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What is This?
Warnings to Women
Police Advice and Women’s Safety in Britain

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This article examines police and other governmental crime prevention literature advising women about personal safety. Through a radical feminist perspective, my personal narrative includes a historical context for developments in Britain that give rise to a social and political climate within which individual responsibility for avoiding violence is paramount. The purpose of this article is to raise theoretical questions about the effect of this context on us as women. As a feminist, I also argue for the usefulness of a radical feminist perspective to inform our thinking about avoiding men’s violence and ensuring women’s safety.

Common sense tells you that not every man approaching you in a lonely place will do you harm. But it still pays to be wary. (Positive Action, 1995)

Through the traditions of an approach to women’s safety as developed in Britain from radical feminist critiques of violence against women (Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1985, 1990b), I raise concerns with the assumptions about women, violence, and crime avoidance embedded in police and other governmental crime prevention literature that ultimately find their way into the popular press. This article offers a textual analysis of police advice literature to women on crime and its avoidance. During the years, I have watched as this advice has been reproduced by the media in its coverage of violence against women. Do the public police and popular media converge in their views of men’s violence to women? Do such views give advice to women that may assist them in avoiding or minimizing (or both) men’s violence?

I ask: Have women’s experiences of sexual and physical violence and its avoidance been used to inform women’s safety pamphlets issued by the police, who are credited for finally taking

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violence against women seriously? What are the lessons about safety we can glean from media accounts of violence against women? Is such advice likely to assist in assuaging women's fear of crime (Stanko, 1990b; Young, 1992) or women's avoidance of men's violence?

SOME CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

WOMEN'S FEAR OF CRIME

During the 1980s, women's fear of crime, as measured by the influential British Crime Survey (Hough & Mayhew, 1983), opened up another dimension of the debate about women and violence in the United Kingdom. Stanko (1987) suggested that women's fear of crime is an expression of women's fear of men and of men's violence. Radical feminists interpreted women's fear of crime as a barometer of our actual and perceived vulnerability to men's physical and sexual violence (Hanmer & Maynard, 1987; Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1987, 1990a, 1992; in the United States, see Young, 1992). As such, we began to document our anticipation of men's violence, which results in "policing ourselves" (Radford, 1987). Accumulated research suggests that (a) women are more likely to restrict their activities in public because of anxiety about encountering the potential of men's violence (Burgess, 1995; Crawford, Jones, Woodhouse, & Young, 1990) and (b) women use more safety precautions than men do (Stanko, 1990b; for the United States, see Gardener, 1980, 1990; Gordon & Riger, 1988).

The British Home Office, the government ministry responsible for all domestic affairs including law and order in Britain, also became concerned about fear of crime, and women's greater fear was acknowledged. It convened a working group in 1989 to consider the problem and recommend solutions to people's fear of crime.¹ One of the findings of the Working Group on the Fear of Crime was that the media exaggerated the fear of crime and, as part of a concern for public responsibility, the media were asked to be "more responsible" in their coverage of crime and violence. Although some media (such as the BBC) adopted guidelines for their handling of crime, there is little evidence that the media have muted their spotlight on violence, in particular sexual violence.
POLICING AND THE CRISIS OF PROTECTION

In the early 1980s, the police came under public scrutiny for their treatment of women as victims of violence (Radford & Stanko, 1991). The police were criticized for their handling of women who complained of rape. Public pressure initiated internal police reforms (Blair, 1985). Police suddenly seemed to be taken by a zealous concern about violence against women: They established domestic violence teams; initiated training about sexual assault; and became active spokespeople, advising women about criminal assault. Today, many of these reforms are still in place, and police crime prevention literature remains an important component in an overall publicity strategy to involve individuals, and especially women, in crime avoidance.

WOMEN’S SAFETY AND THE AGENDAS FOR STATE RESPONSIBILITY

In Britain, the Conservative government was elected in 1979. One central component of their campaign was a "law and order" agenda (Downes & Morgan, 1994). Concern for victims, and the development of a national agenda to meet their needs, was given special emphasis with the establishment of a National Association of Victim Support Schemes (see Rock, 1990). The Women’s Movement was also active; refuges for battered women arose in the early 1970s and most major conurbations had rape crisis centers (see Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

By the late 1980s, local government authorities hosted a variety of women’s units, equality units, or community safety units, many of which put women’s fear of crime, domestic violence, and sexual violence on the agendas for innovative social policy. Although not exclusively in Labour authorities, many of the mostly women working on issues of women’s violence and safety were informed by radical feminist campaigns and were theorizing about violence against women. Underpinning the work on women’s safety, therefore, was a commitment to confront the climate of victim blame so prevalent within the criminal justice approaches to violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Stanko, 1985; see, in particular, Dobash & Dobash, 1992, for a history of the rise of domestic violence as a social problem in Britain).
A decade later, by the 1990s, many local authorities, police forces, and central government departments had taken on the issues of women and violence, in its broadest sense. The Association of Women’s Units in Local Government released *Responding With Authority* (National Association of Local Government Women’s Committees, 1991) as a call to action for local governments to become actively involved in discovering support systems to alleviate all kinds of violence against women, including women’s fear of crime. Edinburgh City Council sponsored a highly visible public education campaign, *Zero Tolerance*, which confronted myths about rape, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and women’s safety from a feminist perspective (see Stanko, 1995). All of these initiatives served to reinforce the importance of catering to the needs of women in the communities—and violence was shown to be high on the agenda of the needs of women.

However, the mid-1990s find Britain, after 16 years of Conservative party rule, amid a cash crisis in public expenditure, with a decline in the welfare state (with severe cutbacks in basic provision of services such as health, education, social services, transportation, and public policing). It is essential to view police advice within the context of the wider changes in British public services—and as a metaphor for the abdication of the state for collective responsibility toward its subjects. Crime prevention advice is a centerpiece of the Conservative government’s campaign against crime; advice to women flourished in the context of the developments in prevention of crime (Pease, 1994), not the prevention of violence against women (Stanko, 1990a).

My ongoing research suggests that police advice dominates community safety work. As part of a nationwide crime prevention initiative, crime avoidance and safety have become popularized, with the so-called “active citizen” taking center stage (O’Malley, 1992; Pease, 1994). Individual prudence (O’Malley, 1992) prevails; as individuals, we are responsible for our own safety.

A METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH FOR ANALYZING SAFETY ADVICE

As a feminist academic, I am consciously trying to influence change through a radical feminist perspective (see, e.g., Stanko,
1985) on how we think about violence against women: through involvement in devising strategies for local government officers to introduce programs addressing violence against women, and in training police on issues of rape and domestic violence.\textsuperscript{6} I am interested in discovering ways of changing police practice, thinking, and attitudes toward violence against women. My critique of this literature is in the spirit of such activism.

Since 1991, I have collected safety advice generated by government bodies, statutory and voluntary agencies, and the police. The initial study began in 1991 when I contacted more than 80 local governments in England, Scotland, and Wales to discover whether these bodies distributed information about women and safety to their local residents.\textsuperscript{7} I asked for pamphlets, posters, and other relevant material to advise women about issues of their safety. I received information from 66 separate agencies.\textsuperscript{8} A significant proportion of these local authorities forwarded the literature produced by their local police or by the Home Office’s crime prevention campaign, \textit{Practical Ways to Crack Crime},\textsuperscript{9} or had local models adapting these official approaches.

The analysis in this article first examines the literature distributed by police, then illustrates how this advice appears within the press coverage of men’s violence against women. I am using content analysis, choosing particular passages of the texts to illustrate the approach to crime prevention advice that permeates this literature. The advice contained within these documents cannot be read with indifference to gender. To analyze them, police must be treated as socially situated within legal and ideological structures that take the provision of safety and its distribution as gender-neutral. In many ways, women—the supposed audience of these booklets—are largely silent, presumed unified in their needs, and are treated as simultaneously needlessly frightened, yet rationally wary, the voiceless objects in the negotiation of our own safety. It is an ambivalence that, I suggest, can only arise because the theoretical basis of such crime advice removes women from their position as intentional targets for men’s violence (Stanko, 1990b). As such, my interpretation of these booklets is necessarily my own, informed by my 20 years as a radical feminist criminologist and an analyst of the everyday practices of personal safety of women and men.
ADVISING CAUTION:  
A LOOK AT THE SAFETY ADVICE

My 4-year collection of available advice literature can be assigned to five categories:

1. Advice concerning sexual assault, rape, or both.
2. Advice concerning personal safety for women, notably a pamphlet that first appeared in 1982 titled *Positive Steps*, produced by the London Metropolitan Police and reproduced by numerous local police forces. In 1995, such pamphlets were still being used and were often available at front desks of police stations, distributed at neighborhood meetings, or posted as general advice from community police officers.
3. General advice about crime prevention in the community, including personal and household safety. Although some communities authored their own guidelines, by and large the central government crime prevention document *Practical Ways to Crack Crime* (known in Scotland as *Don't Give Crime an Open Invitation*) was the literature provided.
4. Advice concerning domestic violence. Some of this information was directed at women themselves; other information received included information to workers in local government, such as housing officers, social workers, or teachers.
5. Guidelines and advice concerning sexual harassment, aggression at work, or both.

As such, women’s safety from men’s violence has become divided into discrete problems, which are fragmented, with advice about domestic violence separated from that of crime, and particularly, rape avoidance. Kelly (1988) warned us against separating forms of women’s abuse at the hands of men, preferring instead to remind us of the “continuum of sexual violence.” Without such an understanding, I believe, thinking about violence against women becomes a distortion of individual men’s behaviors, when, according to a radical feminist analysis, such behavior is indicative of women’s subordinate status to men.

A word about the booklets: Their structures are similar; the types and kinds of illustrations show remarkable likenesses. Men are shadowy characters, police are kind and reassuring figures, and women deserve to be reassured. These booklets (and there were many different booklets issued in Scotland, England, and Wales) tend to be organized around three sections:
1. Suggestions about how to conduct oneself when home alone, fending off exterior intrusion.
2. Advice about how to walk on the street, carry one’s handbag, and how to travel by car or public transport.
3. Reassurance if an assault happens, with a description of the partnership the victim has with the police to solve the crime.

I will explore each of these in turn.

HOME ALONE: WOMEN BEWARE

Section 1 of Positive Steps (PS), an example of the first (and current) booklet specially devised for women and safety by the London Metropolitan Police in the early 1980s, and Practical Ways to Crack Crime (PWCC), the Home Office’s crime prevention guide, emphasize the special risks of being at home, at risk to strangers. States PS: “You probably think that you are only at risk when you’re out—in side streets or up dark alleys. . . . Many incidents occur just where you might expect to feel safest—at home.”

The safety suggestions revolve around the fitting of security hardware: chains on doors, windows, and so forth. The booklet gives tips on safe courses of action: Ask for identification of callers who wish access to the house; dial 999 if you are at all suspicious of the caller; and seek special advice if you are trying to sell a house (“Try not to show people around on your own”). The booklet continues:

You can never be too careful. Every woman living alone should be especially safety conscious, and take these simple precautions to improve her security. Get into the habit of “doing the rounds” before you leave home. Lock every outside door and window—one lapse could put you at risk. (emphasis mine)

Similarly, “Although attacks on people do occur in their own homes, many citizens fail to take precautions to reduce such risks” (Taking Care).

Directed at women living alone, the suggestions include keeping the fact that one lives alone as obscure as possible. The pamphlets add that one might “wish to keep a dog,” “draw curtains at night and remove clothes from outside line to deter peeping toms,” keep a whistle by the telephone for pestering callers, and demand identity cards of strangers at the door. At
every stage, reminders about the availability of the police to provide advice and protection appear. Throughout, there are constant references to join a Neighborhood Watch group, advice that ignores the research that suggests that Neighborhood Watch participants report higher levels of fear of crime (Mayhew, Dowds, & Elliot, 1989) and are confused about how to participate (McConnville & Shepherd, 1991), and that overall such schemes have a doubtful effect on crime reduction (Bennett, 1990).

The view of “woman” is a reflection of assumptions about which women are likely to be frightened unnecessarily: single, home owning, incompetent, perhaps elderly, and naive about strangers, and especially women living outside of the supposed individual protection from individual men. Two points to emphasize here: First, the research about women and safety (Gardner, 1980, 1988, 1990; Gordon & Riger, 1988; Stanko, 1990b) suggests that most women already have fairly elaborate strategies to minimize risk of danger from strangers and are already wary of male strangers (Burgess, 1995). Of course, women could always learn different, creative strategies but many of the ones suggested—for example, do not walk in dimly lit alley ways—are ones women already adopt (Burgess, 1995; Stanko, 1990b), and if we do not, we do so for our own reasons (e.g., we may live down dimly lit alleys!).

Second, as all the research suggests, it is known that men, partners or former partners of women, pose the greatest threat to women. Advice about this type of violence is limited in these booklets: Women, it is proposed, might ask for police or court interventions, but there is no recognition that women are already actively negotiating men’s violence day in and day out. The fourth and current edition of PWCC suggests:

If the violence is within your family, the courts have powers to help you, regardless of whether you press criminal charges. They can, for example, require a husband not to enter your home, and in some cases, even your neighborhood.

The actual protection provided by civil injunctions has been questioned by research (Barron, 1992). The focus on strangers found in the safety literature continues to capture the imagination of the advisers as they turn to tips for women walking and driving in public. Moreover, it is also interesting to note that we ourselves have strongly held beliefs that we are most at risk in public places
(Pain, 1993). Such beliefs, suggested from an overall evaluation of my collection of safety advice, influence the literature produced by local government women’s units as well as by the police. As more women live outside male control/protection by choice, is it possible to advise women about men’s violence without somehow belittling different women’s perceptions and experiences of dangerous men?

OUT AND ABOUT: WOMEN KEEP VIGILANT

Obviously, no one deliberately puts themselves at risk, but the thought of becoming a victim can still be a constant worry. (Positive Steps)

Consolation for women’s anxieties begins the next major section on women-in-public. Women are told to walk confidently, to avoid lingering at darkly lit bus stops, to keep to well-lit roads, to walk facing the oncoming traffic—all practical steps the advisers assume women do not already do. Women are encouraged to plan ahead if they are going out for the evening: Have taxi numbers on hand or trusted friends and acquaintances for company on the way home and, if walking, keep hands free for self-defense. Booklets state that handbags, carried carelessly, expose women to the opportunist thief, as does the wearing of expensive-looking jewelry. Precautions about how to travel on public transport, how to travel in a car, and how to park safely in well-lit public areas are also included.

This advice is especially ironic, given the ruthless abandonment of public expenditure to services such as transport and the staff employed by transport. The wholesale privatization of bus companies has resulted in limited and unpredictable provision of bus services and in the elimination of staff on underground trains in London and on British Rail (which is itself scheduled for privatization, hence the reduction of more staff).

The pamphlets attempt to reassure women by alerting them to their potential as targets of theft, personal assault, or worse in public places. Returning to the sanctuary of one’s home is presumed. Are homeless women or women fleeing violence in the home merely overlooked? Having options, choices, daily plans, and detailed strategies are obligations: These are the armaments of the responsible woman. But many of us are excluded from
being responsible before we start. What if we feel we are targets for men's violence? What happens if a man really wants to hurt us because we are women?

IF THE WORST HAPPENS: SYMPATHETIC PARTNERSHIP

It is sensible to think about what you would be prepared to do if you were physically attacked. Could you fight back or would you play along and wait for a chance to escape? Preparing yourself for all possibilities could provide a split-second advantage. (Taking Care)

If the worst happens and you are raped or sexually assaulted, turn immediately to the police. It's vital to report quickly what has happened, and you can do so in complete confidence. You will need all the special care and attention the police are anxious to give. (Positive Steps)

The booklets encourage the woman to report the assault to the police and assure her that she will be treated sympathetically. Police practice, however, does not ensure such sympathetic treatment. More than 10 years after this booklet was first issued, the police practice of "unfounding" rape complaints—in effect, nullifying the crime report—still exists (Lees & Gregory, 1993). No matter how sympathetic the police, if the woman gives evidence in court, she is still likely to be aggressively cross-examined by a defense attorney in a way that relies on stereotypical images of "the responsible woman" (Matoesian, 1993) and that contributes to the likelihood that her assailant will be acquitted.

Inspector Shirley Tulloch, "personal safety adviser" of the London Metropolitan Police, recently commented in a 1994 article in the widely read popular London weekly guide Time Out that women's fear of crime is unrealistic ("Cosh or Cheque," 1993). She noted that most women imagine potential attackers as strangers who jump out at them from bushes but this type of crime is actually rare.

She suggested that police advise women to be on their guard and avoid potentially dangerous situations: Do not take shortcuts and stay in well-lit areas. She also recommended that women carry rape alarms. Her comments are meant to comfort, but they illustrate both the confusion in the way women's safety is promoted by the police and their actual concern about it. On one
hand, there is an effort to debunk the stereotype of women's danger (see Stanko, 1988; Young, 1992)—the stranger—whereas on the other hand, offering advice about how the prudent woman should behave to avoid the potential danger of the (presumably) male stranger.

This contradiction, I suggest, can be understood through an analysis of the creation of the responsible woman. Police advice exists within a context that takes for granted the responsible woman—the woman who commonsensically takes all necessary precautions to avoid the violence of men and treats the violence of men to women as encounters that can, given responsible precautions, be avoided.

In addition, the conscious use of pictures and sketches of women and children in the care of women officers invites women's trust in the police as sensitive interviewers of women reporting rape or sexual assault, as crusaders in child protection, or as dedicated domestic violence workers. Clearly, these images illustrate how the police are using women police as a public relations tool, the acceptable face of police protection, and aim specifically at reassuring women they will be treated sympathetically should they need to contact police. What is important here is the use of imagery about victims. Only the deserving and unfortunate victim is the legitimate recipient of care. Presumably, she is responsible.

Over the past few years, police have extended this approach to advising women in highly publicized crimes against women. For instance, when a young mother was brutally killed in a London park, police suggested women avoid parks until the killer was arrested. In one recent study of the use of urban fringe woodland (Burgess, 1995), all of the women interviewed mentioned this horrific murder, some adopting precaution without police advice.

Long-standing allies of the police in their fight against crime, the media cover much crime within a legacy of its own distortions (see, e.g., Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1991; Saward, 1991; Soothill & Walby, 1990). Police advice to women appears as part of the story, as a public service cautionary tale. How this assuages women's fear is unclear, for the fact that women are attacked, and are attacked because they are women, is a subtext, within both the safety pamphlets and, as I argue next, in the news.
POPULARIZING DANGER: MEDIA AND POLICE ADVICE

Clearly, women’s fear of crime has captured, and continues to capture, the imagination of the popular press. Images of women walking down dark alleys clutching their handbags abound; news stories of women attacked in parks, cabs, and dimly lit streets mirror these images of danger. Within this arena of crime, prevention initiatives embrace individual obligation and specify the burdens of individuals to protect themselves and their property from the opportunist thief and assailant. Within this opportunity-reduction initiative, gender has particular salience. Women—the generic audience of the advice about personal safety—represent a stereotypical, gendered vulnerability. There is, for instance, no special advice for young men, the population, according to official data, that is most at risk from assault in public.

The production of news has metaphorical import: It presents the police as sympathetic, caring professionals who are knowledgeable about what frightens women. It is only recently that police public relations officers have spotlighted the symbolic import of women police as protectors of women and as specially qualified to service the needs of women’s emotional turmoil (Soothill, 1993).

The use of the police by the media as experts in women’s safety stems in part from the ideological import of the police in societal protection, which is based in their crime fighting abatement, their role as gatherers of evidence and apprehenders of suspects, and their moral obligation to protect the public from the vagaries of those dangerous few, who the police, given their ownership of expertise, can identify. This is paradoxical because the media have also spearheaded the discussion of the role of policing and public confidence in that role in contemporary Britain. Concerns about confidence in the police to protect the public against crime—fostered by the civil disturbances of the 1980s, feminist campaigns about police responses to rape and domestic violence, Black people’s campaigns about racial harassment, escalating crime statistics, and a host of miscarriages of justice—have been raised by the popular press in Britain.

However varied the explanations of the decline in confidence in the police though, such coverage uses the police forces through-
out the country to assuage women's anxiety. In doing so, the news media actively give credence to police as servicers of the needs of vulnerable or victimized women. Although the police may privately assail the media for focusing on the most salacious of crimes against women—murder or sexual assault of young, often White, women—and for raising women's anxiety about safety, police also use the publicizing of such crime as occasions for issuing encouraging advice about how to avoid similar misfortunes and for confirming their position in the public's eye as the experts on women's safety and protection. But what they suggest as responsible precautions are usually safety measures that women already take (Stanko, 1990a) or that may increase women's fear of crime. Pain's (1993) study of women in Edinburgh found that 1 in 6 said they worried more about their safety because of police advice.

Ironically, radical feminists are still being accused of unnecessarily frightening women by publicizing the prevalence of violence against them (Roiphe, 1993). To me, though, the awareness of men's violence through a radical feminist perspective intends to spotlight the problem of men, not the problem of individual, imprudent women. The police advice fails to condemn male violence as indicative of women's subordinate position in society. As such, it individualizes responsibility, without collective comment on the problem of men.

So, too, the media individualizes the problem of violence against women. Violent crime committed by male strangers against women is a popular folktale of danger. The police use publicity to appeal to the public for clues to the identity of an unknown attacker. Take, for instance, a story that appeared in the Daily Telegraph ("Don't Go Out Alone," 1992). An Oxford undergraduate who was raped on her way home from a party was interviewed about the incident in an attempt to catch the attacker. The attack, it was noted, had created an atmosphere of tension among the thousands of women students in the city. With a victim-support counselor and a "specially trained police woman at her side," the young woman warned others not to walk alone at night. She praised the police for treating her well, and a detective working on the case advised students to avoid walking alone at night, because the crime appeared to be opportunistic and "spur of the moment."
What then are women to do? Do such news stories reassure women that the police are on the suspect's trail? This story contains a standard recipe: a random attack, an innocent victim grateful for her sympathetic treatment at the hands of police and for victim support, a police search for the perpetrator, and offers of public service follow-up to women, such as advice and police seminars on self-defense.

Another tale in *The Independent* ("Taxi Driver," 1992) reported on a taxi driver jailed for rape in a cab. The news story reported the conviction of a man for rape of a passenger. The final paragraph of the story contained a statement by the detective who headed the investigation, reassuring women that they should not be afraid to take a black cab, because this was an isolated incident.

An August 1992 story in *The Guardian* contained an appeal by police for a witness to an attack on a woman by a "bogus" minicab driver (Johnson, 1992). The detective heading the investigation stated that he was sure that the rapist had found the woman by listening to calls to the firm she had phoned, and he warned other women to be on their guard against rogue cabbies who may eavesdrop, telling women readers to always use a reputable firm and to check that the driver who arrives is from the company they called. *The Independent* also carried a story about this incident in which the final paragraph also contained a warning to women to be vigilant, to always use reputable taxi companies, and to be certain that when a cab arrives, it is from the firm called (Braid, 1992). This article also stated that there had been no publicity about this case until this point because police feared that reports might hamper their investigation. Here, it is interesting that the requirements of the police—catching the suspect—may collide with the need to warn women about similar incidents. What is the message about safety here?

Finally, consider a story that appeared in *The Independent* in July 1992 with the headline, "Fantasy World of a Murderer." In a journalistic biography of Scott Singleton, recently convicted killer of a 17-year-old woman, cautionary advice for young job applicants was included in the story. The last two paragraphs were devoted to lessons about men’s tactics for luring women for abuse. The detective leading the murder investigation was quoted as saying that he was disturbed by the number of phone calls the
police had received from women who had had experiences similar to the victim, but had managed to escape. He noted that this made the police realize how widespread the practice of recruitment is, especially during a period of economic recession. His advice to women applying for jobs through agencies was to check the credentials of all prospective employers by using such techniques as looking for agency letterhead, taking the agency’s phone number and calling back to see if it really exists, and being suspicious of any job that sounds “too good to be true.”

When I asked senior police officers at a recent seminar on service to women given at Bramshill Police College about the appearance of the above advice in the newspapers, they suggested that the reporters ask police “what advice they have for the public” subsequent to an act of random violence. The scripts for the social construction of the responsible woman are readily available: Prudent women avoid men’s violence.

The messages contained within the advice booklets and the news stories suggest that we should, and can, be individually accountable for our own safety. To be a responsible woman is to display a healthy suspicion of men who appear to be ordinary men: cab drivers, potential employers, passers-by, doctors, co-workers and so forth. Such wariness is never-ending and resonates in the questions we ask ourselves when we have been attacked: if only I did not walk home, open the door, shop at this store, and so forth. Even more curious, all of this advice is supposed to ease our anxiety about our safety-in-public.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, I have argued that police advice to women about personal safety fails to question why we are at risk. The feminist efforts to put violence against women on the state’s agenda has also led to police turning the problem back on us. Although the police may be taking violence against women seriously, the form of their practice and thinking often reinforces the assumption that we can, given correct and responsible behavior, avoid the violence of men. As the research continues to verify, violent men want to attack a woman, whether at random or with foresight. Even
assailants rationalize their behavior by blaming us for bringing on
the assault ourselves (Scully, 1990; Smythman, 1978), or minimize
the actual harm they cause us (Hearn, 1993).

Police advice to women implicitly reflects an understanding of
our risk to men's violence: Presumably, we are vulnerable because
we are women. What continues to be ignored, however, is the
feminist-inspired interpretation of our vulnerability, embedded in
an appropriation of our sexuality: "that which is one's own, yet
most taken away" (MacKinnon, 1982, p. 515). We take many
precautions because we acknowledge such potential violence as
a condition of being a woman. Publicized advice, generated by
in-house police publicity or through media attention to salacious
crime, reinforces the message of our sexual vulnerability. It does
so without the wider context that radical feminism sought to
expose. Our anxiety may be raised: By placing the responsibility
for avoiding men's violence once again on our shoulders—for it
is our behavior that can minimize the chances of becoming a target
of men's violence—we are responsible for sorting safe from unsafe
men.

Given that much abuse arises within women's friendship, inti-
mate, kinship, and daily relationships with men (Stanko, 1990a;
Young, 1992), women routinely risk misjudging men's trust-
worthiness. Given that we may wish to live our lives without
constantly thinking about our protection, we are questioned about
being prudent and sensible when we stray from the rigid guide-
lines that will never entirely assure safety. The failure to recognize
the contradictions within the subtext of police advice and the daily
media accounts of violence to women, I suggest, diminishes the
potential to assuage women's "fear of crime." Police are not
guaranteeing—and can never guarantee—us safety within a
world that takes for granted our perceptions and our experiences
of sexual vulnerability. But the police are trying to do just that,
resulting in a failure to truly confront the devastating personal
consequences of our subordination (nor do I think they can). Thus
Inspector Tulloch's advice mentioned in this article is not meant
to aid us in eluding violence, but is meant to reassure. So if
personal alarms make some of us feel better, regardless of whether
they actually work in attracting assistance ("Calls for Alarm,"
1994) or fending off attackers, then alarms work as long as they
reduce our anxiety.
In sum, the advice booklets and the media accounts of police advice following horrific incidents subscribe to a standard narrative: Women are unduly afraid; if we were to adopt a set of basic safety precautions, we would reduce an already small risk of crime; police are our protectors and will treat us seriously and sympathetically; men, when they encounter us “duly protecting ourselves,” will not act on impulse and foresight and attack, rob, beat, or rape us.

What would radical feminist-inspired safety advice look like? If we suggest women-only parking lots, women-only buses, or women-only bars, would we be ridiculed? Is this even realistic, given the many differences among us? How would we offer advice about minimizing the violence within intimate relationships? If we drew up a list of the “dos” and “don’ts” of safety, would it minimize the violence of men we experience? Certainly, women-designed environments, which increase the likelihood that other people “look out for them” (Burgess, 1995), are contributing to more woman-friendly environments in public. But we are still left with the problem of men. I welcome any and all suggestions to find some method of discovering collective ways to minimize our encounters with men’s violence. After all, the research suggests that ultimately it is men who decide to attack us—and we need to find ways of stopping them collectively, not individually.

NOTES

1. The working group was convened in 1989, chaired by Michael Grade, chief executive of Channel 4 Television. I was a member of the working group, which was dominated by members of the media.

2. Three parties dominate the political scene in mainland Britain: Labour, Tory, and Liberal Democrat. From 1979 onward, the Tory party has controlled Central Government, but local authorities were controlled largely by either the Tory or Labour parties. Much of the so-called progressive work took place within Labour authorities, who incorporated special units within the local government, such as women’s equality units or police units (which monitored the activities of police delivery of community protection).

3. See, for instance, Smith (1989a, 1989b). The Home Office issues two circulars to police concerning their treatment of women complainants of rape and domestic violence. Home Office Circulars 69/1986 and 60/1990 were issued to the police forces of England and Wales, serving as guidance in their responsibilities to provide more adequate care and attention to violence against women. A handful of local authorities, for instance, hosted conferences bringing together local agencies, interested women, and the police to discuss available remedies to domestic violence, women’s fear of crime, or sexual safety.
4. Not only is such advice available throughout Britain, but I have seen versions of this crime prevention document in Australia, Canada, and the United States (see DeKeresedy, Burshyn, & Gordon, 1992, for an analysis of the Canadian pamphlet).

5. As both Stanko (1988, 1990b) and Young (1992) argued, traditional approaches to women’s fear of crime neglect the domestic nature of a vast majority of men’s violence to women, which may contribute to women’s fear and anxiety about their own safety.

6. These training sessions took place at the Hendon Police Training College, home of the Metropolitan Police training operations. Later, I participated in the training of senior officers at Bramshill Police College, a national training ground for officers facing promotion.

7. I did so as a prelude to a national conference on women’s safety, bringing together then junior Home Office Minister John Patten (Tory) and the late Shadow Minister for Women Jo Richardson (Labour)—a demonstration that both parties treat the issue of violence against women high on their agendas.

8. I did not receive replies from 10 queries; 4 responded, informing me that they did not distribute any information to women.


10. A man was arrested and acquitted of this murder. The police were accused of entrapment.

11. Even more curious, when radical feminists suggested that all men could be rapists, they were castigated for tarring all men with the same brush.

REFERENCES


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