunteer for that walk 'em home program, now I never thought about that, I just, you know. That's such a shame!" (*Bob, Group P1*) This kind of well-meaning comment reaffirms relationships between social groups. Bob clearly sees himself in the role of protector of women; his comment reaffirms women's perceived vulnerability and men's ability to protect them.

### **Transmission of Strategies**

Another way that these associations between gender and vulnerability are constructed is through the passing on of strategies for managing danger. This transmission happens through communication: people learn strategies by talking to or observing each other, learning from authorities such as teachers, parents, or police, reading books, or watching television. These strategies are passed on in patterned ways: those who are perceived as vulnerable are targeted for this kind of communication while those perceived to be invulnerable are not.

In the focus group discussions, there were 40 mentions of these kinds of transmission processes. Twenty-eight of these mentions, or 70%, were made by women; the remaining twelve were made by men. Table 8-2 reports the variety of different sources of information about strategies, and their frequencies for male and female recipients.

Table 8-2  
Patterns in the Transmission of Danger Management Strategies

Source of Information	Recipients		
	Men	Women	Total
<i>Men and Women</i> Parents	3	4	7
<i>Men</i> Father	0	1	1
Brothers	0	2	2
<i>Women</i> Mother	0	5	5
Female Teacher	0	2	2
Female Friend	0	3	3
<i>Gender Unspecified</i> Police	1	0	1
Media	1	2	3
Stories	1	1	2
Reading	0	1	1
Observation	0	1	1
Experience	4	3	7
<i>Source Not Specified</i>	2	3	5
<b>Total</b>	12	28	40

Several patterns are notable in this table. First, women report more incidents of learning strategies, and report learning them from a wider range of sources than do men. Among these sources are mothers, fathers, female friends, teachers, and brothers:

*Alissa:* ...[When I was a child] my mom and dad weren't home when we got home from school and we never had a house key, we just walked in, you know, our doors were always unlocked, I never—I didn't realize that it was even supposed to be locked until I got older and when we [she and a friend] moved in together, that's when I first started locking the doors when I came in the house. (Group 11)

*Katrina:* Well, I vividly remember in first grade, my first grade teacher she had the whole year—she had this whole lesson plan on strangers. And it was like every Thursday, and I remember like that's when I kinda learned about violence, that there were bad people out there, because I don't remember like in kindergarten or whatever, you don't really realize it, you're just little and you just think that everything's just happy and great. And I remember she would talk about strangers, don't talk to strangers, touching in bad spots, and I just vividly remember all this. And I remember like the first day she said it I took the bus home, and

after I got off the bus the bus dropped me off about a block away from my house and I thought I was going to get abducted. All these fears in your head, because then you realize it's out there and that there's bad people out there, so even though it's good because she's telling you that it's happening and this is what you do to stop it, you know, stop and scream, or whatever, but it just—I've remembered that my whole life. It's probably the only thing I learned in first grade, was that there's bad people out there, I just really, really remember that. (Group 12)

This last quote illustrates another pattern in these data: women's reports of learning strategies, but not men's, were often accompanied by a palpable sense of learning to feel vulnerable and fearful.

In particular, women learned many strategies from other women: ten, or 35.7%, of the women's reports of learning involved transmissions from women: five from mothers, three from female friends, and two from female teachers. A number of these comments suggested the presence of an ongoing chain of transmission of strategies between women. For example, this 20-year-old woman described how she has passed on the strategies her mother taught her, which she in turn learned from her mother:

*Mia:* I think it's different for me. It started when I was little. I remember my mom would always say, if we went somewhere, "Don't look at him. Don't look at him. Don't do that. You never know what will happen to you. Watch what you're doing." I was like, "oh." It was always instilled, and it still is, you know, when you go somewhere you always watch—I watch what I do and like where I walk to or who's around me or who's sitting next to me or who's going to sit across from me, because she kept saying it over and over again because her mom said it to her, and so automatically, and now I'm like looking at my niece and I'm like, "Don't do that." It's like a little line that's going around, it goes from one person to the next to the next, and that's what happened to me. So I'm like passing it on to her, and now, she has a new baby sister and she's like, "Don't do that." (Group 12)

Comments from women in other groups paralleled this description:

*Tina:* I had, my family was like that too, growing up in New York, I had a lot of sort of overprotective, careful, let us know when you're coming home, we're going to be up until you're ...you gotta call if you're gonna be late. And I do that now even with my partner, because it's sort of the way I feel like. If she's vulnerable too. Even though she feels totally not vulnerable, I worry for her, because my parents worried for me. (Group 5)

*Nora:* If I'm out at night, one of my roommates [works for] athletic services like every other night and that's pretty far walking at night...so I always warn her, you know, I tell her to ride her bike, she's got her bike at the apartment, so, you know "don't walk, take your bike, it's too far anyway, especially when it's dark." I'll tell her to ride the Night Shuttle back home, you know, "don't go to the bathroom by yourself, take a buddy." [laughter] But, that's, all that stuff that my mother tells me, I tell her. (Group 1)

These patterns of communication between women suggest that women and men may talk about danger and vulnerability in different ways when in same-sex vs. mixed-sex contexts.

Both sexes report learning strategies from the media, especially television, and from stories they have heard about others' experiences:

*Virginia:* But I think through experiences of talking to other people that things have happened to them, for instance, Elaine over at the Nettleton, she was up here just with her cigarette case and she had \$5 and something. Someone came along and grabbed it out of her hand and started running, you know. They look for these things, the same things you have in your hands or on your body. So I try to just not do that. I have one of those little purses, you know, in the front here, but you know those aren't even protection at times. (Group 10)

*Sarah:* One way that my dad kinda taught the dangers of the world or whatever, was he knows a lot of people, so he'd always come home with these stories about people and their circumstances and their situations and the kinds of troubles and things like that that they may have had, and so he never, you know, directly said, "Don't do this, don't do that," but through the use of examples we learned that, "Oh, no, that's bad, horrible, awful. I'm glad it's not like that for us," or things like that. So that's one of the ways that I learned. (Group 12)

*Sandy:* I'm very careful about how I park my car and walking at night by myself, especially after watching that 20/20 segment where they had, like about people breaking into the manager's office, stealing their keys to people's apartments, I'm like afraid to take a shower, you know. [laughter] (Group 1)

Only 10.7% of women's comments involved learning from their own direct experience. In contrast, a third of men's reports of strategy transmission involved learning from their own experiences, as in this example:

*Kevin:* It's like, people tell you to lock your doors when you drive through the city, you know? I never used to believe in that, until one day I was driving through the city with my brother, he always locks his doors when he goes driving through the city. And we're stopped at a stop light, and all of a sudden this guy just comes running up to the rear passenger seat and tries to hop in the back seat, but cause it was locked he couldn't get in. Man, did that scare the crap out of me. I started locking my doors after that. (Group 7)

Men also reported learning strategies from their parents, as in this example:

*Charlie:* You always get them [warnings] when you're a kid. From like your parents and your neighbors, and stuff, they always say don't talk to strangers, and don't take candy from people, unless you know em, so. I think that's the main thing, is you learn from, you learn at an early age, that's when you need to learn, because then you're more likely to remember it. (Group 7)

Another quarter of men's reports of learning involved this kind of education as children. However, no man reported learning strategies from others as adults; when compared with women's comments, this silence was notable. The sense here is that once men have grown out of childhood, they act and explore in the world, and learn from their own successes and mistakes. Women, however, continue to be instructed by others.

### Collective Strategizing

The final method for constructing and performing gender, vulnerability, and danger in the focus groups involves collective strategizing about how to avoid danger. As with the other methods described above, the practice of collective strategizing serves a dual function. While it transmits potentially useful information on how to keep oneself safe, it can simultaneously function to construct the meaning of gender and claim one's identity within this system of meaning. For example, take the following conversation among a group of women about one of the participants' glass-paned front door:

*Mona:* I just want to say, if you come to my house after dark, I won't come to the door. [laughter] I do not answer the door after dark and I'm not kidding, so if you ever come to see me make sure you call before you come... It's just since I've been here because I cannot—because of the

glass here, I cannot check out the situation before I go to the door, it just makes me a little uncomfortable after dark... So I just don't answer the door after dark. So. That's so sad, that you have to do that.

*Susannah:* Doors don't cost that much.

*Fiona:* Yeah. I would change that door.

*Stacy:* You could.

*Mona:* I like that door a lot.

*Susannah:* It's pretty, but.

*Mona:* I do the blinds, but still someone could see a figure walking in here.

*Tina:* [name] Doors and Lumber, it's on 15th North.

*Fiona:* You could do that, change the door.

*Susannah:* You could just change one or two panes, so that you aren't visible.

*Fiona:* With a little peep.

...*Kim:* If I had a door like that, I'd change that too.

*Stacy:* Would you?

*Kim:* Yeah, you bet.

*Fiona:* I would too.

*Susannah:* I like to be able to walk to the kitchen without my clothes on in the morning to get a cup of coffee and go to the bathroom. And I do not feel like I could do that... See, that's what I would immediately look at that door and think, "Oop, can't get from the bedroom to the kitchen naked, change the door." [laughter]

...*Mona:* Yeah, so I have to be real careful. (Group 5)

On one level, this conversation is a collective attempt to strategize how to make Mona's living situation more secure, so she can better enjoy her home. As discussed in Chapter 5, women report thinking about the safety of their homes more than men do, and spend a great deal of time devising ways to protect themselves. Here, the strategizing is collective rather than individual, providing more evidence for the suggestion in the last section that women frequently talk among themselves about danger and safety.

On another level, however, this conversation also serves to confirm ideas about gender, and particularly about women and vulnerability. Mona points out what she perceives to be a security flaw in her home. The other women could have responded in a variety of ways. For example, they could have challenged her assertion that this door increased her risk by suggesting that the door was not problematic, that being seen at home by others was not dangerous, or that Mona was perfectly able to take care of herself. However, they said none of these things. Instead, their immediate focus on

strategizing to decrease the risk posed by the door confirmed Mona's contention that she was indeed at risk and affirmed her sense of her own vulnerability.

The gendered aspect of the above conversation is not entirely clear. It is more visible, however, in this conversation among a mixed-sex group. Linda has been discussing the violent ex-boyfriend of one of her friends, whom she fears might try to contact her:

*Linda:* And it's like, there's this crazy violent guy who might want to try to contact me to find her. Well, I can't do anything about it, and I feel like I can't even waste time worrying about it, cause I can't stop him, there's nothing I can do.

*Bob:* Oh... That ain't so, that's...

*Linda:* And I don't want to shoot him! [laughter]

*Bob:* No... I'm not saying shoot him, just because I own a gun, no, I've never killed anybody in my life, have no intention of it...I keep thinking in my mind listening to you, like what anybody I know what would say, they'd say well get your brothers, your old man, go over there, haul him up like that, go over pay him a visit and bust him up a bit, you'll be surprised, he'll shut up real good.

*Barbara:* Well see, that's the way my dad used to be.

*Carl:* And that would work!

*Barbara:* Yeah, that would work, but my dad's dead and my brothers are all dispersed. I mean, it, I'm, basically I don't have anyone, except my 14-year-old son. Now he's pretty good, but he is only 14. [laughs]

*Marie:* But it's not fair, in our lives, to ask us to go get, or, I have two brothers, which I could, you know, employ for that purpose if I wanted, but. [laughs] It's not fair ...I don't want to run my life like that.

*Linda:* And we have to live this way.

Here, the gendered nature of Linda's vulnerability, and the gendered nature of the solution Bob suggests to address it, are both clear. Linda believes herself to be vulnerable to "this crazy violent guy"—and note the association here between masculinity and dangerousness—in part because she is a woman and thus perceived to be incapable of defending herself. None of the other participants contest this assumption; rather they confirm it by suggesting that she seek protection from men who, as discussed in Chapter 6, are perceived to be relatively invulnerable and able to defend others as well as themselves. Through this conversation, the association between gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness is asserted and confirmed.

### **Remodeling Projects: Resistance and the Social Reconstruction of Gender**

Much of social interaction serves to reconstruct ideas that already exist. As I have discussed above, a great deal of the talk about violence in the focus groups served to reconfirm stereotypical notions about gender: the idea that women are vulnerable to violence but men are not, and the idea that men may be dangerous but women are not. Why is this kind of reconstruction of the status quo so prevalent? First, repeating old patterns is always easier than creating new ones; the metaphors, stereotypes, and schemas are already in place and available for easy use. In addition to these cognitive reasons, however, there are very real social rewards for “doing gender” properly, and very real social sanctions for flouting gender expectations. As West and Zimmerman note, “If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions).” (1987: 146) Thus challenging gender involves substantial effort and risk for the speakers.

However, this does not mean that it is impossible to construct new ideas and associations. The social meanings that are constructed in conversation can be varied; the same tools that work so efficiently to construct the familiar meanings of gender can also be used to change those meanings. Although I have focused in the bulk of this dissertation on the ways in which gender is reaffirmed in conversation, there were constant, although quiet, voices in nearly every group that challenged the dominant construction of gender.

#### *Challenging Dominant Femininity*

According to Connell, “emphasized” femininity is challenged by other forms of femininity, all “defined centrally by strategies of resistance or non-compliance” or by “complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance, and co-operation.” (1987:

183–4). While much of the talk in the focus groups reaffirmed the expectation that women are vulnerable and unable to protect themselves, there were also occasional moments when women challenged this dominant version of femininity. One example of this kind of challenge took place in a discussion among eight lesbian women. The participants were discussing the prevalence of male dominance in this society:

*Stacy:* But I think there is something too, on a cultural macro level, it is a man's world. There is more place for women now, but, many places in the world, women are considered second class citizens, and here it's somewhat of an illusion, we're like one and a half. (*Group 5*)

There was general agreement on this point until Lorna challenged this view of reality, arguing that she had never felt that it was a man's world:

*Lorna:* Well, I guess I've never had someone say, male or female, mineral rock whatever, tell me that I couldn't do something that I wanted to do. I mean, if I wanted to go to school, I made enough money and I went to school. If I wanted to change jobs, that's what I did ... And I've just never had what you're talking about. It's really hard for me to relate to that, because I've never had someone tell me that I can't do it because I'm a girl. Or that I can't do it because they don't think that that's the right thing for me to do. And—I mean I don't know if there are a lot of people out there that have had that? Or maybe one or two? Or you know, twenty, I don't know. But I've never run into someone who said, "you're a woman, you can't do that." Or, "you're a woman, you should be like, home ec," you know, or something like that.

*Stacy:* Well I don't know that I've ever run into anybody in particular. But it's a cultural myth or a cultural expectation that I think is almost unconsciously passed on, and it's great that you didn't get it.

*Lorna:* Yeah, but you don't have to buy into it, is my kind of thinking. (*Group 5*)

Here, Lorna is challenging the notion that women cannot be efficacious; instead, she suggests that women can be in active control of their lives.

More specific to fear and danger, another woman in this same group challenged the idea that women's danger management strategies keep them safer. Here she responds to another woman's comment that walking confidently and not making eye contact are useful strategies:

*Kim:* I think that's a myth. I think that's like the same as the myth of, you know, carry your keys between your fingers. Like, have you ever seen a *guy* do that? I think that's a myth. Yeah, you should be aware of what's going on around you. But I don't think you're any safer doing that than not paying any attention at a—you know? If you're in a bad situation just by a matter of circumstance something could happen to you. I think it's so random, violence, these days. Just so very random. (Group 5)

Kim challenges the idea that women are uniquely vulnerable to violence. Rather, she asserts that violence is random and that everyone, not just women, should be aware and alert. Particularly interesting is her comment specifically about gender: "have you ever seen a *guy* do that?" Carrying one's keys between one's fingers, she suggests, is a sign of femininity that may mark one as female and therefore vulnerable. Thus she challenges conventional notions of both gender and safety, providing an opportunity for gender to be reconstructed anew.

Other participants also talked about alternative models of femininity. This man, for example, discussed how he and his wife had tried to provide their daughter with the tools she needed to defend herself from violence:

*Jerry:* I have an issue that's identical with our daughter, my former wife and I took a different tack with respect to potential violence against her, with respect to someone she might be dating. Instead of warning her, I don't recall that we've ever warned her about the possible problems that would arise when dating someone who had a tendency toward violence, but what we did, which I think was a very good thing, was give her a very strong sense of her own importance, and I don't mean that in an egotistical way, but she has—her self-esteem is very high. And she did have a boyfriend a couple of years ago that actually seemed like a really nice guy to start with, and she—he started having a very bad temper and they had arguments, and yelling at her rather violently. And she just, she got rid of him...because she understood that she didn't have to take that crap from anybody. And I think that was one of the best things we ever did in raising her, is put, you know, giving her that frame of mind, so we didn't have to warn her really, we approached it from I guess you could say a positive way, making her strong so that she didn't feel that she had to take that kind of treatment from him. (Group 3)

Instead of relying on the dominant model of femininity, which conceptualizes women as weak and therefore forces them to look beyond themselves to men for protection, this man describes helping his daughter to develop a sense of herself as competent and

able to defend herself. His description thus allows others in the group to envision possible alternatives for themselves or for women they know; in a small way, it challenges traditional models of femininity.

Another possible construction of femininity involves women's presenting an active threat to others. There were several comments like this in the focus groups; generally, they involved women asserting that they have responded or would respond vigorously if threatened, rather than passively submitting or freezing in fear. In the most vivid of these comments, a 40-year-old lesbian described her response to being attacked:

*Karen:* Well, I won't go into total detail, but ... basically, I got mad enough to take the weapon, throw the weapon, and beat the shit out of him. [pause] [laughter] ... But it was very scary for me. He didn't scare me with his gun. He didn't frighten me that much. What frightened me was the amount of anger that came out of me, and had to, and actually got lost in the rage. And I could have killed him with my bare hands—I think that of all the violent acts and things that have occurred to me in my life up until that point, by men, as a child, as a teenager, I took out on that one particular guy. And I could have killed him. And just because of that anger, that's what frightened me. It didn't frighten me that, what he was about. It was that I had to see enough of the blood to click and say "god, I could kill this guy" and get up. And it was—But it didn't frighten me, him having a gun, because if I have someone who's going to have the nerve to come at me that way, I'm going to use everything I have, they're going to have to kill me to get whatever they want. But I'm going to use everything I have, and grab anything I can. I mean, they're not going to be—they're going to be marred somehow, if they get what they want. It's just—I think I've experienced enough, that I have enough anger that I just, you're not going to do that to me. (*Group 5*)

This woman claims an alternative form of femininity that does not include weakness or submission to men. The situation is frightening to her, but not because of the attack. Rather, it is her own violence that scares her.

As these examples demonstrate, alternative femininities are available in social discourse. There are models for women that involve self-sufficiency, strength, and power. Although they are far less common than conventional stories of weakness and vulnerability, they do provide the opportunity for the construction and performance of alternative femininities.

### *Resisting Hegemonic Masculinity*

Like dominant femininity, hegemonic masculinity was the most prevalent form of masculinity represented in the focus group discussions. However, there was also evidence that some men were choosing alternative forms of masculinity as well. For example, some men reported eschewing violence for other goals. One of the most dramatic examples of this was a man who reported having committed a great deal of violence in his past as a gang member in a number of different cities. He made this statement at the beginning of the focus group:

*Franklin: I'm Franklin, and I've seen much violence, participated in a lot of it. ...I've been shot 4 times, I was shot in the head twice, and I've beaten individuals with bats, and butt of a shotgun. I ran over an individual on a bicycle... I shot an individual that was chasing my friend out of the complex, apartment complex. To this day I'm always wondered if he's dead. Nobody knows. Sawed-off shotgun and it was point blank, so I truly believe it happened, but I'm not sure... I went to prison in three states, in California, Nevada, and here in Washington. I had to go to psychiatrists and stuff. I always was an opportunist on criminal behavior. I too was one of those individuals that looked for the cash register open, or purse that was sitting next to the chair. I ran burglary rings, I had some kids get killed by drunk driving in front of me. I ran into the back of a car that was parked containing five kids, two were thrown out, the other three burned on impact, this was on Christmas Day. I seen all kind of levels of violence. I've seen my mom get beat on numerous occasions. I beat my stepdaddy, ran him over with his car... he was a quadriplegic and died from, he had his legs amputated and died, he had too much sugar, but I truly believe that was behind that situation. I've seen a lot of stuff. And I've participated in a lot. Shot a close friend of mine for beating me up on my birthday, he was on a drunk. You know, they beating me up, fun stuff, just playing, but it got kinda out of hand, they were drunk, I grabbed the shotgun and I shot him. Shot him. I used to always have guns and weapons next to, I always used to hang out on the corner drinking, everybody used to come by. I participated in a lot of stuff. (Group 9)*

Later on in the discussion, however, it became clear that as a result of a number of factors, including time in prison, recovering from alcohol and drug abuse, and simply having "a lot of people that believed in me," this man was attempting to change his life, repudiating violence and striving for different goals:

*Franklin: I just don't talk about it [his violent past] because I'm dealing with the positive aspect of life now. How to father children and how to*

be a productive citizen and be a part of society and be reliable and pay bills and stuff, some of the simple things that I neglected for a long time. And I'm doing pretty good now. (Group 9)

This is perhaps more of a shifting of focus of masculinity than a turning away from hegemonic masculinity; fathering children and being a productive citizen are certainly related to the side of masculinity that involves the protection of others. However, the letting go of "doing masculinity" through aggression is certainly notable.

Other men challenged conventional masculinity by their admission that they experienced fear and did not see themselves as invulnerable. For example, this man commented that he feels "pretty nervous" as a result of the violent incidents he has witnessed and experienced as a resident manager of a low-income residential hotel:

*Ernie:* Well, I feel a little bit differently than everybody else does. I am pretty nervous when somebody knocks on my door. And...I am nervous, because I've had too many things happen around my door, and I am just really nervous. And especially the one time in the middle of the night, somebody knocked on my door and I said who is it, and next thing they start kicking at it and everything. So I called 911, said you gotta get a police over here. I called down to the office, I said to one of the desk clerks working at that time I told him to go up the steps to see who's at my door, and they kicking my door, and they cracked my door and they're trying to get in. Well, I feel nervous every time. Maybe because I'm a resident manager maybe I should, but I feel like if I go answer the door, it might be some crazy guy and they're ready to shoot me with a gun, or I don't know what's out there. And I really am nervous... (Group 6)

This comment was strikingly different from all the other comments in this focus group; this man was the only one to admit significant amounts of fear. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, one of the most interesting findings from the survey data was just how many danger management strategies men actually practiced.

Note that because masculinity is more valued than femininity, challenging gender expectations has different consequences for women and men. For men, not meeting the expectations of strength and self-sufficiency carries with it the stigma of weakness and the threat of losing masculine privilege and power. For women, in contrast, it is more positive: resisting gender expectations can bring strength, power, and independence.

### **Summary**

This chapter has discussed five discursive methods of constructing and performing the dimensions of masculinity and femininity related to vulnerability and danger. These included story-telling, warnings, offers of and requests for protection, the process of learning danger management strategies, and collective strategizing. Through these processes, participants in the focus groups constructed and reaffirmed conventional notions of gendered vulnerability and dangerousness, and claimed for themselves a particular position within that system of meaning. These conversations are gendered performances that recreate gender by reaffirming the perceived polarization of females and males. Perceptions of danger and vulnerability are of course affected by actual violence and threats of violence. However, behavior and discursive practices (including the recounting of behavior) also play important roles.

These methods were most frequently used to reinforce conventional notions of gender. However, as I discussed at the end of this chapter, these same tools can also be used to resist these conventional meanings, and build alternative ideas about gender. Thus the same processes that function to maintain the status quo also contain the possibility of change.

## Chapter 9 Conclusions

### Summary of Questions and Findings

I began this dissertation by describing the paradox of gender and fear. Women report being much more afraid of violence and crime than do men, and also report practicing more strategies to manage this perceived danger. However, according to crime statistics, men are in fact victimized more frequently than women are. Moreover, the contexts in which women report being afraid—away from home, at night, outside—are not the contexts in which they are most at risk. In fact, the majority of crimes occur during the day and in or near one's own home (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995: 231, 237).

Other scholars have proposed a number of explanations for the gender / fear paradox, including underreporting of violence against women, women's fear of rape, the effects of sexual harassment, and the media's sensationalization of violence against women. In Chapter 1, I proposed an additional explanation for this disjunction of objective risk and feelings of fear. I suggested that talk about violence—the mundane conversations that take place every day in a wide variety of circumstances and relationships—constructs particular meanings of gender that paint women as vulnerable and men as potentially dangerous. Over time, women come to see themselves as vulnerable to violence and see at least some men as potentially dangerous to them. Simultaneously, men come to see themselves as relatively invulnerable to violence and see women as vulnerable and / or in need of protection.

The body of the dissertation provided evidence to support this argument, following the outline of the three questions I asked in Chapter 1:

- (1) What is the social organization of fear and vulnerability? In other words, who is fearful, of what, in what situations, and with what effects? Similarly, in what contexts do different people feel more or less safe?

- (2) Are cultural conceptions of vulnerability and dangerousness linked to particular social groups? In other words, who is believed to be more or less afraid, dangerous, vulnerable, or safe?
- (3) How are these meanings constructed, transmitted, maintained, and transformed?

### *Question 1*

In Chapter 4, I discussed how feelings of fear, perceptions of risk, and perceptions of defensive ability are distributed among social groups. I began the chapter by questioning the distinction that other scholars have made between affective feelings of fear and cognitive perceptions of risk. In these thirteen focus group conversations, involving a total of 76 people, affect and cognition about danger do not seem to be so easily separable as others have suggested. While the survey did ask separate questions about risk and fear, I am not convinced that they really measured different dimensions of experience. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is consistent with other recent explorations of relations between affect and cognition (see Smith-Lovin 1995).

In general, women report being more afraid, perceive themselves to be more at risk, and have less confidence in their ability to defend themselves from attack than do men. In other words, they perceive themselves to be more vulnerable to physical violence than men do. In these respects, the findings of this study parallel those of other major studies to date. However, I also go beyond past research by looking more closely at the context of risk and fear and by examining qualitative as well as quantitative data on these dimensions. I found that social context is important in determining perceptions of risk and feelings of fear. In particular, respondents reported feeling more afraid at night than during the day, and more afraid away from home than at home. Women reported being significantly more afraid than men when away from home, but there were no such gender differences reported for fear when at home. Again, this finding flies in the face of the fact that many assaults, especially sexual assaults, occur at or near the victim's home, and that women are in fact more at risk of assault from intimates than from strangers (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995: 240).

I also found that gender is not the only factor that is associated with differences in fear, risk, and defensive ability. There were, for example, significant racial differences in fear when away from home and interacting with others: people of color report feeling more afraid than whites in contexts where they may have to interact with strangers. Like other past research, I found that older people are more afraid than younger people when away from home—but, as I note in Chapter 5, older people are also less likely to venture away from home than younger people, so their reported fear may be hypothetical rather than actual. When examining feelings of safety when outside in one's neighborhood at night, results paralleled those of other researchers: women, poorer people, less educated people, older people, and those who live alone feel significantly more afraid. I also noted that the shape of the relationship between age and perceived risk was different for women and men: for men, it is a linear relationship, with perceived risk increasing with age; for women, it is a J-shaped curve, high during young adulthood, dipping during middle age, and then increasing again in old age. I also noted that the interactional context is also important for determining levels of fear: women reported being afraid of dates more frequently than men did, while men reported being afraid of fathers or stepfathers more frequently than women did.

I also examined participants' perceptions of their ability to defend themselves, a factor that has rarely been included in research on fear of crime. Not surprisingly, I found this perception to be correlated with perceptions of safety. I also found significant gender differences: in every social category, men perceive themselves to be more able to defend themselves than do women. In addition, people of color perceive their self-defense abilities to be greater than do whites. In the focus group conversations, I found that women discuss these abilities more than men do, and that these discussions are more ambivalent, suggesting again that women are less confident in their abilities than are men.

I also noted in this chapter that women and men discuss risk and fear in different

ways. Men tend to use what I called “minimizing” comments about fear, suggesting that they do not feel particularly afraid, while women tended to make more “maximizing” comments, emphasizing their fearfulness. These differences in talk paralleled and in some cases were even more pronounced than the differences in risk and fear found in the survey responses. It is important to note that these patterns could be interpreted in multiple ways. They might suggest, for example, that women are indeed more afraid than men. Alternatively, they might indicate that men and women face different presentational pressures: that men are expected to present a self that is fearless and tough, consistent with the demands of hegemonic masculinity, while women are culturally permitted (and perhaps expected) to express fear. Or, both explanations might be true: women may indeed be more fearful on average than men, and presentational pressures may exaggerate this difference.

In Chapter 5, I showed how one’s sense of vulnerability translates into daily practices intended to protect oneself from danger. Overall, women tend to practice more of these danger management strategies than men do, and this gender difference tends to be greatest for those strategies that limit one’s normal life activities, such as isolating oneself from others, changing one’s daily patterns (such as one’s residence, work schedule, or transportation routes), or relying on others for protection. Gender differences tend to be smaller for strategies that are less constraining, such as fortifying one’s home or person, participating in a block watch program, or monitoring one’s surroundings. It is important to recognize that men do practice a substantial number of danger management strategies—far more than one might expect given other literature on this topic. However, the strategies that men tend to practice are only a subset of those that women tend to practice, and are those least likely to constrain their ability to live freely.

I also showed in Chapter 5 that gender is not the only social status with implications for danger management strategies. People reporting higher incomes were more likely to report using fortification, obfuscation, and community action strategies; I

hypothesized that many of these strategies were associated with homeownership, which was more common among those with higher incomes. Gay and lesbian respondents were also more likely than straight respondents to use these strategies, as were those age 25–34, likely because in this sample, these groups were more likely to have higher incomes and own homes. Wealthier participants, those age 25–34, and gays and lesbians also tended to practice more monitoring strategies. Those with education reported using more monitoring and fortification strategies. Thus those participants with more education and more financial resources reported practicing these less limiting strategies more often.

The more limiting strategies, in contrast, were used more frequently by the less privileged participants. For example, those with less education and those in the oldest (over age 75) and youngest (age 18–24) age categories reported relying on others for protection more frequently. Avoidance strategies were used more often by younger people, while older people tended to be use obfuscation and isolation strategies more often than younger people. Interestingly, there were no significant relationships between race and types of strategies, although one relationship did tend toward significance: people of color reported using obfuscation strategies more than did whites.

### *Question 2*

In the next section of the dissertation, I turned from the practical level of who is afraid and who practices strategies to the conceptual level of ideas about vulnerability and danger. In Chapter 6, I showed how women are consistently associated with vulnerability and men with invulnerability. Unless there are specific circumstances that suggest otherwise, men are generally seen as capable of protecting themselves (and others) from violence. Conversely, unless there are specific circumstances that warrant an exception, women are seen as inherently vulnerable to violence and unable to protect themselves or others. Moreover, gender interacts with other statuses, particularly age, race, social class, and sexual orientation, in signalling vulnerability. In

many cases, the associations between social categories and vulnerability made in the focus group conversations do not reflect the real patterns of victimization that prevail in society.

In Chapter 7, I turned to the concept of dangerousness, and showed how men are associated with potential danger, while women are believed not to be threatening to others. At times, masculinity interacts with other social statuses, especially race, class, and age. For example, young men are considered to be more dangerous than old men, poor men were identified as more dangerous than wealthy men, and men of color were often (but not always) seen as more dangerous than white men. However, except in very rare cases, being male was a consistent component of perceived dangerousness for the participants in the focus groups.

Many scholars have focused on the association of gender with the dimension of aggression and passivity. I have suggested that this association does not fully capture the relationship between gender and the experience of danger in daily life. Regardless of whether they actually behave aggressively—and many men do not in fact act out aggression—men are seen by others as potentially dangerous. Similarly, regardless of whether they respond passively or assertively to an attack, women are seen as inherently vulnerable to violence. Indeed, I found no evidence that women perceived themselves to be passive, and many indicated that they would respond vigorously if attacked. What was salient, however, was women's lack of faith in their ability to defend themselves against men, and their pervasive association of masculinity with danger. *This, then, is the central argument of this dissertation: that vulnerability and dangerousness are central components of gender in this culture. Part of what it means to be feminine in this culture is to be simultaneously vulnerable to violence and not dangerous to others. Similarly, part of what it means to be masculine is to be not vulnerable to violence, but potentially dangerous to others.*

### *Question 3*

In Chapters 4 through 7, I provided evidence for the empirical and conceptual associations between gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness. In Chapter 8, I showed how the conceptual associations are constructed in conversation. Specifically, I identified five discursive strategies as particularly important in the construction of these associations in the focus groups. The patterned use of these five strategies—story-telling, warnings, offers of and requests for protection, the process of transmitting danger management strategies, and collective strategizing—builds particular ideas about gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness. Each use of these strategies both occurs within a social context where such ideas prevail, and simultaneously helps to reaffirm that context.

I also noted in Chapter 8 that the conceptualizations of women as vulnerable and men as dangerous, while certainly dominant in the focus group conversations, were not the only ideas and associations available in this discourse. In nearly every group, alternative conceptualizations of gender challenged these dominant ideas. For example, some participants suggested that women could be strong, powerful, and actively defend themselves and others from attack, while some men talked about their own feelings of vulnerability and envisioned a form of masculinity without violence. Thus the same strategies that are used to construct traditional notions of gender can also be used to subvert them.

### **So What? Why Are These Findings Important?**

Thus in the body of the dissertation, I argued that the ongoing association between gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness serves to construct and reconstruct particular meanings of gender. Through conversation, people built, reinforce, and transmit particular understandings of what it means to be feminine and masculine in this culture. I provided evidence for the empirical and conceptual association between gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness, and showed how these associations are built

through discourse. Returning to the questions that are at the heart of discourse analysis, it is important to ask what functions these discourses serve in the world. What do these associations of gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness achieve? Which patterns of social relationships do they sustain, and which ones do they inhibit?

### *The Construction of Gender*

While abstract, these meanings have concrete implications for individuals. In essence, they become gender expectations: prescriptions and proscriptions for what one must feel, express, and do in order to be seen as properly feminine or masculine within a particular cultural context. Through conversations such as those I have described above, interactants both perpetuate these expectations and respond to them. Through their talk and behavior, individuals claim for themselves a particular identity within the system of gender meaning, and in so doing reaffirm that system. Through conversation about violence, men and women “do gender,” affirming their cultural legitimacy as women or men.

Over time, these identities—presented in particular situations for particular ends—may in fact become integrated into individuals’ more permanent self-concept. Blumstein argues that “if identities are projected frequently enough, they eventually produce modifications in the self.” (1991: 307) He calls this process “ossification” in order to emphasize the fact that this process occurs gradually over time through the repeated enactment of specific identities. He also suggests that altercasting is an important part of this process: it is not simply through playing particular roles, but through being cast in these roles by other people, that this ossification occurs. As an example, Blumstein offers the following story: “A husband may learn for the first time that he cannot cook as his wife describes his culinary failures to a group of assembled friends. If he hears such commentary with sufficient frequency, both in front of guests and in solitary conversation with his wife, one may expect that he will come to incorporate culinary incompetence into his self. Moreover, if no circumstances arise to

propel him into the kitchen, he will have no opportunity to challenge that aspect of self." (1991: 309) While Blumstein focused on the ossification of selves in intimate relationships, I suggest that such processes take place in more public relationships as well—in other words, in the interaction between individuals and many different actors in both their private lives and in the public world. Over time, if the same identity is projected often enough, it may ossify into a stable component of the self.

The focus group conversations provide a window on this process for identities related to vulnerability and dangerousness. The associations made in these conversations between gender, vulnerability and dangerousness were recurrent, and it was obvious that they had been repeated many times outside the focus group setting as well. Over time, if a woman hears repeatedly that women are vulnerable to men's violence, that women cannot protect themselves, and that women need men for protection, these ideas may begin to ossify into a sense of herself as vulnerable. As a result, she may request (and receive) protection from men, feel vulnerable when in situations she perceives to be dangerous, and practice a variety of danger management strategies. If she has no opportunity to challenge this conception of herself (for example, by participating in a sport that helps create a sense of physical self-efficacy or by taking a self-defense class that changes her belief in her ability to defend herself), this sense of self as vulnerable will continue to solidify. Similarly, if a man repeatedly hears masculinity associated with invulnerability and toughness, these ideas may begin to become part of his self-concept. If he observes women looking fearful when he is near them, if he offers to (or is asked to) accompany a woman in order to protect her, and if he has no cause to perceive himself as vulnerable, the identity of invulnerability may ossify to become part of his self.<sup>1</sup> In this way the processes of construction I have described here can become a self-perpetuating cycle. Particular constructions of gender become expectations for behavior. In response to these expectations, one

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<sup>1</sup>Note that this does not mean that a man will necessarily see himself as actually dangerous to others. The knowledge that others perceive him as *potentially* dangerous, however, is more easily established.

presents particular identities, which reaffirm the original expectations. And over time, these identities may ossify into selves.

This does not mean that these processes are inevitable, however. Although they more frequently are used in service of maintaining the status quo, I have also noted that the same strategies may be used for resistance and subversion as well: as strategies to resist conventional meanings of gender, undermine the status quo, and build new structures in its place. As I noted in Chapter 8, conforming to pre-existing patterns is in many ways easier than striking out anew: the identities are already formed and one has only to enact them, and social rewards are forthcoming. However, change is possible, and I have presented evidence that alternate stories are being told and therefore that change can occur.

Nonetheless, the predominant pattern is a conservative one; the stories of hegemonic masculinity and dominant femininity, of masculine dangerousness and feminine vulnerability, were the most frequently told. These patterns, I argue, are deeply consequential: they have far-reaching and profound effects on individuals and on the social world at a number of different levels.

#### *Consequences of the Discourses of Danger*

I argued at the beginning of this dissertation that the ideas about gender that are created in conversation function to keep women afraid of men's violence, while allowing men to live without the kind of perpetual fear that women experience. I also argued, and demonstrated empirically in Chapter 5, that these differences in fear are associated with differences in the strategies women and men use to keep themselves safe. Women practice more such strategies than men do; moreover, gender differences are the greatest for the most limiting strategies: isolating oneself, avoiding situations perceived to be dangerous, relying on others for protection, and changing one's life patterns. To varying degrees, other groups that are low in social privilege and power

also use these more limiting strategies: poorer people, people with less education, and the youngest and oldest age groups.

The effect of these strategies is to keep women—especially older, poorer, or less educated women—out of public space and to limit women’s public roles. Because of the fear of violence, women often confine themselves to certain spaces, times of day, modes of travel, and destinations: “[women] do not go out just to be out. Women must have a reason for being out in the world...The exclusion of women from the public place (and this is defined differently according to social class, neighborhood, and region) is yet another way of restricting women’s information or knowledge about the world, thus restricting their potential for power in the world.” (Fox 1977: 813–4) Public space is largely a male domain, especially at night: women may travel through it, but their freedom of movement is “contingent on men’s goodwill—a goodwill which can be withdrawn at a moment’s notice and as such is itself a form of male control.” (Radford 1987: 33)

Keeping women out of public space may have consequences that go beyond limiting their freedom of movement. I speculate that these constraints may, over time, limit women’s involvement in the public world: it may keep them from fully developing their education or their skills, freely choosing or keeping certain jobs, or actively participating in political life. Thus, although women’s access to education, work, and political opportunities have greatly expanded over the last decades, women may not be able to take full advantage of these opportunities because fear constrains their choices and their lives. Although there has been little research on this topic, I believe it would be a fruitful direction for future study.

Fear also helps to keep women dependent upon men, both economically and physically (Riger and Gordon 1981: 72). This dependence has far-reaching effects: “for the most part, women find that they must constantly negotiate their safety with men—those with whom they live, work, and socialize, as well as those they have never met. Because women are likely to be physically smaller than men, as well as emotionally

and economically dependent on them, they must bargain safety from a disadvantaged position.” (Stanko 1990: 16) Women’s precautionary behavior keeps them isolated inside their homes, which prevents them from forming strong bonds with others, both men and women, and simultaneously makes them more vulnerable to possible abuse from those with whom they live (Enjeu and Savé 1974: 10).

The effects of fear extend beyond the restriction of individual women’s lives, however. Although the goal of this dissertation is not to explain gender stratification, the patterns of vulnerability and fear I have discussed here may contribute to the maintenance of such stratification by limiting women’s, but not men’s, resources and opportunities. Sociologists have suggested three general types of explanations for gender stratification: those that focus on political economic factors (e.g., mode of production or control over resources), those that focus on ideological and cultural factors (e.g., socialization or beliefs about inequality), and those that focus on physical and biological factors (e.g., differences in strength, reproductive capacity, or violence). My research underscores the relationships between these three types of factors: I have suggested here that cultural ideas about gender, and especially about the different capabilities and vulnerabilities of gendered bodies, may ultimately influence the material bases of power and inequality. In the aggregate, cultural ideas about gender may facilitate women’s fear of violence—and men’s lack thereof—and the consequences of these differences in fear may help to perpetuate gender stratification.

Thus I argue that ideas about gender, vulnerability, and dangerousness have consequences for both individual and social life. Violence against women does occur regularly, and tragically. However, the fear of such violence affects many more people than those who are actually victimized. Ideas about the relative strength, vulnerability, and dangerousness of women and men—ideas that are built, shared, and maintained through the kinds of conversations I have examined in this dissertation—keep women fearful, keep them from fully occupying public space, and ultimately may help to limit

their control of the material resources that would lead to greater equality and power in society. Shared ideas about bodies, in other words, affect material realities.

### **Didn't We Know This Already?**

In one sense, the information I have presented here is not surprising. Because the focus of my investigation is shared cultural ideas about gender, of course they seem familiar. The stories I have described here are so pervasive that all members of a culture are familiar with them; hegemonic masculinity and dominant femininity are indeed hegemonic and dominant.

In another sense, however, we have not really known the things I have described in this dissertation. Even patterns that seem obvious—perhaps especially patterns that seem obvious—need to be examined empirically, or we risk basing our research and policy on our own biases and assumptions, rather than on empirical reality. Now that I have established this base of research, I can build on it—for example, by looking at how fear affects individuals in particular contexts or by examining why some people do not fit the dominant patterns.

In fact, vulnerability and dangerousness have not been a focus of past research on gender. As I noted above, aggression and passivity have long been associated with gender; however, these are quite different from the ideas I have discussed here. Aggression and passivity have been understood either as personality traits or as patterns of behavior. The concepts of vulnerability and dangerousness that I have discussed here go beyond individual traits or behaviors, although they certainly may influence them. Vulnerability and dangerousness refer to shared beliefs about what it means to be masculine or feminine in this society; these affect our ideas about others and about ourselves. The fact that these have not been identified in past scholarship on gender suggests how taken-for-granted these associations are.

In addition, there are particular elements of the findings presented above that are surprising, that we did not, in fact, already know. For example, although the

predominant pattern is one of female fear and male fearlessness, there are some women who report little or no fear, and some men who report extensive fear. There are some women who report practicing very few danger management strategies, and some men who report practicing many. Indeed, the difference between the number of strategies reported by men and women was smaller than I had expected based on past research and my own assumptions.

Finally, although the discourses I have described here are pervasive, their pervasiveness tends to make them invisible. Because these stories are all around us, they seem somehow natural and therefore invisible. I have shown here that these kinds of ideas are common in face-to-face conversation; indeed, they emerged in the focus group conversations about violence even though the group facilitators never mentioned gender or other social statuses. Other researchers have demonstrated that similar ideas are also present in media discourse. For example, Gordon and Riger (1989) show that the news media focus on the most extreme and sensational cases of violence against women, ignoring more mundane violence against both women and men and also ignoring the ways in which women successfully defend themselves against victimization. Bond-Maupin et al. (1997) show that these ideas are also present in "reality-crime television," reality-based programs that have mushroomed in popularity in recent years. They show that women tend to be portrayed in ways consistent with notions of "emphasized femininity" and that they also tend to be portrayed as victims in these programs. In all of these forms of communication, gender is a clear and pervasive framing device for discussions of violence.

Because these ideas are so pervasive, we risk trivializing them and dismissing them as unimportant. They are "obvious," they are "not new." But in fact, I think it is precisely *because* these ideas are obvious and so normal that they are so important. The everyday patterns of meaning we receive and pass on, and the practices that surround them, are the basis for our ongoing sense of social reality. Ideas about gender, vulnerability, and danger are so widely accepted that they are rarely salient; instead,

they form the taken-for-granted backdrop for everyday life.

An incident from one of the focus groups illustrates this point. The group was a mixed-sex, all-white group that took place on the campus of a high-tech company outside of Seattle. When the discussion ended at about 9 P.M., it was quite dark outside. The participants were chatting as they prepared to leave when one of the men in the group turned to me and said, "Need a walk out? To where you're parked." (*Jack, Group 4*) This well-meaning offer encapsulates the ideas discussed in this dissertation. In just a few, indirect words, this speaker suggests that women are vulnerable and unable to take care of themselves, and that the protection of women by men is necessary and natural. That simple question reproduces shared ideas about vulnerability and danger, and reaffirms the perceived reality of a world in which women's fear is rational and expected, because only in such a reality does the statement make sense.

Conversations and comments such as those discussed above take place every day, in a wide variety of situations. Warnings, strategizing about danger, and stories about actual or possible violent events are all ordinary parts of individual and social life. If we ignore these kinds of discourse as obvious or trivial, we risk reinforcing the meanings they construct. If we target them as worthy of investigation in their own right, however, we give ourselves the opportunity to question them—and, perhaps, to change them.

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**Appendix A  
Survey**

**Group Discussions on Violence  
Questionnaire**

**Instructions:**

The group discussion that you have agreed to participate in will focus on violence in American society. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather some preliminary information on your ideas, feelings, and experiences with violence.

The questionnaire has six sections. Section 1 asks about your attitudes about safety, both at home and away from home. Section 2 asks about the precautions you take to keep yourself and/or your family safe. Section 3 asks about experiences with violence — both your own and those you have heard about from others. Since the media (TV, newspapers, etc.) are a major way that people hear about violence, Section 4 asks how often you read or watch these types of media. Finally, Sections 5 and 6 ask for some basic information about you, such as your age, sex, and education.

Please answer each question as accurately as possible, by circling the correct answer and/or filling in the blank. If the choices provided do not fit your situation, please feel free to write in a more appropriate response, or to write additional comments in the margins or on the blank page provided at the end of the questionnaire. Please note that there are questions on both sides of each page.

Please do NOT put your name on this questionnaire. Your answers will remain confidential; only the investigator will know your identity. You may leave blank any question(s) you do not wish to answer. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the investigator at the phone number below.

**PLEASE RETURN THE QUESTIONNAIRE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE,  
USING THE ENCLOSED, PRE-STAMPED ENVELOPE.**

Thank you for your participation.

Jocelyn Hollander  
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**How often do you worry about this?**

All or most of the time

Fairly often

Seldom

Never

7. Have you ever been afraid that a spouse/lover/partner could physically hurt a child in anger?

Yes

No

Not applicable

8. Have you ever been afraid of: (check all that apply)

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> spouse or partner    | <input type="checkbox"/> stranger              | <input type="checkbox"/> boss              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> father or stepfather | <input type="checkbox"/> adult son or daughter | <input type="checkbox"/> teacher           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mother or stepmother | <input type="checkbox"/> date                  | <input type="checkbox"/> acquaintance      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> another relative     | <input type="checkbox"/> sibling               | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> coworker             | <input type="checkbox"/> friend                | <input type="checkbox"/> none of the above |

9. Do you work outside the home? Yes No

If yes, how safe do you generally feel when you are at work during working hours?

Very  
safeReasonably  
safeSomewhat  
unsafeVery  
unsafeI am never in  
this situation

How safe do you generally feel when you are at work after hours?

Very  
safeReasonably  
safeSomewhat  
unsafeVery  
unsafeI am never in  
this situation

Are there any particular situations at work in which you feel unsafe?

10. Do you attend school? Yes No

If yes, how safe do you generally feel when you are at school during school hours?

Very  
safeReasonably  
safeSomewhat  
unsafeVery  
unsafeI am never in  
this situation

How safe do you generally feel when you are at school after hours?

Very  
safeReasonably  
safeSomewhat  
unsafeVery  
unsafeI am never in  
this situation

Are there any particular situations at school in which you feel unsafe?

11. Please describe any other situation(s) in which you often feel unsafe.

**12. Do you feel that your risk of being a victim of violence is *increased* because of any of the following personal characteristics? (check all that apply)**

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sex                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Age                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical condition  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability                | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Height              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weight                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupation           | <input type="checkbox"/> Race                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious affiliation     | <input type="checkbox"/> People you live with | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial situation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood of residence | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____          | <input type="checkbox"/> None                |

**13. Do you feel that your risk of being a victim of violence is *decreased* because of any of the following personal characteristics? (check all that apply)**

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sex                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Age                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical condition  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability                | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Height              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weight                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupation           | <input type="checkbox"/> Race                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious affiliation     | <input type="checkbox"/> People you live with | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial situation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood of residence | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____          | <input type="checkbox"/> None                |

**14. On a scale of 1–10, how effectively do you feel that you would be able to defend yourself against an attacker?**

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Very effectively				Moderately effectively						Not effectively at all

**To the extent that you feel you would be able to defend yourself, what would you do?**

**To the extent that you feel you would not be able to defend yourself, what factors do you think would prevent you from doing so?**

**Section 2: Safety Strategies**

15. Some people do things to protect themselves from dangerous situations. Other people don't do any of them. Have you done any of the following things since you've lived in your present home? (Check all that apply.)

- Gotten an unlisted phone number?
- Used initials or last name only instead of your first name on your mailbox or in the telephone directory?
- Installed or made sure there were special locks or bars on the doors or windows?
- Installed or made sure there were bright lights outside the house?
- Installed or made sure there was a burglar alarm?
- Kept a dog for protection?
- Kept a weapon for protection?
- Participated in a neighborhood block watch program?
- None of the above

16. Have you ever done any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- Moved because of fear for your safety?
- Considered the safety of your neighborhood before moving in?
- Considered the safety of your building before moving in?
- Considered the safety of the area where you would be working before taking a job?
- Arranged your work or school schedule with an eye to safety?
- Taken a self-defense class?
- None of the above

17. On a scale of 1 to 4, please indicate how often you do the following things *at home*.

- |       | 1                       | 2            | 3      | 4     |
|-------|-------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|
|       | All or most of the time | Fairly often | Seldom | Never |
| ----- |                         |              |        |       |
| ----- |                         |              |        |       |
| ----- |                         |              |        |       |
| ----- |                         |              |        |       |
- Lock the outside doors when you are home alone during the day?  
 Lock the outside doors when you are home alone at night?  
 Check to see who is at the door before opening it?  
 Ask sales people or repair people for identification before opening the door?

18. Are there any other things (not mentioned above) that you do to protect yourself *when you are in your home*? If so, please list them below.

19. Do you take any special precautions to protect other people in your household? (If you live alone, please go on to the next question.)

Yes                      No

If yes, what do you do?

20. On a scale of 1 to 4, please indicate how often you do the following things *when you are out of your home*.

- | 1                       | 2            | 3      | 4     |   |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|---|
| All or most of the time | Fairly often | Seldom | Never |   |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Deliberately leave on lights, TV, or a radio (or use a timer to turn these items on and off when you are not home)? |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Ask a neighbor to watch your home, bring in mail, etc. when you will be gone for several days?                      |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Choose a seat on a bus or in a movie theater with an eye to who would be sitting nearby?                            |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Avoid looking people in the eye when you walk down the street?  |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Go out with a friend or two for protection?   |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Avoid walking through poorly-lit alleys or streets when you are out at night?                                       |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Take something along for protection (such as a dog, a whistle, mace, pepper spray, etc.) when you are out alone?    |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Take a weapon for protection when you are out alone?  |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Restrict your going out to only during the daytime?   |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Stay out of parts of town you think are dangerous?  |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Get your housekeys out so they are in your hand before reaching your door?  |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Avoid doing shopping, errands, laundry, or other things you have to do because of fear for your safety?             |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Avoid leisure or pleasure activities (things you want to do, but don't have to do) because of fear for your safety? |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Drive or take a taxi, rather than walk, when you go out because of fear of being harmed?                            |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Choose transportation routes (bus lines or stops, driving or walking routes) because of safety concerns?            |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Make a point of being alert and watchful when you are out walking on the street?                                    |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Cross the street when you see someone who seems strange or dangerous?   |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Consider safety concerns when choosing clothes if you are going out alone?  |
| _____                   |              |        |       | Wear shoes that are easy to run in, in case of danger?  |

21. Are there any other things (not mentioned above) that you do to protect yourself *when you are out of your home*? If so, please list them below.

22. Are there any other things (not mentioned above) that you do to protect yourself *when you are at work or school*? If so, please list them below.

23. Do you own or drive a car?

Yes

No

24. If you do own or drive a car, please indicate on a scale of 1 to 4 how often you do the following things. (If you do not own or drive a car, please go on to the next section.)

1  
All or most of the time

2  
Fairly often

3  
Seldom

4  
Never

- \_\_\_\_\_ Lock the doors while you are in the car?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Think about personal safety when looking for parking places?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Carry your keys in your hand when going to the car, instead of waiting to get the keys out after reaching the car?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Check the back seat for intruders before getting into the car?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lock your car when it is parked?

25. Are there any other things (not mentioned above) that you do to protect yourself *when you are in or near your car*? If so, please list them below.

**Section 3: Knowledge and Experience with Violence**

**26. Are there any crimes you have read about in the newspaper that you particularly remember? If so, please describe them here.**

**27. Are there any crimes you have heard about on TV that you particularly remember? If so, please describe them here.**

**28. Do you personally know anyone who has been the victim of a violent crime?**

Yes                      No                      Not sure

**29. The State of Washington defines *rape* as the use of force to obtain sexual intercourse (genital, oral, or anal) with someone without their consent. Do you personally know anyone who has been raped?**

Yes                      No                      Not sure

**30. Have you heard any second-hand reports of rapes or sexual assaults (in other words: heard about them from someone else, not the victim)?**

Yes                      No                      Not sure

**31. Have you heard any second-hand reports of violent crimes other than rape (in other words: heard about them from someone else, not the victim)?**

Yes                      No                      Not sure

**32. Have you ever been in a situation where someone used physical force to make you have sexual intercourse with them when you didn't want to?**

Yes                      No                      Not sure

**If yes, what was the relationship of that person to you? (Check all that apply)**

- Spouse or partner       Date                       Acquaintance  
 Stranger                       Other \_\_\_\_\_

33. Have you ever been in a situation where someone used some degree of physical force (twisting your arm, holding you down, etc.) to try to make you engage in kissing or petting when you didn't want to?

Yes No Not sure

34. Have you ever been in a situation where someone used intimidation or the threat of physical force to try to make you engage in kissing or petting when you didn't want to?

Yes No Not sure

35. Have you ever been the victim of any crime other than rape? Yes No

If yes, check all that apply:

- Vandalized
- Theft from home, car, work, etc.
- Theft from person
- Physically assaulted by stranger
- Physically assaulted by spouse/partner/date
- Physically assaulted by parent or sibling
- Physically assaulted by acquaintance
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

36. Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone when he/she didn't want to because you used some degree of physical force?

Yes No Not sure

37. Have you ever been in a situation where you used some degree of physical force (twisting someone's arm, holding someone down, etc.) to try to make him/her engage in kissing or petting when he/she didn't want to?

Yes No Not sure

38. Have you ever been accused of rape or sexual assault?

Yes No Not sure

39. Have you ever participated in a violent crime other than rape?

Yes No Not sure

40. What percentage of rape victims in the United States do you think get beaten or physically hurt in addition to the rape? \_\_\_\_\_%

41. What percentage of rape victims in the United States do you think get killed? \_\_\_\_\_%

42. What percentage of attempted rapes do you think are completed? \_\_\_\_\_%

43. Have you ever seen or heard: (check all that apply)

- Your father physically hurt your mother or sibling
- Your mother physically hurt your father or sibling
- Your sibling physically hurt another family member
- Your parent ever hurt a grandparent or other elderly relative
- None of the above

44. Have you ever *avoided* doing any of the following because you were afraid of violent consequences?  
(If an item is not applicable to your situation, please write "NA" in the space provided.)

- |  | 1          | 2            | 3             | 4     |
|--|------------|--------------|---------------|-------|
|  | Frequently | Occasionally | Once or twice | Never |
| _____ Disagreeing with spouse or intimate partner          |            |              |               |       |
| _____ Talking back to father                               |            |              |               |       |
| _____ Talking back to mother                               |            |              |               |       |
| _____ Arguing with an adult son or daughter                |            |              |               |       |
| _____ Arguing with a boss or teacher                       |            |              |               |       |
| _____ Drinking alcohol on a date or other social situation |            |              |               |       |

45. Which, if any, of the following actions have you performed in anger as an adult (after age 18) ?  
(check all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thrown an object at the wall      | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanked or hit a child        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thrown an object at someone       | <input type="checkbox"/> Screamed and sworn at someone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slapped someone with an open hand | <input type="checkbox"/> Shoved someone                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hit someone with a closed fist    | <input type="checkbox"/> Hit a family pet              |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above             |

46. Has your boss/client/teacher ever... (check all that apply)

- Demanded sex
- Threatened you physically
- Forced you to work in situations you consider dangerous
- Made sexual innuendos
- None of the above
- Does not apply

**Section 4: Media Exposure**

47. In an average week, about how many hours do you personally watch television? \_\_\_\_\_

48. a. Do you usually watch a TV news program?

Yes                      No

b. If yes, which station(s) and time(s) do you usually watch?

49. What other TV shows do you usually watch?

50. How often do you read the newspaper?

- Every day
- Nearly every day
- A few times a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week
- Never

51. Please list the newspapers you usually read, if any.

52. Please list the magazines you usually read, if any.

53. Please list any movies you have seen in the last month.

**Part 5: Personal Characteristics**

54. Below are listed a number of personality characteristics. Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 7, how true of you each of these characteristics is.

	Never or almost never true	Usually not true	Sometimes but infrequently true	Occasionally true	Often true	Usually true	Always or almost always true
a. Defend my own beliefs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Affectionate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. Conscientious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. Independent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Sympathetic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Moody	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. Assertive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Sensitive to needs of others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i. Reliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j. Strong personality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k. Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
l. Jealous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m. Forceful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
n. Compassionate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
o. Truthful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
p. Have leadership abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
q. Eager to soothe hurt feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
r. Secretive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
s. Willing to take risks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
t. Warm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
u. Adaptable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
v. Dominant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
w. Tender	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
x. Conceited	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
y. Willing to take a stand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
z. Love children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
aa. Tactful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
bb. Aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
cc. Gentle	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
dd. Conventional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

55. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.

Strongly agree     Agree     Disagree     Strongly disagree     Don't know

56. Do you approve or disapprove of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?

Approve     Disapprove     Don't know

**Part 6: Demographic Information**

Please answer each question as accurately as possible, by circling the most appropriate answer and/or filling in the blank. If the choices provided do not fit your situation, please feel free to write in the more appropriate response, or to write additional comments in the margins or on the back of the page.

57. What Seattle neighborhood do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_  
(If unknown, please write in the nearest major cross-streets.)

58. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

59. What is your sex?     M     F

60. What is your race or ethnic background? (check as many as apply)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African-American        | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian-American      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White or European-American       | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/a, Chicano/a, or Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |

61. What is your principal occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

62. Approximately what was the total combined income (before taxes) of all the people in your household last year? (Exclude renters or roommates who are financially independent)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Below \$10,000    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 – 75,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 – 25,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 – 100,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 – 50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over \$100,000     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown           |   |

63. What was the last grade in school you completed?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8th grade or less     | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-year college graduate       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school      | <input type="checkbox"/> 4-year college graduate       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High school graduate  | <input type="checkbox"/> Some post-graduate work       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business/trade school | <input type="checkbox"/> Post-graduate degree obtained |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some college          |  |

64. What is your sexual orientation?

- lesbian or gay     bisexual     heterosexual     other \_\_\_\_\_

65. Relationship status: Are you, or do you consider yourself to be:

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never married                | <input type="checkbox"/> Separated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Living with romantic partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Married                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed   |

---

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please feel free to write any other comments on the next page.

## Appendix B Focus Group Protocol

(Introduce self) You've all signed a consent form giving your informed consent to participate in this study. Do you have any questions about the forms, or about your rights as a subject?

What we're going to do in the next 2 hours is have a group discussion focusing on issues of violence. The goal of this session is to learn from you & your experiences. Because of this, I'm going to stay out of the discussion as much as possible. I'll give you some general guidelines before we get started, and if you run into trouble I'll jump in and help get you back on track, but mostly I'll just ask a couple of questions and then listen to what you have to say.

A few things before we get started. You should be aware that this discussion is being tape recorded. What you say in this discussion is confidential, however: no one will have access these tapes but me, and when the tapes are transcribed, you will be identified by a subject number, rather than your name. I would also ask that you each treat the discussion as confidential, and not talk outside of this room about what the other group members have said. You should be aware that although I will do my best to preserve your confidentiality, the other participants in the group may talk to other people — so I would advise you not to talk about information you don't want generally known about you.

### **Brief discussion guidelines:**

- Because I'm going to try to stay out of the discussion, each of you is responsible for helping to manage the discussion. If the group gets off track, someone will usually pull the group back to the topic at hand. I'll jump in if I have to, but usually one of you takes care of that for me.
- I'm going to ask you about your ideas about violence, but I'm also interested in knowing where those ideas come from. I'd like to hear about experiences — your own and those of people you know — and I'd like to hear as many stories as possible. Even if you think your experience is just like everyone else's, don't just say, 'I agree.' Go ahead & tell your story, because there's always something unique in each person's own experiences.
- Along the same lines, I'd like to hear as many different points of view as possible. If your experience is a little different from the others in the group, then that is exactly what I'd like to hear. It often turns out that the same things have happened to several people in the group, but no one would have mentioned it if someone didn't start the ball rolling. As with most discussions, there really aren't right or wrong answers in this area — each of you is the expert on your own experiences.
- If someone hasn't really joined in the discussion, or you seem to be hearing from the same people all the time, try asking a question to someone who hasn't spoken as much. Everyone will say a little bit about themselves in the first part of the discussion, and you can use this information to ask them a question later.

• If the group runs out of things to say, just remember that I'm interested in your ideas about violence and I want to hear as many different points of view about this as possible. So what usually happens is that someone will think of something that hasn't come up yet, and then that story will restart the discussion.

Any questions? [TURN ON TAPE RECORDER]

1. I'd like to begin the discussion today by having you each say a little bit about yourselves. Why don't we start with [name person to my left], and then go around the room. I'd like you to each tell us your first name, and something about yourself — perhaps a little bit about why you decided to participate in this discussion today.

[opening statements]

Okay, let's get started on the discussion itself. Again, I'm going to leave most of the talking to you, & just listen.

2. The problem of violence has received a lot of attention in the news lately. I'd like you to think back over your own past experiences, and those you've heard about from friends and relatives. Do you feel that this issue of violence affects you personally, or affects your friends and relatives? [have them each answer this in turn until general discussion starts]

*Prompts:* How so?

Why not?

*Probe for specific examples*

*If they start talking about news events:* How does \_\_\_\_\_ affect your life?

[Used in Groups 1–5]

3a. One of the things I'm interested in is how people learn about violent events, and how they communicate with others about them. The next thing I'd like you to do today is take a few minutes to fill out this short questionnaire — I think it will take about 10–15 minutes — and then we'll talk about it. If you finish before the rest of the group, feel free to read something you brought with you or one of the magazines in the box here. [*put box of magazines & newspapers on the table*]

[*pass out questionnaire — be sure that subject numbers match.*]

*When all participants have completed questionnaire, ask:*

The questionnaire you just finished asks you about a number of different kinds of conversations. I'd like to talk specifically about the last two questions — the ones about warnings you get from and give to other people.

- I'd like you to begin by talking about warnings you receive from other people.
  - When other people give you warnings about dangerous situations or people?
- How do these warnings affect the way you behave, or the way you think about your behavior?
- Now I'd like to focus on the warnings you give other people. What kinds of warnings do you give others?

- How do you come to give these warnings? What kinds of situations do you give them about?

[used in Groups 6–12]

3b. I'm going to switch gears a bit here, and present a couple of situations for you to think about. Each of these situations is something that might happen on any given day. I'm going to read each situation aloud, and then have you write down your answers to a few questions about it. Then we'll discuss it as a group.

- Read vignette #1 aloud
- Pass out worksheet "Situation #1." (make sure each person gets the copy with his/her name on it.) Pass out pens if needed and have them fill out the worksheet.
- When most people have finished the worksheet, begin discussion again by asking, "What do you think might happen in this situation?" *Probe: what makes you think that might happen?*
- After one person has explained what they think might happen, ask the rest of the group what they think. Are there any different interpretations? *Prompt: if they have difficulty talking about this, ask them to explain what they would do, and why.*
- Collect the worksheet and repeat the process for vignette #2.

#### Vignettes

1. One evening you're at home on your own. It's late. There's a knock at the door, but you're not expecting anyone.
2. You are having an argument with the person in your life you are closest to — your romantic partner if you have one, or a family member or close friend. You are alone with this person, somewhere out of earshot of anyone else. The person suddenly becomes very angry and begins to yell.

4b. Part of the questionnaire you received in the mail asks you about a number of different kinds of conversations you might have with other people about violence. One of the things I'm interested in is how people learn about violent events, and how they communicate with others about them. I'd like to talk specifically about the questions about warnings about you might get from and give to other people. These warnings can be either direct and explicit, or indirect and implicit.

- I'd like you to begin by talking about warnings you *receive from* other people. When do other people give you warnings about dangerous situations or people?
- How do these warnings affect the way you behave, or the way you think about your behavior?
- Now I'd like to focus on the warnings you *give to* other people. What kinds of warnings do you give others?
- What leads you to give these warnings?  
*Prompt: What kinds of situations do you give them about?*

[used in Groups 1–12]

5. We've been talking a lot about violence, and feelings of danger. I'm also interested in the flip side of this issue: safety. I'd like you all to think for a moment, and then tell me when you feel most safe.

*Prompts:* Who do you feel most safe with?

Where do you feel most safe?

What is it about these situations that makes you feel safe?

When/where/with whom do you feel most vulnerable? What is it about these situations or people that makes you feel vulnerable?

6. *[optional question]* Why do you think there is so much violence in this society today?

*Prompts:* Do you all agree?

Does anyone have any different/additional ideas about the causes of violence?

7. *(if discussion lags with more than 30 minutes to go)* You've already said a lot about violence, but I'd like to ask one more question. What do you think should be done to stop violence in our society?

8. *[15 minutes before end of time]* We're running out of time, so we're going to have to end the discussion in about ten minutes. But before we stop talking, I'd like to make sure you've all gotten a chance to say what's on your mind. I'd like to finish up by going around the circle as we did in the beginning of the discussion, and hear any final thoughts you might have about the issues you've discussed here today.

[closing statements]

Thank you all for participating. That's the end of the study — if you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them informally now.

*[Pass out resource list and subject money.]*

## Appendix C Participant Biographies

**Group 1** *George*, a fifty-three year old white man, is a college graduate. He works as an industrial claims manager, making between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year, and lives in a suburban area. He identifies himself as heterosexual and is separated from his romantic partner.

*Anita* is a twenty-one year old white woman. She currently attends college and her family income is unknown. Anita defines herself as heterosexual, has never been married, and lives in an urban area.

*Lori*, a twenty-three year old white woman, lives in an urban area and works as an administrative assistant. She attends college as a fifth-year senior, and her household income is between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year. Lori is heterosexual and lives with her romantic partner.

*Richard*, a heterosexual Asian man, has never been married. Richard is twenty-five years old, works as a clerk, and earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year. He has graduated from a two-year college and lives in an urban area.

*Timothy*, a resident of an urban area, works as a keyboard operator. He is a twenty-eight year old white man and earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually. He has completed some college, identifies himself as heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Janet* is a forty-eight year old heterosexual white woman. She lives in an urban area and works as an executive director of a non-profit corporation, earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year. She graduated from a two-year college and is divorced.

*Sandy* lives in an urban area and works in a restaurant, with a household income between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year. She is a twenty-eight year old Latina woman and has a degree from a two-year college. Sandy identifies herself as heterosexual and is married.

*Nora*, a twenty-two year old Latina woman, lives in an urban area and is a student. She earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year and has earned a degree from a four-year college. Nora is heterosexual and has never been married.

**Group 2** *Rick*, a thirty-nine year old white man, is an urban resident and works in sales. He has a degree from a four-year college and earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year. Rick identifies himself as gay and has never been married.

*Elliot*, a forty-one year old white man, identifies himself as gay and lives with his romantic partner. He lives in a suburban area and works as a process facilitator and a coach, with an annual household income between \$75,000 and \$100,000. He has completed some post-graduate college work.

*Gary*, a thirty-one year old white man, lives in an urban area and works as a corporate trainer. He has a post-graduate degree and earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year. He is gay and has never been married. Gary did not attend the focus group discussion.

*Tom*, a thirty-four year old gay man, lives in an urban area. He is white, works as a driver, and earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year. Tom has earned a post-graduate degree and has never been married.

*Bill*, a sixty-three year old semi-retired white man, lives in an urban area and has an annual household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year. Bill has a post-graduate degree, identifies himself as gay, and lives with his romantic partner.

**Group 3** *Joe* works as a soil scientist and earns less than \$10,000 a year. He is a thirty-three year old white man and lives in an urban area. Joe has a post-graduate degree, is heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Jerry*, a fifty-five year old white man, works as a documentary video producer, and lives in a suburban area. He earns between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year and has a post-graduate degree. Jerry is heterosexual and divorced.

*Liz*, a fifty-nine year old white woman, lives in an urban area and identifies herself as heterosexual. She works as a personal and business consultant, earning between \$10,000 and \$25,000 annually. She has completed some post-graduate college work and is divorced.

*Lisa*, a thirty-three year old white woman, works as a clerk and has a household income between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year. She lives in an urban area, has a degree from a four-year college, identifies herself as heterosexual, and is married.

*Becky*, a dentist, earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year and has a post-graduate degree. She is a thirty-five year old white woman and lives in a suburban area. Becky has never been married and identifies herself as heterosexual, but notes that she does "not believe in labels, everything is on a continuum."

**Group 4** *Ed*, a thirty-seven year old white man, works as a supervisor at a high-technology firm and lives in an urban area. He has a four-year college degree, earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year, and is heterosexual and divorced. He did not attend the focus group discussion.

*Christine*, a thirty-five year old white woman, works as a writer and has a post-graduate degree. She earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year, is heterosexual, has never been married, and lives in a suburban area.

*Joyce* works in the field of computers and has a household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year. She lives in a suburban area, has a post-graduate degree, and is a thirty-eight year old white woman. Joyce identifies herself as a lesbian and is married.

*Evan*, a thirty year old white man, lives in an urban area and is married and heterosexual. He works as a technical writer, has an annual household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000 annually, and has completed some post-graduate work.

*Harold*, a software test engineer, is a married, white, heterosexual man who has a household income between \$75,000 and \$100,000 annually. He is thirty years old, has a four-year college degree, and lives in a suburban area.

*David* works as a computer professional and earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year. He is a thirty-two year old white man, has a degree from a four-year college, and is heterosexual. David lives in a suburban neighborhood and has never been married.

*Jack*, a thirty-two year old white man, works in software and has completed some post-graduate work. His annual household income is over \$100,000 a year. He is heterosexual, married, and lives in an urban area.

**Group 5** *Stacy* lives in a suburban area and has obtained two post-graduate degrees. She is a thirty year old white woman and works as a marriage and family therapist. She has a household income over \$100,000 per year, identifies herself as a lesbian, and lives with her romantic partner.

*Lorna*, a resident of a suburban area, is a forty-one year old white woman. She is a student with a household income between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year. She has a post-graduate degree, lives with her romantic partner, and chose not to identify her sexual orientation on the survey.

*Tina*, a physical therapist, is a forty-year old white woman. She lives in a suburban area, has a post-graduate degree, and has a household income between \$25,000 and \$50,000 annually. Tina, a lesbian, lives with her romantic partner.

*Kim*, a thirty-six year old white woman, lives in a suburban area. She works as an editor, has attended some college, and has a household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year. She is a lesbian who lives with her romantic partner.

*Susannah* did not return her survey. Therefore, demographic information is unavailable.

*Mona*, a thirty-one year old white woman, works as a nurse practitioner, earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year. She lives in a suburban area, has a post-graduate degree, identifies herself as a lesbian, and is divorced.

*Fiona* is a thirty-seven year old Latina lesbian who lives with her romantic partner. Christina has a post-graduate degree, works as a physician, has a household income over \$100,000 a year, and lives in a suburban area.

*Karen* is a forty year old woman who identifies herself as white and Native American. She works as a driver, earns between \$50,000 and \$75,000 annually, and lives in a suburban area. Karen has attended some college and business/trade school. Karen describes herself as a lesbian and is divorced.

**Group 6** *Frank*, a thirty-five year old white man, is unemployed and earns less than \$10,000 per year. He has attended some college and lives in an urban area. Frank is heterosexual and widowed.

*Arnold*, a forty-six year old man, works as a bookkeeper and describes himself as Native American and Irish. He makes less than \$10,000 per year, has attended some college, and is divorced. He is heterosexual and lives in an urban area. Arnold did not attend the focus group discussion.

*Stuart* lives in an urban area and reports that he used to work as an engineer draftsman. He is a sixty-year old white man and earns less than \$10,000 a year. Stuart has a degree from a two-year college, is heterosexual and divorced.

Henry did not return his survey; demographic data are unavailable.

Ernie did not return his survey; demographic data are unavailable.

**Group 7** *Rob*, a nineteen year old white man, lives in an urban area and participates in Army ROTC. His annual family income is unknown, he has attended some college, identifies himself as heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Andrew*, a white man who has never been married, lives in an urban area. He is nineteen years old, heterosexual, and a student. Andrew reports his family income as over \$100,000 a year. Andrew has graduated from high school.

*Sean* is a nineteen year old white man. He is a student and works as a software tester. Sean reports his family's annual income as between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, but notes that his individual income is less than \$10,000 a year. Sean lives in an urban area, is a high school graduate, has never been married, and identifies himself as heterosexual.

*Eric*, an eighteen year old white man, is a student and lives in an urban area. He has graduated from a two-year college, reports his family income as unknown, defines himself as heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Charlie*, a heterosexual white man, is a student and reports his income as less than \$10,000 a year. Charlie has graduated from high school and is nineteen years old. He lives in an urban area and did not identify his relationship status.

*Kevin*, an eighteen year old white man, lives in an urban area and is a student. Kevin reports his household income as unknown, is a high school graduate, heterosexual, and has never been married.

**Group 8** *Leanne*, a forty-four year old African-American woman, works in health and caretaking. She earns less than \$10,000 a year, graduated from high school, and has attended business/trade school and some college. Leanne lives in an urban area, identifies herself as heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Meg* is a seventy-one year old white woman. She is retired, earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year, lives in an urban area, is heterosexual, and divorced. Meg graduated from a two-year college, has attended two and a half years of art school, and participated in fifteen years of federal training programs.

*Sue*, a forty-nine year old Native American woman, reports that she works as a volunteer at a mission. She is a high school graduate, has attended some college, and did not report her household income. She lives in an urban area, has never been married, and identified her sexual orientation as "single."

*Louise* lives in an urban area and works as a delivery driver, earning less than \$10,000 a year. She is a fifty-four year old white woman, has attended some college, identifies herself as heterosexual, and is divorced.

*Catherine*, a fifty-two year old white woman, lives in an urban area and marks her occupation as "none." She makes less than \$10,000 per year, has graduated from a two-year college, identifies herself as heterosexual, and is divorced.

**Group 9** Franklin, an African American man, did not return his survey.

*Michael* did not return his survey, and moved with no forwarding address.

*Keith*, a disabled man, is thirty-two years old, white, and lives in an urban area. His income is less than \$10,000 a year and he has graduated from a two-year college. Keith is separated from his romantic partner and marks his sexual orientation as "NOYB," meaning "none of your business."

*Irving*, a seventy-one year old African-American man, works as a merchant seaman and earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year. He has attended some high school, lives in an urban area, is separated from his romantic partner, and reports his sexual orientation as "man." He came to the focus group discussion but left almost immediately because he decided he was too drunk to participate

*Leroy* is a retired x-ray technician. He lives in an urban area, earns less than \$10,000 a year, has graduated from a four-year college, and has completed some post-graduate work. *Leroy* is a seventy-one year old African-American man, identifies himself as heterosexual, and is divorced.

*Kurt*, a resident of an urban area, works as a cook and earns less than \$10,000 a year. He is a fifty year old African-American man and has attended some high school. *Kurt* identifies himself as heterosexual and reports his relationship status as both married and widowed.

**Group 10** *Jane*, a sixty-five year old white woman, lives in an urban area and is retired. She makes between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year, has graduated from a two-year college, and identifies herself as heterosexual and divorced.

*Sadie*, a seventy-six year old retired woman, lives in an urban area and reported her racial/ethnic background as white and Spanish. She earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year, has graduated from high school, and identifies herself as heterosexual and divorced.

*Virginia*, a sixty-eight year old white woman, lives in an urban area and is retired. She makes between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year, has graduated from high school, attended some college, identifies herself as heterosexual, and is widowed.

*Mae*, a resident of an urban area, is an eighty-eight year old white woman. *Mae* is retired, makes less than \$10,000 a year, and has completed some college. She describes herself as heterosexual and is divorced.

*Tony*, a retired sixty-nine year old white man, lives in an urban area and earns less than \$10,000 a year. He has completed some college, identifies himself as heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Sam*, a retired accountant, is a seventy-four year old white man. He lives in an urban area, makes less than \$10,000 per year, has graduated from a four-year college, has never been married, and is heterosexual.

*Harriet* is a retired sales clerk and reported her household income as unknown. She is an eighty-two year old white woman, lives in an urban area, and has graduated from high school. She is widowed and did not report her sexual orientation on the survey.

*Louisa* is a retired eighty-one year old white woman. She lives in an urban area, earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year, and has graduated from high school. She has never been married and reported her sexual orientation as "normal."

**Group 11** *Frances*, a nurse and business owner, has an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$50,000. *Frances* is a thirty-eight year old African American woman, has graduated from high school and attended some college and business/trade school. She is heterosexual, married, and lives in an urban area.

*Tanya* lives in an suburban area, works in retail management, and graduated from a four-year college. She is a thirty-two year old African American woman, identifies herself as heterosexual, and is married with an household income between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year

*Caroline*, a thirty-two year old African American woman, works as a restaurant manager. She has attended business/trade school, earns between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, and is married. She did not report her sexual orientation or what type of neighborhood she lives in. Caroline did not participate in the focus group discussion.

*Angela* lives in an urban area, is self-employed, and has completed some post-graduate work. She is a forty-four year old African American woman, identifies herself as heterosexual, and is married. Angela did not report her annual household income.

*Alissa*, a thirty-year old African American woman, lives in an urban area and is a homemaker. She has completed some college, earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year, and is heterosexual and divorced.

**Group 12** *Mia* is a twenty-year old Filipino woman. She works as a public relations assistant, lives in an urban area, has attended some college, and makes between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year. Mia has never been married and identifies herself as heterosexual.

*Marcia*, a twenty-two year old white woman, lives in an urban area and has completed some college. Marcia is a student, reported an annual household income of less than \$10,000 a year, is married, and identifies herself as heterosexual.

*Jill*, a nineteen year old white woman, lives in an urban area, has completed some college, works as a nanny and earns between \$10,000 and \$25,000 per year. She lives in an urban area, has never been married, and is heterosexual.

*Sarah*, a student, is a nineteen year old white woman. She lives in an urban area, reports her household income as unknown, has completed some college, is heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Katrina* is an eighteen year old white woman. She is a student, lives in an urban area, and reports her household income as unknown. Katrina has graduated from high school, is heterosexual, and has never been married.

*Belinda*, a student, lives in an urban area and has never been married. She is an eighteen year old white woman, has graduated from high school, and is currently a freshman in college. She identifies herself as heterosexual and reports her household income as unknown.

*Anna*, a nineteen year old white woman, is a student and lives in an urban area. She is heterosexual, has never been married, has completed some college, and reports her household income as "not applicable."

**Group P1** *Desiree*, a white woman, is between the ages of thirty-one and forty, and lives in an urban area. Desiree has graduated from a two-year college, earns less than \$10,000 a year, is a student, and has been laid off from work. She reports that she is divorced and currently engaged.

*Marie* is an urban resident and is between the ages of thirty-one and forty. She is a white woman and reports that her ethnic background is "American only." Marie, a student, is married, and reports her annual household income as between \$40,000 and \$49,999. She has graduated from college and has now returned as a fifth-year senior.

*Bob*, a suburban resident, is between the ages of thirty-one and forty. Bob is a man, reports he is white and Native American, and is a student. Bob is divorced, has completed some college, and reports his annual household income is between \$40,000 and \$49,999.

*Carl*, a man between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, reports that he is white, Chicano, and Native American. He is a student, lives in an urban area, earns below \$10,000 per year, has completed some college, and has never been married.

*Linda*, a white woman between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, lives in an urban area. She works as a telephone operator, earns between \$10,000 and \$19,999 per year, has completed some post-graduate work, and reports her marital status as "non-partnered."

*Barbara*, a white woman, lives in a suburban area and is between the ages of thirty-one and forty. Barbara is divorced, a student, earns between \$10,000 and \$19,999 per year, and has graduated from college.

Appendix D  
Crosstabulations of Demographic Variables

	Gender	Age	Race	Income	Education	Own vs. Rent
Age	.038 (70)					
Race	.179 (70)	.010 (70)				
Income	-.035 (57)	-.230 (57)	-.121 (57)			
Education	-.061 (70)	-.005 (70)	-.137 (70)	.490**** (57)		
Own vs. Rent	.089 (59)	-.228 (59)	.032 (59)	.642**** (48)	.380*** (59)	
Sexual Orientation	-.054 (64)	.002 (64)	.096 (64)	-.583**** (53)	-.491**** (64)	-.444*** (55)

\* p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\* p<.005, \*\*\*\*p<.001

## Appendix E Coding Scheme

### People

VICTIMS	Characteristics of victims
PERP	Characteristics of perpetrators
DANGER-PPL	Characteristics of people perceived to be dangerous
NO DANGER-PPL	Characteristics of people perceived to be <i>not</i> dangerous
VULN-PPL	Characteristics of people perceived to be vulnerable to violence
NO VULN-PPL violence	Characteristics of people perceived to be <i>not</i> vulnerable to violence
FEAR-PPL	Characteristics of people perceived to be fearful of violence
NO FEAR-PPL	Characteristics of people perceived to be <i>not</i> fearful of violence
SELF	Characteristics of speaker

\*\*\*\*\*for each of the above, code the following characteristics (also, code these characteristics if they're mentioned without talking about a specific person)

SELF	Talking about oneself
OTHER	Talking about someone else
STRAT	Stratification variables
-G	Gender
-RACE	Race or ethnicity
-S.O.	Sexual orientation
-CLASS	Social class
-OCCUP	Occupation (note: related to social class)
-AGE	Age
-RELP	
-KNOWN	Person is someone the speaker knows
-CHILD	Person is a child
-PARENT	Person is a parent
-PARTNER	Person is an intimate partner
-FRIEND	Person is a friend
-REL	Person is a relative
-STRANGER	Person is a stranger
BODY	
-APPEAR	Appearance
-SIZE	Size (height or weight or bulk)
-DRESS	Dress or clothing
-STRENGTH	Strength
-ATHLETE	Athletics
-ABILITY	Physical ability
-DISABILITY	Disability
-INJURY	Injury
-PAIN	Being in pain
-SEXUALITY	Comment about sex, sexuality

### Experiences with violence or threats of violence

VICTIM	Victimization
-SELF	Victimization of self
-OTH	Of other
-CAUSE	
-CONSEQ	
PERP	Perpetration (add event code from below specifying type of violence)
-SELF	Self as perpetrator
-OTH	Other as perpetrator
-CAUSE	
-CONSEQ	
EXPOSURE	Exposure to violence (not victimization or perpetration)
WITNESS	Witness to actual violence
-MEDIA	Exposure to violence through media
-SELF-RELEVANT	Event particularly relevant to self (e.g., victimization of someone with whom one identifies)
-JOINT	Involvement in violent event where victim/perpetrator roles are not obvious (e.g., a bar fight)
-THREAT	Situation where there was a (direct or implied) threat of violence, but nothing happened. (Don't use in cases where someone was simply afraid; use when there was a reasonable expectation that violence might ensue. E.g., a person was followed, verbally threatened, or provoked.)
-CONSEQ	Consequences of exposure
NO EXPER	Lack of experience with violence

### Types of violence

#### Violence against persons

-ASSAULT	
-SA	Sexual assault
-RAPE	
-CSA	Child sexual assault; molestation
-SH	Sexual harassment
-MURDER	
-DV	Domestic violence
-MUGGING	
-STABBING	
-SHOOTING	
-PICK ON	Picking on people who are weaker

#### Violence against property

-BREAK-IN	-THEFT
-BURGLARY	-VANDALISM
-TRESPASS	-ARSON

#### Violence against both persons & property

-BOMBING	-TERRORISM
-WAR	-RIOT
-HIJACKING	-CARJACKING

#### "Victimless" crimes

- PROSTITUTION
-DRUG USE

## Strategies

### Strategies for dealing with fear and violence

#### STRATEG

-DANGER	Strategies for managing danger
-MONITOR	Monitor surroundings, "being careful"
-ISOLATION	Keeping oneself away from potentially dangerous situations by not doing the things one would otherwise do (e.g., not going out after dark)
-AVOID	Avoidance (e.g., maintaining usual activities but staying away from specific people, places and situations perceived to be dangerous (e.g., changing seats on bus, avoiding certain parts of town, not honking at other drivers)
-FORTIF	Fortification of self or home (buying guns, using locks. etc.)
-OBFUS	Obfuscation (e.g., say "we" on answering machine); making oneself look more confident than one really is.
-RELY	Reliance on others for protection
-COPS	Reliance on police, calling police
-COMM ACT	Organized community action (e.g., block watch)
-PATTERN ▲	Changing one's normal life patterns (e.g., work schedule or transportation routes)
-INTUIT	Rely on intuition
-EXT CONSTRAINT	External constraints on strategies that prevent you from implementing strategies you otherwise would (e.g., work rules)
-INSTIT	Institutional strategies (e.g., apt. bldg. rules about guests checking in)
-THREAT	Strategies in threatening situation
-ATTACK	Strategies in an attack
-INT	Strategies for intervention in a violent event
-FEAR	Strategies for dealing with fear (as vs. danger)
-NO THREAT	Strategies to avoid perception of self as threat
-ANALYSIS	Analysis of strategies
-MOTIV	Motivation behind particular strategies
-DK	Don't know what to do
-CAN'T KNOW	Can't know what I would do until in the situation
-EFFICACY	Efficacy of strategies ("this strategy works well")
-SUFF	Sufficiency of strategies ("this strategy is enough to protect me")
-VARIES	Strategies vary depending on other factors
-LEARN	Process of learning strategies
-NOTHING	There's nothing one could do
-PERP	Perpetrator's presumed strategies for committing violence
-NO STRATEG	Not using strategies to protect oneself
-ACTIVE	Actively deciding not to use a particular strategy (e.g., "I don't carry a weapon")
-BEH-W/O STRATEG	Behaving without strategizing (e.g., "It never occurs to me to use any strategies")

## Thoughts & Feelings

<b>FEAR</b>	Feelings of anxiety or terror about victimization.
-SELF	own fear
-OTH	other's fear
-IND	indirect acknowledgement of fear (e.g., "I glance over my shoulder")
-ACCUSN	fear of false accusations
-FOR OTH	fear for others
-IRRAT	comment that fear may be unwarranted or disproportional to risk
-OWN VIOL	fear of own violent behavior
-CAUSE	causes of fear
-CONSEQ	consequences of fear
<b>NO FEAR</b>	explicit denial of fear (e.g., "I'm not scared")
-SELF	denial of own fear
-OTH	comment that others are not afraid
-IND	Indirect denial of fear (e.g., "I feel fine walking around at night")
-CAUSE	Cause of lack of fear
-CONSEQ	Consequence of lack of fear
<b>RISK</b>	perceptions of the chances of being victimized (a cognitive judgement)
-SELF	perception of one's own risk
-OTH	perception of other's risk
-INATTN	comment about lack of attention to danger, violence, etc.
-PERVASIVE	comment that risk is pervasive, there's always a risk
-CAUSE	cause of perceptions of risk
-CONSEQ	consequence of perceptions of risk
<b>NO RISK</b>	statement that one does not feel at risk, or feels safe ("Violence isn't directed at me")
-SELF	one's own lack of risk
-OTH	other's lack of risk
<b>VULNERABILITY</b>	perceptions of one's ability to resist victimization (a cognitive judgement)
-VULN	feelings of vulnerability
-SELF	one's own vulnerability
-OTH	other's vulnerability
-CAUSE	causes of vulnerability
-CONSEQ	consequences of vulnerability
-INVULN	feelings of invulnerability (same categories as for VULN)
<b>DANGER</b>	Identification of particular people or situations perceived to be dangerous
-CONTEXT	Places perceived to be dangerous
-AMBIG	It's hard to assess danger
-BEH	Behavior that is believed to put one in danger
-SELF	Consciousness that oneself can be perceived by others as dangerous
-VARIES	Comment that danger varies, is not specific to a particular situation
<b>NO DANGER:</b>	Explicit statement that someone or somewhere is not dangerous
-CONTEXT	Places perceived to be not dangerous
-BEH	Behavior that is perceived to be safe, not dangerous
<b>PROTECTION</b>	
-SELF=PROTECT	Self as protector
-OTH=PROTECT	Others as protectors

### **Communication about Violence**

<b>MEDIA</b>	<b>Violence in the media</b>
<b>WARN</b> -NO WARN	<b>Warnings about danger</b> <b>Lack of warnings about danger</b>
<b>COMM</b> -NO COMM -CONSEQ	<b>Other kinds of communication (conversations, classes, books...)</b> <b>Lack of communication about a topic (e.g., "No one talks about X")</b> <b>Consequences of communication</b>

### Talk, Beliefs & Miscellaneous codes

#### **Talk**

<b>TALK</b>	Features of the talk itself
-OTHER	"Otherizing" (e.g., talking about "them")
-CONTRADICT	Contradictions in talk
-STORY	Narrative story
-COLLECTIVE	Collective storytelling
-DISCOURSE	Self-conscious comment about a social group or feeling (e.g., "I hate to say it, but race plays a factor in my feelings of fear" would be coded as DISCOURSE-RACE. However, "Black people scare me" would simply be coded as GP-RACE.)
-RACE	Discourse about race
-G	Discourse about gender
-SO	Discourse about sexual orientation
-FEAR	Discourse about fear
-PRESCRIPT	Prescriptions ("Don't ever do X" or "They should do X")
-POSSF	Possible future
-POSSP	Possible past
-POSSPr	Possible alternate present

#### **Beliefs about violence**

##### **BELIEFS**

-VIOL-CAUSE	Causes of violence
-VIOL-CONSEQ	Consequences of violence
-NO VIOL-CAUSE	Causes of lack of violence
-NO VIOL-CONSEQ	Consequences of lack of violence
-PREV	Prevalence of violence
-DEF-VIOL	Definition of violence

##### **MISC**

	Miscellaneous categories
-INT	Interesting things that don't fit into other categories
-QUOTE	Really good quotes
-SURVEY	Comments about the survey
-VIGNETTE #1	Discussion of Vignette #1
-VIGNETTE #2	Discussion of Vignette #2

## Jocelyn A. Hollander

### Education

- 1997 Ph.D., Sociology, University of Washington  
*Areas of Examination:* Sociology of Gender, Social Psychology
- 1991 M.A., Sociology, University of Washington  
*Thesis:* Does Protest Work? The Anti-Abortion Movement and the U.S. Abortion Rate After *Roe v. Wade*.
- 1987 B.A. with distinction, Linguistics, Stanford University

### Book

- Howard, Judith A., & Jocelyn A. Hollander. 1997. *Gendered Situations, Gendered Selves: A Gender Lens on Social Psychology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

### Articles

- Hollander, Jocelyn A. Forthcoming. "Doing Studs: The Performance of Gender and Sexuality on Late-Night Television." In *Dominance and Resistance: Performing Everyday Hierarchies*, edited by Jodi O'Brien and Judith A. Howard. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
- Burstein, Paul, Rachel L. Einwohner, & Jocelyn A. Hollander. 1995. "The Success of Political Movements: A Bargaining Perspective." Pp. 275–295 in *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Studies of States and Social Movements*, ed. J. Craig Jenkins & Bert Klandermans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Howard, Judith A., & Jocelyn A. Hollander. 1993. "Marking Time." *Sociological Inquiry* 64(4): 425–443.

### Presentations

- Hollander, Jocelyn A. "I Love Being Locked In': Conceptions of Safety and Vulnerability Among Women and Men." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, NY, August, 1996.
- Hollander, Jocelyn A. "Violence and Vulnerability: The Construction of Gender Difference through Talk about Danger." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C., August, 1995.
- Howard Judith A., & Jocelyn A. Hollander. "Conceptions of Gender in Social Psychology." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C., August, 1995.

Hollander, Jocelyn A. "Doing *Studs*: The Performance of Gender and Sexuality on Late-Night Television." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA, April, 1995.

Einwohner, Rachel L., Jocelyn A. Hollander, & Toska Olson. "Gender as a Resource: The Role of Social Identity in Social Movement Success." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Los Angeles, CA, August, 1994.

Olson, Toska, Jocelyn A. Hollander, & Kari Lerum. "On Display: Sex Workers, Sorority Girls, and Models." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Diego, CA, April, 1994.

Hollander, Jocelyn A. "Using Small Groups to Shrink a Large Class." Paper presented at the Fourth National Conference on the Training and Employment of Graduate Teaching Assistants, Chicago, IL, November, 1993.

Hollander, Jocelyn A. "Does Protest Work? The Anti-Abortion Movement and the U.S. Abortion Rate After *Roe v. Wade*." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Pittsburgh, PA, August, 1992.

Burstein, Paul, Rachel L. Einwohner, & Jocelyn A. Hollander. "Political Movements and Their Consequences: Lessons from the U.S. Experience." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Cincinnati, OH, August, 1991.

Howard, Judith A., & Jocelyn A. Hollander. "Marking Time." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Cincinnati, OH, August, 1991.

### Research Grants & Fellowships

- 1995-97 National Institutes of Justice: grant (to the City of Seattle, in association with Margaret Gordon, Andrew Gordon, Cy Ulberg, Paula Nurius, Rick Brandon, Jocelyn Hollander, & Linda Stephens) for research on "The Role of Evidence in Case Dispositions for Domestic Violence Cases": \$200,000 (Grant declined by the City of Seattle)
- 1995-96 American Association of University Women American Fellowship: \$14,500
- 1995 Grants-In-Aid, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues: \$1,000
- 1994-95 University of Washington Dissertation Fellowship: \$3,300

### Other Fellowships & Awards

- 1996-97 Award for Excellence in Teaching, UW Department of Sociology
- 1995-96 PEW Charitable Trusts/Preparing Future Faculty Fellowship
- 1990-94 National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship
- 1993-94 Distinguished Graduate Student Award, UW Department of Sociology
- 1993 PEW Charitable Trusts Teaching Leadership Award
- 1993 Sarah Denny Fellowship, University of Washington
- 1989 University of Washington Graduate Fellowship