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Article:
Hill, RL, Hesmondhalgh, D and Megson, M (2020) Sexual violence at live music events: Experiences, responses and prevention. International Journal of Cultural Studies, 23 (3). pp. 368-384. ISSN: 1367-8779

https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877919891730

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To appear in *International Journal of Cultural Studies.* Accepted 8th November 2019.

Authors' final approved manuscript, as submitted to journal.

Sexual Violence at Live Music Events: Experiences, Responses and Prevention

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Abstract

Recent media reporting has highlighted that incidents of sexual violence frequently occur at live music events. Sexual violence has significant impacts on the health of those who experience it, yet little is known of how it impacts on everyday engagements with music, nor what measures venues and promoters might take to prevent and respond to incidents. Through interviews with concert goers, venue managers, promoters and campaigning groups, we investigated experiences of sexual violence at indie, rock, punk and funk gigs in small venues in one English city. We show that sexual violence at live music events significantly impacts on (predominantly) women's musical participation. We argue that venues and promoters must work proactively to create musical communities that act as a defence against the normalisation of sexual violence, taking inspiration from safe space policies.

Keywords

Gender, live music, prevention, safe spaces, sexual violence, unwanted sexual attention

Introduction: sexual violence in public places

Recent media reporting (e.g. O'Connor, 2017; Sanghani, 2015; White, 2017) has highlighted that incidents of sexual violence frequently occur at live music events.. A recent 'UK Live Music Census' found that only a third of music venues have policies in place to counter such behaviour (Webster et al., 2018). Sexual violence has significant impacts on the physical and mental health of those who experience it (Itzin et al., 2010), yet we know little of how it impacts on everyday engagements with music, nor what measures venues and promoters might take to prevent and respond to incidents. To correct this, our article draws on a small research project conducted with two industry partners [NAMES]. The project investigated incidents and experiences of sexual violence at indie, rock, punk and funk music gigs in small venues in one English city, the different responses of venues to such incidents, and what might be done to improve responses. We show that sexual violence at live music events significantly impacts on musical participation for those that suffer it (predominantly women) and that this is an equality issue. We argue that venues and promoters must work proactively to create musical communities that act as a defence against the normalisation of sexual violence by

acknowledging the problem and developing policies and procedures to counter it. We begin with a consideration of existing research on sexual violence in public spaces, including at musical events, and we summarise our methodology. We then turn to analysis of the experiences of sexual violence at gigs in the city before outlining the value of trust and community building. Finally we consider how safe space policies can provide an inspirational basis for venues to take action so that audience members can feel free to enjoy immersion in the music they have paid to listen to.

Kelly has defined sexual violence as:

> any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact (1988: 41)

Kelly's definition emphasises the everyday experiences of sexual violence which are, in Fiona Vera-Gray's (2017) term, 'intrusive' and impede women's ability to act freely in the world. Vera-Gray's theorisation of men's intrusions depicts incidents of sexual violence as pulling women out of themselves, taking women out of the flow of their own thoughts.She argues that when men intrude, women are pulled from their engrossment in what they are doing or thinking. When we are engrossed, whether in music or other activities, we lose consciousness of our own selves, in a way that is often experienced as valuable and life-enhancing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Intrusions make us aware of our bodily selves through body image and the body's vulnerability. For women this includes a '"fear of rape"' (Vera-Gray, 2017: 89) or an awareness of the potential of rape.

When it comes to attending a live music event, many people enjoy being engrossed in the live performance of music. In their investigation into how people value live music, Behr et al. (2016) found that '[a]cross the board, participants attach a value to becoming immersed in the live music event' (Behr et al., 2016: p.411). This was through 'inward participation' of feelings of transcendence, relating to either immersion in music, or a sense of belonging within the crowd. When one's attention to and engrossment in music are disturbed by sexual violence, then this clearly has an impact on the well-being of those who suffer it. Meanwhile, the second kind of

immersion that Behr et al. highlight, a feeling of being part of the crowd, is likewise put to the test when incidents of sexual violence occur, or are feared. Fileborn (2016; drawing on Noble, 2005) argues that the discomfort resulting from unwanted sexual attention means that people feel unwelcome in the space, that they do not belong. Sexual violence, then, has the effect of disrupting feelings of community and belonging.

Definitions of sexual violence need to take full account of the experiences and reflections of victims/survivors. Kelly highlights that self-identified women are most likely to suffer sexual violence. Of course, not all of those who suffer sexual violence are female: men, trans and non-binary people also suffer. Building on Kelly's definition, Fileborn (2016) in her research on Melbourne pubs and clubs, uses the term 'unwanted sexual attention' to include a broad range of behaviour and experiences, to include 'everyday' acts and behaviour, such as staring and comments, that cause feelings of (sexual) degradation, while Kavanaugh (2013) uses the term 'sexual victimization'. The broad definitions permitted by such terms are useful for understanding problems concerning live music events, as we discuss below.

Research on urban nightlife has uncovered 'a cultural atmosphere surrounding nightlife where instances of unwanted sexual contact such as touching, groping, and other aggressive attempts at coercion, as well as verbal harassment, are normalized' (Kavanaugh, 2013: 21; see, for example, Phipps and Young, 2015; Fileborn, 2016). Evidence from studies into sexual violence in night time leisure settings such as clubs, bars and pubs, show that sexual harassment is a frequent experience for Australian women (Fileborn, 2016), and 90% of incidents of unwanted sexual advances towards women in Canadian bars are from men (Graham et al., 2014). Indeed, 'unwanted sexual attention' (to use Fileborn's term) is so persistent an experience for women that it is expected (Graham et al., 2014) and is seen as normal in United States EDM clubs (Kavanaugh, 2013). Drugs and alcohol play a part in the prevalence of sexual assault: men prey on drunk women (Fileborn, 2016; Graham et al., 2014) and purposefully seek to intoxicate them in order to reduce their resistant capabilities, then use their own intoxication to argue for diminished responsibility (Fileborn, 2016; Hutton, 2006). Graham et al. (2014) describe this as 'not blurred lines, but an excuse for sexual aggression' (p.1422). Grazian (2007) argues that men use 'the girl hunt' on nights out as part of performing their masculinity to other men and for

homosocial bonding. In the process, however, they dehumanise and objectify women, ignoring their sexual agency. Meanwhile safety campaigns to prevent sexual violence at night tend to be aimed at women's preventative actions rather than men's perpetration, thus inadvertently contributing to the normalisation of men's violent behaviour (Brooks, 2011). The built environment of night time leisure venues significantly impacts on feelings of safety, for example long dark corridors to toilets are often experienced as intimidating by women (Fileborn, 2016). And whilst sexual violence can take place in any venue, bars, pubs and clubs have typically been slow to react to promote safety from sexual aggressors (Fileborn, 2016).

Music venues share a number of features in common with pubs, clubs and bars, and indeed many live music events take place in such venues. Our project focused on venues whose primary focus was music, but all sold alcohol, and live music events took place in the evening (typically from 8pm until 11pm in the UK). Yet there are key differences in thinking about live music events as opposed to bars, clubs and pubs: going to a gig means that the evening has a focus other than drinking alcohol, meeting friends or meeting potential sexual partners (which are often understood to be foci of pubs and bars). Potential reasons may be to listen and see to favourite musicians, to hear new music, to meet friends or be part of a community of like-minded music lovers, to dance. The evening is usually segmented by the presence of the musicians on stage so that the evening may involve periods of intense interest in the performance so that the audience members' attention is focused on the stage rather than each other, interspersed with socialising and getting drinks during breaks. Thus the gig crosses the boundary of nightlife and cultural event. In addition, particularly in rock music culture, live music events form part of the masculinist ideology of the genre so that songs may include portrayals of sexual violence (Savigny et al., under review). Furthermore some male musicians may objectify female audience members from the stage (for example calling for women to show their breasts or indicating to security staff which women they want taken backstage). Thus going to a live music event may mean direct interaction with dangerous misogyny. In their work on Australian music festivals, Fileborn et al. (2019a) drawing on Gavey (2005), describe this musical context as the 'cultural scaffolding of rape'.

Yet there is little existing research that examines sexual violence at live music events, its impacts on concert goers, or what venues and promoters are doing to prevent or respond to it. In researching sexual violence at Australian music festivals, Fileborn et al. (2019b) find that festival organisers are not doing a good job of preventing or responding to incidents. The report identifies that men at festivals are predatory and opportunistic, using the closeness of crowds to grope whilst other men egg them on. The impacts on women are numerous:

> "• Hyper-vigilance and concern for safety at festivals
> • Limiting which festivals they attended
> • Altering their dress or behaviour at festivals
> • Changing use of festival space (e.g., no longer going in the moshpit)
> • Consuming less or no alcohol or other drugs
> • Anger
> • Shock
> • Anxiety
> • Decreased tolerance of harassment and anti-social behaviour
> • Increased willingness to act as a bystander
> • Loss of trust – particularly of men and security guards" (p.26)

Sexual violence does appear occasionally in feminist work on popular music, but often this is briefly mentioned as part of a broader scoping of gender inequality in music scenes (e.g. Leblanc, 1999; Leonard, 2007; Riches et al., 2014). Some authors have provided insights into misogyny within certain musical cultures (e.g. Reynolds and Press, 1996; Hill, 2016; Leonard, 2007), while some have focused on the kinds of sexism endured by female musicians (e.g. Reddington, 2007) or have more generally shown the links between music and violence (Johnson and Cloonan, 2009).

This lack of attention to sexual violence at gigs is surprising and unfortunate. Within particular cities and regions, musical production and consumption in particular music genres become focused on sets of institutions, for example record shops, live venues, and educational establishments. Successful city and/or regional musical 'infrastructures' are an important basis for pleasurable and rewarding experiences of musical creativity, and can also contribute to

economic regeneration (though this latter aspect has sometimes been stressed at the expense of the former) (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 125-7). Failures on the part of venues to address problems of sexual violence are therefore likely to have a profound effect on the character of live music experience within a particular city. What's more, the widely acknowledged benefits of participation in music (see, for example, Pitts, 2005) may be denied to women in such circumstances, if they feel compelled to withdraw from musical public spaces. More broadly, studies show that sexual violence has complex but overwhelmingly negative health impacts (Itzin et al., 2010). Countering, reducing and eliminating sexual violence are of course important goals in themselves. Using Simone de Beauvoir's (2009 [1949]) concept of embodied freedom, Vera-Gray (2017) argues that as well as the health harms of sexual violence, we should also pay attention to the important principle of freedom to enact agency. In the context of music, this would mean that everyone should be able to go to concerts without fear of being touched without permission or mentally preparing for such incidents, by changing behaviour (e.g. choosing trousers over skirts or avoiding the front of the stage). Sexual violence significantly limits people's freedom to enjoy music, especially that of women.

The project we report on here was a collaboration between three academic researchers, and two partner organisations involved in music making in the city (one runs a venue and the other puts on gigs) and in campaigns aimed at developing greater degrees of participation and equality in the musical spaces of the city concerned. It was led by Hill. The project had four main aims: to analyse experiences of sexual violence within the city's small venue music scene; to investigate responses and policies on the part of venues and promoters; to analyse barriers to reporting; and to make recommendations for better responses and policies.

Methodology

We aimed to gauge the ecology of the music scene in the city through in depth qualitative research which examined sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs, from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders. The research was based on four sets of empirical data, as follows. We interviewed seven concert-goers about their experiences of sexual violence at gigs in the city (anonymised below as 'Oona', 'Teresa' etc.), comprising the following demographics: five identified as female, one female/non-binary, one male; ages ranged from 21-43 with a mean of

30, four identified as heterosexual, two as bisexual and one as pansexual. Fileborn (2016) notes that unwanted sexual attention for LGBT people is often cut through with homophobia and/or transphobia, and this raises the issue of the value of safe spaces for these groups. Two of our participants identified as bisexual and one as pansexual. The experiences they told us about had happened at events that were not specifically aimed at LGBTQ people, although the bisexual man made reference to incidents that had occurred on Pride marches and at a gay nightclub (we did not discuss these since they were beyond the remit of the project). Five named themselves as middle class in some way, one as working class and one as 'bohemian'. We interviewed three promoters in the city (two women and one man) and three people managing venues (two men and one transman). We selected promoters and venues to approach, on the basis that they would provide a range of ideas about how to put on gigs in the city and some diversity of clientele. All were small venues independent of the larger corporate venues in the city. We also spoke to three organisations working to make gigs safer for women (Good Night Out, Girls Against Gig Groping and White Ribbon Safe Music Campaign). All concert goers identified as white, and venue managers and promoters were identified by the researchers as possibly white (no self-identification question was asked). In our continuing research we are seeking to work with participants of greater ethnic diversity, but here we note the limitation, in part introduced through an emphasis on indie, punk, rock and DIY music. Finally Hill and Megson undertook ethnographic observation in three small venues in the city. We paid particular attention to what was happening in the audience, in different parts of the auditorium and what kind of atmosphere the venue had. As two women, we spent parts of the evening separate from one another (looking like lone women) and parts together. The amount of time spent together and apart depended on our feelings of safety in the venues. In order to gain a rich understanding of the subject, in depth qualitative interviews necessitated a small sample size. The aim was to provide a 'snapshot' of the city's musical life at the independent venues and grassroots level. Data was analysed thematically using a grounded theory approach, with the following themes emerging: short and longer term impacts on concert goers; enabling factors and barriers to reporting; promoters and venue managers' responses to incidents.

Our concert goer participants answered a call for those who had experienced 'unwanted touching and sexual harassment' or 'sexual harassment or violence' at gigs and concerts in the city (although some of the events which were recounted to us had not happened in the city where the research was conducted). Some came to us via the social media accounts of the project and the project partners, and some via their acquaintance with the research group – one of the benefits of the researchers' collaboration with the industry partners was greater access to industry and audiences. Some participants told us that they had taken part in order to benefit others who had suffered sexual violence at live music events. Taking part in research about sexual violence can be beneficial for participants, because it can potentially provide them with a feeling of being heard. This could be particularly valuable if feelings were not validated at the time of the original assault or harassment. Our methodological choice means that those who answered the call typically had experiences that they thought of as 'serious enough' and in a number of cases the psychological impacts persisted. We also hoped to speak to perpetrators, but none came forward, and this indicates an area in which future research could be fruitful.

In the UK, small venues play an important part in the nation's musical life: the UK Live Music Census (Webster et al., 2018) found that 78% of the audience members they surveyed had attended a small venue (defined as under 350 capacity) for live music in the past year. For musicians small venues are key, offering an environment in which new talent can be nurtured and providing the 'bread and butter' (Webster et al., 2018: 50) of most musicians' working lives. However, small venues face a range of obstacles including declining audiences, competition between venues and promoters, restrictions around loading and parking, and pressures and conflict due to an increase in city centre apartments (Webster et al., 2018). Thus the environment for small venues is a challenging one, but their continued existence would seem to be crucial for the UK music industry more broadly. Understanding how sexual violence fits into this environment is therefore an urgent need. Live music festivals in the UK are proliferating and increasingly popular to mainstream audiences. A recent YouGov poll found that 30% of women had experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention at festivals, marking such events out as in need of further research (BBC News, 2018). Such research was beyond the

scope of this study as festivals present a specific environment with marked differences to live music events in small venues.

Sexual violence at gigs

From concert goers, venue managers, promoters and campaigners, we heard of a range of incidents that fall under a broad definition of sexual violence. One concert-goer estimated that at a quarter of gigs she had experienced groping (Thora), whilst another referred to a 'laundry list' of sexual harassment (Sinead). We heard from a woman who had experienced a man suddenly and without any prior contact putting his hand down her trousers. Another women felt a man place his penis in her hand. We heard from a man who was repeatedly groped through his clothes on the genitals by a woman who would not take no for an answer. We heard from women whose roles as musicians had been exploited by male listeners who tried to touch or kiss them whilst on stage or during meet and greets. We heard from women who had been groped on their buttocks and breasts on numerous occasions. Such incidents take place within a broader live music context of everyday sexism that our participants described to us: of bands singing objectifying or sexually violent lyrics (Venue 1, Campaigner 1); of men in bands perpetrating violence against fans (Fran); of drink spiking (Venue 2); of arguments between women and men over the use of space (Venue 2). During our observations we also witnessed men acting in controlling ways such as holding a female partner back from dancing nearer the stage; we overheard a seemingly un-ironic comment from a man to a woman about her enjoying herself too much; and Fran, a musician, reported comments made about her stage costume and performance being too sexual.

We now use one particular account in order to analyse what such incidents mean for (predominantly) female gig goers. Oona related an incident at a rock concert in the city when she was 14:

> I was in the pit and I was right at the front. […] I was stood next to a guy who was very blatantly extremely drunk. And drunk men make me nervous so I was already on my guard. And he started dancing. […] [I was] trying to make sure he was okay […] [S]ometimes when you get shit faced you're a little bit like … and especially if you're in

> a gig as well, I've had so many panic attacks at gigs just because it can be overwhelming having everyone around you and everyone's shouting and stuff. […] I started dancing, not with him but just dancing in general, knowing he was watching me, to show that it was okay, that everything is fine. […] And he took that as, 'I've got her now! So I've got her attention. She's submitted herself to me', kind of thing. So it literally went from two people separately doing their own thing to him just coming over, putting his hand down [the front of] my trousers. […] In a second it just went from those two environments to him just completely doing that. And I was shocked to say the least.

Oona then punched the man on the nose and he left the immediate area.

Oona's account of the incident shows her to be very conscious of the feelings and intentions of the man in question. She was already 'on her guard' yet also empathising with him, drawing on her own experiences of crowds and panic attacks. However, her empathetic projection was revealed by his actions to be a misunderstanding of his intentions. Oona's account describes how the man's intrusion pulled her outside of herself and distracted from the music even as she was dancing and in a prime spot at the gig, before the violent incident.

Oona's experience of losing focus on the music is important and common, as Sinead also said, 'At the very least [experiencing unwanted sexual attention] is distracting'. And more than distracting. For Teresa, a man escalating his unwanted stroking from her arm to her breast, apologising and claiming it to be accidental each time, 'ruined' the show she was attending. She was unable to enjoy it because even when she was dancing she was vigilant as to where the man was, and aware that the stroking would start up again as soon as she returned to her seat. Oona was in a prime spot in front of the stage when the man assaulted her. She left the auditorium to recover in the toilets. When she returned she moved to the back, away from the stage and with the resultant poorer view. Thora, who had experienced groping at a quarter of the gigs she attended, sometimes drank more to cope with what was happening and sometimes she left the venue altogether. Our interviewees felt anger at not being able to enjoy something they had paid for (Teresa, Thora); some felt that what had happened was

‘dehumanising’ or ‘objectifying’ (Oona, Fran) and Fran felt unable to control her personal space. In the moment people felt emotions including fear (Thora), powerlessness and loss of dignity (Felix), anger (Oona, Teresa, Thora, Fran), shock (Oona), annoyance and irritation (Fran). Some reacted violently, for example by punching the perpetrator in the face (Oona, Thora, Fran).

Such incidents act as the kinds of intrusions discussed by Vera-Gray and others, as noted in the Introduction, preventing the kinds of pleasurable and life-enhancingly immersive experiences afforded by live music (Behr et al., 2016). Sexual violence therefore works to change the demographic constitution of the space, making women feel unwelcome. Fileborn (2016) found that incidents had the result that some people stopped going to clubs and pubs because they were so fed up with the unwanted sexual attention or because they had had very bad experiences. Similarly our participants told us of avoiding particular venues where things had happened to them (Thora) or where they knew of things happening to others (Sinead). People stopped going to gigs alone (Felix). Thora just about stopped going to gigs altogether: she had seen just two bands in three years, when previously she had seen a band every week. She described the panic attacks and claustrophobia that resulted from an accumulation of incidents:

> [W]henever I started going to gigs I felt very uneasy. I felt like I had to constantly look over my shoulder. And I started having panic attacks, suffering from claustrophobia. Like I struggle with getting on busy trains and public transport. And it’s really affected the way I live my life. (Thora)

In a separate incident, Oona (a musician) was packing up after her first solo gig when a man walked up to her and kissed her on the mouth. She ‘was so shook up for ages and I was certain I wasn't going to do another gig’ (Oona). There is a real risk, then, that sexual violence can impede women’s music-making as well as their attendance at live music events.

The incidents therefore had an impact on our participants’ ability to enjoy music, to feel its immersive, transcendent and community forming values and to participate in musical life. The longer term impacts show that for some participants it meant losing out on the experience of live music altogether. This is an equality issue, since in most incidents the perpetrators are men

and those on the receiving end are women. This raises questions of how some men may be using groping, harassment and violence to maintain the male dominance of the gig space. The use of sexual violence to maintain power has long been acknowledged by feminist theorists (Radford et al., 1996) and by riot grrrl analyses which led to the practical application of ejecting abusive men from gigs (Downes, 2012). In Northern Ireland's straight edge scene, cries of 'no clit in the pit' and the sexual assault and rape of women who *do* enter the moshpit are how some young men police who enters the space and what is acceptable behaviour for women (Stewart, 2018). Similarly Helen Reddington (2011) argues that in the late 1970s UK punk scene, some men used rape to punish female musicians for daring to get on the stage. Teresa interpreted the motivations of the man who escalated his 'accidental' touching to stroking her breast, as making a claim about his masculinity in front of the male performer, by whom his wife was entranced. She said:

> 'This wasn't directed at me, it didn't feel that way at all. I felt that it was directed at the performer, not me, and possibly the wife [laughs] to a certain extent or to a large extent actually' (Teresa)

This mirrored our observation of a man at one of the city's venues, in which he constantly fondled, stroked and moved his body against the woman he was with. Whilst this was apparently consensual, at one point he held her back from approaching the front of the stage as she became more enthusiastic about the music. In these incidents we argue men use sexual touching and sexual violence to assert their own masculinities and their relationships with women when challenged by women's attention towards male performers. Our participant Sinead described this kind of violence as 'sexist violence', which highlights that the violence is not sexually motivated, but is about sexual control of women and musical control, since it impeded their ability to participate fully in the gig.

So what can music lovers, venue managers and promoters do to create an environment which is free(er) from sexual violence and that promotes more equal participation between men and women?

What can be done?

Whilst the immediate responsibility for sexual violence lies in the hands of the perpetrator, it is the responsibility of everyone to work towards the broader shift away from a culture of male entitlement to female and gender diverse bodies. Venues and promoters are uniquely placed to take a role preventing and responding to incidents of sexual violence within live music culture. A dual approach to sexual violence at gigs is needed: one that is focused on that culture change and ensuring that those who are likely to commit violence know that it is unacceptable – i.e. a preventative approach; and one that is directed towards dealing with incidents when they occur. Concert goers' feelings about venues are an important factor in determining their enjoyment (Pitts and Spencer, 2008), i.e. it is not *just* about the music. Venues and promoters must take into account how they manage the audience's interactions with one another. Fileborn (2016) argues that the sense of community that exists between a venue and its clientele influences people's feelings of safety. Our interviewees told us of venues where they had had bad experiences, or where they knew others to have been harassed or assaulted. These venues were afterwards entered with trepidation or avoided altogether. In our interviews with venue staff and promoters, cis male venue managers and promoters reported shock and surprise when an incident occurred (Venue 2, Venue 3, Promoter 2). For Promoter 2, the incident was an eye opener which led him to reflect on his more privileged position amongst concert goers:

> I'm conscious that I'm a white man so I'm not on the receiving end of this sort of activity. But yeah if I'm honest I was just a bit surprised. I wasn't expecting to have to deal with this. (Promoter 2)

The majority of venues and promotion groups in the city are run by cis white men and, as Promoter 2's comments show, this group may not have personally experienced sexual harassment, violence or unwanted touching. Moreover, we would suggest that until recently the issue has been taken as a normal hazard of gig going for women and therefore not openly discussed. The momentum of #metoo has meant that many women, men and gender diverse people have felt able to share their experiences after years of silence. Thus cis male venue staff

and promoters may not have had sexual violence at gigs on their 'radar' as a problem, or they may have misunderstood what 'counts' as sexual violence.

Our participants provided evidence of a significant reduction in trust in venues when things were handled inadequately (Oona). Even rumours of incidents and their mishandling impacted on trust, with Thora arguing that venue managers 'turn a blind eye' to sexual violence in their premises. Furthermore, some participants said they would not go to venues where they knew the management to be supportive of known harassers. Sinead said she had not gone to gigs at one particular venue in the city because she had heard that it was not a very safe place. Participants also told us of their disappointment with responses from security and venue staff, promoters and bands: security staff shrugged their shoulders and took no further action (Oona, Thora, Felix) or told them that such incidents should be expected in crowds of this size (Felix, Oona, Thora); the promoter and band said they would make social media statements but then didn't (Oona); sometimes it was the security staff themselves conducting the harassment (Promoter 3). Teresa expressed how she imagined venue staff to hold onto ideas about sexual violence that could be categorised as 'rape myths', for example that women lie about being assaulted when statistics show false allegations to be very rare (Levitt and Crown Prosecution Service Equality and Diversity Unit, 2013). Again, this suspicion is not unjustified since rape myths are a common discourse through society.

All this leads to low trust in venue staff which is not conducive to a strong sense of community. Women, then, make choices about which gigs to go to depending on where the concert is being held. This means that potentially they may choose not to see a favourite artist because they feel at risk in a venue. The majority of promoters and venue staff we spoke to expressed a desire to do *something* about sexual harassment and violence at their gigs, but were unsure what. Only one venue had policies and procedures for staff, audience and band members to follow (which we will come to below). This means that there is a lack of *reactive* procedures as well as *proactive* policies. This lack caused problems for venues when an incident took them by surprise. For instance, the manager at venue 3 told us of an incident in which a man had groped a female musician's buttocks whilst she was packing away equipment. He and his staff 'didn't know how to react to it as well as we should have done' (Venue 3). Similarly Promoter 2 was

unsure how to respond to a separate incident. He felt that the perpetrator needed an opportunity to have his say and sought to investigate the issue, subsequently using social media to express that sexually violent behaviour was not welcome at their gigs – aiming for culture change. Venue 2 also had no policies or procedures in place and in the manager's response to three incidents in one night demonstrated prevalent discourses around sexual violence as a misunderstanding when he used the phrase 'someone's matter of fact or fiction versus each other'. This shows that culture change is not just a matter for concert goers, but that promoters and staff working throughout venues would benefit from training to address widespread rape myths and a lack of awareness of the ubiquity of sexual violence.

Improving policies, combating sexual violence: safe spaces policies

Our concert goer participants (two in particular) described a number of things that they felt promoters and venues could be doing to enable better experiences. Participants wanted a sense that the venue was looking out for them, caring about them. Participants desired a sense of community through a shared responsibility of the people in the venue (staff and audience) (Oona), something that Promoter 3 and Felix felt was already in existence in the hardcore punk scene. In particular, some participants wanted to see safe spaces policies drawn up, applied equally (Thora), enforced (Felix) and well publicised so that everyone knows what to expect (Promoter 1, Thora). They wanted there to be somebody in the venue that victims knew they could speak to and that they would be believed by them (Thora, Felix). They desired staff and bands to have positive attitudes and to set the tone of the event (Felix) and they wanted venues to have policies in place to deal with sexual violence, including staff training (Felix). They wanted to know that perpetrators would be removed from the building and that police would be called if desired (Thora). These are practical measures that venues and promoters could be taking, but which we discovered are not the norm amongst independent venues in the city. As noted at the start of this article, the UK Live Music Census (Webster et al., 2018) found that two thirds of venues have no policy on sexual harassment so venues that are taking action are currently unusual, despite the desires of people attending events.

That said, there are places in [CITY] that are already doing good work on preventing and dealing with sexual violence. Those places with safe spaces policies or agreements were singled out by

our participants as being good examples. This tells us that, although such policies may be still quite unusual, and although they have their critics (e.g. Promoter 3, Venue 2, as we discuss below), it is worth considering how such mechanisms for preventing and dealing with sexual harassment could be developed and made more widespread.

The idea of safe spaces was developed by radical feminists during the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s (Keenan and Darms, 2013). In that context it means a place to withdraw to, to organise and to train together. Lewis et al. (2015) posit that 'a defining feature of safe space is the "acceptance" of [the] personal nature of feminist politics' (Lewis et al., 2015: 7). The concept of safe spaces is therefore a fundamentally feminist one, which is grounded in the sense of men's presence as potentially inhibiting for women. The authors argue that women-only safe spaces not only provide freedom from misogyny, but also freedom for women to express ourselves cognitively, emotionally and to be 'fully human' (Lewis et al., 2015: 10). The authors argue that being safe *from* is only a starting point and that 'safety is one aspect of freedom, a necessary requirement for full personhood, but hardly an end in itself' (Lewis et al., 2015: 10). In the context of gigs, safety and freedom *from* sexual violence would be a pre-requisite for women to enjoy the immersive and communal experiences of live music.

One such venue we observed, and whose staff we spoke to, had a well-publicised safe spaces policy which was mentioned by some of our participants. The policy states that the safety of everyone in the venue is prioritised and it seeks to clarify what kind of behaviour is un/acceptable. It details the procedures that the venue will follow and declares that it is a work in progress, collaboratively reviewed with those coming to the venue. Underpinning the policy are both individuals' responsibility for their own behaviour, and collective responsibility to work together in the management of the venue. Core values are care and respect for others, listening to others' views and being willing to change. Audience members are encouraged to report any deviations from the policy and are assured that they will be taken seriously and the incident treated confidentially. In practical terms this means that three forms of unacceptable behaviour are outlined: violence and intimidation; prejudicial treatment; and harassment. Contravention of the policy may result in ejection or a ban from the premises and the possibility of police involvement. At the heart of the policy is an assertion of respectful engagement with other

audience (and staff and band) members. Belief of the victim/survivor underwrites the policy so that a zero tolerance attitude can be presented without undermining their claims. This fits in with evidence that false complaints are rare (Levitt and Crown Prosecution Service Equality and Diversity Unit, 2013), and with feminist arguments that believing the victim is the first step. It also links to the idea of the discursive continuum (Fileborn, 2016), in which sexual violence is defined discursively, and also to Vera-Gray's (2017) argument about intrusion, as evidenced by the manager of venue 1:

> One of my favourite clauses is the harassment one which is… it's quite hard to quantify when someone says, 'that guy won't leave me alone'. 'Cause it's not always as simple as 'that guy just grabbed me somewhere'. Sometimes someone's just latched on to you and won't leave you alone. Even just won't stop talking to you and your friend. And so in, I think the wording of it is, 'if somebody asks you to leave them alone or give them some space and you refuse to do so then that's a violation of the safer spaces policy' which yeah I find that really handy. (Venue 1)

As we found whilst undertaking ethnographic observation at the venue, it had a welcoming atmosphere and a fairly diverse clientele (especially in terms of LGBTQ). As two women standing alone for much of the evening, we were struck by the lack of attention from men. Safe spaces policies do not prevent sexual violence altogether, but they are likely to act as a preventative, perhaps in persuading people who may have a tendency to harass that they would not be welcome, and, as Fileborn (2016) notes, by increasing bystander intervention when an incident occurs. Such policies legitimate the experience of the harassed concert goer by believing them and providing a robust response. In enabling people to feel believed and respected this provides an atmosphere that is friendlier to women and LGBTQ people in particular. The policy therefore provides a community in which women and LGBTQ people are more likely to feel free *to* enjoy fuller musical participation.

Of course, for safe spaces policies to work, they must be acted on consistently (Fileborn, 2016). Felix explained that he knew of places which *said* they had a safe spaces policy, but that this did not amount to much in practice. It was this inconsistency in what a safe spaces policy might be that caused Promoter 3 to steer clear of using such policies, preferring to rely on the self-

policing of the hardcore scene (which was in itself not without problems, as described by Sinead and Sarah). Meanwhile, the manager at venue 2 was concerned about the exclusion of men generated by safe spaces policies, misunderstanding the purpose of such policies and failing to acknowledge the need for spaces free from harassment in which women can be free to make and listen to music. As the Roestone Collective argues, safe spaces are not utopias. They are socially produced in situ and grounded in the idea that what we understand to be "safe" is 'continually materially and socially produced' (The Roestone Collective, 2014: 1361). What might work well for one venue may be less suitable to another.

A question that arises then is, can safe spaces policies work in venues which are not explicitly feminist, since such venues are not about withdrawing or (explicitly) finding commonalities along the lines of marginalised identities? The Roestone Collective (2014) argues that safe space is a valuable concept because it enables the practice of social justice whilst also encouraging social diversity, but they do not advocate a prescriptive kind of safe space. They argue that safe spaces need to be self-reflexive and critical, as we saw with the venue in [CITY]. We think that the practical steps taken in safe space venues to ensure that audience members and others using the venue are free-*er* from harassment and violence could well be taken into consideration by other kinds of venues. Such steps need not alienate particular groups within the audience (some men), but rather encourage other groups (women, LGBTQ people) to feel comfortable and safe in the venue. Doing this kind of work would necessitate that policies be adapted to reflect the local community, which should be viewed as positive community work. We would not want to see policies watered down in this process, but rather for venues to view taking such action as a core part of their audience management strategy and about equal access to music. This would, as it happens, also help them to fulfil their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Working together across the city would enable venues and promoters to share the labour and transition the culture of the live music scene in [CITY]. Such schemes have been undertaken in Baltimore, USA (Potter, 2019) at a DIY level, and in Melbourne, Australia (Moskovitch, 2015) by the local authority, although details on the implementation of these schemes are elusive.

Riot grrrl's further recommendations for making gigs better for women go beyond the strategies we have mentioned here (for instance changing timing and location of gigs) (Downes, 2012). Our concern here is with what can be done within current gig setups. We agree with the riot grrrl perspective that for change to be effective, men's active involvement must be secured, for example in relinquishing spatial privilege and in whole-hearted support of women (Leonard, 1997; Downes, 2012). There is a need for further discussion and experimental research on how live music might be done differently to further women and LGBTQ people's full participation.

Conclusion

Sexual violence is happening in the small music venues in [the city]. It is mostly being perpetrated by men against women. It impacts upon musical participation in a number of ways: it pulls the victim/survivor out of themselves so they are no longer immersed in the music; it disrupts feelings of community in the gig audience so that victim/survivors no longer feel comfortable; it polices the demographics of the gig space, promoting male dominance; and it causes victim/survivors to circumscribe their gig-going activities. Venues and promoters are typically unprepared to deal with incidents of sexual violence, nor are they immune to 'rape myths' which inform common discourses of sexual violence. Poor responses from venues result in low trust from victim/survivors and from women who are aware of the reputation of poorly responding venues. This means that the chance of establishing a strong sense of community, which can help to prevent incidents escalating, is missed. Safe spaces policies present a means to rethink what venues and promoters can do to not only provide an environment which is free *from* sexual violence, but which also enables women to be free *to* enjoy the immersive and communal transcendence so highly valued by gig goers. Thus we argue that clear and rigorously implemented policies and procedures, in relation to sexual violence, agreed with audience members and other stakeholders in the venue, represent the most likely way to combat sexual violence through their nurturing of a strong sense of community. Such policy changes need to work in tandem with broader changes in the culture of live music and, of course, in society and culture more generally. Riot grrrl's reformulation of music-making and participation present a starting point for conceiving of how this might be done. However, to gain a broader

democratisation of music participation needs investment and practical action from men in the music industry, as we come together as a community to prevent and respond well to sexual violence at gigs.

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