

**“I try to use my body language to show I am not a bad guy” –
Male bodies and women's fear of a repeat offender in Umeå, Sweden**

Linda Sandberg
(Umeå University, Schweden)

This article focuses on changing perceptions and representations of female and male bodies during a period of threat against women from a repeat offender in the medium-sized city of Umeå, Sweden. Based on interviews with women and men in Umeå, this article aims to examine meanings of fear of violence in public space by focusing on constructions of the body during a period of changing public crime discourses due to assaults by a serial rapist, the so-called Haga Man. The article illustrates how a change took place in both individual and public narratives from a focus on how women should conduct themselves to be safe, toward men's bodily behavior in order to present themselves in a non-threatening way. This case study stresses the importance of context and demonstrates the temporality in how bodies are perceived in space. A shift of emphasis took place toward bodies that frighten, rather than those that are afraid. Public descriptions of the Haga Man focused on characteristics of the perpetrator's body and 'normal Swedish appearance', which constructed an image of the dangerous white body. White male respondents positioned themselves in relation to these descriptions and were partly challenged with respect to new perceptions and meanings associated with 'normality'. In descriptions of the Haga Man's victims women were presented as vulnerable, but in contrast to many other cases there was no immediate focus on women's bodies in terms of respectability. The findings contribute to a discussion of how gendered power relations can be understood through shifting representations of bodies in space.