

# **Visual Terror: Graffiti and Outdoor Advertising as Street Harassment**

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## **Abstract**

This paper suggests that both graffiti and highly sexualized outdoor advertising should be understood as forms of street harassment. Research exists charting the manner in which graffiti creates fear in public space and fear of crime is something experienced by women more frequently than men. There has been no similar research done on outdoor advertising. Using ideas from feminist geography and criminology this paper argues that the socially exclusive consequences of the fears of crime brought about by graffiti and outdoor advertising can be understood as being similar to the consequences of street harassment. The framework of social exclusion will be used to suggest that, like graffiti, highly sexualized outdoor advertisements constitute an important public policy concern.

## **Introduction**

Research has implicated graffiti as a contributor to women's fears of crime in public space, indicating that graffiti is a crime committed primarily by men. Similarly, street harassment has been connected to women's fears of crime and similarly it too is something committed primarily by men. In this article, I argue that through their contribution to women's fears of crime, graffiti and street harassment are contributing factors to the social exclusion of women in public space. This article will

focus on sexualised outdoor advertising – exploring how in a similar manner to graffiti and street harassment, such advertising charges public space with a male sexuality that makes women fearful of crime. Its connection to women’s fears and thus to their social exclusion, makes such advertising a pertinent public policy concern.

### **Social Exclusion: Theory**

This paper uses social exclusion as the framework for analysing the harms associated with both graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising. ‘Social exclusion’ is a broad term used to describe the cumulative factors that prohibit a person participating fully in society – in this case, in public space. This theory dates back to the 1970s and 1980s in France where the term was used to describe the so-called ‘new poor’ who were unprotected by social insurance, excluded from the benefits of economic growth and experiencing social instability amidst traditional institutions such as family and neighbourhoods (Jones & Smyth 1999).

Nowadays social exclusion describes social phenomena far broader than simply poverty. Australian social policy theorists Andrew Jones and Paul Smyth argue that social exclusion has been used as a framework to describe youth, homelessness, women, disabled children, nomadic workers, ethnic minorities, housing, urban segregation in Western cities, probation, community safety and funeral services (Jones & Smyth 1999).

In Jones and Smyth's list of policy issues that social exclusion has been applied to, the authors list crime and the 'spatial dimension of exclusion' (Jones & Smyth 1999, 19).

Fear of crime, which will be discussed in greater detail, is something that women feel more strongly than men. This paper will argue that graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising contribute to these fears. Similarly, while Jones and Smyth restrict their discussion on space to the geographic specificities of exclusion – i.e, particular housing estates or localities – this paper will move the discussion towards broader public spaces like cityscapes, and explore how such space becomes gendered and how graffiti and sexualised advertising contributes to the masculinising of the landscape.

### **Street Harassment: Definitions and Measurements**

It is through the lens of 'street harassment' that graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising will be analysed. This model has been chosen because street harassment is a concept that is measurable in terms of both frequency and in regards to the negative consequences perceived to ensue. Street harassment is something that criminologists have already attempted to quantify, thus giving the framework legitimacy. It is also a simple term that, if extended to incorporate graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising, will give legitimacy to concerns and, ideally, attach stigma to the kinds of socially exclusionary activities constituting harassment occurring in public space. Lastly, street harassment has been chosen as a descriptor because it is a concept that takes into consideration the unique elements of public space and the fact that street harassment is something women experience more often

than men, and which contributes to the pervasive fears of crime women harbour, fears of which, arguably graffiti and outdoor advertising also contribute to.

Street harassment is a concept used to describe disrespectful behaviour occurring in public space that is engaged in by men and directed at women. Such behaviour encompasses all kinds of conduct including staring, comments about women's bodies, sexual propositions and touching. Carol Brooks Gardner in *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment*, uses the term 'public harassment' instead of street harassment to describe the broad range of behaviour that help define this phenomenon:

Public harassment includes pinching, slapping, hitting, shouted remarks, vulgarity, insults, sly innuendo, ogling and stalking. Public harassment is on a continuum of possible events, beginning when customary civility among strangers is abrogated and ending with the transition to violent crime: assault, rape or murder (Gardner 1995, 4).

Gardner presents public harassment as something very common: all 293 women in her study had experienced some form of public harassment, and all but nine regarded it as 'troublesome' (Gardner 1995, 89). It should be noted that Gardner's statistics paint a picture that is significantly more disturbing than other studies.

In 1984, the British Crime Survey asked a question about 'sexual interference' in public and found that less than 2% of female respondents had such an experience during the previous year (Hough & Mayhew 1985). There are numerous reasons that

could explain this very low figure, but the idea of 'sexual interference' is likely a term survey respondents associate with touching or rape rather than the more pervasive kinds of harassment Gardner described above. While other studies do not present statistics as high as Gardner's, other research does indicate that instances of street harassment are far more common than the 1984 study indicates. Approximately 40% of women interviewed in a 1988 English survey reported having been harassed (i.e, being stared at, approached, followed or spoken to) during the survey year (Crawford et al, 1989). U.S. studies have indicated that 15% of women living in major U.S. cities had been verbally or physically harassed in the past week and almost 87% of U.S. women between the ages of 18 and 64 have been either verbally or physically harassed on the street by a male stranger sometime in their life (Oxygen/Markle Pulse Survey 2000). Canadian statistics correlate with this U.S. data, indicating that just over 85% of the respondents had experienced at least one incident of street harassment since the age of 16, and 36% had experienced at least one of these incidents within the previous year (Lenton et al, 1999). Survey data is destined to be diverse because the nature of a broad term like 'street harassment' means that definitions will differ across studies and the understandings of respondents will be inconsistent. That said, this paper is taking the position that public harassment does occur, that instances are prevalent and that they are symptomatic of the kinds of behaviour taking place that contribute to the gendering of public space and the reaffirmation of it as a male domain. Lisa Rundle in the Canadian women's issues magazine *Herizons* illustrates this point well:

[A]s many variables as there are, street harassment is still (universally) a phenomenon in which men are acting and women are reacting. And that merits some collective attention to the issue (Rundle 2003, 31).

Regardless of the frequency statistics adhered to, this paper argues that the fact that street harassment is occurring – however often – should be of concern to public policy practitioners, for such harassment leads to social exclusion.

### **Graffiti and Outdoor Advertising as Street Harassment**

Using Gardner's definition of public harassment, on a cursory level, neither graffiti nor outdoor advertising fit this description. On one hand, graffiti is illegal and something more often associated with crime and social disorder than gender disparities in public space. (This would be exemplified by the lack of research done in the area of gender and graffiti). On the other hand are outdoor advertisements – i.e, billboards and tram shelter advertisements – which have been legally erected through the rental of sites built for these very purposes. On the surface, neither medium seems particularly suited to the street harassment descriptor and similarly, neither street harassment nor public harassment appear to be terms that have been used previously in the context of graffiti or outdoor advertising and thus applying the term seems incongruent. However, street harassment will be applied as a descriptor in this paper because the negative consequences that plague both mediums demand an encompassing term which explains the impact that these displays have on the social exclusion of women. Similarly, in the same way that

graffiti and street harassment are unavoidable in public space, outdoor advertising is equally raising similar concerns regarding women's exclusion. Also, like street harassment, both sexualised advertisements and graffiti are symptomatic of male control of public space, which is thus exclusionary for women.

### **Graffiti and Outdoor Advertising: Case Studies of Male Control of Space**

This section will explore the ways in which graffiti and outdoor advertising function as examples of male control of public space.

Feminist geography explores the ways in which the relationship between men and women in society is exhibited in public through the design and use of space. This idea is explained by feminist geographer Linda McDowell in *Gender, Identity and Place*:

The specific aim of a feminist geography... is to investigate, make visible and challenge the relationships between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematize their apparent naturalness (McDowell 1999, 12).

Feminist geographer Robyn Longhurst argues that underpinning this theory is the idea that 'place tends to be organized in ways that privilege men at the expense of women' (Longhurst 1999, 154). It could be understood then, that in patriarchal society public space functions to include and exclude. Just as power lies with the



male street harassers, this paper will argue that when men utilise public space in a way that suits their interests without regard for other citizens, that they then come to dominate the way space is used and in turn put themselves in control. This can prove socially exclusionary, particularly for women, the consequences of which are an important public policy concern.

Graffiti illustrates male control of public space in numerous ways. While it is difficult to gauge accurate figures on the gender make-up of participants (as most graffiti goes unpunished), research does indicate that perpetrators are male. In 2002, criminologists Mark Halsey and Alison Young undertook interviews with 'graffiti writers' and the profile that emerged was that the typical 'writer' was a male between 12 and 25 years of age. As the authors argue, 'graffiti - like most other types of crime - is an activity most often undertaken by young men' (Halsey & Young 2002, 3). Other writers corroborate with this profile: Nancy McDonald in *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York* argues 'most graffiti writers are boys' (McDonald 2001, 6). In Australia, research undertaken by Paul Wilson again supports this profile, indicating that 'Sydney graffitists are mainly young adolescents and include both girls and boys, although boys predominate' (Wilson, 1987).

While the reality is that the majority of perpetrators of graffiti are male, this is not the only attribute enabling the graffiti-ed environment to be described as male. The actual practice of graffiti itself can be viewed as demonstrative of masculinity.

As illustrated by Halsey and Young earlier, in general most crime is undertaken by young males. Research exists arguing that masculinity is actually reaffirmed by a male's participation in crime (Messerschmidt 1993; Collier 1998). Explanations for male crime statistics vary, but most can be traced back to binaries and the public/private divide. Just as the public and private are perceived to be male and female realms respectively, similarly, often specific personality traits are assigned genders. Just as traditionally men are perceived to be strong and women weak, men are seen as actors and women as acted upon. The idea of man as actor, and the acting out of masculinity in a physical manner, is one explanation for male participation in crime, as Glenn Walters explains:

It has been proposed that males often engage in externalizing behaviors like delinquency and substance abuse because of masculine attitudes and interests, whereas females, by virtue of stronger communal ties, tend to internalize problems (Walters 2001, 677).

Whether 'externalizing behaviors' are attributed to biology or social construction, the idea of men acting out their masculinity externally is an important tool in explaining graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertisements. It therefore is necessary to explore the aspects of masculinity that are being externalised.

Much has been written about the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity', the common argument being touted is that men are now the 'second sex' (Sommers 2000; Tiger 1999; Faludi, 1999). Feminist theorist Michael Kimmel eloquently explains the

limitations of this 'crisis', describing it as a 'heavily-hyped right-wing fusillade against feminism' (Kimmel, 2000). Interestingly, while Kimmel is indeed critical of the causes of this crisis, Kimmel does acknowledge the reality of high levels of depression and suicide amongst young men. Explanations as to why people feel depression often include isolation and social exclusion (Minardi & Blanchard 2004; Christoffersen et al 2003; Rivers 2000; Kendall & Walker 1998; Nezelek et al 1997). The implication of social exclusion in suicide and depression would therefore correlate with Halsey and Young's findings about why young boys externalise the more problematic aspects of their masculinity - i.e., isolation and social exclusion - and engage in graffiti: the authors argue that 'around one quarter of writers have experienced some level of alienation from pedagogical institutions' (Halsey & Young 2002, 16 - 17). Of course, alienation, isolation and social exclusion are conditions that women also feel and yet women do not engage in crime - notably graffiti - to the same extent as men. It is therefore, necessary to interrogate what is unique about masculinity that contributes to our understandings of male involvement in such crimes.

Both sides of the political spectrum link contemporary problems affecting boys (i.e, depression, suicide, weaker performance in school) to masculinity (Kimmel 2000). On one pole there is Christine Hoff Sommers' book *The War Against Boys* which blames feminist activism for punishing boys for being masculine in their endeavour to bring about equality for women. Interestingly, on the opposite pole is Kimmel who also implicates masculinity in this 'crisis', but argues that it is the 'outdated' and flawed definition of the construct that is actually responsible:

The therapists... understand that what lies beneath boys' problems (apparent or real) is an outdated ideology of masculinity to which boys are struggling desperately to adhere, and which is applied ruthlessly and coercively by other boys (Kimmel 2000).

The insistence of being a real man and acting as such is far more likely the explanation for graffiti, if not for this 'crisis' in its entirety. As outlined earlier, traits are often attributed to specific genders: in this discussion, the trait of risk-taking is inextricably bound to traditional understandings of masculinity (Sommers 2003; Larkin & Pines 2003; Evans & Davies 2000; Naffine 1987). The interest graffiti-writers have in the risky appeal of crime is supported by comments made by graffiti writers in Halsey and Young's interviews:

I think it's to do with the um, ah why are men, adolescents, boys attracted to kind of danger and risk maybe more so than females, I mean like why do they like driving fast cars and you know going and doing burn outs and stuff and the need for speed, there is that... it must be to do with that, the risk, the danger factor... you know even for me that the tag was a kind of way of, well, saying I'm out there in a way, proving myself... so maybe, yeah, girls they still might have a desire to express themselves through art, but they maybe don't feel the need to prove themselves so strongly (Halsey & Young 2002, 39).

This paper isn't an attempt to delve into the reasons behind why boys engage in graffiti, but rather to distil the themes that help provide a gendered analysis for the behaviour and to help link this to the similar explanations for, and problems concerning, sexualised outdoor advertising.

The last explanation for the male nature of graffiti that will be explored in this research is the understanding of the importance of visual images to masculinity: i.e, masculinity externalised in a physical and visual manner. Popular psychology routinely informs that 'men are more visual than women' (Decker 2003; Bakos 1996) or that 'men are visual creatures' (Corcoran 2004; Hutcherson 2003; West & West 2002). This idea is used to explain a multitude of happenings in male culture - i.e, why men are so interested in the physical appearance of women (Lehmann 2002; *Jet* 1999) and why men have a disproportionate interest in pornography and sex shows (Hutcherson 2003; Grey 2003). The notion of the importance of the 'visual' as it links to sexualised displays will be discussed shortly, however, the importance of the 'visual' to men is fundamental to analysing graffiti in public space.

There is much overlap in the manner in which visual images are perceived to arouse men, and the interest men have in leaving their own visual markings on spaces: as a way to externalize arousal, to demonstrate presence and to indicate ownership.

Below is an extract taken from an on-line forum as part of a sexual advice website in response to a man's question about giving a 'facial' (i.e, ejaculating on a woman's face). One forum participant's response helps to tie together not only the importance

of visuals in a sexual arousal sense, but the importance of being able to leave a mark on a site – in this case with semen:

Now I can't speak for every guy, but I do think that most men would agree, that it's not about power, or being degrading to women, or any other silly macho thing like that, it's totally a visual thing for men.

Most men are more visual than women technically speaking in nature, but some men are more visual than other [sic], so if a lady like yourself were to have a boyfriend who is more visual, he more than likely will want to ejaculate somewhere on your body rather than inside of you, kind of like a person watching a music video, where you get to listen and watch visually with your eyes what's going on, instead of just listening to a music CD, where there would be no visual things to see, you would only be able to here [sic] (All Sex Advice, on-line forum).

This article isn't attempting to draw a direct correlation between semen and aerosol paint, however, there are connections to be made in regards to men and site brandings. Ejaculating on a woman's face is one of the more graphic examples. Others, equally concerning, are well documented. It was documented in 2003 that a doctor in Kentucky was sued by a patient he performed a hysterectomy on. The doctor in question had used a cauterizing instrument to brand the initials of his alma mater - University of Kentucky - on her uterus to distinguish between the organ's left and right side (Associated Press 2003). Another example of the branding of women's

bodies can be illustrated in the following African case. It was reported in a World Health Organization report on condom use by sex workers in Zimbabwe, that female prostitutes often claimed clients made holes or tears in condoms with their nails so that the woman would get infected or pregnant. This process is described as 'leaving their mark on them' (Ray & Maposphere 1997). The idea of 'leaving their mark' - or marking one's territory - is very important to understanding how masculinity plays into graffiti writing. One of Halsey and Young's interviews illustrates this idea well:

**Interviewee:** ... Like, you see a blank wall, you want to be up there first and train lines mainly cause that kind of stuff gets viewed on trains and it's like a negative area really for Government and all that, they don't put up signs and posters and things, so it's all just negative space ... .

**Researcher:** Sure. Just that phrase 'negative space' can you just explain what you meant by that?

**Interviewee:** Something that's not being used, [...] like a big blank wall, I think of that as like a negative space.

**Researcher:** Sure.

**Interviewee:** Like not being used and you think, Yep, well, I could style that up and do a big blockbuster kind of style (Halsey & Young 2002, 32).

The graffiti writer has marked the territory as his own with aerosol paint and in the process claimed the space as male. Taking this idea a step further, it's not just the idea of the space being marked, but the space actually being branded: the idea of the marking functioning as a means of publicity for the writer. This is again, something

that correlates well with Halsey and Young's interviews which unearthed that a key trend in the stated reasons for engagement in graffiti – particularly tagging - was '[t]he sense of *publicity* that graffiti can provide for writers' (Halsey & Young 2002, 13):

I don't know, it's just getting to have your name well known all around the place... They'll be like, they'll see your tag and they'll be like, that's good... and they'll be like, I know who writes that, I'm his friend...he's heaps cool (Halsey & Young 2002, 13).

...me and my friend's name was on the inside of every single red hen (Halsey & Young 2002, 18).

Seeing my name everywhere gave me pride (Halsey & Young 2002, 21).

[I]t's all about one up-man-ship in terms of where you put it, how well you've done it, how big you've put it, how many times you've got it up. So every time you go out it's like putting on a little bit of a show. You're not necessarily putting on a show to the greater audience of the community but you're putting on a show amongst your peers saying, "Right, I've done this here, look how good that looks and you know, what are you going to do about it?" So you know someone else will come by or add to that, put their's there. It's almost like name-chasey or something, I'm not sure. But... (Halsey & Young 2002, 21).



They see my initials there they'll say, yeah, AA's been here ... It's like a calling sign (Halsey & Young 2002, 21).

Numerous traits routinely associated with masculinity can be distilled from the comments made by writers above: i.e, competitiveness, notoriety, pride, risk-taking. It is these very same masculine traits evidenced through graffiti that provide a useful segue into a discussion on sexualised outdoor advertising.

It is essential to return to the elements that enable graffiti to be deemed masculine and attempt to apply these frameworks to analysing sexualised outdoor advertising. It is important to note that it is men who assume the voyeur position in the realm of outdoor advertising, taking the seat of power as spectator, while it is the woman who is subordinate, featuring far more often than men in outdoor advertisements and routinely being portrayed as merely decorative (Uray & Burnaz 2003). Using the binaries referred to earlier, public space is perceived to be a male because it is associated with masculine traits like action, power and production. It is also perceived to be a male realm visually, particularly, when images of women feature prominently throughout. As argued earlier, 'visuals' are very important to the construction and reaffirmation of masculine culture. Just as tagging a blank wall is an externalisation of masculinity, it can be argued that the same thing is happening in outdoor advertising: the erection of a sexualised billboard is a way for men to externalise their sexual interests and desires. When the display of women is done in a way that uses women's bodies and sexuality as the primary attention getter, this is

evidence of the importance of the visual to masculine culture. Of course, it is a certain kind of sexuality depicted in outdoor advertising – i.e, women’s sexuality – and thus sexualised outdoor advertising can be seen to illustrate a heterosexual male sexuality. The prevalence of such examples of masculine culture indicate the dominance of masculinity in public space.

As demonstrated with graffiti, the notion of acquiring and branding public space is well illustrated with outdoor advertising. Graffiti writers’ comments cited earlier by Halsey and Young indicated great pride in ‘seeing my name everywhere’. This reaction is not at all unlike the motivation outdoor advertisers have in seeing their brandings everywhere in public space. As the Outdoor Advertising Association of Australia discusses in their promotion of their medium: ‘Outdoor ads done will get seen - they create attention, they make one look, they brand’ (Outdoor Advertising Association of Australia 2003). Similarly, the reaction of New York advertising agency founder Esther Lee to blank public space is again not at all unlike the graffiti writers’: ‘If there’s a surface, I expect to see an ad on it’ (see Pappas 2000, 16).

Both the graffiti artist and advertiser see blank walls and unused spaces, not as public sites, but rather as apt targets for the projection of their ideas and agendas at the expense of others: in the process allowing a public space to become male space that can prove exclusionary for women. This ‘branding’ of public space through advertising parallels the motives and implied claims staked by graffiti writers over public space. It appears that because the space is demarked as public, that this is enough justification for the minority – for graffiti writers and outdoor advertisers – to

exert their will. One of the graffiti artists interviewed in Halsey and Young's study said that he would never tag 'other people's property' (Halsey & Young 2002, 22).

Interestingly, as Halsey and Young surmise:

This touches on the important idea that for the bulk of participants public property was literally that: namely, public, held in common, there for each to do with as they so wish (Halsey & Young 2002, 23).

Like the trait of risk being deemed male, territorialism is another attribute often associated with masculinity (Gross 2003; Vettel-Becker 2002; McBurney 1992). In the case of advertising, the idea of being able to claim public space, to brand it, to be able to show passers-by that you have claimed a little part of public space as your own, is exactly what is being done with advertising. Just as the graffiti writer quoted earlier discussed the concept of 'one up-man-ship', a similar idea is being played out in the realm of advertising in terms of where advertisers put it, how well they've done it, how big it is, how many times it's being displayed, only somehow the 'corporate' nature of their activity comes to legitimise their practice as though it is something different than what the graffiti writers are doing.

Just as graffiti is something that men are disproportionately involved with, so too is outdoor advertising. A 2002 study by *Advertising Age*, indicated that of 4,145 employees in 228 agencies surveyed, men occupied 53.8 percent of the positions and dominated - by a ratio of 2.77 to 1 - the top five positions (chief executive, chief financial officer, chief technology officer, creative director and associate creative

director). In the six lowest positions, women outweighed men 1.12 to 1 (Friedlin 2003). When girls get involved in graffiti it seems completely out of character given traditional traits assigned to their gender (Muncer et al 2001). When women are in senior roles in advertising and are involved with campaigns deemed sexist, the idea that a woman is the instigator supposedly gives the campaign liberal legitimacy. An important illustration of this would be the 2000 Windsor Smith case where Lisa Trendell took responsibility for the controversial simulated-fellatio advertisement displayed on billboards in Australia (ABC 2002). This assumption completely ignores the overarching masculine nature of the industry and the medium as a whole.

### **Graffiti and Outdoor Advertising: Fear, Social Control and Social Exclusion**

As described earlier, street harassment takes many forms: this article suggests that graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising should be understood as examples of street harassment because the objectives and negative consequences are similar. Just like graffiti, street harassment and outdoor advertising grant control of public space to men, each medium thereby placing certain controls on women in public space.

Sociologist Thomas Gieryn in his article on place and sociology explains that space is often used to exert control in public space:

Police squad cars in Los Angeles maintain order in part by patrolling boundaries and restricting access - they use place as a means to decide who

and what properly belongs where... The same tactics are used by gang members seeking to establish and control their turf (Gieryn 2000, 463).

Taking Gieryn's point a step further, not only is activity in space used to illustrate social control, but more specifically male activity is used to illustrate male control.

Firstly, it is essential to understand the motivation behind a street harasser's

behaviour. Street harassment is often rationalised by perpetrators as being

complimentary in nature (Lenton et al 1999). The on-line magazine *Salon* undertook

interviews with street harassers to ask them why they did it. Below are some

examples of their justifications:

Aw! There y'all go, there y'all go!... Always complainin' when you should be happy. We like you, get it? We human men. We like your bodies. We like your ... your ... okay, I'll say it and it's your fault because I don't even talk like this - we like your titties! We like titties. We men. We like women, ain't no fags round here.

It's a compliment, alright, jeez... Why is it so wrong to tell you that you're pretty? How much time you spend getting dressed this morning? How much makeup you got at home? Huh? It's for me, right? For men (Dickerson 1999).

A feminist analysis argues that street harassment is not designed to be

complimentary at all, rather, that the motives are deemed far more insidious.

Michelle from the New York Street Harassment Project explains that rather than

being complimentary, such harassment is evidence of a desire for men to exert control:

A lot of that stems from street harassment, because the underlying theme of street harassment is violence. When men harass it is not borne out of love or respect - it comes from some need to control women and that can lead to anything from stalking to rape (*Off Our Backs* 2002).

Gieryn corroborates with Michelle's point, arguing that like the police squad car in Los Angeles, street harassment is often used as a way to exert control over public space:

Public places provide the circumstances for the most degrading forms of informal social control: on-the-street harassment of women or racial minorities is surely one way to keep disadvantaged groups in their place (Gieryn 2000, 463).

The idea that street harassment is done as a means of social control is a point supported not only by Michelle and Gieryn, but theorists including Fitzgerald and Koss *et al* (Koss et al 1994; Fitzgerald 1993).

The idea of street harassment functioning as means of social control is the reason why this article argues that graffiti and outdoor advertising should also be included under this descriptor. Just as verbal harassment of women in public space functions

to control them, so too does graffiti, being a visual example of harassment. The major way this control is achieved is through the cultivation of fear. Laura Beth Neilsen in her article on street harassment argues that 'fear' is the most commonly reported reaction to 'sexually suggestive speech from strangers in public places'. Neilsen's research indicated that one-third of women claimed to be 'fearful' or 'afraid', and 'still more' reported feeling 'intimidated' or 'threatened' as a result of street harassment (Neilsen 2002). A U.S. study cited earlier indicated that the feeling of threat ensuing from street harassment was the reported sentiments of 87% of female victims surveyed (Oxygen/Markle Pulse Survey 2000).

Geographer Rachel Pain takes this notion of fear surrounding experiences of street harassment further, arguing that there is a strong relationship between women's experiences of street harassment and their fear of violent attack (Pain 1995; Painter 1992; Painter 1989; Crawford et al 1990; Stanko 1990; Junger 1987). It is this fear that something worse could ensue which facilitates such control becoming debilitating. Like street harassment, graffiti makes women fearful of public space and it is this fear that works to reinforce male dominance and control of public space. The presence of graffiti around a city can increase perceptions of fear: the assumption is that a graffiti-ed space is an unsafe environment where crime may not be restricted to aerosol cans. The U.S. Public Works Department furthers this point, arguing that graffiti gives the perception that a space is no longer safe or under control:

If allowed to remain, graffiti becomes the first sign of urban decay, sending a highly visible message of lawlessness and a neighborhood unconcerned about

its appearance. It instils fear and a feeling of vulnerability (Eugene Police and Public Works Departments).

It is the perception of fear and vulnerability that graffiti creates that helps illustrate why graffiti is a contributor to women's fear of crime and thus to women's social exclusion.

It is necessary to establish precisely how graffiti contributes to fear in society. One explanation would be the visual nature of the medium and its prevalence: graffiti is a criminal act, so when it is prominent in public space, it works to remind women that they are entering an environment where crime is rife. Also, as mentioned earlier, graffiti changes people's perceptions of who is in control of public space. The British Transport Police argue that graffiti gives commuters the perception that control is out of the hands of authority and in the hands of vandals:

Stations and trains covered in graffiti make users of the railway think that the vandals are in control, not railway management or the police. This induces fear of being attacked and means that they may choose not to travel. This is particularly true of discretionary, usually leisure, travel - women in particular will fear to use the system at night (British Transport Police).

Despite the much-documented reality that women have much lower chances of victimisation than men (Pain 2001), women feel less safe than men in society (Alvi et al 2001; Institute for Security Studies 2001; Pain 2001), both within their homes



(Harris & Jensen 1998, 10) and out in public (ABS 2003; Valentine 1989; Hanmer & Saunders 1984). This perception of fear is amplified in certain cohorts of women such as lesbians and the elderly (Corteen 2002; Warr 1985; Maxfield 1984; Garofalo, 1979; Baumer 1978; Hindelang, 1974). Undoubtedly the culpability of graffiti in making an environment seem unsafe is an important public policy issue. Christopher M Grant in his article on graffiti and quality of life discusses that while clean-up costs of graffiti can be measured with relative ease, of important concern is the 'intangible psychic costs of living in a city that looks as though it is under siege' (Grant 1996; Stolberg 1992):

The presence of graffiti discourages citizens from shopping or living in affected areas. As established businesses relocate or close, new businesses might be reluctant to move into areas where customers would feel unsafe. As property values decline and law-abiding citizens with resources move, once-thriving neighborhoods can quickly degrade into dangerous places. Thus, the seemingly trivial offense of graffiti ultimately can have devastating consequences for a community (Grant 1996).

When women are fearful of public space they place restrictions on their behaviour. Therefore, not only do the male graffiti writers come to control public space by making such spaces visually frightening, but this control is also exerted in that the frightening environment becomes exclusionary for women and thus forces women to pose restrictions on themselves and their movements.

Esther Madriz in *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls* argues that the fears of crime poses negative consequences on the freedom and equality of women:

...fear of crime contributes to the social control of women by perpetuating the gender inequalities that maintain patriarchal relations and undermine women's power, rights and achievements (Madriz 1997, 2).

Elizabeth Stanko in *Intimate Intrusions* argues that '[w]omen, in fact, are specialists in devising ways to minimise their exposure to the possibility of male violence' (Stanko 1985, 1). Consequences of the 'social control' that Madriz describes, and the crime minimisation techniques that Stanko alludes to, are far reaching. Rachel Pain describes some of the reactionary measures women engage in to attempt to minimise their chance of attack: 'not answering the door, to avoiding certain areas or streets, to choice of employment, leisure and social activities' (Pain 1997, 234).

The British Transport police cited earlier, explained that women are fearful of going on graffiti-ed trains at night. Fears amplified at night and generating reactionary responses from women is a point furthered by Gordon and Riger. Gordon and Riger's research indicates that the kind of behaviour modifications Pain discusses are experienced far more often by women than men. Their research indicated that 25.3% of the women they surveyed, compared to only 2.9% of the men, said they never walked in their neighbourhood alone after dark (Gordon & Riger 1989).

Just as graffiti functions to control women by making them fearful of public space, so too does sexualised outdoor advertising. In a workplace, sexual harassment is relatively easy to define. The branch of workplace sexual harassment that is most useful to this discussion is that of 'hostile environment'. In Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) describes a 'hostile or sexually permeated working environment' as:

...ongoing unwelcome sexual conduct in the workplace that interferes with work performance or affects an employee's enjoyment of the working environment. The behaviour does not need to be directly or consciously targeted at an individual. Common examples of this form of sexual harassment include the display of explicit or pornographic materials, relentless sexual banter, crude conversation, innuendo and offensive jokes (HREOC 1996).

Just as the above working environment is deemed sexually harassing, when such behaviour is taken outdoors - when similarly explicit material is being displayed publicly on billboards and in bus shelters - then public space should be able to be defined as 'hostile' towards women and such activities dubbed street harassment.

Sexualised advertisements make women feel fearful on a number of levels. The first level is that the advertisement restricts their worth to their sexuality. As illustrated above in the HREOC statement, the display of pornographic pictures constitutes sexual harassment. When pornographic references are entering mainstream products

including outdoor advertising (Sørensen 2003; Dilevko & Gottlieb 2002; Well Davis 2002; Nordlinger 2001; Satzman 2000; Stewart 2000; Gardetta 1998) there is no reason why such outdoor advertisements shouldn't be deemed sexually harassing in the exact same manner.

Women's fear of crime is inextricably bound to women's fear of rape (Maxfield 1984), and thus, it is on these grounds that street harassment through sexualised outdoor advertisements is deemed to contribute to women's fear of crime. Cynthia Grant Bowman argues that street harassment, regardless of how 'harmless' it is perceived to be, works to remind women that they are rape-able:

[A]ny incident of harassment, no matter how 'harmless' [is held to reinforce fear of rape] by demonstrating that any man may choose to invade a woman's personal space, physically or psychologically... (Bowman 1993).

Street harassment, graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising impacts on women's social exclusion because the fear of crime that ensues has women modifying their behaviour in ways outlined above: i.e, not going out at night; not going out unaccompanied; avoiding certain areas etc. It is argued that such restrictions are examples of the ways in which women are socially excluded from full rights of citizenship: i.e, excluded from uninhibited and unobstructed access to public space.

### **Prevalence and Powerlessness: Graffiti and Outdoor Advertisements and Response Reluctance**

As discussed earlier, while statistics vary, street harassment is the experience of many women in society. Similarly, prevalence of graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertisements are each equally pervasive. In September 2003, local councils in the U.K. conducted a survey of 'anti-social behaviour'. This survey tallied 7,855 incidents of graffiti and vandalism with this behaviour costing local councils an estimated £600m worth of damage annually. According to certain councils in the U.K., costs are spiralling upwards. Wandsworth council spent £625,000 on cleaning graffiti in 2002, claiming that this figure was more than three times the mid-1990s bill (*The Economist* 2003). According to the National Graffiti Information Network in the U.S., graffiti eradication costs the public \$4 billion per year (Grant 1996). In Australia, the costs are estimated at \$200 million per year (Smith & Lee 2003). Such clean-up costs indicate that graffiti is prevalent, thus indicating that the negative consequences mentioned throughout this paper are likely to be widespread.

While a cursory glance around public space indicates that women feature far more prominently than men in advertising, academic studies actually quantifying this are scarce, particularly so in specific regards to the outdoor medium. Instead, numerous examples exist of studies that refer to the reality of more women featuring in advertisements generally (i.e, in print and television advertisements) than men and documenting that their presentations are more often concerned with their sexuality (Murnen et al 2003; Reichert 2003; Rouner et al 2003; Varney 2003; Reichert et al 1999; Lin 1998; Soley & Reid 1988).

Indeed, the reality of prolific graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertisements make 'street harassment' an apt descriptor for both mediums, because as in street harassment, an ordinary woman going about her daily activity in public space is being harassed by these images and experiences the negative consequences that ensue.

The problems with the prevalence of such images are two fold. The first problem is that like with street harassment, the prolific nature of graffiti and outdoor advertising makes women feel powerless to react. Problematically, the silence of women and public policy makers on these issues devalues the necessity to legislate. Michelle from the New York Street Harassment Project explains women's silence in regards to street harassment:

One reason why street harassment is so prevalent is because, for the most part, the men who do this get away with it. And it's not that women are letting it happen, but there is such an intimidation factor that goes along with it that most women feel that all they can do is just walk away or ignore it. But that gives the impression to the sexist mind of the street harasser that he can get away with that behavior (*Off Our Backs* 2002).

Just as the pervasiveness of street harassment feeds the perception that men can 'get away with that behaviour' this pattern is replicated in graffiti and outdoor advertising.

Also, the problem with widespread graffiti and sexualised portrayals of women is that the fear of crime that ensues means that the number of places women fear to go and the extent of the social exclusion exacerbates.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to draw parallels between the motives behind, and negative consequences of graffiti and outdoor advertising, likening both cases to the situation of street harassment. Just as the graffiti-ed environment makes women feel fearful of public space, so too does an environment charged with a hostile male sexuality.

Like street harassment, graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising present dire consequences on women's inclusion in public space and therefore need to be understood as important public policy concerns.

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