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**WOMEN, ENVIRONMENT, AND HEALING:  
A BATTERED WOMEN'S SHELTER**

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## ABSTRACT

In the 1970s, the feminist movement instigated a growing awareness of the dangers and suffering endured by victims of domestic abuse. This prompted a surge in the number of battered women's shelters and other services for battered women around the world. However, three decades later, shelters are seldom designed to specifically address the healing of survivors of domestic abuse. Studies in the field of environmental psychology show that spaces can evoke certain responses from occupants, ranging from inducing fear to producing calmness and relaxation. Using these findings, this investigation seeks to prove that careful design in the physical properties of a space, when partnered with efficient shelter services, can create a more complete healing environment for battered women than is found in most shelters today. An integral solution can be found by studying the plight of battered women, the history of design for battered women's shelters, and environment as it affects healing. The result will be an emotionally responsive haven for women in crisis.



# DEDICATION

To my Grandmother and the countless others who have lived with abuse  
all of their lives

## EPIGRAPH

*We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated.*

*-Maya Angelou*

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Theresa Singleton, the director of the YWCA's battered women's shelter in Hamilton County: She took an hour out of her hectic schedule to give me personal input on the lives and needs of battered women, so that I could design a shelter that would best fit their needs. She also allowed me honor of touring their present shelter so that I could understand the mood of the place.

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# INTRODUCTION

Every 15 seconds, a woman in this country is battered by her partner. Domestic violence affects all races, ages, and religions, as well as all educational and income levels. In the 1970s, the feminist movement instigated a growing awareness of the dangers and suffering endured by victims of domestic abuse. This prompted a surge in the number of battered women's shelters and other services for battered women around the world. However, three decades later, shelters are seldom designed to specifically address the healing of survivors of domestic abuse. Using findings from the field of environmental psychology, this investigation seeks to prove that careful design in the physical properties of a space, when partnered with efficient shelter services, can create a more complete healing environment for battered women than is found in most shelters today.

Currently, a majority of the shelters are existing buildings that were transformed into shelters. As a result, they do not cater to the special circumstances of the women, their children, or the people that work in the complex. Rather, they simply make the best of the building that they were given. This often results in less than ideal compromises in the arrangement of the shelter rooms. While some buildings are in good condition, most of the time they are not. This results in the women leaving just as soon as they possibly can, whether or not they have received the help and healing they need; if they are accustomed to better living conditions, they may even go back to their abusers rather than stay at the shelter. Unfit buildings help the cause very little. Something more must be done.

This study begins by examining the life of battered women. It is impossible to understand how a shelter can be created to aid these women in healing without knowing the day-to-day reality of their lives. Next, existing shelters are analyzed to understand how they fundamentally help women, as well as the ways in which they do not. Following this, the interrelationship of women and their environment is analyzed in the fields of environmental psychology and feminism. It is from all of the above information that an integral solution is found and ultimately documented in a comprehensive design for a battered women's shelter.

This shelter will be a haven for women in times of crisis. Here, they can be protected from an abusive relationship, receive therapy for past events, or simply commune with other women. This shelter's existence in the community of Cincinnati will send a clear message that women will no longer have to deal with abuse, that those who abuse cannot continue the domination of others, and that the city of Cincinnati is a safe haven for those who once felt they had nowhere to go.

# THE BATTERED WOMAN

"Nice looking man, the doctor."

"Doctor?"

"He says I have a beautiful house . . . best on the beach. When was he in here . . . yesterday while I was in town?"

"Martin, I don't know the doctor."

"Young, good looking . . . said you'd been staring at him from the window all day?" He slaps her hard across the face. She gasps and falls to the ground as the flower-filled vase that she was holding shatters across the floor. "Does it give you that much pleasure to humiliate me?" he snarls. Her only response is a whimper. "Stop it!" he yells at the top of his lungs, giving her a swift kick in the stomach. A terrified cry is her only response. He bends down to her on the floor and says, as if he had done nothing wrong, "Now you'll sulk, won't you?"

"No."

"Yes you will."

"No I won't."

"You'll pout and spoil our supper . . . our beautiful supper." He runs his fingers through her hair as she sobs. "I'm so sorry," he says, "Will you smile? Please?" He gives her a kiss and, after a while, he leaves for town.<sup>1</sup>

The above is a scene from the 1991 thriller, *Sleeping With the Enemy*. Although this scene is fictional, it is not an uncommon occurrence in reality. Every 15 seconds, a woman in this country is battered in ways such as this. Domestic violence affects all races, ages, and religions, as well as all educational and income levels.<sup>2</sup>

Abusers come in all shapes and sizes. They include not only men in poor urban areas, but also those who are professionals and well respected in the community.<sup>3</sup> Typically, they are devout believers in male supremacy and in the stereotyped role of the male within the family unit. These men are abnormally jealous and often present a dual personality, appearing to be kind and sincere in one moment and a violent terror in the next. They generally have a low self-esteem and frequently use sex as an act of aggression to boost their waning view of themselves. These men often blame their partners for spurts of abusive behavior and believe that their tumultuous behavior could never have any negative outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

According to psychologist Joel Schumacher, there are three categories of domestic abuse. The first is psychological abuse. In this stage, the abuser



Fig. 1: A child's picture of abuse. From the YWCA Cincinnati website.



Fig. 2: Woman in crisis.

<sup>1</sup> *Sleeping With the Enemy*. Videotape. Dir. Joseph Ruben. With Julia Roberts, Patrick Bergin, and Kevin Anderson. Fox Home Video, 1991. (99 min.)

<sup>2</sup> Sandra Arbetter. "Family Violence: When We Hurt The Ones We Love," *Current Health* 2 Nov. 1995: 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Domestic Violence: The Facts." Myths, Facts, Stats. Safety Net Home Page. 3 Feb. 1997. Available: <http://www.cybergrrl.com/dv/book/myth.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Metro Nashville Police Department. "Domestic Abuse." n. pag. 3 Feb. 1997. Available: <http://www.nashville.net/police/abuse/index.html#batterer>.

uses male privilege, isolation, and economic and emotional abuse to make his wife act as he wants. Through isolation, he can control every aspect of her existence, justifying his actions by saying that he is jealous. Because of his male privilege, he is the “Master of the Castle” who makes all of the big decisions in the family; she is his own personal servant. Economically, he can abuse her by preventing her from getting a job and not letting her know about or have access to family funds. If she has any money at all, he takes it from her and makes her beg for money if she ever needs it. He humiliates her by putting her down and calling her names. Constantly he plays mind games with her so that she will think she is absolutely crazy. If she does do something to break his hold, he makes her feel guilty by sulking or threatening to leave her.<sup>5</sup>

The second category is indirect physical abuse, through which he can intimidate her by using looks, gestures, or actions. Throwing and smashing objects, abusing pets, driving recklessly, or displaying weapons are just a few ways in which he can indirectly threaten her. This stage can also be called the pre-battering violence stage. He uses verbal abuse and makes threats to do something to hurt her in addition to the situations listed above. Almost 100% of men that reach this point resort to battering.<sup>6</sup>

The final stage, direct physical abuse, has, in itself, many smaller stages. The beginning levels involve pushing, grabbing, and restraining the female - eventually progressing to slapping, pinching, kicking, and pulling out masses of hair. At the severe stages, the woman is choked, beaten with objects such as baseball bats, threatened with weapons, and raped. The rape is either forced by the use of a weapon or the woman simply submits out of fear; she knows that he will beat her if she says no. The abuser usually tries to minimize the violence or say that it didn't even happen. He also likes to shift the responsibility and say that she caused the violent episode to happen.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of the terror these women live with, they have a low self-esteem and willingly accept full responsibility for the batterer's actions. The woman typically suffers from guilt, thinking that she is the reason the relationship isn't working; yet she denies the dread and anger that she has a right to feel. Time and again, she discounts the abuse by saying, “It wasn't that bad,”

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<sup>5</sup> “Domestic Violence: The Facts.”

<sup>6</sup> “Domestic Abuse.”

<sup>7</sup> “Domestic Abuse.”



Fig. 3: Woman in crisis.



Fig. 4: Woman in crisis.

or, "He only hits me every few months." She blames herself because she cannot figure out how to make him happy in order to stop the battering.<sup>8</sup>

It is naive to assume that signs of abuse are only in the forms of bruises and other bodily injuries. Battered women frequently suffer from bouts of depression, nightmares, anxiousness, or nervousness, and naturally, they are terrified of their abusers. They have trouble dealing with their anger, identity, and sex. At times, they cannot bear to talk to their parents or to their children. They are also likely to abuse substances to help them block out the painful reality of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

Violence in a relationship heightens in severity over time; the more a woman has been injured previously, the more at risk she is to injury during the next episode of violence.<sup>10</sup> This leads to many long-term effects on battered women. As a woman grows older, domestic violence aggravates arthritis, hypertension, and heart disease. She frequently loses jobs because of absenteeism, whether it is from illness as a direct result of the violence, or from court appearances to testify against her abuser. If she moves to avoid the violence, she can lose her job as well as the support from close friends she had to leave behind.<sup>11</sup>

With all of the ill effects of the violence, why does a woman stay in an abusive relationship? First and foremost, her partner has called her dumb, ugly, or useless so often that it has worn down on the woman's self-esteem, making her doubt her ability to successfully leave and make it on her own.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, there is the basic feeling of fear. She fears retaliation from the abuser. He may have vowed to take revenge on family members if she were to leave him. She may hope for her partner to change or even feel that he needs her. She may fear the psychological and economic difficulty of being on her own. Community and family reactions to her leaving may make her fearful because she was socialized to believe that marriages are meant to be forever.<sup>13</sup> She may also be incapable of taking action to stop the abuse through learned helplessness. The attacker seems invincible to her and so she doesn't take action against him.<sup>14</sup>

Her economic situation may also keep her from leaving because she has no access to the family finances. Most of these women stay at home to take care of their children and have no income of their own. For a woman that



Fig. 5: Woman in crisis.



Fig. 6: Woman in crisis.

<sup>8</sup> "Domestic Violence"

<sup>9</sup> Joel C. Schumacher. "Wife Abuse: Are There Warning Signs?" *Intimate Violence*. 3 Feb. 1997. Available: [http://www.theallengroup.com/members/Fr\\_schumacher.html](http://www.theallengroup.com/members/Fr_schumacher.html).

<sup>10</sup> Alfred DeMaris and Steven Swinford. "Female Victims of Spousal Violence: Factors Influencing Their Level of Fearfulness." *Family Relations* Jan. 1996: 99.

<sup>11</sup> "Domestic Violence"

<sup>12</sup> Arbetter 9.

<sup>13</sup> Cassey Conley. "Abused Wives: Why Do They Stay?" *Intimate Violence*. 3 Feb. 1997. Available: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/n/x/nxd10/violence.htm>.

works, her controlling partner is deliberately there on payday to take her paycheck.<sup>15</sup> Too often, women's shelters, which would help a woman with financial difficulties, are full. As a result, she would have no way to support herself or her children if she were to find an apartment on her own. If she is married, she might have trouble finding a place to go, as family and friends, even today, usually are not very supportive of a woman leaving her husband.<sup>16</sup>

Another reason that she stays is because she knows no safe refuge from her abuser. The victimizer has threatened to kill her countless times and there are not any federal witness protection programs for domestic assault victims.<sup>17</sup> Even with anti-stalking laws in many states, women who leave their husbands face a greater danger of being killed by their abusers than those who stay with their husbands.<sup>18</sup>

Abused women feel mortified, humiliated, and dehumanized. They believe that the physical pain is more endurable than the shame they experience when they sense that others can see what happens to them behind closed doors. Instead, they stay and hope for better times. Naturally, the relief felt during periods of peace from the battering is enormous. However, this hope and feeling of relief can also prompt her to stay.<sup>19</sup> Hoping for the best, she believes that the last episode could have also been the final one.

Victims usually don't call the police about domestic violence because they would fear for their lives if they were to do so. The immobilizing effect of fear makes women incapable of taking action to stop abuse even when the opportunity presents itself.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, women are more likely to be murdered by their abusers when they attempt to report abuse.<sup>21</sup> Knowing of their partners' violent tendencies, these women have no desire to provoke the anger further. Finally, they may be terrified of the police. If the police were to come to the abusive episode, they might contact social workers. She fears that these social workers may declare her an unfit mother and take her children away.<sup>22</sup>

Even when in situations of abuse, many women still claim to love their husbands. There are a few ways of explaining this. Love is irrational and oftentimes paradoxical. The battered woman may love the abuser's pleasant characteristics and stifle any outrage at his cruel behaviors.<sup>23</sup> She might have a strong



Fig. 7: Woman in crisis.



Fig. 8: Woman in crisis.

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<sup>14</sup> DeMaris 98.

<sup>15</sup> Conley n. pag.

<sup>16</sup> "Domestic Violence"

<sup>17</sup> Frank M. Ochberg. "Understanding the Victims of Spousal Abuse." n. pag.

<sup>18</sup> Arbetter 8.

<sup>19</sup> Ochberg n. pag.

<sup>20</sup> DeMaris 98.

<sup>21</sup> "Domestic Violence"



emotional attachment to the batterer called traumatic bonding.<sup>24</sup> The relief from punishment that he withheld was so rewarding that she is grateful to him for ending her suffering-even though he is the one who caused it in the first place.

When a woman finally leaves her husband, going to a women's shelter is sometimes better. Going to a place without the protection of a shelter can present too many opportunities for the abuser to try to convince her to come back to him. An abusive man cannot bear being left and begs incessantly for her to return, promising that he will never hurt her again.<sup>25</sup> He may bribe her with hearts and flowers or claim that he will be a great father to the kids as he has never been before. He may claim that he has accepted Christ into his life, that he has stopped drinking, or that he has gone to counseling and he is a changed man - almost any lie to convince her to come back to him.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, he may not be so nice. He may find her after she leaves and threaten her with violence to make her come back to him or to simply harass her.<sup>27</sup> To deal with these conditions, she needs the stable support of a shelter.

An abused woman needs physical protection, financial resources, and a reliable support system. These are all available at a shelter.<sup>28</sup> Sessions with caseworkers and fellow abused women will help her through the tears and second thoughts, and give her a boost on her feelings of being female. Sessions show her that women can be strong, brave, and demand respect.<sup>29</sup> The shelter services help her deal with the issues of trust, rejection, anger, abandonment, and the severe depression encountered by battered women who leave their partner. Her feelings of safety can only be regained through warmth and understanding on the part of counselors, friends, and family.<sup>30</sup> This is the life of a battered woman. In the next section, the role of the shelter is described in more detail, as well as the history of shelters for survivors of domestic violence.



Fig. 9: Woman leaving with child.



Fig. 10: Women talking at shelter.

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<sup>22</sup> Ochberg n. pag.

<sup>23</sup> Ochberg n. pag.

<sup>24</sup> DeMaris 98.

<sup>25</sup> Arbetter 8.

<sup>26</sup> "Domestic Violence"

<sup>27</sup> DeMaris 98.

<sup>28</sup> Ochberg n. pag.

<sup>29</sup> Arbetter 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ochberg n. pag.

## BATTERED WOMEN'S SHELTERS

The first refuges for women grew out of the Catholic Church's desire to curb the vices of society. Prostitution and homelessness were the main reasons for these safe houses, but occasionally women who were abused by their husbands were allowed to enter. For the longest time, it was considered the right of a husband to keep his wife in check if her sinful nature were to rear its head. The husband had the right to beat her if he thought she was straying from the straight and narrow path. The church would only interfere in the most extreme cases.

In the 1970s, there was a growing awareness of the dangers and suffering endured by victims of domestic violence. The rapid development of emergency shelters began in 1971 with the Chiswick Women's Aid, founded by Erin Pizzey in England. The movement quickly swept to the United States; by 1980, at least 300 shelters were established countrywide.<sup>31</sup> Cincinnati, Ohio, had one of them.

### History of Cincinnati's YWCA Shelter

In the mid-1970s, the YWCA became aware of domestic violence both at a national and local level. Cincinnati's YWCA CEO, Charlene Ventura, wanted to investigate how much domestic violence was affecting women in the Cincinnati area. When she had the Kentucky Post publish a questionnaire on intimate partner violence, she received a huge response – over 100 women responded. The results of the questionnaire led to a public hearing held at the YWCA in August 1976. Many women showed up to give testimony, while government officials and members of law enforcement listened. Promptly, it was decided that the YWCA would open Hamilton County's first battered women's shelter.<sup>32</sup>

In 1978, the Alice Paul House opened as a sanctuary for battered women. It operated for twenty years, housing 21 women and their children. Over time, however, several inadequacies were emerging. The building was falling apart, structurally, it did not have adequate facilities such as restrooms and overall space, and it was, overall, not a very warm and appealing place. It did not meet the needs battered women in the



Fig. 11: A shelter can be any building. From Safe Horizon website.

<sup>31</sup> Albert Shostack. *Shelters For Battered Women and Their Children*. 2002.

<sup>32</sup> YWCA Cincinnati. Battered Women's Shelter. Accessed October 15, 2002. Available: <http://www.ywcacincinnati.org/crisis.html>

Cincinnati community, as there were 100 women on the waiting list monthly.

Leadership Cincinnati did a needs assessment to determine if a new shelter that was needed. They approached the investigation by using focus groups of YWCA staff, community members, and battered women to determine the problems with the current shelter. The conclusion of the assessment was that there was definitely a need for a new structure. At this point, the committee shifted its focus to determine what the shelter should include, as well as where it should be located. It needed to be near social service agencies, hospitals, and on the bus line. Amazingly, the perfect site with a large building to house the shelter was found, near all of the amenities. In 7 months, the newly renovated shelter was ready.<sup>33</sup>

### YWCA's Battered Women Shelter

The YWCA Battered Women's Shelter provides the only emergency protective shelter for battered women and children in Hamilton County. The goal of the YWCA Battered Women's Shelter is to provide safe, secure, temporary shelter and to provide necessary supportive services for battered women and their children to move them towards living independently and free from violence. Every aspect of the programming is designed with the safety of the victim and her children in mind. Supportive services include case management and advocacy, group support, onsite employment training, financial and transportation assistance, children's programming, and community education.<sup>34</sup>

The committee of women and architects who coordinated the \$1.6-million project kept future residents in mind as they mapped out how the 11,300-square foot, four-story mansion would look. The 10-bedroom house is filled with comforting touches, from the pastel tones of the walls to the flower vases on the tables. Every room is decorated with artwork, etched in comforting colors. Every bed is covered with a homey quilt. The shelter also stocks different sizes of women's and children's clothing, because many women have to leave their abusive situation on the spur of the moment.<sup>35</sup>

The new shelter improves on the old with a larger capacity, new security measures, and many new services. The waiting list from the old shelter has been



Fig. 12: Great room at YWCA Cincinnati shelter. From Fall 1999 newsletter.

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<sup>33</sup> Lisa Cardillo Rose. "Sanctuary for battered women." Kentucky Post 17 May 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Rose.

<sup>35</sup> These observations were made during a visit to the shelter on November 28, 2002.

completely eliminated. It also has a security system that consists of 16 cameras to monitor the exteriors and interiors. Panic buttons are also provided throughout the shelter to help the women feel more secure; they know that help isn't very far away if they need it. Visitors must stand outside a security fence, identify themselves, and be buzzed in by staff before they can approach the house.

Upon walking in the gate, there is a butterfly garden, a vegetable garden, a relaxing space, and a play area for children. There are park benches and playground equipment in the fenced yard. The Horticulture Society does all of the landscaping free of charge.

The shelter also has services for children. A cheerful indoor play area is stocked with toys and built with cubbyholes for hide-and-seek. An educational room provides schooling inside the shelter walls for residents' children. In the recent past, the women had to either send children to schools near the shelter or keep them at their regular school if it is considered safe. The schoolroom is bright, with murals of the solar system covering the walls and shelves are full of books and games.

In touring the current shelter I noticed that there is specific emphasis in keeping the house very clean. This is out of necessity because of the volume of people that the shelter accommodates throughout its life. Keeping the shelter clean is just one way in which the shelter conveys respect to the residents. They do not need to feel that they are the stepchildren of society.<sup>36</sup>

The artful ways in which this shelter is hidden is quite amazing. It is right in plain sight, yet the casual observer would never ever think it was anything other than a normal residence. There are no bars on the windows; in fact, the interiors feel so open and spacious that one would never guess that security was a main issue there. Aside from the mass of people in the building – it serves 60 people, but averages out at about 54 at a time – the shelter maintains the feeling of a peaceful home.

The office area and entryway of the shelter is very cramped, but that was the result of having to conform a program to an existing building. The battered women were important first, and then the workers' areas were



Fig. 13: Child's play area at YWCA Cincinnati shelter. From Fall 1999 newsletter.



Fig. 14: Resident bedrooms at YWCA Cincinnati shelter. From Fall 1999 newsletter.

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<sup>36</sup> Information gathered from interview with Theresa Singleton. November 28, 2002.

secondary. However, it is extremely important to have these caseworkers in close proximity to the residents, or at the very least, easily accessible. The rest of the main floor is occupied with the great room, conference room, and the children's wing. Resident rooms and restroom facilities occupy the top two floors of the house, along with a women-only room. The kitchen and dining areas are on the bottom floor, which is the basement, along with all of the food storage, laundry, and mechanical services. They also have a small closet space for goodwill items that are to be an amenity to women at the shelter. At least five times this amount of storage is needed.

### Shelter Procedures

The shelter hotline operates 24 hours a day; Women Helping Women takes calls during the 40-hour work week, and the shelter staff take it for the additional 128 hours. If a call comes in on weekends or after hours, it is sent to one of Women Helping Women's after-hours counselors.<sup>37</sup>

Typically a woman calls the hotline and a quick telephone interview is done to determine if she is battered and at risk. If she is, then she goes to a pick-up point where a cab is sent for her. Upon entry, an intake interview is completed, which takes about 45 minutes. She is then assigned a case manager who, in turn, does a needs assessment and connects her to services that she might need: housing issues, child custody, immigration, chemical dependency, HIV, protection orders, safety planning, etc. The shelter's primary service is to be a safe place. The location of the shelter is completely confidential; no visitors are allowed. If a resident wants to meet with a mom or aunt, she has to meet them at one of the pick up points – there is no other solution. Also, if the woman needs it, a physician visits regularly, as well as a legal aide.

The YWCA realizes that it is not an expert on every issue, so they collaborate with the Center for Independent Living Options, and organization that finds a suitable living arrangement for a woman that is not battered, but does need help. Sometimes women, who have a sensory or cognitive disability, mental retardation, HIV, or AIDS, call the hotline for help. They are, in turn, referred to a corresponding agency that specializes in dealing with the disability in question. The YWCA tries to make the right connections to best help each woman.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Theresa Singleton November 28, 2002.



Fig. 15: Dining room at YWCA Cincinnati shelter. From Fall 1999 newsletter.



Fig. 16: Mother and child. From YWCA website.

The shelter takes a lot of money to maintain. This shelter serves 900 women and children a year – naturally there is wear and tear on all aspects of the building. Most of the time, damage to the shelter is not malicious. The residents are people in crisis; they spill coke and don't clean it up, and children sometimes act terribly because of the violence they have witnessed. Food is not allowed upstairs because of the possibility of bugs; an exterminator comes to the shelter once a month. Donations are used to finance all of these issues.

For other money to help the women with deposit, rent, birth certificates, furniture, and other such items, the case managers are busy writing grants. For example, from January 1, 2002 to Nov. 18, 2002, the shelter received \$100,000 in direct financial assistance. The shelter also receives money from the City of Cincinnati, as well as the income from fund raising. Accessing this money removes a barrier for women trying to make it on their own.

The shelter has about 35-38 people working as staff. They work in shifts to cover the shelter 24 hours a day. The major staff positions' responsibilities are listed below. There are also other workers, such as the volunteers and kitchen staff. Maintenance and cleaning are contracted out.<sup>38</sup>

Job Position	Responsibilities
Residential Aides	Make sure the house is kept clean; make sure residents pick-up their rooms, get out of bed in the morning, eat breakfast, shower, and get moving; do all security and house inspections.
Family Support Specialists	Hotline advocates, answer telephone and do telephone and intake interviews; occasionally do security checks; give out medication, bus tokens; give moral support to residents.
Case Managers	Ensure the delivery of services to program participants; plan strategies with women to get from point A to point B; apply for grants of federal money.
Case Manager Coordinator	Makes sure that services are being delivered to residents, checking the work of case managers; in charge of Virtual Electronic Shelter tracking program; sign-off on all requests for money.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Theresa Singleton November 28, 2002.



Fig. 17: Living room at Safe Horizon. From Safe Horizon website.



Fig. 18: Playroom at Safe Horizon. From Safe Horizon website.

Evening Coordinator	Supervision of all family support specialists.
Aftercare Coordinator	In charge of statistical collection, training of volunteers, and the like.
Weekend Coordinator	Ensures that needs are met even during the weekend
Child's Advocate	Helps children; in charge of activities to teach children that abuse was not their fault; anger management, etc.
On-Site Director	Overall supervision of everyone in the facility



Architects Ben J. Refuerzo and Stephen Verderber investigated the functions that nature had in the design of a battered women's shelter that would contribute to the feeling of a safe refuge. They conducted a post-occupancy evaluation (POE) on approximately 800 battered women's shelters across the country to determine what the occupants needs were particular to the situations that they had been in, and what could be defined as a safe, nurturing environment. They found that problems, such as crowding and privacy, demanded a solution of architecture as a therapeutic support device. Based on the results of the POE, they discovered certain aspects that a shelter needed to function properly, both as a building and as a nurturing environment:<sup>39</sup>

1. *Accessible local resources*: A site should be chosen that provides for direct, safe access to local community resources, i.e. stores, jobs, health clinics, schools, parks, and other green spaces, counseling centers, and recreational facilities. These areas should be close enough so as to not induce fear.
2. *Appropriate shelter imagery*: The architectural style of the shelter should reflect the scale and character of the neighborhood. As one passes to and from the shelter, the landscaping should complement the building by creating a safe, visible, and dignified experience. Building security and the natural context should compliment one another.
3. *Shelter site security*: Careful landscaping can create a sense of security, yet avoid the appearance of a fortress. While the use of certain barriers is essential, remember that fences, gates, and windowless walls are characteristic of prisons.
4. *Environmental sound control*: If shelters must be located in urban areas, then some method of acoustical protection must be provided for the residents and staff. Unwanted environmental sounds can troublesome in that they are discomforting and often

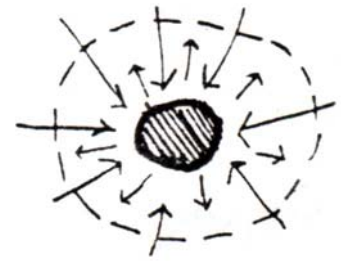


Fig. 19: Accessible Local Resources

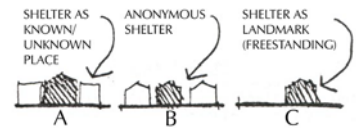


Fig. 20: Appropriate Shelter Imagery. From B. J. Refuerzo and S. Verderber. (1988) "Creating a Safe Refuge" as listed in footnote.

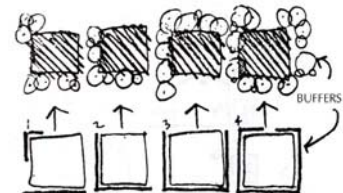


Fig. 21: Shelter Site Security. From "Creating a Safe Refuge."

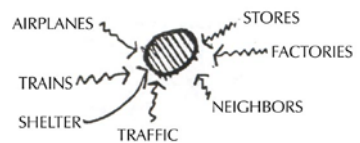


Fig. 22: Environmental Sound Control. From "Creating a Safe Refuge."

<sup>39</sup> B. J. Refuerzo and S. Verderber. (1988) "Creating a Safe Refuge: The Functions of Nature in the Design of Shelters for Battered Women and Their Children. In D. Lawrence, R. Habe, A. Hacker, D. Sherrod (eds.), *Paths for Co-existence (EDRA 19 Proceedings)*. Washington, D. C.: Environmental Design Research Association, pp. 63-69.



a source of uncertainty in an abused woman. This could cause residents to feel unsafe or fearful, which defeats the purpose.

5. *Visual buffers*: The shelter should be screened from the street and nearby buildings by trees, hedges, fences, berms, or trellises. The creation of hiding spots should be avoided, especially behind bushes, in corners, or against the building. All landscaping elements should be low maintenance and durable to keep the shelter environment therapeutic.
6. *Places for refuge*: Safe places of human scale should be designed to allow for reflection, intimate thought, and privacy. These places should be comforting and reassuring, as opposed to threatening and uncontrollable. One should be able to exert territorial control over these places, such as the use of moveable, flexible furniture, which will allow more freedom and choice for the residents. Arbors, outdoor sitting alcoves, benches along pathways or in the corner of a yard allow for social interaction.
7. *Centralized entry sequence*: Beginning at the point of entry to the site, transitional spaces and subsequent elements of the approach should be consciously arranged to unfold sequentially. The parking area should be a coordinated element, either encountered before the shelter is seen or configured to allow for the passing of the shelter followed by the approach to the front door. Controlled access points should be provided for the front door, service entry, and back door.
8. *Secure entry*: From the inside of the building, the person at the reception desk should have direct visual access to the immediate outdoor area. Landscaping should be considered as a means of screening the entrance from the "outside world," not prohibiting one's ability to scan the outdoors from within. Even with visual access to the surrounding area, electronic security video monitoring systems are recommended for use on a 24-hour basis.

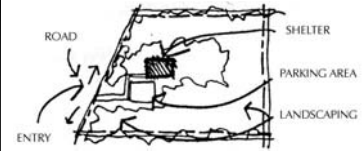


Fig. 23: Visual Buffers. From "Creating a Safe Refuge."

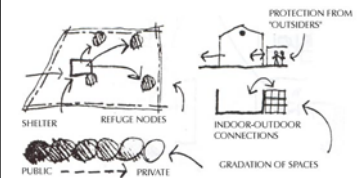


Fig. 24: Places for Refuge. From "Creating a Safe Refuge."

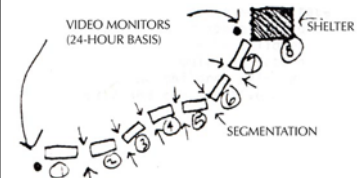


Fig. 25: Centralized Entry Sequence. From "Creating a Safe Refuge."

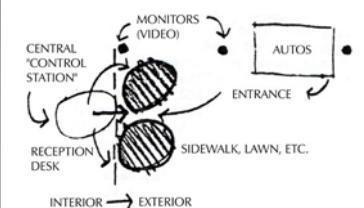


Fig. 26: Secure Entry. From "Creating a Safe Refuge."

9. *Interior courtyards:* If residential units area clustered in a courtyard configuration, the buildings will act as a protective barrier - the courtyard as the therapeutic “heart” of the shelter. Access to the courtyard should be through a few major doors, one leading from the public shared spaces inside, one into the courtyard from each residential unit. Trees, lawns, bushes, gardens, and water can help to create a feeling of refuge and a human scale in the courtyard.

10. *Children’s play and counseling area:* Children should have safe, secure outdoor places to engage in constructive, therapeutic play and counseling activities. This should be a series of indoor-outdoor transitional spaces to provide more options for counseling and access to supplies and toys. Decentralized play areas should be provided to allow for various play spaces for differing numbers of children.

11. *Viewing stations:* Window seats and alcoves should be provided so that residents can retreat for privacy without going to their bedroom. These stations will provide safe places for the monitoring of the shelter site, children, and natural elements.

Based on the above guidelines, Refuerzo and Verderber’s architectural firm, R-2ARCH, developed a prototypical design for a shelter in Waldorf, Maryland. The shelter complex includes staff and counseling offices, a community cluster, residential places, a child day care facility, and abundant storage opportunities. All components are set into the site with a logic that grows from the site program and the design guidelines.<sup>40</sup>

The 3.5-acre site is shrouded in vegetation and very inconspicuous. Visitors pass through a single formal entrance into a series of gates – symbolic as well as real – before they enter the more private areas of the shelter. The lower wall around the courtyards is softened on the interior through the plantings of hedges and trellises, thus creating a safe environment within the wall. The wall is part of the building: it varies in height and material selection.

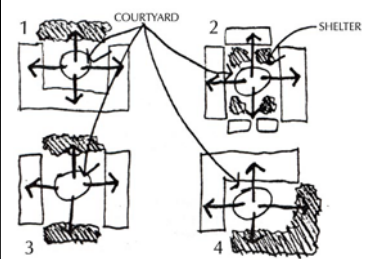


Fig. 27: Interior Courtyards. From “Creating a Safe Refuge.”

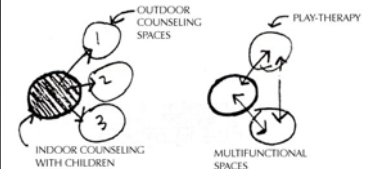


Fig. 28: Children’s Play and Counseling Area. From “Creating a Safe Refuge.”

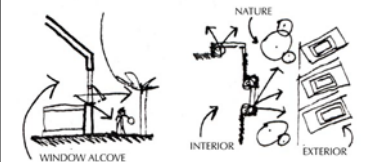


Fig. 29: Viewing Stations. From “Creating a Safe Refuge.”

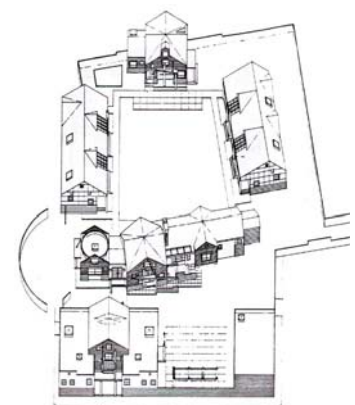


Fig. 30: Axonometric Plan of Charles County Shelter Prototype. From Benjamin Refuerzo and S. Verderber. “In support of a new life: a shelter for victims of domestic violence.” see footnote.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Refuerzo and S. Verderber. “In support of a new life: a shelter for victims of domestic violence.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (1993) 10, 40-58.

The reception area acts as a gate and protective buffer for the rest of the complex. There is a change in materials at this juncture between the public and private sphere to represent the women's first bridge to the healing process. Light, height, and space are used to greet and welcome.

The grand room is the focus for group interaction and activity. Here women can come together to participate in organized activities, attend group meetings, or interact with others. The spaciousness of this room gives opportunities for scale changes, scattered alcoves, and window seats to enhance the versatility of the space; residents can sit alone in a niche or congregate in a small group while still feeling connected to the larger community of the shelter. The room's double height ceiling adds an uplifting feeling intended to symbolize hope.

The residential units are designed to evoke a true feeling of home. Each unit has a shared alcove entrance with a liberal stoop overlooking the courtyard. These exterior rooms create a sense of belonging and connection to the larger community within the shelter. Interiors are divided into three main zones: a small living room, a courtyard, and sleeping areas. The sleeping areas are large enough to accommodate two double beds or a bunk bed with a built-in storage wall. A seating bay with high windows softens the space.

Overall, this shelter was designed using much thought into the lives and issues of battered women. The architects used a design approach typical to that used in environmental psychology. As a result, most of these elements will also be used in my design approach as well.



Fig. 31: Reception Hall. From "In Support of a New Life."



Fig. 32: Great Room. From "In Support of a New Life."

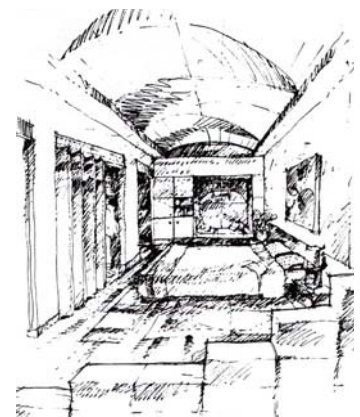


Fig. 33: Resident Bedroom. From "In Support of a New Life."

# WOMEN & ENVIRONMENT

In an environment such as a battered women's shelter, where everything is observed from the heightened level of fear or apprehension, studies in environmental psychology can lead to successful solutions in designing spaces to aid in healing. As stated before, this investigation seeks to prove that careful design in the physical properties of a space, using information gathered from the fields of environmental psychology and feminism, can create a more complete healing environment for battered women than is found in most shelters today. The key to producing an emotionally responsive haven for battered women comes with finding out a little more about the relationship between women and their environment.

Environmental psychology examines the relationship between physical environments and human behavior in order to predict the environmental conditions under which humans will behave in a decent and creative manner. This field has a multi-disciplinary focus, drawing on the theories and case studies of related fields in the social sciences.<sup>41</sup> This pool of information allows designers to find the best solution to a given criteria by predicting what the likely outcome will be given certain conditions. If it happens that the conditions are not met satisfactorily, then the problematic situations are diagnosed to prevent them from occurring in future designs.

In order to understand situations, environmental psychology relies heavily on the phenomenological approach. The primary focus of phenomenology as a research methodology is to understand the essential structures and meanings of a lived experience from the perspective of the one experiencing the phenomenon. Phenomenology's purpose is to explain, rather than predict, and to pose understanding, rather than solve problems.<sup>42</sup> It is the combination of predictions and solutions that are the purpose of environmental psychology. For example, in examining a battered woman's life at the point when she has decided to break away from the abusive relationship, a phenomenologist would explain the behaviors that tend to surface and why these behaviors occur. In

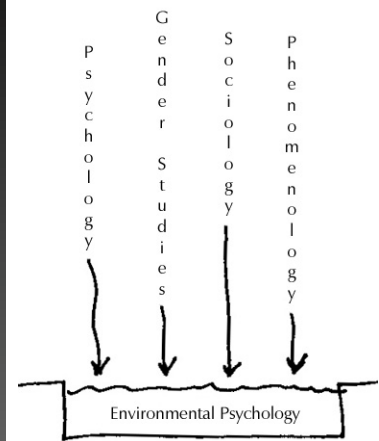


Fig. 34: The pool of environmental psychology.

<sup>41</sup> Franck, K.A. 2002. Women and Environment. In Robert B. Bechtel and Arza Churchman, (Eds.), *Handbook of Environmental Psychology*. New York: Wiley.

<sup>42</sup> Vivian Mott. P.4.

turn, an environmental psychologist would take note of these behaviors and then predict what kind of environments would work best for a battered woman.

For the purpose of a battered women's shelter, environmental psychology would also reference feminism in order to understand the differences in how women and men interact with the environment. There are distinct differences in each gender's basic orientation to, and engagement with, the environment. Men tend to separate themselves from their environments, live in a space that somebody else creates and maintains, "tune out," and see in the space only what pleases them. A woman's consciousness, however, is more immersed in her surroundings, since she is more likely to be monitoring for unruly behavior or for something that needs to be done. Consequently, women's underlying relationship to the world is one of connection while men's is one of separation.<sup>43</sup>

In order to make a battered women's shelter more responsive to the specific needs of women in general, this connection cannot be ignored. Women are going to notice the tiny details and the architectural cues of the place that they inhabit. They will also know whether they are truly safe or not. The place may be secure, but if the women do not perceive it as so, then they will not get over their fears enough to heal. Architecturally, the perception of security can be fulfilled with the use of thick sturdy walls, visible barriers separating outsiders, or vegetation that does not grow too closely to the walls and windows of the shelter.

The objects that women and men value also differ. Men typically value objects of action such as TVs, stereo sets, sports equipment, and vehicles, whereas women value objects of contemplation such as photographs, sculptures, and plants.<sup>44</sup> Also interesting is that women tend to mark their space with items like articles of clothing, pictures, or knick-knacks, so that no one will intrude in their space; men typically guard their area with a severe look. Hence, for many men, it would seem, the world is a place to do things; for women, it is a place to relate to things and to others.<sup>45</sup> It should not be forgotten that in many instances, battered women have not been allowed to think of their home as their own or even use their home as a place to relate to others. Everything has had to be done under the abuser's conditions. At a shelter women should be encouraged to regain these aspects of what it means to be a woman. Photographs,

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<sup>43</sup> Franck 350. *Women and Environment*.

<sup>44</sup> Franck 349, quoted from Csikszentmihalyi & Co. 1981. *Women and Environment*

<sup>45</sup> Franck 349. *Women and Environment*.

paintings, and plants should be present in every room. The women should be allowed to mark their own space in their sleeping quarters with items that are their own, or if they came with nothing, with items that came to them through shelter services. Battered women's shelters exist to heal all of the scars of abuse. These women must reconnect at all levels in order to completely heal.

Additionally, Karen Franck, a feminist in the field of environmental psychology, found several qualities that outline how women look at the world environment.<sup>46</sup> While not all of these categories have a direct translation for a battered women's shelter, many of them do. The values of connectedness and inclusiveness deal with dualisms and their consequences on everyday life. This states that women enjoy experiences that are independent and overlapping, such as a bedroom that can also be a sitting room. There is also a desire for closer spatial or visual connections between spaces.<sup>47</sup> Everything in the shelter should be connected with visual cues, if not, in fact, with direct visual access. Some places, such as the great room, have double meanings in terms of its visual connectedness. It should have direct sightlines to the celebration garden and the children's play areas, as well as a visual connection to downtown Cincinnati to reinforce a relationship to the world outside the shelter.

Also mentioned by Franck are the values of everyday life and "ethic of care."<sup>48</sup> Everyday life realizations rather than idealizations become the generators by accepting subjectivity as a strategy for knowing. This also allows personal experience and knowledge to be sources of information for design.

The design project takes some of the above-mentioned ideas from environmental psychology and feminist discussion. Before any architectural meaning behind an abuse shelter was investigated, sources of real life experience were explored. I interviewed my grandmother with corroboration from my mother on what it felt like to be in a home where domestic violence was almost an everyday occurrence. In addition, interviews were undertaken with people that help battered women on a daily basis. Tours of existing shelters helped in identifying spaces that worked well for a battered women's shelter as well as others that did not function as well as expected. Although I was not permitted to talk with any of the women there, I was able to witness the lives of

<sup>46</sup> Karen A. Franck. "A Feminist Approach to Architecture: Acknowledging Women's Ways of Knowing." In Ellen Perry Berkeley, ed., *Architecture: A Place for Women*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. These were found after an intensive research of feminist literature in psychoanalysis, psychology, philosophy, and philosophy of science. They have 1) an underlying connectedness to others, to objects of knowledge, and to the world, and a sensitivity to the connectedness of categories, 2) a desire for inclusiveness and a desire to overcome opposing dualities, 3) a responsibility to respond to the needs of others, represented by an "ethic of care," 4) an acknowledgement of the value of everyday life and experience, 5) an acceptance of subjectivity as a strategy for knowing, and of feelings as part of knowing, 6) an acceptance and desire for complexity & 7) an acceptance of change and a desire for flexibility.

<sup>47</sup> Franck. 206. "A Feminist Approach to Architecture: Acknowledging Women's Ways of Knowing."

<sup>48</sup> Franck found that women designers tend to focus more on the everyday lives and perceptions of the clientele they design for. 207. "A Feminist Approach to Architecture: Acknowledging Women's Ways of Knowing."



these women in the shelter and the ranges of emotions felt. There was a woman who seemed very happy just to be able to do such a simple thing as button up her child's coat without having to worry about abuse. Then there was the survey of their women-only room which revealed a woman curled up in the fetal position in the dark, dealing with the echoes of her abuse in her own way.

With all of this information in mind, I began to research case studies on therapeutic environments and people in crisis situations. Whether the design was a center for Alzheimer's patients,<sup>49</sup> a homeless shelter,<sup>50</sup> or other similar facilities, some design guidelines still stayed the same. The article, "When Buildings Don't Work: The Role of Architecture in Human Health," by environmental psychologists Gary Evans and Janetta McCoy, summarizes the guidelines that should exist in therapeutic environments.<sup>51</sup> The authors list elements that will potentially induce stress in the built environment and present recommendations on how to best use these factors in a design. Below, these factors are listed along with my recommendations for how they should be applied to a battered women's shelter.

### Stimulation

The factor of stimulation refers to the amount of sensory information in an environment. Too much or too little sensory information can be unhealthy.<sup>52</sup> In an environment for battered women, stimulation must certainly be used in moderation, resulting in design elements that are subtle. This can be achieved through simplistic decoration and design details that are used throughout the building. Realistically the designer must realize that the women are not going to notice the details right away, however, they eventually will. The details are there to be appreciated, even if absently, and then passed on by as a delightful observation for their day. Design details should not overwhelm the place in an effort to be noticed. Any highly intense environment will evoke a defensive response in a battered woman, which will not aid in healing by any means.

A subset of stimulation is the element of mystery. When used in moderation, it is a clever invitation to have the occupant freely explore the space. Using a colonnade of trees or trellises that frame a view or a pathway can enhance this, resulting in the occupant being beckoned closer to discover what else lies

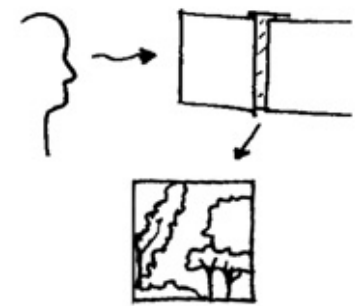


Fig. 35: Discovery through use of small details.



Fig. 36: Mystery. From Gary Evans and Janetta McCoy. "When Buildings Don't Work: The Role of Architecture in Human Health." see footnote.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret P. Calkins. "Design for Dementia." (1991) In Wolfgang F.E. Preiser, Jacqueline C. Vischer, Edward T. White, eds., *Design intervention : Toward a More Humane Architecture*. New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold

<sup>50</sup> Anne Gelbspan. "Brookview House: A Home for Mothers and Children." (1991) In Wolfgang F.E. Preiser, Jacqueline C. Vischer, Edward T. White, eds., *Design intervention : Toward a More Humane Architecture*. New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold

<sup>51</sup> Gary Evans and Janetta McCoy. "When Buildings Don't Work: The Role of Architecture in Human Health." *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. (1998) 18,85.

<sup>52</sup> Evans and McCoy. 85.

beyond. Even with the relief present from the absence of abuse, a battered woman who enters the shelter sometimes still asks herself why she left. She may never have had to work before, or worry about how the bills will be paid. Instead of allowing her to focus backward, mystery can prompt her to ask what lies ahead, not just in the architecture but in her future too. This can happen at the entry sequence, as well as at every passage sequence to further illustrate the amount of protection and the unique nature of each section of the shelter.

The amount of stimulation associated with noise is naturally a factor in a healing environment. There are times when noise is just an added irritant in an already precarious situation. At other times, noise is a comfort. Children's areas should be distanced from the women's private contemplation rooms and other areas of privacy. Areas where families congregate, such as the great room and dining room, should be relatively near the children's areas and other such places where much noise should be expected and even encouraged. Similarly, the acoustics in the privacy alcoves and small spaces for multiple people to converse should be deadened so that the sound does not carry. Group sessions or general meetings occur in the great room, where acoustics should be such that a voice carries within the room but does not receive any outside noises to avoid distractions.

Interpersonal distance can be another source of stimulation. The meaning of appropriate interpersonal distances varies from culture to culture; it also varies for battered women in different stages of healing. Picture a typical seating arrangement, where chairs and sofas are huddled around one central focus point, such as a fireplace, a sculpture, or even a TV. At first, this close of a distance to people that she does not know may be expecting too much of her, so she avoids the arrangement and thus the potential help from sharing her experience with another woman. The shelter should include arrangements such as the ones above, but it should also have arrangements meant only for two or three people focused only on the other person who is to be part of the discussion. Arrangements should also have an adequate amount of moveable furniture, for any circle of discussion may require different seating arrangements depending on the nature of the discussion. People

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are different in their personalities and preferences, and the design should reflect this by providing modifiable environments throughout the shelter.

Visual exposure is the extent to which others can see a person in a room. Private niches in the shelter should have a very low level of visual exposure, as these are places that a woman comes to when she does not wish to be bothered. Others may know not to intrude on the space based on signals like a table element at the entry to the niche being shifted left to denote that it is taken. Intermediate areas should have increasingly higher levels of visual exposure, as the women gain confidence. In group meeting areas, the visual exposure should be high, for in these meetings, the woman should not feel the urge to hide. Children areas should always be of a high visual exposure for ease of monitoring by the child caseworker, teacher, and, of course, the mothers.

Certain areas can allow for more stimulation as a result of proximity to circulation than others. Therefore, like-minded spaces should be grouped together to avoid a potentially stressful conflict of use. The bedrooms and private niches should be removed from the distractions resulting from circulation. These areas should be placed outside of the circulation corridor, and the space should be fit with elements that will effectively remove the potential distractions that corridor proximity could create. Other environments, like the children's area, would probably be fine along the circulation route, as at any time, a mother is allowed to come spend time with her children if she chooses. The great room will generally have no problems due to circulation because it is the hub of the shelter life. Alcoves off the great room, however, should be removed from the circulation in much the same way as the private niches.

### Control

Control is the ability to either alter the physical environment or regulate exposure to one's surroundings. By reducing choice, the occupant cannot effectively interact with the environment, or receive much helpful cues from it.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the ability to modify the environment or alter one's visibility in the environment is very important. This can be done through the use of a privacy gradient, boundaries, and depth.

Privacy, or the ability to regulate interaction among the residents, is provided

<sup>53</sup> Evans and McCoy, 87.

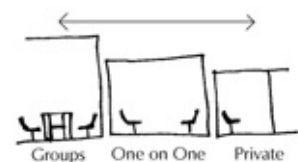


Fig. 37: Hierarchy of spaces

by a system of spatial hierarchies. Having a designated privacy gradient for every room enforces these hierarchies. This spatial hierarchy ranges from places that provide solitude and intimacy to those that foster contact with the public.<sup>54</sup> Bedrooms, privacy niches, the women's contemplation room, and the contemplation garden are at the most private end of the scale because they are areas where the need for counsel is not enforced through use of shelter personnel. These are the areas where women sort out their situation in their own minds and speak to a trusted confidant of their choosing. This is also the area where she decides what it is that she wants to do with her life now that abuse is not a factor. For maybe the first time, she is in control, and this point needs to be reinforced at the shelter. She needs a place to be alone to reconcile her past with her future. The great room, dining room, child play areas, and the celebration garden are the least private and therefore also the most group oriented spaces for the users of the shelter. Here is where a woman learns to interact again with other women, other mothers, and begins to gain some semblance of a normal life.

Even within a room, the privacy gradient could differ through the use of boundaries. Boundaries should be clearly delineated and visibly marked to enhance the expression of personal or group identity.<sup>55</sup> Boundaries to each different level of privacy are marked with a passage so that women know a boundary has been breached. Even though women are at the shelter, they don't lose their identity or personal needs of space. Therefore, their spaces should be able to be modified by them in little ways, mostly enabled by partitions or screens that can be moved in the bedroom area, and also the furniture, like chairs and beds so they can have a space that feels like their own. Furthermore, the number of spaces one must pass through to get from one point in a structure to another, or depth, can give more privacy and enhance ability to regulate social interaction, as well as visual access and visual exposure.

### Restorative

The most important element in relation to a battered women's shelter is the restorative factor. The restorative element is a coping resource that mediates the balance between environmental demands and personal resources for building

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<sup>54</sup> Evans and McCoy, 89.

<sup>55</sup> B. Brown. Territoriality. (1987) In D. Stokes & I. Altran (Eds.), *Handbook of Environmental Psychology*. New York: Wiley. 505-532.

occupants. It is important that healing environments are arranged in a way as to not aggravate stress because all of the stress that battered women need comes from dealing with their abuse. It functions therapeutically by providing rest, recovery, or contemplation to help combat stress.<sup>56</sup> Restorative design elements include places to retreat to, elements of fascination, and an exposure to nature. This can include anything from such peaceful settings such as window views and fireplaces, to displays of moving water and views of nature. These kinds of things uplift the human spirit and promote healing because they attract attention effortlessly and do not contribute to mental fatigue.

The restorative factor requires minimal distraction, the provision of stimulus shelters, a great deal of fascination elements, and the possibility of solitude. Stimulus shelters, in the form of privacy niches, should be found all throughout the shelter, regardless of where it falls in the privacy gradient. This also allows the possibility of solitude. Sometimes a battered woman doesn't need ultimate privacy in the form of a privacy niche located in the most private part of the facility. Sometimes she just needs a place for quiet reflection, even if it is near an area of high noise and crowding. Fascination elements include sculptures, paintings, water elements, and vistas. Focal points within the shelter can aid in circulation through the use of fascination elements so that the walk around the shelter is, in effect, restorative. This would be evident by having a general path from every point in the shelter with a beginning point and a terminus. From the entry of the shelter, the user immediately sees the garden beyond and a focus point, such as a sculpture. A crossroads would also be an interesting feature in a shelter, as a point to determine whether the woman needs the ultimate private experience that day, or the need to connect to others. This point would be the juncture between the private contemplation area and the great room.

It is with all of this in mind that a design for a shelter begins to form. In my review of the literature, I found several design generators for creating a space that would aid women in healing. Overall, the research insists that these women have many issues that they need to solve given their situation. Therefore the design of their environment should use moderation so as to not overpower and thus nullify the healing effect of the shelter. The

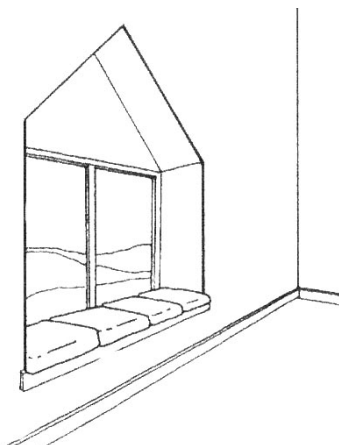


Fig. 38: Restoration from nature  
From "When Buildings Don't  
Work."

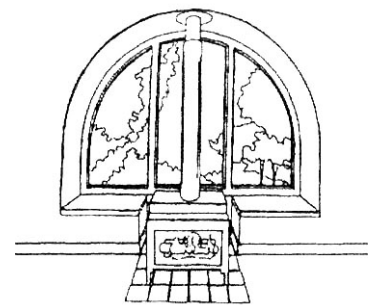


Fig. 39: Restoration from focal  
points. From "When Buildings  
Don't Work."

<sup>56</sup> Evans and McCoy 91.

architecture will not be fantastic; it will be subtle and soothing. Following is a list of certain elements that will be explored in the design process:

1. **Discovery:** When a woman first comes to the shelter, she will likely not notice anything about the shelter other than the fact that it is there. Over time, however, as she is gaining back her confidence, she will start to notice subtle design elements unfolding before her. These elements could be accomplished with covert views, or repeating design details, for example. This discovery of the architecture will parallel her discoveries about herself; the design details, as well as her strength, were there all along.
2. **Reconnection:** As research indicates, women are more immersed in their surroundings, using objects as a means to indicate that a space is theirs. One of the problems with a battered woman's situation is that she has been robbed of her ability to connect – both to her environment as well as to other people. Her abuser wanted things done one way – his way. Therefore to re-engage in the environment, women should be allowed to modify their settings to adjust to their specific needs and identities. This can, more specifically, take place in the bedrooms, along with the allowance of objects of value to them, such as flowers that her child picked for her or a calendar that counts the days that she has been free. This is not a call for haphazard design; it is simply to redefine the meaning of home into an environment that she makes for herself.
3. **Reimmersion:** When women first come to a shelter, they will be less likely to initiate conversation or basic human contact; most likely, they will want to be left to themselves for a few days. In the first days, this need for privacy must be respected and provided for in the architecture. This need can be fulfilled by the existence of tiny, sheltered alcoves or a secluded garden area. As time passes, the need for such immediate privacy will diminish. Various arranged spaces that could accommodate a changing number of women should be provided to allow for group discussions.

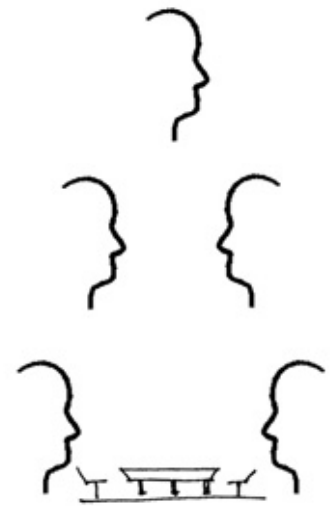


Fig. 40: Degrees of connection for a battered woman.

## DESIGN SOLUTIONS

The shelter I design will have complimentary services attached to it that act as the first barrier of security. This part of the facility will be called Fayette Center for Women, intended to be resources for the women in the shelter as well as other women in the area. The facilities would offer physician services, therapeutic counseling, job counseling, legal aid, and a room for hosting community events about women.

### Site

In finding a proper site for a battered women's shelter, many issues have to be considered. The area has to be appropriate for a shelter in terms of location, community amenities, need, and suitability. In response to these issues, further illustrated below, I selected a site at 578 Mt. Hope Road in Price Hill. Part of the site overlooks Mt. Hope Road, while the other half opens at the hilltop to a beautiful view of downtown Cincinnati. This particular section of Price Hill is a very quiet residential neighborhood with many trees and a suitable amount of resources nearby.

When Price Hill was an early suburb of Cincinnati the residents of this area were some of the wealthiest in Cincinnati. Over time its population declined as the wealthy moved further out of the city, and other income groups settled into Price Hill. Currently the population is mixed in terms of income levels and cultural groups. The last census showed that, currently, Price Hill has a large Hispanic population as well as other minority groups.

As a reflection of the varied cultures and economic levels that have existed in Price Hill, its architectural styles show many different periods of growth. The architecture of Price Hill, from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, cannot be classified as one or two dominant styles. Many of the local architects borrowed design characteristics from Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, and Second Empire buildings. Whether the homes of laborers or of wealthy businessmen, the homes were built with unique features.<sup>57</sup> Houses from the last century survive

<sup>57</sup> Kelso Murdock and Ralph F. Diserens, eds. (1998) *Price Hill: Its Beauties and Advantages as a Place of Residence*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Kelso and Diserens, 3.



Fig. 41: Site at 578 Mt. Hope Rd. Not to scale.



Fig. 42: A view from the hilltop. Personal Photo.



Fig. 43: A view of the street from the site heading south. Personal Photo.

alongside newer homes. Young artisans are carefully restoring many of the magnificent large Victorian dwellings. One can also find many newer homes of brick and frame, more modest in size and price.

A battered women's shelter in Price Hill would have many accessible local resources. It is two blocks away from a bus line, which is the same distance for the YWCA shelter in Cincinnati. It is close enough to the shelter, but not too close to alert too many people as to where the shelter is located. The District III police headquarters is located about seven blocks away from the proposed site; close enough should shelter security alert them to a problem. Grocery stores and other specialty shops are also available seven blocks away, or a bus ride could take them to some of the more popular stores in the Glenway Crossing or Western Hills Shopping Center.

There are six Catholic churches in this area, four of which have their own school facilities. The parochial elementary schools are Resurrection, St. Lawrence, St. Teresa, and St. Williams. Graduates from these parochial schools attend Elder High School (all boys) and Seton High School (all girls). There are also Protestant churches of all denominations in the area. The Price Hill area is part of the Cincinnati Public School system. The elementary schools are Carson Montessori, Quebec Heights, Covedale, and Whittier. Junior High students attend Roberts Paideia or Dater Junior High. Senior High students attend Western Hills High School. St. Francis-St. George Hospital is within 10 minutes of the area. All other Cincinnati hospitals are approximately 20 minutes away. The area is also convenient to the Western Hills Medical Center.

Mt. Echo Park is a very short ride from the shelter. It offers a beautiful view of downtown Cincinnati, the Riverfront Stadium and Coliseum, plus the many bridges to Northern Kentucky. Also, just a five-minute walk from the shelter is a little known community park called Wilson Commons. It is carefully tucked away down a seldom-used residential street. This site would be ideal to use as a day retreat for the shelter because it is so secluded. Either of these parks would be a great place for a woman to arrange a meeting with family members.

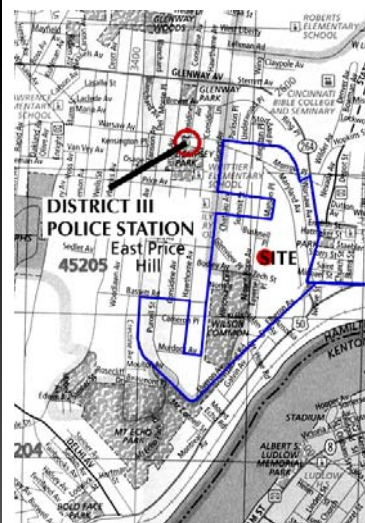


Fig. 44: Proximity of bus line and police station. Not to scale. From Rand McNally's Cincinnati map.



Fig. 45: Proximity of parks and greenspace. Not to scale. From Rand McNally's Cincinnati map.

Currently the shelter site is covered with trees. Since the community center is serving as a false front for the shelter, the architectural style of the place does not have to be similar to the style of the neighborhood. This is for two reasons: 1) the architectural styles in this part of the community lack a conforming architecture and 2) The difference in architectural styles will point out to women of the neighborhood that this is the community center for them. The buildings will however, conform to the architecture surrounding the complex in terms of building height and materials. The complex will not completely overpower and seem distasteful in respect to the buildings surrounding it. Trees and appropriate landscaping will surround the entire shelter site, but there will be no trees allowed close to the shelter area as this presents a security problem. The landscaping will not hide the center, but it will hide the shelter buildings effectively.

In addition to the landscaping, there will be a series of berms and stone walls that surround the shelter. These walls and berms will not overwhelm the shelter, for their purpose is only therapeutic. They are to act as visual buffers. The site will constantly be monitored for activity along the barriers by security, and these barriers should not be so oppressive as to make the woman feel like she is being held captive. Windows will help promote a sense of openness and freedom.



Fig. 46: A view of the street from the site heading north. Personal Photo.

## Program Summary

1.	Entrance Lobby	1000 sf
	Offices:	
2.	Residential aide office (3 @ 120 sf)	360
3.	Family Support Specialists (3 @ 150 sf)	450
4.	Case Managers (3 @ 150 sf)	450
5.	Case Manager Coordinator	120
6.	Evening Coordinator	120
7.	Aftercare Coordinator	150
8.	Teacher's Office	150
9.	Child's Advocate	150
10.	Weekend Coordinator	120
11.	Security Offices	300
12.	Physician Room	250
13.	Volunteer Room/ Training Room	250
14.	Break Room	250
15.	On-site Director	200
16.	Restrooms for Shelter Service Personnel	250
17.	Dining Room	1000
18.	Industrial Kitchen	750
19.	Kitchen Storage	750
20.	Women-only rooms	1000
21.	Child play area	1000
22.	Child Academic Area	500
23.	Great Room	1000
24.	Conference rooms (2 @ 250 sf)	500
	Bedrooms	
25.	2 Hospital rooms (2 beds)	800
26.	8 Single family rooms (2 beds)	2400
27.	8 Multi family rooms (4 beds)	4000
28.	Resident Bathrooms (4 @ 200 sf & 4 @ 400 sf)	2400
29.	Mechanical Space	2370
31.	General Storage	1000
32.	Laundry Facilities	300
33.	Goodwill Items Drop Off Storage	750
34.	Cleaning Supply Closets	750
35.	G.I. (@ 10%)	1815
	Preliminary Total	28,000 sq. ft.



## Requirements for Major Spaces

The **Entry Sequence** demands careful attention in planning. First, there should be a security gate, which must be passed through to get to the community services and shelter parking lot, in effect hiding the women's cars from public view. Also, this first gate implies to the public that this is a specialized facility and not open to just anyone. From the parking lot, visitors either enter into the very obvious entrance of the community services building or into the "quiet" entrance of the shelter, at which point there is to be a receptionist or a member of security to ensure that whoever enters belongs there. How the shelter buildings are serviced is also an issue. It would violate the sanctity of the women's shelter if service providers, such as the garbage, the food delivery service, and goodwill drop-off trucks were allowed to enter the shelter when it is not necessary. Therefore, there is to be a specialized loading area off of the parking lot that should always be monitored by a member of security and not disturb the occupants of the shelter.

The **Entry Lobby** will be the first impression of the shelter for a battered woman. At this point she will have passed through two points of security and seen the ways that security is enforced. Now she can begin to relax. The entry should be welcoming, with a large window wall to show parts of the shelter beyond. It should be filled with natural light, and beckon the woman to enter intuitively. Windows on the wall facing the parking lot are to be situated so that the shelter service personnel can monitor it. For the working woman, the entry lobby will be an everyday point of welcome as well as a bid to return to the safety of these walls until the she feels strong enough to leave them forever.

The **Celebration Garden** should have many different vistas to different parts of the shelter. Within the grounds are to be a variety of landscaping elements allowing for singles or groups to engage in a variety of outdoor activities. Here the woman can spend time with other women, with her children, or simply enjoy the life going on in the space. It is a place to celebrate the happiness that can be found in life through connection with other people.

The **Great Room** is where the woman is encouraged to engage in the normal experiences of life. This is where the mother can nourish the bond with her

children. This is perhaps the first time she has been able to engage in this kind of “normal” family activity that neither the woman nor her children have been able to experience because of the abuser’s influence. This room should be situated on the eastern side of the building, as there is an excellent view of downtown Cincinnati that can be used as a connection point for the women. They will know that they are safe because of the succession of boundaries required to enter the shelter, yet they are still free to have such a beautiful view of the city and feel a connection to it. They are not so disconnected from reality as they might have felt upon first coming to the shelter. In response to the view and the benefits of having it shown, there should be a large window wall facing the view, with window seats all along it. At the sightline there should also be appropriate landscaping outside the windows.

As the great room is the hub of the shelter, being a room for all occupants, there should be a variety of seating arrangements as well as one area specifically for group meetings. The group meeting area could be in the same area as the seating for different groupings of people as long as the furniture is moveable. There should be a variety of plants and artwork in the space as well as one central piece for a soothing focus. While this room will have several TVs spaced along it on swivel stands they are not to be the focus. The ceiling in this area will be taller than the secondary spaces, for the reinforcing view of Cincinnati would be greatly diminished if it were seen through a small windowpane. The great room should be in close proximity to the dining hall and the children’s areas.

The **Dining Hall** will be arranged similarly to the great room for the view from the windows will be the same. It will also have the landscaping elements outside to help soothe the drop-off of the hill that will occur very close to where the windows stop. The dining hall is the area where women perform the ritual of communal eating that has occurred for centuries. For a woman, talking about life is sometimes easier if it is over a casual meal or, more than likely, a dessert. For a woman with children, especially younger ones, it is the place where she bonds to them through the act of feeding and taking care of them. In this hall, the view should be the backdrop and the act of eating the center, just as it is at so many high-class restaurants.

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The women eat to nourish their bodies, communicate with others to nourish their souls, and care for their children to nourish their hearts.

The **Children's Areas** should consist of the playroom, playground, academic areas, and therapy rooms. All of these spaces should be built to a child's scale, respective to what age they are. The child play area should have a section for the toddlers, 4-6, and 7-12 age ranges that are separate but with sections that overlap. Children play as a form of therapy. In observing play, a child advocate can pinpoint what a child has learned from abuse and what should be corrected in their time at the shelter. With any indoor section there must also be a counterpart outside just for children following similar space planning to the indoor play area. There should also be a nursery for the very young with its own caretakers. The academic areas should be divided among age groups, by physical walls or simply partitions, for one group will surely be distracted by what the other age group is learning. Group therapy will take place in the academic areas as well, for all of the children will need general knowledge of what is right or wrong in the relationships that they have experienced. Individual counseling sessions should take place with the child advocate in her office.

In the most private part of the shelter will be the **Contemplation Garden**. This is to be an area only for women during most of the day at the shelter. It should be a quiet, lush space with many niches for privacy and quiet reflection. The entire area should have the background noise of water running through rocks in the landscape elements. In the winter, or cooler months when the water does not flow, these elements will still be restorative, having been designed with the ultimate care. All of the residential units should have frontage on this central garden.

The **Women's Private Contemplation Rooms** are in some ways a reflection of what occurs within the contemplation garden, but it is an inside activity that handles a variety of situations. It should have small windows at the top to light the space. This will draw the eyes of the women up, evoking a feeling of reverence or strength that is greater than one's own. It will be very similar to the feeling that a chapel evokes. A woman can heal through connection

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to herself through a spiritual being, for many religions are really focused on connecting to oneself. Therefore the similarity between this space and a chapel are warranted. This space will allow for individual seating and privacy from all others, as well as seats that will modify to include another woman.

The **Bedroom Units** should present a variety of configurations, located off of the contemplation garden. There should be two hospital type rooms that will accommodate two women each, placed near the shelter services and away from the children's areas. These rooms are for those who are terminally ill, handicapped, or those who have come to the shelter after a particularly abusive episode and need the comforts that such a room provides. These rooms are, for the most part, transitional. Other room arrangements will accommodate two to four people each, housing a variety of families so that, gradually, connections can be made. Each shelter family will have a lockable armoire as well as a desk/dresser with a mirror to give utility to the space. Additional private areas and bathrooms should be shared between two respective rooms to help form identity with a group over time. The units are based on a residential scale with low ceilings and a very casual atmosphere, which allows for personal accent in the bedclothes, curtains and other items as are deemed appropriate by the resident aides. To one side of the resident space should be shelving with books on self-help and stories of triumph over life's problems. To the other side should be a quiet activity area for reading or watching TV quietly, listening to music, or doing small crafts. In total, there will be enough rooms to house roughly 50 women and their children.

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