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Misogyny, racism and Islamophobia: street harassment at the intersections

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Misogyny and Islamophobia: Street Harassment at the Intersections

Abstract

Veiled Muslim women are at an increased risk of street harassment in the current political and economic climate. Their visibility, combined with their popular portrayal as culturally dangerous or threatening means that they are vulnerable to receiving verbal and physical threats, which can be misogynistic and Islamophobic in nature. Drawing on 60 individual and 20 focus group interviews with Muslim women in the UK who wear the niqab (face veil) and had experienced harassment in public, this qualitative study details their lived experiences. It argues that an intersectional analysis is crucial to understanding the nuances of their lived experiences and the impact street harassment has on their lives. The findings demonstrate that street harassment can produce a hostile environment for veiled Muslim women which can have a terrorising effect, limiting their full participation in the public sphere.

Introduction

Within the current post-Brexit climate, veiled Muslim women are facing increased risks of attacks in the UK. The anti-Muslim hate monitoring group Tell MAMA reported in their annual survey for 2016 that there was a significant rise in hate crimes against Muslims being reported to them after the vote to leave the EU. Research found that not only are Muslim women more likely to be attacked than Muslim men but that their experiences demonstrate misogynistic and Islamophobic undertones (removed for review, 2015). The number of people identifying as Muslim has increased by 1.2million between the 2001 and 2011 census sweeps (Casey, 2016, p. 121). Our research took place at a time where Muslims are having their faith and beliefs questioned more vocally by some sections of society. A 2016 ComRes

poll noted that 43% of 2000 adults surveyed felt that Islam was a negative force in the UK. A recent government report suggested that this was partly caused by concerns over integration, immigration and perceptions of backward religious practices (Casey, 2016).

Certainly, not all Muslim women wear the headscarf and/or face veil, and some are not covered at all. However, as Perry (2014) points out, Muslim women and girls are extremely vulnerable to street violence motivated by their visible status as Muslims. This also has to do with the controlling images of veiled Muslim women that render them especially attractive and available targets. Bullock and Jafri (2002, p. 36) highlight three 'personas' that Muslim women are perceived to occupy in the popular imagination, and thus define what Muslim women 'are supposed to be and do':

> The first is the 'harem belly-dancer character,' the mysterious and sexualized woman of the 'Orient'; the second is 'the oppressed Muslim woman,' often represented as the hijab (headscarf) wearer or the woman who is unable to drive; and, finally, there is the 'militant Muslim woman,' often shown in hijab with a gun and military clothes.

Along similar lines, removed for review (2014) point out that veiled Muslim women are routinely portrayed as oppressed, 'culturally dangerous' and 'threatening' to the Western way of life and to notions of public safety and security by virtue of being fully covered in the public sphere. Correspondingly, the visibility of veiled Muslim women must also be understood in the current climate of international legal reforms, which have attempted to criminalise wearing the niqab in public places. France was the first to ban face covering, when in 2009 then president Nicolas Sarkozy said that such clothing was 'not welcome' and that legislation would protect women who were being

forced to wear it. There have been calls by some MPs to ban the niqab in Britain, following recent bans in other European countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Italy and Bulgaria. Such legislation alludes to a need to protect Muslim women from an oppressive male family member which infantilises them and makes them appear weak. Furthermore, it promotes a message of intolerance and indicates that Muslim women who wear the niqab do not belong in secular Western countries. Both messages have a similar impact, which is to encourage Muslim women to stay home and out of public view.

While there is increasing literature on street violence against women generally, there is relatively little scholarly work examining the experiences of Muslim women who wear the niqab. Allen's (2015) study provided a significant contribution to this gap by interviewing veiled Muslim women about their experiences and concluding that incidents were often at the intersection of religion and gender. However, there still exists a lack of engagement with wider literature on street harassment, which draws out more general gendered experiences. Drawing on 60 individual and 20 focus group interviews with Muslim women who wear the niqab, this article reflects upon their lived experiences in public spaces. We argue that it is essential to take an intersectional approach by looking at how they are victimised along Islamophobic and misogynistic lines. Our aim with this paper is to demonstrate the religious and gender dimensions of veiled Muslim women's experiences in public. This does not just mean acknowledging that Muslim women have different experiences, but thinking more critically about how key aspects of their identity intersect to define their place in the social world.

Understanding street harassment and intersectionality

In this article, we employ the term 'street harassment' because it is inclusive in terms of capturing different forms of the harassment of women in public (rather than merely sexual harassment). As Davis (1994) points out, there are three certain key characteristics associated with street harassment: the locale; the gender of and the relationship between the harasser and the target; and the reference to body parts. Typically, the targets of street harassment are female whilst the harassers are male, the harassers are unacquainted with their targets, and the forum is a public one (although the content of the speech, if any, is not intended as public discourse) (Bowman, 1993). From this perspective, street harassment is defined as 'the unsolicited verbal and/or nonverbal act of a male stranger towards a female, solely on the basis of her sex, in a public place' (Laniya, 2005, p. 100). Both men and women can experience street harassment; however, most victims are women.

Vera-Gray (2016) argues that empirical studies of street harassment, its prevalence, manifestations, effects, and the meanings it holds for both the men who practice it and the women who experience it, are limited. Reasons for the 'invisibility' of women's experiences of street harassment include: trivialisation (Tuerkheimer, 1997); normalisation (Bowman, 1993; Larkin, 1997); and the ways in which practices in public or semi-public places do not receive the same scrutiny as practices in private places (Gardner, 1995; Goffman, 1990). With the exception of Kelly (1988), Randall (1987) and Wise and Stanley (1987), public space as an arena, and everyday life as the context, is largely absent from mainstream work on sexual harassment. Furthermore, scholarship on street harassment has tended to overlook the issue of intersectionality in relation to victim experiences. Coined by Crenshaw (1989), the concept of intersectionality was introduced to explain the way that multiple systems of oppression construct our identities and also our access to power

and privilege. In relation to violence and hostility, difference is obscured both in an attempt to understand the victim experience and also in relation to how campaigners and policymakers might exclude issues of gender, religion or other identity characteristics. This is particularly the case for the lived experiences of 'other' women such as Muslim women who wear the niqab in public in the UK.

Against the backdrop of the 'War on Terror' and the popular perceptions of gender oppression in Islam, the visibility of the niqab renders Muslim women the 'ideal' target for street harassment (removed for review, 2014). In this regard, wearing the niqab marks Muslim women more readily visible as 'soft', 'easy' and 'convenient' targets to attack. Veiled Muslim women often occupy intersecting positions in terms of religion, gender and appearance coupled with other aspects of their identities, and this defines their experiences of street harassment. Abu-Ras and Suarez (2009) highlight the complexity of Muslim women's identities: (i) their gender status as women, who generally face more discrimination in access to educational, financial, health, and social resources; (ii) their cultural identity that is shaped by structural social and cultural constraints provided by gender socialisation and patriarchal processes; (iii) their status as immigrants and minorities in a Western country, and the resulting social and economic marginalisation and finally (iv) their Muslim dress code that symbolises modesty and physical integrity, and identifies them from non-Muslims, marking them as targets for hate crimes, discrimination, and possible violations of their bodily integrity.

At the same time though, this does not mean that street harassment has one meaning for veiled Muslim women and a different meaning for all other women; rather, veiled Muslim women can experience street harassment in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by all other women. According to

Davis (1994), in order truly to understand any woman's experience, it is crucial to think of her as embodied and not as an individual experiencing street harassment on various, nonintersecting axes. It is argued that "we cannot hope to understand the meanings of a person's experience, including her experiences of oppression, without first thinking of her as embodied, and second thinking about the particular meanings assigned to that embodiment" (Davis, 1994, p. 214). To illustrate this, Lloyd (2005, p. 45) points out that black women do not experience racism because they are black, and sexism because they are women; they experience both simultaneously on the basis that 'racism and sexism interlock, they modulate and inflect one another'. Taking a similar position, Spelman (1990, p. 12) states that 'sexism and racism do not have different objects'. Such insights can be revealing, for example the work of Fogg-Davis that examined the victimisation of black lesbians. He noted that it was important to question the 'interplay between civic behaviours and intersection structural inequalities' and that their victimisation drew upon heterosexism, colonialism and slavery (Fogg-Davis, 2006, p. 57). Such a detailed examination has not been carried out in relation to the experiences of veiled Muslim women.

For Muslim women, their experiences can sit at the intersection of religion and gender coupled with other aspects of their identity. In essence, these aspects of identity not only define their everyday life experiences, but specifically their experiences and responses to street harassment. For many the niqab itself is a symbol of gender oppression and 'extreme' Muslim values, meaning that perpetrators feel emboldened to enact both their Islamophobic and misogynistic feelings on Muslim women (removed for review, 2015). Literature on street harassment demonstrates that it is commonplace for women to take safety precautions in public such as altering their appearance or clothing (Bowman, 1993).

For Muslim women, this gendered approach takes on an added dimension because it might mean removing their niqab, which has implications for their religious sense of self and practising their religion.

Methods

Overview of research design

The research took the form of a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews carried out between 2011 and 2012 with Muslim women who wear the niqab. The research took place in Leicester. Specifically, the study comprised 60 individual and 20 focus group interviews with veiled Muslim women who had experienced anti-Muslim hostility in public places. The topics covered in the interviews and focus groups included: (a) nature and frequency of harassment; (b) impact of harassment upon victims, their families and wider communities; (c) women's coping mechanisms and (d) effectiveness of criminal justice responses to this problem. The interviews, undertaken by the second author, typically ranged from one to two hours, with an average interview length of one hour. Participation in the study was voluntary. All the women who took part in the study wore the niqab at the time of fieldwork. There was no overlap between the women who participated in the interviews and in the focus groups. Of the 60 veiled Muslim women who took part in individual interviews[1], 83 per cent (n = 50) were born into Islam and 17 per cent (10) had converted to Islam, whilst the largest ethnic group of participants classified themselves as Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Asian other - 70 per cent, 42), followed by Black (either Black Caribbean, Black African, and Black Other - 13

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[1] Members of the focus group sessions varied from six to 20 individuals, However, it is not possible to provide demographic information about the veiled Muslim women who took part in the focus group interviews because the relevant gatekeepers did not allow the researcher to note women's personal details.

per cent, 8), and White (British, Irish, and Other - 17 per cent, 10). The majority of participants had lived in Leicester for five years or more (67 per cent, 40).

Sampling

Women were invited to participate in the study based on the premise they had experienced harassment in public. Using convenience sampling, prospective participants were identified through local Muslim organisations including mosques, Muslim schools and Islamic centres, as well as local Muslim university student societies, and Muslim women's groups. The study was advertised through these organisations, and women could contact the researcher directly in order to arrange for an interview (the researcher's contact details were included in the call for participants) on the basis that they had experienced harassment in public. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher explained to prospective participants the scope of the study, that is, examining their experiences of harassment in public. Participants who had not experienced harassment in public would be excluded from the study; however, this was not the case as all the participants did report some form of harassment, whether anti-Muslim, racist and/or misogynistic.

An advantage of employing these organisations for participant recruitment was that individuals were introduced to the study by a familiar, trusted organisation. This alleviated any concerns that participants might have had about taking part in the study, thus potentially increasing participation in the study. Participants unaffiliated to any local Muslim organisations or groups were also recruited through snowball sampling. As with convenience sampling, snowball sampling is a type of non-probability method, which is particularly appropriate when the population of interest is 'hidden' or 'hard to reach' and there is a lack of sampling frame of the target group

(Patton, 1987).

Individual interviews took place at women's home or at the University where the researcher was working at the time of the fieldwork. Conducting interviews at the University was offered as an alternative to participants who did not wish for the interview to take place at their home. The university was a safe, private location to conduct the interviews, for both the researcher and the participants (when arranging an interview at the University, a room was booked to ensure privacy and to minimise interruptions). Conducting interviews at women's home was useful for some participants as it minimised the inconvenience of leaving the house as some women had caring responsibilities of young children and/or elderly family members. However, some women chose the University as their preferred location for the interviews as they might not have been able to fully disclose their experiences of victimisation if other family members were present in their home during the interview.

Focus group interviews were conducted at local Muslim organisations such as mosques, Islamic centres and Islamic educational institutions. The focus group participants were already at these premises for religious purposes such as praying and learning or teaching the *Quran*. Most groups were already established in certain classes and participants would either take some time off their classes to participate in a focus group interview or they would join in the next session as soon as they finished their activities. It is likely that participants felt comfortable and secure because they were interviewed in environments that they were mostly familiar with. This approach reinforced notions of good interview rapport and trusting relationships between the researcher and the researched (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). It also encouraged openness and honesty from the women, particularly because of the sensitive nature of the discussion.

Data analysis, authenticity and reflexivity

With the exception of one individual[2], the rest of participants consented to their interviews being audio recorded, and the material was subsequently transcribed and analysed using Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded Theory, which is based on an inductive approach, involves developing a 'story' that emerges from the data. Within this framework, participants' responses are construed as evidence of what they think and feel and how they interpret the social world (Glaser, 1992). In this case, verbatim transcripts are essential for Grounded Theory analysis as they capture information in participants' own words, phrases and expressions as well as providing 'rich' detail. Within a Grounded Theory framework, the data was reviewed and coded in order to produce categories consistent with issues of thematic interest. Nvivo 9 was used to code the data under broad themes of women's victimisation, and then patterns and sub-themes were identified within broad themes such as the nature, frequency and impact of victimisation, women's coping mechanisms and prevention of victimisation.

As Payne (2004) points out, the terms and concepts used to demonstrate rigour in quantitative research – including reliability, validity, representativeness, generalisability and objectivity – are problematic for qualitative research. Since most qualitative research methods of analysis are concerned with the interpretation of data and the researcher's role in this is explicitly acknowledged, the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity is not supportable. Rather, qualitative researchers must demonstrate the methodological rigour of their work, and be clear and explicit in the claims made when research is written up or presented. This

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[2] One of the women refused for the individual interview to be recorded and therefore the researcher offered to take notes, which was accepted by this participant.

indicates that researchers need to use reflexivity throughout the research process in order to recognise the potential influence of the researcher(s) on the research design, participant selection, as well as data collection and interpretation (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011).

Indeed, as an Orthodox Christian female individual[3], the researcher was sometimes perceived as an 'outsider' by her participants due to her religion. In order to gain an insider's perspective the researcher used different techniques such as using a semi-structured interview guide to prompt the data collection; employing careful listening skills, establishing rapport and trust with participants; creating a safe, comfortable environment for participants; asking questions in an open, unthreatening way and in a friendly colloquial manner; showing empathy towards participants; and motivating them to tell their stories in detail by using probes. For example, asking questions in a non-threatening, friendly way included framing questions in a manner that was non-leading; using neutral language (rather than using emotive language) and using open ended questions. Additionally, throughout the research cycle, the researcher asked for feedback from the participants, and received critical remarks on the research design, which were implemented; thus enhancing the quality of the study. For example, the researcher found that interview questions posed in a more academic language were not immediately understandable by some participants and thus she decided to pose questions in colloquial language. Amending the language of the questions posed was important in order to get an insight into participants' perceptions, emotions, feelings and beliefs, and thus truly understand their

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[3] Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher stated her non-Muslim identity (Orthodox Christian) to participants as a way of introducing herself, and outlined her motivation to research this topic as a non-Muslim woman. This was important for establishing rapport with participants, as they typically asked questions about the researcher's background including her religion, ethnicity and motivation for doing this research.

experiences.

Other aspects of the researcher's identity also contributed to her 'outsider' status such as her Western style of dress. In this case, the leaders of the mosques, Muslim schools and Islamic community centres (that the researcher visited to conduct the focus group interviews) advised her to dress and behave in a religiously and culturally appropriate manner when visiting these places. For example, the researcher was asked to dress modestly, including wearing a long loose dress (preferably black) and covering her hair with a hijab (headscarf) when conducting focus group sessions at mosques. The fact that the researcher conformed to this advice eased access to participants, and helped to develop trust and rapport with them. As Zubair et al. (2012) point out, researchers' bodily appearances and bodily actions, adaptations and interactions are important markers of their identity in the fieldwork. Okely (2007: 71) suggests that researchers often have to learn to adapt their bodily performances and actions – including the way they dress – in order to fit in with, and be accepted amongst, those they are researching, especially when they are closely scrutinised and instructed. This demonstrates the important role the researcher's body and behaviour may play in developing (or hindering the development of) trust and rapport with participants. This discussion shows that research design needs to take into account the religious and cultural context of the community. Awareness of cultural and religious norms is vital for negotiating insider/outsider dynamics through showing respect for participants' culture and religion.

Street harassment

Nature and extent

All the participants[4] reported feeling unsafe in public spaces because of concerns that they were likely to be approached, intimidated, threatened or attacked. Such concerns were based on previous experiences ranging from verbal and non-verbal street remarks, to serious incidents of stalking and physical assaults. In particular, participants experienced verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment in public spaces. Participants reported that unknown men on the street made sexual comments and/or sexual noises at them (often accompanied by sexual gestures). In some cases, individuals asked them questions about their sexual life and/or their sexuality. Also, participants were subjected to wolf whistling, catcalling and sexist jokes.

The visibility of the niqab confounds public norms, partly because of the niqab's message of sexual unavailability (removed for review, 2014). This symbolism brings the veiled Muslim woman very visibly into the public sphere where she simply cannot walk by unnoticed. In this context, the niqab symbolises the sexual 'non-availability' of Muslim women. As a result, men may find it difficult to forgive those who 'disrupt' the 'pattern of the masculine gaze' (Franks, 2000). Correspondingly, unknown men on the street often 'demanded' that participants unveiled themselves by taking the niqab off, as indicated in the comments below.

I want to cut that black thing off your face!

Halimah

Show me what you're wearing under there!

Ruqiia

Give us a flash!

Alima

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[4] Throughout this paper, we avoid using the term 'victim' to describe participants who reported being subject to harassment, stalking, and/or physical assaults. We recognise that many women who have experienced different forms of harassment and violence may not describe themselves in these terms.

In the eyes of their harassers, veiled Muslim women participated in the public sphere in order to entertain and please men (Kissling & Kramarae, 1991). This led to participants feeling objectified and reduced to their body parts. As Kissling (1991) points out, street harassment remarks often refer to parts of the body not available for public examination. Accordingly, participants were sometimes 'challenged' by unknown men walking by on the street, who often assumed that women wore the niqab because they were 'ugly', as the following quotes demonstrate.

What's that on your face? Why are you covering it?

Sarah

Why do you have a mask on? Are you really ugly under there?

Focus group participant

If participants were travelling with their children, it was also common for unknown individuals to make comments such as: '*Why are you covered up and your children are not covered up?*'

Performance of gender

Participants felt that performing gender inappropriately was key to triggering such comments, as indicated in the following focus group discussion.

Participant A: We are very different to the average non-Muslim woman. We are doing everything that the media tells us we shouldn't be doing in terms of how women should dress and behave.

Participant B: In Western societies men are used to seeing women in all their glory really, aren't they? I think men appreciate the fact that they can see a woman's face and that they can see her figure. They probably feel

deprived of this opportunity because they can't assess a Muslim woman in
the same way that they can assess a Christian, Sikh or Hindu woman.

Participant C: They just don't want this image [of the veiled Muslim
woman] to be out there because that image is not 'pleasant' to the
Western world, that image is not a symbol of the sexual exploitation of
women.

Participants also argued that performing gender 'inappropriately' coupled with practising Islam as pious Muslim women was seen as a symbol of segregation and unwillingness to 'integrate' into British society. To this end, street harassers 'punished' veiled Muslim women for their deviant behaviour and assumed that veiling represented a rejection of Western values. It would be interesting to explore in a further study the extent to which other Muslim women experience this perception. Relatedly, this issue was debated in a focus group interview at an Islamic centre.

Participant A: If they get rid of Muslims then they will have a white
Christian England.

Participant B: I don't think it is about being Christian. I think it's about
being like them. Hindu and Sikhs are brown. They are Asians but they
drink, they go clubbing, women wear short skirts. They'll do everything like
them. It's about socialising so they feel more integrated with them. They
feel they are the same.

Participant C: You're right, especially the drinking thing kind of unites
them. They think 'We might be different colours but we are the same, we
drink, we club, we dress the same, we are mixing' but we as Muslims
don't do what they do. We dress differently. We say no to drinking. We

won't go clubbing. Yeah there are Muslims that do go but generally you won't see that many Muslims going to clubs. Even if they go, you can't tell that they are Muslim. Even we as Muslims can't recognise them. If someone is not dressed as a Muslim you can't tell if they are Muslim or not.

In their research with veiled Muslim women, both Bullock (2002) and Abu-Lughod (2013) highlight Muslim women's perceptions of the hijab and/or niqab as a form of emancipation and agency. Bullock (2002, p. 85) states that Muslim women "whose grandmothers and mothers may have fought to uncover, started wearing the *hijab* and *niqab*". However, although freedom of choice and individual agency are amongst the most cherished values in contemporary Western societies, the woman who freely chooses to wear the niqab often provokes public hostility (removed for review, 2014). The 'refusal' of veiled Muslim women to conform to the expectation of being 'the object of the gaze' constitutes a disruption of power relations in the public sphere. In this context, veiled Muslim women's bodies become a medium on which to inscribe hostility and enmity (Perry, 2014). And the body is, in the words of Eisenstein (2006, p. 186), 'a horribly powerful resource for those who wish to conquer, violate, humiliate, and shame.' Like many women of colour, Muslim women are sexualised, such that they are reduced to their bodies (Perry, 2014). This reflects a familiar dichotomy that characterises their perceived identities. For white women, there is the Madonna/whore duality; for black women, there is the Jezebel and Mammy distinction whilst for Muslim women there is distinction between the sexual belly dancer and the oppressed woman who is in need of saving (Perry, 2014).

Furthermore, participants reported being subjected to name-calling which would be difficult to define as sexual harassment *per se*, yet this type of harassment is part of

some Muslim women's lived experiences of wearing the niqab in public places in the UK. To illustrate this, participants reported being used as a form of 'entertainment'. For example, they were called names such as 'Ninja', 'Catwoman', 'Batman', 'Darth Vader', 'Ghost woman', 'Bin bag', 'Letterbox', 'Postbox', 'Witch' and 'Walking Coffin'. Moreover, participants noted that they had been subjected to swearing such as 'Fucking freak', 'Muslim bitch' and 'Muslim whore'. In addition, a couple of participants reported that people on the street sometimes took photographs of them (without asking their permission) whilst others revealed that they had been followed and/or stalked, illustrations of which are presented below.

> *I was walking on the street [in London] and this guy was following me. He was saying 'Come on show me your face, show me your face' and after a few streets I took my niqab off and showed him my face. I was so scared that I took it off. After a couple of streets down I put it back on again.*
>
> Salimah

> *I was walking in town [Leicester city centre] and this man followed me home. He saw I was a single woman in the house with a child. I didn't have money to buy the curtains. He used to come and knock on the door. I told the Council what was going on and they gave me a house in another estate.*
>
> Johara

The niqab as a terrorist 'threat'

Veiled Muslim women are not only characterised as exotic and/or as oppressed but they are also represented as mysterious, dangerous and threatening (Perry, 2014). To this end, veiled Muslim women are perceived as 'agents' of terrorism or as tools of Islamist terrorism aiming to infiltrate the West (Freedman, 2007). Participants were

often perceived as a security or terrorist 'threat'. In some cases, they were being called names such as 'mothers of suicide bombers'. Also, the following comments demonstrate that veiling was perceived as a camouflage for a terrorist.

Are you carrying belts full of explosives?

Jahidah

When are you going to blow us up?

Shelina

Why are you dressed like that? Are you a suicide bomber?

Amtullah

Physical harm

A minority of participants were victims of serious physical harm. They reported being pushed, slapped, spat at, shoved or had their niqabs pulled off by unknown men on the street. In some cases, they had things thrown at them (such as alcohol, water bombs, bottles, eggs, take-away food, rubbish and stones) or they had a weapon (such as a knife) being used against them. Such incidents were demonstrated in Armstrong's (2015) study of sex workers which found that while they experienced the common forms of 'low level' street harassment, they were more vulnerable to escalating abuse which had more 'sinister undertones' (Armstrong, 2015, p. 292). Armstrong's research has connections with the current study because it also features women facing specific forms of street harassment because of what they represent. They share experiences of hostility and dehumanisation as well as being at risk when in certain public spaces. Participants in the present study also reported incidents where passing vehicles attempted to run them over. These findings show very strong similarities with qualitative research into the experiences of Muslim women who wear the niqab in other European countries namely Belgium, Denmark,

France and the Netherlands (Brems, 2014). For example, veiled Muslim women in the Netherlands reported regularly being confronted with people who scolded, insulted or spat at them (Moors, 2009; 2014). Echoing these experiences, veiled Muslim women in France described a stream of violent insults in public places including being violently pushed, spat on, and having their niqab pulled off (Boutelja, 2011).

Participants noted that the typical perpetrator was male (and unknown to them). Specifically, participants' accounts suggested that perpetrators were usually white men, aged between 16 and 25. However, participants argued that they were sometimes targeted by members of ethnic and racial minorities (including EU nationals) as well as from fellow Muslims. In the latter case, the abuse came from members of the Muslim community, who were 'Westernised' or 'non-practising' Muslims. However, it is important to note that Muslim women who do not veil are also subject to discrimination on the streets (removed for review, 2015). In very few cases where street harassers were female, this involved cases of verbal abuse and name calling rather than physical violence or stalking. For Davis (1994), while women can and do in fact make comments to other women, a qualitative difference exists; women's comments directed toward other women are not situated in the same place of power as are men's comments. However, they do demonstrate an interesting perception of veiled Muslim women as performing gender differently and perhaps in a way that some female perpetrators do not like. The same situation was found in Armstrong's (2015) study where sex workers reported some attacks from women which might be evidence of an internalised misogyny and also a public scolding of them 'for stepping outside of the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour' (Armstrong, 2015, p. 291).

Finally, it is important to point out that such experiences were not one-off, discrete or isolated incidents; rather, it was part of a process of being targeted in public. Relatedly, very few participants reported these experiences to the police. Participants gave a range of reasons for not reporting but the most popular reason was that they did not think it was serious enough to report. This was followed by concerns about being blamed and feeling ashamed/embarrassed about what had happened to them. Lastly, some participants did not think that what had happened to them could be classed as a crime *per se*. Similarly, Larkin (1997) found that everyday incidents of street harassment were so normalised that they were rarely seen as 'harassment'. Vera-Gray (2016) highlights the limitations of criminalising behaviours that are extensions of commonly accepted gender relations.

Street harassment: Impacts

<u>Geography and boundaries of safety</u>

The most significant impact on the lives of veiled Muslim women in the research was the increased level of fear or vulnerability that they felt. Sometimes this fear would happen before even leaving the home and in the anticipation of going outside. Such experiences concur with other academic studies on street harassment, for example the work of Ilahi who noted that the women described having to 'psychologically prepare yourself to go out and run a simple errand' (Ilahi, 2009, p. 62). This level of preparation was commonly noted amongst participants in this study, who would evaluate the likelihood of attack based on a number of factors. Many identified that being in a non-Muslim area might make them more likely to be targeted because of their visibility as practising Muslim women. Some felt safer nearer home, although this depended upon previous experience of localised harassment. For example, one

focus group participant noted that she had experienced criminal damage of her home and also threats of eggs being thrown at her when she left the house. So for her, the immediate area surrounding her home was where she felt less safe.

This awareness of geography and boundaries of safety has much in common with wider experiences of street harassment. Ilahi describes this as a 'discursive negotiation' of urban space and this has the effect of excluding women from certain public spaces or at least impinging upon their free movement (Ilahi, 2009, p. 56). According to Davis (1994), street harassment genderises the street by institutionalising male privilege in, and 'ownership' of, the public street, thereby excluding women. From this perspective, street harassment allows men to establish the boundaries that define women's participation in the street. As such, street harassment excludes women by demarcating the street as 'male space', which maintains and perpetuates the public/private distinction in a gendered form (Davis, 1994). Bowman (1993) notes that street harassers create a hostile environment on the street, implicitly informing their targets that they are not 'welcome'. From this perspective, to be a woman in public is to be available for men's comments.

Street harassment genderises the street by distributing power in such a way that perpetuates and reinforces the gender hierarchy (Mackinnon, 1987). In light of this, the psychological pressures of running even a simple errand were significant (Ilahi, 2009). The participants in this study took safety seriously, but not only because of the fear of attack. A number of women felt that it was a central part of their religion. In one focus group, it was noted that *'In Islam you have to look after yourself'* and that *'In our religion, we are supposed to keep ourselves safe'*. This imperative placed added pressure on the women as they weighed up how they might negotiate safe areas whilst also honouring the tenets of their faith.

Sexual terrorism

The findings show that street harassment produced an environment of sexual terrorism. This refers to the visibility of the Muslim woman wearing a niqab, but also about perceived issues of vulnerability that women generally might possess. These perceptions were often connected to their feeling that attacking or removing the niqab was a form of sexual assault. As Maha notes:

> *Taking the veil off is equal to rape really. I was walking down the street in the local area [Highfields, Leicester] and there were three white men in their early 20s. They took my niqab off from behind. I tried to conceal my face with my scarf and then when I tried to retrieve my niqab they wanted to take a look at me. They bent down to see what I looked like and then they chucked it on the floor.*

It is important to recognise that street harassment mirrors a larger system of sexual terrorism. Kissling (1991, p. 456) defines sexual terrorism as a 'system by which males frighten and, through fear, control and dominate females'. As Davis (1994) points out, recognising street harassment's role in sexual terrorism is crucial to understanding its potential to harm. From this perspective, street harassment provokes in women a fear of rape, acting as a salient warning of the omnipresent threat of physical and/or sexual violence (Kissling, 1991). Regardless of whether there is the possibility of actual rape, street harassment reminds women of their vulnerability to sexual violence in general, and intensifies the fear of the possibility of rape (Davis, 1994). As a precursor to rape and an escalator of the fear of rape, street harassment entraps women in a sexually terroristic environment (Davis, 1994). Iman concurred, suggesting that:

Although I don't have any bruises to show from the assault, I am damaged and harmed inside as if have been sexually assaulted.

These comments demonstrate how important an intersectional understanding of women's experiences is. In his study of black lesbian experiences of street harassment, Fogg-Davis (2006) observes that street harassment, like rape, is about asserting male dominance over women in 'situations where women appear vulnerable' (p. 65) and that it indicates an imbalance of power which is 'connected to systems of patriarchy, racism and homophobia' (Fogg-Davis, 2006, p. 74). For the women in the present study, the forced removal of the niqab was often tied to male entitlement – or the perpetrator's frustration at the inability to visualise the female body. As mentioned earlier, participants spoke of men demanding *'show me your face', 'give us a flash'* or *"show me what you're wearing under there".* Bowman writes that such invasions are like a rape, where someone is forced into your private space (1993, p. 535). Comments were often accompanied by catcalls, wolf whistles and sexual noises. These inherently sexual and misogynistic incidents when accompanied by a physical removal of clothing, demonstrates the intersections of religion and gender in the experiences of veiled Muslim women. As Fogg-Davis (2006) also notes, this simultaneous embodiment can mean that women are between categories of religion and gender and the complex psychological impacts are rarely attended to in policy or practice. We would suggest that the gendered nature of much hate crime is often overlooked by policymakers and practitioners, meaning that the nuances of the victim experience and their relative impacts can be missed.

Street harassment: Strategies

<u>Safety work</u>

In classic studies of street harassment, scholars have noted the myriad strategies that women employ in their attempts to avoid being victimised. Liz Kelly (1988) coined the phrase 'safety work' to describe the preparations and coping strategies that all women employ when negotiating public space. Our participants invested considerable thought into their geographic movements. This was partly based on previous experience, demonstrating again how women bring their biographic experiences to their current fears of street harassment. Some participants decided to drive or take a bus or taxi (instead of walking) in order to avoid street harassment. In some cases, participants changed traveling routes and made decisions not to venture into the public on certain days/times. Some participants chose not to go out at all.

The women interviewed for this research expressed strongly how their sense of identity was harmed not just by the incidents, but by feeling compelled to unveil themselves. This had a very real impact on many women's sense of self and identity. For example, a participant who advised her daughter not to wear the niqab on a trip to Paris said that it made her daughter 'feel bad'. Another noted that the niqab is supposed to be a symbol of protection, but ironically to protect herself she sometimes removed it. Participants did feel that they had committed a 'sin' which increased their feeling of self-blame and guilt. Tashia said:

> *Since I took it off, it feels like I've committed a really big sin…I should have*
> *fought back, I shouldn't have removed it.*

As Laniya (2005) points out, a member of a minority group that is consistently marginalised, blamed, and victimised may be more likely to attribute the occurrence of street harassment to herself and see herself as the cause of such harm. Thus, this woman may internalise the blame that a dominant group has placed on her. When a

person blames herself, she is less likely to identify an experience as injurious, and even if she does recognise the experience as injurious, she is less likely to externalise the harm and blame someone other than herself (Laniya, 2005). That stated, some participants felt judged from within their community for deciding to take it off as a safety measure. Yara expressed this sentiment:

The ladies who wore niqabs were quite horrible to me. They judged me for taking it off. They said, "Oh that's come off, so does that mean that everything else is coming off?"

Such a sense of shame or lack of community support is not uncommon from women who alter their clothing to avoid street harassment. They too might feel a sense of letting their Muslim sisters down, or of being judged by others. As Bowman writes, the intent of street harassment is to remind women of their gender identity and this is achieved by teaching women to 'associate their bodies with shame, fear and humiliation' (1993, p. 541). For Muslim women, this is tied to decisions over where and when to wear the niqab, and what response this might glean from members of the public, their own family or community. As such it adds layers of complexity to their harm. As Ilahi (2009) has suggested, their social positions are interwoven into their experiences of negotiating public space.

Managing presentation of self

Other strategies employed by participants included altering the niqab in order to manage the presentation of self. One focus group participant suggested that she would use a range of colours and sizes in her niqabs, so as not to appear 'too black in the face'. Another said that she would use colour because it looked 'more friendly'

and less 'hostile'. In this regard they were grappling with concerns over their desire to veil but also to avoid being attacked. For Davis (1994), street harassment forces women to alter their behaviour, thus further oppressing women by denying them the opportunity to make an authentic choice of self. The denial of a woman's "authentic choice of self" by externally imposing on them the conditions in which they live is also perpetuated by the existence of stereotypes. For some white British Muslims, they would in fact cover more of their body to avoid being perceived as a 'traitor' for supposedly 'betraying' British values and Christianity by converting to Islam. Some participant noted that they would wear an additional eye veil and/or gloves to cover the colour of their skin.

A common practice amongst participants was to ignore, or pretend not to hear a street harasser's comments. Specifically, some participants, especially the young women who took part in the research, wore headphones to avoid hearing these comments. But as Davis (1993) points out, normally, when people talk to you, you do not ignore them. Thus, street harassment forces women to act in ways they would not otherwise act. Street harassment does not allow women to be themselves and to enjoy even the basic pleasures of everyday life (Rushin, 1983). A further strategy employed by many participants was the use of a male companion when in a public space. Griffin (1971) describes this as a 'male protection racket' with Bowman (1993) concurring that women are often actively encouraged to seek a male escort when moving about in public spaces. Our participants certainly demonstrated this, with some saying *'I never go to town alone'* or *'I prefer my husband to be with me'* and *"I don't think I would go anywhere without my husband".* However, in some situations this would exacerbate the abuse, especially if their husband was visibly Muslim, for example, by wearing a beard, Islamic cap and jubba (Islamic dress for men). This

need for a male companion has negative repercussions in that it limits freedom of movement. One participant noted *'I have to wait for my husband to come home from work to go somewhere'.* Another expressed this feeling of 'ent' in the starkest terms:

> *It feels like we are under house arrest. People have locked us up without realising it.*

Another participant now has agoraphobia and so does not leave the house. What was evident was the acute irony of the situation. As one noted:

> *People are being hypocritical in their argument that women in veil are oppressed because they oppress us. We are stuck at home all day.*

This theme of 'imprisonment' is commonplace in literature on the impact of street harassment. Bowman describes this as the ghettoization of women that effectively confines women to the 'private sphere of hearth and home' (Bowman, 1993, p. 520). Street harassment excludes women from public space, which they are entitled to share with men as equal citizens of the state (Laniya, 2005). As mentioned earlier, public places are designated as male space, and women must negotiate the terms and conditions upon which they may enter these spaces. This means that street harassment infringes upon the rights of veiled Muslim women as citizens in the UK. In order to escape harassment, they often must travel with a male companion or in groups; this restricts a woman's autonomy by limiting her ability to go to a place by herself if she so desires and further reaffirms the notion that men control women's 'rights to passage through public space' (Bowman, 1993, p. 30).

Oppression is the 'absence of choices'; street harassment oppresses veiled Muslim women by restricting their physical and geographical mobility, thereby denying them

a right guaranteed to all citizens - the freedom of movement, a fundamental liberty of freedom (Bowman, 1993). Indeed, a fundamental aspect of liberty is mobility, yet free exercise of mobility is denied to veiled Muslim women. This also harms them economically because it dissuades them from venturing into occupations that require them to work outside (Laniya, 2005). It also forces behavioural change and reduces women's quality of life. Kissling argues that this is in fact the goal of street harassment, in that it acts as a form of social control (1991, p. 455). We would suggest that it acts on a number of levels. First, Muslim women think about modifying their clothing in public because they might want to feel that they 'belong', not just avoid being attacked. One participant discussed how her family disprove of the niqab anyway and so she did not wear it when visiting them because she did not want to be an outcast everywhere. In this sense, the home might not be a place where the women are not judged or harassed because family might reinforce the public negative views of the niqab. So they feel a double sense of judgment as Muslim women. Furthermore, their recourse to go out with a male companion not only makes them reliant on men, but it does not always mean that they will not face abuse. If the man is wearing traditional Islamic dress, then they might still face abuse. So the social control that is experienced by Muslim women exists along misogynistic and Islamophobic lines. As Neilsen has observed, members of different groups and backgrounds 'face a strikingly different reality on the street than do members of privileged groups' (Neilsen, 2002, p. 279). As such, they have to 'prioritise social identities that are integral to their self-concepts and life experience' (Fogg-Davis, 2006, p. 59).

Concluding thoughts – What next?

The preceding discussion shows how street harassment, a seemingly 'invisible' harm, hinders veiled Muslim women's mobility, infringes on their access to public spaces and even forces them to alter their behaviour. To this end, veiled Muslim women feel excluded, dominated, oppressed and violated. Acting as 'public gatekeepers', men establish the rules of veiled Muslim women's participation in the public sphere, which further genderises the street. In this respect, street harassment 'punishes' veiled Muslim women who participate in the street for not performing gender appropriately. Typically, most men view the occurrence as harmless and even desired by women, while most women resign themselves to the inevitability of the acts and the absence of a vehicle to remedy such harm (Laniya, 2005). Nevertheless, there is potentially hope to address this problem. Policy has an important role to play in tackling street harassment. Nottinghamshire Police became recently the first force in the country to record harassment of women as a hate crime in order to tackle misogyny and street harassment. Since then, three police forces have agreed to begin recording misogyny as a hate crime and a number of other forces are looking into this. The latest recording figures show that, since Nottinghamshire Police began recognising misogyny as a hate crime on 1 April 2016, they have received 57 reports, 15 of which have been recorded as crimes and are being dealt with accordingly. The video, *Because I Am A Woman*, which was launched by Nottingham Women's Centre and Nottinghamshire Police, includes testimony from Muslim women about their experiences of street harassment and has been used to raise awareness and as a training aid. There is now an emerging body of academic research which points towards the importance of recognising intersectionality and multiple oppressions in victim experiences of hate crime (removed for review, 2015; removed for review, 2014). It is crucial that research

which engages with the lived experience of intersectionality and street harassment continues.

However, policy and research alone can only do so much to challenge Islamophobia and misogyny. It is crucial that continuing efforts include the involvement of Muslim women themselves and are culturally appropriate and sensitive. As Strid et al. (2013) note, multiple inequalities are only made more visible when minoritised women are involved in the policy making process. This means government and policy officials engaging with women themselves and for local community based organisations to have a voice. Therefore, it is vital that policymakers and practitioners do not further the 'othering' of Muslim women, but instead ensure their involvement at every stage. Future research should further examine the intersectionality between misogyny and Islamophobia, and inform policy accordingly.

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