

BEING AND SPACE

An Exploration of the Experiences of Women on York University's Campus

Research Questions

- How do women experience York University's campus?
- How do women's experiences on campus impact the ways that they contribute to the York University community?
- How can we improve the experiences that women have on campus?

*"The way people think about safety at York needs to change."
- Lia, 2nd Year York Student*

Abstract

Being and Space investigates women's *being* on campus through an exploration of women's phenomenological experiences of comfort and safety, and discomfort and fear on York University's Keele and Glendon campuses. Additionally, the present research explores the impact of these feelings on the behaviors and contributions that the women make to York University's campus following these experiences.

Goal

The goal of the project is to provide a resource of qualitative information to help understand what helps create safe/unsafe places. The present research is guided by the experiences of participants. We aim to express women's unique, subjective feelings and experiences. Further, the present research advocates for the welcoming of all women into spaces so that the community can benefit from their valuable contributions.

Method

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research uses narrative inquiry (through interviews) to better understand complex human experiences. The stories give insight into the action, judgements, and motivations of individuals.

This method places participants in a position of power. In the interview participants *tell* their experience, identity, and life story, rather than being *told*. In this way, the individual situates and creates meaning in her narrative and world.

Photography

Following the qualitative interviews, researchers revisited the sites that each woman described. The area was photographed to provide a visual representation of the space that elicited powerful emotions and memories for the individual.

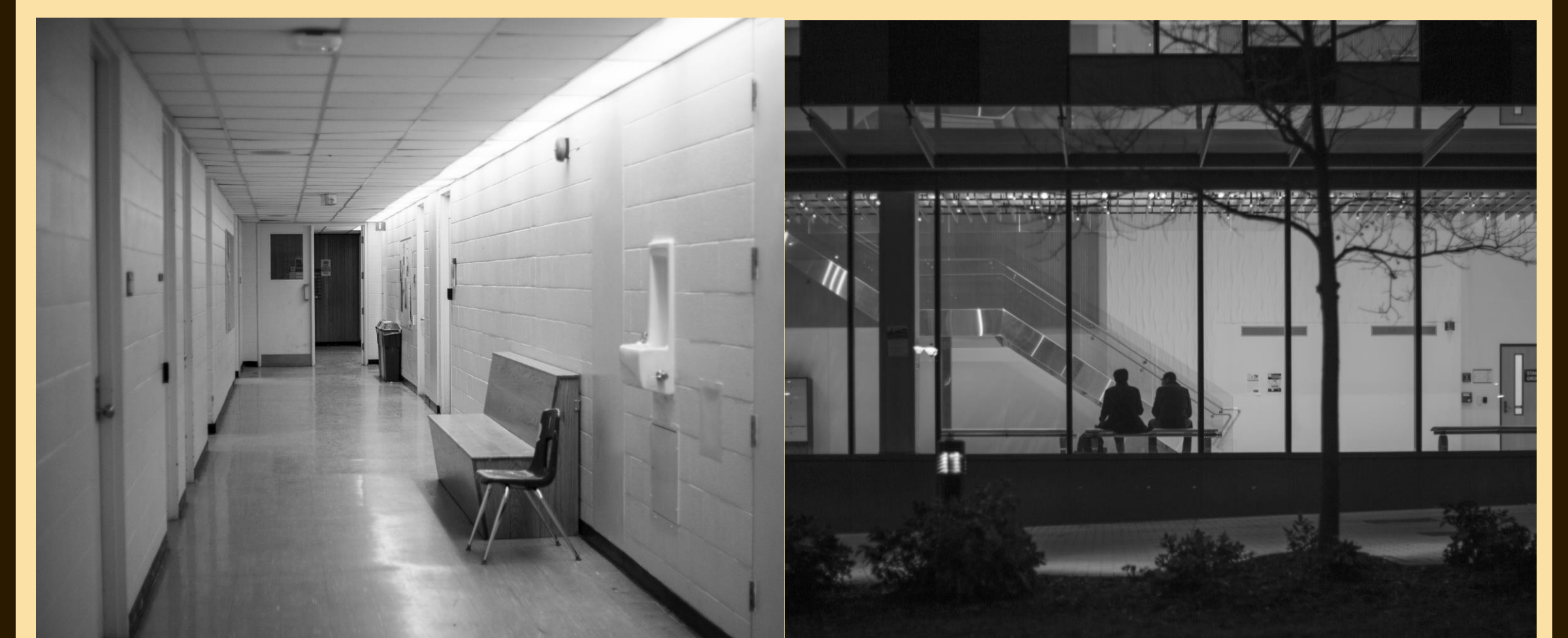
*"I try to be off-campus by seven...eight o'clock"
- Tilda, 3rd Year York Student*

Queer Phenomenology

The theoretical base for our project stems from Sara Ahmed's book, *Queer Phenomenology*. In it she questions what it means to be oriented in the world. As she states, "the question of orientation becomes, then, a question not only about how we 'find our way' but how we come to 'feel at home'" (7). This distinction of finding our way and being at home, along with other results that come from it (such as losing one's way and feeling lost) are what our project *Being and Space* wishes to find.

Results

Individuals were most uncomfortable in spaces in which they did not associate as their own. Individuals tended to look for sanctuaries on campus that allowed them to feel at home. For some, "home" was a space where they could be alone; other "homes" were found in communities that they felt they belonged in. Many participants had experienced gender-based harassment on campus and then felt unwelcome in those spaces. Additionally, participants were aware of available resources to increase safety but do not generally utilize them.



	Safe Space	Unsafe Space
Lora	Scott Library	Tait McKenzie
Naomi	VCP Theatre	York Lanes
Lia	Scott Library	Outside at Night
Marta	Between the Shelves at Scott Library	Collaboratory
Tilda	agYU Meeting Room	Glendon Campus
Heidi	Vanier College	Empty Spaces
Desirea	Scott Library	Bus Stops



Discussion

Improvements on campus can be made to increase the quality of experiences that women have. Recommendations based on interview content include:

- Foster smaller sub-communities within campus
- Encourage discussion about and labelling of harassment and assault
- Improve relations between York security and community members
- Increase security presence and transparency on campus