Female Undergraduates Playing it 'Safe' to Stay 'Safe': Further Understanding Sexual Violence against Women

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Female Undergraduates Playing it 'Safe' to Stay 'Safe': Further Understanding Sexual Violence against Women

By Helen Bovill[1], Kieran McCartan[2], Richard Waller[3]

Abstract

Women's safety from sexual violence whilst at university is a global issue and the UK is no exception. Whilst the authors of this paper acknowledge that sexual violence can occur across the gender spectrum, most sexual violence 'victims' are women and girls, and this study explores sexual violence experienced by female undergraduates. This paper explored sexual violence and university students with fifteen undergraduate participants who took part in a total of three qualitative focus groups at one post-92 UK University. Whilst the study focussed on the experiences of female students, we sought the perspectives of female and male students to investigate this. The first focus group in this study consisted of five female students, the second, five females and two males, the third, two females and one male. Each focus group lasted between two and three hours and was audio recorded and transcribed. Focus groups were semi-structured. Participants were purposively sampled. Data was analysed through thematic analysis. A theme to emerge within the data demonstrated women changing behaviours to 'stay safe'. This paper categorises safety behaviours into two typologies. Typology one is 'indirect safety work' which includes aspects such as putting up with unwanted sexual touching, and appropriation of cultures such as lad culture to fit in. Typology two is 'direct safety work' such as including male 'protectors' in social situations in an attempt to stay safe. This paper explores agency in the safety work that women do day to day, alongside the 'hidden labour' this entails which can restrict female freedom. This paper further explores the power that can be ascribed to particular gendered and sexed bodies and the power imbalances that can result. Women can be compelled to seek protection from those who are predatory toward them. This can be impacted by and contribute toward 'shattering', which is a loss of a belief in the world as a safe space or women's perception of their capacity to keep themself safe within it.

Keywords: Indirect safety work, Direct safety work, Shattering, Qualitative focus groups

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Introduction

Sexual violence, and particularly sexual violence against women, is a global issue. Sexual Violence (SV) is defined as 'any sexual act or any attempt for the purpose of obtaining a sexual act through violence or coercion' (World Health Organisation, n.d., p.1). According to The World Health Organisation (WHO), this may encompass:

> rape or marital infidelity, rape by strangers, sexual abuse, sexual or physical abuse of those with disabilities, sexual abuse of children, forced marriage and child marriage, denial of the right to use contraceptive equipment or prevention of sexually transmitted diseases as well as forced abortion. (Borumandnia, Khadembashi, Tabatabaei, and Alavi Majd, 2020, p. 1)

Global estimates for women who have experienced SV sit at around 35% with wide variances of prevalence across countries and contexts, and whilst men are also subject to SV, it is widely reported that this is at a much lower prevalence than for women (Borumandnia, et al., 2020). Prevalence statistics can only tell us part of the problem as underreporting across populations is likely. Nobles (n.d.) explores the development of violence against women as a human rights issue, and from the 1990s this has been paving the way for SV to become part of the global human rights discussion. The importance of considering SV in this way is that it enables conversations about universal understandings of basic rights which, despite cultural and contextual differences, are nevertheless considered as extendable to all within a framework of human dignity. The importance of this for SV is that it challenges notions of the inevitability of SV and the construction of such violence as part of the natural order. Thus, just because SV is so ubiquitous and part of the everyday experience for women and girls in particular, it leads the debate back to problematising this rather than a fatalistic acceptance.

Whilst it is acknowledged that SV in universities is a global issue (Humphreys and Towl, 2020) for the purposes of this paper, US and UK statistics only will be drawn upon. This is due to similar cultural contexts surrounding prevalence and understandings of SV within the US and UK and due to the increasing availability and recency of such statistics within both countries. The UK focus also stems from the origin of the data for this paper which was collected within a UK institution. Just as there are issues with under-reporting of global statistics of SV, university statistics on prevalence are also considered to be subject to under-reporting (Fedina, Holmes and Backes, 2018) and so need to be interpreted within a critical stance.

In the US, the Association of American Universities (AAU) conducted a large campus climate survey in 2018, receiving 181,752 survey completions from across 33 schools, finding that overall, 13 percent of students reported experiencing 'non-consensual penetration, attempted penetration, sexual touching by force, or inability to consent' with the rates for undergraduate women at 20.4 percent compared to undergraduate men at 5.1 percent (Cantor, Fisher, Chibnall et al., 2020, p.14). The overall rate of interpersonal violence (IPV) [4] was 10.1 percent with the rates for undergraduate women at 14.1 percent and for undergraduate men 10.1 percent (Cantor, et al., 2020, p.52). The overall rate of experiencing at least one form of sexually harassing behaviour were for the two most common behaviors 'heard insulting or offensive remarks or jokes' 27 percent and 'heard inappropriate or offensive comments about someone's body, appearance or sexual activities' 33.7 percent. A further form of harassment noted was 'being repeatedly asked to "go out" (e.g. have dinner, drinks, or sex) by a perpetrator

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[4] Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to non-sexual violence among individuals who had been in a partnered relationship (i.e., marriage or civil union, domestic partnership or cohabitation, steady or serious relationship, or other ongoing relationship involving physical or sexual contact).

even though the student had previously said no' at 11.2 percent. More than half of undergraduate women 59.2 percent reported experiencing at least one harassing behaviour, whilst 36.2 percent of undergraduate men reported this (Cantor et al., 2020, p.47).

As with the US, data regarding SV in UK universities has been emerging particularly since 2010. Though UK datasets are not as large or currently as widely gathered as in the US, similar trends of prevalence can be determined. For example, the National Union of Students (NUS) carried out a 2010 survey of 2,058 women students across the UK finding '68 percent of respondents had been subject to verbal or physical sexual harassment on campus and 14% had experienced a serious physical or sexual assault' (Universities UK (UUK), 2016, p. 18). A survey in 2016 by Drinkaware of 2004 students across the UK found '54 percent of 18 to 24-year-old female students experienced sexual harassment on nights out' and with half of these respondents saying 'this is experienced most or every time they go out', and 15 percent of male students reported experiencing sexual harassment on a night out (UUK, 2020, p.19). Also, in the UK, Revolt Sexual Assault (2018, p.4) distributed a survey investigating students' experience of sexual violence, receiving 4,491 responses from 153 UK institutions and found: '70% of female students and recent graduates surveyed have experienced sexual violence'. This spectrum and prevalence of SV begins to denote the ubiquitous nature of sexual violence within universities and globally. Nobles (n.d.) notes that by adopting a human rights approach to SV it enables a more open approach to exploring the problematic nature of SV which in recent times and in Western institutions has potentially opened up space for survivors to come forward, speak up about their experiences of SV, and to challenge universities to respond, holding them to account for poor handling of cases.

This paper shall now consider the ubiquitous nature of SV within university contexts and from the standpoint of women's perspectives of safety and safety work. It reports findings from qualitative research focus groups conducted in one post-92 UK University[5]. From these focus groups, themes around safety and threats emerged. This paper identifies two typologies which drive forward prior theories on (a) 'safety work' (adapted from Kelly, 2005) defined as 'hidden yet necessary work women do in relation to sexual violence' (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 82), and (b) 'invisible work' (adapted from Fishman, 1978) or 'small alterations to what we do and how we are' (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 79).

Typology one is identified as 'indirect safety work' which is not consciously conducted with the intent of safety, but which nevertheless may unconsciously be enacted to do just that. For example, putting up with unwanted sexual touching, and appropriation of cultures to fit in such as rape culture understood as condoning and normalising SV through attitudes, actions, and institutions (Lewis, Marine and Kenney, 2018; Mkhize, Majola, Olofinbiyi, 2020; NUS, 2010). Rape culture is also sometimes referred to within the UK context as 'lad culture' (Jackson, 2006; Jackson and Tinkler, 2007; Lewis, Marine and Kenney, 2018). Lad culture is understood and defined by the NUS as 'a group or pack mentality residing in activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption and 'banter' which was sexist, misogynist, or homophobic' (UUK, 2016, p. 18).

Typology two is identified as 'direct safety work' which is consciously planned to keep oneself safer. For example, including male 'protectors' in social situations. Additionally, the concept of 'shattering' (adapted from du Toit, 2009) and considered by Kelland (2014) is explored. Shattering is a belief that the world is an unsafe place in which you are no longer able to keep yourself safe. This paper contends that shattering occurs because women operate within a context of threat (Vera-Gray, 2018) of SV, which has also been explored by researchers as the 'shadow' of SV (Mellgren and Ivert, 2019). As such, this paper brings together the work of Kelland and Vera-Gray to drive new understandings of how women

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[5] Post-92 UK University denoting former polytechnics, awarded university status after 1992.

experience and respond to SV and operate indirect and direct safety work which leads to them sometimes 'trading freedom for safety' (Vera-Gray, 2018). The following section introduces some of the theory underpinning safety work.

Women and the Work of Staying Safe

Vera-Gray (2018) considers the origins of learned safety work, where women are always alert to the possibility of SV from childhood, making, 'habitual, sometimes unconscious, choices and changes…daily to maintain a sense of safety in public space' (p. 5). She expresses this as a form of 'hidden labour' and 'invisible work'. Vera- Gray (2018) considers invisible safety work as skilful, embodied agency seen in practices such as: avoiding eye contact, wearing headphones, or getting your phone out when alone. At the same time, she acknowledges that it places restrictions on female freedom and recognises the dichotomy of women's safety work as both freedom and restriction. Women's safety work can be a way of both avoiding and managing risk. Women that employ these strategies are possibly developing control over their lives where they feel more in charge of their surroundings.

Jayapalan, Wong, and Aghamohammadi (2018, p. 27) note that 'a woman's vulnerability is explained by the nature of the patriarchy tradition practised in most societies' and male privilege and entitlement 'can be said to both express and reproduce unequal social relationships' (Kelly, 2005, p. 7). Prevalence and fear of SV reproduce relations of dominance, as do women's actual or perceived need to take pre-emptive actions of avoidance and damage control to stay safe. Actions such as women being mindful of what they do and where they go; policing what they and other women wear; caution over how much they drink, or who or how many people they have sex with, all contribute.

Kelland (2014), drawing on the work of (du Toit, 2009), considers the phenomenon of 'shattering' where beliefs about safety in the world are challenged. This can shatter:

> the necessary trust that a woman must place in others, and particularly in men, her assumption that the world is a relatively safe and secure place *and*, importantly that she is able to protect herself, make good decisions, and act effectively in the world according to her own will. (Kelland 2014, p. 2784)

This current paper contends that awareness of the threat of SV is enough for shattering to occur.

Cultural Appropriation and Safety Work

Lewis, Marine, and Kenney (2018) raise a range of issues that arise in concentrating debates around universities as places of danger for women. In particular, a limited focus on danger obscures the importance of universities as sites of possibility and freedom for women. They can be sites where women can collectively challenge and resist sexist, misogynistic discourses and cultures, such as rape culture or 'lad culture'. Rape or lad culture is characterised by behaviour which objectifies women, uses misogynistic 'banter', and plays out in the context of excessive drinking or drugs, partying, casual sex, and often within social and sports clubs. This paper incorporates the two terms here of rape and lad culture because they are often used interchangeably and because the term lad culture has been adopted in literature in the UK and in common parlance within UK universities. There has also been extensive research into the impact that lad culture has upon SV within UK universities and noted in this research that:

> When we examine something like 'lad culture', it is useful to outline exactly what we understand the term 'culture' to mean. It is a complex notion, but can loosely be described as a set of shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and norms (Phipps and Young, 2013, p. 13)

These cultures encompass ideas that normalise and condone rape supportive attitudes and actions, such as endorsing rape myths, normalising unwanted sexual touching and commenting, and can lead to beliefs that 'sexual violence is an unavoidable truth' (Mkhize, et al. 2020, p. 389) which is in contrast to the human rights approach (Nobles, n.d.).

The term lad culture presents issues, for example trivialisation, stereotyping SV behaviour to be present within partying clubs and cultures when in reality it is ubiquitous in many contexts. Lad culture may also further contribute to normalisation of SV through its usage and messages that this is 'natural' behaviour. It might also stop people from reporting SV through fear of it being seen as 'normal' behaviour (UUK, 2016, p. 19). Phipps and Young who conducted the (2013) research on lad culture in university for the NUS themselves cite the problematic nature of the term which may imply 'a homogeneity and cohesiveness which may not necessarily be found across communities or over time' (Phipps and Young, 2015, p. 2).' We accept these criticisms whilst also acknowledging the potential impact of such powerful cultures upon behaviour.

Alternatively, other theorists have considered the ways in which women and girls may appropriate cultures through displays of sexual freedom. This is sometimes noted as 'ladette' culture where women and girls are said to adopt 'crude' behaviour, such as heavy drinking and explicit sexual behaviour, most often associated with 'lad' behaviour. Jackson (2006) and Jackson and Tinkler (2007) note 'ladette' culture may be a way for girls and women to disrupt traditional notions of femininity, display ownership of this identity, or a way to counter discourses of not fitting in. Women and girls may be attempting to operate their own form of safety work in appropriating and subverting rape and lad culture. However, women continue to face pressures to conform to sexualised and gendered social norms and arguably, a part of both rape and lad culture is encouraging women to objectify themselves into being what men want, particularly in a society where 'women are – still – heavily rewarded for pleasing men' (Bauer 2010, p. 5).

Popular culture may point to a loosening of ties to traditional sex and gender norms. However, Crasnow and Waugh (2013) have drawn attention to the ways in which popular culture is in fact 'a chief vehicle for the perpetuation of gender discrimination' and drawn attention to the work of Oliver (2016). Oliver draws on films such as *Twilight, Fifty Shades of Grey, Kick-Ass*, and *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* which appear to present 'tough, tomboyish young women who kick ass' (Jackson 2016, p. 1) but may instead reproduce sex and gender stereotypes and normalise SV. Oliver considers whether these films and others like them are presenting 'feminist role models or patriarchal fantasies' (Oliver 2016, p. 142) and concludes they do both. It is possible to contend that, in the same way, women appropriating rape and lad culture is both a form of control and ownership and playing into the construction of traditional sex and gender social norms.

Methods

This study is qualitative in nature, consisting of focus group discussions to elicit group beliefs, experiences, attitudes, values, and reactions (Cohen and Manion, 2011). Focus groups can be used to gain participant's ideas, opinions, thoughts, and perceptions. The group dynamic or socially oriented (Krueger, 2000) aspect of focus groups was important to this study as participants can develop a cohesiveness in a group situation which can help them feel safe in sharing, break down power dynamics, and create spontaneous responses. Focus groups are

often viewed as a less threatening method than one to one interview, however potential power imbalances may still emerge and this needs skilful management, for example in managing stronger voices (Femdal and Solbjør, 2018). Focus groups were conducted by two authors of this paper, one (cis woman) led the focus group, and one (cis man) made detailed observations. Having two facilitators enabled movement between roles to enable moderation and manage power imbalances with the researchers positioned as 'facilitators' (Ochieng, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee, 2018).

The first focus group in this study consisted of five female students, the second, five females and two males, the third, two females and one male; totalling fifteen participants. Each focus group lasted between two and three hours and was audio recorded and transcribed. Focus groups were semi-structured. Each focus group began with introductions, revisiting information sheets and consent forms, and helping participants to settle into the focus group with general discussion to begin with. Potential themes for discussion were determined by a focus group guide, resulting from a prior literature review of the area. Examples of this were exploring what healthy relationships look like and considering what the social norms around sexual behaviour are. At the end of each focus group participants were given the opportunity to ask any further questions and handed a range of support service contacts, including the lead researcher's work contact details, and internal and external support services.

Sampling

Non-probability purposive sampling techniques were used through contacting participants who took part in any university programme exploring prevention of SV at the university and who had provided further contact details. This produced a homogenous purposive sample (Etikan, Musa, Alkassim, 2016) by virtue of participants sharing similar traits and characteristics such as within an age range and being a university student who had an interest in work which explored prevention of SV.

Analysis

This paper used thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) consisting of data familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching, reviewing, defining, naming, and reporting themes. All authors initially read all transcripts separately for familiarisation, after which they met to compare and contrast findings. Initial codes were generated through this discussion for further separate investigation. During this stage of analysis, the researchers then each took responsibility for further exploring particular codes across all transcripts. They individually further coded data by colour coding different sections of the transcripts via Microsoft word. Further joint meetings enabled establishment of prominent themes with the research team discarding those initial codes that were less present in the data. This resulted in final stages of thematic analysis where the most prominent themes were defined, named, and reported. The theme represented in this paper is expressed as the work women do to keep themselves safe from SV.

Data Protection and Ethics

In line with current university protocol and General Data Protection Regulation (Information Commissioners Office, 2018), the recorded focus group data was immediately transferred and stored on password protected one drive files, and deleted from recording devices once successful transfer was verified. Data to be transcribed was emailed via password protected one drive files to a transcription service, registered with the university, and returned in the same way. Transcript data was not offered for participant validation due to anonymity and confidentiality issues within group methods.

Ethical permission was granted by the university ethics board (ethical approval reference number: UREC17.08.02) applying some conditions to approval, including: exclusion of anyone under 18, provision of support services, and a named research contact. Information and consent sheets detailing the research, right to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection processes were given and explained to participants at the sampling stage and later at data collection. A privacy statement was included which clarified that focus group discussions were confidential to the focus groups. The research process was informed by British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) guidelines.

Limitations

There is bias within the non-probability sampling techniques used, such as researcher subjectivity and self-selection and the team remained aware of this. Additionally, the sample size of fifteen is small. We recommend further studies in the area of SV and safety practices. We do however relate our findings to other studies on safety in the literature review and discussion, and our aim here is to add to the emerging body of literature and thus this study does lead to greater accumulation of knowledge.

Additionally, in recognition of these limitations, inference and generalisability are not overtly claimed. Rather, 'fuzzy' or propositional generalisations (Bassey, 1998) based upon the focus group data and compared to other literature in the field, drive the claims of this paper. Stake (1995) discusses 'petite' generalisations where assertions in smaller studies may be applied cautiously to wider populations within similar contexts.

Findings and Discussion

Data demonstrated that women sometimes changed their behaviours to 'stay safe' and we categorise this into two typologies of indirect and direct safety work.

Indirect safety work is not consciously conducted with the intent of safety, but nevertheless may unconsciously be enacted to do just that. This includes the ways in which women have learned to put up with unwanted sexual touching, and the role of culture in women's safety work. The paper considers what this means in practice for women within their university journeys. In doing so, it sheds some light on the way society ascribes power to particular gendered and sexed bodies.

Direct safety work is consciously planned to keep oneself safer. This includes women seeking protection from men and including men in socialising groups. This paper explores the tensions that this poses as women seek protection from those that are also predatory toward them.

The identification of these two safety work typologies drives the field forward in novel ways by adding new dimensions to the original concept of safety work (adapted from Kelly, 2005), invisible work (Vera-Grey, 2018), and shattering (adapted from du Toit, 2009; Kelland, 2014) whilst also understanding that more research is needed. The tensions between women being further 'victimised', alongside displaying a form of agency through safety work, is explored throughout these arguments, seeking to contribute to theories of change as advocated by Vera-Grey (2018).

Indirect Safety Work: Putting up with Unwanted Sexual Touching

One focus group talked in detail about different perceptions of and reactions toward unwanted sexual touching. Stereotypical language that is accepting of this behaviour emerges alongside confusion over how to respond:

> Interviewer (F[6]): Do you think people realise that groping is not part of everyday normal life?
>
> Participant (F): I would have just assumed, groping just happens to everyone, doesn't it, and you wouldn't really say anything. But then you actually realise, no, they shouldn't be doing that.
>
> Participant (F): Yeah, like, it's not actually normal for that to happen.

The first participant response is explicit when she identifies with the perception that groping 'just happens to everyone' and that it is considered normal to accept this behaviour; this demonstrates an example of where this has become a form of male dominance that is just seen as part of the fabric of society (Jayapalan, Wong and Aghamohammadi, 2018; Vera-Gray, 2018). Conversations in this group continue with the interviewer probing more deeply and normalisation discourses re-emerge resonating with Manne (2016; 2017) and an environment of hostility:

> Interviewer (F): Could I ask why you think it's normal to go out on a night and to be groped?
>
> Participant (F): I think it happens so often.
>
> Participant (F): Yeah, it's just something that happens to you. It's kind of something that you feel like, 'oh, here we go again'.
>
> Participant (F): And like, some people, they wouldn't think twice about it. Like, 'oh, someone's touched my arse', like OK, let's carry on with the night. Whereas other people, it can really impact them. So, if you see someone reacting like, 'oh, it's just boys being boys!' Then you think, OK, maybe it is just boys being boys and I should act like that too.
>
> Participant (F): Yeah. And they're, like, laughing at you, so you feel a bit, like, stupid almost.

Participants in this study are demonstrating a resignation to unwanted touching. Jayapalan, Wong, and Aghamohammadi (2018) note in their study that there is a lack of knowledge about what constitutes sexual abuse, this study finds a similar confusion. Fernandez and Nor (2019) discuss the role that rape myths have in this lack of knowledge. Rape myths, such as believing women who dress in revealing clothes or who go out to clubs invite sexual attention, contribute to social constructions which can fuel normalisation discourses. This can lead to those that experience SV, such as unwanted touching, having difficulty recognising SV when it happens to them. Phipps and Young (2013) note this too, where sometimes it takes an outsider to draw attention to this from an objective stance. However, if all members of a culture are impacted by rape myths and normalisation discourses, this misinformation may go unchallenged and perpetuate misogynistic cultures and SV environments. This can lead to nobody calling out or reporting SV and contribute to perpetrators believing that their behaviour is acceptable.

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[6] F denotes female respondent.

This current study also notes how you can be brought into line by others who excuse SV behaviour. Deciding to go along with unwanted touching is indirect safety work, as to make a fuss about the unwanted touching is to stand out from the crowd which may have negative consequences. So, instead a participant above demonstrates beginning to think that perhaps this is an overreaction, and 'I should act like that too' and put this down to 'typical boy' behaviour. It is unclear whether the excuse of 'boys being boys' is expressed as coming from men or women, rather it is a generalised comment from the participant which potentially demonstrates that this is felt as a generalised and widely held societal or culturally condoned belief. It is expressed here as part of a collective unconscious which may contribute to patterns of male dominance over women.

The interviewer asks a question about male perceptions of the normalisation of groping:

> Interviewer (F): Do you think that males also think that it's quite normal to grope somebody on a night out?
>
> Participant (F): Yeah, I reckon. I don't think they mean it in a mean way.
>
> Participant (F): I think it's jokey sometimes.
>
> Participant (F): Obviously not all guys are going to do it, but I feel like some guys that do, I think they do it in a jokey way to maybe get your attention…
>
> Participant (F): And then their mates egg them on and…
>
> Participant (F) And then it's like, because they're joking you feel like you can't react to it, because they're only messing with you.
>
> Participant (F): It's like male banter.

This extract highlights a perception that men can be excused for this behaviour, it is not meant in a 'mean way', 'it's jokey', 'it's like male banter'. If women stand up for themselves and call out or report this unwanted sexual touching then they risk being accused of over-reacting because 'they're only messing with you'. It is potentially riskier to react to the unwanted groping, and so indirect safety work is to say nothing and go along with the view that no harm is meant. Vera-Gray (2018) considers the ways in which women learn to stay silent which contributes to individualisation and victim blaming; 'the questions become 'Why didn't she speak?' Not 'How was she silenced?' (p.75). Language used here also begins to demonstrate the power of rape or lad culture (Jackson 2006; Jackson and Tinkler 2007; Lewis, Marine and Kenney, 2018). It begins to demonstrate the difficulty and danger to be found in attempting to subvert these powerful cultures and so indirect safety work here is to go with the predominant belief system of the group.

In another focus group, a conversation developed where participants were discussing how it is difficult to go against social norms of unwanted sexual touching, with a male participant also agreeing with this:

> Participant (M[7]): They walk in a club and something goes over their eyes and they think they can just grab, touch everyone!

> Interviewer (F): Is that normal?

> Participant (F): It's kind of normal. Like, if someone did that to me I'd just – I don't even think I'd react, which is probably bad. I'd just be like, 'whatever'.

> Participant (M): That it's not worth it.

> Participant (F): I'm not going to go and tell the police.

In another discussion, unwanted sexual touching then comes up as something that can happen anywhere and not just in spaces that you might have come to expect it, such as a club:

> Participant (F): In fresher's, I was having a photo taken and someone literally grabbed my arse in the photo, he was behind me, and I didn't want to ruin the photo, so I just went like this, moved that arm behind me and I was still smiling.

This event stuck in this participant's mind. It happened right at the beginning of her university journey and in the middle of the day in a crowded environment from a complete stranger who remains unknown to her. This participant laughed while recounting it, as did the rest of the focus group (male and female). Yet despite the humour with which it was conveyed, the words here are powerful, 'I didn't want to ruin the photo', 'I was still smiling'. All of this conveys a clear and strongly remembered incident resulting in indirect safety work from the participant who 'just moved that arm'. This participant is in an unfamiliar environment, she wants to fit in and does not want to cause a fuss when most likely she feels nothing will come of it if she does. Under-reporting perpetuates SV and is part of the structural glue which holds together rape and lad cultures. Phipps and Young (2015) note awareness of under-reporting within lad cultures which can embolden SV behaviour. The NUS (2010) survey also noted that reporting of incidences of SV is low across all types of SV and that reasons given for not reporting were shame and embarrassment, along with not thinking the SV was serious enough to report. Parnitzke Smith and Freyd (2014) highlight the concept of 'institutional harm'. This participant does not know how the institution might have reacted had she drawn attention to this unwanted behaviour. However, her split second reaction to move on from this without calling the perpetrator to account may have been conditioned by widely held doubts about reporting (Fedina, Holmes and Backes, 2018; Zinzow and Thompson 2011).

This may constitute protective indirect safety work because of a feared 'second assault' or inadequate response (Campbell, 2006; Linder and Myers, 2017) fearing a complaint will potentially be dismissed by peers, friends, or the institution. This participant's decision not to react was expressed as habituated, an unconscious example of indirect safety work, and a form of hidden labour of the kind that women undertake every day (Vera-Gray 2018). It is also an example of Manne's (2016, 2017) work on the institutional and institutionalised aspects of misogyny.

Indirect Safety Work: Appropriating Cultures

The next extract is discussing female behaviour on a night out:

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[7] M denotes male respondent.

Participant (F): I think there's some girls who are very, like, in boys' faces. Then there's quiet girls and outgoing girls…

Participant (F): It's alcohol though, isn't it?

Participant (M): I think it is alcohol. Girls get beyond drunk…

Participant (F): It makes you, like, arrogant. If people went out sober, no one would argue with each other. No one would – yeah, it's alcohol that's the problem.

Participant (F): I think it's the mentality that some people have when they go out, as well.

Participant (M): Their aim is to get with someone.

Group (F and M): Yeah.

Participant (M): That's the only reason they've gone.

Participant (F): Some girls see it as, like, their only way to mix with – like, I know a girl and she will go out and she'll get with someone, that's the aim of going out. And, of course, if boys think that's what girls want, you know, then they're going to expect it the next time if they do it once.

This extract veers toward derogatory language from the males and females in the focus group and as such is reproducing sex and gender stereotypes where women and men's behaviour is 'judged' according to stereotyped beliefs. They are also steeped in the language of 'lad' and 'ladette' culture. Appropriation of a culture often associated with men, by women, may be another form of indirect safety work for some women who are trying to fit in with their peers and to take charge of their own sexualities. Jackson (2006) and Jackson and Tinkler (2007) have discussed the concept of girls taking on aspects of lad behaviour as 'ladettes' in schools, as a form of appropriation and ownership and as a way to fit in.

The reactions in the extract demonstrate some strong and stereotypical responses such as 'girls get beyond drunk', being 'arrogant', 'in boys' faces', which emerge from both the males and the females in the group and are also synonymous with rape myth acceptance. This language underscores that sex and gender stereotypes continue to shape performance. Challenges to sex and gender stereotypes are fraught with difficulty. They are often met with reactions designed to pull women and girls back in line, to conform to stereotypical expectations. Behaviour that goes against commonly understood gender norms is heavily criticised. Jackson and Tinkler (2007, p. 262) note that 'when these constructions are examined closely, the ladette and modern girl's key threat to society is their capacity for gender disorder' and central to this are beliefs of 'natural' differences between the genders. This naturalisation discourse contributes both to rape and lad cultures and to acceptance of SV environments. Patriarchy relies upon maintenance of these stereotypes and of sex and gender roles, where women continue to be seen in relation to and less than men, and who are often still rewarded for pleasing men (Bauer, 2010).

Direct Safety Work: Men as Added Layers of Protection

Vera-Gray (2018) notes how girls and women are trained throughout their lives to be alert for danger and to pre-empt danger through cautious behaviour and notes this as hidden labour which is habituated and embodied. The following extracts display forms of hidden labour that this paper refers to as direct safety work, as it is calculated and planned with the explicit intention of attempting to keep oneself safe or safer.

> Participant (F): I always go out with someone, I'm always with someone, you know, who'll look after me.

This participant's statement that she always makes sure she is with someone when she goes out is a clear restriction to her freedom. She further states that this someone will 'look after' her denoting a loss of confidence in her own capacity to keep herself safe, or a shattering of her perception that she can protect herself or act according to her own will (Kelland, 2014). The following extract backs this up and refers specifically to a need to have a man's protection too:

> Participant (F): I usually never go out but, when I do go out, I make sure that there is at least one male in our group. Yeah, I just don't feel very safe. I do feel a lot more comfortable when I'm around males that I know.

The next extracts demonstrate the impact of men in a group when SV actually occurs:

> Participant (F): I've had guys grab you and stuff and then, if you reject, they get quite physical. I've had a guy try and hit me before because I pushed him away. But, like, other guys around me were there to challenge it.

> Participant (F): I was on a dance floor and this guy …at one point he, like, picked me up and tried carrying me away. And he was bigger and I couldn't get down and I was quite drunk, but he was literally going to try and walk out of the club carrying me, but my friends, it was two of my guy mates that came running after me and shouting at him, telling him to put me down.

Mellgren and Ivert (2019) consider the impact of the shadow of SV and this includes the potential for women to imagine themselves as 'victims' so that the threat of SV and pre-victimhood position women as vulnerable. These extracts demonstrate that the women are doubly vulnerable, through being subject to violence from men and then having to find protection from men. This is a dual form of victimhood and perpetuates violence whereby women's recourse to safety is found at the hands of men.

A further extract demonstrates women orchestrating social situations to include men in the group for protection:

> Participant (F): I find it's different, as well. If I go out with a group of girls, and it's just girls there. We just can't do it anymore, because you just end up with a group of guys just coming around and circling you…but then when we go out and we mix in a few boys with that, we find we're pestered less, because the other men know that someone might intervene.

The word 'pester' is used above and then in the extract below. In both extracts, the women participants are saying that unless they have men in their group they will be pestered by the unwanted attention of other men:

> Participant (F): I think if you see men, like when we go out to the flat, we're three girls and three boys and the girls really don't get pestered at all. But if, like, last night we went out and it was mostly girls, there was constantly–no matter where you were, there was a guy just stood, like hovering around with his friend on the other side, sort of thing. That doesn't happen when you're out with a guy friend.

The interviewer then seeks to clarify what that means for women and their freedom:

> Interviewer (F): Would you say, then, that some of this is meaning that it's hard to go out, as females, either on your own or as females in a group?

> Participant (F): Yeah, definitely. I think you can tell.

> Participant (F): I reckon you could literally video it and you would compare the difference.

This extract demonstrates the limits to women's freedom in that their night out is completely different based upon whether they have men in their social group or not. Direct safety work for the women in this situation is having to plan to have men in social group situations. Ironically, freedom and safety from men's violence relies upon the presence of other men. These extracts provide examples of how women have to consider changing their behaviour and support Mellgren and Ivert's (2019) ideas regarding the threat of violence which the study here argues, positions women as 'pre-victims' *before* violence is fulfilled. Women are victims to freedom in that they have to think and consider whether to go out alone, whether to include men in their social groups, and how best to position themselves so that if violence does occur, there might be men at hand to step in and protect them. In this way, the shattering of the view that women can keep themselves safe can be said to be taking place before any violence has occurred, and the threat of this is being considered by these women when planning social situations.

Conclusion

Women live under the threat and fear of SV and are engaged all the time in safety work which is skilful, embodied, and agentic, but at the same time restrictive of their freedom (Vera-Gray 2018). Women are at once policing the behaviour of other women whilst trying to assert their own agency; men are asserting their own selves as protectors of women too and women adjust their behaviours in anticipation of SV. Daily, women receive messages from wider society about SV, immersed in stereotypical norms, despite claims that popular culture has loosened traditional perceptions of gender norms (Cransnow and Waugh, 2013; Lewis, Marine and Kenney 2018; Oliver, 2016).

Safety work is both shaped by and contributes toward a climate or shadow of fear (Mellgren and Ivert, 2019) that can result in women employing a range of safety behaviours, which this paper has categorised within two typologies of indirect safety work and direct safety work. This paper has also demonstrated that women sometimes lose faith in their own capacity to protect themselves and this drives forward understandings of shattering (Kelland, 2014). An act of SV does not need to be fulfilled for women to demonstrate a shattered belief in their safety in this world and a loss of confidence in their capacity to protect themselves. In demonstrating this, the paper further supports emerging theories on safety work and acknowledges that women's resistance can be a compromise of, 'safe but not comfortable, safe but not free' (Vera-Gray, 2018, p. 133). There is a need for more work on the experiences of

women in relation to how they 'trade freedom for safety' (Vera-Gray 2018) and this paper has contributed to this. What is central to this debate is how women continue to be constructed as both vulnerable to and responsible for SV, alongside acknowledgement that popular culture and appropriation of popular culture is not necessarily dismantling traditional sex and gender stereotypes.

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