

“I Just Really Like Walking, to Tell You the Truth”: Gendered Discourses of Safety and  
Danger in Urban Public Spaces

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes gendered discourses of safety and danger in urban public spaces as they relate to women who embody salient social privileges. I seek to answer two related questions: (i) what are the dominant gendered discourses of safety and vulnerability regarding public spaces? And (ii) how are those discourses understood and negotiated by women who are most constituted or targeted by them? This research project is significant because it analyzes both the discursive construction of fearfulness and vulnerability and the ability to resist that construction.

Previous research indicates that women report being more fearful of crime than men and are the targets of gendered safety advice to help them manage their potential victimization. In particular women who are privileged by education, social class, geographical location, and/or whiteness are most expected (and able) to embody the type of femininity represented in the media and official safety sources. A key characteristic of this type of normative femininity, or what I term 'respectable' femininity, is physical vulnerability. Enacting respectable femininity includes fearfulness, which is especially acute in the presence of male strangers. As such, women report taking precautions that place limits on their mobility through public spaces in order to ensure their safety.

In order to explore gendered safety discourses, as well as to investigate the enactment of and resistance to respectable femininities that these discourses encourage, I employ a three-pronged research approach. I analyzed (i) official safety advice from police and university websites, (ii) articles about violence against women in *Cosmopolitan*, and (iii) interviews with nineteen women who all embody a level of social privilege based on their social class, education, and/or racial category. From these sources, I argue that personal

crime prevention advice remains gendered and contains dominant discourses which reinforce and reify female bodies as vulnerable and strangers in public spaces as dangerous. These discourses help to maintain women's fearfulness and encourage the performance of fearful femininity through the promotion of safekeeping behaviour.

Using the concept of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987), I analyze the constant negotiation between doing gender in an 'appropriate' way that follows the dominant discourses of respectable femininity and 'redoing' gender by resisting these expectations of respectable femininity. I conclude that women both maintain gender norms and resist them. They resist partially through the construction of identities which do not conform to the image of normative femininity. The implications of this research are that by studying resistance or actions of redoing gender we can explore the ways in which these changes at the interactional level can possibly drive institutional change, in order to have a transformative effect on urban public spaces.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Safety is an area of concern for most people, and safety from criminal victimization has been a preoccupation since the latter part of the twentieth century and continues today. Such concerns are often documented and discussed as ‘fear of crime’, and they are often most acute in public spaces among strangers. Concerns about safety are not distributed equally across all members of society; in general, women have been oriented towards safety in very different ways than men. In particular women are perceived to be more vulnerable than men and thus more at risk of physical assault, especially sexual assault. However our understanding of safety, danger, and vulnerability does not exist independently of our social institutions and interactions. Our orientations towards safety, danger, risk, and vulnerability are all discursively constructed and maintained through various mechanisms and are different for men and women. The outcomes of differently constructed messages impact members of society differently and thus contribute to inequality. My project is about these discursively constructed ideas regarding danger and vulnerability, in terms of what they are in relation to women and how they are taken up.

This thesis will analyze public space safety and danger discourses as they relate to women who embody salient social privileges, and I have set out to explore the discursive construction of safety and danger for women who, like me, embody some level of privilege. I wanted to know how gendered danger and safety were represented within Canadian (and the wider North American) culture. Specifically, I was interested in urban public spaces and the construction of gendered safekeeping in relation to criminal threats.

This project started from a personal place. My own position as a woman privileged by whiteness, education, and social class informs my orientation towards public spaces and personal safety. I feel able to move through the city streets with ease and I am out at various times of the day and night without very much concern for my safety. I also know that the statistics show that I am unlikely to be assaulted in public spaces by strange men. I do not live or work on the margins where women are at risk by virtue of their social position in a patriarchal society. Despite this my female body also positions me in a particular relationship to the gendered discourses surrounding women's vulnerability and public space safety.

Women's bodies are by and large viewed as biologically weaker and vulnerable to larger male bodies and masculine aggression, but we are also charged with safeguarding our bodily integrity. Further to this, the construction of female bodily vulnerability is both implicitly and explicitly a matter of sexual violation, which is understood both in the popular imagination as well as in the criminal justice system, to be an exclusively female burden. This essentialist construction of female bodies permeates the discourses of safety and danger in public spaces, as I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation.

Throughout my life I have been exposed to messages about my own vulnerability and the steps I should/must take to safeguard my bodily integrity, yet I do not enact a fearful version of femininity. This disconnect in my own life led me to want to investigate the possibilities of resistance to the dominant messages of danger and vulnerability. I wanted to explore this through talking to women like me about their negotiations of these discourses of vulnerability.

In this chapter I will trace the personal and academic origins of this project, introduce my research questions, and set the geographical boundaries of the project. I shall then outline the theoretical framework of this project, 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987), before finally laying out the map for the rest of the dissertation.

### **My Beginnings**

This project started when I was about 12 years old. I was walking down a busy road at dusk in my suburban neighbourhood when a car drove past from behind and the man (or men) in the car yelled at me through their window. I do not remember what they said, but I remember being startled and uncomfortable. Several years later, when I was nineteen or twenty, I was walking to school one day in the middle of winter bundled up against the cold and a similar thing happened. A man drove up behind me and yelled out their car window; this time I remember being angry. It was in those moments that this project took root. There have been other similar incidents through the years, and I experienced a range of emotions—including pleasure. But as I got older and started to develop a feminist perspective, those two incidents crystallized for me. What stood out to me was the fact that the only thing that could be established in both cases was that I was female. None of the traditional hallmarks of female attractiveness could be established; all a person driving up behind me at dusk or in the winter could reasonably ascertain would be gender. It struck me that there was something not right about a situation where (some) men felt that it was acceptable to yell at women on the street.

All of my academic work up until this point has been circling this topic. The most memorable project in my undergrad (2000) was an independent study on women's only spaces and the male gaze. My Master's thesis (2003) was on video surveillance cameras in

public spaces with a substantial focus on gender. It took several years and a couple of degrees before I was able to focus exclusively on those moments, but when it came to picking a dissertation topic the choice was obvious. My research confirmed what I knew personally and anecdotally: that this type of ‘cat-calling’ was far from unusual (Lenton 1999; MacMillan et al. 2000). From this initial research I became interested in looking at public space sexual harassment and its connection to fear of crime. My intended project on harassment, fear of crime, and the limitations that women faced due to fear of violence (in particular sexual assault), which would have focused on the negative aspects of experiences in public spaces, never came to fruition, as several occurrences led me to shift my focus fairly substantially while still retaining the spirit of my original project.

### **The ‘Spark’**

The story of my experiences of public space sexual harassment established the origin of my interest in the rather undefined area of women’s mobility in and entitlement (or lack thereof) to public spaces; however, my focus began to shift as I started reading the fear of crime literature and it began to occur to me that I did not recognize the ‘fearful’ woman that was represented in the literature and research. It was from the disjuncture between the literature and my own experiences that my research questions began to develop. My very general question as I read through the literature was: where are the stories and explanations of confident or non-fearful women? This led to more specific questions about what discourses exist about women’s safety and abilities in public spaces, what and how do women know about these discourses, and how do they negotiate them. These questions were further refined to include issues of privilege in relation to these discourses as it became clear that while there is essentialism in the conceptualization of women’s bodies, the ‘universal

woman' of the safety discourses really only refers to a particular group of women and ignores those who are economically marginalized.

The feeling of disjuncture was strengthened and the project began to take shape after I read Hille Koskela's 1997 article, "'Bold Walk and Breakings': women's spatial confidence versus fear of violence". In the article she makes the argument that, despite the fact that the majority of research on women and fear took the position that women were fearful in public spaces at least some of the time, not all women identified with the fearful woman that appears in the literature. What was especially relevant for me was her statement that "some women are not afraid" (Koskela 1997: 301). One of the main objectives of her article is to include an analysis of boldness and courage. She writes that "women's courage and their ability to take possession of space" was a concept that challenged most of the previous research on women and fear, and established that fear and confidence are complicated, fluid, and shifting (Koskela 1997). That phrase really resonated with me and provided an early spark for this project. Another influential aspect of Koskela's article was her suggestion that:

It is so frequently said that women are afraid that it seems almost indecent to say that they are not. When some women in questionnaires say that they are not afraid, it is often interpreted by social scientists as if they just do not want to use the word and admit their fearfulness (1997: 305).

For me this was the beginning of my questioning the supremacy of the fear of crime literature, which eventually led to the desire not to frame my research through the lens of fearfulness, even though this area of literature remained influential to the project. Koskela's article is often referenced in sociology, criminology, and geography yet, with a few exceptions, there has been very little further exploration about women's 'ability to take possession of space' (1997: 301) in fear of crime literature.

Given the primacy of the negative aspects of women's experiences in public spaces in the literature and my desire to look beyond that singular construction, Elizabeth Wilson (1993, 2000, 2001) served as the second important academic spark to shape this project. Wilson argues that feminist scholars have been preoccupied with the danger and fear women face in public spaces (2000). She writes that feminist researchers have been "primarily concerned with that side of city life that represents danger, disempowerment and deprivation, whereas their male counterparts felt freer to explore pleasure, excitement and empowerment" (2000: 207). Wilson (2000) argues that feminist scholarship was/is needed to address the initial belief in the fear of crime literature that women's fear was irrational as well as the more general lack of gendered analysis of space. She goes on to suggest that the preoccupation with the danger and fear that women are presumed to experience in public spaces has dominated subsequent research. Women's fear of crime has also become normalized to the point of being a taken for granted condition of being a woman in urban public spaces (Lee 2007). Yet, as Wilson points out, there is a need to see the positive and the potential for pleasure, enjoyment, and empowerment in the everyday movement through public space so that we can open up space for alternative experiences beyond fearfulness. I have further refined this position to be attentive to the aspects of privilege that make it more possible and likely for some women to view their experiences in public spaces as positive and empowering.

The third spark was the relatively recent scholarship that reflected my feelings about the possibility of women's fearlessness, courage, and boldness (Hollander 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2009; Kern 2005; De Welde 2003a, 2003b; Campbell 2005) and the theorizing and researching of resistance and strength in a different way than much of the other literature.

These authors' foci and orientations were slightly different from mine<sup>1</sup>, but they served as both inspiration and as building blocks for my own research and will be discussed in further detail in the coming chapters.

These three sparks: (i) the disjuncture between the fear of crime literature and my own experiences represented in a key text by Koskela (1997), (ii) the desire to challenge the conceptualization of public space as inherently dangerous and hostile, and (iii) the recent conceptualizing of the possibility of women's resistance served as the inspirations and foundations for this project and led me to formulate two broad research questions.

### **Research Questions**

My project seeks to answer two related questions that arose after I began to review the above literatures. These questions very broadly are:

- (i) What are the dominant gendered discourses of safety and vulnerability involving public spaces?
- (ii) How are those discourses understood and negotiated by women who were most constituted or targeted by them?

The first question explores the dominant discourses surrounding 'women's' safety in public spaces and how these discourses are created, maintained and disseminated. I use quotation marks around 'women' in this context because while these discourses are gendered, they are focused on a particular demographic of woman, and they construct a particular type of femininity.

The second question examines how the dominant discourses of vulnerability and the narrow construction of safe behaviour are negotiated and includes the possibilities of

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<sup>1</sup>Hollander is coming from a psychological orientation, Campbell is focusing exclusively on safety advice, and De Welde is exploring a women's self-defence programme.

resistance. I explore ‘alternative’ stories that are not highlighted in the fear of crime literature. This research question intersects with larger issues of (in)equality, language, biology, social construction, and feminist politics.

This project demonstrates that fearfulness is not inevitable or natural. However, this is not to suggest that fear of violence and violence are not serious social problems that affect many women in a diversity of ways, even if they are not directly the victims of men’s violence. But, I argue that the conceptualization of safety in public spaces needs to go beyond the static view in which fearfulness is privileged (to the exclusion of other experiences and feelings), and in which female bodies are essentialized as vulnerable. In order to do this, I explore the daily lives of a small group of relatively privileged women. The women in my study spoke about their experiences in public spaces from a perspective that did not presuppose fearfulness and vulnerability, thus revealing the discursive construction of fear and vulnerability, even as it appears natural.

This work expands on the previous work in several ways. First, the foundational study by Koskela (1997, 1999), as well as similar studies by Pain (1991, 1997) and Valentine (1989), were conducted and written in the 1980s and 1990s. Koskela’s project was undertaken in Finland while Pain and Valentine work out of the United Kingdom. Gender relations have changed and evolved in the years since these pieces were written, and while I believe that they are still relevant, it is important to explore issues of safety and fear after decades of feminist activism and research. Additionally I am conducting a Canadian project where work similar to the above projects has not been undertaken to nearly the same extent as in Europe and even the United States.

Elizabeth Stanko (1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000) wrote extensively on U.K. safety advice and crime prevention directed towards women in the 1990s. DeKeseredy et al. (1992) did a Canadian analysis of safety advice to women, also in the early 1990s. With the social and political changes that have occurred in the past two decades, I wanted to establish if personal crime prevention advice had also been transformed. Stanko also wrote comprehensively on U.K. safety advice and crime prevention directed towards women in the 1990s and I have undertaken to update those findings in the Canadian context.

I also take a different starting point than many of the studies referenced above, as I do not focus on fear of crime; I frame my analysis of both the textual data and interviews through the lens of safety. Walklate and Mythen write, “talking about safety rather than fear constituted a deep-rooted challenge to the production of empirical findings that previously supposed women to be fearful risk avoiders and men fearless risk seekers” (2008: 213).

Given that I am primarily interested in the way that fearfulness and vulnerability are discursively constructed and maintained for a particular group of women and how those women negotiate those discourses, I expand on the previous work done by including examinations of official safety advice and media narratives along with interviews, which add new layers of analysis to the issues of the maintenance of and resistance to the literature on women’s fearfulness.

### **Boundaries of the Project**

This is primarily a Canadian research project that has two sites of Canadian data: safety advice from Canadian police and university websites, and interviews with educated women in Ottawa. However, the academic literature that I draw from is international. Much of the fear of crime research that I discuss next in the chapter has been conducted in Great

Britain, which has set the standard for fear of crime research for the past two decades. I also draw extensively on Canadian and American literature and research.

The interview component was done exclusively in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I chose Ottawa as my research site for three reasons. First, it was practical because it is the city where I was living and studying, which allowed me both daily insights into the city's landscape and on the ground knowledge of the areas my participants were speaking of, as well as ease of access to participants. Second, this project is well situated in Ottawa because it is an urban centre with well-used public spaces. Ottawa, as Canada's capital city, has a great deal of public space activities. From festivals, to race weekends, to the huge annual Canada Day celebration, there is a culture of public space activities. Finally, Ottawa is home to many people who are not native to the city, as many people move to the city for work or schooling. Thus my interviewees were able to draw on experiences from other places in North America (and in some cases internationally).

The third site of data comes from the American magazine *Cosmopolitan*. I chose this particular magazine for two reasons, with the first being that it is an exceptionally well-read magazine and a well-known brand in Canada and internationally. It is on prominent display at drugstores, grocery stores, and convenience stores all over Ottawa and often has cover stories about women's sexual and physical dangers. The second reason for choosing an American magazine is that there is not a comparable Canadian magazine which is marketed towards the general demographic of women I was interested in talking to.

### **Privilege**

The issue of privilege is central here. Age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographical location, education, socioeconomic status, disability, and marginalization all

impact an individual's feelings of safety and comfort (Koskela and Pain 2000; Day 1999). As Day writes, "fear in public space is shaped by one's identity—including race, class, and gender. It is misleading to speak of women's fear as if it were uniform, though race, class, and gender are not always equally salient in the experience" (1999: 325). Green and Singleton (2006), for example, talked to South Asian young women in their study and illustrated that for this group of women, living in a relatively small town, their concerns were oriented to the safety of their reputation and family honour. As they write: "women carry a multiple burden of risk where risk relates to culturally situated aspects of risk intertwining with more generic risks to women" (2006: 864).

There is an essentialism that is reflected in these discourses insofar as the female body is understood to be universally vulnerable (in relation to the male body). There are also institutional pressures on all women to reduce their victimization, which is typical of neo-liberal governance: people with female bodies need to keep themselves safe by not putting themselves in dangerous situations (Stanko 1997). However, these pressures vary a great deal depending on the social position of different women. This message has different implications and consequences for different women, but the general discourse is that all women's bodies have the potential to be victimized (especially sexually) by men's bodies (Campbell 2005). The mechanisms for disseminating this message also differ, as does the effort exerted. These discourses are also important to the construction of the 'proper' victim and allow for mechanisms of blame to be applied when the proper course of behaviour is violated, as I will discuss in the upcoming chapters.

Much of the literature, research, and safety advice represent women as a unified category and presume and target a universal category of woman. The universal woman is a

‘rational’ citizen who can ‘do something’ about their fear—for example, those who have homes, jobs that keep them out of public space at night, husbands/boyfriends, a social circle of other privileged women, the means to buy safety devices, and/or gym memberships. They are not sex workers who have dangerous jobs and who are constructed by police and media as an ‘unworthy victim’, or someone who has ‘decided’ that they are not going to act in prudent ways to heighten their safety. Safety advice presupposes a desire to stay safe within a narrow and traditional model of safety, prioritizing staying safe above all else.

The vulnerability of different groups of women is constructed very differently in relation to victimization, safety advice, and blame. Educated, white, middle class women fit the into the construction of the ‘good victim’, or the virtuous victim and thus, “the distance between self and victim becomes negligible as many white middle class women, already living in a culture of fear, identify with those victims” and are therefore “encouraged to feel more vulnerable since they are the ones with (supposedly) more to lose from a violent crime” (De Welde2003: 75). Women who embody the social privilege of being members of the middle class are those who are in the best position to make safekeeping behaviour part of their daily and nightly routines. The victims of violence represented in the media are predominantly white middle class women, the ‘good girl’. Given the content of safety advice and the representations of victims in the media, women who embody social privilege are most encouraged and expected to do something about their gendered vulnerability. De Welde (2003a) makes the argument that a hallmark of white femininity, as constructed in relation to fear of crime, is vulnerability. However, an opposing view to this notion is provided by Kern (2005), who argues that this demographic of women are able to ‘appropriate’ space and live in the city confidently with little concern for their safety.

## **Doing Gender Framework**

'Doing gender' is a popular lens to explore women's (and men's) behaviour. Introduced in a 1987 article by Candace West and Don Zimmerman, it has been employed and developed by many feminist scholars in the twenty-five years since it was first published. According to the 'doing gender' framework, gender is an accomplishment rather than something we are. We do gender every day, guided by the normative constructions of femininity and masculinity. In particular gender is "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). By 'doing gender', one is responding to these normative conceptions as well as reinforcing them. Normative ideas of masculinity and femininity vary across race, class, and sexual identity but 'doing gender' is a constant and ubiquitous activity (Deutsch 2007).

West and Zimmerman (1987) distinguish between sex, sex category, and gender. Sex is determined by biological criteria in order to classify a person as female or male. Sex category stands in for one's sex in many occasions. West and Zimmerman write, "categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category" (1987: 127). The final category is gender as discussed above (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). In everyday life there is an expectation that gender will follow from sex category in a congruent way, so much so that they are virtually indistinguishable (Messerschmidt 2009: 86). However, as many of my participants demonstrated, resistance is often manifested in the incongruence of the sex category and gender.

This framework allows “researchers to consider both structural restraints and individual choice in phenomena, the fluidity of gendered action, and contextual difference” (Rader 2008: 36). Doing gender is a good lens for this project as it allows me to explore the way normative femininity influences and constrains the women in particular ways when it comes to safety strategies.

Doing gender also allows an understanding of the process of changing gender identity throughout the life course (Cops and Pleysier 2011). This is important for my purposes because the women in my study transform their orientations towards the city and their safety throughout their lives. Additionally doing gender allows for an understanding of how gender is enacted in a variety of contexts. The women in my study show variations of how they do gender in relation to their interpretations of their safety in the multitude of daily and nightly circumstances.

The social construction nature of the ‘doing gender’ framework also lends itself to the investigation of social change, as it implies that gender relations are not based on biological essences of men and women, but rather are constructed and maintained, in part, through interaction. This is an important consideration because I am not only looking at how the women I interview do gender in relation to managing their safety, but also how they ‘redo’ it through their resistance to the expectations of normative femininity that they be vulnerable and dependent.

I also borrow loosely from Raewyn Connell’s (1987) concept of emphasized femininity. ‘Emphasized femininity’ is the embodiment of stereotypical feminine characteristics such as dependence, vulnerability, and passivity. As such ‘emphasized femininity’ is the ‘compliance’ of women to their subjugation to men’s dominant social

position and is “oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Connell 1987: 183). While emphasized femininity is a highly valued form of femininity, it may not be the most dominant (Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie 2005: 129). In relation to ‘doing gender’, women may opt to comply with emphasized femininity at least in part because we are all held accountable for acting in ways that are consistent with our sex category (Morash and Haarr 2012).

This general concept is important to this project because while none of my participants seemed to aspire to the model of femininity described by Connell, it was something that they needed to negotiate. As women in public spaces, they were aware of how their appearance impacted their experiences and consciously and subconsciously managed it—both out of awareness for their safety and for their own comfort. I have also borrowed from Elizabeth Stanko and her use of the term ‘respectable’ femininity, which I think represents the type of femininity (more precisely femininities) as it relates to women’s behaviour in public spaces. Respectable femininity is achieved through the performance of the appropriate safekeeping techniques, which include dressing ‘properly’ (read: not ‘slutty’) and avoiding ‘dangerous’ places and times. Respectable femininity reflects a middle-to-upper class position and a particular orientation to public space safety that privileges fearfulness and caution. The risk of not doing respectable femininity properly can be dire; since women are instructed that fearfulness and caution are essential for safekeeping, by not doing gender properly they are putting themselves at risk of both physical threats and social judgement. Respectable femininity is an impossible achievement for many, especially if they do not occupy a socially privileged position, and those who fail at it are often labelled as undeserving victims (De Welde 2003b).

While I did not directly interview men for this project, masculinity remains present, almost in shadow form. Gender is a relational concept, as doing gender emphasizes, and the women in my study are constantly interacting with men who are doing masculinities in various ways. Additionally they are interacting with the idea and threat of men when they are doing gendered safekeeping.

## **Conclusion**

Women's experiences in public spaces and the extent that they are fearful have been a long-standing issue for academics and activists. People have been interested in the impacts and causes of fear of crime for decades, and with such academic history, one runs the risk of a topic becoming 'finished' inasmuch as there is nothing new to say about it. However, this topic continues to be actively researched and articles have been published in many major journals. The academic interest has been supported by social conditions in which violence against women is still a reality for many and the news still eagerly reports violent crimes, which serve to remind women of their vulnerability at the same time that 'tips' are offered to help keep women safe.

The timeliness of this topic was again reinforced last year, when a Toronto police officer made headlines for telling a group of students that women could best avoid being victimized if they did not "dress like sluts" (Anderssen February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. This comment was a discouraging reminder that the sentiment of women's responsibility to prevent sexual assault is still alive and well and one that is reflected in the two sites of safety warnings I surveyed. It was the response to the comment that made me hopeful when thousands of

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<sup>2</sup> This warning was met with a criticism of victim blaming that is being attributed to the influence of the 'Slutwalk'. It remains to be seen what long-term impact the Slutwalk has on the discourse of victim blaming and responsabilization of women.

women (and men) took to the streets to protest the victim blaming discourse that has been dominant for so long. This dissertation and its conclusions also contain some of that hope.

### **Chapter Outline**

In this chapter I have outlined the personal and academic origins of this project, presented my research questions, as well as delineated the geographical boundaries of the project. I ended the chapter with a discussion of ‘doing gender’ (West and Zimmerman 1987) as it applies to my project.

**Chapter Two** discusses the fear of crime literature and offers a critique of the conceptual problems faced by the fear of crime research to the extent that the underdevelopment and misuse of the term “fear of crime” has lived consequences, particularly for those groups labelled as fearful.

**Chapter Three** outlines my methodological strategy for collecting and analyzing the data. I also outline my approach to research design as it pertains to the methodological and epistemological problems and critiques of one of the predominant ways of studying ‘women’s’ experiences in public spaces with emphasis on the fear of crime literature.

**Chapter Four** reviews personal crime prevention advice in order to explore how it normalizes fear and vulnerability as an essential aspect of safekeeping, as well as how it discursively constructs threats as primarily coming from the stranger. This chapter addresses the first research question of how fearful discourses are maintained and taken up.

**Chapter Five** continues to explore the discursive construction of safety, danger, and safekeeping strategies by analyzing *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

**Chapter Six** discusses the discourses found in the official safety advice and in popular entertainment media.

**Chapter Seven** establishes which messages and discourses are known to the participants and it also explores when and how the women in my study accept the construction of vulnerability and how it modifies their behaviours in public spaces. I will begin to address my second research question in this chapter.

**Chapter Eight** continues to address the second research question, focusing on when and how my participants resist normative femininity and ‘break the rules’ of safekeeping.

**Chapter Nine** summarizes and concludes this dissertation. I also take into account the limitations of my dissertation research and suggest several avenues for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Moving Beyond Crime Research**

### **Introduction**

Academically and politically, my work is rooted in the broad tradition of feminist research which, in the most general terms “problemizes gender and brings women and their concerns to the center of attention” (DeVault 2007: 174). Feminist practice and theory underscores the entire research project from the selection of a topic, the methodology used, the group to be ‘studied’, the interaction with the participants, and the potential implications and practical applications of the findings (Moss 2002: 12).

More specifically, several bodies of literature have been important to the development of this project and the analysis of the data: (i) fear of crime, (ii) theories of the body, (iii) mobility, and (iv) public spaces and the stranger. I spend the first half of this chapter discussing fear of crime literature because it is instrumental to my orientation to the project, the methodology, and the analysis. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this is not a traditional fear of crime project, although it easily could have been. The decisions that I made throughout the research and writing process were made in part as a response to this body of literature. This project is intended to be part of the conversation with the fear of crime literature because it is dealing with the same general topic; it differs in many ways, perhaps most fundamentally in that I do not frame the project through the lens of fear. Rather I frame this project through the concept of safety (Walklate 2007).

Fear of crime research is also a key body of literature in the research on women’s mobility in public spaces and contributes to the discourses that privilege fearfulness. Fear of crime as a concept and a research object frames much of what is known about women’s perceptions of safety and limitations to their mobility in public spaces. Through this research

we ‘know’ that fearing ‘crime’ is a significant aspect of women’s lives. As such it is part of the discursive mechanism that privileges fearfulness.

To this end, I will summarize the relevant aspects of this literature in regards to gendered fear and I will present some challenges to its conceptualization that are pertinent to my analysis. I shall then present further literatures that will be drawn on in order to situate this project beyond fear of crime.

### **Fear of Crime Literature**

As stated in the previous chapter, my original interest was in the connection between public space harassment and women’s limited mobility. This was a broad and undefined topic, but one that had me reading in the area of fear of crime. For my course work and first comprehensive exam I did a fairly extensive review of the English language fear of crime literature, especially the literature that focused on the gendered aspects of fearfulness<sup>3</sup>. What emerged from this review was a dominant portrait of a ‘fearful woman’. As my focus shifted to trying to understand the discursive mechanisms that maintained fearfulness as expected for women travelling through public spaces, fear of crime literature remained a relevant literature, as I will discuss below.

The traditional fear of crime research that brings to light women’s high level of fearfulness has at its base two dominant discourses. (I) Female bodies are perceived as physically vulnerable, especially to sexual assault. Because women *are* vulnerable, fear is a rational response to potential victimization. Fearfulness and vulnerability are part of

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<sup>3</sup> This literature review was not confined to the early days of my programme; it was a body of literature that I kept up with throughout the dissertation process. I used the key words ‘fear of crime’, ‘women’, ‘safety’, ‘danger’, ‘vulnerability’, and ‘public/urban space’ in various arrangements. The databases that I used varied over time, but included Sociological Abstracts, Social Sciences Full Text, Scholars Portal, Google Scholar, Gender Studies Database, Studies on Women and Gender Abstracts, and the Carleton University Library collection. I also used bibliographies of articles and books to locate relevant sources. In addition, I searched the specific journals that I felt would be publishing in this area, such as *The British Journal of Criminology*, *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, and *Gender, Place and Culture*.

normative femininities or respectable femininities (Stanko 1997). Women (white, middle class, heterosexual women in particular) are socialized to be fearful and vulnerable and women's bodies are trained from birth to be less capable than men's bodies are encouraged to be. The focus on gender as a crucial variable reinforces that there is something about women as a social group that makes them more fearful.

And (II) it is stranger men who embody the threat and the stranger is most often located in public spaces. Thus public spaces, especially at night, are viewed as not safe. This comes out in the literature as almost all of the spaces associated with fear of crime research are public. To talk about fear of crime as being part of heterosexual relationships in a patriarchal society is destabilizing to the social organization and thus it is easier to promote fear of strangers as the primary concern of women. These assumptions about women's physical vulnerabilities (Stanko 1997; Campbell 2005; Lee 2007) and stranger danger (Pain 2001) are reproduced in official safety advice and popular media, which I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five.

Fear of crime is a widely accepted social phenomenon. Lee writes that "over the past four decades the fear of crime has become an increasingly significant concern for criminologists, victimologists, policy-makers, politicians, policing organizations, the media and the general public" (2007: 1). Fear of crime has come to be identified as a social problem (especially for women and the elderly) which encourages more research into the 'problem', with special attention paid to those groups. This research in turn helps to constitute this population as fearful (Lee 2007). Governments use this information to promote 'tough on crime' policies and a variety of programs designed at least in part to address the growing 'fear of crime' problem. At the same time there is a growing body of

crime prevention literature which is designed to help people reduce their risk of victimization, and by doing so signal to citizens that there is something to be fearful of (possible victimization), suggesting they should enact safekeeping strategies (discussed in detail in Chapter Four).

The research into fear of crime helps to perpetuate the perception of crime as a significant problem (Lee 2007; Jackson 2004b; Walklate 1997). While not all criminological research will result in policy development, it is important to note this connection because fear of crime research, done with or without government funding, has the potential to be influential in policy development aimed at reducing people's fearfulness independent of policies aimed at reducing crime (Lee 2007; Sparks 1992). 'Women' have been the primary objects of fear of crime research, which often leads to them becoming the targets of governance influenced and inspired by their reported fear of crime due to perceptions of their vulnerability.

Fear of crime research and literature contains assumptions about women's bodies, strangers, and public spaces that frames further research of women's mobility (fear of crime is cited as a major impediment to women's mobility). Fear of crime research is a large sub-discipline that produces a great deal of knowledge and this knowledge is productive, as all knowledge is (Campbell 2005: 125). To this point Grosz states, "knowledge is an activity; it is a practice and not a contemplative reflection" (1995: 37). It is important to examine what the knowledge produced by the fear of crime research 'does'.

The knowledge that is produced makes it possible for one to be fearful of crime and to make that experience intelligible to other people (Lee 2009: 37). The argument that Lee is making is built on Ian Hacking's work on the identification of psychiatric conditions over the

twentieth century (1995). Hacking argued that the naming of conditions resulted in the proliferation of people with symptoms of those conditions. In a similar fashion the identification of fear of crime enabled a population to be diagnosed as fearful of crime. In particular the use of the term 'fear' gendered the concept (Lee 2009: 37). Thus women became the fearing subject whereas men (as a category) are understood to be rational actors able to accurately calculate their risks of victimization (Lee 2009: 41).

### *Defining Fear*

Lee notes that most of the definitions of fear of crime are rooted in an 'emotional response'. A dictionary definition of emotion is "a disturbance of the mind" which is "opposed to reason" (Lee 2007: 124) and, Lee claims, reason is the binary opposite of emotion. The demographics that are fearful of crime, which is an emotional response, are by definition not reasonable, and instead are unreasonable and irrational. Fear of crime is seen as excessive relative to actuarial risk, and a normative level of fear would be closer to the level of risk. Lee writes:

To suggest that we can have a *normal* level of fear of crime is simultaneously to suggest that there exists *abnormal* levels of fear...the important point is that it is the abnormal that becomes of interest to the research. The (re)search for fear of crime is by definition a search for the abnormal, the excess. It must be, otherwise, why try and reduce crime fear; and more particularly, why target those identified as most fearful with fear reduction literature and techniques? (2007: 125-6).

This of course has great importance for women since they are identified as a fearful demographic.

In terms of the emotional ambiguity of fearfulness, Ditton et al. (1999) found that anger about crime is a more prevalent emotion than fear. Bannister and Fyfe (2001) question whether some of what we take to be fear of crime is actually 'urban anxiety'. This

follows on Hale's suggestion that included in the fear of crime measurement may actually be issues of 'insecurity with modern living', 'perceptions of disorder', or 'urban unease' (1996: 84). The fear of crime is thus tied to the urban conditions of (post)modern life and also to the types of diversity found in the city. 'The city' as disorderly and unruly has become the dominant perception and people seen as different are cast as potentially dangerous and to be feared; thus they are to be excluded or segregated (Bannister and Fyfe 2001: 807).

In an influential and controversial<sup>4</sup> argument Hollway and Jefferson suggest that 'fear of crime' is the displacement of other more abstract fears onto something that one perceives as more controllable (1997: 263). The anxieties that are being displaced are too threatening or too much out of the control of the individual, such as unemployment, physical disability, or the meaningless of life (Hollway and Jefferson 1997: 263). But crime is seen as something that can be controlled in tangible ways such as locks and alarms. Hollway and Jefferson argue, "that the fear of crime is a peculiarly apt discourse within the modernist quest for order since the risks it signifies...are *knowable*, *decisionable* (*actionable*), and potentially *controllable*" (1997: 265, original emphasis). In the end Hollway and Jefferson argue that fear of crime acts as a signifier for other types of risks, risks that are less knowable and controllable (Hollway and Jefferson 1997: 265).

Other emotions that are relevant to this study are more positive such as enjoyment, pleasure, as well as neutral emotions that are common in our everyday lives.

### *Gendered Fear of Crime*

The central finding in the research involving women is that they are 'more' fearful in public spaces, more than men, and more than they ought to be (Silva and Wright 2009; Rader 2007; Listerborn 2002; Pain 2001). This is commonly referred to as the fear/gender paradox.

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<sup>4</sup> This claim is controversial because it is quite difficult to empirically prove that fear of crime is displaced.

Women's fear of crime is presented as paradoxical for two reasons: First, women are more fearful than other groups who are statistically more at risk (Lee 2007); second, women are more likely to be victimized by someone they know in a private space, but express more fear towards strangers in public spaces (Listerborn 2002; Pain 2001). Additionally, young men are much more likely to be the victims of violent crimes in public spaces, but report lower levels of fear (Sutton and Farrall 2005; Lee 2007). The statistics show that men are both the majority of the victims and the perpetrators of violence (Duffy 1995: 162). These findings are fairly consistent across Canada, the United States, and England.

Researchers in disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and geography took interest in the fear/gender paradox as essential to understanding women's experiences, subjectivities, narratives, mobilities, and identities. The fact that women expressed high levels of fear of crime became an indicator of the patriarchal oppression of women (Lee 2007), especially when considered alongside the research that showed that women restricted or limited their mobility and movements in order to stay safe, a finding that was linked to the feelings of fear (of crime) in urban spaces (Pain 2001).

A great deal of research has been done to try to explain the fear/gender paradox. However, this preoccupation, without questioning how a fearful condition is discursively constructed, serves to reify fear as a normal condition for women in urban public spaces. And the normalization of women's fearfulness and vulnerability has framed much of the understanding and inquiry into women's experiences of and in public spaces (Lee 2007). It has resulted in overlooking other narratives, including confidence. While my project is not a traditional project about gendered fear of crime in public spaces, it does address how literature and research in the area of fear of crime, as well as other official crime prevention

advice and media, contain and reproduce certain assumptions about women in public spaces and the dangers that they face, thereby contributing to the general knowledge (or discourses) about what it means to be ‘a woman’ in public spaces.

### *Explaining Women’s Fear*

Beginning with the first studies, gender remains one of the most important variables to predicting fearfulness of crime (Cops and Pleysier 2011) and the “biggest single demographic factor related positively to fear of crime” (Ditton and Farrall 2000: xvi). This finding is consistent across the majority of countries, including Canada (Fitzgerald 2008). The apparent disconnect between women’s ‘perception’ and the ‘reality’ of victimization led early researchers to describe women’s fear as irrational (Lee 2007). However, many feminist academics and activists have analyzed this ‘fear of crime’ and challenged the notion of women as irrational (Listerborn 2002). As Bondi and Rose write:

These patterns can be, and have been, interpreted in ways that denigrate women by implying that the constraining and exclusionary effects of fear are consequences of women’s supposedly inherent ‘irrationality’. Thus, women are portrayed as doubly victimised, in the sense of being constrained not only by fear but also by the apparent irrationality of this fear (2003: 233).

There have been several streams of explanation that seek to substantiate the rationality and justifiability of women’s fear which I will discuss in turn.

The first explanation is that the paradox can be (at least partly) explained by methodological shortcomings of fear of crime research. When women are asked about concerns regarding being a victim of specific crimes instead of a general ‘how safe do you feel’ question, the gender ‘paradox’ diminishes (LaGrange and Ferraro 1989). Furthermore, Sutton and Farrall (2005) suggest that the fear of crime paradox is likely, at least in part, the result of men’s reluctance to acknowledge that they feel fearful at all. They point to the

research on people's tendency to answer according to what they believe to be more socially desirable, and in this case it is 'machoism' that leads men to respond with the socially desirable fearlessness (2005: 213). Sutton and Farrall's study shows that when one controls for social desirability in responses the gender differences between levels of fear of crime disappears (2005: 219) and may actually swing the other way—men may be more fearful than women (2005: 221). This is significant in that it calls into question the entire industry of research into women's higher levels of fear.

The second stream of explanation explores the structural level. Many scholars argue that women's fear reflects gender inequality and systemic violence rather than individual attacks (Stanko 2000; Pain 1997). It is suggested that fear of crime does not solely reflect individual incidences of attack or abuse, nor is it necessarily about an actual event, but is also a result of systemic societal acceptance of women as inferior and women's recognition of the general vulnerability of this position (Yodanis 2004). Through this lens, women's fear can be viewed as a logical response to an environment that is often hostile and dangerous to women as a social group and is maintained as such through incidences of violence and through 'minor' harassment, as well as through the existence of a 'rape culture' that assumes that sexual victimization is inevitable and supports and encourages male aggression (Buchwald et al. 1994).

Given that all women are the potential victims of male violence, this theory holds that women do not have to be directly victimized for violence against women to contribute to fear because violence against other women serves to remind all women of their vulnerability to men's violence. Fear and the subsequent impact it has on one's feelings of wellbeing became understood as collective harms against women (Stanko 2000: 19). The construction

of this as a collective harm has helped solidify fear of crime into a feminist concern that has led to research projects and policy suggestions aimed at reducing and eliminating women's fear of crime.

The third explanation is that there is not really a discrepancy between reported fear and victimization (Valentine 1992). They point to the fact that women are the victims of a great deal of violence in their lives, but much of it is unreported. Pain (1991) argues that if women reported to the police all of the incidences that they interpreted as sexual crimes, official crime statistics would rise significantly and fear of crime and victimization numbers would be much closer together. This position questions the validity of official crime statistics for accurately representing women's victimization (Lee 2007: 117).

Fourth is what is known as the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis, which explains the gender/fear paradox by arguing that women's higher level of fear of crime represents the fear of rape and sexual assault because of a belief that any nonsexual crime can escalate into a sexual assault (Ferraro 1995, 1996). Warr stated this in 1984 when he said "fear of crime is fear of rape" (700). This theory has been supported by empirical research (Ferraro 1995, 1996; Wilcox et al. 2006; Hilinski 2009). In addition, sexual assault comes to be represented as 'the female fear' (Gordon and Riger 1989) and the worst act that could be committed against women. Women report that the potential of sexual assault is ever present and thus rape operates as a 'master offence' (Ferraro 1996). And so, the high level of fear of crime ultimately represents the seriousness of rape. Sexual assault is a central issue to many women's fear, but the reduction of all 'fear of crime' to fear of rape is essentializing. This position also takes sexual assault by men against women as always possible.

Finally, and most significantly for my purposes, is what is called the differential vulnerability thesis (Killias and Clerici 2000). Vulnerability is understood to be “the perception of exposure to danger, a loss of control over the situation and a perceived inadequate capacity to resist the direct and indirect consequences of victimization” (Cops and Pleysier 2011: 59). Women have traditionally been understood to view themselves as more vulnerable than men (Schafer, Huebner and Bynum 2006).

Fear is normalized for women because violence is seen as always possible (Walklate 2007; Stanko 2001). Therefore, women are expected to be afraid because risk is taken as a natural and inevitable part of being a woman (Stanko 2001). The ordinary and the everyday become sites of fear because women are understood (and often see themselves) to be vulnerable, especially to sexual violence (Stanko 1997: 490). This risk is located in the body inasmuch as women’s bodies are considered naturally vulnerable to attack and particularly to penetration by men’s stronger bodies. Feeling fearful or worried about possible victimization is a reasonable response to feeling vulnerable and unable to defend oneself.

Additionally, ‘minor’ harassments which are not legally crime can lead to increased fear because they serve as reminders of women’s vulnerability and men’s ‘ownership’ of public space (Gardner 1995). Some point to the daily harassment that women encounter on the street as a significant contributing factor to the fear that women feel (MacMillan et al. 2000; Gardner 1995).

Further, men and women are socialized towards fear and vulnerability differently. Fear is an emotion, and men and women are socialized towards experiencing and expressing emotions differently (Ragins and Winkel 2011: 379). Boys are socialized to be fearless, or at the very least not to express fear, while girls and women are socialized into fearfulness (Cops

and Pleysier 2011). So fearfulness becomes part of ‘respectable’ femininity. This is particularly the case for white middleclass women who are expected and encouraged to enact safekeeping behaviour in order to safeguard their bodily integrity (Hall 2004). Emotion is perceived to be a feminine trait and studies also show that women tend to view themselves as more emotional than men do<sup>5</sup> (Anderson and Leaper 1998). Given that feminine traits are not valued as much as male traits, ‘being emotional’ is not considered a positive characteristic. For boys and men, there is value placed on stoicism and toughness and they are discouraged from showing or expressing emotion (Nelson 2010: 124). Given that boys are discouraged from expressing emotion, it is not surprising that men do not report their fear. In fact, Kyratzis (2001) found that even preschool aged boys viewed the quality of ‘scaredness’ negatively. Research also shows that parents are generally more tolerant to daughters’ expressions of fearfulness than they are of sons’ (Rivers and Barnett 2011: 124). De Welde (2003b) and Campbell (2005) take this further to claim that this socialization into respectable femininity actually endangers women’s lives. De Welde writes, “For many women, socially dominant gender narratives had rigidly defined femininity for them and what it meant to be a ‘woman’, which often laid the foundation for sexual coercion” (2003b: 256). Encouraging women to develop vulnerable bodies as well as the cultural norms that allow for and reward violent masculinities at least partially create the conditions under which violence against women is epidemic.

This way of understanding fear of crime as a ‘normal’ part of being a woman has had consequences in the ways that women’s experiences in public spaces (in particular) have been framed. The research presupposes fearfulness and works to explain the causes and consequences of the gendered nature of fear of crime. Thus, as Walklate (2007) suggests, I

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<sup>5</sup> Anger is the exception to this as men are ‘allowed’ to feel angry (Anderson and Leaper 1998).

have taken the concept of safety (rather than fear) to explore the daily lives of my participants. According to Walklate, “Talking about safety rather than fear constitute[s] a deep-rooted challenge to the production of empirical findings that presumed women as fearful (and thereby risk avoiders)” (2007: 90). Not focusing on fear or crime allowed for a conversation that went beyond reproducing the model of the fearing woman, without ignoring the fact that for many women the threat of violence is part of their lives.

As researchers and activists challenged the irrationality of women’s fearfulness, the status of women as victim was reified. The move from irrationality (because the victimization statistics and women’s fear were out of sync) to rational fears meant an emphasis on and entrenchment of women’s vulnerability in academic fear of crime literature. For example, in the excellent article “The Gendered “Nature” of the Urban Outdoors: Women Negotiating Fear of Violence”, Jennifer Wesely and Emily Gaarder write:

Perhaps most disturbing about the women’s experiences at South Mountain is the fact that regardless of the ongoing negotiations, strategies, and choices, *eliminating the threat of violence is unlikely. Unfortunately, this is the case for all women: Even if they dress conservatively, carry a cell phone, do not make eye contact, and do not go out at night, they still cannot remove the absolute possibility of potential victimization* (2004: 657, emphasis mine).

The claim that all women will always face the ‘absolute possibility of potential victimization’ (victimization by strange men is implicit) reinforces women’s inherent vulnerability and the inherent danger in public spaces and is also a gross generalization that reveals the essentialism that still exists in much of the fear of crime literature. This is a delicate argument to make because violence against women is distinct from general violence, is a phenomenon that must be taken seriously, and the gender (and class, racial, sexual) inequality that is at the heart of gendered violence must be addressed in order to tackle the epidemic rate of violence against women. But we must also be receptive to exploring

alternatives that do not see female bodies as inherently vulnerable and accept that some women do not feel fearful. Part of my research addresses why and how some women do not feel vulnerable.

As noted above, there is much discussion of the social and structural factors that may cause women to report being fearful in public spaces. But there is less exploration of the discursive mechanisms which keep fear at the forefront of their consciousness. In this project I seek to explore how fearfulness is discursively constituted in relation to women in public spaces. I start from a notion that what and how we research an issue or problem can contribute to both the resolution and the perpetuation of that problem. I position myself quite deliberately to challenge the existing fear of crime literature, which I believe has helped perpetuate women as a fearful population.

Women have long been confirmed as 'more' fearful by the vast research conducted on them in the fear of crime tradition. But Lee (2001, 2007) draws the attention to what he calls the *feedback loop*, whereby the research into fear of crime and those who are fearful legitimates fear of crime as a criminological object and as a legitimate focus for governmental regulation, which feeds into a fearful orientation. According to Lee, this regulation and governance is enacted on the 'fearful' subject and is very often in the form of literature aimed at alleviation of fear *and* crime which enforces the responsabilization of citizens to manage their own fear of crime and safety (Lee 2001: 481). This literature also implies that people (especially women) should be fearful and thus helps to construct a fearful citizenry, which then justifies further research into fear of crime (Lee 2001: 481).

I will quote directly from Lee (2007) because he has succinctly and clearly summed up the interconnections of all of the various layers and levels of fear of crime research:

That research into fear of crime—through crime and victim surveys—produces the criminological object fear of crime statistically and, discursively, a concept is constituted. This information then operates to inform the citizenry that they are indeed fearful, information the *fearing subject* can reflect upon. The law and order lobby and politicians use fear to justify a tougher approach on crime (they have to, the citizenry are fearful apparently), a point on which they grandstand and in doing so breed more fear. The concept feeds the discourse and the discourse in turn justifies the concept. All the while the expanding fields of criminology can use their new concept to measure and assess. If ‘nothing works’ in reducing crime perhaps we can reduce crime fear? The *feedback loop* is inclusive of the productive power of disciplines such as criminology that seek to know and define fear of crime (77, original emphasis).

Therefore, fear of crime as a ‘real’ object can be made sense of through empirical research that framed women’s experiences of safety and public space in narrow ways, so that only certain types of knowledges were produced. Those knowledges serve to support the dominant discourses about safety, danger, and proper behaviour. Of particular relevance is the methodology that has traditionally been employed to measure the phenomenon of fear of crime: the survey.

#### *Fear of Crime and Women’s Mobility in Public Spaces*

Fear of crime is predominantly ‘located’ in public spaces. Pain writes, “most discussions of fear in the city deal only with public spaces which are shared with strangers” (2001: 899). Reading through the literature confirms that this position is still accurate, as there is very little investigation about how fear of crime operates in relation to known others. One of the main trajectories that research on women’s mobility has taken is to explore the constraints on women’s movements due to fear of crime/male sexual attack (Law 1999: 569). Women’s fear is addressed, alluded to or implied in much of the academic literature concerning women’s experience in urban spaces (Bondi and Rose 2003) and it is often prioritized as an object of study.

Much of the theorizing and research regarding women's mobility and experiences in public spaces is framed through a lens of fearfulness, separate from victimization<sup>6</sup>. There are two aspects of this. One is that many women do report feeling unsafe at certain times and that fear (or anxiety) impacts their behaviour. It is generally accepted that fear of crime impacts some women's levels of comfort when they are in public (Reid and Konrad 2004) and that they behave in ways that reflect this fearfulness, especially at night. The second is that women are expected to feel unsafe and enact safekeeping routines, again especially at night. Female bodies are also trained and expected to be vulnerable (Campbell 2005) so that safekeeping behaviour is taken for granted as necessary. This learned vulnerability, a trait of white middle class femininity, in turn can lead to fear as women who embody it feel as though they cannot defend themselves if attacked (De Welde 2003a, 2003b). The existence of the advice (official or interpersonal) may also persuade women that there is danger to be guarded against and/or can result in pressure to enact safekeeping strategies even when women themselves do not feel at risk.

### *Marginalized Groups and Fear*

The fear of crime literature traditionally has not addressed the lives of certain marginalized groups, in particular the homeless and sex workers. However, there are some examples of 'non-traditional' groups being included in the fear of crime research paradigm, especially in recent years: see Baron's (2011) article on street youth and fear of violent crime and Kohm's (2009) work on fear of crime in an inner city neighbourhood in Winnipeg as

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<sup>6</sup> By this I mean that much of the mainstream research done on 'women' and fear of crime does not address women whose position at the margins of society places them at a much higher risk of victimization—for example sex workers, women who are homeless, or Aboriginal women. I suggest that this is, at least in part, because 'fear of crime' is separated from incidences of victimization. So while there may be studies that address marginalized populations and fear, they may not be framed as fear of crime studies because the 'crime' in fear of crime is not actualized.

examples. Pain and Francis (2004) also explore homeless youth in their article “Living with Crime: Spaces of Risk for Homeless Young People”. Additionally sex workers and their allies have taken it upon themselves to produce research on their own fear and safety in an extensive report called *Challenges: Ottawa Area Sex Workers Speak Out* (2010).

One of the issues that is not typically addressed in the fear of crime literature is fear of the police. This is especially salient for those groups who are marginalized by the law. Sex workers in Ontario have spoken out about their fear of the police. In a recent forum in Ottawa, Monica, a sex worker from Toronto, was quoted as saying, “not only do I fear the predator, but I also fear the police who are working to bust me and incarcerate me” (quoted in Fagan 2012). The fear of crime literature is not able to account for fear of the police, or any other type of state violence, as police and state violence does not fit with the current conceptualization of crime as represented in the fear of crime literature.

Additionally those who are marginalized are often considered as ‘part of the problem’ (Whitzman 2013). The presence of the homeless, sex workers, or community housing may be what leads people to be ‘fearful’ or uncomfortable. It is difficult for the concept of fear of crime to take into account the fear of those who are also feared.

### *The Victim*

The focus on crime also assumes a state of victimization. The literature on victimology is also relevant to this project as women are often encouraged to take on the victim role throughout their lives. The focus on ‘the victim’ can also be traced to crime surveys. Victims were of little interest in the criminology literature until the late 1970s (Rock 2002: 1). However, the crime surveys were implemented and information about

victims was gathered, analyzed and reported. The President's Crime Commission report made the claim that "every American is, in a sense, a victim of crime" (1967).

Garland (2001) argues that crime is normalized in today's western culture and therefore being a victim of crime is normalized. The expectation of potential victimization is very present in narratives around women's safety. Reid and Konrad write, "all women are socialized to expect to be victims of crime at some time in their lives" (2004: 421). This focus on victimhood has implications for women in particular ways. Walklate writes that examination of the genealogy of the word victim illustrates a link with being female, and therefore the "passivity and powerlessness associated with being a victim are also associated with being female" (2007: 27).

Raising the *potential* of victimization because one is a woman, it seems, may also raise another form of dubious biological determinism. Women accordingly, are naturally victims. Reconceptualising danger in situations that jeopardize women's and children's lives, however, demands that we re-examine what constitutes *real crime* to most female victims of violence" (Stanko 2001: 18).

The key to the above quote is identifying and addressing 'real crime', which according to statistics is violence by intimates (current or ex) as opposed to the shadowy and ubiquitous vision of crime as it is represented in fear of crime research.

### **The Legacy of Fear of Crime Research**

The initial measurements of the public's concern of crime were done through large scale surveys (Jackson 2004b) and surveys continue to be a popular way to research fear of crime (Lee 2007). There have been critiques levelled at the methodological strength of this research which has focused on the types of research methods used, the way that the term has been operationalized, the conclusions drawn from the research, and the under-theorizing of the concept in general. This sentiment is summed up by Farrall et al., who note that "the

results of fear of crime surveys appear to be a function of the way the topic is *researched*, rather than the way it *is*” (1997: 676).

Lee takes this a step further with the claim “that this imposition of fear of crime on to subjects, as carried out by these researchers, may also turn out to be self-substantiating in terms of future research...research may not only produce representation of the fear of crime in research results, but may actually produce fear of crime in the populations it surveys” (Lee 2007: 131). Despite these challenges, relatively little has changed in the intervening decades about the way we study fear of crime, in both form and content. Also, the early surveys formed a base of knowledge which has not been successfully challenged and continues to be built upon. The challenges to the early research are relevant because the early research informs much of the current research, and in many cases current research still includes the same questions that have been used for decades. This position is consistent with John Law’s claim “that methods are practices that tend to enact realities as well as describing them” (2009: 240). And while this is not a position held by all, I believe that it is salient in the discussion of fear of crime and fearing subjects because fear of crime is “not pre-discursive, self-evident, or ahistorical” (Lee 2007: 133). I will elaborate on this notion below.

Questions from the first surveys became standard despite continual critique and criticism of their ability to measure what they purported to measure (Ferraro and LeGrange 1987; Stanko 2000; Jackson 2004b). For example, one question asked in the original studies is, “how safe do you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood after dark?” This question was, and is still, used to assess fear of crime despite not mentioning either fear or crime (Jackson 2004b: 8). Questions about safety are not inherently problematic; it is using the responses to represent levels of fear that is, as Walklate remarks, a difficult ‘conceptual

transformation' to make (1998:406). Another popular question, included in the Canadian surveys, is "is there anywhere in your neighbourhood that you are afraid to walk at night?" (Roberts 2001:1). In using a blunt survey instrument, these types of questions fail to capture any nuance; for example, one may be afraid to walk in a dark alley in their neighbourhood, but they may feel perfectly safe in all other areas.

Another critique is that early researchers constructed fear of crime as a generalized concept which included worry, anxiety, and safety concerns (Rader 2004: 690) as well as vaguely drawing on a diverse set of emotive, behavioural, and cognitive responses towards a range of factors including safety, threat of victimization, as well as crime (Jackson 2004b: 8). If we agree with Shirlow and Pain (2003) that fear is an incredibly difficult concept to know and measure, then the often un-nuanced survey methods cannot be expected to get to the complexity of people's perceptions and experiences of fear towards crime. Surveys continue to be an important criminological tool (Stanko 2000); however, critics challenge the conclusions derived from these surveys. Two influential reviews of literature outline the main challenges to the traditional fear of crime research.

In a 1987 piece, Ferraro and LaGrange undertook a review and assessment of the empirical measurements used to study fear of crime. They found that the results derived from the early crime surveys were mostly questionable as a result of methodological and conceptual troubles with the surveys and the analysis of the data. Ten years after Ferraro and LaGrange, Farrall et al. (1997) undertook a similar project, with similar results. Both found that the phrase 'fear of crime' is used in so many diverse ways that it became fairly unusable. I will briefly examine the major concerns as outlined by Farrall et al. (1997), which echo the

same findings as Ferraro and LaGrange (1987). Despite the dates of these studies, so little has changed in the fear of crime research, they are still relevant.

First and foremost were epistemological and operational concerns. Surveys cannot, or at least currently do not, capture the multifaceted components that play into someone's fear of crime, including the temporal, spatial and social relationships that are crucial to developing a conceptual understanding of 'fear of crime' (Farrall et al. 1997: 661). The methodological tools commonly employed, such as Likert scales, do not capture the diversity and variety of an individual's experiences and emotions, leading people to respond with only a generalized sense of their fear of crime (Farrall et al. 1997: 661).

As Farrall et al. put it, "a simplistic, numerical, answer to a general, closed question cannot hope to represent the breadth of experiences and feelings about crime experienced by most people" (1997: 661). To go back to the question of "how safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?", there were only four possible responses allowed for: 'very safe', 'fairly safe', 'a bit unsafe', and 'very unsafe'. If the respondent claimed that they did not go out alone at night the researcher was to prompt, "how safe would you feel?" (Wood 1984 in Lee 2007: 90). This strips from the answers the specific type of crime people may be concerned about (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987). It also generalizes to all spaces, times and contexts.

There were also concerns about the wording and organization of the surveys because differences in wording can produce different answers to essentially the same question. For example, the difference between asking 'closed' versus 'open' questions<sup>7</sup> resulted in a 22% difference when measuring, in this case, fear by the elderly of crime (Farrall et al 1997: 662).

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<sup>7</sup> A closed question can be answered with one word or a short phrase and provide facts, as opposed to open questions, which are longer to answer and allow the answerer to reflect and give answers about feelings and opinions ("Open and Closed Questions": n.d.).

Closed questions resulted in a much higher rate of fearfulness while being the most common type in surveys. Sutton and Gadd (2004) suggested poorly worded fear of crime surveys result in an overestimation of fearfulness. Farrall et al. write, “it would appear that attempts to measure the extent of the fear of crime are grossly sensitive to the nature of the question asked” (1997: 662; see also Farrall and Gadd 2004) and concluded that the measurement tools for fear of crime surveys needed to be improved substantially.

Gray et al. (2008) argue that the wording of the standard types of question serve to amplify everyday fear. Fear of crime surveys tend not to ask the frequency of people’s fear and worry, only how worried/fearful they are (Gray et al. 2008; Farrall and Gadd 2004). The frequency of worry, according to Gray et al. (2008), is essential to being able to determine how significant a problem is, both for an individual and as a social concern. This leads to fear of crime being dichotomized—one is classified as ‘fearful’ of crime or ‘not fearful’ of crime. This is then used to draw the conclusions about how many people are afraid of crime, which is problematic for several reasons. First it does not allow fear to be understood on a continuum. One may be very fearful at certain times and not as fearful at others, depending on multiple factors. Nor do most studies talk about different types of crime—one may be very afraid of being murdered, but not particularly fearful of being mugged. Farrall and Gadd (2004) also point to the issue of frequency of fear and found that people do not experience fear very often, but this measure was not taken into account in most fear of crime studies. When they included intensity of fear with frequency, only eight percent of their sample expressed being very fearful four or more times in the past year (Farrall and Gadd 2004: 130). I have yet to encounter a study that explores the duration of these fearful

incidences; it would be illuminating to know if these incidences of intense fear were long-lasting or fleeting.

The crux of these critiques is the claim that fear of crime surveys and questionnaires do not measure what they purport to measure. Yet, despite these critiques, the concept of fear of crime persists and the measurement mechanism also remains predominantly survey-based. All of these critiques remained in the foreground of my mind and fundamentally informed my research design.

Following from Lee's (2007) argument, it is my position that methodological and theoretical problems have actually led to a misrepresentation of the level of people's fearfulness. These research results and analyses have therefore led to the discursive construction of the very phenomenon that is being studied (Lee 2007). Lee argues that safety 'advice' literature is part of a feedback loop. When the first studies were done the findings of fear of crime in the population demanded attention (Lee 2007). This in turn led to more studies and more evidence of a fearful population. Because women and the elderly were found to be the most fearful they became an intense focus for many researchers. Government bodies responded to this 'expert' knowledge with advice literature "aimed at enabling women to reduce their risk of victimization" (Lee 2007: 99) as well as to manage fear (Lee 2007: 137). Therefore one outcome of the fear of crime studies is policy development that is aimed at particular populations who are viewed as more fearful (and possibly more at risk), which includes crime prevention advice.

This advice, discussed at length in Chapter Four, very often centres on ways to keep the female body safe from sexual attack by male strangers in public spaces (Campbell 2005; Hollander 2002; Stanko 1997). While on the surface this advice seems to reflect an interest

in addressing women's fear of crime (Stanko 1992), the effect of this advice is to inform women that they should be fearful by telling them that there are many things that they need to do in order to stay safe, which presumes that there is danger to stay safe from. This may then lead to women expressing fear, which legitimates fear of crime as an object of study. So in this sense, academic knowledge and research (which impacts policy, policing, and victim services) are caught in this cycle of reinforcing assumptions about women's fearfulness and vulnerability, and the dangerousness of public spaces (Lee 2007).

It is important to consider these methodological critiques because, as Jens Zinn states, "initial assumptions and decisions influence the subsequent theorizing and lead to different research programs as well as different interpretations of the results" (2008: 2). I believe that the preoccupation with women as a fearful population in need of protection from dangerous strangers has influenced decades of research into women's feelings of fear and safety and reproduced these assumptions to the point that they become 'fact'. It also shaped the lens through which research is interpreted and is what led Koskela and others to question many researchers' proclivity to recast women's responses that did not fit into the preconceived fear narrative into denial of fear instead of courage, boldness, and empowerment (1997: 305).

I suggest that while women's expressions of fearfulness may be a part of their daily lives, they need to be understood within a broader understanding of a patriarchal societal organization, gender identity, and the discursive maintenance of rape as inevitable. It is also only one possible part of women's daily lives—not the only nor even the primary one. However, given the fact that many women report being fearful and restricting their movements because of this fear, and because male violence is a reality in many women's lives, we cannot completely ignore the fear of crime research. I think we need to pay

attention to the way in which fear and vulnerability come to be prioritized over other discourses and possibilities, that may include pleasure, empowerment, resistance, frustration, and even banality. I am not suggesting that simply researching differently will change the very structure of social inequality. Women are the victims of a great deal of violence at the hands of men and eradicating this involves more than merely changing the frame of research; it involves a fundamental cultural shift which includes the deconstruction of the woman/man dichotomy. This is far beyond the scope of this project, but I believe that this project is in the spirit of that larger endeavour.

There have been many methodologically sound, rigorous, and insightful feminist qualitative research projects into women's fear of crime, but I argue that most of these still take as their starting point the methodologically questionable findings of the fear of crime surveys. They struggle to answer the questions, 'why are women so fearful?' and 'what can be done about it?' Researching further into women's levels of fear serves to reify the category of 'fearful woman' and to legitimate further studies and investigations. As Lee notes, "many of the researchers who rightly suggest that the measure of 'fear' is problematic implicitly take their normative assumptions from the very research results they openly question" (Lee 2007: 125).

### **Fear of Crime as Governance**

An important thread of this project is exploring how the dominant discourses of safety and vulnerability are understood and negotiated by women who were most constituted or targeted by them. As noted above, one of the main findings out of the fear of crime research is that women are fearful and that fear constrains their behaviours. Thus fear of

crime can operate as a form of governance to encourage a specific population (women) to manage their behaviour in particular ways. Lee writes:

One of the perhaps unintended consequences of the development of a feminist discourse about crime was that it had the effect of sensitising women to fear of crime and both provoking research into women's crime fear and... establishing new and not always constructive modes of governing it (Lee 2007: 99).

These modes of governing women's fear of crime include attempts to manage it through governing women's behaviours. As such, crime prevention programmes were developed and implemented to attempt to manage women's 'fear of crime' (Stanko 1997: 491).

The crime prevention programmes that Stanko (1997) references likely vary from place to place, but they developed at a time when feminists were pushing for women's safety to be taken seriously and during a general move towards neo-liberal crime prevention (Stanko 1997). At the very least crime prevention advice is meant to reduce the chances of being victimized, and by extension reduce feelings of fearfulness. Fear of crime, crime prevention, and 'actual' safety come to be tangled up with each other, so that fear of crime findings (that women are fearful of crime) come to influence policy aimed at the reduction of fear through the attempt to make women feel safer (and presumably it is believed that these policies will actually make women safer) (Stanko 1997).

This adds another complexity to the fear of crime research and literature. Fear of crime is identified as a social problem (especially for women and the elderly), which encourages more research into the 'problem', with special attention paid to those groups. This research in turn helps to constitute this population as fearful (Lee 2007). Governments use this information to promote 'tough on crime' policies and a variety of programs designed at least in part to address the growing 'fear of crime' problem. At the same time there is a growing body of crime prevention literature which is designed to help people reduce their

risk of victimization, and by doing so signals to citizens that there is something to be fearful of (possible victimization), reinforcing that they should enact safekeeping strategies. Fear of crime is part of a larger fearful culture which I turn to now.

### *Fearful Culture*

Historically people have feared many different things, and according to David Altheide, every era has distinct fears that are often fostered in order to control populations through solutions to combat or manage these fears (Altheide, 2002b: 14). The objects of fear are historically, politically, geographically, and socially specific and contingent (Furedi, 2006). Fear of communism, AIDS, cancer, crime, and terrorism have all been harnessed and used by government and corporate agencies to control and govern populations, and to profit from as well. Fear of crime has been successfully manipulated to responsabilize citizens to manage their own safety in the face of criminal dangers.

Academic research and publications are not inconsequential to people's everyday lives. The research and reporting of data creates knowledge and that knowledge is used to govern people's behaviours. Fear of crime has also been fed by not only a desire to know and develop statistical data about crime fear, but also by the desire to govern (Lee 2007: 134). Accordingly Lee writes,

fear of crime is not only an object or problem of governance, something to be controlled and reduced, but that it also operates as a tactic or technology of governance, a strategy that can be invoked with the aim of encouraging individuals to regulate or minimize their own risks in a variety of ways (2007: 134-5).

More broadly, Barry Glassner (1999) refers to a 'culture of fear', Mike Davis (1998) to 'ecologies of fear', and Ulrich Beck (1992, 1999) to 'the risk society'. These are all different in their nuances, but share the common meaning that we are living in a world that is characterized by a climate of fearfulness. What is unique about 'modern' fear is that it is

sometimes considered as big, or bigger, a problem than the object which spawns it. So the problem of crime is the object of laws, policies, and programmes in an attempt to reduce or manage criminal behaviour and the resulting costs; while fear [of crime] is addressed as a separate problem with attempted solutions that are independent of the solutions mobilized to address crime (Furedi, 2006). The problem of fear of crime and the crime problem is that while they are connected, they are two different issues, and policies that are developed to combat an actual problem with criminal activities may not actually cause a reduction in 'fear' and vice versa.

We become preoccupied with risk and we are encouraged to adopt a risk-avoidance orientation towards the world so that we might take actions to minimize the ever present risks that surround us (Furedi, 2006: 5). It is in this cultural context that fear of crime is researched and the results mobilized to encourage particular types of behaviours in the constant and ultimately futile effort to feel safe. These crime prevention behaviours, the substance of which are communicated through personal safety tips or advice, are bound to fail in increasing feelings of safety because they do not take the knowledge that women may have developed themselves regarding sexual danger over the course of their lives, they normalize these concerns for personal safety, and they perpetuate the idea that women should shoulder the responsibility for safekeeping (Stanko 1990). While neo-liberal safekeeping is being directed towards all citizens, the crime prevention strategies, especially those that address physical violence in public spaces, are still understood to be largely for women (Campbell 2005).

## **The Problems with ‘Fear’ of ‘Crime’**

There is much useful insight in the fear of crime literature despite the conceptual and methodological problems. However, I have opted not to employ fear of crime in my research, instead using the concepts of safety, danger, comfort, and discomfort to frame the questions about my participants’ behaviours in and perceptions of public spaces. I choose safety as a lens because it offered a positive starting place, rather than starting from the presumption of fearfulness. One is less likely to feel fear when one is safe. Danger is a broad and imprecise concept, but it offers some advantages over ‘crime’. First it is more inclusive, so dangers posed by vehicles and inclement weather can be included. Second, its political connotations are less. While I am sure that the argument can be made (and has been made) that the concept of danger is political, I suggest that it has less ‘baggage’ than does crime. I am not using safety and danger interchangeably with fear and crime, but they offer a way of moving beyond the conceptual problems that I outline below.

### *The Concept of Fear*

The term fear, while not an easy term to concretely define, has an intuitive meaning. Fear is an emotional response and one that often has physical manifestations as well. While the responses of the mind and body are not universal, almost everyone can tap into a memory of an instance in which they would have felt ‘fear’ and equally most can agree that situations and circumstances that cause fear are something to be avoided<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the primacy of the concept, it is difficult to find a definition of fear in the fear of crime literature; this has led to an imprecise application of the term as both researchers and participants have different (and often unclear) definitions of what it means to be fearful.

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<sup>8</sup> There are of course those who seek fear for pleasure, for example through participating in extreme sports or watching horror movies, but unplanned fearfulness in everyday life is generally not considered a positive experience.

In fact, some researchers suggest that people can feel a variety of emotions in relation to crime and other potential threats and dangers (Farrall et al. 2006, Jackson 2004a, Bannister and Fyfe 2001: 808). These emotions can range from annoyance to terror, but are all subsumed under the banner of ‘fear’ in interpretations of survey questions (and answers) by participants and researchers (Bannister and Fyfe 2001: 808).

Another problem with the use of fear in the fear of crime literature is that it is almost exclusively used in the context of personal victimization and very little emphasis is given to what is termed ‘altruistic fear’ (Madriz 1997a: 50). For both women and men this is important because many women fear for those close to them, typically children, and this fear is often greater than it is for themselves (Madriz 1997a: 50)<sup>9</sup>; men also typically fear for women in their lives (Gilchrist et al. 1998: 296). Kevin Walby and Aaron Doyle (2009) extend the discussion of altruistic fear beyond humans to companion animals in their article about shared risk epistemologies. They find that “attention to interpretive and emotional processes shows how over-emphasis on rationalized reflexivity discounts the other ways people make decisions concerning risk” (Walby and Doyle 2009: 6.3). This is relevant to the fear of crime critique because fear, crime, and risk management are constructed as very individualistic, which, as Walby and Doyle illustrate, is often not compatible with how people experience ‘fear’ (however that is defined). All of these critiques point to the fact that the ways in which fears are mobilized and constructed in the research and writing on fear of crime is inconsistent, imprecise, and possibly inaccurate.

Questioning the appropriateness of using the term fear to represent people’s perceptions and experiences is a common form of critique in much of the recent fear

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<sup>9</sup> Madriz (1997) found that over half of the women she interviewed were more fearful for others than themselves.

of crime literature. Sparks (1992) writes, “we fear many things: war, accident, illness, death, financial ruin, scandal, estrangement and loneliness, the dark, dentists. It is not immediately apparent that the term ‘fear’ is being used in precisely the same way in each case” (125). Fear is not a homogenous experience or emotion, nor is the term applied uniformly in crime/victimization surveys. Both researcher and participant may have different interpretations of the term and it may not accurately reflect the range of emotions people experience towards crime and disorder. It is also an intense emotion and as such it is questionable whether or not it is a suitable term to apply to the day to day experience that the term ‘fear of crime’ is often connected to. There has been discussion of alternatives to the use of fear, such as anxiety (Hollway and Jefferson 1997), worry (Gray et al. 2008), anger (Ditton et al. 1999), concerns about societal change and the state of the modern world (Jackson 2004a; Hale 1996), and general unease about the urban condition (Bannister and Fyfe 2001).

This reflects the challenges that come along with the study of the ‘other mind’ (Sutton and Farrall 2009: 109). Getting the ‘Truth’ of experiences is a difficult task that researchers have long struggled with. Joan Scott (1991) writes:

“When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual... becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured—about how language (or discourse) and history—are left aside” (777).

This quotation speaks to the problems with the traditional fear of crime literature, which takes as uncontested and incontestable women’s experiences of fear without attempting to understand how the experiences of fear and fearlessness are constituted. This quotation also inspired me to look at the way that language (discourses) is constitutive of women’s experience in public spaces, which became a large part of this project.

### *The Concept of Crime*

A major fear of our time is crime, but the category is vague; this is obvious in the vast amounts of research and literature on the topic. When I sat down to write this section I attempted to find a definition of crime in the fear of crime literature, but much like the definition of fear, it was hard to come by. The problematic application of the concept of crime has generally attracted less attention than the problems with the concept of fear, even though 'crime' too tends to be applied imprecisely, universally, and vaguely as though there is only one type of crime (Pain 2001: 367), much in the same way that fear is used to represent multiple emotions. Crime, beyond the notion that it is the violation of the law, is, as Sparks, Girling and Loader claim, difficult to define because it "never quite stays still and submits itself for dispassionate examination" (2001: 887). Within the fear of crime literature, crime is rarely defined in any way.

As a mini study, one night I asked some friends if they were afraid of crime. I got some strange looks (probably at least in part because of the random nature of my question), and then they asked questions. "You mean afraid of being a victim of crime? No, not really...Or witnessing crime? That could be scary. But I guess it depends on the type of crime. I'm not afraid of watching someone committing fraud" (Personal Communication October 10, 2010). This short anecdote illustrates the difficulty in using and talking about crime as a unified category. However, in the fear of crime literature, crime is often talked about as though it is a uniform category that is perceived and can be managed in a uniform way.

Crime is widely understood to be a social construction. At one level, a crime is simply what is defined as a violation of the criminal law. However, not everything legally defined as crime comes to mind when people think of crime. What is considered criminal and worthy of being feared is culturally, historically, politically, and demographically influenced. Even the legal definitions are fluid: many activities that are defined and categorized as crimes in current Canadian legal codes were not always criminal; for example marital rape was not illegal until 1983 (Tang 1998). The reactions and experiences of crime depend on the 'type' of crime as well as the social, historic, and individual context of the event (Farrall et al. 1997). For some people, graffiti is a sign of danger as it indicates a neglected and un-policed neighbourhood (Wilson and Kelling 1982). For others, graffiti is a way of resisting corporatization of the city and a legitimate form of art (Young 2010). Additionally, the category of crime is so diverse that it would be practically impossible to have a singular reaction to everything that is considered 'crime'.

The term 'crime' still has conventional and legal meanings that are employed by policy makers and the public that have significant consequences for both those constructed as criminal and victim. Shirlow and Pain write, "clear benefits arise from the focusing of fear of crime on groups marked out as different and deviant" (2003: 18), especially given the fact that those who are different are often cast as criminal (Lofland 1998: 152). The construction of certain groups as criminal (and therefore the perpetrators of crime) also obscures the multiple victims and perpetrators of 'crime' who do not fall into the traditional categories of victim and criminal. The homeless are constructed as fear provoking, yet they are much more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators (Pain 2001). People of

colour are often constructed as criminal (Pain 2001: 901), thus making the specificity of fearing racially motivated violence invisible in the discourse of fear of crime.

The term 'crime' cannot be separated from law; using a legal definition of an event takes complex social relationships and structural inequality and makes them one-dimensional. When we refer to crime uncritically we conceptualize it as an act perpetrated by an individual towards an individual (Hollway and Jefferson 1997: 260). These individuals are identifiable and knowable and when they are not knowable (i.e. corporate crime) they tend not to be part of the fear of crime discourse (Hollway and Jefferson 1997: 260). Perpetrators of white collar or corporate crime, often upper class white men, fall outside of the criminal construction and get left out of the fear of crime discourse (Hollway and Jefferson 1997). Men in heterosexual relationships are also left out of the fear of crime discourse because they are constructed as the protectors of women against the violent stranger (Stanko 2001). In these ways, the use of the term 'crime' obscures the collective harms and social/systemic causes of fearfulness and it also ignores violence that occurs in private spaces by people who are known, which is statistically the most common type of violence against women<sup>10</sup>.

For example, in the gendered fear of crime discourse the perpetrator is the male stranger. Additionally, there is also an aspect of intent that is implicit in the fear of crime discourse. The crimes that are feared tend to be constructed as things that are intended to cause harm, such as stranger rape, and not as things that are criminal by neglect or carelessness, such as drunk driving. Madriz also makes reference to the fact that many of the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Statistics Canada the majority of women are sexually assaulted by someone they know. In 2008 about twenty-four percent of sexual assaults were committed by strangers. In terms of other violent victimization, thirty-one percent of assaults were committed by strangers (Vaillancourt 2010). It should be noted that these statistics refer only to those crimes reported to the police.

women she interviewed made reference to crime as an individual event without ties to the structural forces of patriarchy and misogyny that underlie gendered violence (1997a: 351). Indeed some of the women she interviewed blamed the victim for their role in their own victimization, which again reflects an individualistic notion of crime: criminal and victim.

Using the generic term 'crime', especially in relation to marginalized people, obscures the contingent nature of the actions. When women are afraid of sexual violence, or gay men are afraid of 'gay bashing', these fears must be understood to be embedded in the social inequality that people face. All social groups do not experience all types of crimes and therefore all members of different social groups do not, and potentially cannot, fear the same types of crimes. The use of the broad term 'crime' obscures the specifics of peoples' lived experiences and the specific social positions that we occupy and that the people we fear occupy. Stanko articulates this position well when she writes, "women, though, are not fearing crime; they are noting the potential for danger stemming from the behaviour of men" (2000: 22); this gets ignored in the generic term 'crime'.

### **Beyond Fear of Crime: Additional Literatures**

As I discussed in the previous chapter, I apply 'doing gender' to the analysis of safekeeping strategies that the women in my study employed or did not employ. This lens is applied to understand how the dominant discourses of safety and danger work to constitute and enforce a particular type of feminine subjectivity (fearful) and vulnerable female bodies. By also using the lens of resistance and mobility, it can be determined how some women are able to dismiss these dominant discourses and occupy public spaces in a way that challenges the narrow model of safety.

It is not my intention in this dissertation to construct an alternative survey method or interview questions to study fear of crime in a ‘better’ way, or to suggest a new explanation to explain the fear/gender paradox, but to suggest that there is a need to shift away from fear of crime as the starting point of our understanding of women’s behaviours, feelings, and mobility in public spaces towards a framework that does not take vulnerability as normal and expected. I am suggesting that we allow for space to understand women’s movements in public spaces as also empowered and resisting the dominant messages of danger and vulnerability. There are several literatures that are important to this project.

### *The Feminine Body*

Searles and Follansbee wrote over twenty-five years ago:

Traditionally, women have been socialized to believe that they are the “weaker sex”. Females socialized into the conventional feminine role have been taught to be passive, dependent, emotional, helpless, inadequate, ladylike, inactive, and incapable of protecting themselves. In order to avoid being victimized, they have been encouraged to limit their mobility and to rely for protection on men—fathers, boyfriends, husbands, police officers—or other external agents such as large barking dogs or burglar alarms. The emphasis on being soft, gentle, and ladylike has further hampered women as it has discouraged them from developing their physical potential and from expressing anger or aggression in any active or physical way. Taught not to rely on themselves and discouraged from developing the capabilities to be able to do so, females have thus been trained to be good victims. Girls learn early on that all females are vulnerable (1984: 66).

This statement is unfortunately just as relevant today as it was in 1984. The ways in which girls and women are socialized do not just shape beliefs, values and behaviours, but they also affect physical bodies.

In Canadian society (like in many other countries), distinguishing male bodies from female bodies is a crucial task. Martha McCaughey (1998) suggests that one of the primary ways that this is accomplished is through the acceptability of using aggression. Aggression in men is accepted and celebrated (see the rise in popularity of Mixed Martial Arts fighting

as an example), but discouraged and reviled in women (McCaughey 1998). This is mapped onto bodies, thus normalizing women's bodies as incapable of fighting back against aggressive male bodies. Additionally white, middle class, heterosexual women learn to be passive, deferential, and polite. McCaughey (1998) gives several examples of this in her study of self-defence. She cites women who are embarrassed, disgusted, afraid, and mentally unwilling to engage in violence as they embark in learning self-defence. She reports that some women started out by apologizing to the pretend assailants as they practiced their skills. She argues that through self-defence women unlearn and overcome their feminine training and learn a new bodily script: one that embraces a body that is capable of, and perhaps even enjoys, violence and aggression (McCaughey 1998). Through the success that women who participated in these self-defence classes, McCaughey argues that women's bodies are not naturally assailable but discursively constructed through the norms of femininity and masculinity to embody vulnerability. The gendered norms of aggression are very much present in the official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan* articles that I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five.

A central figure in this area is Iris Marion Young (1990, 2005), who states that "women in sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified" (2005: 42). Girls are not encouraged to fully develop their body capabilities and as they grow up they develop a 'bodily timidity' (Young 2005: 44). As such Young asserts that "the more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile and the more actively she enacts her own body inhibition" (Young 2005:44). These claims by Young are

central to this project as she establishes that the feminine body is not a natural phenomenon and that femininity as it exists in a patriarchal society is intimately connected to physically weak bodies. It is important to mention, as Young does, that femininity is not a biological imperative, and that not every woman need be feminine; given this it is possible for some women to transcend the construction of what it is to be a feminine woman in any given society (2005: 31). Of course, many women develop strong and active bodies.

Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) discusses the expectation of women to not just constrain their physical mobility, but also their gaze. She writes that “the female gaze is trained to abandon its claim to the sovereign status of seer” (67). This is significant in the discussion of women’s mobility and safety, as women are often charged with ‘being’ aware at all times, which contradicts the deferential gaze that is part of mainstream femininity.

Theories of the body are also important because biological differences between men and women are often considered to be the causal factor of sexual assault. To put it another way, women’s bodies are understood to be rapeable (Campbell 2005). Women’s high level of fear of and presumed vulnerability to sexual assault has led to the development of ‘safety’ tips/advice for women which Alex Campbell (2005) faults for the construction and maintenance of the rapeable female body. She argues that the belief that women’s bodies are weak and vulnerable in the face of men’s ability to rape is not a natural state, but comes from women learning “to view themselves as *always-vulnerable* and this affects the *physical body* and simultaneously *subjectivity*, which come to be experienced as lacking and deficient” (2005: 121; emphasis original). In a Foucaultian employment of the notion of power, Campbell (2005) writes that safekeeping strategies illustrate the “productive mechanism of

discourse” and as such safety advice does not just react to the reality of rape, but it contributes to the construction of the belief that rape is an inevitable reality.

The literature on the body and embodiment is important to this project as I explore the ways that the vulnerable female body is discursively constructed and maintained through official safety advice and media representations. I also explore the connections that my participants make to their embodied identities and their public space lives.

### *Mobility*

As I have stated, the starting place for this project was public space and reflections on the limitations of mobility and ‘rights’ to space. While at twelve years old I did not frame it academically, as I started to think about my experiences more theoretically it became clearer that mobility would be an important concept for this project. By mobility, I mean the ability of people to use their bodies to get from one place to another, but the term mobility also situates the discussion within the larger issues of the power to control one’s own mobility and others’ mobility (Massey 1994). Additionally daily mobility is based on the “participation in a system of cultural beliefs and practices” (Law 1999: 574). How we get around is not simply an individual decision, but one that is predicated on assumptions and norms that are collective and enforced through formal means (laws) and informal means (norms).

Criminologists and sociologists have spent a great deal of time researching the constraints and limitations to women’s mobility which arise as a result of fear of crime (Law 1999). Most studies on mobility which explore gendered mobility patterns show that women have more limited mobility than men do (Hanson 2010). This gendered inequality is partly based on the ideology of the public/private split, under which women are seen as more tied

to the home (private sphere/space) and men go out to work (public sphere/space). This division is shifting and fluid and to say that all women have been confined to the home and kept off the street is to miss the rich history of women's lives. Women's mobility has not been constant by any means, and while it has not been at the same level as most men's throughout history, there are many groups of women who have been free(r) to move in and through public spaces (Lofland 1998). Social class, ethnicity, geography, and age all played an important role in who was able to access and occupy different types of spaces (Lofland 1998). In particular middle/upper class women have historically been those whose mobility is more monitored and governed.

Attempts to limit women's mobility, overtly and subtly, have a long history. This includes the opportunities, the experiences, and knowledge possible from being in those spaces. Public spaces are the traditional gathering places for social movements and protests, the places where official decisions and laws are made and enacted, the places where concerts and festivals occur, and the places where work in the formal economy is often located. The unequal access to these spaces therefore has limited and restricted many groups' participation and inclusion in much public life, including women. Women as a social group have historically been restricted from equal access to material spaces.

Privilege also impacts women's mobility patterns. Historically women of upper classes were much more limited in their mobility and access to public spaces. Those who are in a lower socio-economic status may have 'more' mobility as they are largely ignored by attempts to govern women's mobility. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, women privileged by social class and whiteness are the primary targets of safety advice instructing them how to stay safe, as well as their social networks' resistance and ability to limit their mobility for

safety concerns. For example, those who are reliant on shift work will have to be out at night in order to stay employed.

Being unable to access safe transportation also presents risks for many women. For example, young women, many of them First Nations, who need to travel along the Highway 16 in British Columbia but do not have reliable or affordable transportation are forced to hitchhike, which has proven to be deadly. The highway is also known as the 'Highway of Tears' for the many women who have gone missing along its route between Prince George and Prince Rupert (Harper 2006). The police response, typical of neo-liberal crime prevention, was to put up anti-hitchhiking billboards warning of the potential dangers. Women's mobility is interconnected with class, race, and sexuality, as are the attempts to govern it. There are multiple forces that make mobility more or less possible and desirable. One of the factors that make mobility less desirable for some women is the discursive construction of dangers that are faced while moving through public spaces.

One of the main contributors to the limitation to women's mobility, and the starting point for this project, is 'fear of crime' (sexual assault in particular) (Pain 1997, 2001; Law 1999). As Ester Madriz writes:

Fear of crime is one of the most oppressive and deceitful sources of informal social control of women. The images and representations that shape Americans' fear of crime and appear in everyday narratives are translated into a familiar discourse filled with stereotypical images of offenders, victims, and their interconnectedness (1997b: 182).

Given the discourses around danger, it should be unsurprising that some women worry about their safety in public spaces more than in other spaces even when crime rates are low and they are statistically unlikely to be victimized. As a result, these women enact a variety of safekeeping behaviours, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. There is often a normative expectation of limitation in the name of safety. The worry about blame, if 'something' were

to happen, also impacts women's decisions regarding their mobility. Women's mobility is important to this project because limitations (and the expectations of limitations) to women's mobility have surely impacted women's experiences in public spaces as well as their social position, which has contributed to their inequality.

Another important aspect of mobility is understood as the movement of the body for enjoyment and pleasure that is found in physical activity. The way one uses their body is related to gender ideologies (Hanson 2010: 9). The 'ability' of women to use their bodies with strength and confidence can be restricted by the body and mind's socialization into the dominant form of femininity, which encourages the development of a vulnerable body (Young 2002; Hubbard 1990). Issues of mobility in this project are tied together with concepts of public spaces and strangers.

### *Public Spaces and Strangers*

My orientation towards public spaces is that access to them is essential to both a healthy democracy and all social justice projects (Mitchell 1995). This includes the freedom to feel safe going to and from work; the ability to organize, meet and protest; the possibilities of meeting people with different ideas, cultures and appearances; and the ability to enjoy being out amongst others. To take this position further, I argue when the mobility of some groups is constrained it has consequences for equality. As Doreen Massey writes, "mobility and the control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power" (1994: 62).

I recognize the importance of Bondi and Rose's suggestion regarding those working in feminist urban geography—that great care is taken in "appraising the gendered politics of struggles for urban public space, making a variety of strategic interventions that seek to counter unduly positive/optimistic or unduly negative/pessimistic accounts" (Bondi and Rose

2003: 238). This is important because I think, and many others comment on the fact, that public spaces, and experiences therein, are often seen with contempt because of danger, strangers, pollution, and chaos (see Lofland 1998), or alternatively seen to be the site of community, emancipation, empowerment and a celebration of difference (Wilson 1993, 2001; Sennett 1970). The two sides are often seen as mutually exclusive experiential categories. However, like all dichotomies, this is reductive and the two sides do not reflect most of the everyday experiences of people in the city. Many of the experiences of the women in my study fall in between these two poles, and sometimes they are happening at the same time.

Freedom can happen because of and in spite of the negative aspects, and what may be negative to some are considered positive (or neutral) to others. For example, being out at night is often felt to be more threatening than being out in daylight hours; however Bankey notes women who have panic disorder with agoraphobia (PDA) sometimes choose to be out at night because they feel less visible in the darkness and therefore more comfortable. Any concern or fear of vulnerability at being out at night is trumped by the anonymity of the darkness (Bankey 2001:49). Women who struggle with agoraphobia present a challenge to the normative assumption that women are universally fearful of assault in public spaces at night.

Another important element with regard to public space is the stranger. Fear of the stranger as criminal has been a longstanding and continuous fear in public spaces. The specific identity of the feared stranger is not constant through time or space and often focuses on groups which are regarded with suspicion by the majority, such as 'racial minorities' and the homeless. As I will discuss, safety advice encourages women to fear all

male strangers.

We have seen the growth of the 'stranger society' (Norris and Armstrong 1999), where people's knowledge of others is no longer based on personal interaction and the 'stranger' becomes what is feared. The stranger is often cast as the criminal (Lofland 1998: 152). In much of the construction and representation of danger in public spaces, it is the stranger who is the threat. In relation to women, it is the unknown assailant who is waiting for his opportunity to rob, rape, or murder. If that opportunity is removed, by not being in dark places alone at night, then he will not attack, or at least not attack those prudent responsible citizens who are heeding the warnings of police. Hollway and Jefferson, building on Bauman, claim that the construction of the stranger is important to the modernist project of 'order-building'. To situate the known person in contrast to the stranger is a key strategy in crime prevention. Hollway and Jefferson write, "offenders tend to be 'strangers', rather than known others, which helps explain why the key measure of fear of crime is premised so unselfconsciously on 'stranger danger'" (1997: 260).

The construction of the stranger as dangerous is tied to the construction of known men as safe; and in fact they are mutually dependent. Despite the well-established fact that violence against women is more often perpetrated by someone known, the myth of stranger danger persists and reinforces women's dependence on known men. By maintaining the stranger as the threat there is no challenge to the heterosexual patriarchal organization of gender relations. When violence against women is shown as the acts of deranged strangers, the treatment of women is individualized. It becomes a problem between an individual man and an individual woman. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the construction of the

dangerous stranger in public spaces also serves to encourage women to limit their participation in public life.

## **Conclusion**

A lifetime of anecdotal evidence, conversations, relationships, and media depictions point to a fairly universal perception of women as physically weaker, more vulnerable, and less able to defend themselves against attack. While I am not in a position to deny those expressions of fearfulness, I will suggest in this dissertation that this is not a natural or inevitable way of being. Both 'fear' and 'crime' need to be thought through in a more critical way and to be decentred from the discussion about women in public spaces. The gendered experiences of women in daily life are more nuanced and multifaceted than the concept of fear of crime, and the methodology used to study it, allows.

I will now turn to the methodological considerations that informed my project. As I will discuss, much of the thought about the methodological design began with this literature review on the work of fear of crime. In the next chapter I will outline my project and research design.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Methodological Considerations and Research Design**

### **Introduction**

When some women in questionnaires say that they are not afraid, it is often interpreted by social scientists as if they just do not want to use the word and admit their fearfulness (Koskela 1997: 305).

As I discussed in the previous chapter, women are primarily understood as fearful. So when I read this quote I wondered if it could be possible that researchers were so preoccupied by a particular notion of women's experiences (those of fearfulness), that they would explain away or ignore other possibilities? And if this was true, what did that mean for our understandings and theories about gender and fear, not to mention the practical policies, programs, and advice literature that draw on this research? This questioning is significant because I, like many others, accepted without question that women were more fearful than men in public spaces. For feminists, it is something tangible to point to as proof of women's continued inequality (Lee 2007; Stanko 2000), given that all of the evidence pointed to the fact that women are still more fearful in public and therefore limit their activities, which in turn restricts their opportunities in comparison to men (Brooks 2011; Gardner 1995). But as I did more and more research on this topic it became clear to me that Koskela (1997) as well as other critical voices (Hollander 2009) were correct: stories and examples of women's boldness, risk-taking, and fearlessness are conspicuous in their absence.

My foundation of certainty of women's fearfulness began to give way a little. In the midst of this academic research came the reflexivity that allowed me to acknowledge that as much as I believed that other women were fearful of men in public spaces, it did not really hold true in my own life. I went where I wanted, when I wanted, and I mostly went

there on foot and almost always felt fine doing it. I have jogged at night and walked home from the bar alone. I realized that my experiences were not reflected in the majority of the literature I was reading. From this I began to wonder about the possible discrepancy between the literature and women's experiences and started thinking about how to research it.

When I began to design this project I believed that it would be difficult to get women to speak about experiences that they did not believe fit in with normative femininity of risk aversion and safekeeping. Given that the fear of crime literature represented women as fearful and that women are encouraged to enact a fearfulness in public spaces, I entered into the research design believing that I would hear from the women I was interviewing that they were worried about being in public spaces at night and took precautions to avoid the problems of other studies of women's mobility and safety and danger discourses, in particular the preoccupation about fear. I wanted to talk about what I considered 'rule-breaking' (in terms of breaking the safety rules that include not being out alone and not being out at night, among others), but was prepared for it to not be something that women would find easy to talk about because the framing of women's experiences in public space is mostly negative.

I expected that I would find some level of discrepancy between the discussion of fear and the women's daily movements as they reported them to me. However, my belief that it would be difficult to get women to admit that they were not fearful proved mostly incorrect. As I began the interviews, I was surprised with the responses that I was getting for two reasons: (i) the level of mobility that the women reported was higher than I expected, especially at night; and (ii) the openness with which they spoke about their lack

of fear and precaution. Both of these contradicted my expectations, but also contradicted much of the literature about the limitations that women placed on themselves in terms of being in public spaces and the level of fear that they experienced (Whitzman 2013; Silva and Wright 2009; Law 1999). This is not to say that there were no limitations or fear experienced, but that it was not the norm to be fearful, and for the most part the women reported that they felt that their limitations were few and mostly did not impact their lives in a meaningful way.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the fear of crime research is consistent in the finding that women are more fearful than men in public spaces, and moreover that women report that they often limit their activities in light of this fear. However, the methodology that has been employed to study fear of crime has been criticized since the first crime survey was implemented (Jackson 2004b). These methodological critiques raise questions about the validity of the findings, which is significant given the power that the research has to contribute to the discourses of female vulnerability. Recent scholars such as Koskela (1997, 1999), Hollander (2001, 2002, 2004a, 2009), and Campbell (2005) continue to be vocal in challenging the discourses that are produced by this traditional fear of crime research; my project continues this critique.

The development of the methodological strategy for this project started with a review and critique of the fear of crime literature (which I outlined in the previous chapter) in order to avoid the methodological and operational problems associated with exploring the limitations that women experience in public spaces. As Farrall et al. (1997) note, what we know about fear of crime is dependent on the way it is researched, and the problematic way it has traditionally been researched has caused fear of crime to be overestimated. I

will first briefly outline some of the specific methodological critiques relevant to my project design and then I will turn to my own methodological strategy. I will then discuss in detail my interview process, including the recruitment and demographics of the participants; I shall also discuss the data analysis of each research component.

### **Research Design**

The methodological considerations for this project were complex, especially at the research design stage. I began this project with the belief that being fearful of crime was a significant problem for women, it needed to be studied and addressed through academic research, and it should be considered a priority for government and policy makers to seriously address women's vulnerability to men's violence. I still firmly believe that women are the survivors of a great deal of violence, both interpersonal and structural. However, I want to go beyond the fear of crime model of understanding women's experiences in public spaces.

Following from Lee (2007), I argue that all the reconceptualization, refinement, and reframing of 'fear of crime' is a mostly futile attempt to rescue a bankrupted concept. As such my aim here is not to develop a new survey methodology, new questions, or new terms (instead of 'fear' of 'crime'), but to establish why reworking 'fear of crime' is not the direction that I pursued in my own work. I will now turn to my methodological strategy to research women's experiences and perceptions in and of public spaces.

My project involves a three-stage empirical study that evolved from my dissatisfaction with the traditional fear of crime literature. After establishing the presence of the discourses of female bodily vulnerability, strangers who embody the threat who are most

often located in public space, I set out to explore if and where these discourses could be located beyond the academic setting. As I am dealing with safety and danger, I identified the police as representing ‘authority’ and ‘expertise’ in matters of safety and crime, as ostensibly they are responsible for the safety and security of the population to which they serve. This is not to suggest that I believe that the police are experts or are particularly effective at safeguarding people, but that they have been granted authority by governments and much of the population on matters of public safety.

I will start with a brief exploration of the official safety advice as found (mainly) from police and university safety departments; this takes the form of a discourse and content analysis of personal safety tips that are found on police and university websites that are also disseminated through the media. I will then continue with a discourse analysis of the safety advice and representations of danger found in popular culture representations as exemplified in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The third stage is an exploration of a particular group of women’s interpretations of these discourses. In order to do this I talked to nineteen educated women using in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I will address the methods employed to analyze each data site individually.

### *Official Safety Advice*

I will first discuss official safety advice, which is an important aspect of constructing discourses about safety, danger, and responsibility (Stanko 2000). Safety advice is made up of suggestions to citizens about how they should act in order to minimize their chances of criminal victimization. Contemporary personal safety advice highlights the dangers that lurk in public spaces, especially the danger of sexual assault (Stanko 1998). The attention given to public space danger obscures the dangers presented by men that are known. In addition

Pain (1997) argues that all of these warnings may reinforce fear of being in public places. In exploring my first research question regarding the dominant gendered discourses of safety and vulnerability in public spaces, official safety advice represents an important source.

My primary sources for the official, or expert, safety advice are the personal safety tips posted on English Canadian police service and university safety department websites. Police agencies are a powerful force for the dissemination of safety information. They are actively involved in communicating crime prevention messages to the general public (Johnson 2007) and most police services have some form of ‘crime prevention’ tips on their website.

I based the sample on the twenty most populous English-speaking cities in Canada<sup>11</sup> (in addition, I included the largest cities in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to ensure that all provinces were represented). My reasoning for choosing the largest centres in Canada was practical—the larger the city, the larger the police service, which I postulated would mean that there was a significant likelihood that the website would have multiple resources beyond the basic information. It also allowed for a fairly representative sample. I also included the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), as well as the other police services that serve The Greater Toronto Area (GTA): York Regional Police, Peel Regional Police, Halton Regional Police, and Durham Regional Police Service<sup>12</sup>. In total I surveyed twenty-five police service websites, of which nineteen (seventy-six percent) had personal crime prevention tips for safety in urban public spaces.

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<sup>11</sup> To establish the population, I used the Statistics Canada population and dwelling counts from the 2011 censuses (“Population and dwelling counts” 2012).

<sup>12</sup> For a complete list of police forces surveyed, see Appendix B.

In addition to police resources, I looked at campus security websites from the largest English universities<sup>13</sup> in Canada<sup>14</sup>. I reviewed university websites because my sample all had some level of university education, so safety advice from university officials was a logical extension of the data found on the police websites. Similar to my analysis of police websites, university safety offices can be considered an ‘authority’ on matters of safety and security on campus. I sampled the largest two universities in all provinces<sup>15</sup>, except in Ontario where I looked at nine universities. I included the five largest Ontario universities as well as Carleton (because it is in Ottawa), Brock (one of the participants spoke a great deal about her time in St. Catharines while attending Brock), and two randomly selected mid-sized universities (Wilfrid Laurier and Ryerson). I expanded the sample in Ontario because that is where the study is located, it is the most populous province, it has the most English-speaking universities of any Canadian province or territory, and it is where most of my participants attended some level of university. This allowed me to review the same number of universities as police services. In total I reviewed twenty-five university campus security/safety websites, of which twenty-two (eighty-eight percent) had crime prevention/personal safety tips.

Further, university safety websites were a novel source of data, as there are no studies I was able to locate that explored university safety advice. In total I reviewed twenty-five university campus security/safety websites, of which twenty-one (eighty-four percent) had crime prevention/personal safety tips. I only looked at the websites of the department in

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<sup>13</sup> To establish the enrolment I used the 2011 preliminary numbers compiled by the Associations of Universities and Colleges Canada.

<sup>14</sup> For a complete list of universities surveyed, see Appendix C.

<sup>15</sup> Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland only have one university in each province.

charge of safety and security (generally the departments were called some variation of ‘Campus Security’ or ‘Campus Safety’).

As I reviewed the data, I constructed a chart of the websites that included the police service, the categories of advice their site contained (if any), the type of advice included (i.e. sexual assault, personal safety when at a club, etc.), anything that was specifically directed at women, and anything on domestic abuse or assault from known others. From this chart I was able to determine the general type of advice and the prevalence of it. Once I established that there were a significant number of police services that were dispensing personal safety advice, I then did a thorough reading of all of the relevant material and organized it thematically. These themes and my analysis of them are found in Chapter Four.

#### *Cosmopolitan Magazine*

As will be discussed in later chapters, several of my participants cited the media as a source of their awareness of gendered messaging about women. Their answers went from general media, to more specific mentions of news reports, police press releases, newspapers, TV shows, movies and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. And while *Cosmopolitan* was only mentioned by two participants, the themes found in *Cosmopolitan* are present in the interviews with my participants and in the official safety advice. The discourses that are present (and perpetuated) in *Cosmopolitan* are also present elsewhere and have cultural relevance even to those who do not report reading it, so I believe that *Cosmopolitan* is a good source that exemplifies the popular culture media representation of danger and safety for women. These themes are also reported in newscasts/newspapers and fictionalized in prime time programs (Carli 2008).

I chose to analyze *Cosmopolitan* after picking up the magazine in a store when I noticed a headline about rape. I kept buying the magazines every time that they had a story about violence against women, and it was not long before I realized that I was buying a lot of them. The presence of the cover stories that indicated sensational danger stories that ‘every women needs to know’ conveys the message that this is an important topic that needs to be displayed prominently to catch people’s attention<sup>16</sup>. In reading these first few articles I began to see a pattern emerge of the types of dangers these articles were describing and the type of advice given to women to protect themselves from these dangers; at that point I began a more systematic study of the types of stories in this magazine.

I also chose *Cosmopolitan* because it represents the popular culture medium of advice and instruction. The narratives that are present in *Cosmopolitan* are representative of popular media and echo the safety warnings given by the police and other agencies as well. Women’s magazines are by design instructional, so advice is a prominent part of their content. Further, while there is a long history of exploring the news media and fear of crime (Weitzer and Kubrin 2004; Land and Meeker 2003; Gerbner et al. 1980), there is nothing written about the discourses of public space danger in popular magazines<sup>17</sup>, so *Cosmopolitan* provided a new source of data.

Additionally, all of these articles rely on advice and expertise by academics, many of whom are criminologists who would likely be knowledgeable about the fear of crime literature and research. *Cosmopolitan* is aimed at women without children (or at least there is very little mention of children in a typical issue of *Cosmopolitan*) who are pursuing careers

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<sup>16</sup> Over one-third of the violence against women stories appeared as cover stories.

<sup>17</sup> One of the only research projects that focuses on the danger narratives in women’s magazines is Miller and McMullan’s (2011) historical analysis of *Chatelaine*, in which they explore how that magazine constructed the signifiers of safety and danger for women.

and live in the city. This is not to say that members of this group were the only ones who read *Cosmopolitan*, but that the pages of the magazine reflected that type of woman, at least more than other characteristics. These characteristics were also found in my participants. Finally, *Cosmopolitan* offered a unique data source as no one had analyzed it for safety and danger discourses in public spaces.

I reviewed fifty-eight issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, from July 2006 to June 2011<sup>18</sup>. I began my analysis by skimming through the magazines to get a general sense of the articles. There are a variety of formats through which information is presented: non-fiction articles, photo spreads, advertising, editorials, and readers' questions answered by 'experts'. This was not my first experience reading *Cosmopolitan*; I was quite familiar with the type of articles, pictorials, and advice that were associated with both the magazine and the broader genre of women's magazines.

I identified six broad types of article, including articles primarily focused on: women's issues (i.e. women and careers, women's health, and interviews with famous or influential women), men (i.e. explaining men's behaviours), relationships, sex, fashion/beauty, and 'real-life' stories. There was occasional overlap with some of the articles and the themes are not mutually exclusive (i.e. articles about sex in relationships). I included all sections that were not advertisements or pictorial spreads (for example the fashion spreads or the pages of beauty products, etc. that were not accompanied by significant text were not included in this sample). Articles categorized as real-life stories were not the majority of the content, but there are two to three such articles included in every

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<sup>18</sup>Once I began to analyze the magazine, I went to the Ottawa Public Library for back issues. The date of the first magazine for review was determined by library availability and continued until I completed the analysis. I felt that five years of magazines provided a sufficient sample size to illustrate the pattern of articles, as I reached a level of saturation. It also spanned five years of the magazine. I reviewed all magazines from this period except August and October 2008 because of availability issues.

issue. Some of these were health related, including stories about cancer and STIs, but the vast majority of these stories were about threats that women faced or unusual/tragic situations they were in. Examples of articles that were not included in my analysis included stories about dangerous cosmetic surgeries, drug and alcohol abuse, women in the military, suicide or death of a loved one, and dangerous driving; however, overwhelmingly the danger stories were about physical victimization by men. Of the fifty-eight editions I examined, thirty-nine issues, or just over sixty-seven percent, had articles about violence against women. There were others about different forms of crime (for example burglary), but I did not include those in the analysis as they did not have an aspect of physical violence.

I carefully read each of the thirty-nine articles that were explicitly about violence against women and identified the predominate themes that were present in the majority of the articles. I then developed a chart of all of the themes I identified as significant, as well as the articles and the quotations that corresponded with those themes.

### *Interviews*

I thought that it would be difficult to get my participant women to speak outside of the dominant discourses of fearfulness and vulnerability<sup>19</sup>. I developed this belief from the overwhelming amount of literature that reflected women's fear of crime, anecdotal interactions in my own life, and the dominance of this discourse in popular media, including magazines and news media. I developed interview questions that deliberately avoided the term 'fear of crime' and which allowed the participants to start off the interview talking about their daily lives in the attempt to avoid privileging either fear or courage.

Instead I focused on concepts of safety, danger, comfort, and discomfort as well as the relationship between these feelings and emotions. Most of the questions I

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<sup>19</sup> As I will discuss in depth in Chapters Seven and Eight, this proved to be a mostly unrealized concern.

asked were open-ended, which allowed the participants to answer in their own words instead of choosing between options provided by the interviewer (Reinharz 1992: 19). Reinharz writes that the strength of open-ended interviewing, especially for feminists, is that it can be “an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women” (1992: 19). I wanted the questions to be open-ended in order to allow women to answer as they wanted, but I also wanted some structure in order to ensure that the interviews asked questions about alternative narratives and did not focus too heavily on the dominant discourse of fearfulness.<sup>20</sup> My interview design did reflect my concern about socially desirable responding (Sutton and Farrall 2005), inasmuch as I wanted to open up space for the participants to discuss positive experiences or experiences which were sources of empowerment within the discussion of safety and danger messages. I also did not want to close off discussions of any negative experiences and violence that were important to the participants. The choice of semi-structured interviews, and the wording and order of questions, struck that balance.

Beyond that, interviews are an important feminist tool to allow those who have historically been denied a voice and a space to tell their stories (DeVault and Gross 2007). Most of my participants are privileged in particular in relation to education, but their stories of confidence and general lack of preoccupation about their safety in public spaces are neglected in much of the fear of crime literature, as well as much of

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<sup>20</sup> I had originally planned to run focus groups, but decided against them because I wanted to allow women the space to speak outside of the normative framework of the discourses of women in public space, which stress fearfulness and vulnerability. The reason I determined that focus groups would not fit this aim was based on Hollander’s research, in which she conducted focus groups and found that in such settings alternative narratives were typically silenced (2001; 2002). I determined that one-on-one interviews would best allow women to feel free(r) to express non-traditional orientations towards safety without being concerned about judgement from other women, which might serve to silence some stories.

the feminist discussions of mobility (Koskela 1997). The interview is a way of bringing forward these neglected stories (DeVault and Gross 2007: 176). This point is made by a participant when she said, unprompted:

I've spoken about things that would have been construed as negative experiences if you gave me a survey. Have you ever had someone touch you like you didn't want them to... and yet those are not negative experiences. They don't necessarily rattle me for any length of time; they don't have any lasting negative effect on me (Cecelia)<sup>21</sup>.

Cecelia was not the only participant to describe a negative experience which was contextualized and interpreted by the participant herself in a non-traditional way, but her words stayed with me and gave me further confidence in the methodological choices that I had made.

### **Who, How and Why of the Participants<sup>22</sup>**

At the conceptualization stage of my project I determined that the boundaries of my sample (Miles and Huberman 1994) would be based on gender and not having children. As I refined my research design I also included limitations based on living arrangements. In addition to these boundaries that I set at the outset, my sample is characterized by women who embody the social privilege of middle classness, including education.

#### *Childfree Women*

I only interviewed people who self-identified<sup>23</sup> as a woman and did not identify as mothers. I chose to focus on childfree<sup>24</sup> women because I am interested in women's stories

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<sup>21</sup>All participants were assigned a pseudonym by the researcher.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix D for summary of the participant demographic information.

<sup>23</sup>I used the term 'self-identification' because I wanted to include those who considered themselves to be women. I did not have anyone who reported to not being born biologically female, but since this research is about the performance of gender it seemed important not to exclude those whose gender identity was as a woman even if their biological chromosomes were not sexed female.

in a period of their lives where they do not have dependants to be concerned with and likely have more free time and more ability and perhaps desire to be out in public spaces. As Glenda Laws (1997) points out, women's mobility is constrained by, among other things, the roles that they occupy—this includes motherhood. Childcare becomes a consideration in the ease of mobility and activities that women may be able to practically participate in. This shift happens even before the child is born, according to Koskela (1999), who found that women's orientation to public spaces change with pregnancy. She writes, “pregnant women easily and almost unconsciously abandon the public sphere—at least the dark streets at night” (120). Additionally, women's safety is directly tied to their children's wellbeing and therefore women with children may be less inclined to act in ways that may be perceived as risky or ‘dangerous’ (for example jog at night) (Koskela 1999: 120).

In addition to women's reduced risk taking, the focus of safety worries and concern is seen to shift to concern and worry for their children (Snedker 2006; Warr and Ellison 2000; Pain 1997). Pain writes, “women's childcare responsibilities are growing with concerns about sexual and physical dangers to children and this creates additional constraints on their own opportunities” (1997: 242). This is both a gendered trend, in which women's roles as mother and nurturer leads to fear and concern for their children (Snedker 2006), and also a general trend in which fear for children is increasing across all social groups (Shirlow and Pain 2003; Altheide 2002a).

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<sup>24</sup>The term ‘childfree’ is meant to refer to women who do not have children (and define themselves as childfree, for example a woman who gave up a child for adoption would be childfree for the purposes of this project, so long as they did not identify as a mother). None of the participants reported to have been a primary caregiver for a child at any point in their lives, although beyond the initial call for participants no questions were asked about children.

### *Living arrangements*

As I refined my research design I also decided to limit participation to women who did not live with a parent or guardian. I wanted women who lived without the constraints and rules that come with being under parental rules and surveillance. This was also based on the assumption that one would have a different orientation to activities, space, and freedom that comes with adulthood and living on one's own.

### *Demographics of the Interview Participants*

The defining characteristic of my sample is that of social privilege vis-à-vis further marginalized women. First, the women in my sample all possess some level of post-secondary education. Twelve of my participants had full-time jobs, two identified that they were self-employed as consultants, four were employed part-time while going to school, and one did not have a job during the school year, but anticipated being employed over the summer.

Thirteen of my participants identified as white or Caucasian, one woman each identified as Caribbean, Indian (Asian), Lebanese-Canadian, Sri Lankan, and Italian (non-Caucasian), and one did not indicate an ethnicity on the demographic sheet (based solely on appearance I have categorized her as white).

The participants were between the ages of 19 and 45 at the time of the interview. All of the women that I interviewed had at least one semester of post-secondary education: three participants had a Bachelor's degree; six had completed Master's degrees; one had an LLM degree in progress; three had PhDs in progress and one had a completed PhD; one participant had a certificate in Alternative Medicine and one had an MD and was a practicing medical doctor.

In terms of geographical location, only one participant did not live full-time in Ottawa. In that case the participant had a house in Toronto and commuted to Ottawa for school (she also lived full-time in Ottawa while going to school a few years previously). The participants grew up in a variety of locations across the country. Two women characterized their hometowns as rural locations and the remainder of the participants grew up in Canadian urban towns and cities. Three participants identified their hometowns in locations in the Maritimes, four in Quebec, six in Ontario (including four from Ottawa), two in Saskatchewan, and two in British Columbia. Traveling or residing in different cities/countries was significant for many of the participants. None of the four women who identified their hometowns as Ottawa had lived there continually.

Only one woman identified as a lesbian. I cannot claim that the other eighteen women were heterosexual, as some did not discuss their sexuality. However, many of the participants did discuss their (current and former) relationships with men.

### **Recruitment**

Participants were recruited primarily through snowball or chain sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994), which consisted of an email sent to friends and colleagues (requesting that they forward the email to anyone who fit the criteria), and also to a Canadian feminist listserv. The email I sent was very simple and read:

My name is Tamy Superle and I am a doctoral candidate at Carleton University conducting research on women's positive and enjoyable experiences in public spaces.

I am looking for potential interview participants who:

- \* Do not identify as a mother
- \* Live in or near Ottawa, Ontario and who would be interested in speaking to me about their experiences in public spaces (about 60-

90minutes)

This research has received ethics approval from the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information about my research project, please feel free to contact me at [my email address].

Of my participants, two were friends-of-friends and two were colleagues whom I recruited directly, seven were recruited through a feminist listserv, seven were recruited via emails from my friends and acquaintances, and one participant received an email that had been forwarded through multiple people.

I was not interested in conducting research that focused on women's fearfulness, so I was deliberate in my framing of the project during recruitment as about positive experiences. Several factors led me to the conclusion that I needed to filter potential respondents to at least try to recruit women who were more open to going beyond negative experiences. These factors were: the overwhelming research done on women's fearfulness in public spaces; the stories that colleagues and friends told me about their own experiences once they found out about my project; my knowledge of the media representation of violence against women in public spaces; and the preliminary work I had done on official safety advice. I am confident that this was a necessary step to take because, as I will discuss in Chapter Eight, several of the participants expressed that they assumed we would be talking about fearfulness and negative experiences, despite the wording of the ad.

I started the interview process with a pilot phase in order to test my questions and methodological approach. During the pilot phase I conducted four interviews: two with fellow doctoral students, one with an acquaintance who fit my criteria, as

well as one with my supervisor (her responses were not included in my sample). This stage allowed me to test out the interview questions and methodological approach to ensure that they were sound. There were some practical suggestions and some fine-tuning of wording, but the overall interview matrix remained more or less unchanged from the beginning to the end. The first two interviews were slightly longer and included questions asking the respondents to define more concepts and terms at the beginning of the interview. These fell away before the third interview because they impeded the flow of the interview as the answers ended up being essentially repetitive. Other than the omission of a few questions and the refinement of wording to make some word meanings clearer, the interview schedule remained consistent.

## **The Interview Questions**

### *Formulation of the Questions*

To develop the interview questions I started with three overarching interests: The first was what the participants did on a daily basis in public spaces; the second was what sorts of messages they heard or knew about women in public spaces; and the third was how they negotiated these messages (if they knew them). From those three broad interests I formulated several themes which were then translated into specific interview questions. These themes are:

- a. How do women speak of their experiences, perceptions, activities, interactions and behaviours in public spaces?
- b. How are fearful discourses maintained and taken up (both in general and specific to individuals)?
- c. How does gender influence women's experiences?
- d. Do women cross the boundaries and borders of the 'fearful woman' and experience pleasure, fun, desire, and empowerment in public spaces? And how is that boundary crossing accomplished?
- e. How do women negotiate feelings of insecurity and the desire and need to be in public spaces?

- f. How do women define the right to be in public spaces and how important is that right?

This strategy allowed me to link my research questions with the interview questions that I would ask the participants. From these six broad themes I developed multiple specific questions that I believed would allow me to get answers to these broad thematic questions. This was a process that I adapted from Jennifer Mason's (2002) strategy of developing an interview matrix to ensure that the actual questions being asked of the participants are reflective of the larger themes of the project. This process was a lengthy one and involved refining the questions multiple times in order to ensure that they were clear and that they were appropriate for the research question<sup>25</sup>.

#### *Before the Interviews*

After making initial email contact I met each woman at a time and location of her preference. Most women I met at an urban coffee shop; I met some in their homes. I was concerned about the participants' feelings of being able to speak freely when in such a public place, but most of the participants were quite candid regardless of the location of the interview. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes each, with the average being around sixty minutes.

Several of the participants asked for further information from me before they agreed to an interview so I was able to give them some background and context of the study. I also began each interview by telling the women a bit about my research, perspective, and background. I highlighted that I was interested in hearing about all types of experiences, so I did not want them to censor any negative or positive ones

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix C for the research matrix.

that they may have, although I was especially interested in any positive experiences that they could relate to me. The participants were then able to ask any questions needed to gain clarification about any aspect of the project.

The questions were asked to each participant in more or less the same order. There was some flexibility in the structure of the interviews depending on the answers provided by each participant. On a few occasions some questions were omitted if an answer to a previous question made a subsequent question unnecessary. Follow up questions were asked as necessary.

Before I began every interview I asked the participants to read and sign a consent form that had been approved by the Ethics Committee at Carleton University. This procedure complies with the “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans”. Participants were also asked to fill out a brief demographic information sheet that asked their ages, hometown, current job, education, ethnicity, and general area of the city that they currently resided in as well as any other information that they thought might be relevant to their experiences in public spaces. This allowed women to self-identify their ethnicity as well as to be as specific or general as they wished about the other demographic information. This was both a time-saving technique and a privacy consideration, so those participants who were interviewed in a public setting would not have to answer personal demographic questions out loud. In many cases women provided more detailed demographic information during the course of the interview. The participants agreed to have their age, ethnicity, educational achievement, and area of residence used as part of the analysis.

### *Asking the Questions*

The interviews were divided into two main sections and a third concluding section. The first was regarding women's definitions of public and private spaces and their accounts of their perceptions, activities, interactions, and behaviours in what they defined as public (thematic number one). This section also addressed thematic numbers four and five if women expressed behaviours that could be considered 'rule-breaking'<sup>26</sup>. The second section involved questions around the messages and how women negotiated the safety and danger discourse (thematic numbers two, four, and five). The third section involved questions that address social justice, rights to the city, and perceptions of gender inequality (thematic number six). Questions about the influence of gender are asked throughout the interview (thematic number three). There is of course overlap and blurring of these themes into different sections.

### *Messages and safety advice*

The second portion of the interview focused on what the participants knew or 'heard'<sup>27</sup> about being a woman in public spaces. This section involved questions regarding general cultural knowledge about women's safety in public spaces, messages, warnings and tips that they knew about, where they came to know them from, and their friends' and families' reactions to their behaviours. I also asked the women to comment on the times that they followed the general safety advice, when they did not, and who they were more or less likely to listen to. This section also

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<sup>26</sup> 'Rule-breaking' is based on a common understanding of safety rules that are promoted and disseminated as important to follow for women's safety. What the safety rules are and rule-breaking behaviour is discussed at length in subsequent chapters.

<sup>27</sup> I use single quotation marks around 'heard' because I mean it in a broader and more colloquial sense of coming to know something in general, instead of a literal sense of auditory listening.

included questions relating to how women negotiated these messages, including what types of advice they chose to follow and when, if they chose to employ strategies to increase their feelings of comfort or safety in public spaces, and what types of strategies were used. These data will be discussed extensively in Chapter Seven.

### *Social Justice and Rights to Space*

The final questions of the interview were overarching questions about social justice issues of access to public space and the mobility of women in particular. These questions were used to evaluate the women's positions in regards to social justice issues and larger questions about gender inequality. While the interviews were semi-structured, I was most comfortable thinking about the process through Ann Oakley's (1981) ideas around conceiving the interviewer not as an objective data collector, but instead of as part of a process of knowledge sharing.

### **Coding and Data Analysis**

Data analysis began with the transcription of the interviews. The first six interviews were transcribed verbatim and the remaining interviews were selectively transcribed. Even in those that were selectively transcribed, most of the participants' answers were transcribed in their entirety and it was only the interview questions that were shortened. I was comfortable doing this because most of the questions were more or less worded the same in all of the interviews. I did transcribe any questions that included prompts from me, or where the responses referenced the question with a positive or negative response (i.e. if the participant responded first with "Yes" or "No", or if their answer referred in any way to the wording of the question). I conducted and transcribed all of the interviews myself.

I was reflexive in the coding process and allowed the themes, patterns, and points of interest to emerge from the data. Because women's vulnerability is such a pervasive discourse that would be impossible for me to be outside of, there were some themes that I was expecting to see, but I stayed open to unexpected findings in regards to these themes.

I used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program, for the coding process. I was able to organize and compare the transcripts in an efficient and systematic way using this software, and it was used as a tool to organize and manage data, which enabled me to see the emergent patterns more easily and clearly<sup>28</sup>. I read through each interview and attached codes to various segments of interviews. As I went through the transcripts, more patterns emerged and more codes were added. The first coding of the transcripts was done over approximately two months and, at times, I was transcribing and coding concurrently. Once all of the transcripts were completed and coded I went back to the first transcript and repeated the process. I read through each transcript at least three times to ensure that the codes were consistent and that all of the data was properly categorized.

Some of the codes were very broad, such as "public space: positive experience", which was present multiple times in individual interviews. Some were more specific responses to a certain question, such as "public space: definition". Some of the codes were attached to all mentions of certain things, for example "alcohol/drinking", no matter what the context. These codes types were also part of the larger thematic codes, such as "public space: activities".

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<sup>28</sup> As someone with a tendency to write notes on scraps of paper and then lose them, ATLAS.ti was essential to allowing me to keep all of my data and thoughts in one easily accessible place.

The codes were developed both from the emergent themes in the data as well as from the research questions I had developed and operationalized in the interview questions. An example of this process is that I coded all mentions of activities that people did in public spaces; this code corresponded to questions asking ‘What does a typical day look like for you?’, but was also applied to other mentions of activities that came out at various points in the interview. This code often corresponded with codes for positive, negative, or ambivalent experiences and feelings. There were times when I asked about how something made a participant feel, and there were situations where I interpreted events and feelings as positive, negative, or neutral given the context of the answer and discussion. These codes were for practical purposes so that I could identify and group experiences and feelings that were ‘more positive’ and those that were ‘more negative’. In many instances participants expressed ambivalence, ambiguity, and a combination of good and bad. These codes were used in conjunction with multiple other codes to create a nuanced and layered understanding of a variety of experiences. This is in line with Thomas’ general inductive approach: “the evaluator identifies and defines categories or themes. The upper-level or more general categories are likely to be derived from the evaluation aims. The lower-level or specific categories will be derived from multiple readings of the raw data” (2006: 241).

Throughout this process I used the memo function of ATLAS.ti to record comments that were attached to both specific interviews, memos about the general themes and patterns that I was developing, and memos that related to various relevant theoretical perspectives. I kept a record of similarities with other interviews and made

notes of the patterns that were beginning to emerge. This process occurred over quite a long period of time and was, at times, concurrent with my conducting other interviews. Working with the data while conducting interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions in subsequent interviews if the participant mentioned something that had come up in previous interviews. This process allowed me to ensure that I was representing the participant's stories as accurately as possible as I was developing themes.

Because I had a relatively small sample, I was able to spend a lot of time with all of the interview data. I read and reread all of the text in a very short time period so that the documents were always very fresh in my mind. As I read the data the themes took shape. I did find some of what I expected, but there was a great deal that was not what I thought I would find. In particular, I thought my participants would be more discursively bound by the model of fearful femininity that I found in the literature and in my own interpersonal interactions. However, as I will discuss in Chapters Seven and Eight, I did not find this to be the case.

I do not claim generalizability from this research and have followed from Corrine Glesne who wrote, "the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize to a population, but to create in-depth understanding to inform future research" (1999). I endeavour to bring the stories of these women into dialogue with the larger academic debates as an attempt to get a more nuanced account of this group of women's negotiation; with the dominant discourses of safety and danger, as well as the role that normative femininity plays in the acceptance and resistance to mobility, feelings, and accounts of the city in relation to fear of crime research and literature.

There are many models of data analysis to draw on and they all have strengths and weaknesses, but discourse analysis ultimately suits my purposes most completely. In particular Michelle M. Lazar's (2007) discussion of feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA) provided a useful theoretical and methodological starting point. Lazar writes that feminist CDA endeavours "to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (2007: 142). Given my interests of understanding how the safety and danger surrounding women's mobility come to be discursively constituted, so it follows that a discourse analysis is the best way of doing that. I orient myself towards discourses from the perspective that asserts that discourses do not simply represent the world, but help to construct and constitute it (Foucault 1980).

Discourse analysis does not rely on a standardized technique that is universally accepted; rather it is up to the researcher's analytical skill to make sense of the data (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Potter and Wetherell note this about the methodology of discourse analysis when they write:

Analysis of discourse is like riding a bicycle compared to conducting experiments or analysing survey data which resembles baking cakes from a recipe. There is no mechanical procedure for producing findings from an archive or transcript. There is no obvious parallel to the well-controlled experimental design and test of statistical significance (1987: 168).

The two overarching research questions guided reading of the data. I was interested in knowing the dominant discourses relating to women and public spaces so I looked for patterns in the advice given on police and university websites and in *Cosmopolitan*. I also examined the answers given by my participants in regards to

what they 'knew' about being a woman in public spaces. CDA allowed me to analyze how women's physical vulnerability are discursively produced and the power that these discourses have; in particular through the governance of women's mobility in public spaces. CDA also allows for an exploration of women's negotiation of these discourses. CDA was especially useful as I did not focus on the experiences of my participants, but rather how they understood and negotiated the shared meaning of safety, vulnerability, and danger.

In order to explore these meanings I looked at the coded transcripts and extracted those segments which corresponded to the two research questions. I looked at segments that had been coded with mentions or discussion of vulnerability, safety messages, 'rule-breaking' (which I later conceptualized as resistance), confidence, safety, media, and bodies. I then created charts with all of the participants' answers (including if they did not mention anything that was coded in that group). This allowed me to see the patterns of talk in relation to the various codes. For example, in relation to the segments coded as 'safety messages', I was able to see the dominant messages as known to my participants. CDA was especially useful in answering my second research question as I explored how my participants talked about issues of safety, vulnerability and gendered safety discourses.

As I had done a lot of the conceptual work in designing the interview matrix, I was able to pull out the answers to particular questions and compare the answers of all the participants. The process of in-depth interviewing, transcribing, and coding resulted in rich data that allowed me to make some unique contributions to the literature on women, safety, and resistance.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Official Safety Advice**

### **Introduction**

Crime prevention is a concept that is often used to imply that one does not wait for a crime to occur to act, but acts before a crime can be committed (O'Malley 2000a). Crime prevention is argued by many as an alternative to the traditional forms of crime control, such as disciplinary models of crime and punishment. Personal crime prevention advice is an umbrella category that contains advice for many types of situations; for example, there is advice oriented to home safety, safety while in driving, safety in open public spaces, and safety while travelling. This advice is often directed towards particular demographics, in particular the elderly, teens, parents and women; in the case of universities it is primarily directed towards students. Because it is contained on police and university websites, there is the implication that it is written and approved by experts<sup>29</sup> in safety. Fear of crime is the most significant predictor of enacting the safety strategies suggested in personal crime prevention advice (Silva and Wright 2009). The purpose of crime prevention tips is, on the surface, to promote precautionary and reasonable behaviour in public in order to alleviate fears and keep people safe. However, I argue crime prevention contributes to the discourses of female vulnerability and stranger danger, which maintain an expectation of unequal participation and unequal presence in public spaces between men and women.

This chapter explores the official crime prevention advice or tips which are produced by 'experts' and are provided in order to address perceived risks of victimization in public spaces. Police websites and university campus security websites are the primary sources of

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<sup>29</sup>The credentials of these authors are unknown and the effectiveness of this advice is unsubstantiated.

data, but I shall also explore emails and news reports which contain similar types of advice. I will trace the history of this type of personal safety advice, pull out the main themes contained in the advice found on the websites, briefly discuss the dissemination of this advice through email, and conclude with a discussion of the role safety advice plays in the governance of populations, in particular women.

### **Personal Crime Prevention and Safety Advice**

Crime prevention is a vast field that involves multiple perspectives, practices, and theories about the best way to prevent a variety of crimes. I will be focusing on one aspect of crime prevention, which is personal safety advice for being in public. This type of advice address individuals and, as I argue, women in particular. Much of the crime prevention advice meant to address women's safety is concerned with public spaces and strangers (Shaw and Andrew 2005). I am interested in crime prevention at the level of the individual; in other words, the advice given to individual people in the attempt to reduce the individuals' risk of becoming a victim of crimes. These tips also implicitly target particular demographics of women: those with homes, cars, jobs, and social support networks within similar class positions. This advice ignores and/or is incompatible with many of those who are positioned on the margins, such as sex workers, homeless women, and/or those who are suspicious or hostile towards the police.

The advice that I will discuss in this chapter is labelled in a variety of ways: crime prevention tips/advice, safety tips/advice, and personal safety/crime prevention. There are more specific subcategories of advice on many of the sites I explored, including advice concerning issues such as: sexual assault, date rape drugs, walking/running alone, and general safety on the streets, in bars, and while out alone.

It may be useful to introduce the concept of risk at this point. A full and detailed exploration of risk is beyond the scope of this project, but it does offer an analytical lens to critique safety advice as presented in this chapter. Risk is a term that is used in many ways; it can be applied in very precise ways to mean a statistically calculable model or predictive model (O'Malley 2000b), and it is often used in more imprecise ways that can imply notions of danger (Stanko 1997) or uncertainty (Beck 1992). I am using risk in a broader sense that corresponds more to Stanko and Beck than O'Malley.

Individuals in late modern societies are inundated with risks that they have to negotiate in everyday life (Tulloch and Lupton 2003; Beck 1992). Risks are historical and contextual; at different times and for different groups. Different groups are going to experience different risks depending on their social positioning. For white middle class women, risks of sexual violation (in particular by a strange man) are deeply entrenched in everyday life and practices. Safety advice offers these women a way of managing risk while at the same time reifying them. I will return to this discussion of risk at the end of this chapter.

Pat O'Malley and Steven Hutchinson write, "it is widely accepted that the rise of crime prevention is linked with a convergence of social forces associated with the 'risk society' and the ascendancy of neo-liberal governance from the 1970s forward" (2007: 373). O'Malley (1997) contends that while crime prevention strategies are not as new as is often claimed, it can be said that there is a resurgence and (re)popularization of crime prevention under a neo-liberal framework. What crime prevention consists of in its more modern form is, "a broad post-Keynesian model of rule which seeks to govern through 'empowering' individuals, rather than by social engineering" (O'Malley 1997: 257). This type of crime

prevention strategy operates to create subjects who view themselves as individuals and as responsible to look after their own needs and wellbeing, instead of relying on the state to take care of them—including their personal safety and security (Larner 2000). Thus under neo-liberalization, the focus of crime prevention shifts from the offender to the target (O'Malley 1992/2003). It becomes the responsibility of every individual to prevent crimes from happening to them. In terms of crime control, this strategy refers to the shift from the state being primarily responsible for preventing crime through the formal mechanisms of the criminal justice system to individuals and organizations taking responsibility for their own security to prevent becoming a victim (Larner 2000: 25; Garland 2001: 124-125). The result of this 'downloading' is to have multiple actors responsible for crime prevention (Garland 2001: 124).

This type of crime prevention advice also reflects the traditional (or positivist) conception of victimology, which is still influential in many arenas even while being widely criticized by critical scholars. This literature is based on the belief that lifestyle (meaning 'routine daily activities') is directly related to victimization (Walklate 2007). From this perspective the claim can be made that there is a direct link that can be drawn from a person's daily routine and their exposure to 'high-risk' situations where victimization occurs (Walklate 2007). In developing this theory, Hindelang et al. (1978) introduced several propositions in order to understand the patterns of criminal victimization. Among these are:

1. The amount of time spent in public spaces (especially at night) is linked to the probability of victimization.
2. The more time that someone spends with non-family members, the more probable is victimization.

As I will discuss, the stranger in public space is assumed to be the primary threat to the law-abiding person's safety and most of the advice is geared towards managing that type of risk.

The model of personal crime prevention that exists today seems to be very similar to that which existed twenty years ago, at least in content. The biggest change has been in the mode of distribution as more of these advice pamphlets or tip sheets exist online. The topics have expanded as well to correspond with the changing nature of crime—there are now crime prevention tips regarding identity theft, electronic security, date rape drugs, and other modern criminal problems. But, the prescriptive nature of the advice, the neo-liberal responsabilization of the citizen to prevent crime, and the superficial nature of the advice are all consistent.

Safety advice is designed to ‘help’ individuals protect themselves from a variety of crimes. Official safety advice or personal crime prevention tips are communicated through pamphlets and brochures that are available via police or community agencies, both in hardcopy and as digital content. The aim of these types of advice is to encourage people to adopt safekeeping behaviours in order to prevent or minimize the risk of criminal victimization. The Winnipeg Police Service’s Crime Prevention Handbook makes this clear with this statement: “to protect yourself against crime is to incorporate certain habits into your daily routine that make you and your family less vulnerable – to adopt a ‘security conscious’ lifestyle” (46). This sentiment is echoed by The Barrie Police Service, who in the conclusion of their Personal Safety section writes, “using the common sense rules mentioned here will cut down your chances of becoming a victim”. Many of the other police services that I reviewed have a similar message: these tips are meant to guide and inform people who will then follow the advice to live a safer life.

The direct impact of this safety advice is not known. In other words, I do not know how many people actually read this advice and follow it because it is on the police website.

And I do not believe that establishing the direct impact of these websites is of primary importance. Instead, as I will discuss in the remaining chapters, these messages are ubiquitous. These sites are only one of many sources of the same information and the same discourses. What these sites do represent is official advice given by agencies that are responsible for the safety and security of those living and working in the major centres and universities in Canada. They are also a concrete source for very common and widespread messages about safety and danger that are reproduced at multiple other sites and are widely known by my participants.

Before I address the specifics of the historical and contemporary safety advice, it is important to establish that this advice is gendered; that is, it is directed specifically at women, as women are considered, by public safety ‘experts’ to be a high risk group who need to take special precautions to stay safe. Thus, in the next section, I will begin with a discussion of the gendered nature of these warnings, then follow with the history of safety advice, and continue with the contemporary advice as present on Police and University Safety Department websites.

### *The Gendered Nature of Safety Warnings*

This advice is not neutral; it is complicit in the construction of vulnerable bodies and dangerous spaces. While not explicitly stated, the advice is often gendered, as I will discuss throughout this chapter. The personal safety advice in particular is targeted at women—more specifically at women in the middle to upper class positions.<sup>30</sup> Historically and currently there is a dedicated and specific literature that is directed at women and designed to ‘aid’ them in managing or reducing their fear (Lee 2001: 481), and to help them avoid victimization by strange men. The safety advice addressed to women is based on a particular

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<sup>30</sup>I will more fully address the racist and classist nature of safety advice in the following section.

notion of women's bodies and the special threats they face as women. Subtly and explicitly these safety tips assume a female body that is susceptible to stronger male bodies and by and large prescribe restrictive behaviour in the name of safekeeping (Campbell 2005).

Police services and government agencies at one time had explicitly gendered safety publications as exemplified by the Solicitor General of Canada's crime prevention booklet, *Women Alone* (1990). By 2012, fewer police services have tips directed specifically towards women. Among the police services I investigated, only the Ottawa Police Service has an entire personal safety page explicitly directed towards women; however many other services have sheets for sexual assault and/or sections of general personal crime prevention tips explicitly addressed at women. Many other services have gender-neutral personal safety tips. The question that this inspires is: has crime prevention been democratized so that men are equally enlisted to enact safekeeping strategies? On the surface this appears that this might be the case; however, as I argue in the next few paragraphs, I do not believe that the substance or the intended audience has changed despite the lack of gender specificity in the tips sheet titles.

The Ottawa Police Service's brochure entitled *Crime Prevention for Women* declares that it 'outlines some of the techniques successfully used by women to reduce opportunities for criminals'. These tips, which are explicitly directed at women, are practically identical to the more gender-neutral personal safety tip sheets. When comparing the recent non-gendered advice to *Women Alone* it is apparent that advice to women in 1990 is practically identical to the 'gender-neutral' personal safety advice being offered today. In fact, much of the contemporary advice is so similar that it could have been taken verbatim from the 1990 report and it is questionable if this advice (as reproduced in DeKeseredy et al.'s 1992) has

changed at all in the intervening decades. Elizabeth Stanko (1998), in her study on safety warnings to women, illustrates a general message that is also extremely similar to the website tips I looked at.

When there are tips for men, they are addressed explicitly. For example, from Memorial University's personal 'on the street' safety tip sheet: "A good suggestion for men is to carry a second wallet containing a few dollar bills and old expired credit cards, which are normally destroyed or discarded" (n.d.). The sheet also contains two references to purses, yet does not specify that it is referring to women. The explicit reference to men is conspicuous and implies that the rest of the tips are not their concern. Given these circumstances I have concluded the advice offered on the websites is still implicitly advice for women, despite the change to more gender-neutral language. The advice for avoiding sexual assault, however, is explicitly directed towards women.

Moreover, these warnings are likely to be interpreted as tips *for* women, because as Walklate (1997) argues, 'risk' is gendered. Women and men are not socialized towards 'risks' in the same way. It is difficult to imagine that men as a group would be advised to sit near a bus driver or to have someone meet them to walk home from a bus stop. These are traditionally pieces of advice given to women as a group considered to be vulnerable<sup>31</sup> (Gardner 1995; Egger 1997; Stanko 1992; 1998). These tips also enlist men as protectors—men meet women at bus stops to walk them home, not the other way around. According to Stanko (1992, 2000), women are often constructed as a vulnerable population in need of help. As she writes, "we women have been accorded a special place in crime prevention and are often considered the appropriate audience for helpful hints in avoiding crime" (1992:

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<sup>31</sup> It is possible to imagine that men who are members of marginalized groups might be constructed in similar ways as women in relation to vulnerability, but I did not encounter any advice sheets aimed at men.

488). This is not to say that there are no tips that are applicable to men, but that the intended target for this advice is generally women<sup>32</sup>.

There are also some tip sheets that are directed towards preventing sexual assault and drink spiking which are explicitly directed towards women. In addition, the Winnipeg Police's "comprehensive compilation of crime prevention information" booklet has a section on sexual assault that includes tips to "to reduce the risk of sexual assault" and these tips are very similar to the tips given in the section (in the same publication) on 'Personal Safety on the Street' (n.d.: 53-54). This illustrates that the tips that are explicitly directed at women are very similar to the generic personal safety tips. It also indicates that the overarching concern in these tips is that of sexual assault and/or the implicit belief that all crimes against women may escalate to sexual assault.

Given these characteristics I will be working from the premise that the majority of the personal crime prevention tips are directed first and foremost at women and that even if these warnings are not explicitly addressed to women they are likely received as gendered by those reading them.

### *The Classist and Racist Nature of Safety Warnings*

'Women' are often constructed by police and other agencies as well as in the media as though all women have more or less the same orientation to fear, crime, and safety. Implicitly the safety advice is directed towards women who follow the gender and social norms of the 'good' citizen and who enact normative femininity—that is, femininity that embodies vulnerability as an inherent characteristic. Also, the media often represents white middle class women as victims of violence and ignores those who do not fit into that

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<sup>32</sup>There are tips on some websites addressed to those who are elderly; in such an instance men may be included in the intended audience.

category. When news coverage does report on violence against further marginalized women, they are often blamed for their victimization (Taylor 2009; Meyers 1997).

Safety advice essentializes women's bodies; all women are physically vulnerable and rapeable and therefore the potential targets for victimization. It also ignores differences between the social positioning of women. Implicitly the 'woman' who is addressed by safety advice is white (Hall 2004:13). This advice is unable to address those women who are statistically at higher risk of violence, thus "reinvest[ing] white and middle-class women with a sense of preciousness, while ignoring the particular concerns of working-class women" (Hall 2004:4). For example, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a woman who works nights (or who is homeless) to avoid being out alone at night, yet by presenting a picture of the 'universal' woman who is at risk by virtue of her biology the expectation is that ALL women need to enact safekeeping behaviour.

This advice is often regarded as 'common sense'; however, the 'common sense-ness' of the advice obscures the gendered, classist, and racist ideologies present within it (Hall 2004). Rachel Hall writes about rape prevention advice and notes that "within the universe of rape management, performances of diligent fearfulness grant some women access to good citizenship and all the rewards (psychic and social) that ensue" (2004: 10). She argues that through rape prevention as it currently exists, fearfulness is advocated as part of 'responsible citizenship'. Fearfulness is also part of normative or respectable femininity. Similar to Hall, Campbell (2005) argues that rape prevention advice maintains the threat of rape as omnipresent, which "encourages [women] to engage in multiple 'safe-keeping' acts which have come to be a performative condition of normative femininity" (2005: 119). Normative femininity is most available to those women who are white, middle class, and heterosexual.

According to Madriz, “white women fit more closely the gendered, racist, and classist concept of ‘femininity’” (1997b: 350). As such they are taught that they should not physically fight, it is not ‘lady-like’. Fighting is something that ‘bad girls’ do; ‘bad’ here is code for poor and/or racialized. Feminine women, those who obey the rules of vulnerable femininity, do not know how to fight and defend themselves, so they should take precautions. Whereas ‘bad’ women do not follow the rules of normative femininity and so they “have to fight to protect themselves” (Madriz 1997b: 350).

The performance of the type of fearfulness required by safety advice is only possible for certain women in a society that denies some groups the resources necessary to follow the tips—in particular those who are homeless, sex workers, racially marginalized, and/or poor. In her discussion of rape prevention advice, Hall writes: “The quintessentially vulnerable woman at the heart of the conservative dream of ‘women’s safety’, as well as older paternalistic models of protectionism, is specifically white and middle class” (2004: 5-6). Additionally, people in marginalized groups are viewed as ‘bad’ or ‘non-ideal’ victims who are not able to mobilize the same level of sympathy or credibility compared to those who are closer to the ideal victim. Not only do middle class women most likely have the financial means to act on the safety advice (for instance, have the disposable income to take a cab when feeling unsafe), they are also closer to the ideal victim and can expect a positive response for those issuing the advice if they do interact. For example, Kern (2005) reports that the white women in her study associated their feelings of confidence to the belief that they would be taken seriously by authority figures in the event of a problem based on their age, appearance, and professional status. She goes on to write that this confidence “rests on the notion that there are some identities that will not be taken seriously” (Kern 2005: 366).

Many of the police tips encourage people to contact the police agency immediately if they feel at risk or if they have been victimized. The domestic violence advice sheets often include sections of 'what the police will do' when contacted by an abused woman. However, there are many populations who are afraid of the police and would not expect to receive aid. Sex workers and the homeless may have very hostile relationships with police and/or be systematically ignored and mistreated by those officers who they are instructed to call 'as soon as a crime happens' (Bruckert and Chabot 2010).

These tips do not address the specifics of the most vulnerable populations or most dangerous spaces. For example, many of these tips include the suggestion to carry a cell phone at all times. This assumes that one can obtain and afford a cell phone, which many of those living in poverty cannot. Much of the advice is aimed at getting women through public space safely to their home or other destination. Within that framework, the safety concerns of homeless women are completely incompatible. Safety initiatives that are meant to address concerns of the housed often come at the expense of those without houses. For instance, public space video surveillance cameras (CCTV) often displace those living in the surveilled public spaces (Radley, Hodgetts, and Cullen 2006: 450).

In some cases the police websites actively perpetuate classist stereotypes. For example, on a page for 'International Student Safety', the Vancouver Police Services educate visitors that: "Street people who ask you for money are sometimes called 'panhandlers'. Many of them suffer from drug and alcohol addictions. If you give them money you will be encouraging their addictions...Please ignore panhandlers" (n.d.). When the police use an approach that dismisses people such as panhandlers and the homeless as addicts and

recommends ignoring their requests for aid, they cannot possibly be able to adequately and sophisticatedly meet the needs of those on the margins.

Those who are further marginalized are often viewed as the criminal or the person who is fear provoking. Fear of crime, which is connected to the enactment of safekeeping behaviour (women feel the need to take precautions because they are fearful), also has racial and class components. When fear of crime emerged as a social problem apart from the problem of crime in the 1960s<sup>33</sup>, there was a racial context of these early results. Walklate writes that in these early results fear of crime “stood for the fear of black crime” (1998: 404). In the analysis of the first victimization surveys (the genesis of all fear of crime research), there was explicit acknowledgement that structural inequalities, poverty, and racial exclusion needed to be understood in order to find a way of addressing fear of crime (Stanko 2000: 14). Over time however, the initial social context of ‘racial frustration’ was forgotten and the discussions about the structural inequalities that, as Stanko writes, “underpin people’s day-to-day existence as well as contributing to much to people’s fear of crime” (2000: 13) came to be ignored or silenced. But that did not erase those underlying conditions of inequality and privilege, nor resolve the connection between fear of crime and racial and class inequalities.

Hall (2004: 4) writes that the rape prevention advice relies on and reifies rape-myths regarding race and class. She details the history of racism and rape in the United States, in which white women have been positioned as ‘uniquely vulnerable’ and in need of protection from Black male rapists. The historical construction of the ‘Black rapist’ continues to operate today. Madriz (1997b) found that, regardless of their racial background, women

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<sup>33</sup>All of the countries that employed the victimization surveys came to recognize fear of crime as separate from statistical threats of criminal victimization and separate from perpetrated crimes.

reported that their images of criminals were highly racialized. Madriz (1997b) also found that in general the image of the criminal was that of a man who was a minority, poor, on welfare, and/or an immigrant. In safety advice, women are encouraged to be aware and vigilant and to trust their instincts and flee if feeling uncomfortable; but without acknowledging the racist and classist construction of the criminal this advice has the potential to contribute to discriminatory behaviours. To sum, Hall writes:

Rape prevention...encourage[s] (white) women to be suspicious of men's appearances even as it admits that appearances sometimes lie. It is this paradoxical relationship between seeing and knowing that lends rape prevention its racist edge, rekindling older fears of men of color as "suspicious persons" harbouring dubious intent. At its worst, rape prevention leads to the everyday mistreatment of men of color as menacing, intimidating, threatening, and scary (2004: 13)

#### *History of safety advice*

There have always been attempts to control movement through public space and there are rules that govern interaction in public spaces, just as there are rules that govern interaction in all other realms (Lofland 1998: 27). These rules are not neutral; those with power have been the ones who have been able to enforce their norms of behaviour on the rest of the citizenry (Domash 1998). Traditionally, it has been white men who have had this 'power' to dictate the actions of others in public space; this is why women traditionally have had less access and less mobility in public spaces (Gardner 1995; Bondi 1998; Domash and Seager 2001). Domash (1998) asserts that the codes that govern behaviours and actions in public are different for different groups<sup>34</sup>. As Green and Singleton write, "space...is gendered, sexualized, classed and racialized; and ease of access and movement through spaces for different groups is subject to constant negotiation and contestation, and is embedded in relations of power" (2006: 859).

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<sup>34</sup> Women are not all governed by the same code however. Ethnicity, sexuality, age, dis/ability etc. all have impacts on the expectations for women in public.

Historically, it was etiquette rules that governed women's behaviour. Gardner (1995) traces the rules of etiquette from the 1860s through to the mid-1990s. She claims that these etiquette rules for women require that they "demonstrate their gender in public places in ways that have connotations...of frailty, incompetence, and subordination" (1995: 18). Women have long been expected to manage their reputations in public spaces by enacting 'appropriate' behaviours (Gardner 1995). For example, social expectation required that respectable middle class women be absent from the street in nineteenth-century cities or risk being perceived as being responsible for any sexual victimization that may befall them (Lofland 1998).

The spirit of these etiquette rules still dictates the norms of behaviour in public spaces. Gardner argues that these traditional etiquette norms are still widely known to women, even if women believe in more egalitarian practices (1995: 19). Gardner (1995: 19) traces four elements of etiquette 'rules' that appear in the forms of folk wisdom and advice manuals dating back as far as 1860, and continues through to current crime prevention advice. The first is that women should not be in public places at all in certain circumstances; the second is women should behave in 'distinctive' ways when they are in public (especially if they are on a date with a man)—that is to say, they should avoid behaving in ways that would be perceived as masculine; the third is women should not be alone; and fourth, women should behave as 'unremarkably as possible', so as to not draw unwanted attention to themselves. Etiquette manuals may be out of style<sup>35</sup>, but these rules and norms still permeate our consciousness. Rules of etiquette do not have to be adopted as

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<sup>35</sup> Etiquette books that proscribe traditional gendered behaviour are still being written and published, although not only under the category of etiquette books. For example, *The Rules* (Fein and Schneider 1996) is basically a modern etiquette book.

such, but “such gender expectations...are still part of what women (and men) know is available as acceptable behaviour” (Gardner 1995: 19).

While the formalized rules that women had to follow in the late 1800s have fallen away as women entered the workforce, politics, and business and thus were in public spaces alone and with strange men much more often, the sentiment behind etiquette rules has not entirely disappeared. Instead it has morphed into the contemporary personal safety warnings which still serve to encourage women to place limits on their activities and mobility. So if we compare etiquette advice to official safety advice we can see many of the same rules and sentiments remain. Whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the lack of a proper escort would result in a stigma for an unaccompanied woman, the Women’s Movement and changing social norms led to the falling away of the social stigma of the unaccompanied woman. But modern safety advice still warns women that they should not travel alone. The social stigma for the unaccompanied women has shifted to concerns about being an ‘easy target’ for criminal victimization and while she may not be stigmatized, the woman alone does risk judgement for her perceived disregard for her safety. Possible judgement is contextual; women traveling alone in the middle of the day are likely not going to be judged as taking any sort of risk (even they are is victimized), but traveling alone after dark in the same neighbourhood may be judged as unsafe. Given this, I suggest that contemporary safety advice functions in much the same way in terms of governing women’s mobility in public spaces, and women still may receive blame for the ills that befalls them if they do not follow the ‘rules’. I will now turn to the specifics of the contemporary advice and outline the main themes present in that literature.

### *Safety Advice: Police*

In total I surveyed twenty-five police services and eighteen (seventy-two percent) of those services had some form of crime prevention advice. Every police service had a website, but they were not equally comprehensive. On each website I initially looked for tabs or links to sections on personal safety, safety tips, crime prevention, or some reference to safety and the individual. If the site did not contain those sections I looked for sections about community, publications, facts (or FAQs), services, or any other subject that seemed remotely relevant. If I still did not find any tips I used the search function to search the sites. I also looked at any reference to domestic violence and sexual assault. Of the websites that did not contain personal safety tips, some of them did not contain any sort of safety or crime prevention tips, and some contained other types of tips (for example, home safety, identity theft).

I reviewed any site that referred to personal safety tips or safety for women in particular, including tips to avoid sexual assault. I also reviewed any site that contained reference to personal safety, domestic violence, safety in the home, safety in a vehicle, and also sites that that addressed day-to-day safety concerns. These are not the only types of tips or advice sheets; other types exist for issues such as fraud, crime stoppers property protection, automobile theft, identity theft, and internet safety for example, but I did not include tips that did not involve the protection of the physical self.

There is a great deal of consistency in the advice given across the police services that had personal safety advice on their websites. These tips are present in slightly different wording (and in some cases two or more police services have the exact same wording) but in general the advice consists of suggestions to:

- Plan and know a safe route to take
- Avoid being out alone
- Avoid short cuts through parks, alleys, vacant lots, or any areas without lighting
- Avoid dark places
- Avoid deserted, isolated, and dark bus stops
- Do not carry a purse
- Carry a personal alarm
- Be aware and alert and walk with confidence
- Do not talk to strangers, stay a 'safe' distance away from strangers, and be wary of approaching strangers
- Do not wear restrictive clothing or shoes
- Look tough and walk with a purpose
- If attacked or confronted, make a scene, and yell and scream

This advice is oriented towards taking individual action to ensure safety and it also contains implicit notions about danger and vulnerability, which are found throughout the messages that women receive about being 'out in the world'. As I mention above, there is some advice that is implicitly and explicitly directed towards risk at night (for example, the common advice to travel on well-lit streets); it is not explicit in most advice. This is relevant because, while most of my respondents indicate that they only would feel it necessary to enact these strategies at night, the official advice often does not differentiate between day and night, which gives the impression that crime is possible at anytime, anywhere (something that I will discuss shortly).

It should be noted that the origin of this advice is not evident and it is not clear as to the credentials of those writing the tips (or even who is writing them). Their appearance on police websites implies that they were compiled by safety experts, but it is not possible (at least not within the scope of this project) to trace the original individual authors, as the tip sheets are mostly not credited. In addition, the date that the information is gathered is unknown, but the similarity to older advice would indicate that they have not been substantially revamped since at least the late 1980s to early 1990s.

### *Safety Advice: Universities*

In addition to police websites, I also reviewed university safety/security websites. I chose to look at universities as sites of data because my participants all attended university and university safety sources add an additional layer to the data. I was acutely aware of danger and safety when I was in university. There was a communal safeguarding of the women on campus, from both my female and male friends, as most of my peers and I were developing our sense of boundaries and I was acutely aware of my vulnerability as a woman. This was likely a result of being on my own for the first time, but I also remember being told regularly that I need to be concerned about my safety.

The university advice was more directed towards the particular risks faced on campus, including office safety, laptop security, bike theft, date rape drugs, working alone, and sexual assault, as well as general personal safety tips. Also, the university websites tended to be a little more paternalistic in tone. For example, the University of Western Ontario suggests: “Communicate with your family and roommates. If you are leaving, let them know your plans and expected time of return. A phone call saying you will be late will prevent unnecessary worrying. People care about you – be considerate” (n.d.). This likely reflects the assumption that students will be the primary audience for this information and young people are often talked down to.

As with the police website, authorship and date cannot be determined. For example, The University of Western Ontario makes reference to carrying dollar bills (the Canadian dollar coin replaced the dollar bill in 1987) and uses the term VD (rather than the more current STD or STI) (n.d.). There are mentions of cell phones, so updates have been made,

but overall the tone, content, and wording has been consistent throughout the history of police crime prevention tips.

Overall, much of the personal safety advice is the same as that offered by the police. Given that the themes of the police and university advice are very similar, I analyzed the two sources together and noted when they diverge.

### **Safety Recommendations**

The safety recommendations (and recommend behaviours) fall into three main categories: (i) avoidance, (ii) self-precautionary behaviours, and (iii) awareness. These are not mutually exclusive and much of the advice contains aspects of all three categories, but for analytical clarity I have divided the advice into distinct types. I developed these categories partially from Luciana C. Silva and David W. Wright's article "Safety Rituals: How Women Cope with the Fear of Sexual Violence" (2009) and partially from my own reading of the data. Silva and Wright identify two types of strategies that women undertake in response to fear of sexual assault: avoidance and precautionary behaviours. These two categories were evident in the official safety advice. The use of the term 'avoid' is common and the suggestions that fit this category encourage the limitation of behaviour in the name of safety (Silva and Wright 2009, Riger and Gordon 1981).

The second type is 'self-precautionary behaviours', which are meant to increase safety (Silva and Wright 2009, Riger and Gordon 1981). These types of behaviours encourage 'common sense' behaviour including carrying an alarm and ensuring that car keys are in your hand before getting to the car.

The third type of advice falls into the category that I label 'awareness'. This is a very common type of advice that encourages vigilance, attentiveness, planning, and attitude.

Being aware was mentioned in every tip sheet, and of the three categories it may be the most problematic, for reasons I will discuss shortly.

### *Avoidance*

In order to stay safe people are advised to avoid doing certain things and being with (or around) certain people. Many of the tips that I classify as 'avoidance' literally used the word 'avoid' or 'avoidance'. One of the most common forms of advice is to avoid being alone in public spaces. Avoidance techniques require women to limit their activities and participation in public life (Haskell and Randall 1998). For example, The Winnipeg Police Service crime prevention booklet advises, "a lone person is the best target for a criminal. Travel in pairs or with a group whenever you can" (n.d.: 44). The OPP cautions, "avoid being alone if you can" (n.d.: 1). The Toronto Police suggest, "When possible, walk with a friend—try to avoid walking alone" (n.d.). The university safety offices also advise avoidance. On their 'Street Safety' page, Simon Fraser University suggests, "Don't jog alone late at night, or walk on trails alone" (n.d.). Brock University advises, "Use a buddy system when going out and agree to watch out for each other" (n.d.). The Special Constables at Wilfrid Laurier: Brantford suggests, "We are never too old to walk with someone, especially after dark" (n.d.). The notion of 'avoiding' being alone is common to all police and university safety advice. While being alone at nighttime is often explicitly mentioned, many of the warnings are not temporally specific. I mention Wilfrid Laurier to draw attention to their use of the word 'especially' when referring to night. This implies that walking with a friend is always the recommended option, and is just a more acute need at night.

The tips also suggest avoiding certain areas. People are advised to “avoid wooded areas at night, and stay to well-lit areas” (Vancouver Police: n.d.); “Do not walk in dark parking lots, dark alleys, dark lanes, dark trails, or any other dark areas. A well-lit path in a well-populated area is your safest route to any destination, even if it takes longer” (Edmonton Police Service: n.d.); and “avoid isolated areas, alleys, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and construction sites” (Waterloo Regional Police Service: n.d.). Transit stops are also flagged as risky, especially isolated ones at night. The Halton Regional Police advise that “when taking public transit alone, avoid waiting or getting off at isolated stations/stops. Arrange for a family member or friend to escort you to and from the station” (n.d.). And Hamilton Police offer the blanket statement that “Avoidance is better than resistance” (n.d.). The University of Calgary proposes, “Avoid taking short cuts through unfamiliar locations or areas with limited access” (n.d.). The Memorial University St. John’s Campus Enforcement and Patrol office suggests that people: “Plan your route and avoid shortcuts through dark, untraveled areas. Take the most direct, frequently travelled route” (n.d.). Wilfrid Laurier University’s safety tips include the suggestion that, “avoidance is a key component to your own safety. Refrain from going to establishments that draw people that you do not want to be involved with or where it is known that drugs and violence are a regular occurrence” (n.d.).

This type of avoidance advice is often combined with the suggestion to plan a route in advance (in order to ensure one can avoid the dangerous areas). Halifax Regional Police suggests to “Plan your route and avoid short cuts through parks, vacant lots or unlit areas” (n.d.). Regina Police Service offers more detailed advice: “Plan the safest route to your destination prior to leaving; stay on busier, well-lit streets and stay on the centre of the

sidewalk; avoid dark or concealed areas and structures; Cross the road if necessary; Walk facing traffic to prevent being approached from behind. Have a plan of where you need to go and how to get there—and stick to it” (n.d.).

This also applies to university websites. On their Student Safety page, the University of Victoria suggests, “Plan your route and avoid shortcuts through dark, untraveled areas. Take the most direct, frequently travelled route” (n.d.).

All of this avoidance—avoid walking alone at night, avoid isolated bus stops, avoid dark alleys and paths, avoid deserted places, avoid walking on the same side of the street as parked cars—takes a toll on women financially, mentally, and emotionally. If you are to avoid walking alone and avoid isolated bus stops, then you need to take a taxi. If you are to avoid deserted streets and areas, then you need to always be planning ahead. And in some cases the route one must take may be longer and inconvenient, but should still be taken in the name of safety. For example, The Ottawa Police Services recommend that “if necessary take the long way around if it is the safest” (2012, April 27).

Reflected in these tips is the message that public spaces are dangerous and caution needs to be exercised while traversing them. It is also implicit that public spaces are being ‘passed through’; reinforcing the notion that safety lays in private spaces. This entrenches the public/private split in which private spaces and known men are safe and it is in public that women must safeguard their bodies and sexual integrity from strange men (Haskell and Randall 1998).

The suggestions of avoidance while being alone reinforce the expectation of dependence; women are not self-sufficient or capable of protecting themselves. The male chaperone and protector is long established in safety and etiquette advice (it is also found in

*Cosmopolitan*, as discussed next chapter). The reliance on known men for protection again reinforces that known men can and should be trusted while strange men pose a threat. This ignores women's experience of domestic and dating violence, which has been shown time and again to be the dominant threat to women's safety. Most of these safety tips do not specify gender of companions, instead mentioning friends or buddies. This reinforces the notion of dependence, vulnerability, and the inability of women to protect themselves (Campbell 2005).

Being able to practice avoidance is an aspect of privilege. First, having a job that operates during daylight hours gives one the option of not being out at night. Being able to afford cabs if necessary is a financial cost not bearable by all. And having a social network of people to call on for companionship may also speak to having time, a peer group with time to spend together, and the ability to coordinate companionship. This advice is likely incompatible with sex workers, especially those who work at the street level, as their job requires that they spend time alone with strange men.

#### *Self-Precautionary Behaviours*

These next types of suggestions involve techniques or actions for enacting self-protective behaviour. These are likely employed by women on a more regular basis (Silva and Wright 2009). They differ from avoidance and awareness as they are concrete, but usually minor, actions. As opposed to the more abstract 'awareness', they involve material suggestions, such as "Have your house keys or car keys ready in your hand" and "Continue to monitor your surroundings" (Toronto Police Service: n.d.). Durham Regional Police advise, "keep a charged cell phone with you, have one piece of ID with you and an emergency contact number" and "carry a flashlight and a personal safety alarm when

walking alone or at night” (n.d.). Calgary Police Service and Winnipeg Police Service also suggest carrying a personal alarm. York Regional Police suggest not wearing headsets or any device that could compromise hearing.

Other advice consists of suggestions to park in a well-lit area or park near the door, not to carry valuables especially in plain sight, and in the case of the Toronto Police, to “Avoid overburdening yourself with parcels. Carry your purse close to you but do not wrap it around your neck, shoulder or hand” (n.d.). The reference to purses is another indication that these tips are aimed primarily at women and it could be argued that parcels are also in reference to women, as they are the gender more connected with shopping. There are several other references to purses throughout the police service, both in terms of protecting purses from theft and also cautioning against ‘digging through a purse’ and being distracted or not having keys ready. Some of the university websites suggest personal alarms or emergency whistles. The University of New Brunswick asks, “If you know you will be returning late at night, consider what you will be wearing: Can you run quickly?” (n.d.). This tip implicitly suggests that women should wear clothing that facilitates fleeing from an attacker.

Another form of this type of suggestion involves ‘checking in’. For example, Barrie Police suggests, “whenever you can, call ahead and let someone know when you expect to arrive” (n.d.) and Durham recommends, “make sure you have a scheduled time to call a family or friend to know your whereabouts” (n.d.). This advice is given especially in relation to being out alone. The O.P.P.’s website advises, “get a friend to accompany you. If they can’t, let them know the route you’re taking. Call when you arrive” (n.d.). Wilfrid Laurier University: Brantford offers this tip:

If you go out anywhere, tell someone. Let them know where you are going, who you are going with and when you are expected back. If you are going to be away longer

than expected, call the person you advised and let them know there was a change in plans. That way, if something does happen, the police have a starting point as far as people, times and places are concerned in an attempt to locate you. Every second may count! (n.d.).

Much like avoidance advice, 'checking in' expects and encourages that there be restrictions and limitations taken in public space mobility. And while there is nothing inherently wrong with 'checking in' with a loved one when arriving somewhere safely, the expectation that this be done as a routine matter of course gives the impression that every trip through one place to another is potentially dangerous and that women travelling through that space are always at risk, especially if they are alone. Expecting one to make and keep to a schedule (for calling or arriving) is restrictive and paternalistic. In addition it limits options and autonomy and discourages free use of space and one's own time.

The other major suggestions in this category involve body posture and attitude. The Edmonton Police Service advises: "Keep your head up and look confident. Posture can make all the difference in how a potential attacker perceives you. If you are looking down, seem distracted or appear afraid you are [a] more likely target" (n.d.). Toronto Police Service offers a common suggestion to "Walk with purpose. Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times" (n.d.). The Ottawa Police Service adds the suggestion to "walk with confidence and purpose" (n.d.). This type of strategy is mentioned often by the women in my study. What is noteworthy about this type of advice is that there is a need for it to be given. As I note throughout this dissertation, vulnerability is a hallmark of middle class (white) femininity, thus walking with confidence is likely not something that is part of everyday bodily comportment. This reinforces the claim that normative femininity is dangerous to women as it creates 'easy targets' for victimization (De Welde 2003a).

Physical resistance is rarely advocated by the official sources. There are two exceptions; Calgary Police Service brochure includes the tip “Sometimes physical resistance may be effective. Immediate and forceful resistance may throw the attacker off-guard and allow you time to escape” (n.d.), while The Durham Police offer the slightly vague suggestion, “Do whatever you need to do to defend yourself if you are physically attacked” (n.d.). The Toronto Police had the only website to suggest taking a self-defence course (n.d.). As well, some Police Services explicitly suggest not taking physical action. For example the York Regional Police say, “If you are a victim of crime, don’t fight back” (n.d.: 1). Hamilton does not mention fighting back in the text, but does start their tip sheet with, “Personal safety does not have to begin with a self-defence course”, which could be read as a suggestion that self-defence courses are not necessary or useful (n.d.: 1). The rest of the police websites are silent on the issue of using physical resistance.

The university websites have more references to self-defence training, likely because several of them run a R.A.D. (Rape Aggression Defense) Systems programme. The R.A.D. System is a self-defence course that is offered to female students. It involves an educational component in which women are told about the risks they face as well as a physical training component which culminates with a “simulated assault” by a padded attacker.

The third category of recommendations is awareness, which is the most common piece of advice given. Awareness is present in almost all of the advice given by the police agencies and university safety offices.

#### *Awareness*

There are two aspects of awareness advice. The first is being aware of one’s potential victimization and the second is being aware of the surroundings when out in public

space. The first type is less common, but there are examples where the reader is encouraged to acknowledge their victimization in order to stay safe.

The Winnipeg Police state, “just by being aware that you are a potential victim of a personal crime is the first step toward prevention” (n.d.: 44). The Barrie Police Service website advises that one should “know that a danger could exist and never forget it” and “Admit to yourself that you could become a victim” (n.d.). This type of advice is not found on the university websites and suggests a permanent expectation of victimization. Vulnerability is implied if one is always potentially in danger.

The more common piece of awareness advice concerns being alert when in public space. The Toronto police suggest that individuals “Walk with a purpose. Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times” (n.d.), while the Edmonton’s police website states, “be aware of your surroundings—know who’s around you and what’s going on. Walk with confidence and purpose” (n.d.). This is echoed on all the sites, with many of them adding ‘at all times’. The Vancouver Police include this advice: “approach shadowy doorways, shrubbery, or anything that someone could hide behind with extra caution” (n.d.), which on a city street would likely be constantly. Awareness also cuts across the other two categories. To avoid areas involves awareness while travelling through public places in order to evaluate what is safe and what is not. Many of the safekeeping techniques are suggested to ensure that one can be aware (or to increase awareness), such as not wearing headphones at night.

One of the reasons that I think that awareness types of tips are so problematic is that they emphasize hyper-alertness, bordering on paranoia, and constant consciousness of oneself in relation to others and the environment. This requires a time commitment as well as the mental energy to be constantly vigilant. It is incompatible with enjoyment of being

in public space—there is no wandering aimlessly or strolling without destination if one must be constantly aware with a predetermined route. As advice it is also very vague. What being aware means is not explicated nor is how one is to be aware detailed. As such, awareness must be a state of being.

Along with awareness tips come the additional tips to “trust your intuition – if something doesn’t feel right, it likely isn’t” (York Regional Police n.d.: 1). Regina Police tell us to “trust your feelings when you feel something is not right” (n.d.), and The Barrie Police Service advises, “trust your good judgement. Common sense is the best protection” (n.d.). The Vancouver Police state, “trust your gut instinct. If a certain person, place, or situation makes you feel uncomfortable, get out immediately” (n.d.).

University websites also include awareness advice. These can be more specific to the university community—for example, “Be Prepared! Be aware of your surroundings. Make sure you are aware of bus schedules, building closing times, etc.” (University of Regina: n.d.). As well as the more general ‘be aware’ type of advice, The University of New Brunswick states, “Be aware of what is around you” (n.d.).

Trusting one’s judgement and instinct is not included in all of the advice, but several of them mention something similar. While these messages may seem positive, there are some problems that come along with the ‘trust your instinct’ advice. The assurance that women can and should rely on their instincts is problematic for several reasons. First, this instinct is only mobilized in reference to strangers. Second, it assumes that there are universal danger cues that are given off in a recognizable way and that all women react to the same cues in the same ways. And third, it is difficult to separate the concept of instinct from the discourses that tell women that they should be afraid in certain situations. Sociologists

are sceptical of what (if any) role instincts play in people's day-to-day lives in modern society and are much more likely to attribute reactions to socialized behavioural norms.

Socialized danger cues have class and racial implications as well. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the image of the criminal is often the people who occupy the margins of society (Madriz 1997b). So we may 'instinctively' react to someone who is racialized as a threat when we would not react with fear (or at all) to a man who occupies a privileged racial or class category.

The awareness advice is problematic for several reasons: one, it does not hold men responsible for behaviours in public spaces and the impact that certain types of behaviours may have on women's feelings of comfort and safety; two, it ignores domestic dangers by focusing on public spaces as where precautions primarily need to be taken; three, there is a very broad and expanding list of 'dangers'; and four, these dangers are different for women and men and they reinforce and maintain inequality for women by encouraging women to limit their participation and, as some suggest (Campbell 2005), by encouraging the performance of a type of femininity that is based on physical vulnerability

Awareness is a key concept throughout the advice and the strategies of the participants I interviewed. Of all the various safety advice given, awareness was what my participants cited most often as the safekeeping behaviour they enacted, and it was often the only one they mentioned.

### *Avoiding Sexual Assault*

In many of the websites I reviewed the advice around avoiding sexual assault was implicit, or not specified. However, there were some websites that had specific sections regarding sexual assault. Many of these sites had useful information regarding resources, but

they also offered tips. The majority of these tips presumed that women were at risk from strangers or people that met at bars. There were some specific sheets for ‘bar safety’, or safety when ‘going out’, which were predominantly about date rape drugs. These involved many of the same tips from the general tips: avoid being alone, be cautious of strangers, keep an eye on your drink at all times, and be aware and alert. Each of these websites place the responsibility on women to avoid being in a situation where sexual assault is possible. There are some initiatives that are aimed at men, such as the ‘Don’t be that guy’ campaign that has been launched through several police services and on many university campuses<sup>36</sup>. The University of Ottawa does a good job contextualizing sexual assault as a “serious social problem related to power imbalance between genders, and because of this it is something that must be addressed by an entire community, not just women”. Their website includes a section titled, “Do your part! Men can help!”, as well as the more traditional advice for women (n.d.). Addressing men is a positive step, but in the context of statistics that indicate men perpetrate ninety-seven percent of sexual assaults in Canada (Statistics Canada 2010), the phrase ‘you can help’ seems understated. It implies that men are merely there to support women’s efforts to solve the problem of sexual assault. Below the section addressed for men is a section of the more common tips for avoiding being sexually assaulted.

The university websites, more often than the police websites, had specific sheets on sexual assault. Most of the universities had well-developed information about what sexual assault is and what to do if one is sexual assaulted. But even on the best websites there is

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<sup>36</sup> The ‘Don’t be that guy’ poster campaign was launched in spring/summer 2011. Ottawa Crime prevention describes the campaign as, “instead of placing responsibility for preventing sexual assault in the hands of victims, the posters appeal to potential offenders” (Crime Prevention Ottawa n.d.). Many of the police services listed here are participating in the campaign. This is certainly a positive development, but in all cases personal safety tips are still featured on the websites, and it is too soon to establish if this type of thinking will replace the victim blaming and women as responsible discourse that currently exists in regards to sexual violence. Many of the universities have also launched this campaign.

still contradictory information. Women are still encouraged to view sexual assault as something they can prevent. For example, McMaster University states: “Be aware that, while it in no way justifies sexual assault, going off by yourself can make it easier for someone to isolate and assault you” (n.d.). The University of Saskatchewan counsels, “stay in control of yourself. Limit alcohol and drug use” (n.d.).

Most of the websites acknowledge that sexual assault is most often perpetrated by someone known to the victim and many of them address acquaintance assault. Yet they still advise ‘being alert and aware’.

There is also implicit victim blaming. For example, Simon Fraser University has a tip to “Be conscious of your nonverbal messages. Match your actions with your intentions” (n.d.). This implies that sexual assault may be at least partially the result of ‘mixed messages’ sent by the victim. The University of Western Ontario’s “Sexual Assault” tips page states, “The prevention of sexual assault is the responsibility of both men and women. Communication is the key factor in the prevention of most sexual assaults. *At anytime you have the right to say “no” and be heard*”<sup>37</sup> (n.d., original emphasis). The suggestion of communication as a mechanism for avoiding being sexually assaulted is not that far off of blaming sexual assault on ‘miscommunication’, a rape myth that is tragically common. The model of implied consent can be contrasted with an affirmative model of consent, which requires asking and getting an affirmative answer at all steps of sexual relations.

Many of the websites acknowledged that women are not to blame for sexual assault. The Vancouver Police Service offers a good example of this found in the ‘If You Are Stalked or Attacked’ segment of their personal safety section. It states, “remember that it is

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<sup>37</sup> Given the evidence that sexual assault prevention is aimed at women, as well as the rest of the content on the website, I am reading this to imply that women are being addressed as the potential victim (rather than a potential perpetrator). However, it is not conclusive that this is the intent of the author.

not your fault and you have nothing to be ashamed of” (n.d.). While this seemingly indicates an understanding of the attacker’s culpability as opposed to the victim’s, it is only one line among the dozen of tips to avoid becoming a victim. The juxtaposition of ‘it is not a woman’s fault’ with ‘only individual women can prevent assault’ certainly implies that women have a major role to play in avoiding assault.

As I mentioned, the police websites had many types of safety advice for a variety of situations and generally these tips were separated into discrete sheets or pamphlets. Consequently the general personal safety tips most often did not address sexual violence explicitly and domestic violence was separated on a different webpage. For example, Winnipeg Police Services’ comprehensive crime prevention booklet did have all of these topics in one document and in one sub-section, but they are still discussed as independent of each other. Stanko (1996) also found this fragmentation in her survey of police advice in the early 1990s. She critiques this tendency because it individualizes acts of violence against women rather than understanding violence on a continuum. The violent stranger on the street, the date rapist, and the domestic spouse are represented as discrete incidences between one perpetrator and one victim. As a result it is impossible for safety advice to meaningfully prevent ‘violence against women’ and instead can only address the problem as one of individual actors. This is something that I will discuss further in the next chapter in relation to *Cosmopolitan*. I now turn to a discussion of the themes that run through this advice.

### **Themes in the Advice**

The message surrounding women’s fear has long been that they should take precautions and adopt ‘self-protection’ strategies, especially when in public—women should

be responsible for their own security and safety. In 1970 Meredith Tax wrote this about women:

Walk down the street without being tuned in and you're in danger; our society is one in which men rape, mug, and murder women whom they don't even know every day. You'd better keep track of what car is slowing down, and who is walking behind you.

Throughout all of this advice, there are four discourses present that resonate with this quotation, with the first two points resonating with the dominant discourses drawn from the fear of crime literature. First is that women face ever-present danger because they are women; second, this danger is represented by the stranger or near stranger; third, women are responsible for their own safety; and fourth, women are responsible if they do not follow the safety advice. I will start with a discussion of ever-present danger.

#### *Ever-Present Danger*

In their section on Personal Safety tips, the Barrie Police Service advises people to “know that a danger could exist and never forget it” and “admit to yourself that you could become a victim” (n.d.). The Peel Regional Police suggest that people underestimate the chances of being victimized and in the Introduction to *Basic Crime Prevention Face Sheet* they claim that “many of us fail to take what in many cases are obvious crime prevention measures because we routinely underestimate the risk of a common crime occurring” (n.d.: 1). The Windsor Police Service states explicitly that “While anyone of any age can be victimized, children, women, seniors and persons with disabilities are usually more targeted” (n.d.).

The stated and implicit basis of crime prevention is that it is something that must be adopted as a lifestyle or as daily habits to attempt to protect women from the ever-present risk of criminal victimization. At the same time there is the acknowledgement that if

adopted, these strategies at best reduce the incidents of crime, but cannot prevent all victimization. The result of all of this advice is that it can reinforce and add to the anxiety that women may feel when out in public, especially at night, which therefore may lead to women limiting their movements (Pain 1991).

Hall (2004) writes that the implication in rape prevention advice is that women can never be free of the threat of sexual assault. The best they can hope for is to become ‘hard targets’, so that while they may not necessarily be capable of defending themselves if caught, they are difficult to catch in the first place. This is the function of safety advice as illustrated by the Toronto Police Service’s statement on their ‘Protect Yourself’ webpage: “To a potential criminal, Carolyn may have appeared to be an easy victim—alone, tired and distracted. Fortunately, Carolyn was aware of her role in crime prevention, and was prepared to act” (n.d.). Hall writes that the framing of assault, and rape in particular, as always out there, or as “an impossible problem, erases the question of how we might stop it. Or, rather, that question gets deflected back onto individual women as vulnerable subjects” (2004: 6).

### *Stranger Danger*

Additionally, most of these personal safety tips emphasize danger from strangers. Even tips for ‘in the home’ are oriented towards keeping dangerous strangers out. Stranger danger is highlighted even when it is acknowledged that most women are victimized by those they know. For example, the Winnipeg Police Service’s *Crime Prevention Handbook* states, “Very often women are more at risk of sexual assault by someone they know rather than by a stranger” (n.d.: 53). The Handbook goes on to make suggestions aimed at reducing the risk of sexual assault, which include: “Always pay attention to your surroundings”; “Use the ‘Buddy System’ when going out in the evening”; and “Walk with confidence and stay in

well-lighted areas” (Winnipeg Police Service n.d.: 53). These precautions are meant to protect from stranger danger and not with those who are known<sup>38</sup>, thereby contradicting the opening statement. Stanko (1992) writes that this advice that focuses on strangers may “distort the reality of danger and crime for women in contemporary society” (118).

Despite the history of this type of advice being directed towards women, it does not address the actual risks that women face, which may be structural (for example, patriarchal oppression, poverty, sexualization), or may occur as a result of the ‘normal heterosexual relationships’, which in a patriarchal society can lead to the normalization of violence against women. So it is a double blow for women, who are expected to act in particular ways to minimize their risk, yet the advice they are being given does not take the most salient aspects of women’s victimization into account. This is demonstrated by Rosenbaum et al. (1998: 83) who state, “unless one lives with a violent family member, staying at home behind locked doors and not venturing outside should lower a person’s risk of personal victimization because most violence crime occurs outdoors”. Given that the home is the site of the majority of violence against women and women are most at risk from ‘a violent family member’, this clearly does not reflect an orientation to women’s lived reality of violence. However, the emphasis on strangers and avoidance of strangers runs through multiple sites of ‘risk’, such as the street, in their homes, and in their cars. I think that Stanko put it best when she writes that this type of advice “is most curious if it is to seriously address women’s safety and fear of crime” (1992: 118).

Many of the sites have brochures about domestic violence or have sections with links to women’s originations, shelters, or crisis lines, but these are not oriented as ‘prevention’

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<sup>38</sup> There is a section on domestic abuse, but it does not contain ‘tips’ in the same way. It defines domestic abuse and offers suggestions on legal interventions.

advice. The information that does exist on the police sites (as opposed to external organizations) tends to be what to do if one is in a violent situation and what the police will do. Stanko suggests in 1992 that the existence of such information was a concession to feminists and it certainly seems that acknowledgement of intimate partner violence has become commonplace within police agencies. There are also sites that will preface safety tips directed at stranger danger with the statement that most violent crimes against women are committed by those who are known to the victim, but then proceed to give the standard stranger danger tips. However, as Stanko suggests, it would be difficult to identify 'in advance' those men who may become dangerous within a relationship (1990, 1992), and thus safety advice is unable to adequately address the crimes against women within the dominant norms of heterosexual relationships. This is something that is obvious in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, which more overtly emphasizes that known men are the protectors of women from the violence of the stranger predators.

### *Responsibilization*

Responsibilization is a key term in a neo-liberal style of governance and implies something different than simply being responsible. Responsibilization is the process of creating 'empowered' citizens (Cruikshank 1999). Through the knowledge that they are at risk, individuals become empowered to act to prevent their victimization. In relation to crime prevention, various campaigns and advice are given to impress upon people that everyone is a potential victim and to encourage the practices that, if undertaken, will help prevent an individual from becoming a victim. Individuals and communities are encouraged to form neighbourhood watches and other organizations which will work with the police to keep neighbourhoods 'crime free'.

The focus of crime prevention shifts from the offender to the target (O'Malley 1992/2003). The result of this 'downloading' is to have multiple actors responsible for crime prevention, as opposed to a more centralized state agency (Garland 2001: 124). In order for this to be successful, it is then necessary to identify and enlist those who you are attempting to responsabilize (Garland 2001). One of the broadest forms of this enlistment is targeting the 'general public' with publicity campaigns such as consciousness raising campaigns—media ads, pamphlets, etc.—which are designed to imply that every person is a potential victim and to instil the appropriate practices so that every person will take steps to prevent themselves from becoming a victim. It is easy to see how crime prevention advice fits within the neo-liberal framework in which everyone is responsible for preventing their own victimization.

There are multiple examples of the responsabilization of individuals, including Durham Regional Police's statement that "preventing crime and maintaining safe communities is everyone's responsibility. By practising the following personal and property safety tips, you can help reduce the incidents of crime and keep your community safe" (n.d.). The Hamilton Police's "Personal Safety and Protection" page declares that "everyone is responsible for his or her own personal safety—Have a Plan!" (n.d.). The Peel Police and the OPP claim "personal safety is a concern for all of us" (n.d.). The Winnipeg Police state that "in most cases, you are in control of the circumstances in which you place yourself" (n.d.: 44). The Ottawa Police advise, "following these tips, combined with your own common sense, can help make crime prevention a natural part of your life" (n.d.). The Toronto Police suggest, "Personal safety is the responsibility of each of us, as well as your community" (n.d.). The responsibility for crime prevention has fallen solidly on the shoulder

of the individual, whereby people are encouraged to “adopt a ‘security conscious’ lifestyle” (n.d.: 44).

Concordia University’s Security Department offers one of the strongest responsabilization statements when they suggest that “The key to reducing the risk of becoming a victim of crime is prevention. *You are the sole person responsible for your personal protection* and that of your property. Crimes can be avoided by following the guidelines you will find on the pages of this website” (n.d., emphasis added). Throughout all of the safety tips runs the personal responsibility thread, maintaining the burden of safekeeping squarely on women.

As already established personal safety tips that are meant to address violent crime and sexual assault are gendered, and given the long history of etiquette rules as well as victim blaming, women have an extra burden in terms of avoiding potential victimization. So, while all people are responsabilized to some extent, women are targeted in specific gendered ways. Women are expected to ‘self-police’ their behaviour and actions (Chan and Rigakos 2002) and practice ‘behavioural precautions’ (Pain 2001) in public spaces. Women are targeted and given gendered advice. For example, The Ottawa Police Service claims:

Ottawa is regarded by many as one of the safest cities in the world, but that's no reason *for women to let their guard down*. Common sense tells us that the streets of any city are not entirely safe. While the Ottawa Police Service will always be available to respond to crime, we need *your active participation to help prevent crime*. The police can't do it alone - *get informed, get involved and make crime prevention part of your everyday life*. Together, we can continue to build a safer Ottawa for all (n.d.).

With the downloading of responsibility also comes the application of blame. If a person does not act in a prudent way and takes risks, that person also can be held responsible for any ill that befalls them. This is also evidenced by The University of Ottawa’s framing of men as ‘helpers’ in women’s effort to end sexual assault.

Women are responsabilized to avoid ‘risk’ and that can only really be done in regards to strangers, as women who are socialized to embody normative heterosexual femininity are taught to want relationships with men and to accept unequal treatment from their partners (Campbell 2005). There can be no prevention in relation to assault by known others. So instead of campaigns aimed at men to educate about sexual assault, the majority of the advice and responsabilization falls on women to avoid being in a situation where a stranger can attack. In many cases this reflects a belief in the inevitability or naturalness of male violence towards women (Campbell 2005).

Under the guise of empowering the rational citizen to take control of their own safety, these police tips, if followed, would severely limit the mobility of women (or anyone who followed them). Gardner (1995) writes that the crime prevention literature for women would result in ‘near-paranoia’ if it were followed to the letter. Hall writes, “Women’s safety pedagogy produces popular notions of female agency in which women are simultaneously assigned a priori victim-status and expected to avoid the inevitable all on their own. The resulting paradox is that agency is possible for women only through avoidance” (2004: 6). In fact it may be the case that such advice is actually harmful to women because of its potential to cause women to employ a great deal of personal restrictions (DeKeseredy et al. 1992). But, if women do not take ‘appropriate’ action to safeguard their safety, they risk being judged and blamed should any victimization occur (and even if it does not).

### *Blaming the Victim*

In a neo-liberal model of governance, the empowered citizen makes the choice to follow the safety advice or not. However if we do not buy into this system and take the

appropriate steps to manage our risk we can then be blamed for our own victimization (Carmody and Carrington 2000: 348). There is no overt victim blaming in the advice offered by police. In fact, the opposite is true in some cases; for example the Vancouver Police claim “You are never to blame for being sexually assaulted”. However by offering suggestions to lessen the risk of victimization, the implicit message is that if you choose not to follow the advice you may be found culpable.

This blaming is often subtle and can be interpreted through the wording. For example, The O.P.P’s tip sheet contains this introduction: “Be aware of your surroundings at all times, and do not place yourself in situations which might jeopardize your safety” (n.d.: 1). This phrasing implies that one would be responsible if they were to ‘place’ themselves in a situation that could be dangerous.

Additionally the suggestion to rely on instinct and judgement implies that these are actually effective techniques that are natural and innate. The failure of one to successfully mobilize one’s instinct to avoid danger could be seen as a failing on a deep and personal level. To fail at applying ‘good judgement’ is also something that may be judged harshly. As I will discuss next chapter, *Cosmopolitan* also relies on this narrative, but they are more likely to explicitly gender it. So it becomes ‘women’s intuition’ that ‘all’ women have. The implication from both sources is that there is something innate, at the gut level, that ‘all’ people/women should be able to utilize to keep themselves safe.

These safety warnings serve to create rules of behaviours in which women are expected to limit their mobility in the name of safety, and if or when these rules are broken women risk being blamed for any ill that befalls them. The blame that is placed on women who violate the ‘proper’ safeguarding practices is one way that the safety advice

contributes to the governance of certain populations. What is at risk, as well as being a victim of men's violence, is 'a risk to self' (Stanko 1997). It is a risk of being judged imprudent; keeping oneself safe is seen as part of being a woman and failing at that has wider consequences than experiencing men's violence. As I have already stated, safety advice is not neutral. Despite the guise of reasonable actions to prevent victimization, it is deeply unreasonable.

### **Risk Avoidance and Safety Advice**

Risk avoidance is not uncommon and has become a legitimate strategy as the 'technological world' has advanced (Walklate 1997: 39). However, as Walklate writes, "it is clear that we accept routinely and implicitly that being human is about *taking* risks. Moreover, we accept that it is a culturally embedded requirement for (young) men to seek out pleasure and excitement, i.e. positively to take risks" (1997: 39). This way of thinking would thus exclude women from that category of taking positive risks. A woman walking alone after dark through the streets of a city is perceived as taking a negative risk, no matter what the reason for her behaviour or her comfort in doing so.

O'Malley (2000a) writes that one of the effects of the neo-liberal policy is that crime is regarded as normal and that those who perpetrate crime are rational choice actors. The safety strategies that are described above illustrate this concept as they assume that crime (implicitly crime against women) is an act of opportunity. If women did not go out alone at night then they would not be the victims of crime. This ignores that most violent crime is perpetrated by someone known to the victim and is not amenable to this type of crime prevention. This is not to assume that random violence and property crimes such as

muggings and car thefts do not occur or are not crimes of opportunity, but that these personal safety tips are just that, tips to keep 'the person' safe.

The gender neutrality of risk often leaves out the particular experience of women (Walklate 1997; Chan and Rigakos 2002). A risk-based model of crime prevention privileges a model of male science, and promotes a vision of control of the environment which is a constant project of 'malestream' science (Walklate 1997). Thus risk avoidance is valued and held up as the best course of action. As Walklate writes, "it could be argued that this emphasis on risk avoidance through the knowledge of risk management reflects a version of (masculine) knowledge...this version of knowledge values reason, and as risk avoidance is presumed to be reasonable, risk-seeking behaviour is downgraded, obscured, hidden from the debate although not from social reality or experience" (1997: 38).

While it is not possible within the parameters of this study to determine the motivations behind these warnings, it is possible to examine the potential effects that they would have if they were followed. Lone travel through nighttime spaces on foot, dark bus stops, and walking from a bus stop to home at night are all to be avoided. This leaves women with an option of a car; if they cannot afford a car then they should travel with someone. If that is not an option then they should simply stay at home. But cars carry their own danger with them, as women are also warned that parking lots and parkades are dangerous places for women, so they should be avoided or women should be accompanied through them. It is easy to see the limitations for leisure, employment, and education that result from this understanding of crime prevention.

Safety advice fails to address that this is a society in which there are few options for women to be 'safe' (Chan and Rigakos 2002). The advice implies that there is a place that

women can go to avoid violence (home) and that there are ways to lessen the likelihood of victimization (staying off the street). These tips ignore the fact that home and known others are statistically more dangerous than the strangers and public spaces that they are being warned about (Statistics Canada 2012). Additionally, these crime prevention tips presuppose a category of criminal who is 'out' looking for a victim. This construction of the criminal makes it difficult to reconcile sexual assault that occurs in a relationship or on a date as a crime. This tendency is especially prevalent in *Cosmopolitan*, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

These warnings also ignore women marginalized by race and class, who are not represented by the 'universal' women target of the advice. This fact may not be entirely negative for women who do not feel that they are the targets of this advice, and thus might be less constrained by discourses of vulnerability.

None of the police or university safety websites gives any evidence of the effectiveness of their techniques. Despite my years of research in the area, I have yet to find any data that systematically study whether or not these techniques work. Even if this evidence exists, it is unlikely that it has been taken into account in this advice development. As I detailed in the previous chapter, very little has changed in the past twenty years in terms of the advice's content. There is also contradictory advice between sources—some advice suggests one should fight back; others recommend not to.

This advice also takes little account of alternative models of safekeeping such as self-defence classes; although several of the university sites have the R.A.D. System programme. I actually took a R.A.D. course in 2008 that included both classroom education about risk and physical self-defence training. Many of the messages in the classroom education section

of the course are similar to official safety advice. In fact the class material claims that there are four 'risks' to personal safety: awareness, reduction, recognition, and avoidance, which are very similar to the awareness and avoidance model of official safety advice<sup>39</sup> ("Basic Physical Defence for Women" 1991-2006:13). Only one, (Toronto Police Services) police website suggests self-defence as a safety technique. The university websites are more likely to suggest taking self-defence courses (even when they do not offer a R.A.D. course), but it is still relatively rare. This relative absence of self-defence content privileges a model of passive avoidance and mental awareness over corporeal resistance.

## **Conclusion**

The common-sense purpose of safety advice is to encourage people to take precautions to reduce the chance of criminal victimization, or to develop strategies to manage their presumed risk and/or fear. As indicated above, the explicit instructions are not the only way that messages about danger and vulnerability get spread to women. The general discourse of women as vulnerable in public spaces is reinforced through media and interpersonal communication that encourages safekeeping behaviour and upholds the trend of victim blaming.

Safety warnings reinforce women as victims who should be fearful, and therefore taking precautions and limiting mobility is the only way to keep safe. As well there is very little mention of other types of non-violent and non-criminal behaviour (for example, sexual harassment) that contribute to women's discomfort and anxiety in public places (Gardner

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<sup>39</sup> I do not include an analysis of R.A.D. here. There is excellent work done on women and self-defence that discusses the power and strength to resist the feminine training to be weak and submissive and develop powerful self-defence tools and confidence in one's ability to defend themselves (Hollander 2004, 2010; De Welde 2003a and 2003b; McCaughey 1998) which I will draw on in subsequent chapters. I raise R.A.D. here only to present the complete picture of messages offered by university safety departments and to point to the consistency of messages being presented across a variety of mediums.

1995). Personal crime prevention advice can lead to women placing limits on their mobility and thus their opportunities for employment, education, and leisure are constrained (DeKeseredy et al. 1992). Additionally, there is a privileging of a risk avoidance model of behaviour that marginalizes and makes women's risk taking appear irrational (Walklate 1997). This is a topic I will discuss in the final two chapters.

Safety advice, as I argue in this chapter, is highly gendered. It essentializes women's bodies and ignores women's difference. The safety warnings and precautionary behaviours all have the appearance of common sense, so it is difficult to critique what are seen as 'reasonable' measures to prevent bad things from befalling us. These crime prevention tips, which are directed at women, are built on the belief that all women are naturally physically vulnerable. However, Campbell (2005) argues that rape prevention literature actually contributes to the construction and maintenance of 'rapeable' bodies. This is an argument that I discuss further in the next sections.

I have no ability to speak to the motivation or compassion of those responsible for maintaining safety tips for women, but the lack of any real updating of these tips does give the impression of passive disregard and disinterest for the actual safety of women from violence.

In 1996 Stanko concluded her study on safety advice in Britain by saying, "police advice to women about their personal safety fails to question why we are at risk" (19). In the sixteen years between then and now, the only real substantive change has been an update to include the existence of cell phones and date rape drugs. Some of the advice is word-for-word the same as the advice Stanko quotes from the early 1990s as well as from the Solicitor General's *Women Alone* pamphlet published in 1990. The normalcy of these tips are taken

for granted; there is no more questioning why, where, or which women are at risk today than there was sixteen years ago.

My analysis reflects the work of Stanko (1990, 1992, 1996, 1997, 1998), Campbell (2005), Hall (2004), and others on safety advice and reaffirms the existence of and stagnancy of the advice in the 2010s. I have noted what appears to be the (very) slow move to include men in the sexual assault sections of safety advice. And the ‘Don’t be that Guy’ campaign is promising, but it appears to operate separately from safety advice.

Police and university websites provide a rich source of safety advice data, but they are far from the only site of this information. I will discuss another major site of information, the media, in the next chapter, but before that I will discuss the themes found in this advice, and I shall briefly examine the function of email in disseminating this advice. Police websites do not operate in a vacuum, and indeed we may be hard-pressed to find anyone who actively reads these websites. However, the tips found in official publications are often restated in other arenas, including media reports of violence, women’s magazines, Facebook groups, email forwards, and other Internet content. The wide distribution of safety advice facilitates a reinforcement of the stranger danger and women as potential victims.

Having established the existence of these gendered safety warnings from official sources, I also wanted to establish whether these broader discourses of safety and danger appear in more popular and accessible mediums, and in the next chapter I will discuss my analysis of the magazine *Cosmopolitan* within the broader context of mediated messages of danger and vulnerability.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Mediated Messages: *Cosmopolitan Magazine*

### Introduction

As I discussed in the previous chapter, one means of disseminating these safety messages and advice is through official sources—often police or other government bodies as well as university safety offices. These safety messages are also disseminated through the media. They are both directly stated in mediums such as *Cosmopolitan* and news reports and indirectly implied in fictional entertainment formats. This chapter explores five years, from July 2006 to June 2011, of the popular women’s magazine *Cosmopolitan* as an exemplar of safety and danger messages in popular media and the role that popular media play in disseminating messages of safety and danger for ‘women’. Next chapter I will further discuss the role that both *Cosmopolitan* and official safety advice play in constructing and maintaining the discourses of vulnerable female bodies and dangerous public spaces and strangers, which support the enactment of fearful femininity.

*Cosmopolitan* is a women’s magazine which reaches millions of readers in over a hundred countries. It is the epitome of the category of magazine which offers lifestyle tips and information for women<sup>40</sup>. The magazine is also displayed prominently in supermarkets, drugstores, and corner stores. The covers of the magazine feature the ‘sensational’ stories found within and very often there are headlines telling women of the ‘new’ dangers that they face. As with the police and university safety advice, I am not claiming a direct relationship between reading *Cosmopolitan* and feeling fearful and vulnerable, only that the magazine is another site of safety and danger discourses, and these discourses are very similar in theme

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<sup>40</sup>The category that *Cosmopolitan* fits into is magazines which are not family or children inclusive, but aimed more towards women’s social, leisure, and work lives.

to the official safety advice examined in the previous chapter, thus contributing to the production of dominant discourses of vulnerability and danger.

First I will briefly discuss the role that popular culture, news, and social media play in disseminating representations of danger in public spaces, and then I will contextualize women's magazines and their role as instructional guides. For the remainder of the chapter I will discuss the themes found throughout the stories of violence against women. I shall then conclude the chapter by drawing out the similarities between official safety advice and crime prevention in *Cosmopolitan*.

### **Popular Culture Representations of Women and Danger**

The media is a central institution in the construction of everyday life (Kellner and Durham 2006: ix). Douglas Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham write, "The narratives of media culture offer patterns for proper and improper behaviour, moral messages, and ideological conditioning" (2006: ix). The media influences our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Taylor 2009), and is especially significant in the representation of gender. Films, television programmes, magazines, music, advertisements, and Internet content by and large represent men and women in stereotypical ways and reinforce unequal power relationships between men and women (Woods 2005: 233). In addition to the general stereotypical, objectified, essentializing, and unequal portrayal of women, the media also disseminates and perpetuates harmful myths and stereotypes about victims of violence (Taylor 2009).

Through the media we are also exposed to images of victims and perpetrators that help to shape the dominant ideology of crime. As Madriz states:

This ideology is shaped by popular images about what is criminal, who is more likely to commit a crime and who is more likely to become a victim, what are the

connections between criminals and victims, where and when is a crime more likely to occur, and what are the best ways to control or prevent crime (Madriz 1997b: 342-3).

These representations are found in various forms of media, from television shows, movies, novels, soap operas, magazines, advertising, newspapers, news shows, and the Internet. All help to shape the image of crime, victim, and perpetrator. The representation of violence against women in many popular mediums is that of public space crime committed by strange men (Berns 2004). The criminal man is thus portrayed as poor, racialized, recently immigrated, uneducated, and/or mentally unstable (Madriz 1997b: 343). Victims are often put into dichotomous categories of either innocent/ideal or deserving of being victimized. Madriz (1997b) argues that the image of the ideal victim is the white, middle-class woman. The more ideal a victim, the more legitimacy they are granted by the courts and in the media. In general, studies show that the media influences popular perceptions of victims and perpetrators (Rader and Rhineberger-Dunn 2010).

In terms of content, criminal justice is one of the most popular themes in entertainment programming (Surette 2007); this includes television programmes, movies, and fiction novels. In a 2008 publication Rhineberger-Dunn, Rader, and Williams counted nineteen prime-time crime dramas on the three major American television networks alone. Examples can be found in television programmes, such as the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* franchise, *NCIS*, *Criminal Minds*, and the *Law and Order* franchise, including *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, which is exclusively about detectives investigating cases involving sexual assault.

In general, a feminist orientation towards rape and sexual violence is rare on primetime and furthermore, as Lisa M. Cuklanz and Sujata Moorti write, “rape narratives in detective genres have focused primarily on men and masculinity, and that the central and

often sole cause of rape is a character defect of the individual perpetrator” (2006: 307). Implicit and implied warnings are evident in fictionalized media such as movies and television shows that depict crimes against women that are often concluded to be the fault of women’s behaviour or lifestyle choices (Franiuk 2008). These morality tales serve to reinforce ‘proper’ safety behaviour for women by showing that bad things happen to women who do not take the ‘appropriate’ precautions. As I will discuss below, the stories told in *Cosmopolitan* almost exclusively involve the individual deranged predator with no contextualization of violence against women within a patriarchal culture.

Even when sexual violence is not part of the story being told, representations of women (mostly white women) as slender, feminine, and ‘girly’ abound in the media. Campbell (2005) points to the media presenting representations of women as weak and vulnerable which normalizes this type of female body. Slender frames and toned, but not well developed, muscles are promoted as a highly desirable body. As I discuss in Chapter Six, the type of female body represented as ideal has implications for women’s feelings of vulnerability.

#### *News Media*

Criminal events are a significant part of television news stories. About a third of the coverage on television newscasts is on crime, and crime stories often lead off broadcasts (Kohm et al. 2012). Research is inconclusive about how much, if at all, television and newspaper reports impact fear of crime (Altheide 1997). Some research does show that news programmes, especially the local news, play a role in shaping views about crime (Weitzer and Kubrin 2004). In particular, ‘indirect’ exposure to crime via second-hand information, such as a news report or magazine article, may make people believe that

victimization is more likely (Land and Meeker 2003), especially if one feels that the media content reflects their experience (Kohm et al. 2012). Regardless of the direct impact, Nancy Berns (2004) argues that the media does have an influence in the framing of social problems. She goes on to suggest that even though people may not deliberately turn to the media for advice or information, we still absorb what we hear and see in the media. As such, the mediated information regarding social problems “becomes part of our ‘experience’, and we come back to it when we need to make decisions or interpret new situations” (Berns 2004: 53).

Police are used as experts in terms of safety and are turned to by media outlets for advice in relation to ‘staying safe’. Stanko (1996) suggests that the police have an ideological position as protectors, which is part of the reason that they are called on to deliver messages about safety. However, by positioning police as legitimate sources of crime prevention knowledge, the media confirms their role as experts on women’s safety, reinforcing this advice as beyond question (Stanko 1996). The media is an important avenue for spreading information about possible risks as well as crime prevention advice. In fact the Government of Canada developed the ‘Safe Communities Kit: Working with the Media’ toolkit aimed at enabling community groups, local government, and the private sector to effectively work with the media in order to attempt to prevent crime (Carli 2008: 7).

Advice is often packaged with news stories. When media sources report incidences of violence against women, police officers are often interviewed or make statements, which provide them the opportunity to make ‘standard’ safety warnings to women. This was demonstrated in Victoria in March 2011, when the Saanich Police issued a public warning after a woman was abducted and sexually assaulted. A police spokesperson stated that

women should “travel in groups, stick to well-lit areas, be mindful of your drink, where you leave it, and who you accept a drink from” (quoted in Hopper 2011). In response to a woman being murdered in Vancouver in 2006, a police spokesperson was quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as saying: “this could possibly have been a stranger attack. We cannot rule that out. Because that is a possibility, we just want to raise the awareness that any women...just to remember all those safety tips that you've been given from a very early age” (Hume 2006: S1).

The proliferation of safety advice is not restricted to news programmes—the ABC morning programme *Good Morning America* website contains an archived page titled “Personal Safety Tips for Women” (Cohen 2006). This page contains advice from ‘crime and safety specialists’ about the “most effective precautions a woman can take when walking alone to keep herself from becoming a statistic” (Cohen 2006). This page contains similar advice as the police websites and other sources of crime prevention tips and shares what is generally the same starting point—women are vulnerable. The site claims, “women need not view themselves as helpless victims” (Cohen 2006), but all of the tips contained on the site encourage women to view themselves as potential victims.

#### *Social Media: Email Forwards*

Email is a form of interpersonal communication that allows for quick and easy dissemination of information. Information regarding safety and danger can be easily forwarded to many people with a push of a button and without much thought. Safety tips can take the form of email forwards, which are anonymously authored warnings with instructions to ‘read and forward’ to other women. Marjorie Kibby (2005) labels these types of emails as electronic chain mail and contends that they constitute a type of folklore. Kibby writes,

“Email folklore is often perceived as true, but even when the recipient is sceptical, there is a belief that others would want to see the message and so it is forwarded again” (2005: 733)<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, Kibby argues that safety warning emails fall under the label of ‘scarelore’, which she defines as “dire warnings that reflect the fears and obsessions of contemporary society” (2005: 783). As they pertain to safety warnings, these emails typically contain an urban myth about an attack of some sort (drugged perfume, rapists dressed as old women) and corresponding strategies to avoid victimization. There are also general ‘the world is dangerous for women’ messages which include tips from various ‘experts’. With a slight bit of investigation most of the information in these emails is exposed as fraudulent, or at least misrepresented (for example, isolated incidents are represented as trends).

As I will discuss further in Chapter Seven, many of my respondents cited email forwards as a source of safety advice, and I collected a few that were sent to me over the last ten years. For example, I received (along with thirty-seven other people) an email forward from a high school acquaintance, who I was not otherwise in contact with, which contained the subject line: “read this ladies for our safety”. The second line read, “Because of recent abductions in daylight hours, refresh yourself of these things to do in an emergency situation...” and it continued to give ‘9 crucial tips’ (personal correspondence, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006). These tips are even more essentializing than the official advice and were also quite alarmist in tone. They are explicit in stating that women are vulnerable and need to take precautions to stay safe.

These emails typically come from friends or acquaintances, and some participants cited their mothers as being the ones who forward these types of emails. The woman who

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<sup>41</sup> This type of folklore and spread of (mis)information did not originate with email and the Internet, but the speed and ease of transmission has been facilitated by the nature of email.

sent me the email discussed above is a practising lawyer (working as a prosecuting attorney), who one would expect would have a sense of the trends of crimes and genuine dangers as opposed to accepting the sensationalized version of danger to women. And while I cannot make claims about how seriously the advice is taken, it still serves to reinforce the messages that women face dangers in public spaces from stranger men. Some of the safety emails also include a reference to the inability of the sender to verify the information, but that they are sending it ‘just in case’ or because ‘one can’t be too careful’. This again reinforces the inevitability of danger, especially for women. Additionally, when these emails are circulated on mailing lists (I received another one through our graduate student list-serv) they are judged to be more credible, as are ones that are received from people we know (Kibby 2005: 785).

To give a sense of the pervasiveness of this type of communication and the way it can be transformed into ‘legitimate’ information, I will use McGill University’s Security Services website as an example. On their website they have a page titled “Through a Rapists [sic] Eyes” (n.d.: 1). The sheet claims that “a group of rapists and date rapists were interviewed on what they look for in a potential victim and here are some interesting facts”. The first two ‘facts’ on this page concern hairstyle and clothing. To begin with, women should know that:

The first thing men look for in a potential victim is hairstyle. They are most likely to go after a woman with a ponytail, bun, braid or other hairstyle that can easily be grabbed. They are also likely to go after a woman with long hair. Women with short hair are not common targets (n.d.: 1).

This is followed by: “Clothing – They look for women whose clothing is easy to remove quickly. Many of them carry scissors around specifically to cut clothing” (n.d.: 1).

McGill's official endorsement of these tips (by virtue of posting them on the Security Service website on Security Service letterhead) speaks to the capacity of misinformation to come to be represented as fact. I include McGill in this section rather than the previous chapter to illustrate the potential power of these types of emails to be taken seriously; I also wish to exemplify the slight irrationality behind these tips. Without getting bogged down in the details of the 'Through a Rapist Eyes' sheet a simple reading of it reveals inconsistencies in the narrative, a salacious tone, and an underlying tenor of urban legend. The fact that someone (or multiple people) read the sheet and thought it was not only reasonable advice, but reputable enough to post on a website for public consumption speaks to the mentality of those giving the tips; that no matter how ridiculous the suggestion, it is important to advise women to take any and all precautions 'just in case'.

Another way that email is used to spread crime prevention tips is in connection to a criminal event. For example, in the aftermath of the murder of Ardeth Wood on a bike path in Ottawa in 2003, there was a report of another attempted abduction. This turned out to be misinformation and in an attempt to dispel the rumours, the administration at Carleton University circulated an email that contained the following message:

This is an opportunity to remind the public once again *and especially women*, to exercise caution. Summer is coming and outdoor activities are starting.

- \* If you go on the bicycle paths, why not be with a friend
- \* Bring a cell phone
- \* Tell a friend where you are going and when to expect you back
- \* Do not stop and talk to strangers
- \* Report anything that seems strange
- \* Stay where the paths are well lit, don't go in remote areas alone

(Connect Administrator 2004; my emphasis).

Despite the email's purpose of reducing fear, the opportunity was taken to reinforce the message that the outside world is dangerous for women and to 'remind' women about their vulnerability and their responsibility to take steps to minimize the risks they face.

Now that I have briefly discussed the role of media in disseminating discourses of danger and female vulnerability, I turn to a more specific source of danger discourses: *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

### ***Cosmopolitan* Magazine and the 'Fun Fearless Female': Readership and Content Details**

*Cosmopolitan* magazine has been published since 1886, but it was not until the 1960s that it was transformed into its modern manifestation as a women's lifestyle magazine under the editor-in-chief Helen Gurley Brown<sup>42</sup> (Benjamin 2009). It is the self-proclaimed "#1 Women's Magazine" and it is the best-selling magazine in this category<sup>43</sup> in the United States<sup>44</sup> (*Cosmo* Media Kit n.d.) and the world (Gupta et al. 2008). Amongst women's lifestyle magazines it also ranks highest in readership of women currently in college, women eighteen to forty-nine, educated women, and working women ("Demographic Profile" n.d.). It also reaches a higher percentage of women than any one of the top ten primetime television shows ("The Cosmo Effect" n.d.). *Cosmopolitan* has a website; a television channel: *Cosmo* TV; and had a magazine aimed at teens, *CosmoGirl*, from 1999 until 2008<sup>45</sup>. *Cosmopolitan* is one of only three American magazines in the top 100 magazines in Canada

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<sup>42</sup> Before Gurley Brown became the editor, *Cosmopolitan* was a general interest women's magazine (Benjamin 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Other magazines that fall in this category of women's magazines include *Glamour*, *Vogue*, *InStyle*, *Elle*, and *Marie Claire*.

<sup>44</sup> In 2011 the total circulation was 3,032,211, which was an increase from the 2009 number of 2,907,436 ("Cosmo Media Kit"). This does not take into account the secondary readers who borrow from friends, read in an office while waiting for an appointment, borrow from a library, or thumb through while waiting in line.

<sup>45</sup> *CosmoGirl* is still publishing international editions.

in terms of circulation (61<sup>st</sup> in 2010, and 48<sup>th</sup> in 2011)<sup>46</sup> (“US Spills into Canada” 2012). You can borrow the magazine from the library and they are often found in waiting rooms and gyms. There is also a Canadian edition of *Cosmopolitan* Television. While there are higher selling women’s magazines in Canada, there is not an equivalent Canadian magazine to *Cosmopolitan*. *Cosmopolitan* is available by subscription in Canada and also widely available, and prominently displayed, at newsstands, grocery stores, drugstores, and supermarkets. Given these numbers, it is safe to say that *Cosmopolitan* reaches a large number of women in both Canada and the United States.

The audiences for popular magazines are often segmented by gender, racial categories, and class (Nettleton 2011). *Cosmopolitan* is a popular magazine for middle class women between the ages of sixteen and thirty (Gupta et al. 2008), and the racial representation in *Cosmopolitan* is predominantly white (Baker 2005). The ads and pictures are overwhelmingly of thin white women and the stories are told from perspectives that take whiteness to be universal. Baker (2005) reports that white women make up over eighty percent of the audience for *Cosmopolitan*. It can also be inferred from their demographic information that many of their readers are educated and employed. Therefore the ‘woman’ who is being represented in *Cosmopolitan* is middle-class, educated, career oriented, heterosexual and white (Gupta et al. 2008). The advice and guidance offered in the magazine is directed towards women who fit that narrow description.

Despite being targeted towards a particular demographic, *Cosmopolitan*, like official safety advice, essentializes both women and men. In general *Cosmopolitan* authors speak of ‘men’ and ‘women’ as uniform categories in which everyone sees the world and the ‘opposite’ sex the same way. A glance through a random issue (October 2007) reveals

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<sup>46</sup> Canadian circulation is 274 000 in 2011 (“US Spill into Canada”).

articles such as “4 Things that all Guys Keep Private”, “What Makes a Man Fall in Love”, and “Sex News that Every Cosmo Girl Must Know”. The article titles alone indicate that ‘men’ and ‘women’ are perceived by *Cosmopolitan* authors as unified categories, ignoring differences within each category as well as similarities between genders.

Before I discuss safety advice that is dispensed and how the magazine represents safety and danger, I will briefly contextualize the tradition of women’s magazines as instructional guides.

### **Women’s Magazines**

Women’s magazines have long been, and continue to be, designed to guide and “instruct women in appropriate conduct for living” (Durham 1996: 18). More specifically they can be considered instruction manuals for ‘doing gender’ in a particular way. Thus women’s magazines do not simply reflect women’s roles; they are active agents in supplying a hegemonic model of femininity, and then in socializing women into that model (Durham 1996). Women’s magazines have historically been predicated on prevailing male-derived notions of proper femininity and serve as ‘moral’ teachings that impose standards and socially accepted values about what it is to be a woman in specific cultural contexts (Durham 1996). In particular, *Cosmopolitan* can be considered a guide for doing respectable femininity properly. Beyond the articles I analyzed in depth, *Cosmopolitan* also provides instruction on the performance of emphasized femininity more broadly, stressing the importance of normative physical beauty and heterosexual attachment.

In any given issue, there are explicit instructional aspects of *Cosmopolitan*’s articles and editorials. There are numerous explicit ‘Q&A’ (question and answer) segments in which readers ask questions on such diverse subjects as work, relationships, and sex, which are

answered by various 'experts'. In addition, there are more subtle aspects meant to guide, including articles that 'decode' various behaviours, words, and body languages. There are also pictorial and editorial spreads to indicate 'what's hot and what's not' in fashion, hair, make-up, accessories, and other areas of style. Articles on everything from getting ahead at work to achieving the best orgasms all involve the 'how to' model.

Women's magazines in particular play an important role in this transmission of normative femininity (Durham 1996:21). The role of the audience in interpreting and changing meanings is not to be underestimated, but the role of the text in constructing social reality is also important to understanding the dissemination of dominant messages and ideologies. As the main focus of this project is the realm of safety and vulnerability discourse, women's magazines are excellent sites to examine these discourses because in their role of instructional resources the ideology of women's safety and vulnerability is made explicit.

Women's magazines in general have been the focus of a considerable amount of academic interest. There has been work done on the ideological function of women's magazines (Berns 2004, 1999; Ballaster et al. 1991), as well as specific studies on the various aspects of magazines, including the construction of desire (Durham 1996), body image (Baker 2005), and relationships (Gill 2009). Nancy Berns (1999) and Pamela Hill Nettleton (2011) have written on the domestic violence narratives in women's magazines and Susan Caringella-MacDonald (1999) has explored the coverage of rape in popular magazines. However, there has been relatively little work on the construction of public space dangers to women in the pages of women's magazines. *Cosmopolitan* is an excellent site to begin this research as female vulnerability, male aggression, and public space dangers

are explicit in *Cosmopolitan*'s reporting of real life stories. These articles play an important role in perpetuating the traditional view of women as vulnerable and at risk from strange male sexual predation. The uncritical acceptance and perpetuation of commonly heard narratives of safety and danger in these articles serve to disempower women and re-entrench unequal gender roles.

### **Gender Ideology in *Cosmopolitan***

I did not do a systematic analysis of all the content in the magazine, but I read the majority of the substantial (2-3 pages) articles in the magazines from June 2006 through January 2008 to get a sense of content, tone, and themes. I was particularly interested in how femininity and masculinity were represented. What I found were very stereotypical images and characterization of men and women which constructed normative femininity as heterosexual, thin, not too aggressive, interested in and concerned about relationships, conscientious about appearance, fashion, and beauty, and 'not masculine'. There is, however, some level of diversity within these boundaries. For example, there are articles about being assertive at work and stories about women who have achieved success or strived for social change. Men are represented much more one-dimensionally as brash, insensitive, aggressive, competitive, clueless, sports loving, emotion suppressing providers and protectors. *Cosmopolitan* is relentlessly heterosexist and heteronormative and most of its articles, including those about danger, rest on an assumption of heterosexual desire and a strict gender binary which naturalizes and normalizes gendered behaviour. Feminine and masculine behaviours are said to be 'biologically hardwired' and many articles rely on biological or evolutionary explanations for actions and interactions.

I will start with a more detailed discussion of the gender binary as it underpins the narratives about safety and danger before discussing the specific safety advice and then the broader narratives about safety and danger.

*Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus: Gender Binary in Cosmopolitan*

The underlying narrative in *Cosmopolitan* is predicated on the existence of fundamental differences between women and men. These differences are most often explained as natural/biological and therefore inevitable. Even when the social or socialization enters into the discussion, nature is still held to be more powerful; this is especially true in the danger stories. It is in the manifestations of these differences that danger is found; it is because of the natural difference between genders that women taking precautions is acceptable and necessary (because this is the way men *are* so the choice is either to take precautions or be at risk). The existence of this difference means that women (and female bodies) are naturally vulnerable and accordingly men, at the level of biology, are aggressive, unable to control themselves, and threatening to women.

Throughout the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, male aggression is normalized, both in articles that are explicitly about violence against women and those that are not. For example, in the advice column ‘Ask Him Anything’ from May 2007, a woman expressed concern about her boyfriend’s aggression while watching sporting events on television. She writes, “if his team loses, he’ll throw stuff at the wall—it’s intense. I know it’s a guy thing, but do you think I should be worried?” The answer reaffirms the, ‘boys will be boys’ ideology which is equated with ‘boys will be violent’—the advice columnist writes, “don’t be alarmed by his behavior—it’s normal. I’d be more concerned if he sipped tea while watching the game” (Small May 2007: 188). This is an explicit affirmation of the differences between

men and women and in the essential nature of each sex according to *Cosmopolitan*—men are violent and aggressive and men who do not display this type of aggressive behaviour are abnormal. *Cosmopolitan* represents danger for women as ever possible. And even more than official safety advice, *Cosmopolitan* ‘empowers’ women to take precautions to ensure their own safety.

### ***Cosmopolitan* and Crime Prevention Tips**

Not all the articles have explicit safety tips, but the ones that do are much like the official crime prevention tips discussed in the previous chapter. *Cosmopolitan* offers ‘practical’ suggestions to reduce the risk of criminal victimization. These tips imply that women are responsible for their own safety, which is framed in a neoliberal model of responsabilization. The crime prevention tips are usually connected to the topic of a specific article, on such topics as escaping from a moving car (Booth March 2011), what to do if you are carjacked (Fairstein April 2010), and identifying and avoiding date rapists (Stacey June 2008, December 2008). Many of the articles also contain general tips to stay safe. Through these articles women are ‘educated’ about their risks and responsabilized to manage them. As with official safety advice, *Cosmopolitan* articles encourage the enactment of awareness and intuition as effective techniques to avoid victimization. Throughout these articles and stories the message is clear that it is women who must be vigilant, aware, and cautious while taking steps to ensure their safety, especially in regards to the stranger, and if proper measures are not taken more often than not women are blamed for the ills that befall them.

In many of the articles the author presents ‘warning signs’ and ‘tools’ to aid the reader in avoiding the fate that befell the women in the stories. These fit into a larger crime prevention ethos that is discussed in the previous chapter, which has at its core the notion of

‘empowering’ the individual to manage their own safety (O’Malley 1997). *Cosmopolitan* is steeped in this narrative of pseudo-empowerment and strength. As I will discuss towards the end of this chapter, according to *Cosmopolitan*, women are inherently at risk and they must manage this risk at all times. By providing the tools and strategies for women to employ, *Cosmopolitan* is fulfilling its role as an instructional resource, but it is ultimately attempting to responsabilize women into managing the risk of male violence on their own, no matter how remote the possibility.

The articles about particular crimes or types of crimes (as opposed to the more narrative stories about individual victims) involve giving advice to prevent crime from occurring. Many of the more narrative stories about victimization of particular women also include advice and tips in sidebars. These tips are very similar to the tips given by official source. Examples include “at parties, don’t drink from punch bowls or other large, common open containers” (Stacey April 2009: 137), and “never allow a stranger to lure you out of the car or approach too closely” (Fairstein October 2007: 159). Some instances of such advice are: stay in groups, especially at parties or the bar (October 2006; January 2008); do not go out alone at night (July 2006; August 2006); do not drink too much and always watch your drink (October 2006; June 2008); lock your doors and windows (October 2007; January 2008; March 2008); do not wear an iPod or use a cell phone, walk like you know your destination, do not have too many packages to carry and have your keys out (October 2007); and wedge your key between your fingers to use as a weapon (March 2008).

This advice is not confined to action, but also involves personality, as illustrated in June 2008’s article “How a Date Rapist Works” (Stacey) which gives several ‘traits’ of serial rapists that women should be on guard for and also contains a sidebar listing four

‘personality traits that make you more vulnerable’ (152). These traits include “desire to please; naïveté; need to fit in; and passiveness or timidity” so women are advised to “show that you are either turned off or pissed, he will sense that he cannot push you around” (Lisak in Stacey June 2008: 152). Women are also counselled not to be too nice or too assertive as either could put them at risk<sup>47</sup>.

While safety tips are inherently meant to encourage individuals to take action to protect themselves, there is a thread that flows through *Cosmopolitan* that women are not capable of this type of complete self-protection. There is a lot of instruction that encourages women to rely on others for their safety, mostly men—suggestions such as having a male friend record a voicemail message to hide the fact that you live alone (Stacey May 2009). Women are also encouraged to rely on each other as well. In particular women are counselled to never leave the bar alone, or leave a friend at the bar alone (Forman October 2006; Goad May 2010) and to ask to stay at a friend’s place if they are tired or have been drinking to avoid being vulnerable while returning home (Fairstein October 2010). The article, “Why You May be in Danger” suggests that “people protect themselves from crime to the degree that they surround themselves with capable guardians: someone who can deter victimization” (Wildman August 2006: 149).

In the next section, I will discuss awareness and alertness separately from the rest of the safety advice because it constitutes an important part of the safety ethos in *Cosmopolitan*. It is also common advice in official safety advice as well as something my participants speak about in their own safekeeping behaviour.

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<sup>47</sup> The responsabilization is not limited to the stranger danger articles; those dealing with intimate partner violence also warn women of ‘red flags’ that will help them identify men who may become violent (although in the same articles they are told that there are often no warning signs). In December 2009, ‘expert’ David Adams advises women that “after a breakup, don’t keep talking to him or calling him back—he’ll think if he’s persistent enough, you’ll give in” (in Sikes 2009: 177).

### *Awareness and Intuition*

Awareness is highly encouraged as a safekeeping mechanism and it operates on two levels in *Cosmopolitan*. The first is being aware of one's own vulnerability; this aspect of awareness is more prevalent in the magazine advice than in the official advice. The second way that awareness is mobilized is through recommendations to be aware and alert in all situations.

Some of the advice regarding awareness of vulnerability is overt: for example, the article from October 2007 states, "remember, just knowing that you might be vulnerable in these places will help ward off attackers, because they are looking for unaware victims" (Fairstein: 159). The issue a month earlier contained the declaration that "You must see yourself—as a woman—as vulnerable. If you don't you're at great risk'" (Catherine Busch quoted in Stepp, Sept. 2007: 202). However, much of the encouragement to be aware of possible victimization is implicitly embedded throughout the articles. The narrative in *Cosmopolitan* is that women can be victimized anytime and anywhere, but that one can take precautions to minimize the risk. I shall discuss this in much more detail in the next section. More common is the advice to be aware at all times.

Being aware is more than simply a singular act; instead it is presented as something that women must be doing constantly. For example, the August 2006 issue suggests "cultivating an aura of awareness" (Wildman: 149). Awareness is not confined to public spaces. Women are warned that letting their guard down at home could lead to break-ins culminating in violent abductions, rape, and/or murder (Fairstein September 2008). Women are warned over and over not to let their guards down, not to appear distracted, and not to be tired lest a predator takes that moment to attack.

Awareness is a key crime prevention technique that is also present in the official safety advice and cited by many women in my study when speaking about their attitudes and strategies in public. As with the official safety advice, awareness is never really defined nor explained in *Cosmopolitan*; it is assumed that everyone is competent at being aware. Additionally, while being somewhat aware of one's surrounding is likely a good idea for a host of reasons, the model of awareness promoted by official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan* borders on paranoia.

Beyond just being aware, women are expected to be able to recognize who is dangerous and who is safe and to follow their 'instincts' to avoid bad situations, people, and places. Many of the *Cosmopolitan* danger and safety articles offer ways to identify or recognize certain warning signs that, once learned, will allow women to keep themselves safe by anticipating problems and danger. For example in the June 2008 article, "How a Date Rapist Works" women are instructed in ways to "learn to recognize what one expert has dubbed the undetected rapist...before it's too late" (Stacey: 149). Women are also instructed on how to identify dangerous circumstances and what steps to take to get away before the situation becomes dangerous. For example, women are told to check the credentials of a cab driver because taxis are one of the five most dangerous places for women (Fairstein October 2007).

*Cosmopolitan* delivers a double whammy to women by implying they can and should be able to detect potentially dangerous men through use of their instinct, yet are at constant risk of random violence by simply being out in the world. This manifests as an expectation of constant vigilance, constant planning, and constant awareness of where you are, where

you are going, and where you have to transverse in public spaces so as to avoid dangerous situations and people.

### ***Cosmopolitan* and Violence Against Women**

Every edition of *Cosmopolitan* that I read had some form of danger or risk stories, although not all of them had to do with violence against women. While discussions about danger and risk were also found in other sections, especially in stories about health and sex, the feature stories were predominantly in the ‘Real-Life Reads’ or ‘Need to Know’<sup>48</sup> sections and occasionally appeared as ‘Special Reports’.

Of the issues I reviewed, sixty-seven percent had at least one article (or major section of an article) about violent criminal victimization by men against women or the threat of it. There are three broad formats of these types of danger stories. The first, and least common, are articles that contain reference to multiple dangers, and not all of which is related to violence against women. For example the August 2006 edition’s “Why You May Be in Danger” about the general dangers of being young and out on one’s own for the first time included several references to rape and murder, and December 2010’s “How to Handle 5 Very Scary Situations” included resisting a man’s sexual aggression after you said no. I include these articles into the count because there is discussion about violence against women.

The second and third types of article are entirely dedicated to criminal victimization. These articles make up the majority of what I surveyed. The second type of article is written in a more narrative style; it tells a story of an event. These types often do not contain explicit safety advice (although some do include a sidebar with tips). For example, the March 2010 issue’s “Inside a CSI Murder” (Malone) tells the story of a woman’s brutal murder and the

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<sup>48</sup> If ‘Need to Know’ was in a magazine then ‘Real Life Reads’ was not and vice versa.

forensic techniques used to solve it. The third type is written more in a ‘do not let this happen to you’ style. These stories typically start with a vignette of an actual case, and then move on to discuss the criminal and victimization trends, commentary by experts, and at some point contain tips or advice to avoid a similar fate as described in the opening vignette. Like the advice on sex, relationships, and cosmetics, these safety articles represent ‘how to’ do this in a way that reflects dominant and fairly traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. No matter the format, all of these articles serve to inform women of the dangers of the world and to reinforce female vulnerability in the face of men’s aggression.

The danger stories in *Cosmopolitan* support the enactment of fearful femininity through safekeeping techniques that are very similar to the official advice. These articles also reflect the discourses of vulnerability and danger that are present in fear of crime literature and the official safety advice. Danger stories draw on ‘expert’ knowledge, often in the form of academic or professional criminologists, feminists, psychologists, and sociologists, as well as those active in the criminal justice system, which are used to give the articles legitimacy and authority. The sensational and extreme cases are used to punctuate many of the articles and serve as morality tales and warnings that many types of behaviour carry extreme risks for women. In the *Cosmopolitan* safety stories, the examples that are used are often the most extreme and rare event, yet are presented as imminently possible<sup>49</sup>. Berry Glassner writes that “the depiction of isolated incidences as trends” (2004: 823) is a key strategy in fear mongering. By representing extreme and horrific cases as parts of trends, *Cosmopolitan* is able to construct threats that women must then manage through the

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<sup>49</sup> Studies show that daily news sources report stranger rape, the most statistically uncommon form of violence, far more often than they report incidences of domestic violence, which are statistically much more common (Hughes, Kitzinger, and Murdock 2006).

employment of various strategies that limit and restrict their activities and opportunities and ultimately reify the natural differences and inequalities between men and women.

I have identified the two main discourses found throughout the criminal safety and danger stories, with the first being that women are constantly at risk because they are women. Included in this is the naturalization of women as victims (in particular of sexual violence). The second main discourse is that this risk is from strangers. I will discuss each in turn and conclude with a discussion of victim blaming. I have divided these themes up for analytical clarity, but as I will illustrate, they are connected and often reinforce each other.

#### *Vulnerable Female Bodies are at Risk—Always*

The guiding danger narrative of *Cosmopolitan* is epitomized by this quotation: ““You must see yourself—as a woman—as vulnerable. If you don’t you’re at great risk”” (Catherine Busch quoted in Stepp, Sept. 2007: 202)<sup>50</sup>. This risk is not confined to dark alleys and late at night, but is omnipresent and explicitly gendered. Even walking in the middle of the day on a familiar street is deemed not safe for women, as illustrated in the October 2007 article “The Five Most Dangerous Places for Women” (Fairstein). This article lists five ‘very dangerous’ places for women: parking lots, taxi cabs, private vehicles, familiar streets, and one’s own home. Without knowing the exact statistics it is reasonable to expect that many women are in these spaces for a great deal of their lives; thus women must always be alert. Additionally, women are warned that it is precisely in the everyday spaces

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<sup>50</sup> While the majority of the articles are concerned with managing danger, there are some positives to note. Many of the articles mix the safety advice and danger warnings in with stories of women who have survived and overcome adversity. There are small aspects throughout various articles that contradict some of the larger themes discussed in this dissertation. For example, in an article about a woman murdered by a stranger on the street, a friend of the victim is quoted as saying: “if Michelle had been frightened to go places and to do things others may see as dangerous, she wouldn’t have had all her fantastic experiences or been the person she was. I don’t think she would change a thing” (Sikes February 2007: 161). And while these types of message is in the minority, they do exist within the pages of *Cosmopolitan* and it reflects a more positive message for women who do not want to live a life constrained by worst-case scenarios.

where they consider themselves safe that are most dangerous. This is made very clear with statements such as:

Many abductions occur...in such common situations—going to and from work or running errands—in which women seem completely safe...*that misguided comfort level* is exactly what potential abductors know how to exploit (Fairstein October 2007:157; my emphasis).

In addition to framing all spaces as dangerous, this sentiment also encourages women to second-guess themselves if they are feeling comfortable. Again women are encouraged to be ever vigilant and aware, an exhausting and taxing psychological state to maintain.

In the July 2008 article “Summer Dangers You Don’t Think About” (Stacey), the danger settings listed are hiking trails, biking and jogging paths, and anywhere after dark. The October 2010 edition contains many tips to help women “make sure her day-to-day behaviour isn’t putting her at a higher risk” (Fairstein October 2010: 197) and goes on to state to its female audience that they could not possibly protect themselves “one hundred percent from becoming a target” (Fairstein October 2010: 197).

Complicating the situation is the contradictory advice that appears in the different stories. In one article women are at risk if they are too nice, and in another they are at risk if they are too aggressive. What these contradictory stories do is paint a picture that there is no time, no place, and *no way* to be completely safe as a woman. Women are *always* at risk in everything they do (or do not do—even staying home is risky). All women can do is attempt to reduce their risk. Because of the constant possibility of victimization, women can never let their guard down and they are at greatest risk when they assume that they are safe. The emotional and mental stress that this expectation may place on women is enormous and unrelenting.

Being alone is established to be when women are especially vulnerable. Fairstein makes this clear with the statement that “young women are indeed vulnerable to abduction when walking unaccompanied, even in daylight and on a busy street” (October 2007: 159); living alone makes one more vulnerable to a stranger attacking you in your home (Stacey May 2009); and even driving alone is dangerous (Fairstein April 2010). The only relief that women may get is to be in a heterosexual relationship with a male protector so that she does not have to be alone. Being with another woman or a group of women is better than a woman alone, but it is not as beneficial as being with a known man. There are several articles that counsel women to not leave the group or leave a friend in a ‘vulnerable’ position (for example, at a bar with a strange man, or exiting a bar alone). Beyond the encouragement to not be alone, the implication of having to tell women not to leave their friends is that the friendship bond is not as strong or reliable as an established heterosexual relationship<sup>51</sup>. All of these stories reinforce the prudence in not being alone and thus the necessity of relying on someone else—being fully independent is a threat to women’s safety.

Even those people who are charged with keeping women safe cannot always be trusted. In September 2006 women were warned about “Rapists in Uniform” (Todd), those pretending to be authority figures such as police officers and firefighters in order to rape women. “Killer Charm” (Fairstein: September 2009) tells of a woman engaged to a man who was a serial killer, unbeknownst to her; so even those who we trust enough to marry may be capable of great violence<sup>52</sup>.

This ever-present threat of victimization is purportedly based on natural and biological differences between men and women. For example, in “The Dangerous Mistake

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<sup>51</sup> I speculate that this is grounded in the belief that women will prioritize meeting a man over staying with their girlfriends.

<sup>52</sup> This is not an article about domestic violence because all the victims were strangers to the perpetrator.

Gutsy Women Make”, the author states that “one reason for men's potential to react violently to minor challenges lies deep within our human history... There is an evolutionary advantage to responding disproportionately to a threat” (Stacey April 2007 : 201). Later in the same article, it is stated that “the most dangerous males—both prehistorically and today—are the ones of prime reproductive age, from about 17-27 because, ‘Young men have much more fast-twitch muscle fibre...the 20-year-old man is built for fighting, and he has the psychology to go with it’” (Stacey April 2007: 202). And in “The Scary Truth About Guys in Groups” (Gerszberg November 2006), the hormonal element comes into play when it is suggested that “otherwise decent men can morph into monsters when spurred on by a testosterone-fuelled peer group” (Gerszberg 2006: 115).

The natural state of female potential victimhood is also exacerbated by socialization. Women are assumed to have a natural and inevitable physical vulnerability, but they also act in ways that increase this weakness. For example, women’s niceness and desire to not offend anyone can make them unwilling to see men as dangerous. The March 2008 *Cosmopolitan* cover included the headline: “Women and Danger: The “Nice” Habit That Can Cost You Your Life” (Fairstein). The accompanying article warned women that they should embrace fear and not let polite manners or a belief that people are generally decent get in the way of staying safe: “Women who are too nice to ask for ID before opening the door, who hold the apartment building door open for strange men and who are too nice to leave an area when they are alone with strange men are at risk of being victimized by ‘predatory strangers’” (Fairstein March 2008: 173). This type of article implies that women need to question every interaction, every person, and every motivation. It explicitly encourages the adoption of fearfulness as a safekeeping technique, while encouraging a

social isolation from strangers (especially men) that many feminists suggest is dangerous for women (Pain 1991) because it may reinforce women's dependence on intimates who statistically pose a greater risk to women's safety than strangers. It is also socially limiting and potentially emotionally and psychologically damaging to see everyone as a potential threat. It may also limit the ability to grow a social or professional network.

On the other hand, in some articles it is when women act like men that they put themselves in danger. For example in the April 2007 edition the author writes, "unlike previous generations, today's young women stand up for themselves, refuse to take any BS, and aren't afraid to speak out. For the most part that's been a huge step forward. But Shelly's [a murder victim] story is a frightening reminder of the danger that sometimes can result from following assertive impulses" (Stacey 2007: 201). In this article standing up for oneself in the face of bad behaviour or an unfair situation can lead to violence, thus encouraging the enactment of a more passive and 'feminine' attitude. While acknowledging that women have the 'right' to be out in the world, *Cosmopolitan* authors still imply that they should not try to be too present, too confident, or too equal.

The threat of sexual violence is prominent in *Cosmopolitan*. Nine of the articles I reviewed have 'rape' in their title and many more include content about rape or stories about women who have been raped. Rape is normalized, yet violence against women is taken out of the ordinary. By this I mean that the narratives in *Cosmopolitan* take the chance of violence, especially sexual violence, as a daily possibility, yet there is barely mention of intimate partner violence, the sexualization of women and of violence against women in the media and advertisements, or the general and systematic inequality and oppression of women in the stories or advice. Women face various levels of violence and harassment on a daily

level and much of this is subtle and ‘minor’<sup>53</sup> violence which is considered so common that it is often unremarkable. While the majority of violence and sexual assault happens in the course of the everyday, the reality of this daily violence is not reflected in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*; instead the extreme and fatal type of violence is represented as the normal type of violence that women must protect themselves from.

Male violence is a lightning rod issue for feminist activists (as it should be), but what can be problematic is navigating the thin line between seeing rape as one of the multiple effects of a patriarchal society, as well as an act that contributes to the maintenance of male dominance and seeing the female body as imminently and inevitably rapeable. The former assumes that with greater equity comes less threat of rape because women are not naturally rapeable and men are not naturally rapists. The latter locates the act of rape in and of the body which leaves little hope for the eradication of sexual assault because what makes rape possible are the sexual and physical differences between men and women. Under this understanding of rape, women are always at risk by the very nature of their biology. *Cosmopolitan* perpetuates the latter of these two ideologies and we see this through their continual referencing to the risk and threat of rape as well as the biological and physical differences between men and women, which are mobilized as explanatory frameworks.

Women’s victimization is often constructed in *Cosmopolitan* as the result of bad judgement and ‘misplaced’ confidence, because women have not accepted that they are inherently vulnerable. The magazine frequently reminds its readers that women are always in danger from random violence. Joel Best argues “concern about random, senseless violence has become a central theme in contemporary culture” (1999: 2) and that by

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<sup>53</sup> I only use the term “minor” to contrast with the extreme and often deadly violence that is often referenced in *Cosmopolitan*, and not to place judgment on the level or consequences of any form of violence against women.

constructing violence as ‘random’, the media creates a fearful climate that evokes concerns about a collapsing society that is devolving into chaos (1999: xiii). So then, it is these sensational and extreme cases that are used to punctuate many of the articles and serve as morality tales and warnings about a risky world that is exceptionally perilous for women.

The articles are often listed within the sections titled ‘Real Life Reads’ or ‘Need to Know’ in the table of contents, making it explicit that these should be considered as fact. The taglines for many of the articles include phrases such as “A New Kind of Date Rape You Must Know About” (Stepp September 2007), and “The Buddy System That Can Save Your Life” (Forman October 2006), establishing that knowledge of these stories are essential to safekeeping. It is made clear to readers that these stories are real and have happened to women ‘just like you’ so that connections are made explicit to the readers in *Cosmopolitan’s* demographic. The titles and subtitles establish a direct connection with potential readers; ‘you’ and ‘your’ are common words in the titles which establish the relevance to the reader. *Cosmopolitan* is also famous for the ‘new thing’, from sex positions to fashion trends, and this extends to the safety stories. In January 2007 it was “Scary New Ways Stalkers Come after Women” (Fairstein) and in September 2007 it was “A New Kind of Date Rape” (Stepp). There is nothing particularly new about any of these stories but they do serve to signal to the reader that there are new and emerging dangers that one needs to be vigilant about, no matter how vigilant one already is.

Public spaces and strangers are represented to women as the primary threat. Given the importance placed on heterosexual relationships in *Cosmopolitan* (and indeed, throughout society), the identification of the stranger as the dangerous man enables *Cosmopolitan* to maintain the model of the male protector (husband, boyfriend, lover) while

still including stories about violence. The representation of violence against women in the news is also typically those incidences that are sensational or extreme, and in the case of sexual assault, the ones that are reported are those that involve force at the hand of the stereotypical stranger who jumps from the bushes with a weapon (Caringella-MacDonald 1998). *Cosmopolitan* is no exception to this trend, which is the second theme of the representation of danger as being primarily from a strange man, and additionally that public spaces are particularly dangerous.

### *Stranger Danger*

Within *Cosmopolitan*, the inherently rapeable woman is particularly vulnerable to strangers who are cast as ‘sexual predators’. Of the thirty-nine danger stories, only seven were explicitly concerned with known perpetrators and of those seven, five were concerned with intimate partner violence during or at the end of a relationship<sup>54</sup>. Specifically three articles were about violence after a relationship ended (Booth August 2007; Stacey November 2008; Sikes December 2009); one about dating violence (Fairstein July 2009); and one about a woman who was (allegedly) killed by her husband on their honeymoon<sup>55</sup> (Ryes June 2011). Of the other two articles involving violence by known others, one involved a story of a young woman kidnapped by her neighbour (Sikes June 2007), and the other was a story of the criminal investigation into a woman’s death in which her ex-boyfriend is the prime suspect (Malone: March 2010). Some articles also have sections devoted to both stranger danger and threats from people known to the victim (often ex-

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<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that some articles that I have categorized as stranger violence do involve men who are known to the victim. I classify them as strangers if: the perpetrator is someone who a woman has just met or knows very peripherally (i.e. seen in the neighbourhood); if they are framed as a ‘predator’ who is looking for victims; and if there is no discussion of a relationship.

<sup>55</sup> The murder was framed as an isolated incident, and there was no mention of ongoing violence in the relationship.

boyfriends). For example, in “Scary New Ways Stalkers Come after Women”, there are stories about women stalked by ex-boyfriends, old classmates, and strangers (Fairstein January 2007). The December 2008 issue contains an article about date rape which contains references to both strangers and someone known to the victim (Stacey December 2008). Overall, articles about threats from those who are known are the minority: in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, the primary type of danger faced by women is ‘stranger danger’.

Public spaces are a prime location for stranger danger, and a variety of public spaces are cited as particularly dangerous throughout the magazines I reviewed. Perhaps the most explicit example of this was in the previously discussed article “The Five Most Dangerous Places for Women” (Fairstein October 2007), which focuses on five specific places where women faced danger from the stranger sexual predator who somehow possesses omniscient knowledge of women’s vulnerabilities and how to capitalize on them. The July 2008 edition includes multiple locations that women may be abducted from including parks, jogging and hiking trails, and any public spaces after dark. The introduction of this article reads, “sure, anyone who goes out jogging, biking, or hiking can encounter dangers—injury, flash floods, wild animals, or getting lost. But women face all those plus an additional risk: human predators who see them either as easier targets than men or as sexual prey” (Stacey: 130). Often the dangerous spaces were more generally described as the ‘street.’ The August 2006 edition cites the “obvious physical dangers of living in an unfamiliar place and usually on an inadequate salary—and being out at night on city streets” (Wildman: 147), while the February 2007 edition contains the story of a young woman who was abducted from a public street and murdered by a stranger in a random attack (Sikes).

Regardless of what the violence against women statistics indicate (that women are at greater risk from men they know), it is the stranger (or near stranger) attack that takes precedence in the articles of *Cosmopolitan*. The July 2010 edition contained an article titled “When a Stranger is Watching You” (Stacey), explicitly about stranger stalkers. The October 2009 (Malone) and May 2010 (Goad) issues contain stories about young women being abducted from public streets by strangers. And the April 2010 cover story “The Rape Danger Zone Most Women Don’t Know About” (Fairstein) is about women being attacked in their cars by strangers.

Moreover, stranger attackers are constructed as predators and deviants. The term ‘predator’ is used on multiple occasions to indicate the difference between men who attack women (predators and monsters) and men who do not (the ‘catch’ and protector). In the October 2010 article about serial rapists, Fairstein writes, “rape is a crime that occurs because of the offender’s predatory behavior, and you can never protect yourself one hundred percent from becoming a target” (197). The cover of the October 2007 issue advertises “5 Places Sexual Predators Look for Women” (Fairstein). In October 2006 the predator/prey allusion is also used when trying to convince girls to stay together at the bar because “a predator is looking for the most vulnerable prey” (Forman: 165), which is a woman alone. Even the date rapist is constructed as a near stranger who is a “‘predator’ who methodically stalks his ‘prey’” (Stacey June 2008: 149). And in reference to college parties women are warned about “guys who really do go out looking for victims at a frat party on a Saturday night” (Booth January 2008: 123).

The assaulter is not depicted in the pages of *Cosmopolitan* as the boyfriend or a co-worker, but as a predator who is stalking a party or bar, looking for vulnerable prey who

have wandered away from the safety of the pack. Even men who look ‘normal’ can turn out to be monsters (April 2007; June 2008; Sept 2009). The September 2009 article “Killer Charm” (Fairstein), examines a man who led a double life. He was engaged to a woman who claimed to have no idea he was also a serial rapist. This construction of the predator is not embedded in any understanding of a ‘rape culture’ or structural conditions which normalizes and ignores violence against women, but instead locates violence as an individual act that starts and ends with the deviant criminal.

In the April 2007 edition, statistics are misrepresented to imply that stranger danger is more common than it is. Author Michelle Stacey spends much of the articles discussing men’s evolutionary ‘hair-trigger response’, which apparently makes them quick to anger. In counselling women to avoid getting into confrontation with men, such as over a parking spot, Stacey states that “the most often cited trigger for murder was an argument, accounting for forty-four percent of homicides<sup>56</sup>” (April 2007: 201). What is not mentioned is that only 8.7 percent of women are murdered by strangers<sup>57</sup> (“Homicide Trends In The U.S”), so some of those argument induced homicides would involve people who knew each other and would also include male homicide victims. The lack of specificity with regards to the trends and patterns that are involved in the murder of women leads to the risks to women being misrepresented.

The December 2008 article “How to Outsmart a Date Rapist” (Stacey) is a good example of the mixed messages sent by *Cosmopolitan* in relation to risk. At one point the author says “among college students, one-half of all rapes are committed by a date” yet the

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<sup>56</sup> It is also unclear how exactly ‘argument’ was measured in this statistic.

<sup>57</sup> This is not a perfect comparison, as the data I am using includes data from 1976-2005 and the *Cosmopolitan* data is from 2004 only. Additionally, in 27.6 percent of the cases the relationship to the victim was unknown. But it does give a sense of the relative rarity of women murdered by strangers.

article begins with the blurb, “this kind of sexual predator is very slick at gaining your trust—until it’s too late” (Stacey 143). The implication is that the date rape is a premeditated act. In contradictory advice, the article suggests that women make sure that their body language matches their words as they ‘set boundaries’. As with the September 2007 article, “A New Type of Date Rape” (Stepp) there is the tendency to imply that date rape is a result of women miscommunicating their desires.

*Cosmopolitan* attempts to make women feel vulnerable and vigilant towards strangers and at the same time it makes issues of consent more unclear. *Cosmopolitan* introduces a concept called ‘gray rape’<sup>58</sup> in the September 2007 edition. Purportedly, this article is about sex where alcohol is involved which, according to *Cosmopolitan*, is something different than (date) rape. This so-called ‘gray rape’, according to *Cosmopolitan*, is “sex that falls somewhere between consent and denial and is even more confusing than date rape because often both parties are unsure of who wanted what” (Stepp September 2007: 199). This ‘new’ category of sexual assault, and its unproblematic introduction in *Cosmopolitan*, is especially troubling since it takes the serious issue of alcohol impairment and the ability to give consent and reduces it to an issue of a ‘misunderstanding’. Even more confusing for a reader is that every example given in the article is a clear-cut example of sexual assault where a woman clearly did not give consent and was forced to have sex. The incorrect labelling of (date) rape as ‘gray rape’ subtly reinforces the idea that rape is something that is perpetrated by strangers in a traditionally violent manner because these incidences of ‘gray rape’ are not being classified as rape. This again draws a distinction between the deviant individual

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<sup>58</sup> I do not have the space in this dissertation to take on the ridiculous and dangerous attempt to re-categorize sexual assault as something less than sexual assault, but I did not want to leave my objection with the publication and support of the concept unsaid.

predator (the date rapist who hunts his victims) and the confused and drunk college kid who will grow up to be the protector.

This attempt to reclassify rape as misunderstanding reflects some of the university advice to ensure that one is communicating clearly on dates (University of Ottawa for example). It is also very reminiscent of the mid-nineties backlash epitomized by Katie Roiphe's 1993 book *The Morning After: Fear, Sex and Feminism*, in which she argued that women bore some responsibility for date rape if they were too drunk or high to consent. Date rape, she claimed, was more often than not reinterpretation of 'bad sex'. While *Cosmopolitan* does not veer as far into victim blame, the stench of mid-1990s backlash lingers.

In the sidebar that accompanies the 'gray rape' article are the stories of two men whose 'lives were ruined' because of false rape accusations. In conjunction with the main article, the sidebar serves as a warning to women to 'be sure' that they were raped before making accusations and to ensure that what happened was 'really rape'. This article exists in the cultural context of American lawmakers who suggest that 'legitimate rape' cannot result in pregnancy and use terms such as 'forcible rape' to attempt to narrow the definition of sexual assault. *Cosmopolitan* serves to reinforce and disseminate the common rape myths that 'real rape' is violent and 'good guys' do not rape, but can be targeted by 'vindictive' women. This message encourages sympathy for men accused of rape and scepticism towards victims.

When there are stories about those who are known to the victim, there is a tendency to minimize the 'monstrousness' of the perpetrator. In an article about a college student who killed his ex-girlfriend (Sikes December 2009) the tone was sympathetic towards the

perpetrator, as his life was also ruined through his act of violence. When men are not constructed as the predator, that is that they are instead described as ‘normal’ college kids who will grow up to be husbands and fathers, they are not held as responsible for their behaviour. Their testosterone, brain development, physiology, and biology are all highly influential. The exemplar for this type of narrative is the article “A New Kind of Date Rape” (Stepp: September 2007), discussed above. Date rape at colleges that are perpetrated by ‘normal guys’ are not considered criminal violence, but a misunderstanding. This narrative is very different than the predator that goes stalking his prey at college parties with intent. This type of man is and always will be the monster, as opposed to the college kid whose acts are unintentional and therefore can still have a chance to grow up into the protector.

When intimate partner violence is addressed, it is still framed through the stranger danger lens as illustrated by the August 2006 article “Why You May Be in Danger”, which contains this passage:

‘Many killers don’t look like the strangers your mother warned you about—they don’t wear signs that identify them as murderers or rapists.’ That’s one reason why intimate-partner violence is also more common among women in their 20s, says Rosenfeld [criminologist professor]. To protect yourself, ‘you have to cultivate your human wariness of strangers’ says Levin [director of Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University] (Wildman August 2006:148).

The connection being made between intimate-partner violence and being wary of strangers is unclear, but it implies that if a woman can identify the dangerous stranger he will not become the surprisingly violent boyfriend. This is very similar to the propensity of official safety advice websites to state that the majority of violence is perpetrated by someone known to the victim, but then follow up with tips involving public spaces and strangers.

*Cosmopolitan* generally underemphasises violence against women by partners and those who are friends or acquaintances, and constructs known men as the protectors of

women from the dangerous stranger. This is problematic because evidence indicates that for women there is far more of a chance of being victimized indoors, in their own homes, and by men they know (Vaillancourt 2008; Janhevich 1998; Stanko 1992). The few articles that do deal with intimate partner violence mostly ignore sustained violence within relationships, and instead focus on those men who turn violent only after a relationship ends. This is illustrated by this quote: “While sometimes the warning signs are abundant...many times, the violent ending seems to come out of nowhere” (Stacey, Nov. 2008: 155).

I am not claiming that there are not circumstances in which relationships turn violent without any prior red flags; however the almost complete disregard for violence within the relationships misrepresents the pattern of violence that many women experience. It also completely erases systemic inequality that leads to the possibility of domestic violence. The discourses of stranger danger and public space risks also obscures the dangers for women found within normative heterosexuality because it assumes that women need protection from strange men, and known men are the ones to provide that protection. In this way the heterosexual union is seen as normal, and as such it is difficult to question (Stanko 1992, 2001). Within heterosexual relationships are unequal relations of power and violence, yet it is still the stranger outside of the home that is seen as the biggest threat to women’s safety, and thus messages about crime prevention centre around identifying and avoiding these men.

What happens if women do not buy into this strategy of safekeeping and do not take the appropriate steps to manage risks? They are at risk of being blamed for their own victimization (Carmody and Carrington 2000: 348). Avoiding blame appears to be an important factor for women when they make decisions about where they go, what they wear, and what they do.

### *Blaming the Victim*

Women are blamed both implicitly and explicitly for their own victimization in the pages of *Cosmopolitan*. They are implicitly blamed when it is stated that everyone has an ‘innate’ gut feeling that ‘we’re taught to ignore’ because we are empowered, or because we are trying to be nice or polite. The narrative of the articles that evoke intuition is that if women are victimized it is because they chose to ignore their instincts. In a story of a woman who was raped by a Black man at a New York subway station, Fairstein wrote, “The first thing Erika [the victim] had to confront...was her powerful self-blame. She’d known in her heart that it was safer to wait closer to the street until she heard the train...but she’d ignored her instincts because she did not want to seem racist or judgemental” (March 2008: 176). As discussed in the previous chapter, the view that women have natural instincts that can be relied upon to keep them safe is problematic. This type of suggestion presupposes that there is a natural way of responding to potential danger and that all potential danger is recognizable. This narrative ignores the social and cultural differences that may give rise to different orientations towards danger and also the gendered nature of fear. What is labelled as instinctual in *Cosmopolitan* might better be defined as socialized fearful femininity.

Individual women are blamed for their own victimization because they are not paying enough attention, not following their instincts, or being stubborn. This is exemplified by the quote that “a lot of the danger boils down to naïveté” (Wildman August 2006: 148). Additionally women’s confidence in the world can also lead to victimization. According to the April 2007 edition:

‘Women feel stronger than they did before—more willing to express their feeling even if it leads to a confrontation’ [says Jack Levin, criminologist and director of the

Brudnick Center on Violence at Northeastern University]. Combining that with women simply being out in the world more, often in positions of some authority, and you have many more opportunities for something bad to happen (Stacey April 2007: 202).

This confidence is placed in the context of women's increased social equality, so that the feminist movement's fight for gender equality shoulders some of the blame: "We're living in a post-feminist era...and that has given young women a lot more opportunities including the opportunity to be victimized by total strangers" (Wildman August 2006: 148).

There is very little attribution of responsibility to societal factors and women's social inequality as leading to possible vulnerability. And while the abuser/attacker is often mentioned in the *Cosmopolitan* articles, he is given little agency to control or prevent his behaviour—it is up to women to keep themselves safe. When 'the social' does enter into it, it is often women who are responsible for men's anger. Women's empowerment and 'new' place in society (as more equal) has been highlighted as making women more vulnerable to attack, and making men angrier towards them. This is made clear by Michelle Stacey when she writes, "a lot of male anger stemming from a deep-seated feeling of not being good enough or strong enough... [says Thomas Harbin, author of *Beyond Anger: A Guide for Men*] 'Here's this person who I'd like to think of as my inferior, and she's in my face. As a last resort, I'll try to beat her down.'" (April 2007: 203)

Additionally to not follow their instincts, women, especially young women, are seen as actively putting themselves at risk (in a number of ways, including drinking alcohol, excessive partying, and poor decision-making skills). This is evidenced in the August 2006 article "Why You May Be in Danger" (Wildman), which is about the 'dangers' that people in their early twenties may face because they are on their own for the first time. Women are "vulnerable to all kinds of calamities, including violent crime and fatal accidents that occur

as a result of risk-taking behaviour” (147). What is particularly problematic here is the construction of activities such as being out alone at night on a city street or going to bars where there are young men as ‘risk taking behaviours’ (148). The most overt of these has been mentioned already, called “The Dangerous Mistakes Gutsy Women Make” (Stacey April 2007), which explicitly labels common behaviours (such as standing up for oneself) as ‘mistakes’ and ‘dangerous’.

However, ‘risk-taking behaviour’ does not have to be present for blame to be placed. In the January 2007 article “Scary New Ways Stalkers Come After Women”, women are told that “there are things you do every day that enable an obsessed ex, acquaintance, or stranger to track you” ( Fairstein:119). The use of the term ‘enable’ implies that women’s behaviours assist and allow such stalking and harassment.

This blame is not confined to interactions with strangers. In a scholarly article which explores the discourses dealing with the attribution of responsibility for domestic violence in popular women’s magazines, Nancy Berns writes that this discourse overwhelmingly “focus[es] on the victims while it leaves the abusers in the background” (1999: 86). While Berns’ article focuses solely on domestic violence, her statement above can easily be transferred to *Cosmopolitan’s* articles on physical danger towards women. For example, one of the few articles about intimate partner violence is titled “Her Boyfriend Killed Her For Breaking Up With Him” (Aug. 2007). The phrasing of this title places the blame on the victim for taking action (breaking up with her boyfriend) that led to violence instead of placing the blame for the decision to do harm on the perpetrator of the act.

The backlash against women as they achieve more success and equality is one feminist theory to explain violence and harassment (Faludi 1991), so these ideas in

*Cosmopolitan* are not inherently problematic, but the way that they are framed is. Women, and the feminist movement, are blamed and men are not held accountable for their behaviour. The 'feelings of inadequacy' are mobilized as an explanation and perhaps an excuse for male violence in the same way 'intermittent explosive disorder' and evolutionary advantage is used to explain and justify male violence. None of these explanations locate male violence in its social context.

Women's 'empowerment' to drink alcohol and party 'like men' is also brought into conversation about sexual assault. In the article about 'gray rape', the idea that women can be just as bold and adventurous as men and drink as much as them is introduced as part of the problem. Armstrong et al.'s study on the phenomenon labelled as 'party rape'<sup>59</sup> found that sexual assault prevention literature and strategies, which are abundant in *Cosmopolitan*, can maintain a victim-blaming way of thinking by placing the responsibility to safeguard against sexual assault on women (2006: 493). Women are charged to watch their drinks, stick together with friends, and regard men who give them drinks with suspicion; the implication is that if these things are all done properly then one will stay safe. If one fails at proper safeguarding, and is irresponsible or lets their guard down, then sexual assault becomes a proper punishment (Armstrong et al. 2006: 493). Women are held responsible by their peers and often themselves for their mistakes in not following these safeguarding rules. This also implies that men (without active intervention from women) are naturally likely to attempt to rape and abuse women (Armstrong et al. 2006: 493).

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<sup>59</sup> Party rape is a term that is also used in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which appears to have been recently defined by the Department of Justice in the United States as 'a distinct form of rape' that occurs (or originates) in off-campus housing or in fraternity houses and involves deliberately providing women with copious amounts of alcohol in order to engage in sexual behaviour.

Blaming the victim is not a new phenomenon; women have been blamed throughout history for inflaming men's desires and causing their own victimization. It is evident that this trend continues through to today. The concern around being blamed and the inclination to blame others shows up in the interviews with the women in my study. The fact that the women that I spoke with were well-educated and many of them expressed a feminist politic illustrates the strength of this discourse which is very present in *Cosmopolitan*. Blaming the victim in large part relies on knowingly violating gender role expectations of women and men. It is about knowing (and accepting) that physical vulnerability is inherent in women and physical aggression is inherent in men, and acting in such ways that acknowledge these characteristics. When women do not act in appropriately deferential ways to their own vulnerabilities and men's possible aggression, then they are at risk of violence (for *Cosmopolitan* that consists mostly of rape and murder). So women are held responsible to avoid spaces where men's aggression is likely to be present (the street or the bar), to intuit when a strange man may get violent, and to follow a host of safekeeping practices in all circumstances while men are not expected to be responsible for their behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

The type of advice offered in *Cosmopolitan* draws on and perpetuates the discourses about danger and women's vulnerabilities. The fact that women are particularly targeted in safety warnings is not surprising given that women's bodies are commonly perceived to be susceptible to attack by stronger, more aggressive male bodies because female bodies, in general, are seen as inherently vulnerable. Jocelyn Hollander writes, "women continue to be portrayed as weak, helpless, and passive in both scholarly and popular writings" (2002: 476); and because of this perceived vulnerability women are expected to be fearful and act in ways

to protect themselves from “ever present” potential danger (Hollander 2002: 474). There has been extensive documentation that women have limits placed, and place limits, on their movements and mobility (Hollander 2002; Stanko 1992). This has individual, familial and social consequences as women are often not able to participate as fully as men in the social, economic, political, and personal aspects of life that occur outside of the ‘safety’ of the home (Hollander 2002: 476). The reasons for these limitations are often attributed to fear: fear of crime (especially sexual assault), but also fear of judgement and blame if the appropriate safekeeping behaviour is not practiced (Stanko 1997; Gardner 1992).

Despite *Cosmopolitan*’s motto of “Fun, Fearless, and Female”, women are not always encouraged to act fearlessly or with confidence; in fact doing so is often seen as dangerous. *Cosmopolitan* is dedicated to the maintenance of their brand of femininity, a femininity of fear based on the fundamental assumption of women’s natural physical vulnerability. As discussed earlier, women’s equality (which is characterized to a large extent as confidence and visibility in public spaces) is actively blamed for women’s victimization. Blaming women’s increased equality is compounded by the suggestion that women’s innate/socialized niceness and unwillingness to offend can put them in danger; the sum of this advice is for women not to be confident and expect every interaction (especially with male strangers) to be potentially dangerous.

*Cosmopolitan* encourages ‘worst case’ thinking and contributes to the ‘boogeyman in the bushes’ fear. This maintenance of women as justifiably fearful because they are naturally vulnerable to men’s natural aggressiveness, I suggest, is part of the reason that women’s reported fear of crime is so high and why many women place limits on their movements through public space. The analysis of official sources and a widely read

women's magazine allowed me to confirm that the assumptions of female vulnerability and public spaces, as well as the notion of strangers as dangerous as established from the fear of crime literature, exists in other forms as well.

In the next chapter I will draw together these two sites of safety advice and discuss the discourses that underscore this type of advice and the implications they have for women's experiences and perspectives in public spaces.

## CHAPTER SIX: Establishing the Discourses

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss how the discourses in official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan* contribute to the creation and maintenance of the norms of respectable femininity, in particular that female bodies are vulnerable and that the precautions must be taken to avoid danger posed by strangers, especially in public spaces. It will also locate the discourses in their wider social contexts as well as discussing the consequences of this construction. As maintained and reified in official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan*, these discourses serve to justify women's fearfulness and encourage the performance of fearful femininity, in which women are expected to regulate their mobility through public spaces in order to minimize their risk of criminal victimization. After a more detailed discussion of these discourses in this chapter, I will spend the next two chapters exploring some of the ways the women in my study complied, negotiated, and resisted them. It is important to note, as West and Zimmerman do, that doing gender does not mean "living up to" the normative version of femininity, rather "it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*" (1987: 136; original emphasis). This discussion is not to suggest that these normative behaviours are inescapable; as I shall discuss in the next two chapters, there are many different ways that the women in my study 'did gender' and some of those ways never conformed exactly to respectable femininity.

### The Power of Discourse

Hollander (1997; 2001) argues that the role of discourse cannot be underestimated in the construction and maintenance of fearfulness. Hollander defines discourse as "a collectively constructed, coherent way of understanding the world" (2002: 477). She notes

that there are multiple discourses that can inform our perceptions and understandings of the world. Drawing on Jeanne Marecek (1999), Hollander defines dominant discourses as those “that are granted the status of truth, the agreed-upon frameworks of language and meaning”. In this chapter I will discuss the dominant discourses of vulnerable female bodies and dangerous public spaces that are found throughout the safety advice and representations of dangers in *Cosmopolitan* articles.

Campbell writes, “what we consider to be freely chosen decisions are in actuality objects of power that have been formed and shaped in relation to specific discourses which give rise to specific sets of practices in respect to the most intimate aspects and routines of our daily lives” (2005: 123). Campbell’s point is relevant here as it relates to the fact that these discourses ‘give rise’ to the practices of feminine safekeeping.

This is not to suggest that we are powerless to change or resist these discourses. Taking a note from the post-structuralist argument, it is important to recognize that “individuals are both active and passive, users and used, or products and producers of discourses” (Peace 2003: 165). This will be evident in the next two chapters as my participants discuss their negotiation with the safety and danger discourses, both resisting and reaffirming their power.

The discourses of vulnerable bodies and dangerous strangers in public spaces are sustained and perpetuated through education and socialization, which start at birth. The discourses of vulnerable female bodies and public spaces stranger danger contribute to the continuation of gender inequality and the subordination of women. Women are encouraged to be fearful because they are taught that their bodies are vulnerable, especially to sexual assault, and that strange men (who are located in public spaces) are the main threat to

women's bodily safety. For the sake of analytical clarity I will speak of each of these discourses separately, but they are connected and mutually constitutive. I shall begin with vulnerable bodies.

### **Vulnerable Female Bodies**

A lifetime of anecdotal evidence, media representations, experiences, and interactions point to a fairly universal perception of women as physically weaker, more vulnerable, and less able to defend themselves against attack. I am not trying to dismiss or minimize the epidemic level of violence against women; I am suggesting that this is not a natural, universal, or inevitable way of being. Hollander asserts that in commonly shared constructions of gender, "vulnerability to violence is a core component of femininity, but not masculinity" (2001:84). Respectable femininity requires the performance, or doing, of gender. In particular white middle class women are more often depicted as the victim in fictionalized television shows (Britto 2007; Soulliere 2003), with the perpetrator often depicted as a strange man (Britto 2007).

It is common sense to think of male and female bodies as different, and indeed reproductive organs are a major difference between the majority of male and female bodies. This difference in reproductive capacity is often considered to indicate different bodily capacities and abilities. In fact, bodily movements are taken to be natural—the result of biology, genetics, and nerves that are trained and developed to the extent that the biology allows. Male bodies are generally thought of as capable of more: size, strength, and competence. Women's bodies are viewed as weaker, frailer, and generally lesser in comparison. Women have always been seen to be at the mercy of their bodies; their ability to menstruate, get pregnant, and lactate all serve to tie them to the body in a way

that men have mostly escaped, at least men of the dominant groups (Bordo 1993). It is not surprising then, that women's bodies are still seen as a limitation—specifically as a limitation to women's safety in this context.

In order to combat the notion that women are always vulnerable, I will draw on Iris Marion Young (2005) and other authors to discuss the learned bodily habits of gender, and Alex Campbell's (2005) argument regarding the effect of safety advice on the production of rapeable bodies.

### *Bodily Socialization and Ideal Body Type*

A tenant of feminist and sociological thought is that femininity and masculinity are not innate, but consist of learned behaviours and attitudes that are linked to biological sex. Also, there is not one model of femininity and masculinity, but multiple constructions and ways to 'be' masculine or feminine. However, generally feminine traits include nurturing, passivity, and emotional sensitivity whereas masculine traits include aggression, independence, and emotional control. Gender socialization is a complicated and contradictory process and one which is ongoing throughout life; *Cosmopolitan* is an example of gender role instruction aimed at adults. Learning 'what it means' to be a girl or a boy begins at birth.

The messages contained in the official safety advice and the pages of *Cosmopolitan* collectively illustrate a world that is dangerous for everyone with a female body. The fact that risk of violence is not equally distributed amongst all women is mostly ignored and the norm of white femininity is universalized. In the official safety advice, those in a middle class position are implicitly targeted as being able and willing to enact safekeeping behaviour.

The safekeeping behaviour espoused in both of these sources is one of avoidance rather than engagement. While many of the sources advocate 'making a scene' or drawing attention to oneself if in danger, they do not advocate using physical force. The subtle message being sent is that woman cannot win a physical fight with an attacker. Ubiquitous in both sites is the suggestion to report all crimes and suspicious activity to the appropriate authority. This is true on many types of situations, not just physical attacks. 'Suspicious behaviours', being 'watched', and feeling uncomfortable can all be justifications for getting the authorities involved. This reinforces the dependency of others and also, given the racist and classist construction of the 'criminal', may lead to the harassment of people who have been identified as 'suspicious' or threatening.

It is not surprising that research indicates that feelings of physical vulnerability contribute to feelings of fear (Killias and Clerici 2000). Killias and Clerici characterize vulnerability as "the inability to cope with a physical attack" (2000: 449). Because of this perceived vulnerability, women are expected to be fearful and act in ways to protect themselves from 'ever-present' potential danger (Hollander 2002: 474). Normative femininity requires weak bodies (or at least bodies that are weaker than men's), and weak bodies are vulnerable to attack by strong(er) bodies.

The frequent refrain heard in safety advice, media sources, and in everyday conversation is that men's bodies are simply bigger and if a man wants to attack a woman there is nothing she can do about it. However, it is more complicated than this. According to Brian Turner, bodies must be "trained, manipulated, cajoled, coaxed, organized and in general disciplined" (1992: 15). Even though physical movements look to be natural, bodily behaviours are not innate, but learned (Young 1990, 2005; Martin 1998). Karin Martin

(1998) writes that many feminist theories of the body focus on the adult body and do not seek to explain how a body becomes gendered, thereby contributing to the perceived naturalness of the body. But learning bodily capacities starts early in our lives (Martin 1998).

Parents (and others) treat girls and boys differently from birth. In general, boys are given more physical freedom and independence whereas girls are viewed as more physically vulnerable, fragile, and in need of protection (Nelson 2010: 122). Even in the first six months of life, fathers (more so than mothers) are more likely to roughhouse with boys while discouraging the same types of behaviours in daughters (Nelson 2010: 122). Given the early physical play that boys are encouraged to participate in, it is not surprising that as they grow up they are more willing to test their bodies in active and physical ways (Coakley 2001: 129). Thus men's bodies come to be seen as sources of power (Connell 1995) while "women's bodies are often sources of anxiety and tentativeness" (Martin 2005: 495).

Research indicates that male and female infants are also communicated with differently (Clearfield and Nelson 2006). Words used to describe infant boys include tall, sturdy, and serious, while those for infant girls are small, pretty, and delicate (Nelson 2010: 121). Girls and boys are dressed in different colours—pink for girls and blue for boys. Storybooks portray stereotypical gender roles for men and women, even if the characters are animals (Anderson and Hamilton 2005). Toys are gendered as well, with girls expected to play with dolls, princesses, and cooking paraphernalia while boys are plied with action figures, cars, and fighting machines. This gendering continues into school; Barrie Thorne (1998) writes that apart from age (which divides students into distinct grades), gender is the most highlighted of the social categories of students in the course of each school day.

Gender socialization teaches girls and boys and women and men the expectations of 'normal' gender behaviours. This includes the sexual aggression of men and the passivity and availability of women.

Bodily gendered norms are reinforced through the interaction between boys and girls and men and women. For example, 'don't hit girls' is a common message that boys receive from a young age and it serves to reinforce the gender and bodily differences between girl bodies (explicitly not to be hit) and boy bodies (implicitly acceptable to hit). And while I would argue that 'don't hit' is a positive and important anti-violence message that should be applied universally, distinguishing that it is girls' bodies that should not be hit prescribes that female bodies are distinct from and more fragile than male bodies. Additionally, Martin observes that some of this difference is brought about through the difference in clothing that boys and girls wear (1998). In her study of preschool classes, Martin observed that girls wear clothing that tends to be more restrictive and less comfortable. Additionally teachers were more likely to manage girls and their clothing, for example straightening skirts and tights, than they were for boys. She writes, "perhaps the most explicit way that children's bodies become gendered is through their clothes and other bodily adornments" (Martin 1998: 498). This illustrates that gendering of the body begins at an early age and occurs in ways that are incredibly subtle, constant, and embedded in everyday interactions such that they come to be thought of as normal and natural (Martin 1998).

Similarly, Ruth Hubbard argues that the gendered social practice towards boys' and girls' bodies leads, not only to behavioural differences, but also to biological differences.

She writes:

If a society puts half its children into short skirts and warns them not to move in ways that reveal their panties, while putting the other half into jeans and overalls and

encourages them to climb trees, play ball, and participate in other vigorous outdoor games; if later, during adolescence, the children who have been wearing trousers are urged to “eat like growing boys,” while the children in skirts are warned to watch their weight and not get fat; if the half in jeans runs around in sneakers or boots, while the half in skirts totters about on spike heels, then these two groups of people will be biologically as well as socially different. Their muscles will be different, as will their reflexes, posture, arms, legs and feet, hand-eye coordination, and so on (Hubbard 1990: 69).

Specifically this training leads to women’s bodies being less than men’s—weaker, more fragile, less capable. Young argues that a lack of physical confidence develops from women’s inability to use one’s body fully and freely (2005). David Inglis continues to make this point when he says, “while males tend to use their *whole* bodies when doing something like throwing a ball, girls tend only to use the body parts most directly relevant to the activity, such as the arm in the case of throwing” (2005: 31).

Being thin and small is a western model of white beauty, in which girls and women are encouraged to strive for smallness and toned, but not developed, muscles. This is contrasted with the desirable male body, which is strong, big, and powerful. In their discussion of women and sports, Blinde et al. (2001: 159) argue that gender-role socialization dissuades women from seeing themselves as strong and powerful. Instead girls and women are encouraged to focus on being thin as an essential part of being attractive.

This model of femininity is predominantly white and middle class. As Madriz writes regarding white women:

They are taught not to get involved in physical squabbles. Only “bad girls”—or poor girls of color—do...Good women obey the codes of behavior and do not fight. Therefore, they should stay in because they do not know how to protect themselves. Bad women do not follow those codes. Therefore, they have to fight to protect themselves (Madriz 1997b: 350).

Additionally, many women are apprehensive about weight training because they are concerned about building too much muscle (Shilling and Bunsell 2009). In fact, too much

defined muscle on women, for example female body builders, is considered transgressive of the norms of gender (Shilling and Bunsell 2009). According to Chris Shilling and Tanya Bunsell, “girls are meant to learn that female strength is unappealing to men, that being attractive to men is important, and that competing with boys in sports risks having called into question one's gender and sexuality” (2009: 145-46). This has major consequences for how female bodies develop.

### *Sexual Assault*

The official safety advice and the danger stories in *Cosmopolitan* implicitly and explicitly highlight the risk of sexual assault. Much of the safety advice/warnings and media representations rest on and contribute to the understanding of sexual assault as ‘the worst’ possible crime. It is implied, assumed, and stated that one of the predominant features of being a woman in the Western world is a fear of rape and that most women see all crimes as potentially escalating to rape; as such women’s high levels of fear may reflect the seriousness of rape (Koskela 1997; Stanko 2000). Women’s understanding of danger seems to be tied up with their understanding of sexual safety (Stanko 1992). Sexual assault is also constructed as a crime that exists only for women and moreover, the threat of it is seen to exist for all women.

However, it has not always been the case that sexual assault has been so central a fear for women. As Bourke writes,

Although women have been raped and murdered throughout previous centuries, the *fear* of rape did not generate a discourse of terror among feminists of earlier periods...It was only from the 1970s that feminist activists identified women’s dread as *the* central fear of women. They were driven by a political agenda involving a passionate critique of Western patriarchal society” (2005: 325).

Additionally rape is constructed differently in different cultural contexts. Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke (2002) explores cultures in which rape is rare or absent. She investigates

matrilineal societies and concludes that there are societies that are essentially rape-free. The difference between these societies and those of the west where rape is epidemic and considered an inevitable fact of life are several, but one that is relevant to this current project is that family dynamics create and maintain an understanding that “heterosexual interaction does not become associated with authority, dominance, and control as it does in the West” (2002: 605). Societies in which rape is rare help illustrate that rape is not located in the biology of the male and female body, but rather in the social relations of patriarchal heterosexuality.

It was not until the 1970s that rape became identified as ‘the fear’ for women. The discussion of sexual assault was framed through the lens of the feminist critique of patriarchy and women’s oppression (Bourke 2005). And eventually, as Bourke writes, “for millions of women in Britain and America, fear of rape was woven into the everyday fabric of her life. It was an ambient fear, a low-level but constant unease, present in public spaces (especially at night)” (2005: 325). The fear of sexual violence has come to be understood as a major contributing factor to women’s fear of public spaces (Beneke 1997: 130), and the fact that women fear the possibility of rape when in public (especially at night) is so accepted and repeated that it has become Truth. Thus, given this construction of sexual assault, all of the restrictions and warnings make sense and are ‘worth it’ but they also maintain this understanding of rape as that which we fear above all, contributing to the discursive construction of the rapeable body. And the ‘better safe than sorry’ attitude becomes normalized and beyond challenge.

### *The Body and Fear*

As previously noted, the notion of fear of crime is often bound up with particular

ways of thinking about the female body. As Lee writes,

The search for surplus fear almost always concerns itself with bodies of women. These bodies, precisely because of their femaleness, are at risk...Sexual assault, vulnerability, and domestic violence become the sources of women's surplus fear of crime. Masculinity's discursive association with the mind as opposed to femininity's association with the body obscures it as an object of enquiry (2007: 129).

Women are often seen (and see themselves) as physically vulnerable to men's larger size and strength (Hollander 2001: 84). And as discussed earlier, this physical vulnerability is taken as natural and inevitable.

In addition, women are also believed to be naturally less aggressive than men. However, the level of sex differentiation between females and males is a complicated and contextual matter that depends largely on how one defines aggression and subsequently researches it (Rivers and Barnett 2011). Caryl Rivers and Rosalind C. Barnett write, "it seems that researchers, like the rest of us, assume that boys will act in certain ways and focus on those behaviours, paying less attention to the more numerous non-aggressive behaviours that are more typical of most boys, most of the time" (2011: 105). They suggest that given this bias, the level of boys' and girls' aggression is distorted. This finding echoes the critique of the research bias in regards to female fearfulness and is reflected in both academic literature and in popular imagination.

The flip side of this is that aggression in girls is ignored and/or discouraged (Rivers and Barnett 2011). While aggression in boys is accepted as normal, girls are expected (by adults) to display cooperative and restrained play and moreover, research indicates that girls' behaviour is more 'culturally constrained' than is boys' (Rivers and Barnett 2011)<sup>60</sup>. The

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<sup>60</sup> Rivers and Barnett (2011) note that girls and women have more opportunities in recent years to engage in aggressive behaviours (i.e. competitive sports) and there is less shock when girls display aggressive behaviour. This suggests that the sex differential of aggression may be narrowing, although there are still many mechanisms that work to maintain the expectations of male aggression and female passivity.

discouragement of girls to actively participate in 'rough and tumble' play is another mechanism that shapes female bodies as weaker and less competent than male bodies. Additionally girls may also be uncomfortable in developing powerful bodies and using their bodies in physical ways.

Alex Campbell argues that rape prevention literature is implicated in the reproduction and maintenance of a 'rapeable body' (2005: 120). It does this, Campbell claims, by keeping women captive to "restricting regimes of the self which render women less socially orientated and more reliant on men are more likely to harm women" (2005: 120). Additionally and equally important, it (re)inscribes the female body and femininity as inherently and biologically vulnerable (Campbell 2005:120). Campbell argues that the belief that female bodies are weak and vulnerable to men's ability to rape is not a natural state, but comes from women learning to see themselves as constantly vulnerable. This view of vulnerability is imprinted on the body, which is not expected to be able to be strong and capable. The belief that one is vulnerable simultaneously affects one's subjectivity so one sees themselves as vulnerable and lives their life as though their body is lesser (Campbell 2005: 121). Learnt vulnerability is accomplished (at least partially) through recurring acts of safekeeping (Campbell 2005: 120).

In her study of women's self-defence classes, De Welde makes the claim that enacting femininity, especially white femininity, is actually dangerous for women. She writes,

gendered behaviors were based on cultural/ideological conceptions of white women and femininity. White, middleclass, heterosexual gender socialization had saturated these women's thinking to such an extent that their struggles to maintain femininity had virtually endangered their daily lives (De Welde 2003b: 256).

De Welde and Campbell come to the conclusion that the way that women ‘do gender’ (West and Zimmerman 1987) is constructed but deeply entrenched, and moreover that the dominant model of white middle class femininity contributes to women’s vulnerability. I would suggest that a lot of the fear and anxiety that women may feel is at least partially explained by the construction of the vulnerable female body. Women are made to see their bodies as weak, particularly those women who aspire to normative femininity as the ideal, since those bodies are slender, slim and non-muscular. Thus not seeing one’s body and one’s self as weak may be an important factor in the expression of confidence.

In summary, this all points to the fact that women and girls are not taught to use their bodies to their fullest abilities, to take up and use space, or to move through space with confidence (Young 1990; Martin 2005). Nor are they taught to believe that their bodies can be strong. When one believes that they are vulnerable and they have been taught and trained their entire lives to develop a vulnerable body, then fearfulness is a predictable outcome.

When it comes to discussing women’s safety in public spaces and the role that fear of crime plays in restricting women’s mobility, the second influential discourse that appears throughout the safety advice and representations of danger is that strange men in public spaces are dangerous; I will now address this idea.

### **Strangers in Public Spaces are Dangerous**

Safety advice, media depictions, news reports, and interpersonal communication represent public spaces (especially at night) as dangerous spaces for women to be (especially alone); in particular it is the location of the (potentially) dangerous stranger. The majority of personal safety tips concern public spaces and the advice they give is oriented to providing

protection from the stranger, and the majority of the danger articles in *Cosmopolitan* are set in public spaces, and of those that are not, the stranger is still constructed as the threat.

Fear of crime literature takes public space as its de facto location (Pain 2001). This is evidenced by one of the most common survey questions in fear of crime research: a variation of 'how safe do you feel in your neighbourhood or X kilometres from your home?' This question is then used to interpret fear of crime, which makes public space the default location when investigating fear of crime. As such, most of the crime prevention tips are directed to activities and behaviours in public spaces and to provide safety from strangers. This is the case even though empirical studies illustrate that women are less likely to be a victim of all crimes except domestic violence and sexual assault (Lee 2007: 116), and these crimes are mostly committed by someone known in a private space (Listerborn 2002; Pain 2001; Whitzman 1995). Crime prevention tips that are directed towards the home are mostly concerned with preventing property crime, although this also includes making sure that people cannot break in and put the inhabitant's physical safety at risk.

The knowledge of the dangers of public spaces and strangers are developed from an early age. Children are taught not to talk to strangers, public spaces are constructed as spaces of danger, children's access to public space is highly regulated, and they spend little time unaccompanied in public spaces. Additionally girls have even less access to public spaces than do boys (Valentine 1997). Furthermore, girls are more likely to be required to return home once night begins to fall which leaves the playgrounds and the street to the boys (Gagen 2000). This is consistent with Valentine's (1997a: 24) research on middle and lower class parents in the rural UK, which reveals that "after the age of 11...parental restrictions on boys' spatial ranges are relaxed and restrictions on girls are intensified with the emphasis

placed on their physical vulnerability to attack.” Parents of girls encourage in them a sense of vulnerability in public spaces, which is reinforced through official safety advice and media depictions of danger.

If public spaces are deemed dangerous, then private spaces are constructed as safe. Media representations of crimes against women typically underreport violence by known others and when they do report on domestic violence, those cases are often reported as ‘bizarre spectacles’ rather than common everyday events (Soulliere 2003: 50). As Kristen Day points out, by focusing on the stranger in public, women’s experiences of violent crimes in private spaces do not receive the appropriate level of attention (2001). Day writes that “the construction of feminine gender identities often emphasizes women’s vulnerability and reinforces the idea of public space as dangerous for women” (2001: 109). There are many researchers, scholars, and activists who have argued tirelessly that much of the violence that women experience is located in the private spaces of the home at the hands of intimates (Johnson 1996, 2006). However the discourse of stranger danger and public spaces as dangerous has persevered (Myers and Post 2006). As much as our feminist foremothers tried to make the personal the political, the ‘private’ violence faced by many women is still second to ‘stranger danger’ in our collective consciousness<sup>61</sup>. As Emily Myers and Lori Post write of their research sample, “it appears that the pervasive myth of the stranger rapist hiding in the bushes is alive and well” (2006: 222).

### *Separate Spheres*

If private spaces are predominately the site of violence and known men pose more of a threat than strangers, how can we understand the overwhelming focus on public spaces and

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<sup>61</sup> This is not to suggest that there are not scholars actively studying domestic violence, but that scholarly research into domestic violence has not translated into an increased public awareness, as the fear of crime literature has produced a public awareness of ‘stranger danger’.

strangers? In order to understand this incongruity, it is important to start with a discussion of the ideology of the public/private dichotomy (as well as the construction of the stranger, which I will discuss in the next section). Much of the discourse about stranger danger is built on the ideology of separate spheres and the dichotomy between the public and the private. In fact, the general inequality of women can be traced back, at least partially, to the confinement of women to the private sphere (Bondi 1998). However it is important to note, as Bondi argues, that this separation should be understood as ‘ideals’ or ‘ideologies’, and not an accurate representation of the majority of women’s everyday lives (1998: 161). Whether or not they represent reality, these ideologies have a great deal of power to maintain ideas and judgements about who belongs and who does not belong in certain spaces.

Davidoff writes, “despite their instability and mutability, public and private are concepts which also have had powerful material and experiential consequences...in short, they have become a basic part of the way our whole social and psychic worlds are ordered, but an order that is constantly shifting, being made and remade” (1998: 165). The construction of the public and the private has been drawn in such a way as to ‘confine’ women to the private realm of care-giving, reproduction, and housework (Benhabib 1998). This construction of women in the private has historically kept them off of the ‘public (state) agenda’ (Benhabib 1998). As well, it justified the treatment of women as the property of men (Bondi 1998). Men have been associated with the public sphere of politics and civic life as well as the public spaces of the city<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Another example of this gendering of the public and the private is that a public woman has traditionally been a prostitute or a commoner, and in comparison a public man is someone whose actions are seen to be benefiting the ‘common good’ (Landes 1988).

The ideal of the separate spheres helps to reinforce the discourse about ‘stranger danger’ by propping up the idea that women should not be in public spaces (Bondi 1998), even though the reality is that women throughout history have always existed in both types of spaces. The maintenance of these dichotomies has consequences for the structure of our society. Bondi writes, “the *ideal* of separate spheres has had, and continues to have, enormously powerful effects”, and she continues, “the ideal of separate spheres also reverberates through moral judgements made about the behaviour of women and men in ‘public’ spaces” (1998: 162).

#### *Anti-urbanism and Fear of the Stranger*

The city has long been viewed with both hostility and wonder; it was seen as both a place of corruption and a place of freedom (Lofland 1998). However the anti-urbanism sentiment tends to be more dominant and people seen as different are cast as potentially dangerous and to be feared (Bannister and Fyfe 2001: 807). Therefore, the historical context of anti-urban sentiment constructs the streets as dangerous and dirty places where people should spend the least amount of time possible in order to avoid being victims of violence or being contaminated in some way (Lofland 1998). The outcast may be seen as infectious, both morally and physically, and not to be touched or seen. The reaction to this is to retreat to the private: to the family, the home, the car, and the suburbs. The street, with its variety of ills, is avoided and interaction with family and intimate friends becomes prized above all else.

One of the reasons for the anti-urban sentiment is that the city streets are a place of mixing. The city contains members of different and diverse social groups and is technically open and accessible to all groups of people. Lofland (1998) claims that this complaint is less

evident today, not because of an increased tolerance, but because we have decreased the probability of encountering anyone who is different by choosing to spend time in places frequented by those who are similar to us. For example, upper class white people tend to choose to spend time in places where they are likely to encounter other upper class white people such as country clubs, expensive shopping districts, and exclusive suburbs (Lofland 1998). This segregation can therefore lead to increased fear and anxiety when difference is encountered.

Fear of public spaces can also be based on the fear of the unpredictability of people in an urban setting. There are crowds filled with strangers, whose behaviour cannot be controlled by an individual: the poor, whose behaviour one fears may turn violent if their calls for money are not appeased; the ‘crazies’, whose behaviour is feared to be completely irrational because of drugs or mental disease; and the aliens, who are so unlike the norm that their behaviour is perceived as completely unpredictable (Lofland 1998: 162-167). Because of the construction of female bodies as vulnerable, public spaces viewed as full of threatening strangers are even more of a concern for women. And encouraging, supporting, and constructing fearful femininity is one way of attempting to control and constrain women’s mobility in and through public spaces.

### **Doing Fearfulness**

Joan Scott writes,

It is not, after all, nor has it forever been, the universal condition of women to be so afraid. The current association between being afraid and being a woman is the effect of a certain feminist discourse which makes the experience or anticipation of violence a major aspect of what it means to be a woman (1993: 439).

This quotation by Scott encapsulates much of my argument—that being afraid, or fearful, is considered to be a natural and normal part of being a woman, but the being fearful is not

inevitably female. I suggest throughout this dissertation that the construction of the female body as vulnerable and public spaces and strangers as dangerous (and the implication that private spaces and known others are safe) encourages the performance of femininity that embodies vulnerability and therefore prioritizes a fearful orientation to public spaces and strangers in the name of safekeeping. Fearfulness is encouraged and maintained through multiple mechanisms, including the academic literature, which prioritizes gender as related to fear of crime and seeks to find out what causes this fear in women (Lee 2007), the proliferation of safety advice, the dissemination of that advice, and the cautionary tales in the media. The importance of performing fearfulness properly is reinforced through victim blaming if it is not performed properly. This is not to say that fearful femininity is the only model of femininity, but that it has a privileged place in the Western femininity.

This model of fearful femininity does not seem to have a place in a country like Canada, where women work outside the home, live alone, walk home at night alone, play contact sports, engage in sexual activity outside of marriage, and do a host of other things that defy and ignore the norms of respectable femininity. The next chapters will explore how salient this model is in the daily practices of doing gender. If, as I argue, fear and vulnerability are socialized, learned, and embodied in ways that do not reflect natural or inevitable conditions of life, then questions can be posed: why do these discourses exist as they do, and what are the consequences of them?

One of the ways that this fearful femininity is established and maintained is through the offering of safety advice. This advice serves two purposes: first, it establishes a risk or threat that precaution must be taken against; and second, it offers a series of tips or advice on how to avoid the risks and threats while placing the responsibility on women to stay safe. If

these tips are followed, they lead to a restriction of women's behaviours and movements. Campbell (2005) also asserts that fear of crime is "a necessary and inevitable component of crime prevention" (129). The crime that women are thought to be fearful of is typically sexual assault, with the seriousness of this crime creating a motivation for women to take precautions (and to curtail mobility) in the name of safety. Lee (2007) also points to the role fear of crime plays in the governance of populations, or 'governance-through-fear' (141). He argues that fear of crime can also operate as a strategy that is mobilized to encourage people to manage their risks through preventative techniques. The encouragement of fearfulness is evident throughout the crime prevention tips and danger stories that I discussed in the previous two chapters.

If the dominant discourses reinforce the stranger danger concept and the vulnerable female body, it would follow that doing gender in relation to the normative assumptions of both one's sex category (female) and one's gender (woman) would require one to either avoid public spaces or to enact safekeeping behaviours to ensure the safety of one's bodily integrity. Respectable femininity requires one to embody the knowledge of one's vulnerability and act on that knowledge prudently. However, much like the concept of emphasized femininity, this is a model that is difficult to achieve in everyday life, yet it is still a model that one is measured against, especially in light of failure.

Doing gender in a way that conforms to the fearful and prudent model of women that is outlined in the official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan* is a class project. In order to follow the advice, one must have the means and ability to. In other words, there is privilege in being able to avoid being out at night that not all women possess. However, not doing fearfulness is also made easier by possessing social privilege. Kern writes that "confidence,

a sense of belonging, and the ability to distance oneself from violence are all related to privileges such as whiteness and middle-classness” (2005: 357). Many of my participants are privileged in ways by their social class, education, and skin colour yet rather than following the more normative model of vulnerable femininity, they have resisted it in many everyday acts, while at other times they are more likely to follow the safekeeping guidelines. These examples illustrate the shifting and contextual nature of doing gender, and it follows that those who engage in less feminine (or more masculine) behaviours while in public space would be less likely to report being concerned with their safety. It is also likely that the farther from emphasized femininity that women see themselves as being, the less likely they are to act in ways that conform to respectable femininity. The following two chapters will explore the participants’ negotiation of the normative model of femininity and its associated suggested behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter serves two purposes: one, it is a discussion of the data presented in the previous two chapters, and a discussion of the two main discourses I identify as being dominant in regards to women and safety. The second purpose of this chapter is to establish the dominant discourses so that I can situate the interviews’ data in relation to these discourses. The next two chapters will discuss the knowledge and influences of these discourses on my participants’ everyday lives.

I have argued that the two discourses discussed above (vulnerable female bodies and strangers in public spaces as dangerous) help to construct and frame knowledges, expectations and fears about safety, danger, and female bodies, which encourage the enactment of fearful femininity. These dominant discourses are so entrenched that they are

seen as natural and inevitable. However, they are neither of these. Women take them on in some circumstances and actively resist them in others. The negotiation of these discourses is complex, continual, and both conscious and unconscious. Discussion of these negotiations is the focus of the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: Participant's Stories of Safety and Danger Messages

### Introduction

I began this project as a woman who had who had heard warnings and advice all my life about girls' and women's safety in public spaces. A large part of this project was exploring the discursive construction of safety and danger messages that exist for women today in Canadian society, a place where there is the principle of gender equality and the ability to for all groups to participate freely in public life. Through my exploration of official safety advice on police and university websites, stories of danger in *Cosmopolitan*, as well as my review of the literature, I established that safety and danger discourses still exist in North American culture for women. These discourses reflect the belief that women's bodies are vulnerable and that public spaces are dangerous for women, in particular because of the presence of strangers. These discourses support and encourage the performance of a type of fearful femininity that is marked by enacting safekeeping strategies and placing limitations on mobility in the name of staying safe.

In order to fully understand the power of these discourses at the level of women's daily lives, it was crucial to go beyond the text and talk with women about their knowledge of the gendered expectations of safety. Essentially I wanted to know how the women in my sample 'did gender' in relation to the "normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127) particularly in relation to the dominant model of female safekeeping. As I have stated earlier, my sample is made up of women who are the primary targets in safety discourses, namely women who through their social positioning have a level of privilege. In this case the privilege was education, class, and for many of my participants, whiteness. After establishing the salience of the discourses of vulnerability and public space dangers that are meant to responsabilize

women to manage their own safety, I sought to explore if and how a fearful orientation was understood by a small group of women and how it was maintained, taken up, or dismissed by these women.

The 'doing gender' framework argues that gender is 'done' differently in different contexts; thus as women encounter different people and different circumstances in public spaces, their way of doing gender will shift. In relation to enacting respectable femininity their decisions to conform were situational and varied.

This chapter establishes which messages and discourses are known to the participants and it also addresses the situations and circumstances where they would enact safety strategies. Chapter Eight, my next chapter, illustrates the various levels of resistance to these dominant discourses that the women's daily lives showed. Before I discuss the knowledge my participants had of the gendered messages about safety, I will begin with an examination of the participants' understandings and interpretations of public spaces. Because the safety discourses that I am interested in primarily concern public spaces, it is important to establish how the public spaces are constructed by my participants. I will first discuss what my participants know about the gendered safety and danger messages and how they know them; I shall then spend the second half of the chapter addressing the 'precautionary strategies' that women enact and their interpretations of why they enact them.

#### *Public Space Definitions*

One of the most challenging aspects of this project (at least in the beginning) was with definitions. One of the framing concepts for this project is public space and what became quite evident early on, even before the interview process began, was that everyone I spoke with was keen to know my definition and no one agreed with it. Colleagues were

quick to point out that the difficulty in applying a universal definition to everyday lives was that everyone had their own slightly different definition of what constituted public space. This critique resonated with me and I eventually decided to simply ask the participants to define what they meant by public space, which allowed me to ensure that a) there was a frame of reference to the interviews that was shared by both me and each participant and b) that the concept of public space was relevant in their lives.

One of the most significant aspects of public space was that the women themselves did not control who could and could not enter that space. Public spaces were identified as those owned by the state (i.e. parks, sidewalks, and city green spaces) and spaces which were privately owned, but opened to the public with some restrictions (for example restaurants that closed). For the most part private space was referred to as some place that a person would be trespassing in or a place that was owned or rented by a resident. Privately owned businesses, while being acknowledged by some as different than streets and parks inasmuch that someone could restrict access, were mostly considered public because it was not the women themselves who were able to control access.

Another factor, closely related to the first, is that in public space you are more likely to interact with other people, mostly people whom you do not know. Stella sums this up in her response to the question of what makes a space public:

I guess the chance to interact with other people...I guess it's the opportunity to meet different people...In a private space I think you're more likely to know the people you're meeting... you have certain expectations [which are] easier met. Where in the public space the expectations might be a little bit more open.

The women predominantly characterized their homes as a private space. In their own homes they were the gatekeepers and had significant control over who entered that space. Several of the participants identified anything outside of their own home as public. Allison

stated: “I guess home wouldn’t fit into my definition of public space, but I think pretty much anything else would.” Some also mentioned work as private, but this was only the case for those who worked somewhere that entry could be restricted, if they had an office with a door for example.

Others mentioned that in public space there were rules and norms that needed to be abided by, whereas private space was essentially rule-free in terms of behaviour. My participants identified the majority of the material places in a city as public space. These definitions, however, were fluid. For example, a coffee shop may be considered public during business hours, but private when it was closed. Additionally, a coffee shop may be considered private space to some people inasmuch as the owners could restrict entry to certain people. Some of the women described this type of space as semi-public, to indicate that these types of spaces were privately owned, but (at least during business hours) were open to members of the public.

My participants did not view public and private spaces as dichotomous but existing on a continuum in which public and private spaces intersected (Lohan 2000: 108), and they also acknowledged the fact that public and private were not absolute, and that the nature of a space could change depending on the time, the people present, and restrictions that may come to exist around access. Sheller and Urry (2003) have suggested that the public and private divide was no longer evident in modern life; however the women that I interviewed made a real distinction between the two spaces. This supports Sophie Watson’s claim that “the way the public-private division is understood remains a key part of how people live together in cities, determining to some extent the routines of daily life” (2006: 160). While there were variations in the precise nature of, as well as the boundaries

between, public and private spaces, my participants all had a general sense of what they viewed as public and private spaces.

### **Safety and Danger Messages**

As previously discussed, safety tips and strategies are fundamentally a responsabilization technique, as they are meant to instil in women the idea of appropriate ways to govern themselves in order to ‘stay safe’. The ‘general public’ (both women and men) are targeted with publicity campaigns—such as media ads— which are meant to raise ‘awareness’ that every person is a potential victim and to encourage every person to take steps to prevent themselves from becoming a victim; this applies to crime as well as public health issues, such as the flu. However, there is still a gendered aspect of these messages, and importantly the women in my study expressed a belief that the messages about safety that women are taught are different from those taught to men.

I began my investigation into safety messages by asking my participants very broadly, what they knew about being a woman in public spaces. The wording of the question was: ‘what type of messages do you hear about being a woman in public spaces?’<sup>63</sup> This question was aimed at getting to the discursive construction of safety and danger in public spaces as known by my participants. I was interested to know if the discourses that are disseminated by official sources and through the media were reaching the women in my study.

The participants all gave a variation of the same answer: there were messages (discourses) that are directed towards women if they were going to be in public space. There was particular emphasis on going out alone and going out at night. These discourses present

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<sup>63</sup> Because the question was very general, I did need to prompt some participants by asking if they had ever heard messages such as ‘it is dangerous for women to be out alone at night’.

a primarily negative sense of public spaces and carry with them an expectation that women should behave differently than men in public spaces. Only one woman, Lakmini, did not know these cultural messages. She grew up and lived in a South Asian country until she was in her teens. The answers varied in specificity and level of detail, but there was enough general similarity to allow me to confirm that there is a dominant discourse of vulnerability and danger for women in public. It became clear in the answers that the women had knowledge of public spaces as dangerous for them, even though they did not feel that way the majority of the time.

This is not to say that they always felt that these messages were being directed at them, nor did they all indicate that they heard them from their own family or friends. Additionally, their knowledge of the discourses should not be taken to mean that they believed them, but only that they were aware that these existed. Even the women who felt they there were not the intended recipients of these messages were able to relate what these messages were.

### **Gendered Messages**

One of the guiding methodological principles that I tried to apply throughout this process was to make explicit the assumptions that exist in much of the existing literature and not take them for granted in my own research design. Previous research clearly establishes these messages as directed at women exclusively (Campbell 2005; Gardner 1995; Egger 1997; Stanko (1990, 1992, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000). But much of the pioneering work done in the area, by Stanko (1990, 1992, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000), DeKeseredy et al. (1992), and others is ten to twenty years old and much has changed in Canadian society the intervening years. In relation to official safety advice, my own research reveals that personal

crime prevention is not addressed explicitly to women, opening up the possibility that there has been a democratization of safety advice (and possibly safekeeping behaviour). However, as I noted in Chapter Four I do not believe this to be the case, but I wanted to establish if my participants viewed these safety messages as gendered.

When I asked the women if they thought that there was a difference between the messages that women get and the messages that men get, they all answered in the affirmative<sup>64</sup>. This is consistent with Walklate's argument that 'risk' is gendered (1997) insomuch that women and men are socialized towards 'risks' in the different way. My participants acknowledged that the messages were different (or non-existent) for men in terms of safety and vulnerability. I did not interview men to ask them if they received any of this type of safety messaging, so I am not making claims as to their actual existence or if and how men negotiate safety and danger, but I am able to establish that these messages are perceived as gendered by the women that I interviewed.

Adeline identified that she felt women are charged with the responsibility for their own safety in a way that men are not:

The onus, for women, is always to watch where you're going and what you're doing and if you do that then...nothing bad should happen.

To illustrate the lack of messages directed at men Isabelle told a story about a male friend's reaction to a poster campaign aimed at raising awareness about sexual assault. Speaking of her friend, Isabelle said:

He'd seen a poster that listed all these rules for men, like men should wear a bell around their neck and shouldn't walk down streets where there are women and all this stuff and he was really annoyed by it. My friend said to him, that they're just turning it around, usually women get told all these things, you shouldn't go down dark streets and you should walk in groups and if you see a man you should be afraid

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<sup>64</sup> Three women did not give an answer to this question.

and all this stuff. And that was really interesting because all the messages are targeted at women<sup>65</sup>.

Another reason that these messages are gendered is the perception of public space (and the public sphere) as a masculine space. Historically men have been associated with public and women more confined to private spaces<sup>66</sup>. Jane reflected an awareness of this when she mentioned that she felt as if many men perceived a type of ownership of public space. She said:

I don't really think that men get any messages, because they don't have to be concerned about it in the same way that women do. They sort of own the public space in a way that women don't, [men] occupy it, with their sports teams and being out in pubs especially along [particular] strips of the street and you see guys that are spilling out, and they do act like they own it... it's almost like a rite of passage [that] they own the space (Jane).

Lily places these messages into their wider social and historical context when she stated:

The fact that there're places that you can and cannot go and there're times where you should be out and you shouldn't be out...It's because you're a woman, but it's not because you're not supposed to be there, but it's because I don't know, I guess people are trying to protect you from other people. I just feel like women are always told like don't take up much space, historically you're supposed to be seen, but not heard and I think that's just like in the modern way of doing that, telling people where you can and cannot go.

Lily shows that she is aware of the role that these messages play in the attempt to manage women's movements, which regardless of intent, has the effect of encouraging limitation in the name of safety.

Overall the messages that my participants identified are grounded in an understanding that women are more vulnerable because they are women. These knowledges of safety and danger that are generally about women reflect the discourses of female vulnerability and dangerous strangers in public spaces. It is important to note, and I will

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<sup>65</sup> Some participant quotes have been edited slightly to increase clarity and readability.

<sup>66</sup> The accuracy of women's confinement to private spaces has been undermined by historians and feminist scholars who have shown that many women were in public spaces. As discussed in Chapter Two, this division has ideological strength, even if it was not always manifest in practice.

discuss this further in Chapter Eight, that the women in my study did not necessarily identify themselves as vulnerable, but the existing messages that they received implied that women were vulnerable. Cecelia summed this up well with her statement, “generally it’s a message of vulnerability”. I identified five main themes that were present in the women’s accounts of the messaging around women’s safety in public spaces. They are: a) women are vulnerable; b) public spaces at night are dangerous; c) danger is in the form of other people (in particular, strangers), highlighted by the threat of sexual assault; d) women are responsible for their own safety; and e) clothing and appearances are factors connected to safety. These themes correspond with my two other sources of data—the official safety advice given by police and university safety departments and the review of the danger stories in *Cosmopolitan*.

### *Vulnerability*

The female vulnerability that was so dominant in the official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan* was more subtle in the participants’ responses. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the majority of the women I spoke with did not identify themselves as vulnerable, yet they acknowledged and implied that the messages and safety tips for women were predicated on the notion of women’s vulnerability.

Cecelia was the most explicit when I asked what kinds of messages existed for women in public spaces when she said simply, “generally it’s a message of vulnerability”.

She goes on to assert that these messages are situational:

Is it about being aware when you’re in the grocery store? Not really, it usually has something to do with the shady, dark places, not the gym, not the grocery store, not the lecture theatre public spaces. They’re more about dark places; they’re about places where you find yourself alone or in a situation where people may not be as aware of everybody else’s interactions.

Nina reflected that both her parents and friends were fearful for her than she was for herself because, in her words, “there is this tremendous emphasis on small women being assaultable.” Nina actively resisted this construction of her vulnerability, but she recognized that others viewed her as vulnerable because of her female physicality.

Additionally some of the participants recognized their vulnerability as located, at least partially, in their social position vis-à-vis men. In a discussion about potential danger and negative interactions that she had had with men, I asked Shauna what shaped her orientation to potential danger and she replied, “I don’t think that men go about feeling this unsafe as women do, so I think that it’s gendered. I think that it’s becoming more aware of the position that women have in society, for me anyways. The powerlessness that we have when it comes to being female and to see that’s a weakness.” Shauna is connecting her growing awareness of women’s unequal and relatively powerless positions in society to her perceptions of danger from men.

In discussing self-defence classes and general safety messages, Cecelia said that she believed that a lot of the language used reinforced vulnerability. In discussing wider society she said, “the vulnerability issue is both sexually appealing in some sectors of advertising, femininity and vulnerability is something that's still fairly entrenched.” Cecelia located feminine vulnerability as beyond issues of safety that existed in various other forms indicated as well as the connectedness of various sites of information. Some of the discussion surrounding vulnerability was in relation to the different types of safety messages for men and women. When I asked Lily if she thought women received different messages than men in terms of safety, she responded: “I’m not a guy, but I don’t think I’ve ever met a guy that’s been told, ‘you can’t go to these certain areas at these certain times’; it’s just

frustrating that they can go anytime, just because I'm physically smaller, like I can't go in those places at those times." Olivia responded that, in relation to safety messages, men are "never going to be vulnerable, whereas we are the defenceless ones." The contrast between men's implicit non-vulnerability and women's vulnerability speaks volumes about the perceived gendered differences between male and female bodies.

### *Public Spaces at Night are Dangerous*

It is not surprising that most of the women felt that the messages are mostly applicable after dark. In fact, many women mentioned that they could not think of too many messages aimed at women during the day. Although, some did mention that they were aware that risks could be present during the day as well. The dark holds significance in our popular imagination as something to be afraid of. In the fear of crime literature, night is the time that women are most fearful and mostly avoid. Night is a particular time of concern in these safety messages and it is clear from the respondents that these are messages that are part of their lives from a young age. Valerie said:

It seems to be those rules that have been ingrained in your brain ...since childhood, growing up: 'Don't go out at night', 'don't go into unfamiliar places', 'don't go by yourself', don't do those things because I guess growing up we always thought that bad things happen at night so if you're doing things that go against those rules then I guess there are things out there that are faux pas [or] kind of the risks, [so] you're putting yourself at risk if you're going against the rules.

Valerie continued and said, "yeah, safety warnings...since growing up that's all you heard, the assumption that bad things happen at night". Stella and Lily also expressed similar sentiments. Stella stated, "I think that that's something that you grow up with"; and Lily said, "you're taught at a young age, 'don't go out after dark'". The orientation towards being out at night seems to be that at a young age girls are less able to stay out past dusk, while boys are allowed more freedom to stay out later (Gagen 2000; Valentine 1997a).

The expectation of limitation after dusk is problematic for several reasons. First, it has the potential to limit options for leisure, education, and employment. Many things happen after dark and to expect some members of a community to not participate, or only participate in certain ways (with someone else, for example), is reinforcing inequality and difference. Second, it may have the result of making space feel more unsafe. If there are fewer people on the street in general this may lead to more insecurity, as those in my study noted that a feeling of community contributed to feelings of comfort and safety. Furthermore, if women abandon the streets at night to men, this may lead to feeling at risk, discomfort, and/or feeling out of place (as Jane referred to above). Feeling out of place was a significant factor that my participants indicated influenced feelings of discomfort.

### *Dangerous Strangers*

While I did ask about non-human threats, no one spontaneously mentioned safety warnings that concerned threats from something other than people<sup>67</sup>. When I asked the general question about what messages women ‘heard’ about being in public spaces, the warnings about weather, traffic, or any other type of potential danger were not talked about in the same manner that they talked about warnings about ‘stranger danger’. Both the specific safety tips (for example, walk with your keys between your fingers) to the more general (do not go out alone at night) are based on the idea that there are dangerous men in public who will prey on women if given any opportunity. The implication of these messages is that there are dangerous strangers who mean to do harm. The harm that is both implicit and explicit in the participants’ answers is mainly sexual violence.

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<sup>67</sup> As I will discuss in the next chapter, some of the participants noted feeling concerns or worry about non-human risks (i.e. slipping on the ice), but no one mentioned that they knew of any warnings that addressed inanimate dangers.

For Michelle worrying about a partner was a normal part of being in a relationship. While she knew her husband worried if she was late arriving home, it did not bother her because, “I worry about him too, not usually about getting raped or anything”. What is significant about this is her reference to rape and the implication that his concern for her was based on the possibility of sexual violence, but that was not something that she ever worried about happening for him. This was stated in an offhanded way, but it does represent the assumption that the threat to women, who are moving through public spaces, is rape/sexual assault, which is a non-factor in terms of men’s safety.

Jane made explicit reference to sexual assault when she discussed the messages she has heard. She also suggested that part of the reason that stranger attacks, as opposed to those perpetrated by known others, were the focus of media attention and safety warnings is the assumption that one can avoid the dangerous stranger. She said, “[the assumption is] if it's a stranger you can control that by just not going to public and by being careful”.

The general sense from the participants is that the messages are meant to address dangers from people, men in particular, in public spaces. Since strangers are the occupants of public spaces and are by nature unknown and their behaviour possibly unpredictable, caution must be used when interacting with them or sharing the same space. This premise is based in the idea that all women are possible victims and men are possible aggressors. If unpredictability is part of the reason that people feel uncomfortable in spaces, strangers’ behaviour is unpredictable, and sexual assault is a primary concern, then following these notions to their logical conclusion would mean that we should view all strange men as possible attackers. This sentiment has been long dismissed in feminist politics and

scholarships, but it is alive and well in safety warnings. The ‘more’ strange a person is (that is to say, different from the norm), the more of a threat he is perceived to be.

Interestingly, a few participants remarked that they may worry more about other types of dangers (i.e. slipping on ice) if they were to encounter that danger, but it was not an ever-present concern. This is worth noting because this is not the case for person-based threats. The majority of my participants did not disclose any previous victimization; nevertheless, any concern about their safety was overwhelmingly directed towards stranger danger.

### *Responsibility*

As I discuss in the previous chapters, the safety discourse implies and states that women bear the responsibility to ensure their own safety. This is often referred to as part of a neo-liberal strategy of responsabilization, and even though the women in my study did not use the word ‘responsibilization’, it was clear that they understood that women were considered responsible for their own safety in ways that differed from the expectations for men. Adeline responded, “the responsibility is on the woman to make sure she doesn’t go anywhere she shouldn’t, or at any time that she shouldn’t, and of course not wear anything that she shouldn’t be wearing [or] not drink anything she shouldn’t be drinking”. Jane states this clearly when she says:

We’re told as women that we are the ones that have to take responsibility for being safe in public space and we have to control our dress and what time of day we’re out in public [as opposed to when] there’s been a sexual assault and everyone’s upset about it why isn’t it up to men to stay home to make women feel safe so they can be out in public space? So I guess that’s a perspective I come from that it seems like it’s a lot of responsibility on women that takes place.

Even when women did not explicitly talk about responsibility, their answers indicated that they were very aware that the main point of safety messages is that it was up to them to

ensure their safety. While many of the official safety tips offered by the police and universities involve how a woman can be 'safer' if she is going to be out in public spaces, many of them encourage women to avoid being in these dangerous places (public spaces) at dangerous times (night) alone. The primary message that many of the women talked about was one of avoidance: one has the responsibility to avoid putting themselves in harm's way.

Some of the participants' answers included references to specific behaviours that are similar to the ones given on official agency websites. These included examples such as: carry keys in between the finger as a weapon, parking close to the door in a well-lit area, do not wear hair in a ponytail or loose because it gives an attacker something to grab, walk with purpose, stay in well-lit areas, be cautious with dress, wear flat shoes to get away quickly, and go out with someone else at night. After Maggie listed about ten tips off the top of her head she asked, "Yeah is that good enough? I can give you more, but I could probably go on forever". Stella echoed these as well: "Travel in pairs, don't go out alone at night, these days take a cell phone"<sup>68</sup>. These types of specific safety tips are well known to each of the women who were raised in Canada. And although she did not know about these messages in the same way as the women who grew up in Canada, Lakmini did report that that her mother encouraged her to always carry a cell phone and let her know where she is going.

### *Clothing*

The issue of clothing and dress is part of the larger message of individual responsibility discussed above. Clothing was mentioned frequently by my participants, both in terms of messages they had heard and also in relation to the strategies they performed (which I will discuss later in this chapter). In particular they were aware that they had to be

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<sup>68</sup> Stella indicated that she believed that a cell phone was a good safety tool for women on foot and while driving.

cautious and conscious in their dress. When asked about messages for women in public spaces, Michelle answered, “don't dress a certain way. I think I've definitely interpreted that [so] I think about what I'm going to wear in terms of how much I want to be noticed today”. Jane echoed that sentiment when she said, “we [women] are the ones that have to take responsibility for being safe in public space and we have to control our dress and what time of day we're out in public”.

The ideology that clothing, dress, and appearance are causal factors in sexual assaults is evident in contemporary Canadian society. Recently this ideology was reinforced when a Toronto police officer commented that women should not dress like ‘sluts’ in order to avoid sexual victimization (Anderssen February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011). The fact that a police officer giving a presentation about sexual violence believed that how a woman dressed could lead to victimization is deeply troubling and seems to be rooted in the belief that sexual assault is based on uncontrollable sexual urges which can be inflamed by provocatively dressed female bodies<sup>69</sup>. But, unfortunately this sentiment is reflected in the discourses about women's safety and prevention.

### **Sources of Information<sup>70</sup>**

Once I established that these messages do exist ‘on the ground’ for the majority of my participants, as well as what the general themes of the messages were, I also wanted to get a sense of the sources of this information. This proved to be slightly difficult as most of my participants could not clearly identify a source, which seems to reinforce the ubiquity of

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<sup>69</sup> This incident sparked an international movement of “Slut Walks” whose message was, in part, that dress does not cause sexual assault.

<sup>70</sup> Very few of my participants cited police websites or *Cosmopolitan* by name when discussing the origin of safety messages. I did not include these sources in this dissertation to suggest that there were the direct sources of my participants or to suggest that these were the only sources of information about safety and danger, but to provide examples of sites of information and establish what discourses existed regarding safety and danger for women in public spaces.

these messages. Allison captured this when she said, “I think [it’s just a] general kind of discourse, which doesn’t give you an answer because it’s just sort of everywhere, in hallway conversations, or in classrooms, or just sort of around, it’s just sort of this norm that we accept”. This is a similar finding of Silva and Wright (2009), who noted that the women in their study were mostly unable to identify the source of their knowledge about safety precautions. The women in my study did indicate that generally these discourses were spread through two main sources: the media, in particular the news; and through interpersonal communications, in particular parents. I will briefly discuss these two sources in more detail.

#### *Media/News*

The media is a common source of safety messages, danger warnings, and safety tips. The media often carries official safety warnings along with their stories about crimes against women. The news also reflects stereotypical views of crime which typically blame female victims, and represents violence against women as isolated incidents which pathologizes an individual perpetrator (Carll 2003). The tendency to pathologize and individualize the perpetrator is also very present in the *Cosmopolitan* danger articles. The women in my study reported that the media played a large role in how they knew about safety and danger for women (both specific events and the general discourses about danger and public spaces). Thirteen of the nineteen respondents in my sample mentioned that one of their main sources of information about safety and danger is the media. When asked where she heard messages about being a woman in public spaces, Beth responded with “the media, the newspapers, radio, all kinds of media...There’d probably be articles in the daily newspapers, you’d probably see something in those posters stuck to something, it’s all around you.” Jane

reported that “even the talk shows and even Oprah had a guy on talking about burglar proofing your house and how you should react if you have been abducted. I don't know if I can just point to one thing in particular just because I think the culture [is] saturated with it”. Maggie’s response echoes those above when she said, “I suppose a large part from the media. From the media, from TV, news, newspapers, radio, all this stuff. Magazines I would say come into play, so all that stuff just generally constitutes our sense of what’s safe and not safe”.

Jane pointed to the fact that the media typically portrays the perpetrators of violence against women as being strangers:

I think the stranger assaults are really played in the media because that's something that's easier for society to deal with. Oh if it's a stranger you can control that by just not going to public and by being careful, blah blah blah. [But] it's usually the people in your home [you] have the most to fear from. So I don't necessarily know if public is the danger that we really need to be watching out for.

Jane also identified police alerts as a source of information likely to be broadcast through the media.

In addition, Juliette cites the paper as a source of advice, including not walking alone and staying in well-lit areas. This indicates that at least one participant recognized that the media can also be a source of explicit safety warnings that are issued by an expert and reported in the news. The dissemination through the news adds legitimacy to this advice.

It is not only news media that impacts women’s view of safety, but fictional media shows as well; for example, television shows such as *CSI* and *Law and Order*. Shauna answered my question about the origins of safety messages with:

Definitely the media...If I wasn’t influenced by the media I think that I would feel a lot safer than I do. If I watch a movie with someone being kidnapped, [I’d feel like] the next week I was going to be kidnapped. So the media has a lot to do with it, but at the same time I try to tell myself that it’s not real, it’s just fiction. But then again

when you do hear something [that's] real, that's so close to [the fictional stories], you sort of come back to [the idea that even though] it is fiction, it does happen, so even though you try to tell yourself to be safe. You come back to that insecurity and that unsafe feeling.

Even those who did not cite the media as being influential to them personally indicated that they were aware of the media's power. Stella believed that the mediated messages could be very influential for some women, especially if they had negative experiences in their own life. Nina, who is not included in the above thirteen, mentioned the media as a possible source, but she did not consume much media and has a very critical view of media 'propaganda'.

Olivia spoke more generally of the media's role in perpetuating stereotypes when she said:

what's sad is that young adolescents and young adults, girls from ages of 13 to 18, 19, 20 they read them [women's magazines] and they believe what they're saying. They're essentially brainwashed into believing. "I have to wear that, I have to wear this". It's taken me a long time, I've always [been] kind of the one who was outside of the box and those times you're awkward a little bit. You're figuring out who you are... t it's unfortunate because we read those types of magazines. I don't even buy magazines like that anymore.

Olivia's comments illustrate that she once actively consumed the mediated message of female beauty, and has had to work to overcome the 'brainwashing' effect of women's magazines.

Some of the women indicated that they were frequent consumers of a variety of media (mostly news), some did not specify the amount of media they viewed on average, and some indicated that they did not consume much media at all. But from my participants' answers it is obvious that they believed the media plays a significant role in the propagation of messages regarding women and danger, both explicit and implicit. Because of the ubiquity of the media (from news, to magazines, to advertisements), it is not surprising that

the women get a lot of their information from some form of media. As discussed in chapters four and five, mediated information about safety and danger often misrepresents risk and increases fearfulness. But the relationship between these mediated messages and women's perceptions and behaviours is not straightforward.

I asked my participants if there were situations or sources that they would take more seriously than others. These responses were quite varied, but several participants cited the media as a source that could be trusted<sup>71</sup>. This is not to say that they felt that the media increased their fearfulness, but that media sources provided relatively credible information that may or may not have been acted on. Beth makes the claim:

I guess since I read newspapers a lot if there's quite a few articles within a given week of some sort of issue concerning safety and females. I'd pay a little more attention to that and maybe even saw that it was in a specific area, I'd be like 'okay' I need to do something and be aware. Maybe I should think about taking buses or taxis not just being out in that area.

The other main source of information that my participants identified is interpersonal communications. Hollander writes "that everyday talk is central to the construction and perpetuation of fear, and especially, difference in fear between women and men" (Hollander 1997: 11). This sentiment is reflected in some of my participants' responses in regards to the dissemination of safety advice. The primary sources of such advice were parents, but some cited friends and siblings as well.

### *Interpersonal Communications*

Michelle characterized her mother as fearful for her daughter's safety and very cautious in her own life. She reported that from a young age, and continuing to present day, her mother communicated a message that the world was dangerous. She described living in

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<sup>71</sup> It should also be noted that not all participants trusted what was reported in the media and they also reported being critical of the messages delivered by media sources.

a safe community, yet she said “every day I was reminded that I was going to get mugged and murdered and raped. [Impersonating her mother] ‘Be careful.’ When you hear that every day you can't help but have that on your mind”. Several other women also spoke of conversations about safety that they had with their parents and, on some occasions, siblings. Often these conversations were the result of news of an attack; for example the sexual assault that occurred at Carleton University in the summer of 2007. Nina pointed to her parents and ex-husband as sources of safety messages. She remarked that her parents were tremendously fearful for her, but more often than not she would ignore their warnings and safety requests.

Olivia identified her school as a source of information as well as her family. She spoke of taking in information and opinions being discussed with her family. In particular she noted that the topic of an attack on a woman would come up at family dinners. She said, “everyone had an opinion about it, and as a kid you kind of absorb everything and you make conclusions. Most the times I was concluding that, ‘oh it was not good.’”

Some of the women also reported that they would not tell their parents about some of their behaviours, to save their parents from worrying and also to prevent ‘getting in trouble’ for activities that would be judged to be unsafe or foolish. Isabelle disclosed that there are some things that she does that she never tells her parents about. As I will discuss later in this chapter, some of the women did not engage in certain behaviours, such as running at night, at least in part out of concern for their parents’ reaction; Valerie concluded her explanation about why she does not run at night by saying, “and my Mother would kick my ass”.

Some of the knowledge of these messages comes though contravening the normative safety behaviour. For example, Beth told a story of walking home after an evening out with friends at the bar. She said that she decided that she was tired and wanted to go home and

did not want to pay for a cab. She also indicated that her level of intoxication probably made taking a cab a better idea, but cited her stubbornness as the reason she decided not to. The next day she related that her friends were critical of her decision not to take a taxi, which she thought was related to both the fact that she was intoxicated and also just the fact she walked home alone in general. She did say that her friends' reactions may have made her more likely to consider taking a taxi if a similar situation arose.

Valerie's comments also indicate that the disapproval of others has a subtle impact of reinforcing appropriate safekeeping behaviour:

I always used to walk home from the bar by myself and I was often just kind of criticized subtly or directly, 'do you think you should be doing that?' by friends. I mean I would have never told any of my siblings or my parents that I did that, because for me, well I need to get home and I'm walking along busy roads... I didn't see it as a deal, but when other people make those comments, like 'stupid girl' and I generally try to be smart... If I felt like I'd be physically able to, to the best of my ability to defend myself if the situation was to arise I would just walk home. But yes, people do give you the stupid girl look or question.

In the end, the majority of the women did not feel that people were critical of their decisions, which I will be discussing further in Chapter Eight.

Much of these interpersonal interactions also contained requests that precautionary behaviour be enacted. Juliette also referred to the rules that were enforced when she was younger, which she interpreted at least partly as being attempts to ensure her safety because she was female. She said, "when I was younger I felt very frustrated because it seemed that my movements were restricted a lot, and there was curfew and rules when to be home and rules from my parents about what was considered safe behaviour and what wasn't".

Not all of the communication was verbal. Parents gave their daughter's safekeeping tools, such as whistles or personal alarms. Beth's father gave her a personal alarm which she characterized as, "it was something, a little tidbit, without saying, 'be safe at nighttime' he

was, [saying] at least...I'm going to give you something". Cecelia also spoke of receiving a personal alarm from her mother.

Email messages were also cited as a source of information. Veronica referenced an email forwarded from her mother when she stated,

I've had so many emails over the years about how to protect yourself, and keep yourself safe. And when I was walking up that long dark hill [from school to home], I'd think to myself and tell myself over and over again, whatever these emails had said about how to deal with and attacker, how to confront somebody before they attack you.

This type of communication falls into the 'scarelore' category (Kibby 2005) discussed in Chapter Five.

These messages are also reinforced by interpersonal relationships with men. In discussing an experience at university where she met and flirted with a man at a party, Cecelia expressed that what started as a flirtation with sexual interest turned into a lesson on women's vulnerability and men's aggression. She said:

So he drove me home and I invited him up and...and we're still making out and this is a guy who's a bouncer at a bar in a small town about 3 hours away and he just looks at me and says, 'you know you're really naive, I weigh double your weight, you could be unconscious in minutes, your roommate could be the same. I'm not going to do anything to you, but you need to know I'm a good guy, but they're not all good guys.' And that make out session turned into him teaching me a few key moves.

What is evident here is the reinforcement of the normative positioning of women's bodies as inherently physically weaker and vulnerable to men's physical strength and the explicating of what that might mean for women—the possibility of attack and violence at the hands of any man. This was a casual relationship between Cecelia and this man, yet he felt justified in judging her behaviour as foolish and followed up by assuming the role of teacher in the name of protection.

The women in my study confirmed that they knew of the general themes of the safety discourses. All of these sources contribute to the position that public spaces are dangerous and because they are vulnerable, women need to take precautions to ensure their safety. These messages are so ubiquitous and part of the cultural norms of femininity that they are hard to avoid even when the women do not want to buy into the discourses. As I will discuss next chapter, there is resistance to these messages and the 'buying in' is incomplete, negotiated, and situational. I will now turn to a discussion about how the women negotiate these messages and when and why they are likely to be impacted by them.

### **Taking on the Messages**

I asked my participants if they believed they 'took on' these gendered messages in their everyday lives. These answers were quite varied. Jane seemed to have taken on the messages the most out of all the participants. She said: "well like I say I'm always concerned if I have to go out at night by myself. And definitely I'm looking around and watching and making sure so I've absorbed all of [the messages] that I have to take precautions". Other participants replied that they believed that it was inevitable that the discourses impacted them. Michelle responded, "I think you can't help it; yeah for sure", and Maggie said, "yeah I do, I guess I do. Without consciously meaning to it can [be in] the back of my head sometimes and I guess that I've picked up a few things." Others indicated that they were less likely to take on dominant messages of danger. Adeline stated:

I would definitely say I don't listen to those messages... if I want to go out or if I need to go out then I go out and it doesn't become a reason for me to stay in or to limit my outings or whatever. I will challenge them whenever I'm speaking about this to people, I will raise that as a myth [that women need to be responsible for their own safety] that's perpetuated by media and by the police.

The women who indicated that they did or had 'taken on' the messages of public spaces as dangerous for women were more likely to acknowledge that they enacted

safekeeping strategies. The enactment of the safekeeping behaviour was not uniform or consistent across the day or even the life course, but for the majority of the women I interviewed, at some point they would enact safekeeping strategies.

### **Safekeeping Strategies**

There is a good deal of literature that reports that women limit their mobility and/or that women use ‘precautionary strategies’ in response to the discourses of vulnerability and dangerous spaces (Silva and Wright 2009; Rader 2009; Law 1999; Stanko 1997). Fear of crime is understood to play a role in the implementation of safety strategies; as Silva and Wright claim, “fear of crime is the most powerful predictor of the use of these strategies” (2009: 749). Teaching female vulnerability and safety warnings may begin at birth so the employment of ‘safety’ strategies becomes ‘second nature’ and is seen as a necessary and inevitable part of being a woman (Stanko 1997). In particular, safekeeping behaviour is a component of respectable femininity.

Once I established that the participants knew of the danger and safety messages, I presented several questions to try to establish how much these messages impacted their behaviours in public spaces. I asked them if they employed any strategies to increase feelings of safety or comfort in public spaces, as well as if there were circumstances where they would be more likely ‘listen’ to these warnings. I will discuss their answers to these questions below.

When one follows safety advice, they likely enact some form of safety strategy. As discussed in Chapter Four, this is a type of personal crime prevention that is encouraged under a neo-liberal governance style which ‘empowers’ citizens to manage their own safety individually. Women, in general, are much more likely to adopt some form of safety

strategy than men (Stanko 1992: 129). The types of strategies that are enacted vary, but Silva and Wright (2009) identify two general forms that are relevant to my project: avoidance behaviours and ‘self-precautionary’ behaviours. Avoidance behaviours are attempts to avoid being in ‘dangerous’ situations. These can be very broad (for example, not leaving the house at night), to more specific, (for example avoiding being out too late at night or avoiding being out in particular neighbourhoods). Silva and Wright note that these behaviours are “those used to isolate oneself from danger by limiting one’s actions and routines” (2009: 749).

‘Self-precautionary’ behaviours are those which are meant to “minimize risk in the face of danger” (Silva and Wright 2009: 749). These types of behaviours would include such things as carrying pepper spray, not wearing high heeled shoes, or taking a taxi instead of a bus. These types of behaviours are by and large considered to be limiting and restrictive, although not all of these behaviours would be limiting to the same extent, nor are they as limiting as avoidance behaviours (Silva and Wright 2009).

When arguing that fearfulness is discursively constructed as a part of respectable femininity, I am not suggesting that fear is not experienced. Despite believing that much of what my participants discuss in relation to their safekeeping behaviours are highly influenced by the discourses of women’s bodily vulnerability and dangerous spaces, the material reality of the threat of violence cannot be dismissed. Additionally, regardless of the discursively constituted weaker female body, the fact remains that many girls and women have not developed strong bodies that they have confidence in.

When discussing the strategies that my participants enacted, it is difficult to pull apart how much is being done out of habit as they have been internalized as part of the way they

embody femininity. Bodies and threats are both material realities that are made comprehensible through discourse. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the way that women are encouraged to view what and who is a threat also makes it difficult to pull apart the discursive and the material. Some of the women in my study spoke of knowing that the safekeeping behaviour was likely not effective. And some of them discussed that there were certain things that ‘popped’ into their heads when they were in possibly threatening situations. My participants did not link their safekeeping behaviour to successful avoidance of danger, with the exception of awareness which was framed as having been successful

When enacting safety strategies my participants were doing gender in a more expected way and in a way that lined up closer with their sex category. The types and intensity of strategies vary in terms of situations and context. Many of these strategies are very similar in content as the official safety advice and in *Cosmopolitan*. For example, a common piece of advice from official sources is to ‘use the buddy system’ when out at night, and a safekeeping strategy that my participants reported was going to and from bars with at least one friend.

Adapting Silva and Wright (2009), I have identified three broad types of strategies: (i) avoidance; (ii) minor modifications; and (iii) awareness that my participants reported enacting. The first strategy type, those based on avoidance, necessarily limit and constrain mobility and activities; the second type are small changes to daytime or normal behaviour done to increase feelings of comfort and safety when out in public; and the third category, awareness, is the most significant strategy cited by my participants. Minor modifications and awareness could be in the same category; however, since awareness is mentioned quite

often by my participants as separate from other types of safekeeping strategies, I address it in its own category.

### *Avoidance*

Avoiding situations that are viewed to be dangerous or uncomfortable was indicated by some of the women in my study as an action that they took, mostly at night and/or in unfamiliar areas. While these types of strategies were less common than other forms of strategies, they are still important to address because, although rare, they were nevertheless present in some of the women's daily practices. Additionally, avoidance is a main theme of the safety advice literature and I wanted to explore how and why the women in my sample engaged in this type of behaviour.

Jane responded, "I'm not out too late at night by myself, I'm always checking in with people, so I guess the extent that I know that there's rules I guess I follow them and they don't really go out of my way to do anything too stupid". Jane also indicated that she is unlikely to go out alone and as such does most everything with her husband if she can. Stella spends a lot of her leisure time hiking in the trails around Ottawa. On rare occasions she said that she will avoid hiking if there's only one car in the parking lot. She explained:

Sometimes there's one other car in the parking lot and I don't like that. If there are a number of cars or if there's no cars, it's funny... or if you see some guy sitting in his car in [the] parking lot and there's no one else there I'm not going to get out [of my car]. That hasn't happened a lot, but it has happened.

Stella also mentioned that she would not go hiking after dark.

There were three participants who indicated a more present level of discomfort and subsequently were much more conscious (than the other participants) of limiting their activities because of safety concerns or feelings of discomfort. When asked if she enjoyed being out at night, Valerie responded:

I love being out at night actually. If I could I would run at 9 o'clock at night every night, if I could. But there's a part of me that wants to be sensible and try to take as many precautions as I can to be safe. Obviously you can't account for everything...It's also the feeling, I get enjoyment out of exercise, so if exercise is now during a time that's made me feel more vulnerable and scared while I'm running, I'm not getting the enjoyment out of it that I would so it's kind of a dual.

Not only does Valerie limit an activity that she enjoys, she also indicates that if she were to do it, she would not enjoy it. Michelle also responded that she would like to go jogging at night, but did not "because of safety".

Although even with the explicit avoidance of certain activities, when asked if she listens to the safety messages, Valerie responded:

I listen to them to a certain degree, if I want to do something, I will do it. If I want to walk home from the bar at 1 o'clock in the morning, by myself, I will do so, but I try to do it in a way that I feel safe and more sensible, like I don't go down dark alleys. I would try to pick busy roads, but in the big scheme of things I realize that they're generalizations and the actual chances of something happening are small, but at the same time sometimes I don't feel like taking the risk, there's some evenings, for whatever reasons, I don't feel like taking the risk. Whereas other nights I don't think twice about it.

Despite stating that she does not does run at night, which she would like to do, Valerie still insists that she does not restrict her movements. However, she is also often out at night walking to or from a social event or home. This is a good example of the contradictions found in most of the women's stories and also indicates that precautionary behaviour is contextual and at times unpredictable.

Those women who expressed that they are more likely to avoid doing something because they were fearful also expressed frustration or displeasure at the fact they felt that they had to make accommodations because of their safety concerns, especially those who were more likely to make significant accommodations. Jane described the fact that she felt like she would be fearful without having another person with her as "pretty sad". And

Valerie declared that not being able to jog when she wanted was unfair and that made her angry. She felt that men have much more freedom to go out at a variety of times without thoughts to their safety.

The women also spoke of being able to 'avoid' being in or putting oneself in a dangerous situation. This was not necessarily seen as negative or restrictive behaviour, but was framed by some as an example of exercising good judgement. There was also a sense of 'not doing anything dumb'.

Often when someone talked about an incident that was in the model of avoidance, it was not conceived of as a strategy. Many participants talked about not being afraid in Ottawa, but they would also say that they would get out of a space if they were afraid. Fear when it did occur motivated one to leave the situation immediately, but it was not framed as avoidance and it was not something that necessarily happened in advance, which I would suggest the concept of avoidance implies. Strategy may imply a choice to do something as opposed to escaping a situation that is judged to be dangerous, which would not be considered optional. Juliette made this point after I mentioned a situation in which I confronted a strange man who was following me. She said:

I think it's just avoid the situation for me and go to a safer place, a more well-lit place, and make it clear that I'm not engaging if I don't want to. I've never verbally turned around and confronted somebody, I just try to go more with an attitude that I'm not engaging, very calm, measured I suppose.

This also led me to speculate that feeling afraid (as opposed to uncomfortable, or worried) is taken very seriously by my participants; that is, it is a state of being that did not occur often, but if it did (or were to), it would require immediate action on the part of women to remove themselves from the situation. It would not be a situation where they would enact any sort of minor modification strategies, nor would the majority of them engage. The fact

that these incidents were so rare (many participants could not think of a recent occasion when they were afraid) and likely taken so seriously reaffirms my assertion that fear is not the correct concept for what individuals (at least my participants) may experience in their daily (and nightly) lives. This also corresponds with Farrall and Gadd's (2004) findings that intense fear is experienced infrequently by the majority of people.

Avoidance behaviour was relatively rare in my sample. Given the fact that my sample was composed of women who were independent and did not express that concerns for their safety were prominent in their everyday lives, it is not surprising that they did not report high levels of avoidance behaviour.

Avoidance, when it was reported, was typically more about avoiding particular areas that were viewed as unsafe. None of my sample lived in areas that were identified as 'bad' although Nina did report that she had heard people refer to her neighbourhood as rough, but she disagreed. And none of them needed to be in 'bad' areas. Kern (2005) argues that labelling a space as 'bad' or places one would not go help people distance themselves from violence and victimization, thus victimization is unlikely because they do not go to places where violence happens. Identifying 'Vanier' as a bad Ottawa neighbourhood where one should not go at night reinforces a sense of belonging and safety in one's own neighbourhood. Distancing from 'bad neighbourhood' is possible because of multiple layers of privilege that my participants occupy. It should be noted that not all participants did this, but many did point to places where they would not go if they did not have to. My participants were more likely to distance themselves from the possibility of victimization through their identities; for example many mentioned that they adopted an 'attitude' which they believed discouraged people from targeting them. This will be discussed further in the

next chapter. I now discuss the minor modifications, which were much more common for my participants.

### *Minor Modification*

I have chosen to use the term minor modification rather than Silva and Wright's (2009) term 'self-precautionary behaviour' because the manner in which my participants described these actions seemed to constitute only minor changes to daytime, or 'normal', behaviour. While some of these behaviours were enacted in the precautionary sense of taking action in advance to prevent something negative from happening, most of them did not represent any significant level of inconvenience to or constriction of mobility. Additionally, many of the examples used did not indicate that there was any planning involved; rather the behaviours were performed during an activity (i.e. walking at night) in an almost habitual way or as a response to a particular person or circumstance.

The minor modifications that my participants employed varied widely. There were only two examples of strategies enacted in the daytime. Stella spent a great deal of her leisure time hiking out of the city. She did not go at night, but did frequently go alone. If she was alone there were certain preventative measures that she employed. As mentioned previously, she would reconsider hiking if there was a man sitting in a single car in the lot. She would also make sure to take a cell phone with her when she was alone, as she recognized that if she was injured she would need to be able to contact help. After initially saying she did not think about her safety going to and from work, she clarified that she did occasionally alter her route in case someone was watching her. It was the same three participants that expressed the most fearfulness, Valerie, Shauna, and Jane, who indicated a more present level of concern about their safety and subsequent strategies.

There are two general types of circumstances under which the women were more likely to employ modification strategies, with the first being in response to something or someone and the other being something that is done fairly regularly in particular circumstances (for example, at night). A comparison might be useful: when one is driving they may (i) modify speed or route in response to a temporary hazard (for example ice), or (ii) practice defensive driving at all times in the winter.

The first types of modifications were normally done in response to some circumstance that made a woman feel uncomfortable or vulnerable. For example, Veronica recounted an instance in which she was walking home alone at night in an isolated area and saw a man dressed in black hiding behind a sign. She took her keys and phone out and crossed to the other side of the street and watched him as she passed. He did not make any moves towards her, but she described the experience as “pretty scary”. However, this incident did not make her change her behaviour. She was taking a night class and did not have the option not to walk home after dark, but she also said that she never opted out of taking a night class because of the incident. Maggie also mentioned having her keys out and carrying them through her fingers like a weapon and speed walking if she was feeling afraid or vulnerable. Other women spoke of pretending to be on the phone or actually phoning someone if they were uncomfortable in a situation.

The second type of ‘minor modification’ is that which is done deliberately as part of being in a particular space at a particular time. One of the most common examples is ‘awareness<sup>72</sup>’, which I will discuss in the next section; however there are a several other examples which I will discuss here. This type of planned modification involves such

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<sup>72</sup> I consider awareness a modification because it represents a change or modification to behaviour which is only done when women feel that there is a reason for concern (i.e. at night).

strategies as not wearing headphones or turning music down at night. Many of the women also mentioned having their keys in their hands while walking at night. Shauna said she always has her keys out (which also have a flashlight) and talks on the phone (or pretends to) when she is walking alone at night. Juliette stated that she was much more conscious when she was in Toronto and acknowledged that her use of safety strategies was very situational.

Many of these strategies seem to be internalized and for various reasons, enacting these strategies was easier than not. For example, Maggie said in response to whether she pays attention to safety advice:

I guess I do. Without consciously meaning to it can be at the back of my head sometimes and I guess that I've picked up a few things that I feel are easy advice to think about every now and then. Yeah it does come into play whenever I'm in a situation [where] I feel somewhat vulnerable... Easy things like where I park the car. I do think about stuff like that sometimes, I don't necessarily follow it, but if there's a spot, well it's easier, I'll just take it. Whether I think about that as a crime thing or not... I don't mean that I park close to the door all the time, at night in a dark parking lot if there's a spot there, I'll take that over the farther one, so like little things like that. Easy things that just make you feel better I guess.

This is also reflected in Michelle's comment that she is aware of the pervasiveness of these messages and finds herself acting out the tips and strategies, even while calling them "stupid". When I asked her if she thought that hearing the constant safety advice and warnings from her mom impacted the ways she saw the world, she says:

Oh yeah for sure. I felt like every day of my life I was waiting for someone to come and accost me or do something. And it maybe in some cases it was good to be that careful, I never let people walk behind me, in a market [or] on the street and [if] I can hear footsteps I step to the side, I walk with my keys in my hand on my way home, I do stupid things that I don't even realize, I've been doing it for so long that I [don't] think twice about it anymore, but those are all kind of weird things to do in a safe environment.

When Michelle discussed her daily activities, she did not reflect a high level of fear, but this quote helps to illustrate the ways that these messages become ingrained in both the subconscious/subjectivity and the body. This point indicates that these discourses are so

pervasive that they often surfaced when one is feeling insecure, even when they 'knew better' (i.e. when they knew that there was no danger). Veronica replied that there was a time where she "would carry my keys in my fist walking through different space and I think about what I could do in terms of my surroundings to keep myself safe, either walking on the other side of the street...or if I see somebody in a car I keep my eyes on them in case they suddenly get out". She finished her list with, "silly things like that."

These quotes also reflect the insidiousness of the discourses of vulnerability and stranger danger. Isabelle spoke to this as well when she was mentioning coming home late at night from school, sometimes as late as 4am. She goes on to say:

There was a few times when there was a man walking behind me on the bridge and I felt very nervous. And it was for no reason and it was against my own instincts. And I don't think I would have felt the same way had it been a woman. A large part of it was that there was no one else around and it was such an odd time. But definitely the fact that it was a male impacted my feelings of safety.

She recognized that her safety was not at risk, yet the dominant messages of danger were quick to surface.

Many of the participants in fact thought that safekeeping behaviour was silly and there was a sense from some participants that these strategies were not going to be effective in the case of an actual threat or attack. In this context safety strategies could be interpreted, not always as a response to danger, but more so as a temporary acquiescence to discourses of vulnerability and danger in public places. In this sense, they were ritualistic behaviours and/or habits that could be relied on when there was anxiety or discomfort. Cell phones were a popular technology that women used to increase feelings of safety. For some, it was simply having one available; for others it was talking (or pretending to talk) to family or friends that increased their feelings of comfort. The latter may be as much about being seen as unapproachable as it is about having someone know if something bad were to happen.

This supports Silva and Wright's (2009) research on safety strategies as rituals that are enacted when one is not feeling safe enough. These strategies are used because they are reassuring at the time and also later when one looked back at the situation (Silva and Wright 2009: 763). Many participants implied or stated that modification and awareness strategies are in the back of one's mind and can become habitual. This reflects Silva and Wright's (2009) analysis of safety rituals. They are explicitly concerned with strategies that are enacted in response to fear of sexual assault, but I believe that their analysis is relevant more broadly as well.

I am not claiming that minor modifications are inconsequential, even if they are habitual. I agree with Silva and Wright's claim that "these precautionary behaviours are responsive to the environment, but they also shape it as inherently sexist" (2009: 751). Women enact safety rituals in a patriarchal society where violence against women is possible. There was an understanding on the part of some of the participants that the expectation that they see the world as dangerous is an unfair situation that reflects unequal gender relations rather than risk or danger. And while they may have believed that the expectation that they perform these safety strategies was unfair and in many cases unnecessary, they still reported that they enact them, especially at night.

The strategies that were employed were often temporary, contextual, sporadic and often used when convenient. For example, while talking about strategies Stella stated, "I'll often do it [hiking] with friends if they're available, but I'm not going to wait for them to be available. I go now when I want to go". These strategies did not limit mobility. The women who expressed a higher level of fear and a belief that they were at risk were more likely to

avoid being out alone and to limit their behaviours. Even more specifically, the most common types of these modification strategies involve attention to clothing and appearance.

### *Clothing and Dress*

Part of accomplishing normative femininity is dressing the part. High-heeled shoes, 'sexy' clothing, well-styled hair, and thoughtfully applied makeup are all hallmarks of emphasized femininity. But in order to achieve respectable femininity women must be cognisant of what their appearance is 'saying' about them as well as how it impacts their safety. As such, many of them were conscious of their clothing (and appearance) when they were out in public. Clothing and shoes were mentioned with frequency when it came to safety strategies and concessions that women made to feel safe. The messages surrounding dressing were of two types; one involved being able to 'get away' or be a 'hard target' if there was a conflict or attack, and the second involved how others might judge them based on their dress and appearance.

The consideration to being able to get away if there was a conflict was mentioned less frequently, but was raised by a few participants. When I asked Michelle if she changed her behaviour based on messages about the danger to women in public spaces, she answered: "I guess changing my clothing is a big behaviour change". She went on to say, "I tend to only wear flat shoes for that reason [to make myself feel safer], unless I'm going in a car to restaurant or if I'm with a group of people if I know I'm walking, day or night, I always wear shoes I can run in basically. One of the things that's in the back of my mind." Valerie reflected on the various factors she would consider if she were to go out jogging at night (which she does not do because she does not feel safe doing so). She said that she knows

that she “shouldn’t put my hair in a ponytail because that’s something they can now grab.” Maggie mentioned that she would tuck her hair up if she was feeling unsafe.

More commonly my participants spoke about clothing as something that needed to be considered and consciously chosen, not just based on the practical circumstances such as the temperature, but also by the attention that a particular outfit would garner. Lily said,

When you’re out on the town and you’re all dolled up and you feel good about yourself going out to the club and even if you’re in a group of people, like women, you’ll still get whistles and stuff. I want to dress up for myself and I know that’s what every girl says, but...[I’m] never like ‘I’m going to wear a certain shirt that’s going to show off my breasts.’ It’s more like, ‘oh I feel really good in this shirt.’ I find if I dress for myself people are going to, not all the time, but people can comment on it and it’s frustrating. I don’t feel like I need to wear baggy t-shirts all the time and not have any self-confidence because someone likes the shirt I’m wearing.

When I asked Michelle if the way she dressed impacted her level of comfort in public spaces, she responded:

Dressing, yeah, even amount of makeup, I guess it's the attention factor... if I put on my jeans and running shoes and T-shirt I don't really expect anyone to look at me twice...but, I just know if I put my boots and a tight top that people are going to notice. Most of the time I don't really want to be seen, I just want to do my errands and go home.

Some participants cited clothing as a source of concern and a part of any strategy that they may have for increasing their comfort. This is also reflected in Shauna answers:

[Tamy]: Do you think that people believe that there’s this general equality so this is just the way that life is, that women shouldn’t dress in provocative ways?

[Shauna]: My friends, no. They generally dress however they like to dress, but I think it depends on where they’re going and how they perceive that space. If they perceive it’s a comfortable space, they’ll probably be more comfortable to dress however they feel, but if they feel like they’ll probably encounter people who will not just see them dressing how they desire to dress, but dressing because they’re trying to attract you type thing, then they probably won’t dress that way, to avoid that attention.

Maggie makes this observation about being noticed, or not, depending on her clothing:

I notice a huge difference from the days [when]...I've just gotten out of bed and I've put no effort in and I look—there's no makeup on, my hair's not done, it up, I'm not wearing any nice clothes, I'm wearing my crappy clothes or whatever. I feel pretty much invisible, or just no one notices me in a way. Compared to when I do dress in a particular way and I do my hair and I do my makeup and I look done up I guess that my experience with the world is completely different. It's like two different entities all together. One being when I am done up people notice... so [it] makes for a whole other type of interaction. Which is why I only really do that [dress 'up'] when I'm feeling good and I'm up for that type of potential interaction that comes with that.

To have to be aware of their outfits and potentially not dress the way they wanted was a concession for some respondents. For example, Juliette explained that this was a deliberate strategy, and one that she seemed unhappy with. When I asked her if she would change her behaviours if we lived in a perfect world, she responded:

I think so, I think if I do compromise on anything it's on how I dress when I go out at night...I'm a little disappointed in myself and I will consider not wearing a short skirt and tank top to go out at night because I'm concerned about possible reactions to the situation when I'm walking home.

Connected to this is Martin's (1998) research on preschoolers and gendered bodies in which she discovered that girls have attention paid to their clothing more than boys do. She writes:

Teachers were much more likely to manage girls and their clothing this way—rearranging their clothes, tucking in their shirts, fixing a ponytail gone astray. Such management often puts girls' bodies under the control of another and calls girls' attentions to their appearances and bodily adornments (498-9).

From childhood, girls' clothing is more restrictive and confining than boys' and girls are judged on their appearance more critically than boys. Martin (1998) also makes the argument that the bodily restriction of girls' clothing contributes to the development of weak and passive female bodies, which echoes Young's argument about the development of weak female bodies through teaching girls and boys different bodily capacities.

Some of the participants articulated the connection between clothing and being noticed (and possibly targeted). When asked if her physical appearance affected her comfort and experiences in public spaces Valerie responded,

I think generally speaking, just generally, women who dress more provocatively just get more attention, I'm not trying to say it's bad attention, but I find that if there's a girl walking by at the same time as I, even if she's wearing a skirt, I think she'd get more notice and I'm not saying that's at all a bad thing, but I personally feel more confident when I'm wearing something comfortable and practical shoes.

Concerns or desire to be noticed (or not be noticed) for the way that they were dressed were echoed in other responses. It should be noted that the women were not necessarily making the claims that if they dressed 'nicer' or more provocatively then they felt more at risk, but that clothing and appearance did affect the way that they believed they are perceived and how they are noticed by others. The clothing that was perceived to get the most attention is based in 'feminine' dress: skirts (especially if they were short), high heel shoes, tight or low-cut shirts, make-up, etc. Veronica commented on this when she said, "But certainly how you're dressed, you get a lot more looks and comments and that's unfortunate, if you're wearing a skirt or boots, especially the boots, stilettos". Adeline summed this up by stating:

I didn't feel at risk at all...but you do know that you're looked at differently because I also go out, even like this [casually dressed] or with cords which are not really feminine or anything like that, so yeah definitely. It completely alters how people will look at you if you're wearing a skirt or slacks or how I carry my body. If I decide to take a more military or harsh gait as opposed to a more feminine one, that changes things, how I talk to people.

Additionally, the way one dresses and the attention received was tied to being sexualized. Cecilia explicated this notion by when she said:

It is not within our individual power to prevent all things, whether it's illness, whether it's physical injury, whether it's sexual assault. So [that we] inherently put it on individuals is a problem, to go to that place where we blame individual for an experience... i.e. if you are sexually assaulted the question gets asked what were you

wearing when you walked down a dark lit street—somehow we brought this upon ourselves.

Olivia implicitly acknowledged the propensity of many people to link sexual assault with sexual desire where she made a reference to the fact that she believes people blame women for their own victimization if that woman was wearing a short skirt. Juliette reiterated this more explicitly by saying “it's the short skirt at night thing; you're inviting trouble if you're doing certain things that are perceived as risky. And if something does happen when you're in that sort of situation that's your own fault”. It is worth noting that in this statement Juliette is characterizing wearing a short skirt as risky.

Not all of the women reported that they enacted some form of the above strategies; in fact some of them said that they did not enact any strategies to increase their feelings of safety or comfort in public, with the exception of being aware.

#### *Awareness*

The most common strategy that the women reported performing was ‘to stay aware’. Many of the respondents said that awareness was their only or main strategy or that they would try to be more aware if they felt vulnerable for any reason. Again, heightened awareness was almost only invoked at night. Beth responded to a question about whether she thought about safety with:

I think that I try to be aware even if I'm talking on the phone; to be like is there someone walking behind me? [I] try not to be just like, ‘blah, blah, blah’ and be completely involved in my conversation but to be like there's cars coming and going in the crosswalks that sort of thing.

Adeline responded:

I'd say, if I go out at night I'll feel a little bit differently, say walking to work at midnight I'm going to be a little bit more vigilant than I would be at say 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock. But in the evening I don't feel any different going out in public space.

Even when there was no worry or fear, the concept of awareness was mentioned as a way of being in public space. When asked if she thought of her safety, Stella responded, “I’m always aware, but I can’t say that I think about it in a worried way very often”. And Sandra echoed this when asked if she thought about the fact that she was out in public at night:

I would say I’m more conscious about when I’m walking the dog in the farm; it’s not particularly well lit. It’s mostly the darkness that makes me more aware of my surroundings, more conscious. But other than that, it’s rare that I think much about it [being out alone at night].

Not listening to an iPod at night or listening to it at a lower volume were mentioned as strategies that enabled the ability to be aware. The strategy of awareness was done to increase feelings of comfort and actually increased their mobility because by enacting them, the women could feel comfortable doing things in public spaces alone.

Adeline puts her safety strategies into a perspective that contradicts much of the literature that suggests that women are unduly burdened by actions they take to feel safer:

it’s only if walking outside at night where I would do scans, maybe look behind me, last night I looked behind me a couple of times, not because I thought there was anything there, but just to make sure. If someone walked by me I’d give them a few metres and then have a look just to make sure they’re still going on their way. Maybe listen to the iPod at a little lower level, but otherwise, it’s actually it’s something I do for the most part automatically, so it’s not something I feel cuts into my enjoyment at all, it’s just something I do. Kind of like when you drive, you can enjoy driving, but you still do a check of your mirrors, you just stay alert and you’re looking at people and thinking of driving defensively.

For Adeline, these small accommodations are so second nature that they do not represent a disruption of enjoyment or lifestyle.

The power of female vulnerability and dangerous public spaces discourses is reflected in the fact that many of my participants reported that at times they were likely to heed the safety messages and enact some form of safety strategy. But when discussing these

strategies, they were quite reflexive about it and some even noted that the action had more symbolic meaning than actual ability to keep them safe. Enacting these strategies does not necessarily signal an acceptance of women's vulnerability and knowledge of these messages did not always translate to action, but there were situations where my participants reported that they did follow some of the safety rules that they knew about.

Awareness is a concept that reoccurs throughout the safety advice, *Cosmopolitan*, and interviews, but it is a nebulous concept that is not defined or detailed neither in the text sources nor from the participants. De Welde (2003a) encounters awareness in her sample of women she interviewed post-self-defence class. She concludes that when the women she's talking with use the term 'awareness', they are referring to their ability (newly found) to think critically about whatever situation they are in. She writes that this 'awareness' enables the women to "be pragmatic about the sorts of fear they ought to be focused on, if at all" (De Welde 2003a: 87). Many of my participants illustrated that they were critical and reflexive in their daily lives, so it is possible that this definition of awareness is applicable, at least some of the time. For example, when I asked Sandra if her attitude towards her safety has changed, she responded:

"Probably when I was younger I was just a little maybe more naïve and didn't really think about consequences as much. I'm certainly more aware of the potential for what could go wrong, but it doesn't always impact on what I do, the fact that I'm aware and are more vigilant about what I do but it wouldn't necessarily change what I do".

Using De Welde's (2003a) definition of awareness, Sandra's response can be read more positively to imply that a state of youthful naiveté is dangerous because one is not critically evaluating possible dangers (of all kinds) and developing an awareness of possible problems is an important strategy in general.

Another way to read the employment of awareness is a more literal one. The majority of my participants were speaking about being conscious and attentive to their surroundings. The reliance on awareness, alertness, and ‘paying attention’ when in public, especially at night, could be considered an indication of confidence and self-assuredness and a belief that they are able to identify threats and then be able to act in a way to get out of the situation unharmed. The women I interviewed did not let much stop them from going about their daily and (significantly) nightly lives. The dark did make them become more aware of their surroundings, which is not surprising given that discursively the night has been constructed as a time of danger and practically we are not as able to easily see what is around us. Additionally, depending on the exact time of night, the streets are often deserted. But the dark did not prevent them from doing very much. This is important to note, as much of the explanation of women’s heightened fearfulness is often explained by women’s perception of their inability to protect themselves in a violent situation (Madriz 1997). As I will discuss further in the next chapter, the women in my study did not express any real concern about their vulnerability—perhaps one explanation for this is that awareness operates in a way that allows for confidence in the ability to see trouble coming and avoid it; thus a belief exists that they do not need to be able to physically defend themselves because they will not be in a position to need to do so. This is not to say that there was a sense of invincibility, but a confidence in one’s ability to use their observational skills and judgement to stay safe.

As I established earlier, safekeeping techniques are well known to my participants. However, recognizing their existence and accepting their accuracy is not the same thing and all of my participants indicated that they were sceptical of the effectiveness of these

strategies. Safety advice is not consistently followed by my participants, but it is known and followed in certain circumstances. I argue from my interviews that these strategies are employed for a variety of reasons, including a belief that they work to reduce the risk to women and to increase women's ability to recognize danger, and therefore avoid it; to increase comfort by enacting a 'ritual', because they have become habitual (they are enacted without thought), at the request of family and/or friends; and to minimize blame or judgement. Some of my participants were more likely to report that they followed 'safety rules' more closely than others. Not surprisingly, these women were also the ones who reported being the most fearful and worried, the least likely to be out alone at night, and the more suspicious of strangers. Regardless of whether the women in my study enacted strategies for safekeeping often or rarely, and regardless of whether or not they believed that they were effective, all of the women knew the consequence of breaking the safekeeping 'rules': blame.

### **Safety Strategies and Doing Gender**

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, safety concerns for women seem to be largely based on the belief that women are naturally vulnerable to assault and attack because of their lack of physical strength. This lack of strength is seen as an inevitable part of being a woman. In addition, rape is understood as an extension of a biological process; as "an expression of natural relations between the sexes" (2005: 125). However when we explore fear of rape and rape from a doing gender perspective, we can understand that the gender relations that allow for rape are not natural; rather as Campbell phrases it, "rape is made possible and inevitable by specific configurations of gender/sex categories, which are constituted, not by nature, but through a nexus of intersecting narratives" (2005: 124). The

possibility of rape is a consequence of how gender and sex categories are constituted through interaction.

### **Consequences of Not Following the ‘Rules’: Blame**

A section of West and Zimmerman’s initial article is devoted to ‘gender accountability’ (1987: 135-137), in which they argue that “actions are often designed with an eye to their accountability, that is, how they might look and how they might be characterized” (136). Further, the way that we ‘do gender’ (either well or poorly) allows people to judge and respond to us in various ways (West and Zimmerman 1987: 140). Safekeeping is an excellent example of this, as those who fail at following the rules of gendered safekeeping risk judgement from others and often from themselves. The presence of self-blame indicates the power of the normative messages of female responsibility for their own safekeeping. The women in my study articulated their awareness of possible blame and also the influence the risk of blame has over behaviour.

After establishing the ‘rules’ of safekeeping that women are encouraged to enact in public spaces, especially at night, I asked my participants if they thought there was disapproval of women who ‘broke’ these rules. The women in my study were aware of the blame that is placed on women and by and large saw it as a gendered phenomenon<sup>73</sup>. They acknowledged that women were held responsible for ensuring their own safety and blamed when that ‘effort’ failed.

Adeline identified the propensity for victim blaming when she said, “The onus, for women, is always to watch where you’re going and what you’re doing and if you do that then you shouldn’t be, nothing bad should happen...and if it does, well then you did

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<sup>73</sup>Seventeen out of nineteen answered in the affirmative. Two participants, Allison and Maggie, did not provide answers to this question.

something wrong.” When I asked her if she thought that there was a general feeling of disapproval that surrounds behaviour that is deemed unsafe for women, she replied:

Oh yeah, definitely disapproval. If a woman’s going into those areas, definitely. For me I think of women going out into public spaces, like going out walking. If anything happens, it’s all ‘why were you there, what were you wearing, what were you thinking?’ and it’s a way that doesn’t happen to men, because if a man gets mugged of his iPod, nobody will say, ‘what the hell were you doing, walking around there showing your iPod off in public?’ it’s very, very different, a lot of disapproval.

Lily pointed to the media’s role in victim blaming:

I find when the media ever covers an attack on women or if there’s been a rape case, sometimes the hidden message is that she shouldn’t have been out at the time, or she shouldn’t have been wearing what she was wearing and that’s just angering, that no you should be more mad at this man that attacked her, I guess sometimes women attack each other, but I’m just going to go with the stereotypical it’s the guy that attacks the woman.

Shauna answer indicates that this occurs at the interpersonal level as well:

I think initially, for some reason, women are always blamed when something happens, I remember, a couple of years ago when a friend was telling us this story and one [of] the friends was ‘oh what were you wearing’ like maybe [her outfit] had sort of added to being harassed because of what she was wearing which I thought was a little bit inappropriate, just because that what you’re wearing.

Campbell’s work is very useful here as she notes that women who violate the expectations of proper femininity or ‘gender norms’ are subjected to the victim-blaming discourse. She writes that the public and vocal blaming of rape victims for their own victimization “effectively cajoles others into ‘safekeeping’ routines which (re)constitute a feminine-vulnerability” (2005: 122). Following safekeeping routines does more to maintain ‘proper’ femininity than to keep women safe (Campbell 2005).

The participants also gave indications that they criticized or blamed themselves, even in situations where nothing ‘bad’ had happened. They used words like dumb, stupid and naïve to describe their behaviours. Beth makes this clear when she said:

The odd time I've cut through Rideau Centre and going through Confederation Park I'm kind of like, 'huh, I'm cutting through a park in the dark at nighttime, probably not the smartest thing to do.' I know I'm actually thinking all that as I'm walking though it thinking 'this is not the brightest idea'. I've only done it a couple of times, but I know I've thought it as I'm actually going through the park.

This would seem to indicate that there is a belief, at some level, that attack is inevitable when the rules are not followed, so when one does break the rules then it is considered 'luck' that 'nothing bad happened'. This sentiment was brought up a by other participants as well. When I asked Stella if she was ever out by herself at night she responded, "yes absolutely, but I'm not stupid, I'm certainly aware of the things, I am not late a late night person at the best of times anyways, so I'm usually home by, to be honest, 10, but other occasions special or something, midnight or one, but that's rarer these days". The implication here is that being out 'too' late alone constitutes unwise behaviour. This sentiment was interesting coming from Stella, who volunteered at a remote site in Southeast Asia and who often travels alone. The fact that she constructs being out alone in Ottawa late at night as potentially unwise and the casualness of her statement indicates how normal these messages of danger are.

When Michelle told me about her time traveling alone in a South American country, I asked her if she looked back on that fondly. She replied, "oh yeah, I think I did stupid things and I don't think I'd be happy with my daughter if she was going to go and do that, but when you're in it and you're that young, I was like 'nothing's going to happen to me'". What is interesting in Michelle's statement is the juxtaposition of 'doing stupid things' and having good memories of a time when she was gaining experience and a sense of independence. On its own this may not be that significant; there are many examples of experiences where we look back fondly on things that were in actuality quite dangerous or unwise for whatever reason. But many of these women told similar stories of good memories that were tinged

with the fear of sexual assault that seemed to come with being a lone woman out in public. This is different from the construction of coming of age and risk-taking for boys and men. Stories of youthful stupidity are told with honour and without judgement, but the women who told me their stories often did so with some level of self-judgement. Once again Koskela's findings support this position when she writes:

Women are so socialized into being afraid that even when they are not, they tend to regard the action in retrospect as daring or stupid. It appears that they cannot admit to themselves that they might have the right interpretation of the situation and acted accordingly...In addition, the tradition of victim-blaming, reproduced by media images and discourse on violence against women, supports the notion that women should blame themselves if something happens when they enter a situation normally regarded as not suitable for women (Koskela 1997: 311).

Blaming the victim is well established in western culture. The notion that women are to blame for their own attack is reinforced through news discourses and language, legal judgments, fictionalized media portrayals, safety advice, and informal conversation. For example, in a 1998 legal decision in Alberta, Canada (*R. v. Ewanchuk*), the Court of Appeals held up an acquittal of a man accused of sexual assault citing the fact that the victim implied consent in part because of the perceived provocative nature of her clothing. The judge of the case, McClung, infamously stated that the woman who was assaulted was not wearing "a bonnet and crinolines", which implies that her clothing caused Ewanchuk to attack her. Additionally the judge decided that she did not resist in an 'appropriate manner' and that Ewanchuk's "advances to the complainant were far less criminal than hormonal"<sup>74</sup>. This sentiment was unfortunately echoed in the 2011 decision of a Winnipeg judge who excused a rapist's actions by blaming the victim. In February 2011, Judge Dewar convicted a man of sexual assault, but did not sentence him to a prison term. Dewar stated that "sex was in the

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<sup>74</sup> The Supreme Court of Canada overturned this ruling in 1999 (Ehrlich 2001).

air” and commenting on the fact that the victim was wearing a tube top, no bra, high heels and a lot of makeup

(CBCNews Manitoba: 2011, Feb. 25). In a 2012 case that made international news, a Phoenix, Arizona judge decided not to sentence a police officer who was convicted of sexually assaulting a woman in a bar to jail time. Instead, the judge, Jacqueline Hatch, told the victim, “if you wouldn't have been there that night, none of this would have happened to you”, and that she hoped the victim could take something positive about the experience and that the victim had “learned a lesson about vulnerability”. Denying that she was blaming the victim, Hatch insisted that ‘all women must be vigilant against becoming victims’ (Alcindor 2012, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>). As Susan Ehrlich (2001: 25) wrote, such decisions help to create and enforce a discourse which affirms “that it is women who are responsible for controlling men’s sexual urges”. To this point, Cecilia related a story about attending a wedding wearing a tight-fitting outfit and receiving a comment that she took as a complement and another she characterized as “the beginning of a rape defence”. She said,

The fact that we are considered to be [looking for attention] if we show some cleavage, that we are now asking for it, that we are now vulnerable, that we bring these negative things upon ourselves is [a] really insidious message that we do hear. And we hear it not just in a sexual context, but it's pervasive in all aspects of our lives at this point, that we are at risk and that we must do everything... in our power to reduce that risk or it is our fault.

In this statement, Cecilia clearly acknowledges the propensity for people to use clothing and appearance as a reason to blame women for being attacked.

The subtle cruelty of victim blaming is reflected in the fact that women also have some thoughts of blaming other women for their attack. This is reflected in Isabelle’s answer to my question regarding if she thought there is general disapproval around women’s behaviours that are deemed unsafe. She answered:

Yep, for sure...for example my friend in Toronto, if she [had] been in [the] Jane and Finch area late at night and doing something and had been physically harmed or otherwise there's definitely a big part of me that would be like, 'what were you doing by yourself alone late at night?' There's also part of me, that even, in terms of things like dressing, never so far as to say the stereotype of someone who's raped and they're asking for it because they were dressed in a certain way. I think a bit of that is in my own consciousness even, so I think it's definitely out there.

I do not believe that Isabelle would blame her friend in any real way, but her statement does indicate how deep these notions of women's culpability go.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter established the safety messages that the women in my study were familiar with and in what ways women performed the fearful femininity that is encouraged by the discourses of vulnerable bodies and dangerous spaces. The data in this chapter is similar to that of previous studies that indicate women undertake safekeeping behaviours in response to numerous cultural and social pressures, such as feelings of vulnerability or concerns about being blamed, as a way to appease family and friends (Silva and Wright 2009). This chapter demonstrates that gendered safekeeping is still a part of some women's daily routines. However, this is only part of the story. My participants expressed a great deal of resistance to these discourses, which is the topic of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: Resistance and the Creation of 'New' Social Spaces

### Introduction

The previous chapter illustrated that women know about safety messages and often enact various strategies in response to feelings of vulnerability or discomfort. However, this is not the entire story of my participants' understanding of safety in public spaces. I do not think that it is even most of the story, even though this is often where much of the research on women, fear of crime, and public space resides. However, when I asked my participants if they thought about their safety while they were out, the vast majority of them said that they did not. As the previous chapter indicated, there are times and circumstances where concerns about personal safety are evident, however it appears that there is some resistance to the performance of fearful femininity among my participants. This chapter deals with how my participants *resist these discourses*, or participate in 'redoing gender' (West and Zimmerman 2009: 118). It is my claim that discourses shape our understanding of femininity, the body, and public spaces.

Academic literature, popular culture, and my participants indicate that these discourses are very powerful in the lives of women, and for some more than others. They encourage a limitation of women's mobility (although as discussed in this chapter the extent of the limitation varies according to several factors); they help shape our perceptions of femininity and risks and spaces; and they play a role in shaping women's expectations and development of their physical bodies.

One of my central arguments is that the women in my study reflect a tension between the limitations of conforming to the dominant modes of feminine safekeeping and a desire to

not be limited by discourses of danger that they feel are not true in their own lives. This tension can also be thought of in terms of ‘doing gender’ in a way that lives up to the normative construction of femininity (West and Zimmerman 1987), or redoing gender in ways that resist respectable femininity and as such possibly have a transformative effect.

One of the strengths of the ‘doing gender’ framework is that it allows for one to get beyond socialization as the cause of differences between women and men. Instead the ‘doing’ of gender is examined and gender is seen as dynamic and changeable. While this is not necessarily as radical a thought as it once was, it is still important for this project because girls and boys are still socialized towards safety in gendered ways and as the fear of crime literature indicates, these messages are still strongly felt. So seeing gender as dynamic and relational allows me to talk about how the women in my study have been able to resist the socialized messages of female vulnerability.

The women I interviewed for this project at times challenge and resist these dominant discourses and the type of femininity encouraged by them in order to claim space and perhaps even to create new types of spaces. In this chapter I will outline my participants’ general orientation to safety and danger, as for most participants this differs from the dominant discourses presented in the last three chapters. I will then explore ‘rule-breaking’, or resisting the dominant discourses, followed by a discussion of factors that my participants indicated were significant to their feelings of safety, which help to explain their ability and desires to resist the dominant discourses. I will then conclude with a discussion of the tensions and contradictions present in my participants’ negotiations of the boundaries of respectable femininity and an evaluation of whether this resistance constitutes a ‘redoing’ of gender.

## **General Orientation to Safety and Danger**

Even though my subject matter was similar to the fear of crime research, I deliberately did not frame my research through the lens of fear and crime (for reasons discussed in Chapter Two). Instead I asked my participants questions about safety/unsafe situations and spaces and comfortable/uncomfortable situations and spaces. Fear and crime were not mentioned by me, although many of the participants referenced specific criminal events and mentioned times when they were afraid. A conversation framed in this manner shifted the focus away from the negative connotation of fear and crime and instead opened up the discursive space for a wider range of topics, emotions, experiences, and stories.

Overall, the women in my study worried very little about their safety in public spaces, and in fact for some, safety was not something they thought much about at all. For example, I asked Sandra if she thought about her safety a lot and she replied, “in Ottawa not very much. I feel quite comfortable here; there are very few places in Ottawa where I feel unsafe”. This is not to say that safety was never a concern, but rather it was, for most of the participants, not on their minds very often. Safety was a holistic endeavour that was often tied to feelings of comfort and familiarity (most participants were quick to say that one could be safe and uncomfortable, but not many reported that one could be comfortable and unsafe). An ability to feel safe, be independent, and do what one pleased was important to the identity of most of the women I interviewed. So their stories were most often ones of confidence that were occasionally interrupted by safety concerns or periods of fearfulness.

To that point, three of my participants explicitly expressed concern that they would ‘skew my data’ or be unable to offer anything useful because they did not consider themselves particularly fearful and had not experienced any particularly negative

experiences. Stella mentioned that she worried that she would have nothing to add to my study. At the end of my interview with Isabelle she shared her initial concern, “I was thinking on the way over ‘gosh what am I going to say? I’m going to screw up her data because I don’t [want to] lie and say that I’m afraid to be out at night’”. And Nina stated: “I have to say I’m on the edge of your sample because I’ve never been assaulted in public ever, or harassed in any way”. This is especially interesting because the recruitment email was explicit in framing the interview as being about positive and enjoyable experiences in public spaces. So despite answering an email explicitly mentioning the positive and not mentioning fear or assault, at least three of the participants assumed that a study on women in public spaces was about fear or the negative experiences. This was a good indication of the pervasiveness of expectation of fearfulness for women.

Despite the discourse of danger at night, all of my participants were out alone at night to some extent. Some were less likely to be out alone or out too late alone, and some expressed that they were often or occasionally uncomfortable with being out alone at night. But all were out to some extent and none expressed that they felt like they would not go out at night if there was something they wanted or needed to do. In general, my participants were reflexive about their fears, concerns, and worries (or lack thereof) in public space. They were not overwhelmed with concern and did not report that negative emotions impeded their daily lives. The majority also did not report that they felt overly constrained or limited by the strategies enacted to ensure safety. This is not to say that the women never felt constrained, or felt as though they were completely free to do whatever they pleased at all times. There were limitations that they spoke of which they felt were expected of them by virtue of their gender, and also limits that were part of living in an urban centre.

Even those who spent the most time concerned with and thinking about their safety did not indicate that they felt fearful in any overwhelming way. For the most part, concerns about safety were not prompted by fear or worry, so even those who spent time actively thinking about their safety were not afraid. Most women also did not report that fear or concerns over their safety stopped them from doing anything that they wanted to do. I asked this question explicitly and it was (more or less) worded like this: “Have you ever not done something that you wanted to do because you were concerned for your safety?” There was diversity in the answers, but most women reported that there was little or nothing that they would not do because of concern about their safety. For example, Maggie responded in this way:

In terms of my actual safety, it's been so long since I've been in a situation that there's *any* fear of *anything* around that it's hard to really remember. It just goes to show how tame life is here; it's pretty tame you know. There's really not much in Ottawa, in my life, in the circle I live in. I don't really let stuff stop me either I guess. That's my generally experience, if I think I want to do something...if I think that it's safe to do and it should be safe to do then I'm going to do it.

Asking about limitations was interesting because while the women reflected that they were not limited by safety concerns from doing anything they wanted, there were examples of limitations in other answers. Additionally some participants answered that there was nothing that they would not do that they wanted to, but they mentioned many examples of things that they did not do because they did not want to, or it simply never occurred to them to want to do those things. Jane for example, answered the question by stating:

it just never occurs to me to go to do things, I just don't think of them in that way that if I had to go out to someplace, it just doesn't, like I don't make a conscious decision 'no I can't do that', it just doesn't occur to me do something like that.

Additionally, context matters in relation to the place, the time, and the activity in that space. Ottawa is portrayed as a safe city and the official crime rates are relatively low (Vaillancourt 2010). However, safety is contextual; those who are marginalized through sex work, homelessness, and poverty experience a very different level of safety and comfort that is not reflected in my research participants. Work on homelessness and sex work in particular points to dangers and threats faced by marginalized groups that are not faced by those in a more advantageous class positions (Lee and Schreck 2005). The women in my study understood that they had a level of social privilege that allowed them to be more confident in the safety of their neighbourhoods. Many of them also expressed or indicated an awareness of their privileged position vis-à-vis other groups of women—they were all employed (or full-time students), they all had homes, and they all indicated a level of social and material resources that aided them in feeling safe and confident; this is highly relevant to their abilities to resist the dominant discourse of danger. But I do not want to universalize my participants; this privilege is uneven and experienced differently depending on social context. I will discuss this further in the next sections.

### **Redoing Gender: Resistance to Respectable Femininity**

I argue that being confident in public space represents a resistance to the dominant discourses of vulnerability and dangerous public spaces as well as a resistance to performing respectable femininity, which prioritizes fearfulness and vulnerability. This resistance can be conceptualized as redoing or undoing gender. Francine Deutsch (2007: 107) writes that it is time we start talking about how we can undo gender in order to understand the “social processes that underlie resistance against conventional gender relations and on how successful change in the power dynamics and inequities between men and women can be

accomplished”. West and Zimmerman (2009) are sceptical about the term ‘undoing’ gender as they believe that it implies abandonment of accountability. They write, “an emphasis on ‘undoing gender’ deflects attention away from the situational character of gender accountability” (2009: 118). A better conceptualization then may be ‘redoing gender’, which implies the activity of producing nonstereotypical femininities (and masculinities) (Morash and Haarr2012; West and Zimmerman 2009). For this reason, I have used the term ‘redoing’ rather than ‘undoing’, but with the same goal as Deutsch (2007). This position also builds on Koskela’s work investigating women’s multiple ways of “negotiating danger, reading the signs of danger, taking possession of space, and using power on urban space ...women show ‘spatial expertise’. This demonstrates that women’s everyday spatial practices can be practices of resistance” (Koskela 1999 in Pain 2001: 904).

I frame my participants’ activities of redoing gender through the frame of resistance. I draw on Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) definition of resistance. They write that the concept of resistance involves two core elements: action and opposition. In reference to action, “resistance is not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but involves some active behaviour, whether verbal, cognitive, or physical” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004: 538). In terms of opposition, there is a sense that this action is countering or contradicting something (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). These two elements are present in the accounts of my interview participants when they spoke of their activities

In much of the earlier work, when resistance is referenced, it is done so in relation to large-scale social movements or protests (Hollander and Einwohner 2004: 539). However, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and James Scott (1985) challenge the idea that resistance needs be overt and obvious. Instead Scott asserts that there are multiple examples of

everyday resistance that “make no headlines” (1985: xvii), but nonetheless should be understood as resistance as they challenge the authority of those in power. Scott writes about peasant resistance as everyday resistance that, while significant, does not have the overt and obvious results as a rebellion. He writes of everyday resistance, “it takes the form of passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception” (1985: 31) and additionally it “is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains” (1985: 33). Michel de Certeau is useful here as well in his discussion of strategies and tactics. Tactics are used by those without formal power in order to make daily life ‘more habitable’; they are not meant to change or challenge the strategic power, but to make life more habitable (de Certeau 1984). Scott’s everyday resistance and de Certeau’s tactics are useful concepts to this project because they help to explain both the deliberate, yet subtle, resistance of some women to the ‘rules’ of safety and also the tactical ways that many women go about their day in ways that are not designed to disrupt the status quo, but are meant to make everyday life easier.

And finally, Rose Weitz’s definition of resistance as “actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination” (2001:670) is important for this project because my participants’ acts of resistance (both deliberate and unconscious) undermine the ideologies of women as vulnerable and public spaces as dangerous.

Some authors contend that there needs to be *intent* before an act can be considered resistance (see Leblanc 1999). I do not subscribe to this perspective, as Hollander and Einwohner (2004) caution that it can be very difficult for researchers to be able to accurately know the intent of an actor, and in some cases even the participant themselves cannot

adequately articulate their intent or motivation. I do not believe that intention is vital for resistance to occur (Scott 1985) as long as the actions operate in opposition to the oppressive dominant discourses. However, I distinguish between actions that are intentionally constructed by the actor as resistance and those that are not characterized as resistance.

While many of the women in my sample reported that they were not limited by concerns about their safety or about the discourses of ‘proper’ female fearfulness, I believe that they often did recognize that there were constraints that came along with being a woman and they actively chose to resist those restrictions. That does not mean, however, that they were always successful in their resistance.

Some of the behaviours and actions that I will discuss in the remaining chapter could be categorized as ‘safety strategies’ in a similar way as I explored last chapter, however the difference is that these strategies are not rooted in a model of feminine vulnerability, but instead they are based in competence and confidence. As such, in various ways my participants were resisting both the standard script of safekeeping behaviour as well as the normative expectations of respectable femininity. And as I will discuss at the end of this chapter, tensions and contradictions exist in the resistance efforts. In different social contexts the women would do gender in more or less normative ways. There are even instances within the same answer that reveal both resistance and capitulation.

I have identified two general divisions of resistance<sup>75</sup>: deliberate and everyday. This is not meant to imply that these are mutually exclusive categories, or even that they are the only two categories, but dividing them in this way allowed me to speak of actions and behaviours that the participants themselves define as resistance or rule-breaking as well as

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<sup>75</sup> At times in the interview I referred to the kind of behaviour discussed in the coming sections as ‘rule-breaking’.

the less obvious and explicit acts that I am, nonetheless, labelling as resistance. The former types of behaviours are less common, but are still present in the stories of my participants. Additionally, I have included a section in which I discuss ‘everynight’ resistance. I speak of everyday resistance as something that the women do as part of their normal routines and I explicitly speak of night resistance in order to highlight that nighttime is the time of extra vigilance with an expectation of increased safekeeping behaviour. The women in my study reported that they felt most conscious of their safety at night and much of the safety literature also highlights nighttime as particularly dangerous. Thus, the activities of women at night are worth discussing separately as they represent a more pronounced resistance to the dominant discourses.

I am defining deliberate resistance as those actions and behaviours that the participants themselves define or acknowledge as resisting or challenging the safekeeping rules. I asked some of the participants who discussed breaking the rules if they did it deliberately, and some of them constructed their behaviours as an attempt to challenge the discourses of women’s vulnerability in public spaces. Everyday resistances are acts that were not constructed by my participants as resistance and occurred in the course of daily life and routine. I am constructing these acts as resistance if they fit into Scott and de Certeau’s construction of everyday resistance or tactical behaviour or if they fit within Weitz’s concept of challenging dominant ideology. Additionally, I have included a section in which I discuss ‘everynight’ resistance. I speak of everyday resistance as something that the women do as part of their normal routines and I explicitly speak of night resistance in order to highlight that nighttime is the time of extra vigilance with an expectation of increased safekeeping behaviour. The women in my study reported that they felt most conscious of their safety at

night and much of the safety literature also highlights nighttime as particularly dangerous. Thus, the activities of women at night are worth discussing separately as they represent a more pronounced resistance to the dominant discourses.

### *Deliberate Resistance*

Several of the women reported that their rule-breaking was deliberately done to challenge the boundaries of respectable feminine behaviour. There was a sense that they felt that having to curb their activities and behaviours was unacceptable and while they were aware of the notion that certain activities were considered 'dangerous' for women, they were going to do what they wanted. For example Lily spoke of jogging at night:

It really stresses my mom out, but I really like to jog at night... I enjoy it and I know that there's all these precautions and whatnot, but... I'm not going to be told that like I can't... it can be a scary world for women, but I feel like I don't want someone to tell me where I can't be, or what space I can't take up, so I still jog and make sure I'm aware.

Lily expressed the common discourses of vulnerable femininity and public spaces as dangerous, but was insistent that she not compromise her right to 'take up space' and do something that brings her enjoyment. On a more general level Lily expressed a refusal to live in fear and says,

Yeah I think people think you're stupid (laugh)... or you don't know what this world is capable of, but I think I know what this world is capable of, but I'm not going to live in fear because we have so much fear after 9/11, huge types of fear, so I'm not going to be scared to be alone.

For Cecilia there is an element of pushing her boundaries of comfort for social justice reasons. She said:

I'm not always comfortable, but I don't feel unsafe. I used to work at [name of organization] and it's a... block away from the Mission and I literally walked [a male] three blocks out of his way to get to his car because he doesn't like walking by the Mission. And that was shocking to me and [he is a] physician. I'm like this is the human condition, you can't confront it is really quite terrifying to me, so I actually

probably purposely try to push my own boundaries at times in terms of things I know to be safe, but might be uncomfortable. Shelters are a good example where I consciously don't let myself avoid exposure.

When I asked Olivia if she ever deliberately did something that she 'knew' she should not do (according to the traditional safety rules), she responded:

yeah, and sometimes it [is] kind of gratifying, you're defying the rules. It's like 'I know I shouldn't be out here, or I know that society thinks I should [not] be out here, but I don't really care, everyone should be out here' not that I'm asking for it, 'oh come and hurt me,' but why not. There's nobody on the sidewalk at nighttime you don't have to wait for pedestrians, it's late why not. But I'm trying to think of a situation that I've been in where it's not been pleasant at night, I can't think of one right now. I'd be like, 'too bad, I want to go out and I'm going to'.

I asked Cecelia, who demonstrated a great deal of self-awareness and critical thinking, if she had to actively try to resist dominant discourses, especially those surrounding women's vulnerability. She replied:

I'm sure sometimes I do. In terms of my own thinking, I think it's fair to say that there were times that I have to actively remind myself of these things. I'm sure the times when you actually are vulnerable and feeling very vulnerable, the dominant discourses pop back up, like 'you put yourself in the situation, now you have to deal with it.'

From this response, it can be suggested that these discourses are so dominant and ingrained that they are very difficult to overcome, even when women actively attempt to resist them. Resistance to these messages occurs on a spectrum and changes based on a number of factors and are not always identified as resistance.

### *Everyday Resistance*

What I have categorized as everyday resistance was exceptionally common in the stories that I heard. These were actions that defied the dominant discourse of safekeeping that are promoted through official safety advice and media representations, yet were not categorized as resistance or deliberate attempts at rule-breaking by my participants. One of

the reasons that the women in my study may not have characterized these behaviours as resistance was that they were a regular part of their everyday lives. I am characterizing them as resistance because they are in opposition to the dominant discourse of vulnerable female bodies in public spaces (which still holds a great deal of power), and because safekeeping strategies are still so prevalent. But it is better to conceive of this type of resistance as an ongoing way of redoing gender as opposed to discrete events.

Even though the women do not express that their behaviour is done to overtly oppose or challenge the dominant discourses, it may have that effect. While this does not have the intentionality that some theorists claim is necessary in order for acts to be viewed as resistance, the acts do however fit into Weitz's definition of "actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination" (2001: 670). They may also fall into Scott and de Certeau's conceptions of everyday resistance and tactical behaviour, respectively. These types of resistance are more of a personal type; there is recognition that these behaviours constitute a type of defiance of the norms of female behaviour, but they do not explicitly place that defiance within the larger structures of gender inequality. However, I would argue that it still destabilizes heterosexual gender relations and challenges the subordination of women. Regardless of the intent, the action may still affect social change.

Many of my respondents spoke about having 'an attitude' or 'being seen as intimidating', which all reflected the way that they see themselves as women and therefore the way that they move through spaces as women. Many of the women represented themselves through answers and/or appearance as not embracing traditional femininity. And in their answers regarding clothing, they seemed to feel that by not embracing the

‘traditionally’ feminine (high heels or short skirts) they were protecting themselves, as I discussed in the previous chapter. For those participants it could be suggested that ‘traditional femininity’ was seen as vulnerable and they chose not to be vulnerable by not adopting (to greater or lesser extents) the trappings of femininity.

My participants were women who constructed identities of strength and confidence. They traveled (often alone), lived alone, moved to new cities, and pursued education and careers. They presented themselves as strong. The fearful model of femininity is not compatible with their senses of self.

I categorize being out alone at night as being a challenge to the dominant discourses because there is a lot of pressure for women to not be out alone and the construction of public spaces at night is by and large dangerous. All of the women I interviewed walked alone at night. Some did so with some trepidation, but most indicated that it was something they did without giving it too much thought. Beth’s response indicated that she is aware of this discourse and deliberately ignores it: “I’m aware of them, I’m aware of what areas I probably shouldn’t walk in at night time or by myself. Doesn’t mean that I’m still not going to walk by myself at night time.” This is not done as a deliberate act of resistance; that is, she did not do it because she was told she should not, but it was simply part of her everyday life.

Juliette points to the complexity, but mundane nature, of decision making that is not centered on fear or safety, but involves multiple factors:

[Juliette]: I feel like it’s a confluence of a lot of things in terms of being comfortable in public spaces and the idea of walking home at night, it’s just that I don’t want to spend the money on a cab or I know I am pretty safe and I don’t want to have to drive or there are a lot of things to it that I want to be able to choose how I go about doing things. And I just really like walking to tell you the truth.

[Tamy]: Do you see a difference between precautions that are based on crime rates or something like that and a lot of the more general stuff that we all hear as girls?

[Juliette]: Yeah I think so, yeah absolutely. I lock my doors at night and asked for an apartment which didn't have an entry way onto the street, but if I'm walking home in a short skirt, I'm going to walk home in a short skirt. I'll avoid the outer-rim parking lot where statistically there are a lot of assaults, but I don't want to change who I am.

When asked if she deliberately broke the 'safety rules' Veronica responded:

I don't think so, I mean the only comments that I can really think of is 'don't walk home alone at night' which I do all the time. But I don't do it as a deliberate way of breaking that rule, I just do it because that's what I want to do...I guess they do say that you shouldn't dress provocatively and walk home at night. But if I know this town then I'm going to walk home dressed how I'm dressed and that's the way it's going to be.

Even one of the most cautious women I interviewed, Jane, engaged in this type of rule-breaking behaviour when she would routinely walk home from work at around 11 o'clock at night. These behaviours are cautioned against by family, friends, and official sources, and often depicted as dangerous in popular media. Yet walking alone at night was a common and routine activity for my participants.

Some acts of everyday resistance revolved around clothing. Juliette was conscious of the way she dressed and made concessions in not wearing what she really wanted to (she gave the example of a short skirt) because she was concerned about the reaction of people on her walk home. She expressed that she was disappointed in herself for making this compromise. I asked Juliette if she ever dressed the way she wanted regardless of her concern and she said, "more recently, and I wonder whether that's just a confidence thing or maybe if I'm thinking a bit more critically about the messages...I think a lot of that might also be [me being] more comfortable confronting the situations that might come up".

Other participants reported acts of everyday resistance in their stories, including going out dancing by herself because she did not have friends in town (Adeline); travelling

to and around a South American country by herself (Michelle); and spending a month volunteering in an isolated area in a South East Asian country and spending a week travelling in India alone (Sandra).

Spatial mobility is crucial to how the women in my study form and reform their identities. These identities are fluid and changeable depending on the context and circumstances that they find themselves in. Young, independent, urban, and childfree, these women move through spaces with confidence, which is fundamentally linked to their identities. To either admit to limit their movement and activity or actually be limited would require a significant restructuring of both identity and physicality.

Robyn Longhurst (2001) studied pregnant women participating in sports. She claims that sports activities consist of crossing boundaries of appropriate pregnancy behaviour, and draws on research that indicates pregnant women who are active have better self-esteem than those who are not. She goes on to suggest that the high self-esteem may not just be an effect of the exercise, but that:

only those women who have high self-esteem are prepared to contest the boundaries of 'appropriate' behaviour for pregnant women. High self-esteem is necessary to contest the surveillance and the many discursive constraints that operate to keep exercise/sport and the Pregnant Woman in mutually exclusive conceptual categories (Longhurst 2001: 17).

I suggest that this hypothesis could be applied to the women in my study who express and state that they are confident in their everyday lives and therefore have the confidence/self-esteem to cross the boundaries of 'safekeeping' to engage in behaviours that often go against 'common sense' prudent behaviour and to resist the judgement that might result from such behaviour.

In addition, by ignoring or dismissing the dominant discourse of women as vulnerable, the women in my study can be seen as producing acts of subtle and everyday

resistance or rebellion that challenge this dominant discourse and help to create an alternative reality (Gibson-Graham 1997 in Hollander 2002: 477).

### *Everynight Resistance*

Nighttime is highlighted as a time of heightened risk for women in both the official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan*. When my participants spoke of safety messages, many of them pointed to the fact that the messages seemed to only be for nighttime. Given this it is significant to know how the women in my study negotiated being out after dark. I asked first if they were out after dark by themselves and then how their feelings about being in public spaces changed between being out in the day versus being out at night, as well as if they enjoyed being in public spaces at night. While I used the word *night* when asking these questions I did not specify between evenings and the middle of the night. Some of my participants specified time ranges in their answers, making it clear that their feelings changed depending on the time of night. Some also indicated that their feelings also changed depending on the seasons and weather.

All of my participants replied that they went out at night by themselves. I asked Nina if she spent time for leisure in public space after dark and she responded in a way that was typical of other responses; “Yes of course, I mean after dark is 4 o’clock in the winter. You can’t stay home just because it gets dark at 4. Or I can’t.” Some of the women expressed less comfort being out after dark than others, especially alone. Jane for example, did not prefer being out alone after dark and did most things with her husband. For the majority of the women being out after dark was a regular occurrence, prompted by both need and desire.

Utility was one of the major reasons for my participants being out at night. Walking home from work or other activities was common. Beth worked downtown in the evenings

and would walk home afterwards, while Veronica indicated that she would walk home from the gym after dark the majority of the time. Many of the women also claimed that they would walk home from the bar as well, although this often required more consideration and negotiation. Other women attributed their decisions to walk home alone at night, or to 'break' other safety rules, to their stubbornness.

I found it significant that despite the association of dark with danger, the majority of the women I interviewed reported that they did not really feel much different being out at night than they did during the day. The major difference that they did say was that they were more aware at night. For example, Allison said, "if I was coming home at night and walking, not biking, but walking, I would definitely feel like I'd be more alert. I want to say on edge, but that makes me sound like I'm nervous about it where it's not [that] it's more just the sense of being more conscious of the surroundings". Others also expressed that they were more aware or alert when they were out at night, but other than that there was not much that changed for them.

For others their comfort levels went down at night. Michelle indicated that she was less comfortable being out at night and is more likely to alter her route later at night. Shauna's concern about her safety is much higher at night. She said:

During the day I don't ever think about my safety, but at night, you do. It's sort of, like if you're out with your friends and you [are] going home by yourself, the first thing you think about is your safety. Do I feel safe enough to go home by myself? Is it too late, which area am I in, type thing. So yeah, it's constant at night when you're not in a safe surrounding.

Shauna's answer is interesting as well because she is also indicated a spatial element to her safety concerns in the last line. This implies that in areas that she is comfortable in and familiar with, her concern about her safety may not be as acute.

Some of the women also expressed that they enjoyed being out after dark, as it was often less crowded or they were less stressed because the workday was over. Maggie's response when asked if she ever finds being out alone in the evening pleasurable is similar to other comments: "it's just nice to be on my own [and] to be doing something, and not needing someone else to be there or to be part of it, it's just nice that it's something I can do when I want for myself, so it's something that I enjoy doing in the evening, it is nice to get out in the evenings, I do enjoy getting out." Maggie did qualify this by saying that the time of night matters, as does the area and the activity. So for her, walking to and from the local coffee shop by herself is pleasurable, whereas going out to a bar alone would not be. Maggie's answer also highlights the importance of independence, which represents resistance to dependence, an aspect respectable femininity.

### **Resistance, Identity, and Safety**

As I have stated throughout, dominant discourses encourage the performance of fearful femininity. However, as my participants illustrate, not all female bodies and subjectivities conform to the fearful or safekeeping model of femininity. So the question for me became, why did my participants feel that this type of safekeeping was often unnecessary? If, as I have argued, safekeeping strategies are tied to respectable femininity, then my participants had some characteristics that make them less likely to identify with this version of femininity. Further, respectable femininity is more available to women who are white and middle class with the means and expectations to enact respectable femininity. My participants all fit into a more or less middle class social position, but there was some racial diversity in my sample that is important to take into account.

As I suggested earlier, there are several factors that play a role in my participants' feelings of safety and confidence in public spaces. In the following section, following from Hollander's position that vulnerability and the relationship to safety cannot be analyzed in isolation from other social positions (2001: 87-8), I will explore how age, ethnic identity and racialization, education and feminism, social support, and the body, appearance, and attitude influenced their feelings of vulnerability, confidence, and their likelihood of enacting safety strategies.

### *Age*

Many participants reported that their confidence increased with age and experience. There is a connection to age and comfort that seems to relate to insecurities around appearance and being judged and also about being a potential target for harassment or assault. Both Michelle and Jane expressed these feelings. When asked if Michelle could foresee a time when she felt more comfortable, she replied, "when I'm 50 and hopefully no one is interested in me anymore will I feel safer? I don't know, I don't know if my mom feels any safer now than when she was young." Jane also answered, "I guess... [that at] a certain age you don't get that anymore", in reference to receiving comments regarding her appearance in public space.

Nina explained it thusly: "[I] feel like turning 40 turned me into a matriarch even though I don't have kids. I'm just at the point where I think the role of women, fully mature women, is to claim space...for me, mature femininity is holding space. But girl femininity is supposed to be scared, but that's not what we want girls to be like." Olivia echoed this statement regarding age:

[Tamy]: Has your opinion or attitude about being in public space changed since being on your own?

[Olivia]: Yes, it has quite a bit actually, I feel more confident and self-sufficient. As you grow up, you figure out what you do and what you don't want and then you become more comfortable in your abilities. Maybe [I'm] more confident because of positive experiences... When I was a young adolescent, even in my early 20s, I'd go to the gym [at] Carleton University, I felt so out of place and so uncomfortable. But now, it's like "whatever", it's like you stop caring about it, you realize it's not important, it's not really important.

Michelle also said that much of her discomfort was tied up in a fear of judgement, not necessarily in a fear of harm befalling her. When asked how she felt about being in public spaces, she responded:

[Michelle]: Pretty good, better than they used to, maybe five years ago I felt kind of nervous being out in public, but now I don't feel much of a difference between being in a coffee shop or being at home.

[Tamy]: What do you think changed?

[Michelle]: Probably level of confidence, I just don't care anymore [laughing]. You know, no one really cares, I think that's what changed.

[Tamy]: Was it nervousness about your safety or...

[Michelle]: It was about being judged.

Discomfort about being in public spaces seems to not only be about safety (perhaps not even mostly about safety), but about a whole host of other factors, one of which is being noticed and judged. This is an anxiety that seems to lessen with age.

However, there is some tension between the confidence that one gains through age and experience and the increased knowledge of 'the world' and the bad things that are possible. Some recounted that they felt that they were more naïve in their youth, and less aware of the consequences of actions. On the other hand there was also a sense from some of the participants that they had feelings of invulnerability as youth which may have led them to do things that they labelled as unwise, even though none of them reported anything 'bad' happening to them during those 'foolish' actions. Michelle's story about her unaccompanied trip to a South American country reflected her belief that she felt (incorrectly) invulnerable when she was younger. Jane also expressed a similar sentiment: "I

think that young people don't really have a sense of their own mortality so I don't really know if I was really that conscious of it [safety] when I was younger... I think you're just a bit more fearless when you're younger”.

### *Race and Ethnicity*

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, the type of femininities that expect safekeeping in public spaces are most associated with white middle class women (De Welde 2003a and b). Race and ethnic identity played a range of roles in participants' comfort. Of the nineteen women I interviewed, five identified with ethnicities that were non-white/non-Caucasian. The ethnicities that they identified were Caribbean, Indian, Lebanese, Sri Lankan, and Italian (non-white). Of all the participants, only Shauna identified her skin colour as a significant factor in her feelings of discomfort. Based on appearance, the women who identified as Lebanese and Italian were likely viewed as white in many situations.

Not surprisingly, those who identified as white claimed a great deal of privilege in public space, avoiding experiences of racism and bigotry in Ottawa. Isabelle also articulated her belief that difference between women needed to be understood to avoid universalizing women's experiences and erasing the privilege that some women have. Isabelle explicitly acknowledged that her skin colour affords her a great deal of privilege when she stated, “while I think that I am treated certain ways discriminatory because I'm a woman I'm also afforded enormous privilege for being white and from a middle class background.”

Other women also discussed their ethnic identity as being significant to their experiences in public spaces. Nina, who identified herself as Indian on the demographic sheet and referred to herself as Asian at various points in the interview, regarded her status as non-white as a benefit in a variety of places she had lived. She says, “I'm sure it helped in

L.A. not to be white. And at Jane and Finch (in Toronto), they treated me as not a white woman.” She went on to say of her experience in Ottawa, “I’m living in the Asian centre, yeah, I mean it’s good not to be white actually (laughing). I don’t know if it’s great to be [of] African origin, but it’s really great to be [of] Asian origin because no one considers you a threat or, you’re not the majority group, you’re not the oppressor”. She has had experience of discrimination because of her skin colour, but not in a way that she identified as making her fearful in public spaces.

Lakmini did not grow up in Western society and is not familiar with many of the safety rules that those who did grow up in Canada knew. But in terms of her everyday life now that she lives in Ottawa, she shared that she did not give her appearance of ethnicity much thought; she went on to say, in terms of safety, that she believed that her skin colour was an advantage, claiming that it allowed her to blend in with multiple ethnic groups and therefore not stand out and possibly be at risk.

Maria, who identified as non-white Italian, reported that she was often mistaken for Persian or Lebanese and felt that there were advantages to being identified as a ‘member’ of different ethnic groups in Ottawa. She reported that she occasionally received ‘perks’ at stores or restaurants because of her assumed ethnicity. She also reported that people who viewed her as a member of their ethnicity were open and comfortable approaching her and striking up a conversation.

Shauna, who identified her ethnicity as Caribbean, indicated that part of her discomfort with public spaces centred on the reaction of others to her skin colour. She also related stories of being perceived of as a threat to others or as a potential deviant. She did note that while being a woman of colour did not add to her feelings of safety, it did have

advantages vis-à-vis men of colour. For her and her friends, being a woman made things like getting cabs much easier than her male friends. So while her skin colour was seen by some in some circumstances as an indication that she was a threat, she still maintained that her gender made her seem much less of a threat than men of colour.

For Shauna, at least in the classroom, there was no concern for her physical safety, but her discomfort seemed to be rooted in the acknowledgement and reaffirmation of her difference. She commented, “When I go out in public spaces, I feel most comfortable if I feel like I’m, like they’re not really seeing me as different, I’m just there, just like any other person that’s beside you”. She continued:

In a classroom if I was the only person of colour (self-conscious laughing), that makes me really uncomfortable, I do have a class like that now and I think that it was the first time that I’d ever had that in my university career, so it’s very sad, but the majority of the time that’s what I think about, and mostly likely because the students remind me of it, whatever discussions we may have, they make references to it, or they’ll say I don’t want to offend you, or, so that sort of makes it less comfortable for me because you’re constantly reminding me that’s what you see first. That’s what makes me uncomfortable.

For Maggie, being an Anglophone living in Montreal led to feelings of discomfort and awkwardness because she had difficulty communicating with people which, in turn, left her feeling somewhat removed from the community. She said of moving to Ottawa:

So I could get on the bus and I could just have a joke with a bus driver where I couldn’t have a joke in French because I wouldn’t be good enough in French to have that happen so my sense of public space in Ottawa is totally transformed by the fact that it’s all English and I can just speak comfortably and I don’t have to translate everything in my head in case this person’s French and I want to tell them- from little things, everyday life, from helping someone with directions, will I intervene in that situation or not. Well if they’re speaking French I probably won’t. If they’re speaking English and in Ottawa and I’m right there, for sure I will, so all of that on a daily basis contributes to much more interaction in public space and there is just generally a great sense of community here.

These accounts point to the feeling of inclusion being an important part of belonging in place. Belonging in place is also associated with feelings of safety and comfort (Kern

2005). Belonging can often come from being part of the majority, but it is more contextual than that. What the stories of the non-white women in my study imply is that it is not just whiteness that allows for feelings of belonging. I am not suggesting that this is the same type of privilege that many white women experience, but that for Nina, Lakmini, and Maria, not being white allows for feelings of belonging in particular parts of the city in ways that would not be possible for white women. Nina articulated this most completely when she mentioned the importance for her “not being seen as the [white] oppressor”.

### *Education and Feminism*

One of the most salient factors for my participants’ resistance to respectable femininity was their education and/or their identification with feminism. As described in the Methodology chapter, my sample was highly educated. Higher education has the promise of developing students into citizens able to think critically about dominant discourses and potentially challenge those discourses. Seven of my participants were recruited through a feminist listserv, an additional three identified as feminists, and another had taken women’s studies courses<sup>76</sup>, for a total of eleven for whom feminist politics were present in their lives<sup>77</sup>.

Many of my participants pointed to their education as being influential in their perceptions regarding public spaces. When I asked Allison, who was partway through a doctoral degree at the time of the interview, if she thought her view of her safety had changed in the past decade, she replied that she thought that it had and attributed it partly to “the academic thing to where learning about actual reality versus stuff you hear”. Shauna

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<sup>76</sup> I am making the supposition that taking multiple women’s studies courses and/or having a degree in women’s studies implies a feminist orientation.

<sup>77</sup> This is not to say that other women were anti-feminist or that they were not feminist, just that it did not come out in the interviews. Given the tone of the interviews I am confident in saying that none of the women I interviewed would consider themselves anti-feminist.

echoed this sentiment; when I asked her how she felt about her statement that women were blamed for things that happened to them, she responded:

Well it's sort of upsetting and it's even more upsetting with friends that I have, that they don't see it that their mentality, the way they think, like they've been conditioned to feel...to accept the blame that they've done something wrong and for me, before I took women's studies I probably I had that mentality too, like most of my friends. But once I became aware of it, it slowly died out, but I still have friends who still have that mentality of, 'you don't dress like that, you'll attract attention' and you know.

Like Shauna, for other participants whose education was in women's or gender studies, a feminist orientation was developed through education. For example, Juliette took women's studies in university and said that she thought "it really pushed me to question a lot of the past statements of safety that I would want to take for granted". Other participants also expressed that their feminist orientation influenced their feelings and behaviours insomuch as it gave them some insight into their own safety. Lily regarded her 'feminist politic' as important to her orientation about safety:

Yeah, you're told one thing, [but] coming from a feminist perspective I might not necessarily agree with it. The media is definitely telling you not to go out because of these certain reasons and I guess I just feel like it's my feminist duty to prove... that these stereotypes might not actually exist all the time.

Lily also expressed that jogging at night was something she really enjoyed. When I asked her if her friends suggested she not run alone at night, she responded:

Yeah, and I think maybe 'cause the majority of them, I'm attracted to all these people from Toronto, but it seems to be in my group and they maybe just because they've lived in towns where there's more danger that they're more concerned about it, but I find that my friends that are more like hard-core feminists are the ones who would encourage it, but the ones [who] are a little bit more softer are the ones that are like [in higher pitched voice with mockery] 'don't go out you're going to get hurt' so maybe it's just what you hear from a feminist perspective changes the way that you interact in public.

More generally, Cecelia pointed to the fact that she is a "postmodern influenced feminist" as the most relevant 'label' to understand her orientation towards the world. This orientation

came through in all her responses about the problematic construction of women's vulnerability.

Education and feminism, however, were not entirely correlated with a resistance to the dominant discourses. Jane, for example, had taken a course on violence against women and knew that most women knew their attacker. She went on to say, "I don't necessarily know if public is the danger that we really need to be watching out for"; however Jane also disclosed that she did not like to go anywhere by herself at night because she was worried about her safety. So knowing the statistics, in some cases, did not remove the fear of possible victimization.

It is clear that, for the most part, women who identified with a feminist identity were more critical of the dominant discourses and more likely to be comfortable breaking the 'safety rules'. These women also were less likely to identify with normative femininity. An education is very influential to critical thought as the women had been made aware of the 'facts', as opposed to only being exposed to the dominant discourses. The women's resistance to vulnerability was aided by their belief that gender is socially constructed, and their resistance to 'stranger danger' was facilitated by an awareness of and confidence in the statistics that revealed that women are not at extraordinary risk in public spaces<sup>78</sup>.

### *Relationships*

The relationship one has with friends and families is important in a person's orientation to vulnerability and safety. It is not a straightforward relationship, but there are a few patterns that appeared. One of the things that became very clear is that the most of the

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<sup>78</sup> This is not to suggest that knowledge of violence against women statistics leads to fearlessness in public spaces. Research suggests that even when women do know about their relatively low risk from strangers, they are still fearful in public spaces. But for my participants, being able to recall factual knowledge about victimization patterns was something they noted as positive in their orientation towards public space.

women in my study surrounded themselves with peers who shared a similar orientation towards safety as they did. Stella said, “for the most part, my friends are fairly adventurous and curious and active in a variety of ways.” Michelle, Maggie, Adeline, Lily, Olivia, Isabelle, Nina, Lakmini, Juliette, and Maria also reported that their friends share a similar orientation towards safety. Shauna felt that she shared a similar orientation with her friends, although she believed that she was slightly less fearful than her friends. Many women identified a friend that might be more fearful than the rest, but generally there was the sense of a shared ground in terms of comfort and safety levels within their friend group.

I also asked if the women talked about their experiences or were judged by their peers for when they did things that might be considered unwise (for example, walking home late at night). Most of the participants either did not remember talking to their friends on the matter or reported that they were not judged or discouraged from ‘breaking the safety rules’. When I asked Stella if people she knew were judgemental about her travelling alone, she answered:

I guess I'm just so enthusiastic about stuff like that, I guess I'm lucky I don't come across people who would be wagging their finger at me. I think maybe a lot of people would say ‘My God, I would never do that’, and I can understand that that's fine. But I guess I know a lot of really, really interesting—when I say interesting I mean people that are curious about the world, who've traveled a lot—the more I'm thinking about it, the educators [at my work place], a lot of them have done really interesting things, travelled.

Maggie reflected the importance of friend support I asked her what might make her question her judgement about what she considers safe:

What would make me question my judgment would be if a friend, a good friend, a girlfriend my age type thing thought differently than I did. That would make me question my judgment...it would have to be somebody I really think, kind of like a sister or somebody you really feel that you are of like mind most of the time. If one of them thought differently I think I would question my judgement.

As I was reading through the interview transcripts it became evident that the women who were generally confident and comfortable in public spaces surrounded themselves with similarly minded friends.

As I have discussed, many of my participants pointed to their parents as a source of safety information/messages. Some parents expressed a great deal of worry for their daughters' safety and encouraged fearfulness and safekeeping. Michelle and Nina both reported that their mother/parents respectively were very fearful for their children. I asked Michelle why she thought she did not have a lot of fear herself, and she reflected that there was a level of rebellion to her attitude. Nina reported that she ignored her parents when she was younger and is no longer in touch with them now. In fact, when I asked Nina if she had had experiences where particular people in her life were fearful for her and wanted her to be fearful, she responded, "ultimately I can't keep those people around. But in the meanwhile, it's just annoying. Like if that was a new boyfriend now, he wouldn't last if he kept that attitude. Even if it was completely benignly protective. Sorry I don't need that kind of protecting".

However, parents were also addressed as a source of support. Stella's mother, for instance, was very encouraging and supportive of her daughter's adventures and travel. When I asked Stella if she thought developing close relationships with people who were more cautious would influence her orientation towards her vulnerability, she replied:

If I had been raised in a different way, yeah absolutely. I think it would have had an impact. I can't believe my mom would change her spots now, but...if I developed a new friendship with someone who's very cautious... I can't see that changing me, I just don't think we'd get super close. I think it would limit what we are able to share. If it was a partner, again I think that would depend. I mean if he didn't want me to go to the corner store to pick up something that just wouldn't happen. It wouldn't be an option. So I don't see that [at] this point in my life having impact, I think it could have if I was younger [and/or] if I was raised differently.

Most parents were in between the two extremes, although they tended to fall a little more on the cautious side. Many of the women who did have parents on the more fearful side expressed that they ignored or dismissed much of the advice or cautions as being overreactions. A strategy employed by some of the women was to not tell their parents the details of their more 'risky' behaviours. For example, Michelle, whose mother is very cautious, replied that she did not tell her mother much about her time travelling in South America because she knew her mother "wouldn't approve of it".

Intimate relationships are the final type of relationship that is influential on women's feelings of safety and likelihood to enact gendered safekeeping behaviour. Of my participants, only Allison was openly gay, two were married at the time of the interview (Jane and Michelle), and three had boyfriends (Beth, Shauna, and Adeline). Several of the participants did not make reference to having a partner at the moment and several made explicit reference to being single. From many of the comments made by my participants, intimate relationships, or the lack of them, were significant in my participants' ability to and desire to resist safekeeping behaviour.

Nicole Rader (2010b) discusses what she calls 'fear work transference' and describes this as "where married women, upon entering marriage, gave up their fear work responsibilities to their husbands" (43). This is reflected to some extent in both Jane's and Michelle's interviews. Jane expressed that her husband gets concerned for 'no reason'. She also travels quite a bit for work and said that when she's out for of town on business her husband would get concerned if she did not return his calls in a specific amount of time. She said of him, "He always says that he gives me a set amount of hours and if he doesn't hear

from me then he'll call the police sort of thing, so he's definitely watching out for me and is concerned about my safety.”

Michelle reported that she is “not allowed to run at night, there's no way that [her husband] would be like ‘okay have a good run’ no way, he'd be like ‘go tomorrow morning’”. She also described how when she's late that he will express concern that ‘something has happened to her’. She also mentioned that she is often not particularly safety conscious when it comes to things like crossing the street but characterized her husband as more of a worrier than she.

It is difficult to draw conclusions that absolutely support Rader's ‘fear work transfer’ from such a small sample (only two married women). While it is clear that husbands (and partners) take on some worry for their spouses, it is less clear if that diminishes women's level of fearfulness. Rader also writes that her participants seem to believe that men were better able to act as protectors and thus fell into more traditional gender roles. In this case a feminist orientation would likely impact this as women may not be as likely to buy into stereotypical views of masculinity and femininity.

This fear work transfer also went beyond the women themselves and also seemed to apply to parents. Michelle's mother was one of the more fearful parents that my participants spoke of. In the context of her mother's worry and constant safety reminders, I asked if her mother had ‘transferred responsibility’. Michelle replied, “yes, it's funny you should say that, it's true. She'll say ‘now that you're with [husband] I don't worry about you as much’. When we went on vacation she didn't call once while we were away, but if I had gone on vacation with a girlfriend she would've called every third night.” Valerie related something similar about her mother and sister, saying, “my mom worries because I live alone and

because I'm single whereas I think she worries less about my sister now because she has a husband." This is significant because it may lessen the pressures from family and friends on women to enact safekeeping strategies.

Claire Kinsella (2007) also discusses altruistic fear that men feel for their partners. She suggests that there is an element of control that comes along with altruistic fear as it restricts women's movements. This seems in line with the women in my sample who were not in intimate relationships with men and expressed fewer restrictions in their mobility. The reason for this is likely twofold: one, women without partners have more need to be out alone as they do not have a built-in companion; and two, women who are single will likely use friends as their primary social group and much of that socialization will occur in public spaces. Overall, women without intimate partners have the opportunity to be more independent and do not need to be as accountable of their behaviours and decisions compared to women in relationships.

#### *The Body, Appearance, and Attitude*

The final aspect I want to discuss in this section is body, appearance, and attitude. As I discussed in Chapter Six, conforming to normative femininity entails the constant effort to be thin, young, and 'beautiful'. Respectable femininity also encourages bodily vulnerability and reliance on others for safekeeping. Given this, I wanted to know if my participants felt confidence in their bodily ability and felt their appearance affected their experiences in public spaces. I also asked them to reflect on their experiences and their femininity (however they expressed it). The answers varied and reflected the importance of context.

Several pointed to the way they dressed as being relevant in relation to their experiences. When they dressed 'down' or in a way that deemphasized their femininity, they

felt that they attracted less attention than when they dressed 'up'. This attention or lack of is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative. As I discussed in the previous chapter, modifying clothing as a strategy is something many of my participants admitted to doing, but style choices are not necessarily done in response to safety concerns. But I do believe that the 'style' a woman adopts is a significant factor in the way she experiences public spaces and social interactions more generally. Stella echoed this by stating, "I'm a pretty casual dresser; I don't attract too much attention." For her, not attracting attention was an important way of feeling comfortable in public spaces.

For those who did not feel overly concerned with their safety, it could be suggested that respectable femininity was seen as vulnerable and they chose to resist vulnerability by not adopting (to greater or lesser extents) the trappings of femininity. This is not to suggest that the women would not consider themselves feminine (although some might not), but that they did not conform to the normative constructions of vulnerable and weak femininity. It could also be suggested that many of my participants would be judged as unfeminine by their appearance and attitudes by others.

I also asked my participants about their physical activities, if they had taken a self-defence class, and if they believed their physical ability would help or hinder them to feel safe. Once again, there was a variety of answers in response to this line of questioning. There were some participants who believed that their physicality helped them feel safer. Allison, who is of above average height and wears her hair short, replied:

I think for me, because I'm not a stereotypical woman or girl. It depends on how my hair is whether I'm called 'Sir' daily or not. But I think it's a (big) huge difference for me in terms of someone who looks different than I do in terms of feeling safe partly because I don't get approached a lot. I don't have dudes yelling shit out of their cars at me. I don't have that kind of stuff that other women might have to make them uncomfortable in space. And I feel that it's something that I really like...I'd

never want to be really small because I feel with my size it's a strength thing as well. So I feel like how I am and my physicality definitely makes me feel safer most spaces than if I were smaller.

Allison also thought that when she was younger and 'more girly' she would have been more likely to take on more of the restrictive safety messages. Sandra said that her improved physical fitness has helped her feel safe as well as increased her enjoyment when she is out in public spaces.

Juliette felt more neutral about her physical ability. Despite having participated in jujitsu and weight training, she felt that she would forget what she had learned in training. Stella responded in a similar manner—that she felt out of shape at the time of the interview, but said generally, “I guess I've always been active regardless, yeah I've always been active. I've never been super tough, but I guess neutral”.

The women in my study embodied a variety of subject positions in different spaces and at different times. These positions were informed by their own identities (as has been discussed), their perceptions about or feelings while in certain spaces, and external forces and influences. For example, some women expressed confidence in spaces that they were familiar with in at all times of day and night, while unfamiliar spaces could prompt feelings of discomfort, and at times vulnerability. My participants may also feel more vulnerable if they have heard a news story about a violent incident, but that concern fades over time. Confidence also increases when the women reported feeling good in their own skin (feeling in good physical shape) or being in a generally good mood.

### **Confidence**

As I demonstrated in the last chapter, many of the participants used safekeeping techniques at various times, although not consistently. The number one safety strategy that they used was awareness. As the women in my study did not express any real concern about

their vulnerability, perhaps one explanation is that awareness operates in a way that allows for confidence in one's ability to see trouble coming and avoid it; thus a belief that they do not need to be able to physically defend themselves because they will not be in a position where self-defence is required. This is not to say that there was a sense of invincibility, but rather a confidence in one's ability to use their observation skills and judgement to stay safe.

Adeline related that because she worked shift work she regularly walked to and from work late at night. She also disclosed that she was sexually assaulted several years before our interview and was once hit in the face with an egg thrown from a passing car. Yet she did not indicate that she felt uncomfortable or unsafe while walking through her neighbourhood. She did say:

I'm usually aware, it depends, well I'd say all hours of the day I'm usually fairly aware and vigilant, not that I think anything's going to happen. Normally I feel completely safe, when I walk— I walked [to work] last night for a midnight shift, I wore my iPod because I kind of do a risk analysis so I feel safe and I don't feel like I'm occupying space that's not my own. If I want to go somewhere, I go somewhere [said with a hint of 'defiance' in her tone].

I found Adeline's statement interesting as she was able to feel safe walking at a time when we are told is dangerous (after dark), alone, wearing an iPod (also not advised). By doing a risk analysis, which she did not elaborate on, she evaluated her situation as safe and therefore felt safe. Through feelings of safety, she felt it her right to occupy the space.

In her article about privilege and belonging in the city, Kern (2005) identifies that her sample of young white women were able to distance themselves through labelling 'other' spaces as dangerous, which enables one to "define and delimit a sense of being in place in the city" (369). My participants did this to a certain extent as well, with several of them identifying one particular neighbourhood as 'dangerous' or 'bad' even without having been there. My participants also distanced themselves through their personal identities. For

example, after providing a pair of examples of safety rules as well as acknowledging that there are messages of safety and danger surrounding sexualized violence, Stella stated, “maybe that younger women may be getting the whole ‘it’s not safe out there’ [message], but if it’s coming my way I’m not hearing it, generally speaking”. Allison also responded, “But I don’t get a lot of those messages. And even as a kid, because I grew up in the country, it was so different than growing up [in the city]—we didn’t have those messages in general, no one was going to pick you up on the street because we were in the middle of nowhere”. Also, Allison did not feel as though she fit the physical female body that was the target of these messages.

Additionally, through the adoption of attitude or awareness, my participants were able to distance themselves from women that might be victimized because they were or looked vulnerable. In speaking of her general lack of fear throughout her life, Nina remarked, “I’ve read about people who convey, just the way you walk, the way you are, conveys a shield and I think I’m one of those people... I have an attitude and I’m sure that’s what’s keeping me alive through the places I’ve lived”. She did acknowledge her physical limitations, yet did not have much concern about her safety:

I am aware of being small and female and vulnerable because of that, but I’m also aware that if you have the right attitude things are not going to happen. I’m also aware that’s documented, it’s not just me. So I’m working on that basis; that it doesn’t matter that I’m small because people can sense that I have a presence that they shouldn’t mess with (Nina).

Stella echoed this when she said, “I’ve got a mean street face, I’ve got a street face that says ‘don’t bug me’.”

Juliette spoke of the perception that other people had of her:

A lot of people don’t want to mess with it, [unclear] the assumption is that I’d be a good fighter. I don’t know. And I walk fast and I think put on my serious face and

people get the idea that I'm not there to screw around, or joke or whatever. But I found that in all aspects of my life, in my professional life and my friendship life.

Valerie said,

I've been told by a guy before that I walk like a cop and he meant it not as a complement. But I take that as a complement, because you know what, maybe if I walk like a cop, maybe it's a confidence and I don't know, strength of character thing where that maybe that in itself would be a deterrent because I look less vulnerable versus a woman in high heels and a skirt who may seem more vulnerable for someone if they were looking between the two of us to attack".

Feminist research often claims that rape and violence against women serve to oppress all women regardless of whether a woman has personally been a victim(Stanko 1992). Evidence supports this claim, but my respondents indicated that the effects of this are not predictable or consistent. Even 'close to home' events such as the murder of Ardeth Wood did not seem to permanently stay with most of the women. They were able to justify to themselves why they were not at risk or that they had made modifications in their behaviours that had done enough to keep themselves safe. When I asked Olivia if she ever listened to warnings in regards women's safety, she responded with:

I guess I listen to the news if an incident has happened... I listen to where it is...you do have to care for yourself and just be aware if something happened in a certain area and that if you were to go to that area, the back of your mind you know something's happened here. But it doesn't really stop me from going there. If I don't know the situation and was led to the incident and you're not guaranteed to have it happen again, why should you not go?

Sandra, who spends time walking her dog in the green spaces outside of Ottawa, was confronted with the news of Wood's murder<sup>79</sup> by strangers while she was walking the dog on an out-of-the-way, but familiar, bike path in the Ottawa area. I asked how she managed that concern and the news of the actual event, and she responded:

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<sup>79</sup> Sandra was out of town when the murder occurred.

Thinking that it was an isolated event probably was what made me feel a little more comfortable when I was out there. Certainly after they [the strangers] said something to me I was a little more aware of my surroundings. I tend to be out there anyways, because it's all wide open space, no one could jump out from behind the tree without you noticing.

These responses challenge the notion that violence against women has a collective effect of making all women more fearful. However, these responses still make it clear that when women hear about incidences of violence against other women they are forced to think about them and deal with them, even to the point of justifying their non-fearfulness to others.

This everyday courage and refusal to be secondarily victimized should not be interpreted as a 'better-than' attitude, nor as false confidence, but instead as a resistance to internalizing fearfulness as a condition of safety. This is evidence that incidences of violence do have an impact on the lives of my participants, but that the impact is not predictable or always extreme. Privilege is manifested in these stories, as my participants identified ways of distancing themselves from violent events that did not directly impact them, their friends, or women that they identified with. For example, Allison recounted several recent incidences of violence close to her home, but noted that she did not change her patterns because she did not view herself as a potential target in other possible attacks because she did not fit the marginalized status of the other victims. She did go on to say that if there were incidences of violence towards members of a group that she identified with, she would be more likely to take precautions.

A lot of the change to one's orientation to being in public spaces resulted from increased confidence and being more comfortable with themselves. Teenage and young adult anxieties that are common as one establishes an identity, such as worries regarding fitting in and being popular, diminished and left women more comfortable with being in

public spaces and less concerned about judgement by others<sup>80</sup>. This aspect indicates that at least some of the discomfort that is expressed by young women (and women of all ages) may not be about fear as much as social anxiety.

### **Community**

As Kern (2005) suggests, a feeling of belonging was highly influential for my participants' feelings of safety and comfort in public spaces. Furedi (2006: 6) cites a 2005 study conducted in England that showed that of 1000 people, less than half indicated that they knew their neighbours enough to call on them for help in an emergency. He uses the phrase "living in neighbourhoods without neighbours", which creates isolation and a lack of mutually understood rules for conduct that may lead people to feel threatened because they do not have an established system of conflict resolution. A lack of 'neighbours' causes people to adopt conflict avoidance strategies, and Furedi makes the claim that "the experience of fear of crime is inextricably linked to a situation where the system of formal, and more importantly, of informal understanding about what people can expect from each other exists in a feeble form" (Furedi, 2006: 6).

This sentiment was addressed by Nina, who actively and deliberately acted in ways that are intended, in her words, "To create community safety around me, not just for me". This is part of her strategy to achieve safety and comfort. For Nina, her way of approaching the world includes intervening in interactions that may become hostile, trying to diffuse situations by talking to people that appear to be in crisis, and by generally interacting with people that she meets in a positive manner. She has also encouraged some friends to start to

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<sup>80</sup> It is important to note that my oldest participant was forty-five, so none would be considered among the elderly, who are also represented as a fearful population. Additionally none of my participants looked 'old' and as such may escape the judgement that older women are increasingly faced with as they no longer conform to the idealized version of young beauty.

act in similar ways. This type of behaviour is what Furedi is addressing when he argues that it is the “revitalization of informal networks” that will likely be “the most effective way of tackling the public fear of crime” (2006:7).

Feelings of being safe in particular spaces were not related directly to crime statistics or anything particularly tangible; rather as Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum write, “fear and safety were related more with subjective perceptions of neighborhood quality of life than with objective measures of neighborhood dangers” (2006: 296).

The idea of community as important to safety and comfort is not a new one, but it is one that is negated by the sentiment of safety warnings promoting a fear and wariness of strangers. This is very evident in the advice given in *Cosmopolitan* that recommends women be wary and cautious of strangers. The promotion of stranger danger makes community-building difficult and encourages women to be, at the very least, uncomfortable around strangers.

There were three aspects to community that stood out from my interviews in relation to safety. The first is that familiarity in a neighbourhood increases comfort. Many of the respondents reported increased feelings of safety and comfort in their own neighbourhoods, with most of them saying that they never or very rarely felt unsafe in areas that were familiar to them. Sandra explained, “if you have your bearings in some way that helps you feel more comfortable”, and Olivia said, “definitely the more times you frequent a place the more familiar you become with it, you know the ins and outs of stuff, you do build up this certain comfort level”.

Often this also applied to nighttime as well. Many of the participants indicated that in their neighbourhood or an area that they knew well, they would feel comfortable on the

streets at any time of day or night. This is noteworthy because nighttime is considered to be a time of danger and it is when women are most likely to feel unsafe and enact some measure of safety strategies. This reflects Gilchrist et al.'s findings that familiarity with an area reduced the concern about assault (1998: 290-1).

The second aspect of community that I found to be noteworthy among my interviewees is that being able to more or less predict people's behaviours is important. Participants did not express a desire for sanitized space, but wanted to be able to know what to expect from the variety of people they encounter. Although there is the recognition that that is not always possible, it was considered more possible in areas where the women were familiar with the people in the neighbourhood. It is also likely that the unexpected was also considered easier to handle in areas that are well known because there was a sense of knowing where to turn to if help was needed. Seeing people on the street often was seen as a positive aspect which made them more comfortable<sup>81</sup>.

The third notable aspect of community is that interactions with strangers are mostly positive and make people feel good, which leads me to the conclusion that making connections with others is important. When neighbourhoods appeared to be abandoned or in disrepair, many women in my study expressed feeling uncomfortable<sup>82</sup>. For example, when asked what made a space pleasant, Adeline responded:

It can either be people out, but usually just people who appear to be non-threatening and maybe even say hello, saying hello to someone is nice and a person who says hello, in Regina I could say hello to people and they wouldn't look at me like I was crazy and in Vancouver they usually looked at me like I was nuts if said hello to somebody on the street. Just being in a public space, being out seeing people.

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<sup>81</sup> Although certain types of people were regarded with less enthusiasm. Homeless, drug dealers, and 'shady characters' were all listed as people who made the space uncomfortable.

<sup>82</sup> I do not have enough evidence to make the claim conclusively, but I also speculate that disrepair is not perceived in the same way in a familiar neighbourhood. So the presence of graffiti in the community where one lived would not be considered a sign of a crime-ridden area.

Security of identity helps women feel non-threatened when in their own neighbourhood and support from friends and peers helps to mitigate the concern over being blamed if something does happen.

My conclusions echo Koskela's when she writes:

“An important aspect of being bold is ‘at-homeness’... Often women in my research describe their courage as a product of knowing their environment and feeling at home there. They move a lot and thus use their space. They go out in the evenings and at nights, visit the city centre regularly and choose not to use a taxi, but to walk or use public transport instead. When walking, they often choose the shortest route instead of a longer one presumed to be safer. In this space they know well, they feel confident” (1997: 307).

This sentiment was expressed in all of my interviews—being familiar with a space allowed women to move around with confidence at almost all times of the night. Familiarity is also connected with ownership and the right to the space. As Nina summed up, “the whole emphasis of Take Back the Night marches is ‘I don't care if it's dangerous out there, it's my city too’—that's always been my attitude and that's been what I tell younger women as well, ‘draw your lines of safety where you do, but you have to own the city as much as anyone does’”.

### **Contradictions and Tensions**

It is difficult not to apply one's own parameters of freedom to others. Should every woman feel safe walking the streets at any time of day or night? Yes, as should every person. But the material conditions of being a woman in a patriarchal society mean that there are times and situations that are potentially dangerous; as well, there are many dangerous risks that are part of simply living in the world (for example walking home on icy streets). There were times that the women in my study expressed that they would rather not do something or would rather not do something alone. In some cases this was based on fear

of being sexually attacked. But more often than not, it was a combination of multiple factors, many of them having to do with feelings of social insecurity (i.e. being the first to arrive at a bar), concerns about being judged (i.e. considered being at fault if something happened or as being reckless), and concerns regarding injury (i.e. hiking alone). I found only a few examples of women who did not do everything that they wanted, and this was not the case with any of the women in my study. The women I spoke with did not construct themselves as oppressed or deprived in any significant way. The concessions that were made were done to ensure relatively unimpeded mobility and often involved rejecting feminine clothing (for example, high heels and short skirts).

Behaviours that at first seem explicable in conventional terms can have very different origins and motivations from what is normally understood. What may seem like a traumatic event within a particular framework (for example a 'fear of crime' paradigm) can actually be perceived very differently by those involved. Cecelia spoke to this when she recounted a story of being groped on the street. She went on to say, "I've spoken about things that would have been construed as negative experiences if you gave me a survey. [For example] have you ever had someone touch you when you didn't want them to? ... And yet those are not negative experiences. They didn't necessarily rattle me for any length of time; they don't have any lasting negative effect on me."

This is not to say that there is not a structural element and pattern of gender inequality that exists and was recognized by the participants, but that on a daily level it did not significantly impact the lives of most of my participants. This is not because it does not exist, but because the women I interviewed were active in resisting the gender norms that dictate fearfulness. However, it should be noted that what is 'doable' is informed by the

discourses of safety, vulnerability, and danger. The women I spoke with were doing and redoing gender in their everyday interaction while negotiating the structural inequalities that make violence against women a possibility.

There were instances of contradiction and capitulation as well. When I asked Sandra if she ever did (or didn't do) things despite or because people told her that she should, she responded with, "yeah I do that, but I don't want to be afraid, but I don't want to not do something because of fear, so I would... to a certain extent but I think that [there comes] a point where I think it wasn't worth it". I told a story about jogging at night because, as a woman, I was not supposed to be out at night alone. I asked Isabelle if she ever did something similar:

I think I do, yeah. I try to temper it without being so extreme...Yeah I think definitely for sure, for example if someone says 'you shouldn't walk home', I walked home for 27 years of my life, and I'm perfectly fine to do that. If it makes you feel better I can give you a call when I get home, but I've definite done it in response to that sort of [thing].

Juliette spoke to the social reality that at times she needed to accept that there were threats to her because she was a woman. In particular, she related a time when she lived at Jane and Finch in Toronto, which has a reputation of being a high crime area, and at the time there had been some home invasions. Of this she said, "I wouldn't want to change my behaviour and change who I am to try to not feel like I'm being harassed when I walk somewhere, but at the same time I'm a woman living alone in a dangerous area, there are some precautions that I have to take" (Juliette). The tension between resistance, an unwillingness to change who she was, and the acceptance that there was a threat to take seriously revealed the negotiation that was necessary for many of the women who were unwilling to capitulate to the model of fearful femininity.

Weitz (2001) cautions against overestimating women's resistance and agency and urges balance in exploring acts of resistance which neither 'ignores nor valorizes' everyday resistance. Hollander and Einwohner (2004: 529) reiterate this when they write, "Resistance is not always pure. That is, even while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place".

As I have discussed, the women in my sample did not always resist, and did not always resist in a conscious way, but I would argue there are elements of resistance in all of their stories. Hollander and Einwohner's words about supporting the structures of domination resonate here as some of the resistance reported is to wear short skirts and high heels, which can be argued is a result of the objectification of women's bodies.

What is important, in my view, is to consider that undefined and non-specific fear need not be an accepted part of women's experiences in daily life. The women in my study do not conform to the 'fearful woman' stereotype, and they are not reckless or blindly fearless (Jackson and Gray 2010), but reasonable and aware. They make decisions based on a variety of perceptions, spatial knowledges, and need. Juliette puts words to this when, after the interview questions were done and we were talking about walking home at night, she said:

I feel like it's a confluence of a lot of things in terms of being comfortable in public spaces and the idea of walking home at night, it's just that I don't want to spend the money on a cab or I know I am pretty safe and I don't want to have to drive or there are a lot of things to it that I want to be able to choose how I go about doing things. And I just really like walking to tell you the truth.

### **Gender Redone?**

It is difficult to know the extent of the impact of interactional change on the social institutions (Deutsch 2007). The impact of these women's resistance to be transformative to

the larger system of gender relations is outside of the scope of my study, but I can speculate that the potential to be truly transformative exists. As Susan Shaw writes:

Prejudicial attitudes and behaviors can be challenged both individually and collectively, for example, through alternate discourses and through non-conforming behaviors. Moreover, such acts of resistance may be effective in bringing about change whether or not they are intentional or deliberate (2005: 39).

One way that we may see this resistance as transformative is through looking at the possible impact that women's non-conformity has on access to and perceptions of public spaces. Women's abandonment of spaces at night or attempts to go unnoticed start in childhood. As previously discussed, girls are restricted from public spaces after dark much more than boys and the expectation of women's absence continues throughout all phases of the life course. As many scholars have pointed out, women's confinement to the private sphere has never been absolute or as rigid as it is often represented, but women still have unequal access to many spaces. This restriction may be the result of fearfulness, or it can be the result of a type of space that is experienced as masculine and therefore unwelcoming to women.

Some of my participants reflected that men in public space, especially in groups, had the consequence of making them uncomfortable and feeling that they did not have the right to occupy the same space. These spaces were especially noted to be places where men performed a more hegemonic form of masculinity (sports bars, for example). Nina also described some spaces, not as dangerous or threatening, but as hostile. For her, hostile spaces are uncomfortable, but she does not fear for her safety. Hostile spaces are full of people who seem unwilling to interact with each other, do not make eye contact, and hold their bodies in a way that discourages communication.

Increasing women's presence in space and their ability to claim space may have the cumulative effect of transforming spaces to become more habitable and less hostile. The participation of more people in public life that is enacted in public space will also contribute to building strong communities, which was a big factor in increasing feelings of safety and comfort for my participants.

Some of the women articulated the importance of this community building when they spoke about the wider societal structure. Isabelle said,

[Isabelle]: It's important for me to have that notion of taking back public space, so earlier I said like malls for example and it kind of makes me sick that they have to sort of come to mean public spaces. A lot of that has to do with geopolitics as well, things around capitalism and things around equity and very much tied to social justice issues for me and that it's important to stake out public space. So yeah, feminism is part of that.

[Tamy]: That a healthy public space is essential to...

[Isabelle]: ...a healthy populace. It's essential to social justice for me. It's one of the few equalizers.

For Olivia it was about the right to space. She explained, "I think [the] media tends to or at least the news, 'so-and-so was attacked...' that's always a negative. She was in the wrong place wrong time type thing, why don't we have the right to be there?" (Olivia).

The women within my sample are relatively privileged, and while there are certainly concerns involved in reproducing class and racial privilege in research, my sample does allow me to talk about aspects of resistance that are made possible because of social privilege. In her exposition of the transformative politics of undoing gender, Deutsch (2007) notes the importance of remembering the intersections of race, class, and gender. She suggests that for "white affluent women who have already benefited from structural changes that admit women into the professions and into high-paying jobs, resistance against gendered norms in day-to-day marital interactions may be essential for undoing gender" (Deutsch

2007: 120). The type of resistance that I discuss is not limited to privileged women, nor is it the only type of resistance that is being exercised against unequal gender relations.

### **Conclusion**

Through my interviews with this small group of women in Ottawa, I found them to be very confident women who did as they pleased for the vast majority of the time and were able to express their confidence in their stories of their public space experiences and activities. I quickly realized that I was incorrect in my initial assumption about the difficulty in getting women to speak outside the dominant discourse of fearfulness. The women in my sample did not seem to have trouble expressing any feelings and behaviours that were not in line with the 'woman as vulnerable' discourse. The fact that many of my participants did not view their actions as resistance or rule-breaking, suggests that they do not identify, or at least not completely identify, with the image of respectable femininity. Thus they were not breaking the rules; rather they were simply living their lives in the way they thought best.

This is not to say that the dominant discourses did not affect my participants at all or that they did not limit their activities in the name of safety and comfort. The dominant discourses were acknowledged and understood. The women were aware of, and affected by, the discourses of gendered danger and safety advice, but they were able to express their thoughts critically and challenged these warnings and perceptions of the special dangers of being a woman. My interviewees did have limitations, but they were often situational and contextual, based on everything from daily moods to news reports of violent attacks to the weather.

The women in my sample showed multiple incidences of resistance and boldness. Finding out about women's co-existing stories of confidence and vulnerability allows for

greater understanding of women's mobility and also allows for the exploration of the transformative effects of women's fearlessness on the cityscape by creating liberating and empowering places as well as steps towards empowerment and equity. However as with most things, their resistance is messy, contradictory, and incomplete, because as Hollander and Einwohner point out, "a single activity may constitute both resistance and accommodation to different aspects of power or authority" (2004: 529).

## CHAPTER NINE: Gender Done and Redone

Women are encouraged to limit their mobility in part because of a belief that public spaces are dangerous and that women's bodies are inherently vulnerable. These discourses are reified and disseminated by official crime prevention tips, media sources, as well as interpersonal communications. The focus on women's fearfulness naturalizes women's vulnerability, may result in women's unequal access to public spaces, and may also become mapped onto female bodies, as women's bodies are seen and often experienced as weak. In fact, women's fearfulness has been explained as partly a response to the perceived inability to ward off an attacker (Madriz 1997a; Ozer and Bandura 1990). Women's fearfulness has become taken for granted as an obvious manifestation of 'the patriarchy' (Madriz 1997a).

What became evident was that the women I spoke with did not report being particularly fearful or overly concerned with their safety, but that they were still very aware of the messages that constructed women in public spaces as vulnerable and responsible for their own safekeeping. The way that the women I interviewed talked about their experiences did not coincide with these dominant discourses, and the women did not identify with the essentialized woman who was the subject and object of safety advice. This allowed me to talk about how those women, whose femininity was constituted by and through the discourses, were able to enact resistance to these discourses<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup>In my sample there were women who were more on the margins of this femininity whether by choice, by being racialized, or by not being heterosexual. But I suggest that they are still privileged by their class position, and by loosely following the norms of western femininity and middle class expectations (i.e. they were employed in 'good jobs' or pursuing post-secondary education).

## Claims and Contributions

As I asserted at the beginning of this thesis, this project was not carried out in the ‘fear of crime’ approach to research (see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, this thesis has much to contribute to the ongoing conversations about women’s safety and fearfulness. In particular, I believe that this dissertation adds another more critical voice to the fear of crime debate from the margins of the literature. I have argued throughout this dissertation that fearfulness is not a universal condition of being a woman, yet vulnerability of female bodies in public spaces is a dominant discourse that helps to constitute mobility, femininity (especially that of white middle class women), and subjectivity. Therefore, research that explores the possibility of resistance to these discourses is an important aspect of understanding women’s experiences in public spaces, and can help to balance out the dominant portrait of women as fearful.

I posed two research questions at the outset of this project: (i) what are the dominant gendered discourses of safety and vulnerability involving public spaces? And (ii) how are those discourses understood and negotiated by women who were most constituted or targeted by them? I set about answering these questions through a three-pronged research approach: I carried out a discourse analysis of official safety advice as disseminated on police and university websites, in which I analyzed twenty-five police service websites and twenty-five university safety department websites; I reviewed fifty-eight issues of *Cosmopolitan*, of which I analyzed thirty-nine articles which were about violence against women; and the third form of data took the form of semi-structured interviews with nineteen women in Ottawa.

By using these three sources of data, I established that gendered safety advice still exists and is targeted toward women in ways that promote a model of neo-liberal feminine

safekeeping that I call respectable femininity. These three sources allowed me to develop the argument that dominant gendered discourses of safety and vulnerability involving public spaces are primarily ones of female vulnerability and stranger danger. While these discourses essentialize female bodies and subjectivities, they are especially directed toward middle class (white) women who are more able to enact them. These discourses primarily construct the danger as coming from strange men, with public spaces being the location of the danger. By exploring the textual discourses in a popular women's magazine and official safety advice websites in conjunction with interviews with women, I was also able to explore how safekeeping discourses govern women's everyday mobility; this also led to my conclusion that, for the women I interviewed, there are multiple opportunities for resistance. This resistance may, in turn, eventually lead to wider challenges to traditional safekeeping discourses as women become more confident and less and less willing to perform respectable gender.

As I established in Chapters Four and Five, the discourses of safety and danger give rise to gendered safety advice that encourages the enactment of safekeeping behaviours as part of respectable femininity. This safekeeping involves avoidance, dependence, and awareness, which come from a place of seeing women's bodies as vulnerable. The safety advice has remained virtually unchanged in the last two decades (since Stanko began her analysis in the early 1990s) and thus the majority of the advice does not reflect any social changes and knowledge production that have occurred in the previous two decades. For example, the advice does not reflect the growing understanding of the prevalence of domestic violence and dating violence, as it still does not pay adequate attention to risks

posed by known others. There is also no evidence of effectiveness of these safekeeping strategies; rather they are simply meant to be accepted as common sense.

These discourses are understood and negotiated by women who were most constituted or targeted by them in multiple and diverse ways. First, to reiterate, my sample was composed of women who embodied salient social privileges; in particular all but one were employed (Lily was a full-time student at the time), all but two had at least a Bachelor's Degree and many had post-graduate degrees completed or in progress and thus occupied a middle class subject position. Additionally, many of the participants were white and most identified as heterosexual. While the privileges that my participants experienced were not uniform or complete, none of them were marginalized by extreme poverty, homelessness, or peripheral employment. This privilege influenced their activities and access to public spaces and ultimately allowed them to be reflexive regarding safety and danger discourses.

These women know the safekeeping discourses and have been taught them since childhood. They are the 'type' of women who would be expected to enact safekeeping. They are the 'good' victim and the type of woman represented as crime victims in *Cosmopolitan* and news media. Using the frame of doing gender, I explored if and how they enacted safekeeping behaviour conforming to respectable femininity and found that in various circumstances the participants would indeed conform to safekeeping behaviour.

This behaviour was ingrained and habitual and also brought out at times when the women were feeling vulnerable or uncomfortable. Women were especially likely to enact these strategies at night and/or in areas they were unfamiliar with. They also conformed (or pretended to conform) with safekeeping strategies in relation to other people's concerns, especially family and close friends. In this way they 'did gender' in a way that complied

with the normative version of respectable femininity and thus were at a lower risk of being negatively judged for their behaviour. While this is not a radically new finding, it does reaffirm that educated, privileged women are still under pressure from antiquated safety advice. The articulation of critiques of gendered safety and danger discourses by many of the participants serves as further evidence of the power of these discourses and how they act as a form of governance.

However, my participants did not always 'do gender' in only a way that conformed to respectable femininity. In resisting the dominant discourses that encouraged them to view their bodies as vulnerable, especially in public spaces, they 'redid gender'. The resistance I noted took two general forms: deliberate and everyday. Deliberate resistance involved behaviour that was consciously undertaken in opposition to or disregard for 'safety rules'. Examples of such activity included walking or jogging alone at night in active defiance of 'proper' behaviour. Everyday resistance was more common and were those activities that disregarded 'safety rules' in ways that were less overt, or were not conceived of as resistance. Walking alone at night could also be classified as everyday resistance if it was done as part of one's routine activities. I categorize these behaviours as resistance because they do not conform to the gendered safekeeping discourses that encourage avoidance and dependence.

Most of the time the women in my study did not constitute themselves as vulnerable in public spaces, and many of them expressed the point that they do not really give too much conscious thought to their safety (or even to the fact that they are out in public spaces). Crucially, the women in my study know about the discourses of female vulnerability and dangerous public spaces, but they do not 'take on' those messages in an active way. By this

I mean that they do not view public spaces as inherently dangerous, nor do they act as though they are at risk. Their narratives acknowledged that danger was a reality in the world and, at times and in certain contexts, reported feeling some vulnerability, but this was not a constant in their lives. I am not suggesting that we simply stop asking about and investigating women's fears, but that the presumption of fearfulness and vulnerability needs to be challenged.

As I stated earlier, I make no claims of generalizability to all women in all public spaces; however, my analysis still contains broader implications. The way the women in my study participated in 'redoing' gender through resisting safekeeping strategies (even if it is not deliberate) can be understood as transgressive, and more than that, as transformative.

Vast inequalities still exist for women both locally and globally, but there have been significant structural advances for many women in the past few generations (for example, legislative pay equity policies, legalized abortion, and the entrenchment of gender equality in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*)<sup>84</sup>. However, gender discrimination and inequalities still exist and the focus on everyday interaction of the doing gender framework works well to explore the continued gender inequality and discrimination that still exists despite structural change (Deutsch 2007: 114).

What redoing gender in the context of safekeeping involves is the refusal to capitulate to the expectations of respectable femininity that encourages women to view their bodies as vulnerable to dangerous strangers and take prudent action to avoid victimization. For my participants this took several forms. For some it was about having an 'attitude' when they did not want to be approached in public spaces. For many it was believing that they

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<sup>84</sup> I am not suggesting that gender equality has been achieved or that these structural changes are equally experienced across all women, but just that there has been some movement towards reducing and eliminating gender inequality.

were able to anticipate danger and thus avoid it by remaining aware and alert. This awareness did not follow in the model of hyper-vigilance advocated in the official safety advice and *Cosmopolitan* because it was not constant and it did not cut them off from people around them. In fact, developing a sense of familiarity and community was another way that some of my participants resisted the discourse of stranger danger and the advice to view strangers as potential threats. For others it was about not taking on the messages at all. Being confident in their ability to take care of themselves and embody that confidence is in direct resistance to the expected weakness and dependence of normative femininity.

The fact that gender is 'done' means that it can be 'redone' (West and Zimmerman 1987). Some argue that gender can even be 'undone' (Morash and Haarr 2012; Deutsch 2007; Butler 2004). I do not consider what my participants are engaging in to be radical enough to undo gender; I do believe that they are 'redoing' it through their acts of resistance. While 'doing gender' has been used much more often to discuss gender at the interactional level, there are implications for the institutional level as well (Deutsch 2007). Deutsch writes, "gendered institutions can be changed, and the social interactions that support them can be undone" (2007: 108). While West and Zimmerman do not fully articulate this or the process for doing so, some have taken up their concept to discuss resistance and social change as I have done here (Deutsch 2007; Shaw 2005).

The actions of this group of women in public space have the potential to transform space and strengthen communities. In an era in which the Government of Canada is pushing an aggressive law and order campaign that has the potential to encourage people to be more worried or fearful of crimes despite the decreasing crime rate, small acts of resistance such as confidently possessing space, interacting with

strangers, and openly refusing to enact respectable femininity (at least some of the time) may go some way to creating safer communities and public streets. As Koskela argues:

By their presence in urban space women produce space that is more available not only for themselves but also for other women. Women's spatial confidence can be interpreted as a manifestation of power. Hence, at the level of the whole society, women's safety in public is arguably improved more by women going out than by them staying inside (Koskela 1999 in Pain 2001: 904).

I have offered several insights and conclusions that contribute to the literature on safety, privilege, and resistance, but as with any project there are some limitations to my study that result in opportunities for further research.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The size and sample of this project is both a strength and a limitation. The small sample size allowed me to become very familiar with the data and reread the transcripts multiple times, something that would have been more difficult with a larger sample. And while every participant brought unique stories to the project, there was a great deal of commonality which made me confident that more interviews would not add anything qualitatively different to the project. The demographics of the sample also allowed me to draw some interesting conclusions about the role of privilege in women's ability to identify and resist the discourses of vulnerability. Women who are further marginalized, those who are home insecure or homeless, racialized, Aboriginal, living in poverty, and/or involved in sex work occupy different positions vis-à-vis safety discourses and advice than do women privileged by social class and whiteness. In particular they are not the subjects of safety advice<sup>85</sup>, nor

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<sup>85</sup> One exception is the Ottawa Police Service, which has a message to sex trade workers on their crime prevention page (2011). This sheet was posted on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in response to the murders of several sex workers in the Ottawa area.

are marginalized women represented in the danger stories (or any stories) in *Cosmopolitan*. Expanding the research to those women who face further risks and dangers because of their position in the social hierarchy would add another important dimension to this topic.

There were also issues that upon reflection I would have explored further in the interviews. For example, while I did include a discussion and analysis of awareness as a safekeeping strategy in Chapter Seven and the role awareness plays in confidence in Chapter Eight, I would have liked to have discussed what and/or how awareness was enacted by my participants. I would have also liked to have talked more about intimate relationships and the roles that male partners play in encouraging female safekeeping. While I did discuss the role of social relationships in Chapter Eight, the ability and desire to depend on a partner for safekeeping is a significant factor. Exploring safekeeping and independence of single women and women in relationships would have provided an interesting comparison, as would have comparing women in same-sex relationships with those in heterosexual couples. Rader's (2008) analysis of how married and divorced women 'do gender' in relation to safety provides a good model for such a study.

As I think about future projects and reflect upon the limits of this current undertaking, one of the directions that I would pursue would be to incorporate men into the analysis. I focused on women with forethought and deliberation because the project that I wanted to do was about the discourses of femininity. However, it would be very interesting to do a similar project with men. Talking to men, those who fit into the mainstream version of masculinity and those who are more to the margins of that identity, about their understandings of safety discourses for both themselves and women would open up a very interesting comparative area. It would be especially illuminating to compare the responses

that the women gave regarding their knowledge of safety messages with responses from men to the same questions, as well as what men thought about the risks of being a woman in public spaces. It would also be interesting to explore whether or not there was a sense of safety messages as gendered.

Connected to the above topic is the question: what does a feminist crime prevention strategy look like? The YWCA of Canberra, Australia offers one model of crime prevention that moves beyond the responsabilization of women to manage their own safety with their 'Stay Safe!' programme, which attempts to empower women by not using the template of women as victims, but instead understands that there is a diverse range of women who are:

Resourceful members of the community [but] who are more likely to face particular kinds of unsafe situations as a consequence of their gender. Safety is positioned as a shared community responsibility, and women as well as other community members are provided with practical strategies to improve their own safety (DOC\_515, 2004).

In terms of educational campaigns that challenge the crime prevention advice that place the emphasis on those considered at risk, there is a fairly new sexual assault education campaign called 'Don't be that Guy' which is directed towards men in relation to date rape. Research over time will have to evaluate whether these types of campaigns are sustained and supported as an alternative to the responsabilization of women to keep themselves safe from male violence.

A broader geographic sample would allow for claims to be made about other Canadian cities, which would help place Ottawa into the broader Canadian context. The fact that all of the women had lived in other places around the country allows me to be confident that these findings are not unique to Ottawa, but expanding the location would allow the ability to investigate the particularities of other cities to help identify what it is about particular spaces and places that increase or decrease feelings of safety and confidence.

This project focused on individual women and their resistance in everyday life. While there was discussion about the importance of community to feelings of safety and belonging, I did not undertake to explore collective action of women (and men) to create safer spaces for women in cities and universities. I briefly reference it here to point to how this work is an important component of creating safer cities that allow for more opportunities for resistance.

One important organization doing work around women and safety is Women in Cities International (WICI). WICI is an international organization which aims to be a hub for international conversation and the advancement of knowledge and practices in the area of women's safety and the creation of inclusive cities (Women in Cities International 2002). One of the principle types of collective action that has emerged in recent years is the formation of partnerships (Andrew and Legacy 2013). In the Canadian context, WICI established a partnership project that ran from 2007 to 2010. This project was run in four Canadian communities, in which four community-based women's groups were brought together with the aim of building collaborative relationships with local governments. The project was focused on adapting safety audits to benefit diverse groups of women (Andrew and Legacy (2013). There is evidence that women's lives in the communities involved did improve as a result of these partnerships (Andrew and Legacy 2013: 100).

Collective action can be especially important for the concerns of marginalized women to be addressed. The use of collaborative partnerships to develop safety audits allowed for the voices of marginalized women to be heard and empowered (Andrew and Legacy 2013). I believe that the resistance of the type that my participants demonstrated is part of the struggle for inclusive public spaces, but this resistance is enabled by their relative

privilege. The re-doing of gender through resistance to dominant discourses of vulnerability is an important aspect of creating an inclusive city, but it is incomplete without the types of collective action that WICI is engaged in within Canada and internationally.

### **Final Remarks**

The interactional lens of doing gender does not preclude institutional change. Through resisting the expectation of feminine vulnerability we can change the perception of female weakness. Female body builders are an example of this challenge to the norms of feminine weakness and non-muscularity. Although Shilling and Bunsell (2009) illustrate that for the most part female bodybuilders are met with disgust for violating normative expectation of femininity, they are nonetheless actively recasting femininity. In this way resistance to normative feminine safekeeping expectations does not directly address structural or institutional inequality, but instead works to change the normative conceptions of gender. By exploring resistance or actions of redoing gender we can also explore the ways in which these changes at the interactional level can possibly drive institutional change (Deutsch 2007).

The Take Back the Night March (TBtN) has approached this idea collectively. When women get together they are able to subvert the fear and risk of being out in public spaces at night. Thus TBtN makes women's presence in public spaces at night normal, at least for one night a year. Redoing gender in the way that I have discussed is about occupying the night through walking, jogging, riding a bike, or otherwise being in a space in a way that is discursively constructed as 'unsafe' for some but not for others. When this begins to happen more regularly and more often, public space at night may become more hospitable, which may open up opportunities that were previously inaccessible to a great many women.

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**APPENDIX A: POLICE SERVICE WEBSITES**

	<b>Province</b>	<b>Safety Tips on Website</b>
	<b>Alberta</b>	
1	The Calgary Police Service	X
2	Edmonton Police Service	X
	<b>British Columbia</b>	
3	Vancouver Police Department	X
4	Victoria Police Department	
5	Abbotsford Police Department	X
	<b>Manitoba</b>	
6	Winnipeg Police Service	X
	<b>New Brunswick</b>	
	Biggest city Moncton: policed by the RCMP	
	<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>	
7	Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC)	
	<b>Nova Scotia</b>	
8	Halifax Regional Police	X
	<b>Ontario</b>	
9	Toronto Police Service	X
10	Peel Regional Police	X
11	York Regional Police	X
12	Ottawa Police Service	X
13	Hamilton Police Service	X
14	Waterloo Regional Police Service	X
15	Niagara Regional Police Service	
16	Durham Regional Police	X
17	Windsor Police	X
18	Barrie Police Service	X
19	Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)	X
20	Halton Regional Police Service	X
	<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	
21	Charlottetown Police Services	
	<b>Quebec</b>	
22	Service de Police de la Ville de Montreal	X
	<b>Saskatchewan</b>	
23	Saskatoon Police Service	
24	Regina Police Service	X
	<b>National</b>	
25	Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)	

**APPENDIX B: UNIVERSITY SAFETY WEBSITES**

	<b>Province</b>	<b>Department Name</b>	<b>Advice</b>
	<b>Alberta</b>		
1	University of Alberta	Protective Services	X
2	University of Calgary	Campus Security	X
	<b>British Columbia</b>		
3	University of British Columbia	Campus Security	X
4	Simon Fraser University	Safety and Risk Services	X
	<b>Manitoba</b>		
5	University of Manitoba	Security Services	X
6	University of Winnipeg	Security & Community Ambassador Services	X
	<b>New Brunswick</b>		
7	University of New Brunswick	Campus Security and Traffic	X
8	Mount Allison	SHARE (Sexual Harassment And Assault Response And Education)	X
	<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>		
9	Memorial University	Campus Enforcement and Patrol: St. John's	X
	<b>Nova Scotia</b>		
10	Dalhousie University	Security Services	X
11	St. Mary's University	University Security Services	
	<b>Ontario</b>		
12	University of Toronto	Campus Community Police	
13	York University	Security Services	X
14	University of Ottawa	Protection Service	X
15	University of Western Ontario	The University of Western Ontario Campus Police	X
16	McMaster University	Security Services	X
17	Ryerson University	Security and Emergency Services	X
18	Carleton University	Department of University Safety	X
19	Brock University	Student Safety	X
20	Wilfrid Laurier University Laurier: Brantford	Special Constable Service	X
	<b>Prince Edward Island</b>		
21	University of Prince Edward Island	Campus Safety Initiatives	
	<b>Quebec</b>		
22	Concordia	Campus Security	X
23	McGill University	Security Services	X
	<b>Saskatchewan</b>		
24	University of Saskatchewan	Campus Safety	X
25	University of Regina	Campus Security	X

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW MATRIX

Research Themes	Interview Questions
<p>• How women speak of their experiences in public spaces:</p> <p>*Have these specific discourses constrained the way that women experience public life as well as the way they speak about those experiences.</p> <p>*Do these narratives have influences on women's mobility, gender roles, women's empowerment and pleasure/desires.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think of when I say public space?</li> <li>2. What are the main differences to you between public and private spaces?</li> <li>3. How much time do you spend in public space?</li> <li>4. How would you define urban public spaces?</li> <li>5. How much time do you spend in what you would consider urban public spaces?</li> <li>6. What are your ways of transportation through public space?</li> <li>7. Do you do a lot of walking or biking to get around?</li> <li>8. What does a typical weekday look like in terms of your activities</li> <li>9. Do you interact with people other than at your work place when you are in public space? How?</li> <li>10. How do your weekend days differ?</li> <li>11. Do you often go out in public spaces alone during the day?</li> <li>12. Do you spend leisure time in public spaces? What kind of activities are typical?</li> <li>13. How do you generally feel when you're out in public spaces during the day? (Do you enjoy being out? Is it frightening? Do you find enjoyment being with people? Or being along the canal? Or is it just a means to an end?)</li> <li>14. Do you think about the fact you're in public space in the daytime?</li> <li>15. Tell me about a typical week evening/night for you paying particular attention to your movements in public spaces. How about a weekend evening/ night?</li> <li>16. Do you do anything in public space after it gets dark?</li> <li>17. Do you often go out alone in the evening or night?</li> <li>18. Do you feel differently when it's dark out than you would during the day time?</li> <li>19. Do you ever enjoy being out at night?</li> <li>20. What are some activities that you do in places that you consider public after dark?</li> </ol>

	<p>21. Do your feelings about public space change it/when you're out at night?</p> <p>22. Why do you think that is?</p> <p>23. Do you think about the fact you're in public space at nighttime?</p> <p>24. Think back to the summer months what are your general activities when the weather is nicer?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do women cross the boundaries and borders of the 'fearful woman' and experience pleasure, fun, desire and empowerment in public spaces? *stories of women who defy the social norms and experience public space as not dangerous</li> </ul>	<p>25. How do you define comfort?</p> <p>26. How do you define pleasure?</p> <p>27. How do you define safety? Especially in relation to being in public spaces.</p> <p>28. Do you think that there's a difference between feeling uncomfortable and feeling unsafe especially as it relates to public spaces?</p> <p>29. Do you think about your safety in general?</p> <p>30. For you what makes space pleasant?</p> <p>31. What makes it unpleasant?</p> <p>32. Do you talk to others about your experiences in public spaces?</p> <p>33. Do you ever think of the being in public as pleasurable?</p> <p>34. Why or why not?</p> <p>35. Can you positive experience that you've had in positive space, or one incident that you think of?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the fearful discourse is maintained and taken up? *This involves looking at the ways in which language and narratives are accessible and accessed; *The way that threat of violence in public spaces is normalized for women but not for men; *The way that the discourse about dangerous public spaces has been maintained.</li> </ul>	<p>36. What kinds of advice do you hear about being a woman in public spaces? (Have you heard that it is unsafe to be in public spaces, particularly as a woman?)</p> <p>37. Can you think of where you'd heard these messages from?</p> <p>38. Do you feel that this advice is directed towards women more than men?</p> <p>39. Do you listen to these warnings? Why or why not?</p> <p>40. Are there times when you're more likely or less likely to listen to this advice?</p> <p>41. Are there people or media that you're more or less likely to take seriously when their giving this type of advice?</p> <p>42. Are there times when you're more likely to</p>

	<p>listen to these warnings and change your behaviour?</p> <p>43. Are there people in your life that you're more likely to listen to?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do women negotiate feelings of insecurity and the desire and need to be in public spaces</li> <li>*How do women construct and express their faith in their own ability to stay safe without sacrificing their sense of independence.</li> <li>*Stories of women who defy the social norms and experience public space as not dangerous</li> </ul>	<p>44. Can you think back over the course of the say the last decade or the time you've been on your own and do you think your attitudes have changed about your safety in public spaces?</p> <p>45. Would you say that you trust your judgment and your ability to make decisions about what's safe and what's not safe?</p> <p>46. Do you ever question your judgment when you hear about certain incidences either from people you know or media sources? Does that make you think twice about your safety?</p> <p>47. Does this information influence your faith in yourself to make decisions and take care of yourself?</p>
	<p>48. Do that do you have any strategies that you employ to increase your comfort in public spaces?</p> <p>49. Can you think of a time, being out in public space a lot we all come across things that are weird or scary or uncomfortable, can you think of a time that that happened that you were able to resolve it or 'escape' or get out of the situation unharmed or unscathed?</p> <p>50. How does that ability to deal with that successfully make you feel in terms of your ability to handle yourself?</p> <p>51. We don't really construct these ideas of success. You dealt with it successful, you were fine and you moved on as a way of being able to negotiate and manage yourself?</p> <p>52. Do you think that gives you confidence in your ability to handle the next situation that comes up?</p> <p>53. How did people react when you tell that story?</p>
	<p>54. Do you believe that there's censure that surrounds behaviour that in particular that is</p>

	<p>deemed unsafe?</p> <p>55. Can you think of times when you've done something, you've been out alone at night for example and you've been criticized for it or your judgment has been questioned. How does that make you react or how do you feel about that?</p> <p>56. Do you think that their reaction would influence your future behaviour?</p> <p>57. Do you think that your ability to trust yourself influences the way that you react to those people that say 'you shouldn't have done that'?</p> <p>58. Have you ever let that feeling other people's reactions, or the fear of other people's reactions, stop you from doing what you needed to do?</p> <p>59. Have you ever wanted to do something but didn't because you were concerned about your safety?</p> <p>60. Have you ever wanted to do something but didn't because you were concerned about how people in your life would react?</p> <p>61. Have you ever done something counter to the 'rules' of safety and not told anyone or not told certain people?</p> <p>. Do you ever get that reaction from your parents?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right to be in public spaces and the importance of that right</li> </ul>	<p>64. Is there anything that would keep you from doing what you needed to do?</p> <p>65. Are there places or times you avoid being out?</p> <p>66. Why do you avoid those times/ spaces?</p> <p>67. Do you feel that it's important to be able to be in public in space as much as you want to be?</p> <p>68. As a woman in particular do you feel that you should be able to do what you want when you want?</p> <p>69. At any time of the day or night?</p> <p>70. Do you think that there should be limits?</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does gender influences women's experiences</li> </ul>	<p>71. Have you ever take any self defence courses?</p> <p>72. Do you or have you ever gone to the gym or done any weight training or any sort of physical activity?</p> <p>73. Does your physical ability help or hinder you're feelings of safety in public space?</p> <p>74. Do you think that your physical appearance affects your comfort and experiences in public space? This includes dress, hair, makeup, body size etc.</p> <p>75. Can you think about this in the ways you express your gender (or race or sexuality or dis/ability)?</p>
	<p>76. Women are often told, from various media or personal sources that they shouldn't do certain things that are labeled unsafe (for example walk alone at night) or that they should take certain precautions (get someone to walk you to your car). If this advice is followed it can lead to women placing restriction on their lives and can limit opportunities for education and employment. This advice can also be socially restrictive and isolating. Do you agree that women should be expected to limit their activities in order to stay safe?</p> <p>77. In a perfect world would you behave the same way as you do now in public spaces? Do you think that fair or unfair that you have to change your behaviour because we don't live in a perfect world?</p> <p>78. We often hear that public spaces are dangerous for women more so than for men. Do you agree with this statement? Is this statement true in your own life?</p>

**APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Job	Education	Hometown
Beth	30	White	Non-profit	BA, Post grad certificate	Halifax
Jane	37	White	Law reform lobbyist	LLB, LLM (in progress)	Regina, SK
Stella	40	White	Canadian museum of Nature	BSc, certificate in Adult Ed.	Ottawa
Michelle	29	White	Naturopath	BSC, diploma N.D.	Montreal
Sandra	45	White	Self-employed consultant	MBA, BA	Ottawa
Allison		White	researcher, non-profit PhD Student	BA, MA, PhD (in progress)	Small town in BC
Maggie	29	Lebanese	PhD Student	BA, MA, PhD (in progress)	Montreal
Valerie	32	White	Provincial Gov't	MES	Burlington
Adeline	35	White	National Defense	BA, MD	Kanata
Lily	19	White	Undergrad Student	BA (in progress)	St. John, NB
Shauna	27	Caribbean	Undergrad Student/ real estate	BA (in progress)	Toronto
Cecelia	34	White	Research consultant	BA, MA, BSc (physical therapy)	Rothern, SK
Olivia	26	White	Federal Gov't	BA	Abbotsford
Isabelle	27	White	Federal Gov't	MA	Gagetown/ Fredericton, NB
Nina	40	Indian	Government	BFA, MA, PhD	Montreal
Juliette	29	White	Federal Gov't	BA, MA, MLIS	Ottawa
Veronica	28	White	Federal Gov't	BA, MILS	Pointe-Claire
Lakmini	23	Sir Lankan	F/T Federal Gov't Student	B.A. (in progress)	Toronto/Ottawa Born in Sir Lanka
Maria	31	Italian/ European/ non-white	Student P/T	PhD (in progress)	Toronto