

**Urban Elderly Women and Fear of Crime:
A Sociological Analysis**

by
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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
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Cheryl Christian

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
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Master of Arts**

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Abstract

As Canadians are exposed to more frightening images of crime, violence and victimization, it is not surprising that fear of crime is believed to be increasing. Stereotypical images of “vulnerable” elderly women who are “paralyzed” with fear and have become “prisoners in their own homes” have contributed to the assumption that this segment of our population is the most fearful. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of fear of crime among a group of elderly women, aged 65 and older, living alone in an urban environment. Using qualitative methodology, this research relied on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 women from Manitoba, Canada. Thematically, safety awareness emerged as a more appropriate conceptualization of the concern, worry and fear associated with personal safety and the safety of others. While these levels of safety awareness were not found to be salient problems for the participants, accommodations to safety were extensive. An exploration of the shape of fear revealed the characteristics of fear and identified the signs of alarm frequently associated with fear. Theoretically, the concept of safety awareness was situated within the social disorder perspective and Goffman’s (1971) conceptual framework of normal appearances. The limitations associated with traditional fear of crime measures are discussed and recommendations made regarding future research and the need for more appropriate measurement. The implications of this research address the environmental and social factors associated with fear. Practical suggestions are made concerning the way in which elderly women respond to fearful situations.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
 Chapter One: Introduction.....	 1
Research Objectives.....	2
Importance of Studying Fear of Crime Among Elderly Women.....	4
 Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	 11
Historical Overview.....	11
A Critical Analysis of the Existing Literature.....	13
Definition of Old Age.....	13
Heterogeneous Nature of Old Age.....	14
Conceptual Issues.....	15
Methodological Issues.....	17
Outstanding Issues.....	23
Correlates of Fear of Crime Among the Elderly.....	28
Gender.....	28
Race and Ethnicity.....	28
Living Arrangements.....	29
Health Status.....	30
Victimization.....	31
Socioeconomic Status.....	31
Community Size.....	32
Age Composition of the Neighborhood.....	34
Explanatory Models of Fear of Crime.....	34
Victimization Perspective.....	35
Social Disorder Perspective.....	35
Community Concern Perspective.....	36
Theoretical Developments.....	37
Person-Environmental Theory of Fear of Crime.....	37
Disengagement Theory.....	39
Social Learning Theory.....	40
Feminist Theory.....	41
Theoretical Insights for This Research.....	43
A Social Constructionist Approach to Aging.....	44
Social Construction of Emotions.....	46
Self-Fulfilling Prophecies.....	47
Research Focus.....	48
Research Questions.....	51

Chapter Three: Methodology	54
Sample and Recruitment	54
Research Design and Data Collection	57
Ethical Considerations.....	57
Interview Guide.....	59
Data Analysis	62
Validity and Reliability of The Data	65
Managing the Data	67
Chapter Four: Findings	69
Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants	69
Safety Awareness.....	72
Definition of Safety Awareness.....	72
Levels of Awareness	74
Shape of Fear	83
Meaning of Fear	83
Objects of Fear	84
Level of Fear	85
Duration of Fear	86
Reaction to Fearful Stimuli.....	86
Signs of Alarm	88
Justification for Not Being Afraid	92
Risk Assessment.....	92
Use of Crime Prevention	93
Faith.....	93
Fatalistic View.....	94
Problem Areas.....	94
Accommodations for Safety Concerns	98
Social Involvement.....	99
Transportation	102
Crime Prevention.....	103
Normalization and Minimization of Concerns	104
Crime Prevention	105
Types of Crime Prevention.....	106
Factors That Influence Involvement in Crime Prevention	108
Moral Element of Crime Prevention	111
Victim Blaming.....	112
Stereotypes Associated With Vulnerability and Personal Safety	113
Problems Associated With Traditional Fear of Crime Measures	115
Chapter Five: Discussion	122
Summary of Findings.....	122
Experience of Fear.....	122
Nature of Fear.....	128
Salience of Fear	131
Impact of Fear	134

Coping Strategies	136
Reactions to Standard Measures of Fear of Crime	137
Level of Participation in Crime Prevention.....	142
Vulnerability and Stereotypical Images of Fearful Older Women.....	143
Theoretical Discussion.....	147
Social Disorder Perspective.....	148
Normal Appearances	151
 Chapter Six: Conclusions.....	 156
Limitations	156
Contributions to the Literature.....	159
Future Research	161
Practical Implications.....	163
Final Conclusion	166
 Endnotes.....	 167
 References.....	 169
 Appendix A: Announcement Poster	 186
Appendix B: Study Information Sheet.....	187
Appendix C: Newspaper Advertisement	188
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	189
Appendix E: Consent Form	201
Appendix F: Confidentiality Form	203
Appendix G: Index Sheet.....	204
Appendix H: Individual Profile Sheet.....	205

List of Tables

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants	70
Table 2: Signs of Alarm	89
Table 3: Distribution of Problems.....	97

List of Figures

Figure 1: Classification of Crime Perceptions	17
Figure 2: Measures of Fear of Crime and Sources of Use	18
Figure 3: Dimensions of Safety Awareness	75

Chapter One

Introduction

Almost everyday we are confronted with media reports of elderly women who are "paralyzed" by fear and have become "prisoners in their own homes" in order to avoid criminal victimization (see for example "Canadians Being," 1993; Decloet, 1999; "Elderly Fear," 1992; Kines, 1999; Steinberg, 1999). According to researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology, fear of crime among elderly women has reached "crises" proportions (Cook & Cook, 1976; Cunningham, 1977; McPherson, 1998; Younger, 1976). While in reality elderly women experience the lowest rate of victimization in our society, the mass media, bureaucratic administrators, policy makers and the academic community have all assumed they are the most fearful segment of our population (Yin, 1982). In fact, many researchers (Harris, 1975; Lindquist & Duke, 1982; McPherson, 1998; Pogrebin & Pijoan, 1978; Sundeen & Mathieu, 1976; Yin, 1980) have argued that elderly women consider fear of crime their most serious problem, ahead of other issues such as income, health and housing.

While these assumptions have been accepted and reinforced in our society for the past three decades, there is some evidence to suggest that fear of crime among elderly women has been misunderstood and even exaggerated as a result of widespread methodological problems in this area of study. Since researchers have largely failed to explore the meaning and impact of fear of crime on the lives of elderly women, policy initiatives and programs designed to reduce this fear of crime may simply reflect "myths" or stereotypical images of fearful older women. As a result, rather than enhance their quality of life, fear reduction programs may actually reinforce the social dependency of

elderly women. While the ultimate goals of such programs should include improving the quality of life of elderly women and ensuring their autonomy within our society, these goals cannot be achieved without an accurate understanding of how elderly women experience fear of crime in their everyday lives.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of fear of crime among a group of women aged 65 years of age and older living in an urban environment. The primary objective of this study was to understand more fully the role and significance of fear of crime in the lives of elderly women. More specifically, the objectives of this investigation were to understand the meaning of fear of crime for elderly women; determine the salience of fear of crime among elderly women, relative to other problems they experience; and, discover how older women cope with fear of crime in their daily lives.

By failing to ask elderly women about their experiences of fear of crime, researchers have yet to determine the nature of this fear and the impact on their lives. While gerontologists and criminologists have largely assumed that fear of crime has a negative impact on the quality of life of older adults, only a few researchers have specifically examined the consequences of fear of crime for elderly people in our society. Fear of crime may actually be functional, or have a positive impact on elderly women, if it encourages these women to take reasonable safety precautions and avoid dangerous situations (Alston, 1986; Johnson, 1996). The problematic nature of fear of crime lies not in the fear, per se, but its potentially negative impact on the well being of older adults (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Garofalo, 1981; Yin, 1980; Yin, 1985). If older people go

about their daily affairs doing exactly what they want to do, then it can hardly be said that fear is a particular problem for these individuals (Alston, 1986). This research explored the functional or dysfunctional nature of fear of crime by asking elderly women to discuss the level of fear they experienced, the extent to which this fear imposed limitations on their freedom and how they coped with this fear in their everyday lives.

This research also addressed some of the methodological and theoretical problems in the fear of crime discourse that have prevented a comprehensive understanding of fear of crime among the elderly. For the past three decades, almost all of the research in this area has relied on quantitative methodology, with surveys being the most frequently used data source (Hanrahan, 1990). To determine the prevalence of fear of crime in our society and identify the causal factors associated with this fear, researchers have traditionally analyzed survey responses to single-item measures of fear of crime (St. John & Heald-Moore, 1996). Unfortunately, an over-reliance on this quantitative methodology has oversimplified our understanding of the fear of crime problem in our society (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992; Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 1976). As a result, research on fear of crime among the elderly has only achieved a partial understanding of this complex social issue. In order to determine whether or not traditional fear of crime measures actually capture the meanings and experiences of fear of crime among elderly women, respondents in this study were asked for their interpretations of the most frequently used measures or indicators of fear of crime. While the perceptions of elderly women have traditionally been excluded from this area of study, this project gave elderly women a voice in the research process. Using qualitative methodology, this research relied upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews with elderly women living in Winnipeg,

Manitoba. While we currently know relatively little about fear of crime among elderly women in Canada, a more comprehensive understanding of their fears has important implications for the design and content of future research and the development of both policy and program initiatives.

The Importance of Studying Fear of Crime Among Elderly Women

Despite a declining crime rate in North America, the threat of criminal victimization continues to generate widespread fear. Research indicates that the prevalence and intensity of this fear are increasing. In the United States, the percentage of men and women who reported being "truly desperate" about crime almost doubled between 1989 and 1994 (Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996). While 34% of the public were extremely fearful of crime in 1989, the percentage soared to 62% in 1994 (Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996). What is even more alarming is the fact that over three-quarters of Americans would be willing "to give up basic civil liberties" if doing so would enhance their personal safety (Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996).

While public concern about crime does not appear to be as widespread and intense in Canada, research indicates a consistently high level of fear in Canadian society. Results of the 1988 General Social Survey revealed that 25% of Canadians reported feeling unsafe (Sacco, 1995). According to a more recent report from the Canadian Center For Justice in 1993, over 27% of Canadians expressed a fear of crime (Sacco, 1995). These findings indicate that despite the time and money invested in fear reduction programs in the United States and Canada, these programs have obviously failed to alleviate the high level of fear of crime in our society.

According to researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology, it is elderly women living in urban areas who represent the most fearful social group in our society (Brillion, 1987; Clemente & Kleiman, 1976; Jeffords, 1983; Lebowitz, 1975; Miethe & Lee, 1984; Ollenburger, 1981; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Sundeen & Mathieu, 1976). While the extent of fear of crime among elderly women is relatively unknown, members of the academic community and mass media are convinced this fear is reaching "epidemic" proportions (Cook & Cook, 1976; Cunningham, 1976; Younger, 1976). In fact, many researchers insist fear of crime is the most serious problem facing elderly women (Braungart et al., 1979; Braungart et al., 1980; Brillion, 1987; Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992; Harris, 1975; McPherson, 1998; Yin, 1980).

The consequences of this widespread fear of crime can be devastating. At the societal level, extensive fear of crime among the elderly population can create a "seed-bed" of discontent and may even undermine the legitimacy of the criminal justice system with the rise of vigilante groups (Box et al., 1988; Yin, 1985). Fear of crime can fracture a sense of community and neighborhood, transforming public places into dangerous "no-go" areas (Box et al., 1988).

For the individual elderly woman, this fear can create distress, alienation, restriction and withdrawal (Brillion, 1987; Dowd et al., 1981). Reports of frightened elderly women who isolate themselves from the outside world, live a life of self-imposed confinement, and become "captives" in their own homes are commonplace in the news and fear of crime literature. While researchers have assumed elderly women are the most fearful segment of our population, and that this fear is dysfunctional in nature, the relationship between fear of crime and well being has rarely been studied. This lack of research on

the consequences of fear of crime for older adults is due, in part, to the popular assumption that the fear of crime experienced by elderly individuals is an irrational and unjustified fear.

Research in the area of criminal victimization indicates that the elderly are the least likely of all age groups to be victimized (Cook & Cook, 1976; Fattah & Sacco, 1989). The likelihood of an older person becoming the victim of rape, assault or personal larceny in a given year, for example, is less than one in 200 (Yin, 1985). Since the elderly experience the lowest rate of criminal victimization, their fear of crime is often described as an irrational phenomenon (Braungart et al., 1980; Brillion, 1987; Midwinter, 1990; Pain, 1995). Some researchers (Clarke et al., 1985; Cook & Cook, 1976; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987), have even recommended that policy decisions, police initiatives and crime prevention programs should not be directed toward the elderly. Unfortunately, policy makers and program coordinators in the United States and Canada have used this research to justify the lack of programs that address the fear of crime experienced by older adults (Sunderland, 1978). Since community crime prevention has become more widespread in the 1990s, programs specifically designed to reduce fear of crime among the elderly have become more popular. However, without an accurate understanding of how elderly women experience fear of crime in their everyday lives, these programs could simply reinforce the social dependency of elderly women. Determining the most appropriate response to this fear of crime is imperative, especially considering the dramatic increase in the number of older adults in Canada.

In recent years, a major shift in the age structure of the Canadian population has taken place. According to Statistics Canada (1998), the 65 and over age group is the fastest

growing component of the population. In 1851, 2.7% of Canadians were over the age of 65 (Fattah & Sacco, 1989). By 1995, the number of elderly people over the age of 65 had increased to over 12% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 1996a). In 1995, over three-and-a-half million Canadians were over the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 1996b). It is predicted that if present trends continue, by the year 2041, 23% of Canada's population will be over 65 years old (Novak, 1997).

The fact that this study focuses on elderly women living in Winnipeg, Manitoba is particularly important when one considers the population structure in this Province. In 1995, the Province of Manitoba had the second highest number of elderly people, per capita, over the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 1996a). In the same year, the number of elderly people over the age of 65 in Manitoba was 88,810 (Statistics Canada, 1996c). Senior citizens, aged 65 and over, represent 13.6% of the total population of Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 1996a) and the proportion of elderly Manitobans is projected to increase to 18.1% by the year 2021 (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics, 1994). The City of Winnipeg has one of the highest percentages of older people in a Canadian urban center, with over 13% of city residents being over the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 1996d).

The number of elderly women in the population has also increased dramatically. In 1995, there were 66 males in Manitoba aged 65 and over for every 100 females in the same age group (Statistics Canada, 1996d). This gap between the number of men and women in the older population continues to widen each year. Projections show that by the year 2011, the ratio of men to women over the age of 85 will decrease to only 39 men per 100 women (Novak, 1997). As a result, policies and programs targeting the older population will have a greater impact on women, simply because women live longer lives

than men. Concerns about the increasing number of elderly women in Manitoba have stimulated extensive research and generated a wealth of information on this segment of the population. Unfortunately, there has been little attention directed toward the fear of crime experienced by these women. While previous research indicates that thousands of elderly women living in an urban environment, such as Winnipeg Manitoba, may be "paralyzed" by fear, researchers and policy makers have largely ignored these fears. If demographic projections for Canada and Manitoba prove to be correct, and elderly women do in fact experience high levels of fear of crime, then researchers and policy makers have an obligation to respond to their fears.

While the number of elderly women in Canada and the United States continues to increase dramatically, the fear of crime experienced by these women has received little recent research attention. Rising crime rates and extensive media coverage made fear of crime the focus of widespread international attention in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987). Throughout the 1980s, journal articles, scholarly books, government hearings and reports, research grants and extensive media attention concerning fear of crime increased substantially (Yin, 1985). The identification of fear of crime as a distinct crime-related problem was followed closely by the emergence of an extensive body of literature on fear of crime among the elderly (Hanrahan, 1990). Since the mid 1980s, however, a majority of researchers have simply relied on the results of previous research to describe the fear of crime experienced by elderly men and women (Moriarty, 1988; Yin, 1985). Furthermore, recommendations concerning fear reduction programs are often based on previous rather than current research.

While Canadian society has undergone significant changes since the early 1980s, researchers have largely failed to obtain a current profile of fear among elderly women. Some researchers (Brillion, 1987; Dowd et al., 1981; Hirschel & Rubin, 1982) have suggested that the current age 65 and over cohort may be more fearful of crime as a result of the socio-cultural changes that have occurred throughout their lives. Sensationalized media reports and violent television programs, for example, may generate fear in this cohort, since these individuals have not been previously exposed to this much visual violence (Hirschel & Rubin, 1982). Current research has the potential to not only enhance our understanding of the fear of crime these elderly women experience, but also to generate more successful fear reduction programs.

In addition to obtaining a more accurate understanding of how elderly women experience fear of crime in modern society, research in this area should also reflect the experiences of Canadian women. Traditionally, criminologists in Canada have relied almost exclusively on research from the United States to explain fear of crime among elderly women (Brillion, 1987). While this literature on fear of crime is extensive, it is difficult to determine whether or not this research can be generalized to Canadian society (Midwinter, 1990).

Many researchers (Brillion, 1987; Doob & Roberts, 1982) argue that Canadians express consistently high levels of fear due to their increased exposure to American television. Without taking into consideration the significant differences between Canada and the United States, many researchers have failed to acknowledge the fear of crime elderly women in Canada experience as meaningful and distinct. For example, while many Canadians express concerns about crime, their level of fear is considerably lower

than that of citizens in many other countries. The results of the International Crime Survey conducted in 1992 indicated that Canada ranked ninth out of 12 countries in "fear level", as measured by perceptions of safety walking alone in one's neighborhood after dark (Hung & Bowles, 1995). In fact, only 20% of Canadians reported feeling unsafe out alone after dark, compared to 41% of Americans (Hung & Bowles, 1995). If it is assumed that the level and experiences of fear of crime are similar in Canada and the United States, researchers and policy makers may inadvertently reinforce negative stereotypes associated with old age. Without exploring the meaning and impact of fear of crime on the lives of elderly women in Canada, policy initiatives and programs designed to reduce the fear of crime in our society may be unsuccessful.

A review of the current literature, which follows in chapter two, demonstrates the need for a more detailed investigation of the fear of crime among elderly women.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

An exploration of the role and significance of fear of crime in the lives of elderly women cannot be accomplished without acknowledging previous research in this area of study. Therefore, the literature review is organized to historically review the emergence of fear of crime as a distinct research problem, discuss the conceptual and methodological limitations of previous research, and provide a descriptive overview of what researchers currently know about the fear of crime experienced by older adults. This review will conclude with a critical examination of the explanatory models and theoretical developments in this area of study in order to demonstrate the need to consider this problem within a more appropriate theoretical framework.

Historical Overview

Although crime has been systematically studied for many years, fear of crime is a relatively recent concept. It was not until the mid 1960s that the fear of crime phenomenon was "discovered" by pollsters in the United States (Baumer, 1985). At this time of social upheaval, public polls revealed that increasing crime was emerging as a major social problem in the United States, and that people were feeling less safe on the streets (Yin, 1985). Fear of crime, however, is not an issue unique to the United States or the twentieth century. Residents of large cities have always been aware of the fear engendered by the threat of crime, and sociologists have periodically noted the concern created by crime waves (Midwinter, 1990). What was significant about the emergence of fear of crime in public opinion polls was the identification of fear as an issue distinct from crime and other crime related problems (Baumer, 1985). Fear of crime did not

become the focus of research attention, however, until the late 1960s, when then President Johnson appointed an advisory group to study crime in the United States.

Unsure of how to measure this complex social problem, researchers simply borrowed survey items from the pollsters in order to determine the extent of fear of crime in America (Yin, 1985). In 1966, 10,000 adults throughout the United States were asked whether or not they felt unsafe out alone at night. Conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, this survey represented the first academic analysis of fear of crime (McMurtry, 1993). The results of several other studies conducted in the late 1960s and the report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in 1967 made fear of crime the focus of widespread, international attention. While researchers in Great Britain and Canada did not specifically address this social problem until the early 1970s, the results of the research conducted in these countries reflected the widespread fear of crime found in American studies.

According to Haghighi and Sorensen (1996), since the 1960s no subject matter in criminology has gained more attention from researchers than citizens' concern about criminal victimization and their fears of becoming victims of crime. The extensive body of literature on fear of crime ranges from efforts to examine the correlates of fear, to the development of models to explain fear of crime, to the evaluation of programs aimed at reducing this fear of crime (Hanrahan, 1990). After three decades of research, the bulk of evidence indicates that elderly women in urban areas are the most fearful. The earliest evidence that older adults are more likely to feel unsafe came from a survey conducted in the United States in 1972. Participants in this research were adult members of randomly-

selected households in eight American cities (McMurtry, 1993). The results of this study alerted gerontologists and criminologists to the pervasive fear of crime problem among the elderly, as 62% of adults over the age of 65 reported feeling unsafe, compared to only 12% of younger adults (McMurtry, 1993). In the same study, 60% of women expressed feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods at night, while only 27% of the men interviewed conveyed the same fear (McMurtry, 1993).

While a majority of researchers are convinced elderly women represent the most fearful social group in our society, we still know very little about their fears. The evasive nature of fear of crime among elderly women is largely due to the numerous conceptual and methodological problems that have plagued this area of study. In order to obtain a more accurate description of fear of crime among elderly women, a review of these conceptual and methodological limitations is essential.

A Critical Analysis of The Existing Literature

The Definition of Old Age.

The first problem encountered when researching fear of crime among elderly women is the fact that no uniform, fully agreed upon age at which one is designated as being "elderly" exists (Midwinter, 1990). Unfortunately, the various national and regional studies of fear of crime often define "old age" differently, making it extremely difficult to accurately assess the extent of this problem. While national crime surveys often classify those "65 and over" as elderly, regional surveys have used numerous age categories to represent old age, including: "50 and over" (Linguist & Duke, 1982); "55 and over" (Lee, 1983; Miethe & Lee, 1984); "60 and over" (Box et al., 1988; Braungart et al., 1980; Clarke et al., 1985; Conklin, 1975; Dowd et al., 1981); "61 and over" (Clarke & Lewis,

1982); and "62 and over" (Bazargan, 1994). This arbitrary definition of "the elderly" has not only created inconsistent research findings, but has also made it difficult to compare and generalize information about elderly individuals from one study to the next.

The Heterogeneous Nature of Old Age.

Even when there has been agreement on the chronological age marker for "the elderly," a majority of researchers fail to take into consideration the heterogeneity within the elderly population. Without undermining the severity of the fear of crime experienced by some members of the elderly population, it is important to acknowledge the fact that many elderly individuals are not overcome by fear (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Pain, 1995; Pain, 1996). Not all elderly individuals feel weak, defenseless and vulnerable to criminal victimization. For example, several researchers (Akers et al., 1987; Cook & Cook, 1976) have suggested the possibility that there may be significant differences between how the "young old" and "old old" experience fear of crime. These researchers predict that the oldest group experiences the highest amount of fear, while the youngest group within the elderly population are not as likely to feel intense fear (Akers et al., 1987; Cook & Cook, 1976). This prediction is based on the assumption that the "old old" feel more vulnerable due to a lower sense of physical strength and a heightened concern over their ability to recover from injury and financial losses that are often the result of criminal victimization (Sacco, 1995). Since the elderly population is not homogeneous in nature, programs designed to reduce fear of crime among the elderly should take into consideration the different needs of individuals within this diverse population.

Conceptual Issues.

Another problem related to the study of fear of crime is the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the phrase "fear of crime." This is due, in part, to the complexity surrounding the fear of crime phenomenon. A somewhat abstract and elusive concept, this fear cannot be summed in one specific incident, at an exact time and place. Fear of crime refers to ways of thinking, feeling and acting that are difficult to recognize and define (Fattah & Sacco, 1989). After more than three decades of research in this area of study, the meaning of "fear of crime" is so unclear that its current utility is believed to be negligible (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Warr, 1984). Few researchers have offered an operational definition of "fear of crime." Instead, the meaning attached to this phrase is often simply inferred from the discussion or measurement used in the research process (Hanrahan, 1990).

When researchers have attempted to define fear of crime, their inconsistent results have only made the conceptualization of this problem more difficult. Rather than contribute to the development of a more uniformly acceptable definition of fear of crime, these researchers have simply produced a number of conflicting definitions. In fact, the term "fear of crime" has been used to represent several very different reactions to the threat of criminal victimization including psychological, emotional, physiological, behavioral, and cognitive responses. The psychological definition of fear of crime refers to the "psychological state provoked by an immediate sense of personal risk" (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981, p. 24). Emotional perceptions of fear of crime, on the other hand, refer to an "emotional reaction characterized by a sense of danger and anxiety" (Garofalo, 1981, p. 840). While physiological definitions of fear of crime take into consideration

the physical reactions individuals have to a threatening and immediate stimulus, behavioral definitions of this fear describe activities aimed at reducing the likelihood, or risk, of criminal victimization (Yin, 1985). The cognitive reference to fear of crime describes an individual's perception that he or she is exposed and vulnerable to victimization (Baumer, 1985). A review of the literature, however, indicates that researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology have rarely used this cognitive definition of fear of crime.

Adapted from the work of DuBow et al. (1979), Figure 1 differentiates or classifies selected conceptualizations and demonstrates some of the problems associated with the various definitions of fear of crime. According to Ferraro and LaGrange (1987), only the affective/emotional reaction to the threat of crime, or cells 3 and 6, should be considered appropriate conceptualizations of fear of crime. These researchers argue that cognitive values, cells 2 and 5, are more generalized than the specific reaction of fear of crime at the affective/emotional level. Judgments or estimates of the likelihood of victimization, cells 1 and 4, are also deemed problematic. In fact, individual perceptions of the likelihood of criminal victimization to one's self or others is actually an assessment of risk, not fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987). While fear of crime is conceptually distinct from general concerns about crime and the risk of victimization (Gubrium, 1974; Mawby, 1986; Walker, 1984; Warr, 1984), these crime perceptions are frequently confounded in the literature. For the study of fear of crime among elderly women, these conceptual problems mean that previous researchers may have, unintentionally, failed to measure the fear these women experience. While several conflicting definitions of fear

Level of Reference	Type of Perception	Description of Perception
General	1. Cognitive Judgements	Risk to others; crime or safety assessment
	2. Cognitive Values	Concern about crime to others
	3. Affective Emotions	Fear about the victimization of others
Personal	4. Cognitive Judgements	Risk to self; safety to self
	5. Cognitive Values	Concerns about crime to self
	6. Affective Emotions	Fear of personal victimization

Source: Adapted from DuBow et al., (1979)

Figure 1. Classification of Crime Perceptions.

of crime have appeared in the literature, researchers have failed to investigate whether or not any of these conceptualizations actually reflect how individuals experience this fear.

Methodological Issues.

Although defining fear of crime is often an overlooked step in the research process, the operationalization of this fear is surprisingly consistent. This paradox can be explained by considering the history of the fear of crime literature. When fear of crime became a topic of interest for criminologists in the late 1960s, their analysis of this social problem relied almost exclusively on survey items that were borrowed from National Opinion Polls in the United States (Yin, 1985). Since the late 1960s, a majority of studies have simply replicated this initial research design. The result is a set of rather uniform indicators for the often undefined concept of fear of crime (Yin, 1985). For the last three decades, fear of crime has been consistently measured in one of three ways. Figure 2 summarizes these popular measures of fear of crime and identifies some of the researchers who have used these questions.

Concept	Question	Study	Source
Neighborhood Safety	1. How safe do you feel, or would you feel, being out alone in your neighborhood at night: very safe, reasonably safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?	Baumer, 1985; Conklin, 1971; Garfalo, 1977; Garfalo, 1979; Gordon et al., 1980; Hartnagel, 1979; Hindelang et al., 1978; Hung & Bowles, 1995; Kennedy & Silverman, 1983; Liska et al., 1982; Ollenburger, 1981; Riger et al., 1978; Sherman et al., 1976; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Sundeen & Mathieu, 1976; Sudeen & Mathieu, 1977; Yin, 1982; Weinrath & Gartrell, 1996.	National Opinion Research Center Poll (1967)
Fear in the Neighborhood	2. Is there any area right around here--that is within a mile--where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?	Braungart et al., 1980; Clarke & Lewis, 1982; Clemente & Kleiman, 1976; Clemente & Kleiman, 1977; Culter, 1979; Gerbner et al., 1978; Jeffords, 1983; Lebowitz, 1975; Lizotte & Bordua, 1980; Newman & Frank, 1982; Ortega & Myles, 1987; Sundeen, 1977.	American National Gallup Poll (1965)
Estimation of Risk	3. How likely is it that a person walking around here at night might get held up or attacked: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely or very unlikely?	Block, 1971; Conklin, 1971; Furstenburg, 1971; Lewis & Maxfield, 1980.	National Opinion Research Center Poll (1966)

Source: Adapted from Yin, (1985).

Figure 2. Measurements of Fear of Crime and Sources of Use.

By far, the most popular way to assess fear of crime has been to ask respondents: "How safe do you feel, or would you feel, being out alone in your neighborhood at night?" The origin of this item can be traced to a National Opinion Research Center (NORC) poll conducted in the United States in 1967 (Yin, 1985). Since 1967, literally thousands of people have been asked this question in crime perception and victimization surveys conducted in the United States, Great Britain and Canada. In fact, much of what we currently know about fear of crime in Canada is based on research that has relied on

this survey question (Fattah & Sacco, 1989). Respondents to the 1988 and 1993 Canadian General Social Surveys, for example, were asked how safe they felt or would feel walking alone in their neighborhoods after dark (Sacco, 1995). Conducted by Statistics Canada, these surveys utilize random digit dialing procedures and telephone interviews to collect information from approximately 10,000 Canadians (Sacco, 1995). Using this survey question, small-scale studies have also revealed similar or somewhat higher levels of public fear.¹

From a methodological stance, however, there are several problems associated with this measure of fear of crime. The most noticeable problem with this indicator is the fact that crime is not specifically mentioned as a source of insecurity (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987). Without specific reference to crime, this question fails to take into consideration the other factors that may be responsible for an individual's insecurity about being out alone in his or her neighborhood at night. For elderly women, these factors could include health problems or environmental concerns, such as poor lighting (Alston, 1986).

Another problem related to this measure of fear of crime is the discrepancy surrounding the term "neighborhood." Since this item is not given a specific geographical frame of reference, the meaning of "neighborhood" is left up to respondents' varying interpretations (Fisher & Nasar, 1995; Riger & Gordon, 1981). The "do you feel, or would you feel" portion of this question is also problematic, as this phrase combines actual and hypothetical situations in one double-barreled question (Riger & Gordon, 1981). In other words, this single fear of crime indicator is actually two distinct questions. For some elderly women, this question will have concrete meaning based on actual experience, but for other women, this question will be abstract and somewhat

removed from their everyday experiences. Many elderly women seldom, if ever, walk alone at night for a number of reasons other than fear including ill health, lack of interest or environmental conditions (Johnson, 1996; Midwinter, 1990). If we are truly interested in measuring fear of crime, research efforts should examine the world of everyday life, not hypothetical situations (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987). Since this question is not grounded in the everyday experiences of most elderly women, it has failed to capture the complex nature of their fears.

Fear of crime has also been measured by asking respondents: "Is there any area around here, that is within a mile, where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" The origin of this question can be traced to an American National Gallup Poll conducted in 1965 (Yin, 1985). Like the previous fear of crime indicator, this global measure does not specifically mention crime, or take into consideration the possibility that the extent and intensity of fear of crime may vary in response to different types of crime (Miethe & Lee, 1984). Since these questions do not specifically identify criminal violations, researchers have been unable to determine exactly of what elderly women are afraid. While many older women indicate they are afraid to walk alone in their neighborhoods at night, the object of their fears is vague and open to interpretation.

Another methodological weakness of this question is the fact that it only measures fear in one locale, the neighborhood street. By failing to consider how fear of crime varies by location, researchers have completely ignored elderly women who are fearful in their homes, when using public transportation, or when shopping, for example. Without a spatial or geographical frame of reference, this measure of fear is inadequate for developing explanatory models and programs designed to reduce the fear of crime in our

society. The use of this question also fails to acknowledge the possibility that fear of crime can exist in the daytime. Why should gerontologists and criminologists assume elderly women are only fearful at night?

Another major approach to the study of fear of crime involves asking respondents: "How likely is it that a person walking around here, at night, might get held up or attacked?" Appearing for the first time in academic research in the 1966 National Opinion Research Center Poll, this question allows researchers to construct an index of individual risk assessments (Yin, 1985). While this measure appears to be superior to the previous two questions, in that it specifically refers to one type of crime, this approach does not actually measure fear of crime. According to Ferraro and LaGrange (1987), this item fails to differentiate objective risk, or judgments, from the emotional conceptualization of fear of crime. As a result, this question represents an invalid measure of fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992). A respondent who indicates that it is very likely an individual will be attacked in a particular area at night may not be afraid at all, but simply aware of the risks associated with this type of behavior. Thus, an individual may avoid walking alone in his or her neighborhood at night to reduce the likelihood of victimization, even if he or she is not particularly afraid.

While the three most popular approaches to the study of fear of crime are useful for determining the amount of anxiety over crime, in general, these single-item indicators do not address the complexity of fear of crime as a social problem. Recognizing that fear of crime is a multidimensional phenomenon, several researchers have developed multiple-item indicators. For example, Warr (1984) measured fear of crime among Seattle residents using an alternative set of questions that assess fear in relation to sixteen

specific types of victimization. While the use of such multiple-item indicators appears to address the problems associated with single-item indicators, these measures often share the same methodological problems, including a failure to provide a frame of reference for the terms used and a lack of distinction between fear and risk assessment (Hanrahan, 1990). In fact, combining different types of offenses in a multiple-item measure is likely to confuse rather than clarify the fear of crime issue (Hanrahan, 1990).

In the last few decades, the three questions described above have been used, almost exclusively, to measure the fear of crime experienced by older adults. After analyzing responses to these three survey questions, researchers have consistently reported high levels of fear among elderly women. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that the extent of fear among these women may have been exaggerated. According to LaGrange and Ferraro (1989), these type of measures probably overestimate the actual amount of fear experienced within the elderly population because of the foreboding scenarios used in the questions, and because these scenarios are often irrelevant to the everyday lives of most elderly people. In fact, when older Canadians are asked questions that are more pertinent to their everyday lives, such as being home alone in the evening or assessing their general safety from crime, there is no strong evidence to indicate elderly individuals are more fearful (Sacco, 1995). In an attempt to determine the actual amount of fear elderly women experience, researchers have relied on methodologically flawed research to create a rhetoric of crises.

Dominated by positivist approaches, methodological problems in the fear of crime discourse can also be traced to the widespread use of quantitative methodology (Pain, 1996). An extensive review of the literature indicates that large-scale crime surveys are

the most frequently used data source. Unfortunately, this "mainstream" approach almost completely obscures meaning (Sankar & Gubrium, 1994). Using closed-ended questions, these surveys force subjects to assume the researcher's frame of reference in order to respond. The use of closed-ended questions can even sensitize respondents to the issue of fear of crime (Yin, 1985), causing elderly women to exaggerate the actual amount of fear they experience. While these questions provide researchers with responses that are easy to code, the complex nature of fear of crime is left unexplored. For elderly women, fear of crime is a dynamic synthesis of perceptions and feelings that cannot possibly be captured with one question on a cross-sectional survey (Pain, 1996; Sacco, 1990).

Outstanding Issues.

In addition to these conceptual and methodological problems, a lack of research on the salience of fear of crime in the lives of elderly women has also prevented a comprehensive understanding of this complex social problem. While an overwhelming majority of researchers believe fear of crime is the most serious problem facing older adults, only a handful of researchers have attempted to discover exactly how much of a problem this fear is for the elderly. In 1974, Louis Harris and associates conducted a survey for the National Council On The Aging in the United States in order to determine the importance of fear of crime for the elderly in relation to other personal problems (Pogrebin & Pijoan, 1978). Respondents were read a list of 12 concerns, and for each concern, respondents were asked to indicate if it was important in their lives. Respondents were then asked to rank all of the concerns, with "one" being the most important. In his analysis of the results, Harris (1975) made the startling discovery that elderly respondents rated fear of crime their most serious problem. In this national

survey, 23% of adults over the age of 65 considered fear of crime their most serious problem, compared to 21% who mentioned poor health, 15% who mentioned lack of money and 10% who rated lack of medical care as their most serious problem (Harris, 1975). When this study became public in 1975, fear of crime went from being merely a problem for the elderly to the number one problem facing older adults (Yin, 1985).

Without challenging or replicating the results of the Harris poll, researchers, policy makers and members of the public have simply accepted the idea that fear of crime is the most serious problem facing the elderly. Closer inspection of the Harris poll, however, indicates the presence of measurement problems. According to Yin (1982), the closed-ended question used in the Harris study probably sensitized respondents to the crime issue and amplified their true level of fear. In 1979, Yin asked 1,200 older adults living in the St. Paul, Minnesota area to identify any problems they experience in their daily lives. Unlike Harris, however, Yin allowed respondents to specify their own concerns. Respondents were simply asked to tell the researcher about their biggest problems in life and their biggest worries in life. Using this type of measure, only 1% of elderly participants mentioned fear of crime as a serious personal problem (Yin, 1985). In fact, 25% indicated poor health as their most serious problem (Yin, 1985). In an attempt to discover the salience of fear of crime in the lives of Black elderly women living in Newark, New Jersey, Hanrahan (1990) used both open and closed-ended questions. In her analysis of the responses to these measures, Hanrahan discovered that when presented with the structured item, more women reported fear of crime as their biggest problem. While 35% of women indicated fear of crime was their biggest problem in response to

the structured measure, only 5.9% of respondents who were not prompted indicated the same (Hanrahan, 1990).

Researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology have also failed to explore the different strategies elderly women use to cope with fear of crime in their everyday lives. Despite the lack of research in this area of study, an overwhelming majority of researchers assume elderly women change their behavior, in some way, to reduce their fear of crime. Some researchers (Hindlelang et al., 1978; McPherson, 1998; Sacco, 1995) have suggested that these behavioral changes are very subtle, and that elderly women do not change what they do, only how often they do it. The assumption that seniors do not make drastic changes in their lives in order to alleviate their fears, however, has not received much support in the fear of crime literature. A majority of researchers believe fear of crime forces older women to severely restrict their behavior. Researchers argue that for many elderly women, fear of crime prevents them from doing things they might otherwise do. Concerns about safety can affect decisions about where to live, what to wear and which places and people to avoid (Johnson, 1996).

The most popular fear reduction "strategy" is believed to be social isolation. To reduce their fear of crime, and avoid criminal victimization, researchers assume elderly women withdraw from social activities and become "prisoners in their own homes" (Arone, 1978; Conklin, 1976; McPherson, 1998; Sherman et al., 1976; Van Buren, 1976; Younger, 1976). While these coping strategies may actually be successful, they can detract from an individual's life-satisfaction and quality of life (McPherson, 1998). In fact, some researchers (Conklin, 1976; Lawton et al., 1976) believe fearful elderly

women become so isolated that they are unable to obtain basic needs, such as food and medical care.

While it is true that many elderly women never walk alone or participate in community activities, the reasons for this inactivity may be unrelated to fear of crime (Alston, 1986; Johnson, 1996). For example, elderly women may limit the kinds of activities in which they participate because of ill health, not enough money, lack of transportation or simply a lack of interest. Furthermore, researchers have failed to consider whether or not these elderly women are satisfied with the amount of social activities in which they participate. Should social isolation be considered problematic if individuals freely choose this type of lifestyle? Without exploring alternative reasons for inactivity, gerontologists and criminologists have simply assumed that fear of crime is the cause of social isolation for elderly women. The fact that many elderly people go out less often does not, by itself, "prove" that they stay home because of their fear of crime (Cook & Cook, 1976). Unfortunately, without asking elderly women how they cope with fear of crime, researchers often assume that these lifestyle changes are the product of this fear.

An exploration of how elderly women cope with fear of crime can also reveal their involvement in crime prevention. A popular assumption is that high levels of fear of crime can motivate elderly women to use a variety of crime prevention techniques. According to Brillion and associates (1984), however, this might not be the case. In their Canadian study of public attitudes toward crime, Brillion and associates (1984) discovered that very few people over the age of 60 use concrete methods to prevent crime and protect their property. Of the 817 individuals surveyed throughout Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, only 10% of seniors had a guard dog, compared to 20% for the rest

of the population; only 22% had a chain or safety lock on their door, compared to 56% for other age groups; and only 14% had participated in the Operation Identification Program and labeled their valuables, compared to 22% for younger age groups (Brillion et al., 1984). These findings are consistent with the conclusions drawn in the 1985 Canadian Urban Victimization Survey, which indicated that the elderly are less informed than younger people about community crime prevention programs (Brillion, 1987).

More recently, results of the 1993 Canadian General Social Survey indicated that members of the youngest and oldest age groups are the least likely to participate in precautionary behavior (Sacco, 1995). Some researchers in the United States have suggested that elderly women do not even use basic crime prevention techniques. In one survey of street care, researchers counted eight houses on one street that had their front doors left slightly open (Jones, 1987). While elderly people are encouraged to actively participate in crime prevention at the individual and community level to minimize the risk of victimization and reduce fear of crime, researchers and policy makers currently do not know if elderly women actually respond to these recommendations.

The above conceptual and methodological issues have been presented, not only as an argument for more in-depth research in the area of fear of crime, but also to indicate that what we currently know about fear of crime among elderly women should be questioned. While researchers believe they have discovered the most fearful social group within our society, a review of the numerous conceptual and methodological problems in this area of study should motivate researchers to reconsider the current profile of the fearful older woman. With these limitations in mind, it is important to consider what researchers currently know about fear of crime among elderly women. The following section will,

therefore, examine the factors that are associated with fear of crime within this population.

Correlates of Fear of Crime Among The Elderly

Gender.

One of the most consistent findings in the fear of crime literature is that women are substantially more fearful than men (Conklin, 1976; DuBow et al., 1979; Garofalo, 1981; Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1989; Lee, 1982b; McPherson, 1998; Ollenburger, 1981; Pain, 1995; Sacco, 1995; Yin, 1985; Warr, 1984; Weinrath & Gartrell, 1996). Virtually every study of fear of crime has indicated that women are far more likely to express fear of crime than men (Braugart et al., 1980; Clemente & Kleiman, 1976). This is true in spite of the fact that women are, in general, less likely to be victimized than men. In fact, survey data indicate that over four times as many women are afraid of crime than men (Johnson, 1996; Sacco, 1995). Results of the 1993 General Social Survey revealed the widespread fear of crime experienced by Canadian women. While only 10% of the men surveyed in this national poll felt unsafe walking alone in their neighborhoods after dark, 42% of Canadian women expressed feelings of insecurity (Johnson, 1996; Sacco, 1998). Without taking into consideration the obvious reluctance of men to admit fear and the numerous conceptual and methodological limitations in the fear of crime discourse, the gender distinction associated with fear of crime is assumed to be an "empirical reality" (Fattah & Sacco, 1989, p. 214).

Race and Ethnicity.

In addition to age and gender, some researchers have argued that race and ethnicity are useful predictors of fear of crime. While the relationship between race and fear of

crime among the elderly has largely been ignored by researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology, there is some evidence to suggest that Black elderly women experience the highest levels of fear of crime (Bazargan, 1994; Hartnagel, 1979; Pogrebin & Pijoan, 1978). In one study of 104 older adults in southern California, 69% of Black elderly individuals were afraid to walk alone in their neighborhoods at night, compared to 47% of the white elderly individuals interviewed (Sundeen & Mathieu, 1976). The impact of this fear of crime for Black elderly women can be devastating. More recently, in his study of the fear of crime experienced by Black elderly individuals in New Orleans, Louisiana, Bazargan (1994) discovered a substantial reduction in the subjective well being of these older adults.

A few researchers have also found high levels of fear within the Hispanic population in the United States. In fact, one study found that Hispanics are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanics to worry about being murdered (Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996). In a multi-cultural country such as Canada, it is surprising that researchers have not considered the fear of crime experienced by elderly women who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups.

Living Arrangements.

Another characteristic correlated with fear of crime is living arrangements. In their Canadian study of the factors associated with fear of crime among the elderly, Kennedy and Silverman (1984-85) discovered that unmarried elderly women who live alone experience the highest levels of fear. These researchers claim that being married or living with someone can actually mediate the fear of crime elderly women experience. Most studies indicate that for elderly women, living alone increases the amount of

anxiety over crime (Braungart et al., 1980; Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Lebowitz, 1975; Weinrath & Gartrell, 1996). The loss of a spouse often represents a threat to a woman's safety and can contribute to an elderly woman's sense of vulnerability (Kennedy & Silverman, 1984-85). This finding is particularly significant considering the fact that an increasing number of elderly women are living alone in our society. Approximately 34% of Canadian women over the age of 65 live alone (McPherson, 1998). In Manitoba, over 40% of women over the age of 65 live alone, compared to 17.8% of men the same age (Statistics Canada, 1992).

Health Status.

Another factor related to fear of crime among the elderly is health status. According to Braungart and associates (1980), perceived health status is related to fear of crime for the aged population, but not for adults under the age of 65. In their study of the correlates of fear of crime, Braungart and her associates (1980) discovered that nearly three-fourths of older women who claimed to be in poor health also indicated they were afraid of crime. Ollenburger (1981) also found a relationship between health status and fear of crime in her study of victimization and fear of crime among 1,867 Nebraska residents. In an attempt to explain these findings, researchers claim that elderly individuals with health problems feel even more vulnerable to criminal victimization and believe they are incapable of defending themselves against attack (Lee, 1983). Since only a few researchers have considered the relationship between health status and fear of crime, and because most of these studies have only found a weak relationship between the two variables, the exact nature of this relationship is unknown.

Victimization.

The relationship between victimization and fear of crime has also been analyzed by many researchers, and has produced conflicting results. Several researchers (Baumer, 1985; Box et al., 1988; Garofalo, 1981; Parker & Ray, 1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981) have argued that victimization experience contributes to higher levels of fear of crime. Since the elderly are the least likely to be victimized, however, this finding has been challenged by a number of researchers. Some studies have indicated that simply knowing about other people who have been victimized may create higher levels of fear of crime (Lawton & Yaffe, 1980; Lee, 1983). To complicate the issue further, other studies report that fear of crime is only marginally related to victimization experience (Haghighi & Sorensen, 1996). Despite the confusion surrounding this issue, an overwhelming majority of researchers believe that individuals who experience the highest levels of fear of crime in our society are also the least likely to be victimized.

Socioeconomic Status.

In order to obtain a more accurate profile of the fearful elderly woman, researchers have also considered the relationship between income and fear of crime. Research in this area of study has consistently found that elderly individuals with low incomes are more fearful of criminal victimization than other elderly individuals (Baldassare, 1985-86; Jeffords, 1983; Lebowitz, 1975; Parker & Ray, 1990; Sundeen, 1977). In their study of fear of crime among urban elderly in California, Sundeen and Mathieu (1976) discovered that senior citizens with incomes less than \$7,000 per year indicated greater fear of crime than older adults with higher incomes. Similarly, research in Texas found elderly individuals earning less than \$15,000 a year to have the highest levels of fear of crime

(Jeffords, 1983). These findings are particularly alarming when one considers the fact that many elderly individuals within our society face significant financial problems. In 1993, for example, the poverty rate in Canada for unattached women over the age of 65 was 56% (Novak, 1997).² Almost four times as many unattached older women live in poverty as unattached older men (Statistics Canada, 1995). Even elderly individuals who are not living in poverty generally receive much lower incomes than the rest of the population. In 1995, the average yearly income for those Canadians not living with a spouse over the age of 65 was \$17,711 (Statistics Canada, 1998). In the same year, the average income for elderly women over the age of 65 was only \$16,816 (Statistics Canada, 1998). Since these elderly individuals occupy a marginal economic position within our capitalistic society, their fear of crime is often ignored.

Community Size.

In the last two decades, the relationship between community size and fear of crime has received a considerable amount of research attention. The bulk of evidence indicates that residents of larger cities tend to be more fearful of victimization than residents of smaller towns and rural areas (Akers et al., 1987; Baumer, 1985; Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Jeffords, 1983; Lawton & Yaffe, 1980; Lebowitz, 1975; Lee, 1982a; Ollenburger, 1981; Sacco, 1995; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Ward et al., 1986). For example, the results of the 1993 General Social Survey indicate that urban Canadians are almost twice as likely as rural Canadians to report feeling very or somewhat unsafe walking alone in their neighborhoods after dark (Sacco, 1995). It is not surprising to find that elderly individuals in urban areas experience higher levels of fear than older adults in smaller, rural communities. The idea that larger cities have higher crime rates than smaller

communities has not only been verified repeatedly in criminological research, but is also well integrated into our culture. Cities are usually perceived as deteriorating and crime ridden, while small towns and rural communities are often believed to be virtuous and crime free (Skogan, 1990; Yin, 1985). This finding is particularly important when one considers the growing "metropolitanization" of the elderly population. Research indicates that over 58% of Canada's older people live in Census Metropolitan Areas (Statistics Canada, 1996b). It is estimated that by the year 2021, 60% of the senior citizen population will live in metropolitan areas (Fattah and Sacco, 1989). In 1995, over one-half (56.8%) of the older adults in Manitoba lived in the city of Winnipeg (Manitoba Health, 1995).

Extensive research on fear of crime and community size indicates that the highest levels of fear of crime are experienced by elderly residents of inner-city neighborhoods (Box et al., 1978; Kennedy & Silverman, 1984-85; McPherson, 1998; Midwinter, 1990). According to McPherson (1998), elderly people are often concentrated in these older neighborhoods, where they must continuously face "cues" associated with crime. Evidence suggests that neighborhood conditions, such as abandoned buildings, public drunkenness, and boisterous teen-agers, create feelings of insecurity and anxiety for elderly residents (Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Ortega & Myles, 1987; Skogan, 1990). Kennedy and Silverman (1984-85) argue that since a majority of senior citizens living in inner-city neighborhoods are long-term residents, their fear of crime is probably the result of an influx of strangers into their neighborhoods. With many elderly women living on fixed incomes, moving out of the inner-city to reduce this fear of crime is not an option.

Age Composition of the Neighborhood.

Anxiety over crime may also be related to variations in the nature of the residential environment. With respect to the elderly specifically, the data suggest that fear of crime is lower in age segregated neighborhoods (Akers et al., 1987; Clarke, 1984; Clarke & Lewis, 1982; Gubrium, 1974; Janson & Ryder, 1983; Kennedy & Silverman, 1984-85; Yin, 1980). According to Gubrium (1974), in age-segregated areas there is a greater chance of developing supportive friendships that can diffuse fear of crime among the elderly. Living in an age-heterogeneous neighborhood, on the other hand, can increase one's exposure to crime-prone groups (Alston, 1986). A review of the literature, however, indicates that the evidence surrounding age composition and fear of crime is by no means conclusive. In their analysis of elderly public housing tenants, for example, Lawton and Yaffe (1980) suggest that fearfulness is more prevalent in age-homogenous communities.

Explanatory Models of Fear of Crime

While researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology have spent a considerable amount of time examining the factors that affect fear of crime within the elderly population, very few researchers have attempted to explain this fear. In recent years, however, research on fear of crime has advanced beyond the simple search for correlates. Taking into consideration the personal and social characteristics of fearful individuals within our society, researchers have developed a number of sophisticated models to explain fear of crime (Hanrahan, 1990; Moriarty, 1988). These models can be classified into three broad categories including: the victimization perspective; the social

disorder perspective; and the community concern perspective (Hanrahan, 1990; Moriarty, 1988; Thompson, 1988).

The Victimization Perspective.

According to the victimization perspective, fear of crime is a direct or indirect result of victimization. Within this explanatory model, direct victimization refers to individuals who are vulnerable and more likely to be victimized (Moriarty, 1988). Socio-demographic variables, such as age, gender and ethnicity, represent indicators of vulnerability to violent crime (Hanrahan, 1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Thompson, 1988). Using this explanatory model, research indicates that elderly women are at risk of criminal victimization due to their physical and economic vulnerability (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). Recognizing their vulnerability to victimization, these women experience intense levels of fear (Hanrahan, 1990; Petsuksiri, 1986; Thompson, 1988).

Indirect victimization, on the other hand, suggests that individuals who simply hear about crime from other victims, family members, friends and the media are, themselves, indirect victims of crime. According to Taylor and Hale (1986), a criminal event sends out "shock waves" that spread throughout the community via local social networks. Knowledge about other people who have been victimized is believed to create high levels of fear within our society. A number of researchers (Baumer, 1985; Box et al., 1988; Clarke, 1984; Garofalo, 1981; Parker & Ray, 1990; Yin, 1985) have confirmed that both direct and indirect experience with crime can contribute to higher levels of fear.

The Social Disorder Perspective.

From the social disorder perspective, fear of crime is believed to be a consequence of the erosion of social control within the community (Hartnagel, 1979; Lewis & Salem,

1986). This breakdown in control is symbolized by various social and physical "incivilities," such as public drunkenness, excessive loitering, vandalism and abandoned buildings (Hanrahan, 1990; Skogan, 1990). The prevalence of such disorder can undermine neighborhood ties, particularly commitment and integration into the community (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). People associate these disorderly activities with a heightened risk of victimization and become more fearful (LaGrange et al., 1992; Skogan, 1990). Incivilities suggest to residents that formal and informal social control mechanisms are not effective and that traditional values and standards of behavior are no longer enforced. As a result, weakening social control feeds into opportunities for crime and heightened levels of fear.

The Community Concern Perspective.

The community concern perspective is related to but is distinct from the social disorder perspective in that it emphasizes how community dynamics influence fear of crime (Thompson, 1988). Community dynamics primarily refer to structural characteristics within the community or neighborhood (Hanrahan, 1990). Objective, structural characteristics, such as police patrol or neighborhood integration³ are believed to influence the subjective perceptions of residents in the community (Thompson, 1988). The presence of a high or increasing crime rate and the absence of strong local power structures, for example, generate feelings of insecurity for local residents. Within this explanatory model, fear of crime is the direct result of individual evaluations of community dynamics.

Theoretical Developments

While the use of explanatory models has allowed researchers to simultaneously consider a variety of individual and neighborhood variables, a comprehensive theoretical framework allows researchers to organize the available data, synthesize and explain competing views and establish an agenda for future research (Sacco, 1990; Yin, 1985). Unfortunately, few researchers have attempted to understand fear of crime in the context of existing social science theory. For those few researchers who have attempted to explain fear of crime within a theoretical framework, the explanatory power of these theories has been limited. In fact, recent theoretical advances have not only failed to explain the complex nature of fear of crime among elderly women, but they have also failed to explain how fear of crime becomes meaningful in the everyday lives of older women. With these limitations in mind, it is important to review the theoretical developments in this area of study.

The Person-Environment Theory of Fear of Crime.

In an attempt to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of fear of crime, and make sense of empirical generalizations found in the existing literature, Yin (1985) constructed the person-environment theory of fear of crime. As the name suggests, fear of crime can be explained with a consideration of both personal and environmental factors. Yin's person-environment dichotomy was modeled after the work of Kurt Lewin, who developed a social psychological theory to explain individual behavior. According to Lewin (1951), behavior is a function of both the person and the environment. Although Lewin's statement appears vague and abstract, it has provided the framework for a number of theories including Lawton and Nahemow's (1973) ecological theory of

aging.⁴ While Lewin's theory and the ecological theory of aging have traditionally been used to explain behavior, Yin argues that fear of crime can be explained within a similar theoretical framework.

The first dimension of the person-environment theory of fear of crime is personal vulnerability. According to Yin (1985), a theory of fear of crime should include the personal factors that contribute to an individual's vulnerability. Personal vulnerabilities are defined as any individual characteristics that are associated with weakness, liability to injury or general unguarded exposures (Yin, 1985). These personal vulnerabilities can include a physical disability, hearing loss or lack of physical strength. Yin (1985) suggests that the fear of crime experienced by elderly women simply reflects their personal vulnerability. Through a combination of physical weakness and the socialization process, elderly women in our society come to define themselves as vulnerable (Yin, 1985). Socialized to believe they are vulnerable to sexual violence as young women, the physical and mental impairments associated with aging only magnify existing feelings of vulnerability for elderly women (Stanko, 1990). The obvious limitation of this theoretical explanation of the fear of crime among elderly women is that it does not take into consideration the heterogeneous nature of this elderly population. For example, within this theoretical framework elderly women who are disabled should be more fearful as a result of their limited physical ability. Further investigation, however, may indicate that elderly individuals considered to be physically vulnerable are not always more fearful of crime.

The second dimension of the person-environment theory of fear of crime is environmental peril. Environmental peril is defined as any characteristics within the

environment that signify crime and danger (Yin, 1985). According to Yin (1985), individuals assess their risk of victimization within an environmental context. Certain community characteristics, such as a run-down neighborhood or suspicious-looking neighbors, are often associated with crime. When an environment contains these signs of crime, individuals within the community experience heightened levels of fear.

While personal vulnerability and environmental peril independently affect fear of crime, Yin (1985) argues that the worst case scenario would be where both the personal and environmental characteristics are present. According to Yin (1985), elderly women who live in 'slum' neighborhoods represent the most fearful social group in our society. Unfortunately, Yin's theoretical framework cannot account for elderly women who are not physically vulnerable or feel threatened by their immediate environment, but are nonetheless fearful of criminal victimization.

Disengagement Theory.

In their study of the factors associated with fear of crime among elderly residents in Edmonton, Alberta, Kennedy and Silverman (1984-85) suggest disengagement as a possible explanation for the fear of crime experienced by older adults. Developed by Cumming and Henry (1961), disengagement theory describes the aging process as a gradual and inevitable withdrawal from society. Disengagement is seen as a mutual activity, whereby the individual disengages from society at the same rate as society disengages from the individual (Rybash et al., 1985). From this theoretical perspective, withdrawal from social roles and decreased involvement in social activities is inevitable, universal and satisfying to both the individual and society (Hochschild, 1975; Novak, 1997). Ignoring the voluntary aspect of this disengagement, Kennedy and Silverman

(1984-85) argue that withdrawal from society leads to physical and social isolation. According to Kennedy and Silverman (1984-85), it is this isolation that creates high levels of fear of crime within the elderly population.

Without entering into a discussion about the numerous limitations of the disengagement theory,⁵ it is important to acknowledge the fact that this theoretical framework provides an inadequate explanation for the fear of crime experienced by elderly women. In fact, considering fear of crime within this theoretical framework is even contradictory to the basic assumptions of the disengagement theory. The disengagement theory suggests that a reduction in social activity is a welcomed withdrawal from society for elderly individuals, and is even necessary in order to maintain life satisfaction in late adulthood (Rybash et al., 1985). Kennedy and Silverman, on the other hand, argue that disengagement has a negative impact on the life satisfaction of older adults, since this disengagement is believed to be responsible for the intense fear of crime experienced by these individuals.

Social Learning Theory.

In an attempt to address the lack of theory in the fear of crime discourse, several researchers (Houts & Kassab, 1997; Moriarty, 1988), have used social learning theories to explain fear of crime. While social learning theories encompass a wide range of approaches, all of these perspectives emphasize the importance of reinforcement for learning and adopting behaviors (Houts & Kassab, 1997). Within this theoretical framework, reinforcement and punishment not only shape individual behavior, but can also influence attitudes, such as fear of crime (Moriarty, 1988). To investigate the relationship between race and ethnicity and fear of crime, Houts and Kassab (1997) used

Rotter's social learning theory. According to Rotter (1966), three factors, including locus of control, reinforcement value and social context, influence behavior and beliefs, such as fear of crime. Locus of control is defined as the degree to which an individual believes that behavioral outcomes are the result of internal or external forces (Rotter, 1966). For certain individuals, a diminishing ability to influence events undermines feelings of competence and makes potentially dangerous situations seem even more threatening (Rotter, 1966). Houts and Kassab (1997) suggest that personal control varies considerably by race and ethnicity, with African Americans experiencing the highest levels of personal vulnerability and fear of crime. Reinforcement values refer to the positive or negative rewards that follow specific behaviors (Rotter, 1966). In the case of fear of crime, prior victimization is believed to create heightened levels of fear. The third element of Rotter's social learning theory, social context is defined as personal or psychological situations (Rotter, 1966). A suitable indicator of social context when predicting fear of crime is the level of trust individuals have in their fellow neighborhood residents (Houts & Kassab, 1997). While Rotter's social learning theory has been used to explain the fear of crime experienced by racial and ethnic minorities, researchers have not yet considered the fear of crime experienced by the elderly, and elderly women in particular, within this theoretical perspective.

Feminist Theory.

Several researchers (Riger & Gordon, 1981; Stanko, 1987; Stanko, 1990; Stevenson, 1997) have attempted to explain women's fear of crime within a feminist perspective. Almost all of the research on women's fear of crime has described rape as the universal fear of all women (Edwards, 1987; MacKinnon, 1993; Skongan & Maxfield, 1981;

Stanko, 1990; Stanko, 1993; Stanko, 1994; Warr, 1985). Rape and fear of rape are reported to be a daily part of every woman's consciousness (Warr, 1985). Conventional criminologists, policy makers and members of the criminal justice system have traditionally assumed that this fear of rape is not based on actual experience and that violence against women is believed to be a only small part of some women's lives (Stanko, 1994).

Victimization surveys consistently indicate lower rates of victimization for women compared to men (Hanmer & Maynard, 1987). As a result, criminologists frequently describe women as a "low risk group" whose fear does not stem from direct experience, but is simply a reflection of their physical vulnerability (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). According to Riger and Gordon (1981), this vulnerability is based on decreased physical strength, whereby the majority of women would find it difficult to escape or fight back against an attack. From a feminist perspective, however, this explanation for women's fear of rape is incomplete.

A feminist analysis of the traditional explanation of the fear of crime experienced by women challenges this gender-neutral approach to women's fear and the corresponding failure to acknowledge this fear as experiential. From a feminist perspective, the reality of sexual violence in women's lives is a core component of being female, and is experienced through a wide variety of everyday situations. While a majority of women in our society have not been raped, all women have experienced some form of sexual harassment at some point in their lives (Johnson, 1996). Feminist writers, such as MacKinnon (1993), suggest that sexual harassment oppresses women within our society. Various forms of sexual harassment, including being followed, flashed or verbally

abused, and the threat of rape act as instruments of social control by keeping women in a state of anxiety and encouraging them to restrict their behavior in a quest for safety (Edwards, 1987; Riger & Gordon, 1981).

While a feminist approach may explain fear of crime among younger women, the fear of crime experienced by elderly women is more difficult to understand within this theoretical framework. From a feminist perspective, the threat of rape is a universal fear of all women and is believed to be a daily part of every woman's consciousness (Edwards, 1987; MacKinnon, 1982; Stanko, 1990; Warr, 1985). Personal interviews with elderly women, however, indicate that an overwhelming majority of older women fear purse snatching or mugging as opposed to sexual assault or rape (Hanrahan, 1990). To explain the fear of crime experienced by elderly women, Sacco (1990) suggests that their fears should be understood within the context of a patriarchal society. According to Sacco (1990), elderly women's feelings of vulnerability may be related to the historical reality of unequal gender roles. Sacco (1990) argues that by the time women become "elderly," they have suffered social inequality for over sixty years. In other words, elderly women's fear of crime is believed to be shaped by memories of insecurity, harassment and violence that have taken place earlier in their lives (Pain, 1995). Unfortunately, without exploring their fear of crime within the context of their everyday lives researchers have been unable to determine whether or not the threat of rape and sexual harassment actually influences the meaning of fear of crime for elderly women.

Theoretical Insights For This Research

While recent efforts to explain fear of crime among the elderly have produced a number of explanatory models, theoretically based inquiries in this area are few.

Researchers have largely failed to explain the meaning of this fear for elderly women. Since this research represents an attempt to understand how these women describe and experience fear of crime in their everyday lives, more appropriate theoretical perspectives must be considered. The following section will, therefore, review several theoretical approaches that could explain the meaning of fear of crime for elderly women including the social constructionist approach to aging, the social construction of emotions, and the self-fulfilling prophecy.

A Social Constructionist Approach to Aging.

Influenced by early symbolic interactionists like W.I. Thomas, Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and more recently Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, a social constructionist approach assumes that objects and people are socially constructed categories of meaning. According to Pain (1996) and Fry (1996), old age and the conditions associated with "elderliness" can be viewed as economic and cultural constructs, whereby the meaning of old age varies considerably over time and space. Since old age is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of the world (Achenbaum, 1996), the exact meaning of old age is still relatively unclear. In the absence of clear meanings, stereotypes or partial truths result. In fact, academic research often reproduces stereotypical images of the aging process and elderly people's lives (Pain, 1996). Although ageism in academic research can have significant implications for the fear of crime experienced by elderly women, researchers have largely failed to explore this problem.

Ageism refers to the process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old (Pain, 1996). According to Pain (1996), many of the

negative stereotypes associated with old age are entrenched within our society. Old age is often associated with bodily decline, physical vulnerability to criminal victimization and the dependency of elderly people on younger cohorts (Midwinter, 1990). Just as assumptions about women in the past have influenced a patriarchal view of female vulnerability, negative images of old age have clouded interpretations of fear of crime among older adults (Midwinter, 1990). The public image of the elderly fostered by the mass media and academic community is that of vulnerable and largely helpless seniors who are "prisoners in their own homes" as a result of their "paralyzing" fear. Images in the media overestimate criminal victimization among the elderly and sensationalize horrific attacks against older people (Chircos et al., 1997). In the academic research on fear of crime among the elderly, these stereotypical images are "watered-down" but are not dissimilar (Pain, 1995, p. 125).

Unfortunately, assumptions about the experiences of elderly people and findings of inflated levels of fear of crime have only contributed to the tendency for elderly people to be treated as a vulnerable group by the police and policy makers (Pain, 1996). While the numerous conceptual and methodological problems in the fear of crime discourse cast doubts on the prevalence and intensity of this fear, it may be that the public's reification of "old people are afraid of crime" is, in part, responsible for their high levels of fear (Midwinter, 1990, p. 50). In the social world, elderly people contribute to the creation of these stereotypes and their behavior often reflects this fearful identity (Pain, 1996). In other words, the categorization of elderly people as weak and vulnerable may be internalized by older adults, with the meaning of fear of crime reflecting these stereotypical images. Pain (1996) argues that there is support in the literature for the idea

that ageism and the social construction of old age could actually explain the meaning of fear of crime for elderly people, and the various ways in which they identify and situate themselves in relation to crime.

The Social Construction of Emotions.

In her sociological analysis of human emotionality, Hochschild (1979) argues that emotions are subject to social regulation. According to Hochschild (1979), individuals attempt to express and feel what they think others expect of them. Through "feeling rules," individuals subtly remind one another of what they should, should not and must be feeling. Feeling rules can be defined as socially shared guidelines that direct individual feelings (Hochschild, 1979). According to Hochschild (1979), we learn these feeling rules through interaction with others who influence and react to individual and collective expressions of emotion. Many feeling rules reflect patterns of social membership, with certain rules referring to particular social groups (Hochschild, 1979). For example, Hochschild argues that men in our society are not expected to experience the emotion of fear and are encouraged to alter these feelings in the process of social exchange with other individuals.

Within this theoretical perspective, the fear of crime experienced by elderly women represents an outward and inward attempt to conform to the social expectations associated with aging in our society. Confronted with stereotypical images of vulnerable and fearful elderly women, these women are frequently reminded that they should be fearful of criminal victimization. In response to these emotional expectations, elderly individuals often share and "play out" this fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1992; Midwinter, 1990). The emotional experience of fear of crime, therefore, becomes

meaningful to elderly women as they respond to the feeling rules that are believed to be appropriate for the elderly as a social group.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies.

A self-fulfilling prophecy is an assumption or prediction that, purely as a result of having been made, causes the expected or predicted event to occur and thus confirms its own accuracy (Watzlawick, 1994). In other words, the prediction "sets the stage" or produces the appropriate conditions and, in a sense, creates a reality that would not have otherwise existed. Watzlawick (1994) argues that whether or not the original assumption or prediction is true or false is irrelevant. If the assumption is simply believed to be true, or is seen as a social fact, it will create the assumed reality (Watzlawick, 1994). As philosopher Karl Popper (1974) argues, expectations often play a role in bringing about whatever has been expected.

The most famous study of self-fulfilling prophecies in the area of human communication was conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson. In their so-called Oak School Experiments, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1974) administered intelligence tests to over 650 students. When teachers expected that certain children would show greater intellectual development, those children actually showed an increase in their intelligence (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1974). This experiment not only demonstrates the pervasive influence of expectations on human behavior, but also reveals that social constructs can actually create a reality that becomes fact (Watzlawick, 1994).

Using the self-fulfilling prophecy, the meaning of fear of crime could be related to reports in the mass media that sensitize the public to this problem and actually create this fear among elderly women. In other words, reports that are intended to be a reaction to a

social problem can turn out to be the cause, which then reinforces the validity of the reports (Watzlawick, 1994). Given the fact that media reports and academic research often reinforce stereotypical images of old age and overestimate the level of fear of crime within the elderly population, the public's willingness to believe in this "evidence" may have made fear of crime a reality for older adults. Through the internalization of stereotypical images of elderly women as weak and vulnerable to criminal victimization (Midwinter, 1990), these social constructs may have become a reality in the everyday lives of elderly women in our society.

Research Focus

While the fear of crime experienced by older adults has been addressed by numerous researchers in the field of criminology, the exact nature of fear of crime among elderly women remains unknown. From an extensive review of the literature in this area of study, a number of limitations and gaps were identified. Recognizing that previous investigations of fear of crime among elderly women have often been plagued by numerous conceptual and methodological problems, this research project has addressed some of these problems.

While previous research on the fear of crime experienced by elderly individuals has relied on an arbitrary definition of old age that has created inconsistent research findings, this study relied on a concise definition. Elderly women in this research refers to women over the age of 65. The selection of this age distinction is based on the conventional, social use of the term elderly, and reflects the age grouping used by the Canadian government and Statistics Canada (Novak, 1997). The use of this age distinction,

however, is not intended to imply a lack of diversity among older persons, as previous research in this area of study has so often done.

The most significant problem related to the study of fear of crime is the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the phrase "fear of crime." A somewhat abstract and elusive concept, several definitions of fear of crime have appeared in the literature. Unfortunately, researchers have failed to investigate whether or not any of these conceptualizations actually reflect how elderly women experience this fear. The approach taken in this study, however, reflects the underlying assumption that an accurate description of a phenomenon is the necessary first step in its explanation (Ryan, 1972). By exploring the meaning of fear of crime to elderly women, this study contributes to the development of a more accurate conceptualization of this term by asking elderly women what fear of crime means to them.

In addition to a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the term "fear of crime," researchers have largely relied on inadequate measures to determine the extent of fear of crime within our society. As a result, an over-reliance on these measures has simplified the fear of crime problem and has failed to capture the meanings and experiences of fear for elderly women. In order to determine whether or not traditional fear of crime measures actually capture the meanings and experiences of fear of crime among elderly women, respondents in this study were asked for their interpretations of the most frequently used measures or indicators of fear of crime. Since the content validity of these measures are problematic, this study also encouraged elderly women to identify exactly of what they were afraid, and when and where they had experienced this fear.

Although this study is exploratory in nature and is not intended to estimate the rate of fear within the elderly population, a qualitative analysis can reveal the amount and intensity of fear of crime individual elderly women experience. While large-scale crime surveys are the most frequently used data source, the closed-ended questions used in these surveys force participants to assume the researcher's frame of reference in order to respond. Qualitative research, on the other hand, allows researchers to explore the complex nature of fear of crime. Using a qualitative approach, this study also represents an opportunity to consider the meaning of fear of crime within the broader context of older peoples' lives.

Since researchers have not specifically addressed the salience of fear of crime for elderly women living in Canada, this study explored the relative importance of fear of crime for a group of women aged 65 and over living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The fear of crime experienced by these individuals is virtually unknown. In an attempt to discover where their fear of crime is located within the larger context of life concerns, respondents were asked open-ended questions about their problems and worries. These questions were adapted from Yin's (1985) unstructured approach.

While gerontologists and criminologists have largely assumed that fear of crime has a negative impact on the quality of life of older women, the consequences of fear of crime for elderly people have rarely been examined. This research explored the nature of fear of crime among elderly women by asking a group of older women to discuss their level of fear and the experience and the extent to which this fear imposes limitations on their freedom. For some elderly women, fear of crime may actually have a positive impact if it encourages them to take reasonable safety precautions and avoid dangerous situations

(Alston, 1986; Johnson, 1996). This research is not an attempt to undermine the extent of fear of crime among elderly women, but it is a way to dispel whatever myths have been associated with their fears so that different sectors of society can respond in the most appropriate manner.

Researchers in the fields of gerontology and criminology have also failed to explore the different strategies elderly women use to cope with fear of crime in their everyday lives. Despite the lack of research in this area of study, an overwhelming majority of researchers assume elderly women change their behavior, in some way, to reduce their fear of crime. This research addressed this issue by specifically asking elderly women about the coping mechanisms they use. The respondents in this study were also asked to discuss their involvement in social activities to determine whether or not fear of crime is primarily responsible for social isolation. In addition to these questions, satisfaction with the amount of social activity in their lives was also determined.

An exploration of how elderly women cope with fear of crime was also used to assess their involvement in crime prevention. While elderly people are encouraged to actively participate in crime prevention to minimize the risk of victimization and reduce fear of crime, researchers and policy makers currently do not know if elderly women actually respond to these recommendations. To address this issue, the participants in this study were asked what, if anything, they do to protect themselves from crime.

Research Questions

An extensive review of the fear of crime literature revealed a number of conceptual and methodological problems in this area of study. In addition to these limitations, a lack of research on the meaning and salience of fear of crime in the lives of elderly women

and the strategies used to cope with this fear have also prevented a comprehensive understanding of this complex social problem. After three decades of consistent research attention, researchers know relatively little about the role and significance of fear of crime among elderly women. In fact, the meaning and impact of this fear in the daily lives of elderly women remain virtually unexplored. To address some of the conceptual and methodological issues in the fear of crime discourse and attempt to understand the meaning of fear of crime from the perspective of elderly women, the following research questions guided this study:

1. Does fear of crime exist in elderly, urban women?
2. What is the nature of fear of crime among elderly, urban women?
3. Where is fear of crime located in the context of other concerns of elderly, urban women? What is the salience of fear of crime relative to other fears, anxieties or concerns? Do elderly women define fear of crime as a significant problem in their lives?
4. What is the impact of fear of crime on the everyday lives of older, urban women?
5. How do elderly women cope with fear of crime? What type of coping strategies are utilized to reduce their fears?
6. How do respondents react to the standard, single-item fear of crime measures? What are their interpretations of these items? Do these items capture the meaning and reality of the fear of crime experienced by elderly, urban women?
7. In their own opinions, what do elderly women believe would help reduce their fears and the consequences of these fears? Do elderly women actively participate in crime prevention to reduce fear of crime?

From the literature on the social constructionist approach to aging, the social construction of emotions and self-fulfilling prophecies, alternate explanations for the meaning of fear of crime among elderly women were introduced. While these theories were not tested in this qualitative study, the assumptions associated with these theoretical approaches contributed to the development of two additional research questions that were used to guide the analysis of the data obtained in this research project.

8. Do elderly, urban women perceive themselves to be vulnerable to crime?
9. Does the fear of crime experienced by elderly women living in an urban environment reflect stereotypical images of fearful old women.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Sample and Recruitment

A self-selected sample of 20 women over the age of 65 who lived alone in Winnipeg participated in this study. Establishing contact and recruiting women for this study was more difficult and time consuming than originally anticipated. Four approaches were initially used to recruit participants for this study. In the first approach, a request for research access was submitted to and approved by the manager of community services at Age and Opportunity, a private non-profit voluntary agency that provides services to meet the needs of men and women over the age of 60. The coordinators or facilitators of three senior centres operated by Age and Opportunity were approached in person by the researcher and asked for their assistance in recruiting participants for this study. The first centre was located in downtown Winnipeg, where many of the women who attended this centre lived. The other two centres were located just north of downtown Winnipeg in areas that have become associated with higher levels of crime. Unfortunately, posters (see Appendix A), information sheets (see Appendix B) and presentations at the senior centres were initially ineffective methods of recruitment.

The coordinator of Older Victim Services at Age and Opportunity was also asked for assistance in recruiting potential respondents. The Winnipeg Police Service refers all older adults who have been the victims of crime to Older Victim Services, which provides information on the criminal justice system, short-term emotional support and practical assistance to these elderly victims. The coordinator of Older Victim Services approached a number of women who had been the victims of crime, discussed this

research with them, and provided them with an information sheet about the study.

Unfortunately, none of these women were willing to participate.

In the second approach, posters were put up in 10 apartment blocks located primarily in downtown Winnipeg. Nine of the 10 apartment blocks that had posters on display were senior citizen blocks specifically designed for men and women over the age of 55. Unfortunately, this method of recruiting participants was also unsuccessful, as none of the respondents indicated learning about this study through signs placed in these locations.

The third approach to recruiting participants for this study involved placing advertisements in two local community newspapers including *Seniors Today: The Prime Time News* and *The Manitoba Society of Seniors Journal* (see Appendix C). Both of these papers were created for readers over the age of 50 and 55 respectively, and are dedicated to promoting the needs and concerns of older adults in Manitoba (“Manitoba Society of Seniors Mission,” 2001).

The fourth approach to recruiting participants involved snowball sampling, whereby individuals in the target population were located and then asked for their assistance in recruiting study participants. Those respondents who agreed to be interviewed were asked if they knew any other women living alone in Winnipeg who would be interested in participating in this study. The researcher’s phone number was then given to potential respondents who were then screened for eligibility before receiving an information sheet.

While recruiting potential respondents, the facilitators of the three senior centres, the coordinator of victim services and individual elderly women who informed other women about the study were all reminded that the salience of fear of crime was one of the major

areas of interest in this research. As a result, they were asked not tell potential respondents that this was a study of fear of crime. Instead, they were asked to tell potential respondents that the study was about what their everyday lives were like, what was important in their lives and if they had any concerns or problems to deal with in their daily lives. All of the individuals who helped recruit participants for this study assured the researcher that they had carefully followed these instructions in order to avoid biasing the responses.

Posters, information sheets, and presentations at local senior citizen centres were initially ineffective methods of recruiting participants for this study. To address this problem, the use of compensation was employed. A facilitator of a senior centre located in the downtown area suggested that members of the centre and individual members of the community be offered an opportunity to win 100 dollars once they had completed an interview. Since the use of this form of compensation had been successful in the past, this approach was used to help recruit participants for this study, with the approval of the Ethical Review Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. When analysis of the data confirmed theoretical saturation, a draw was made for the 100 dollars. To ensure that the confidentiality of the respondents was not violated, only their identification numbers were placed in a hat with one number being drawn randomly under the supervision of the advisor of this research. The winner of the draw was then notified and paid. Without compromising the confidentiality of the respondents, this form of compensation successfully encouraged more women to participate in this study.

Of the 20 women who participated in this study, 10 were recruited through senior centres, eight were recruited through personal referrals, and two were recruited through advertisements in local newspapers. The sample size was not predetermined and was ultimately linked to conceptual consistency of the data and theoretical pattern saturation.

Research Design and Data Collection

Because the perceptions of elderly women have traditionally been excluded from research in the area of fear of crime, this project gave elderly women a voice in the research process. Using qualitative methodology, this research relied upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D). The interview guide was pre-tested with one elderly woman who was living alone. This interview was not included in the analysis, but provided valuable insight into concern about crime and resulted in changes to some of the interview questions. Twenty interviews were completed, lasting approximately two hours each. These interviews were audiotaped with prior consent from the participants. All of the interviews took place in the respondents' homes and were conducted between February 2000 and May 2000.

Ethical Considerations

This research followed the ethical guidelines of the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. Interviews were not conducted with study participants until after ethical approval was received from the Research Ethics Review Committee. Before the interviews began, the objectives of the proposed research were clearly communicated to all of the participants, each participant thoroughly reviewed an information sheet and written consent was obtained (see Appendix E). The women who participated in this study were assured that their

identities would not be revealed. However, the respondents were informed that if matters related to abuse or violence against vulnerable persons, such as children and/or older people, were disclosed that the researcher was obligated by law to report such occurrences to the proper authorities. Study participants were advised that they could refuse to answer any questions that caused discomfort and that they could terminate the interview or their involvement in this study at any time. Respondents were also assured that their participation in this study would in no way affect any benefits or services they received and that the research had been approved by the Ethical Review Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. Participants were also told that the use of a tape recorder would help strengthen the anonymous voices in the final research report by allowing for direct, detailed but unattributed quotations. Verbatim transcription of the interviews was shared between the researcher (n=4) and a paid transcriber (n=16). To ensure that the confidentiality of the respondents was not compromised, the paid transcriber was asked to sign a form agreeing to keep confidential any information that identified the participants involved in this study (see Appendix F).

An underlying assumption guiding this research is that sociological research should not simply study a phenomenon, but should actively attempt to intervene and assist the participants (Touraine, 1981). As a result, on completion of the interview, the participants were provided with an information package containing information from the Winnipeg Police Service and from Age and Opportunity, a private non-profit voluntary agency providing services to meet the needs of men and women over the age of 60. This information described some of the strategies that can be used to reduce risk of victimization and listed some of the services available to elderly victims of crime.

Participants were also given a summary of the research findings, and the opportunity to discuss the results, in more detail, with the researcher.

Interview Guide

The approach taken in this study reflects the underlying assumption that an accurate description of a phenomenon is the necessary first step in its explanations (Ryan, 1972). Consequently, the interview guide was designed to address the conceptualization of fear of crime. The interview guide consisted of seven parts. The first part of the interview included questions about personal characteristics such as age, marital status, family composition, residential history, education, work experience and income. These questions not only provided an opportunity for the respondent to feel at ease and become comfortable talking about themselves, but they also offered some context from which to understand their responses to questions concerning fear of crime.

The second part of the interview guide explored the salience of fear of crime. In an attempt to discover where their fear of crime was located within the larger context of life concerns, respondents were asked open-ended questions about their problems and worries. These questions were adapted from Yin's (1985) unstructured approach. In order to determine the salience of fear of crime relative to other fears, anxieties or concerns respondents in this study were asked: "What are your biggest problems in life? What are your biggest worries? Of all the problems and worries you've just mentioned, which are the most important to you?" In order to make the responses of these questions more comparable, respondents were also asked to rank their most pressing problems and worries. The salience of fear of crime in their everyday lives was also measured by having the respondents describe a typical day in their lives. This question not only

allowed the researcher to develop rapport with the respondents in a non-threatening manner, but it also provided an opportunity to explore the extent to which fear of crime influences the routine, daily lives of elderly women.

Part three of the interview guide represented another opportunity to consider the salience of fear of crime within the broader context of older people's lives. The women were asked to describe an average day in their lives, discuss any problems or worries they had, and talk about their social involvement with family and friends. These questions were designed to establish a greater understanding of the respondents' daily lives and determine where and how fear of crime fit into the context of their lives.

This research addressed if and how women change their behavior in order to reduce their fear of crime by asking the participants how often they avoided doing necessary activities, such as shopping or errands, because they feared for their safety. Respondents were also asked if they ever avoided participating in social activities for a variety of reasons including fear of crime. Questions about their involvement in social activities were asked in order to determine whether or not fear of crime contributes to social isolation. These questions included: "Have you taken part in any activities or organizations in the past year? Would you have liked to take part in any activities or organizations? What prevented you from taking part?" In addition to these questions, the women in this study were also asked if they were satisfied with the amount of social activity in their lives.

In order to determine whether or not traditional fear of crime measures actually capture the meanings and experiences of fear of crime among elderly women, part four of the interview guide asked respondents for their interpretations of the most frequently used

measures or indicators of fear of crime. Respondents were asked: "How safe do you feel or would you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night? Is there any area right around here, that is within a mile, where you would be afraid to walk alone at night? How likely is it that a person walking around here at night might get held up or attacked?" The respondents were then asked to expand on their responses to these questions in order to explore in depth what these traditional fear of crime questions measure. These questions included: "Do you go out in your neighborhood during the day? Do you go out in your neighborhood at night? What does your neighborhood consist of?" Since the content validity of the traditional fear of crime measures are problematic, this study also encouraged participants to identify the nature of their fear of crime by identifying exactly of what they were afraid, and when and where they had experienced this fear.

The fifth part of the interview was designed to elicit actual accounts and descriptions of fear and worry about crime. Determining whether or not elderly women in this study experience fear of crime was accomplished by asking the women questions such as: "In the past 24 hours have you been afraid of crime? How worried about crime have you been in the past 24 hours? In the past six months have you been afraid of crime? Are there any other situations in which you have been afraid? Are you ever afraid of being sexually assaulted? Looking back over your life, have there been times when you were afraid of crime?" These questions were asked to determine if fear of crime was currently or had ever been a problem for these women.

In order to determine if they perceived themselves to be vulnerable to crime, the participants were asked if they thought they were at risk of becoming the victim of crime

because of their age and if they believed they were likely to be hurt in the event of a crime. To determine whether or not the fear of crime experienced by elderly women reflects stereotypical images of fearful old women, the participants were asked about the nature and extent of their fears and if they did in fact experience fear of crime.

In part six of the interview schedule, respondents were asked about personal victimization and their knowledge of the victimization of significant others. The women were questioned about any victimization they had experienced and whether or not these incidents had an impact on their lives. The influence of the media on the meaning of fear of crime was also explored by asking respondents: "Do you recall reading about particular crimes in the newspaper or hearing about them on the news? Did this affect you in any way?"

An exploration of how older women cope with fear of crime was also used to assess their involvement in crime prevention. To conclude the interview, section seven asked respondents an open-ended question about whether or not they did anything to protect themselves from crime either at home or on the street. Following their responses to this question, the respondents were read a list of crime prevention techniques and asked to indicate whether or not they used that type of safety precaution.

Data Analysis

A content analysis of all 20 transcribed interviews, averaging 74 pages in length, was conducted in order to obtain a more accurate understanding of the role and significance of fear of crime for the women in this study. Analysis of the interviews was largely guided by the techniques offered by James Spradley in his book, *Participant Observation* (1980). Gathering and analyzing the data was a simultaneous process. As themes surfaced

throughout the interviews, questions in succeeding interviews were refocused in an ongoing attempt to probe for detailed information about the meaning and salience of fear of crime for elderly women.

While conducting interviews and analyzing the data, memos, notes and diagrams were used to direct the research and obtain visual representation of concepts and themes. The next step involved moving beyond these descriptive codes and categories in order to develop abstract and theoretical ways of thinking (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Memos and diagrams were written as graphic representations of abstract thoughts about the data (Glaser, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The memos and diagrams took several forms, such as code notes, theoretical notes, logic diagrams and flow charts. These procedures all contributed to a more complete understanding of the topic under investigation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The memos and diagrams created through the conduct of this study were organized in an orderly, progressive, systematic and easily retrievable manner that assisted sorting and cross-referencing.

Using specific techniques such as domain analysis (Spradley, 1980) and theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the content of the interviews was systematically condensed in order to discover the role and significance of fear of crime. The content analysis of the interviews began by conducting a “grand tour.” According to Spradley (1980), a grand tour is a type of observation used to identify major features of the research topic. In order to develop an understanding of the major characteristics of the concern about personal safety experienced by elderly women who lived alone in Winnipeg, each interview was read at least twice before the material was coded. Using

Spradley's (1980) grand tour questions was also useful in this initial phase, since they allowed this researcher to develop an open frame of mind about the concepts and categories before coding the data. These "grand tour questions" were also useful in understanding the following main dimensions of specific social situations: space, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, time, goals, and feelings (Spradley, 1980).

According to Spradley (1980), conducting a grand tour is just the beginning. In order to obtain a more detailed description of fear or concern about crime, the researcher must conduct "mini-tour" observations. The use of this technique allowed the researcher to discover the detail behind the general dimensions of concern about crime.

Concepts and categories were developed using cultural domains (Spradley, 1980). A cultural domain is like a category in that it includes smaller categories or concepts. To begin making a domain analysis, universal semantic relationships were used. Two semantic relationships that were primarily used to start a domain analysis were strict inclusion (X is a kind of Y) and means-end (X is a way to Y). To identify cultural domains, a photocopy of the interview was used and memos were written directly on the text. A color-coding technique was used whereby different colors represented different categories that were developed throughout the data analysis. While searching for patterns in the data, novel or unanticipated findings, referred to as anomalies, were also considered in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the concern about personal safety experienced by elderly women. Violations of expected patterns or anomalies contributed to a more accurate account of the topic under investigation (Kuhn, 1970).

In order to discover how specific categories were organized, focused observations and taxonomic analysis were conducted. As described by Spradley (1980), focused observations allow the researcher to select a single cultural domain or a few related domains and discover the relationship of such domains to the rest of the cultural scene. Every scene is made up of numerous cultural domains, and every domain has many smaller categories included in them. Focused observation leads to the discovery of both larger and smaller categories that make up a cultural scene. Taxonomies were used to organize a set of categories related to each other on the basis of a single semantic relationship and provided an opportunity to relate specific categories to the whole.

In the next step, a “componential analysis” was used to organize and represent all of the contrasts discovered in the data (Spradley, 1980). A “cultural inventory” was then conducted in order to consider all of the categories developed. Using Spradley’s (1980) concept of an organizing domain, a relationship between all of the domains was established. To enhance theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and organize the relationships between categories, memos and diagrams were organized into flow charts. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), flow charts allow the researcher to visualize an order of elements through time or in a process rather than as a static structure. These selective coding procedures contributed to the theoretical work on the concern about crime experienced by elderly women.

Validity and Reliability of the Data

To ensure the validity of this research, the descriptions, explanations and conclusions developed through the course of this research had to be recognized by the informants as accurate representations of “fear of crime.” Validity refers to the correctness or

credibility of an explanation, interpretation or conclusion (Maxwell, 1996). The use of the term validity, however, does not imply the existence of an objective truth to which an account can be compared (Maxwell, 1996). Validity, as a component of this research design, consisted of a strategy that was used to rule out alternative explanations. Using a process known as “member checks,” feedback concerning the data and conclusions was systematically solicited from a number of respondents in this study. Member checks were conducted by phone with five randomly selected informants the researcher judged to be capable of reflecting on the issue of safety in an abstract form and who had differing perspectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After hearing an overview of the research findings, these respondents were asked if they felt there were any errors in the overview, if they had different interpretations of the material, how accurate they believed the findings were, if any important elements were missing, and if any unimportant elements had been included in the final analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Maxwell (1996), these member checks are one of the most effective ways to rule out the possibility of misrepresentation. Although the use of member checks does not guarantee validity, it is an essential process of eliminating validity threats and increasing the credibility of conclusions (Maxwell, 1996).

The reliability of the interview data was assessed by considering the internal consistency of the information provided by individual respondents. Reliability refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument contains variable errors, that is, varied responses from one observation to the next in the same measuring instrument (Singleton et al., 1993). According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), an assessment of the internal consistency of a report can be conducted by considering whether or not a report is

consistent within itself and to what extent the people involved unaccountably contradict themselves within the report. The interview guide for this study provided respondents with 29 opportunities to indicate and discuss fear of crime in their lives. Comparing individual responses to these questions provided an opportunity to search for inconsistencies in their accounts of fear and concern about crime. If a respondent gave inconsistent answers during the interview, the interviewer pointed out the apparent discrepancy and sought to resolve it.

The external consistency of the final conclusions was also considered. External consistency refers to the amount of agreement among independent reports (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The results of this study were compared to the few similar reports available.

Managing the Data

During the interview process, careful consideration was given to data storage. The identity of each study participant was listed on a separate index sheet that provided the researcher with a summary of each individual. Information included an identification number, date of interview, contact name, address and telephone number and any comments about the interview or follow-up calls (see Appendix G) (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). For ethical reasons, these files were kept separate from all of the interviews. This preserved the separation of the participants from the data gathered (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). When the research was completed, these identity files were destroyed. Only identifying codes on an individual profile sheet were used to remind the researcher where the data originated (see Appendix H).

All tapes, transcribed interviews and other data were kept in a locked facility at all times. Any identifying characteristics were removed from the report and a master list of names and codes was destroyed when the research was completed. With the exception of those participants who requested their own tape, the audiotaped interviews were also destroyed upon the completion of the research.

The following chapter will present the results of the analysis of the data from the 20 interviews.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to address conceptual and methodological issues in the fear of crime discourse and to understand fear of crime from the perspective of elderly women. This chapter is organized to present a summary of the socio-demographic characteristics of the 20 participants and describe the categories and themes that were identified in the data. From the systematic data analysis procedures described in chapter three, a number of categories and themes emerged. The first two themes presented in this chapter, safety awareness and the shape of fear, reveal the meaning and experience of fear for the women. Problem areas, accommodations for safety, the normalization and minimization of concerns and crime prevention are other themes that will be discussed and are indicative of the salience of fear and concern about safety in the lives of elderly women. After an examination of the themes victim blaming and the stereotypes associated with fear of crime, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of the problems associated with traditional fear of crime measures.

The Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. The women who participated in this study ranged in age from 65 to 98, with the average age 76 years. While all of the women lived in the city of Winnipeg, 10 respondents lived in downtown Winnipeg and 10 respondents lived in surrounding areas. In terms of race, eighteen of the women were Caucasian, one woman was Black and one woman was Aboriginal. Although all of the women in this study lived alone, there was quite a variation in their marital status. Half of the women in this study were widowed (n=10),

Table 1

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics	Categories	Number	Percent
Age	65-70	7	35
	71-75	4	20
	76-80	4	20
	81 and over	5	25
Race	Caucasian	18	90
	Black	1	5
	Aboriginal	1	5
Marital Status	Married	1	5
	Widowed	10	50
	Never Married	2	10
	Separated	1	5
	Divorced	6	30
Education	University	1	5
	Community College	2	10
	High School	5	25
	Grade 10 or Less	10	50
	No Formal Education	2	10
Employment	Working	3	15
	Retired	17	85
Annual Income	under \$10,000	3	16
	\$10,000-\$19,999	13	68
	\$20,000-\$29,999	2	11
	\$30,000-\$39,999	1	5
Residential Location	Downtown	10	50
	Outside Downtown	10	50
Type of Residence	House	1	5
	Apartment	15	75
	Condominium	1	5
	Rooming House	2	10
	Life-Lease Apartment	1	5
Age Composition of Residence	Age-Heterogeneous	17	89
	Age-Homogeneous	2	11
Years of Residence at Current Address	Less than 1 Year	4	20
	Between 1 and 9 Years	4	20
	Between 10 and 19 Years	9	45
	20 Years or more	3	15
Type of Victimization	Violent	7	23
	Property	11	37
	Other	3	10
	Harassment	9	30
Time Frame of Victimization	Lifetime	18	86
	Within past year	3	14

six were divorced, two had never been married, one was separated and one was married with her spouse living in a care facility. The income of the respondents also varied considerably. Three women described their income as under \$10,000, 13 women reported their income as being between \$10,000 and \$19,999, two respondents collected between \$20,000 and \$29,999 and one participant earned between \$30,000 and \$39,999 a year. Describing their employment status, seventeen of the women in this study reported to be retired while three of the women were still employed. Of the 20 women who participated in this study, one had attended university, two had attended community college, five had graduated from high school, 10 had completed grade 10 or less and two of the women had no formal education.

Most of the respondents had some victimization experience to report. In fact, 18 women had experienced some form of victimization over their lifetimes. For the most part, however, experiences of victimization were not recent. Only three of the women in this study were victimized within the past year. With respect to the types of victimization these women experienced, seven respondents were the victims of violent crimes, such as robbery, sexual abuse or domestic violence. Eleven of the women were victims of property crimes such as break and enter or theft. Under the Canadian Criminal Code, offenses that do not fall within the two major categories of violent crimes and property crimes are classified as other crimes (Hung & Bowles, 1995). Vandalism accounts for the majority of offenses within the category of other crimes (Hung & Bowles, 1995). In this study, three of the respondents reported having their cars vandalized. Nine of the participants in this study also reported victimization in the form of harassment. Harassment for these nine women included obscene phone calls, being flashed, being

followed or aggressive behavior from panhandlers or youth. While these situations have not traditionally been defined as criminal, they were considered experiences of victimization for some of these women.

Safety Awareness

Definition of Safety Awareness.

In order to understand the meaning and experience of fear about personal safety and the safety of others, the theme of safety awareness was the most useful. Defined as the way in which the issue of safety captured the attention of the respondents, safety awareness referred to how sensitive the women were to possible threats to their safety. An assumption held by many members of the public, mass media and academic community is that fear of crime, as an emotional reaction to the threat of danger, represents a significant problem for elderly women. In this study, however, fear was only one of several different levels of safety awareness the women experienced. Unlike the concept of fear of crime, the women involved in this research project described safety awareness as concerns, worries and fears associated with personal safety or the safety of others. These concepts were described as different levels of "safety" awareness and not as concerns, worries and fears about "crime," as the women did not refer to vague notions of crime, such as the crime rate or the problem of crime in our society. Specific objects of concern, worry and fear were identified by the participants and were always associated with the issue of safety. Being "safe," for these women, represented a freedom from danger and ultimately injury.

Safety awareness for the women in this study was expressed as thoughts, emotions and physical behaviors, each representing different ways of focusing on the issue of

personal safety or the safety of others. While often difficult to articulate, almost all of the women were able to distinguish between fear and concern about safety. As one respondent explained:

Fear is that you're really scared. You know. Fear is that you're really scared. Like in case they would attack you or something. Fear is that you're really scared and like shaking. But concern is that you are thinking. Just thinking. I'm thinking about safety and my own life. (ID# 14, p. 63)

Another respondent captured the distinction between concern, worry and fear as different levels of safety awareness when she stated:

It's not worry. It's concern. I forget about it really till I see somebody walking by and looking at you. And like then sometimes I get a scary feeling but then I mean it takes a minute or two and then you're out of their eyesight and I've forgotten it already. I don't, I don't worry. Like I don't dwell on those things. Have to be an optimist. You can't dwell on all of that. (ID# 17, p. 95)

Unlike traditional conceptualizations of fear of crime, safety awareness did not necessarily involve an emotional reaction to an immediate threat. The women in this study indicated an awareness or concern for their personal safety in the absence of specific threatening situations. One of the women expressed this type of awareness when she said:

I've always been aware of my surroundings. Because I've always been this kind of a person or uh, since I've moved down here anyway. I've been aware of my surroundings and the possible danger that I could be in, like you know, even when I had the car. I was always aware, like you know, to be alert of your surroundings. (ID# 13, p. 24)

For many of the respondents, this type of safety awareness was almost considered intuitive, whereby the women always sensed or focused their attention on personal safety at some level. This idea was captured by one of the respondents who stated, "I don't really worry about these things [victimization], but it's, you know, in the back of my mind" (ID# 09, p. 18). Several women also described "sensing danger" (ID# 13, p. 40)

or being “alerted” by things that did not seem “normal” (ID# 14, p. 49) immediately prior to a particularly threatening situation. Remaining alert to potential threats to their safety, these women were able to go about their daily lives without making personal safety the primary focus of their attention.

Levels of Awareness.

The issue of safety captured the attention of the participants in different ways, with varying degrees of importance and severity. For the women in this study, their focus on personal safety or the safety of others occurred on three levels, which included concern, worry and fear. These different levels of safety awareness and the characteristics associated with each concept are summarized in Figure 3. Considered along a continuum, fear of victimization represented the most severe and intense level of awareness, while concern was believed to be the least severe. Statements such as, “I wouldn’t let it get to that point” (ID# 15, p. 43), or “I didn’t get to the heart pounding stage” (ID# 09, p. 30) suggested that different levels of awareness were more or less severe than others.

All of the women in this study indicated that fear was the most serious level of awareness. Based on their descriptions and experiences of fear, the concept fear of victimization emerged as an emotional and often physiological reaction the individuals had to an immediate threat or sense of danger. As an emotional experience, the women in this study described fear as an intense “feeling” that occurred in the presence of danger or the perception of an immediate threat. For some of these women, feelings of fear involved being “terrified” (ID# 03, p. 39) or “petrified” (ID# 01, p. 74). In their

	Concern	Worry	Fear
Conceptual Clarification	Cognitive	Cognitive	Emotional and Physiological
Level of Reference	General or Personal	General or Personal	General or Personal
Impact	Functional	Dysfunctional	Dysfunctional
Perception of Control	Almost total control	Some control	Little to no control
Salience	Low salience but Incorporated into Routine daily life	High salience as one of Primary thoughts in Daily life	Low salience in daily life But all encompassing in the presence of danger

Figure 3. Dimensions of Safety Awareness.

descriptions of fear however, many of the women simply identified fear as a feeling. As one woman suggested, “fear is well you feel scared for the minute” (ID# 02, p. 44).

Similarly, another woman stated, “I felt like, you know, that I was in danger” (ID# 13, p. 23).

For a majority of the women, this emotional experience or intense “feeling” was often associated with physiological behaviors such as shaking, trembling, rapid heart rate or a shortness of breath. Describing a fearful situation, one respondent explained, “Oh, you get a funny feeling in your chest when you’re scared like that. In my gut. Short breath[s]. It’s not nice. Panic, that’s what it is” (ID# 09, p. 49). Fear was described in a similar manner when one of the women stated, “O.k. I think if you are afraid and you have fear now your physical body is reacting to it, you know, your breathing changes and even though, uh, perhaps, you shake or whatever like that” (ID# 13, p. 25).

In an extreme case, one of the women even attributed hospitalization to the physiological reactions she experienced in fearful situations. She explained:

I've um, I've had, couple of years ago in the month of February, I had four anxiety attacks. That I had to go to the Misericordia Hospital. That was because of tenants. And that was because of violence. They were violent towards each other in the house and things like that. And I wasn't always sure what was going to happen to me. I was afraid then. Shaking, heart pounding. Yes. I was rushed to the hospital several times because I had, they thought I had a heart attack. Yea. I was, it was fear. (ID# 17, p. 74)

In addition to providing specific definitions of the different levels of safety awareness, the women in this study also indicated to whom this awareness was directed toward, or the level of reference. Considered on a personal or general level, the women expressed concern, worry and fear for themselves, significant others and even strangers. The experience of fear on a personal level of reference was captured by one of the participants, who stated, "I'm afraid for myself, afraid I was going to get attacked by some guy or something" (ID# 01, p. 74). While fear was almost always referred to in the context of their own personal safety, three of the women did report experiencing fear for the safety of other people. As with fear for personal safety, the fear for other individuals was also described as situational and was only experienced in the presence of an immediate threat. Having witnessed another elderly woman being attacked and robbed, one woman described her experience of fear for her neighbor in the following account:

When I saw [her neighbor] being dragged out of the alcove. Like you don't breathe right, you know. You know, you're just so, you can't believe what you're seeing. I can understand like you often see an animal on the road and headlights are coming straight for them and their froze, that's what it is, you freeze. We were scared to go out and look and see what they did to her, you know, whether they threw her under a car or were standing on her. (ID# 09, p. 38)

When another woman was asked if she was afraid when her husband tried to abuse her children, she responded:

Oh yea. I knew that he, how he spanked and if he tried, you know. And I would quickly go in there. I mean he tried many a time but he had no, he had no sense of

control. He did it too hard, you know. I mean, and because what I've been through, I just wouldn't allow that to happen. (ID# 17, p. 13)

Concern and worry were also expressed in both specific and general forms. Concern, for example, not only involved thoughts about their "own welfare, but the welfare of other people as well" (ID# 18, p. 87). Many of the women said they had worried about the safety of their children. Describing the worry she experienced for the safety of her daughter, one respondent stated, "I'm always after my daughter. She goes out jogging alone and I tell her, please go in the traffic area. I worry about her" (ID# 18, p. 34).

Another characteristic the women described, with respect to safety awareness, was the impact, or potential impact, of fear, worry and concern in their daily lives. A fearful situation, for example, was always described as a negative ordeal by the women in this study. Experienced frequently and in the absence of an immediate threat, fear was perceived to be dysfunctional. Describing the potential impact of fear if experienced in her daily life, one woman explained:

It would prevent me from uh. If I had that fear that my friend has, they would have to put me in a mental hospital. That would just drive me up a wall. I could not handle it. No. I, I would never be able to function with fear. When I see how she lives, I could never function. Never. (ID# 17, p. 115)

Many of the respondents described how experiencing fear in their daily lives "wouldn't be much of a life" (ID# 04, p. 34). As one woman explained:

I just have this motto in my life that if I have to be casing my apartment and be scared and never go out well then I'll never go out. You know, I just figure nothing is going to scare me. I'm going to have my life and go out and enjoy it the best I can. I'm not going to lock myself in my place. (ID# 16, p. 62)

Several women even described fear as "harmful" because it "wouldn't help you fight for yourself" (ID# 15, p. 22).

The negative impact of fear was also revealed in the participant's descriptions of fearful situations. Their experiences of fear often referred to a "loss of control" and the inability to react to an immediate threat. This loss of control was indicated by one woman, who stated, "If you're afraid you don't have any control. But if you're concerned, you still have control" (ID# 13, p. 26). Similarly, another respondent suggested, "You know you're afraid and you're not reacting" (ID# 17, p. 77).

Although fear of victimization was described as an intense emotional and physiological experience that left many of the women feeling powerless to react, this level of safety awareness was a very rare occurrence for the participants in this study. When asked about any fearful situations they had experienced throughout their lives, only three of the respondents could recall more than two fear provoking incidents. While fear captured the undivided attention of the women in the presence of an immediate threat, the salience of fear was obviously low in their daily lives. Considering the fact that 16 of the 20 women could describe fearful situations that had occurred throughout their lives with surprising detail, it is unlikely that these women would have forgotten to mention other fearful encounters. One 98-year-old respondent, for example, was able to recall a situation where she experienced fear at the age of eight. Similarly, a 75-year-old woman provided a detailed account of a fear-provoking incident she had experienced over 45 years earlier. She explained:

Oh I was in my late 20's. I remember once when I was doing day work. But I didn't get attacked. Like someone was running behind me, very softly, very quietly on River. I was laid off at the time, you know, doing day work in between to make a little extra money. And this man, he was a real nice young fellow and he had shorts on and uh, shirt, like the exercise outfit. And he went by me so softly and gently I never heard him. And I thought I didn't hear him. I didn't look behind me. It made my hair stand on end, you know. I was afraid. It made my heart pound because I thought how close that could have been, you know. (ID# 11, p. 13)

If fear, as expressed by this respondent, was experienced on a more regular basis it is very likely that the women in this study would have discussed these fearful experiences.

Another level of safety awareness described by the participants was worry, or a cognitive evaluation of personal safety and the safety of others. According to these women, worrying about safety involved thinking about safety in such a way that it would become a major or primary thought in their daily lives. Describing her experience of worry, one respondent said that she “worried about safety a lot” and that it was “often” on her “mind” (ID# 03, p. 24). While very few women actually experienced this level of safety awareness, a fairly concise definition of the concept did emerge from their rejection of worry and what it would involve. In fact, 18 women offered similar explanations as to why they did not worry and what this type of awareness would mean to them. As one of the respondents explained:

I mean anything can happen but you don't dwell on it. You don't worry about it or think about it all the time. You're just cautious and that's it. Because, uh, you can't dwell on it or you can't lose any sleep over it. Like, hey maybe that's going to happen to me or that. Maybe I shouldn't do this. (ID# 15, p. 49)

Another woman, when asked whether or not she had any worries, clearly attempted to differentiate between worry and concern when she said:

I would prefer concerns because I don't worry. I shouldn't be worrying and I don't think I do really worry. I'm not anxious about things or dwell on them. I just leave it to the Lord for each day and um, what was I going to say, just work them through and if I can't do it one way, you just do it another. But I don't think about it or worry all the time. (ID# 12, p. 16-17)

The description of worry offered by the 18 women who denied thinking about safety in this manner was best summarized in the following statement: “I don't worry about it, no. I don't keep it in my mind, you know, and dwell on it” (ID# 13, p. 59).

While most of the women did not worry about safety, they clearly indicated that the experience of this level of awareness would be a salient thought in their daily lives. This belief was captured by one of the respondents who argued, “I don’t dwell on that. That’s not a priority for me. That’s just not a priority in my mind” (ID# 17, p. 104).

For these women, worrying about personal safety or the safety of others was not only perceived to be a salient feature in one’s life, but was also believed to have a negative impact. Worry was almost always referred to as a negative experience that would have a dysfunctional impact in their daily lives. Many of the women argued that “worry doesn’t help you” or that it “doesn’t do any good to worry” (ID# 05, p. 15). Describing what worrying about personal safety would be like in her life, one of the respondents stated, “If you sat around and worried about that [safety] you’d make yourself sick” (ID# 20, p. 56).

A conceptualization of worry also emerged from the women’s descriptions of things that did evoke worry in their daily lives. For example, many of the women said they worried about family members. For these women, thinking about significant others was a “priority,” and was often a primary focus of their attention. As one of the women explained, “I worry about a lot of things. Worry about people’s health, my children’s health, and um, I worry about how the system works from hurting people. I think about these things a lot” (ID# 03, p. 14). Similarly, another woman admitted, “You know I worry a lot. I’m confessing now that I worry a lot but not about myself and not about that [safety]. About other people, you know. I worry about my children and my grandchildren” (ID# 02, p. 56).

While safety was rarely a primary focus in their lives, or a source of worry, all of the women did report a concern about personal safety. Concern, like worry, was considered

to be a cognitive interpretation and evaluation of personal safety and the safety of others. Unlike worry, however, concern about safety was incorporated into their daily lives. Concern for these women involved being “careful” (ID# 07, p. 45), “alert” (ID# 12, p. 74), “cautious” (ID# 11, p. 64) and “aware” (ID# 17, p. 116) of their surroundings. The respondents would often say that they were “just concerned” or “aware of the possibilities” and that they would “take every precaution necessary in order to avoid exposing” themselves to “danger” (ID# 18, p. 33). While worrying involved “dwelling” on the issue of safety, concern was a consideration given to safety that was often quickly dismissed. As one woman explained, “I don’t dwell on it [safety], but there’s an awareness there. I’m aware of what’s going on. I’m concerned sometimes but not a lot. I don’t think about it a lot” (ID# 18, p. 69). Another respondent stated, “I’m just concerned. I don’t give it a lot of thought. I’m alert and uh cautious. Watching. I don’t take chances” (ID# 11, p. 83).

The women in this study also discussed the impact of concern in their daily lives. Described as functional by the participants, this level of safety awareness allowed the women to think about maintaining a certain level of safety in their day to day lives. For example, when one of the women was asked about her experience of concern as a way of being “alert” and “aware,” she stated, “I think it’s a good thing” (ID# 09, p. 62). Unlike fear, many of the women believed that concern was associated with control. As one respondent explained, “Like you’re being aware and trying to, you know, think about it. If you’re concerned you still have control. I’m always aware of my surroundings and like I have control” (ID# 13, p. 38-39).

Concern about safety was often associated with involvement in different forms of crime prevention. When asked to describe her concern about personal safety, one woman stated:

I'm concerned. I watch myself. Like you know, if I see somebody downstairs who looks a little bit uh, that don't live here, I wait to take the elevator, you know, with another person and things like that. And if I see some, whether it's drunks on the street, you know, I come back here [home]. Things like that. You have to watch you know. You have to because sometimes you can't see by a person if he's good. I'm cautious and alert. Concerned. (ID# 07, p. 52)

For these women, being concerned was associated with being "prepared" (ID# 17, p. 29) and "staying safe" (ID# 02, p. 62).

While the participants argued that worry would involve making personal safety a primary focus of attention in their daily lives, concern about safety was not described as a salient problem. This is not to say, however, that the issue of safety was not an important feature in these women's lives. Most of the participants made numerous accommodations in their daily lives for personal safety and had all but eliminated situations that were likely to produce fear. Concerns about personal safety were simply incorporated into their daily routines and, as a result, did not require much thought. As one woman explained:

I don't really think about it much. No, no. Maybe my life has just taken a pattern. I just don't take chances and I plan my life, my day's activities. O.k. I do this and I do that. And then I plan the evening. I just avoid putting myself in those [fearful] situations. (ID# 18, p. 55)

Similarly, another respondent stated, "I'm not worried. I don't even think of that. I just don't go out" (ID# 09, p. 30). This respondent went on to say, "I'm careful. I'm aware of what can happen. I just don't go out" (ID# 09, p. 57). By restricting their activities and making extensive accommodations for safety in their daily lives, these women

believed there was “no reason to be concerned or afraid” (ID# 04, p. 53). As a result, concern was not described as a salient issue.

The Shape of Fear

The Meaning of Fear.

As the women in this study described specific fearful situations and their perceptions of what would elicit feelings of fear, a fairly concise conceptualization and explanation of the dimensions of fear emerged. For these women, the meaning of fear reflected emotional “feelings” and “physical reactions” to “threatening” stimulus (ID# 13, p. 46). Absent from their daily lives and rarely experienced, this fear reflected a situational reaction to a threat in their immediate environment. Situations that were typically associated with feelings of fear for the women in this study included domestic violence, harassment on the street and at bus stops, being followed and confrontations with panhandlers. One woman recalled how she felt afraid while being followed by two young men. She explained:

I had two shopping bags with me and my purse and I was walking towards Portage Avenue and they [two young men] were coming down the side, oh I forgot what street that is, it was close to Honeyman. And one was kind of close to Portage and the other one was maybe from here to oh about 15 feet away. And they were coming really quite, uh, they looked like they were up to no good. I thought oh, oh, I’m going to get mugged. I was scared. I thought they were gonna gang up on me. I was scared. I was shaking a bit, you know. (ID# 11, p. 15-16)

Personal accounts of fear, as described above, did not reflect vague notions of “fear of crime” but rather fears associated with personal victimization or the victimization of others. In fact, in their descriptions and explanations of fear of victimization almost all of the women identified specific characteristics associated with this fear. In addition to providing a conceptual definition of fear of victimization, the participants also discussed

the objects of their fears, the amount or level of fear and duration of fear they experienced in specific situations.

Objects of Fear.

One of the characteristics of fear of victimization revealed in this study was the objects of fear. While exploring the dimensions of fear, as experienced by these women, the most significant and widespread object of their fears involved personal injury. Of the 20 women who participated in this study, 18 identified injury as a source of fear. These women would often provide vivid descriptions of personal injury, which involved being “knocked down” (ID# 05, p. 37), “beaten” (ID# 16, p. 38), “attacked” (ID# 01, 74), “grabbed” (ID# 15, p. 39), “clobbered” (ID# 14, p. 17), “stabbed” (ID# 17, p. 92), “hit” (ID# 20, p. 18), “punched” (ID# 13, p. 24), “whacked” (ID# 03, p. 38), “thrown” (ID# 18, p. 50), and “hurt” (ID# 07, p. 12). As one of the respondents explained, “I just don’t want to be harmed in any way” (ID# 13, p. 25). When asked specifically of what she would be afraid, one woman said, “Well anything to do with pain or hurting me” (ID# 09, p. 29). One woman even provided a detailed description of what “injury” meant to her when she said:

Well, you’re not always secure. And they have different ways of knocking you down, you know. Well, at one time they’d grab you by the neck, you know. I had a cop that used to visit us at our shop and he said they [criminals] used to grab you by the neck and pull you down. Now they push you forward so your glasses break, your teeth break and what not. But when they grab you by the neck, you know, they could have a knife and pull it out and stab you. You know, things like that. (ID# 11, p. 55)

While the women in this study identified several objects of fear, the fear associated with personal injury or the injury of others was clearly perceived to be the most common and most serious source of fear. As one woman explained, “I mean, material things. I’m not that uh, you can always replace it, but if they break my arm. I mean I would be afraid

of that. I don't want to be hurt" (ID# 09, p. 59). Describing the relative importance of injury, in relation to other objects of fear, another woman commented:

Because I was scared that somebody is going to mug me, that's what would happen right. There's so much mugging going on, you know. That's what I would be afraid of, you know. The thing with us [elderly women] is we put the money uh, where ever. I would give him that, but as long as they don't hurt you, you know. That's really the only thing you're afraid of, that somebody's going to hurt you. They push you down and break your hip or leg and, you know, then you have to suffer. (ID# 06, p. 32-33)

Although personal injury was the most prevalent and serious object of fear for these women, "purse snatching" was also identified as a source of fear by many of the participants. In this study, 11 women discussed the fear associated with having their purses stolen. Many of these women would say, "I'd be scared they'd [young men] take my purse" (ID# 20, p. 34). As another respondent explained, "They might try to grab my purse if I'm out in the street. That's what I'd be afraid of" (ID# 11, p. 46). For some women, fear of purse snatching referred to the financial loss associated with this form of victimization. As one woman explained, "Well in case someone wants my money. I would be [afraid] then. It's my money and I worked for it" (ID# 14, p. 17). However, the fact that most of the women admittedly carried little to no money in their handbags meant that their fears often referred to personal injury. This point was captured by one of the respondents who explained, "I would be afraid of somebody knocking me down, taking my purse. I don't want to be knocked down" (ID# 05, p. 37).

The Level of Fear.

Another characteristic associated with fear that emerged in this study was the level of fear of victimization experienced by the participants. While this dimension of fear was considered in the explanation of safety awareness presented above, one final point is worth mentioning here. The level of fear was not only determined by calculating the

number of fearful situations the women had experienced over their lifetimes, but was also reported by the women themselves. For example, one woman stated, “Oh I don’t even feel that way, not even once a year” (ID# 17, p. 91). Similarly, another respondent argued, “That is actually the only time, you know, that I can think of [being afraid] in about 10 years” (ID# 13, p. 47). While these two women attempted to calculate their level of fear, most of the participants simply said they “hardly ever” (ID# 02, p. 50) or “rarely” (ID# 16, p. 33) experienced fear of victimization.

The Duration of Fear.

As a characteristic of fear of victimization, the women in this study also revealed the duration of fear. The duration of fear referred to the length of time the women experienced emotional and physiological reactions to fearful stimuli. In their descriptions of fearful encounters, the women always indicated that their experiences of fear were short in duration. For these women, fear was a situational and momentary experience that would often be over in “minutes” (ID# 16, p. 57). As one respondent explained, “Oh I was afraid, but it just went away. You know how you get, and it’s gone in a minute” (ID# 02, p. 65). Describing the duration of fear she experienced during one particularly threatening situation, another respondent stated, “A good 20 minutes that I was sitting there terrified” (ID# 03, p. 39).

Reactions to Fearful Stimuli

Detailed accounts of fear not only revealed the characteristics of fear for the participants in this study, but also provided insight into the specific reactions of these older women to fear provoking stimuli. Classified into three distinct categories of freeze, flight and fight, each category represented the different ways in which the

participants responded to fearful situations. In the presence of an immediate threat or the perception of danger, half of the women (n=10) were unable to react. As the most common reaction in episodes of fear, these women described feeling “frozen” with fear (ID# 09, p. 38). As one woman stated, “The fear is a crippling thing. You’re afraid and you can’t do anything about it. It’s [a] disabling, paralyzing thing. That’s what it is” (ID# 04, p. 57). Describing her reaction to a fearful situation, another participant explained, “I’d be so stunned. My mouth would be open but I wouldn’t be able to say anything” (ID# 15, p. 36). Many of the participants simply stated that they “wouldn’t know what to do” when confronted with particularly threatening situations (ID# 01, p. 30).

The reaction referred to as fight, on the other hand, described those individuals who became confrontational or responded aggressively in fearful situations. Five of the women in this study described this type of behavior. When asked how she had dealt with a fearful situation of domestic violence, one woman responded, “ Well when he started, you see, I would grab a frying pan or rolling pin. Right away I fought back. You cannot let it [the abuse] settle in you, you have to push it back, you know” (ID# 17, p. 6). Another woman, when confronted by several youth, had a similar reaction to fight back. She explained, “I was scared, yes. But I was ready to set down my bag and my purse and see if I could, I would have hit his nose. I was angry but I was scared too” (ID# 11, p. 16). This respondent went on to say that when she felt afraid, she “would often show aggression,” believing that if she was aggressive it would “make young kids and pan-handlers back off” (ID# 11, p. 18). Considering this strategy to be the most appropriate response, this respondent even went so far as to carry a metal bar in a shopping bag when

walking alone in her neighborhood at night. In the event of a fearful situation, this respondent argued, “I would club ‘em. I would if I had the chance” (ID# 11, p. 33).

The category of flight identified the women who responded to a fearful situation by distancing themselves from the fear provoking stimuli. In the presence of an immediate threat, four of the women in this study responded by leaving the situation. Confronted by a persistent and aggressive “beggar,” one of the respondents described her reaction in the following way: “I ran like hell because I thought maybe he was going to grab my purse or grab my parcel” (ID# 15, p. 42). To escape “harassment” from “drunks” and “beggars” these women would often “cross the street” (ID# 16, p. 35). As one respondent explained, “As soon as I crossed the street I was out of uh, out of danger” (ID# 18, p. 67).

Signs of Alarm

Throughout the interview process, it became evident that certain people and locations were more likely to “trigger” feelings of insecurity. At first glance, the number of factors that could be perceived as signs of alarm appears to be extensive. For the women in this study, however, specific signs of alarm were consistently associated with concern, worry and fear for personal safety or the safety of others. Classified as environmental and social factors related to perceptions of safety, Table 2 summarizes the signs of alarm identified by the participants.

By far, the most common factor associated with insecurity was the absence of other people within the individuals’ environments. In fact, all 20 of the women who participated in this study indicated that they would feel uneasy or fearful in the absence of other people. For these women, the presence of other individuals in their immediate

Table 2
Signs of Alarm

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percent
Environmental Factors	Darkness	19	95
	Parks	6	30
	Graffiti	1	5
	Litter	3	15
	Shrubbery	10	50
	Parking Lots	6	30
	Bus Stops	7	35
	Specific Streets	16	80
Social Factors	Absence of Other People	20	100
	Loitering Youth	11	55
	Panhandling	12	60
	Public Drinking	17	85
	Gangs	4	20
	Strangers	4	20
	Men	12	60
	Drug Users	8	40
	Welfare Recipients	5	25
	Racial Minorities	8	40

environments was actually reassuring. As one of the respondents explained, “What makes me feel safe? I still say the presence of other people. That I know there are other people around” (ID# 13, p. 21). Many of the participants believed that they would be more attractive “targets” to potential offenders if they were alone or isolated in public places (ID# 12, p. 23). As one of the respondents argued:

I’m not worried around that area, no. Because there are people around, you know. There’s always other people. I mean you’re not alone. Nobody’s going to attack you when there’s five, six people in the bus shelter or on the sidewalk or, you know, people walking by. (ID# 15, p. 11)

For some women, however, the absence of other people in their immediate environments meant that no one would be available to offer assistance in the event of an attack. This type of reasoning was captured by one of the respondents who stated, “Well if some

creep was to come along and hit me or something, you know, there would be nobody to come to my rescue” (ID# 18, p. 34).

In addition to the absence of other people, a number of other social factors associated with concern, worry and fear were identified by the participants. Public drinking and panhandling, for example, were perceived to be threatening for many of the women in this study. Describing why she felt particularly threatened by panhandlers, one respondent explained:

Well they'd stop there, and they'd have one too many [drinks] and they'd stop there and then they'd say, "Well hello there, do you have 50 cents for a bus" or whatever, you know. It would be scary because if you don't give him anything he might have a knife or a gun and clobber you over the head or something. (ID# 15, p. 10)

While males were more feared than females, five of the respondents indicated that women were also becoming more involved in crime. Explaining her belief that women could no longer be assumed to be safe, one respondent stated:

Well things are happening now with women. Women. Did you hear the latest where this man didn't lock his car door. And, just recently, within the week. And he was at a stoplight and a woman jumped in. I don't know whether she held a needle or a knife and she robbed him. Did she take the car or? No, she just robbed him I guess and then she got out. I'm not sure. But it's starting. It wasn't women but I hear they're starting too. (ID# 18, p. 67-68)

Similarly, another participant explained, "I don't think, it doesn't matter which one [men or women]. When they're drunk they can both be very obnoxious. No, no, I wouldn't uh, I don't think it would matter who was there" (ID# 08, p. 26).

The women in this study also identified a number of environmental or physical characteristics associated with safety awareness. The most common environmental sign of alarm revealed by the participants was "darkness." This fear-provoking condition

represented a sign of alarm for 19 of the women in this study. One respondent described her perception of darkness as a sign of alarm when she said:

And another thing I find here that I'm going to work on is the lights. They're fancy but they are terrible. It's not bright enough. They have those dim lights. Energy saving. Actually they're not saving anything because it costs more money to put people in the hospital. There's too many people getting beaten up around here. There's not enough control, um, it's too dark. Far too dark. And you know, it's not like that in other [areas] of town. But it certainly is bad downtown. It's far too dark. (ID# 03, p. 9-10)

For most of the women in this study, nighttime was perceived to be threatening since it provided "criminals" with an opportunity to "hide or lurk in the darkness" (ID# 05, p. 46). As one respondent explained, "I don't know. I think those people [criminals] are more dangerous at night. They want to hide behind the darkness" (ID# 17, p. 100).

As a sign of alarm or cue to danger, darkness largely reflected the participants concerns about visibility. The issue of visibility also emerged when the women discussed other environmental signs of alarm, such as parks, shrubbery and parking lots. As one of the respondents explained, "If I saw a bunch of high bushes on one side of the street and a bare sidewalk on the other, I would walk over [to the bare sidewalk]. I would think that was only common sense. Somebody could be behind the bushes, but they can't [hide] if it's broad daylight and wide open" (ID# 05, p. 47). Similarly, another respondent described how a park in the downtown area also represented a sign of alarm due to reduced visibility. She explained:

I know a woman and she's 80 some years old and she used to live in a room in here. And she used to march through the library park, even at night. Pitch dark and away she'd go. I would be scared of something [hiding] behind a tree or a bush or something. (ID# 09, p. 12)

A significant number of women (n=16) identified specific streets that were more likely to elicit feelings of fear. Describing an area she felt would evoke fear, one

respondent stated, “I really wouldn’t want to walk down North Main or some of those places. That’s where all the crime is committed” (ID# 19, p. 41). Similarly, another respondent claimed that several streets in the downtown area would trigger feelings of insecurity for her. She explained:

There’s been so [many] murders over there. I just wouldn’t want to be in that environment. I don’t want to live in an environment like that. Maybe, maybe I would be afraid of, I don’t know, of something happening to me. I would be totally afraid. I wouldn’t like anything happening to my tenants or to my neighbors, you know. (ID# 17, p. 85-86)

While specific environmental and social factors were more likely to elicit feelings of insecurity, the women in this study did not experience fear in their daily lives. The low salience of fear was largely due to the fact that these women relied on signs of alarm and avoided potentially fearful situations.

Justification For Not Being Afraid

All of the women in this study sought to explain the amount of fear they experienced and attempted to justify the absence of fear of victimization in their daily lives. The different types of justifications that were revealed by the participants included risk assessment, the use of crime prevention, faith and a fatalistic view.

Risk Assessment.

Many of the respondents did not experience fear in their daily lives because they did not perceive themselves to be at risk of personal victimization. For the women in this study, the term “risk” referred to the probability or likelihood of falling prey to specific criminal acts, such as purse snatching and assault. This group of women generally believed personal victimization to be a remote possibility. As one respondent explained, “I don’t think I’m at risk. I just think, ‘Who’s going to mug me?’ Who wants, obviously

‘no.’ Who the heck wants to mug me? I don’t think it would happen to me” (ID# 06, p. 47). Similarly, another respondent stated, “I just don’t think a person is at risk during the day” (ID# 04, p. 37). Justifying the lack of fear she experienced over becoming the victim of sexual assault, one respondent explained, “I’d say there would be only one chance in a million or even 10 million that they’d tackle somebody they don’t know. No, I would say not likely at all” (ID# 05, p. 43). The fact that most of the women did not perceive themselves to be at risk was largely related to their involvement in crime prevention.

The Use of Crime Prevention.

Many of the women justified the amount of fear in their lives by describing their use of crime prevention techniques. By eliminating the risk of victimization with their involvement in crime prevention, many of the respondents indicated that they had no reason to be fearful. This type of justification was captured by one of the women who stated, “I’m not afraid because I don’t go anywhere that I’m at risk, and I make sure I follow all [the] safety rules” (ID# 09, p. 47). Similarly, another respondent argued, “I’m never afraid in my apartment. Of course I never open the door” (ID# 20, p. 35). Most of the women in this study had taken so many steps to avoid personal victimization that they rarely encountered situations that would provoke fear.

Faith.

A substantial number of respondents placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of faith in their lives. Placing their problems in the “hands of God,” many of the participants believed they had no reason to be afraid (ID# 04, p. 34). As one of the participants explained, “I’m not afraid. If God is with you, you don’t feel afraid” (ID#

02, p. 25). Another woman justified her lack of fear in a similar manner when she said, “No, I’m not afraid of that [crime], but like I say, I go ahead and I leave the house and I leave it in the Lord’s hands. And I cannot say that I’m afraid” (ID# 17, p. 90).

Fatalistic View.

Recognizing that total control over their lives was impossible, many of the women in this study had a fatalistic view of personal safety. As a way to justify the lack of fear experienced in their daily lives, some of the women believed that if they were victimized it was “meant to happen” (ID# 02, p. 37). Many of the respondents argued that “if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen” (ID# 01, p. 60). This is not to suggest, however, that these women simply waited to be victimized, believing it to be the result of fate. Participants in this study did everything in their “power to prevent personal victimization” and would often entrusted their personal safety to God (ID# 16, p. 14). These respondents continued to justify why they did not experience fear by arguing that personal victimization was ultimately determined by fate. This type of justification was captured by one of the respondents, who explained:

Well I had trust in the Lord. You lock the doors and that. We did get a steel door put in and so on, you know. But if they want to get in they’ll get in. You can’t worry about something like that. If it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen. (ID# 12, p. 38)

Similarly, another respondent stated, “I don’t see a reason for worry because whatever is in the future is in the future. And everybody has something in the future” (ID# 04, p. 16).

Problem Areas

One of the primary objectives of this research was to explore where fear of crime was located within the context of older women’s daily lives and to discover the salience of this fear relative to other problems they experienced. To determine whether or not the

women in this study perceived “fear of crime” to be a significant problem in their daily lives, the participants were asked to discuss and rank their biggest worries and problems. For this group of older women, problems were perceived to be certain issues that were difficult to deal with, engaged their attention or affected their sense of well being. In some cases, problems identified by the participants were simply things the women were dissatisfied with in their lives.

While many participants claimed that they were not “the worrying type,” 17 of the women in this study did identify specific issues or problems that were significant in their daily lives. Content analysis revealed seven broad problem areas for this group of women. These problem areas included:

1. Financial Matters: This category described problems related to money.

Specifically, the participants discussed having enough money to fulfill basic needs, participate in social activities and the ability to purchase luxury items.

2. Physical Well Being: This problem area described how the women perceived their physical health, and involved illness or physical disabilities as the primary focus of their attention.

3. Emotional Well Being: Respondents who described problems related to emotional well being indicated feelings of loneliness or isolation. The emphasis here was often on companionship and the development of more personal relationships.

4. Family Issues: As a problem area, the emphasis on family issues reflected difficulties the respondent’s had maintaining relationships within their families or thinking about the well being of their relatives. For some of the women in this study,

problems in the area of family issues referred to their anxiety over separation and estrangement from certain family members.

5. **Autonomy:** Many of the women identified problems with maintaining their independence and remaining in control of their own lives. Problems in this area were also expressed as worries related to caring for themselves.

6. **Public Affairs:** Certain public issues engaged the attention of some of the participants and were perceived to be problems experienced in their daily lives. Public affairs described problems related to political issues and community problems. For example, one respondent indicated that the closure of a local swimming pool was a salient problem in her life.

7. **Personal Safety:** This type of problem referred to individuals who identified concerns, worries or fears associated with personal victimization as primary problems in their daily lives.

The distribution of these problem areas is presented in Table 3. This table indicates the percentage of cases in which each problem was ranked as the most important or significant problem and the percentage of cases in which each problem was mentioned at all by the respondents. As indicated in the distribution table, physical well being emerged as the most salient problem for the women in this study. Of the 17 women who identified specific problems in their lives, six described physical well being as their primary problem. The salience of this problem was captured by one of the respondents who stated, "My biggest worry or problem. Oh my health is the most important and that's the only thing" (ID# 14, p. 12). Many of the women identified specific acute or chronic health conditions that were particularly problematic. As one woman explained:

Table 3

Distribution of Problems

Problem	Primary Problems		All Ranks	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Financial Matters	1	6	4	24
Physical Well Being	6	35	11	65
Emotional Well Being	2	12	6	35
Family Issues	5	29	8	47
Autonomy	3	18	6	35
Public Affairs	0	0	2	12
Personal Safety	0	0	3	18

I um, I have fractures in my back and they just heal and then another one will go. But I'm taking pills too. They often make me nauseated in the morning. So it's either one or the other. You can put up with it. (ID# 19, p. 22)

Some of the women experienced numerous health problems. Describing health as a significant problem in her life, one of the women stated, "I have diabetes. I have back trouble. And I have arthritis in my leg" (ID# 20,p. 19).

Mentioned spontaneously by a total of three respondents, personal safety was not perceived to be a significant problem for almost all of the women in this study. In fact, none of the women identified personal safety as a primary concern, and only three of the participants ranked personal safety as one of the problems they experienced. While these three women did not rank personal safety as the most important problem in their lives, it was perceived to be a real problem. One respondent who described personal safety as a problem in her life explained, "I don't feel safe walking around here at all. I never walk here. Day or night. I don't feel safe here, and that's a problem. Too many people have been beaten up" (ID# 03, p. 7-8). Overall, however, personal safety issues did not emerge as significant problems.

One explanation for the low salience of concern, worry or fear about personal safety was that issues related to health were more visible on a day to day basis and were believed to have a greater impact on their quality of life. As one respondent explained, “If you’ve got your health there are no problems. As long as you can get up in the morning and you can walk, that’s the main thing, you know” (ID# 06, p. 21). Another explanation seems to be related to the idea that numerous accommodations for safety concerns were simply “taken for granted” and were not perceived to be salient by the respondents (ID# 04, p. 22).

Accommodations for Safety Concerns

Accommodations for safety concerns referred to the adaptations that were made in the individuals’ lives in order to avoid risk, eliminate the possibility of fear-provoking situations and enhance their personal safety. Accommodation behaviors involved activities the participants deliberately engaged in or avoided with the intention of enhancing their personal safety and ultimately reducing the likelihood of victimization. Concerns about safety were associated with a variety of modifications that were made in their daily lives. Some of these adjustments were simply incorporated into the women’s daily routines, while other accommodations were more drastic and occurred less frequently. Although the types of accommodations made by the participants varied somewhat, all of the women had “deliberately” structured their lives in order to “avoid situations” that were “considered to be dangerous” (ID# 05, p. 41).

In order to determine the level of “fear of crime” and the extent to which this fear shaped their daily lives, participants in this study were asked to describe an average day in their lives and discuss their social involvement with family and friends. While an

analysis of these questions indicated that fear of victimization was not perceived to be a salient problem for the participants, concerns about personal safety did have a significant influence on routine daily activities. For the women in this study, accommodations for safety concerns influenced their involvement in social activities, choice of transportation and use of crime prevention.

Social Involvement.

Unlike stereotypical images of elderly women as “prisoners in their own homes,” the women in this study were involved in a variety of activities outside of their homes. Describing their day to day routines and involvement in social activities, the women in this study reported to be very active over the course of a day. In fact, many of the respondents “went out everyday” (ID# 06, p. 5), and kept “very busy” (ID# 15, p. 4). Common activities cited by the participants included shopping, taking walks, going to senior centres, assisting in church functions, or visiting significant others. While participation in these activities was often influenced by a number of other factors including “health” (ID# 12, p. 19), “companionship” (ID# 03, p. 20), “the weather” (ID# 02, p. 6), “transportation” (ID# 20, p. 14) or a “lack of interest” (ID# 04, p. 24), the respondents’ personal safety was almost always taken into consideration. Without being forced into “social isolation,” concerns about personal safety did have a significant influence on their patterns of behavior. Personal safety often influenced the location of specific activities, the time of day in which these activities took place and whether or not participation involved the presence of other people.

Most of the women in this study were involved in activities that primarily took place “close to home” (ID# 20, p. 45). This was especially true for the women who walked to

social functions or senior centres. Describing why she was not afraid, one woman explained:

When someone would want to walk me home I would say, "Well look, there's lights up above, you know, on the street there." Like where the Legion is there, at the next door. And then I was just on the corner of the same street like right across from there. You know where that is eh? It isn't very far. (ID# 02, p. 53)

By participating in activities close to home, most of the respondents reported feeling safe. This may be related to a sense of familiarity the women experienced in areas closest to their own homes. The less familiar the respondents were with specific locations and people, the more "suspicious" they were about threats to their personal safety (ID# 01, p. 106).

A majority of the participants also restricted their activities to the daytime. This type of accommodation for safety was captured by one of the respondents who stated, "You plan things so that you don't have anything to do at night, you know. You just plan things that way" (ID# 08, p. 24). Many of the participants cited safety concerns as their primary reason for restricting nighttime activity. As one respondent stated, "I never go out at night. Never. It's not terribly safe and I like to be home" (ID# 07, p. 6). Similarly, another woman explained, "Oh I don't ever, ever go out at night. Not alone. You just never know what's lurking around out there" (ID# 18, p. 25-26). Often described as a "dangerous" time of day (ID# 15, p. 23), most of these women had structured their lives in such a way as to avoid nighttime activities altogether.

On those rare occasions when some of the women did participate in nighttime activities, they were almost always accompanied by other individuals. As one of the respondents stated:

I just don't go out at night. Now like if, say if by chance a bunch of us got together and said that we're going to go out and do this, I'd go with them. But I wouldn't do it on my own. I wouldn't even think of doing it on my own. Not at night. (ID# 04, p. 24)

Evening activities were either completely eliminated or structured in such a way as to be perceived as safe. In the presence of other individuals, these women did not believe they were at risk of personal victimization. The importance of being in the presence of other people when out at night was captured by one of the participants who explained:

I'm going to tell you something. When was it? At Christmas time, yea, I think it was Christmas time. They always put on a party, a Christmas dinner for us at the hotel. A lot of us couldn't walk and we didn't want to take a bus, you know. It's not that far away, so we took our scooters. All of us took our scooters. There was a bunch of us and everything and we didn't have any problems whatsoever. But look how many of us there were. So the way I see it, to see an experience like that, nobody was going to get hurt. (ID# 04, p. 32-33)

In addition to restricting their involvement in social activities, a few of the participants had also deliberately avoided or quit certain activities as a result of safety concerns. While some of the women simply missed meetings or special events that were located in undesirable areas, other women withdrew from certain long-term social commitments due to safety concerns. Describing why she quit bowling, for example, one respondent explained, "I gave up bowling because of my fear. Yes. At that time, yes. At night to wait for a bus at 12:30 at night. That's too dangerous" (ID# 15, p. 34).

For some of the women, safety concerns had a more drastic influence on their lives. Describing their residential environments, five of the women in this study mentioned personal safety as their primary reason for moving out of their previous homes and selecting their current residence. As one respondent explained,

We sold our house too because the older people were dying or moving into blocks and that and the neighborhood sort of went down and there was all these welfare people and it was too rowdy so that's why I left. At nighttime they'd have parties at two,

three o'clock in the morning. They'd have parties down the back lanes and in your yard and what not. So that's why we moved. It wasn't safe. (ID# 15, p. 48-49)

Similarly, another woman moved to a different apartment building after two police officers told her she should "get out" of a "bad part of town" (ID# 02, p. 34). In one extreme case, one of the participants had even moved to a different province as a result of safety concerns. She explained:

My ex-husband was a, what's the word, a stalker. Any place I worked he would either phone or he would, uh, he'd notice when I used to work and that, and I felt I just had to leave so I eventually went to Windsor. There was no sense taking any chances. (ID# 18, p. 4)

Transportation.

Common adjustments for personal safety were often related to transportation. In their day to day lives, safety concerns emerged as a significant influence on the type of transportation the participants selected. In the daytime, many of the women felt safe walking or taking the bus. At nighttime, however, specific arrangements were almost always made to ensure their personal safety. Many of the respondents would plan to get a ride home with family members or friends or take a cab if they knew they would be late getting home. As one respondent explained:

When I'm downtown there are lots of times I'll get a ride home, like you know. And sometimes I'll take a cab home if it's dark. Just at that time of day, you know. Like seven or eight in the winter is dark. But seven or eight o'clock at night to me is not late. When it gets to be about 10, 11 o'clock then there's not as many people around. It's not safe. (ID# 16, p. 27)

To reduce the risk of personal victimization at night, most of the women believed planning for a ride or taking a cab were more appropriate forms of transportation.

Describing why she would take a cab home after dark, another respondent stated, "I just think there's no point in being silly and foolish. I know an older person walking at night

is fair game. So I just don't tempt anybody" (ID# 05, p. 13). Without exposing themselves to the dangers associated with being out alone on the street at night, these women felt safe. As one respondent explained, "Because you're there from one destination to another and that's it. You're safe. You're in somebody's house or wherever you're going and that's it. You would be safe" (ID# 15, p. 29).

Crime Prevention.

In addition to restricting their involvement in social activities and making arrangements for specific methods of transportation, accommodations for personal safety were also made in the form of crime prevention. In fact, all of the women in this study incorporated specific crime prevention techniques into their daily routines in order to enhance their personal safety and avoid victimization. While some of these techniques reflected more traditional forms of crime prevention, such as locking their doors or walking in well-lit areas, numerous personal strategies were also developed and incorporated into their day to day lives. For the women in this study, some personal crime prevention strategies included "pretending not to hear" when a panhandler asked for money (ID# 18, p. 27), wearing a "large hat pin" to "poke an attacker in the eye" (ID# 20, p. 29) or "avoiding certain places where people could hide" (ID# 13, p. 59). Elaborated upon in more detail later in this chapter, what is obvious here is that the use of different types of crime prevention strategies often involved significant adjustments in these women's lives.

While concerns about personal safety clearly shaped both daytime and evening activities, the selection of specific forms of transportation, and the use of numerous crime prevention strategies, most of the women in this study were satisfied with the amount of

social activity in their lives. Of the 20 women who participated in this research project, only four indicated that they were not satisfied with the amount of social activity in their lives. Participants who were not satisfied with their social lives often cited companionship as their primary reason. In fact, none of the women mentioned personal safety as a factor that influenced their level of satisfaction with social involvement. Although the women in this study had made considerable adjustments to their lives as a result of safety concerns, these accommodations were not perceived to be problematic. The overwhelming acceptance of numerous accommodations for personal safety appeared to be related to the normalization and minimization of concerns by the respondents.

The Normalization and Minimization of Concerns

From an exploration of how concerns about personal safety were managed in their daily lives, it became obvious that extensive accommodations for safety were simply accepted and even normalized by the women in this study. Limitations on their freedom in the form of reduced or highly structured social involvement and the widespread use of crime prevention techniques were described as “normal” (ID# 02, p. 82), or “routine” (ID# 08, p. 23) activities. The tendency to normalize the concerns and accommodations associated with personal safety was captured by one of the respondents who stated:

Well I don't even think about being less afraid. But again, you know, I'm in control when I take these precautions. Normally I know what to do. You know, they're just a set of rules I have for myself. It's automatic. I mean I just do these things without thinking really. You know, I've been doing these things for some time. 20 years. Ever since I've been living by myself, you know. So I just sort of take them for granted. (ID# 13, p. 68)

All of the participants indicated that certain accommodations for personal safety, such as locking their doors, were so interwoven in the context of their daily lives that they “could

not imagine” excluding these activities from their routines (ID# 08, p. 54). Regardless of how extensive certain accommodations for personal safety appeared to be from the researcher’s perspective, these adjustments were almost always described as a “habit” (ID# 10, p. 57) or were simply dismissed as “common sense” (ID# 12, p. 41) by the participants.

There was also a tendency for the women involved in this research project to downplay or minimize different problems and concerns experienced in their lives, including issues related to personal safety. As one respondent explained, “The thing is I figure no matter what troubles I’ve got, there’s always someone worse off. And you know, you just thank God that you haven’t got their troubles” (ID# 02, p. 36).

Comparing themselves to women who worried about safety or made more extreme accommodations for safety concerns, many of these women trivialized the role of concern about personal safety in their own lives. Other women minimized their concerns related to personal safety by arguing that they were “no different from anyone else” (ID# 18, p. 63), or that safety was an issue “everyone” had to “deal with” (ID# 06, p. 22).

Believing that other people had similar concerns and reacted in similar in a similar manner, these women often dismissed the impact of safety in their own lives.

Minimizing the role of safety concerns, the women in this study were able to incorporate and accept a considerable number of safety accommodations in their lives.

Crime Prevention

A detailed analysis of their involvement in crime prevention provided further support to the finding that concern about personal safety shaped the everyday lives of the women in this study. Without becoming a salient issue in the respondents’ lives, crime

prevention measures were simply incorporated into their daily routines and had generally become “automatic” behaviors for these women. Crime prevention strategies referred to specific activities the women deliberately engaged in or avoided with the intention of reducing the likelihood of victimization or the severity of a particular incident involving victimization. For example, the participants locked their doors in order to avoid personal victimization and often carried specific objects to defend themselves in the event of an attack. While crime prevention strategies were primarily used to reduce the risk of personal victimization, the participants also indicated a desire to avoid the feeling of fear associated with threatening situations. Describing her involvement in crime prevention, one respondent stated, “I don’t want to be afraid” (ID# 17, p. 46).

Types of Crime Prevention.

Representing significant accommodations for personal safety, two primary categories of crime prevention were revealed by the participants. These different precautionary measures included traditional crime prevention techniques and personal crime prevention strategies. Advocated by the police, media and general public, traditional crime prevention techniques referred to common measures used to prevent “criminal” victimization. Traditional crime prevention techniques described widely recognized behaviors associated with preventing crime, such as locking their doors at all times, walking in well-lit areas and becoming involved in programs such as Neighborhood Watch and Operation Identification. To discover their level of involvement with traditional crime prevention techniques, the respondents were read a lengthy list of 38 possible precautions. The most common forms of crime prevention for these women involved having security locks on their doors (100%), always keeping their doors locked

(95%), avoiding automated banking machines at night (95%), never displaying large sums of money in public (90%), having a neighbor watch their homes while they were away (90%) and walking in well-lit areas (80%). On average, 57% of the strategies listed were utilized by the women in this study. In and of itself, this level of involvement in crime prevention does not appear to be overly high. However, as the participants revealed numerous personal crime prevention strategies, it became obvious that the women in this study had incorporated a significant number of preventative measures into their daily routines.

Personal crime prevention strategies referred to individualized measures of crime prevention that were incorporated into the women's lives in order to reduce their risk of victimization and avoid fear-provoking situations. Often representing unique and creative ways of enhancing their perceptions of personal safety, all of the respondents described various types of personal strategies. Common strategies included always being aware of their surroundings (95%), carrying their money in their pockets rather than in their handbags (80%), minding their own business (55%), avoiding eye contact with panhandlers or youth (35%) and sewing or pinning secret pockets into their clothing to hide their money (35%). Less common personal crime prevention strategies included wearing a baseball cap while driving in order to look like a man (ID# 03, p. 65), having different lock-nuts put on car tires which required a special wrench to remove (ID# 08, p. 47), having a baseball bat in the closet in case of an intruder (ID# 13, p. 44), posting "beware of dog" signs without owning a dog (ID# 11, p. 20) and carrying pepper spray or hair spray to diffuse in an offender's eyes in the event of an attack (ID# 11, p. 68).

Describing a personal crime prevention strategy she developed to deter theft in an apartment locker room, one of the respondents explained:

I'm not worried about having my stuff stolen because I put a sign on the things I took down there. The sign says, "Beware. I have got toxic material in this box and if it gets on you, I won't be responsible and you can't sue me because I'm leaving this note." Nobody's touched it. It's really just a bottle of water, but it looks medical. (ID# 09, p. 60)

Representing a variety of individualized behaviors, the women in this study used an average of 12 personal crime prevention strategies in their daily lives. In combination with traditional crime prevention techniques, a significant number of preventative measures were utilized by the respondents.

Factors That Influence Involvement in Crime Prevention.

Having incorporated numerous traditional and personal crime prevention strategies into their daily routines, the women in this study also described the factors that influenced their use of precautionary measures. These factors included the influence of others, direct and indirect information about victimization and environmental and social signs of alarm.

For these women, the most significant factor associated with the use of crime prevention techniques was the influence of others. Influence from other people ranged from advice to pressing the respondents to conform. While most of the women described friends and family members who would "warn" them to "be careful" (ID# 12, p. 26), other women described being pressured or even forced into behaving in specific ways in order to prevent personal victimization. As one woman explained:

Well everybody yells at you and says you shouldn't walk there at night. If they [friends] see me, they'll give me a ride home. They'd insist on taking me but I wasn't afraid. They'd say, "You're not going home alone", you know. They'd insist, and I mean you can't say no. (ID# 02, p. 28)

For most of the women in this study, significant others represented the most common source of influence on their involvement in crime prevention. Family members, friends and co-workers would often advise the respondents as to what they “should and shouldn’t be doing” in order to enhance their personal safety (ID# 16, p. 30). In some cases, the women described situations in which total strangers had attempted to influence their behavior. Warned by police officers, bus drivers, bingo coordinators and other people in their apartment blocks, six of the women in this study described having strangers tell them to be more cautious in some way. One respondent, for example, described an incident in which a bank teller suggested that her son should carry her money as a safety precaution. She explained:

I took 1500 dollars out of the bank because my son’s got a computer car, you know, and the timing went. And uh, the teller says, “Are you alone here?” I said, “No. My son’s here.” So she told me “Well call him.” Because she was counting the money under the counter, like you know, under the table and she’s giving me the money. And so I called him over. I said, “You have to come here” and he says “Why?” I said “Well, because there’s other people watching me.” You know, maybe that I’m taking out all that money. Yea. So she just handed it over to him and that’s it. (ID# 14, p. 52)

In this case, a complete stranger had taken charge of the situation and had directly attempted to enhance this woman’s personal safety.

Direct and indirect forms of victimization also influenced the participant’s involvement in crime prevention. Direct victimization referred to specific forms of victimization the women had experienced over the course of their own lives. Describing the impact of personal victimization, most of the women would indicate that they were “more careful” or began to use specific forms of crime prevention following a particular incident in order to ensure their personal safety. After having money stolen from her

purse, for example, one respondent stopped carrying a purse and began to “hide” money in her clothing (ID# 01, p. 96). Similarly, after having her car stolen, one participant purchased “a club” that locked her steering wheel in place in order to prevent further theft (ID# 04, p. 45).

Involvement in crime prevention was also influenced by the indirect information the women received about the victimization of others from the media and through formal and informal social networks. After hearing about a woman who was stabbed while walking through a back alley downtown, for example, one respondent said she “walked on the curb” and “glanced in back lanes to see who was there “ (ID# 15, p. 22). Describing how the rape of her neighbor had an impact on her behavior, another respondent explained, “I just say that I try to take extra precautions. That’s all. It doesn’t make me afraid. I feel sorry for the people, like because the hurt lasts for a long time” (ID# 03, p. 59). Although exposure to personal victimization or the victimization of others was often associated with involvement in crime prevention, the participants in this research project often indicated that they were not frightened as a result of these experiences.

Specific environmental and social signs of alarm were also factors that influenced involvement in crime prevention for this group of older women. Described in more detail earlier in this chapter, certain signs of alarm often motivated participants to use specific crime prevention techniques. Loitering youth and panhandlers, for example, prompted one woman to “carry a metal bar in a shopping bag” (ID# 11, p. 32), to reduce her risk of personal victimization. When asked if she was afraid or experienced fear of victimization, this respondent indicated that there was “no reason to be afraid” if she “had the bar” (ID# 11, p. 35). Another respondent described how the absence of other people

at a bus stop prompted her to “walk to the next stop” (ID# 15, p. 39). As warning signs to potentially threatening situations, certain environmental or social cues often influenced these women to use certain forms of crime prevention.

Moral Element of Crime Prevention.

Describing their use of traditional and personal precautionary measures, this group of women clearly identified a moral dimension of crime prevention. According to these women, individuals are expected and expect others to conform and use at least a minimal level of crime prevention in their daily lives. Following specific “safety rules” was perceived to be an “individual’s responsibility” (ID# 16, p. 73). The idea that individuals were expected to conform and use preventative strategies was captured by one of the respondents who stated, “Who would go to bed without locking their door anyway?” (ID# 08, p. 53). Similarly, another respondent argued, “ Anybody with any sense wouldn’t be out walking around at two o’clock in the morning” (ID# 20, p. 37). In this study, involvement in crime prevention emerged as the most appropriate or proper way to enhance personal safety.

Believing that individuals had an obligation to avoid “exposing themselves” to dangerous situations (ID# 18, p. 64), these women often tried to influence the behavior of significant others. After describing her own involvement in crime prevention, one respondent went on to discuss efforts she had made to influence the behavior of other women. She explained:

I, again, like you know, I’m not carrying a large purse. I see so many of them. I try to tell them. I know them, the ones who are doing that, and I tell them not to walk around with that large purse because you’re a walking advertisement to knock me over. (ID# 13, p. 58)

Some of the participants even suggested that older women should restrict their involvement in social activities in order to enhance their personal safety. As one woman stated, “Seniors don’t need to go out at night. They can entertain themselves” (ID# 14, p. 79). Similarly, another respondent believed that “seniors shouldn’t be walking around at night” and that “they should arrange for transportation or an escort” in the evening (ID# 18, p. 63). When individuals did not follow appropriate crime prevention “rules” or were “not cautious enough” (ID# 11, p. 13), there was a tendency for the women in this study to believe these individuals would be “at fault” in the event of an attack (ID# 16, p. 14).

Victim Blaming

With the responsibility of maintaining personal safety largely perceived to be at the individual level, victims were often criticized and even blamed for exposing themselves to danger in some way. In their accounts of family members, friends, acquaintances and victims of crime discussed in media reports, this group of women often criticized victims for not behaving in an appropriate or safe manner. As one respondent stated, “Oh, I have a daughter that’s lost her wallet. A couple of times she was robbed. But she’s careless. She carries her purse” (ID# 03, p. 58). Similarly, another woman blamed a friend for being robbed outside of her apartment building. She explained:

She had no business coming in through the back door in the first place, you know. Instead of using the front entrance she went through the parking lot to the back door. So, you know, she was looking for trouble. That’s what I think. (ID# 15, p. 47)

Describing their knowledge of other people who had been victimized, many of the women would say they were, “asking for it” (ID# 13, p. 41), “inviting trouble” (ID# 16, p. 14), “being foolish” (ID# 18, p. 73), “taking chances” (ID# 07, p. 11), “not using the

right precautions” (ID# 04, p. 53) or that their experiences of victimization were the result of “their own stupidity” (ID# 09, p. 54).

Some of the women in this study had also blamed themselves for becoming victims. As one respondent explained, “I was annoyed with myself that I got into that position” (ID# 12, p. 44). Justifying her use of specific crime prevention techniques, another respondent described wanting to avoid blame in the event of a home invasion. She explained:

Sometimes I’ll go out on my balcony and come in. I go out there and then come in and lock the door. I don’t know, you’re just inviting trouble if you don’t do that because they could come up on your balcony and get in if they want to. And if you get robbed, you’re going to get robbed and it’s going to be your fault. So I lock my doors, and then they can’t blame me for having my doors open in case somebody comes in. Then it’s my fault. This way it’s not my fault because I’ve used precautions. (ID# 16, p. 14)

While the concept of victim blaming initially appeared to be a contradiction to their fatalistic views of victimization, described earlier in this chapter, these participants believed that many victims had not done “everything in their power to prevent” personal victimization (ID# 16, p. 14). When individuals had used “common sense” and followed general “safety rules,” they were not perceived to be “at fault” (ID# 07, p. 54). By failing to use appropriate precautionary measures, these women believed certain individuals were tempting fate or “inviting trouble” (ID# 17, p. 32).

Stereotypes Associated With Vulnerability and Personal Safety

Rejecting stereotypical images of frightened older women, a majority of the participants in this study did not label themselves as vulnerable. For these women, vulnerability referred to the inability to defend oneself against an assailant resulting from a reduced mental capacity, such as being less alert, or a weakened physical condition.

Evaluating personal characteristics that would make them more susceptible to victimization, only four women perceived themselves to be defenseless in the event of an attack. These women often identified certain health conditions, disabilities or a physical decline associated with old age as primary reasons for feeling vulnerable to personal victimization. Describing why she felt vulnerable, one respondent explained:

Because I'm older. I look older. I can't run anymore. I can't stick up for myself anymore. And uh, naturally when you get to be my age you can't defend yourself at all. And I mean at all, you know, because of strength and physical ability. When you're young, at least you think you can. Whether you can or not, I don't know. Sometimes you can't, but at least you think you can. (ID# 15, p. 47)

Similarly, another respondent described feelings of vulnerability related to the fact that she was legally blind. She explained, "In all honesty, um, sometimes I feel a little vulnerable. With a white cane you definitely are because somebody could come right up beside you before you're even aware that they are [there]" (ID# 12, p. 23).

Although a handful of women described themselves as vulnerable, these women indicated that they did not experience fear in their daily lives because of their reduced exposure to situations or environments that were associated with risk. As one woman stated, "I don't put myself in a position where things like that [victimization] could occur" (ID# 09, p. 44).

Many of the participants rejected the idea that they were helpless to defend themselves by arguing that they still had their "own minds" (ID# 16, p. 61) or were "physically able" to "defend" themselves (ID# 17, p. 47). Describing why she did not experience feelings of vulnerability, one respondent explained:

Not yet because I look strong yet like, you know. That when I'm out and I'm in my coat with my stuff and I'm walking along, you know, I don't have a cane or a walker. And [I'm] not stooped over so, even though I'm 67 years old, I look younger than my body. I'm not as vulnerable. (ID# 13, p. 52-53)

While a majority of the women involved in this research project did not perceive themselves to be physically or mentally vulnerable, all of the participants accepted this stereotype for other elderly women. Older women were often described as “weak” (ID# 07, p. 49), “timid” (ID# 11, p. 74), “defenseless” (ID# 18, p. 64), “gullible” (ID# 08, p. 41), and even “stupid” (ID# 09, p. 45). As one respondent stated:

Especially seniors yes. Because some of them can't think fast enough. Some of them they walk so slow that uh, you know, or they walk with a cane or with a walker and then if a fellow or two people see a person like that they figure, “Hey that's a good target there. He or she can't fight back.” So that's what happens, yes. (ID# 15, p. 43)

In addition to perceiving other elderly women as vulnerable, many of the participants believed personal safety was a significant problem for older women. In fact, five of the women described issues related to personal safety as the biggest problem for elderly women, in general. While none of the participants had identified concerns about personal safety as a primary problem in their own lives, some of these women assumed it was a significant problem for other elderly people. As one respondent explained, “But safety is, you know, I think that's one of the biggest things for most [seniors]. That's a big problem because so many of them are getting their purses snatched or getting hurt, you know” (ID# 17, p. 47). The acceptance of these stereotypical images is difficult to understand, considering the participants had clearly rejected these labels for themselves.

Problems Associated With Traditional Fear of Crime Measures

In order to determine whether or not traditional fear of crime measures actually captured the meanings and experiences of fear among elderly women, the participants were asked for their interpretations of the three most frequently used indicators of fear of crime. To date, the most popular fear of crime measure has asked respondents: “How

safe do you feel, or would you feel, being out alone in your neighborhood at night?"

While 50% of the women in this study indicated that they would feel somewhat unsafe or very unsafe alone in their neighborhoods at night, several problems associated with this measure were identified.

The most noticeable problem with this indicator was related to the fact that actual and hypothetical situations were combined in this single, double-barreled question. While responses to this question have been consistently used to determine whether or not elderly women experience fear of crime, the answers provided by these older women were entirely hypothetical in nature. As one respondent stated, "Well I would feel unsafe to go out of here at night. But I don't go out alone at night" (ID# 12, p. 28). Indicating how they "would" feel out alone in their neighborhoods at night, this question failed to capture the situational fear of personal victimization as it was experienced by these women.

The fact that these women overwhelmingly responded to the hypothetical aspect of this question can be traced to another problem related to this type of measurement. Specifically, the behavior described in this question did not reflect the everyday experiences of the women in this study. Asking these women to say how they think they would feel if they had to walk alone in their neighborhoods at night was asking them to think about how it would feel to do something they never do. As one respondent explained, "I don't know. How can I know if I would be afraid when I haven't even tried [going out alone at night]" (ID# 04, p. 31). The likelihood of being out alone in their neighborhoods at night was such a remote possibility for these women that this question was largely irrelevant to the participants. In fact, several women could not even answer

this question. As one respondent indicated, “I don’t know because I never go out at night. It always comes back to that doesn’t it” (ID# 08, p. 36). Similarly, another respondent stated, “I don’t know. I never go anywhere at night anyway, so how would I know?” (ID# 16, p. 46).

This question also failed to take into consideration the various reasons why these women limited or completely avoided nighttime activities. While many of the participants did not walk around in their neighborhoods at night due to safety concerns, several participants described a “lack of interest” (ID# 10, p. 36), the desire for “companionship” (ID# 20, p. 17), “health” related problems (ID# 16, p. 38) or a “fear of falling” (ID# 01, p. 14) as other reasons for not wanting to be out alone on the streets at night. As one respondent explained:

Well right now, I wouldn’t go out at night because I’m not too sturdy on my feet. And when anybody comes to get me, they come to the door and I hang onto their arm to the car. I don’t go anywhere on my own. I’d be afraid of falling. (ID# 19, p. 29)

Another problem related to this measure of fear of crime involved the discrepancy surrounding the term “neighborhood.” After describing the parameters of their neighborhoods, it became clear that this concept represented very different things for the respondents. In fact, the women in this study described their neighborhoods as their own apartment buildings (15%), a section of the street on which they lived (10%), several streets surrounding their homes (45%), a few houses on either side of their homes (5%), landmarks in the vicinity of their homes (5%) or as the neighborhood classification designated by city planners (10%). Some of the participants (10%) were unable to answer this question, arguing that they had never attempted to define their own neighborhoods.

Without a consistent geographical frame of reference, this question obviously represented an invalid measure of fear of crime. For the women who defined their neighborhoods as the apartment buildings in which they lived, walking alone at night in their neighborhoods represented walking around in the hallways of their apartment buildings. For the woman who defined her neighborhood as the entire downtown area, however, the experience of walking alone in her neighborhood represented something entirely different. Without taking into consideration the other limitations associated with this question, different conceptualizations of the term neighborhood could have exaggerated or underestimated the potential fear these women would have experienced.

In addition to the limitations described above, this traditional measure of fear of crime also did not allow the respondents to identify the objects, duration and level of fear as it was experienced in their lives. While fear of victimization was described as an emotional and often physiological reaction the women had to an immediate threat or the perception of danger, the situational nature of this fear was not discovered with the use of this question. More specifically, this question failed to take into consideration the situational fear of victimization associated with domestic violence. Afraid for their personal safety in their own homes, five of the women in this study described fears associated with being injured by a parental figure as a child or their husbands as adults. Having suffered through a particularly abusive marriage, one woman responded to this question by saying, "I was safer in my neighborhood than I was with my own husband" (ID# 07, p. 41). Asking these respondents to discuss the amount of fear they experienced while walking through their neighborhoods at night was clearly an inappropriate way to capture the complex nature of their fears.

Traditionally, fear of crime has also been measured by asking respondents: "Is there any area around here, that is within a mile, where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" In this study, 85% of the women indicated that they would be afraid if they had to be out alone at night within a mile of their homes. As with the previous question, however, this fear of crime indicator overwhelmingly measured hypothetical responses. Unable to identify with the scenario described in this question, these women simply assumed or imagined that they would experience fear in certain locations if they were alone at night. While a majority of the women described certain streets or parks where they "would" be afraid to walk alone at night, insecurity related to these areas was rarely based on actual experience. By avoiding certain areas that were perceived to be "threatening" (ID# 13, p. 49) or "dangerous" (ID# 06, p. 51), these women rarely experienced fear of personal victimization.

Representing another popular approach to the study of fear of crime, respondents were also asked: "How likely is it that a person walking around here, at night, might get held up or attacked?" In this research project, only 25% of the women believed an attack or "mugging" was somewhat likely or very likely to occur in their neighborhoods at night. Analysis of the participants' interpretations of this measure, however, revealed several problems. The first problem was related to the fact that 20 percent of the respondents would "not even attempt to answer" this question (ID# 04, p. 23). Many of these women assumed the researcher was asking them to discuss the rate of crime in their neighborhoods. One woman even stated, "You'll have to ask the police about that" (ID# 05, p. 49). Rather than measure fear of crime, this question often measured individual perceptions of the level of crime in certain neighborhoods.

Another problem involving the use of this fear of crime indicator was related to the issue of risk assessment. More specifically, rather than measure a respondent's fear of "crime", this question often revealed the risk associated with this type of behavior for other individuals. As one respondent explained, "People in this neighborhood would likely be attacked because we don't get all the reports. There's a lot of crime around here. And because of the people that come around here. Like I say, they're either sniffers or drunk" (ID# 03, p. 48). Similarly, another respondent stated, "I would say very likely because, uh, well I hear about it one the news, you know, people being attacked" (ID# 12, p. 38). Since the women in this study did not walk around alone in their neighborhoods at night, their responses to this question often involved a consideration of risk for those individuals whose behavior reflected this type of scenario.

To date, researchers have used these three questions, interchangeably, to measure fear of crime. The results of this study, however, indicate that these measures are not directly comparable. While 85% of the respondents suggested that they would feel unsafe alone at night within a mile of their homes, only 25% believed someone was likely to be attacked in their neighborhoods at night. Representing the most popular fear of crime indicator, 50% of the women indicated that they would feel unsafe alone in their neighborhoods at night. Considering the variation in the women's responses to these questions, it became obvious that these items did not measure the same things.

From an exploration of these three traditional fear of crime measures, a number of problems were identified. In comparison to the detailed accounts of fear obtained through the use of open-ended questions about personal safety, the traditional fear of crime measures clearly failed to capture the meaning and salience of fear of personal

victimization as it was experienced by this group of women. By measuring hypothetical reactions to situations that did not reflect the everyday lives or actual behaviors of the participants, the use of traditional measures of fear of crime actually overestimated the level of fear these women experienced.

In summary, this discussion examined the role and significance of personal safety in the lives of older women. Representing different levels of safety awareness, concern, worry and fear were described along a continuum of increasing severity. A detailed description of the characteristics associated with fear of victimization was presented, and an exploration of the signs of alarm provided insight into the factors that influence feelings of insecurity. While the emotional and often physiological experience of fear of victimization was a rare event, concerns related to personal safety were found to have a significant impact on the choices women made regarding social involvement and transportation in their daily lives. Structuring their lives to eliminate threatening and fear-provoking situations, extensive accommodations for personal safety were overwhelmingly accepted and even normalized by the participants. Standard measures of fear of crime were critically assessed, and numerous limitations were identified.

In the next chapter, these findings are compared to previous research in the area of fear of crime, and are explained within the social disorder perspective and Goffman's conceptual framework of normal appearances.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This study was designed to address a number of research questions about the role and significance of fear of crime for a group of elderly women. In this chapter, key findings from the previous chapter will be summarized and discussed. The results of this study will be compared to previous research, with special consideration given to the conceptualization of safety awareness and the problems associated with traditional fear of crime measures. While few researchers have attempted to understand fear of crime in the context of existing social science theory, safety awareness and concern about personal safety will be considered within the social disorder perspective and Goffman's (1971) conceptual framework of normal appearances.

Summary of Findings

The Experience of Fear.

The first research question involved a consideration of whether or not elderly women living in an urban environment actually experience fear of crime. Although this question appears to be quite straightforward in nature, the experience of fear of crime is a complex issue that is not easily identifiable. The most significant problem in the fear of crime discourse, a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the phrase "fear of crime," has made it difficult to explore the experience of fear of crime for older women. While an exploration of the experience of fear of crime is clearly dependent upon the meaning attached to this term, over three decades of research in this area of study has failed to produce a concise definition of fear of crime. Using an exploratory approach, this

research project allowed older women to define this issue in a manner that actually reflected their personal experiences of fear.

The women involved in this research project had clearly experienced fears associated with personal safety or the safety of others. Their experiences of fear, however, did not reflect traditional conceptualizations of fear of crime. For these women, fear was experienced within the context of safety awareness. Issues related to personal safety or the safety of others captured the attention of the respondents in a number of distinct ways, with varying degrees of importance and severity. For the participants in this study, their focus on personal safety or the safety of others occurred on three levels, which included concern, worry and fear. Expressed as thoughts, emotions and physical behaviors, these three levels of safety awareness represented different ways of focusing on the issue of safety. Considered along a continuum, fear of victimization represented the most severe and intense level of awareness, while concern was believed to be the least severe. Defined as an emotional and often physiological reaction the women had to an immediate threat or the perception of danger, fear of victimization was experienced in isolated situations that involved the presence of a dangerous stimulus. Situations that were described as fear provoking often involved domestic violence or the presence of an environmental or social sign of alarm, such as harassment from youth or being confronted by panhandlers. Personal accounts of fear did not reflect vague notions of fear of crime often described in the literature, but rather fears associated with personal victimization or the victimization of others.

Unlike the emotional and physiological reactions associated with fear of victimization, worries and concerns emerged as cognitive appraisals of personal safety or

the safety of others. According to the women in this study, worrying about safety involved thinking about safety in such a way that it would become a primary thought in their daily lives. While safety issues were rarely a primary focus of attention for these women, concerns related to personal safety were frequently experienced. Concern, like worry, was considered to be a cognitive interpretation and evaluation of personal safety and the safety of others. Unlike worry, however, concern about safety was simply incorporated into the women's daily lives. Experiences related to concerns about safety were largely normalized and accepted as basic or routine elements of daily living.

Considering the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the term fear of crime, a surprisingly consistent conceptualization of fear of victimization was reported by the participants involved in this research project. While fear of victimization represented a distinct level of safety awareness for these women, the terms fear, worry and concern about crime have often been used interchangeably in the fields of criminology and gerontology (Bazargan, 1994; Clarke & Lewis, 1982; Clemente & Keiman, 1977; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987). In fact, several researchers (Brillion, 1987; Janson & Ryder, 1983; Johnson, 1996; Lee, 1982; Sundeen & Mathieu, 1976; Yin, 1980) have even used the term "concern" in their attempts to define fear of crime. In their study of fear of crime among urban elderly women, for example, Sundeen and Mathieu (1976) defined fear of crime as "the amount of anxiety and concern that persons have of being a victim" (p. 55).

Failing to consider the distinction between fear and worry, several researchers have also defined fear of crime as a "nonspecific worry about safety in the community and the neighborhood" (Alston, 1986, p. 104). Believing the concepts of fear and worry

represented the same type of reaction to criminal activity, Parker and Ray (1990) and Johnson (1996) have measured fear of crime by asking respondents how much they worried about their personal safety or the safety of significant others. While the experiences of concern, worry and fear described by the women in this study obviously represented different ways of focusing on the issue of safety, the meaning and relationship between these terms have rarely been explored (Fisher, 1978; Garofalo, 1981; Hanrahan, 1990; Walker, 1994).

When concern, worry and fear of crime have been described as independent reactions to crime related problems, these terms have often been used to differentiate between general and specific levels of reference (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Mawby, 1986). Representing the first attempt to create an analytical distinction between concern over crime and fear of crime (Clarke, 1984; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987), Furstenberg (1971) argued that concern about crime refers to a general resentment of criminal activity while fear of crime represents a subjective assessment of personal risk. Despite Furstenberg's early efforts, however, this distinction between fear and concern appears to be inadequate (LaGrange and Ferraro, 1987; Walker, 1994). While the definition of fear described above suggests that the experience of fear of crime only occurs on a specific or personal level of reference, several researchers (Garofalo, 1981; Jones, 1987; Taylor et al., 1984) have argued that this type of fear can also represent an emotional reaction to violence directed toward other people. The assumption that fear is experienced in response to dangerous situations that threaten an individual's perception of personal safety or the safety of other people was supported in the findings of this study. Expressed in specific

and general forms, this group of older women experienced concern, worry and fear for themselves, significant others and even strangers.

Several researchers (Fisher, 1978; Garofalo, 1981; Hanrahan, 1990; Taylor & Hale, 1986; Walker, 1994) have also attempted to distinguish between the more generalized experience of worry and the emotional reaction of fear. Defining worry as “a general concern about crime” (Taylor & Hale, 1986, p. 169), this type of experience represents a “cerebral or calculating” reaction to the problem of crime in our society (Garofalo, 1981, p. 840). Although this description of worry captures the cognitive component of safety awareness, it fails to take into consideration the worry older women experience for their own safety or the safety of significant others, as was the case in this study. For these women, worrying about safety did not involve vague thoughts about the crime rate or issues related to criminal activity, but rather reflected specific assessments of personal safety or the safety of others. Although some researchers have attempted to capture the distinction among these concepts, the complexity surrounding these terms has largely been ignored (Walker, 1994).

While previous descriptions of fear of crime have often been too narrow and oversimplified (Midwinter, 1990), a review of the literature did uncover two conceptualizations of fear of crime that resembled the experience of fear found in this study. According to Ferraro and LaGrange (1987), fear of crime involves both intense emotional and physiological reactions to potential danger. Similarly, Skogan and Maxfield (1981) have suggested that fear of crime represents an emotional reaction to a dangerous stimulus, such as a gang of youth, poorly lit ally, or run-down neighborhood. This fearful response then leads to physical manifestations, such as a rapid heart rate,

heightened blood pressure and a release of adrenaline (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). The experience of fear as an emotional and physiological response to a dangerous stimulus was consistently found in this study. Responding to threatening situations or the perception of danger, the women involved in this research project experienced both emotional feelings and physical behaviors, such as shaking, trembling, rapid heart rate and a shortness of breath.

Representing a departure from traditional descriptions of fear of crime, Skogan and Maxfield's (1981) conceptualization of fear of crime is also useful in that it emphasizes the situational nature of fear (Yin, 1985). According to these researchers, when older women are not directly confronted by situations that involve a specific threat or the perception of danger, the emotional and physiological response of fear will be not be "triggered" (Yin, 1987, p. 32). In a similar manner, Jeffords (1983) suggests that the experience of fear of crime among the elderly is likely to represent a rational response to a particularly dangerous situation. Confirming the situational nature of fear described above, the women in this study overwhelmingly experienced fear of victimization in response to specific encounters that were perceived to be threatening. Although fear of victimization was described as an intense emotional and physiological experience that left many of the women feeling powerless to react, this level of safety awareness was a very rare occurrence for these participants. In fact, most of the women had taken so many steps to avoid personal victimization that they rarely encountered situations that would provoke fear. A number of researchers (Bazargan, 1994; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1989; Ward et al., 1986; Yin, 1982; Yin, 1985) have suggested that by relying on stereotypical images of elderly women who have become

“prisoners in their own homes” and are “paralyzed” with fear in the absence of an immediate threat, the actual level of fear older women experience has almost certainly been overestimated. The situational nature of fear of victimization as a rare occurrence for the women in this study seems to support this prediction.

The experience of fear described by Skogan and Maxfield (1981) also suggests that environmental and social factors unrelated to crime may be fear provoking for some individuals. While the “generic” use of the term “crime” represents another major problem with the conceptualization of fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987, p. 73), the definition of fear described above at least considers the possibility that different social and physical incivilities may be perceived as dangerous or threatening. Unfortunately, without taking into consideration domestic violence as a dangerous and fear provoking stimulus or specifically describing personal injury or harm to other people as primary objects of fear, this conceptualization has also failed to capture the complex nature of fear of victimization experienced by elderly women. Relying on detailed descriptions of fear of victimization, a more complete understanding of the experience of fear was obtained in this study.

The Nature of Fear.

The second research question was developed to explore the nature of fear among elderly women living alone in an urban environment. In their descriptions and explanations of fear of victimization, almost all of the women in this study identified specific characteristics associated with fear. In addition to providing a conceptual definition of fear, the participants also discussed the objects of their fears and the duration of fear they experienced in specific situations.

For the women in this study, the most significant and widespread object of their fears involved victimization in the form of personal injury or the injury of other people. Offering vivid descriptions of what “injury” would entail, these women were generally afraid of being “knocked down” (ID# 05, p. 37), “hit” (ID# 20, p. 18), “punched” (ID# 13, p. 24) or “beaten” (ID# 16, p. 38). Representing a fear of personal victimization or the victimization of others, situations were described as fear provoking when the women perceived an opportunity for some type of physical harm to be directed toward themselves or other people in the immediate vicinity. Although this group of older women identified several objects of fear, including “purse snatching,” personal injury always represented the primary source of their fears. Criticizing popular descriptions of fear of crime, several researchers (Garofalo, 1981; Miethe & Lee, 1984) have considered the possibility that the threat of physical harm is more likely to provoke feelings of fear than specific forms of criminal victimization. Garofalo (1981), for example, has suggested that the crimes of theft and robbery ultimately represent a threat to individual perceptions of well being in the form of physical harm and, as a result, are likely to elicit feelings of fear. In other words, it is not the loss of property that is especially fear provoking but rather the feeling that this form of victimization could escalate to physical violence and result in personal injury.

While only a handful of researchers have actually attempted to discover the objects of fear for elderly women, many researchers (Brillion, 1987; Fattah and Sacco, 1989; Hung & Bowles, 1995; Pain, 1995; Warr, 1985; Yin, 1980) have simply assumed that the most violent crimes, such as murder, rape and robbery, also provoke the highest degree of fear (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987). In other words, the perceived level of seriousness

associated with a particular crime is believed to determine the degree to which this crime is feared (Warr, 1985). According to LaGrange and Ferraro (1989), more serious crimes often generate heightened levels of fear because they “invoke images of more violent forms of victimization” (p. 700). The findings in this study, however, did not support this assumption. In fact, none of the women in this study identified homicide as their primary source of fear, and a majority of the women explicitly rejected the idea that the object of their fears was ultimately death. As one participant explained, “I’m not afraid of that [death]. Nobody’s going to kill me. I just don’t want to be harmed in any way, you know, because then you’d have to suffer” (ID# 06, p. 34).

Despite the fact that almost all of the research on women’s fear of crime has described rape as the universal fear of all women (Edwards, 1987; Johnson, 1996; MacKinnon, 1993; Riger & Gordon, 1981; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Stanko, 1990; Stanko, 1993; Stanko, 1994; Warr, 1985), the women involved in this research project overwhelmingly denied experiencing fears associated with sexual violence at this point in their lives. Justifying the lack of fear they felt for this type of criminal activity, many of these women believed that they were “too old to be raped” (ID# 11, p. 69) or had simply taken precautions and “avoided situations where [sexual assault] could happen” (ID# 08, p. 46). As Hanrahan (1990) found in her study of fear of crime among older residents of Newark, New Jersey, rape or sexual assault does not represent an object of fear for elderly women. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the women in Hanrahan’s (1990) study identified “purse snatching” or mugging as their primary objects of fear. According to Hanrahan (1990), these elderly women often associated purse snatching with the potential for violence and physical injury. With the ultimate object of their fears

being physical harm, the respondents were largely afraid of the “unintended” consequences of this form of victimization, or the potential injuries that could result from being “knocked off balance” as their purses were “yanked” away (Hanrahan, 1990, p. 94). Considering the results of Hanrahan’s (1990) study and the findings of this research project, rape does not appear to be a universal fear, experienced by women of all ages.

Another characteristic of fear of victimization revealed by the women in this study was the duration of fear. While researchers in the fields of criminology and gerontology have failed to explore this dimension of fear, this group of older women described the length of time in which they experienced emotional and physiological reactions to fearful stimuli. In their descriptions of fear provoking encounters, these women always indicated that their experiences of fear were short in duration, often lasting only “minutes” (ID# 16, p. 57). In addition to describing the duration of fear of victimization experienced in specific situations, the participants also discussed the salience of this fear in their daily lives.

The Salience of Fear.

Representing a major area of interest in this study, the third research question involved a consideration of the salience of fear of crime, or where this fear was located in relation to other problems elderly women experience. More specifically, this question addressed whether or not fear of crime represented a significant problem for this group of older women. While the concept of fear of crime did not reflect the participants’ experiences of fear, the salience of fear of victimization was explored.

To date, many researchers (Clemente & Kleiman, 1976; Janson & Ryder, 1983; Lawton et al., 1976; McPherson, 1998; Pogrebin & Pijoan, 1978; Sundeen & Mathieu,

1976) have described the experience of fear of crime among elderly women as an intense or “debilitating” feeling that has largely become a “dominant” issue in the daily lives of older women (Jones, 1987, p. 192). Terms such as “house arrest” and “prisoners of fear” are commonplace in the media and fear of crime literature and are often asserted to be indicative of the amount of fear elderly women experience in their daily lives (Yin, 1982, p. 240). In this study, however, the experience of fear of victimization did not resemble stereotypical images of frightened older women who are overcome with fear on a daily basis. In fact, fear of victimization emerged as rare experiences for these women. When asked about any fearful situations they had encountered throughout their lives, only three of the respondents could recall more than two fear provoking incidents. Considering the intense emotional and physiological reactions dangerous or threatening situations often elicit, it is unlikely that these respondents simply forgot to mention particularly fearful encounters.

While an overwhelming majority of researchers believe fear of crime is the most serious problem facing older adults, only a handful of researchers have attempted to discover exactly how much of a problem this fear is for elderly women (Hanrahan, 1990). In 1974, Harris and associates conducted a survey for the National Council On The Aging in the United States in order to determine the importance of fear of crime for the elderly in relation to other personal problems (Pogrebin & Pijoan, 1978). Respondents were read a list of 12 concerns and for each concern, respondents were asked to rank the most important problems in their lives. In his analysis of the results, Harris (1975) made the startling discovery that elderly respondents rated fear of crime their most serious problem. When the results of this study went public in 1975, fear of crime went from

being merely a problem for the elderly to the number one problem facing older adults (Yin, 1985). Without challenging or replicating the results of the Harris poll, many researchers have simply accepted the idea that fear of crime is a salient problem for older women.

When allowed to identify their own worries and problems, none of the women in this study identified fear of victimization as a primary problem in their lives. In fact, only three of the participants even described personal safety issues as problematic. Not unexpectedly, problems related to physical well being were perceived to be the most salient for this group of women. Using open-ended questions that did not sensitize respondents to the issue of crime, Brillion (1987), Hanrahan (1990) and Yin (1982) have also found problems of a physical nature to be the most salient in the daily lives of older adults. In fact, the results of these three studies indicated that crime related problems were perceived to be problematic for less than six percent of the elderly respondents (Brillion, 1987; Hanrahan, 1990; Yin, 1982). Attempting to explain the low salience of fear of crime among the elderly, Brillion (1987) suggests that while criminal activity is frightening, personal victimization seems possible to avoid. Problems related to aging, health and illness, on the other hand, can often appear to be “inevitable” or “impossible to avoid” (Brillion, 1987, p. 24). Considering the numerous accommodations the women in this study made to ensure their personal safety, Brillion’s (1987) explanation appears to be at least plausible.

The Impact of Fear.

The fourth research question involved an exploration of the impact of fear on the everyday lives of older women. Although the emotional and physiological experience of

fear of victimization was not a salient problem for the women in this study, concerns about personal safety did have a substantial influence on routine daily activities. In their efforts to avoid dangerous or threatening situations that were likely to provoke fear, these women made numerous accommodations for safety in their daily lives. Accommodative behaviors involved activities the participants deliberately engaged in or avoided with the intention of enhancing their personal safety and ultimately reducing the likelihood of victimization. Concerns about personal safety often influenced participation in social activities, the time of day activities outside of the home were planned, the area of the city they traveled through, the selection of different forms of transportation and the use of a variety of crime prevention techniques. While the types of accommodations made by the participants varied somewhat, all of the women had “deliberately” structured their lives in order to “avoid situations” that were “considered to be dangerous” (ID# 05, p. 41).

Confirming predictions made by Lawton and Yaffee (1980), almost all of the women in this study had restricted their involvement in social activities to the daytime. Representing one of the most common accommodations for personal safety, most of the participants had structured their lives in such a way as to avoid nighttime activities altogether. Less common accommodations for personal safety involved moving, missing special events, or deliberately giving up certain activities in order to avoid victimization. While these type of lifestyle choices were influenced by a number of factors, including health, companionship and a lack of interest, the respondent’s personal safety was almost always taken into consideration.

Although the women in this study had made numerous modifications to their lives as a result of safety concerns, these accommodations were not perceived to be problematic.

In fact, a majority of the participants were satisfied with the amount of social activity in their lives, and none of the women in this study directly mentioned personal safety as a factor that influenced their satisfaction with social involvement. As Hanrahan (1990) and Johnson (1996) have suggested, accommodations for personal safety are often a matter of routine. For the most part, these accommodations are “built into their acquired knowledge” of what is “common sense” and what every woman does to maintain personal safety, “unless she is foolish” (Johnson, 1996, p. 89).

Despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of the respondents in this study had made numerous accommodations for personal safety, the behavior of these women did not reflect stereotypical images of elderly women who have become “prisoners in their own homes” in order to avoid criminal victimization. While many researchers (Arone, 1978; Conklin, 1976; McPherson, 1998; Sherman et al., 1976; Van Buren, 1976; Younger, 1976) have assumed that fear of crime forces elderly women to severely restrict their behavior and become socially isolated, the women in this study were involved in a variety of activities outside of their homes. In fact, many of the respondents “went out everyday” (ID# 06, p. 5) and kept “very busy” (ID# 15, p. 4).

What previous researchers have failed to consider is the idea that concern about personal safety, rather than fear, can be a motivating factor behind the use of these different types of accommodations. Describing fear of victimization as a situational experience, modifications to the participants’ lifestyles did not emerge as reactions to fear but rather specific ways of avoiding fear- provoking situations. Without exaggerating or dramatizing the impact of fear on the lives of older women, this study found that

concerns about personal safety did not force older women into social isolation but rather influenced their patterns of behavior.

Coping Strategies.

The fifth research question that guided this study dealt with the issue of how older women cope with fear in their lives. Researchers in the fields of criminology and gerontology have previously failed to explore the different strategies elderly women use to cope with fear of crime. The women in this study reacted to fear and the threat of danger in one of three ways. From their descriptions of particularly fearful situations, the categories of freeze, fight and flight emerged as distinct reactions to the presence of an immediate threat or the perception of danger.

Considering the fact that all of the respondents had made numerous accommodations in their lives in order to avoid dangerous situations, a surprisingly small number of women had actually given any thought to how they should react in the event of an attack. Representing the most common reaction to a fear provoking stimulus, a majority of the women described feeling “frozen” with fear (ID# 09, p. 38). “Paralyzed” with fear (ID# 09, p. 38) and unable to react, half of the women in this study reported being unaware of how to respond to threatening situations.

The reaction of fight, on the other hand, described those individuals who became confrontational or responded aggressively in fearful situations. Believing that fighting back would enhance their personal safety, five of the women described physical or verbal aggression as the most appropriate response to danger. Reactions of an aggressive nature often involved yelling at beggars, fighting back in response to domestic violence or giving others the impression that they would fight off an attack in some way. Despite the

fact that some of these behaviors actually placed the women in a more vulnerable position, fighting back was still perceived to be the most effective response to danger.

Another coping strategy or reaction to fearful stimuli identified by the participants was referred to as flight. In the presence of an immediate threat, four of the women responded by leaving the situation. To reduce their fears and enhance their personal safety, these women would use any means necessary to escape from danger.

This group of women clearly identified distinct ways of responding to fearful situations. An explanation as to why researchers have failed to uncover these different types of reactions to fear is largely related to the numerous conceptual and methodological problems in this area of study. Without a concise definition of fear or measurements that actually capture the situational nature of fear of victimization, researchers have been unable to explore the different strategies older women use to cope with this fear.

Reactions to Standard Measures of Fear of Crime.

To address the methodological problems in the fear of crime discourse, the sixth research question focused on how older women interpret traditional measures of fear of crime. This question was primarily concerned with whether or not these items actually capture the meaning and reality of fear for older women.

Ever since Harris (1975) discovered that fear of crime represented the most serious personal problem for Americans over the age of 65, fear of crime among the elderly has become a major area of interest for researchers. One of the most consistent findings in the extensive literature on fear of crime is that older men and women are substantially more fearful than younger people (Clemente & Kleiman, 1976; Jeffords, 1983; Lee,

1982). The high level of fear among older adults has been so widely communicated that professionals, politicians and the general public have overwhelmingly accepted images of frightened elderly people as “truth” (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1989, p. 698). Increasingly, however, research in the area of fear of crime is being closely scrutinized (LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987). Arguing that numerous measurement errors have shaped findings in the fear of crime discourse (Yin, 1982), several critics have suggested that problems associated with traditional fear of crime measures are largely to blame for overestimating the levels of fear older adults actually experience (Jeffords, 1983; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987). A review of the measurement problems identified by the older women in this study seems to confirm the prediction that by relying on traditional measures of fear of crime, many researchers have inadvertently exaggerated the actual amount to fear older women experience.

The most noticeable problem associated with traditional fear of crime measures involves the use of actual and hypothetical scenarios in the same questions. Since previous research has largely failed to distinguish between actual and anticipated fear, the scenarios described in traditional survey questions were irrelevant to most of the women in this study. As Johnson (1996) has argued, without knowing how they would feel alone in their neighborhood streets at night, older women simply anticipate the worst. By measuring hypothetical situations that do not reflect the everyday lives or actual behaviors of many elderly women, these traditional measures of fear of crime have failed to capture the meaning and salience of fear of victimization and actually overestimate the amount of fear these women experience (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Garofalo, 1981; Hanrahan, 1990).

Another problem related to the traditional measures of fear of crime involves the discrepancy surrounding the term neighborhood. While there is an abundance of literature documenting the fear of crime experienced on neighborhood streets, several researchers (Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Fisher & Nasar, 1995; Riger & Gordon, 1981) have argued that the term neighborhood represents a vague concept that can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. According to St. John and Heald-Moore (1996), by failing to specify what exactly the term neighborhood represents, "it is almost certain that participants will have, at least, somewhat different settings in mind when responding to these items" (p. 16). This prediction was confirmed in the results of this study, as eight different conceptualizations of neighborhood emerged. Without a consistent geographical frame of reference, these questions obviously represent invalid measures of fear of crime.

In addition to the limitations described above, traditional measures of fear of crime also did not allow the respondents to identify the objects, duration and level of fear as it was experienced in their lives. While fear of victimization was described as an emotional and often physiological reaction the women had to an immediate threat or the perception of danger, the complexity surrounding this fear was not captured with the use of these questions. Specifically, these questions failed to take into consideration the fear of victimization associated with domestic violence. Given the opportunity to discuss the meaning and nature of their fears in response to open-ended questions, five of the women in this study described fears associated with being injured by a parental figure as children or their husbands as adults. Confirming predictions made by Stanko (1987) more than a decade ago, by focusing on feelings of insecurity experienced outside of the home, these

traditional measures have failed to acknowledge the violence and fear many women experience within the home.

Another problem related to the use of traditional fear of crime measures involved the issue of risk assessment. According to LaGrange and Ferraro (1987), one of the most popular measures of fear of crime does not even measure fear, but rather individual “perceptions of risk” (p. 698). The results of this study clearly offer support to this argument. When asked “How likely is it that a person walking around here at night might get held up or attacked?” the women involved in this research project often assumed the researcher was interested in discovering the risk associated with this type of behavior. By asking people to estimate the risk associated with these forms of victimization, and not how afraid they are of being victimized, this question obviously represents an invalid measure of fear of crime (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Haghighi & Sorenson, 1996; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987). Garofalo (1981) captured the significance and impact of this problem on the fear of crime literature when he stated, “What has been measured as fear of crime is simply not fear of crime” (p. 954).

The limitations described above clearly demonstrate the fact that traditional measures of fear of crime are unable to capture the meaning and experience of fear of victimization for elderly women. Consistent with the findings presented in Hanrahan’s (1990) qualitative study of fear of crime among urban elderly women, the traditional measures of fear presented in this study did not address the underlying shape of fear for these women. Considering the fact that a broader concern with personal safety is a more common experience among elderly women, the standard fear of crime measures were not particularly relevant to these individuals (Hanrahan, 1990, p. 134).

Despite the fact that several researchers (Garofalo, 1981; Johnson, 1996; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Riger & Gordon 1981; Yin, 1982) have recognized the problematic nature of traditional fear of crime measures, an overwhelming majority of researchers in the fields of criminology and gerontology continue to use these same questions. Attempting to justify the continued use of these “flawed measures” (Riger & Gordon, 1987, p. 75), many researchers have argued that since these questions “have been consistently used in previous research on fear of crime,” the results of their own research were “directly comparable” to previous literature (Clemente & Keiman, 1977, p. 525). While researchers have consistently relied on three survey items to measure fear of crime, the results of this study indicate that these three measures are not directly comparable. This finding is consistent with Hanrahan’s (1990) study, which indicated that some of the traditional fear of crime items measure fears associated with certain types of crime while other fear of crime indicators actually address the “existence of bad locations” within the participants’ neighborhoods (p. 135). Without considering the fact that these questions are not directly comparable, or that these items do not actually measure fear of crime, the limitations described above have simply become entrenched within the fear of crime discourse.

Level of Participation in Crime Prevention.

The seventh research question was designed to address the issue of whether or not elderly women actively participate in crime prevention. While elderly people are encouraged to actively participate in crime prevention at the individual and community levels, several researchers (Brillion, 1987; Jones, 1987; Sacco, 1995) have suggested that very few people over the age of 65 use concrete methods to prevent criminal

victimization and enhance their personal safety. In their Canadian study of public attitudes toward crime, for example, Brillion and associates (1984) discovered that fear of crime does not necessarily motivate older adults to take precautionary measures. Of the 817 individuals Brillion and associates (1984) surveyed throughout Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, less than 25% of the senior citizens interviewed made use of traditional crime prevention techniques. In fact, only 22% of seniors had used a chain or safety lock on their doors, compared to 56% for younger age groups (Brillion et al., 1984).

More recently, results of the 1993 Canadian General Social Survey indicated that members of the youngest and oldest age groups were the least likely to engage in precautionary behaviors (Sacco, 1995). These findings are consistent with the results of research conducted in the United States, which indicate that elderly women do not use basic crime prevention techniques. The results of this study, however, are in contrast by revealing extensive involvement in crime prevention among some older Canadian women.

To enhance their personal safety and avoid victimization, all of the women involved in this research project had incorporated a significant number of crime prevention techniques into their daily routines. While some of these techniques reflected more traditional forms of crime prevention, such as locking their doors or walking in well-lit areas, a variety of personal strategies were also developed and incorporated into their day to day lives. Some personal crime prevention strategies included sewing pockets into their clothing to hide money, credit cards and identification; carrying a metal bar in a grocery bag; avoiding eye contact with panhandlers or youths; and walking in open areas that did not offer an opportunity for people to "lurk" behind trees or shrubs.

Representing of variety of individualized behaviors, the participants used an average of 12 personal crime prevention strategies in their daily lives. In combination with traditional crime prevention techniques, a significant number of preventative measures were utilized by this group of women. Without allowing the participants to identify personal crime prevention strategies that do not resemble traditional crime prevention techniques, previous research in this area of study has clearly failed to capture the extensive use of precautionary measures among elderly women.

Extensive involvement in crime prevention among elderly women appears to be related to a heightened awareness of issues related to crime and personal safety. Through media reports, advice from significant others and personal experiences of victimization, elderly women have likely become more knowledgeable about a variety of crime prevention strategies. With the rise of community policing initiatives throughout the 1990s, interest in crime prevention has become widespread. In Winnipeg alone, there are over two hundred programs designed to prevent crime (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1997). Continuously bombarded with information about crime prevention, a majority of older women have probably come to accept these precautionary measures as “common sense” (ID# 12, p. 41).

Vulnerability and Stereotypical Images of Fearful Older Women.

The final two research questions were developed to explore whether or not elderly women perceive themselves to be vulnerable and if their experiences of fear reflect stereotypical images of frightened elderly women. Representing one of the most widely accepted explanations for higher levels of fear among the elderly, a majority of researchers have assumed that older adults feel more vulnerable to criminal victimization

than younger age groups (Alston, 1986; Brillion, 1987; Midwinter, 1990; Pain, 1996; Warr, 1984; Yin, 1985). Through a combination of physical weakness, psychological traits, limited financial resources, reduced social interaction and residential environments with high rates of crime, researchers believe that the elderly begin to perceive themselves as vulnerable to criminal victimization (Brillion, 1987; Fattah & Sacco, 1989; Hanrahan, 1990; Lawton et al., 1976; Petsuksiri, 1986; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Thompson, 1988; Yin, 1985).

In the last three decades, an overwhelming majority of researchers have suggested that physical decline and health related problems have had the greatest influence on individual perceptions of vulnerability to crime. The importance of these personal characteristics is largely related to the assumption that “weak” elderly men and women “make more suitable targets” than younger age groups (Fattah & Sacco, 1989, p. 7). As Skogan and Maxfield (1981) explain, victimization is always a possibility for the elderly when potential offenders recognize that certain physical vulnerabilities can easily be “exploited” (p. 72).

Researchers have also suggested those individuals with health problems or limited physical ability may also experience feelings of helplessness and believe they would be incapable of defending themselves against an attack (Lee, 1983; Stevenson, 1997; Yin, 1985). According to Sacco (1995) and Warr (1984), the vulnerability these women experience not only leaves them feeling defenseless during an attack, but also generates uncertainty as to whether or not they are capable of physical recovery after an attack. While the connection between feelings of fear and physical vulnerability has not been directly established in the fear of crime discourse, and is often “inferred” from media

reports of fearful older women, the current profile of the frightened elderly woman as vulnerable and defenseless has rarely been challenged (Alston, 1986, p. 231).

To date, the public image of elderly women fostered by the mass media is that of vulnerable and largely helpless seniors who have become prisoners in their own homes as a result of their paralyzing fears. In the academic research on fear of crime among the elderly, this stereotypical image is “watered-down” but not dissimilar (Pain, 1995, p. 125). According to Pain (1996), many of the negative stereotypes associated with old age are entrenched within our society. Old age is typically associated with bodily decline, physical and mental vulnerability to criminal victimization and the dependency of elderly people on younger cohorts (Midwinter, 1990). In Canada and the United States, the idea that older people experience feelings of vulnerability associated with criminal victimization has largely become accepted as a social fact (Brillion, 1987). For the women in this study, however, their experiences of fear did not reflect stereotypical images of defenseless and vulnerable elderly women.

Rejecting stereotypical images of frightened older women, a majority of the participants in this study did not label themselves as vulnerable. Describing vulnerability as the inability to defend oneself against an assailant as a result of a reduced mental capacity or weakened physical conditions, a majority of the women in this study did not perceive themselves to be mentally or physically unable to guard against an attack of some kind. Refusing to accept the idea that old age was automatically associated with a reduced mental capacity and physical decline, these women did not believe they were more vulnerable to criminal victimization simply because they were over the age of 65.

As one woman explained, “I don’t think I’m vulnerable because I’m over 65. I’m only 73, what’s the big deal. It’s only a number” (ID# 15, p. 44).

Despite the fact that a majority of the women involved in this research project did not perceive themselves to be physically or mentally vulnerable, all of the participants accepted this stereotype for other elderly women. Older women were often described as “weak” (ID# 07, p. 49), “defenseless” (ID# 18, p. 64), “gullible” (ID# 08, p. 41), and even “stupid” (ID# 09, p. 45). In addition to perceiving other elderly women as vulnerable, many of the participants believed personal safety was a significant problem for older women.

While the acceptance of these stereotypical images appears to be difficult to understand, considering the fact that these women had so adamantly rejected these labels for themselves, research indicates that these types of attitudes are quite common among older people. In fact, the acceptance of stereotypical images of old age by older adults has been addressed by several researchers in the field of gerontology. According to Novak (1997), older men and women will often try to “distance themselves” from aging by not referring to themselves as old (p. 5). Without considering themselves to be old, or believing that they are an exception to the rule, many older people will accept particularly negative views of old age (Harris, 1975).

In summary, this discussion examined the experiences of fear of victimization among elderly women in relation to traditional descriptions of fear of crime found in the previous literature. Conceptual limitations associated with the terms concern, worry and fear were identified and a more appropriate analytical distinction between these different types of reactions to personal safety or the safety of others was presented. The

problematic nature of traditional measures of fear of crime was confirmed, and widely accepted assumptions about the salience of fear of crime among elderly women were challenged. Extensive involvement in both traditional and personal forms of crime prevention was discovered, suggesting change may be happening with respect to the amount of crime prevention older women are willing to incorporate into their lives. The theoretical discussion that follows represents an attempt to explain the meaning and significance of fear of victimization, as experienced by these elderly women.

Theoretical Discussion

The following theoretical discussion represents a departure from traditional explanations of fear of crime. With the exception of the social disorder perspective, the explanatory models and theoretical developments described in chapter two were found to be inadequate explanations for the patterns of meaning and experience of fear of victimization described by these women. Failure to acknowledge the situational nature of this fear has resulted in a tendency to rely on theoretical perspectives that overestimate the level of fear older women actually experience. Because the fear of victimization as an emotional and physiological response to an immediate threat or the perception of danger was rarely experienced by this group of women, the following discussion provides alternative explanations for this fear.

Drawing upon the social disorder perspective and Goffman's (1971) conceptual framework of normal appearances, this discussion will primarily focus on the social and environmental cues that signal danger and contribute to feelings of insecurity among elderly women. Taking into consideration Goffman's (1971) concept of "umwelt", an explanation of fear of victimization as a situational reaction to an immediate threat will

be introduced (p. 248). Within the framework of normal appearances, the cognitive experience of concern and the normalization of extensive accommodations for personal safety will also be considered. The primary objective of this discussion, however, is to explain the situational nature of fear of victimization in a manner that is consistent with the explanations described by the women in this study.

The Social Disorder Perspective.

From the social disorder perspective, visible signs of community disorder are closely related to feelings of insecurity (LaGrange et al., 1992). According to Skogan (1990), individuals will often experience fear in response to certain types of social and physical disorders or “incivilities” (p. 4). While social disorder refers to behavioral factors such as public drunkenness, excessive loitering and panhandling, physical disorder involves visible signs of negligence and decay such as abandoned buildings, broken street lights and vandalism (Skogan, 1990; Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Indicative of an erosion of social control within the community, these various social and physical incivilities are often symbolic of dangerous situations and the heightened possibility for personal victimization (LaGrange et al., 1992; Pain, 1996; Skogan, 1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Stevenson, 1997). In other words, individuals within the community will perceive certain types of disorders within their immediate environments as a “prelude to trouble” in the form of victimization (LaGrange et al., 1992, p. 312).

For the women in this study, certain people and environmental cues were clearly associated with concern, worry and fear about personal safety. In fact, all of the women in this study identified certain signs of alarm that would act as a type of warning system and alert them to the potential for victimization. The presence of loitering youth or

drunks in the immediate vicinity, for example, represented common warning signs that often provoked these older women to proceed with caution and utilize various forms of crime prevention in order to avoid potentially threatening situations. As Skogan (1990) explains, disorderly physical surroundings and disruptive social behaviors often represent signs of danger that can provide individuals with an opportunity to avoid particularly fearful situations. By "scanning the immediate environment for cues to danger," an individual can adjust his or her behavior accordingly in order to avoid victimization and personal injury (Nasar & Fisher, 1992, p. 49).

According to Merry (1981), it is this cognitive assessment of environmental and social cues that allows an individual to anticipate harm or danger within his or her immediate environment. By incorporating cognitive evaluations of personal safety into the social disorder perspective, a number of cognitive psychologists (Suttles, 1972; Van der Wurff et al., 1989) have found support for the idea that individuals construct cognitive maps that correspond to physical and social disorders within their local neighborhoods. Representing a mental image of people, places, and times that are likely to be unsafe or dangerous, these cognitive maps may actually guide and channel individual movements within the community (Fisher & Nasar, 1995; LaGrange et al., 1992; Merry, 1981). By relying on a cognitive map of social and physical incivilities, individuals can recognize signs of impending danger and prevent personal victimization (LaGrange et al., 1992; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981).

Based on the experiences of concern described by the elderly women in this study, cognitive evaluations of social and physical disorders within the individual's immediate environment often had a significant influence on their use of crime prevention. In fact,

all of the women in this study relied on certain environmental and social signs of alarm in order to enhance their personal safety and avoid potentially fearful situations. For example, many of these women intentionally steered clear of certain parks, bus stops and parking lots where the opportunity for danger or personal injury was always perceived to be present. In this manner, thinking about the existence of certain incivilities at the neighborhood level actually encourages residents to “look out for themselves” and other people (Skogan, 1990, p. 72).

Social and physical incivilities not only represent cues to impending danger, but can also be fear provoking in and of themselves. For example, many of the women in this study felt particularly threatened by panhandlers. Unable to predict the behavior of beggars who approach them on the street, individuals will often perceive an opportunity for these interactions to escalate and become physically violent (Clarke, 1984; LaGrange et al., 1992). Similarly, the presence of a drunk can be particularly threatening and elicit feelings of fear for older women due to the unpredictable nature of this type of behavior. Recall, for example, one participant who explained:

Well they'd stop there, and they'd have one too many [drinks] and they'd stop there and then they'd say, “Well hello there, do you have 50 cents for a bus?” or whatever, you know. It would be scary because if you don't give him anything he might have a knife or a gun and clobber you over the head or something. (ID# 15, p. 10)

For these women, encounters with drunks and panhandlers were frequently associated with the potential for violence and physical injury and, as a result, were likely to provoke feelings of fear.

Representing a partial explanation for the concern and fear these women experienced, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the use of this perspective alone does not capture the complexity of the experience of safety awareness described by this group of

older women. For example, certain environmental cues that did not directly represent signs of physical disorder, such as the absence of other people and darkness, were described as signs of alarm by a majority of the participants in this study. Similarly, the social disorder perspective does not provide an explanation for situations of fear involving domestic violence within the private sphere. Using Goffman's (1971) conceptual framework of normal appearances, however, the following discussion represents an attempt to address some of these issues.

Normal Appearances.

Suggesting that humans are unable to escape the need to detect and respond to predators or danger within their immediate environments, the central thesis of Goffman's (1971) conceptual framework is largely "Darwinian" in nature (p. 239). According to Goffman (1971), the emotional and physiological experience of fear and the normality of everyday life represent two basic forms of human activity. As Goffman (1971) explains:

[Individuals] go about their business grazing, gazing, mothering, digesting, building, resting, playing, placidly attending to easily managed matters at hand. Or, fully mobilized, a fury of intent, alarmed, they get ready to attack or to stalk or to flee. Physiology itself is patterned to coincide with this duality. (p. 238)

Like other animal species, Goffman argues that humans are constantly scanning their immediate environments for signals or cues to danger (Nasar & Fisher, 1992; Warr, 1990). Unlike animals, however, the process of scanning is such a "natural" experience for humans that they are able to go about their daily affairs "with only peripheral attention given to the stability of the environment" (Goffman, 1971, p. 239). In fact, individuals are so "accustomed" to scanning and monitoring their surroundings for signs of danger that these types of behaviors are largely normalized, or simply accepted as

“routine” activities (Goffman, 1971, p. 238). Goffman (1971) describes this tendency to normalize various accommodations for personal safety in the following statement:

Smells, sounds, sights, touches, pressures...provide a running reading of the situation, a constant monitoring of what surrounds. But by a wonder of adaptation these readings can be done out of the furthest corner of [an] eye, leaving the individual free to focus his attention on the non-emergencies around him...When the world immediately around the individual portends nothing out of the ordinary, when the world appears to allow him to continue his routines (being indifferent to his designs and neither a major help nor major hindrance), we say that he will sense that appearances are natural or normal. (p. 238-239)

Representing a type of “warning system”, constant scanning and monitoring in normal, everyday life allows an individual to experience a sense of “mastery” over his or her environment (Goffman, 1971, p. 249). Relying on “long-perfected” safety skills, and believing that they have eliminated the potential for physical harm, these individuals experience a sense of “control” in their everyday lives (Goffman, 1971, p. 250). When the individual encounters signs of danger, however, normality dissolves and the experience of fear becomes all encompassing for the individual (Nasar & Fisher, 1992; Warr, 1990). In these situations of fear and self-preservation, the absence of control is clearly evident (Goffman, 1971).

An exploration of fear of victimization within the framework of normal appearances also takes into consideration the situational nature of fear. According to Goffman (1971), individuals exist within in zone or “bubble” of awareness referred to as an “umwelt” (p. 254). As individuals negotiate their way through the environment, this umwelt is carried along with them and interacts with physical elements in the environment (Goffman, 1971). Similar to the concept of personal space, the umwelt represents a sort of defensible perimeter within which an individual can monitor personal safety. Fear occurs when the individual identifies certain signs of alarm, or an intrusion into the umwelt has

taken place (Goffman, 1971). In this manner, fear of victimization is understood as a direct response to an immediate threat.

Relying on the assumption that individuals are always surrounded by an Umwelt, or defensible “region,” Goffman (1971) argues that signs of alarm also exist within the “domestic” setting (p. 285). While Goffman (1971) does not specifically identify domestic violence as a sign of alarm within the home, he does indicate that individuals can cause “physical damage” to others within this “fixed territory” (p. 287). To clarify this argument, Goffman (1971) explains:

Given the fact that boundedness protectively cuts off those in the physical frames from the outside, it is to be expected that this sometimes will be turned against an individual in it, for anything that can cut an individual off from sources of alarm can cut him off with sources of alarm. (p. 286)

While the domestic setting has overwhelmingly been ignored in the fear of crime discourse, Goffman’s (1971) conceptual framework indicates that individuals are “never free from risk or bodily harm” within the home environment (p. 287).

In addition to providing an explanation for the nature and location of fear, Goffman also describes the social and physical “elements” or “alarming signs” that often provoke the emotional and physiological response of fear (Warr, 1990, p. 894). For Goffman (1971), alarming signs represent critical variables associated with an individual’s sense of safety and often include lurk lines, or areas outside of an individual’s line of vision; darkness; novel or unfamiliar environments; and the presence of other people, who can always become a threat to personal safety. Representing a disruption to their normal lives, these environmental and social factors trigger feelings of insecurity in individuals and alert them to risk in the immediate vicinity (Nasar & Fisher, 1992; Warr, 1985; Warr, 1990).

The distinction between natural experiences and alarming episodes described by Goffman was clearly reflected in the routine concern and rare accounts of fear described by the elderly women in this study. Without making personal safety a primary thought in their daily lives, concern about safety was largely a matter of routine for these women. In fact, extensive accommodations for safety concerns were simply accepted and even normalized by these women. This is not to suggest, however, that the participants did not remain alert to potential threats to their personal safety. Confirming predictions made by Goffman (1971), this type of safety awareness was almost considered intuitive, with concerns about personal safety always remaining in the back of their minds.

Fear, on the other hand, involved an emotional and often physiological reaction to an immediate threat or disruption to their 'normal' lives. Consistent with predictions made by Goffman (1971), alarming situations represented unnatural events, with an individual "sensing a sudden opportunity or threat in his current situation" (p. 239). During routine activities, several women described "sensing danger" (ID# 13, p. 40) or being "alerted" by things that did not seem "normal" (ID# 14, p. 49) immediately prior to a threatening situation. Unlike stereotypical images of elderly women who are "paralyzed" by fear in their daily lives, the fear described by these women was clearly situational in nature. Taking into consideration the concept of *umwelt*, the fear of victimization described by these women can be explained as intense reactions to signs of alarm or the presence of danger within their immediate environments. Focusing on the situational nature of fear, Goffman's concept of *umwelt* also provides an explanation for the fear associated with domestic violence. Representing a source of fear for several women in this study, signs of alarm and threats to personal safety were obviously not limited to public places.

While Goffman (1971) does not explicitly offer an explanation for the experience of worry associated with personal safety, he does suggest that “some individuals are more guarded than others” (p. 242). Goffman (1971) explains that while there is a “tendency for individuals to oscillate between being off guard and on guard, it is easy to find some people who are ready to be startled...and others who are slow to be mobilized” (p. 242-243). For Goffman, however, this distinction is irrelevant, with the primary focus of his argument being that every individual possess the capacity to respond to alarming signs and become fearful.

In his explanation of signs for alarm, Goffman (1971) also alludes to the fact that individuals can experience concern, worry and fear for other individuals within their immediate environments. When confronted by threatening stimuli, Goffman (1971) suggests that individuals will often show “signs of alarm” as a way of alerting others to the presence of danger (p. 247). As Goffman (1971) explains, the first people to become alarmed within a threatening situation “serve as a proxy for whatever is alarming” and actually “warn others that there is something about which to be alarmed” (p. 246). This assumption was substantiated in the findings of this study, with elderly women experiencing concern, worry and fear for their own personal safety and the safety of others.

Representing a more comprehensive explanation for the fear of victimization experienced by these women, Goffman’s explanation of normal appearances recognizes the distinction between concern and fear and identifies a number of alarming signs that have largely been ignored in previous attempts to theorize women’s fear of crime. The explanatory power of Goffman’s framework of normal appearances, however, is limited

in one aspect. While the presence of other people is considered a threat to personal safety within this perspective, the women in this study overwhelmingly identified other people as a source of security. As Warr (1990) has suggested, Goffman “entirely overlooks the possibility that the presence of other people can function to reassure rather than scare individuals” (p. 895).

In summary, this theoretical discussion has examined the meaning and experience of fear of victimization among older women within the social disorder perspective and Goffman’s conceptual framework of normal appearances. This conceptual elaboration has illustrated how the emotional and physiological reaction of fear can be interconnected with social and structural characteristics at the neighborhood level. Unlike traditional explanations of fear of crime, the use of these abstract perspectives was grounded in the authentic experiences of fear among older women.

In the following chapter, the significance of this study will be discussed and recommendations concerning future research and practical avenues for change will be presented.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

With a more accurate understanding of the fear of victimization experienced by elderly women, the results of this study have important implications for the design and content of future research and the development of both policy and program initiatives. More importantly, a detailed analysis of fear of victimization among elderly women can improve the quality of life of older women and ensure their personal safety within our society. Therefore, this chapter is organized to review the limitations of this study, discuss the contributions of this research to the literature, suggest possible directions for future research and describe the practical implications associated with the findings of this study.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation associated with this research is the fact that the purposive sample selected for this research cannot be considered representative. In other words, it is impossible to generalize from a small sample of elderly women living alone in downtown Winnipeg to other elderly women living in industrialized countries. Since this study was based on interviews with twenty elderly women, their experiences of fear of crime may differ significantly from elderly women who do not live alone or live in rural areas or outside of the city core.

A self-selected, purposive sample is also problematic in that women who did not experience high levels of fear in their daily lives may have been more willing to participate in this study. According to the coordinator of Victim Services at Age and Opportunity, recent victims of crime that she approached were unwilling to participate. It

would be difficult to determine, however, whether or not fear or the impact and severity of recent victimization experiences prevented these women from taking part in this project. The women who directly told the researcher that they did not wish to be interviewed often stated a lack of time or wanting to maintain their privacy as reasons for not participating. It could be that these women were not afraid for their safety, but remained private in order to avoid fear-provoking situations, as many of the women in this study had done. In other words, not participating in this study could have been a personal crime prevention technique for some of these women.

The potential for bias represents another limitation of this research project. More specifically, bias in this study could have been introduced by constant interviewer characteristics such as age and race. According to Singleton and associates (1993), the age, race and gender of the interviewer may influence the answers given by the respondents. Since only this young, white female collected information from the respondents, it is difficult to know the extent of this systematic error on the data. The respondents in this study were all over the age of 65 and while a majority of the respondents were white, one of the respondents was Black and one was Aboriginal. Although almost all of the respondents were surprisingly candid about intimate details of their lives, this study does not allow for an assessment of the exact influence of interviewer characteristics.

Another limitation of this study is associated with the cross-sectional research design. Recognizing that fear of crime is a dynamic process, a single interview may not capture the complex nature of fear of crime experienced by elderly women. Ideally, a longitudinal research design would be used to investigate the fear of crime experienced

throughout an individual's life. For example, research using a longitudinal design may reveal that fear of crime is unrelated to age effects and is actually the result of period effects, or historical changes that have influenced elderly individuals. Unfortunately, time constraints and financial considerations prohibit such a study at this time.

The selection of a single method of data collection represents another limitation of this study. Since the use of intensive interviewing is subject to systematic errors, such as constant interviewer characteristics and leading questions, the findings may simply reflect this method of study. Although an attempt was made to eliminate leading questions from the interview guide, the use of a single method is always a validity threat (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Recognizing that every research procedure has inherent limitations and biases, the best way to address this problem is to use triangulation and combine methodological approaches (Denzin, 1978; Maxwell, 1996). While the use of focus groups was considered for this research project, problems associated with this method precluded its use in this study. Using both intensive interviews and focus groups in her study of fear of crime among urban, elderly women in Newark, New Jersey, Hanrahan (1990) found that the use of focus groups was not a successful technique for investigating the salience of fear of crime. While the data obtained from the focus groups in Hanrahan's study did influence the structure of her interview guide, participants were often reluctant to discuss their personal problems in the group settings. Since the salience of fear of crime, relative to other problems elderly women experience, was a major area of investigation in this study, focus groups were not used to gather information. While triangulation does not automatically increase the validity of the data (Maxwell, 1996), the use of multiple methods, different data sources, more than one researcher to code the data

and theoretical triangulation could enhance our understanding of concern about personal safety and fear of victimization.

Contributions to the Literature

This study has made significant conceptual, methodological and theoretical contributions to the existing fear of crime literature. Conceptually, this study has presented a concise definition of the fear of victimization experienced by older women. Representing a departure from traditional research in the area of fear of crime, one of the primary objectives of this study was to explore the meaning of fear for elderly women. While an explanation of fear of crime is clearly dependent upon the meaning attached to this term, over three decades of research in this area has failed to produce a concise definition of fear of crime. Using an exploratory approach, this project provided older women with an opportunity to define this issue in a manner that actually reflected their personal experiences of fear.

In this study, the concept of fear of victimization emerged as an emotional and physiological response to an immediate threat or the perception of danger. Unlike vague descriptions of fear of crime found in the previous literature, these women identified specific characteristics associated with fear of victimization. Furthermore, this experience of fear emerged as one of several different levels of safety awareness, with the concepts of concern and worry representing cognitive evaluations of personal safety or the safety of others. Considering the fact that the terms fear, worry and concern about crime have often been used interchangeably in the fields of criminology and gerontology (Bazargan, 1994; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987), the results of this study help clarify the relationship among these three distinct experiences of safety awareness.

The use of qualitative methodology also represents an important contribution to the fear of crime discourse. While only a handful of researchers have used a qualitative approach to explore fear of crime, the results of this study clearly demonstrate the value of qualitative research as a way of understanding the complexity surrounding the fear of victimization among elderly women. Since the conceptual nature of fear of crime was largely unknown, a qualitative analysis was particularly valuable for exploring the meaning behind the term “fear of crime.” Relying upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the design of this research provided an opportunity to explore the meaning and experience of fear of victimization within the broader context of older women’s lives. The use of this type of methodology was also instrumental in identifying the numerous problems associated with traditional measures of fear of crime.

Although several researchers (Garofalo, 1981; Hanrahan, 1990; Johnson, 1996; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Riger & Gordon, 1981), have described possible limitations associated with traditional measures of fear of crime, few attempts have been made to actually confirm the problematic nature of these items. The results of this study, however, offer validation for the growing skepticism surrounding the use of these single-item measures. In fact, “the shortcomings of traditional measures of fear of crime may be even more serious than the current spate of criticism suggests” (Hanrahan, 1990, p. 133-134). Standard measures of fear of crime were often interpreted differently by the respondents or did not reflect their everyday life experiences. Without taking into consideration the difference between actual and anticipated fear, the use of these traditional measures clearly overestimated the amount of fear these older women experienced in their daily lives. Contradictory interpretations of the term “neighborhood”

also represented a significant threat to the validity of these traditional measures of fear of crime. To complicate the issue further, other factors, such as health status, the weather or a lack of interest, often influenced the women's sense of security while out alone in their neighborhoods. Recognizing exactly how these methodological limitations can interfere with our understanding of fear of crime, future research can more effectively explore the experiences of fear of victimization among elderly women.

An exploration of the meaning and salience of fear of crime for elderly women also has important theoretical implications. A comprehensive theoretical framework allows researchers to organize the available data, synthesize and explain competing views and establish an agenda for future research (Sacco, 1995; Yin, 1985). Solid empirical tests of theories explaining fear of crime are dependent on solid links between conceptual and operational definitions (Hanrahan, 1990). To date, however, a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the term "fear of crime" and measurement error has cast doubt on these conceptual/empirical connections and threatened the validity of theoretical explanations. With the development of a more appropriate conceptualization of fear of victimization, and an argument for more suitable measures of this fear, the results of this study can improve confidence in theory testing.

Future Research

Considering the problematic nature of previous research in the area of fear of crime, several recommendations can be made regarding the direction of future research. Of particular importance is the way in which fear of crime has been defined and measured in the last three decades. While the terms fear, worry and concern have been used interchangeably in the fear of crime literature, the results of this study demonstrate the

need for researchers to recognize these concepts as distinct ways of focusing on personal safety or the safety of others. Furthermore, the salience of these experiences should also be taken into consideration. Recognizing the fact that elderly women rarely experience feelings of fear in their everyday lives, future research should be directed toward the more common experiences of worry and concern. In order to capture the extent of worry and concern among elderly women in our society, however, researchers will have to develop measures that actually reflect the cognitive nature of these experiences.

While a majority of researchers have considered “fear of walking alone at night” to be an acceptable measure of fear of crime, the results of this study indicate the importance of developing more appropriate indicators of fear of victimization. By referring to hypothetical situations that are often unrelated to routine behaviors or actual experiences of fear, traditional measures of fear of crime have not only failed to capture the meaning and salience of fear of victimization, but have also overestimated the amount of fear older women actually experience (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Garofalo, 1981; Hanrahan, 1990). To address the methodological problems in this area of study, and more accurately determine the extent of fear of victimization among elderly women, the design and content of future research must become a priority. More specifically, the meaning and experience of fear of victimization discovered in this study clearly demonstrates the need to abandon survey-items that emphasize vague notions of fear and situations unrelated to routine behaviors or actual experiences of fear among elderly women.

Taking into consideration the conceptualization of fear of victimization, the salience of this fear in the everyday lives of older women, and the personal and general levels of reference associated with feelings of fear, the wording of future survey-items should

reflect the complexity surrounding this issue. For example, researchers could measure fear of victimization by asking elderly women, “Over your lifetime, how many fearful situations have you experienced, where you felt afraid for your personal safety or the safety of others?” Recognizing the complexity surrounding this issue, however, it is unlikely that one, single measure of fear of victimization will be adequate. Until researchers recognize the critical importance of developing more appropriate indicators of fear of victimization, and use them in their work, our understanding of this fear will be limited and meaningful policy decisions impeded.

Practical Implications

A more comprehensive understanding of fear of victimization among elderly women has important implications at the personal, neighborhood and societal levels. For individual elderly women, the results of this study can encourage these women to consider more appropriate ways of reacting to fearful situations. Based on the results of this study, a majority of older women are either unable to respond to fear provoking stimuli, feeling “paralyzed” or “frozen” with fear, or will react in an aggressive manner by yelling at beggars or attempting to fight off an attack. Unfortunately, these types of reactions can put older women in a more vulnerable position and actually increase their risk of personal victimization. For example, one of the participants in this study carried a metal bar in a shopping bag to defend herself in the event of an attack. While the use of this type of personal crime prevention strategy may enhance an individual’s sense of security, a weapon of this nature could also be used against the individual if an offender were able to gain control of the situation. Recognizing the dangers associated with these types of behaviors, elderly women can work with local law enforcement officials to

discover more appropriate ways of dealing with threatening situations. Considering the loss of control and feelings of powerlessness often associated with particularly fearful encounters, strategies that emphasize an individual's ability to find some form of control in these situations may be the most effective (Teitelman & Priddy, 1988).

Implications of this research are also evident at the neighborhood level. Taking into consideration the situational nature of fear of victimization and the factors that trigger feelings of insecurity, policy makers, police departments, and urban planners, for example, could all contribute to improving the quality of life of elderly women and enhancing their personal safety at the neighborhood level. Specifically, different agencies need to respond to the social and environmental signs of alarm that are typically associated with feelings of insecurity and concerns about personal safety. In fact, the findings of this study identify several ways in which social and environmental neighborhood characteristics could be related to experiences of fear. While these social and physical cues are often simply dismissed as "trivial" problems within our society (Skogan, 1990, p. 89), certain incivilities were clearly perceived to be threatening and fear provoking for these older women.

Social cues to danger, such as drunkenness and begging, created feelings of insecurity for many of the women in this study. While these types of behaviors could be seen as relatively harmless to some people, for these elderly women targeting these types of social disorders could go a long way to help enhance their sense of security. Environmental characteristics, such as poor lighting, should also receive more attention. Urban planners must take into consideration visibility issues and the potential for criminals to conceal themselves in darkness when designing urban areas. A specific

concern addressed by several women in this study was the new energy saving streetlights that have been installed along Winnipeg streets within the last few years. While these new forms of lighting are saving energy and money, the cost to individual security may be high because of reduced illumination. As Skogan (1990) has suggested, community members, local businesses and law enforcement officials can all work together to identify the different problems associated with specific neighborhoods and set practical solutions in motion to deal with these social and environmental disorders.

Recommendations regarding fear of victimization among elderly women can also be made at the societal level. The results of this study not only encourage all sectors of society to be responsive to elderly women who experience fear of victimization, but to recognize the fact that their experiences of fear do reflect stereotypical images of elderly women who are “paralyzed” by fear. A more complete account of their fears, as presented here, has the potential to dispel myths associated with “fear of crime” among elderly women and to generate more successful ways of responding to the situational nature of their fears. More specifically, by focusing almost entirely on the age of fearful individuals, policy makers and program coordinators have ignored the neighborhood characteristics that are often related to their experiences of fear. As Fattah and Sacco (1989) have suggested, “age-specific policies are clearly not in the best interests of older persons” (p. 277).

Final Conclusion

This study of urban-dwelling women age 65 and over has addressed some of the conceptual and methodological limitations associated with previous research in order to obtain a more accurate understanding of the role and significance of fear of victimization

in the lives of elderly women. While the perspectives of elderly women have traditionally been excluded from the fear of crime literature, this project has given elderly women a voice in the research process. Relying on their descriptions of fear, worry and concern as distinct experiences of safety awareness, recommendations were made for the direction of future research and the use of more appropriate measurement items. Theoretically, this study has provided a more concise conceptualization of fear of victimization that has the potential to improve confidence in theory testing, and encourages researchers in the fields of criminology and gerontology to seek out more appropriate explanations for this fear. On a practical level, the implications of this study suggest direct avenues for change at the personal, neighborhood and societal levels in order to enhance the personal safety of elderly women in Canada. Clarifying a number of discrepancies surrounding the issue of fear of crime, this research not only represents an important contribution to the existing fear of crime literature, but also has the potential to improve the quality of life of older women within our society.

Endnotes

¹ See for example an Angus Reid study conducted in June 1994 in which 24% of respondents said they felt "unsafe" walking alone in their neighborhoods after dark (Sacco, 1995). See also the 1992 Macleans/CTV poll in which 33% of survey respondents indicated a "fear" of walking alone in their neighborhoods at night. In this poll 55% of females and 11% of males reported feeling unsafe (Sacco, 1995).

² In Canada, individuals are classified as living below the poverty line if they must spend more than 58.5% of their income on the basic economic necessities of food, shelter and clothing (McPherson, 1998).

³ Neighborhood integration refers to how acquainted residents are with their neighbors, the level of integration and mutual trust among neighborhood residents, the ability of individuals to recognize strangers in their neighborhood, and the sense of control and responsibility residents have over events that take place in their neighborhood (Taylor, 1977).

⁴ Lawton and Nahemow (1973) developed the ecological model of adaptation so that gerontologists and policy makers could identify and create the best environment for specific elderly individuals. This theory is based on the premise that adaptation depends on the interaction of "individual competence" and "environmental press." Within this theoretical framework, positive and negative adaptive or maladaptive behavior is the direct outcome of the competence/environmental interaction (McPherson, 1998). See Lawton and Nahemow (1973).

⁵ Some common criticisms associated with the disengagement theory include: a lack of evidence surrounding the idea that decreased role involvement and social interaction are inevitable and universal; the inability of researchers to "prove" that disengagement is related to higher levels of life satisfaction; the inability to determine the causal relationship regarding whether or not disengagement is initiated by the individual or society; the failure to acknowledge the fact that there may be different types and degrees of disengagement for different people in different social situations, and a relatively small number of studies that have actually found withdrawal in later life to be a typical pattern (McPherson, 1998).

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Appendix A**ANNOUNCEMENT POSTER**

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS OF ELDERLY WOMEN?

A graduate student from the University of Manitoba is conducting a study about the concerns of elderly women who live alone in downtown Winnipeg and surrounding areas. If you are a woman over the age of 65 living alone in downtown Winnipeg or just outside the city center and are willing to be interviewed about what your everyday life is like, what is important in your life and any concerns or problems you may have, please contact **Cheryl** at 474-8903.

Confidentiality is assured.

Appendix B

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

The study that you have agreed to participate in is to fulfill the requirements of a Master of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Manitoba. The information gathered in this study will be used for Cheryl Christian's Master's thesis and publications derived from this study.

In conducting this research, I will be interviewing a sample of elderly women living alone in downtown Winnipeg and surrounding areas who have been solicited through organizations, apartment blocks, informational posters or other people who have been interviewed. You are volunteering to be interviewed about what your everyday life is like, about what is important in your life, including your safety and social involvement with family and friends, and about any concerns and problems you may have. In addition to questions concerning these issues, you will also be asked for some personal information such as marital status, occupation and involvement in social activities.

Confidentiality will be assured to all study participants. However, confidentiality cannot be maintained in the event of disclosure of matters related to abuse or violence against vulnerable persons such as children and/or older people. I am obligated by law to report such occurrences. Interviews will last approximately one and a half to two hours and will be audiotaped with your prior consent. Any identifying characteristics will be changed or omitted from any writings derived from the research and a master list of names and codes will be destroyed when the research is completed. The audiotaped interviews will also be destroyed upon completion of this research. All transcribed interviews and other data will be saved on computer disks and will be kept in a locked

facility at all times. You will have the opportunity to review the taped interview once transcription has taken place. A summary report of the study's findings will be made available to you if you wish and will be mailed out to you once the study has been completed. You can refuse to answer questions that cause you discomfort and can terminate the interview at any time. Being involved in this research is completely up to you. You can decide to drop out of the study at any time, as you are under no obligation to participate. Agreeing or not agreeing to participate in this study will have no effect on any benefits or services you now receive.

This study is being supervised by Dr. B. Payne and has been approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee. Any concerns or complaint regarding a procedure used in this study can be reported to the Head of the Department of Sociology (474-9260) for referral to the Research Ethics Committee.

Your time, effort and input in this study will be most valuable and are greatly appreciated.

Cheryl Christian xxx-xxxx

Appendix C

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

What are the concerns of elderly women?

A graduate student at the University of Manitoba is conducting a study of the concerns of older women living alone in downtown Winnipeg. If you are a woman over the age of 65 living alone in downtown Winnipeg and are willing to be interviewed, please contact Cheryl at xxx-xxxx. Confidentiality is assured.

Appendix D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study. The study that you have agreed to participate in is for my Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Manitoba. As you know, we will be talking about what your everyday life is like, about what is important in your life, including your safety and social involvement with family and friends, and about concerns and problems you may have. What we talk about today will help people who develop programs and those who conduct research to understand the needs and concerns of elderly women like yourself.

Before we begin our interview together, I want to make sure you understand:

- (a) That you can stop the interview at any time;
- (b) That you can refuse to answer any questions that you think are too personal or make you feel uncomfortable;
- (c) That none of your answers are being judged right or wrong, I am only interested in your experiences and your opinions;

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask before we get started?

Identification Number:

Date of Interview (d/m/y):

Time Interview Began:

Time Interview Completed:

Place of Interview:

BEGIN TAPING NOW

PART ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. To start off, could you please tell me a little about yourself to give me a good sense of who you are (PROBES: WHAT IS YOUR DATE OF BIRTH? WHAT IS YOUR MARITAL STATUS? IF WIDOWED, HOW MANY YEARS WERE YOU MARRIED? DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN? GRANDCHILDREN? HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN YOUR CURRENT HOME? WHERE DID YOU LIVE AS A CHILD? DO YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS? WHERE DO THEY LIVE? WHAT IS THE HIGHEST GRADE YOU ATTENDED IN SCHOOL? WHAT IS YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE? WHERE WOULD YOU PLACE YOUR LEVEL OF INCOME: UNDER 10,000 BETWEEN 10,000 AND 19,999, BETWEEN 20,000 AND 29,999, BETWEEN 30,000 AND 39,999, BETWEEN 40,000 AND 49,999, OR 50,000 AND UP?)

PART TWO: SALIENCE

2. Can you describe an average day in your life? What do you do in a typical day? Take yesterday, for example. What did you do from the time you woke up until you went to bed? (PROBE FOR DETAILS ABOUT DAY AND NIGHT ACTIVITIES AND THOUGHTS AND FOR CRIME PRECAUTIONS -- How does she get to the store to do her shopping, does she go alone, does she go outside in the neighborhood at all? WHEN? WHAT DOES SHE THINK ABOUT?)

3. We all have problems in our lives, things that we have to deal with. What do you think is the most serious problem facing elderly women today?

4a. What are your biggest problems in life? (PROBE: ARE THERE ANY OTHER?)

4b. What are your biggest worries? (PROBE: ARE THERE ANY OTHER?)

5. Of the problems and worries you've just named (LIST), which are the most important to you? (RANK ALL PROBLEMS AND WORRIES FROM MOST TO LEAST IMPORTANT)

6. What do you think are some of the greatest opportunities older people have today? What do you think are some of the greatest opportunities you have? What can you do now that you could not do earlier in your life?

PART THREE: PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Next, I'd like to ask you some questions about your involvement in social activities.

7. Have you taken part in any activities or organizations in the past year? PROBE: OFFER EXAMPLES SUCH AS RELIGIOUS SERVICES, GOING TO A SENIORS CENTRE, TAKING A HOBBY COURSE)
IF YES, DISCUSS WHAT, WHERE AND WHEN, ALONE OR WITH OTHERS, ASK ABOUT PARTICIPATION IN THE PAST.
IF NO, WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE TAKEN PART IN ANY...

WHAT PREVENTED YOU FROM TAKING PART IN ANY...

8. Who do you socialize with? (PROBE: FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS)
How often do you socialize with family, friends, or neighbors? (PROBE FOR DETAILS - WHEN - DAY OR NIGHT-, WHERE - HOW FAR AWAY FROM HOME, HOW DO YOU GET THERE, WHAT DO YOU DO)

9. Do you have someone you can talk to about your needs and worries? (PROBE: WHO? ANYONE ELSE? PROBE FOR SAFETY ISSUES)

10. Do you ever have trouble participating in social activities (ADD SOME OF ACTIVITIES RESPONDENT MENTIONED ABOVE) or doing things like shopping, going to a show? (PROBE FOR SOURCE OF TROUBLE, OFFER SOME EXAMPLES SUCH AS TRANSPORTATION, HEALTH, FINANCIAL CONCERNS, FEAR)

11. Are you satisfied with the amount of social activity in your life?

PART FOUR: REACTION TO STANDARD FEAR OF CRIME MEASURES

Now I would like to ask you some questions about safety.

12a. How safe do you feel, or would you feel, being out alone in your neighborhood at night? (LET THEM ANSWER THEN ASK FOR TRADITIONAL RESPONSES LISTED BELOW)

Would you say that you feel very safe, reasonably safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?

12b. Why do you say that? (DEPENDING ON THE RESPONSE, PROBE FOR: WHAT EXACTLY WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL SAFE/UNSAFE? IF UNSAFE, PROBE FOR AREA OF CONCERN OR TYPE OF INCIDENT OR CRIME AND FACTORS, SUCH AS ENVIRONMENTAL CUES, THAT TRIGGER FEELINGS OF BEING UNSAFE. SPECIFIC CRIMES: GIVE EXAMPLES SUCH AS ARSON, MOTOR-VEHICLE THEFT, VANDALISM, ROBBERY, BREAK AND ENTER. IF SAFE, PROBE FOR FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN FEELING OF SAFETY)

12c. Do you go out in your neighborhood? (PROBE: IF YES, WITH WHO? ABOUT HOW OFTEN? WHERE DO YOU GO? WHEN DO YOU GO? DOES SHE GO OUT ALONE OR WITH OTHER PEOPLE? HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU ARE OUT WITH OTHER PEOPLE? IF NO, WHY NOT? PROBE FOR ALL THE REASONS)

12d. How would you describe your neighborhood to someone who was thinking of moving here -- say another woman like you? What's good about the neighborhood and what's bad? (PROBE: WHAT DOES SHE CONSIDER HER NEIGHBORHOOD TO BE, WHAT DOES HER NEIGHBORHOOD CONSIST OF, DOES SHE AVOID ANY AREAS DURING THE DAY OR AT NIGHT, HOW MANY YEARS HAS SHE LIVED

IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD, DOES SHE KNOW MANY RESIDENTS IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD)

12e. If you could change one thing about your neighborhood, what would it be? Why?

12f. Do you ever think about moving out of your neighborhood? Why? Do you ever think about moving out of Winnipeg? (PROBE: WHY DID YOU MOVE HERE? ASK IF APPLICABLE)

13a. Is there any area right around here--that is, within a mile, where you would be afraid to walk alone at night? Yes or No. (ASK AS WRITTEN, IF RESPONDENT HESITATES, ASK IF THERE IS ANY PARTICULAR AREA WITHIN A MILE) (PROBE: WHERE ARE YOU THINKING OF? IS IT CLOSE TO WHERE YOU LIVE? DO YOU EVER GO THERE? WHAT EXACTLY WOULD YOU BE AFRAID OF? PLEASE DESCRIBE IT TO ME. IF YOU FELT IT WAS SAFE, WOULD YOU WALK ALONE AT NIGHT? WHY?)

13b. How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighborhood during the day? Very safe, reasonably safe, somewhat unsafe, very unsafe. (PROBE: WHY?) Do you ever walk alone in your neighborhood during the day? Why?

14. How likely is it that a person walking around here at night might get held up or attacked? -- Very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely? (PROBE: WHY DO YOU SAY THAT? ARE YOU AFRAID THAT THIS MAY HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOU WERE TO WALK AROUND HERE AT NIGHT? FEAR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?)

15. Is crime a problem in this neighborhood? (PROBE FOR DETAILS: WHY DO YOU SAY THAT? HOW MUCH OF A PROBLEM IS IT?)

PART FIVE: DETAILED ACCOUNT OF FEAR

Next, I would like to ask you about times when you have been afraid.

16a. In the past 24 hours, between this (MORNING/AFTERNOON) and yesterday at this time, have you been afraid of crime? (PROBE: IF YES, WHEN? CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT IT? PROBE FOR CONTENT OF FEAR AND INTENSITY. IF NO, WHY HAVE YOU FELT SAFE?)

16b. How worried about crime have you been in the past 24 hours? Was there any time when you weren't actually afraid, but your safety was on your mind?

17a. In the past six months, have you ever been afraid of crime? I would like you to describe in your own words and in as much detail as possible the time you were most afraid of crime during the past six months -- tell me where you were and what was going on. (IF NO INCIDENT IN PAST SIX MONTHS, ASK ABOUT MOST RECENT INCIDENT AND WHEN IT OCCURRED). (PROBE FOR INCIDENT DETAILS, AND ESPECIALLY DURATION AND INTENSITY)

17b. How often are you afraid like this? (PROBE: IS IT DAILY, WEEKLY, ONCE A MONTH OR LESS OFTEN?)

17c. Are there other situations in which you have been afraid? Please tell me about them. (IF NOT MENTIONED, ASK ABOUT SAFETY AT HOME, FEAR OF PURSE SNATCHING AND, IF APPLICABLE, SAFETY WHILE TRAVELING ON CITY BUSES, IN ELEVATORS, LAUNDRY ROOM IN APARTMENT. IF NO MENTION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ASK NEXT QUESTION)

17d. Of all the different types of crimes that could happen to a woman, which one do you fear the most? Of the types of crimes you have told me you are afraid of - SUMMARIZE CRIME TYPES -- which one are you the most afraid of? Why this one? (PROBE FOR PERCEIVED RISK, SERIOUSNESS OF CRIME)

17e. (IF NOT IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS QUESTION, ASK:) Are you ever afraid of being sexually assaulted? (IF RESPONDENT IS UPSET BY QUESTION, NOTE THAT SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO THINK THAT FEAR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IS HIGH FOR ALL WOMEN)

18a. How likely do you think it is that this would happen to you: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not at all likely?

18b. What about the other crimes you mentioned--LIST--how likely do you think it is that you would be a victim of these crimes: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, not at all likely?

19. Do you think that older people get singled out by criminals--are criminals more likely to choose older people? Why is that? (IF YES, IS IT TRUE FOR MEN AND WOMEN EQUALLY) Do you think that you are at risk? Why? Do you think that you are more likely to be hurt in the event of a crime than other people in your neighborhood? Why do you say that?

20. We have been talking about fear of crime--times when your were in the situation, you felt afraid, your heart pounds, etc. (ADD RESPONDENTS OWN WORDS). Are there times when you are not actually in the situation but you are thinking about your safety, or worried about it, or it's on your mind?

21. How often do you avoid doing necessary activities, such as shopping or errands, because you fear for your safety?

22. Looking back over your life, have there been times (OR OTHER TIMES) when you were afraid of crime? (PROBE: AS A CHILD OR YOUNG WOMAN? DID YOUR PARENTS EVER WARN YOU OR DISCUSS YOUR SAFETY? DO YOU FEEL MORE OR LESS SAFE TODAY? WHY? DO YOU FEEL MORE OR LESS SAFE

THAN THREE YEARS AGO? WHY? WHERE/WHEN DO YOU FEEL MOST SAFE/UNSAFE? WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES YOU FEEL THIS WAY?)

23. If you were to pinpoint when you began to worry about crime, can you tell me when it was?

PART SIX: VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCES

Now I would like to ask you some questions about being a victim.

24. Have you ever been the victim of crime? (PROBE: WHEN -- LAST SIX MONTHS, PAST YEAR, PRIOR TO THAT? IF YES, WHAT HAPPENED? HAS THIS HAD AN IMPACT ON YOU BEING AFRAID OF CRIME? ARE YOU AFRAID THIS MIGHT HAPPEN AGAIN? ARE YOU MORE FEARFUL SINCE THIS HAPPENED?) NOTE: ASK ABOUT ALL VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCES. PROBE: OBSCENE PHONE CALLS, FLASHED, FOLLOWED?

25a. Has anyone else in your family, or any close friends been the victim of crime? (PROBE: WHO, WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN, HOW DID THIS AFFECT YOU)

25b. Have you heard about any crimes in your neighborhood? How did you hear about this? Has this had an impact on you being afraid of crime?

25c. Do you recall reading about particular crimes in the newspaper, or hearing about them on the news? (IF YES: WHAT HAPPENED? HOW DID IT HAPPEN?)

PART SEVEN: CRIME PREVENTION

We are almost finished the interview, I just want to ask you a few questions about what steps, if any, you take to protect yourself.

26. Do you do anything to protect yourself from crime either at home or on the street?
 (RECORD UNAIDED AND THEN ASK ABOUT ANY OF THE LISTED
 ACTIVITIES THAT WERE NOT MENTIONED. NOTE THE ORDER IN WHICH
 SHE VOLUNTEERS SAFETY PRECAUTIONS)

UNAIDED AIDED

YES NO

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Direct deposit of social security or pension checks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoid using automated bank machines at night |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoid carrying large sums of money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Never display large sums of money in public |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you have security locks on windows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you have security locks on doors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you have bars on windows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Always lock doors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Always lock windows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Keep garage doors locked (IF HAVE GARAGE) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Stopped carrying a purse on the street |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Carry your purse close to you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wear a money belt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Stopped going out at night |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Marked property for identification (Operation Identification with The
Winnipeg Police Service) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have you had the Winnipeg Police Service do a security check of your
home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Attended meeting on crime prevention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Member of neighborhood watch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use timer or left lights on when away from home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Own a dog for protection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you have an alarm system |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you have peephole in door |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Have neighbor watch your home when away |

- ☐ ☐ ☐ Have neighbor collect your mail when away
☐ ☐ ☐ Stop deliveries (e.g. newspaper) when away
☐ ☐ ☐ More cautious when outside
☐ ☐ ☐ Go out in groups or with other people
☐ ☐ ☐ Walk in well lit areas
☐ ☐ ☐ Keep emergency phone numbers handy
☐ ☐ ☐ Avoid opening your door to strangers
☐ ☐ ☐ Watch for suspicious activity in your neighborhood?
☐ ☐ ☐ Do you refer unknown persons seeking entrance into your apt. to the manager? (APT.)
☐ ☐ ☐ Avoid entering elevators with suspicious occupants
☐ ☐ ☐ Lock your car whenever leaving it (CAR)
☐ ☐ ☐ Check interior of car before entering (CAR)
☐ ☐ ☐ Lock car after entering (CAR)
☐ ☐ ☐ Remove valuable items from your car (CAR)
☐ ☐ ☐ Park in well-lit parking lots (CAR)

OTHER: _____

27. Do you feel less afraid when you take these precautions? (PROBE: REPEAT COUPLE MENTIONED BY THE RESPONDENT) Do you think these techniques are effective ways of preventing crime? Why?

28. Do you have any suggestions for things that could be done, by the police or the city of Winnipeg or anyone else, to help decrease your fears or concerns about crime in your neighborhood? What could be done to make you less afraid?

29. What do you think can be done to protect older residents of Winnipeg?

30. Generally, would you say that Winnipeg is a safe place to live? Why?

These are all the questions I have to ask you. Is there anything you would like to ask or go over again? If you think of something more that you feel would be important to this study, please feel free to contact me.

When this study is complete, would you like a summary report of the study findings?
(IF YES, I WILL RECORD YOUR MAILING ADDRESS SEPARATELY FROM
YOUR RESPONSES. MAY I HAVE YOUR MAILING ADDRESS FOR THIS
PURPOSE?)

I would like to give you an information package obtained from the Winnipeg Police Service and Age and Opportunity. (DESCRIBE WHAT AGE AND OPPORTUNITY IS IF UNAWARE). This information describes some of the strategies that can be used to reduce the risk of victimization.

This completes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Your time, effort and input have been most valuable.
Thank you.

Appendix E

CONSENT FORM

Identification Number:

I, _____, voluntarily agree to participate in a study exploring the concerns of elderly women living alone in downtown Winnipeg. I have been informed that my involvement consists of an in-person interview that is being conducted for Cheryl Christian's (338-4339) Master's thesis and publications derived from this study. I understand that this interview will be audiotaped, and that the purpose of recording the interview is to strengthen the research by allowing an accurate record of what I say.

I am volunteering to be interviewed about what my everyday life is like, about what is important in my life, including safety and social involvement with family and friends, and about any concerns and problems I may have. In addition to questions concerning these issues, I understand that I will also be asked for some personal information about myself, such as marital status, education, and occupation.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from this study at any time.

I understand that my involvement in this study will be kept confidential, except in the event of disclosure of matters related to abuse of violence against vulnerable persons such as children and/or older people. If the researcher discovers any abuse during the interview, I understand that she is obligated by law to report this abuse.

I understand that the information I share in this interview will be identified by code rather than by name, and that the master list of names and codes as well as the audiotapes

will be destroyed when the research is completed. I have been assured that my name will not be used in any reports of the study's findings. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the taped interview once transcription has taken place and that a summary of the study findings will be made available to me once the study has been completed.

I have also been assured that my participation in this study will not affect any benefits or services provided to me.

I am aware that this study is being supervised by Dr. B. Payne (474-8903) and has been approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee. I understand that any concerns or complaints that I may have can be reported to the Head of the Sociology Department (474-9260) for referral to the Ethical Review Committee.

Name: _____ Investigator's Name: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Appendix F
CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I agree to keep any information identifying the participants involved in this study confidential by not revealing this information to anyone.

Name: _____ Investigator's Name: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Appendix G**INDEX SHEET**

Interview Number _____ Date: _____

Identification Number _____ Place: _____

Time Arrive: _____

Time Leave: _____

Length of Interview: _____

Contact Name: _____

Number: _____

Time: _____

Address: _____

Other Contact Times: _____

Comments: (Any immediate comments about the interview or follow-up commitments)

Appendix H
INDIVIDUAL PROFILE

Date of Interview _____

Identification Number _____

Date of Birth _____

Occupation _____

Education _____

Individual Income _____

Marital Status _____

Living Arrangement _____

Place of Residency _____