

**‘It’s more like, guys stop doing it!’**

**Young women’s adoption and rejection of safety advice when socialising in bars, pubs and clubs.**

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*Introduction*

Concern about women’s increased levels of alcohol consumption (Mathews & Richardson 2005; McKenzie & Haw 2006; Richardson & Budd 2003) and drug and alcohol assisted sexual assault (Beynon et al. 2005; Burgess et al. 2009; Moore 2009; Sturman 2000) has prompted a renewed interest in the dissemination of safety advice to women, particularly young women, who are simultaneously positioned as ‘a risk’ and ‘at risk’ when they socialise in bars, pubs and clubs. Within the media and public health discourses in the UK, particular concern has been expressed about the apparent ‘convergence’ of women’s alcohol consumption with that of their male counterparts, accompanied by substantial media coverage of a growing and problematic ‘ladette culture’ whereby young women are seen to embrace reckless behaviour and high levels of alcohol consumption, leaving them vulnerable to sexual assault. Ladette culture has construed as an undesirable by-product of women’s increasing independence and equality with men in late modern society (Day et al. 2004; Jackson & Tinkler 2007). Jackson and Tinkler (2007: 259) argue that ‘ladettes’ have been subject to particularly negative commentary within the media due to the association of this hedonistic lifestyle with health problems, social dis/order and most significantly, *gender dis/order* [emphasis added].

Despite the apparent convergence of women’s behaviour and levels of alcohol consumption with those of men, there remains a much greater likelihood of men engaging in violent or offending behaviour when they have consumed alcohol (Deehan 1999; Richardson & Budd 2003). A recent systematic review of evidence detailing alcohol trends in the UK over the past 20 to 30 years (Smith and Foxcroft 2009), also indicates that women are still less likely to drink than men, and those who do drink, drink less than men. Recent research evidence suggests that there may now even be a decline, or at least a plateau, in women’s levels of alcohol consumption, although annual fluctuations and the backdrop of a notable increase in levels of alcohol consumption over the past two to three decades, mean that any indications of such a decrease should be interpreted with caution (Smith and Foxcroft 2009).

Concern about young women’s alcohol consumption, their conduct and their safety, should be viewed within the context of broader concerns about young people, ‘binge drinking’ and a culture of ‘determined drunkenness’ (Measham 2006). While legitimate public health concerns exist in relation to high levels of alcohol consumption in the UK (Leon and McCambridge 2009), and the associated marketing strategies of the alcohol industry (Day et

al. 2004; Hastings et al. 2010), Hayward and Hobbs (2007) also argue that the ‘spectacle’ of ‘binge drinking’ has become a form of televised entertainment.

Nonetheless, young women have been identified as the primary audience for safety campaigns about socialising and consuming alcohol. This advice has been developed by a range of agencies including the police, sexual assault support agencies, drug and alcohol agencies, the government, and community safety partnerships (Brooks 2005). Such advice is intended to equip young women with the knowledge to avoid or prevent drink spiking, sexual assault, and the irresponsible consumption of alcohol. The following messages are typical of safety advice found in contemporary awareness raising materials:

*Drug rape is rare: don't let it happen to you!*

(Fife Community Safety Partnership ‘Don’t take a chance’ leaflet)

*If you do wish to accept a drink from someone, make sure it is in a bottle and that the bottle is opened in front of you. Better still, open it yourself and always carry your own bottle opener.*

(The Roofie Foundation Scotland, ‘Drink Spiking: how to avoid it and what to do if it happens to you’ leaflet)

*Just who has bought you that drink, can you trust them?*

(West Lothian Drug Action Team, ‘Everything you need for a good night out’ leaflet)

*Don't be a target, be pub and club savvy, don't lose it!*

(Lothian and Borders Police poster)

*One in three reported rapes happens when the victim has been drinking.*

(Home Office, ‘Know Your Limits’ poster)

*Remember, if you're not keeping an eye on your drink then somebody else might be.*

(Scottish Executive, ‘Know the Score’ leaflet)

*Go out in a group and have a 'sober' friend who can look after you.*

(St. Andrews University, ‘Spike’ advice website)

To a certain extent, it could be argued that the recent preoccupation with safety advice for women drinking in bars, pubs and clubs is a reflection of a broader concern with crime prevention, amidst claims that we now live in a ‘culture of fear’ (Furedi 2002), and that, “crime has become a routine part of modern consciousness” leading to a “criminology of the self” (Garland 1996: 446). In this context, it is argued that the burden of responsibility for minimising the risk of crime has shifted from the state via the criminal justice system to individuals in the form of self help crime prevention (O'Malley 1996).

However, from a feminist perspective, it is argued that women have always been held individually responsible for preventing the sexual violence which is perpetrated against them; a discourse evident within conventional crime prevention literature directed at women. Feminist critiques of this advice reflect four key concerns: the individualisation of responsibility (Walklate 1997); the gendering of risk and responsibility (Neame 2003; Walklate 1997); the adoption of a limited conceptualization of sexual violence (DeKeseredy et al. 1992; Lawson & Olle 2005); and the absence of any focus on men who choose to perpetrate sexual assault (Berrington & Jones 2002; Stanko 1996). It is argued that such

approaches limit women's freedom and autonomy in public space and invoke a victim blaming discourse should a woman fail to adhere to particular standards of conduct (Campbell 2005), typically those associated with appropriate femininity. As one of the most ardent critics of crime prevention literature directed at women, Campbell (2005) argues that this literature inadvertently furthers the possibility of rape rather than preventing it by casting male sexual behaviour and feminine vulnerabilities as inevitable. This forms part of 'gendered configurations' which reify male dominance and female rapeability by constructing 'masculinity-as-aggressive' and 'femininity-as-vulnerable' (Campbell 2005: 134), thus installing rape as a 'fixed reality'.

Despite these critiques of conventional safety advice for women, it would appear that a discourse of gendered and individualised responsibility persists in contemporary safety campaigns. Given the apparent freedoms young women have to consume alcohol and socialise in bars, pubs and clubs (Burgess et al. 2009; Lyons & Willot 2008), the way they view and respond to this advice, however, is unclear. Research which has explored the safety behaviours used by women in public spaces contends that they are acutely aware of their vulnerability, and that they adopt a range of 'safe-keeping' strategies in response to their fear of sexual assault, physical assault and sexual harassment (Seabrook & Green 2004; Stanko 1990; Tulloch 2004; Wesely & Gaarder 2004; Wilson & Little 2008). However, there is a lack of research which specifically examines women's responses to safety advice and the safety behaviours they adopt in the context of bars, pubs and clubs (including the reasons why they may adopt some behaviours while rejecting others). This paper, therefore, explores these issues from the perspective of young women themselves, with the intention of contributing to a greater understanding of the complex and diverse responses which women make when faced by the often contradictory and gendered discourses around safety when socialising in bars, pubs and clubs.

### *Study design and analysis*

This paper draws upon data from a qualitative study, which explored the views, experiences, and behaviours of young women (18-25 years) in relation to their safety when socialising in bars, pubs, and clubs. Four focus groups and 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted with young adult women in Scotland. In total, 35 young women participated in this study. Of these 35 women, six chose to participate in a focus group only, 20 participated in an interview only, and nine participated in both an interview and a focus group. Due to the geographical spread of participants, experiences of socialising in four out of Scotland's six cities formed the main focus of discussion, although some participants also referred to their experiences of socialising in smaller towns.

Focus groups were designed to concentrate primarily on young women's views about safety, and associated safety advice for women in bars, pubs and clubs using materials from safety campaigns as prompts to facilitate discussion. Meanwhile, individual semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit participants' personal experiences of socialising in bars, pubs and clubs, their safety concerns and safety behaviours in these settings. Where participants opted to take part in a focus group and an individual interview, the interview followed the focus group. This allowed for greater exploration and reflection of emerging focus group themes. Data from focus groups and interviews were fully transcribed and coded using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package NVivo. Broadly speaking, the analysis process followed a three-stage model comprising of open,

axial and selective coding (Strauss 1987). In practice, however, this was not a linear process and the analysis moved back and forth between different stages of this model as new themes and connections within the data emerged.

Participants were primarily white, heterosexual women in further or higher education. This is a limitation which should be borne in mind when reflecting upon the findings of this study. For example, a more diverse sampling frame in terms of race and class may produce different findings, particularly given the construction of respectable or successful femininity through race and class (Griffin 2004; Jackson & Tinkler 2007; Skeggs 1997). It is also acknowledged that sexuality impacts upon definitions of safety and the identification of safe spaces in the night-time economy (Corteen 2002; Moran et al. 2003). Nonetheless, the sample used in the current study provided a valuable opportunity to examine the views and experiences of a key population within bars, pubs and clubs, since the consumption of alcohol is an acknowledged feature of student life (Gill 2002; Piacentini & Banister 2008), and students are a population specifically targeted by the alcohol industry (Hastings et al. 2010). Moreover, young women are identified as being particularly (although by no means exclusively) vulnerable to sexual assault within licensed premises (Moreton 2002; Schwartz 1997; Watson 2000), and are a key target audience for safety campaigns in these social settings.

### *Findings*

Bars, pubs and clubs represented important social spaces for young women to have fun, meet friends and develop their social networks. However, safety in these venues was a matter of concern for participants, none of whom were able to describe bars, pubs and clubs as safe spaces for women without some form of caveat. This finding is perhaps unsurprising given the conventional constructing of public spaces as masculine spaces, when women are not typically taught to feel safe (Gardner, 1990; Skeggs, 1999; Valentine 1992; Wesely and Gaarder, 2004). In keeping with earlier studies which locate the fear of sexual violence as women's primary safety concern (Myhill & Allen 2002; Stanko 1990; Tulloch 2004), participants' safety concerns were overwhelmingly related to the fear of sexual violence and they understood women to be significantly more likely to be concerned about their safety than their male counterparts when socialising in bars, pubs and clubs. This concurs with research which has highlighted gendered disparities in the nature and extent of safety concerns in other contexts (Stanko 1990; Tulloch 2004; Walklate 2007).

Participants were asked if they were aware of any specific safety advice or campaigns in relation to socialising in bars, pubs and clubs, and prompted for details of this advice. Although participants' recall of specific safety campaigns was relatively low, there was a high level of awareness of the key messages within these campaigns (i.e. how to prevent drink spiking, look out for female friends, and limit alcohol consumption). To a certain extent the young women who participated in the current study endorsed and adopted behaviours advocated within the prevention literature, describing an extensive range of safety behaviours, which they used when socialising in bars, pubs and clubs, including: watching drinks, only drinking out of bottles, covering the tops of bottles, taking drinks to the toilet, not dressing 'provocatively', going out in a group, staying with friends at all times (including going to the toilet), limiting alcohol consumption, pretending to be engaged to be married, seeking protection from male friends, leaving bars, pubs and clubs to escape unwanted male attention, humouring men, wearing shoes that they can run in, pretending to spill drinks

bought for them, not accepting drinks from unknown men, and seeking assistance from bouncers or bar staff.

However, young women's behaviours were complex and contradictory in that they adopted, resisted and transgressed behaviours advocated in safety advice. Five key themes emerged in relation to participants' adoption and rejection of safety behaviours: commonsense and necessity; the inevitability of male behaviour; disparity between theory and practice; maintaining control and respectability; and resentment of the focus on women's behaviour. These themes are discussed below with verbatim extracts from interviews and focus groups to illustrate these themes in participants' own words<sup>1</sup>.

### *Commonsense and necessity*

For most of the young women in the current study, utilising safety behaviours was "just what you do" while drinking in bars, pubs, and clubs and, as such, recommended behaviours within safety campaigns were simply described as 'common sense' precautions.

*Katy (FG02):* A lot of it's common knowledge, though, isn't it? You do without thinking of it, this is one of the steps on the poster 'go out in bunch, go out in a group' – yeah; 'keep your drink with you' – yeah.

Participants' positioning of safety behaviours as 'common sense' precautions, is reminiscent of the 'normal precautions' described by Stanko (1987) in relation to safekeeping strategies used by women in public places, although in the contemporary context of bars, pubs and clubs, new behaviours have emerged in relation to the prevention of drink spiking. For example, Burgess et al (2009: 859) have argued that "a new morality of caution" is emerging whereby those who do not anticipate the potential for their drink to be spiked by a stranger or an acquaintance are seen as "naive or foolhardy".

Young women's assertions that they were already aware of the advice contained within safety campaigns were largely based on receiving messages from their family and the media at an early age. The most notable features of familial advice were both the early age and vigour with which this advice was given, in addition to the explicit (and implicit) focus on preventing sexual violence.

*Annabelle (INT):* I'm the only daughter in my family so I've had it drummed into me by my dad. 'There's a lot of perverts out there. Be careful ... my parents aren't trying to be nasty about it, but they do sort of hammer home the fact that look, you're a young girl, you're more vulnerable than your brothers will be.

Safety messages given to women at an early age were also described by participants in the current study as being reinforced by media accounts of women being raped or sexually assaulted, including 'real life' stories in women's magazines. Stanko (1990: 85) notes that as women reach adulthood, they develop an acute awareness of their vulnerability and the need to adopt safekeeping behaviours as part of "a continuous lesson about what it means to be

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<sup>1</sup> Where participants' responses have been quoted directly, pseudonyms have been used to protect their anonymity.

female'. In this regard, and in light of the prevailing drinking culture, some young women welcomed safety campaigns.

*Fiona (INT):* I think that campaigns have definitely like opened your eyes to the fact that, you know, to keep everyone safe and you don't know what's going to happen, especially when everyone's drinking heavily or that sort of thing.

Practical advice about sources of support following an assault and factual information about the alcoholic content of different drinks (contained with alcohol advice leaflets) was particularly welcomed by some young women.

*Ruth (FG03):* I got a leaflet in Freshers Week... I didn't have a clue what [alcohol] units were, how many units were in something so I found it quite helpful.

*Marion (INT):* ...when we first started at [University] they gave out loads of flyers which you wouldn't really look through, but there's one we've still got it... it's got help lines and stuff on it... I did actually feel when that was given out, that was quite a good thing because like if something did happen you wouldn't know who to contact.

Further, participants' awareness of their vulnerability as a young woman meant that their adoption of safety behaviours was also influenced by a sense that taking responsibility for your own safety was a necessity:

*Sophie (INT):* ... you're forced to think about it [safety], you have to think about it. Unfortunately it's just part and parcel of the going out situation... you could put yourself in a very vulnerable position if you don't think about who you're talking to, who you're going with, how you're getting back home.

The necessity of engaging in safety behaviours was both normalised by participants and understood to be gendered. It is noteworthy that relatively few participants questioned *why* they should need to adopt safety behaviours in the first instance.

### *The inevitability of male behaviour*

The need to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and that of men around them, emerged as a prominent theme within young women's accounts of their time in bars, pubs and clubs. Moreover, the perceived inevitability of men's behaviour, or at least the behaviour of some men, contributed to participants' understanding that they needed to take responsibility for their own safety.

*Rachel (INT):* ... it should be that the men know that there are lines and you shouldn't cross them, and if a woman says 'no' she means no... but I just don't think it ever is going to be... you have to look out for yourselves and other women.

*Debbie (INT):* I think men are always going to behave the way they are and that's just men [laughs]. I think it is mainly the women themselves [who should take responsibility for safety] because, obviously, they have control over what exactly they're drinking and what exactly they're doing.

These assertions draw upon essentialist discourses of male sexuality, as predetermined and incapable of change. Debbie laughs after suggesting that men do not have the capacity to

change their behaviour, since “that’s just men”. The laughter which accompanies this statement effectively minimises the gravity of the idea that men are incapable of changing their behaviour, even if women experience this behaviour as intimidating or abusive. To a certain extent, this finding lends credence to Campbell’s (2005: 119), assertion that women internalise the message within the prevention literature which unwittingly reinforces essentialist notions of the ‘vulnerable/undefensible feminine’ and the ‘potent/unstoppable masculine’. This builds upon earlier feminist work which highlights the way that cultural norms position intimate sexual violence as a ‘natural’ or ‘exaggerated’ expression of innate male sexuality (Neame 2003), thus upholding the myth that men are physically incapable of controlling themselves sexually (Lawson & Olle 2005), implying that women must accept responsibility for avoiding and evading such threats. However, as will be discussed, young women in the current study also resented and resisted the idea that their own behaviour should be questioned or moderated in order to maintain their safety. This highlights the complex, and at times, contradictory nature of young women’s responses to this issue.

### *Disparity between theory and practice*

Although engaging in safety behaviour was understood to be a ‘normal’ and largely accepted element of a night out, participants also described limitations to adopting the behaviours advocated within safety advice; namely that doing so imposed on their capacity to have fun, was at times impractical, and conflicted with the prevailing drinking culture. Given that young women seek to ‘have a good time’ when they are in bars, pubs and clubs, it is perhaps unsurprising that some young women did not consciously think about their safety, or resisted doing so.

*Lynn (FG01):* A lot o’ people just try and put that [safety] out their mind so it doesn’t ruin their night.

The restrictions of remaining vigilant and adopting safety behaviours have been acknowledged within other work in terms of the associated limitations on women’s opportunities and the mitigation of their use of leisure space for pleasure, enjoyment, and relaxation (Gardner 1990; Seabrook & Green 2004; Snow et al. 1991; Wesely & Gaarder 2004). However, the vast majority (31 out of the 35) young women in this study said that they watched their drinks in bars, pubs and clubs in order to prevent them from being ‘spiked’, although some participants did acknowledge that this could be difficult to do in practice.

*Ruth (FG03):* You go out with the intention of right, keep a hold of my drink and I won’t put it down and all this stuff, but then once you’re out and you’ve had a few more drinks it tends to go a little bit by the wayside. It’s all good in theory, but in practice it doesn’t really work out.

As an evening progressed watching drinks was something which young women conceded became more difficult, particularly as the amount of alcohol that they had consumed increased. Safety advice intended to help women avoid their drinks being spiked recommends that they avoid leaving drinks unattended and don’t accept drinks which they have not seen being poured. However, participants highlighted scenarios in which it would be impractical to follow this advice.

*Judith (INT):* ... if I was with a guy going out for a drink that I'd just met, like a month ago or whatever.... I would never have any second thoughts about going away to the toilet and leaving my drink. 'Cause I mean what do you do? You're not gonna say.. "I'm taking my drink with me to the toilet"... you would just leave it there.

Aspects of safety advice such as 'never accept a drink you've not seen being poured' were also highlighted as unfeasible in busy bar and club environments. Ironically, women's concerns not to leave their drinks unattended also meant that they may consume their drinks more quickly, increasing the likelihood of drunkenness.

*Melissa (INT):* You either down it or you trust your friends... If you've spent £5 on a cocktail and your favourite song's just come on, all your friends are grabbing you up to dance and you're like do I down it, do I not?

The unintended outcome of accelerated alcohol consumption is a phenomenon also identified by Burgess et al (2009) in a study of university students' risk perceptions of drink spiking. Although almost all of the young women in the current study watched their drinks, none of them used specific devices to prevent their drink from being spiked, or to detect whether their drink had been spiked<sup>2</sup>. On the whole, young women were critical of devices such as bottle stoppers and 'drinks detectives'. These devices were described as costly ("it costs money to buy these stoppers, you know, to stop your drink getting spiked"), impractical ("you're gonna have to take like a big black bag of those out with you every time you go"), and at odds with having fun ("it takes kind of the enjoyment bit out of it really").

Advising women to go out in groups, look out for their friends and avoid leaving with a stranger is an integral part of safety advice directed towards young women socialising in bars, pubs and clubs. Going out in groups, or at least not alone, is something which participants described doing as a matter of course. This is perhaps unsurprising given the safety concerns and stigma attached to drinking in bars as a lone female (Hey 1986; Stanley 1980). However, the nomination of a 'drinks watcher' within friendship groups, as recommended within safety literature was not adopted by any of the participants; it was rejected on the basis that it formalises responsibility for something which seems like 'natural' behaviour and that doing so would be an unfair imposition of responsibility on one person. Further, relying on friends is a safety strategy which is not without difficulties, particularly if they are also intoxicated.

*Judith (INT):* ... you always think, "Oh...oh they would look after me", but then in the end they've not remembered going home either, so... if some guy was trying to like...drag me somewhere, would they even be in a position to do anything about it?... it's not that your friends...would intentionally not look out for you, but it's that maybe...they've lost control as well.

Reiterating the finding of other studies exploring the role of alcohol within women's lives (Rudolfstottir & Morgan 2009; Sheehan & Ridge 2001), alcohol consumption was considered to be a pleasurable and normal aspect of socialising in bars, pubs and clubs. However, it could also be equated with vulnerability and loss of control (Brooks 2008). Some women did seek to limit their alcohol consumption, and factual information about the alcoholic content of different drinks was generally viewed positively by participants.

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<sup>2</sup> These devices include 'spikeys' and 'drinks detectives'. A 'spikey' is a product which is designed to prevent a substance being administered into a drinks bottle by sealing the bottle neck, allowing space for only a straw to be inserted. A 'drinks detective' is a device which is designed to be inserted into a drink in order to detect the presence of 'date rape drugs'. The reliability of these devices, however, is questionable.



However, information and advice about sensible drinking was seen to contradict the promotion of alcohol and the prevailing drinking culture, described by (Measham & Brain 2005) as a 'culture of intoxication'.

*Lisa (INT):* ... see I think that's really silly because it's a bit for students and then it says "Avoid cheap drinks promotions or competitions to get you to drink more" [laughs] ... That's all about Freshers' Week. I mean they can't... give out a leaflet like this in a Freshers' Week pack, and then you're gonna open it and then behind it you're gonna have "12-hour Tuesdays, drinks are all 99 pence" – it just totally contradicts each other.

The contradiction highlighted here by Lisa is perhaps unsurprising given that young women have become a key audience for both safe drinking advice and aspects of alcohol industry marketing (Day et al. 2004; Hastings et al. 2010). Young women constitute a valuable consumer group (Jackson & Tinkler 2007; Rudolfsdottir & Morgan 2009), and both alcohol products and commercial drinking environments have become increasingly feminised (Chatterton & Hollands 2003; Rudolfsdottir & Morgan 2009).

#### *Maintaining control and respectability*

Given the nature and extent of young women's safety concerns, behaviours which give women the sense that they are in control of their environment and their own bodies have an understandable appeal even if, as discussed previously, there are practical challenges in implementing these behaviours. Indeed, some participants displayed a sense of pride and reassurance, emanating from their own level of awareness and use of safety behaviours. Parks (1998: 713) contends that women's belief that they can control or minimise the aggression directed towards them may account for the paradox whereby women expect and experience high levels of aggression in bars, yet continue to socialise in these venues on a regular basis. It has been argued elsewhere, that safety behaviours employed by women in the realm of leisure, such as only going out at particular times, are 'resistant practices' (Jordan & Aitchison 2008: 343), illustrating how women address their fears in order to participate in leisure activities (Bialeschki & Hicks 1998; Mehta & Bondi 1999). The notion of safety and control as a state which can be practiced and accomplished was evident in the participants' accounts.

*Fiona (INT):* ...it's more when people have bad incidents or if someone's had to walk home... we'll talk about it as a group and it's discussed that won't happen again. As bad as it sounds it's always bad incidences that make us kind of think, "Right, this...like, we'll be safe this time"... I don't know if that's a good thing or not, but... yeah, it's basically just kind of years of practise [laughs].

Implicit within Fiona's description of the way that she and her friends "will be safe this time", is a belief that they are capable of ensuring their safety, so long as they behave in a particular way. While the sense of control and security this belief may offer young women has an understandable appeal, it is difficult to position safety behaviours as 'resistant practices' in the empowering sense of this term when the adoption of these behaviours emanates from an understanding of the adverse implications of failing to adopt such precautions. Further, for some women the adoption of safety behaviours also appeared to offer a means of distinguishing themselves from the less controlled behaviours of 'other' women.

*Jessica (INT):* I'm ... more aware of things that are around me than some girls. Some girls just seem to let go too much when they're out.

Watson (2000) observes that within the setting of licensed premises, women can be particularly critical of one another if they are seen to fail to look after themselves and take responsibility for their own safety. Distancing themselves from the 'risky' conduct of 'other' women in bars, pubs and clubs may allow young women to maintain a position of respectability; an appealing position given that alcohol consumption is not conventionally associated with respectable femininity (Green et al. 1987; Schwartz & DeKeseredy 1997). Women who are drunk subvert virtues typically associated with normative femininity, such as modesty, caring and nurturance (Day et al. 2004), thus risking being viewed as unfeminine, unattractive, and of questionable sexual character. Earlier studies indicate that women who drink alcohol are frequently viewed as being more sexually available and promiscuous than women who do not consume alcohol (Abbey et al. 2001; Testa & Parks 1996). Further, as Measham (2002) notes, alcohol consumption is not just influenced by gender, it is also a way of 'doing gender' and excessive alcohol consumption, in particular, is associated with the less respectable working classes (Skeggs 2004). This highlights one of the negative implications of the individualised discourse inherent within much of the contemporary prevention literature targeted towards young women. In essence, it can be argued that women who fail to 'self regulate', fail to do their gender properly (Campbell 2005: 132).

To what extent, however, do these conceptions of gender persist in the contemporary discourse around young women and alcohol consumption? While participants in the current study understood women's drinking to have become more socially acceptable now than it was in the past, they were also acutely aware of enduring gendered risks.

*Fiona (FG03):* I don't know if it's just in my personal experience, but I think I'm more likely to hear people slagging off a drunk girl than a drunk guy. You hear people saying ... "What's she doing?", or, "She needs to go home". I don't think you really hear that about a guy as much.

*Ruth (FG03):* No, I agree. They're more likely to say, "Oh, look at the state of her", rather than, "Oh, look at the state of him". The guys would just be look, "Oh, you were so drunk last night", whereas the girls would be, like, "You were really, really bad last night", as in, "Sort yourself out". Yeah. It's more seen as funny....if a guy's really drunk. For a girl it's, "they should be ashamed".

It has been suggested that social taboos around young women's alcohol and drug consumption, alongside a shift in club culture following the growth of the 'rave scene' in the early 1990s reflects the potential for destabilising conventional gender relations within these traditionally sexualised environments (Thornton, 1995; Pini, 1997; MacRae, 2002; Measham, 2002). However, these claims have been met with caution. Studying clubbing identities, MacRae (2002), for example, observes only small changes in gender relations, relating to a shift in emphasis from 'sexual intent' to 'sociability', in some club contexts. Similarly, although McRobbie (1994) acknowledges the potential for conventional femininities and masculinities to be contested within club culture, she also points to continuing tensions for women in relation to freedom and control (e.g. the freedom to dance and a need to remain in control). For participants in the current study, drinking and socialising in bars, pubs and clubs was understood to be more socially acceptable now than it was in the past, although this

freedom remained relative to that of their male counterparts. In this regard, maintaining control and respectability remains a gendered responsibility.

### *Resentment of focus on women's behaviour*

Despite a sense of inevitability about men's behaviour, which manifests itself in women remaining vigilant and adopting safety behaviours, some participants questioned the predominant focus on women's behaviour within safety campaigns.

*Lisa (INT):* I mean they all say the same thing, don't they? And the more you hear something the more you're just gonna be like, "Yeah, yeah, I know, whatever"... because it's all aimed at girls and I think that...yeah, after you hear it too many times you just switch off, whereas guys don't hear it enough, which maybe is why... they spike people's drink... and they think they can get away with it too, and they can. Well they do.

It would appear that participants' sense that they had 'heard it all before' contributed to a process of 'switching off' from safety messages. However, some participants also questioned the intentions of campaigns and media attention on the issue of women's safety.

*Louisa (INT):* ... you've also got like the date rape drugs all over the papers and in the news and everything, but I don't necessarily think that it's any worse than it's ever been... I think it's a backlash... I just think it's like the media trying to make women scared of leaving their houses... it's like you've got to be careful, don't be by yourself, get a rape whistle, be scared of everyone around you because everyone's a danger to you, whereas they're not. You've got to be sensible, but they've created too much of a problem out of it.

While maintaining a balance between the positive outcome of raising awareness and the negative outcome of increasing fear is a matter of contention within safety campaigns, Louisa implies here that there is a 'backlash' to women's freedom which manifests itself in attempts to restrict women's movements through fear. Further, the current approach to women's safety, as conveyed in the media and safety campaigns, was also located by other participants within the context of women's freedoms more broadly, again alluding to a 'backlash' (Faludi 1992):

*Eilidh (INT):* It's like women are let off the leash in some ways. It's like those training leads you get for puppies, you're let off for so long and then they kind of like yank you back again. It's like oh you're allowed to vote and do all this, but now you're not allowed to drink or smoke "Come back! Come back! Get back in the kitchen!" I honestly feel like it's like it can be so difficult to be a woman 'cause you keep getting told what's appropriate and what's not appropriate...

For some participants, their frustration with what they perceived to be unfair and contradictory messages triggered a reaction against safety messages ("men don't get this... so why should I listen to it?"). Related to this sense of injustice, and concern articulated by some participants that there were negative implications of safety campaigns focusing entirely on women's behaviour, a preference was articulated for campaigns which focused on men's behaviour. The following focus group extract relates to discussion of a Home Office poster with the message "1 in 3 rapes happened when a woman has been drinking":

*Lorna (FG03):* It feels like they should have another poster that says one in three...out of how many rapes has the male been drinking when he carries out rapes?

Perhaps paradoxically, the Home Office also developed a campaign which focused on the need for men to ensure that they have the sexual consent of women if they have been drinking. This campaign was received more positively by participants.

*Louisa (INT):* I think that's a good campaign [Home Office consent campaign], because I think it might make men question like their attitude and themselves rather than women being told to question themselves and stop drinking because you're going to end up getting taken advantage of. It's more like, guys stop doing it!

### *Conclusions*

While it is difficult to ascertain the specific impact that safety advice has on young women's attitudes and behaviours, amidst other social and cultural influences, findings from this study suggest that the individualised and gendered discourse within contemporary safety campaigns is reflected in young women's accounts of socialising in bars, pubs and clubs, and their associated safety concerns and behaviours. However, even within the confines of the relatively homogenous white, middle-class sample of the current study, young women's responses to safety advice were diverse and, at times, contradictory; gendered safety advice was simultaneously adopted, resisted and rejected. Arguably this highlights the complexity of 'doing gender' within the contemporary context of bars, pubs and clubs.

For most of the participants in the current study, adopting safety behaviours to prevent drink spiking and sexual violence was both 'common sense' behaviour and a necessity in light of their safety concerns in bars, pubs and clubs. These concerns were by no means irrational given their experiences in these venues, echoing the findings of other studies which have highlighted the vulnerability of young women to sexual assault (Myhill & Allen 2002), particularly in licensed premises (Moreton 2002; Schwartz 1997; Sturman 2000; Watson 2000). However, adopting safety behaviours such as only going out in groups, having shoes that they can run in, and watching their drink at all times are surely only 'common sense' measures for women, not men. Further, participants highlighted practical difficulties in relation to successfully implementing advice such as watching drinks at all times and never accepting a drink you have not seen poured.

Echoing the assertions of Neame (2003) and Campbell (2005), it is argued here that safety campaigns inadvertently compound the normalisation of male violence and harassment experienced by women by presenting it as an innate aspect of male behaviour alongside the presentation of safekeeping strategies for women as 'common sense'. Drawing upon a Foucauldian perspective, McNay (1992) argues that bodily practices become a 'technology of the self' through a process of normalization. Applying this logic to safekeeping strategies employed by women to prevent rape, Campbell (2005: 123) posits that these strategies become 'embodied acts' rather than a coercive form of regulation. The findings of the current study largely concur with the conceptualisation of safety behaviours as normalised and 'embodied acts', which form part of a process of self-regulation and social control. However, for participants in the current study these acts were often performed with an awareness, and at times resentment, of the individualised and gendered responsibility inherent within these acts. Moreover, certain aspects of safety advice were also rejected by participants as unrealistic, or

unfairly concentrated on the behaviour of women rather than men. This challenges the notion that safekeeping behaviours used by women are entirely internalised or ‘embodied acts’.

Further, participants made distinctions between their own behaviour and the ‘risky’ behaviour of ‘other’ women, which may, in part, have operated as a function of class due to the association of working class femininities with excessive and unrestrained behaviours (Skeggs 2004). Reflecting conventional public attitudes towards appropriate behaviour for women, this was particularly apparent in relation to alcohol consumption. Reiterating the conclusions of Rudolfstottir and Morgan (2009), middle class women’s projection of themselves as in control of their drinking (and arguably other behaviours), may limit the extent to which they see campaigns as relevant to them, as opposed to ‘other’ women. In this regard, such campaign messages are arguably externalised rather than internalised.

While there are legitimate public health concerns about women’s increased levels of alcohol consumption, and participants were largely receptive to advice about alcohol consumption, campaigns which fuse messages about women’s alcohol consumption and the prevention of sexual assault risk (re)invoking a victim-blaming discourse. There are certain implications for women who ‘fail’ to adopt recommended safety behaviours in that they subsequently risk blame or alienation in the event that they are assaulted, since they have essentially ‘failed to do their gender properly’. The gendered construction of risk, predicated upon notions of appropriate femininity, has practical implications for the attribution of blame and responsibility following rape or sexual assault. A survey of male and female attitudes towards sexual assault conducted by Amnesty International UK (2005) revealed that 30% of respondents thought that being drunk makes a woman in some way responsible for being raped. Similarly, research commissioned by Rape Crisis Scotland (2007) revealed that 26% of people questioned agreed that women contribute to being raped if they are drunk<sup>3</sup>. The existence of these attitudes may, in part, explain why rape cases involving alcohol or drugs are still less likely to progress through the legal system, and more likely to end in acquittals<sup>4</sup> (Lovett et al. 2004), endorsing the assertion by Watson (2000: 12) that, “The role that alcohol and other drugs play in sexual assault is most apparent in the area of perceived culpability”. The findings of this study highlight the need for safety initiatives to focus on the behaviour of abusive men and the cultural beliefs which sanction sexual violence as a normative aspect of male sexuality, rather than on the ‘risky’ behaviour of women. Ultimately, violence against women cannot be eliminated without focusing preventative work on abusive male behaviour (Flood 2003). This would represent an important departure from current prevention campaigns which, with the exception of the ‘consent’ campaign developed by the Home Office, have focused on women’s individual responsibility to resist the violence and harassment they are subjected to at the hands of abusive men.

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<sup>3</sup> Over 700 participants between the ages of 18 and 65 years were surveyed, reflecting the age of eligibility for jury service in Scotland.

<sup>4</sup> Other factors such as impaired memory are also likely to contribute to the difficulties in prosecuting sexual offence cases where intoxicants are involved.

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