

## **Safety planning and the role of research**

### **Plenary IV**

*Presentations :* Sophie Paquin [S.P.]  
Carolyn Whitzman [C.W.]

*Synthesis prepared by:* Maria Nengeh Mensah & Sophie Paquin  
*Translation:* Katherine Oginsky

#### **Question/Comment No. 1**

The construction of fences with round and well-spaced bars, rather than square bars with little space between them, improves visibility within enclosed areas.

#### **Reaction No. 1**

[S.P.] Yes, when one drives even at a moderate speed past an area enclosed by traditional rectangular bar fencing, visibility through the fence is negatively affected and one is not able to see what is happening behind that fence. Fences that use round bars instead greatly reduce the shutter effect caused by rectangular bars.

Here is a photo of a fence with round bars:



## **Question/Comment No. 2**

What is the difference between graffiti and vandalism?

### **Reaction No. 2**

[S.P.] Graffiti can also be considered an act of vandalism if it damages a wall or other urban property. Any damage to public or private property is generally considered to be vandalism. For example, destroying a fountain is considered vandalism just as is breaking a light or painting over a light with spray paint. Graffiti refers specifically to designs done with spray paint on a wall. Graffiti is often used a way to mark space and as a form of expression (of a group, of creativity, of revolt, etc.). Contrary to vandalism, graffiti does not normally hinder the use of property or a public service. Regardless, graffiti is done without consideration of the financial and social costs that it causes.

## **Question/Comment No. 3**

When asked, women often want more partially-enclosed or fully-closed areas rather than the open spaces that you have shown.

### **Reaction No. 3**

[S.P.] Women want spaces where their safety is assured. In certain places, this is done by restricting or controlling access to an area in order to keep unknown or dangerous people out. This seems to be an attractive short-term solution since it does not involve having to deeply change things (spatial organization, relations between men and women, social relations between rich and poor, etc.). However enclosing or fully closing off areas can be very harmful in the long-run as it is based on exclusion which can also work against women. What is more, such a solution does not teach women and men to share public space equally and freely but rather it reinforces stereotypes and women's vulnerability and invisibility in public space.

#### **Question/Comment No. 4**

Have surveys been conducted that give data on higher-level indicators of women's safety such as socio-economic measures, indicators such as women's previous experiences of violence, their social status, or the like?

#### **Reaction No. 4**

[S.P.]: Our survey did not include indicators of socio-economic status but rather aimed to get a broader, general snapshot. In Québec, we have little public data on violence against women that is this detailed. This is even truer when we consider urban safety studies. Much work remains to be done however it can not be done without funding and greater organizational support for research. Physical and urban planning and architecture are only some of the many ways in which women's safety can be addressed. We are not proposing a miracle solution, but rather taking gradual yet continuing steps forward.

#### **Question/Comment No. 5**

We must strengthen the social fabric of our communities.

#### **Reaction No. 5**

[S.P.] Certainly the fight against urban insecurity and social and gender inequality demand that we develop multi-faceted strategies. It is important to understand that the planning and development of cities and urban spaces are essential parts of such strategies. We must strive to decrease abuse and increase feelings of safety through a well-developed framework.

Actions seeking to increase informal social control, improve accessibility and assistance, and strengthen social fabric all remain important however our efforts must also be realistic. While strengthening social fabric is an ideal solution, it is not a panacea.

It is therefore important for us to remember that urban planning and development are part of many possible actions that can improve women's safety and freedom in cities. It is a field with much room for reflection and many legitimate opportunities for intervention. However, as with other fields of action, it must be part of a global strategy which intervenes to eliminate violence against women on many fronts. Moreover, safety planning allows us to create safer places for everyone. While women will certainly greatly benefit from safer and more welcoming public spaces, places that are made safer for women also become safer for everyone: children, youth, elderly, etc.

### **Question/Comment No. 6**

We know that 83-90 % of handicapped women are abused once in their life as well as that women in rural areas have special needs. How are these women who are doubly discriminated against and their situations integrated in your approach?

**Carolyn Whitzman [C.W.]**

### **Question/comment**

[C.W.] The table with four legs that we mentioned earlier can always be reinforced by a fifth leg - for example, involving the private sector. In this case, we are talking about an "enlightened capitalism"; we must show private enterprise how they too can profit from a safer community environment. It is not a question of being for or against, but rather of maximizing everyone's profit.