# "Oh, you look pretty on your knees": Exploring Gendered Safety Work in Traditionally Masculine Workplaces

Breeanna Melville[1, 2], Peta L. Dzidic, [1,2,3] & Chantel Tichbon[1]

[1] *Curtin University, School of Population Health,* [2] *Curtin University Gender Research Network,*

[3] *Curtin University enAble Institute*

*Gendered safety work is a response to gender-based violence (GBV) where harm is caused through the reinforcing of problematic gender norms, or through actions against others based on their gender identity or sexuality. Traditionally masculine, or male-dominated, workplaces often have a culture that lends itself to sexual harassment and GBV. To prevent the threat and experience of GBV, individuals report altering their behaviours via 'safety work'. The aim of this study was to explore the perception people have of their engagement in gendered safety work in the context of traditionally masculine workplaces. Reflexive thematic analysis and social constructionist epistemology were adopted; 13 in-depth interviews were conducted. Participants identified as working in a traditionally masculine workplace, and as currently or previously aligning with womanhood or femininity. Four themes were identified: workplace gendered safety work; burden of responsibility; deprivation of independence; and gendered workplace culture. Notably, participants reported making personal sacrifices to ensure their safety at work, for example downplaying their expression of femininity to avoid sexual harassment and avoiding confrontation to ensure job security. Findings allowed further development of our conceptualisation of safety work and its gendered aspects.*

*Key words:* safety work, harassment, gender-based violence, masculine workplaces

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is harm perpetrated in both public and private spaces through the actions of one or more people against others based on their gender identity or sexuality, or by acting in ways that reinforce harmful gender norms (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024). GBV can occur as sexual, physical, mental, and economic forms of harm and can include: threats and acts of violence, bullying, coercion and manipulation, sexual harassment, stalking, defamation, hate speech, and exploitation (United Nations [UN], 1993; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022; WHO, 2024). In public contexts GBV includes deliberate intrusions, commonly by male strangers, and predominantly perpetrated against those who present as (or are perceived as) women, feminine, or gender diverse (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021; Vera-Gray, 2016). Publicly, these deliberate intrusions typically take the form of street harassment and abuse, often intersecting with discrimination against disadvantaged groups (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021; Fileborn & Hindes, 2023). However, GBV in the form of public intrusions is not limited to street harassment and can include other public and common spaces (Mellgren et al., 2018), including public transport (Gardner et al., 2017), academic settings (Roberts et al., 2022), and workplaces (Wright, 2016).

Gender-Based Violence is commonly underreported, but the consequences are long-reaching and devastating (Rees et al., 2011; UNHCR, 2022). Data suggests that mental health disorders, disability, and the impairment or disruption in an individual's behaviour or mental wellbeing are significantly associated with GBV (Rees et al., 2011). This association could be

that GBV may predispose women to mental health disorders; that mental health disorders may increase vulnerability to GBV; and/or that biological vulnerabilities of mental health disorders are compounded by the trauma of GBV (Rees et al., 2011; WHO, 2012). However, considering GBV through a single-axis (e.g., gender) and ignoring intersectionality undermines how the impacts of GBV can be exacerbated by the intersection of other identities (Brassel et al., 2020).

### *Gendered Safety Work*

To prevent the threat and experience of gendered violence that pervades public settings, individuals report altering their behaviours, including avoiding strangers and risky locations, and travelling at particular times of day and night and/or alone (Pain, 1991; Roberts et al., 2022). Such behaviours are examples of 'safety work': the often intrinsic and automatic adaption of behaviours and activities to avoid or prevent the threat of intrusion in public spaces (Vera-Gray, 2018; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). Safety work, or gendered safety work, is a response to that threat of GBV and is commonly experienced by those presenting as, or perceived as, women or feminine. Though the term safety work has only been coined in recent years, these behaviours are by no means a new or novel experience. For example, Pain (1991) described similar behaviours as a by-product of women's fear of crime. Other studies such as Murnen and Smolak (2000) looked at the construction of gender identity, vulnerability, socialised fear of crime, and experiences of harassment that pervade the lives of women and girls from childhood, from personal and peer experiences of harassment to prevalent safety advice aimed at how women can avoid being the victims of gendered violence. This fear of crime is also the basis of Vera-Gray and Kelly's (2020) conceptualisations of safety work, particularly in the context of street harassment. They use this idea of socialised behaviours coming from gendered expectations communicated throughout people's lives as part of their construction of safety work in public spaces. A systematic review undertaken by Fileborn and O'Neill (2021) solidifies the idea that street harassment is a global gendered experience and has the potential to cause great harm, not only for women but for all marginalised groups.

Most safety work research considers the experiences of those who identify, or have been identified, as traditionally feminine cisgendered women; however, there is growing emphasis in recent works on the need to consider safety work with an intersectional perspective (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021; Fileborn & Hindes, 2023). Yavorsky and Sayer (2013) found that, following socially transitioning, transwomen often report heightened anxiety and fear of crime in public spaces, frequent experiences of objectification, and an increased perception of their vulnerability to becoming victims. Yavorsky and Sayer describe these experiences as resulting from early socialisation and later learned behaviours. Gender identity and expression, gender role socialisations, and the way society itself perceives GBV means there is a diversity of people who employ safety work whose perceptions are important to consider (Eichenberg et al., 2022; Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021).

### *Gender-Based Violence and Safety Work in the Workplace*

Workplace harassment is a common experience that can cause a great deal of harm to the individual's mental and physical health, and to the overall functioning of the workplace (Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2016; Raj et al., 2020). In particular, sexual harassment can result in traumatising physical and psychological impacts for the individual experiencing it, as well as a decrease in their work productivity, effectiveness and morale; and an increase in absenteeism and staff turnover for the organisation (Naveed et al., 2010). Traditionally masculine or male-dominated workplaces are those where most employees are men and the roles seen as masculine; such workplaces have been described as designed and catering for white, cisgender, heterosexual men (Roberts et al., 2022; Valentine, 1993; Wright, 2016). The

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, 2018) reported that three of the five industries to have the highest rates of workplace sexual harassment were those currently considered to be male-dominated (electricity, gas, water and waste services; mining; and information, media and telecommunications). Sexual harassment was most commonly reported as comments or jokes of a sexually suggestive nature and intrusive or offensive questions directed at physical appearance or private lives (AHRC, 2018). This GBV in the workplace, also referred to as work-related gendered violence, encompasses this sexual harassment as well as other types of harm such as verbal, physical, or sexual abuse (WorkSafe Victoria, 2022). In a survey examining sexual harassment in the workplace, Raj et al. (2020) found that risk of sexual assault was much less in female-dominated industries compared to those which have gender parity or more men, while in male-dominated industries the risk of sexual assault from a supervisor was much greater than any other. Within traditionally masculine or male dominated workplaces, harassment is seen as a result of masculine privilege where there is a cultural pressure to maintain masculine dominance and control (Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2012). These workplaces often have an established culture of toxic masculinity where dominance and aggression are traits that are valued and positively socialised, and femininity is seen as vulnerable and shamed (Galea & Chappell, 2022; Hulls et al., 2022).

The presentation of harmful gender norms is also most likely to be prevalent in the workplaces that are seen as traditionally masculine (Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2020). Goodman-Delahunty et al. (2016) considered the traditionally masculine workplace context of policing and found that women employees were seen as more vulnerable to negative workplace outcomes than their male colleagues. They found that physical injury, sexual coercion, and gender-based hostility were all likely to produce clinically diagnosable injuries, and that specifically sexual coercion was considered to elicit more workplace problems in its aftermath (Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2016). Certain groups are disproportionately affected by GBV in the workplace; among these groups are women, workers diverse in gender, sex, or sexuality, and workers who are seen as not fitting into gender roles and stereotypes (AHRC, 2018; WorkSafe Victoria, 2022). Dray et al. (2020) observed that there was a hierarchy of how likeable and competent colleagues were, based on their gender and sex assigned at birth, as non-binary and transgender employees were unfavourably compared with cisgender male colleagues, who were considered the most likeable and competent.

Despite the extensive evidence of sexual harassment and other GBV in workplaces, there is limited research that considers or explicitly looks at safety work as a term to describe behaviours in workplace settings (Dorrance-Hall & Gettings, 2020). Research conducted by Wright (2016) examined qualitative data on the intersection of gender and sexuality in the construction industry in the UK and provides some ideas of what safety work could look like in this context. Although not explicitly deemed safety work behaviours, Wright (2016) noted that to avoid the threat of violence women were distancing themselves from femininity, ‘managing’ male sexual advances, seeking out female solidarity, and engaging with male allies.

**Research Rationale**

As mentioned, despite extensive reporting of GBV and the forms it takes in workplaces, especially traditionally masculine settings, there is limited application of the concept of safety work in the workplace. Although there has been some research into protective factors such as mentoring and the presence of male allies to prevent workplace GBV, safety work has not been the focus of research in this area and there is very limited understanding on the actual behavioural changes adopted as safety work in the workplace context (Atkinson, 2020; Brassel et al., 2020; Jones, 2017). Further to this, the current literature calls for more for consideration of intersectionality (Fileborn & Hindes, 2023; Fileborn & O’Neill, 2021), as the majority of

research on safety work has focussed on the experiences of cisgendered women or does not acknowledge other populations at risk of GBV.

Understanding safety work and its effectiveness in different settings can help address GBV, particularly in settings where there is high incidence, such as masculine dominant workplaces (AHRC, 2018). Given this, the research question of this research was: How do people perceive their engagement in gendered safety work in traditionally masculine workplaces?

## Methods

### *Research Design*

An exploratory qualitative approach was used. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling and engaged in semi-structured interviews. Verbatim transcripts were analysed according to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). A social constructionist epistemology was adopted, whereby, ideas and perspectives of safety work were viewed as constructions of how we interact as a society (Losantos et al., 2016). Social constructionism's core concepts centre the idea that knowledge is something that is constructed by community and the interactions people have with each other and is not unproblematic objective truth; this includes the knowledge of gender, and GBV (Marecek et al., 2004). This social constructionist approach was relevant to this research as safety work entails both the interaction of people with their environment and others, and with the social construction of gender roles and stereotypes that are a direct aspect of GBV (WHO, 2024).

We recognise our approach to research and choice in research design is shaped by our positionality. The first author (she/they) is a fifth generation (or more) Caucasian Australian of heavily Western European ancestry. This meant that her perspective and experience was framed within the context of the privilege that heritage gives them as a part of the dominant culture of Australia. Her positionality towards this research also comes from being a bisexual, queer, and feminine-presenting person and the familiarity this gave them with certain risks and dangers. Specifically queer people and those perceived as feminine, which includes cisgender and/or straight women, may adopt specific behaviours to reduce the risk of harm. Beyond personal experiences with safety work, her experience with gender involved observing it as an intrinsic experience, not limited to a binary understanding. Instead, they view gender as subjective but also informed by the societal contexts and innate traits of an individual.

The second author (she/her) is a white cis-gendered woman with invisible chronic illness. She is the daughter of an Australian-born White Catholic mother of Celtic ancestry, and a White refugee Muslim father born in a displaced persons camp and resettled in Australia as part of a post-war government re-settlement scheme. She experiences the White privilege afforded to colonisers in the country now called Australia. She has experienced gendered violence and coercive control and has witnessed the intergenerational impacts of these dynamics as a child. Engaging in gender research has afforded her language and theory to describe these lived experiences and that of the women in her life. Social constructionism has afforded her an epistemological stance to make sense of the boundaries and overlap of lived experience and research practice.

### *Participants*

The population of interest was individuals who identified as working in a traditionally masculine employment who wished to talk about their perceptions of safety work in that context. Thirteen participants who aligned or had previously aligned with womanhood or femininity at any point were recruited. This alignment allowed them to describe their gendered experiences of learned or performed gendered safety work.

For RTA, Clarke and Crook (2021) propose 6 to 10 dense interviews containing rich and detailed data could be appropriate, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommendations around small thematic analysis studies, prioritising pragmatics in terms of research scope and timelines. Data collection ceased after 13 participant interviews after the allotted recruitment time passed with the expectation of having obtained sufficiently dense and detailed interview data. Out of the 13 participants, 5 worked in mining fields, 3 in research fields, 1 in the energy sector, 1 in warehouse labouring, 1 in law, 1 in finance, and 1 in male focussed retail. Ten out of 13 of our participants opted to complete a voluntary demographic survey (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Demographic Survey Data* (n=10)

| Demographic Questions | *n* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| Question 1. What pro-nouns do you use? | | |
| She/Her/Hers | 8 | 80.0 |
| He/Him His | 1 | 10.0 |
| Did Not Answer | 1 | 10.0 |
| Question 2. Please select the category that best describes your age | | |
| 18-24 years | 6 | 60.0 |
| 25-29 years | 1 | 10.0 |
| 30-34 years | 2 | 20.0 |
| 35-39 years | 1 | 10.0 |
| 40-44 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 45-49 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 50-54 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 55-59 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 60-64 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 65-69 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 70-74 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 75-79 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 80-84 years | 0 | 00.0 |
| 85 years and older | 0 | 00.0 |
| Question 3. Do you engage in employment and/or education and training? | | |
| Engaged through full-time study and full-time employment | 0 | 00.0 |
| Primarily engaged in full-time study | 3 | 30.0 |
| Primarily engaged in full-time employment | 3 | 30.0 |
| Engaged through part-time study and part-time employment | 0 | 00.0 |
| Engaged in part-time study only | 0 | 00.0 |
| Engaged in part-time work only | 3 | 30.0 |
| Not engaged in paid employment | 0 | 00.0 |
| Not engaged in education/training | 0 | 00.0 |
| Prefer not to disclose | 0 | 00.0 |
| Did not answer | 1 | 10.0 |
| Question 4. On average, how many hours of unpaid domestic work do you engage in per week? | | |
| Nil Hours | 1 | 10.0 |
| Less than 5 hours | 4 | 40.0 |
| 5 to 14 hours | 4 | 40.0 |
| 15 to 29 hours | 0 | 00.0 |
| 30 or more | 1 | 10.0 |
| Prefer not to disclose | 0 | 00.0 |
| Question 5. What is your highest level of education attainment? | 1 | 10.0 |
| Postgraduate Degree Level | 1 | 10.0 |
| Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate Level | 4 | 40.0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bachelor Degree Level | 0 | 00.0 |
| Advanced Diploma and Diploma Level | 1 | 10.0 |
| Certificate Level III & IV | 3 | 30.0 |
| Secondary Education – Years 10 and above | 0 | 00.0 |
| Certificate Level I & II | 0 | 00.0 |
| Secondary Education – Years 9 and below | 0 | 00.0 |
| Prefer not to disclose | | |

### *Procedure*

Following ethics approval [HRE2022-0256], recruitment commenced. A recruitment poster was displayed at key locations in the community with permission (e.g. university campus with a focus on traditionally masculine faculties, lobbies of business hubs, recreation facilities), as well as online via a research-specific Facebook page and relevant social media pages. The poster defined safety work as "the often-automatic activities individuals engage in to avoid intrusion, threat, and prevent them from experiencing harm by others". Participants expressed interest in participating by privately messaging the research-specific Facebook page; via telephone; or by scanning the QR code and emailing the research team via the address provided. Participants were provided an information sheet and consent form and were invited to complete a demographic survey. The demographic survey detailed (Table 1), consisting of five questions, was developed with the research question in mind and was optional for participants. A time and date were arranged for the interview and a corresponding invitation to a video call was sent.

A semi-structured interview guide of 17 questions was developed iteratively and used to interview participants, and included questions such as 'What is your understanding of safety work?', and 'How is safety work discussed in your workplace?'. Interviews were completed online via WebEx. Before beginning the interview, the participant was again informed about their rights and their consent to participate and be recorded was confirmed verbally. Following this confirmation, the interview began following the semi-structured interview guide.

The interview began with the question of 'What is your understanding of safety work?' and after the response and asking any relevant prompting questions, a definition of safety work was provided to the participant before the remaining questions were asked. Following the interview, participants were debriefed, and next steps explained, including the withdrawal process, and member checking if they wished to participate. Interviews ranged from 34 to 67 minutes in duration (M = 52 minutes). Interviews were transcribed verbatim; pseudonyms were applied and transcripts deidentified to maintain confidentiality.

### *Data Analysis*

A Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), intended to help develop, analyse, and interpret patterns in qualitative data, was adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2021; 2013). Central to conducting RTA was acknowledging how positionality influences and contributes to the research process and that themes are not objective facts or data but rather developed by the researcher in response to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; 2013). RTA allows determination of the pervasive themes in the data while acknowledging the influence of the researcher and the active role they take in understanding the data. Both the clear semantic data around the participants' experiences and the latent meanings derived by the authors from participant perceptions in the data were examined. Doing so entailed reviewing the transcripts and forming initial codes, then generating and assessing the groups of codes that were defined and named as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

### *Quality Procedures*

Quality procedures were adopted in accordance with RTA-specific quality assessment developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Positionality was achieved through reflexive journalling which allowed awareness of positionality and the potential impact of position on each step of the research reflexive approach was maintained throughout data analysis to consistently think critically regarding the influence of our positionality on data interpretation, and how the selection of codes and themes was shaped. Quality procedures were adopted in accordance with RTA-specific quality assessment developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Positionality was achieved through reflexive journalling which allowed awareness of the researchers' positionality and the potential impact of position on each step of the research process (Byrne, 2022). In particular, a reflexive approach was maintained throughout data analysis to critique the influence of positionality on data interpretation. Peer coding was undertaken, again with a focus on reflexivity. Through in-depth discussion of transcripts, we allowed for multiple interpretations of data and sense-checked the ideas behind these interpretations rather than looking for consensus (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This allowed a deeper understanding and broader perspective of the data without stifling any variations in themes. Member checking was also adopted (Birt et al., 2016; Clarke & Crook, 2021). A two-page summary of initial findings across all interviews was emailed to participants to provide feedback on interpretive accuracy. Participants who were engaged in the process gave positive feedback and concurred with the interpretations, and no changes were incorporated as a result.

## Findings

In this research, effort has been made to recognise that gender is not limited to a binary, and this enabled participation of women and individuals who currently or previously aligned with womanhood or femininity at any point in their lives. Consistently, participants described perpetrators of actual or potential harassment and violence as being predominantly men, and described the victims and/or survivors of harassment and violence as being women or gender-diverse individuals.

The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of four themes: workplace gendered safety work; burden of responsibility; deprivation of independence; and gendered workplace culture. Pseudonyms have been adopted and fields of work stated in brackets.

### *Workplace Gendered Safety Work*

In this theme, participants reflected on being hypervigilant at work and their private lives, but identified workplace-specific behaviours, namely, downplaying their femininity and avoiding confrontation. Downplaying femininity was often described in terms of workplace-appropriate attire whereby participants referred to either the experience of presenting or the expectation to present in a more masculine way. Johanna (mining) stated:

> *I think everyone does downplay their femininity. You see a couple of women come through with, you know, they express it, and they wear makeup, and they've got false lashes and the clothes fit them well. And they do get judged by a lot of other women.*

Johanna is describing the experiences of some women in her workplace and how their femininity is a target of judgement. This quote demonstrates the expectation of how those aligned with womanhood should present themselves in the workplace and further demonstrates criticism directed from other women for failing to do so. This example illustrates an expectation

of certain safety work behaviours and an associated judgement that accompanies perceived failure to perform those behaviours.

Participants described how they were burdened by having to make difficult decisions at work that often resulted in trade-offs between their emotional, physical, and financial needs. Engaging in safety work often entailed choosing the path of least resistance, that is, the path of least confrontation and risk. This translated to potentially minimising and undermining their own experiences. For example, Grace (energy) conceptualised *"conflict avoidance"* as a means of safety work, stating that sometimes she would have to tolerate uncomfortable work situations to prevent backlash if she spoke up. Similarly, Dorothy (research) recounted a male colleague *"mansplaining"* but she had resisted challenging his behaviour because, *"I don't want to be like, Oh, I'm starting all this conflict by being like a person who's hard to deal with. And doesn't like talking to a male co-worker".* To avoid the judgement of other co-workers that could have impacted her reputation and security in a job, she avoided the confrontation and tolerated the harmful behaviours. While this behaviour was not undertaken to avoid physical harm but rather harm to career or financial safety that might result from harm to her reputation in the workplace, this trade-off between one kind of safety and another can have far-reaching impacts on a person's whole life. Cynthia (finance) describes an occasion where a male colleague was behaving in ways that made her feel unsafe, and the lack of support or action from those around left her with limited recourse; *"I sort of just left I just quit. And I was like, I can't deal with this. And I didn't receive any more things from him from that after I left".* This is an example of participants often being forced to choose between the burden of confrontation and risk in one setting or shifting this burden to other aspects of their lives; in this instance, the lack of safety and security that comes with unemployment.

***Burden of Responsibility***

Participants described how they felt a societal pressure to engage in gendered safety work, specifically, that it is a practice that is framed as being the burden of those aligned with womanhood, whereby *"you have to take that responsibility to look after yourself"* (Mae, mining). As Mae describes here, it is a burden that is seen by participants as necessary requirement for themselves. Participants reflected that the burden of responsibility is not just at moments when they felt explicitly at risk, but that they experience a constant state of vigilance in an attempt to make themselves comfortable and secure. Cynthia (finance) detailed the never-ending experience of gendered safety work, "*I think even if you told me like, all [perpetrators of GBV] were in jail, these people were gone, I would still be practising it [safety work], because this is something I've taught myself to do".* This describes the unending and ingrained nature of these safety work behaviours present even in the absence of obvious threats. Katherine (mining), also conveyed this state of hypervigilance irrespective of visible threat, "*We're not walking around thinking that everyone's out to get us but really, subconsciously keeping ourselves aware".* Ida (research) and Helen (mining) both described safety work as providing them with a *"peace of mind"*. Helen added that, *"It's a bit of overkill, but I always have this image of I'd rather be safer than sorry"*. This idea participants describe suggests that the act of safety work also has direct impact on their feelings of safety. Grace (energy) describes the tangible emotion of this responsibility of having to advocate for and ensure her own safety, stating, *"I'm, like, hyper-aware of it happening at work, and I get very cranky about it. And that's exhausting... it's tiring, constantly having to advocate for yourself".* So while safety work can contribute to feelings of safety and peace of mind, the burden of constant hypervigilance affects the individual in negative ways. Having to take responsibility for their safety, particularly in the workplace, is an added labour for those practicing gendered safety work.

Participants often compared their experience to a notable lack of burden experienced by traditionally masculine men and critiqued their complicity in gendered safety work. Grace (energy) reflected on a former partner's view regarding safety work, *"but I don't think it would occur to him to think about [gendered safety work]".* While Helen (mining) described that for men *"some of them aren't even aware of how like, bad the behaviour is".* These descriptions convey a lack of awareness of people who are not the targets of GBV or who do not participate in gendered safety work behaviour. This is not just a lack of awareness of the issue but also lack of awareness of its severity or extent. Annie (retail), described an instance when her only female colleague was facing harassment:

> *Another employee was harassing her, being very misogynistic. There was even one instance of sexual harassment... and she complained about it very loudly, and how just nothing was being done about it and how it made her feel awful. And the owner's response was, "just don't come into the store while he's working".*

In this example, the business owner failed to provide a safe workplace and instead the burden of responsibility was placed on the victim/survivor to accommodate the perpetrator's existing work schedule. Annie's workplace environment appears indicative of a broader cultural issue within traditionally masculine workplaces, where there appears little expectation that men and other perpetrators of GBV change their behaviour and so patriarchal values are upheld. For example, Bonnie (research) reflected on the complicity of male colleagues who tend to, *"conform with the other men around them",* and that they *"can't really say anything because everyone else is like for it, you know, but just kind of the culture of it".* Arguably, this tendency to conform may serve as a means of protection for those not subjected to GBV, whereby inappropriate behaviours are normalised and not viewed as warranting intervention and to intervene may bring risk of harm or censure. Consequently, it appears that the harm experienced by victim/survivors is undermined or maintained by this system, and the burden of responsibility to be hyper-vigilant at work is reinforced for those victims of GBV.

When there were endeavours in the workplace to curb problematic male behaviours, participants described examples that appeared at best tokenistic, doing little to challenge the underlying culture supporting problematic behaviours. In such instances, intervention appeared more as a way for men to protect themselves as opposed to challenging the status quo, or as one-off interventions. Bonnie described an instance at her partner's workplace where the men were warned away from their female colleague:

> *They sat all the boys down and had a speech about like, you're not allowed to hit on her, you know, you are not allowed to flirt with it, and stuff like that. Like, you're not allowed to add her on Facebook, don't talk to her.*

Rather than address the causes of behaviour or changing the potential workplace culture that would deem that behaviour appropriate, the response of management was to restrict her involvement in the workplace on her behalf. This suggests that they were aware of the problematic behaviours present but only chose to intervene when there was a direct victim.

### *Deprivation of Independence*

Participants described how working and existing in spaces designed for and dominated by men meant that they experienced little ability to exercise control or independence particularly while performing safety work. Losing independence was evidenced in participants' need to partner with others to ensure their safety, and how their professional autonomy was invaded through sexual advances.

Participants described that while safety work is ultimately considered an individual's responsibility, it was common for this safety work to occur within a group or as a collaborative effort. Cynthia (finance) reflected, *"I always feel comfortable asking like other girls [for help] because it's like, because, you know, most of the time, they're gonna say "yes", that they get they understand that there's that common sort of understanding".* Participants described how engaging in safety work often occurred in solidarity. For example, Katherine (mining) described how she engaged with a colleague on site to keep safe, and stated, *"So she will get off her bus and wait for me and then we will usually walk to our room. We go to the gym and go to dinner together, our washing in a pair".* To be safe in that environment Katherine explains that her safety work is aided by the presence of another. There is an expectation that those aligned with womanhood cannot simply exist unescorted and have to be accompanied by others. This restriction of independence comes across in an almost infantilising way, suggesting that they are unable to be alone, as if they were a child. This is reflected explicitly in some participant accounts. Cynthia (finance) described seeking protection from men around her as making her feel like *"a weird little girl. Like, following, like, this strong dude going like, 'if anything happens, please help me'"*.

Participants also detailed their experiences of when others, particularly men, felt entitled to their time and attention in ways that threatened their independence and altered their navigation within the workplace. Eli (law) described having to avoid a co-worker because *"he would often make gross comments like about everything in general"* and *"make it sexual"*. Eli was not alone in his experiences; Lili (mining) described such an instance, *"I was kneeling down stocking the fridge. And somebody made a comment to me saying, Oh, you look pretty on your knees".* Sexual comments and sexual harassment that is suggestive are a major part of these experiences of GBV in the workplace (AHRC, 2018) that participants experienced, and were not just limited to passing comments. Katherine (mining) also had a similar experience with being subject to the sexual advances of a colleague:

> *... he would come to my area of work, even though he wasn't like, that wasn't his area of work, he would purposely come there, and try and get me like, on my own, and he was always talking to me and hanging around and things like that. And then, you know, he started trying to talk to me outside of work when I was on [break].*

In another example Katherine reflected on when she refused romantic advancements from someone in a position of power at work:

> *he was insistent on starting a relationship with me. I didn't want to. Told him repeatedly. But I didn't want to, wasn't interested. And then he ended up cutting my contract. So, I did end up losing my job from that.*

Here in Katherine's accounts and with other participants' experiences they are not able to exist alone and unbothered. There are these elements of the constant presence of others that either present a risk or a potential ally.

Participants reflected on how being viewed as independent and autonomous presented as a professional and safety risk and described how they would relationally anchor themselves, or, be anchored to others in order to garner more respect from male colleagues. For example, participants described how it was their outward relationship to men that tended to afford them respect, not their own personhood. Johanna (mining) described that in the workplace *"a lot of women will fake wedding rings"* to avoid unwanted attention, and Helen (mining) reflected that a way to dissuade men from harassing women was through reminding them that they *"have a sister, a mother, daughter, you know, wife, all of that, you know?"*

Participants reflected on a clear deprivation of independence that comes with working in a traditionally masculine workplace. Being deprived of independence is at its core a restriction of agency, making participants reliant on the support of others for their safety work as a direct result of a combination of men's active and passive roles in removing the agency of those aligned in some way with womanhood.

***Gendered Workplace Culture***

Participants described navigating traditionally masculine workplaces as a complex and threatening experience, and one that mirrored the broader culture. For example, Ida (research), reflected that there is:

> *a culture of sexual harassment in the workplace and outside the workplace. And even if people haven't experienced it personally, they know the dangers of it, because it's just everywhere. Problem is, I sometimes fear that it might lead to victim blaming once an assault does occur.*

Participants reflected on gendered roles within their masculine dominated workplaces and often identified safer spaces as those occupied by fewer men. For example, Grace (energy) described her workplace as *"pretty good, especially my like department. Because we are more of the like, on the administrative, non-technical side of things. There are a lot more women in my area"*. Person-centred helping roles were described by participants as being more commonly held by those aligned with womanhood, than the more technical or manual roles. This likely has relevance to overarching societal influences, of elements of gender roles and the construction of traditionally masculine workplaces. Further to this, leadership roles were seen as male-dominated. Bonnie (research) reflected, *"My boss, and the other person that I work with, they're both male, but the other research assistant is female. So, it's a bit like the bosses are men, and we are ladies"*. Frankie (warehousing) described witnessing resistance to women taking on more masculine-coded tasks and accounted for this on the basis that those tasks were seen as a 'man's' job:

> *And this girl's been trained up because she'd been nagging and because they needed people to be trained up- It's like, you- we needed people, she's already got a forklift license fine. And they weren't training her up in the more prominent area they are only training her up in the middle area. Just hard to explain, but one is more high paced, and they don't want to put her in the high paced area, which is kind of like- it's a bit unfair. They haven't even tried her out there.*

The perception of those who want to step outside the gendered expectations of roles within the traditionally masculine workplaces is seen to meet resistance and only accepted as a last resort.

Participants also explain that they themselves and others around them were reduced to feminine or masculine stereotypes by both men and non-men in order to fit into the workplace. Those aligned with womanhood were often seen as a novelty rather than another employee or colleague, as Grace (energy) described:

> *just the way he talks about [her] is like dehumanising, like she's just like a novelty. It's not- It's not here's a capable, professional tradesperson that came and did their job. It's like, 'Oh, it was on a lady on site'.*

Grace goes on to say that the way a woman is spoken about in the workplace is like she is the *"team mascot"*. This suggests that women and those aligned with womanhood or femininity

are viewed tokenistically and as something that is lesser and trivialised, rather than considered a colleague on a level playing field.

Participants also described that within the gendered space of work, there are acceptable limits regarding the expression of femininity. Annie (retail) described how as a transwoman "*it's kind of expected to me to need to be feminine. And like, present my gender very loudly. But not too loudly".* Annie's reflection conveyed the idea that there is an acceptable level of femininity to avoid being reduced to a stereotype or diminished in some way particularly regarding gender diversity. Similarly, Mae (mining) reflected, *"I think, in the workplace, there still lots of people have this stereotype, thinking, you know, it's a male dominant company then is like, woman, you know, just don't be a lady".* Katherine (mining) described the experience of exceeding the expected level of femininity in her workplace:

> *I am quite feminine. I have my nails done. I have my eyelashes done I am relatively quite short and little, and I think people kind of stereotype me as in, you know, I don't know what I'm doing here, and I shouldn't be here.*

As demonstrated above by Mae and Katherine, there appears to be an understanding that expressing femininity beyond what is deemed acceptable in a male-dominated workplace is a risk. This dehumanising aspect that accompanies the culture of traditionally masculine workplaces appears somewhat connected to the safety work behaviour of downplaying femininity.

Lili (mining) reflected on the causes of the detrimental culture by describing men's role in the maintenance of damaging ideas like victim blaming, *"when guys get into groups, sometimes they really take on the poorest of their behaviour".* By buying into those behaviours and beliefs to maintain the status quo they are creating a problematic work environment, even if they are doing it for their own safety. Participants described that there are ideas within their workplace that even though they worked within traditionally masculine workplaces they cannot do a 'man's' job, and instead adopt a 'woman's' role. Dorothy (research) conveyed how this perception was endeavoured to be instilled in her prior to entering the workforce and described how her high school chemistry teacher attempted to dissuade her from pursuing science, *"telling me in no uncertain terms that I shouldn't pursue chemistry because I was a girl".* Dorothy's account demonstrated the threat of internalised misogyny, noting that her teacher upheld harmful gender roles even as a woman who had studied chemistry herself.

Participants said they were more likely to feel supported and had a sense of solidarity when there was visibility of those aligned with womanhood in positions of leadership and power, and that they were encouraged when there was an opportunity for mentorship. Lili (mining) viewed this as *"the best way to help people is to give them the time to kind of be supported".* Eli (law) states that he will *"constantly say to everyone how much I love [his workplace] because it's mostly women".* While Mae (mining) describes the peer support in her workplace as *"support from different perspective for women and gives us an opportunity".* A benefit that Johanna (mining) noted was that she had *"found some really supportive people and mentors and peers"* and Helen (mining) supports this idea, *"it's important to have more women because it's important to say, hey, is this okay?".* The accounts of Lili, Mae, Johanna, and Helen depict that even if the representation is limited, those aligned with womanhood find comfort and safety through the presence and mentorship of others aligned with womanhood.

Even with the problematic culture of traditionally masculine workplaces and industries; the diversity and support of their immediate surroundings mitigate potential issues or negative feelings. Something Frankie (warehousing) goes on to explicitly say:

> *There's nothing you really want to say to a big… guy, right? It's a bit awkward, like or inappropriate or something, you'd rather talk to a female but because it's female manager, she's in a different area. So, it's a bit hard.*

Here Frankie is explicitly showing demonstratable barriers this presents when it comes to discussing the issue of bringing problems around safety work to managers that are men.

There are several impacts that workplace culture has on the participants' perception of their safety work. The depiction of gender expectations of roles and the dehumanising nature of stereotypes suggest that the traditionally masculine workplace is a heavily gendered experience that has problematic implications for those aligned with womanhood who work there. The presence of peers and representation for those aligned with womanhood helps to negate the negative aspects of this culture.

## Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore the perception that people had of their engagement in gendered safety work in traditionally masculine workplaces, not just the detrimental and problematic culture in traditionally masculine workplaces, but how participants conceptualised their participation in gendered safety work to combat the GBV present. The reflective thematic analysis resulted in insights regarding gendered safety work practices in male-dominated workplaces, the associated burden of responsibility of safety work, the deprivation of independence that occurs within these workplaces, and the gendered nature of workplace culture that necessitates engaging in this gendered safety work.

Findings indicated that while participants engaged in an array of safety work practices, they perceived two practices as specific to the workplace: downplaying femininity and avoiding confrontation. Downplaying femininity was reflected in the way participants described the 'ideal level' of femininity, and the judgement or censure that came from expressing 'too much' femininity. Steps taken to downplay femininity are interpreted by participants to result in less instances of overt GBV even if it does nothing to combat the more subtle aspects of gender roles, and may not in actuality have an impact at all. Avoiding confrontation was evidenced in the way participants describe repeatedly avoiding addressing problematic behaviours, particularly from their male co-workers, to either avoid being perceived in a negative light in the workplace, or even to avoid the risk of more blatant GBV. Both of these workplace-specific safety work strategies reflect efforts to minimise themselves, to appear less visible, for example, through downplaying their femininity.

Participants described how they had to make difficult decisions that often resulted in trade-offs between their emotional, physical, sexual, and financial safety and security. Another implication of participants making trade-offs is that through minimising their presence in the workplace, it also makes their professional self less visible. In doing so, it perhaps inhibits the opportunity for individuals in these traditionally male-dominated workplaces to engage in work practices that may be conducive to their own career progression. The process of making trade-offs is reminiscent of findings that Watson (2016) found when they investigated disadvantaged groups in the context of GBV in public, specifically with young Australian women who had experienced homelessness. Watson (2016) found that with young Australian women who experienced homelessness, their safety work was in trade-offs between the risk of GBV from strangers, or, as a consequence of garnering protection from known men, then finding themselves at risk from intimate partner violence instead. For these women, danger was a given and it was instead a case of determining which situation would result in the lesser threat of harm. Through intimate relationships, they gained via proxy the safety and privilege masculine bodies have in the public space that is simultaneously hostile to the female or feminine body (Watson, 2016).

Though Watson (2016) described a unique intersection of environment and disadvantage, looking at other aspects of intersectionality draws on similar ideas. Nicholls (2017) drew on qualitative interviews with young women engaging in nighttime leisure spaces in describing how the visibility of gender and sexuality also has important intersections and implications in safety work. Adopting clear visual signs of heterosexual femininity out in public serves to reduce the risk of experiencing homophobic harassment. Although this lowers the risk of one type of harassment, doing so increases the risk of experiencing other forms (Nicholls, 2017). The trade-off that participants describe in our study is consistent with the ideas raised by both Nicholls (2017) and Watson (2016) and further establishes that the kind of trade-off that safety work requires depends on the context they are performing that safety work in (Vera-Gray, 2018). This aligns with Vera-Gray and Kelly's (2020) conceptualisation that women undergo this gendered safety work in exchange for freedom and a sense of safety.

The participants perceived that their engagement in gendered safety work was accompanied by both a burden of responsibility and a deprivation of independence. The failure to be responsible for their own personal safety would result in judgement and harm, while men as the likely perpetrators were described as facing little accountability or judgement. There is a clear deprivation of independence that comes with working in a traditionally masculine workplace while being a person who aligns in some way with womanhood. This restriction of independence is at its core a deprivation of autonomy, making participants reliant on the support of others for their safety as a direct result of a combination of men's active and passive roles in removing non-men's agency. Lennox (2022) suggested that women undertake safety work in order to be perceived as 'virtuous' and undeserving of attack or censure, and therefore perceived as acceptable to be participating in public life. Campbell (2005) examined rape prevention literature of the time and described that the safe-keeping acts that women perform in response to perceived threat of rape have become a norm of femininity. The literature around gendered safety work being accompanied by a deprivation of independence is consistent with this idea. Campbell (2005) raised the point that instilling rape and sexual assault as a fixed reality supports gender norms including the vulnerability of femininity and the invulnerability of masculinity, which only makes rape seem even more of a fixed reality; one that women have no ability to change, and that men have no desire to change. As such, gendered safety work presents in the current research as a mechanism that participants, and women and feminine presenting people more generally, are expected to engage in as virtuous citizens (Lennox, 2022) and have to engage in to protect themselves from normalised reality of the threat of sexual assault and rape (Campbell, 2005). Engaging in gendered safety work is not limited to managing stranger intrusions, but as evidenced in this research, occurs within workplaces, and is perpetrated by known individuals. What appears common to all types of safety work is the sacrifices made by means of the trade-offs undertaken by those engaging in it.

Our research was interpreted specifically in the context of traditionally masculine workplaces, where participants described a highly gendered environment that leaned heavily into ideas of 'men's' and 'women's' work: a notion reflective of their workplaces considering gender according to the binary. This was seen to the extent that the depiction of gender expectations of roles and the dehumanising nature of stereotypes necessitated changes to the femininity or masculinity of someone's gender expression in that context. This idea of femininity or masculinity having an impact on gendered safety work was considered by Cops and Pleysier (2011) who examined the reported levels of fear of crime in adolescents and young adults. They found women consistently reported higher levels of fear than men but accounted for this difference beyond binary gender. They found that regardless of the sex of participants, those who described more 'masculine' patterns of behaviour and attitudes reported lower levels of fear of crime, than those who reported more feminine patterns; this suggests that a fear of crime is socialised as a part of being feminine (Cops & Pleysier, 2011).

Findings from the current research in culmination with the existing literature suggest gendered safety work is perhaps not limited to those who have been socialised as women or perceived by society to be a woman or feminine in their lifetime. Several participants indicated that they felt men around them were participating in GBV to prevent themselves from being ostracised, and that their violence was perhaps a means of self-protection from the threat of violence from other men, its own kind of safety work. Additionally, some participants indicated that their own safety work was dependent on aspects of 'femininity' or 'masculinity' they might choose to present outwardly. This dynamic was particularly apparent in the accounts of the two participants who identified as transgender. Combined, there is some suggestion that perhaps gendered safety work consists of scales of behaviour, related to whether there is conformity or not to different 'feminine' or 'masculine' societal gender role ideals. These behaviours are not just dependent on an individual's gender expression, but how those individuals express traditional or stereotypical feminine or masculine traits and how that expression is interpreted and responded to by others. Thus stereotypically 'feminine' aspects are portrayed as relying on others for safety, accepting GBV or general poor behaviour so as to be seen as agreeable and not difficult. Conversely, 'masculine' safety work behaviours are those that require elements of either passively or actively perpetuating GBV, by treating femininity with disdain and distancing from it or otherwise engaging in behaviour that could be misogynistic.

A key aspect of safety work emerging from these considerations is trade-offs. These may involve not only potentially choosing between feminine or masculine conformity, but also weighing up what choosing not to conform to either, whether fully or partially, might mean in terms of one's safety and security. To our knowledge, there is no research that considers the idea of adopting masculinity and femininity as explicit engagement in safety work, though the ideas behind it are consistent with some explorations of gender. This includes Cops and Pleysier's (2011) aforementioned research, and the mixed methodological study by Roberts et al. (2022) on how women construct the urban landscape. The latter considered how women construct and navigate the urban landscape to avoid sexual violence, and found distinctly gendered readings, where women were viewing the public environment as masculine in ways that were interwoven with fear and aversion. They also touched briefly on the accounts of men in the same spaces, describing that while men may feel the increased danger, their narratives lacked the impact and detailed strategies to address feeling unsafe that women recount (Roberts et al., 2022).

### *Limitations and Avenues of Future Research*

This study sought to expand understanding of gendered safety work as it applies in traditionally masculine workplaces. As a result of sampling, five of the 13 participants worked with the mining industry, and four of those participants worked in nearly identical roles. The majority of the participants who answered the demographic survey indicated that they were educated to at least a bachelor's degree and were under 30. A useful avenue for future research would be to consider other industries and roles not covered by this research's sampling, and to look at more specific age ranges or education levels.

Another limitation is a limited focus on intersectionality. So, while this research did encounter data relevant to these areas and included a wider sampling of gender and sex than other research in this area due to the broader target population, this was not measured in a quantifiable way. The demographic survey did not include questions related to cultural identity and ethnicity, nor did it include questions related to sex, sexuality, or gender beyond asking pronouns. Some participants alluded to the idea of safety work behavioural changes being undertaken to avoid violence other than GBV, and this could be a promising future avenue of safety work to explore.

Additionally, though the themes were interpreted with a focus on traditionally masculine workplaces, it was clear in the data that safety work expands beyond that context, and potentially even beyond the context of public spaces. There were several references to safety work in urban areas, rural areas, online spaces, and in private spaces such as the home. Applying the ideas of gendered safety work within the context of the home presents as an important avenue for future research, where they may amplify parallel research previously done in relation to family and domestic violence.

## Conclusion

The way people perceive their gendered safety work behaviours is dependent on the context and culture in which they are employing the safety work. The four key findings from this study involved gendered safety work practices, the burden of responsibility and deprivation of independence that is associated with those practices, and the gendered nature of the workplace culture which necessitates it. This results in individuals being forced to make concessions to some forms of their personal safety or comfort in order to protect themselves from others, be that in minimising their gender expression, or making trade-offs that impact their emotional or financial security. The above findings were interpreted specifically in the context of traditionally masculine workplaces, where participants described a highly gendered environment necessitating changes to the scale of how stereotypically 'feminine' or 'masculine' someone presents. This gendered context can perhaps be attributed to the construction of these workplaces in relation to gender roles and 'women's work' and 'men's work'. These ideas lead to the conceptualisation of gendered safety work, and though this research takes steps to acknowledge the restrictions of gender binary constructions, such constructions still form a part of the societal context necessitating these safety work behaviours. As a result, we could interpret this gendered safety work as being interwoven with ideas of 'femininity' and 'masculinity', where an individual's presentation and how others interpret that, on either scale, can influence the safety work they perform in response. Moreover, choosing how 'feminine' or 'masculine' to present, or to not present, can itself be an aspect of gendered safety work – notions that warrant further research.

This research is highly relevant as GBV is still a pressing issue in Australia, and combatting it requires examination of its nuances and recognising how different groups might be affected by and participate in it. This examination encompasses how those at risk understand and interpret their reactions in the form of gendered safety work. Our research presents a deeper understanding of the psychosocial impacts of engaging in gendered safety work in traditionally masculine workplaces, and also has implications for other forms of violence targeting individuals on the basis of their identities.

## References

Atkinson, S. (2020). Female role models in a male-dominated workplace: Do we still need their influence today?. In A. Smith (Ed.), *Gender equality in changing times.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26570-0_2

Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC]. (2018). *Everyone's Business: Fourth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.* https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everyones-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Brassel, S. T., Davis, T. M., Jones, M. K., Miller-Tejada, S., Thorne, K. M., & Areguin, M. A. (2020). The importance of intersectionality for research on the sexual harassment of black queer women at work. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science, 6*(4), 383-391. https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000261

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18*(3), 328-352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Byrne, D. A. (2022). Worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity, 56*, 1391-1412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Campbell, A. (2005). Keeping the "lady" safe: The regulation of femininity through crime prevention literature. *Critical Criminology, 13*(2), 119–140. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612- 005-2390-z

Clarke, V., & Crook, C. (2021). *Conversation: (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis in qualitative research*. Researching Education. https://researchingeducation.com/braunandclarke/

Cops, D., & Pleysier, S. (2011). 'Doing gender' in fear of crime: The impact of gender identity on reported levels of fear of crime in adolescents and young adults. *The British Journal of Criminology, 51*(1), 58-74. http://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azq065

Dorrance-Hall, E. D., & Gettings, P. E. (2020). "Who is this little girl they hired to work here?": Women's experiences of marginalizing communication in male-dominated workplaces. *Communication Monographs, 87*(4), 484-505. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2020.1758736

Dray, K. K., Smith, V. R. E., Kostecki, T. P., Sabat, I. E., & Thomson, C. R. (2020). Moving beyond the gender binary: Examining workplace perceptions of nonbinary and transgender employees. *Gender, Work & Organization, 27*(6), 1181-1191. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12455

Eichenberg, R.C., Lizotte, M.-K. & Stoll, R.J. (2022). Socialized to safety? The origins of gender difference in personal security dispositions. *Political Psychology, 43*, 221-235. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12748

Fileborn, B., & Hindes, S. (2023). It is "part of this larger tapestry of anti-queer experiences": LGBTQ+ Australians' experiences of street harassment. *Critical Criminology, 31*(4), 971-988. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-023-09742-4

Fileborn, B., & O'Neill, T. (2021). From "ghettoization" to a field of its own: A comprehensive review of street harassment and abuse. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *24*(1), 125-138. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211021608

Galea, N., & Chappell, L. (2022). Male-dominated workplaces and the power of masculine privilege: A comparison of the Australian political and construction sectors. *Gender, Work, & Organisation, 29*(5), 1692-1711. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12639

Gardner, N., Cui, J., & Coiacetto, E. (2017). Harassment on public transport and its impacts on women's travel behaviour. *Australian Planner, 54*(1), 8-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/07293682.2017.1299189

Goodman-Delahunty, J., Schuller, R., & Martschuk, N. (2016). Workplace sexual harassment in policing: Perceived psychological injuries by source and severity. *Psychology, Injury and Law, 9*(3), 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12207-016-9265-3

Hulls, P. M., Richmond, R. C., Martin, R. M., Chavez-Ugalde, Y., & de Vocht, F. (2022). Workplace interventions that aim to improve employee health and well-being in male-dominated industries: a systematic review. Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 79(2), 77-87. https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2020-107314

Lennox, R. A. (2022). “There’s girls who can fight, and there’s girls who are innocent”: Gendered safekeeping as virtue maintenance work. *Violence Against Women, 28*(2), 641–663. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801221998786

Losantos, M., Montoya, T., & Exeni, S. (2016). Applying social constructionist epistemology to research in psychology. *International Journal of Collaborative Practice 6*(1), 29-42. https://ijcp.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/losantos_montoya_exeni_santacruz_loots_english_6.pdf

Marecek, J., Crawford, M., & Popp, D. (2004). On the construction of gender, sex, and sexualities. In A. H. Eagly, A. E. Beall, & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The psychology of gender* (2nd ed., pp. 192–216). The Guilford Press.

Mellgren, C., Andersson, M., & Ivert, A. (2018). “It happens all the time”: Women’s experiences and normalization of sexual harassment in public space. *Women & Criminal Justice, 28*(4), 262-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2017.1372328

Murnen, S. K., & Smolak, L. (2000). The experience of sexual harassment among grade-school students: Early socialization of female subordination. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 43*(1-2), 1-17. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/experience-sexual-harassment-among-grade-school/docview/62337278/se-2?accountid=10382

Naveed, A., Tharani, A., & Alwani, N. (2010). Sexual harassment at work place: Are you safe?. *Journal of Ayub Medical College, 22*(3), 222-4. http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_son/

Nicholls, E. (2017). ‘Dulling it down a bit’: Managing visibility, sexualities and risk in the Night Time Economy in Newcastle, UK. *Gender, Place & Culture, 24*(2), 260-273. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1298575

Pain, R. (1991). Space, sexual violence and social control: Integrating geographical and feminist analyses of women’s fear of crime. *Progress in Human Geography, 15*(4), 415–431. https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259101500403

Raj, A., Johns, N. E., & Jose, R. (2020). Gender parity at work and its association with workplace sexual harassment. *Workplace Health & Safety, 68*(6), 279–292. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165079919900793

Rees, S., Silove, D., Chey, T., Ivancic, L., Steel, Z., Creamer, M., Teesson, M., Bryant, R., McFarlane, A. C., Mills, K. L., Slade, T., Carragher, N., O’Donnell, M., & Forbes, D. (2011). Lifetime prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in women and the relationship with mental disorders and psychosocial function. *The Journal of the American Medical Association, 306*(5), 513–521. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2011.1098

Roberts, N., Donovan, C., & Durey, M. (2022). Gendered landscapes of safety: How women construct and navigate the urban landscape to avoid sexual violence. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 22*(2), 287–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895820963208

United Nations. (1993). *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women: Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 48/104 20 December 1993*. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2022). *Gender-based violence*. https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/gender-based-violence.html#:~:text=Gender%2DBased%20violence%20refers%20to,threatening%20health%20and%20protection%20issue.

Valentine, G. (1993). (Hetero) sexing space: Lesbian perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 11*, 395–413. https://doi.org/10.1068%2Fd110395

Vera-Gray, F. (2016). *Men's intrusion, women's embodiment: A critical analysis of street harassment* (1st ed.). Routledge.
Vera-Gray, F. (2018). *The right amount of panic: How women trade freedom for safety* (1st ed.). Bristol University Press.
Vera-Gray, F., & Kelly, L. (2020). Contested gendered space: Public sexual harassment and women's safety work. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice, 44*(4), 265-275. https://doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2020.1732435
Watson, J. (2016). Gender-Based Violence and young homeless women: Femininity, embodiment and vicarious physical capital. *The Sociological Review, 64*(2), 256–273. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12365
WorkSafe Victoria. (2022). *What is work-related gendered violence?* https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/gendered-violence-what
World Health Organisation [WHO] (2012) *Understanding and addressing violence against women: Intimate partner violence.* https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf
World Health Organisation [WHO]. (2024). *Violence against women.* https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_1
Wright, T. (2016). Women's experience of workplace interactions in male-dominated work: The intersections of gender, sexuality and occupational group gender. *Work & Organization, 23*(3), 348-362. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12074
Yavorsky, J. E., & Sayer, L. (2013). "Doing fear": The influence of hetero-femininity on (trans)women's fears of victimization. *The Sociological Quarterly, 54*(4), 511–533. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24581872

**Acknowledgements**

We extend our gratitude to our research participants who candidly shared their experiences of engaging in safety work.

**Author Contributions**

This manuscript is based on a Psychology Honours Dissertation by Breeanna Melville and supervised by Peta Dzidic and Chantel Tichbon. All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Breeanna Melville and supervised by Peta Dzidic and Chantel Tichbon. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Breeanna Melville. Writing, reviewing, and editing was conducted by Peta Dzidic and Breeanna Melville.

**Disclosures**

No funding was received to conduct this study or support the preparation of this manuscript. The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Part of the development of this article was undertaken while the primary author was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

The dataset generated during the current study is not publicly available as transcripts contain information that may identify participants.

**Address for Correspondence**

Breeanna Melville

Curtin University, GPO Box U1987 Perth, Western Australia 6845.

**Author Biographies**

Miss Breeanna Melville (she/they) at the time the research was conducted was a Bachelor of Psychology honours student and while developing this article is now a postgraduate student finalising her Master of Research (Psychology), at Curtin University and beginning their doctoral studies. She has practical experience as a Queer Peer Educator and has volunteered for a number of years in roles relevant to LGBTQIA+ community, Sexual Health Promotion, and youth; and their research interests fall solidly in these areas. She has a keen focus particularly on the mental health and wellbeing of these young people.

Dr Peta Dzidic (she/her/hers) at the time the research was conducted was a Senior Lecturer in the School of Population Health, Discipline of Psychology. She is the Curtin Gender Research Network (GRN) Academic Co-Lead, and within the Curtin enAble Institute, Peta was the Social Justice and Community Mental Health Program Lead. Her research focuses on gender, young people, coloniality, climate and social justice, and their intersection.

Ms Chantel Tichbon (she/her/hers) is a Master of Research (Psychology) graduate from the School of Population Health, Discipline of Psychology. Her research focus is in gendered studies, particularly street harassment.