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## **Men's Stranger Intrusions: Rethinking street harassment**

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### **Abstract**

Women's experiences of intrusive men in public space, popularly termed 'street harassment', is one of the most understudied yet commonly experienced forms of violence against women. Despite acknowledgement of its importance, an explicit debate on naming – with an exploration of how language creates both openings and restrictions of what can be said – is yet to be had in the literature. This paper begins this conversation, detailing the benefits and challenges in current terminology, and exploring the possibilities of reframing the most common dynamic in street harassment as men's stranger intrusions on women in public space.

### **Keywords**

*Street harassment; violence against women; sexual violence; public space; men's intrusion; fear of crime*

### **Introduction**

During the 1970s, key feminist texts began to raise the issue of men's violence against women and girls in its criminal and mundane manifestations. Susan Brownmiller (1975) theorised rape as a tool of social control and Germaine Greer (1971) used the concept of 'petty rapes' to describe the ways in which the everyday and the presumed rare 'sledgehammer' (Stanko, 1985) experiences of men's intrusion were connected. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, feminist research and activism combined to substantially build the knowledge base and theoretical frameworks available for understanding men's violence against women (Kelly, 2011). Key contributors highlighted the danger in relegating such practices to a set of aberrant behaviours of a deviant minority of men, pointing to the importance of recognising the ordinary forms of men's violence (Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1985; 1990; Wise & Stanley, 1987). Yet despite this early acknowledgment, women's experiences of intrusive men in public space remains an understudied area.

Empirical studies of what is commonly known as 'street harassment', its prevalence, manifestations, harms, and the meanings it holds for both the men who practice it and the women who experience it, are few. Reasons for the sparse academic treatment across disciplines include: trivialisation (Tuerkheimer, 1997; West, 1987); normalisation (Bowman, 1993, Larkin, 1997); and the ways in which rules of conduct public and semi-public places do not receive the same scrutiny as practices in private places (Gardner, 1995; Goffman, 1990; Lenton, Smith, Fox & Morra, 1999). Terminologic difficulties also explain the relative silence, given the expansion in the knowledge base on other forms of men's violence against women. The lack of agreement on what constitutes the phenomenon, how to name it, and how to conceptualise the harm, presents problems for survey methodologies and

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complicates comparison between studies. Despite acknowledging its importance, an explicit debate on naming – with an exploration of how language creates both openings and restrictions of what can be said – is yet to take place.

This paper seeks to carve a space for such a discussion. I first review the disparities in how the phenomenon is named and defined, identifying the relative silence on the limitations and benefits of existing terminology, even within studies recognising the problem of bringing women's experience into language. This problem was met in earlier campaigns to recognise sexual harassment, and the second section explores how this earlier work has framed street harassment, as well as the limitations in doing so. I then outline what is lost in mapping our terminology onto the framings necessary for a legalistic project, exploring the benefits and limitations when contrasted with a phenomenological frame. This leads to another definitional obstacle: the lack of agreement as to what practices actually constitute the phenomenon. The fourth section addresses this, exploring what practices are incorporated into different definitions in order to illuminate the gaps in what is recorded and researched. These gaps are pronounced when we turn to an examination of harms. Here I look first at how useful it is to conceptualise the harm as particularly gendered, having a specific impact when directed from male to female strangers, before exploring how connecting experiences across the continuum of sexual violence can help us understand the harm in relation to existing literature on women's fear of crime, and particularly the 'crime paradox'. I conclude with the suggestion of reframing street harassment as men's stranger intrusion. The term is introduced with an acknowledgement of its limitations, whilst pointing to how it may help fill some of the gaps in the existing literature, and assist in a wider project of building a phenomenology of violence against women and girls.

### **The Problem of Naming**

Engaging with the difficulties of naming forms of men's violence is critical in attempts to combat historical silencing. Such a project may be incompatible with the provision of a workable framework for policy and legal reform, but this should not deter us from seeking ways of articulating women's experiential realities. Deirdre Davis (1993) describes the relationship between African-American women's experiences of embodiment and street harassment as 'the harm that has no name'. While the harm may be difficult to bring into language, attempts at naming the phenomenon itself meet the counter obstacle of a multiplicity of names.

There is no consistent term used in the literature to capture the range of women's encounters with men's stranger intrusion in public space, highlighting the need for an explicit debate on naming, similar to the debates on other forms of violence against women and girls (see the discussion of 'violence' in Dobash & Dobash, 1998; or of 'paedophile' in Kelly, 1996). Though necessary to build both the knowledge and theoretical base, this debate must carefully acknowledge both the powers of and barriers to developing a shared definition, as well as questions about the limitations of criminalising behaviours or marking out as distinct practices that are extensions of commonly accepted gender relations. It is thus a more complex endeavour than a simple evaluative review of the literature, though even attempting to find a baseline here reveals the extent of the problem.

Reviewing the literature solely through terminology reveals multiple namings within the same work or across different studies by the same writer. For many, the location of the experience in public space is important, thus it is variously described

as: 'public harassment' (Gardner, 1995; Guano, 2007; Kearl, 2010; Lenton et al 1999; Lord, 2009; Rosewarne, 2005) 'public sexual harassment' (Thompson, 1994) or 'sexual harassment in public places', used in global advocacy including ActionAid's Safer Cities program (Kelly, 2014) and UN Women's Global Safe Cities Initiative (see Kearl, 2015), as well as by Abdolali Lahsaeizadeh & Elham Yousefinejad (2012), Olatokunbo Olukemi Laniya (2005) and Lenton et al (1999). Some terms are not shared by other authors. Tracey Lord (2009) uses 'gender based public harassment', Robin West (1987) uses the term 'street hassling', and Carol Brooks Gardner (1980) uses the similar 'street remarks'. Laura Beth Nielsen (2004) uses the term 'offensive public speech', explicitly including racialised speech.

For several authors, the frequency and/or mundanity is definitionally important, often at the exclusion of the location. Liz Kelly (1988) uses 'commonplace intrusions' and Anne W. Esacove (1998) names encounters as 'everyday unwanted sexual attention', though the problems of limiting the phenomenon to being 'unwanted' will be discussed later. Kimberly Fairchild notes frequency in her use of 'everyday stranger harassment' (Fairchild, 2007; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), but focuses solely on identifying the perpetrator by using 'stranger harassment' (2010). The degendered term of 'stranger harassment' is also used by Eric Wesselmann & Janice Kelly (2010), and Macmillan, Nierobisz & Welsh (2000). By far, the most common terminology is that of 'street harassment' (Bowman, 1993; Davis, 1993; Fogg-Davis, 2006; Kearl, 2010; Kissling, 1991; Laniya, 2005; Larkin, 1997; Lenton et al, 1999; Macmillan, Nierobisz & Welsh, 2000; Nielsen, 2000; O'Neill, 2013; Oshynko, 2002; Rosewarne, 2005; Thompson, 1994; Tuerkheimer, 1997; Walkowitz, 1998), with some studies simply placing these practices under the umbrella of 'sexual harassment' (FRA, 2014; Quinn, 2002; Rosewarne, 2007; Wise & Stanley 1987).

I am by no means the first to note variations in terminology. Elizabeth Arveda Kissling (1991) argues that there is no agreed label for 'street harassment', a claim remade by Holly Kearl (2010), who recognises that some researchers reject the term 'street harassment' though does not explicitly explore how her use of this framing impacts on her commendable project of developing a name for the phenomenon from the women who experience it. In fact, many researchers acknowledge that the lack of a unified term for the range of behaviours and practices that are studied arises from the difficulties women encounter in attempts to identify and label their experience (Kearl, 2010; Kissling, 1991; Laniya, 2005; Larkin, 1997; Lenton et al, 1999; Long; 2012; Tuerkheimer, 1997; West, 1987). This gap is evident in Lenton et al (1999), which acknowledges that comparisons between surveys are complicated by different definitions, without explicitly discussing its own terminology. This is a particularly confusing omission in a paper where 'sexual harassment in public places', 'public harassment of women' and 'street harassment' are all used interchangeably. These variations are important in recognising that, for example, men can experience 'sexual harassment in public places'. but not 'public harassment of women.' Similarly, whereas racist harassment can be covered by both 'street harassment' and 'public harassment of women', many of these practices would not qualify for inclusion in the category of 'sexual harassment in public places'.

Thus, conversation is needed on what connections particular framings encourage, and how to manage the tensions between the articulation of lived experience and the boundaries necessary for legal and policy interventions. Here, my focus is on articulating the experiential connections between 'street harassment' and other forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls from known and

unknown men. As evidenced, the most common framing across the literature is as a form of harassment, be it stranger, street or public, but Kelly (1988) stands out for adopting the term 'commonplace intrusion', alongside Elizabeth Stanko (1985, 1990) who conceptualises the phenomenon as both an intimate intrusion and everyday violence. In addressing naming conventions then, it may be useful to briefly revisit the sexual harassment framework first, to investigate the problems and benefits of using it as a conceptual apparatus through which to talk about women's experiences in public space.

### **Sexual harassment: A name for our suffering**

Sexual harassment is a term feminists brought into language (Spender, 1985). Prior to its naming it existed as what Miranda Fricker (2007) terms a hermeneutical injustice, hidden from collective understanding through the limits of language and through this concealment negatively impacting on women as a particular socially disadvantaged group. Catharine MacKinnon's (1979) groundbreaking work is generally credited, alongside that of Liz Farley (1978), with bringing the concept of sexual harassment into everyday language (Brant & Too, 1994; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997). While the initial focus was on occupational sexual harassment, later broadened to include educational institutions. Recently these latter contexts have been the target of activism and policy in the United States and the United Kingdom, where such practices are occasionally reframed as 'sexual bullying', a term critiqued by Maddy Coy & Maria Garner (2012). Public space as an arena, and everyday life as the context, is largely absent from mainstream work on sexual harassment, except for feminists such as Kelly (1988), Melanie Randall (1987), Sue Wise & Liz Stanley (1987).

This absence is understandable given the urgency of developing frameworks that could be translated into the language of law and policy. Such a need may have made contexts that struggle for legal redress secondary, contexts like public space where the perpetrator is anonymous and the encounter is often fleeting. 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. For example, the non-profit Hollaback! movement, established in 2005, currently has chapters in 84 cities and 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' quickly went global, spreading to over 15 countries and collecting more than 50,000 entries within just eighteen months (Bates, 2014). In India, the 2011 publication of a study on women's safety and freedom in Mumbai's public spaces has 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 new wave of activism gives us an opportunity to ask different questions. The success of the sexual harassment literature in giving women 'a name for their suffering and an analysis that connects it with gender', together with 'a forum, legitimacy to speak, authority to make claims, and an avenue for possible relief' (MacKinnon, 1987: 103), has meant that feminists working to legitimise women's experiences in public space, with the aim of providing a structure for legislative redress, have focused on gaining recognition for men's stranger intrusion as a form of

sexual harassment. If the aim shifts to finding ways of explicating women's experience both to the wider realm and to ourselves, tensions emerge with this framing. As highlighted in Clare Brant & Yun Lee Yoo's (1994) collection on rethinking the concept of sexual harassment, there is unease about the term itself (similar to that identified in the 'street harassment' literature) and variance in definitions. For MacKinnon (1987) it is firmly embedded in work and educational settings, and operates as sexual pressure imposed on someone who is not in a position to refuse it. Developing a psychological scale, Fitzgerald, Gelfand & Drasgow (1995) suggest that sexually harassing behaviour can be grouped into three categories: sexual coercion; unwanted sexual attention; and gender harassment. Examining the more recent literature on 'sexual bullying', Claire Maxwell & Hannah Wharf's (2010) toolkit developed for work in schools defines a range of similar practices with the qualification that the behaviour is repeated over time and has the intention to hurt the receiver. Across even these three conceptualisations, there are categories that need to be unpicked and key factors that need to be disregarded in order to adequately capture women's experiences on the street. Calls to 'cheer up' would be difficult to define as sexual harassment using any of these definitions, yet they form a significant part of some women's experience of unknown men in public space and are uniquely gendered (Vera-Gray, 2017). The ways in which women experience these behaviours are predefined through the 'harassment' framework, again missing practices like wolf-whistles, which may not be experienced in all contexts by all women as harassing.

There are also limitations in the use of 'street' to narrow the spaces where the phenomenon takes place, particularly should we want a frame that can be extended into online public space; a growing arena for men's stranger intrusion (see FRA, 2014). While the notion of 'public harassment' can be expanded to include online spaces, the more common usage of 'street harassment' cannot be so readily adapted, despite the usefulness in connecting the two for policy or support responses as evidenced by the recent launch of Heartmob by Hollaback!.<sup>2</sup> Though 'street' is used as an abbreviation for any public place rather than a definitive location, it marks a separation between physical and non-physical public space. Such separation hampers opportunities to explore the overlaps and differences across both physical and online public spaces, as well as the cumulative impact on women of intrusion by unknown men in public. The use of 'harassment' across both of these framings also suggests that practices not experienced in this way are unproblematic and may be missed when measuring the phenomenon. It moves focus away from men, who are unaware of whether particular practices are wanted by individual women. Their motivations are left unexamined, as is the possibility of negative impacts on the women who may experience such intrusions as wanted or desired. This is a key and often overlooked point. The process of routine interruptions into women's internal world, a disruption not only of one's time to oneself but one's time *in* oneself, has consequences irrespective of whether such interruption is experienced as pleasurable (see Vera-Gray, 2017).

The sexual harassment framework may also exclude experiential realities that do not fit 'sexual harassment' as it is normatively understood, such as the impact of

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<sup>2</sup> Launched in 2015 by Hollaback!, Heartmob aims to be a platform providing real-time support to individuals experiencing online harassment, as well as empowering bystanders to act. See <https://iheartmob.org/>.

anticipation, or intrusions that are not 'sexual' in nature. This separation formed part of Wise & Stanley's (1987) critique, that by 'picking out particular behaviours (those supposedly 'sexual') for inclusion within the definition of sexual harassment', the appearance is given of sexual harassment as extraordinary rather than a routine expression of men's power (67). Similarly, Debbie Epstein (1997) suggests it may be time to reconsider the use of 'sexual', suggesting instead 'sexist harassment' – a frame that may be more useful to those on the receiving end. Except for 'sexual harassment of women in public places', other ways of naming risk hiding the gender-specific nature of the harm and its links to other forms of men's violence against women as a cause and consequence of gender inequality. The focus is diverted to location or, in the case of stranger harassment, relationship, rather than the gender of the perpetrator and the target. This is not to suggest that there is no harm when pointed in other directions. Epstein (1997) demonstrates the connections between the harassment of gay men and that of women, seeing both as a key means for the institutionalization of heterosexuality. This can be expanded to draw connections between the ways in which queer or transgender individuals experience intrusion on the street, and explore the overlaps where individuals occupy intersecting positions. Where our aim is to locate the practice on Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence, pulling together the similarities and overlaps to other forms of men's violence that women experience across their life course, the naming and gendering of perpetrator and target becomes important.

We find then that there are unresolved contestations with the terminology of sexual harassment, many of which arise from its conceptual beginnings as directed towards legal and policy reform. While such reform is necessary, there is also a usefulness in developing a range of concepts to mobilise for different purposes, helping to ensure that the limitations imposed by a legal frame do not then limit the project of articulating the experience of being a woman in public.

### **Between the law and lived experience**

The largest body of work is found in the American legal literature, reflecting the dominance of criminal justice framings of violence against women. Writers from a legal perspective do use the connections women make between men's intrusive practices to forge a case for the recognition of gender-specific harms in law, however Kelly (1988) found that the range of men's behaviour defined by women as abusive was not reflected in legislation or research. Legal definitions' reliance on binaries (either something *is* 'street harassment' or it is not) fail to capture the ways in which experiences of the mundane operations of the gender order can be lived as ambiguous, defined differently both between women and also by the same woman in different contexts (external or their own ever-changing, internal world). This difficulty is picked up in Nadia Ilahi's (2010) work on street harassment in Cairo, and its implications for women's access to public spaces. Without the conceptual history of 'sexual harassment' to rest on, the meaning of the term when translated into Arabic 'carries serious and negative connotations' (Ilahi 2010: 59). Similarly, June Larkin (1997) found that identifying the routine, everyday incidents of men's intrusion is difficult as such encounters are so normalised they are rarely named as harassment. Justine Tinkler (2008) also shows that this seriousness can hamper attempts to name the practices as harassment. In workplace contexts she found a general reluctance to label practices seen as 'less serious' (such as sexual jokes or innuendo) as sexual harassment, although these were understood as such. Such findings demonstrate how

the pervasiveness of men's intrusion situates it as within the realm of ordinary experience and as such is not seen by some women to 'count' as harassment. Some of the most common practices comprising the experience may therefore be missed in studies using the harassment framing.

There is an important note here about using terminology that helps make visible the seriousness of such practices even where it may suggest a more limited range of practices than is in fact included. We see a similar debate in England about the use of the term 'domestic violence' or 'domestic abuse'. The latter is seen to more readily include practices beyond physical violence and as such has increasingly been adopted by frontline service providers. Those who use the former term argue that what is lost in the use of 'abuse' is the seriousness contained in 'violence', and that what is needed instead is an expansion of how we understand the term 'violence' (to include psychological violence). Thus, it may be possible to counteract the ways in which normalisation problematises the naming of particular practices as harassment by expanding the concept of harassment, though there would still be difficulties in capturing experiences that were experienced as complimentary or benign.

In the legal literature we find broad agreement on the naming of the practice as street harassment, and the project turns to outlining the particular behaviours included as a means of gaining recognition of the practice as criminal. Some practices that are already criminalised or that maintain experiential ambiguity are not included. Cynthia Bowman (1993) was one of the first legal scholars to attempt a definition of 'street harassment' by building on the work of anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo (1981) and acknowledging the broader definition of harassment as '*an unwanted and unsought intrusion* by men into women's feelings, thoughts, behaviours, space, time, energies and bodies' given by Wise & Stanley (1987: 71. Emphasis in original). In recognising the breadth of practices included in the conduct generally taken to constitute the phenomenon, and how this works to problematise attempts to define the practices, Bowman aims to outline its defining characteristics before developing a legal definition. For Bowman: '(s)trete harassment occurs when one or more unfamiliar men accost one or more women in a public place on one or more occasions, and *intrude* or attempt to *intrude* upon the woman's attention in a manner that is unwelcome to her, with language or action that is explicitly or implicitly sexual' (1993: 22. Emphasis added). Deborah Tuerkheimer, who investigates the nature of gender specific harm, also defines street harassment as occurring 'when a woman in a public place is *intruded* on by a man's words, noises or gestures' (1997: 167. Emphasis added). Note that the verb 'intrude' is central to the legal definition of harassment. It is used to describe the experience and the action, but the harassment framing is drawn on as already having legal recognition.

By comparing the concepts of intrusion and harassment we uncover some of the ways in which the former might struggle as a legal frame, due to the breadth it allows in terms of practice, effect and intention. Intrusion in public space can be used to encompass a wider range of behaviours without predefining the ways in which they are experienced. It is the actor who intrudes onto, or crucially, *into* the acted on. The feelings of the acted on are not prescribed by the actions of the actor; that is, one does not necessarily have to experience the act as intrusive for it to be an intrusion.<sup>3</sup> It is a practice defined by the act – an intentional breaking into or entering without consent. Harassment is linked more to the experience of intimidation, connected to behaviours

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<sup>3</sup> One can imagine, for example, a home intrusion that occurs regardless of our experience of it.



such as physical attacks or aggressive pressure. While this gives a seriousness or weight to the harms of the practice, it also defines the experience for the acted on in a different way than intrusion. This may limit the stories of actions which are not subjectively experienced as harassing and yet are uninvited interruptions, committed with the intent to break into one's field of awareness. Despite the difference in meanings between intrusion and harassment, and their acknowledgement of intrusion as fundamental to the experience, both Bowman and Tuerkheimer draw on the existing legal framework of harassment to name the phenomenon.

None of these tensions deny the importance of using the legal system to legitimise women's harms and delegitimise men's harmful practices. There is however the risk, as Evan Stark (2009) suggested in relation to domestic violence, that 'new laws raise the expectation that victims will use the law' (1518), and those who do not seek legal remedy have their harm disregarded. The suggestion is also raised in sociological studies examining the intersections of race and 'street harassment' (Davis, 1993; Fogg-Davis, 2006; Gardner, 1995; Ilahi, 2010; Laniya, 2005). This literature demonstrates the ways in which race, appearance, class, age and sexuality all influence the likelihood of women defining men's practices as harassing and of seeking legal remedies for harm. As such, there is a case for us to explore the usefulness of a conceptualisation that is not bounded by the terms of a legalistic project, seeking instead a phenomenological framing.

### **Defining Men's Practices**

Gardner completed an early in-depth empirical study of what she termed 'public harassment' in Indianapolis in 1995. For Gardner, '(p)ublic harassment is on a continuum of possible events, beginning when customary civility among strangers is abrogated and ending with the transition to violent crime: assault, rape or murder' (1995: 4). This concept of a continuum links to Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence, and points to another difficulty in comparisons across studies; namely inconsistency in what practices are being included.

Following Bowman (1993), Leonardo (1981), and Elizabeth Kissling & Cherise Kramarae (1991), Laniya defines 'street harassment as the unsolicited verbal and/or nonverbal act of a male stranger towards a female, solely on the basis of her sex, in a public place' (2005: 100). She critiques Robin West's (1987) use of 'street hassling' because naming the phenomenon as harassment 'does not couch the injury in euphemism, but calls it what it is: harassment' (Laniya, 2005: 100). Whether the effect on women is always one of feeling harassed is unquestioned. Laniya's critique raises interesting questions in regards to Nielsen's (2000; 2004) use of 'offensive public speech' in her study of women and men's attitudes on legal regulation. Using this degendered approach enables Nielsen to capture a wide range of practices, including sexually suggestive speech, race related speech and even begging. Practices are thus put on a broader continuum with points of intersection with race and gender, such as that women of colour are more likely to experience sexually suggestive speech and race-related speech than white women. Whether women of colour are also more likely to experience race-related speech than men of colour is unaddressed. This expansion through conceptual differentiation is also apparent in Lauren Rosewarne's sociological work. By defining street harassment as 'disrespectful behaviour occurring in public space that is engaged in by men and directed at women' (2005: 5), Rosewarne extends the practices involved to include graffiti and outdoor advertising.

There are benefits in opening out the frame for a broader range of experiences, and limitations. Nielsen's framework risks focusing only on 'sexually suggestive speech' and thus loses the ways in which the practice is located within the wider framework of structural gender inequality. Speech can be sexually suggestive from both women and men, but has particular meanings when directed from men to women given the prevalence of violence against women and girls (see below an exploration of the crime paradox). In addition, it is in and through the wider context that individual acts of speech gain meaning. As such, what constitutes harmful speech may not be the same as 'sexually suggestive', as well as practices that could not be defined as speech, yet situate the speech as harmful. In Rosewarne's broader framework, there is also the danger of collapsing the differences in experiencing one's freedom diminished by another subject compared to living in a threatening or objectifying environment. There is a uniqueness to the experience of another's freedom being acted over one's own which sits in tension with Rosewarne's categorisation of this alongside the experience of objects in public space as creating or adding to an atmosphere of hostility. In feminist and psychological literature this uniqueness is commonly referred to as 'objectification' (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Hill & Fischer, 2008). This framing can be critiqued for simplifying the lived experience, which can be more accurately described as a 'curious paradox of being both object and subject' (Tuerkheimer, 1997: 186). The mechanisms of objectification recognise our subjectivity and diminish it, producing a 'contradictory embodiment' (Young, 2005) or an 'ambiguous embodiment' (Vera-Gray, 2017).

### **Identifying the harm**

We start to see then how choices of terminology and of the practices included within this encourage or mute the articulation of particular forms of harm. Despite moving across different terminologies and encompassing different practices, there is broad agreement across the literature as to the gendered nature of the harm of street harassment, though it is noted that men's experiences are under-researched. The challenge in articulating women's experiences of unknown men in public space reflects the difficulties feminist theorists have identified in bringing aspects of women's unique phenomenological experience into man-made language (Cameron 1998; Spender, 1985; West 1987). Finding a language adequate to the expression of gender-specific harm is vital to making that harm visible, a dual process of 'validating our experiences as we live them and then communicating the nature of these experiences to those who do not share them' (Tuerkheimer, 1997: 174). This suggests an additional explanation for the paucity of the literature: women's inability to make truth claims about the world or the 'phenomenological difference in women's hedonic lives' (West, 1987). Women's experience is rarely held as a general expression of the world (Smith, 1990), thus social phenomena that are experienced in different ways by women and men encounter the problem of naming, as seen in the previous section. Evidence for this claim is found in the contradictory language often used in reference to forms of violence overwhelming targeted at women. Where the same event is experienced differently by men and women, existing discursive framings mean that women are obliged to acknowledge the meanings men attach to the experience and describe it from a women's phenomenological standpoint. Some women use terms such as 'sexual harassment', which defines the experience both from the perpetrator's perspective (sexual) and their own (harassing), rather than come from a label solely referring to the experience from a woman's standpoint such as in Epstein's (1997)

example of 'sexist harassment'. This is a product of women's historic conceptual and material exclusion from the production of knowledge, blocking women's meanings and explanations from acceptance as valid truth claims about the world (Spender, 1985).

Kathleen Cairn (1997) highlights this, identifying some of the problems in how psychological framings of sexual harassment attend to the harms of the experience. She identifies obstacles to the development of women's personal agency that psychological perspectives do not address in their exploration of gender specific harms. Cairn's critique echoes Tuerkheimer (1997) in addressing Bowman's (1993) framing of the harm as one of the loss of liberty, a framing also used by Stark (2009) in his exploration of coercive control in intimate partner violence as a 'liberty crime'. For Tuerkheimer this conceptualisation of harm is gender-neutral and 'fails to explain our greater, gender-specific suffering' (1997: 181). Cairns' critique plays out in the psychological literature of 'stranger harassment' (Fairchild, 2007; 2010; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008) or 'everyday sexism' (Berg, 2006; Swim, Eyssell & Murdoch, 2010; Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson, 2001). The harms are addressed in this literature through appeal to objectification theory (Fairchild, 2007; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008, Lord, 2009) and/or body image and self-esteem (Lord, 2009, Swim & Hyers, 1999; Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson, 2001).

The difference in women's phenomenological lives is not addressed through measuring harm in this way, which can result in a particularly degendered approach despite focusing on women's experiences. Kimberly Fairchild & Laurie A. Rudman (2008) for example, support treating stranger harassment as a significant form of harm targeting women, but miss the contextual backdrop of the gender order and how 'stranger harassment' operates within current structures of gendered power. This decontextualised perspective is replicated in Fairchild's (2010) study on the impact of context on women's perceptions of stranger intrusion, and her finding that 'when women are catcalled on the street they assess the context in formulating their reactions' (215). Fairchild focuses on external contextual factors, such as attractiveness of 'harasser' or time of day, missing internal contextual factors that may greatly influence perception, particularly contexts of histories of escalating men's intrusion and experience of a range of forms of sexual violence from known and unknown male perpetrators.

The contribution of feminist-legal literature offers specific insight here, claiming that the denial of difference in women and men's realities is enshrined in legal statutes based on the principle of the 'reasonable man', which claims to represent an objective standard against which any individual's understanding or conduct can be measured. Though the legal language of many countries has now changed to 'reasonable person' to reflect equality before the law, borrowing from the legal arguments for feminist jurisprudence from feminist legal scholars such as Bowman (1993), MacKinnon (1979), and West (1987), there is a need to acknowledge gendered differences in understanding or conduct if we aim to capture gender specific harm.

### **Connecting the continuum**

The denial of gender differences in relation to men's stranger intrusions onto women in public space is often found in the wider social framing of the phenomenon, where women's statements of harm are met with variations of the narrative that their experience is invalid as women do it too (and that when they do, men enjoy it). Such a

gender-neutral framing of the issue is also argued by Katz, Hannon & Whitten (1996), who find that both women and men identified the same behaviour as being sexual harassment. This illuminates both a benefit and a limitation in the street harassment framing –it can be used as disconnected from a gendered context. Bowman (1993) exposes the flaws in such mirror-image arguments by linking the harm here to women's fear of rape: 'the reasonable man may not be placed in apprehension of receiving a battery by a stranger yelling, "Hey, cunt," the response of a reasonable woman may differ, because of her constant awareness of the violent consequences of male hostility to women and her realistic fears of rape' (Bowman, 1993: 554). Unable to identify which intrusive encounter will lead to rape, Bowman (1993) and Deborah M. Thompson (1994) claim that a reasonable woman must regard every encounter as potentially dangerous. Here we find usefulness in a framing that could enable a joint exploration of the ordinary and extraordinary practices evidencing men's entitlement to act on women, as well as help to connect criminal forms of violence against women such as rape to the more routine interruptions of women in public space. This link is also seen in Gardner's (1995) finding that many women: 'considered street remarks and exploitative touch on a continuum with rape, a possible "preamble to rape", "verbal rape", "a little rape", or connected to "sexual terrorism"' (183). Similarly for Tuerkheimer (1997) the harm of 'street harassment' is in its reminder to women of male dominance and women's vulnerability in the face of this. In this way the feminist legal literature connects women's responses and understandings of 'street harassment' to the wider literature on women's fear of crime and explicitly the fear of rape (Ferraro, 1996; Gardner, 1990; 1995; Hall, 1985; Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; Harris & Miller, 2000; Madriz, 1997; Poropat, 1992; Scott, 2003; Stanko, 1990; 1992; 1993b; Warr, 1984; 1985; 1990).

Connecting the experience to fears about other forms of men's violence against women is not limited to the legal literature. Across disciplines, writers refer to the phenomenological difference in women's experiences of intrusion in public as related to the threat of gendered victimisation. Some agree with the 'crime paradox' (Gordon & Riger, 1989; Rosewarne, 2005), where research has consistently found that women fear violence in public spaces more than men yet their risk of victimisation by strangers, at least as measured by crime statistics, is far lower (Ferraro, 1996; Harris & Miller, 2000; Warr, 1984; 1985, 1990). Others recognise that the experiences measured in crime statistics may not represent the amount of violence women experience in their everyday lives, suggesting that women's higher fear of victimisation may stem from their daily experiences of 'minor victimisations', a term suggesting reliance on a hierarchy of harm (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Harris & Miller, 2000; MacMillan, Nierobisz, & Welsh, 2000). For Stanko (1993a; 1993b; 1995) and Michael Smith (1988) the fear of crime paradox fails to capture women's living experience of physical and sexual violence. Stanko claims that conventional criminology tends to look at street crime and not crimes happening behind closed doors with known perpetrators, thereby undermining the detection of crimes of violence against women. Esther Madriz (1997: 43), argues that studies finding that women have a higher fear of crime than men are tainted by the fact that: 'women, by virtue of their socialization, are more open to admitting their fears'. In this way, the fear of crime paradox can be critiqued as failing to acknowledge the ways in which men's definitions of what is criminal become enshrined in law. Thus, the claim that men experience more crime in public space misses the frequency of 'non criminal'

intrusions that women experience (or those women experience but do not report), which may in fact form a central part of perceptions of susceptibility to crime.

Feminist sociologists argue alongside legal scholars that the fear of rape acts to deny women's freedom of movement and thus works as a form of social control (Holgate, 1989; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Madriz, 1997). Jalna Hamner & Elizabeth Stanko (1985) report negative psychological effects of this fear, particularly on forcing behavioural change and reducing quality of life. Such a framing of the harms of men's stranger intrusion underscores the importance of lodging the meanings of practices in embodied experience, an experience which includes the different meanings associated to different bodies such as differently racialised, aged or abled bodies. It also highlights some of the tensions for feminism in relying solely on the terms of a legalistic project. Davis (1993) recognises this importance, stating that 'we cannot hope to understand the meanings of a person's experience, including her experiences of oppression, without first thinking of her as embodied, and second thinking about the particular meanings assigned to that embodiment' (214). Exploring the racialisation of street harassment results in a particular harm Davis terms 'spirit murder' to represent the cumulative effect of a multitude of microaggressions on African-American women in particular. Hawley Fogg-Davis (2006) picks up Davis' claims through examining same-race street harassment against African-American lesbian women as a behavioural pattern rooted in Black patriarchy. Across much of the literature, however, disruptions to embodiment are highlighted through exploring the adaptive methods of resistance women adopt in response to this fear of rape (Gardner, 1990; Hamner & Stanko, 1985; Kearl, 2010; Poropat, 1992; Valentine, 1989), methods conceptualised by Kelly as 'safety work' (Vera-Gray, 2017).

Different studies examine the varied routines of safety work that women conduct in response to the reality and potentiality of men's stranger intrusion in public. In her 1995 study of experiences with 'public space harassment' in Indianapolis, Gardner 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' to provide defence or to screen or mask their own reactions (including, for example, the use of sunglasses, business-like walks); staged compliance; answering back, acting back; redefining an already redefined situation; scening and flaunting: acting up by acting out; 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: 113). Similarly Madriz's (1997) study of women's fear of crime based on interviews with Black, Latina and White women living in New York City revealed bodily strategies including: self isolation; hardening the target; strategies of disguise; looking for guardians; ignoring or denying fears; carrying protection; and fighting back including accessing police protection.

Kelly (1988) observed that as '(m)ost women recall an awareness of being watched or possibly followed. It is these perceptions and realities that result in women feeling they have to be constantly aware of their environment, watching and checking the behaviour of men they may encounter, trying to predict their motives and actions' (98). Both Stanko (1985) and Larkin (1997) suggest that this routine vigilance takes on the illusion of normalcy for women, what I have conceptualised as an habitual bodily attitude (Vera-Gray, 2017). Such methods of resistance, though acknowledged in some studies (Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1990; Wise & Stanley 1987), 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. The lived potentiality of intrusion thus impacts on women's sense of safety, yet perhaps due to the success of women's safety work, does not show up in crime statistics.

### **Men's Stranger Intrusion: A phenomenological framing**

Given the repeated recognition in the literature of the need to begin from a woman defined place to articulate gendered experiences, it is surprising that so little work has asked women to define their experiences. This may relate to a critique of Kelly's (1988) concept of the continuum of sexual violence, which places women's own understandings of violence at the centre of theory, as creating uncomfortable legal challenges. As I have outlined, there are also problems in locating men's intrusion solely within a legal paradigm. Though such a framework assists in legitimising the experience as harmful, it may alienate those who do not feel entitled to legal remedies or who feel that seeking to do so would negatively impact on their social power (Laniya, 2005). Recently activists such as Kearl (2010) have made steps towards filling the gap in identifying women's definitions born of experiential knowledge. However, despite her intent to examine women's definitions, when none of her published survey responses included feeling 'harassed'<sup>4</sup> Kearl follows the dominant framing and names the experience as street harassment in order to ensure a common language.

Suzanne McKenzie-Mohr and Michelle N. Lafrance (2010) use the term 'dominant narratives' to capture how the wider stories on social phenomena readily available for use as explanatory frameworks can operate to silence experiences that are understood to 'not count' within the framework provided. As such, the dominant narrative of 'street harassment' requires careful negotiation when operationalised within empirical work on the phenomenon to enable wider stories which may not fit into categories of harassment, both those seen as too trivial and too criminal to be categorised in this way. My own empirical work (Vera-Gray, 2017) found that the street was not the most frequent arena for men to practice intrusion, and women's emotional responses ranged through complimented, insulted, harassed, intimidated, confused, annoyed and terrified – often moving across these states within the same encounter. There is also a need to broaden out the range of practices that could be included as 'street harassment'; a form of naming that helps connect criminal forms of violence against women such as rape to the more routine interruptions of women in public space, and one that allows for experiences that may not *feel* harassing yet still impact on how women live their bodily-self. The challenge then is how to negotiate the tension between finding terms that are understandable – a name that we know – but do not close off aspects of experience that we may not usually include within the dominant framing.

In response to such a challenge, I suggest a return to the way such practices were conceptualised in early work on violence against women – as intrusions (Stanko:1987; 1990, Kelly, 1988). Intrusion is used here to refer to deliberate act of putting oneself into a place or situation where one is uninvited, with disruptive effect ("Intrusion", 2001). Following such a definition, there is no need to evidence a desire to harm or disrupt the target, the focus is on the deliberateness of the practice, whilst

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<sup>4</sup> In asking women how they define street harassment, Kearl (2010) gives examples of definitions which pull on the concepts of intrusion, disrespect and intimidation and states the most commonly used words in responses were 'unwanted', 'sexual', 'uncomfortable', 'touch' and 'threat'.

'uninvited' shifts from 'unwanted' as a qualifier that affirms the power of the target to choose who is able to enter their physical and emotional space. It foregrounds the actions of the perpetrator, rather than their intentions or the target's response, allowing for a broader range of practices to be addressed. Intrusion as a verb also more closely fits the phenomenological experience where one's inner world is entered into, rather than solely acted on. Shifting terminology from 'street harassment' to 'intrusion' thus may assist in coming closer to the experience as it is lived; intrusion not only onto but, crucially, *into* women's experience of their bodily-self. Whilst this may be limited in its ability to seek legislative redress, an important avenue that must be held open, it allows for an exploration of impact that the harassment framing limits. Keeping the perpetrator within the frame is also important, given the particularities of intrusion when directed from men to women and the project of connecting forms of men's violence across an experiential continuum. Critical masculinities theorists including Malcolm Cowburn and Keith Pringle (2000) have suggested the use of 'male' can work to hide how men's violence is the result of men's practices, not their biological 'maleness'. As such, I use men's stranger intrusions to denote those specifically carried out by unknown men, and men's intrusion to refer to the broader range of relationships women may have with men who use intrusive practices. In this way we mark out a particular definition: from 'street harassment' to 'men's stranger intrusions on women in public space'.

Such a move has limitations. Naming practices such as rape as a form of men's intrusion risks losing what is gained from naming such actions as violence: the power for legislative redress and acknowledgement of harm. It is not my intention to undermine or trivialize, but to note that terminology carrying particular connotations, such as 'violence' with its intimations of physical attack, outward aggression, and legitimising harm, can silence experiences that are more diffuse than this. One frame need not replace the other, rather open discussion about terminology can expand the vocabulary we have to speak of women's living experience. There is also the difficulty of introducing a new term when 'street harassment' as a concept is the more understandable. Here the concern is about duplication and the need for a shared language to ground legal reform and mobilise social change. Sally Engle Merry's work on translating human rights concepts across borders offers an interesting response here, highlighting the potential in the introduction of new terms, rather than the refinement of existing ones, to crack open our ways of thinking. For Merry, '(i)t is the unfamiliarity of these ideas that make them effective in breaking old modes of thought' (2006: 178), arguing that in order for new concepts (or new language for old concepts) to effect practical change they must be seen as familiar but never fully indigenised. Given that intrusion can be seen as a way of returning to how such practices were conceptualised by sociologists in England in the 1980s, it may be that the possibilities suggested by Merry cannot be realised here. I draw then too on Audre Lorde (1986), who declared the importance of returning to our concepts, of testing, revising and reforming them in new contexts to test their efficacy and potential for change. For Lorde, the need to revisit is grounded in how the resonance of concepts change over time, together with our receptiveness. It is in this spirit of adventure and possibility, that men's stranger intrusions on women in public is introduced: terminology for a particular experience that may help us to name a particular harm. My intent is to invite the conversation, for us to question together what we lose, and what we gain. As well as to assist in bringing forward a hitherto unexplored

philosophical perspective to provide a framework that can be used and understood by individuals as reflecting our lives as lived.

### **Conclusion**

That no consistent term is used across or within the cross-disciplinary literature on what is most often termed 'street harassment' evidences how little work has been done to ask women themselves how they define their experiences. Indeed reviewing the difference between a legal and phenomenological project reveals a possible tension between providing a framework that can be used and understood by individuals as reflecting lived realities, and providing one that can be operationalised easily in legal and policy contexts. It may be that this tension cannot be reconciled. Within the legal literature, which dominates attempts to define the practices, there is a reliance on binaries, either something is 'street harassment' or it is not; Kelly's (1988) concept of a continuum captures the ways in which experiences of the routine and mundane operations of the gender order can be lived as ambiguous, defined differently both between women and by the same woman given different contexts. This highlights the importance of lodging the meanings of practices in embodied experience; an experience that includes the specific meanings associated with different bodies in particular cultural contexts. It is here that the possibilities of a philosophical perspective are brought forward - in particular a phenomenological frame - to provide a way of naming and conceptualising experiences that can be used and understood by individuals as reflecting gendered realities, without hiding the revolutionary aspects of subverting dominant narratives. Men's stranger intrusions on women in public is one suggested way of responding to this challenge; providing an entry not end point to the project of reflecting women's living experience.



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