



Gender and fear in urban greenspaces

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Thanks to: Prof Birgitta Gatersleben, Dr Matilda van den Bosch

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Funded by
the European Union

Is nature (more) *frightening* for women, and why?

There exists a gender-nature gap

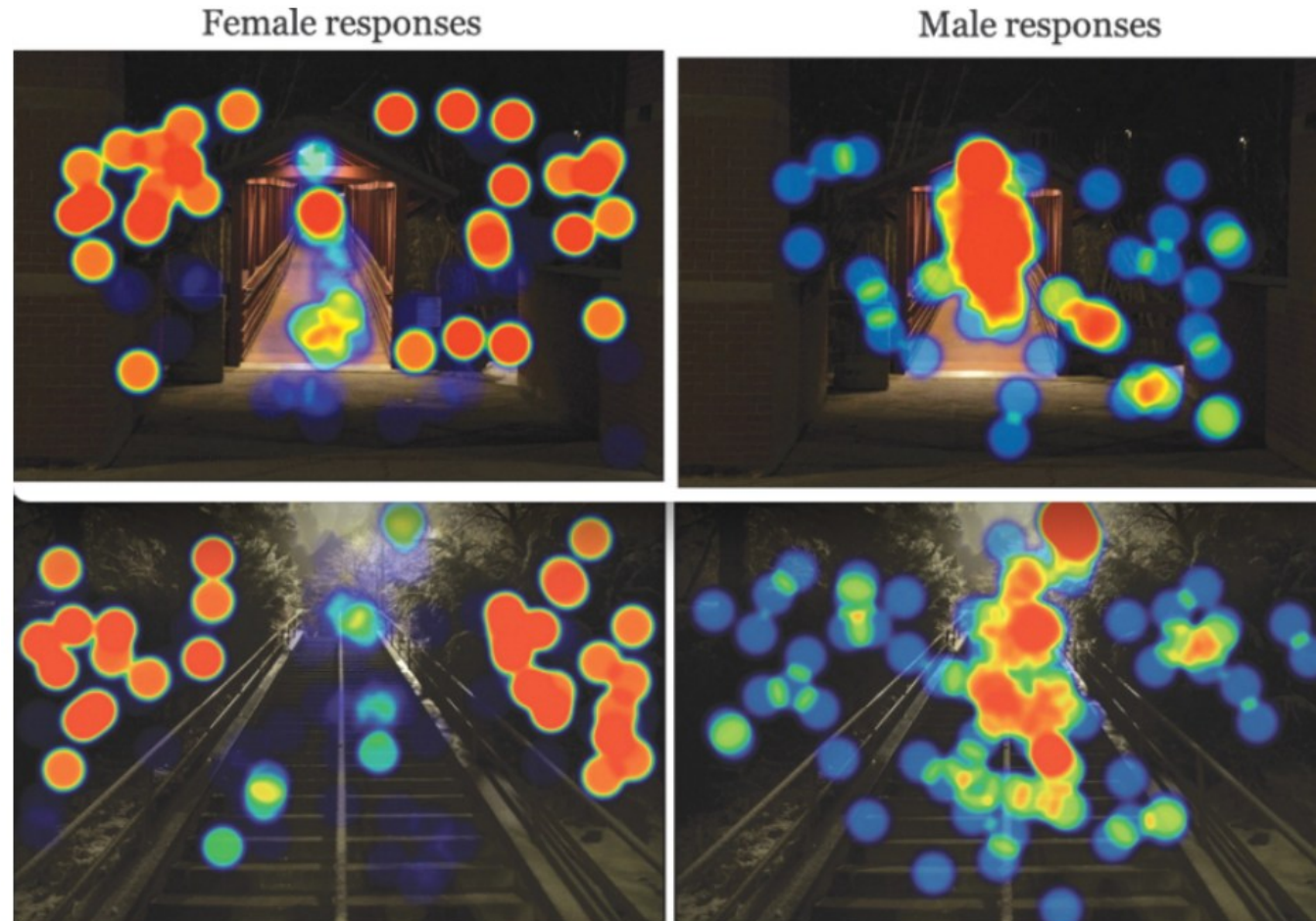


Women:

- **3x more likely than men to feel unsafe in parks, in the UK** (ONS, 2022)
- **tend to visit nature less than men** (Basu & Nagendra, 2021; Cohen et al., 2007, 2021; Colley, Irvine, & Currie, 2022; Derosé et al., 2018; Sonti et al., 2020)
- **are also at higher risk of depression and anxiety than men**

**Crucial to identify the barriers
that women face when in nature**

Poor safety perceptions are an issue: men focus on path, women on surroundings



Chaney, R. A., Baer, A., & Tovar, L. I. (2024). Gender-based heat map images of campus walking settings: a reflection of lived experience. *Violence and gender*, 11(1), 35-42.

Popular culture recently highlighted women's fears of being attacked by strangers

Forbes

BUSINESS

Man Or Bear? Many Women Say They'd Rather Be Stuck In The Woods With A Bear In Latest Viral TikTok Debate

By [Conor Murray](#), Forbes Staff. Murray is a Forbes news reporter covering ent...

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May 03, 2024, 04:40pm EDT

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TOPLINE

In the latest viral debate taking over TikTok, users are asking women whether they'd rather be trapped in the woods with a man or a bear, and many are choosing the bear, stating that a man may pose more potential danger than the wild animal—and the trend is sparking conversations about violence against women.



[CNN](#) US Crime + Justice

[Watch](#)

Man or bear? A viral question has spawned scary responses



By [AJ Willingham](#), CNN

🕒 5 minute read · Published 10:00 AM EDT, Mon May 6, 2024



An experimental study on fear in nature

We replicated Gatersleben's studies on vegetation density and nature experiences

- Series of online experiments with British respondents: participants shown a slideshow of woodlands with varying levels of density and danger scenarios
- Dense vegetation and danger threats hindered experiences of natural environments

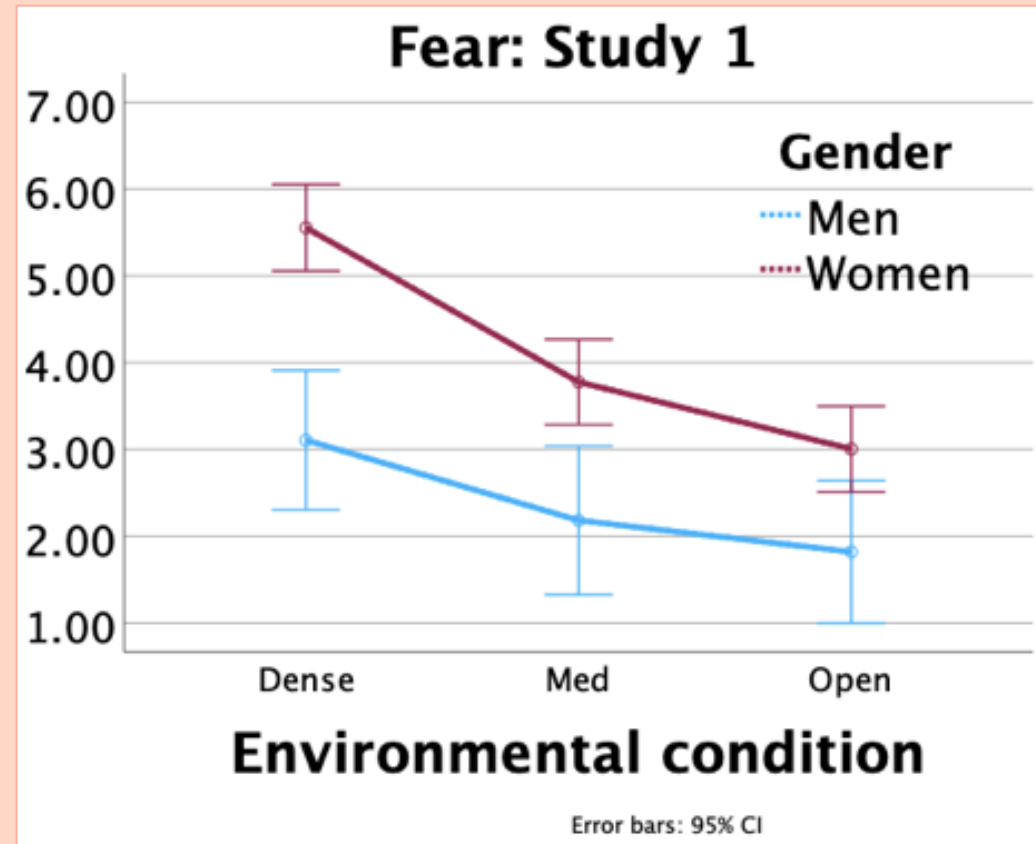


We re-analysed the data with gender-split samples and replicated some of the studies

First, we looked at how vegetation density affects fear



Fear was higher among women, especially in dense greenspaces



Second, we looked at how different dangers affect fear

DANGER - WILD BOAR IN AREA



Following some isolated incidents where the Wild Boar have attacked walkers, please take care by:

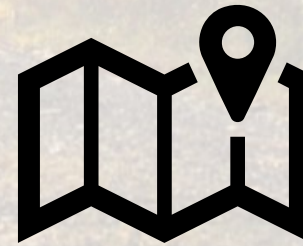
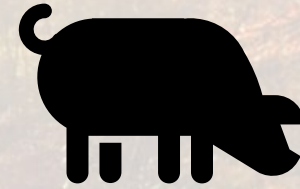
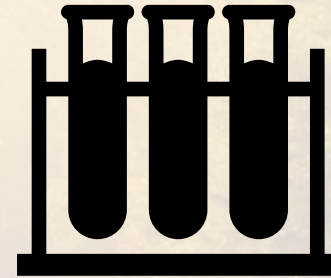
AVOIDING DENSE UNDERGROWTH

KEEPING TO PATHS

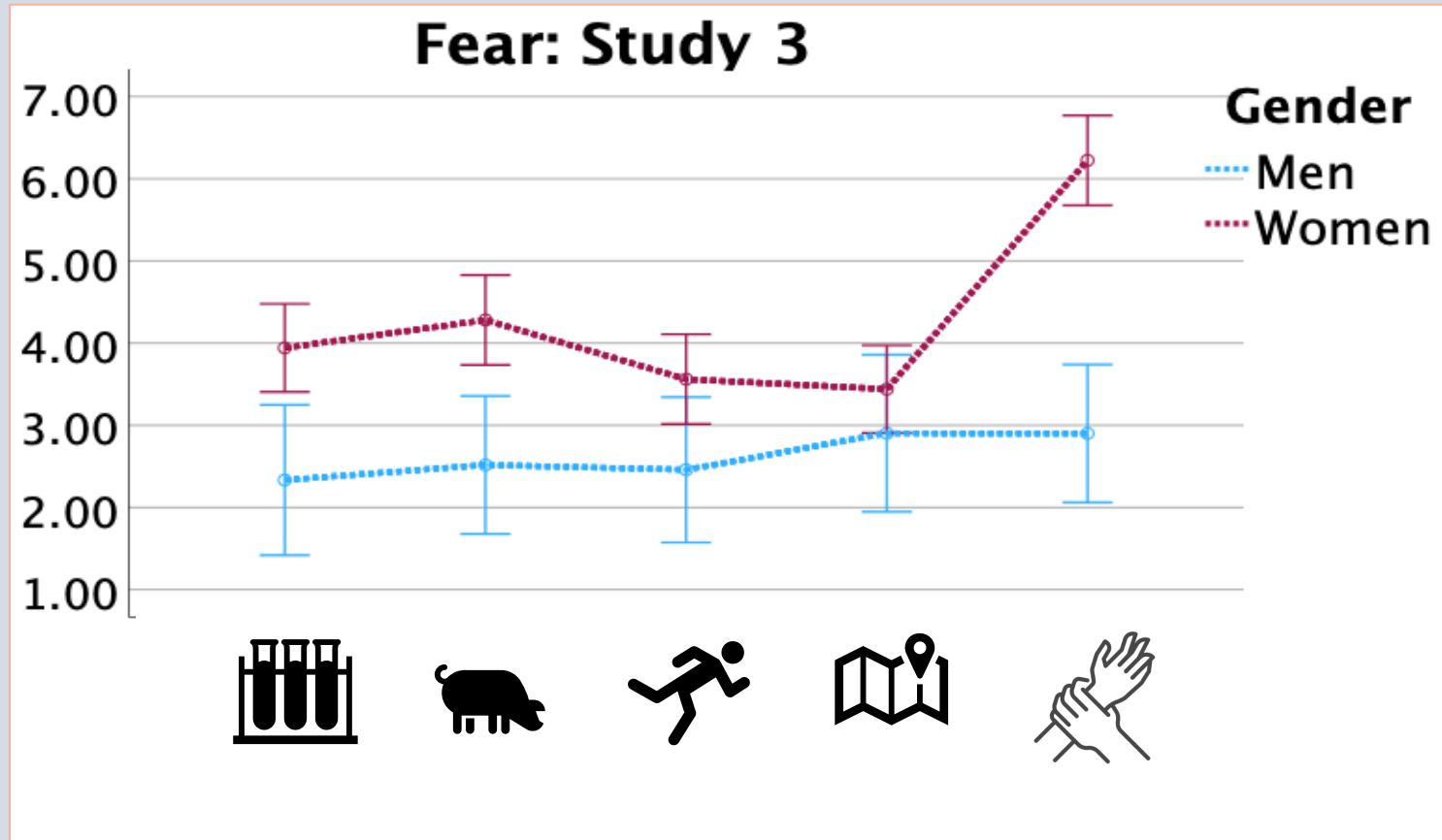
AVOID APPROACHING THEM

IF ENCOUNTERED, WALK AWAY STEADILY

Further advice is available from DEFRA at www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside



For women, the social danger scenario triggered the highest fear during the walk



**Third, we observed association fear/restoration:
when controlling for fear, restoration is higher among women**

	Standardised Beta ₁			
Outcome:	Han restoration			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Woman	-.197**	.087**	.087**	.107***
Fear		-.885***	-.885***	-.762***
Age			.000	-.039
Familiarity				.208***
Adjusted R ₂	.035	.739	.738	.762
1: *** p<.001; **p<.005; *p<.010				

Overall: women consistently more fearful than men

**When
vegetation
is dense**



**In presence
of social
dangers**

**When women feel safe, they do enjoy
nature, even more than men do!**

**Why are women scared in
presence of dense vegetation
and worried about social threats?**

Women might be more scared due to the prevalence of gender-based violence



Risks of sexual harassment is higher among women (81% vs 43% prevalence, in the UK)

Women aged 18–24: 97% experienced harassment!



Objectification theory (Roberts, et al., 2018):

- Male gaze: sexual objectification**
- Women have internalized such male gaze, seeing themselves through others' eyes, and might fear for their safety**

Social narratives & gender stereotypes: women tend to get warned about dangers in public spaces



Socio-cultural narratives: public spaces “thought” for men

Feminist urbanism aims to create more equitable cities

**Traditionally, public space was for men
(women's space was the *home*)**



Social narratives & gender stereotypes: women tend to get warned about dangers in public spaces



Socio-cultural narratives: public spaces “thought” for men

Feminist urbanism aims to create more equitable cities



Gender stereotypes: “what behaviours are appropriate for women/men”, learnt since childhood

**Traditionally, there are stark gender differences
in the representation of men/women in nature**

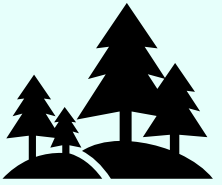


**Traditionally, there are stark gender differences
in the representation of men/women in nature**



What can we do about it?

Land managers can reduce fear in greenspaces



Manage physical features

Improving maintenance of parks, manage dense vegetation



Change the “image” of greenspaces

Promoting greenspaces as spaces *for women’s empowerment*, organizing events, etc.



Address crime in parks

Addressing gender-based violence in nature spaces and beyond



Other personal factors matter too, and their combinations



Thank you!

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PARKS

**PLACES DESIGNED FOR
WOMEN ARE GOOD FOR
EVERYONE**

Leslie Kern, *"Feminist City: A Field Guide"* (2019)



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Appendix

Definitions: gender and sex



Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics of female and male humans, including reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones



Gender is a socially constructed concept, and refers to characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men” (WHO, 2024).

**CAFÉ CLOSED FOR
REFURBISHMENT**



The park Café will be closed for the next
3 weeks for refurbishment.

Apologies for any inconvenience.



DANGER - GETTING LOST



We have removed and are currently
renovating the route markers along the
various walks around the park. Several
walkers have become lost and disorientated
requiring rescue.

**Therefore please come prepared and
ensure you have a detailed map of the
park with you and stick to the pathways
to avoid getting lost.**

DANGER – UNSTABLE PATHS



Recent rainfall has made rocks and pathways very
slippery and uneven. Areas have also been eroded
and may be liable to landslides.

Several walkers have been injured tripping or slipping whilst
walking through the area so please take care on slippery paths and
by trying to avoid walking through or on:

DENSE UNDERGROWTH

STEEP SLOPES

DANGER - WILD BOAR IN AREA



Following some isolated incidents where the Wild Boar have
attacked walkers, please take care by:

AVOIDING DENSE UNDERGROWTH

KEEPING TO PATHS

AVOID APPROACHING THEM

IF ENCOUNTERED, WALK AWAY STEADILY

Further advice is available from DEFRA at www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside

POLICE WARNING

SERIOUS ASSAULT

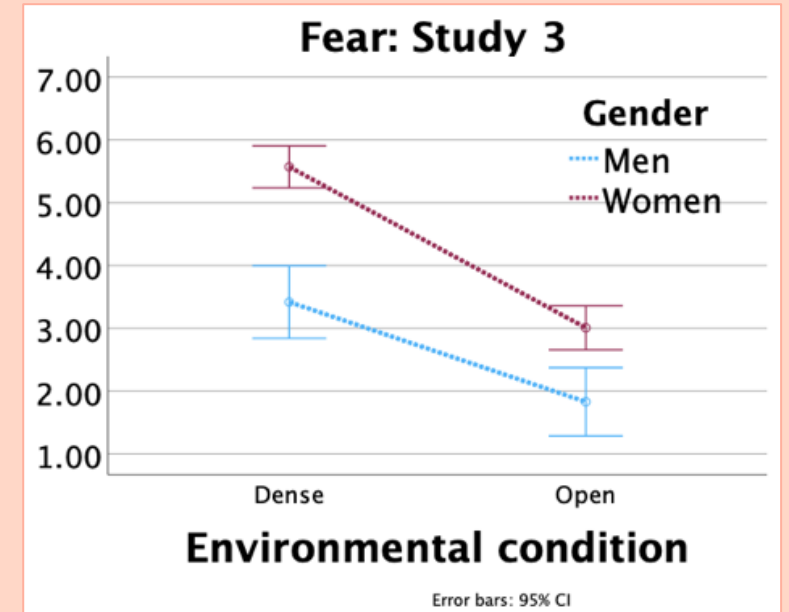
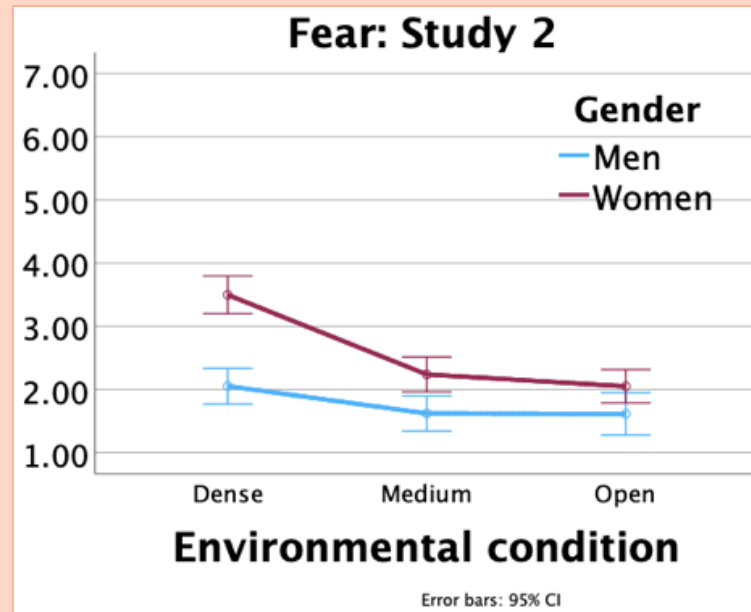
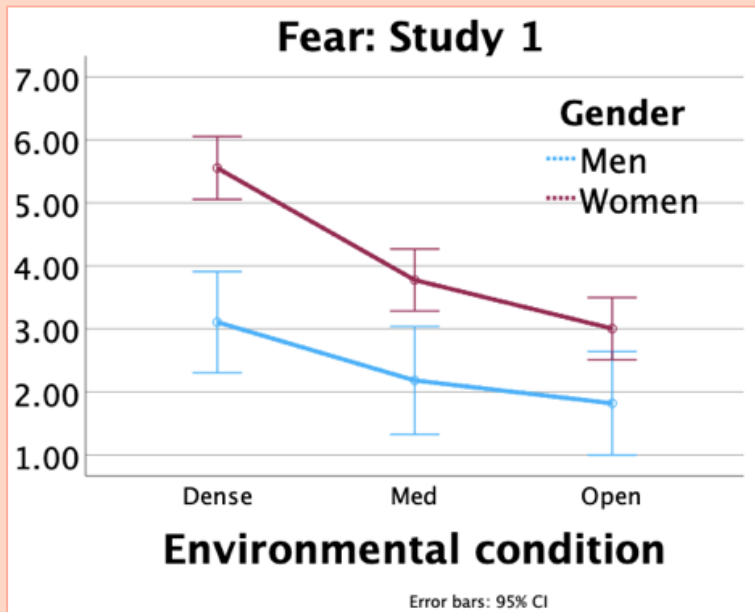
Police are appealing for witnesses after an unprovoked
violent assault in this park on the 22nd May 2008.

Owing to the seriousness of the assault, police are
advising walkers to be vigilant and avoid walking
through the area alone.

The attacker is described as a young male in his early 30s or late
20s, short black hair, around 6ft and wearing a black top.
Police are appealing for anyone with information to phone
Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Fear and density

- Women more fearful than men, independently from density of nature
- Fear was higher in dense environments



Restoration and density of nature

- Main effect of gender on restoration: restoration lower among women ($F(1,268) = 14.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .053$)
- Main effect of density on restoration: restoration lower in dense environments ($F(1,268) = 26.21, p < .001, \eta^2 = .166$)