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Riding Scared: Sexual Violence and Women's Mobility on Public Transportation in Santiago, Chile

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Keywords

women, fear, public transportation, sexual violence, mobility

Disciplines

Social and Behavioral Sciences | Urban Studies and Planning

Comments

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Chile

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Abstract

Past research has shown that the experience of a woman traveling in her city is dramatically different from that of a man in the same city. The relationship between a woman and urban public space has been well documented. Much less consideration, however, has been given to the experience of a woman in the space of public transportation, a space both of critical importance to the lives of women and a space often characterized by threats of violence. This study seeks to understand how the pervasive fear of sexual violence that women face while traveling affects both their travel habits and their urban life more generally. Using survey data from college-age women in Santiago, Chile, this paper argues that a threat of sexual violence limits a woman's mobility, affecting the decisions that she makes about how and when to move throughout her city, with critical implications for gender equity. The paper concludes with a series of policy recommendations for the city of Santiago – interventions in infrastructure, the justice system, and public awareness, focused on expanding a woman's safety and mobility, as part of a broader movement to build a more equitable and inclusive city.

Keywords: women; fear; public transportation; sexual violence; mobility

Introduction

I suffered from harassment from a traveling musician in the metro, nobody helped me, everyone laughed and even a few recorded it...another time, someone began to touch my leg on the bus; I was standing, very normal, and a man brought his leg closer and closer to mine...I walked away and he kept approaching at all costs...it's a shame because one tries to travel so normally. – Survey respondent, age 20

In the spring of 2017, I spent a semester living in Santiago, Chile. Santiago is a huge, modern city – the population is almost 7 million, slightly less than half of the country's population – and is a city in constant motion. Immediately upon arriving, I was struck by the incredible life that exists on the vibrant and diverse city streets. Everywhere one looks they see vendors, musicians, families and young couples picnicking – a whole world of life in the public space. This energy extends to all aspects of city life, from parks, to schools, to trains and buses. There were always aspiring rappers, chocolate bar salespeople, and folk guitarists on my daily morning commute on the metro.

A few weeks into my semester I began to think more critically about the populations of these public spaces, and about who was engaging in the activities that I was noticing and appreciating. I was waiting for the bus late one night in a neighborhood known for its nightlife and, looking around, realized I was the only woman at the bus stop. I didn't think much of it that night, even after getting on the bus and recognizing that I was the only female passenger, although I distinctly remember breathing a sigh of relief that the bus driver was a woman, who greeted me with an enthusiastic "*buenas.*" After that experience, however, I started to pay

attention to who was traveling alongside me. Over and over again I found myself surrounded by men while traveling, especially at night, but at other times of day as well.

The Santiago metro and buses get crowded – really, really crowded – a travel experience unlike any I had previously encountered. Passengers press into each other and squeeze into unimaginably small spaces. One quickly learns how to angle their body and hold their belongings, positioning themselves to be able to get out of the crowd at the proper stop, starting to feel more comfortable pushed up against strangers. These experiences led me to begin questioning whether men and women in the city were interacting with the transport system in different ways. I wanted to know if women were choosing other ways of traveling late at night or whether they simply were not going out after dark. Were women being turned away from these mass transit systems because of a threat of violence or because of other factors? And what were the implications of these decisions on other parts of a woman's life? Was she missing out on professional, educational, or social opportunities because she was choosing not to take the bus? These questions led me to conversations with classmates, professors, and friends about their travel patterns, habits, and the motivations behind their choices. These discussions began to paint for me an ugly picture of fear and violence in Santiago's public spaces – an image I had fortunately personally avoided. What I learned from these conversations led me to questions about how a public transportation system can perpetuate patterns of exclusion and sustain systems of sexual violence, focusing on the experience of a Chilean woman traveling in her city.

Life in cities is not the same for all people. Although there exists a general consensus regarding the objective of building cities free of violence of all types, there has historically been a lack of study of the particular urban experience of marginalized groups and the complexities of their experience of urban violence. Gender has been and remains a neglected focus for theory

and practice in shaping cities (Beebeejaun, 2017, p.323). Women, compared to men, experience a unique set of threats, fears, insecurities, and interactions with the urban environment. In cities across the world, women face a near-constant fear of sexual violence – harassment and/or assault – while traveling or in public space.

This fear and perception of insecurity is felt acutely on mass transit systems, spaces of incredible value for the lives of women, connecting familial, professional, and personal obligations. In Caracas, Venezuela, for example, a survey of feelings of fear in distinct urban domains, conducted both in 1996 and in 2004, found that fear in public transportation, compared to other domains, was highest – in both years, nine out of ten respondents expressed having experienced fear while on public transportation. The interactions, both between men and women and between women and space, and the associated sense of fear, have important impacts on a woman’s travel choices and habits, affecting the decisions she makes about how she moves within and interacts with her city. This decision-making process can limit a woman’s mobility, excluding her from the full right to move in and experience her city – something Roberto Briceño-León, a Latin American Program Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center, refers to as “losing the city” (Koonings & Krujit, 2007, p.139).

This study examines sexual violence on the mass public transit systems in Santiago, Chile and develops an understanding of how the nature of transit systems facilitates the prevalence of sexual violence in that space, which, therefore, restricts the mobility of women in the city. There currently exists very little gender-specific mobility data, which makes it difficult to design city-wide systems that are safe and responsive to the unique needs of women. The conclusions made in this paper are based on survey data of college-age women in Santiago. The survey serves to illustrate the dangerous, violent, and unequal world that women learn to navigate when they are

exposed to the transit systems of their city and reflects the mechanisms women use to create safer experiences for themselves. The survey responses serve to amplify the voices of young women in Santiago, a population that has historically been underrepresented in the making of public policy. The impact of sexual violence on a woman's public life is not a purely Chilean problem, as will become clear throughout this paper; the significance of this research extends across Latin America and even across the world, as part of the global goal of eradicating gender-based violence and building more equitable cities.

The paper will begin with a review of literature, developing a framework for understanding how patriarchal power structures are reflected on public transport and providing an overview of policy strategies and efforts that have been used to address safety issues for women in urban public space. In the following section, I present and critically analyze my survey data, focusing on how the travel experiences of the survey respondents imply a narrative of limited female mobility and exclusion from the city. Lastly, I draw on analysis of policies that have been experimented elsewhere in order to recommend policies that Santiago could put in place to address the prevalence of sexual violence on the city's public transportation systems, focusing on infrastructure investment, relationships with the police system, and increased public awareness.

Literature Review

Much has been written about the high rates of sexual and domestic violence that women experience in the private space. Less understood, however, is the unique form of sexual violence that women are vulnerable to in the public, urban sphere. This threat is especially prevalent on public transit systems, spaces governed by the power relations of a patriarchal society (Roth,

1999; Levy, 2013; Lefebvre, 1974). In many cities, women, despite the threat of violence, have no option besides the public transportation system (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2009). In Santiago, for example, 68 percent of women consider themselves regular public transportation users, compared to only 45 percent of men, whereas 3.7 percent of women and 13 percent of men are private car users (Granada et al, 2016, p.14).

Mass transport connects urban residents to the assets of an urban area (Villagrán et al, 2017). The threat of sexual violence is a barrier that prevents people from accessing,¹ experiencing, and benefiting from these systems equally. Public transport is failing women who, because of their domestic responsibilities, familial obligations, and economic relegation, disproportionately depend on public transit. A threat of violence conditions a woman's mobility, impacting how she negotiates her public space and the choices she makes about how, when, and with whom to travel (Koonings & Krujit, 2007; Rainero, 2010).

A woman feels the pervasive threat of violence much further than modifications she makes to her travel patterns; a woman's fear for her safety is a violation of her right to the city – her access to the benefits of city life and her power over processes of urbanization (Harvey, 2012; Habitat International Coalition, 2004). The violation of the right to the city limits a woman's potential agency in her city, her capacity to influence institutions and her ability to attain a livelihood, the implications of which go far beyond the choices specifically involved in travel (Jiron, 2007; Whitzman et al, 2013). Although we know that the right to the city manifests itself differently for marginalized urban populations, the literature has so far failed to define what

¹ Tiwari (2014) defines accessibility as the ability of an individual to be able to participate in an activity or set of activities.

the women's 'right to the city' might look like and what the connections are between high rates of sexual violence and the right to the city.

The building of a more inclusive and equitable city involves work in historically masculinized spaces, including the transport and policy sectors (Bowman, 1993).² In order to confront the issue of sexual violence on public transportation systems, many cities have segregated transportation, creating female-only train cars, buses, or taxis. Mexico City's *Viajemos Seguras* program has been proven to make women feel safer and incidents of sexual violence have gone down since the policy was implemented in 2007 (Villagrán et al, 2017). There is, however, considerable debate about this type of policy; critics question whether it puts the burden on women to protect themselves by requiring them to withdraw from the male gaze into second-class status and whether it perpetuates stereotypes of female vulnerability (Whitzman et al, 2013).

Interventions that cities have experimented fall into three broad themes: urban transport infrastructure improvement, relationships with the police, and increased public awareness. Toronto has defined a series of ways infrastructure can be improved to make transport safer for women, including transparent bus shelters for better visibility, emergency intercoms in transit settings with little to no staff, elevators for safer/easier access of under or above ground transit settings, and designated waiting areas at subway stations that are well lit and equipped with CCTV cameras (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2009, p42). There is a clear connection between infrastructure and women's safety; certain spatial factors have been proven to create or reduce opportunities for crime and violence (Rod Burgess in Whitzman et al, 2013, p.106-107). The

² Women account for only 17.5% of the workforce in EU urban public transport and hold less than 10% of technical and operational jobs. In the United States, women comprise only 15% of transport and related occupations (Olczak-Rancitelli, 2015).

relationship between these characteristics and women's mobility more generally is less understood.

Cities also focus on building trust in their police and judicial systems, facilitating effective intersections between these systems and public transport and taking advantage of new technologies. A partnership between the municipal government in Quito, Ecuador and UN Women, for example, developed a mobile phone application that operates through text message and serves as an official method to file complaints of sexual violence (UN Women Ecuador, 2017). Lastly, cities have implemented campaigns of public awareness, which, as Holly Kearl has shown with her work with *Stop Street Harassment*, can have a significant impact on the likelihood of a woman to report an incident of sexual violence (WMATA, 2017).

Using survey data of female college students in Santiago, Chile, I will argue that Santiago's public transportation system perpetuates patterns of exclusion and violence with wide-ranging consequences not only on an individual's specific travel experience, but also with implications for society-wide issues of mobility and gender equity. Focusing on the issues of sexual violence on Santiago's public transit systems, this research asks how the prevalence of violence specifically limits a woman's right to the city and how policymakers and citizens can best address the violence and reform their transit systems in order to expand women's mobility and build a more equitable city.

Methodology

This study uses data from a survey of female college students in Santiago, Chile in order to understand both the prevalence of sexual violence on the mass public transit system in Santiago and the unique relationship between the threat of violence in this space and female

(im)mobility.^{3;4} Through a variety of networks available to me over the first two weeks of July 2017, including private university Facebook groups and electronic mailing lists, I collected data from a sample of 407 women from three of the largest universities in the city of Santiago, Chile - the Universidad de Chile, the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and the Universidad Diego Portales. Because these universities are three of the most prestigious, selective, and costly schools in the country, this population cannot and should not be considered representative of the entire Chilean female population or even the college-age female population in Santiago. The purpose of this study is not to draw conclusions about the experience of all women, or even all college-age women, traveling in Santiago.⁵ The chosen population was intentionally selected because it represents a group of women who have deliberately taken on a public life by attending college with the purpose of pursuing careers outside of the home. The experience of these 407 women provide an understanding of how one population of women might be affected by the threat of violence on the city's public transportation system.^{6;7} Furthermore, because we know that poorer women are more likely to be impacted by issues of sexual violence, it is fair to

³ The full survey can be found in the appendix

⁴ Surveys and interviews were conducted in accordance with the University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board. Although the research was conducted without IRB approval, the board has granted this study exempt status.

⁵ Studies have shown that young women are the most vulnerable to gender-based violence while traveling; these survey results, therefore, cannot be considered representative of the whole female population in Santiago.

⁶ The survey respondents are all Chileans who self-identify as female, which might include transgender women. This entire data collection and analysis has been based on a dualistic perspective of gender: women-men. It is important to recognize the limitations that come from this assumption, and its potential to ignore the differing experiences that impact the transgender community.

⁷ There is also a possible selection bias - women had to choose to fill out the survey, which could impact the data results.

assume that the conclusions made in this study about this relatively privileged population can be extended beyond this population.

The women responded anonymously to questions asking them about their daily travel patterns and their previous experiences with sexual violence while traveling. The survey questions vary from a respondent simply describing her daily routine transiting in her city to, more intimately, responding whether she has ever been a victim of sexual violence while on public transport.⁸ The survey combined quantitative questions with open-ended questions, which thereby allowed me to obtain qualitative information. I developed codes that enabled me to analyze the open-ended questions quantitatively. I coded, for example, the responses to an open-ended question that asked women who identified as survivors of sexual violence whether they had made changes to the ways in which they travel after the incident. In addition to the collection of survey data, I conducted interviews with experts in the field: Paula Soto Villagrán, a professor of Sociology at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City, Andrea Monje, a gender consultant at the Inter-American Development Bank, and Norma Peña Arango, a specialist in gender equality and citizen security at the Inter-American Institute for Economic and Social Development.⁹ These conversations provided a crucial context to my data analysis, especially in the process of drafting recommendations for reforms to Santiago's transit system.

The following data analysis provides a new view of the issues of sexual violence in public space in Santiago by drawing on the voices of the respondents as much as possible,

⁸ For the sake of this analysis, sexual violence was defined as including anything from catcalling to groping to rape, perceived as a threat to the victim.

⁹ These conversations were all conducted in Spanish, and then transcribed and translated into English. The quotes included throughout this paper have all been translated from Spanish by the author.

amplifying their stories in the context of the study.¹⁰ Until now, no research of this magnitude has been conducted of this specific population; a focus on young, female students is critical for addressing the safety and security of women on public transportation and in the city more broadly.

Data Presentation

The Survey Respondents

The 407 women who responded to the survey are between 18 and 35 years old, students at one of the three universities, and use public transportation in the city on a daily basis. Charts 1-3 below present an overview of the most popular times of day to be traveling and the most common modes of transport for the respondents. Chart 1 highlights the centrality of public transportation to the lives of the respondents- more than 75% use public transportation more than once per day. Chart 2 shows that these women tend to use more than one mode of travel – more than 90% of respondents wrote that they take both the bus and the metro regularly.¹¹ Lastly, Chart 3 shows the most common travel times for respondents, which reflects the fact that the respondents are all students.

¹⁰ All survey responses have been translated by the author and edited for clarity

¹¹ Respondents selected as many modes of transportation as they use regularly. It is clear that the women often rely on more than one type of transport on a daily basis, necessitating attention given to how these modes of transport connect with and complement each other.

Chart 1: Frequency of Public Transportation Use Among Survey Respondents

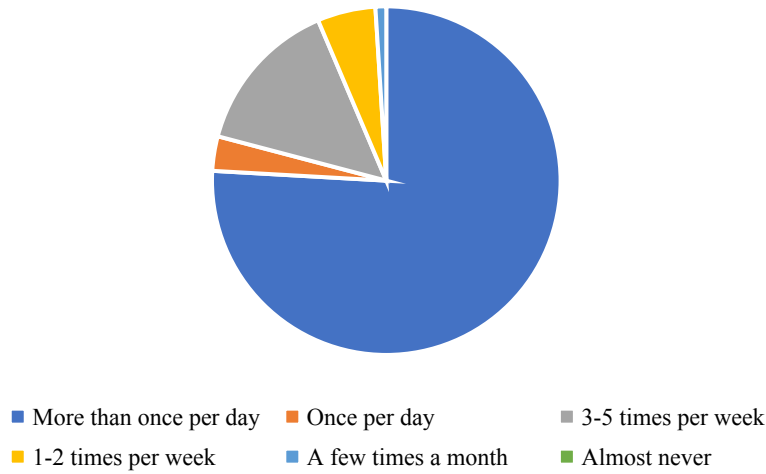


Chart 2: Common Modes of Transportation used by Survey Respondents

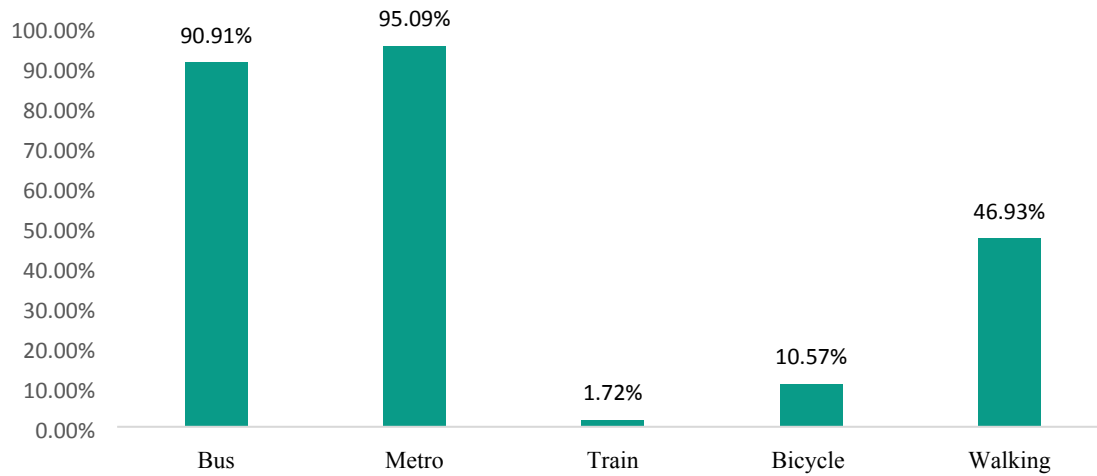
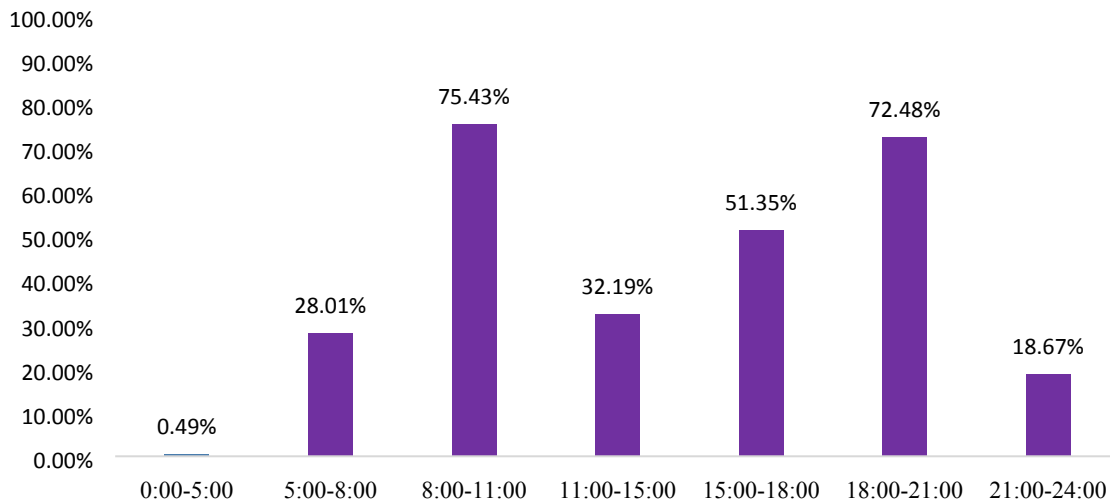


Chart 3: Most common travel times of survey respondents



Characterizing Sexual Violence on Santiago's Public Transport Among Respondents

The survey responses paint an unambiguous picture of the prevalence of sexual violence on Santiago's public transportation system. Of the 407 respondents, 293, or 72%, reported having been the victim of sexual violence while using public transportation. Of that 72%, 14.7% had been a victim only once, whereas the majority, over 85% of those who are survivors, reported having experienced such violence repeatedly - 45.1% 2-5 times, 14.3% 5-8 times, 5.1% 8-10 times, and 20.8% more than 10 times. Women who responded that they had never had this experience, when asked if they had ever observed an incident of this nature on public transportation, were likely to say they had. Overall, ***90.4% of respondents had either been victims of or witnesses to sexual violence while traveling on public transportation in Santiago.*** These responses demonstrate how violent and dangerous the public transportation space is for women. Recognition of the depth of this problem is essential to understanding the unique relationship between a woman and her urban public transport system and the impact of this relationship on a woman's mobility.

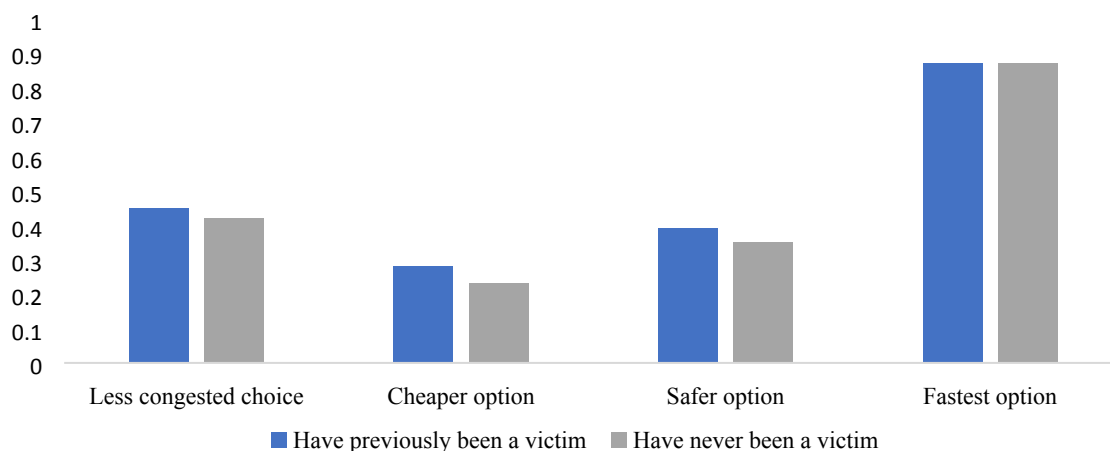
The pervasiveness of violence influences every aspect of a woman's travel experience, including her decisions about if and how to travel. That the exclusionary nature of the transport system influences an individual's travel choices is seen in the factors women consider when deciding how they are going to travel in the city. Survey respondents selected the factors they regularly take into account when making decisions about how to travel. The top four factors the respondents consider are speed, (87%), safety (46.2%), lack of congestion of the bus or train car (44.2%), and cost (26.3%). A woman's decisions about transport are a constant weighing of options, which involve unique considerations because of her gender.

Chart 4 (below) shows the factors that influence a respondent's choice of travel based on whether or not she has previously been a victim of sexual violence. The factors that influence a woman's choice of travel are dependent on whether or not she is a survivor of sexual violence while traveling. A woman who has experienced an incident of violence is more likely than a woman who has not to prioritize safety and a lack of congestion. 39% of women who had previously been victims said that they prioritize safety, compared to only 35% of women who had never had an incident of this nature, a statistically significant difference.¹² It is difficult to draw conclusions about the other factors because the differences are not statistically significant, likely because of the small sample size and the unique characteristics of the surveyed population—students who, because of the constraints of their schedules, are required to travel using certain modes at certain times of day. The fact that all women, regardless of their prior experience of victimization, prioritize speed over all other factors highlights the importance of these transport systems to a woman's daily routine – a woman might choose to opt for the fastest option even if it may not be the safest.

¹² A Chi-Squared test with an α value of .05, produces a p-value of .039. This value provides evidence that there exists a significant difference in the two populations – the group of women who had previously been victims of assault compared to the group of women who had not – and that this difference is caused by more than just random chance; there is something characteristically different about the two populations.

Chart 4:

Factors that influence choice of travel based on whether or not respondent has previously been victim of sexual violence



Changes in Behaviors after Incident(s) of Sexual Violence

For policymakers and citizens in Santiago to best address the pervasiveness of sexual violence on the city's transport system and construct a more inclusive system they must first understand how women react to an incident. Survivors of sexual violence discussed in the survey whether these incidents had changed the ways in which they use public transportation. A majority (52%) of the women who said they had been victims at least once described making some type of change to the way in which they used public transportation after the incident(s). The responses of both the women who did and those who did not make changes provide a detailed view both of how women are forced to change or limit their behavior as well as the obstacles to doing so.

A few common themes emerge from my analysis of women's changes in their behavior on public transportation after an incident of sexual violence. In general, the data show that incidents of violence do affect mobility, highlighting the relationship between an incident of harassment or assault and how a woman moves in her city. These incidents often change how a

woman handles her body, how she controls her presence on transport, and how she might travel in a permanent state of alertness. In order to appreciate the limitations to female mobility caused by the threat of sexual violence it is important to understand mobility as more than just the movement from one location to another, but also the ability to feel safe and comfortable while traveling. The changes that women make to the way they travel, a process referred to as “self-regulation” (Graglia, 2015), illustrate the existing threat to their mobility. The changes described in the survey responses fell into four broad themes: changes to how a woman positions her body, adjustments to the way a woman dresses, differences in a woman’s travel patterns, and resignation to the victimization.¹³

First, it is clear that after an incident of assault women become more intentional about how they position their bodies while traveling. Respondents wrote about sitting closer to other women, sitting or standing closer to the bus driver, and arranging their bodies so as not to expose their behind. One woman wrote, *“It has made me try to find spaces where there are more women; if I sit, I try not to sit next to the window (unless it is next to a woman) and I try not to sit in the rear of the bus.”* Another wrote that, *“I am also very aware of who is behind me, and if it is a man or a woman...If it is a woman behind me, I feel much more relaxed,”* a third wrote that *“after this, you are much more conscious of the seat that you choose, of how you carry your backpack...”* while another wrote that *“I try to situate myself in the corners cramped against the wall so that nobody touches anything.”* After an incident of violence, small decisions while

¹³ The themes that are described do not apply to every respondent; they are, however, an attempt to use the preponderance of responses in order to represent the majority sentiment portrayed in the survey.

traveling take on greater significance. A woman begins to consider her safety in every choice she makes, including where and how she sits or stands while traveling.¹⁴

Second, as a strategy to protect themselves from being perceived as potential victims, women will change the way they dress when they travel. Respondents chose to wear less revealing or “provocative” clothing in order to protect themselves from being considered targets. One woman wrote, *“If I wear tight clothing, I put on a big coat so that I don’t look provocative,”* while another wrote that *“I try to dress as covered up as I can, which is possible in the winter, but in the summer, there is no way to escape.”* These responses make it clear that women consider the relationship between their dress and safety while traveling. The data show that regardless of whether a woman makes the conscious decision to change the way she dresses, her decision-making process takes into account the connection between how she is dressed and her potential victimization in public space, which influences her relationship with that space.

Third, many respondents made explicit changes to their travel patterns after an incident. This decision manifested itself in different ways – some chose a different mode of transportation, others avoided traveling at certain times of day, while others simply decided, when possible, to limit their exposure to public space. These women were often motivated by a fear of the increased level of anonymity associated with being in large crowds of travelers at rush hours or from not being seen at night, a fear that transport systems must recognize and work to address. One respondent, fearful of being out alone at night wrote, *“If I have to get home, I will choose*

¹⁴ It is important to note that often the women who make these changes are those who have experienced more serious incidents of sexual violence. Multiple respondents wrote that if a more serious incident had occurred to them, they would have made more dramatic changes. One woman wrote that she did not make changes because *“luckily, it was only a catcall. If it had been some type of stalking or physical contact, I would be very scared to continue to use the transport in the same way.”*

*the method that will get me there fastest and will allow me to walk the least, even if it isn't the method that I usually use (taxi or Uber, for example)."*¹⁵ Another woman wrote that *"More than change the way in which I travel, I try to use it only when it is absolutely necessary, if not I use the car."* The opportunity to make this change is out of reach for large portions of the Santiago population, for whom spending more to take a taxi, uber, or private car is not a possibility.¹⁶ Those who travel by taxi, moreover, are not immune to sexual violence; multiple women wrote that they avoid taxis because of a threat of insecurity.

Women who cannot opt for a different mode of transportation often avoid traveling at rush hour in order to circumvent the extreme congestion. One respondent wrote, *"Yes. Before I used the metro more, but it is always very full, so they assault you more... I prefer the bus, but never at "peak", when the buses are as full as the metro."* Changes that women make to their travel patterns vary from avoiding certain bus routes or times of day to bypassing the space altogether. It is true, however, that changes of this nature are out of reach for some women. One respondent wrote that, *"I can't [make changes], they are the routes that take me to my house; all I can do is use them with more attention and precaution."* Others related the possibility of these changes to their resignation to the violence, the theme discussed below. Recognizing the nuances of this decision-making process is critical to developing an understanding of the unique experience of a woman traveling on public transportation in order to then develop appropriate responses to the issue.

¹⁵ Parentheses in original

¹⁶ Although beyond the scope of this study, it is important to recognize that the poor are often disproportionately affected by violence and are often considered most vulnerable to the impacts of urban violence, including sexual violence. Existing research shows that disadvantaged women are more likely to experience violence generally, as well as violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (Rennison, 2014).

Fourth, the survey data suggest that many women become resigned to the victimization, and feel they have no travel alternative and that there is no way they could adapt the way they use their public transportation system in order to be safer. Respondents wrote that they had become accustomed to the constant violence, that it was a normalized characteristic of traveling in the city as a woman. For example, one respondent wrote about her choice of clothing that *“It doesn’t matter how one dresses, men are always going to harass you.”* Another, writing that she did not change the way in which she uses public transportation stated that, *“does not depend on me – I always take precaution and even so it happens.”* Many felt that attempts to change their patterns of movement would be fruitless because sexual violence is not a phenomenon unique to public transport, but instead is pervasive in all of the city’s public spaces. These responses suggest that they believe making changes to their own travel habits would not address the root of the problem. A study conducted by the Observatorio Contra el Acoso Callejero in Chile and published in March 2015 confirms the prevalence of this belief. The advocacy group found that there exists an important passive nature related to the issues of sexual violence in public space in Santiago; people often believe that *“siempre ha sido así,”* that it has always been this way and it won’t change (Gil, 2016, p.29). My survey data emphasize that Santiago’s response to this issue must not be limited to changes within the transport space, but instead must be placed within a broader context of pervasive, normalized sexual violence.

Quantitative survey data also support the narrative of sexual violence being a normalized characteristic of a woman’s travel experience in Santiago. Respondents ranked on a scale from 1-7 both their perception of security while traveling on public transportation and their agreement with the statement that sexual violence is a persistent problem in Santiago. With 1 signifying typically feeling very unsafe, and 7 typically feeling totally safe, the mean ranking for perception

of security among all 407 respondents was 4.17. Such a ranking is not especially startling in itself, although it is surprising given what we have already seen about the prevalence of sexual violence in the space. Chart 5 (below) shows this contradiction between the noted prevalence of violence and low perceptions of insecurity. There was a statistically significant difference in perceptions of security between the respondents who were survivors of sexual violence versus those who were not. Of the women who had previously been victims, the average perception of security was 3.99. For women who had never been victims that same number was a 4.62.¹⁷ This difference suggests that there is a relationship between a women's previous victimization and her perception of security, and that a woman experiences her environment differently as a survivor of sexual violence. The data point to the relationship between incidents of violence and perception of insecurity in a public space, wherein that space begins to appear hostile to a woman.

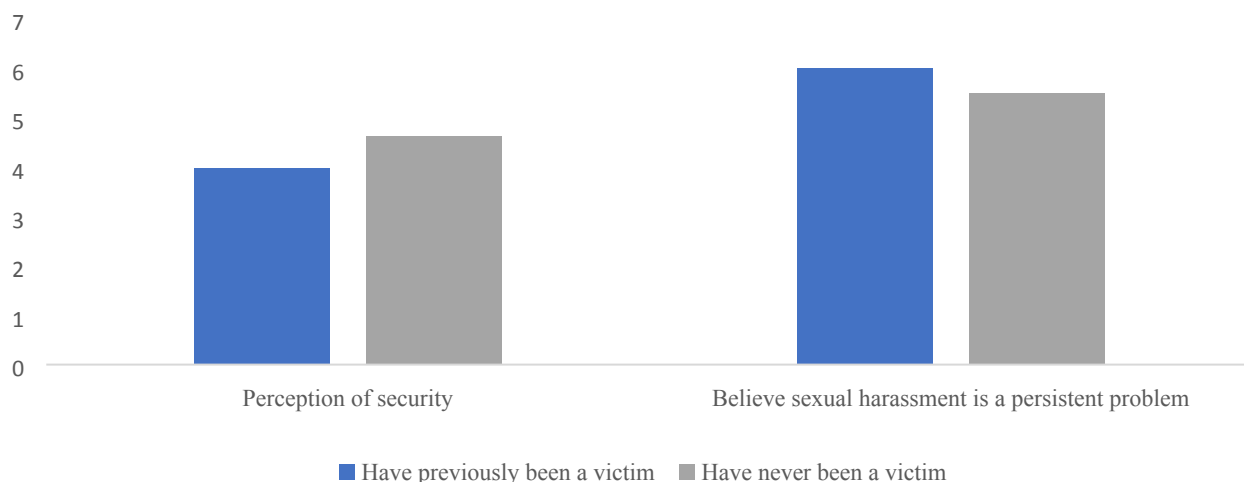
A similar pattern, differentiating survivors from those who have never been victims, appeared when respondents answered whether they believe that sexual violence against women on public transportation in Santiago is a problem. Respondents used a scale from 1-7, with 1 signifying that sexual violence on public transportation is not a problem, and 7 that it is a persistent problem. The average response was 5.77. There is a relationship, furthermore, between previous victimization and whether a woman believes sexual violence to be a persistent problem. The average response of survivors of sexual violence was 6, while for women who had never experienced an incident of this nature this number was 5.5 – another statistically significant

¹⁷ Treating this as categorical data, a chi-squared test, with a α value of .05, was conducted, and produced a p-value of .00094. The full data from the test can be found in the appendix.

difference.¹⁸ The difference between whether the two populations believe sexual violence on public transport in the city is a problem shows the transformation in a woman's perception of her environment after an incident in which she was a victim of sexual violence.

Chart 5:

How do perceptions of security change based on whether respondent has been a victim of sexual violence?



The pattern of responses to these two survey questions sustains a narrative of normalized sexual violence in an unequal and exclusive space. The number of respondents who believe sexual violence on public transportation to be a persistent problem is significantly higher than the number who perceive this space to be decidedly unsafe. This seeming contradiction could have a variety of different explanations, including the failure of society to react strongly to sexual violence, giving the impression that it is less of a danger than other forms of violence. It is critical to question how the societal norms of sexual violence are developed and whether the voices of survivors are heard in these constructions. Why might a woman consider a space where sexual violence is pervasive to be a safe space? Rainero (2009) argues that the weak nature of

¹⁸ Again, the numbers were converted into categorical data and a chi-squared test, with a α value of .05 was conducted, producing a p-value of 4.93×10^{-818} . The full data from the test can be found in the appendix.

responses to violence against women leads to rationalization and its being seen as part of everyday life (in Whitzman et al, 2013, p.83). This same contradiction might explain why so many women choose to opt for the fastest option even if it might not be the safest. The prevalence of sexual violence reflects the gendering of the city, the spatial nature of power structures in urban public space, especially on transport, and the unique nature of traveling in a city as a woman.

Exclusion from the right to mobility is often subtle and invisible, as seen through the predominance of sexual violence on Santiago's public transportation system. My survey data illustrate the extensive decision-making processes that a woman in Santiago undergoes as a means to gain access to public space, considering factors such as what she is wearing, where she is standing, and what time of day she is traveling. The necessity of these considerations affects a woman's capacity to have full agency over her own life, limited in her potential by external threats of sexual violence. According to Andrea Monje, "in the act of limiting the mobility of women, we are limiting her access to the city, her access to work, her access to services, and her liberty of movement – the very agency of women" (personal communication, October 23, 2017). Women, because of the threat of sexual violence while traveling, are restricted in their full access to the benefits of the urban space.

Policy Recommendations

In the literature review, I laid out three categories of interventions to make public transportation safer for women. Effective strategies to combat the prevalence of sexual violence *should have a three-part approach, with focuses on investment in infrastructure, facilitation of the process for women filing official complaints, and education and public awareness.*

Responses drawn from the survey data confirm this claim; each respondent was asked if there were any policy that their city could implement that would make them feel safer while traveling and this section draws on those answers as much as possible.

There is a connection between the quality of public transportation infrastructure and both a woman's perception of (in)security and her safety.¹⁹ Investing in the quality of the city's transport infrastructure should include a broad range of initiatives, from ensuring that buses run according to schedule to improving the lighting near bus stops and on train platforms. Strategies that would reduce congestion on buses, trains, and platforms must be prioritized. As discussed earlier, the negative impacts of over-crowding on transport are often a source of fear for woman while traveling. One respondent wrote, *“more than anything else, the city should increase the frequency of buses in order to not crowd as many people, which causes the touching and abuses to begin. Some people take advantage of the fact that people are very cramped and they feel that they have the right to touch you because you won't know who to blame.”* Another wrote that the city should, *“increase the metro routes and their frequency in order to avoid congestion [and] that there be more control of the capacity of buses and metro trains...personnel should avoid that the metro, for example, is filled to the point that one is left crushed next to the door.”* Women see, and articulated in the survey, the relationship between the quality of the service they receive – wait time and/or bus or train congestion– and their safety while traveling.

¹⁹ Although improving the quality of the travel experience benefits the entire population, it disproportionately benefits the most vulnerable, in this case, women. This public policy approach can be thought of through the “targeting within universalism” framework whereas quality services are made available to all (universal), while also reaching disadvantaged and marginalized populations in order to meet their needs (targeted). (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health)

The project of making traveling in the city more accessible to women cannot ignore a woman's safety in spaces beyond the public transportation system, including while she is on the street, connecting between modes of transport, or in route to the train station or bus stop. According to Andrea Monje, "the public policy to reduce violence is complicated because it has to be a combination of infrastructure interventions –more light, better sidewalks, which gets into the theory of 'see and be seen.'" She opines that cities should focus on building streets with mixed-use development in order to ensure that there will be more movement on the street, which will, in turn, make women feel safer (personal communication, October 23, 2017). Women both perceive and experience a higher level of safety when urban infrastructure works well.

Second, Santiago's response to the prevalence of sexual violence on the city's transportation system must include facilitating the process of reporting crimes of sexual violence to the police. One of the most common responses to the survey question regarding potential public policies came from women who suggested that the process of filing a report should be moved physically closer to the transportation system. One woman recommended that victims be able "*to report in the same place as the incident to some special manager (person in charge), guard, or [that there should be] video cameras in a center and people can call so that [the police] can monitor or investigate in real time,*" while another simply wrote "*more ease and simplicity in reporting cases of harassment.*" Others highlighted the importance of technologies in the design of public policy; one woman, writing about Santiago's public transportation emergency line, said that, "*one should not have to call, because the idea is to be anonymous and if someone reports someone else, that person could perform some act against the complainant. The system should function through text message.*" Research has shown that women tend to hesitate before reporting a crime of sexual violence that occurs on public transport because the

aggressor is often anonymous, and the reporting process tends to be complicated, which can be both physically and emotionally taxing. Recognizing the specific needs of women in this space where they hold very little power and making this course of action as simple and straightforward as possible for a victim of sexual violence would have an important impact on a woman's perception of insecurity in the city.

The third element of the policy response to sexual violence on the public transportation system, highlighted repeatedly in the Santiago survey data, focuses on education and public awareness. The typical respondent was hesitant to advocate for any specific public policy, writing that the government could not be responsible for legislating the mentality of individuals nor of an entire culture. One woman wrote, *"It doesn't have to do with making laws in that regard. It has to do with education in a chauvinist country that has taught women to conceal themselves and to be afraid because a man can come and do whatever type of thing to them."* This response speaks to the normalized nature of sexual violence and society's failure to react appropriately to women's fears.

The society-wide education should have a variety of goals, beginning with making visible the prevalence of sexual violence that occurs in the public space. A survey respondent confirmed, *"the first step is to make visible the problem, so that the population is aware and understands and supports the victims."* Education of this form must start early and must be targeted both at men and women. According to Norma Peña Arango, "we can't forget the intervention that has to be done with the men, because in the end it is with them and the topic of masculinity, of what it means to be a man, how one understands the idea of masculinity in the public space, and what it means to respect the rights of others" (personal communication, October 11, 2017). This policy intervention is not a quick fix but will work over generations.

According to the Observatorio Contra el Acoso Callejero Chile, “it is necessary to think of an educational focus in the long term, capable of modifying the symbolic trauma in order to give way to the changes that this society is asking for and needs” (Gil, 2016, p.36).²⁰ Beyond interventions in infrastructure and in the police system, the Santiago population has to revolutionize how it both talks and teaches about these issues, which could, in turn, transform citizens’ interactions with the public space.

Conclusion

Evidence drawn from the survey data suggests that the threat and prevalence of sexual violence on Santiago’s public transportation restricts the mobility of women and perpetuates systems of exclusion, with critical implications for equity in the city. The data also indicate that the typical woman is unlikely to completely alter the way she travels after an incident of sexual violence; the focus, therefore, must be on making the physical space of the transportation system as safe as possible.

Patriarchal power relations and violence in city space are complicated, nuanced, and have roots in history, culture, and urban design. The prevention and eventual elimination of sexual violence on public transportation systems globally will require transformative solutions that go much further than those that have been addressed in this paper. According to Kalpana Viswanath (2013), writing about the Gender Inclusive Cities Programme, an international program funded by the UN Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence Against Women, “the program has also reinforced the belief that, in order to bring about long-term changes and sustained measures of safety, a fundamental rethink is required in the way that cities are conceived,

²⁰ Quote translated by author

planned and managed, along with changes in attitude and ideological beliefs about women and their rights” (in Whitzman et al, p.78). To make cities safer, more inclusive, and more equal, planners, policymakers, and partners will have to address the clear relationship between the threat of sexual violence and a woman’s mobility. Through this process, and through interventions in transport infrastructure, in the city’s police system, and increased public awareness, the city can actively address the needs of women.

Narina Nagra, the safety director of METRAC (Toronto’s committee on violence against women and children), speaking about her group’s focus on sexual violence in the public space, said, “when you make a space safer for the most vulnerable members of society, you make it safer for all” (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2009, p.40). Protecting a woman’s safety on public transportation is about more than how she feels traveling from one place to another. A woman’s ability to move freely and safely in her city has important implications for her own agency, and for gender equity and inclusion more generally. Survey data from Santiago, Chile, paint a picture of a violent place, violence that while gender-based, must not be thought of as solely a women’s issue. The safer a city’s public transportation system is for women, the safer it is for all its citizens.

This study recommends policy interventions, focused not only on the behavior and experience of women, but, more broadly, on improving the travel experiences of all passengers. We know that simple changes that may seem to have little to do with women’s safety such as placing countdown clocks on platforms or bus stops, opening up the barriers between train cars in order to ease congestion, or ensuring that bus drivers receive bystander training, will disproportionately improve women’s travel experiences. Understanding the needs of women, and making changes that help them to feel safer, is critical to building a safer, more inclusive, and

more equal city to benefit all citizens. It is crucial, furthermore, to ensure that any change comes after listening to the voices of the most marginalized populations and finds ways to incorporate those voices into the systems with the most power.

It is through a recognition of the ubiquity of sexual violence, not only amongst those interacting directly with the most powerful, but in the lives of all women, and an understanding of how society's public spaces, especially public transportation systems, have developed to perpetuate patterns of systemic violence against women, that we will be able to build more inclusive cities. Only when we listen to women, believe their stories, and incorporate them into spaces and systems of power, will cities, and society at large, become truly equal.

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Appendix A

Below is the full set of data from the chi-squared tests

Perception of Security:

Observed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Victim	9	29	54	90	87	19	4	292
Not a Victim	1	3	15	31	41	18	6	115
Total	10	32	69	121	128	37	10	407

Expected	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Victim	7.1744	22.9582	49.5036	86.8108	91.8329	26.5454	7.1744	292
Not a Victim	2.8255	9.0417	19.4963	34.1891	36.1670	10.4545	2.8255	115
Total	10	32	69	121	128	37	10	407

Is sexual harassment a problem in Santiago?

Observed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Victim	2	3	7	16	51	81	132	292
Not a Victim	1	5	7	25	28	24	25	115
Total	3	8	14	41	79	105	157	407

Expected	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Victim	2.152	5.739	10.044	29.415	56.678	75.331	112.638	292
Not a Victim	0.847	2.260	3.955	11.584	22.321	29.668	44.3611	115
Total	3	8	14	41	79	105	157	407

Full Survey:

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) Where do you study?
- 3) Describe how you use public transportation on a daily basis. If you don't use public transportation, please finish the survey here.
- 4) How often do you travel using public transportation?
 - a. Once a day
 - b. More than once a day
 - c. 3-5 times per week
 - d. 1-2 times per week
 - e. A few times a month
 - f. Almost never
- 5) During what time of day is it most common for you to travel using public transportation?
Choose all that apply.

- a. 0:00-5:00
 - b. 5:00-8:00
 - c. 8:00-11:00
 - d. 11:00-15:00
 - e. 15:00-18:00
 - f. 18:00-21:00
 - g. 21:00-24:00
- 6) What type of transportation system do you use? Choose all that apply.
- a. Bus
 - b. Metro
 - c. Train
 - d. Bicycle
 - e. Walking
 - f. Other:
- 7) Do you travel alone or with acquaintances?
- 8) What factors do you consider when deciding how you are going to travel from one location in your city to another? Choose all that apply.
- a. The route that is less congested
 - b. It is the fastest way to get to my destination
 - c. The people that use this route are similar to me (in terms of age, gender, etc.)
 - d. I know people (friends, family) who also use this route
 - e. It is the route on which I feel safest
 - f. I choose the cheapest route
 - g. I only have one option
 - h. Other:
- 9) Is there any route or mode of transportation that you don't consider in your options for whatever reason? Why?
- 10) Do you feel safe traveling on public transportation? Evaluate on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means you feel very unsafe, and 7 means you feel totally safe.
- 11) Have you ever been the victim of sexual harassment while using public transportation? (Sexual harassment can include from catcalling to groping to rape)
- a. Yes
 - b. No
- 12) If your response to the previous question was yes, how many times have you experienced sexual harassment while using public transportation?
- a. Only once
 - b. 2-5 times
 - c. 5-8 times
 - d. 8-10 times
 - e. More than 10 times
- 13) Have you changed the way in which you use public transportation in your city since this incident(s)? Please elaborate.
- 14) If your answer to question number 9 was no, have you ever observed an incident of sexual harassment while traveling on public transportation?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

- c. I'm not sure
- 15) Do you think that sexual harassment or violence against women on public transportation in your city is a problem? Evaluate this problem on a scale from 1-7 where 1 means sexual harassment on public transportation is not a problem and 7 means it is a very persistent issue.
 - 16) Do you think this problem is more prevalent on specific routes, modes of transportation, parts of the city, or times of day? Please be as specific as possible.
 - 17) Is there any policy that your city could implement that would make you feel safer while traveling?