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# Moving in a State of Fear: Ambiguity, Gendered Temporality, and the Phenomenology of Anticipating Violence

Joy Twemlow, Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine

Durham Law School, Durham University, Durham, UK; School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland



## ABSTRACT

This article adopts a feminist phenomenological method to flesh out the way in which gendered norms position the experience of anticipating violence. While women's everyday lives are frequently polluted with an atmosphere laden with potential threats, the law struggles to adequately grasp this experience of anticipating violence. We argue that the dominant legal understanding of violence is incapable of grasping the experience of *anticipating* violence because the temporal focus of violence is constrained by the law's focus on violence as an 'event' to which it responds. Drawing on interviews with women in positions of leadership in Northern Ireland we provide a description of this gendered experience of anticipating violence. In these cases, women occupy a temporally and spatially stretched out space of being-in-anticipation that not only creates an atmosphere of ambiguity but restricts the space for women to exercise control over their own lives. Arguably the way that anticipation restricts women's ways of engaging with the world create affective conditions that parallel those of the violence they seek to avoid. We conclude by proposing that the ambiguity that characterises anticipation leaves space for a compassionate response through intersubjective recognition.

**KEYWORDS** Phenomenology of violence; anticipation of violence; feminist phenomenology; gendered violence; women in leadership

## 1. Introduction

In 2021, two of the co-authors of this paper undertook interviews with women in positions of leadership in politics, security, and justice in Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> In these interviews women continuously described the experience of

**CONTACT** Joy Twemlow  [joy.twemlow@durham.ac.uk](mailto:joy.twemlow@durham.ac.uk)  Durham Law School, Palatine Centre, Durham, DH1 3LE

<sup>1</sup>Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, 'At the Nexus of Participation and Protection: Protection-Related Barriers to Women's Participation in Northern Ireland' (International Peace Institute, June 2021). The authors worked with the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) in Belfast to recruit

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anticipating violence; how their everyday lives were polluted by an atmosphere laden with potential threats. This gendered experience of anticipating violence is one familiar to women beyond the realm of official politics: it can be felt walking home alone at night, on social media, in our workplaces. In March 2021, this sentiment mobilised women all over the UK: shocked by the murder of a woman walking home by an off-duty police officer, they marched in the hundreds to 'reclaim the streets'.<sup>2</sup> In the same month, thousands of women across Australia marched in anger over numerous stories that had emerged of sexual harassment within parliament, Australia's school system, and workplaces.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, the sentiment of women participating in these marches not only encompassed solidarity with the female victims, but foregrounded how these specific events fed into the gendered experience of anticipating violence.<sup>4</sup> In this way, women on opposing ends of the globe expressed anger at the degree to which spaces that operate as backdrops to their lives demanded an exhausting degree of anticipatory hypervigilant navigation.

While women marching to 'reclaim the streets' or demand change to sexist workplace cultures demonstrate how common the gendered experience of anticipating violence is, official responses continue to deliver tone-deaf, victim blaming suggestions that reflect a clumsy grasp on the issue. For example, in their response to the discovery that one of their plain clothed officers had murdered a woman walking home, the Metropolitan Police suggested that women should 'wave a bus down' if threatened by a plain clothed police officer.<sup>5</sup> This advice was both unhelpful and ignored the primary issue that the streets *don't feel safe in the first place*, regardless of women's behaviour and actions. In fact, it is our contention that the dominant (legal) framework for understanding violence fails to capture the essential characteristics of the *experience of anticipating violence* in this way.

Further it is our view that the experience of anticipating violence identified in the interviews discussed, and reflected in the response to the above events,

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participants. Interviews were conducted online due to public health restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of ethical concerns for women's safety, recruitment focused on women in positions of leadership accustomed to speaking publicly about their roles, and who were less at risk of intimidation or violence arising from their participation in the research. Ethical approval for the project was granted by Durham University Ref. Law-2020-10-22T12:36:56 (29 October 2020).

<sup>2</sup>Reclaim the Night: Women Call for Safer Streets at Night' *BBC News* (28 November 2021) <[www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-59451817](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-derbyshire-59451817)> accessed 7 April 2022.

<sup>3</sup>Australia March 4 Justice: Thousands March against Sexual Assault' *BBC News* (15 March 2021) <[www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-56397170](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-56397170)> accessed 7 April 2022.

<sup>4</sup>Alexandra Topping, 'Sarah Everard Murder Sparked UK Reckoning with Male Violence, Say Charities' *The Guardian* (3 March 2022) <[www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/03/sarah-everard-sparked-uk-reckoning-with-male-violence-say-charities](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/03/sarah-everard-sparked-uk-reckoning-with-male-violence-say-charities)> accessed 11 April 2022; Janine Hendry, 'There's an Outpouring of Rage about Gendered Violence. Women Have Had Enough' *The Guardian* (14 March 2021) <[www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/14/theres-an-outpouring-of-rage-about-gendered-violence-women-have-had-enough](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/14/theres-an-outpouring-of-rage-about-gendered-violence-women-have-had-enough)> accessed 11 April 2022.

<sup>5</sup>Sarah Everard: Challenge Plain-Clothes Officers, Met Police Says' *BBC News* (1 October 2021) <[www.bbc.com/news/uk-58757375](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-58757375)> accessed 7 November 2021.

is a gendered experience. The gendered nature is exemplified by the Australian Prime Minister's assertion that his decision to undertake an inquiry into workplace culture in Parliament was prompted by a conversation with his wife about the conditions he would want for his daughters.<sup>6</sup> His need to centralise his paternal role to grasp the experience of navigating the workplace with an atmosphere of (latent) violence demonstrates how gender has a material impact on how violence is anticipated. While it is true that individuals across the spectrum of genders can experience the anticipation of violence, there is a gendered aspect to how the anticipation of violence is *experienced*. In the same way that a person's degree of fluency in Korean will materially impact the experience of watching a Korean soap opera, gender materially impacts *how* one anticipates violence. That is, one's gendered acculturation, identification, the gender one is perceived to be by others, the gendered structuring of what is and is not harm and of its effects (eg stigma), qualitatively impacts the structure of this experience.<sup>7</sup>

In order to flesh out the contours of what it is like to anticipate violence, and how this experience is gendered, we adopt a feminist phenomenological method. As a method for describing the structures of experience, phenomenology is a useful approach to build descriptions of phenomena on their own terms. Feminist phenomenology adds a critical lens to this descriptive practice by acknowledging that certain experiences become naturalised along gendered lines. In this paper, we specifically focus on the experiences of women in leadership positions. Thus, through the adoption of feminist phenomenology, our paper directs attention to the role of gendered norms in positioning the experience of anticipating violence for women.

More specifically, we advance three positions in our paper. First, we argue that the dominant legal understanding of violence is incapable of grasping the experience of *anticipating* violence. This is because the logic of legally defined violence relies on linear temporal structure organised around violence as a concrete event. However, by contrast, the defining feature of anticipation is that the occurrence of the predicted event remains suspended in ambiguity. We therefore posit that understanding how ambiguity is inherent in the temporal structure of anticipation is key to grasping the experience of anticipating violence.

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<sup>6</sup>Emma Brancatisano and Evan Young, 'Scott Morrison Criticised for Invoking His Daughters in Response to Brittany Higgins' Rape Allegations' *SBS News* (16 February 2021) <[www.sbs.com.au/news/article/scott-morrison-criticised-for-invoking-his-daughters-in-response-to-brittany-higgins-rape-allegations/2vcacxya](http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/scott-morrison-criticised-for-invoking-his-daughters-in-response-to-brittany-higgins-rape-allegations/2vcacxya)> accessed 7 April 2022.

<sup>7</sup>See for example Suzanne J Levitt, 'Rethinking Harm: A Feminist Essay' (1994) 34(3) *Washburn Law Journal* 531; Margaret Urban Walker, 'Gender and Violence in Focus: A Background for Gender Justice in Reparations' in Ruth Rubio-Marin (ed), *The Gender of Reparations: Unsettling Sexual Hierarchies while Redressing Human Rights Violations* (Cambridge University Press 2009); Jessica Penwell Barnett and others, 'Stigma as Social Control: Gender-Based Violence Stigma, Life Chances, and Moral Order in Kenya' (2016) 63(3) *Social Problems* 447, 447–62.

Second, we describe this gendered experience of anticipating violence. To do so, we draw from the aforementioned interviews which were undertaken in 2021 as part of a research project exploring safety-related barriers to women's participation in conflict-affected contexts.<sup>8</sup> Interviews with 25 women in positions of leadership in Northern Ireland (in formal politics, security and justice sectors, and civil society) captured details of their exposure to threat or risk of violence, and its impact on their professional and personal lives.<sup>9</sup> Through accounts of their experiences we describe how gendered habits and expectations cast a wide temporal and spatial scope for coming-to-anticipate violence. That is, because of the social habituation of how and when women are expected to mitigate the risk of violence, the potential of violence is perceived everywhere and at any time. The practical, everyday implication of this habituation is that women find themselves undertaking actions to reduce ambiguity; for example, by limiting the spaces they occupy or the interactions they undertake. We argue that the experience of being-in anticipation results in the corrosion of the embodied self and shares many experiential similarities with the experience of violence.

Finally, we propose that a compassionate response to the experience of anticipating violence can be found in feminist phenomenological ethics. The very ambiguity that underpins the anxiety of anticipation also leaves space for imagining alternative responses, beyond the law, to alleviate the corrosion of the self. We conclude that the necessity for women to habituate their lives around a temporally stretched space of ambiguity and vigilance does not compel an expansion of legal categories or legal capacity; rather, a relational ethics that recognises these experiences and the anticipation of violence as part of the violence experience is needed.

## 2. Feminist Phenomenology

The motivation behind our paper is to better describe and understand the gendered experience of anticipating violence. Phenomenology is a method

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<sup>8</sup>See Turner and Swaine (n 1).

<sup>9</sup>Participants in the research represented a broad spectrum of political opinions, geographic locations and ages. A multi-level definition of leadership ensured the research is informed by women who have a macro-level perspective, see Catherine Turner, 'Women's Leadership for Peace: Towards a Model of Multi-Track Leadership' (IPI Global Observatory, 18 October 2019) <<https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/10/womens-leadership-for-peace-towards-multi-track-leadership/>> accessed 12 June 2022. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, allowing women to speak from their own experience. Interviews were coded inductively to derive understanding of risk and violence from women's lived experience rather than through external definitions of risk or harm. These interviews are referenced throughout the article. They have been anonymously coded using the following convention: NI denotes the location of the interview; the number 1 denotes the specific research project for which the interviews were conducted; each interview is then allocated a number to identify it. A descriptor is then added to indicate whether the participant worked in elected politics, in justice and security, or in civil society. For example, interview 1 is coded as NI 101 Civil Society. This convention is used to cite the interviews throughout.

directed towards uncovering the structures of perception, experience, and consciousness, and thus it allows us to locate ways of describing the anticipation of violence on its own terms.<sup>10</sup> Beyond its usefulness, the particular lens of feminist phenomenology has a normative purpose; it calls for us to pay attention to gendered experiences that have been rendered invisible.

As a method, phenomenology calls for the suspension of habitual and theoretical presuppositions in order to uncover and describe the world as it appears before us.<sup>11</sup> While there is no single, uniform way of undertaking a phenomenological inquiry, there are a discernible set of acknowledgements that guide a focus on experience and consciousness. First, phenomenologists recognise that we are situated in a (shared) physical, social, and cultural world. If we arbitrarily pluck things out of their embedded and enmeshed locale, we fail to understand phenomena in their entirety. Second, our access to this physical, social, and cultural world necessitates a subject who makes sense of what is being perceived and experienced. This subject is not a passive receptor of external stimuli, but rather an active subject who adopts particular ways of engaging (intentionality) towards the shared world. She orients herself within the physical world, she seeks recognition within social contexts, she reproduces habits of her culture, all of which change the nature of her experience and consciousness. Finally, phenomenology recognises that this process of perceiving, experiencing, or being conscious of phenomena are orientated by – *and within* – spatial, temporal, and intersubjective spaces.

There is a growing body of critical phenomenology that integrates the phenomenological method with the observations of critical scholarship. Critical phenomenology, including feminist phenomenology, recognises that certain ways of experiencing the world are privileged, naturalised, and normalised along structural lines and that, conversely, certain ways of being-in-the-world are rendered invisible.<sup>12</sup> By calling for the suspension of habitual and theoretical assumptions in order to provide a description of things-as-they-are, phenomenology is directed towards countering ontologies that forget the situated, subjective, and oriented nature of phenomena. Neither a mere list of facts sterilised of context, nor the sublimation of all experience into judgements, are considered truly rigorous description of phenomena. Thus, for example, in the context of our paper, it might be entirely appropriate to judge many of the experiences of the interviewees as threats made against them. However, a threat denotes a (legal) judgement of the

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<sup>10</sup>It is important to clarify that phenomenology is not primarily concerned with the collection and aggregation of specific experiences, but rather it is directed towards looking at experience with the aim of uncovering processes which make them possible and meaningful.

<sup>11</sup>Gail Weiss, Gayle Salamon and Ann V Murphy (eds), *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (Northwestern University Press 2019).

<sup>12</sup>*ibid* 15.

significance of the experience rather than a description of what is being experienced. By judging something to be a threat, we bring sedimented normative and legal assumptions that shift the focus away from the structures of experience in question. Judgements of significance, whether valid or not, cannot exist in the absence of the experience to which they are attached; to collapse the reality as experienced within the privileged judgement of (legal) significance obscures the qualities of the phenomena examined. Critical phenomenology is therefore directed towards prying apart normalised modes of experience, suspending automatic assumptions, and articulating the ways of being that are rendered invisible, to map and describe the conditions that make the experience of phenomena – such as anticipation of violence – possible.

A feminist phenomenological approach focuses specifically on how our shared physical, social, and cultural world is gendered; it draws out the ways in which experience is shaped by gendered habits, expectations, and embodiments.<sup>13</sup> Thinking about gendered ways of being in the world requires, *inter alia*, recognition of how our body – as the means through which we reach out to, and are seen within the world – is a gendered body. While part of this gendering-of-the-body is derived from self-identification and expression, our subjectivity is inevitably shaped by things outside our control such as sociocultural facts, the way that others encounter us, and expectations that exist within our shared world.<sup>14</sup> This acknowledgement of gendered positioning directs us to take women's experiences seriously. As Shabot and Landry outline, one of the key concerns of feminist phenomenology – and feminism(s) more generally – is to provide descriptions of the everyday experiences of women in a way that raises questions about what is accepted as a 'normal' experience.<sup>15</sup> Raising these questions is especially important where structures (such as law) confer legitimacy onto certain ways of being-in-the world whilst rendering others invisible. As Shabot and Landry themselves outline:

Changing the definition of normal experience to account for women's experience is one of the radical endeavours of feminist phenomenology. We need more feminist phenomenology because the experience of the 'Other' – which

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<sup>13</sup>Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press 2005); Alia Al-Saji, 'Feminist Phenomenology' in Serene J Khader, Alison Stone and Ann Garry (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Routledge 2017).

<sup>14</sup>While we do not explicitly engage with intersectional positionings, to fully understand the experience of anticipating violence, greater exploration of how gendering occurs within and across multiple positions in structures is required. For example, we cannot ignore how race, sexuality, class etc position people differently in regards to the anticipation of violence. See for example Megan Burke, *When Time Warps: The Lived Experience of Gender, Race, and Sexual Violence* (University of Minnesota Press 2019).

<sup>15</sup>Sara Cohen Shabot and Christinia Landry, 'Introduction: The Water We Swim in: Why Feminist Phenomenology Today?' in Sara Cohen Shabot and Christinia Landry (eds), *Rethinking Feminist Phenomenology: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives* (Rowman and Littlefield 2018).

is, in fact, most women's experience – has not been told enough, and the concept of 'normal experience' (that on offer by classical phenomenology and the natural attitude) has not been challenged enough; 'normal experience' must be rethought and rewritten.<sup>16</sup>

The exclusion of gendered perspectives has implications within the way the law, officials, and women themselves engage with the experience of anticipating violence. As will be further discussed, law predisposes, and indeed requires, women to understand and describe their experiences in particular ways in order to 'fit' into the legal definitions provided for them.<sup>17</sup> It pre-positions a delimited frame for experience<sup>18</sup> – in our case, the legal definition of violence constrains the gendered experience of its anticipation. A feminist loss of the articulation of what violence is and means through the lens of the life, perceptions, and experience of the individual absent of pre-determined legal assumptions, but in response to perceptions of the world from their gendered positioning. The erasure of race and gender for example is evident in the design and execution of the law.<sup>19</sup> It also means that aspects of what it means to navigate the world while anticipating violence, of the harm it generates, are left aside, rendered invisible and irrelevant. We can see this in the practical implications of following the Metropolitan police's suggestion of waving down a bus; the fear of being labelled as 'over-reacting', the acute awareness that non-compliance increases threat of police violence (particularly towards Black, Brown, and Queer bodies); the practical considerations of there being a bus *to wave down*. The failure of the Metropolitan Police to reflect on the obvious flaws of their advice demonstrates how women's experiences of anticipating violence are perceived as an infrequent, trivial, and illegitimate occurrence. And, thus, the 'nothing happened' of women's experiences of violence is reinforced so that social processes (the law) continue to minimise women's experiences.<sup>20</sup>

By recognising both the way gender positions individuals in their experience, and how the exclusion of gendered perspectives skews what are considered to be 'objective' descriptions of phenomena, phenomenology speaks to the gap between 'objective' empirical descriptions and normative

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Lucinda M Finley, 'Breaking Women's Silence in Law: The Dilemma of the Gendered Nature of Legal Reasoning' (1989) 64(5) *Notre Dame Law Review* 886; Aisling Swaine, *Conflict-Related Violence against Women: Transforming Transition* (Cambridge University Press 2018).

<sup>18</sup>See for example Mary Hawkesworth, 'Sex, Gender and Sexuality: From Naturalized Presumption to Analytical Categories' in Georgina Waylen and others (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (Oxford University Press 2013).

<sup>19</sup>Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics' (1989) *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139; Ruth Gordon, 'Foreword: Critical Race Theory and International Law: Convergence and Divergence' (2000) 45(5) *Villanova Law Review* 827.

<sup>20</sup>Liz Kelly and Jill Radford, 'Nothing Really Happened': The Invalidation of Women's Experiences of Sexual Violence' (1990) 10(30) *Critical Social Policy* 39.



critiques of patriarchal power structures. The acknowledgement of phenomenology that all perspectives are held from somewhere, by someone, and is oriented in time and space offer a critique of a God's-eye view *from nowhere* with its delusions of objectivity. Instead, phenomenology views objectivity as the product of a *view from everywhere*; practically only possible through the intersubjective sharing of subjective perception and experience.<sup>21</sup> Feminist phenomenology speaks to this not only by explicitly aiming to articulate different, diverse ways in which gendered structures position the experience of people, but also by treating these different positions as contributing to a collective project of elucidating an objective view of the world we share.

### 3. The Experience of Anticipating Violence

Prior to outlining the gendered dimension of anticipating violence, it is important to articulate how the dominant legal framework of violence fails to capture the experience of anticipation. We argue that this failure is due to a structural limitation: the way that temporality is organised within the legal understanding of violence cannot accommodate the ambiguity which defines the act of anticipation. By temporality we mean how time allows us to make sense of a phenomena.<sup>22</sup> This not only refers to the length of time across which a phenomenon spans, but how sequencing, spaces between time, and the relationship between past-present-future bring sense to the phenomena. In illustrating this point, phenomenologists frequently reference the role time plays in perceiving a melody.<sup>23</sup> It is the temporal relationship between notes which bring about the phenomena of hearing a tune. To exist, melody relies upon the pattern created through their sequence, the gaps between the notes, the way past notes are retained in the present and future notes predicted.<sup>24</sup> Just as understanding the experience of a melody requires engagement with its temporal structure, we posit that a key feature of the experience of anticipating violence is its temporality.

The orthodox legal understanding of violence is temporally organised around a concrete 'event': an absolute and inescapable moment of rupture and re-doing that disrupts the embodied self. While anticipation is similarly temporally organised towards an event, the event itself is not absolute: it oscillates on the ambiguous boundary between our lived reality and

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<sup>21</sup> Anya Daly, 'A Phenomenological Grounding of Feminist Ethics' (2019) 50(1) *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1.

<sup>22</sup> Burke (n 14).

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics* (Northwestern University Press 1964); Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)* (John Barrett Brough tr, Springer Netherlands 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Laura McMahon, 'Freedom as (Self-)Expression: Natality and the Temporality of Action in Merleau-Ponty and Arendt' (2019) 57(1) *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 56, 60–61.

imagined possibility. Thus, while violence is experienced, understood, and defined as an inescapable, certain, present – anticipation is conversely characterised by an escapable, uncertain, future. A description of anticipation of violence must speak to both the rupture of violence and the ambiguity of anticipation.

In arguing that the inability of legal understandings of violence lies in its temporal structure, we take as our starting point the understanding of violence as an ‘event’ that is premised in law: a particular moment of rupture and re-doing that disrupts all that we take for granted in our relationship to the social world. This understanding is reflected in the discourse of law. Law in this context refers to a closed system of rules which both defines the act of harm and provides the possibility of redress through institutions. Reading violence through law reveals a linear temporality which centres specific events. Think, for example, of the law of rape. When a person has suffered violence we ask: ‘What could have been done to prevent that act from occurring?’, ‘What specific act of harm did the victim suffer?’, and ‘Can the perpetrator be held to account for committing the act of violence?’ ‘Violence’ on these terms refers to certain acts that meet certain thresholds as proscribed by the law. At each stage the focus rests on a specific act – on whether it can be defined as unlawful, whether it can be proved beyond reasonable doubt in accordance with the law of evidence, and whether the victim is entitled to redress as a result. Even when the gaze of the legal system does rest on events leading up to the act of harm, these are assessed through the lens of what came next. Institutions of criminal justice, whether the police or the courts, cannot respond to acts that have not yet taken place.<sup>25</sup> Further, at the later stage where the law is most active, the possibility of redress will depend on the victim being able to establish that that act falls within the definition of a ‘crime’ as prescribed by law.<sup>26</sup> Only if that definition is met will there be the possibility of redress. Redress itself will be oriented towards punishment for the act that has already been committed. Therefore, at all stages of the process, the victim’s experience of violence is interpreted through the lens of this one act of violence and its status in law. Conceptualising violence as an event in this way sets the limits on the structural conditions of recognition.

The way violence is understood in law is also reflected in the phenomenological understanding of violence. Developing the claim that violence ruptures and destroys the sense of self, Thiemo Breyer explains this loss of ownership over our experience by exploring how violence can overwhelm the structures of embodiment and intersubjectivity, thus severing the

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<sup>25</sup>See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press 2007) 157, discussing how subjective experiences of harassment are ‘not a police matter’ unless they can be framed with reference to existing crimes.

<sup>26</sup>This includes having to establish this fact in a way that meets high evidential thresholds.

means through which we act on, and relate to, the world.<sup>27</sup> This view of the impact of violence draws upon the phenomenological observation of the twofold constitution of the body as subject and as object. As individuals, we are subjects who experience, act, and encounter others through our body as it is located in the world. Our bodily senses allow us to orient ourselves, the limbs of our body allow us to reach out and make a mark on the world, our voice allows us to intersubjectively affirm objective and subjective realities. While our body allows us to animate our subjectivity, it is simultaneously an object amongst other objects in the world, governed by the same laws of nature. This twofold constitution of the body grounds the relationship and continuity that we experience as a subjective self concretely situated in an objective world.

When one experiences violence, this reciprocal project of generating coherence with and within the world is disrupted. On the one hand, our ability to act in the world through the control we have over our body dissipates as we are forced to reflexively respond to and/or endure the constrained possibilities for action created by violence. Our body betrays us; our flesh is no longer experienced as our means of accessing the world, instead the flesh becomes heavy with the reminder that we are an object amongst other objects in the world. Further, it is through our flesh that we encounter others – it is our bodies that gaze upon, speak with, listen to others whom we recognise as another subjectivity and expect recognition from. Thus, in violence, this expectation of recognition is also violated; the reduction of our body to an object by the other severs the process where the other reaches out and recognises our subjectivity – leaving us to drown in our own subjective experience lacking external affirmation. In this way, violence threatens the whole person because it destroys both the process of reaching out to the world, and the process that allows for the world to reach out to us. It is this understanding that violence is experienced as an event of rupture where the whole self is lost that provides an explanation of the heavy affective fog of fear and anxiety that can permeate through a life lived in anticipation of violence.

Feminists have worked to shed light on the gendered ways that the self is destroyed through violence – the temporal experience of it, the lack of recognition that some phenomena are experienced as violence by women, and the anticipatory effect that implies for women. Embodied *apprehension* and *anticipation* of violence in circumstances assumed to structure the normalised everyday of women's lived experience, such as childbirth, jarringly encounter formal, legal, and political recognition that determine what is and is not 'violence'. For example, '[h]ow can women perceive obstetric violence as actual

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<sup>27</sup>Thiemo Breyer, 'Violence as Violation of Experiential Structures' (2017) 16(4) *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 737.

violence, rather than as a normal part of the “essentially benevolent” medicalised and medically managed childbirth process?<sup>28</sup>

While feminist scholarship has revealed the limitations of the legal system in recognising and redressing the harms suffered by women,<sup>29</sup> law and its capacity to deliver justice for gender-based harms nevertheless retain a strong hold on the feminist imagination.<sup>30</sup> When the experience of violence is not fully recognised, this prompts alienation and lack of trust in the law itself.<sup>31</sup>

We contrast the temporal structure of violence, both defined in law and experienced, with the temporal structure of the phenomenology of anticipation. Anticipation denotes a certain type of intentionality towards an identified future. When we come to anticipate, we experience a specific potential future being foregrounded – this future becomes adorned with expectation and a greater sense of ‘this will happen’-ness while other potential futures retreat into the background. In this way, to anticipate refers to something more than imagining or considering; a future that is anticipated is felt as falling just outside of the peripheral of what we are currently experiencing. We might call this process of foregrounding ‘coming-to-anticipate’ and the temporal gap between the development of intentionality towards a particular future and the actual occurrence of this expected future ‘being-in-anticipation’. What is key, however, is that the foregrounded future still falls outside of current experience. This temporal space of being-in-anticipation is imbued with ambiguity as we direct our perception and consciousness towards identifying signs in the world which will affirm (or negate) the future that is anticipated. In this way, the experience of being-in-anticipation focuses our attention towards closing the gap of ambiguity; colouring the way we perceive and relate to the world around us. A preoccupation with responding to the inherent ambiguity of the foregrounded future is the key experiential feature of anticipation.

Being-in-anticipation of violence thus places us in a space where the ambiguity of anticipation pertains to our ability to engage with, and relate to, the world; we fear the destruction of the self. It is the magnitude of this rupture that contextualises the effect of fear and anxiety that is felt when one anticipates violence. Thus, the event of violence exists in a reciprocal relationship with the ambiguity of anticipation. It is precisely because violence is understood as an inescapable, absolute event that there is heightened anxiety about extinguishing the ambiguity inherent in anticipation. While it would

<sup>28</sup>Sara Cohen Shabot, ‘Why “Normal” Feels So Bad: Violence and Vaginal Examinations during Labour – A (Feminist) Phenomenology’ (2021) 22(3) *Feminist Theory* 443.

<sup>29</sup>Robin L West, ‘The Difference in Women’s Hedonic Lives: A Phenomenological Critique of Feminist Legal Theory Papers’ (1987) 3 *Wisconsin Women’s Law Journal* 81; Levitt (n 7).

<sup>30</sup>See Yvette Russell, ‘Woman’s Voice/Law’s Logos: The Rape Trial and the Limits of Liberal Reform’ (2016) 42(2) *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 273 identifying and discussing this trend.

<sup>31</sup>Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard* (Columbia University Press 2015); *ibid.*

be wrong to claim that there is a uniform manner in which people occupy this space of anticipating violence, understanding the ways in which this state of anticipation impacts day-to-day lives is a step towards understanding how the ambiguity inherent in anticipation is essential to grasping the gendered experience of anticipating violence. A heightened anticipation of violence will lead to particular ways of engaging with the world, including hypervigilance as to the possibilities in the world that affirm, or negate, this projected future, and taking actions which are directed towards affirming the self as an embodied, agential, and intersubjective self with the aim of negating the anticipated future of violence.

It is this relationship of futurity and ambiguity that anticipation has with the event of violence that the law struggles to capture. This is because, as outlined above, law is organised around an event; if there is no experience of being overwhelmed by the present, there is no violence. Feminists, and broader scholars working in the fields of violence against women have thereby attempted to drive recognition that it is not just the 'rupture' of violent event that matters, but that the latency of violence and its anticipatory effect in women's lives also require recognition. The nature of coercion and threat in the contexts of domestic and sexual violence experienced by women points to how the perception and anticipation of *what may happen* may be as effective in controlling, violating and securing compliance from women as any immediate physical threat or act of violence.<sup>32</sup> For example, the particular shape that the temporal and spatial dimensions of the phenomenon of coercive control may take are increasingly identified, including its 'technologies' of words, intimidation, isolation, and threat.<sup>33</sup> Here, the ambiguity of anticipation is revealed in its full efficacy. Coercive control is not reliant on a violent rupture; rather, it is chronic rather than episodic, and its cumulative effect is to reinforce an apprehension of the omnipresent and God's-eye view on the part of the controller.<sup>34</sup> Its cumulative and latent persona is central to an anticipatory effect reliant on an assumption of contingency (ie the nature of coercive control reveals a range of phenomena reliant on a perception of contingent threats and the very possibility of an ultimate violent outcome).<sup>35</sup> This phenomenon, situated within broader

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<sup>32</sup>Evan Stark, *Coercive Control: The Entrapment of Women in Personal Life* (Oxford University Press 2007); Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (first published 1988, John Wiley & Sons 2013); Marta Garrido-Maciás, Inmaculada Valor-Segura and Francisca Expósito, 'Women's Experience of Sexual Coercion and Reactions to Intimate Partner Sexual Violence' (2022) 37(11–12) *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* NP8965.

<sup>33</sup>Stark (n 32); Evan Stark, 'Re-Presenting Battered Women: Coercive Control and the Defense of Liberty' (Violence against Women: Complex Realities and New Issues in a Changing World conference, Montreal, May–June 2011) 19.

<sup>34</sup>Stark (n 32); Kristin L Anderson, 'Gendering Coercive Control' (2009) 15(12) *Violence against Women* 1444.

<sup>35</sup>James T Tedeschi and Richard B Felson, *Violence, Aggression, and Coercive Actions* (American Psychological Association 1994).

and latent gendered structural injustices that give it even deeper context,<sup>36</sup> is estimated to contribute to the sense of pervasive or expected harm. What some refer to as ‘the female fear’<sup>37</sup> then is the idea of the something that may never happen. But it might. And women know that it might because their wider experience of the world is one which is structured around that possibility, facilitating an insidious, enduring, and all-encompassing latency of anticipation.

Building on this feminist literature, we understand that in order to appreciate how anticipation is experienced by the women in leadership positions interviewed, the impact of ambiguity needs to be captured. In describing the experience of anticipation of violence, we ask: how do we not only leave space for ambiguity, but understand it as a key feature that characterises the gendered experience of being in anticipation of violence?

#### 4. Gendered Positioning of Anticipating Violence

The following section will describe the way gender positions individuals with regards to coming-to, and being-in, anticipation of violence. Through exploration of the experiences of women in public life in Northern Ireland, we dissect how gendered ways of being-in-the-world shape the experience of anticipating violence and reveal how these structures are illustrated by the day-to-day experiences of the women interviewed. It should be noted that in this context, gender and gendered vulnerability intersect with historic patterns of political violence and social norms that increase the state of being-in-anticipation of violence. Systems of informal social control in Northern Ireland have created structures that support macro level political violence (eg through paramilitarism) and high levels of gender inequality and gendered violence across public and private spaces.<sup>38</sup> The anticipation of violence thereby permeates both professional and private spaces, with no clear demarcation between the two for the women interviewed. Their experience was characterised by a temporally stretched experience of fairly acute being-in-anticipation of violence in their private and public lives. We will outline how gendered responses to the ambiguous nature of being-in-anticipation of violence frequently call for a loss of embodied engagement with the world. Ultimately, we argue that the inherent ambiguity of occupying the space of anticipation and loss of embodied engagement with the world

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<sup>36</sup>Stark (n 32); Anderson (n 34).

<sup>37</sup>Margaret T Gordon and Stephanie Riger, *The Female Fear: The Social Cost of Rape* (University of Illinois Press 1991).

<sup>38</sup>Aisling Swaine, ‘Beyond Strategic Rape and between the Public and Private: Violence against Women in Armed Conflict’ (2015) 37(3) *Human Rights Quarterly* 755; Swaine (n 17); Turner and Swaine (n 1); Kit Rickard and Kristin M Bakke, ‘Legacies of Wartime Order: Punishment Attacks and Social Control in Northern Ireland’ (2021) 30(4) *Security Studies* 603.

leads to day-to-day conditions that parallel the very loss of self that one seeks to avoid.

#### 4.1. Coming-to-Anticipate Violence

We believe that gendered expectations and habits make a difference in how anticipation of violence is experienced. Indeed, the gendered particularities of these experiences was recognised by interviewees. One participant reflected how ‘[i]t just seemed really unfair to me, like it’s personal safety. I think women, unfortunately, have to be more careful than men, it’s not fair.’<sup>39</sup> Another commented how this was

the kind of factor that affects women maybe more than men ... because we are much more likely to think “What is it that I could do to make myself safer?” as opposed to “Hang on a second, you shouldn’t be doing this”.<sup>40</sup>

More specifically, social expectations about when and how it is reasonable to expect women to act in avoidance of violence habituates women to perceive a potential violent future at a stage of temporal and spatial removal from the anticipated event. Anticipation of violence is therefore experienced simultaneously as an increase in this-will-happen-ness of a future in which the self is ruptured *and* of a future that remains ambiguous. Any description of the gendered experience of anticipating violence must capture the combination of these qualities.

##### 4.1.1. When Women Anticipate Violence

First, gendered expectations shape *when* it is deemed reasonable for women to act in anticipation of potential violence. In discussing feminist phenomenology, Alia Al-Saji raises the question:

[W]hat if gendering and racialization make a difference in *how* time is experienced – a difference in the very structure of temporal experience and not simply in its coloration or content?<sup>41</sup>

Gendering makes a difference to how time is experienced in anticipation of violence: women the world over are expected to take measures that ‘protect’ themselves where the anticipated event of violence is still a distant possibility. For example, they are taught to carry their keys between their fingers while walking *in case* they encounter an attacker. They are advised to refrain from drinking alcohol *to avoid* being ‘taken advantage of’. The social expectation about reasonableness of gendered action can be framed as a two-stage justification. First, that women are ‘biologically’ and

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<sup>39</sup>Ni 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>40</sup>Ni 105 Elected Politics.

<sup>41</sup>Al-Saji (n 13) 146.

psychologically weak and therefore will not be able to respond in the face of violence. Second, it is, therefore 'reasonable' for women to be expected to take responsibility for and take precautionary measures well before the eventuation of the event. Putting aside the numerous flaws in these justifications, our aim is not to describe these gendered structures but to highlight their impact on the way women come to anticipate violence: namely that this expectation of an early response requires early anticipation and constant vigilance. These were universal themes that were illustrated acutely in the experiences of the women who took part in the research.

The interviews revealed how women made calculations in advance of, as well as in a moment of, feeling unsafe in relation to the likelihood of violence and how to avoid it. One noted, for example, being aware of the fact that in a meeting 'the door was very far away from me and there were these two, three men blocking it.'<sup>42</sup> Another noted how:

You have to think about where you're going and who might be there, and where you sit ... and just give a wee bit more thought to the things that you do.<sup>43</sup>

She commented,

I would have become very conscious just of where I went and who was there with me, and things like that. It just made me a little bit more reticent about kind of going out and about on my own.<sup>44</sup>

For women with public profiles the constant processes of assessing risk and anticipating the need to avoid violence means they 'don't get really any downtime'<sup>45</sup> and are constantly 'mentally prepping for it [the possibility of violence].'<sup>46</sup>

Gendered expectations habituate women to come-to-anticipate violence at a point temporally removed from the potential event. The temporal space of being-in-anticipation is thereby imbued with ambiguity as perception and consciousness are directed towards identifying signs which will affirm (or negate) the future as anticipated. These gendered expectations mean that women occupy a temporally stretched out space of ambiguity and hyper-vigilance. Anticipation of violence is here experienced both as an increase in this-will-happen-ness of a future in which the self is destroyed *and* of a future that remains ambiguous.

#### *4.1.2. What Triggers Women to Anticipate Violence*

A second way in which gendered ways of being-in-the-world cast a wide net for women's anticipation of violence is how gendered norms shape what

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<sup>42</sup>NI 120 Civil Society.

<sup>43</sup>NI 105 Elected Politics

<sup>44</sup>ibid.

<sup>45</sup>ibid.

<sup>46</sup>NI 116 Elected Politics.



triggers the foregrounding of the potential future of violence. The most obvious example of this is the gendered nature of sexual violence. Feminist phenomenologists have pointed to how shifts in understandings of rape as *something that a woman experiences* illuminates 'the pervasive threat of rape that faces women in the present culture', where the 'fear of harm [is] (so likely that the subject constructs a small "safety zone" around the body)'.<sup>47</sup> The difficulty presents for women to perceive such fear and anticipation as harm, where it is not just structured but lived as 'normal'.<sup>48</sup> Further, the 'pre-victim' status of women implies their culpability when a rupture does occur, where a woman's body that 'wanders beyond its safety zone ... can expect to be hurt'.<sup>49</sup> The decisions and actions this implies for women in anticipation (ie to stay safe, to accept for example that it is their responsibility to carry keys between their fingers to thwart the threat of rape, or to flag down a bus), means that women in political roles must infuse their political life with this same anticipation and corresponding actions.

One interviewee involved in formal politics described multiple experiences of unwanted attention from male constituents. In one instance, a male constituent consistently insisted that she attend to his house in person and refused to deal with anyone else until it was apparent that 'he was just trying to entice me to his home'.<sup>50</sup> A barrage of abusive and invasive text messages and harassment ensued when she did not comply and in response to her involvement in other public engagements. On another occasion, sitting alone in a rural town hall, a temporary rented constituency office, a man appeared who proceeded to do electrical repairs. The *sense* that something was wrong prompted later inquiries by her office that revealed that there were no scheduled works at the hall that day. Later that night she received an anonymous text message saying: '... finally to see you in person is so nice'.<sup>51</sup> The same interviewee noted the impacts of the fear and anticipation that these experiences prompted for her and the impact on her role and potential as a political actor, stating:

[I]t's so deeply frustrating and this is the key point ... my male colleagues could go out to houses, and in the winter months, knock on the doors on the dark days [for campaigning]. I can't do that; do you know what I mean? I always have to have a male accomplice go with me and I just found it so frustrating because other parties, if they had more male representatives, had the political advantage because they could essentially work in those winter dark hours in a rural context and go out and engage, and I just didn't feel safe doing so,

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<sup>47</sup>Ann J Cahill, 'A Phenomenology of Fear: The Threat of Rape and Feminine Bodily Comportment' in Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo (eds), *The Feminist Philosophy Reader* (McGraw-Hill Companies 2008) 811, 819.

<sup>48</sup>Burke (n 14); Shabot (n 28).

<sup>49</sup>Cahill (n 47) 819.

<sup>50</sup>NI 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*

especially with some real weirdos who were like because you're at their beck and call.<sup>52</sup>

Women here are self-policing in order to remain within the safety zones they have had to determine. This clearly places them at a disadvantage professionally, and ultimately reinforces the idea that this is how women should behave given that they would in the end be blamed for not doing enough to anticipate and thwart the eventuality of a sexualised violent event.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews that triggered the anticipation of violence was one that extended beyond themselves to encompass potential harm to their families. This may also be a reflection of gendered habituation. Namely, those gendered as women may see a threat to the self as encompassing their relational self – thus the threat is not only ignited when their own subjectivity is felt as threatened, but when those they define themselves through, the collective sense, are also felt at risk. This reflects literature that highlights how those gendered as female define themselves with greater reference to their relations compared to their male counterparts.<sup>53</sup> There are gendered expectations and ways-of-being that shape the relational scope of who one is responsible for.<sup>54</sup>

Research participants reflected on the relational anticipation of violence and calculation of risk in terms of their family members. The risk that (an event of) violence would be enacted on members of family was integral to how women anticipated violence. For example, one interviewee noted how

it was more my family I was frightened for than me ... I never had any fear ... but it's the fear of what they could have done to people I love. I couldn't risk [them] being hurt.<sup>55</sup>

She continued, '[i]t's the people around you who are affected by what happens, not just you.'<sup>56</sup> For another, concerns for family were 'more acute' than concerns for herself and anticipation was experienced as 'trying to keep [my] wider family safe and not wanting them to come to any harm.'<sup>57</sup> In one striking example, a participant experienced the most fear when her

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<sup>52</sup>ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Susan E Cross and Laura Madson, 'Models of the Self: Self-Construals and Gender' (1997) 122(1) *Psychological Bulletin* 5; Shira Gabriel and Wendi L Gardner, 'Are There "His" and "Hers" Types of Interdependence? The Implications of Gender Differences in Collective versus Relational Interdependence for Affect, Behavior, and Cognition' (1999) 77(3) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 642; Kaite Yang and Joan S Girgus, 'Are Women More Likely than Men Are to Care Excessively about Maintaining Positive Social Relationships? A Meta-Analytic Review of the Gender Difference in Sociotropy' (2019) 81 (3–4) *Sex Roles* 157.

<sup>54</sup>It is worth noting that leaders of other genders also frequently experience threats to their family, and gendered expectations vary across cultures, thus greater examination is required in order to understand *how* gender impacts the extension of anticipation to encompass relational selves.

<sup>55</sup>NI 103 Civil Society.

<sup>56</sup>ibid.

<sup>57</sup>NI 108 Justice and Security.

home address was sprayed on a wall near where she lived, and her articulation of the harm caused was the anticipation experienced in terms of her children's safety.<sup>58</sup> Her children expressed fear of the house being targeted by projectiles and being burned down, affecting their ease of sleeping in the home. She also felt she could not tell her parents about the threat because of the impact it would have on them: '[my father] still doesn't know to this day, because if he did it would have killed him.'<sup>59</sup> This was a sentiment that was repeated time and again by women.<sup>60</sup> Another noted how 'it broke [my father] having to watch me always be strong and waiting for just the next embarrassment or humiliation or hostility ...'.<sup>61</sup>

Other respondents reflected on how the absence of immediate family enabled them to live more comfortably with the possibility of violence. Some articulated this as being 'fortunate' – the absence of children in the home lessened the sense of fear of violence.<sup>62</sup> As one participant noted,

I'm probably in a fortunate situation where I live on my own. So whatever I do, it's me that's going to be punished ... I don't have kids running about, or I don't have a partner. So anything I do it's me I'm putting at risk, I'm not putting anybody else at risk.<sup>63</sup>

Another noted,

I'm single, I don't have children or family. I think perhaps if I had other people in the home with me, I might be less robust about [the risk of violence].<sup>64</sup>

That these women experienced the absence of relations *as a relief* indicates how threat to the relational self is not merely a product of gendered ways of identifying, but also to social expectations about the scope of women's responsibility. The experience of having children in particular altered the significance of latent violence for women. One participant captured this dynamic as existing in a

higher appreciation of the work that you do and where it opens you up to risk and possible threat, and what that means not just for you as an individual but for your family, your husband and your children.<sup>65</sup>

A number of participants commented on the distress caused to partners or parents by the wider atmosphere of fear.<sup>66</sup> The pervasiveness of anticipation seeped into intergenerational relationships, creating a sense of responsibility

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<sup>58</sup>NI 119 Civil Society.

<sup>59</sup>ibid.

<sup>60</sup>NI 101 Civil Society; NI 105 Elected Politics; NI 110 Elected Politics; NI 125 Justice and Security.

<sup>61</sup>NI 125 Justice and Security.

<sup>62</sup>NI 109 Justice and Security; NI 117 Justice and Security.

<sup>63</sup>NI 102 Civil Society.

<sup>64</sup>NI 117 Justice and Security.

<sup>65</sup>NI 120 Civil Society.

<sup>66</sup>NI 110 Elected Politics; NI 125 Justice and Security.

for women for having placed their children in these circumstances.<sup>67</sup> If we understand the effect of fear and anxiety in anticipation of violence to derive from the fear of the destruction of the self, the experience of the self as a relational self casts a wider net for potential threat. Combined with the idea that women occupy a temporally and spatially stretched-out space of being-in-anticipation – violence thereby becomes a continuous latent possibility.

#### 4.2. Navigating the (Ambiguous) Space of Anticipating Violence

The dual factors of the wide scope of what foregrounds a potential future of violence *and* the ambiguity of temporal removal helps to explain how gender impacts the experience of anticipating violence. This wide scope speaks to the feeling of increased ‘this will happen’-ness; gendered habits cast a wide net temporally and thematically, for when one comes to anticipate violence it creates a constant atmosphere of ambiguity.

Speaking to the experience of occupying this space of ambiguity, one of the familiar themes that emerged from the interviews was the level of vigilance that women exercised within their day to day lives and, further, the explicitly gendered nature of that vigilance. The state of being-in-anticipation of violence is ‘constant’, ‘always there’. This ever-present-ness is particularly exacerbated by social media,<sup>68</sup> and, more recently, working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>69</sup> Reflecting this, interviewees spoke of existing in a heightened state of being-in-anticipation over a longer period of time, such as ‘watching the windows for a few weeks’<sup>70</sup> (in a reference to the anticipation of having one’s home targeted). Another noted how she ‘moved into a state of fear constantly. I lived that way and I didn’t realise I was doing it.’<sup>71</sup>

In this way, the wide scope for a potential future of violence changes the space around women. Places that should operate as a backdrop to life are polluted by the heavy fog of anticipation, shrinking the moments and spaces available where women can feel safe. This sentiment is expressed by the feminist phenomenologist Young when she states, ‘the woman lives her space as confined and closed around her, at least in part as projecting some small area in which she can exist as a free subject.’<sup>72</sup> The following quote from one of the respondents demonstrates the way being-in-anticipation of violence impacts the manner in which space is experienced:

I think this has another layer to it in terms of, for example, recently my neighbours moved in ... We live in a country lane and we wondered who are they and

<sup>67</sup>NI 112 Justice and Security; NI 115 Justice and Security.

<sup>68</sup>NI 110 Elected Politics; NI 115 Justice and Security.

<sup>69</sup>NI 123 Civil Society.

<sup>70</sup>NI 102 Civil Society.

<sup>71</sup>NI 103 Civil Society.

<sup>72</sup>Young (n 13) 45.

do they know me. It's those thoughts which are really not healthy that form your hyper security approach to life.<sup>73</sup>

The neighbouring space, usually imbued with friendly welcoming, is tainted with the latency of violence. The world is experienced as confined and suffocating – and there is acknowledgement that this experience is underpinned by the habit of hyper-vigilance brought on by (gendered) ways of being-in-anticipation.

This constant state of being-in-anticipation – the fact that 'it is always there in the background'<sup>74</sup> – also shapes the way women behaved in their working and home environments. Simple things like answering the phone, or meeting constituents or clients, became potential sites of violence. A number of women commented on their reluctance to answer the phone when they did not recognise the caller's number,<sup>75</sup> or the inherent vulnerability of being a woman in a political role where you were expected to be available to meet strangers in person.<sup>76</sup> As one participant noted, 'you are opening yourself up there for who-knows-what could happen.'<sup>77</sup> The constant possibility of an as yet undefined event of violence arises from a gendered social context in which misogyny and violence against women goes unchallenged. Women are accustomed to simply putting up with experiences such as aggressive behaviour and misogynistic abuse in their daily lives. This creates a permanent sense of latency that blurs the boundaries between normal and 'violence' and extends well beyond individual incidents. As one participant noted, 'I still jump when the phone rings ... or the doorbell or knocker goes. It's constantly in my mind that it could be something else, something bad.'<sup>78</sup>

The futurity of anticipation coupled with the fear of violence invites one to grasp for certainty, to escape the space of anxious ambiguity that characterises the all-consuming nature of anticipating violence whereby they 'run that risk every day, no matter what happens.'<sup>79</sup> More often than not, the ways in which women do (or are encouraged to) respond to this ambiguity is to restrict the space within their control. Practically this acts to limit the space in which the self can be enacted. Restriction of the space for enactment, coupled with gendered modes of official recognition of the individual's subjectivity produce an affective condition whereby shared similarities with the anticipated affective structure of the violence is sought to be avoided; namely, the rupture of both the enacted self. As Young suggests,

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<sup>73</sup>NI 122 Justice and Security.

<sup>74</sup>NI 105 Elected Politics; NI 125 Justice and Security.

<sup>75</sup>NI 101 Civil Society; NI 125 Justice and Security.

<sup>76</sup>NI 107 Elected Politics; NI 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>77</sup>NI 110 Elected Politics.

<sup>78</sup>NI 125 Justice and Security.

<sup>79</sup>NI 111 Civil Society.

The girl learns actively to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her.<sup>80</sup>

In the research, women spoke of tactics they had adopted in response to this state of being-in-anticipation of violence. Many of these are familiar to women the world over, such as keeping doors locked,<sup>81</sup> having keys ready when approaching the house, and being conscious of where they went and who was there.<sup>82</sup> They were more reticent about going out alone,<sup>83</sup> and they made sure that other people were aware of their movements and the circumstances in which they felt at risk.<sup>84</sup> This was justified on the basis of letting trusted colleagues know that 'if anything happens to me, this is what is going on in the background.'<sup>85</sup> These are just the things women learn to do to feel safe,<sup>86</sup> and the way they prepare mentally for engaging in 'social' life.<sup>87</sup>

This personal security approach to the anticipation of violence was mirrored in the response of the police service to security concerns. For example, one woman who had reported a threat to police was advised to 'look over your shoulder' and 'try and get someone to chaperone you to your car.'<sup>88</sup> Another was advised by police to change the way she travelled to work because of intelligence that she was being watched.<sup>89</sup> Others had either been advised to enhance home security measures or had chosen to do this on their own initiative. Participants took many measures in anticipation of violence, including installing security buzzers at their work premises<sup>90</sup> and security cameras, lights and alarms at their homes,<sup>91</sup> and purchasing fire extinguishers.<sup>92</sup> One participant noted how she 'wouldn't feel comfortable living in a house that didn't have those security measures.'<sup>93</sup> This restriction of physical space corrodes the sense that the world is a place that we can reach out to, to act within, and – *ultimately* – to exist as a self within.

As is evident from the ways in which women acted to make themselves *feel* safe, the response to a state of being-in-anticipation of violence is to shrink

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<sup>80</sup>Young (n 13) 43.

<sup>81</sup>NI 101 Civil Society; NI 103 Civil Society; NI 107 Elected Politics; NI 110 Elected Politics; NI 120 Civil Society.

<sup>82</sup>NI 105 Elected Politics; NI 122 Justice and Security.

<sup>83</sup>NI 105 Elected Politics; NI 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>84</sup>NI 101 Civil Society; NI 105 Elected Politics.

<sup>85</sup>NI 101 Civil Society.

<sup>86</sup>NI 103 Civil Society.

<sup>87</sup>NI 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>88</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>NI 101 Civil Society.

<sup>90</sup>NI 107 Elected Politics; NI 111 Civil Society; NI 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>91</sup>NI 110 Elected Politics.

<sup>92</sup>NI 119 Civil Society.

<sup>93</sup>NI 110 Elected Politics.

the possibilities for interaction with the outside world. This comes out particularly strongly in the interviews where women respond to the anticipation of violence by avoiding engaging in certain forms of behaviour that they believe might lead to violence. Of particular note was the role of social media in women's anticipation of violence. One participant commented how

I'm afraid to raise my head on any public profile. ... I'm not confident enough to try and go for things higher above anymore. The more public profile the more I get worried. So, you know, that's not good for me either really.<sup>94</sup>

Here the participant was referring to how the fear of backlash and targeting on social media was deterring her from applying for professional roles with a higher public profile.

Crucially, women's responses to anticipation of violence included self-silencing and making themselves invisible in the hope that they would not attract attention. One participant noted how:

I came off all social media. [My employer] closed down all my social media accounts. All my Twitters and all my Facebooks were all closed down. For about four months I wasn't allowed to go near social media. They didn't want me near it because they said it was too risky.<sup>95</sup>

Another commented,

I have just stopped sharing my political opinion on a lot of things ... That's one side that has made me reluctant to express my opinion. I know loads of women who are in the same boat.<sup>96</sup>

These are personal decisions made in response to living in a state of anticipation of violence. It is understood that expressing opinions or celebrating successes results in significant online attention and abuse. These choices fundamentally restrict women's agency and their ability to contribute to public life. They close the spaces of enactment in which women can contribute to and be recognised in the social world. As one participant noted:

there are lots of things I would like to call out that are happening on social media and these sexist and misogynistic narratives that we are seeing being pushed by our public representatives. I would like to call it out but I just don't because I know it's not worth the abuse that is going to come.<sup>97</sup>

The lived experience of occupying this gendered space of anticipating violence shares key similarities with the expected affective state of the violence sought to be avoided: namely the destruction of the enacted self. The restriction and encumbering of physical space corrodes the sense that the world is a

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<sup>94</sup>NI 119 Civil Society.

<sup>95</sup>ibid.

<sup>96</sup>NI 123 Civil Society.

<sup>97</sup>ibid.

place that we can reach out to, and act within. Further, habituated ways in which women are expected to hamper engagement in order to avoid violence further constrain the sense that she is an agent who is able to act. There is, however, a key difference between the experience of being-in-anticipation of violence and the experience of violence. Violence is seen as immediate and inescapable; in contrast anticipation is characterised by its disorientating ambiguity. Highlighting the way that gender impacts the scope and occupation of this ambiguous space is essential to understanding the gendered experience of anticipating violence.

## 5. Intersubjective Recognition as a Potential Space of Ethics

Our discussion thus far has centred around expanding the temporal focus beyond the event of violence and its consequences in order to understand how violence is experienced as latency. We highlighted how gendered ways of being in the world shape this experience of coming to, and being in, anticipation of violence, creating day-to-day experiences which parallel the destruction of the self sought to be avoided. By focusing on anticipation of violence rather than an event and its consequences, we create the space to think across the borders of legal categories of violence and instead look for potential spaces for imagining alternative responses. While the law might be blind to the experiences that fall outside its limited scope of comprehension, it is worth noting that what was expressed as the desired response by interviewees did not necessarily implicate the law. Instead, women focused on the desire for recognition, acknowledgement, and appreciation of the added weight occupying the space of anticipating violence placed on them compared to their male counterparts.<sup>98</sup> This points to a potential for relational ethics. Indeed, feminist thought regularly refers to social or relational spaces of ethics, but 'there is sometimes a failure to appreciate *how* these social and relational ontologies are established and *why* they can offer such a powerful critique of reductive objectivist patriarchal accounts'.<sup>99</sup> Responding to this, we suggest that the dual understanding of the ambiguity of anticipation and the fear of loss of self through violence points to a potential space of ethical response. Drawing on feminist phenomenological ethics we posit that, instead of reducing the space of anticipation of violence to one of rupture *per se*, intersubjective recognition is a potential space for alleviation of the corrosion of the embodied self. To make this claim, we need to describe in greater detail how a feminist phenomenology of ethics could view the relationship between subjectivity, objectivity, and intersubjectivity. As previously outlined, phenomenology offers a critique of a God's-eye view *from nowhere* with its delusions of objectivity. Phenomenology views

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<sup>98</sup>For example, NI 110 Elected Politics; NI 116 Elected Politics.

<sup>99</sup>Daly (n 21) 14.



objectivity as the product of a *view from everywhere*; practically only possible through the intersubjective sharing of subjective perception and experience. As Daly outlines:

Our communications are meaningful whether in agreement or dispute; I can consider anything from your perspective and in fact all potential perspectives and we can negotiate our understandings through language and expression. *And so it is through these generalities of communication and expression that we know we live in a shared world.*<sup>100</sup>

In this way we can confirm our subjective experience of the shared world not only through acting within it and grasping it, but through communicating and validating it with others. It is important to note that this experience of validation does not rest on the ability to infer the perception of the other through direct access to an analogous perception of our own. The validation of our shared world occurs precisely because we know that the other does not occupy the same vantage point as ourselves.<sup>101</sup> It is our very difference, and the multiplicity of perspectives that our differences generate, which allows us to co-create an objective *view from everywhere*. Practically what this means in the context of our discussion is that, first, the inherent ambiguity of anticipation creates the potential for intersubjective validation or invalidation. An intersubjective exchange is capable of reaching out to us and, thus, recognising that we are a subject within a shared world. In this way, there is something ethical in the act of recognition and validation of experience in the context of anticipation of violence. Namely, there is a call to alleviate the disconnect from the world that both violence and the embodied gendered response to anticipation of violence threatens the subject with.

Second, this does not, however, necessitate the expansion of law to encompass the temporal space where the anticipation of violence is experienced by women. This is because the act of reaching out is not necessarily about feeling – or even imagining ourselves feeling – the same as the subjectivity that we encounter. In fact, the reduction of everyone to the same extinguishes the very contingencies and differences that need to be retained to understand how experience of anticipating violence is shaped by gender. Rather, the objectivity understood through phenomenology is the intersubjective appreciation of the reasonableness of experience of the other given their particularities in our shared world. It is here where we locate the potential space of ethical response to gendered ways of being-in-anticipation of violence and of the latency in the gendered temporality of violence for women.

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<sup>100</sup>ibid 9 (emphasis added).

<sup>101</sup>Dan Zahavi, 'Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity' (2001) 8(6–7) *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 151.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we set out to highlight the gendered experience of anticipating violence. Motivated by gendered experiences that are rendered invisible by legal categories of violence, we highlighted the structural limitations of the law when it comes to the inherent ambiguity of anticipation. More specifically, we argued that the linear temporal structure of legally defined violence fails to grasp the ambiguous uncertainty that defines the experience of anticipation. Adopting a feminist phenomenological method, we focused on the experiences of women in the political sphere in Northern Ireland; how their everyday lives are structured around calculations and precautionary measures that are a constant feature of women's lives arising from the fear of an as-yet undefined act of violence. Our analysis has revealed how women become habituated to anticipate violence, trapping them in a temporally stretched space of ambiguity and vigilance. The effect of this anticipation itself is shown to constrain women's engagement with the world around them, thus mimicking, through the loss of self, the effect of the physical violence they seek to avoid. In highlighting the existence and the effect of anticipation of violence we argue not for an expansion of legal categories to incorporate this ambiguous state-of-being, but rather emphasise the importance of relational ethics when it comes to gendered experiences. We argue instead for a feminist phenomenology of ethics that allows for intersubjective recognition, and indeed validation of these experiences, which ultimately addresses the disconnect between the law and women's experience of anticipation of violence.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

**Joy Twemlow** is a PhD Candidate at Durham Law School, Durham University. Her research focuses on using phenomenology as a critical disposition to examine legal concepts and practices.

**Catherine Turner** is Associate Professor of Law at Durham University. Her research focuses on international conflict resolution, including women's participation in peace and security in post conflict societies under the Women Peace and Security agenda.

**Aisling Swaine** is Professor of Gender Studies at University College Dublin. Her research engages with the fields of feminist legal and harm theory, transitional justice, conflict-related violence against women, gender peace and security and gender in global governance.