



FEAR AND SAFETY IN TRANSIT ENVIRONMENTS FROM THE WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

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Bus stop at Central and 7th St. in Los Angeles

Outcomes of Women's Fear



- Mobility effects
- Adoption of certain behavioral mechanisms and defensive strategies
- Choice of certain routes and modes of travel; avoidance of “unsafe” settings (e.g. certain bus stops) and activities (e.g. walking, cycling)
- Use of certain settings only at certain hours, and with company
- Social exclusion

Scope of the Study

Objective: Documentation of the safety concerns and needs of US women transit riders; listening to women's voices in transportation planning

Data Sources:

1. Literature review
2. Interviews with 16 women leaders of national women's interest groups

Understanding Women's Fear: Fallacies and Paradoxes

- Statistics show low rates of reported crime against women in public spaces, therefore women's fear is often described as “irrational.”
- Empirical research justifies women's fear showing that levels of violence against women are significantly higher than those reported to the police.



Women's Fear: Fallacies and Paradoxes

“Spatial mismatch” between the locations where most violent acts against women occur (private spaces) and the locations mostly feared by women (public spaces).

Equalizing all women under a uniform category and ignoring important differentiations that exist among them.

Fear and boldness may be gendered but are not essentially female or male qualities. Fear is socially constructed.



Gendered Mobility

How people move (where, how fast, how often) is demonstrably gendered and continues to reproduce gendered power hierarchies (Cresswell and Uteng 2008)

- Historically, women's mobility more hindered than men's because of:
 - Inferior access to resources, less transportation options, higher transit dependency
 - Disproportionate domestic and care-giving responsibilities affect travel patterns
 - Socio-cultural norms coding masculinity and femininity as a series of binaries: public/private; breadwinner/homemaker; mobile/static
 - Fear of possible victimization

Modifiers of fear

Socio-psychological	Socio-demographic	Environmental
Experiences and memories	Gender	Geographic setting
Prior victimization	Race/ethnicity	Physical incivilities
Familiarity with setting	Age	Social incivilities
Media stories	Poverty	Boundedness
Admonitions	Disability	Surveillance opportunities
		Lighting level
Source: Loukaitou-Sideris and Eck (2007)		

Women's Unsafe Places



Enclosed spaces with limited exit opportunities



Anonymous and deserted open spaces

Feared Transportation Settings



Empty parking
structures



Desolate bus stops



Empty train wagons

Transportation settings perceived as unsafe after dark

WOMEN	MEN
Walking in multi-story parking structures (62%)	Waiting on underground station platforms (32%)
Waiting on underground station platforms (61%)	Travel on the underground (32%)
Waiting on train platforms (60%)	Walking in multi-story parking structures (31%)
Travel on the underground (60%)	Waiting on train platforms (25%)
Walking from bus stop or station (59%)	Walking from bus stop or station (25%)
Travel on Train (51%)	Walk in surface parking lot (21%)
Walk in surface parking lot (51%)	Walking to bus stop or station (20%)
Waiting at a bus stop (49%)	Waiting at a bus stop (20%)
Walking to bus stop or station (48%)	Travel on Train (20%)
Travel on Bus (40%)	Travel on Bus (18%)

Department for Transport (2004), London, U.K.,

Women's distinct safety/security needs

As consumers of transport, women have too often been assumed to have identical needs to men's. However, it is clear that women have travel needs as significant to those of men's and in many respects distinct from them... There are significant differences between women's transport demands as opposed to men's to justify treating women separately (Hamilton and Jenkins 2000)



Interviews

9to5 National Association of Working Women

Alliance of Faith and Feminism

Church Women United

Black Women's Health Imperative

Lifetime: Low Income Families Empowerment Through Education

Gender Public Advocacy Coalition

American Nurses Association

DC Rape Crisis Center

Chicago Foundation of Women

National Research Center for Women and Families

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association

MANA National Latina Association

National Organization for Women Foundation

Older Women's League

Women in Cities International



Interviews with leaders of women's interest groups

- Interconnectedness of transit security to economic security
- Prominence and underreporting of sexual harassment

“Harassment transcends age, race, and income for both harassers and victims. It is consistently felt by women in transit or walking around the city”

“ I estimate that 60-80% of sexual assault and harassment incidents are never reported to the police.”
- Misplacement of the blame on the victim rather than the perpetrator

“What happens if a woman is harmed or hurt? If she is out in public in the evening, or at a place she shouldn't go, then she is blamed for violating the rule of social control.”

Feared Transit Settings

“It is definitely safer to be waiting at a metro station than on a street corner for the bus.”

“I don’t take the bus because it is unpredictable, uncomfortable, unsafe. ...Most women feel much safer and don’t hesitate to go out at night if they have a car and a safe place to park it. They do hesitate if they have to walk 3 blocks to the bus stop .”

“I feel afraid at dimly lit parking lots, parking garages, walkways connecting station platforms to park-and-ride facilities, and at unstaffed stations with no service and ticket booths.



“Older women and men feel unsafe on streets without sidewalks, bus shelters without lighting, benches too close to the curb, crosswalks with short signal timing, and metro escalators not well marked for ingress and egress.”



“I feel safe at the Washington DC metro, which has lots of transit safety personnel and is designed well with lots of lighting and numerous station managers at entrances, and officers who ride its trains”



Behavioral adjustments

“When you are by yourself you have to really watch where you go, try to eliminate going in certain areas, going alone at dark, and watch what you carry in your purse. I always watch who is on the bus. I am very uncomfortable if I’m the only woman.. You really have to use precautions wherever you are. You don’t want to go out at night carrying a big purse and look like a target. I try not to wear hooded clothing that someone can grab...”



“Whenever I use the bus or metro I have my fare card or bus money ready and never open my purse in public. Otherwise, you are asking for mugging.”

Distinct safety needs of women

“Women face different issues than men in regards to security in public transport. I’d be concerned about my son riding the bus as it relates to groups of young men targeting and picking on him, but I would be worried about my daughter as it relates to sexual assault. I don’t think that I would allow her to ride alone”

“Older women, who are easier to prey upon and overcome, mothers travelling with children, as well as low-income women who are less likely to have a car and more likely to use buses, are more at risk”.

Suggested actions and policies

Environmental Design

- Siting bus stops near people and activity
- Allowing for natural surveillance
- Bus shelter design that allows good visibility from surroundings



Suggested actions and policies

Environmental Design

- Regular cleaning of graffiti and litter
- Good lighting

“Transit settings do not have as much lighting as they should. Every parking lot at every line should have good lighting. Agencies should make sure that there is a well-lit area around the station with no dark corners. That’s an easy fix. There’s no excuse for not having good lighting”



Suggested actions and policies

Policing and security technologies

- Preference for police patrols and visible security officers
- Mixed feelings about CCTV cameras
- Presence of emergency buttons; phones on trains, buses, and bus stops
- Real time scheduling information at bus stops



Suggested actions and policies

Education and information



- Public education workshops/campaigns against sexual harassment
- Signage

“We need more public education and messages to achieve an enormous cultural change in how our system responds to gender-based bias... Right now such violence gets a victim-centered explanation. The very first narrative from the media and everyone is ‘what did she do wrong to cause this.’ That’s the wrong message. It should be the other way around: Why do we have a culture that breeds this level of violence and how can we disrupt it? “

Suggested actions and policies

Other policies

- 1) Escort programs for female passengers during early-morning or late-evening hours
- 2) Request-stop programs at night
- 3) Reliable information about bus schedules to minimize waits;
- 4) More bus stops in poor neighborhoods so that people do not have to walk for long distances
- 5) Taxi vouchers available to low-income women for use in emergency situations
- 6) Incorporation of women's voices in the transportation planning process
- 7) Enabling car-ownership and car-sharing for low-income women

Conclusion

The **gender gap** in mobility should concern policy makers.

- Women's reluctance to walk, bike or take public transport counteracts promotion of green travel modes
- Aging society: more elderly men and women depending on transit
- Not only a “woman's issue”

“We are talking about nothing less but public transportation justice”