

'Who do you think you are?' Female students' experiences and responses to unwanted sexual attention in night-time spaces

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For female students, sexual comments, groping and other forms of unwanted attention are frequent features of time spent in bar and club spaces. Despite such behaviours having received recent attention, they remain largely unexamined within UK academic literature.

Drawing on focus group discussions with 31 female students, this paper asks: what types of unwanted sexual behaviour are experienced in licensed venues and how are these behaviours perceived and responded to? For participants, sexual harassment and touching were part-and-parcel of a night out. However, this did not mean that such behaviours were perceived acceptable.

Responses were varied and complex, with a range of strategies emerging in order to manage incidents. In particular was the expression of a 'feisty femininity' which challenged unwanted behaviours and perpetrators. This femininity stands in contrast to the more 'respectable' form that has received widespread attention when theorising young women's participation in night-time leisure spaces.