Contested gendered space: Public sexual harassment and women's safety work
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In October 2017 the revelations of systemic sexual violence in the American entertainment industry sparked global interest in what had been, up until that point, a commonly trivialised form of men's violence: the routine sexual harassment of women. What followed was a unique moment in recognising and problematising sexual harassment not only in workplaces, but also in one of the most understudied contexts — public space.

That public space is gendered space has not been a focus for mainstream academic analysis, but such a framing offers important insights. Bea Campbell (1993), in *Goliath,* argues that in the United Kingdom in the mid-1990s, riots in a number of cities, were sites of struggle: "over young men's criminality and control over their shared streets" (p.168) ... "increasingly regulated by organised crime and masculine tyrannies: (p.177). In urban studies the recent concepts of 'the right to the city' and 'the right to security' lack this critical lens, with a few notable exceptions (see, for example, Beebeejaun, 2017). Struggles over space continue to be about the right to be seen, to be heard, with new political formations, including fundamentalisms invoking gender segregation and limitations of access to public space for women. Belonging in public space is both different for women and differs between women: for example, the possibility of not being observed/judged is accentuated if you are minoritised or gender non-conforming. Yet despite international policy and research focus on crime and fear in public, we still need to contend seriously and analytically with why public space remains a 'conducive context' (Kelly, 2016) for violence against women and girls.

Mapping the impacts of this context is not only a matter of finding out more about what is done to women and girls in public, but of increasing our understandings of how women and girls respond. From changing routes home to choosing seats on public transport, physically reducing themselves in public, to using headphones and sunglasses as a way of feeling invisible, women and girls globally are routinely making strategic decisions to avoid sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. Different women, at different times, are acutely aware of their surroundings, tuned into the presence of unknown men. When considered in isolation, such changes can be dismissed as an annoying but necessary result of living in a world where occasionally strangers may do you harm. But when seen across the course of a woman's life, these adaptations come to be understood as responding to a particularly gendered message: that women need to *be less*—less vocal, less visible, less free—in order to be safe.

When these routine strategies are made visible the impact of men's practices on women and girls comes to be understood not only in terms of their safety, but also their freedom (Vera-Gray, 2018). This highlights the existence of a form of invisible work mandated for women and girls in public, something which one of us has conceptualised as 'safety work' (Kelly, 2012). This chapter sets out the concept of safety work in the context of women's fear and women's freedom in public, drawing on our respective previous research and thinking about these issues. We begin by locating our discussion firmly in the legacies of women's claiming of a place in public space.

A woman's place
Feminist research and activism has a long history of engaging with the range and extent of what is often talked about as men's intrusions onto and into the minds, bodies, and space

women and girls in public. The second wave feminist insistence that the personal is political was a challenge to prioritisation of the (male coded) public sphere, and the diminishment of the (female coded) private: a foundation in western intellectual traditions in law, political science and other disciplines. That said, the focus in early feminist history on 'separate spheres' as a legitimation of patriarchy was complicated by later work paying attention how this was inflected by class and race (Fox-Genovese, 1988; Vickery, 1993). Within this contestation sat earlier challenges in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the gender segregation of public spaces. Women in public were a cause of anxiety in the white middle classes at beginning of 20th century and this still the case globally for many women into 21st: an association with looseness and prostitution, a sexual availability being read into women's presence.

The separate sphere perspective is now understood as an ideology or discourse, since women as individuals and through suffrage movements recognised that exclusion from, or limitations within, public space symbolised restrictions on women's place in the social, political, economic and political arenas. Suffragists occupied public space as collective women and increasingly as angry women: organising public presence through processions (Liddington, 2006) and making public speeches were claims to occupy it as a political act, a location for resistance and protest. Unsurprisingly, critiques rebuked women for the abandonment of domesticity and femininity: opposition was fierce, with many having to run the gauntlet of jeering crowds of men, jostled when entering public buildings for meetings. Half a century later black women would take to the streets in the USA as part of the civil rights movement, making their own claims for rights and justice (Crawford et al, 1990), and twenty years later still in South Africa women protested in huge numbers their opposition to the pass laws and apartheid (Federation of South African Women 1954-63, 2013). Claiming such public presence is embodied and emotive – a combination of strength, determination and anxiety – requiring risking opposition and even encountering violence from men and state agencies.

These movements did not, however, create a right for women to occupy public space on the same terms as men. One of the early challenges of the Women's Liberation Movement in many locations was the public space harassment which was a frequent experience of women (Greer, 1971). In the 1970s there were many papers documenting women's experiences in public urban space—comments, 'wolf whistles', being touched on public transport. That women felt, and were, excluded from many spaces was a focus for activism at individual local and national levels: one of the first widely publicised actions in London in 1971 protested the refusal of Wimpy Bars to serve unaccompanied women after 10pm (Scott, 2010). By the end of the 1970s, however, the focus had shifted to sexual harassment in employment (Farley 1978; MacKinnon, 1979), with the aim of providing legal remedies for individuals rather than a more collective approach to changing social norms. This shift continued into a focus on educational contexts, from schools to universities. It meant that despite the history of feminist work in this area, public space as an arena, and everyday life as the context, came to be largely absent from the wider violence against women policy and research agenda.

The rise of social media has enabled a revisiting of these more mundane manifestations, with various platforms harnessed as tools to share experiences that support and validate women's experiential realities. The non-profit Hollaback! movement, established in 2005, is perhaps one of the most global, currently running in over thirty countries 31 countries, while another American-based site 'Stop Street Harassment' has developed as an online blog space and a resource hub for research and prevention work on street harassment (Kearl, 2010). In 2012, a

website and Twitter account created in England to record experiences of 'everyday sexism' also went global, spreading to over 15 countries and collecting more than 50,000 entries within just eighteen months (Bates, 2014), while in India, the 2011 publication of a study on women's safety and freedom in Mumbai's public spaces begun a movement of women 'loitering' as a political and social statement across cities in India and now Pakistan, with supporters encouraged to share their acts on social media (Phadke, Ranade & Khan, 2011).

This wave of activism in the new public space of the internet offers a unique opportunity to understand more about the lived experience of sexual harassment with many platforms enabling women and girls to record and publish intrusions 'in real time'. In this social media has been conceptualised as a counter-public, providing avenues for informal justice and enabling a recognition, and validation, of harm (Fileborn, 2016; Salter, 2013). More than this, the use of online tools for documenting public sexual harassment it has also revealed the extent to which women and girls change their behaviour—not only due to the reality but because of the possiblity of experiencing sexual violence in public space. These changes, and the beliefs that underpin them, provide a new lens on an old problem, commonly referred to as the 'fear of crime paradox'.

Gendering the fear of crime

A prolonged focus for criminologists has been described as women's disproportionate, paradoxical and even 'illogical' fear of crime (Riger and Gordon, 1981). Put simply, the paradox is that relatively consistently, across studies, across decades, and across contexts, women report significantly *higher* levels of fear of crime than men – often two or three times more—yet routinely crime statistics show that women actually have a *lower* rate of victimisation than men do (Hale, 1996). This gender difference is by far the most consistent finding in all of the fear of crime literature. What the fear of crime paradox tells us is that gender matters as a predicator for the levels with which an individual will both fear and experience crime, but it does not tell us how.

Typically, there are three main explanations given for the paradox, all of which may work together. The first is that gender roles mean that women are more likely to admit their fears. Gender stereotypes typically attach vulnerability to women and fearlessness to men. This explanation suggests that women are more likely to report their fear of crime in surveys, and that men may struggle to admit to a realistic estimate of their levels of fear. The second explanation is that the fear of rape or sexual assault is a type of fear that is particular to women. It is a fairly well-accepted statement now that across the world rape is significantly under-reported. So the combination of this under-reporting of rape, and the fact that this is the type of crime women are actually most fearful of, helps to elucidate why women report more fear but less crime. The third explanation looks to 'what counts' as crime, and thus what is counted. This argument suggests that the difference is not just about a difference between levels of fear of crime, but also about how such crime is defined and measured: that crime and victimisation surveys and legal frameworks systematically exclude practices that women are more likely than men to have. This is evidenced in the very data the underpins the paradox, sexual harassment is notably absent from the victimisation surveys on which it is based. This analysis raises the possibility that what we are seeing is not paradox at all, but the result of a male as norm understanding of what counts as crime.

Considering women's safety work however, offers a possible fourth explanation, one that works alongside rather than in competition with the others. Here we draw on feminist geographers such as Gill Valentine (1983) and Rachel Pain (Koskela & Pain, 2000; Pain

1991; 2000) whose work on the relationship between sexual harassment, fear, and the built environment suggests that such harassment can be understood as a spatial expression of patriarchy, functioning to reinforce and reproduce women's exclusion from public life more broadly. The adaptations women make to their behaviour in order to participate in public space—adaptations that have been well documented in arenas such as public transport for example (Gardner, Cui & Coiacetto, 2017; Hsu, 2011; Lewis, 2018)—aim to minimise the potential to not only be victimised but to be blamed for that victimisation. Such behaviours provide a challenge to the idea that women's fear of crime is irrational. Instead the disparity between fear and reality is revealed as not only logical, but perhaps even causal. To understand this more we need a more detailed account of what safety work is, what it does, and, importantly, what it means.

The invisible work of being a woman
During the 1970s and 1980s the concept of 'invisible work' was developed as a way of bringing the range of women's work more fully into view. One of the key studies looking at this was from 1978, conducted by Pamela Fishman. Fishman was interested in what could be learnt about gender through considering casual conversations between women and men. What she found was an asymmetrical division of labour in talk between heterosexual couples with women asking more questions, filling more silences, and needing to do more to be heard. Women were doing the work of the conversation, ensuring it flowed smoothly and felt natural, even if this meant they had to adopt a backseat in relation to expressing their own views. Such labour was made invisible as it was a form of 'women's work'. As Fishman says, being "related to what constitutes being a woman, with what a woman *is*, the idea that it *is* work is obscured. The work is not seen as what women do, but as part of what they are" (Fishman 1978, p. 405).

The idea of extra work hidden, as just part of what women are, is particularly interesting when we take an intersectional perspective attuned to the differences between women. Judith Rollins' work in the 1980s speaks powerfully to this. Published in 1985, Rollins' study *Between Women* focuses on the forms of invisible work required by African-American women doing paid domestic labour for white women employers. Where unearthing the invisibility of women's housework had previously been the study of sociological interest (Oakley 1974), Rollins explored the complexities of the experience of African-American women hired as domestic help. Her work revealed the literal nature of their invisibility where sometimes they would be treated as if they were not actually seen by white women, who, for example, would turn down the heat or lock the door when they left as if no one else was in the house. She also highlighted the ways in which deference functioned as a form of work that was an invisible and yet necessary part of the role. Acts such as lowering one's eyes, slouching, or speaking in poor English, were required by the African-American women in order to validate the racial superiority of the white women.

That such acts were understood by those undertaking them as a requirement, absorbed into part of the role, connects to the work of American sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) on the management of emotion. Hochschild developed the concepts of emotion work and emotional labour during a study of female flight attendants in the late seventies. Emotion work, for Hochschild, is the work involved in dealing with or managing other people's emotions, and emotional labour refers to this kind of management done during work for a wage. As with Fishman's findings, Hochschild found this work fell largely to women and was rendered invisible. And just like Rollins' study, though invisible and unpaid this work was required, a silent embedded necessity stitched into the fabric of the role itself.

Taking the idea of invisible work into the realm of violence against women, two forms of labour are revealed. The first, violence work, refers to the work women do in the aftermath of violence to rebuild their sense of self and belonging (Kelly, 2017). To be violated is to have your bodily autonomy, sense of self and connection to others disrupted, indeed recent understandings of the harms of image-based sexual abuse have drawn on the concept of 'social rupture' to describe this (McGlynn & Johnson, 2018; McGlynn, Rackley, & Johnson, 2019). Being at home within one's body and in company are challenging, and the legacies of abuse remain for many years, potentially one whole lifetime. Violence work refers to the work victim-survivors do to undo the harms, make their lives liveable: much of this will be entirely invisible, since it consists of internal rumination, other aspects are more visible in the purchase of self-help books, seeking out support and counselling. The point here is that it demands time and energy, which could have been spent on other projects.

Connected to, but separate from, violence work is the work women do as a precursor to stop the violence happening at all—safety work (Kelly, 2012). Such work can become an automatic reflex, especially when in public space alone as a woman: so automatic that we no longer notice the strategies that we use in our attempts to limit or avoid intrusions. Like other forms of invisible work, safety work is hidden because it is related to the very core of what being a woman is—not seen as something women *do* but as something that they *are*. This causes problems not only because it renders the work women do invisible even to ourselves, but also because it can mean we blame those who don't act in the ways we feel they have to. Instead of an optional addition, safety work comes to be understood as a requirement (Vera-Gray, 2016; 2018), producing a set of gendered expectations that have a huge amount of influence over our actions and beliefs.

Women's embodied safety work
Studies on the different strategies women use in public space have broadly separated these into avoidance behaviours, those used to isolate or remove oneself from danger, and self-protective behaviours, those designed to minimise risk when facing danger (Riger & Gordon 1981). Both types of actions can be seen in the changes women make to where and how they move in public, something that reveals the ways in which women and girls routinely trade their freedom—in this case freedom of movement—in order to feel safer.

One of the largest studies conducted on sexual harassment in Europe found that almost half of the 42,000 women surveyed had restricted their freedom of movement based on the fear of gender-based violence (FRA, 2014). However restricting movement is not the only form of safety work women and girls conduct on a routine basis. Research has shown that where restricting movement is not possible or desirable, women and girls have learnt bodily strategies to prevent or minimise the possibility of men's intrusion. In one of the first in-depth studies conducted in America, Carol Brooks Gardner (1995) outlined seven strategies of women's responses to men's intrusion that involve the body: invoking an absent protector; ignoring, blocking and repressing (the pretence that 'nothing is happening'); staged compliance; answering and/or acting back; redefining the situation (for example by using comedy to shift the encounter from intrusive to humorous); scening and flaunting (that is using the intrusion or attention for their own ends); and official and informal complaints. She found that "the most common restrictive behaviours women said they regularly engaged in related to being "on guard" while in public, particularly when they are alone" (1995, p.113). Similarly, Esther Madriz's (1997b) study of women's fear of crime based on interviews with Black, Latina and White women living in New York City revealed women's use of a range of

bodily strategies to minimise the possibility of experiencing harassment as well as minimising the harmful impact such harassment may have. Madriz conceptualised these behaviours in terms of self-isolation; hardening the target; strategies of disguise; looking for guardians; ignoring or denying fears; carrying protection; and fighting back including accessing police protection.

Our own research has also shown the ways in which many women and girls learn to adapt their appearance and clothing (Kelly, 1988; Vera-Gray, 2016; 2018). In particular, one of us has argued that what underpins women's safety work is an understanding of the 'unsafety of femininity' (Vera-Gray, 2018), with physical characteristics associated with a feminine appearance such as long hair, jewellery, red dresses and lipstick, positioned by women as to be avoided either always or in particular contexts such as being alone or at night. This underlying message of womanhood as a site of unsafety has implications not only for accessories and attributes that can be added or removed, but suggests something much deeper about a sense of unsafety entangled with the female body itself.

This leads onto a key but often missed form of safety work, a change to women's embodiment through the process of strategic alienation (Vera-Gray, 2016). Alongside a change to movements and clothing, some women try to find a way of being in the world without being wholly present, where to be present as a woman in public is to be vulnerable. Our work has found that one of the most obvious ways of doing this is through finding some kind of barrier, like sunglasses or headphones often used both to create a separation and to create the illusion of a separation between self and world (see Vera-Gray 2016; 2018). This is not to claim that the use of such accessories is limited to women or that it is always about creating safety through distance. Sunglasses and headphones, like being distracted by a phone or choosing to sit somewhere a bit away from people on public transport, are also ways that people in general try to create a sense of their own private space in public. But this distancing can serve a particular purpose for women wanting to put some space between themselves and a world that feels unsafe, a distancing that for some comes to sit between themselves and their bodies. If a woman's body is unsafe in the world, and the risk is understood as not only being in the world but in *the body itself*, then reducing the risk means reducing the body. Instead of clothing then, the adaption here is to women's embodiment: a feeling of (or desire to be) smaller and less visible in the world.

However, the possibilities of invisibility are not available to all women in the same way. Here is where an intersectional perspective, attuned to the differences between and among women is as important to understanding the functions and meanings of safety work. Logan (2015) gives an excellent overview of the research on the importance of intersectionality when addressing public sexual harassment. Age, for example, can not only effect the level of harassment a women or girl experiences (see for example FRA, 2014; Madriz, 1997a) research has also found it greatly effects a woman's visibility. For younger women it can make it harder to disappear, while for women who are older, it can mean that invisibility is experienced but not necessarily desired (Vera-Gray, 2016). The impact of racialisation has been shown not only in research (for example Chen 1997; Fogg-Davis 2006; Madriz 1997a, 1997b) but also in the work of two of the UK's leading women's organisations. A powerful short film created by Imkaan, a specialist organisation for groups working to challenge violence against women of colour; and the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), a coalition of over 80 groups and individuals working on violence against women throughout the UK, uses women's testimonies to highlight the public sexual harassment of young women from black and minoritised ethnic groups (Imkaan, 2016). The accounts given

reveal how such harassment works to produce a feeling of unbelonging heightened by an inescapable visibility—seen but discounted; a 'recognition-based harm' (Vera-Gray & Fileborn, 2018).

Sexuality also can make women more or less visible as targets for sexual harassment in public. Valentine (1993) addresses the ways in which heterosexual hegemony is reproduced and expressed through space through the ways in which a fear of violence inhibits the expression of lesbian and gay sexualities. Though she looks specifically at environments such as workplaces and hotels, her analysis can be extended into public space and applied to the experience of sexual harassment, with research suggesting for example, that heterosexual women can often find a safety in being in public with their partner in ways unavailable to women with female partners (Steinbugler 2005; Vera-Gray, 2016), and that butch lesbian, as well as queer masculine, women bear the brunt of homophobic violence against lesbians due to the (assumed) visibility of their sexuality (Inness & Lloyd, 1995. See also MacKay, 2019 for a detailed discussion of the contemporary experience of butch lesbian and queer masculine identities).

With the importance of an intersectional approach in mind, we believe that more attention is needed in research and practice to understand the full extent and range of women's embodied safety work. Such methods of resistance, though often acknowledged in feminist studies of the early 1990's (Kelly, 1988; Kelly and Radford, 1990; Stanko, 1990; Wise & Stanley 1987), have been less focused on more recently and are not captured in prevalence data on men's violence against women—the data relied upon for the claim that women's fear of crime outweighs their experience. It is here that we suggest safety work may provide a fourth explanation for the fear of crime paradox. Given that surveys attempting to measure the prevalence of sexual harassment in public are unable to account for the amount that is blocked, it is possible, though rarely acknowledged, that the safety work that women perform *because* of their fear of crime may in fact be *reducing* their levels of victimisation. This would mean that it is not so much a paradox we are seeing here but a relationship of effect, where the fear is having an influence on women's behaviour and that this altered behaviour may be reducing the amount of crime they experience. We conceptualise this as a different kind of paradox, a catch-22 based in the impossibility of achieving the 'right' amount of panic.

The right amount of panic
The safety work that women conduct in public is not only in response to individual actions by individual men. Instead, the vast majority of women's safety work is conducted before anything happens 'just in case'. Women learn to adapt their behaviour and movements, habitually limiting their own freedom in order to prevent, avoid, ignore, and ultimately dismiss what they experience as ordinary. Over time the repetition of this behaviour comes to be unnoticed: what started off as work comes to be thought of as just common sense. This is a problem not only because it hides what women are doing from themselves, but also because it can mean that we blame those who do not act in the ways we feel they have to. Instead of an optional addition, safety work comes to be understood as a requirement, as something a woman *is* rather than something a woman *does*. When it is not performed, or not performed successfully, women are perceived not only as having done something wrong, but as *being* something wrong.

This perception is reinforced by seemingly well-meaning campaigns and comments targeted at giving 'safety advice' to women on how to prevent sexual violence. A recent example of

this comes from Australia where, in 2018, Victorian police responded to the rape and murder of Eurydice Dixon by Jaymes Dodd, a male stranger who followed her through a public park, not with outrage over the man's actions but with a statement claiming that 'people' – in this case a stand in for women – need to have more "situational awareness" (Davey, 2018). Such comments work to infantilise women – focused on what is understood as reasonable advice the underlying message is that women lack reason. They also fail to acknowledge the extent of work women already perform as a matter of habit. Eurydice Dixon was killed just 900 metres away from her home, soon after she had texted her boyfriend one of the 'almost home safe' messages that many women are all too familiar with sending. These kinds of messages, rarely required in the same way of men, are just a small demonstration of just how situationally aware women and girls are, and are another form of gendered safety work that common goes unremarked.

Experiences of harassment from childhood through to their adult years, combined with routine safety advice positioning women as responsible for preventing sexual violence, means that contrary to these kinds of police-led messages, many women have developed a highly attuned sense of their environment and those within it. Women talk about responding to the environment and intrusive men within it using an escalation calculation, drawing on a template of risk to evaluate the safest course of action (Vera-Gray, 2016). This evaluation includes not only an assessment of the man himself, but of the entire situation—including whether other people would intervene should the men's actions escalate. The calculation does not always end at the end of the encounter: it can continue after initial action is taken, assessing the consequences, adjusting the response. It is complex, nuanced, and skillful, looking forward to the future, drawing on lessons from the past, to establish how to act in the present. And yet none of this is acknowledged in comments like those of the Victorian police, or in campaigns that encourage women to "look after" themselves and each other, such as those seen in England and many other countries worldwide (Vera-Gray, 2018). Instead these comments, demonstrate just how unrecognised the sheer scale of the work women already do is. This lack of acknowledgment, though deplorable, is understandable when we examine the logic of safety work more closely. What we find is that it is not only the work itself that is invisible, but also the times it is successful.

The vast majority of women's safety work is pre-emptive; attempting to evaluate 'the right amount of panic' (Vera-Gray, 2018) in a situation where they can only ever count the times it doesn't work. The problem here is that success is an absence of what might happen. As such, this absence can always be attributed to the fact that it was never going to happen at all. It is equally as likely, yet hardly ever considered, that sometimes, maybe many times, women are, without remark or recognition, preventing sexual violence. Sue Wise and Liz Stanley highlight how the possibility of women's success here is hidden from view: "The amount that sexual harassment is thwarted is a social invisibility – we can't see that women have skilfully and successfully assessed and dealt with a complicated social situation because success here is an "absence" of a predicted outcome" (Wise and Stanley, 1987, p. 171).

What is revealed by examining the reasoning of safety work is that women are doomed to fail as the only times that we can measure are the times their strategies are unsuccessful. The pre-emptive nature of safety work is intended to prevent the very forms of escalation that would confirm whether such work was needed in the first place. With no way to know when they're getting it right, women are caught: blamed if they do not act to prevent sexual violence, yet unable to claim any success for the inevitable, numerous, times that they do. This means that there can never be a "right" amount of panic for women and girls in public places, no matter

how much they are told to be more aware or to take more precautions. There can only ever be too much panic—because 'nothing really happened' (Kelly & Radford, 1990)—or not enough, because something did. Women are caught in a catch-22 which renders the work they do invisible, and as a consequence leads many academics to regard their fear of crime as a paradox. What is needed is a way of recognising women's safety work for the expert negotiation that it is, as well as firmly locating it within an understanding of public space as gendered. We choose to end this exploration considering an avenue that we believe can do just this, though it fell into disrepute for several decades: feminist self-defence.

Feminist self-defence as space for action

Across contexts from Kenya to Canada, there is a growing dialogue seeking to reclaim feminist self-defence (Sarnquist et al, 2014; Senn et al, 2015). Though considered a radical intervention in the 1970s and incorporated into the services offered by many Rape Crisis Centres, critiques of self-defence led to ambivalence about its usefulness and its eventual replacement with prevention initiatives focused largely on giving information about what does and doesn't constitute sexual consent. Luckily, in the last decade there has been a resurgence in considering its potential contribution to sexual violence prevention, a contribution that is based around the way it changes gender norms.

In Aoeteroa New Zealand a national network of accredited teachers of feminist self-defence has been in operation for over thirty years. Though originally targeting adult women, the Women's Self Defence Network Wāhine Toa (WSDN-WT) now focuses on school aged girls, delivering their training to almost 10,000 girls each year, as well as delivering to women in communities that are specifically targeted for sexual violence due to geographic, cultural and/or disability-related isolation. In 2016, the outcomes of this work was evaluated using the accounts of over 3,000 participants, from seven-year-old girls to adult women, including a high proportion who were Māori and Pasifika (Jordan and Mossman, 2016). The results reveal that contrary to accusations that it is victim-blaming, feminist self-defence may in fact provide a crucial route for undoing how women and girls have been taught to blame ourselves. The evaluation found significant improvements in the importance girls and young women placed on help-seeking for themselves and others in the aftermath of sexual violence – suggesting the programme helps to challenge the ways that women are taught to be silent.

This promising evaluation is not alone. A considerable body of research now exists showing that feminist self-defence has positive consequences for women including increased self-esteem, capability, assertiveness, physical skills, and, crucially a reduction women's fear of crime (Kelly & Sharp-Jeffs, 2017). Studies on effective rape prevention have also shown that feminist self-defence is positively associated with rape avoidance, brings no increased risk of physical injury, and can form part of a support process in how it helps to reduce the levels of trauma symptoms experienced in the aftermath of an assault (Brecklin and Ullman, 2004; Senn et al, 2015). Yet in spite of the weight of research in its favour, feminist self-defence is still misunderstood and misrepresented. Mention it today in relation to the prevention of sexual violence and you will usually be met by the questions and criticisms that seem to follow it regardless of evidence of its success. These largely revolve around the claims that self-defence only focuses on stranger attacks, it excludes women with physical limitations, and it upholds an individualist approach focused on addressing violence just one woman at a time. There are also the long-standing arguments that prevention should be about changing men's behaviour, not women's, and that ultimately self-defence is victim-blaming.

While we have previously addressed these critiques in detail (see Kelly & Sharp-Jeffs, 2016; Vera-Gray 2018), we want here to highlight a key issue: that is what we mean when we talk about self-defence. In contrast to the current exchange of freedom for safety that underpins much of women's safety work, and can ground self-defence approaches based on martial-arts techniques, we see feminist self-defence as focused not on increasing 'safety' so much as on expanding women's 'space for action' (see Jeffner 2000; Kelly 2003; Coy 2009; Vera-Gray 2016, a concept that builds on Norwegian sociologist Eva Lundgren's (1998) work on 'life-space'. While physical techniques can be learned and practiced, the fundamental skill taught in feminist self-defence is the belief not only in our own capability to respond in situations of immediate threat, but ultimately a belief in women's—all women's—right to be safe *and* free, and a confidence in their abilities to ensure this is respected. This marks a shift in what is meant by 'self-defence' from the idea of it being about defending against an individual's actions, to the idea of a defence against the weight of gendered norms that situate women's bodies as something acted on rather than acted through. In such a reframing, self-protection becomes not only about protection during a possible event, but a way of building resilience and resistance to the weight of a society which position women as weak, unreliable, and unsafe.

Such a reorientation supports a return to earlier feminist efforts to create a right for women to occupy public space on the same terms as men. We see feminist self-defence as pushing against the taken for granted practices we noted earlier that women should be smaller, less visible and unchallenging in public space. In this, it offers a possibility worth pursuing of women actually feeling they have a right to the city, that they can belong in public space on their terms, rather than gendered business as usual.

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