



ELSEVIER

Women's Studies International Forum 28 (2005) 67–78

WOMEN'S STUDIES  
INTERNATIONAL  
FORUM

www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif

# The men's gallery

## Outdoor advertising and public space: Gender, fear, and feminism

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Available online 19 April 2005

### Synopsis

Outdoor advertising presents a unique case in that, unlike advertising in other media, an individual's capacity to avoid exposure is inhibited. Unlike the "private" world of magazine and television advertising, outdoor advertising is displayed throughout public space, thus making regulation of the medium a pertinent public policy concern. The inescapable nature of outdoor advertising, compounded with the increasingly sexualised display of women within, demands that an active public policy response occurs. This paper draws from the disciplines of criminology, architecture, and feminist geography to argue that the continued sexualised portrayal of women in outdoor advertising works to illustrate and contribute to the social inclusion of men and the social exclusion of women in public space. I argue that these portrayals fuel women's perceptions of fear and offence, and force them to limit their movements. I further suggest that such portrayals function to amplify masculine "control" of city spaces and reinforce women's exclusion.

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### Introduction

In Australia in 1993, New South Wales magistrate Pat O'Shane dismissed charges against four women who had graffitied a billboard advertising Berlei underwear. This 5-m-high poster depicted a smiling woman about to be sawn in half by a magician, the slogan reading, "You'll always feel good in Berlei." The four women were charged for adding the phrase, "Even if you're being mutilated." In an article written for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, O'Shane justified her judgment:

It is no accident in a society dominated by males that we get this kind of advertising that is depicted in these

photographs. It is no accident that we do not see similar depictions of men being disembodied, dismembered... The real crime in this matter was the erection of these extremely offensive advertisements... (Sweet Justice, 1993, p. 39)

It was over a decade ago that O'Shane drew attention to the sexist culture of outdoor advertising, and yet, 10 years later, I find myself writing about the problem as though it is a new phenomenon. In fact, even 10 years ago, such imagery was not used for the first time: advertising academic Juliann Sivulka traced the first use of "erotic appeals" in advertising back to the earliest years of the 20th century (Sivulka, 2003). The Berlei protests in 1993 of

course were not unprecedented either: feminist criticism of advertising began in the early 1960s when Betty Friedan bemoaned the limited and sexualised advertising portrayals of women in *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963). What has changed 10 years on, however, and why I find myself writing on a topic that has been critiqued and lamented for over 40 years is that, despite feminist awareness, not only does sexist advertising still exist, but as I suggest in this article, the situation has worsened. Despite research indicating that the effectiveness of highly sexualised advertisements (in terms of increased product sales) is moot (Dolliver, 1999; Fetto, 2001), and that it would make good policy sense for agencies to avoid highly sexualised depictions (Bartos, 1990; Courtney & Whipple, 1983), the frequency of overt sexual appeals in advertising has actually *increased* in recent years (Ford, LaTour, & Middleton, 1999; Lang, Wais, Lee, & Cai, 2003). Advertisers are routinely treading a very fine line between sexual appeals and pornography, so often in fact that protest now seems anachronistic. I suggest, however, that in order to deal with problems present in contemporary outdoor advertising, we need to document the kinds of imagery present: establish why they are a problem and explore new frameworks to highlight this issue and develop strategies to reduce sexist advertising.

This paper is based on a collection of over 100 examples of outdoor advertising which were photographed in Melbourne during 2003 as part of my PhD dissertation. Some of the photographs in this data collection will be referred to in this article.

Unlike advertising in other media such as magazines or television, an individual's ability to avoid exposure to outdoor advertising is inhibited due to its public nature. Considering that women feature far more frequently than men in outdoor advertising, and given that their presentation routinely focuses on their appearance over and above the product advertised, I argue that, as a result, female users of public space come to be excluded. This exclusion stems from highly sexualised imagery reminding them of their sexual vulnerability that, in turn, has them fearful for their safety and alters their behaviour to compensate.

In this article, I argue that images of women more traditionally associated with the sex industry and

venues such as The Men's Gallery have moved beyond the private realm and been mainstreamed into the public sphere via their presentation in outdoor advertising. "The Men's Gallery" is the name of Australia's largest tabletop dancing venue. This venue, located in the Melbourne central business district, boasts "100's [sic] of the most beautiful dancers performing non-stop everyday" (Men's Gallery, website). It is my contention that such highly sexualised outdoor advertising displays work to make public space a gallery for men where women are used to decorate space in a way that sexually objectifies women and offends and harasses female public space users, thus making it less pleasant—and even impossible—for women to enjoy public space. Put differently, women come to feel excluded.

### Sexualised imagery

Long-term research indicates that women are portrayed in advertising more frequently and more sexually than men (Lin, 1998; Murnen, Smolak, Mills, Good, & Lindsey, 2003; Reichert, 2003; Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999; Rouner, Slater, & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003; Soley & Reid, 1988; Varney, 2003). While research on the content of outdoor advertising is scarce, the most cursory observations of advertising currently on public display indicate that imagery similar to examples analysed in research on print advertisements also exist in the outdoors: in fact, nowadays, there is much cross over between the two mediums. Tram shelter advertisements for *Harper's Bazaar* magazine shown in Melbourne in 2003 encapsulate this idea well. *Harper's Bazaar* was marketed using fashion advertisements from brands such as Versace, taken directly from issues of the magazine. Often concerns raised about print advertisements are discredited because it is understood that choice for the consumer exists in the purchase of the magazine, which includes exposure to the contents, including advertisements. Such choice does not exist in outdoor advertising. Therefore, when advertisements with varying degrees of allusion to problematic print advertisements—as well as the sex industry—enter the mainstream, the public's forced exposure becomes a public policy concern. A 2003

billboard campaign displayed around Australia advertised Heaven brand ice cream showing naked women submerged in ice creams with the caption “I’m in heaven.” Wendy Varney, in an article on the advertising campaign, suggests that not only the appeal of the ice cream and the woman were being exploited, but also the *consumption* of both:

The women are there for the taking if/when the ice-cream melts or is consumed from around them. . . This is a pretty grand claim for an ice cream: that the pleasure it holds is equivalent and similar to “taking” one of these beautiful women. . . (Varney, 2003, p. 12)

As Varney explains, the women in these advertisements are “primarily there to be appealing, attractive, sweet, and ultimately consumable” (Varney, 2003, p. 12). It is these kinds of advertisements, where the women are displayed as sexualised and consumable, that I am referring to in this article. My contention is that the inescapable nature of such advertisements when displayed outdoors presents the public policy concerns pertinent to this piece.

### Audience capture

The notion of a “captive audience” is crucial to our understanding of both the appeal of the outdoor advertising medium and also the problems that such a visible presence pose for public policy activists. Advertisers take advantage of people’s regular daily activities and utilise our inescapable surrounds to display advertisements, and, in turn ‘capturing’ passersby. As the following quote illustrates, for advertisers, there is enormous “captive audience” appeal to be found in the outdoor medium:

You can immediately penetrate [sic] an entire market with it [billboard advertising]. There’s no way to avoid it if you do a large enough showing. (Warner Bros advertising executive in Gardner, 1999, n.p.)

The above quote explains the appeal of outdoor advertising from a commercial perspective: the medium is broad-brush and visible by all consumers all of the time; it can be placed anywhere and is largely inescapable. Of course, the very reasons that make the medium so valuable illustrate why the contents need to be scrutinised.

The next section will explore the concept of social exclusion in an attempt to contextualise the negative consequences of sexualised advertisements.

### Social exclusion

In this article, I apply the framework of social exclusion to the ramifications of the display of highly sexualised imagery of women in public space. I argue that it is a right of citizenship for women to be able to access public space in the same manner as men, but that this right is jeopardised when women feel frightened or offended in the outdoors. As I will later discuss, these feelings of fear and offence come from an environment that is charged with a hostile male sexuality highly influenced by pornography.

“Social exclusion” explains the disadvantages and the factors (often compounded) that impede a person’s ability to participate fully in society (Jones & Smyth, 1999). While poverty was once understood as the primary contributor to exclusion, de Haan and Maxwell argue that to be poor and to be socially excluded are in fact two very different things:

The poor are excluded but so are the old, the homeless, the mentally ill, and the culturally alienated. (De Haan & Maxwell, 1998 in Jones & Smyth, 1999, p. 2)

Silver expands on these ideas, arguing that the applicability of the social exclusion framework is far broader than merely being a way to analyse poverty. He writes:

Whereas poverty and inequality are concepts reducible to money, an exclusion perspective combines economic and social problems, material and symbolic relations, distributional conflicts and identity politics, class and status orders, social rights and human rights. (Silver, 1998 quoted in Jones & Smyth, 1999 p. 12)

It is in Silver’s work where concepts of social exclusion move beyond traditional concerns surrounding economic marginalisation into something more applicable to individual exclusion from rights.

Jones and Smyth argue that the social exclusion framework has come to encompass youth, homelessness, women, crime, and housing (see Jones &

Smyth, 1999). The authors' listing of crime is particularly important to this article, as fear of crime is a well-documented contributor to women's social exclusion.

Of particular interest in Jones and Smyth's work is a section on the "spatial dimension of social exclusion" (Jones & Smyth, 1999, p. 19). While they restrict their discussion to relatively narrow understandings of spatial exclusion, focusing on impoverished communities and inadequate infrastructure, in this article, I expand on existing research and argue that highly sexualised advertising imagery works to decorate public space in a way that imbues the outdoors with male concepts of sexuality, arguing that such an environment is exclusionary for women.

To understand how the captive audience problem is connected to concerns over sexist imagery—and more directly to women's social exclusion—it is essential to understand how outdoor advertising illustrates, amplifies, and facilitates the interaction between the sexes in the public sphere.

### Gendering public space

In this section, I use ideas from feminist geography to explain how public space becomes gendered and, in turn, functions to exclude women from full participation in public life. Originating in the 1970s, feminist geography explores how gender relations are illustrated and amplified in the physical layout of spaces, both in the public and private spheres (see McDowell, 1999). Feminist geographer Robyn Longhurst claims that the central tenet underpinning this theory is that "place tends to be organized in ways that privilege men at the expense of women" (Longhurst, 1999, p. 154).

Along with including and excluding genders, space can also function as a contributing factor in their construction. An argument not exclusively applicable to feminist geography but to feminist theory generally is the notion of the public/private divide whereby the domain of the private is associated with femininity; the realm of the public sphere is associated with masculinity. McDowell argues that a geographic site becomes masculine because of the assumed link between the political

structures located within and their association with traits deemed masculine (i.e., independence, production, and power) (see McDowell, 1999). Of course, a case can also be mounted that cities are understood as masculine because of their aesthetic attributes. It is the gendered nature of these aesthetic attributes that is of greatest concern to this article. As nature and the "natural" are deemed feminine attributes, thus following the idea of binaries, the created or built environment becomes something synonymous with masculinity.

It is essential not only to understand how gender is associated with space but also to pay attention to how these associations have translated into planning decisions. If an assumption is made that men primarily use a space, the space will be designed to cater for their perceived needs, ignoring or sidelining the concerns of subsidiary users of space: women. One such "inclusion" for women in male space is as decoration. Architecture theorist Joel Sanders explains men and women's different inclusions in architecture: "[b]y identifying manliness as "genuine" and womanliness as "artifice," architects since Vitruvius have associated the ornamented surface with femininity, not masculinity" (Sanders & Joel, 1996, p. 79). Sanders' point, along with similar claims made by theorists like Laura Mulvey (Mulvey, 1985), is illustrated well with the routine use of women as decoration in space. The sheer number of women portrayed in outdoor advertising far outweighs men, and therefore on a cursory level, advertising can be interpreted as contributing to the gendering of public space through its continued use of women as "artifice." When women are relegated to the background—as artifice, as decoration—it is evident that the masculine nature of public space has placed limitations on their inclusion. The negative, disempowering effect of this kind of objectification extends beyond the "ornamented surface" and can be interpreted as having harmful ramifications on the mental and physical safety and prosperity of all women in public space.

Taking this idea further, I argue that not only is public space deemed masculine, but that this masculinity is a highly specific manifestation of perceived male sexual desires and agendas, peppered heavily not only by popular culture, but, more specifically, by pornography.

## Sexualising space

Feminist geographer Mona Domosh suggests that spaces come to reflect the sexual understandings and practices of the genders within public space: “[s]paces both reflect and are produced by these cultural prescriptions, and the acting out of these gendered and sexed performances” (Domosh, 1999, p. 432). Through its highly sexualised representations of women, advertising works to sexualise—or at least genderise—an entire city through its perpetuation of understandings and illustrations of gender roles: it is men who control the space, who gaze upon the decoration within; it is women who are defined by Mulvey’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1985) and by having their sexuality exploited and commodified. Outdoor advertising spreads these images of “gendered and sexed performances” throughout public space.

To make the case that advertising is not only aesthetically masculine as Sanders’ argued, but sexually masculine, too, it is important to understand the kinds of portrayals displayed and their links to understandings of male sexuality.

As mentioned earlier, the most basic content analysis of outdoor advertising indicates that women feature more often than men. In terms of geography and gender this point helps illustrate masculine “control,” or at least domination, of space. McDowell discusses the work of French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and his work on “hexis,” and describes it as a concept which helps to explain “the different ways individuals and groups have of bearing their bodies, presenting them to others, moving or making space for their bodies” (McDowell, 1999, p. 41). Visually it is images of women through outdoor advertising that are occupying the public landscape in cities. However, the manner in which women are presented—as decoration, often sexualised, and/or to give adornment rather than authority to a product—indicates that their inclusion in space works to reiterate their subordination. Through their use as decoration, the power lies not with women, but in the masculine space in which their images reside and in the gaze of the men looking upon them.

### *Male sexuality and pornography*

The concept of “male sexuality” is by no means homogenous. Common understandings about male

sexuality have, however, emerged from sexual practices and desires, and thus can inform our understandings of the sexual politics behind the images present in outdoor advertising (Kimmel, 1990; Zilbergeld, 1993).

Bernie Zilbergeld, author of *The New Male Sexuality* (1993), discusses various (and often dubious) sources of sex education and how they contribute to popular understandings of male sexuality:

Whether we know it or not, whether it’s intended or not, sex education goes on all the time, from the day we’re born until the day we die. . . Every time we tell or listen to a sexual joke, watch a movie that depicts sexuality explicitly or implicitly, read a novel, or see a television program that involves sex or adult relationships—at all these times and many others, we learn something about sex or, more likely, something we already believe is reinforced and strengthened. (Zilbergeld, 1993, p. 41)

Zilbergeld argues that the effect of these informal references to sex is cumulative and educative, providing men and women with an understanding about sexuality that often exists within them, unacknowledged and uncontested.

While the routine sexualization of women in outdoor advertising is a contributor to the informal public sex education people receive, another contributor, and one closely connected to both male sexuality and outdoor advertising, is the sex industry, notably pornography. As Michael Kimmel, editor of *Men Confront Pornography* (1990), argues: “[pornography] instructs young men about the relationship between their sexuality and their masculinity. . . [showing them] what it means to be a man in our culture” (Kimmel, 1990, p. 12).

The importance of pornography in a discussion on outdoor advertising is multi-layered. Like outdoor advertising, pornography functions as a form of sex education. It is teaching men about the functioning of their bodies, about sexuality, and, in turn, about their relationship with women. Sex researcher Shere Hite, in her article on the problems pornography creates for male sexuality, argues this point well:

Pornography is above all propaganda—an ideological construct used to direct men toward a certain style of reproductive sexual activity, to tell them the kind of

attitude they should have towards sex and women. (Hite, undated, n.p.)

A discussion of pornography is relevant to outdoor advertising because it has been argued that pornography is moving into popular culture through “mainstreaming,” with outdoor advertising facilitating this process. Danish gender researcher Sørensen (2003) suggests that pornography is no longer cloaked in the taboo it once was because technology, like the Internet, has made access easier and expanded the consumer base, resulting in widespread acceptance.

While Sørensen implicates the Internet in mainstreaming, she also suggests that this is achieved through pornographic references in popular culture, including advertising:

...the use of icons and symbols that refer to, or quote from, pornography are [sic] increasing. One finds it in the postures of photo-models, in their clothing, their movements, or in the scenarios into which they are placed. (Sørensen, 2003, n.p.)

Outdoor advertisements in my data collection illustrate Sørensen's arguments well. A Coca Cola tram shelter advertisement photographed in January 2003 in Melbourne depicted a woman dressed in a red bikini, her lips around the top of a Coke bottle; “You know you want it” captioned the top of the advertisement. A *Harper's Bazaar* tram shelter piece showcased a Versace magazine advertisement showing a woman in a tight mini-skirt and singlet, her head tilted back, her right hand pushed down the neck of her singlet, cupping over her left breast. A billboard for the Moonee Valley Races displayed a black and red image of a woman with a riding crop, the caption reading “Experiment at Night.” All three examples draw on our knowledge of the content of pornography: the fellatio reference in the Coca Cola advertisement, the masturbatory reference in the *Harper's Bazaar* image, and the unsubtle sadomasochistic “experimentation” reference in the Moonee Valley Races advertisement. Each example reflects the mainstreaming of pornography into the public arena.

While much debate exists about the harms of pornography (see Jeffreys, 2000; Kutchinsky & Berl, 1990; MacKinnon & Dworkin, 1988; Morgan, 1980; Russell, 1998; Wilson & Paul, 1995; Zillman & Bryant, 1990), the main resistance such discussions

face is liberalism, and the reality that it is difficult to demand public policy intervention over a private sphere product that customers can choose whether or not to purchase. However, when elements from pornography leave the private sphere and feature in publicly displayed outdoor advertisements, choice regarding exposure evaporates and concerns relating to pornography consumption become important public policy concerns.

### Fear in public space

The most obvious problem with women seeing themselves routinely portrayed as sex objects is the fear they have of men perceiving them exclusively in this manner and then being unable to separate their fantasies from reality. It is this fear that explains women's exclusion in public space: “[f]ear of crime is also bound up with social identity and social exclusion” (Pain, Williams, & Hudson, 1999, n.p.).

Margaret Gallagher, in *Gender Setting* (2001), recounts a 1998 Australian case where a student, while waiting to catch a bus, was “accosted” by two youths: “they began by making gestures at sexualised images in a nearby ad, and moved on to the young woman herself” (Gallagher, 2001, p. 140). This case study helps illustrate the central tenet of this article: the use of women to not only decorate, but sexualise, public space helps facilitate them being actually thought of as such. Being thought of as such by male users of public space can have disastrous effects.

The case Gallagher refers to is somewhat problematic in that, to claim that the “nearby ad” was the instigator for the attack, further details would be needed to assess the involvement of other variables. A better case to demonstrate advertising directly functioning as a catalyst for harassment is a recent Australian example when female bar staff were subjected to frequent sexual harassment “inspired” by a television commercial. The commercial advertised Cougar brand bourbon. It showed an attractive, large-breasted blonde woman wearing a very tight singlet with “Cougar” written across her chest. A male customer gets distracted by her singlet and orders “five Cougars” instead of the drinks he intended. As journalist Patrick O'Neil in the *Herald Sun* explained, “[b]artenders said leering drunks were

sexually harassing them by making the flirtatious request up to 50 times a night” (O’Neil, 2004, p. 9). Bartender Beck May said that some men already thought female bar staff were fair game for sexual innuendo and the advertisement made the situation worse (O’Neil, 2004).

The Cougar sexual harassment situation illustrates that it is, by no means, fanciful to perceive advertising as one contributor to women’s exclusion in public space. Sexist advertising will accentuate their feelings of powerlessness in regards to their safety.

When women are routinely portrayed as sexual objects through advertising, the issue of fear of attack is twofold: (i) there is the understanding that the potential would-be criminal comes to view ordinary women as subordinate based on their media diet of sexually objectified women; and (ii) there is the understanding that women come to see themselves as bestowed with female sexuality above all else. This perception has a woman deeming herself an object for sexual consumption and facilitates her perception that she is more vulnerable and more likely to be a victim of crime. I contend that the fear that ensues here is damaging.

While public crime against women does indeed occur, the reality is that women have much lower chances of victimisation in public than men (Pain, 2001). This situation is known as the “paradox of fear,” which explains that despite the fact that statistics show that women are less likely to be victims of public crime, women are more afraid of crime than men (Madriz, 1997; McCahill, Meyer, & Fischman, 1979; Palmer, 1983; Parrot & Link, 1983), in particular, of crime occurring in public (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003; Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; Valentine & Gill, 1989). This fear, its origins, and the negative consequences must be unpacked.

#### *Causes of fear*

Many disciplines including criminology, sociology, and media studies have tried to explain the paradox of fear (see Poropat, 1993), but most relevant to this paper is a 1984 UK study that psychologist Analise Poropat refers to, which argues that a central explanation for women’s fear of crime is the threat of rape (Maxfield, 1984 in Poropat, 1993). Given the inextricable connection of rape to

sexuality, it is the fear of rape on which I will focus this discussion.

Despite statistics indicating that only a minority of rapes occur in public places (Madriz, 1997), women tend to be more frightened of such crimes occurring outside of the home: Mark Warr’s research indicates that two-thirds of women under 35 years possess a strong fear of rape (Warr, 1985, p. 247) and that women in most age groups feared rape significantly more than they feared death (Warr, 1984). Poropat’s research follows this line, indicating that one quarter of the women surveyed indicated they felt quite, to extremely, fearful of being raped (Poropat, 1993, p. 119).

If, therefore, reported crime statistics do not correlate with the public fears of crime many women harbour, one must question where perceptions are emerging. This “paradox of fear” can be explained in numerous ways, notably with biology and gender strength and size disparities (see Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978, cited in Madriz, 1997). Another explanation for this paradox is the culpability of the media (Madriz, 1997). Gerbner’s “cultivation theory” argues that heavy exposure to cultural imagery “cultivates” attitudes more aligned with the version of reality presented by the media than the real-world reality itself (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This idea is amplified in Cavender and Jurik’s article on violence in reality TV as a contributing factor to women’s perceptions of fear (Cavender & Jurik, 2000).

Outdoor advertisements tend not to be violent. However, given that the range of roles for women in advertising is routinely restricted to those pertaining to their sexuality, and given that women’s fear of rape is well-documented (Madriz, 1997; Poropat, 1993; Warr, 1985), it is likely that highly sexualised outdoor advertisements contribute to public perceptions that a woman’s role is primarily sexual. Such an understanding is likely to be a contributor to women’s fears of attacks. The aforementioned Cougar case illustrates this idea well. When outdoor advertising constantly reminds women about their sexualised role in society, this may be interpreted as fuelling women’s fears of sex-based crime. Stanko helps explain this point:

According to the male point of view, women’s lives revolve around women’s sexuality and around their relationships to men who are often their assailants. Women are, above all, sexual beings... Women, by

virtue of their very presence, are expected to bring forth men's "natural" sexual urges, yet are blamed for receiving sexual and physical advances from men. (Stanko, 1985, p. 74)

It is in this argument that the role of advertising and its complicity in causing women's fears becomes apparent.

### *Sexual harassment in space*

Definitions of sexual harassment vary, but meanings generally describe unwelcome conduct based on sex or of a highly sexualised nature that causes feelings of discomfort, helplessness, or fear. The New South Wales Attorney General's department describes sexual harassment as follows:

In general, sexual harassment is any form of sexually related behaviour that: you do not want; offends, humiliates, or intimidates you in the circumstances, a reasonable person should have expected would offend, humiliate, or intimidate you. (NSW Attorney General's Department, [Anti-Discrimination Board](#), n.p.)

As the Cougar example illustrates, there is indeed scope for interpreting sexualised advertisements as contributors to the sexual harassment of women. I therefore suggest that given the public understanding and legislative support of sexual harassment, understandings of sexual harassment should come to include highly sexualised outdoor advertising. The very nature of outdoor advertising means that people are forcibly exposed to imagery that they did not solicit. When such imagery is offensive because of the way women are portrayed, then arguably it is a form of sexual harassment. As Catherine Hendersen in a U.S. newspaper opinion piece argued:

While definitions and interpretations of sexual harassment vary, displaying pictures or objects related to sex or the sexual nature of a person is, in fact, sexual harassment by even the most liberal of definitions. (Henderson, 2002, n.p.)

Traditionally, sexual harassment has been associated with workplaces and this can largely be explained through the ready identification of a victim and perpetrator and an employer with the onus of duty of care. Such harassment occurring in public presents

a far more difficult case to legislate against. "Hostile environment" is an example of workplace sexual harassment. 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, p. 5)

In this article, I argue that much outdoor advertising permeates public spaces with a hostile male sexuality. Not only is sexual harassment, on its own, frightening, but symbolically is a testimony to gender differences and power disparities. This is of particular concern when research strongly connects sexual harassment with the fear of rape (see [Pain, 2001](#)). As [Bowman \(1993\)](#) suggests, sexual harassment works to reinforce that, by virtue of their gender, women are always subject to rape: "[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](#) in [Kaus, 1993](#), p. 4).

The idea of sexual harassment reinforcing women's fear of rape is reiterated by an Australian study in which [Holgate](#) suggests that the experience of sexual intimidation in women's daily lives generalises feelings of vulnerability ([Holgate, 1989](#) in [Poropat, 1993](#)). Women in outdoor advertising are routinely displayed in stereotypical poses and roles that humiliate and cause offense. Therefore, if such sexist outdoor advertising could be understood as sexual harassment, such advertising could then be deemed a contributing factor to women's fear, as [Pain \(2001\)](#) and [Bowman \(1993\)](#) suggest.<sup>1</sup> While fear on its own is a negative emotion and has been argued to be a direct contributor to social exclusion ([Northern Ireland Office, 2002](#); [Pain et al., 1999](#); [Social Exclusion Unit United Kingdom, 2001](#)), fear of crime poses further numerous negative consequences for women, most notably impaired equality and quality of life.

### *Control of women*

The central reason why fear is of concern relates to the physical and psychological control it places upon women. A dictionary definition of fear explains it as agitation and anxiety caused by the presence or imminence of danger. When women feel agitated or anxious, on the basis of such tensions, they will often modify their behaviour to compensate and limit fears (i.e., not answering the door or altering their commuting route) (Deegan, 1987; Gardner, 1989, 1995; Lawton & Kalai, 2002; Lenton, Smith, Fox, & Morra, 1999; Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1997; Stanko, 1990). Gordon and Riger (1989), for example, found 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 and Riger, 1989, in Lenton et al., 1999, p. 517). One of the central tenets of sociologist Esther Madriz's book is that the fear of crime and the subsequent behaviour modifications that follow pose catastrophic consequences for women's equality. As Madriz explains: "...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, p. 2).

The fear of crime happening outside of the home coerces women to modify their behaviour to ensure that they are not placed in positions of perceived vulnerability. With women's perception that public space is the prime location of danger, the ramification is that "home" comes to be perceived as a safe place, thus potentially relegating women to the private sphere by virtue of claiming that the public sphere is too dangerous.

Modifying travel mode or route is a kind of simple, often-taken-for-granted decisions women make on a daily basis in direct response to their fears. Just as fear cajoles women into "appropriate" ways to interact with public space, it also provides instruction on how to act and dress outside of the home.

### *Restrictions on appearance*

Fear of crime poses restrictions on movement and also dictates how women should appear in public. Opinions claiming that women can provoke their own attack due to their appearance are prevalent. Accord-

ing to surveys conducted by Barnett and Feild, 49% of students surveyed believed that women provoke rape by their appearance (Barnett & Feild, 1997 cited in Ward, 1995, p. 44). Ward (1995), in *Attitudes Toward Rape*, expands on this point, arguing that "provocative appearances" have survey respondents attributing greater blame to female rape victims (Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1980 cited in Ward, 1995, p. 76). Such attitudes and statistics can be seen to coerce women into modifying how they look in public because of fear of attack.

The focus group work that Madriz undertook helps further illustrate these kinds of modification procedures: "[m]y friend is really afraid of rape. She thinks that if she wears several pieces of underwear, it would be harder for the rapist to do something to her." Or, "Even in the summer, when it is hot, I wear a jacket so my breast does not show. You have to take care of yourself" (Madriz, 1997, p. 130).

Leaving the home to engage in normal everyday life means that women's self-policing has to extend to something as simple as clothing choice. Not doing so can have fraught consequences. As Ward (1995) explained, greater blame is placed on a female rape victim if her clothing is deemed provocative.

### **Conclusion**

When outdoor advertising routinely displays sexualised and objectified images of women in order to sell products and sexualise public space, issues regarding women's inclusion need to be investigated. When women's exclusion is fuelled by the public space fears that these images feed, important public policy concerns are raised.

The nature of public space means that it exists for the enjoyment of all. Activity conducted in public space should be monitored, and if necessary regulated, so that it avoids exclusion. If highly sexualised outdoor advertising is excluding women from full and equal participation in public space, then this becomes a public policy concern.

Perhaps of even stronger concern is that such little dissent is currently being expressed regarding these problematic advertisements and the consequences they pose for women. In response to a series of sexist television advertisements shown during the Super-

bowl in 1999, Bob Garfield commented, “[I]t’s as if Madison Avenue sneaked into the nation’s psyche and absconded with 30 years of feminist awareness (Garfield, 1999, p. 1). Over a decade onwards from the Berlei case and while the situation looks every bit as dire as it did in 1993, the only tangible change to be witnessed today is a marked absence of dissent and resistance—feminist or otherwise. Given the success of advertisers in mainstreaming their pornographic portrayals, and given the noticeable absence of protest, more research needs to be done into the causes and effects of such portrayals and about community sentiment towards them. Similarly, greater protest needs to be articulated by offended and insulted women. The reform of regulation to prohibit such portrayals in order to facilitate women’s full social inclusion is something that also needs to be considered.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It is important to point out that the idea of thinking of sexist outdoor advertising as a form of sexual harassment is not a new idea. In 2002, the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria suggested that they would welcome changes to broaden the scope of the Equal Opportunity Act (1995) to include outdoor advertising (EOCV, 2002).

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Sheila Jeffreys and Renate Klein for their ongoing assistance and support with this piece.

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