The Slutwalks: Reappropriation through Demonstration

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Abstract:
The Slutwalks were protests which took place in cities across the world in summer 2011 and were sparked when a police officer told a group of students that they should stop dressing like sluts to avoid being sexually assaulted. A global movement in which women and men took to the streets - many dressed provocatively and proudly called themselves sluts - in an attempt to reclaim both the derogatory term and the right to dress how they want; free from judgement. This paper interviews Slutwalk participants from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK and Vienna, Austria to explore their motivations for getting involved and to gain a deeper understanding of how they have challenged androcentric structural norms that are manifest within the city.

1 From a radical feminist perspective, the city has been so thoroughly characterised by male structures and pervaded by male practices that women have been kept on the margins and, ultimately, have been rendered invisible in this male-dominated environment. Urban architecture with its high-rise buildings reverberates with phallic symbols; a hegemonic narrative of growth and expansion favours capitalist practices of exploitation that exclude female practices; arguably, it is these urban features that have historically defined men's and women's roles and positioning in the city.

2 From a less radical stance, feminist geographers Deborah Parsons, Doreen Massey, Elizabeth Wilson and Leslie Kanes Weisman have provided important discussions on how a given city's spatial structures, its built environment and a hegemonic male narrative have jointly shaped gendered experiences. In their deconstructions of the city, they still maintain that the urban environment has perpetuated male dominance and female subordination. Patriarchy and androcentrism are still manifest in the urban environment. As there does not seem to be a female (counter-) narrative of the city, women are still marginalised in and by urban structures and practices. In line with these feminist geographers, this contribution assumes that, although women have gained the same rights as men, many gendered inequalities still exist and have continued to influence the urban environment, its structures and practices.

3 At the same time, of course, the urban environment is less monolithic than this cursory overview may suggest. As any living environment, it is inherently shaped by the practices of all its inhabitants, be they male or female, be they hegemonic or marginal. When it comes to gendered experience, the city emerges as a site of contestation within which many battles are fought over its structures and practices. In less martial words: Urban public space/s

serve as collective arenas to communicate discontent amongst groups. Such public displays of discontent may become acts of appropriation of urban space/s that may then not only re-define men's and women's experiences as well as their gendered roles and positionings. Rather, they may become expressions of belonging in the urban environment with its everyday structures and practices (Fenster 243).

4 The Slutwalks movement is one such example of appropriating urban public space/s. These walks have taken place in major cities across the world since 2011. Their provocative title expresses participants' attempt at reclaiming a derogatory term used against many "ordinary" women in everyday life to insult them and to thereby place them in an inferior position. At the same time, the Slutwalks constitute a distinctly urban phenomenon that both responds to and undermines the city's gendered structures, practices and narratives. Many women and even men took to the streets, dressed provocatively, to protest against stereotypical perceptions of women and against the social inequalities these entail. Accordingly, the marches illustrate how the city's hegemonic, patriarchal and androcentric, norms and practices are being challenged by the sheer physical presence of people who rebel against these very norms. Moreover, it is important to raise the question to what extent the Slutwalks may represent a tactic of reappropriating the urban environment's spatial structures as well.

5 This empirical study is based on interviews with a group of women who took part in The Slutwalks. The respondents are women from all walks of life; so, of course, factors like age, class, ethnicity and sexuality all impact on their individual perceptions and experiences not only of the city, but also of the Slutwalks. Yet, their shared narrative of having participated in the protests allows for comparing their testimonies, which will be used to give insights into the women's personal motivations for as well as their experiences in getting involved in the event. Due to the limitations of the small-scale qualitative research project conducted for the present purposes, not every facet of gender and its diversity can be explored. Rather, this contribution will begin with a brief discussion of the theoretical background, introducing the concepts of gendered space, language, the body, and gendered social protest before outlining the interview results in order to then conclude with a discussion of how The Slutwalks may have served as tactics of (re-)appropriating androcentric urban space/s.

6 In using the Grounded Theory method, the theoretical framework has been constructed from key concepts and themes derived from this empirical research. In taking this approach, the overarching research question is prevalent, yet the interviewees' responses

helped develop and underpin the main themes which were then explored and analysed in more depth within the theoretical framework. The theoretical part is subsumed under the overarching concept of The Androcentric City. Its core features are illustrated through the abstract categories of Space, Language, The Body, and Gendered Social Protest. The theoretical part shows how all four of these categories are interwoven with such important issues as power, control, safety and sexuality, and how they thus become ambiguous and fluid.

7 The subsequent part of this contribution presents the interviews and their main results. The overarching concept of The Androcentric City of the first, theoretical part, is replaced by the concept of Reappropriation. The change in terminology reflects The Slutwalks' challenge to the androcentrism manifest in the city: within the cluster of theoretical categories of the first part, the results section of the second part demonstrates how these categories have been reappropriated by the Slutwalk participants and, to some degree, how they have been overturned in the protest and have become forms of empowerment for them instead. The final part discusses these workings in more detail.

The Androcentric City

Space

8 Space has a wide array of meanings and evokes a broad range of associations. What all of these share is their emphasis on space being linked to one's sense of place in the world, which is not only the basis for one's feeling of being at home in a particular place, but which is also reverberated in one's feeling of being comfortable in more unknown places and, hence, in one's mobility. The complexity of this matter brings forth many interpretations and discussions (cf. Massey 1). The construction of space, specifically city space, can perpetuate divisions between groups in society, maintaining societal inequalities and subordination: "Space, like language, is socially constructed…the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race and class relations in society […]. Language and space contribute to the power of some groups over others and the maintenance of human inequality." (Weisman 2) However, these divisions are often difficult to pinpoint: With the exception of changing rooms and toilets, explicit sex separations are rarely defined in urban spaces. Rather, gender inequalities may be maintained through a hegemonic masculine ideal and its inherent – and often implicit – 'rules' about such factors as appearance and dress. Non-compliance then impacts upon one's sense of belonging, and, what is more, upon one's general safety, too. Fitting in, as a process of social conformity, can

then become a feeling of being ‘out of place’ for certain groups, leading to groups such as women becoming objectified, even marginalised (Jarvis 19).

9 Omnipresent androcentrism in the construction of urban spaces and in the built environment can thus further propel gender divisions. Given women’s lack of presence in the urban environment (and in the urban workplace) until recently, cities have become habitually male spaces, built upon masculine ideals. Skyscrapers, feminists have argued, are phallic, patriarchal symbols, which now take up large proportions of cities. This is starkly contrasted with the feminine imagery of the home as a ‘nest’ and ‘birthplace’. Hence, space is very much entwined with language (as will also be shown below), representing masculine and feminine binary spheres. Through this socially constructed language, stark contrasts are evident between the city/masculine and home/feminine binaries, thus perpetuating gender divisions between the two areas (Weisman 17). This point can be argued to be somewhat reductionist in the explanation of gender divisions in cities, given the complex mechanisms that cities are: full of history, culture and people that make up the myriad of layers that jointly form the urban environment. However Doreen Massey explains that:

> Space and place, spaces and places, and our sense of them (and such related things as our degree of mobility) are gendered through and through […]. And this gendering of space both reflects *and has effects back* on the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live (186).

10 The construction of space not only impacts upon the sense of belonging that groups can experience in urban spaces, but also on the different gendered uses of these constructed spaces and on gendered relations to these constructed spaces. This becomes particularly evident when considering the construction of the built environment in terms of the monitoring of city space: new forms of architecture and the growing use of surveillance in cities have rendered urban spaces less predictable (Koskela 2000). The gaze, power and control are key terms in looking at more subtle forms of the built environment, such as surveillance cameras, that change the ways in which city space is controlled and the ways in which people relate to that space. In shifting away from the built environment in a traditional architectural form, surveillance can turn space into a more fluid, intangible, heightened space that is difficult to grasp within its alternative dimensions. (Koskella 306). This can be argued to again create alienation and disorientation in bringing a gendered aspect to the use of surveillance cameras in urban spaces. Koskella puts forward the point that they reproduce patriarchal forms of power - women do not rely on those behind the cameras, due to the police and guards that are responsible for the daily routine of the surveillance, yet do not

necessarily consider who is behind the camera. The power and control over women in public urban spaces could be argued to perpetuate the objectification of women through the male gaze due to a predominant male group behind the camera and the mainly female group who move in areas more likely to have surveillance. (Koskela 255)

11 Another example of a heavily regulated and controlled space is that of shopping centres in which women habitually spend more time than men. In the initial construction of its predecessor, the department store, Elizabeth Wilson states that: "[The department store] created an 'aesthetic demi-monde' for the bourgeoisie in which beauty was for sale as a commodity" (Wilson 59). Still, towards the end of the 19th Century, the shopping mall was a space in which women could wander unchaperoned, without the protection of men (Wilson 60). The mall, like its earlier counterpart, the department store, is a "woman's world" (Weisman 44-5). Indeed, the term 'women's world' is used deliberately in relation to the shopping mall due to the rather obvious and narrow assumptions that shopping and consumerism constitute typically female leisure activities related to typically feminine attributes. Moreover, the shopping mall represents how a typical female space is linked to hegemonic ideals of femininity such as seeking enjoyment through shopping and consumerism. Shopping malls, which are carefully planned structures, aim to be the perfect place for women to spend their time – and money. "Malls are artificially controlled environments designed to create illusion and fantasy […]." (Weismann 44) Having put forward the argument that the city is a habitually masculine space, the shopping mall is considered as a more feminine space. As the image of the shopping centre, or of shopping in general, is most commonly associated with women, upon further scrutiny, even consumerism and shopping may come to signify forms of social control over women, e.g. through advertising and through its intrinsic ideology, as well as the heavy surveillance of those areas.

12 Paradoxically they are spaces that have always been associated with heavy monitoring and control, even from the 19th Century onwards. Today, shopping centres have become typical places of surveillance and thus reflect the male/female division in rather intricate ways. This can call in to question women's mobility in urban spaces and show its restrictions: women are not free to wander at their will without being controlled in and by their environment.

Language and the Urban Narrative

13 Language and space are connected in the construction of the city as a male space in which women have been kept on the margins. Feminists have argued that both the built

environment and the language used have been the driving forces in the creation of a masculine, gender blind narrative that has perpetuated the invisibility of women, both in urban spaces and urban scholarship. In moving from the built environment skyline to the street and the creation of a male narrative in city life, the cities of the 19th Century and the era of Modernity play a key role in the marginalising of women from the story of the city. Deborah Parsons' work is concerned with the 'urban wanderer' or the flâneur who was a key figure in the writings of Baudelaire. She contends that the modernist male figure painted as typically an artist, removed from financial responsibility, who is associated with "aesthetic circles of café life" (17), is a representation of the bourgeois male figure that dominates the image of the city and is permitted to wander the urban environment (17). The female, she argues, is not: "The city has been habitually conceived as a male space, in which women are either repressed or disobedient marginal presences, has resulted in an emphasis in theoretical analysis on gendered maps that reflect such conditions" (2). Janet Wolff claims that "there is no question of inventing the flâneuse; the essential point is that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the 19th Century" (47). In the above statements, it is demonstrated that there cannot be a female equivalent to the male urban wanderer due to the oppression and invisibility of women through writing and the construction of language of life in the city. In analysing the construction of language around city life and urban wandering, the masculine narrative has very much laid the foundations of a gendered map of the city in which men have historically been free to roam and women kept on the margins.

14 Language can also be used to show the differences in the way that women are referred to in contemporary society, creating a subordination and the existing invisibility of women through masculine narrative. In local colloquialisms this can be manifest, such as the North-East of England with such terms as hinny, pet, love and darling that are used to greet women. Although seen as rather harmless terms and classed as part of the local culture, they could be deemed sexist given the lack of equivalent vocabulary for men - with the overall possible aim to infantilise women (Jarvis 93). Judith Butler even further deconstructs the binary divisions of gender, calling for language that is not heterosexually presupposed. She cites Wittig in her assertion that language is an "institution that can be radically transformed […] weakened by the collective actions of choosing individuals" (36). In creating gender binary divisions and the language used to define and describe gender identities synonymous with masculine and feminine; they are based on a "heterosexual contract" (36) and do not include homosexual identities or identities removed from reproductive function (36).

15 What Helen Jarvis claims is that in local cultures, language used as terms of endearment towards women also has chauvinist meanings at their root. What makes this apparent may not be the words themselves, but the point that there are no words that represent the male equivalent due to the lack of a female narrative until relatively recently. The Slutwalks could be argued to be an attempt of weakening such a derogatory term as 'slut' in the strive to reclaim a word so steeped in misogyny.

The Body

16 While language works in subtle ways, images of the body are more evident in the urban landscape. Quite often, they propagate hegemonic feminine and masculine identities. It is particularly in the West that images of hyper-sexualised females dominate billboards and shop windows and thus imply a dominant feminine identity. In recent years, feminists have begun to link the body and its relation to space more concretely, both in a contemporary postmodern context but also retrospectively.

17 Whilst in the 19th Century, the above-mentioned shopping malls were emerging as a female domain in which women could wander free of constraints, prostitutes were also a common presence within the modernist city. The prostitute in many ways resembles the binary opposite to the flâneur: "The public symbol of the female vice, the prostitute established a stark contrast to domesticated feminine virtue as well as to male bourgeois identity" (Walkowitz 21). What the prostitutes of the modernist era represented was not only how women of different classes and sections of society related to the city, clearly in different ways, but still on the margins. Yet they resided in red-light districts, as commodities for the male spectators and consumers. Red-light districts remain a consistent zone in many cities today, yet the growth of lap-dancing clubs and strip bars have meant that sexualised activity has become more mainstream, and a widely accepted form of leisure. The hyper-sexualised female body is not something restricted to red-light districts and billboards, but is as accessible on the high street as bars and cafes. In current feminist debate, contentions lie whether women becoming strippers and lap-dancing are a form of empowerment or not. Kat Banyard states that "the 1990s [was] the decade during which sex became managed, manufactured, marketed, and consumed" she further adds "lap-dancing clubs in the UK doubled between 2004 and 2008 to at least 300" (138-39). In *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, Ariel Levy claims that in today's hyper-sexualised, western society, that if you are against stripping and taking part in 'Raunch Culture' then it is considered passé in our supposed postfeminist era. What many feminists argue are the contradictions of this so-called empowerment, is that

the sex industry and the proliferation of strip bars and lap dancing clubs perpetuate a hyper-sexualised image of women that still controls and oppresses them due an identity based on a masculine ideal. The counter argument being that women now have the right to dress and act how they want, free from constraints and pressures to be the 'home-maker' and 'good wife' that they once were.

18 The cultural forces that shaped gendered bodies have attracted a growing interest by feminist commentators, bringing into question issues of controlling our own bodies and having them regulated by others (Jarvis 113). Moreover, this illustrated how our bodies are emblazoned with meaning around sexuality and reiterate the dominant ideals of heterosexuality. "Repeated performances of expected behaviours, then, establish regulatory practices for gendered, sexed and sexualised bodies – and these practices are, importantly, imprinted on space" (Binnie ix). In 'doing' our gender, Butler puts forward "that regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe (185). In relation to the hegemonic ideal of the body, particularly the feminine body, it is a political and symbolic vessel open to much contention and discourse, which Butler has deconstructed and debated in her Queer Theory paradigm.

19 Since emerging in the 1990s Queer Theory has sought to challenge dominant notions of sexuality and heteronormative ideals around gender and question the unwavering notions of sexual identities and behaviours. Queer Theory instead places itself in opposition to the categorisations of sex and even gender by exploring and theorising marginalised groups and behaviours not seen as normative (Cohen 201). In cities, queer spaces have become the sight of designated quarters, in which marginalised activity takes place and marginalised identities are played out. Binnie puts forward the argument that sexuality and space can be somewhat ephemeral in that in the night time economy, queer practices take place in Gay Villages, yet during the day this can create problems with safety (Binnie 113). This demonstrates that acts of marginalised activity – that is behaviour removed from the norm - is not regarded as something as accepted within mainstream society.

Gendered Social Protest

20 The body in protest is an example of the political subjectivity that can be directed at gender, with various perceptions of how not just the individual body, but a body of people taking political action can be interpreted by onlookers, commentators and hegemonic discourses. In the growing field of gender and social movements, observations of the

complexities and contradictions involved in gendered (and non-gendered) protests have been made. Einwohner *et al* claim that "movements that draw on feminine stereotypes face a double bind that hampers their success" (679). In protesting about non-gender issues, when images are attached to the protest, cultural ideas around masculinity and femininity can be constructed. The portrayal of the protesters in action is significant due to the construction and manipulation of gendered meanings and identities. Einwohner *et al* also put forward the point that whether it is intentional or not to manipulate the gendered meanings of demonstrators, that the legitimacy and potential outcomes of a protest can be obstructed. However, what they assert is that "movements that are associated with traditional meanings of gender will be more acceptable than those that resist such meanings" (679). Seemingly conventional notions of femininity and masculinity still prevail, even in rather unconventional activities such as demonstrations. This notion of attaching typical gendered traits to a protesting crowd is somewhat impervious to change, as Deborah Parsons asserts: "Scientific studies of women centred on the female species as less evolved than the male, and thus less intelligent, less morally reasoning, more emotional and prone to violence […] the mass as irrational, excitable, childish, and easily led, all traits they associate with feminine instincts (Parsons 44-45). In focussing on stereotypical feminine traits, a narrative has been established in portraying the female protester as irrational and ultimately situating female protest beneath that of the predominantly male protest. Such patriarchal explanations as this have been used to undermine female protests; the very protests that have sought to fight against such patriarchal controls and narratives set against them. The juxtaposed quotes from Einwohner also highlight the complexities of gendered protest in that conventional notions of gender are seemingly more acceptable to the onlooker, yet gender stereotypes are perpetuated because of this.

21 Today stereotypes are still drawn on as explanations for certain gendered behaviours and motivations. In turning the argument around to a predominantly male crowd of demonstrators, typical traits such as intelligence, being politically active and men as natural leaders, could equally be used as motivations and justifications for an equivalent male crowd of protesters. In conforming to overriding gender traits, it is debatable as to whether this can be a hindrance or a help to women's protests that focus on gender equality. Being seen to display typical gendered characteristics could be viewed as rebellion and the refusal to conform to more masculine language and set of actions. This may demonstrate the reclaiming of femininity and the celebration of qualities that could have been traditionally seen as weaknesses. Taylor investigates the gender processes in women's self-help movements and

found that they promoted essentially feminine traits and qualities during their demonstrations, using “open displays of emotion, empathy, and attention to participants’ biographies” (20). Rather than claim that men do not possess any of the above qualities, they are traits commonly associated with femininity and were used, with the inclusivity of males, as structural forms in the organisation process. What Taylor goes on to add is that a gendered analysis of social movements needs to be aware of the gender binary representations which activists use. This is to recognise and categorise themselves in order to share both commonalities with each other to stimulate collective action, but to also draw a boundary between themselves and their opponents (21). The ‘collective’ is clearly significant is sharing a common goal in protesting for a certain cause, yet linked with personal benefits and self-identities thus relating a united mass of people to individual motivations for demonstrating (Oliver & Marwell 252). Yet, in using the gendered body within protest, Theresa O’ Keefe is critical of the “emancipatory potential of the Slutwalk movement” (10) and how inclusivity of the protests to bodies that do not fit within the ‘norm’ which she feels The Slutwalks portray. O’ Keefe asserts the argument that a protest that uses the body so explicitly in its portrayal can be deemed as creating and widening gender hierarchies based on body difference. What O’ Keefe calls for is, given that bodies are both the medium and the message within The Slutwalks that there is a “blindness to structural oppression” and that they “form a category of femininity that is rooted in sexualised and patriarchal notions of autonomy and agency” (10). In her criticisms of Slutwalks, O’Keefe places The Slutwalks firmly in ‘Post feminism’ in which structural patriarchy is ignored in the hyper-sexualised body protest that has taken place. The question of lack of inclusivity to different forms of sexuality and encompassing of women’s experiences calls in to question the commonalities and collective conscious that the Slutwalks may have. The politics of the body and the discursive practices that occur around the representation and perception of the female body, demonstrate that the very reason and message of the political protest itself can become somewhat secondary.

RESULTS

22 Each interview conducted brought fresh perspectives and shed new light on issues under discussion, and a great diversity of thoughts, opinions and perspectives emerged. The crucial focus of the analysis is to draw parallels between the responses and the main research question, to show in what ways they challenge the androcentric city and to what extent they reappropriated gendered space in their respective cities. The categories and concepts will be listed in order to give structure to the analysis.

Reappropriation

Space

23 Throughout the interviews, the protest was often referred to as a space that allowed the protesters to act, dress, say what they want and be safe due to being part of a collective group and fighting for the same cause as each other. The moving, unfixed space in which the body of people moved somewhat symbolised a space in which they could perform without judgement.

24 El: "For me, the people in the demonstration felt like they were doing something that was important to them and also the feeling having a free space and having fun wearing something they wouldn't usually wear on the street. That was this empowerment feeling that had a great effect"

25 Hu: "It was made quite clearly that people should dress in what they feel comfortable in and for some people they just went in their normal clothes, for other people it was an opportunity to wear clothes that they wouldn't feel comfortable in because, as my Mum pointed out, when you are in a big mob of people, you can wear what you want and you can say what you want because nobody can attack you in that space and nobody can make you feel bad about yourself while you are in that group of people, so there were some people that jumped on the opportunity to go in underwear or something but people just wore what they wanted to."

26 What the protest allowed many to do was be creative in wearing and acting as something that they feel they may have been judged doing outside of the group that they were in. The two respondents above took part in separate Slutwalk protests yet both felt that it created a safe space to have fun in. One respondent, from the Newcastle march was more uncertain of the march, due to it being the first Slutwalk and the messages that it was giving out:

27 Ru: "it was quite small and it went really fast rather than go slow and take the space that we were wanting to reclaim and because of the message – it's an angry and provocative message I think… if you walk as a group of women telling men to fuck off basically then you are just vulnerable, it makes me feel empowered and fantastic to be with those women, to have strength in numbers, but it is a really provocative message, I'd be surprised not to get a reaction."

28 This respondent felt empowered within the space that the protest itself created yet did not feel that it reclaimed the physical space that it had the potential to in order to get the

message across due to its fast pace. Although there was a feeling of safety within the group amongst the respondents, there was clearly still reluctance due to its mixed messages and possible hostile reaction.

Language and the Urban Narrative

29 The discussion of the word slut surfaced naturally in a lot of the interviews with many respondents saying that they wanted to get involved in spite of their reservations about the so-called reclaiming of the word. There was a clear trend in responses and opinions on the much contested name of the protest:

30 Ly: "I've got to say probably because I'm an older woman, when I first heard about the Slutwalks I probably wasn't so enamoured with the idea with the connotations of a word I had grown up with was something I had fought against"

31 Rh: "For me, if we could ignore the word slut that would be good as I don't like the word and don't think it can be reclaimed as we never had it as a positive word in the first place."

32 Au: "I don't want to call myself a slut, I don't want to call anybody a slut, it's not the word itself but what is behind the word."

33 Ru: "I understand and support ideas around reclaiming words like queer, nigger maybe but I don't think slut ever had any positive connotations for women as I understand it, it's always been used in a derogatory way and doesn't have any emancipatory routes, I don't see it as a word to reclaim."

34 Most of the respondents were uncomfortable in reclaiming a word that, at its root is misogynistic. Rather than be in agreement with the critics of the Slutwalk itself, the respondents of my interviews are in support of the march yet have been able to put opinions aside on the name of the protest. What came across clearly in the interviews was the enthusiasm to get involved in the protest and the reasons for marching which in turn overcame doubts about the name of the march itself.

35 The Slutwalk that took place in Vienna brought about an interesting discussion on reclaiming the word slut. The connotations of the word slut in German; the participants felt would be too negative and even put off potential marchers for the protest. By using the English term it also meant that it was part of something bigger, the global Slutwalk movement as a whole rather than a localised protest.

36 Au: For me, I can imagine reclaiming the word in English but in German the word is so negative – *Schlampe* - I don't want to claim the word, I don't know if it is worth it, I think it is energy that isn't worth spending.

37 El: the word slut, I would say that it is connected to the Slutwalk now and not so much connected to its usual meaning. Which also makes it difficult as for me personally I would have loved to use the German word as it is something that people hear and I would love to have the effect of reclaiming the word but on the other hand I think it would have meant that people would have been afraid to come.

The Body

38 In talking to The Slutwalk participants, it was surprising to find that the lot of marchers had not in fact dressed in a provocative way. Having interviewed the organisers of the Newcastle and Vienna Slutwalks, they had made it clear to anyone that wanted to join that they could wear what they wanted for the protest. What many did was have fun and be creative with how they dressed on The Slutwalk, given that it was a safe space in which to do that. Yet the image of the provocatively dressed women who took to the streets dominated the images in the press.

39 Ro: "The media will always pick up on something negative, regardless of what happens. I dressed on the Slutwalk the way that I normally dress and my message was I get shit for dressing like this too, for not dressing like their version of feminine."

40 The Vienna Slutwalk organisers and protesters, after seeing the images that had dominated newspapers, were savvy about getting the press coverage that they wanted for the protest, to get the message across through banners and placards rather than in the provocative images.

41 El: "I had the impression that when people got photographed at ours, people tried not to be super sexy and to put a lot of signs in front of their bodies."

42 The way in which the respondents approached the Slutwalk depended on what they felt comfortable in. The messages of the protest and the wider societal discussion about women's bodies, sexuality and the reclaiming of language created a gap that left some of the participants questioning whether these discussions should have taken place initially. One respondent in particular felt that it was what the Slutwalk lacked:

43 Rh: "I think that the way in which women's bodies are controlled has a lot to do with clothes, fashion, and shopping and consumerism and global capitalism so I think that's a massive discussion to have when you take all of those extra things that it impacts on."

44 The contradictory messages of the Slutwalk were of concern to some of the participants. In being aware of the hegemonic images of women's bodies as sexualised and the oppressive controls that are placed on them, there were small tactics by some participants to still get the core message across about sexual harassment and the objectification of women, by not dressing and displaying their bodies in a certain way. The quote above is representative of broader questions asked of how to tackle these patriarchal controls in a discursive terrain that has already been set through a history of oppression towards women's bodies and the dominant ideal that persists in society. Although serious questions needed to be asked, responses from other interviewees reflected an alternative empowered attitude to dressing provocatively for the demonstration.

45 Hu: "if you think that this is the wrong way to empower myself, well I haven't got any other alternatives at the moment. I haven't come across any other movement recently that has been as big as this and I am happy where I am."

46 Ra: "A lot of women do feel like they have to dress a certain way but it's more because a lot of them dress the way they want to because it makes them feel better about themselves and their bodies and they can show it off how they want."

Mobilisation/Gendered Social Protest

47 From the concepts presented above, there were conflicting viewpoints on the protest and its messages, raising questions and doubts in some participants' minds and giving empowerment to others. What every respondent was wholly positive about was the mobilisation of a predominantly young crowd to take to the streets in anger at the way they had, and the way they had saw other women being treated. The majority of respondents had been involved in activism before and commented that they saw many new people getting involved who were enthusiastic about The Slutwalks. Although the protest raised questions, there was no doubt it had mobilised many women and men to get involved.

48 El: "it was a new way of doing political work and what attracted me was its openness and you could see people that would never normally campaign and never going on the streets but I thought it concerns me and it is about me and feel like you can be around other people and have fun with it with something that is normally very negative."

49 Rh: "it was the first demonstration I had been on and I had wanted to get involved with more activism. So we decided to get involved and a good opportunity to get feminism on the streets of the city centre and bring people together."

Feminist Movements

50 Every respondent's feminism was something unique to them. Motivations for getting involved all differed between one respondent and the next; whilst for the young respondents The Slutwalks is something that they can identify with and for the older respondents who had been involved with feminist activism before; it was a youthful movement that they wanted to support, in spite of reservations.

51 Ru: "a new movement of women who are getting angry and pissed off and doing something about it. They are doing things differently to how we did things in my generation I think, in a more D.I.Y, punk, music oriented, informed by anarchism stuff like that."

52 H: "I have a problem with some women that aren't involved in the Slutwalk that criticise movements like this because for some reason like, I happen to like shaving my legs that this means that I'm not a proper feminist and I really, really dislike the idea of a proper feminist because it means something different to a lot of people…Stuff like that is really lovely because you do get an idea around the fun sense of it, it needs to be creative, you can't sit and petition from home or anything like that because you need something so creative that it will engage people."

53 Ro: "I'm incredibly hopeful that there is a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of young people incredibly motivated to support feminism and I want to be there to support them to do that and their own kind of feminism, not just what I believe it to be but around what they're doing."

54 In seeing the diversity in respondent's own feminism, The Slutwalks gave them a clear space in which to mobilise as part of a collective and fight for the same causes and against the same oppressions. The creative space that The Slutwalks established, also allowed an open space in which protesters could be individual, which demonstrated the inclusivity of different feminisms and people from different backgrounds and ages.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

55 This study sought to explore the question: In what ways do the Slutwalks challenge the androcentric structural norms of the city, and to what extent do they represent a tactic of the reappropriation of gendered space in cities?

56 In deconstructing the city as androcentric, and seeing space as gendered, The Slutwalks have been analysed in this research as a protest that challenges the hegemonic norms of feminine identities and the oppressive constraints that women come up against in everyday life. As Doreen Massey states: "Space and place, spaces and places, and our sense

of them (and such related things as our degree of mobility) are gendered through and through" (186). The Slutwalks have challenged, through controversial strategies, gendered norms and hegemonic values evident within city spaces, in mobilising and taking up a mobile space through city streets; the reclamation of the word slut and the attire associated with being a slut has been pursued.

57 The word slut, within this study however, was as much contested by the Slutwalk protesters as it was in the media. In fact, the word slut has not been reclaimed. Rather, there is reluctance in putting forward the argument that the attempt at reclaiming a derogatory word, represented empowerment and reappropriation. The overall attitude and nature of the protest was angry, uncompromising and energetic, which is reflected in the name of the protest itself. Yet mainly, through mobilising in this fashion and taking to the streets, demonstrates that the participants of the study and the Slutwalk protests they belonged to, created a (safe) space in which their voices could be heard, they could feel empowered, have control and feel a sense of belonging. In the construction of the mobile space that the protests took up, a predominantly female narrative, awash with people with their own individual feminisms could exist.

58 In protesting against sexual harassment, the objectification by men towards women, sexual violence and 'slut-shaming', the Slutwalks have challenged male authority and fought against the inequalities that women face in everyday life. In taking to the streets in the first place, on a fundamental level, the androcentric, patriarchal terrain of the city has been challenged. In adopting the language and dressing in the clothing that is deemed 'slutty', Slutwalk protesters were using the very language and attitude used to oppress them as forms of empowerment. This image of empowerment is of having the freedom to express themselves sexually, to dress the way they want, to not feel objectified, or be judged for the choices they have made. However, the aforementioned image of empowerment is based on masculine notions of female sexuality and to some extent reflects hyper-sexualised culture. The strategy of reclaiming both the word slut and 'slutty clothing' in the protest has been the reason for much media attention. Not only have there been prolific debates about using the word slut and dressing in a sexualised way, but paradoxically, the images used to accompany the vast majority of articles have been of young women, dressed in a hyper-sexualised way whose bodies do fit within a dominant heteronormative ideal of being white, slim, young and sexualised. With the dominant images that sweep the west where forms of empowerment for women are synonymous with sexualisation; the overall strategy of the Slutwalk and the messages that it gives, means that there is a disconnect between the core message of the

protest and that which is being received by its observers and even some of its participants. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs* Ariel Levy discusses this very predicament of modern day western culture.

> Because we have determined that all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual, and because the only sign of sexuality we seem to be able to recognise is a direct allusion to red-light entertainment, we have laced the sleazy energy and aesthetic of a topless club or a Penthouse shoot throughout our entire culture (26).

59 Within the research, this contradictory form of empowerment that Ariel Levy states above has been debated. Rather than to draw the conclusion from this discussion that The Slutwalk participants have not empowered themselves through being overtly sexual; rather than just dressing provocatively and striving to reclaim derogatory language, it was belonging to a collective and the solidarity that this created amongst those that took part which contributed heavily to the empowerment felt amongst the marchers.

60 The *tactics* of reappropriation are conceptual rather than concrete. To give a brief statement in answer to the question: The Slutwalks do not reappropriate gendered space in cities, but create a (safe) space of reappropriation. Within the confined space of the protest, respondents felt they could be creative and imaginative with what they wore and the placards that they carried, that they could say and be who they wanted and not feel threatened. A quote from the organiser of the Newcastle Slutwalk illustrates this:

> L: "the open megaphone session, a lot of people wouldn't have said those things in a public capacity such as in that group. The way that they saw it was that they were supportive of the cause and sympathetic to the experiences and you're not going to be attacked for anything that you come out with."

61 The opportunity to speak out about personal experiences and the causes for the demonstration was something that the protest allowed them to do. In creating a (safe) space of reappropriation, what the protest did was within the confines of the group, reappropriate the very language and attitude towards provocative dress as a justification for rape, and turn this around as a form of power and control for themselves. The tactics themselves were not spatial, they cannot be measured. But the space in which the protest took place symbolised a move towards reappropriation of the body, control, language, sexuality and safety for many. In this respect, parallels can be drawn between Slutwalks and the Queer Theory ethos. Its very name indicates that empowerment can be gained through the reappropriation of language and representing behaviour that goes against dominant, normative ideals. An alternative message from the Slutwalks is that the aggressive, angry attitude of the protesters does go against heternormative ideals synonymous with femininity and rather, creates a space for marginalised activity to take place in a fluid, moving zone.

62 What protesters wore on the march was the focus of much media attention, with the majority of articles written about the Slutwalks accompanied by images of proactively dressed women. From speaking to one particular respondent who wore her usual attire to the protest because of the negative responses she gets for dressing like a “dyke”, what struck was the significance of dressing in everyday dress, removed from the media spectacle created, yet still mocking the very notion that dressing a certain way would ever justify being harassed and/or assaulted, that this in any way should have a bearing on whether they are attacked, both verbally and physically. By doing this, social norms and values that oppress and judge women for what they wear both in a provocative and ‘unfeminine’ sense and how they act, are being deconstructed. In drawing on feminist work that has informed this research, particularly from Weisman and Massey, it is clear that the Slutwalks have challenged traditional notions of the androcentric city which is informed by patriarchy. In an attempt to regain power and control they have come right up to the face of the systems that oppress them, giving them a sense of belonging and solidarity in a collective, mobilised group.

63 The Slutwalk is not without its contradictions and nuanced messages which unsurprisingly have been interpreted in various ways by its participants. The dominant media image and sometimes condescending tone of the newspaper articles written paint a distorted picture of what the Slutwalks are, which perpetuate these mixed messages. Having the opportunity to interview Slutwalk participants really brought the protest to life and added a true human and feminist narrative to this story. The personal motivations and experiences behind the façade were not only interesting to listen to but added multidimensional layers to the research. Although The Slutwalks present contradictory messages at times, in western society women all over are fed riddling contradictory messages of how to be, how to act and rather than realistic notions of femininity being visible, more and more synthetic images are evident in popular culture. In conducting this timely research, commentary has been made on what mobilised younger and older women are doing to fight the inequalities. In one rather disheartening yet uplifting quote, the youngest respondent of sixteen years stated that:

64 “I don’t feel like I have much control over what I want to do or just what I can do. I mean I think I have a lot more opportunities than other people but it doesn’t feel like it especially now when everything is being cut and it’s like if you want to do something then you have to do it yourself and you won’t get help, in fact you’ll probably be discouraged from it so it’s nice to find a group of people that you can do this sort of thing with.”

65 In an era of austerity, the statement made from one young woman indicates that although there may not be much opportunity on the horizon; belonging to a youth group and

meeting friends from taking part in The Slutwalks has allowed her to be amongst likeminded people who wish to make a difference in society. Since the Slutwalks took place in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, a new feminist energy has been induced in to the area with grassroots events taking place involving feminists of all ages.

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