

Women's use of public
space and feelings of
personal safety: preliminary
findings and fieldwork
narratives

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What is my PhD topic?

- Women's use of public space
- Freedoms and constraints
- Women's fear of sexual violence and concerns for personal safety
- Employment of feminist and qualitative methodology



Emergence of this topic in academia

- In 1989, Valentine stated that “Women’s inhibited use and occupation of public space

is...a spatial expression of patriarchy”
(p.389)

- Previous to this, little explicit work
- Since then, knowledge explosion!

(Burgess; 1998; Coakley: 2003; Day: 1999;
Gardner: 1990; Green: 2006; Kern: 2005;
Koskela: 1997; 1999; Listerborn: 2002;
Macmillan: 2002; Mehta and Bondi: 1999;
Meyer and Post: 2006; Pain: 1991; 1997;
2000; 2001; Spalek: 2002; Stanko: 1990;
1995; 1996; Valentine: 1990; 1992;
Walklate: 2004)



Why is this topic and method important?

- Women's fear of sexual violence is considered normative
- Concept of irrationality
- Transference from fear of being attacked by men to fear of specific places
- Qualitative and feminist approach essential



Research experiences so far

- Emotionally demanding but fascinating topic which is highly relevant to most women's lives
- Wide variation in women's spatial movements and use of public space
- Significant themes:
 - Night time economy and alcohol
 - Transport (both private and public)
 - Holidays / travelling
 - Children's safety
 - Frightening or threatening incidents

Taxis

- Wide variance in women's use of taxis and reasoning
- Some women would never get in any taxi by themselves

VS

Other women would hail minicabs off the street



Frightening and threatening incidents

- Interested in the way women reacted to situations where they were exposed to (potential) violence
- Split second decisions
- Descriptions of these are vivid
- Other women gave detailed accounts of how they would react if they were attacked

I suppose it's the only time that I've really felt threatened, this guy came up to us and it's going to sound so stupid, it's sounds like something out of a movie but it was just as it happened and he got this broken bottle out. He was just some guy, looked completely normal, had a backpack on, walking down the street, me and my friend and he pulled this broken bottle out and said "which one of you wants to die first?"

[Gasps]

And it just sounds like something out of a movie, it's so corny when I say it and my friend was trying to run away and I said "no no, don't" and this is going to sound stupid but I just thought about you know lions in the safari when they pick on the weakest gazelle and they wait for that one to run off.

Laughter

- Transcript lacks context
- Some women used humour when describing a frightening situation in order to mask the gravity of it
- Surprised how much laughter existed in interviews, given topic under discussion
- Complex emotion



IMPACT

- Emotions during interview discussion (self and participants)
- Conference presentations
- Publications
- New contributions to knowledge

Any questions

