Business Travel, Risk, and Safety: A Case Study of Female University Faculty and Staff

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Women constitute a significant portion of the total business travel market in the U.S. This study aimed to explore travel risk and safety issues among women in higher education who regularly travel for work. Three focus groups were conducted with female faculty and staff at a major public university in the U.S. Results of a thematic content analysis indicated three major themes, namely, risk perception, risk treatment, and risk adoption. Findings provide insights into how female higher education employees perceive risk and safety during business trips, and their travel behavior that include actions taken to mitigate the potential risks or time-to-time risky decisions about travel arrangements. Further, recommendations are made for enhancement of travel policies at the institutional level to ensure safety of female employees.

Keywords: travel risk; safety; female traveler; business travel; academic women

Introduction

Travel in the United States is estimated as a 3-billion-dollar industry with the number of female business travelers growing drastically over the last couple of decades. Women now represent about half (47%) of the business travel market (Lake 2016) and the higher education travel segment alone reported spend of over 64.8 million in 2015 (Skift 2014). Faculty and staff members travel for a variety of reasons, such as attending professional association/discipline conferences and workshops to disseminate research, participating in training, or promoting the university. Travel is considered a significant expense category for universities and most administrators focus on the cost of the trip and ignore addressing safety and security of their travelers. Women business travelers are typically classified as an at-risk population and likely are more vulnerable and targeted when traveling. Specifically, sexual assault has always been a significant risk factor for women while it is usually not a concern for men (citation).

A common theme in previous studies has been comparing how men and women business travelers are different in their hospitality needs (Ariffin and Maghzi 2012; Luz and Ryan 1993). Not surprisingly, women were found to be more concerned about safety during their business trips (McCleary, Weaver, and Lan 1994); however, little attention has been paid to this trend of uneasiness. Conceivably, academics are even at a higher risk than corporate travelers given the limited funding allocated to their trips and lack of resources that could lead to choosing lower-cost modes of transportation and lodging at the expense of their safety. However, so far, this important population has received little attention from researchers.

With hundreds to thousands of women traveling to represent institutions each year, it is important to listen to their concerns and ensure their safety and satisfaction. All faculty and staff members, especially women, travelling on behalf of the university need support and direction from their institution. However, poor travel policy and ineffective duty of care practices have led

to major challenges internally (Society for Collegiate Travel and Expense Management 2017). Notably, at some universities there is a clear disconnect between travel, risk and legal university departments that complicate this issue even more. This could be partially due to the unique characteristics of the business trips in higher-education system. The purpose, frequency, and length of the trips are completely different from those of other segments of the business travel market. Also, for most of the faculty and staff, with exception of specific positions, travel is voluntary and part of the professional development and not a job requirement. Moreover, most of the faculty only take a couple of trips per year unlike corporate business travelers whose jobs entails either no travel or frequent travels. The combination of all these factors result in distinct travel policies and administration in higher education institutions that are not as supportive as those of the corporate sector. Furthermore, in the academic world previous literature on business travel has mostly focused on corporate travelers. University employees, despite being a very unique travel sector, have been an overlooked population. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the sense of risk and travel safety among female university faculty and staff regarding their business trips and to uncover their major concerns and needs. It is worth mentioning that this study was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic which had dramatic effects on the travel industry. The outbreak of the Virus could completely change travelers' perceptions of risk, at least prior to creation of a vaccine, whereby perceptions of being at risk of getting the Virus would dominate the travelers' mind and overshadow all other risk factors.

Literature review

Tourists' perceived risk and safety perceptions

According to Beck (2006), we are now living in a "risk society (p. 329)," where risk has become an essential element in contemporary lives. This trend is also well reflected in the global tourism

industry, which has been negatively affected by multiple crises over the past decades, including terrorist attacks, natural disasters, financial crises, etc. The onset of these events can negatively impact destination image, travelers' perceived risk and safety concerns, as well as travel decisions (Liu, Pennington-Gray, and Schroeder 2013; Sönmez and Graefe 1998a, 1998b). After all, most tourists have the tendency to avoid risky situations (Sönmez and Graefe 1998b).

Given the importance of this topic, more and more studies have been devoted to tourists' risk and safety perceptions (e.g., Yang and Nair 2014). In terms of perceived risk, Sjöberg (2002) suggested that risk can be measured in two ways objective risk and perceived risk. The majority of travel risk studies have focused on perceived risk, since the evaluation of risk is inherently subjective and varies by the people and their backgrounds (Yang and Nair 2014). Tsaor, Tzeng, and Wang (1997) defined tourists' perceived risk as "what is perceived and experienced by the tourists during the process of purchasing and consuming travel services at the destination" (p. 788-799). It is a multidimensional concept and covers various types of risks. For example, in one of the earlier attempts, Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) identified a typology of travel risks, including equipment, financial, physical, psychological, satisfaction, social, and time risks. Sönmez and Graefe (1998b) further suggested that the risks of health, terrorism, and political instability could be added. Besides identifying the risk types, this research stream also confirmed that an increased level of travel risk is more likely to result in travelers' avoidance of unsafe destinations as well as canceling their travel plans (Yang and Nair 2014).

Another important concept in travel risk literature involves travelers' safety perceptions. The tourism literature has proved that perceived safety could directly affect people's travel intentions (e.g., Law 2006; Liu, Pennington-Gray, and Krieger 2016; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998b). More specifically, the safer a tourist feels, the more likely they would visit a destination

or consume the travel product. Quintal, Lee, and Soutar (2010) also pointed out that travelers assuming a higher level of perceived safety tend to have more confidence in handling unusual situations at travel (Quintal, Lee, and Soutar 2010). Lastly, this research stream suggests that perceived safety can be divided into various types, ranging from the travel process specific-safety, destination specific-safety, to segment specific-safety (Liu et al. 2016; Sönmez and Graefe 1998b).

The definitions of risk and safety can be “overlapping and confusing” in the tourism literature (Yang and Nair 2014, p.245). Sönmez and Graefe (1998a), however, argued that perceived safety is a concept independent from perceived risk, and therefore, these two constructs would have distinctive impacts on people’s travel decisions. On the other hand, Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) suggested that risk perceptions are antecedents of perceived safety, point out that “risk perception determines if potential tourists feel safe on a trip” (p. 215). More recently, studies (e.g., Cahyanto et al. 2014; Liu et al. 2016; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty 2009) found that perceived safety could be the mediator of the relationship between a specific type of travel risk and individuals’ overall travel decisions.

Business female travelers’ risk perception and safety concerns

Female travelers, particularly, female business travelers, are vital to the global tourism industry. According to industry reports, the American female business travelers now make 85% of all purchasing decisions, and account for 58% of online sales (Skift 2014). The increasing number of female business travelers has also resulted in growing research on this population, which not only provided a clear profile of the segment, but also outlined their motivations, preferences, and expectations (Gomes and Montenegro 2016; Lockyer 2002). One of the important issues that emerges in female travelers’ studies involves their safety concerns as well as risk perceptions

(Berdychevsky, Gibson, and Bell 2016; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, and Acrodia 2018). American female business travelers are especially concerned about unsafe situations, followed by other incidents such as medical emergencies and flight delays or cancellations (Bond 2019). When traveling alone, such perceptions of risk may also be amplified through an unequal power relationship in the tourism space, resulting in a fear of gendered risks such as sexual harassment (Wilson and Little 2008; Yang et al. 2018). This also holds true for the higher education travel segment (Skift 2014) but very few studies have examined female travelers in higher education.

Tourism studies have repeatedly reported the differences between women and men in their perceptions of risk, where female travelers tend to assume a higher level of perceived risk and vulnerability, and also more likely to avoid risk (Floyd and Penninton-Gray 2004; Kozak, Crofts, and Law 2007). In addition to the general risk types, female travelers are subject to a gender-induced risk, which is usually imposed by men, and is manifested through potential risks of sexual harassment and violence (Gustafson 1998). This is especially obvious in tourism settings which are deemed as a space often “imbued with sexual implications and sexual permissiveness” (Yang et al. 2017, p. 6). However, even though the number of female travelers has been increasing over the recent decades and is now comparable to male travelers, very few studies have explored this segment in-depth (Jordan and Gibson 2005; Yang et al. 2017; Yang et al. 2018). Particularly, little is known about how they perceive and manage various types of travel risk and safety concerns. Hence, through a qualitative approach this research aimed to explore safety and risk concerns of academic female travelers as a subsegment of female business travel market that has been overlooked in previous studies.

Theoretical Background: The Protection Motivation Theory

First proposed by Rogers in the 1970s, the protection motivation theory (PMT) explicates how individuals decide on enacting self-protective behaviors in uncertain situations ([Figure 1](#)). Based on fear appeals, self-efficacy theory, and the expectancy-value theory, the PMT suggests that with the influence of various factors (i.e., intrapersonal and environmental factors), people assess a risk through a series of cognitive processes which mediate the impact of fear appeals on their intentions to engage in preventive measures (Roger 1975). Roger (1983 1984) further suggested that the cognitive processes are manifested through two paths (i.e., threat appraisal and coping appraisal) and usually result in two modes – maladaptive coping and adaptive coping. The maladaptive coping means that individuals are more likely to internalize the perceived risk and become reluctant to engage in behavioral responses. Conversely, the adaptive coping mode refers to the process where individuals take the recommended preventive measures and undertake self-protective measures (Milne, Sheeran and Orbell 2000).

The PMT has been widely used to study topics related to emerging health issues, such as safe sex behavior, AID's risk reduction strategies, and HIV prevention behaviors (Floyd et al. 2000). The application of PMT has also been expanded to the field of tourism and travel (Wang et al. 2019) mainly because PMT provides a useful theoretical framework that specifies the relationships between perceived risk, coping strategies, and people's enactment of self-protective behaviors. Earlier studies in tourism tend to use travel intentions as the outcome variable (i.e. Sonmez and Graefe 1998; Law 2006) and found that a higher level of perceived risk directly impacts people's intention to visit certain destinations. As this body of literature progressed, recent attention has been paid to tourists' self-protective behaviors, such as information-searching behavior (Liu et al. 2016) and specific health behaviors (i.e. vaccinations and

consulting travel health specialists) (Wang et al. 2019). The positive relationships between the enactment of self-protective measures, a stronger sense of safety, and an increasing desire to travel have been widely noted in this body of literature (Liu et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2019).

Based on our review of the literature, PMT appears to be an adequate theory to examine significant travel risk factors and the common self-protective measures for different populations, in the case of this study female employees in U.S. higher education. Specifically, we draw on PMT which informed the dimensions of travel risk. Accordingly, two research questions were posed to guide this study,

1- How do female employees in universities perceive risks on their business trips?

2- How do female employees in universities cope with risks on their business trips?

population under study, .

Methods

Data collection

Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted to collect data from a purposive convenient sample of female faculty and staff at a major university in the Midwest U.S. All the interviewees were cisgender (i.e. born and identified as female). One woman identified as homosexual, all others were heterosexual. An email invitation with information about the study was sent to potential participants. The inclusion criteria were to be a woman, employed at the University as an academic faculty or staff, who takes regular domestic or international work-related trips. Three focus groups were conducted with women who accepted the invitation to participate in the study; one faculty-only group ($n = 5$), one staff-only group ($n = 5$), and one mixed faculty and staff group ($n = 5$). Focus groups were conducted in a conference room on the University campus. Participants were assured that their identity would be kept confidential, and

therefore, all the information that they provided are presented by their initials. Each session was moderated by one of the researchers and an interview guide was used to guide the discussion. Participants were asked to reflect on their business trip experiences, their information search and travel planning procedures, their perceived risk and safety related concerns, and the strategies they use to treat the potential risks. A social constructionist approach was applied per which “all knowledge is considered local and fleeting. It is negotiated between people within a given context and time frame” (Raskin 2002, p. 9). Accordingly, each session started with an introduction to restate the purpose of the study and explain the procedures. Questions were phrased and asked in an order that best fit the flow of the conversation. Adequate probing was used to facilitate the discussion, and the researchers, all of whom are female academics who travel for work, clarified their positionality, and shared their own relevant stories to provide clarity and lead the process of knowledge creation. The similarities and divergences in participants’ narrations were discussed to delve into the ways they make sense of the situations and social phenomena and tease out the hidden meanings. The moderators ensured that all participants got an opportunity and had enough time to share their experiences and viewpoints without attempting to reach a consensus. Focus group sessions lasted for one hour, were recorded, and then transcribed for the subsequent analysis. Data collection was ceased after the third focus group since the participants appeared to provide repetitive information and the themes were deemed saturated.

Participants

Participants’ years of experience working at the University ranged from two to 18 years. All the participants reported that they travel at least once a year; mostly one or two trips to conferences or symposiums ($n = 12$) for research presentations, invited talks, or professional development.

Three of the staff traveled more frequently (at least once a month) to fulfill the requirements of their position (i.e., admissions recruiter, director of development, and international office staff). Also, one of the faculty traveled once a year to run the study abroad program. The average length of the trip was between three to five days. It appeared that faculty took both domestic and international trips while staff mostly traveled domestically (Table 1.). All the participants stated that their work trips are either alone or with colleagues.

Insert table 1. here

Data analysis

Data analysis was initiated by utilizing grounded theory methods suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998a) that entail an inductive-deductive procedure. First, focus group transcripts were read thoroughly and coded manually incident-by-incident by each of the researchers independently. The open codes were discussed by the researchers until the team reached a consensus over accuracy of the codes and interpretations. The most significant codes relevant to the purpose of the study were then identified based on extensiveness (i.e., how many interviewees mentioned it), frequency (i.e., how many times it was mentioned), and importance of the code to the purpose of the study. Next, the researchers followed the process of theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin 1998b) and referred to the previous literature and existing theories to conceptualize the identified codes. PMT (citation) was found to be an adequate theoretical underpinning, so it was used to guide the axial coding stage of the analysis in which codes were categorized into three themes: risk perception, risk treatment, and risk adoption. To ensure trustworthiness of the analysis codes were compared, contrasted, and discussed multiple times within the research team.

Findings

Risk perception

It appeared that there are certain situations in which women felt like their safety was particularly at risk. Male gaze and isolation in unfamiliar places were highlighted as the major drivers of such feelings. Sexual assault was noted as the most significant concern for the interviewees. It seemed like perceptions of being at risk was exacerbated during the nighttime as well as in certain places such as parking lots/garages, on public transportation such as buses and subways, in closed spaces such as elevators if surrounded by men, or in hotel rooms on lower floors. Not surprisingly, previous travel experiences played an important role in shaping their current perceptions. For instance, reflecting on her interactions with men while travelling, CH explained,

I've had very strange interactions. Men hitting on me in inappropriate ways coming on to me to the point that I'm pretty careful about where I would go to eat or go out by myself. People from the conference asking me to go do something with them in a super creepy way. So, I'm pretty careful about where I go eat and if there are others, I wouldn't go to dinner without knowing who I was going with.

As evident in CH's story, men's behavior and their approach when interacting with her was perceived completely negatively and resulted in her decision to practice more caution in her social interactions and even in choosing places to eat. Similarly, LE talked about an incident she had with a male collaborator,

I had an experience where one of the representatives from one of the partner institutions continued to inappropriately put his hands on me and he made me uncomfortable. This person then wanted to be involved with study abroad program. So, I had to confront that person about why I would not work with them in a professional capacity.

ME mentioned that her greatest fear was sexual assault and physical violence by men. Quoting a story about one of her colleagues who was punched in the head by some guy she said, "no matter how we think we are tough, we could be easily physically dominated by a man." It seemed like word of mouth and stories that was shared with the participants by their female

colleagues/friends impacted their perceptions and kept them alert about certain situations. For instance, CD talked about her friend's experience:

I had a friend who traveled for another university. Some guy in the elevator got off on the floor underneath hers and listened to her footsteps and figured out which row she was in and called her room trying to get her to go out with him or something creepy...

It was obvious in other women's travel tales that such behavior was pervasive of time and place and entrenched in different travel settings. LI referred to incidents that her colleagues faced on the flights:

I know that several of my colleagues have also had instances on airplanes and struggled with somebody saying or doing things that are inappropriate on long hauls trips. What can you do when you are forced to sit there for 6-10 hours?

Any environment that made women feel like they stand out or have limited access to help in case of a risky incident generated fear and a perception of unsafety. For example, NI was scared of being alone with men on the elevators or the hotel hallways. When asked what her biggest concern was, she said, "sexual harassment." Becoming conspicuous as the only woman in a confined space immediately alarmed her about potential sexual assault. Subjective and socially constructed nature of her perceptions became apparent when she narrated her experience in Kenya where the hotel representative (Kenyan security guards usually carry machetes) told her that she needed to be concerned about walking with him in the dark:

I asked the hotel representative to walk me to my room as I was scared of a baboon I saw earlier in the day. He said I should be more afraid of a man with a machete walking me in the dark. I was like Okay! Point taken!"

This social construction of risk and vulnerable feminine identities became more highlighted through contradictions in NI's travel stories. Although she was cautious around men when travelling, she reached out to her male colleague for support when she was scared. Seeking help from men when at the same time alarmed by their presence could relate to social views of

women as vulnerable beings incapable of taking care of themselves and in need of men's protection. NI articulated an incident she had in the hotel hallways with a man who happened to be a security guard:

I was walking to my room and noticed that some guy was following me. I got really scared and talked about it with a male colleague the day after and so my colleague decided to walk me to my room. As we are walking down the hallway the same guy opened a door and saw that I was with my colleagues, went back in and closed the door. We reported to the hotel and realized that the guy was a security guard assigned to make sure female guests make it to their rooms safely. So, we told them they need to inform the guests so they don't get scared.

Likewise, RA gave an example of a situation when she felt safer because she was accompanied by her male colleagues. She specifically pointed out not feeling safe if she was alone on public transportation in big cities:

A conference that was at Bronx Community College where we got off the train we had to walk about 15 minutes to get to the college. So, walking through the Bronx had I been by myself I probably would have not felt entirely safe. But I was with two male colleagues I felt not threatened. I guess like same thing on the subway in New York or the bus system in Vancouver. Have I been by myself I definitely would have had like my guard up.

Another potentially unsafe place for women was hotel rooms located on the lower floors, CA articulated, "I had an incident that made me more careful about my hotel room choices. I was in Atlanta for a conference and they put me in like this basement creepy room. I actually changed because I didn't feel safe."

Interestingly, while women noted sexual assault and being surrounded by men as their main safety concern, not having other people around and feeling isolated also made them feel like they are at risk. CA brought up feelings of isolation at a hotel that lead to perceptions of unsafety:

Partly the problem was they were remodeling; I did not feel safe at all. It was difficult to find your way around the hotel or there were not a lot of people there, it was an off-season. So, it was kind of a very discrete space. I felt very uncomfortable

in that place and people at the front desk were kind of haphazard like they didn't really seem present. As if I call for help, I did not feel they would stay.

Repeatedly, self-doubt, thoughts of vulnerability and always being at risk in unfamiliar places, need for help and men's protection were seen in participants' stories. It seemed like women experienced constant tension and fear during their trips if they did not have company which, again, was linked to sense of conspicuousness and limited access to help. CA felt unsafe when she was the only person in a parking lot:

I've been in the airport parking lot and my car was covered by snow. And there was no one there for me so am standing in this parking lot all by myself. I don't like to arrive in an airport, or at a destination in the middle of the night when there are not a lot of people around me because I don't feel safe which is one of the reasons I choose to make sure I'm getting there even before dark.

She had the same perceptions when felt isolated in an airport, she explained, "I felt unsafe... I had a cancelled flight... my new flight was at six o'clock in the morning... I just stayed at the airport and there's not a lot of people, all businesses closed and that was very uncomfortable."

As obvious in CA's narrations such perceptions of being at risk were exacerbated at night. Other participants had similar opinions. When asked to talk about situations which felt unsafe, NI briefly said, "walking at night when the city is faced with homeless problem. They can be quite aggressive with tourists." Likewise, LI mentioned nighttime and parking garages, "I don't like to get home late... To me it's creepy to walk in the parking garage late at night."

Risk treatment

Women appeared to use a range of strategies to avoid or mitigate risk, or to cope with their anxiety about potential unsafe incidents while traveling. Per what they had learned and internalized through their socialization, almost all women felt responsible for their own safety. AM considered herself 'sloppy' for falling asleep in a cab or walking to her car during nighttime,

“I am a veteran traveler which makes me sloppy in many occasions. I dose off in the cab and there is an absolute depth in it. I have walked to my car the middles of the night.” To cope with fear, negotiate risk, and navigate the unfamiliar environments, women took extra steps prior and during their trips. Doing research and planning ahead, walking in groups instead of alone, always being alert and mindful of sharing information with strangers, asking for rooms on higher floors of the hotel or at the end of the hallways, staying in the conference hotel or the closest second option, using technology, avoiding sloppiness, and dressing authoritatively were the strategies discussed by women. AA did her research prior to her trips and also tried to be more cautious when walking alone or after dark. She stated:

I do a lot of research ahead of time about my hotel, places to eat around there, see how far this is, can I walk there, and when it gets dark how can I get back... Should you be alone not with colleagues be more conscious about the whole area that I'll be walking after dark.

RA felt quite powerful and protected when she travelled with colleagues to the extent that she did not even think about safety, she stated, “I typically travel with colleagues, I don't think that much about safety. You know we walk together to my car driving my car or something like that. So, I'm trying to not be alone in vulnerable situations.” CH even preferred not to be alone on cabs, she said, “I do prefer to share cabs like if I'm traveling with colleagues, we coordinate what time our flights arrive. I'm happy to wait 30 minutes at an airport until my colleague gets there.” EM felt so uncomfortable with getting around an unfamiliar place after dark that chose to pay a higher price and eat at the hotel. She articulated, “I know where to get food. I choose to just eat at the hotel after dark. It's so many times as expensive but because I'm not sure how to navigate or comfortable navigating after dark.” JA brought up being mindful of the information shared with strangers. She said:

Every time like eating alone or having people approach you or being in an Uber or a conversation with someone, I have to stop myself from admitting Oh it's my first time to the city. I'm not familiar with this area. I'm just in town for work for a couple of days. Maybe this is not information that I would share.

For CD being organized and dressing authoritatively were possibly effective strategies.

She explained, "I try to be super organized. I'm not like hanging out at my car trying to put things in bags. I dress in a way that makes me appear authoritative. Like I know where I'm going what I'm doing." Delving deeper into participants' narrations it seemed like it all came down to feeling and looking like they are not vulnerable and are in control of the situation. This was implied in AB's statement when she said, "I do a lot of research and I use my phone to navigate so I am not standing with a map in my hand looking like a confused tourist." ME clearly stated, "If I feel like I am disoriented or am not in control, I feel like I'm at risk." Then she further elaborated, "The culture of academia, with academic freedom and independence, transfers to travel. Most faculty members are used to being on their own and doing their own thing. They like control and nonconformities." This was also evident in women's statements when they talked about public transportation. For instance, talking about the bus system, LE said, "I feel you don't know the city. You don't know what you need to pull back for stop. I find it very disconcerting. CA agreed with this, "You don't use public transportation in cities you don't know." LI totally avoided public transport. She stated:

I opt out in any public Subway or a bus because I don't know the system, who's on it, it starts to going down into dingy kind of basements on the platform, I feel very exposed and those bigger places have a lot of transportation systems that I don't know especially internationally... I would love to do that for sustainability reasons and for other reasons. But for safety reasons I just don't... I opt to take a cab to a meeting or something in place of that.

NI again noted fear of isolation and being out during nighttime. She said, "I do not get on public transportation during nighttime. There was this one time when I was the only person on the train and looked around and there was nobody else there. I was really scared." Nevertheless,

repeatedly, having company seemed to reduce feelings of disorientation and lack of control that lead to fear or perceptions of being at risk. This was evident in LI's statement, "I don't do public transportation unless I'm with other people I would never do that on my own. I would get lost part of the reason. So, if I'm by myself I would always do cab or Uber."

In terms of the accommodation safety, most women reported that they stayed in the conference hotel where they are surrounded by other conference attendees and do not need to go outside after dark to get to another hotel. For instance, NI said, "I stay in the conference hotel where everybody else stays... I prefer to stay in the convention's hotel as I am busy with meetings from early morning to late in the evening." Similarly, LI said, "I try to stay at the conference hotel if possible or with colleagues that I'm traveling with we try to stay at the same hotel." RA briefly mentioned, "I try to stay at the conference hotel." JE said, "I will look where my conference is, look at the hotels around it... I prefer to be as close as possible to walk if it's going to be dark and I'm going to be by myself to feel comfortable." CH shortly said, "If I don't stay at the conference hotel it is highly likely it's because it's booked in its full and I won't take something that's just close proximity so I could walk." Likewise, AM noted, "I say the same is true for me. I like to stay at the conference hotel... when the rate is way over budget, I might kick something like to cross the street or walking distance." After experiencing a creepy room on the first floor, CA preferred a room on the higher floor. She said, "I always ask for a room on a higher floor."

Apparently, women used technology in various ways to push back the socially constructed vulnerable identities by appearing as confident and in control, avoiding conspicuousness resulting from looking like a confused non-local, and ensuring their access to others in case needed. Smartphones in particular were widely utilized. ER relied highly on her

cellphone. She said, “I feel more confident travelling due to technology. As long as I have my phone, I can navigate anywhere. It is just ensuring I have a connection and the ability to communicate if ever in trouble.” CH further explained:

I'm addicted to my cell phone and having access... If I lost cellphone signal or forgot my charger and my phone died on the airplane. Then I'm like okay panic I literally go to the shop and buy a charger really quick and give my phone charged. When I don't have access to communication stuff, I don't know how to function. And I've been in some other remote areas before and if you get lost or you don't know what your hotel is or whatever that can be likewise.

It was evident that women limited their use of time and public space in travel contexts by avoiding places that are deemed dangerous or where they felt vulnerable or uncomfortable as it was stated over and over in their travel reflections. They modified their clothing, restricted their use of time and place, moderate their behavior to fit into what is socially considered safe for them. Adopting the socially acceptable ‘vulnerable’ female identities that are always in need of protection, women proactively took actions to negotiate perceived risks.

Risk adoption

Despite considering some situations as ‘high-risk’, some women still put themselves in danger either to save money or out of sloppiness due to frequent travel. Staying at a cheaper accommodation close to the conference hotel, using public transportation in an unfamiliar destination, falling asleep in cabs, and not thinking about their actions twice were the most significant types of risky behavior mentioned by the participants. For instance, while doubting safety of the cheaper accommodation options, AM said, “I'm pretty budget conscience so I'm always looking for like what are the options that are least expensive.” Similarly, despite having concerns over safety of night-time walks from the conference hotel to another accommodation, EM chose to stay at an alternative hotel to save money, she stated, “Typically, I don't stay at the conference hotel and try to save the most money so I don't have a huge travel budget.” She

appeared to choose cheaper modes of transportation to the expense of her safety too, she elaborated, “I was probably out there a couple of times where I've looked back and thought it wasn't really a smart choice, but the ticket was so much cheaper than an extra day on the rental car so I just took the late train.” Likewise, ME noted that she would make safer decisions if she had more travel funds, “I have very little travel money and pay for most of the trips out of my pocket. If I had more travel money, I would make better decisions.” In a similar manner, AM articulated how budget limitations led to risky decisions:

So, early in my years we did have just given a travel or a professional development allotment that wasn't as much and I tried to stay in a cheaper hotel that is close so I could walk. We really wanted to save money. We're really just jeopardizing our safety in terms of being in public transportation or walking either late at night back to the hotel early morning not knowing the city.

LI agreed with her, “I'd like to echo what AM said. School used to pay a certain amount for a hotel in a city; it never was the cost of the convention hotel... I made decisions based on money that were not safe.” RA continued, “I agree with AM and LI. Before, we had to stick within that certain per diem which costed us to either try to route with someone or try to get a hotel that's within walking distance.”

Following the so-called tradition of blaming the victim, participants clearly took the blame for putting one's ‘vulnerable’ self in potentially dangerous situations. Thinking back about their trips, doubting their decisions in particular situations, and taking the blame for risking their safety was obvious in their statements. Evidently though, travel allocation was the main source for such ‘risky’ decisions and further support from the institution could give women the freedom to choose the accommodation, or transportation that they perceive as safe resulting in ease of mind and safer travel experiences. While to some extent women's concerns reflected their socially constructed images of self and the society, a great deal of their concerns particularly

those related to sexual assault in a travel context is valid. As apparent in their narratives they adopt that risk to manage their travel allocation.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate travel risk and safety among female academic faculty and staff. As women reflected on their work trip experiences, there seemed to be similarities in their narrations. Three themes were identified that represented participants' perceptions which subsequently formed their future travel intentions and behavior (Figure 2).

Insert figure 2 here.

Unlike most of the mixed-gender travel risk literature in which perceived risk of equipment failure, health, terrorism, and natural disaster have been emphasized, our findings indicated that most participants were concerned about potential sexual harassment. This aligns with what Yang et al. (2018) found among Asian female travelers. The consistencies between our findings and Yang et al.'s (2018) suggest that perceptions of sexual risks are prominent concerns among female travelers. Wilson and Little (2008) found similar results for solo female leisure travelers. Given the higher likelihood of sexual assault for women (citation), such concerns are valid to a great extent. However, in relation to feminist research, this could reflect women's perceptions of the wider society as still a patriarchal field in which the public space is not equally shared by genders but is a masculinized space dominated by heterosexual men (Aitchison 1999; Pritchard and Morgan 2000; Valentine 1989). The similarities in findings of gender-specific studies suggest that perceptions of people, places, and times and socially constructed notions of self, vulnerability, and risk play a more important role in perceptions of risk and safety than the purpose of the trip.

Findings showed that interviewees' risk perception and safety concerns are highly intertwined. Most respondents expressed their perceived safety in terms of fear and perceived comfort, which is consistent with the risk-as-feeling hypothesis, suggesting that perceived safety can reflect the affective component of travelers' perceived risk (Liu et al. 2016; Loewenstein et al. 2001). Our findings support the applicability of such a notion to the population of female business travelers. Additionally, the results showed that sense of risk could be intensified at specific times and in certain spaces, such as nighttime in parking lots/garage. This is consistent with the travel risk literature, which noted that risk is socially constructed and involves both the person and the environment (Yang et al. 2019). This was previously found in tourism, leisure, as well as transportation and environmental studies whereby women were found to feel like they were highly at risk, mostly risk of possible sexual harassment (Deem 1986), when isolated in public spaces, walking in certain places such as parks and public transport such as subways (Lynch and Perkins 1988; Westwood, Pritchard, and Morgan 2000), or buses (Sham, Soltani, Sham, and Mohamed 2012). Similar to what was found in this study such perceptions were found to be highlighted during nighttime. Additionally, isolation in unfamiliar spaces, and male gaze appeared as major influencers of the participants' perceived risk and safety. Unfamiliarity is a concept that has been discussed in the tourism literature in many forms, such as destination knowledge and subjective knowledge (Sharifpour et al. 2014). Isolation seems to be related to the sense of perceived comfort, which appears to be a term the participants referred to frequently when describing their evaluation of the situations. This may translate into feelings that have been referred to as anxiety (Resigner and Movondo 2005) and worry (Wang et al. 2019) in previous tourism studies. Such feelings could relate to a lack of confidence in one's ability to navigate the unknown and to find help when necessary (Valentine 1989).

Furthermore, male gaze or being surrounded by men seemed to generate the same feelings as isolation. There seem to be some contradiction in how people and situations were perceived and generated a sense of fear. It is plausible that such fear is due to a sense of conspicuousness (Wilson and Little 2008) that makes women think they are exposed and therefore are at risk. Possibly, such considerations, again, relate to socially constructed notions of risk and unsafety whereby women learn to be constantly fearful and cautious about their surroundings (Greer 1999; Wilson and Little 2008) regardless of whether they are surrounded by men, or are alone in a public space. This process of social construction was apparent when participants narrated incidents of assault or violence that had happened to other female travelers which caused them to doubt their physical abilities to defend themselves in case of an accident, or to believe that they are at risk in most circumstances. Accordingly, women are socialized to believe they are not safe in certain environments and per such beliefs they set spatial and temporal restrictions on their use of public space to protect themselves from men's verbal or physical assault (Valentine 1989; Wilson and Little 2008). Here, we do not mean to invalidate such perceptions and precautionary actions, rather, we mean to argue that perceptions of the frequency and extensiveness of assault are socially constructed and may indicate an exaggeration of what happens in reality. Such perceptions result in a perpetual fear that causes women to be always vigilant, contemplate their use of places, and police their own behavior.

Lastly, this study found that the participants applied various strategies to mitigate the potential risks, which mainly cover the phases of pre-trip and on-site. Most of these strategies are similar to the findings of the existing body of literature, such as information searching (Sharifpour et al. 2014), altering clothing/dressing authoritatively (Wilson and Little 2008), and avoiding risky situations or times and places in which one feels vulnerable such as public

transportation during nighttime (Lynch and Atkins 1988). Nevertheless, in relating to feminist research findings, such practices of caution and avoidance could be reflective of power relations between genders by which women's actions and lives are controlled in a patriarchal system that dictates practices that are "safe, right, and sensible" (Wilson and Little 2008, p. 182) through creating fear (Valentine 1989). Thereby, women are sexualized actors who are not supposed to be in certain places at certain times or otherwise their safety would be at risk (Wilson and Little 2008). Although most of the participants conformed to the social structures and adopted risk reduction strategies, some of them still 'risked' their safety for financial purposes. Lack of experience and optimistic bias were noted as factors that influence their decisions about taking risks while travelling. The former referred to immediate potentially risky decisions that are not well-thought through and come from a lack of travel experience such as choosing a cheaper mode of transportation without thinking about its safety. When women reflected on their actions, they realized that they could have been in danger. The latter referred to risky decisions and actions that took place because one had ample travel experience and took the potential risk for granted. For these women travel became part of their routine and they became so confident in their ability to navigate the unknown that they did not even think about the potential risk any more, a good example of this behavior was falling asleep in a cab. This is different from female leisure travelers, who may enact risk-taking behavior as a way to empower themselves, re-establish their identity, and fight against the existing social norms (Yang et al. 2019).

Conclusion

This exploratory study provided some insights into female academic faculty and staff's perceptions of travel risk and safety as a population that was overlooked in previous studies on travel risk. The unique contribution of this study was that unlike leisure travel, work trips were

not perceived as a context for resistance and identity construction. Most of the participants appeared to adopt to social constructions of gender-identity, risk and safety, and adapt their decisions to conform to what is considered acceptable. Future research is needed to test the findings at a larger scale through quantitative methods, and to examine the generalizability of the results to different types of academic institutions. A comparison between women working in higher education institutions and those working for other types of organizations is another potential direction. Nonetheless, findings provide a foundation for future theory development and modeling of behavior.

This research was delimited to faculty and staff in a large public university in the Midwest U.S., replication of the study at smaller institutions, private schools, or those with unique missions could expand and reinforce the findings. A focus on minorities such as LGBTQ travelers could be a valuable addition. Only one of the women in this study identified as lesbian who appeared to be concerned about an additional risk factor when travelling, she stated, “I am openly gay and I always travel with my partner. So, we do not travel to any destination that is not gay friendly.” While an interesting point, we did not investigate this deeper since all other participants identified as heterosexual. However, her statement indicates that there is more to know about the LGBTQ travelers. A study that focuses particularly on this population could have theoretical and practical merit.

Findings also provide guidance for practitioners such as university administrators, higher education travel managers, staff supporting faculty/staff in travel arrangements, and hospitality professionals (hotel, transportation, destination) to take a proactive approach to mitigate or eliminate perceived risk factors and create better experiences. Themes discussed in this study could be a base for initiating discussion and action for future risk management efforts and policy

development. Although all women may not share the same concerns, themes identified in this study indicated that there are some commonalities in their views and actions based on gender which indicates that this topic warrants more attention at institutional level. Particularly, concerns over budget which appeared to result in fear and taking conceivably risky actions requires special attention. Providing enough travel funds for women to enable them to stay in the conference hotel eliminates the need for night-time commutes between the conference hotel and an alternative accommodation which was a significant context for potential sexual assault. Additionally, hiring travel experts who provide the travelers with information about different destinations, safe and potentially unsafe areas, and presumptively safe accommodation and transportation options could be another feasible practice.

Nevertheless, as discussed above, perceptions of risk to a great extent relate to socially constructed notions of fear as well as women's self and social image. Perhaps, organizing educational sections for female employees could lift part of the travel stress and help in creating more enjoyable experiences.

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Table 1. Participants' profile.

Participant's Initials	Work Profile at the University		Work-related Trips		
	Position	No. of Years	No. per Year	Scope	Travel party
NI	Faculty	17	1 or 2	International & domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
ME	Faculty	10	1 or 2	Domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
ER	Faculty	6	1 or 2	International & domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
AJ	Faculty	4	1 or 2	International	Alone, w/ colleagues
AB	Faculty	8	1 or 2	International & domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
AM	Faculty	18	2-3	International & domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
JA	Staff, Academic advisor	10	1	Domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
EM	Staff, Director of development	3	At least 1/month	Domestic	Alone
CH	Staff, Community engagement	13	At least 1	Mostly domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
AA	Staff, Engaged learning	12	1 or 2	Mostly domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
LE	Staff, International office	15	As needed	Mostly international	Alone, w/ colleagues
CA	Faculty	5	1 or 2	Domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
CD	Staff, Admissions recruiter	< 1	Very frequently	Domestic & mostly regional	Alone
LI	Faculty	18	About 2	Domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues
RA	Faculty	12	2-5	Mostly domestic	Alone, w/ colleagues

Figure 1. An overview of protection motivation theory (adapted from Floyd et al. 2000).

Figure 2. Three aspects of travel risk as narrated by female faculty and staff.

Perception	Treatment	Adoption
<p>Sexual assault (most important risk factor)</p> <p>Perceptions were induced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Male gaze ○ Isolation in unfamiliar space <p>Risky places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parking lots/garages ○ Public transport (specifically subways & buses) ○ Confined spaces (elevators) ○ Hotel rooms in lower floors or at the end of the hallways. <p>Risky times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Early morning ○ After dark (Nighttime) 	<p>Pre-trip preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conducting research ○ Planning <p>During the trip</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Walking in groups ○ Not sharing information with strangers ○ Staying at the conference hotel ○ Asking for rooms on upper floors/ at the end of the hallways ○ Using technology ○ Dressing authoritatively ○ Avoiding sloppiness 	<p>Due to limited travel funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staying at cheaper accommodations instead of the conference hotel ○ Using public transportation <p>Due to sloppiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Falling asleep in cabs ○ Not thinking twice before taking actions