Chapter 2

Everyday, Everywhere: Theorising Sexual Harassment

Abstract

This chapter delves into our past and current understandings of sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence and examines sociological theorisations of the issue, with a focus on feminist perspectives. I begin by exploring the varying definitions of sexual harassment over time, paying particular attention to how these types of behaviour are understood across contexts, including organisational settings and workplaces, and public spaces like the streets. I will finish the chapter by exploring how the issue has been understood in transport settings thus far, acknowledging the developments and limitations of existing theorisations. This paves the way for the following chapter, that argues for the application of a new lens on an 'old' issue.

Keywords: Sexual harassment; public space; public transport; London Underground; gender-based violence

It happens everywhere. It doesn't change how I view transport in London because these things are so widespread it happens everywhere. That's not cool, but these things are so imbedded into me, I'm so used to them I don't even bat an eyelid at being afraid. (Ally)

It's not always scary when it happens. But it's always annoying. (Kady)

They all blur in to one, it's just something that happens, isn't it? (Eliza)

Whilst the focus of this book is exploring the nuances of how sexual harassment happens within a specific space, I will take the time here to situate these behaviours in broader societal understandings of gender-based violence. Whilst feminists and activist groups have long called for recognition of the prevalence and dangers of sexual harassment, over recent years it has become increasingly visible in public discourse as an endemic societal issue, perpetrated by men against women across different environments (Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2023). Sexual harassment in its various forms has been recognised as one the most prevalent manifestations of gender-based violence (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2019). This pertains to the socio-cultural model, which is arguably the hegemonic approach to understanding sexual harassment. In simple terms, this theorisation situates sexual harassment as a product of a patriarchal society. It positions sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence both as a consequence of a culture that legitimises unequal power dynamics and social standing between men and women, and an act that is perpetrated to maintain this power differential. It exists on a continuum (Kelly, 1987) of behaviours perpetrated by men against women in order to dominate and control. In the past, its prevalence has rendered this kind of behaviour normalised and its harms concealed. Research shows that from a young age, girls 'come up against the wall of patriarchy' (Gilligan, 1990) and learn to perceive and negotiate sexually harassing behaviour as a normal part of everyday life (Fineran & Bennet, 1999; Hlavka, 2014). A socio-cultural theoretical model underpins my academic leaning, as well as matching up with how many of the women in this book understood sexual harassment in a wider context.

Whilst the 'everydayness' of sexual violence runs as an undercurrent to women's lives, episodic spikes in media, public and academic interest often occur in the wake of high-profile incidents. A recent example of this is the Harvey Weinstein scandal and the subsequent growth of the #MeToo movement. In October 2017, the New York Times published a story detailing decades of allegations of sexual harassment against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. To date, over 80 women have shared experiences of sexual violence they suffered at the hands of the American film producer. Weinstein's accusers gave traction to the #MeToo movement as it is widely known today. Founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, 'me too' began as a movement to help Black girls and women show support and discuss their experiences of sexual violence (Boyd & McEwan, 2002). When actress Alyssa Milano called for her followers to share their 'me too' experiences of sexual harassment, it quickly transformed into the hashtag and accompanying viral movement that demonstrated the pervasiveness and magnitude of sexual harassment and assault in the entertainment industry and beyond. The hashtag and its variations caused shockwaves around the globe, with millions of women sharing their stories of harassment and abuse, often for the first time. Sexual harassment and sexual misconduct more broadly became a mainstream talking point.

In 2021, sexual violence in public space made national headlines in the UK. On 3 March, 33-year-old Sarah Everard was kidnapped in London by Wayne

Couzens, a serving Metropolitan Police officer, as she walked home from a friend's house in Clapham. Couzens was later charged with kidnap, rape and murder. The case drew significant media attention and reignited discussions about sexual violence and, more specifically, women's fear and safety in public space. Whilst Sarah's case attracted the media spotlight, it was not an isolated incident or 'unimaginable horror'. For most women, this is *exactly* what they imagine as the 'worst case scenario' when navigating interactions with strange men in public space, and what their plans, energy and safety work are attempting to prevent. This was made visible from the ripple effect and outpouring of everyday stories in the wake of Sarah's murder. For months, the public outrage and distress were palpable, as millions of women's stories reverberated in everyday conversation and around social media with the prolific use of hashtags such as #TextMeWhenYouGetHome, #NotAllMenButAllWomen and the resurgence of #MeToo, #ReclaimTheStreets and #ReclaimTheNight. Several months after Sarah's murder, Sabina Nessa, a 28-year-old teacher, was murdered by Koci Selamaj in a park in South-East London. Unsurprisingly, public commentary drew parallels between the analogous attacks, prompting the reignition of discussions around male violence against women in public space (Bleakley, 2023).

In public transport specifically, the occurrence of sexual harassment and violence has also garnered media attention and community action around the world. In 2012, the gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh on a bus in New Delhi, India, shook the news on a global scale, raising questions about women's ability to be safe in public spaces and leading to thousands of people across India marching to call for an end to sexual violence and demanding that the government take action. It also prompted amendments to Indian criminal laws around rape and sexual violence (Rajan et al., 2022). In a different vein, conversation was ignited on the back of a 2020 episode of the popular Netflix show 'Sex Education'. Based on the show's creator's own experience, the storyline begins with a much-loved character, Aimee, riding the bus to school when a man masturbates on her leg. Despite speaking out, no one steps in to help her. The impact of the assault threads through subsequent episodes and seasons as the show takes us on a journey where Aimee grapples with how to navigate her experience. We follow her attempts to shrug it off as no big deal, whilst also walking to school to avoid getting on the bus again, imagining seeing the man's face, struggling to be intimate with her partner, and blaming herself for the man's behaviour. Aimee eventually tells her friends about the incident, who then encourage her to report the assault and share their own stories. The episode struck a chord with women around the world, and received significant attention as the show was highly praised across social media for its nuanced representation and shedding light on the issue of sexual assault on public transport.

Though sexual violence on the London transport network is often peppered in the national media, in late 2023 it hit the headlines. On 7 December, an electrical fault caused service disruption to the Underground's Elizabeth line, halting carriages to a standstill for hours and plunging them into darkness. It transpired that during the chaos, there was an arrest

due to unwanted sexual touching (The Standard, 2023b). Another high-profile incident came to light after the conviction of a man who, in 2020, sexually assaulted and raped a sleeping woman in view of other passengers on a busy morning Tube service. A significant amount of public outrage caused by these events was targeted towards other passengers – the bystanders who did not intervene. One media article claimed those who do nothing are 'failing Londoners' (The Standard, 2023a).

This increase in awareness of the risk of male violence that women are forced to navigate in public spaces has led to various policies and spatial interventions around the globe. Tokyo, which became infamous for its overcrowded trains and 'endemic groping', introduced women-only carriages in 2005. Perth, Australia, introduced female-only parking spaces, something that already exists in Germany and Switzerland. Highly populated cities in Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Mexico, Malaysia and the UAE have all implemented some form of women-only transport (Horii & Burgess, 2012). The idea has also been floated in the UK. Whilst feminist groups around the world highlight that this method endorses segregation and is essentially regressive for gender equality (Gekoski et al., 2015), it signifies the risk of gendered violence in public transport that women around the world experience as a part of everyday life. In the UK, high profile incidents of violence have led to government and organisational interventions, including the 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into the sexual harassment of women and girls in public spaces, which included a focus on transport environments. In the wake of Sarah Everard's murder, the government increased funding to the 'Safer Streets' campaign which largely focusses on making public spaces less hostile to women. In recent years, Transport for London (TfL) and British Transport Police (BTP) have pushed high profile and priority campaigns (detailed below) that focus on combatting unwanted sexual attention on the London Underground. Amid this bubbling public and political interest, where sexual violence and harassment in transport are gaining recognition as an issue that needs significant attention, it is imperative that we fully understand these experiences. We need to scrutinise and dismantle 'taken for granted' understandings of sexual harassment, and forefront women's in-depth stories that portray the way in which sexual harassment is perpetrated and experienced, and the way in which it impacts women's mobilities and every day life.

After a brief note on definitions of 'sexual harassment' and my choice to use the term for this book, this chapter traces the development of conceptualisations of sexual harassment across different social spaces. I examine the various and specific features of how sexually harassing behaviours manifest in different contexts, from workplace and organisational settings to public space and public transport and examine what we know so far about how this behaviour is perpetrated on the London Underground. Doing this allows us to identify how modes of committing sexual harassment mutate and shift depending on the socio-spatial nexus in which it occurs. This also exposes the limitations in the existing theorisations of sexual harassment 'on the move' and reveals the subsequent gap in knowledge that this book aims to address.

'I'm Not Sure if This Even Counts': Defining Sexual Harassment

> *I think a big problem is that we didn't have a language for it … for a long time it's been missing in our dialogue, so how do you describe what happened to you? So many of these little incidents become invalidated or internalised.* (Janice)

> *I have a very broad ranging view of what sexual harassment is. So much of it is micro aggressive shit … ultimately, it's anything where one person makes another uncomfortable in a way that is not platonic. And that encompasses a huge range of stuff. So, I don't think there's a one size fits all definition of sexual harassment.* (Laya)

Before examining how sexual harassment manifests across difference spaces, it is important to note the terminology chosen for this book, as it has methodological and conceptual implications. In the 1970s, feminist scholars and activists brought to public attention the importance of naming and legally addressing sexually harassing behaviour in workplace settings (Brownmiller, 1975; Farley, 1978; MacKinnon, 1979; Rowe, 1974). Whilst 'sexual harassment' has existed as a term in everyday language ever since, due to the origins of the term, it has often referred to behaviour in traditionally structured organisational environments. Consequently, sexual harassment was often viewed with limited scope to mean unwanted sexual relations imposed by superiors on subordinates at work (MacKinnon & Siegel, 2004). Of course, this restrictive understanding of the term negates identifying sexually harassing behaviours that occur in public space and operate within a differing social power dynamic.

Researchers exploring the issue have highlighted the difficulties in appropriately labelling sexual harassing behaviour in public space (Vera-Gray, 2016) and the concurrent struggle in unearthing what to many women, is perceived as an everyday experience. Sexual harassment is being increasingly described as unwelcome or unwanted sexual attention, particularly within organisational settings (the London Underground included; this is the terminology used by both TfL and the BTP) (Gekoski et al., 2015; Solymosi et al., 2017). However, many of the experiences of public harassment including on transport, are difficult to define as explicitly sexualised in nature [e.g. a stranger silently taking hold of your hand, or an aggressive (non-sexual) verbal assault]. Feminist academics have sought to combat this limitation in reference to these behaviours more broadly. One term I find particularly useful is 'men's stranger intrusions' (Vera-Gray, 2016). With the use of this term, Vera-Gray addresses the lack of gendering in commonly used terminology, and the risk of excluding experiences that are not overtly 'sexual'. This term is accurate for many of the behaviours being perpetrated on the London Underground. Firstly, all the incidents were committed by men who were strangers to the victims. And secondly, whilst only around half were overtly sexual (whether in terms of groping/flashing/verbal comments), all were understood

as intrusions – indeed, many women saw these experiences as *particularly* intrusive or disruptive in comparison to similar experiences in other spaces. This was because: (a) they happened on the move, so they were forced to 'deal' with them whilst trying to get somewhere else; and (b) they occurred in a space where this behaviour was so unexpected and out of place (say, in comparison to a bar or nightclub) – often intruding not just in the moment but on their ontological sense of safety in a space they felt was theirs to occupy without the risk of invasion. Similarly, the term 'gender-based harassment' is arguably a more accurate term, as women are often targets of these intrusions because of their gender, rather than for sexual 'purposes' or gain (i.e. flirtation), as 'sexual harassment' may imply.

Another consideration was consistently using one of the two wider umbrella terms, 'gender-based violence' or 'sexual violence', that would then incorporate sexual harassment into their domain. However, I was concerned that by using this language in the call for participants, I would only connect with women who had experienced more physically intrusive forms of sexual violence such as rape or physical assault. Whilst in the social sciences conceptualisations of violence have moved beyond the physical and interpersonal to incorporate a broader understanding of harm, in everyday discourse violence is still often perceived only as an action that inflicts physical pain. Because of this, I was concerned that women who had experienced the more 'everyday' and 'normalised' behaviours (such as intense leering, catcalling, even non-painful groping) would not respond to the call. This proved to be a relevant concern. There were several women who initially responded tentatively to the call for participants, unsure whether their experience 'counted as sexual harassment' or was 'bad enough', when in fact, legally it would be considered sexual assault.

> I knew it was wrong and I knew what I was seeing was completely wrong but I think at the time I wouldn't have put it down as sexual harassment, I would have just put it down to this guy being a creep but I wouldn't have thought wait, this is sexual harassment. (Carla)

> I had a google before I came, to see if I fell into the spectrum …, you're in a public space, is it someone you know, someone you don't know, that all plays into it and a lot to do with the space and how you feel. (Tara)

> Even though I knew I felt uncomfortable and I didn't like it, I wouldn't have framed it as sexual harassment. (Emmy)

> It's difficult because the occasions I've experienced it on public transport, only one of these was I actually touched. The other two they sat opposite me touching themselves … so I don't know if it counts, but I'm still being violated. (Ally)

Many of the experiences described in this book are void of acute physical pain, but rather are suffused with immediate and long-lasting discomfort and unease. I wanted to make sure to catch these experiences. Furthermore, whilst 'sexual harassment' may hold the same connotations (and therefore the same limitations) as 'unwanted sexual attention', I contend that the term occupies a more tangible and established space in our lexicon and psyche, and it is with this rationale that I used the term sexual harassment during the research process. As such, it felt important to use the same terminology in the book, as this is how the participants engaged with and related to the research. The term 'sexual harassment' then has been used for its prominence in our everyday comprehension of a complex issue, as the 'hook', to engage both participants in the research and readers of this book.

Alongside murky language and the normalisation of behaviour, another way that experiences of sexual harassment are rendered invisible or difficult to define, is the complex reality of women's multifaceted identities. Intersectionality highlights that individuals experience overlapping forms of discrimination based on multiple aspects of their identity (Crenshaw, 1989). An intersectional approach to understanding sexual harassment is essential. Also referred to as a 'multidimensional model' in organisational settings (Fitzgerald & Buchanan, 2008), it draws attention to the complex ways in which various forms of discrimination can intersect to shape and compound experiences of harassment. Most explicitly, an intersectional approach highlights how sexism and racism compound to create different experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, misogynoir refers to anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience (Bailey & Trudy, 2018) and addresses the racialised nuance that mainstream feminism was overlooking when speaking to experiences of misogyny. Similarly, intersectionality draws attention to (in this instance) how LGBTQ+ individuals, people from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds and people with disabilities may experience sexual harassment differently to cis, heterosexual, white, middle-class, able-bodied women – on whose experiences research is often focussed. Fogg-Davis (2006) considers this in his work on the victimisation of Black lesbians, claiming the importance of recognising both civic behaviours and how they interact with structural inequalities (such as colonialism and heterosexism).

Social climate is often significant as to why peaks in harassment against marginalised groups occur, and how experiences of sexual harassment become more explicitly intertwined with racist and xenophobic tones. For example, Mason-Bish and Zempi's (2018) work 'Misogyny, Racism, and Islamophobia: Street Harassment at the Intersections' explored veiled Muslim women's experiences of harassment in public space, highlighting how in a socio-political climate rife with islamophobia and sexism, women are targeted for their gender, religion and culture. During the COVID-19 pandemic racially motivated harassment and public hate crimes against Asian communities increased (Karandikar et al., 2024), and a gendered analysis of this showed that Asian women compromised two-thirds of those reporting verbal and physical assault. Unless made explicit through aggressive sexist language, this overlapping of discrimination can shroud women's experiences in confusion as to whether they have been explicitly targeted because

of their gender or their religion/ethnicity/disability and as such, this impacts on whether it is defined and acknowledged as sexual harassment. Intersectionality ensures that we acknowledge that gender is not the only factor that implicates or motivates these experiences. Whilst the experiences I analyse in this book are situated in the 'microcosm' of the London Underground, they are still located within and impacted by the broader context of social, political and economic dynamics 'above ground' that fluctuate and insidiously impact on women's lives. Furthermore, they are often only one part of the tapestry of women's understandings and experiences of sexual violence, and therefore, it is important to review how other experiences manifest in different contexts, setting the scene that allows us to discern what is different and particular about public transport.

Sexual Harassment in Organisational Settings

As noted briefly above, sexual harassment was originally conceptualised in feminist studies that focussed on naming sexually harassing behaviours in the workplace (MacKinnon, 1979). The goal was primarily to identify and label these widely normalised interactions so they could be dealt with through official organisational and legal channels. Conceptions of sexual harassment within the workplace follow that it is perpetrated as an exertion and abuse of power, rather than as an act of sexual desire (MacKinnon, 1979). Cortina and Areguin (2021) contend that, reframed as gendered harassment, the root of this behaviour is contempt, and the goal to intimidate and exclude from the workplace rather than to engage in sexual activity. A structural power analysis contends that sexual harassment in this context is behaviour that abuses hierarchical organisational structures and most commonly takes the form of men in positions of economic power taking advantage of and exploiting relationships with women in less powerful positions, often without fear of reprisal. However, contrary to this being the exclusive dynamic, research has shown how co-workers holding similar organisational power were often reported to commit harassing behaviours (Brant & Too, 1994), and Rospenda et al. (1998) theorise 'contrapower sexual harassment', to explain when the target of harassment has greater organisational power than the harasser. At times, this can act to reflect intersectional influences of gender, race and class on power dynamics in a workplace setting. It also shows how broader gendered power differentials infiltrate and often override organisational power dynamics.

Whilst internal sexual harassment is considered to be the most common form of workplace sexual harassment, women also experience sexually harassing behaviour from male customers. This is reported to be particularly prevalent for those in customer service positions, particularly in nighttime economy settings (Green, 2022). Other organisational settings with complex power dynamics that are important to consider include higher educational settings. Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) argue that these constitute an accumulation of precarious working conditions, hierarchical structure, toxic academic masculinities, a culture of silence and a lack of active leadership as well as a normalisation of gender-based violence, that combine to enable an epidemic of sexual harassment.

Across these organisational contexts, hostile or overtly sexist environments can be fostered by managers and colleagues, permitting space for the occurrence of intimidating conduct and subsequent silence. Hand and Sanchez (2000) describe this form of unwelcome sexual behaviour as often including lewd comments, circulating rumours, and using demeaning language that interrupts a person's ability to do their job. In masculinised environments and traditionally male dominated occupations women were more likely to be touched or grabbed and be subjected to sexualised jokes (Gruber, 1998). Here, it is useful to consider how sexual harassment can also constitute a public performance and affirmation of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Within these settings, peer harassment often reflects performances of hegemonic masculinity for other men, displaying compulsory heterosexuality and acting as a form of 'homosocial bonding' (Kimmel, 2008) through 'girl watching' (Quinn, 2002), where men sexually evaluate women in the company of other men. These more normalised or 'everyday' forms of harassment also constitute an atmosphere in which sexual harassment and violence in more explicit terms can occur, in the form of unwanted sexual advances and coercive behaviours, such as pressure for sexual favours as a condition of employment.

This collusion of organisational structures and atmospheres perpetuates a climate of silence, as victims fear revicitimisation, inaction, job loss or damage to their careers (Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2023). Krasas and Henson (1997, p. 229) suggest there is a response matrix or continuum with regard to reactions to sexual harassment in the workplace, including four major types: avoidance, diffusion, negotiation and confrontation. For example, in their research on temporary workers they observed that women in insecure and vulnerable employment learnt to tolerate sexual harassment by shifting their 'anger boundaries'. Again, context is significant as to how women experienced and responded to such behaviour. As Schneider (1991) considers, women react based on a fear of the depersonalising and humiliating organisational procedures that they have learnt to anticipate if they were to speak out about their experience. In the workplace, sexual harassment is generally perpetrated by men who are known to the victim, and in a setting that is not easy for the victim to detach herself from without serious social and financial repercussions. Intimacy, economic dependency and a conflation of relationships of power are significant as to how sexual harassment is perpetrated and experienced within this context. Whilst these systems are highly flawed, theoretically, within organisational settings, there should be clear avenues and frameworks within which to report. I say this in comparison to street-based public harassment, where a lack of structure often renders these experiences to be considered unreportable. This is important to bear in mind when thinking about the London Underground, which sits as a liminal space that is seemingly public yet is simultaneously managed by stakeholders and governing bodies who control and manage the space and interactions that occur within it, with their own regulations and reporting mechanisms. The identification and naming of sexual harassment in organisational settings paved the way for further understanding the mechanisms of this kind of behaviour and the impact it had on women's participation in the workplace. Yet these conceptualisations are not entirely transferable to other settings, including public spaces, which require their own analysis.

Sexual Harassment in Public Space

As considered in the previous chapter, the acknowledgement that sexual harassment is a predominant and impacting feature of women and girls' existence has become a public policy issue on a global scale. It is now widely documented that women feel disproportionally unsafe in public space, largely due to fears and experiences of sexual violence from men (Fileborn, 2019). 'Lower level' sexual harassment plays a significant role in the production and extent of these fears, acting as a reminder of visibility and vulnerability under the objectifying male gaze (Boyer, 2022). Brooks Gardner (1995) challenged that as a society we have neglected to acknowledge the harms of public harassment, especially heterosexually romanticised public harassment. By this, she means behaviours that are often considered (by men) as harmless and flirtatious, such as wolf-whistling and catcalling – comments or behaviours that are wrapped up and defended as compliments (Di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019). Again, we can utilise Kelly's (1987) 'continuum of sexual violence', to understand how sexual harassment that is so common it is regarded as 'everyday male behaviour', still acts to instil fear. Sexual harassment is on a continuum of possible events in public space, an interaction that begins when civility amongst strangers is disrupted and ends with the transition to violent assault, rape or murder. As such, the regular occurrence of sexual harassment acts as a constant reminder of the risk of a more severe sexual attack and creates a state of anxiety and unease that women must navigate (Pain, 1991). The gendered norms that underpin this historically are explored in much more detail in Chapter 4, so here I will overview key understandings around its manifestation in contemporary society.

Whilst located against the same social backdrop as occurrences of organisational sexual harassment, there are distinct differences in how it manifests and is experienced 'on the streets' in comparison to in the workplace. Not mitigated or sanctioned by the same organisational power structures, sexual harassment in public space has its own key features. Bowman (1993, p. 523) highlights these as: (1) the targets of street harassment are female; (2) the harassers are male; (3) the harassers are unacquainted with their targets; (4) the encounter is face to face; (5) the forum is a public one (in this she includes public transport); and (6) the content of speech, if any, is not intended as public discourse. Sexual harassment in public space is widely considered to include unwelcome physical contact or advances, stalking, lewd gestures and voyeurism, as well as verbal behaviours (Madan & Nalla, 2016). Brooks Gardner (1995) includes scrutiny, exhibitionism, public aid exchanges or greetings with innuendo and romantic overtones and determined following. Pain (1991, p. 421) defined such behaviour as 'unwanted intrusive acts perpetrated by men against women, including staring, touching and comments or actions of a sexual nature'. In India, street harassment is often called 'eve teasing' (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014), and a type of catcalling, sometimes understood by men as a form of gallantry and colloquially called pirópo, is pervasive in Latin America (Bailey, 2017).

Key features of how women experience and perceive incidents of sexual harassment in public space have been identified. According to Bailey (2017), street

harassment in the form of remarks is often not understood as explicitly threatening, yet it is a reminder of vulnerability (Tuerkheimer, 1997). As women learn to perceive strange men in public space as potentially dangerous (Hubbard, 2012), increased feelings of fear and vulnerability can reinforce gender inequality through restricting mobility or contribute to what Bowman (1993) terms 'the informal ghettoization of women', acting to 'keep women in their place' (Crouch, 2009, p. 137). Significant theoretical work has also discussed how women perceive such acts as *intrusions* (Bowman, 1993; Vera-Gray, 2016). These intrusions have been seen as problematic to women's freedom in public space and as invasions of women's right to privacy in public (Brooks Gardner, 1995). Swim and Hyers (1999) highlight that women often react to public harassment in a non-confrontational way due to fear of escalation, fear of being perceived as impolite, societal pressure and 'lines' not being crossed by the harasser (in subsequent chapters, we see all of these dynamics play out in women's accounts of harassment on the Tube). Dhillon and Bakaya (2014) state that women's experiences of sexual harassment often include a combination of self-protective strategies and emotional reactions of fear and anger. In public space, women are unable to predict whether male behaviour may escalate (Stanko, 1993; Vera-Gray, 2018), and it is with a 'worst case scenario' in mind that women often respond. Whilst I knew this latently, I became more acutely aware of these negotiations during this research, as I wrote every incident of sexual harassment I experienced across the city in my fieldnotes and reflexive diary. There's one incident I wrote about in particular detail that I'll summarise below.

> After having drinks and dinner with two of my closest friends, I'm walking to the bus stop, cutting off the busy main road down a quiet street lined with trees, whitewashed houses and the intermittent glow cast by dim streetlights. It's a brusque December evening, and the wine buzz mingles with the bite of static wintry air and I smile contentedly, breathing in the city, and pulling my thick coat tightly around me. Down the street, two men appear, turning the corner and walking towards me. My body and brain shift from relaxed to tense. I immediately clock that they're big in stature, they're around my age, maybe early thirties, headphones looped around their necks as they're chatting animatedly. The pavement is wide and they don't seem to be paying me any attention. I feel myself relax. Just as they're passing me, one of them looks at me and says 'Oh my God, you're beautiful' and licks his lips, searing his eyes into me. My mind jolts. Usually, I'd ignore this, particularly given the setting – it might be a pleasant street, but its dark and isolated, and the fact that in the grand scheme of unwanted sexual attention, this was paltry in scale, non-physical, not even aggressive, *almost* passable as an unthreatening 'compliment'. Yet after months of hearing women's stories of this kind of unwanted attention from men, my anger and resentment bubbles to the surface, dances on my tongue and slips from under the

veneer of nonchalance, contorting my face into a sharp frown. I say nothing, but this look is enough to dramatically shift the gears in this interaction. Their pace slows, and one of them loudly asserts 'What the fuck is that about? FUCK you, you should be saying thank you'. My heart vaults, and I turn, quickening my pace as I walk away, an ugly mix of anger and fear metastasising in my stomach.

I'm scared they'll follow me

> *I'm angry I didn't say anything or do more*

I'm scared there's no-one else around

> *I'm angry at their complete disregard for how their behaviour might make me feel*

I'm scared of violence

> *I'm angry at myself for putting myself at risk of violence*

It doesn't have to come close to the 'worst case scenario' to feel threatening, for violence to become easily conceivable, a mere 'wrong move' away. It is this parallel sequence of events that we are often in negotiation with. Laya, a participant in the research, summarised this succinctly:

> […] And you get that transition from oh hey, alright darling, and the moment you deny them what they want it turns into, fucking bitch, you should be thankful someone's looking at you. And that's the flipside to all these types of engagements, we all know it's not a compliment because fucking bitch is right at the back of it.

Like in organisational settings, experiences of sexual harassment in public spaces are widely underreported (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023). Again, the normalisation of these intrusions from men means they are trivialised, perceived as an expected and unavoidable part of everyday life, with many of these interactions being considered too minor to report (Mellgren et al., 2018). Low levels of reporting are exacerbated by women's perception that they would not be taken seriously by the police (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014), may be met with victim blaming and inaction (Boutros, 2018), and the awareness of ineffective legal frameworks to reprimand offenders, thus rendering the reporting process both hostile and futile. As a semi-public space, sexual harassment in transport has many similarities to street harassment in how it is perpetrated and experienced. However, the unique spatial, temporal and social nature of public transport accounts for the specific ways in which sexual harassment manifests and is negotiated within this environment.

Sexual Harassment on Public Transport

Situated in a broader gendered critique of urban space (Matrix, 2022), early feminist work focussed on highlighting how transport systems were structured to serve men's everyday requirements. Simultaneously, they emphasised that women often have vastly different travel needs than men (Little, 1994) and as such, the 'gender blind' nature of transport acted to curtail women's access and freedom and excluded them from public spaces. On top of this, they raised awareness of the fear of sexual violence that many women experience when using public transport. Since then, research has continued to show that vulnerable groups, including women, often perceive transport as a space of vulnerability, rather than safety (Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink, 2009). Subsequently, gender has been recognised by transport authorities to impact on travel and has been considered in the designing and implementation of policy. The prevalence of sexual harassment in public transport remains an increasing concern for authorities and I explore this specifically in relation to the London Underground below.

There is a growing body of work uncovering various facets of the phenomenon of unwanted sexual attention in transport, including: the fear of sexual harassment and assault (Carver & Veitch, 2020); the frequency and nature of sexual harassment in transit (Ison et al., 2023; Loukaitou-Sideris & Ceccato, 2020); the phenomenon of underreporting (Solymosi et al., 2017), the impact of sexual harassment on women's future travel (Koskela, 1999) and media reporting of the issue (Mowri & Bailey, 2023). There has also been a growth in work that identifies the harassing behaviours that are prevalent in a transport environment (Valan, 2020). This research has shown that the spaces of public transport are exploited in numerous ways, at varying times of day. One of the most investigated times (both academically and by authorities) is the commuter 'rush hours', congruent with the 9 to 5 working day, where bodies are densely packed together in small spaces. The sort of behaviours that are regularly reported to occur during these times include frotteurism (rubbing the pelvic area or erect penis against a non-consenting person for sexual pleasure) and unwanted sexual touching (Shoukry et al., 2008). In Japan, this widespread groping on carriages is termed 'chikan' (Horii & Burgess, 2012). Chowdhury (2023) discusses this in the context of Tokyo and describes the 'sexual politics of commuter crowds', considering how sexual violence in mass transit environments produces everyday knowledge about the nature of shared mobility. It becomes clear that there is an exploitation of the social dynamics of the space: the overcrowded nature of transport at peak times permits bodily contact and the perpetration of sexual harassment in a particular, embodied way (Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014). The necessary proximity to others is exploited in a similar way to the perpetration of sexual assault in crowds at festivals or in a night club (Bows et al., 2024). However, there is more at play here than propinquity, as there are discerning differences in the social atmospheres and norms of these spaces. Festival and night-time economy environs are often socially lubricated with alcohol, drugs and the desire for spontaneous interaction – in these spaces this is also exploited in conjunction with close physical contact (Kavanaugh, 2013). On public transport, despite the 'public' nature of the space, they are commonly

highly individualistic and insular, with interactions minimal and sterile, often there in order for the mass of commuters to be able to cope with the urban stimuli and proximity. As previously discussed, this is immediately discernible on the London Underground. In these spaces, it is the apathy, deference or civil inattention (Goffman, 1963) that is exploited, as offenders depend on these hostile social norms to keep victims and bystanders uncertain and silent. Exemptions to this in London could be the late night or 'night Tubes' that often shuttle partygoers across the city. Here, 'romanticised' sexual harassment is rife in the form of strong come-ons and unwanted, persistent 'flirtation' that is often forced to be temporarily endured due to the trapped nature of the carriage moving between stations.

The picture is quite different when looking at 'off peak' travel times, particularly night travel, or more isolated rural settings. It is perhaps these time-spaces that occupy a place in women's psyche as to where more physical sexual violence might occur and where fear lingers heavily in the space between you and the only other person on the carriage. The uneasiness that, hung suspended in the air, jolts suddenly when the man catches your eye and tries to hold your gaze for a moment too long. Again, in these situations, the worst is anticipated and seems plausible. These imaginings are largely facilitated by the isolated space of the transport environment and solidified by the epistemological understanding of the risk of gendered stranger violence. Indeed, it is in these settings that 'more extreme' violent sexual assaults and rape more commonly occur (Ding et al., 2020). As well as these incidents of violence, quiet and solitary spaces of transport often host incidents of flashing and masturbation (UK Parliament, 2018). Of course, some of these behaviours leak across expected time-space dynamics. Behaviours that especially transgress these time categorisations include lewd, sexualised comments, sexual invitations, leering and stalking. Smith and Clarke (2000) consider that other elements of the environment that impact the prevalence of these behaviours include poor surveillance and supervision, and a lack of patrolling on public transport. It is also important to mention the rise of technologically mediated harassment on public transport, the rise of which is congruent to its occurrence in other social spaces (Henry et al., 2020; Salerno-Ferraro et al., 2022). This can be in the form of watching pornography publicly, air dropping offensive or sexual images, up-skirting and other forms of photographing or filming without consent.

Sexual Harassment on the London Underground

Throughout this book, I draw on women's anecdotal, perceptual and experiential understandings of the space of the London Underground. Alongside my own fieldnote excerpts from observations of the space, it is through a tapestry of these descriptions and stories that the 'research environment' will be depicted. As little has been written about sexual harassment on the London Underground (hence the writing of this book) I will briefly overview the work that does exist and then move on to explore how the governing bodies of the London Underground (primarily TfL and BTP) understand sexual harassment, how they have tried to combat it, and what we can learn from their campaigns.

As signalled above, the majority of studies looking at sexual harassment on public transport have been conducted in the global South (see Horii & Burgess, 2012; Lim, 2002; Marcela Quinones, 2020; Mowri & Bailey, 2023; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014; Shoukry et al., 2008). Ding et al. (2020) offer a review of the existing research that looks at the global North, yet these are predominantly focussed on Australia, the USA and Scandinavia. There remains very little written on sexual harassment in UK transport (with the exception of Gekoski et al., 2015 and Solymosi & Newton, 2020) and even less focussing on the London Underground specifically. That which does exist mirrors broader trends in research of sexual harassment, with a focus on understanding prevalence and underreporting (Gekoski et al., 2015). Solymosi et al. (2017) provide a realist evaluation of the effects of the Report It to Stop It (RITSI) campaign (detailed below) on victims' willingness to report unwanted sexual behaviour on the Tube. They found that the 2015 media campaign raised awareness and led to 'waves' of increased reporting. They also signified that the campaign did not increase passengers fear of crime and highlighted the importance of context in motivating reporting behaviour change. In her Ph.D. work, Shola Apena Rogers focusses on offender behaviours and motivations when committing sexual offences on London trains. Interviewing fifteen proactive police officers, five convicted offenders and analysing case records and offender data, she identifies 'the desire to achieve a thrill' and the perception of London transport being an easy place to get away with it, as key motivators for offenders. She also highlights the police's pro-active 'hunting process' for sexual offences. I have explored elsewhere how sexual harassment is policed on the Underground (Lewis, 2023). Focussing on how the BTP pro-actively and reactively manage incidents of unwanted sexual attention, I show how their knowledge of the issue is constructed through a coalition of organisational police culture and technologies. Significantly, the rhythms and sociabilities of the network were implicit in how BTP sought out and located offenders.

Above I discussed the organisational theory of sexual harassment, which focusses on organisational culture and power dynamics to understand incidents of sexual harassment. Whilst this approach is commonly operationalised to understand inter-organisational dynamics of sexual harassment, it is also useful here. As a public−private, or semi-public space, the social behaviours that occur within the London Underground system, are in part, regulated and mitigated by its governing bodies. For a broader context and a deeper understanding of the often-invisible management of the space, I will overview how key stakeholders have given attention to and attempted to curtail sexual harassment on the network through public awareness campaigns. These campaigns have the potential to impact on the perpetration, experience of and reaction to sexual harassment within these spaces.

TfL is the integrated body responsible for the majority of the city's transport system and is one of the largest transport operators in the world. Over the last decade or so TfL has put significant effort into understanding and responding to women's transport needs (Loukaitou-Sideris & Fink, 2009). In 2004, TfL initiated its first *Women's Action Plan for London* entitled 'Expanding Horizons', prompted by the recognition of the differing demands and issues of men and

women using the network. Herbel and Gaines (2009, p. 113) described this as 'arguably the most comprehensive effort by a transport operator to respond to the needs of women riders'. This included increasing the percentage of women participating in TfL's labour force; a significant increase in CCTV surveillance; and an inclusion of women's voices in the planning process. In 2014, the TfL Safety and Security annual report revealed that one in ten Londoners experienced 'unwanted sexual behaviour' on public transport, but over 90% of those did not report it to authorities (SPA Future Thinking, 2014). Prompting the need to tackle both the prevalence of sexual harassment and the issue of underreporting, this led to the creation of Project Guardian and its inclusive and successive campaigns that have been implemented on the London Transport Network by TfL and the BTP, alongside other stakeholders, over the last decade.

At its inception, Project Guardian was one of the most comprehensive, multi-method programmes in the world aimed at reducing sexual harassment on public transport (Gekoski et al., 2015). The project pledged to take all reports seriously, to identify perpetrators and held the overall aim of reducing all sexual crime on the trains, Tubes and buses. Project Guardian incorporated a variety of initiatives including: the targeting of 'hotspots', action weeks of officers talking to the public, training packages for BTP and Metropolitan Police officers, community engagement and social media and advertising campaigns (Gekoski et al., 2015). It also trained 2,000 police officers and police community support officers to deal with cases of sexual harassment, who were dedicated to patrol the transport network. Under the umbrella of Project Guardian, there are two key interventions that are particularly important to consider. Report it to Stop it, also know as RITSI, was a 2015 publicity campaign led by TfL and supported by BTP. The campaign was deemed a success in raising public awareness and increasing the reporting of incidents (Solymosi et al., 2017). Launched by TfL, BTP, Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police in March 2017, Every Report Builds a Picture was the second campaign targeted at encouraging women to come forward and report unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport. It emphasised how reports can be collated in order to identify, arrest and prosecute repeat offenders. It is within the context of these campaigns that the research for this book took place. Since then, there have been numerous successive campaigns focussing on different areas of the issue. In 2022, a campaign was launched that highlighted less explicit behaviours such as 'staring', 'pressing', 'cyber flashing', 'exposing', 'upskirting' and 'catcalling'. The campaign was highly visible, with posters displayed in stations, platforms and carriages (both on the Tube and trains and stations around the country) and received significant media attention. Another campaign was launched in early 2023 that focussed on creating an 'active bystander' culture to support victims and lead to an increase in reporting. Launched by TfL in partnership with Rail Delivery Group, BTP, Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police, it offered advice on how passengers can look out for each other and safely intervene when witnessing incidents of sexual harassment. In February 2024, a new campaign was launched called 'Your Piece of the Puzzle'. The aim of the campaign is to show the importance of reporting. It uses the real words of victims to show how the information they came forward with led to a serial sex offender being

apprehended. Through this campaign, BTP is sharing with the public that they hold extensive knowledge of offences, and that this knowledge is, in part, built from victim reports. They also focus on the fact that many perpetrators commit multiple offences and that multiple reports help to connect the dots and identify repeat offenders (Lewis, 2023).

This chapter has traced how sexual harassment is understood, manifests and is experienced across different contexts. It is vital that sexual harassment on the London Underground is situated in this broader web of established and normalised gender-based violence. This contextualises incidents of sexual harassment on the Underground, showing they are not isolated, but are perpetrated as part of the continuum of various forms of actual and feared violence across time and space. This chapter has followed the developments that show growing academic attention towards sexual harassment in public transport environments. However, I hope I have also demonstrated the need for innovative inquiry and the benefit of qualitative approaches that prioritise women's nuanced and multifaceted stories, and the importance of the development and application of new conceptual frameworks in order to tease out the intricacies of these experiences and expand our knowledge and understanding. The following chapter connects sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence to a mobilities framework to make sense of women's stories that are presented in subsequent chapters.