An Exploration of Women's Experiences of Sexism in the UK

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ABSTRACT

It is well documented that sexism is a common experience for women with potentially deleterious effects on their wellbeing. The evidence base pertaining to women's experience of sexism has prioritised hypothetico-deductive methods for inquiry, seeking to test existing theories and determine relationships between psychological correlates. It is possible that these studies do not fully encompass the variety of ways in which women can experience sexism, and risk de-contextualising what is effectively a social phenomenon. In response, this study adopted a qualitative exploration into the social and psychological processes by which women experience sexism. The aim was to provide fresh and in-depth understandings of the phenomenon, and prioritise the voices of women in the production of theories pertaining to them. The study resulted in a grounded theory model of *Establishing and Policing the Gender Order*, which captures two interrelated processes: (1) *Reinforcing Inferiority,* whereby women are "brainwashed" into accepting their lower social standing, and (2) *Punishing Transgression,* referring to the norm-enforcing processes which penalise women who violate the gender order. The theory also included processes related to *Coping with Sexism*, indicating feminist identity development as key in helping women to withstand and resist sexism. This study counteracts the post-feminist rhetoric by drawing attention to the ways in which women can be restricted by the patriarchal power structures persisting in contemporary society. These findings can assist clinical psychologist in better serving the needs of female clients and inform policy-level advocacy to end women's oppression. Further feminist and intersectional research is needed to ensure a continued dialogue.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

This study explored women's experiences of sexism in the UK. To introduce the research, this chapter begins by defining sexism and explaining the study's importance to the field of clinical psychology. I then describe the orienting lenses for the research before discussing the current socio-cultural context of sexism. Next, I examine how previous literature has attempted to understand and document women's experiences of sexism by presenting the primary lines of conceptualisation and measurement. I then move on to providing a critical review of the literature investigating processes involved in women's experiences of sexism. The chapter concludes with the research aims and rationale.

1.1.   INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

In this section, I define the concept of sexism and discuss why it is important to the field of clinical psychology to understand how women experience sexism in their lives.

1.1.1.   Defining Sexism

Sexism is a politically motivated construct, introduced by feminist activists in the 1960s to raise consciousness about the oppression of women and girls (Shapiro, 1985). Early conceptualisation of sexism built on Allport's (1954) definition of prejudice as "an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalisation" (p. 9). Thus, traditionally, sexism has been defined as open hostility towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Reflecting changes in women's status and social norms over the past decades, however, the concept of sexism has evolved, and various labels and theories have been offered to describe more nuanced aspects of the phenomenon.

In this research, I drew on Swim and Hyers's (2009) definition of sexism as "individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and organisational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support unequal status of women and men" (p. 407).

That is, I used sexism as a broad term to refer to the different types of oppression of women operating at various levels of society.

1.1.2. Importance to the Field of Clinical Psychology

The negative impact of sexism on women's psychological functioning is well established. For example, studies have found a relationship between experiences of sexism and measures of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, interpersonal sensitivity, obsessive-compulsive symptoms and general psychological distress (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Hill & Fisher, 2008; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath & Denchik, 2007; Landrine & Klonoff, 1997; Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson, 2001; Szymanski, 2005). Furthermore, research has suggested that sexist experiences account for a unique variance in women's psychological distress above and beyond other stressful life events (Moradi & Subich, 2002) and may explain the well-known gender differences in psychiatric symptoms (Klonoff, Landrine & Campbell, 2000).

The core purpose of clinical psychology is "to reduce psychological distress and to enhance and promote psychological well-being" (Division of Clinical Psychology, 2010, p. 2). Given the documented deleterious effects of sexism, it would be remiss for clinical psychologists to disregard such experiences when conceptualising and treating women's mental health. Nevertheless, solely focusing on the psychological correlates of sexism can contribute to the deceptive notion that the problem is located within women instead of in the wider society (Chesler, 1972; Lafrance, 2009; Usher, 2010). Therefore, to avoid de-contextualising what is effectively a social phenomenon, the study of sexism should aim to shed light on the complex social dynamics within sexism and understand women's subjective experience and meanings of such discrimination. The current study attempted to achieve this aim by asking: *How do women experience sexism in their lives?* It is hoped that the insight provided can assist clinical psychologists in better understanding and meeting the needs of female clients.

Furthermore, as professionals with power and resources, clinical psychologists have a social responsibility to challenge and change the oppressive social

realities which impact the lives and health of marginalised groups (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom & Siddiquee, 2011; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). To carry out this responsibility, the current study attempted to draw attention to both macro and micro level processes involved in women's experiences of sexism. As such, this research can inform clinical psychologists in striving for meaningful and effective social change.

1.2.   RESEARCH LENSES

While I made no hypotheses about women's experiences on the basis of existing theory, I approached the study from a particular viewpoint. I now outline the orienting lenses for this research.

1.2.1.   Feminist Perspective

Given the feminist origins of the concept, it seems almost inevitable for the study of sexism to be approached from within a feminist position. Indeed, feminism has been defined as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2000, p. viii). While feminism as a movement encompasses a vast diversity of opinions and philosophical standpoints, the central tenet within all feminist thought is the assertion that women are oppressed within a system of patriarchy (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2013). Thus, drawing on feminist theory, this study did not view sexism as a purely interpersonal phenomenon but as a symptom of hierarchical society in which men have unearned privileges and women experience disadvantage.

1.2.2.   Psychosocial Model of Sexism

To further structure my understanding, I used Lewis's (2018) psychosocial model of sexism as a heuristic tool to help me differentiate between the basic types operating at different levels of society. This model delineates sexism into three contextual domains: institutional, cultural and individual.

1.2.2.1. Institutional Sexism

Institutional sexism occurs when institutions, including governmental institutions, produce and perpetuate policies and practices that exclude women from an equal share of resources and power (Lewis, 2018). An example of this are human resource policies for performance evaluation which systematically favour men over women. For instance, many organisations refer to so-called 'face time' as a key performance metric that rewards employees who are at the office more than those who are not (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Given that the primary responsibility for childcare continues to fall on women (Office for National Statistics, 2017), women are more likely than men to use flexible working arrangements and, consequently, suffer career penalties because of a lower score on face-time (Glass, 2004). Thus, biased criteria in performance evaluation policies can place women at a disadvantage in relation to men, propagating gender inequality within organisations.

1.2.2.2. Cultural Sexism

Cultural sexism refers to imagery, symbols and practices that emphasise the notion that women are inferior to men (Lewis, 2018). This includes the biased representation of women and men in art, media and advertisement. For example, female characters in film are more often portrayed as dependent on others, over-emotional, and confined to low-status jobs when compared to enterprising and ambitious male characters (Lang, 2015; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In advertisements, women continue to be depicted as weak and in need of men's protection, or through hypersexualised imagery, including sexual illustrations of young girls (Mager & Helgeson, 2011). Such cultural depictions of women and girls reinforce women's subservient position in relation to men.

1.2.2.3. Individual Sexism

Individual sexism includes sexist beliefs, attitudes and ideologies, as well as the ways in which individuals communicate this gender bias in interpersonal interactions (Lewis, 2018). An example of a sexist belief would be the preference to work for a male supervisor due to perceptions of his superior competence and authority in comparison to a female supervisor. The way in which this belief is communicated to a woman is an example of sexist behaviour. Much of the research in psychology has focused on individual-level

sexism, which can operate on both an overt, conscious level and a subtle, unconscious level (Sue, 2010).

1.2.3.   Intersectionality Theory

Drawing on intersectionality theory, I also recognised that women are not a homogenous social group, but that each woman is simultaneously a member of several different groups and has unique experiences with privilege and disadvantage because of those colocations (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). A central tenet of intersectionality theory is the insight that social categories do not operate as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as "reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2). For example, Black women often experience discrimination which is qualitatively different from racism experienced by Black men or sexism experienced by White women. Therefore, I aimed to consider the experiences of women within the context of their intersecting social identities.

1.3.   CURRENT CONTEXT

To contextualise the study of women's experiences of sexism, I now discuss the current socio-political milieu of the UK and some of the ways in which contemporary sexism can present itself in individuals' beliefs and behaviours.

1.3.1.   Neoliberalism and Individualism

Neoliberalism is one of the primary political ideologies in modern-day Britain (Munck, 2005). It saw its rise in the 1980s, spearheaded by Margaret Thatcher's government which initiated the privatisation of large publicly owned entities, such as British Telecom, British Gas, British Airways and British Steel (Klein, 2007). Neoliberal ideology shuns social welfare and positions the free market and free individuals as pinnacles of civilisation (Harvey, 2005). To achieve success, individuals are expected to be self-determined, without consideration for their experiences within socio-political contexts; failure to succeed is seen as evidence of a personal flaw rather than of systemic inequality (Gonick, 2006;

Vavrus, 2012). That is, in a neoliberal context, there is no room for consideration of oppressive structural forces which attack marginalised, disadvantaged groups. As such, neoliberalism undoes the anti-hierarchical struggles of social movements, including feminism (Anderson, 2018).

1.3.2. Post-feminism

It has been suggested that the neoliberal philosophy has filtered into mainstream feminism, thus shifting its attention away from collective social change to individual empowerment. That is, while the slogans of "sisterhood is powerful" and "the personal is political" served as the organising principles of the 1970's feminism, critics argue that contemporary feminism has become a depoliticised demonstration of a personal choice and autonomy (Anderson, 2018; Cole & Crossley, 2009; Zaslow, 2018). As Zaslow (2018) put it, feminism has moved "from sisterhood to girl power" (p. 47), thereby undercutting the possible strategic weight of politicised feminist collectives. Therefore, the era from the late 1990s to the present day is sometimes being referred to as post-feminism (McRobbie, 2009).

Studies interviewing young people in the UK (Budgeon, 2001; Crossley, 2010) and Australia (Baker, 2010) show evidence of the post-feminist discourse, reporting an absence of any articulation of inequality or oppression in social relations. Instead, young women tend to emphasise their sense of agency and self-determination and understand challenges as signs of personal failings or inadequacies (Baker, 2010). Furthermore, young women in the UK report beliefs that feminism is not relevant to them because they have myriad choices to be whatever they desire to be (Crossley, 2010). These narratives highlight some of the defining features of post-feminism: the focus on personal choice and the view that feminism has become obsolete (McRobbie, 2009).

Still, it would appear as though feminism is now witnessing a new surge of collective activism. In fact, some commentators have argued that we are in the era of the fourth wave of feminism, closely related to the increased usage of the internet (Chamberlain, 2017; Cochrane, 2013; Dean & Aune, 2015; Martin & Valenti, 2012; Munro, 2013; Rivers, 2017). Whether technological

advancements are enough to delineate a new era is highly debatable; nevertheless, the internet does facilitate the networking of a global community of feminists. For example, online campaigns such as the 'Me Too' movement can rapidly gain worldwide momentum and become powerful vehicles for social change (Pazzanese & Walsh, 2017). It remains to be seen, however, whether this new wave of activism will be persistent enough to fight through the neoliberal noise and move the mainstream feminist discourse permanently past issues of individual choice and self-empowerment.

1.3.3. Contemporary Sexism

The way in which sexism is expressed in contemporary society reflects the post-feminist rhetoric (Anderson, 2018). As the theory of modern sexism (Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter, 1995) purports, sexism is no longer displayed as blatant hostility towards women, but instead as denial of the existence of any gender-based discrimination and resentment towards women who advocate for gender-inclusive policies and practices. Furthermore, increased pressures in contemporary society to suppress obviously sexist beliefs and attitudes may have led many individuals to openly endorse egalitarian values, while simultaneously engaging in practices which perpetuate women's subordination (Swim et al., 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Thus, modern sexism manifests itself in more subtle and covert ways than old-fashioned sexism (Swim et al., 1995).

In contrast to the theory of modern sexism, Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) did not view contemporary sexism as a conflict between old-fashioned and modern forms. Instead, their theory of ambivalent sexism explains that individuals can simultaneously hold both hostile and benevolent views about women (Glick & Fiske, 1996; 2001). Hostile sexism fits Allport's (1954) conceptualisation of prejudice as antipathy and is directed at women who are seen to oppose traditional gender roles (e.g., career women, feminists and lesbians). Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, takes the form of seemingly positive but, in fact, patronising attitudes towards women who endorse traditional gender roles (e.g., housewives and mothers). Both hostile and benevolent sexism are grounded on the same fundamental view of women as weaker and less

competent than men which serves to justify men's dominance (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

The theories of modern sexism and ambivalent sexism have sparked an abundance of empirical literature within the realm of social psychology. Much of this research is quantitative in nature, using the Modern Sexism Scale (MSS; Swim et al., 1995) and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 2001) to measure the extent to which individuals endorse such attitudes and beliefs. However, these scales are not designed to investigate women's subjective experience of these forms of sexism. Thus, while the theories of modern and ambivalent sexism help to understand the nature of one's sexist beliefs and behaviours, they do not capture how women experience and are impacted by sexism in contemporary society. A separate body of literature has focused on understanding the experience of sexism from the perspective of women, allowing researchers to identify the prevalence and impact of these experiences. I examine this line of research in the following sections.

1.4. CONCEPTUALISING AND MEASURING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF SEXISM

The investigation of women's experiences of sexism has yielded multiple conceptualisations, some of which are described as global constructs while others capture distinct dimensions of sexism. In this section, I discuss some of these concepts, describe how they have been measured and outline research demonstrating their prevalence and impact in women's lives. Sample items of the presented measures are provided in Appendix 1.

1.4.1. Perceived Sexist Discrimination

Klonoff and Landrine's (1995) theoretical model of perceived sexist discrimination includes sexual harassment, being called sexist names, and being treated unfairly by others. The authors drew on the general life stress literature (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and contended that "sexist events can be viewed as gender-specific stressors because they are negative events (stressors) that happen to women because they are women" (p. 441).

To measure the prevalence of perceived sexist discrimination, the authors developed The Schedule of Sexist Events (SSE; Klonoff & Landrine, 1995), which assesses the frequency of sexist experiences over the past year and over the lifetime. A study with a relatively diverse sample of women (N = 631) found that virtually every participant had experienced at least one sexist event in their lifetime (99%) and within the past year (97%) (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995). Subsequent research using the SSE has explored the impact of sexist discrimination on women and found that greater perceived sexist events positively correlate with psychological distress (Moradi & Subich, 2002, 2003), depression and somatic symptoms (Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning & Lund, 1995).

The SSE is seen as a global measure of sexist experiences (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995) and, as one of the only scales of its kind, it has yielded an abundance of empirical literature. However, the measure does not capture sexist experiences which are less overt, thus limiting the scope of these studies in reflecting women's experiences. Furthermore, because the theoretical underpinnings of perceived sexist discrimination were born from the literature on generic life stress, it is possible that this conceptualisation does not reflect the variety of ways in which women may experience sexism.

1.4.2. Gender Discrimination

Kira, Shuwiekh and Bujold-Bugeaud (2015) saw gender discrimination as deeply rooted in societal power dynamics and defined it as "a systemic, social-structural inter-gender trauma, comprising micro (e.g., insults and exclusions) as well as macro aggressions (e.g., gender-based violence, trafficking)" (p. 94). Moreover, gender discrimination was regarded as a life-long identity trauma for women, which not only makes women more vulnerable but also has a potential of yielding chronic stress and other long-term mental health outcomes (Kira et al., 2015).

To test their theory, the authors developed the Gender Discrimination Inventory (GDI; Kira et al., 2015) which encompasses experiences of discrimination both by social institutions and by parents. Studies using the GDI with Western

(Kucharska, 2017) and non-Western samples (Kira et al., 2015) found both familial and societal gender discrimination to be associated with internalised gender discrimination and negative mental health outcomes, including trauma symptomatology.

Although the authors claim that the GDI assesses discrimination by social institutions, all the items (see Appendix 1) appear to measure sexism only as it occurs in interpersonal encounters. Furthermore, the scale places a significant emphasis on gender discrimination by parents, which is likely to be a less relevant experience in the lives of older women. Thus, similar to the SSE, the GDI may not be a holistic representation of women's experiences of sexism. Moreover, like the SSE, the GDI does not address types of sexism which are more subtle, further limiting its scope in reflecting women's lived experiences of contemporary sexism.

1.4.3.   Gender Microaggressions

A separate line of inquiry has come from the area of gender microaggressions, aiming to identify women's experiences of types of sexism which are so subtle that they are almost unnoticeable (Nadal, 2010). Modelled after the construct of racial microaggressions, Sue (2010) defined gender microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioural indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative gender slights and insults that potentially have a harmful impact on women" (p. 164).

To refine the construct further, Capodilupo et al. (2010) sought to validate and expand an existing theoretical taxonomy of microaggressions (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008) in a qualitative study using a directed content-analysis methodology. The participants of this study reported various experiences of subtle sexism, which were categorised by the authors into nine microaggressive themes (Capodilupo et al., 2010). Interestingly, however, the authors noted that a large amount of the data was uncoded because it was not seen to represent the construct of gender microaggressions. This draws attention to an important limitation of the directed content-analysis approach, that is, the over-emphasis of existing theory. It also highlights a disconcerting imbalance of power within

the research process as it is the researchers, not the participants, who ultimately define the reality of gender microaggressions.

Thus, while the gender microaggressions literature has brought much-needed attention to relatively mild manifestations of sexism that can often be dismissed as innocuous, the construct has been criticised for not being based on women's experiences and lacking empirical validation (Lilienfeld, 2017). Therefore, as it stands, the current understanding of women's lived experiences of subtle forms of sexism is limited.

1.4.4. Sexual Objectification

Other researchers have investigated constructs representing more specific experiences of sexism, with sexual objectification gaining considerable interest in recent decades. Sexual objectification has been defined as "the act of reducing a woman to her body or body parts with the misperception that her body or body parts are capable of representing the woman as a whole" (Kozee et al., 2007, p. 176).

Researchers have measured experiences of interpersonal sexual objectification using the Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale (ISOS; Kozee et al., 2007), which operationalises such experiences as involving two main types of events: body evaluation (e.g., leering and comments made by others about one's body) and unwanted sexual advances (e.g., unwanted touching, pinching, and sexual assault). Women's self-reported experiences of sexual objectification have been empirically linked to numerous negative consequences, including general psychological distress (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014), disordered eating (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2009; Kozee & Tylka, 2006), depression (Carr & Szymanski, 2011) and trauma symptomatology (Miles-McLean et al., 2015).

While sexual objectification appears to be highly pervasive in women's lives (Swim et al., 2001; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014), it represents only a distinct dimension of sexism and does not capture the myriad ways in which women can experience sexism. Furthermore, the majority of the objectification literature

is dominated by samples of young, White, college-educated women (Loughnan et al., 2015), making the findings difficult to generalise to other groups.

1.4.5.   Sexual Harassment

Yet another offshoot of sexism research is the investigation into women's experiences of sexual harassment, which also forms a central component of the perceived sexist discrimination construct. According to Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow (1995), sexual harassment can take both milder forms, such as hearing suggestive or offensive jokes, and more intrusive forms like being sexually coerced or touched.

The majority of the research on sexual harassment has used the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1995), which delineates these experiences into three different types: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. Studies have indicated sexual harassment to be a common experience among women. For example, Fairchild and Rudman (2008) found that nearly a half of the diverse sample of women had experienced unwanted sexual attention at least once a month, more than one-third reported experiencing catcalls, whistles and stares almost daily, and over a quarter had experiences akin to sexual coercion or assault at least once a month. Sexual harassment has been linked to myriad of negative psychological outcomes, including the full diagnostic criteria of PTSD (Schneider, Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997)

Fairchild and Rudman (2008) further delineated 'stranger harassment' (i.e., experiencing unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public) as a distinct form of sexual harassment. The authors developed the Stranger Harassment Index (SHI; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008) which measures two types of experiences: verbal harassment (e.g., catcalls and whistles) and sexual pressure (e.g., unwanted touching or stroking). Research has found a link between street harassment experiences and increased anxiety (Davidson Butchko, Robbins, Lindsey & Gervais, 2016) and a fear of rape (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008).

The SEQ has been criticised for being built on a flawed definition of sexual harassment which, as a construct, is not based on empirical evidence of women's experiences (Gutek, Murphy & Douma, 2004). This same critique can be applied to the SHI and the other measures presented above. That is, given that the conceptualisation of sexism has been so heavily focused on creating variables which can be objectively and quantitatively measured, understanding the complexity of women's experiences may have been sacrificed in the process.

1.4.6.   Summary and Critique

The numerous conceptualisations generated to measure women's experiences of sexism reflect the drive in the field of social psychology to document the pervasiveness of sexism within contemporary society (Swim & Hyers, 2009). Nevertheless, notable overlap among the constructs exists and no one concept appears to fully encompass the varied ways in which women can experience sexism. Furthermore, the current concepts and measures have focused on capturing women's experiences of sexism as it occurs in interpersonal encounters without sufficiently addressing cultural or institutional sexism. Therefore, they may not provide a holistic picture of women's experiences of sexism.

It is important to highlight that the conceptualisation has been heavily theory-driven, seeking to verify existing assumptions and frameworks instead of uncovering the complexity of women's lived experiences. It is hence possible that the insight provided by this body of literature does not wholly reflect the social reality of sexism as experienced by women. This limitation is more typically encountered within a quantitative framework which has been criticised for oversimplifying human experience and attempting to calculate processes which are not quantifiable (Essex & Smythe, 1999; Michell, 2010). Expressly, by focusing on producing objective and numerical facts, the quantitative paradigm reduces complex and dynamic social realities to operationally defined components and does not leave room for individuals' interpretations or explanations of their experiences (Halmi, 1996).

Still, due to the vastness of the body of quantitative literature on the subject, it would be wrong to completely dismiss its contribution to the knowledge base. In the next section, I review both quantitative and qualitative studies which have attempted to provide insight into the processes involved in women's experiences of sexism.

1.5. LITERATURE REVIEW: HOW DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE SEXISM?

In the previous section, I presented the different lines of conceptualisation and measurement of women's experiences of sexism. I also summarised research demonstrating the prevalence of sexism and its negative influence on women's psychological functioning. In this section, I evaluate existing literature that has focused on exploring the *processes* by which women experience and are impacted by sexism. I further explain the rationale and the strategy for this approach below before providing a critical review of the literature.

1.5.1. Literature Review Strategy

As seen above, it is well established that women continue to experience sexism in different forms and that these incidents can negatively impact on women's wellbeing. However, the current study aimed to move beyond simply demonstrating the prevalence and harmfulness of contemporary sexism, and asked: '*How* do women experience sexism in their lives?'. That is, the focus was on exploring the social and psychological processes involved in women's experiences of sexism.

In order to evaluate the current understanding on this topic, I carried out a systematically conducted review of the literature, guided by the research question. Evidently, this question is more easily addressed through a qualitative methodology, which can ask participants to provide rich, subjective explanations of their experiences. Still, quantitative studies do ask questions about patterns of relationships between variables and seek to test theoretically informed hypotheses about processes which may underline observable behaviour (Toomela, 2010). Thus, to include quantitative studies in this review, the

question was adapted to the following: What processes might explain the correlation between women's experiences of sexism and negative outcomes?

To identify papers relevant to these objectives, I systematically reviewed the following psychology and social sciences databases: PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Academic Search Complete and SCOPUS. The articles included in the search were published in peer-reviewed journals and limited within the time frame of 2007 to the current day. Covering the last decade of the literature was thought to provide an accurate representation of the current understanding on the topic of contemporary sexism. The search incorporated a number of different terms related to sexism, including the concepts discussed in the previous section (e.g., discrimination, harassment, objectification, microaggressions). That is, both studies utilising more global conceptualisations of sexism and those investigating a specific type of sexism were included in the review.

As the aim of this literature review was to understand processes involved in women's experiences of sexism, quantitative studies employing simple two-variable correlational designs (i.e., sexism – distress) were not included. This is because they did not appear to provide any additional insight into how or why this relationship occurs. Instead, this review focused on studies which had utilised a form of elaboration methodology (Lazasrfeld, 1955; Hyman, 1955) by examining the mediating effect of a third variable in the previously established sexism-distress relation. Mediation analysis is one of the primary ways in which quantitative research can attempt to "explain the process or mechanism by which one variable affects another" (MacKinnon, Fairchild & Fritz, 2007, p. 1). That is, these studies can improve the understanding of the processes by which sexism is related to distress.

Appendix 2 contains full details of the step-by-step approach to the literature search including the search terms used, limiters applied, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, as well as the number of studies identified at each stage. In the remainder of this section, I critically review the literature identified by the search. I have organised the review in relation to methodology, presenting the quantitative studies first and the qualitative studies second.

1.5.2. Quantitative studies

The literature search identified ten quantitative studies. These studies sought to explain the nature of women's experiences of sexism by examining variables that might mediate the relationship between such incidents and distress. That is, the aim of these studies was to test a psychological theory that would explain the mechanisms involved in women's experiences of sexism. I have synthesised these studies based on the mediator variables investigated.

1.5.2.1. <u>Self-esteem</u>

Three studies identified by the search (Fischer & Bolton Holtz, 2007; Kira, Shuwiekh, Kucharska, Abu-Ras & Bujold-Bugeaud, 2017; Watson, DeBlaere, Langrehr & Zelaya, 2016) sought to explain the relationship between sexism and women's distress by examining women's self-esteem as a mediator. These studies were premised on the notion that, through experiencing oppression and discrimination due to their gender, women face threats to their social value which translates into their personal feelings of lower self-esteem and subsequently leads to distress (Kira et al., 2015). Two of the studies (Fischer & Bolton Holtz, 2007; Watson et al., 2016) used the SSE (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995) to assess perceived sexist discrimination, and one study (Kira et al., 2017) used the GDI (Kira et al., 2015) to measure gender discrimination.

Two of the studies found that self-esteem mediated the effect of sexism on depression and anxiety (Fischer & Bolton Holtz, 2007) and on trauma symptomatology (Kira et al., 2017). Additionally, Fischer and Bolton Holtz (2007) found that the sexism-distress link was also mediated by collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), which refers to a woman's self-evaluation as a part of the group of women. The authors concluded that being treated unfairly on the basis of sex can lead women to view women as a group as well as themselves as a part of that group more negatively, ultimately increasing psychological distress (Fischer & Bolton Holtz, 2007). These studies were conducted within ethnically homogenous student samples in the US (N = 275) (Fischer & Bolton Holtz, 2007), Poland (N = 277) and Egypt (N = 319) (Kira et

al., 2017). That is, the majority of the participants in these studies identified with the dominant ethnic group of said country.

In contrast, a study by Watson et al. (2016) was conducted within an ethnic minority ("women of colour") student sample in the US (N = 368) and found that, while self-esteem mediated the relationship between racism and distress, it did not explain the link between sexism and distress. The authors offered various speculations for the lack of a statistically significant relationship. For instance, it was suggested that Black women in the US may place more emphasis on their racial identities than on their gender identities and, therefore, sexist experiences do not impact on their self-esteem (Watson et al., 2016). However, the ability to draw conclusions from this study is obscured by the use of an additive intersectionality framework which seeks to quantify racism and sexism as separate forms of oppression. Such approach overlooks the interlocking, unique experiences of ethnic minority women which cannot be captured by simply summing racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989; Cole, 2009; Lewis, 2018).

The findings of these studies indicate that, among women of dominant racial groups, sexism can have a negative impact on women's self-esteem, which then predicts further negative psychological outcomes. However, the experiences of women from ethnic minority backgrounds may be more complex and further research is needed to better understand intersectional experiences of racism and sexism. As it was concluded by the authors, by drawing on positivist or statistical assumptions, quantitative research is not able to fully account for multiple oppressive experiences, thus qualitative research may be a more desirable method for conducting intersectional research (Watson et al., 2016).

1.5.2.2. Internalised objectification

Four of the studies identified by the literature search (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014) examined the role of self-objectification in explaining the process by which sexism leads to distress. These studies drew on objectification theory (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) which can be defined as "a framework for understanding the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that

sexually objectifies the female body" (p. 173). Objectification theory posits that constant exposure to sexually objectifying experiences and images socialises women to internalise society's perspective of the female body as their own (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Szymanski & Henning, 2007). This internalisation is often referred to as self-objectification and it is thought to carry myriad negative psychological consequences for women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Three of the four studies (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014) measured experiences of interpersonal sexual objectification using the ISOS (Kozee, et al., 2007); one study (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008) explored sexual objectification in the form of stranger harassment using the SEQ (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Two of the studies were conducted with samples of predominantly White women in the US (N = 289, Carr & Szymanski, 2011; N = 270, Szymanski & Feltman, 2014), while two were carried out with relatively ethnically diverse US samples (N = 288, Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; N = 337, Miles-McLean et al., 2015).

Consistent with objectification theory, the studies found that self-objectification (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014) as well as closely related variables of body shame (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Miles-McLean et al., 2015) and body surveillance (Miles-McLean et al., 2015) mediated the relationship between objectification experiences and negative psychological and behavioural outcomes, including depression (Carr & Szymanski, 2011), general psychological distress (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014), trauma symptomatology (Miles-McLean et al., 2015), substance abuse (Carr & Szymanski, 2011) and fear of rape (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). In short, these studies showed that more frequent experiences of sexual objectification were linked to an increased tendency of a woman to view herself as an object, which was then related to greater psychological distress.

These studies can help to elucidate some of the processes involved in women's experiences of sexism. However, they have focused on a specific aspect of sexism, hence the findings may not be applicable to the varied ways in which

women experience sexism devoid of sexual objectification. Still, as Frederickson and Roberts (1997) argued, sexual objectification is a universal experience shared by all women within a sexist society. Thus, it is possible that a significant proportion of women's experiences and distress related to sexism is encapsulated within sexual objectification experiences and the internalisation of such encounters.

1.5.2.3. Coping via internalisation

Three of the studies drawing on objectification theory (Carr, Szymanski, Taha, West & Kaslow, 2014; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014) also considered the role of coping via internalisation (i.e., attributing the cause of sexist oppression to one's self) in women's experiences of sexual objectification. They were premised on the notion that the gendered power dynamics in society, wherein women are socialised to accept responsibility for limiting and controlling men's sexual behaviour, may result in women blaming themselves for these experiences, leading to increased distress (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014).

Using the ISOS (Kozee et al., 2007) with a sample of White U.S. college students (N = 270), Szymanski and Feltman (2014) found that greater experiences of objectification were linked to more coping via internalisation, which in turn was linked with greater psychological distress. Likewise, Carr et al. (2014) found that internalisation mediated the link between sexual objectification experiences and depression in a sample of low-income African American women (N = 144). Along similar lines, using the SEQ (Fitzgerald et al., 1995) with an ethnically diverse sample (N = 288), Fairchild and Rudman (2008) found that women who viewed stranger harassment as their own fault were more likely to experience self-objectification and associated negative psychological consequences. These findings indicate that self-blame can be an important process by which women are distressed by sexual objectification experiences.

Furthermore, Carr et al. (2014) also considered the mediating role of coping via internalisation in the link between gendered racism and distress. To measure gendered racism, the authors used the Racialised Sexual Harassment Scale

(RSHS; Buchanan, 2005) which assesses experiences of oppressive behaviours that focus on one's race and gender simultaneously (e.g., "Called you insulting names that referred to your gender *and* race"). Contrary to the hypothesis, the study found that internalised coping did not explain the impact of gendered racism on depression, and the authors concluded that the simultaneous experience of racism and sexism is not internalised as readily as experiences of sexism alone (Carr et al., 2014).

Alternatively, the reason for the lack of statistically significant finding may lie in the way in which gendered racism was measured. As highlighted by Lewis (2018), the RSHS was not developed specifically for use with African American women to assess gendered racism and as such may not represent the unique experiences of intersecting forms of oppression among this group. That is, it is possible that Carr et al.'s (2014) sample of low-income African American women had experiences of specific types of oppression not captured by the RSHS, thus obscuring the conclusions drawn from this study. It is indeed this complexity of encapsulating the intertwined experiences of oppression which limits quantitative research on intersectionality.

1.5.2.4. Safety perceptions

Two of the studies (Davidson et al., 2016; Watson, Marszalek, Dispenza & Davids, 2015) explored whether women's perceived (lack of) safety could be a process by which experiences of sexism are linked to psychological distress.

Davidson et al. (2016) assessed experiences of street harassment within a predominantly White US college sample (N = 501) using the SHI (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). The results confirmed that women's perceptions of safety mediated the relationship between street harassment and anxiety. Although this study measured a specific and blatant form of sexism, it does highlight that fear and perceived lack of safety may be salient features in women's experiences of sexism. However, the homogeneity of the sample makes it difficult to generalise these findings to women representing broader ethnic, age and educational demographics.

Watson et al. (2015) used the ISOS (Kozee et al., 2007) to measure experiences of sexual objectification within a sample of Black/African American (N = 133) and White American (N = 95) US college women. The results indicated that perceived risk of crime fully mediated the relationship between sexual objectification experiences and psychological distress for Black/African American women but not White women. The authors speculated that, because Black women tend to be exposed to more crime than White women, their perceived risk of crime has a greater effect on their overall psychological wellbeing than it does for White women. However, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the findings when race is treated as a categorical variable. As already discussed, there may be ways in which experiences of sexism intersect with race that are unique to each group of women. Therefore, comparative research is not sufficient to explain why Black women's and White women's experiences of sexism may differ.

1.5.2.5. <u>Summary of the quantitative studies</u>

The quantitative studies identified by the literature search highlighted a number of psychological processes related to how women experience and suffer from sexism, including reduced self-esteem, internalised objectification and coping, and perceptions of lack of safety. Whilst some of these variables, such as self-objectification, were studied in relation to specific forms of sexism (e.g., objectification or stranger harassment), others, such as self-esteem, were linked to more global experiences of sexism (e.g., perceived sexist discrimination).

However, these studies are inherently limited by the quality of the measures used. As noted earlier, the quantitative measures have been built on theoretical assumptions about women's experiences of sexism, instead of women's subjective accounts and elaborations. It is therefore unlikely that they can fully reflect the complexity of women's experiences of sexism. Furthermore, as there is a paucity of validated measures assessing women's experiences of gender microaggressions (Lilienfeld, 2017), the current quantitative literature has focused on more overt experiences of sexism, overlooking the types of sexism which are more nuanced. Moreover, because the current quantitative measures only assess women's experiences of interpersonal sexism, these studies do not

shed light on the processes involved in women's experiences of sexism on cultural or institutional levels.

The quantitative studies are also restricted in their ability to measure the experiences of women from minority backgrounds. This is partly because the measures of sexism tend to reflect the experiences of White women and not of women belonging to different ethnic minority groups. Thus, until the development of constructs and scales which genuinely reflect the experiences of women of various, intersecting social identities, quantitative methodology is not able to meaningfully examine the unique forms of oppression of women in these groups.

It is also important to note that all of these studies focused on measuring psychological correlates of sexism, without addressing broader, social processes which may be involved in women's experiences. Although many of the authors argued that the psychological processes are consequences or indications of the underlying social processes explained by the theory on which their studies drew, this line of literature risks de-contextualising what is effectively a social phenomenon. That is, by reducing the social reality of women to their internal processes, quantitative studies may contribute to the false notion that the problem of sexism is located within the woman.

1.5.3. Qualitative Studies

The literature search identified three qualitative studies. These studies aimed to explore women's subjective experiences in relation to sexism. Thus, these studies were closely in line with the research question of the current study, namely: *How* do women experience sexism in their lives? I summarise these studies below.

1.5.3.1. Everyday sexism within male-dominated industries
A UK-based study by Powell and Sang (2015) investigated women's experiences, understandings and explanations of everyday sexism within male-dominated industries. The authors reanalysed data from three interview-based research projects by the authors, which had initially focused on different

research questions. The total sample included 43 female undergraduate engineering and technology students, 10 female architects, and 16 women working within the construction industry.

The study found that the women regularly experienced marginalisation and exclusion through a process referred to as "everyday othering" (Powell & Sang, 2015, p. 923). That is, the women gave examples of being treated differently to men by both male and female colleagues, managers, lecturers and clients. However, some of the women did not recognise these incidents as oppressive and in fact expressed views that justified the gender inequality within their professions. For instance, some of the participants saw women's subordinate position as a representation of natural or innate differences between men and women (i.e., "naturalisation"). The authors concluded that it is indeed the routineness, or everyday nature, of sexism which renders it largely invisible to women. This, they argued, leads women to accept these conditions as a natural order of things thus helping to reproduce the conditions of their oppression.

The results of this study help to elucidate some of the self-perpetuating processes involved in sexism. That is, the study suggested that women may be socialised to endorse sexist beliefs and thus participate in the maintenance of gender inequality. Nevertheless, the findings of this study are specific to male-dominated professions of engineering and construction, and as such may not be directly transferrable to other contexts. Furthermore, the authors did not report the ethnic or racial backgrounds of their participant sample, making it difficult to determine the extent to which this study captures the views of diverse groups of women.

1.5.3.2. Intersections of sexism and racism
Two qualitative studies (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood & Browne-Huntt, 2016; Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018) identified by the search explored women's experiences at the intersection of racism and sexism.

Lewis et al. (2016) conducted a constructivist qualitative study to explore subtle forms of sexism and racism, or 'gendered racial microaggressions', among Black women (i.e., women who self-identified as Black or African American) (N

= 17) at a predominantly White US university. Data was collected through focus groups and analysed using dimensional analysis (Schatzman, 1991) leading to the identification of three core gendered racial microaggression themes. First, the women reported experiencing projected stereotypes which refers to specific gendered racial stereotypes that objectify Black women and sexualise or exoticise them, such as expectations of being a Jezebel. Second, the women reported being silenced and marginalised through experiencing invisibility and power struggles for respect within professional, school, workplace, or social settings. Third, the women experienced assumptions about style and beauty, which refers to assumptions being made about the cultural ways of being, aesthetics and appearance, and communication styles of Black women.

These findings help to elucidate the layers of complexity that are involved in the subtle forms of intersectional sexism and racism experienced by Black women. However, as this study was conducted at a predominantly White US college, the findings may not appertain to the experiences of Black women in other countries and contexts, or settings which are more racially diverse or predominantly Black. Furthermore, by focusing solely on gendered racial microaggressions, the study did not consider other, less subtle forms of gendered racism which may be significant in Black women's lives.

A study by Mukkamala and Suyemoto (2018) focused on experiences of discrimination among women who identified as Asian American. The researchers used multiple methods for data collection and analysis, namely, consensual qualitative research with standardised open-ended survey responses (N = 94) and a thematic content analysis with data from focus group interviews (N = 13). The findings indicated various types of discrimination that involved restricting the role of Asian American women to fit stereotypes about their gendered racial group. The assumptions about Asian American women being considered submissive and passive were among the most salient experiences reported by the participants, alongside experiences of exoticisation and fetishisation specific to Asian American women (e.g., "China doll"). The findings also indicated that Asian American women experience intersectional discrimination not only from the dominant racial group but also within their own families and ethnic groups.

As the first one of its kind, this study sheds light on the nature of Asian American women's experience of intersectional discrimination. Due to the multiple methods used, the study was able to include a range of voices from women of different geographical locations and age groups. However, the experiences highlighted in this study were specific to the socio-cultural context of the US and thus cannot be directly transferred to other settings. For example, the Asian population in the UK includes a large number of people of South Asian origin (Office for National Statistics, 2011), whereas the Asian American ethnic group typically includes people of East Asian origin (as demonstrated in the term "China doll"). Thus, it is likely that the findings of this study do not correspond with the experiences of Asian women living in the UK.

1.5.3.3. <u>Summary of the qualitative studies</u>

The qualitative studies in this review provided deeper insight into the complex dynamics involved in women's experiences of sexism. Unlike quantitative studies, these studies were not aimed at confirming prior hypotheses or theories but building new explanations based on the articulations of the participants. Therefore, they were able to more fully reflect the social realities of the women. Still, it is important to carefully consider the context in which the findings were derived before generalising them to other settings.

Overall, there appears to be a paucity of research exploring the sexist experiences of women living in the UK. Although Powell and Sang's (2015) study was UK-based, it was aimed at specifically investigating women's experiences and understandings of sexism within male-dominated professions and as such may not reflect the experiences of women within other settings. Furthermore, the lack of information about the participants' racial and cultural backgrounds limits one's ability to determine the transferability of these findings to the wider, ethnically diverse context of the UK.

Moreover, while the studies by Lewis et al. (2016), and Mukkamala and Suyemoto (2018) did explore the experiences of women from ethnic minority groups, they were conducted in the US. As the UK's political and social climate is not directly comparable to that of the US, these findings may not be

applicable to the UK context. Therefore, more research is needed to understand women's lived experiences of sexism in contemporary UK society.

1.6. THE CURRENT STUDY

As seen in this chapter, sexism appears to be a common experience for women in contemporary society, with potentially harmful consequences on women's wellbeing. However, the understanding of the psychological and social processes involved in sexism as experienced by women in the UK is still rather limited. In this section, I discuss how the current study attempted to contribute to the evidence base by outlining the research aims, the research question and the purpose of the research.

1.6.1. Research Aims

As highlighted throughout this chapter, the quantitative framework is limited in its ability to account for the complexity involved in women's experiences of sexism. Specifically, because the focus of these studies is on testing theoretically derived hypotheses, they may overlook important aspects of women's experiences which are not covered by the theories. Furthermore, previous quantitative studies have focused on investigating the psychological covariates of sexism and not explored women's experiences of the social processes involved in sexism, thus, arguably, individualising and de-contextualising the phenomenon.

To counterbalance the previous body of literature which has been heavily weighted in favour of quantitative methods, the current study adopted a qualitative approach. The aim was to provide fresh and in-depth understandings of both psychological *and* social processes involved in sexism, in a form of a theoretical model which is fully grounded in women's experiences. While my approach to this study was informed by feminist thought, intersectionality theory and the psychosocial model of sexism (Lewis, 2018), my aim was not to verify any preconceived ideas but, instead, I used these perspectives as orienting lenses to help me remain cognisant of the structural forces perpetuating women's oppression in society. In the next chapter, I further explain how I sought to maintain an open-minded and curious stance towards the topic.

Feminist psychologists have rebuked the traditional power hierarchy between researcher and researched (Campbell & Schram, 1995; Peplau & Conrad, 1989) and expressed concern over the ways in which the interests and views of research participants are subordinated to those of the researcher (Unger, 1983). Therefore, in feminist research, attempt is made to realise "as fully as possible women's voices in data gathering and preparing an account that transmits those voices" (Olesen, 1994, p. 167). Drawing on this recommendation, this study aimed to prioritise the voice of the women in the production of knowledge regarding sexism. While I acknowledged that the power differential between myself and the participants could not be completely eliminated, I made an effort through my chosen methodological approach to minimise its impact, as explored in the next chapter.

Furthermore, drawing on intersectionality theory, this study did not view women as a homogenous social group, but sought to understand the participants' experiences within the context of their unique social identities. For the individual self, as argued by feminist scholars (e.g., Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1996), is always in connection or relational to its social context. Although the aim of this study was not to explore any particular aspect of intersectionality, effort was made to represent the views of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds and explore their unique experiences of oppression.

To summarise the research aims, this study sought to:
- Develop fresh and in-depth understandings of the social and psychological processes involved in women's experiences of sexism
- Prioritise the voice of women in the production of knowledge about them
- Consider women's intersectional experiences of oppression

1.6.2. Research Question

I approached the study with the following open-ended and theory-free research question:
- "How do women experience sexism in their lives?"

It was felt that this question allowed the flexibility to address a range of experiences of sexism as well as discover both psychological and social processes involved in these experiences. Importantly, this question did not discriminate between different forms of sexism (e.g., blatant vs. subtle; or interpersonal vs. cultural), allowing the participants to decide which experiences they wished to discuss. This approach was hoped to facilitate a bottom-up exploration, producing understanding of the manifestations of sexism which the women themselves saw as the most pertinent.

1.6.3.   Purpose of the Research

The study was hoped to draw attention to some the ways in which women are restricted by the patriarchal power structures operating at different levels of society. This is important in order to counteract the current post-feminist rhetoric which endorses the myths that sexism is a thing of the past and that challenges experienced by women are evidence of personal failings rather than of systemic inequality (McRobbie, 2009). As Patel (2003) highlighted, research is a political act which can publicise the effects and processes of social injustices and demand changes in oppressive policies and structures. Thus, the findings of this study can raise public consciousness about the pervasiveness of sexism and influence policy-level change.

Furthermore, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the topic of sexism is of vital importance to the practice of clinical psychology. That is, sexism is likely to be a major source of distress in women's lives, and understanding of the processes by which it operates can enable clinical psychologists to develop skills to better serve female clients. As argued by feminist psychologists, there is "a very strong and pervasive masculinist bias within psychology" (Gross, 2009, p. 86) whereby men are regarded as the universal norm. That is, most of the influential theories are based on studies of males only while still being applied to both men and women equally (Wilkinson, 1986). As these male-oriented theories have formed the basis of our clinical practice, it is likely that the current therapy modalities do not adequately consider the needs of women. Thus, the theory developed through this study can be used by psychologists to

inform their clinical work with women, thereby moving the profession towards a more gender-inclusive future.

2.   METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by outlining my personal and epistemological position in relation to this study. I then discuss the methodological approach adopted and provide information about the sample of participants. Ethical considerations and the procedure for the study are then described. The chapter ends with outlining the guidelines for ensuring rigour of the qualitative method.

2.1.   POSITIONING

In this section, I provide an account of my personal and epistemological position in relation to the research topic. This is hoped to enhance clarity and transparency in the research process.

2.1.1.   Locating Myself

I am a 30-year-old, White, middle-class woman from Finland. My upbringing was rooted in Western values of freedom and equality, which supported my development of a feminist identity and concern with issues of social justice. As a cisgender female, I have experienced sexism in various forms and contexts at different points of my life. Thus, there was a duality to my position in relation to this research, as I was both the researcher and a member of the group being researched.

I am aware that my personal values and world-views, my socio-cultural background, as well as my personal experiences of sexism have impacted my choice of research topic and methodological decision making. However, I acknowledge that the privileges afforded to me by my race, sexual orientation, ability, middle-class background, education and other factors pertaining to my social status, preclude me from experiencing many of the disadvantages suffered by others. Therefore, I recognise the importance of representing a diversity of experiences, which is what I sought to accomplish in this study. Thus, in embarking on this research endeavour, I understood that I may have to modify or reject my preconceptions pertaining to sexism based on the

participants' data. I used a reflexive journal (Appendix 3) to remain cognisant of my personal biases and the way in which they may have impacted on the research process, including the questions I asked and my interpretation of the findings. This helped me to maintain an open-minded stance towards my understanding of the topic.

2.1.2. Epistemological Position

I approached the exploration of women's experiences of sexism from within a critical realist position. Sometimes referred to as ontological realism, this position is situated between realism, assuming a direct relationship between observation and reality, and relativism, where the truth is always constructed (Harper, 2012). In other words, critical realism assumes the existence of a real (i.e., material, social and psychological) world, but acknowledges that data is never a direct or explicit reflection of that reality but instead is mediated through the lenses of language, meaning-making and context (Willig, 2016).

A critical realist position allowed me to consider sexism to have an objective existence while moving beyond the participants' descriptions of it to interpreting the social and psychological processes involved in their experiences. This was important because it did not necessitate the participants' conscious awareness and ability to articulate the underlying mechanisms or conditions which inform their overt experiences of sexism. However, I also acknowledged that my interpretations of the data were just that – interpretations – representing possibilities rather than certainties (Frosh & Saville-Young, 2008).

2.2. METHODOLOGY

In this section I outline the methodology chosen for the study, discussing its suitability to the research aims.

2.2.1. Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodologies generate rich descriptions of experience, pursuing meanings rather than quantification (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009) and

attending to contextual factors (Barbour, 2008). As highlighted in the previous chapter, the evidence base pertaining to women's experience of sexism has prioritised hypothetico-deductive methods for inquiry, seeking to test existing theories or determine relationships between variables. As this research endeavoured to explore what it is like for women to experience sexism and to uncover the meanings these experiences hold, a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate.

A qualitative approach also supports the ethical intention of this study, specifically to facilitate the voice of women in the production of knowledge regarding them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). However, I acknowledged the inherent power imbalance in the research process whereby I, as the researcher, was in control of designing and conducting the study and interpreting the findings, thus prioritising my voice over that of the participants. I sought to reduce this power differential through the approach chosen for data collection and analysis as explored later in this chapter, as well as through keeping a reflexive journal (Appendix 3).

2.2.2. Grounded Theory

I chose to use Grounded Theory (GT) methodology within this study due to its compatibility with the open-ended research question of "How do women experience sexism in their lives?". GT is an inductive, as opposed to deductive, method, aiming to generate contextualised theories rather than verify existing theory (Wuest, 2012). In this way, GT was well placed to support the intention of this research of counterbalancing the literature on sexism, which, to date, has favoured top-down approaches to knowledge production, with a theory grounded in women's experiences.

2.2.2.1. Compatibility with critical realism
GT has been dismissed by some critical realists for its emphasis on induction and presuming that theory can be 'discovered' from the data, thus underestimating the researcher's active role in the research process (Danemark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen & Karlsson, 2002). Furthermore, certain versions of GT embrace detailed, step-by-step guides to the method (e.g.

Strauss & Corbin, 1998), thus adding a deductive element to the process (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, some have argued that GT is more aligned with positivist epistemology and too rigid and empirical to accommodate the principles of critical realism (Danemark et al., 2002).

More recently, however, Charmaz (2005, 2008, 2014) has advocated a constructivist version of GT that shifts away from a positivist epistemology. Constructivist GT builds on symbolic interactionism, whereby understandings of society and reality are seen to be constructed from the interactions between communicating individuals (Charmaz, 2014). However, as Willig (2016) highlighted, even constructivist qualitative research tends to invoke a realist ontology due to its aspiration to understand the nature of the social world. Therefore, constructivist GT can be seen to subscribe to ontological realism together with epistemological relativism (Willig, 2016), making it well aligned with the critical realist approach of this study.

Constructivist GT is also compatible with critical realism's view that all understanding is partial and tentative. While traditional versions of GT held onto the idea of data saturation, constructivist GT sees the theory arising from inquiry as only the best available explanation for the time being, allowing for conceptualisation and reconceptualisation (Charmaz, 2014). In this respect, I acknowledge that the resulting theory was shaped by my own subjective position including assumptions, values, experiences, knowledge base and interpretations. I utilised methods such as reflexivity, open coding and the constant comparative method to increase my awareness of my preconceptions and remain open-minded towards my understandings of the topic (Charmaz, 2014). These methods are further explored throughout this chapter.

2.2.3.   Focus Group Methodology

Focus groups were used as a data collection technique because they best supported the intention of this study to represent the voice of women in the development of a theory about sexism. In focus group research, the relationship between participants and the researcher is less hierarchical than in other methods, thus minimising the power differential between the researcher and the

people being researched (Wilkinson, 1998). Therefore, this method is viewed as particularly suitable for feminist research, generating insight into the social realities of groups who have been marginalised in society (Wilkinson, 1999). Using focus groups also sustained the principles of GT by reducing the impact of my personal views about sexism on the data.

The decision to use focus groups was also based on the expectation that the group interaction could allow participants to explore and clarify their views more effectively than one-to-one interviews, therefore generating richer data. That is, comments and responses from others can spark off new thoughts in individuals and challenge participants to explain themselves in more depth (Warr, 2005). Thus, using focus groups was believed to be a good way to uncover the subtleties and complexities of women's experiences of sexism.

Focus groups were considered to be an ideal method not only for exploring women's collective experiences of sexism, but also the ways in which these experiences are socially constructed (Kitzinger, 1994). Expressly, providing that the researcher remains alert to group processes, focus groups can offer data about the interactions between individuals which construct society and reality (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). As such, this method was seen to coincide with the critical realist epistemological stance from which this study was approached.

A principal challenge presented by focus groups is that the presence of the group can sometimes prevent participants from voicing their personal views (Hennink, 2007; Lehoux. Poland & Daudelin, 2006). Methodologically, this issue was not considered significant within this study, as the value of the findings was not predicated on full disclosure of each participant's views. However, power dynamics within the group can leave some participants feeling powerless or disadvantaged in regard to the subject being discussed, potentially opening them up to vulnerability (Owen, 2001). For this reason, focus groups are not generally thought to be suitable for exploring issues of a sensitive nature (Hennink, 2007). Sexism can be a delicate topic for some individuals, owing to their personal experiences. Therefore, specific consideration was made to

ensure the safety of participants during focus groups. These considerations are discussed further in section 2.4.

2.3. PARTICIPANTS

This section gives information about the participants comprising the sample of this study.

2.3.1. Inclusion Criteria

2.3.1.1. <u>Gender</u>
Anyone who self-identifies as a woman could take part.

2.3.1.2. <u>Age</u>
As this research considered sexism experienced by adult women, only those over the age of 18 were eligible for the study. There was no upper age limit.

2.3.1.3. <u>Language</u>
As the focus groups were carried out in English, participants were required to be able to understand and communicate fluently in English.

2.3.2. Profile of Participants

Thirteen women participated in the study, forming four focus groups. The first focus group consisted of four participants, and focus groups 2, 3 and 4 had three participants each. The women ranged in age from 18 to 37, with a mean age of 29.3 (SD = 5.6), and identified as White (n = 8), Asian (n = 4) and Black (n = 1). Twelve of the women identified as heterosexual, while one woman did not report her sexuality. Regarding relationship status, some of the women identified as being single (n = 5), while others reported being in a relationship but not living with a partner (n = 4), living with their partner (n = 3), or being married or in civil partnership (n = 1). With regard to religion, the women identified as Christian Methodist (n = 1), Sikh (n = 1) and Muslim (n = 1), although the majority of the women identified as having no religion (n = 10). The participants indicated that they were in full-time employment (n = 5),

professional training (n = 5) or studying full time (n = 3). Regarding the highest level of education achieved, the women reported post-graduate degree (n = 6), undergraduate degree (n = 5) and secondary school (n = 2). None of the participants considered themselves as having a disability. The demographic profile of participants in each focus group is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of Participants

	Participant Identifier	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Education Level
Group 1	P1	32	White (British)	None	Post-graduate
	P2	27	Asian (British Indian)	None	Post-graduate
	P3	27	Black (British African)	Christian Methodist	Post-graduate
	P4	31	White (German)	None	Post-graduate
Group 2	P5	27	White (Irish)	None	Post-graduate
	P6	30	White (British)	None	Under-graduate
	P7	34	White (British)	None	Post-graduate
Group 3	P8	34	White (British)	None	Secondary School
	P9	36	White (British)	None	Under-graduate
	P10	37	White (British)	None	Under-graduate
Group 4	P11	27	Asian (British Indian)	Sikh	Under-graduate
	P12	18	Asian (British Turkish)	None	Under-graduate
	P13	21	Asian (British Sri Lankan)	Islam	Secondary School

Although the demographic characteristics of the participants were diverse, there seemed to be a sufficient degree of homogeneity between the women in each group to facilitate an open and productive discussion (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). That is, the participants in each group shared some common characteristics (e.g. age, ethnic background, level of education) which was likely to foster a sense of confidence in voicing their opinions.

Furthermore, participants in focus groups 1 and 3 knew each other prior to the group and were able to use this knowledge to remind each other of specific points. However, the level of shared understanding between the participants

required me to listen out for unexpressed assumptions in the discussion and prompt for elaboration so as to not lose valuable information. In contrast, participants in groups 2 and 4 did not have prior knowledge of each other and thus required some time to build rapport. However, the lack of acquaintance seemed to foster frank and detailed exchanges of views. Overall, the combination of focus groups with different participant characteristics seemed to generate rich data of the processes involved in sexism.

2.4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, I highlight the ethical issues relevant to this study and discuss how they were addressed.

2.4.1. Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the research committee of University of East London (Appendix 4).

2.4.2. Power

Research is a political act and therefore has the potential to further exploit and disempower marginalised groups (Aanand, 2013). Although in focus group research the relationship between the researcher and participants is less hierarchical than in other methods (Wilkinson, 1999), I was aware of the inherent power imbalance between myself and the participants. To reduce the impact of the power differential and ensure the safety of the participants, I carefully followed the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) and University of East London through the considerations outlined below.

2.4.3. Informed Consent

In line with BPS (2014) guidelines, informed consent was obtained from all the participants. All potential participants were fully informed of the nature and aims of the study and issues relating to confidentiality, consent and right to withdraw. This was done through the information sheet (Appendix 5) which was emailed

to the participants prior to participation and discussed again in person at the start of the focus group. The participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the study via email and in person. Before each focus group, the participants all signed consent forms (Appendix 6).

2.4.4. Safety and Wellbeing

I was mindful that some participants may find it difficult or upsetting to discuss their experiences of sexism. I highlighted this in the participant information sheet and at the start of the focus groups, reminding the participants that they were free to take breaks or withdraw from the study at any point. Further, I sought 'processual consent' (Rosenblatt, 1995), by using questions such as "would it be ok to ask you more about that?", "are you ok to continue talking?" to check in with each participant throughout the focus group. I hoped that this would help the participants feel more in control of shaping the process and be able to say if they were feeling uncomfortable. The BPS (2018) has also published guidance for psychologists on ethical behaviour in clinical and research work, which I followed throughout the research.

Time was allocated at the end of each focus group for participants to reflect on the process of talking and raise any issues. No participant reported any distress due to the discussion. Each participant was also given a debrief form (Appendix 7) that listed organisations that they could contact for support if needed. As two of the focus groups took place outside of the office hours of the university, a protocol was in place whereby I informed the research supervisor via text message when the focus group had finished. The research supervisor was prepared to alert the campus security should he not hear from me within an agreed time frame. It was reasoned that this protocol would ensure my own safety and that of the participants.

2.4.5. Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality of the data, audio recordings of the focus groups were saved onto a password-protected computer immediately after each group discussion and deleted from the digital voice recorder. I was the only person to have access to and listen to the recordings. The recordings will be deleted from

the computer after the examination. The use of the digital voice recorder and confidentially were explained to all participants before and after the focus groups. All participants were asked to respect each other's privacy by not repeating any portion of the discussion outside of the group.

As qualitative research involves detailed accounts of individuals' social lives, special care must be taken to protect the anonymity of each participant (Kaiser, 2009). In the process of transcribing, I removed all names of people, places and organisations. Any information that could identify participants was removed from the transcripts and the final report. The written transcript will be kept as a computer file for three years and might be used to write up the research into an article to be published in a journal.

2.5.   PROCEDURE

This section details how the study was conducted, including the procedures involved in sampling, recruitment, compensation, focus groups, materials, transcription and analysis.

2.5.1.   Sampling

In GT, sampling is purposive. It involves a deliberate recruiting of participants who have experienced the process or interaction of interest and can thus best inform the developing theory (Tweed & Priest, 2015). My goal, therefore, was to recruit women who self-identified as having experienced sexism.

I also endeavoured to recruit a sample of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds to represent a multiplicity of perspectives and explore issues related to intersectionality. GT also rests on theoretical sampling, where early analysis of initial data directs subsequent data collection and sampling which, in turn, develops existing categories (Willig, 2008). Therefore, after the collection and analysis of initial data, I followed emerging leads and concepts to recruit a more feminist-oriented sample of women to refine the theoretical categories.

2.5.2. Recruitment

Recruitment involved advertisement using research posters (Appendix 8) requesting research assistance from women who had experienced sexism. These posters were distributed in the public areas and women's lavatories in UEL Stratford and Docklands campuses. The study was also advertised using social networking websites, and a Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com /moderndaysexismuk/) and an Instagram page (https://www.instagram.com /moderndaysexismuk/) were created for this purpose. The research poster included a direct link to the website through a Quick Response (QR) Code which could be read using a smartphone application. Those interested in participating in the study were asked to contact the researcher via email. All the women who expressed an interest in taking part were sent an electronic version of the participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and consent form (Appendix 6) and invited to ask further questions relating to the study.

Analysing the data of the first two focus groups indicated that feminist identity development may be a central component in the emerging theory. Thus, I purposively recruited a group of women representing an explicitly feminist viewpoint, by contacting an organisation focused on women's issues (name not included in this report to protect the participants' anonymity). I sent the organisation an email explaining the purpose of my study and inviting participation, along with a participant information sheet, consent form and a link to the Facebook page. A phone call was arranged with a representative of the organisation to discuss the study further. The representative then agreed to advertise the study via the forums of the organisation which resulted in Focus Group 3.

After the first three focus groups, I wished to increase the ethnic diversity within the sample to further explore the intersections of sexism and racism. I acknowledged that grouping women from ethnic minority backgrounds together with White women may privilege the views of White women. Therefore, I specifically recruited a separate focus group of women from ethnic minority backgrounds. To do this, I contacted everyone who had previously expressed an interest in participating but had not been available to attend the focus groups

and invited women from ethnic minority backgrounds to get in touch if they were still interested. This resulted in Focus Group 4, consisting of three women all of whom identified as Asian. The purpose was not to recruit a specifically Asian sample; however, no individuals from other ethnic minority backgrounds came forward to participate in the study.

2.5.3. Compensation

The participants were given a £5 Amazon voucher as a thank you for taking part in a focus group. Travel costs were also offered to be reimbursed. This was funded by University of East London. The voucher compensation was aimed to promote a sense of mutual transaction through acknowledging the expertise provided by each participant (Walmsley, 2001). The amount of the voucher was thought to be optimal in serving as a gesture of appreciation without exerting undue pressure on any individual to take part in the research. In other words, the payment was not believed to over-ride the principles of informed consent.

2.5.4. Focus Groups

The scheduling of Focus Groups 1, 2 and 4 was done by asking each potential participant, via email, about their availability for attendance and establishing dates with the best overall availability. Six participants were invited to attend each of the first two focus groups (not everyone attended) and three participants were invited to the final focus group. Email confirmations were sent one week prior and again the day before the scheduled focus group. A representative of the women's organisation assisted in scheduling Focus Group 3 by liaising with the potential participants about availability. Six participants were invited to attend this focus group, but again, not everyone attended.

The focus groups took place in a private room at the university campus. The campus security and reception were notified and given a list of names of participants who were not students of University of East London. The duration of the focus groups ranged from 60 minutes to 95 minutes (M = 78, SD = 15.54). Refreshments were provided.

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 9) was developed prior to the recruitment process and was used as a general guide for the focus groups. This addressed the following areas:

- Examples of experiences of sexism
- Reactions and responses to those experiences
- Outcomes of those reactions and responses

Sexism was not predefined for the participants but they were encouraged to discuss anything they felt was relevant to the topic. This was an attempt to get a true representation of participants' experiences instead of validating a pre-determined concept or theory.

The interview schedule was amended for Focus Groups 3 and 4 by including a summary of the emerging theory at the beginning of the discussion, inviting the women to challenge, comment and elaborate on the findings. Focus Group 3, in which all the women explicitly identified as feminists, also included the following question: "Has feminism had an impact on how you experience sexism?". In Focus Group 4, where all the participants identified with an ethnic minority group, I asked the women about challenges they experienced "as a young Asian woman". This question assesses participants' intersecting identities instead of separating aspects of their identities into distinct entities and has been advocated as an effective methodological tool for studying intersectionality (Bowleg, 2008; DeBlaere et al., 2014).

I acknowledged that my role as the group moderator was not to dominate the discussion but to facilitate a lively and productive conversation between the participants (Kitzinger, 1994; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). That is, instead of asking questions of each participant in turn, I encouraged participants to interact with one another by inviting them to comment on each other's points. I explained this format at the beginning of each focus group. However, it was my task to keep the group focused on the topic and ensure each participant was able to participate equally. To achieve this, I aimed to remain alert to power dynamics being played out between the participants and made an effort to invite views of participants who were quieter.

2.5.5. Materials

2.5.5.1. <u>Demographic information form</u>

A demographic information form (Appendix 10) was used to ask the participants to provide information about their backgrounds. This was given to the participants at the start of the focus groups.

2.5.5.2. <u>Audio recorder</u>

A digital voice recorder (Trustin 8GB PCM) was used to audio record all the focus groups. The recording was transferred onto a password-protected computer immediately after each focus group and deleted from the voice recorder.

2.5.6. Transcription

Transcription performed by the researcher can strengthen the bond between participant perspective and resulting analysis (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Thus, I personally transcribed all the focus groups verbatim. A simple approach to transcription, focusing solely on the macro-level content rather than micro-level organisation of language, is typically considered sufficient for GT (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). As such, I followed Banister et al.'s (2011) transcription scheme (Appendix 11).

I transcribed each focus group prior to the next so I could study the emerging data and use the information generated to inform the emphasis of subsequent focus groups (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). A concurrent process of coding and memo-writing allowed me to ascertain nuances of the participants' language and meanings and continuously revise the direction of the study. These techniques are further discussed below.

2.5.7. Analysis

To construct my analysis, I chose to draw on Charmaz's (2014) guidelines for their suitability to critical realist inquiry. The analysis followed the principles of abductive inference, whereby I sought out unexpected findings from the

participant data, produced speculative theoretical hunches for these discoveries and then checked these hypotheses against the observed data until arriving at the most plausible interpretation (Charmaz, 2008; Richardson & Kramer, 2006). In this process, my theoretical knowledge and pre-conceptions about sexism served as "heuristic tools for the construction of concepts" (Kelle, 1995, p. 34). However, these ideas were constantly elaborated and modified based on the observed data. The process of analysis was dependent on an iterative process of constant comparison between data collection and analysis, using methods of coding, diagramming and memo-writing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The coding consisted of four contemporaneous stages as detailed below. Memos (Appendix 12) and diagramming (Appendix 13) supported the articulation of ideas relating to the analytic steps taken to raise codes to categories to model.

2.5.7.1. Initial coding

Initial coding involved coding each line of the data with a code that remained as close as possible to the words of the participants (Charmaz, 2014). This included the use of in vivo codes as well as coding with gerunds to capture actions and processes that conceptualised and integrated the studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). These initial codes informed the framework of the emerging theory.

2.5.7.2. Focused coding

The next stage of coding involved the reviewing of initial codes for frequency, salience and significance (Charmaz, 2014). During this process, I explored the possible relationships between the initial codes, and generated more abstract and theoretical code names that best accounted for large segments of data (Appendix 14).

2.5.7.3. Raising codes to categories

I reviewed the focused codes for their ability to account for themes running throughout the data and refined their wording to be as abstract, analytic, precise and active as possible (Charmaz, 2014). This resulted in selecting the codes with best explanatory power and raising them to conceptual categories

(Appendix 15) for the developing analytic framework. Again, such categories were compared back to data, codes and other categories to test their salience and significance.

2.5.7.4. Theoretical coding

The final level of coding involved constructing a coherent, analytic storyline of the theoretical framework derived from the codes and categories. Glaser (1978) propounded using 'theoretical sensitivity' during this process, suggesting that researchers would draw on prior knowledge to help them render explicitly the subtleties of the relationship in the data. Charmaz (2014) cautioned researchers not to over-apply prior theories and concepts to the emerging theory but acknowledged that theoretical coding can aid researchers in making the analysis more precise and comprehensible.

I drew loosely on my understanding of feminism, intersectionality theory and Lewis's (2018) psychosocial model of sexism to help me to specify a multi-level, dynamic process by which women experience and are impacted by sexism. Furthermore, my own experiences of sexism allowed me to see certain phenomena more clearly in the participants' data. I reflect on this process further in section 4.4.2. of the Discussion chapter.

2.5.7.5. Memo-writing

The writing of memos is seen as a crucial method in GT since they represent the intermediate stage between the collection of data and the first draft of the completed analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1998). Throughout the research process, I wrote memos on: (a) participants' quotations to analyse their significance and likely contribution in the evolving theory, (b) focused codes and categories to explain their meaning and illuminate possible relations among them, and (c) emergent hypotheses and assumptions to scrutinise them against the data and modify or discard them accordingly (Appendix 12). This process allowed me to remain involved in the analysis and increase the level of abstraction of my ideas.

2.5.7.6. Diagramming

Diagramming was used throughout the analysis to provide visual representations of the categories, their relationships and connections (Appendix 13). Together with memo-writing, diagramming essentially bridged the gap between coding and conceptual development.

2.5.7.7. Member checking

Consistent with the ethical intentions of this study, that is, to prioritise the voice of women in construction of theories involving them, I consulted a subsample of participants (P2, P11) to provide feedback on the emerging issues and hypotheses throughout the data collection and analysis. Such member checking can significantly improve the credibility of qualitative research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.6. ENSURING RIGOUR

This section outlines the guidelines for ensuring rigour of the method. I followed Yardley's (2000) qualitative research criteria which consider sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; and transparency and coherence as necessary methodological processes. I will return to these criteria in section 4.4. of the Discussion chapter to evaluate the methodological quality of the study.

2.6.1. Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2000) emphasised the importance of qualitative researchers remaining sensitive to the data itself, that is, to avoid drawing conclusions which are not based on the data. In GT, this is achieved through the coding and memo writing techniques outlined above (Appendices 12 and 14). Yardley (2000) also advocated sensitivity to socio-cultural setting and consideration of how the beliefs, expectations and conversations of participants and researcher are influenced by socio-contextual factors. This is achieved in GT through the use of a reflexive journal, in which the researcher examines how their positions and assumptions influence their inquiry of the subject (Charmaz, 2014).

2.6.2. Commitment and Rigour

The concept of commitment refers to the extent to which the researcher demonstrates a prolonged engagement in the topic and thoroughness in data collection, use of method and analysis (Yardely, 2000). This was ensured through a detailed process of initial, focused and theoretical coding supported through memo-writing and the reflexive journal (Appendices 3, 12 and 14). The concept of rigour refers to the completeness of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Yardley, 2000). To ensure the rigour of my analysis, I sought guidance from my supervisor throughout the process. Member checking was used to further confirm rigour.

2.6.3. Transparency and Coherence

Yardley (2000) emphasised the importance of a coherent and transparent presentation of the research. Attempts were made to depict this research project in a clear and transparent manner. The analytic processes are documented in the Appendices.

3. RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the outcome of the GT analysis achieved using the methods detailed in the previous chapter. The theory described below represents my understanding of the narratives of the 13 women who participated in the study. The theory depicting women's experience of sexism will be outlined first, before moving onto a detailed analysis of each category.

3.1. THE GROUNDED THEORY MODEL

Two main categories, *Reinforcing Inferiority* and *Punishing Transgression,* were constructed from the participants' accounts across all the focus groups. Given that I did not feel that any category could, alone, represent the participants' narratives, I engaged in theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978) to construct a core category comprising the grounded theory model: *Establishing and Policing the Gender Order*.

3.1.1. Establishing and Policing the Gender Order

The constructivist grounded theory model of *Establishing and Policing the Gender Order* is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1 (page 57). This model captures the social and psychological processes involved in women's experiences of sexism. In this model, 'the gender order' refers to cultural and social constructions of gender, and the relations of dominance and subordination organised around the notion of gender difference. More specifically, the gender order is a system, performed by individuals, which positions men in a dominant role and women in a subordinate role. The theory encompasses two interrelated, yet analytically distinct, processes as captured in the categories of *Reinforcing Inferiority* and *Punishing Transgression*. These two processes work in unison to ensure that women submit to the gender order.

Figure 1. Grounded Theory Model
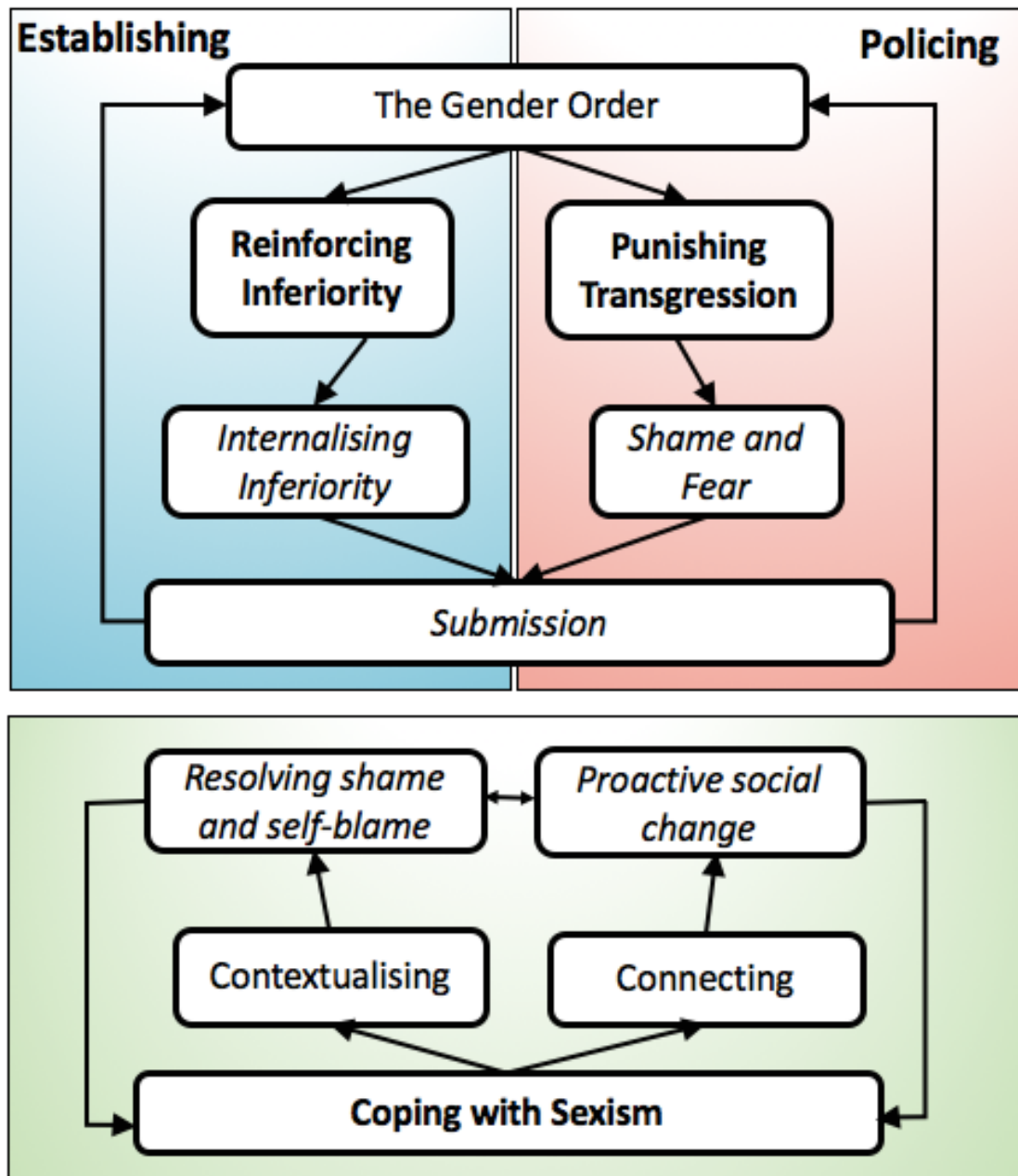
Reinforcing Inferiority is a process by which women are socialised into the gender order. It refers to mechanisms whereby women are "brainwash[ed]" (P9) into believing that they are fundamentally less important and less capable or, simply, less human than men and, therefore, deserving of their lower social standing. It includes cultural narratives, social practices and interpersonal encounters which disrespect and demean women, thereby destroying their self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence. This can lead to women behaving in accordance with these expectations, in essence, submitting to the gender order.

Punishing Transgression refers to the policing of the gender order, whereby women who are seen to contravene their role in the gender hierarchy are penalised in order to re-establish the status quo. The participants explored different ways in which women can be seen to transgress, including eschewing feminine role prescriptions, exhibiting sexual agency and speaking out against oppression. The mechanisms of punishment can range from subtle social signals of disapproval to physical aggression. This process can result in women feeling ashamed of their behaviour or being fearful of further punishment, thus precluding women from challenging the gender order.

3.1.2.   Coping with Sexism

The participants also engaged in a process of exploring ways in which to cope with the impact of sexism. This yielded the category of *Coping with Sexism*, capturing mechanisms that can help women to withstand and resist sexism (see Figure 1, page 57). These strategies are portrayed in two interrelated subcategories: *Contextualising*, which refers to a process whereby women consider the contextual factors involved in sexism and thus avoid individualising their experiences, and *Connecting,* which captures processes by which women seek camaraderie and support from other women, and pursue positive connections with men in an effort to work together towards ending sexism. These processes can help women overcome the shame and self-blame elicited by sexism and feel empowered to proactively challenge the gender order.

3.2.   DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL

The two core processes *Reinforcing Inferiority* and *Punishing Transgression* involved in women's experiences of sexism, as well as the mechanisms related to *Coping with Sexism*, will now be detailed through the exploration of quotes from which they were inducted. Double quotation marks and participant identification numbers denote direct quotations. Square brackets are used to indicate information which has been inserted into the original extract to clarify or simplify it for the reader. This includes explanations of participants' expressions, words used to clarify a pronoun and ellipses denoting the omission of unnecessary words. Care has been taken not to obscure or change the

intended meaning of the speaker. Unedited excerpts from the original transcript are provided in Appendix 14 to ensure rigour and auditability of the study.

3.2.1. Reinforcing Inferiority

The *Reinforcing Inferiority* category was constructed from narratives across all the focus groups. It refers to mechanisms which accentuate women's subordination, resulting in the diminishing of women's self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence. It encompasses three further subcategories: (1) Assuming *Traditional Gender Roles,* (2) *Undermining Women's Competence* and (3) *Sexual Objectification.*

3.2.1.1. <u>Assuming traditional gender roles</u>
 "Women are, like, there to serve men" (P12).

This subcategory relates to the presumption that women will behave in accordance with the traditional female role which, essentially, holds less social value than the male role.

The participants explored how these expectations are displayed in day-to-day interactions, particularly in the work context. For example, P9 shared examples whereby her male colleagues often assume that she will perform tasks below her grade and, effectively, act as their assistant. She shared two examples of this:

> P9: "We have a senior managers' meeting, which is where every head reports about their area. And if the person who's there to take the minutes isn't there, they will automatically assume that I will be writing them."

> P9: "There were no [personal assistants] on the floor when the phones were ringing. And there was just me and another gentleman who are at the same level. And the phones were ringing and he turned around and he said to me, are you gonna answer that?"

That is, although gender roles are changing, and women are making their way up the career ladder, many individuals may still hold beliefs related to women's subservient position and communicate these beliefs to women through casual remarks. These beliefs seem to reflect gender stereotypes, whereby women are

primarily perceived as mothers or in helping or caring roles, as highlighted by P9: "It's that expectation, that expectation [that] women will be at home looking after the kids"; "I'm a woman, I must be a secretary. Like, secretary or a nurse".

Although such environmental invalidations can be experienced as disrespectful and demeaning, the participants discussed that individuals behaving in this way may often be unaware of their actions being sexist. For example, P8 reflected: "I wonder if the man that was responsible, would he even recognise that as something that was offensive". However, the assumed ignorance was not felt to reduce the hurtfulness of these behaviours, which were seen to be deeply rooted in sexist beliefs. The participants explained: "[P8:] So, if you're not aware of it, like, you're just, like, you're 100 per cent <[P9:] Being sexist> [P8:] Yeah".

In fact, the notion of gender role expectations being so entrenched within social norms and people's belief systems that individuals can perpetuate them unknowingly appeared to elicit a strong feeling of disillusionment regarding the lack of progress made to combat sexist attitudes. P10 described this feeling as follows:

> P10: "It's the sense of disappointment you get with these people that you work with all the time. And you feel like, actually, in unguarded moments, you actually show what you really think. So, like, actually, most of the time I'd consider you to be like a decent human being who's, like, um, you know, works with people, doesn't seem to look down on women. But then, actually, in that unguarded moment of something happening and you needing to have a quick response, your brain automatically defaults to sex roles."

Thus, some of the participants felt that behaviours which seem to reflect deep-rooted, albeit unacknowledged, prejudiced beliefs about women were especially cutting, even more so than deliberate insults. P8 explained: "If he knows [what he is doing], it's like part sexism but part bullying. And then it makes the sexism like more tolerable. Cos like partly he's just being an arsehole".

The participants also reflected on how women themselves can internalise gender role expectations, for instance, through upbringing. Such socialisation can potentially thwart the development of a woman's self-confidence and ability to express herself, as highlighted in the following quotes:

P8: "Because of growing up in a sexist household, um, I wouldn't have the same confidence as men."

P9: "Upbringing. That's brainwashing though isn't it, cos you've been told that women are like, not allowed to take space. So, I definitely notice making myself smaller."

P10: "I grew up in a particular kind of environment that was very much dominated by men and women weren't allowed to speak. So, I wasn't allowed to speak, and that, I think, I carried that with me."

These quotes demonstrate the self-perpetuating nature of sexism whereby girls are socialised early to behave in accordance with gender order, thereby submitting to male dominance. That is, through messages and behavioural guidelines emphasising women's inferiority, women are "brainwash[ed]" (P9) into accepting a lower position in the gender hierarchy, thereby inadvertently contributing to the perpetuation of the gender order.

Other participants also considered the family context to be a particularly conducive environment for the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. For example, P7 conveyed the following commonplace interaction with her father.

P7: "[My father] sees me as his little girl and, you know, often he's very much like, in terms of complementing me, it's all very much like, oh you look pretty, you look beautiful. With my brother, it's so much more about his, um, achievements and career, you know."

Thus, P7 felt that, as a woman, her achievements are not regarded as highly as those of men: "It's like nothing I've done holds any value". Moreover, the above quote highlights the way in which women are often praised purely on the basis of their looks, thereby devaluing women's skills and abilities. (This aspect is explored further in section 3.2.1.3.)

As above, P7 considered these beliefs to be so deeply ingrained that her father would not recognise his actions as being sexist or harmful: "It's so, kind of, inbred that he's not really aware that what he's saying is, kind of, offensive". Nevertheless, P7 described how she can be strongly impacted by such interactions: "It absolutely kills me"; "I feel like I constantly have to justify my worth". Thus, it appears that the endorsement of gender role beliefs, albeit subtle and unintentional, can communicate to a woman that whatever she

accomplishes is not important or valuable, which is likely to have a negative impact on her self-efficacy and self-worth.

Discussing their experiences as Asian British women, the participants in Focus Group 4 noted particular cultural and familial practices which emphasise the disparity in the roles of men and women. Specifically, women are expected to not occupy male spaces and prioritise men's comfort over their own:

> P12: "It's the separation of men and women in many Asian families. The men always seem to eat first and they would always be served before the women <P11: And served by the women> Yeah, yeah, and you would see the women in the kitchens, just staying in the kitchen and not eat till the men finish."

The participants also spoke of the deep-seated nature of such cultural norms and traditions which can make it more difficult for women to challenge them. In response to another participant's pondering of how to challenge the gender order, P11 shared the following:

> P11: "I always find it harder to do that in family […] So my background's, like, Punjabi and [my extended family] is a lot more Indian than they are English, if that makes sense. Like the community is a lot more like close-knit. It's much harder to confront that."

Thus, familial and cultural pressures can leave women feeling powerless to stand up to sexist practices and resigning themselves to the gender order without much protest. P12 portrayed this through the following exchange with her mother:

> P12: "So, one day I just, like, I questioned it, and I was like, mum, like why is it like this? And she, kind of, she looked at me and I knew for a fact she wasn't going to, like, give me a full answer about it. She was like, 'do you know what, it's not even worth it'. She was like, 'because it's not gonna change'."

3.2.1.2. Undermining women's competence

"He's undermining your abilities just because you're a female." (P13)

This subcategory reflects social processes which portray women as less capable, intelligent or skilled than men.

The participants in Focus Group 3 discussed this in relation to the level of knowledge and understanding a woman is considered to have in comparison to a man. P9 explained this as follows:

> P9: "It's the general assumption that [men] know more than you or that they can dismiss what you have to say without evidence. And nothing, your own knowledge or your own experience […] doesn't seem to carry any weight."

The participants shared examples of various situations where they had experienced an endorsement of such beliefs. For example, the women explored how men can undermine women's competence through their style of communication, as described by P10:

> P10: "He didn't even know what I was gonna say. He interrupted and dismissed what I said and said 'oh that's stupid' or 'that's wrong' or something."

> P10: "He would validate what I said by saying, 'oh yeah, a man told me that'. So, because he had it confirmed by a man he was then validating what I said."

P10 had noted this to be the case even when her knowledge of a topic area was evidently superior to that of the man: "I get my degree subjects mansplained to me all the time by men who don't know anything about it". Here, P10 used the neologism of "mansplaining", which has been defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as "a man talking condescendingly to someone (especially a woman) about something he has incomplete knowledge of, with the mistaken assumption that he knows more about it than the person he's talking to does" ('Mansplaining', 2018). Such interactions appear to communicate that, regardless of a woman's level of expertise on a given topic, her understanding is inevitably inferior to that of a man.

The participants examined how such demeaning social interactions can become internalised by women. P8 expressed this as follows:

> P8: "I feel like, in a situation where I'm up against a man, probably I always just assumed that they do know more than me. So I just tend to be more quiet."

This, again, speaks to the self-perpetuating nature of sexism. That is, the regular experience of being undermined can lead a woman to perceive herself as less knowledgeable than a man, which, in turn, may result in her behaving in a way that reaffirms the man's dominant position. In other words, through socialising women into believing that they are less competent than men, sexist interpersonal encounters can lead women to submit to the gender order and preclude them from challenging such norms.

The participants in Focus Group 2 also discussed experiences in which men have assumed that women's contributions or opinions are less valuable than their own. For example, P6 spoke of a scenario at work where she observed a man interrupting a female colleague, insisting that his view was correct and, essentially, more important than hers. P6 highlighted that the man seemed to assume superiority over the woman, regardless of their equal standing within the team.

> P6: "So, what he thinks, kind of, overwrites her opinion. Whereas actually, we were all, kind of, equal supposedly in that meeting. So, those opinions should actually be of equal rating. But it was like, he says what goes, and what she has to offer and what she thinks is inferior to what he thinks."

P6 noted that, although the incident had made her feel uncomfortable, the level of ambiguity in the situation had led her to initially perceive the man's intentions as innocuous, precluding her from identifying the behaviour as sexist:

> P6: "In that moment, being a bit confused about that, although knowing that it was quite uncomfortable, like – I feel like that, kind of, like, obscured me from saying that that was a sexist event. And maybe cos it was in a professional setting as well, kind of, feeling like, well of course he didn't mean it because she was a female, because he's a professional. And actually like, I'm sure he did."

Thus, the subtle nature of sexism as well as the context in which it occurs can make it more difficult for women to detect and identify discrimination as it happens, possibly precluding them from challenging such interactions.

Focus Group 4 explored how women's competence can also be undermined in areas not requiring knowledge or intellect. P13 relayed the following dynamic involving her kickboxing instructor:

P13: "To progress on to a different stage, he makes us, like, train, like, twice as hard as a male would […] It's not really obvious. Like, kind of, undermining your abilities just because you're a female."

Hence, men can invalidate women and their sense of ability through various subtle behaviours signalling women's incompetence and inferiority. Again, the participants reflected on the subtle nature of these interactions and the challenge it poses on the woman's capacity to confront the person endorsing such views. P12 expressed this as follows:

P12: "Because it's so subtle, and you – They don't say anything, like, actually offensive to you, but you know it's sly and there's like a definite, sort of, background to it. So then when you do try to, sort of, confront them about it, they're like but I didn't actually say anything, like why are you assuming?"

Building on this, P13 concluded her reaction as follows: "That's frustrating, that experience. But you just, kind of, accept it". That is, as noted above, the insidious nature of the invalidations leaves women powerless to challenge these behaviours resulting in them seemingly submitting to the gender order.

3.2.1.3. Sexual objectification
"I was just like this, like, piece of something." (P6)

This subcategory captures social processes whereby women are treated as sexual objects as opposed to autonomous, whole human beings with agency.

The participants described the contemporary culture as an environment where women's and girls' bodies and sexuality are put on display, thus tacitly encouraging others' right to evaluate these bodies and their sexual desirability. The participants noted an increase in the sexually objectifying media representations of women, as highlighted by P2:

"Just, like, thinking about the culture of music videos and that being a very modern-day form of sexism […] I think it's definitely increased. Like the level of what you would see in […] music videos. The level of what you would've seen in maybe, like, eight years ago compared to now, like, I-I think a lot of it verges on soft porn."

In this respect, gender equality seems to have taken a step backwards, with women facing an increasing degree of sexual objectification within the culture.

Such an environment can lead to women feeling pressured to spend a great amount of time and effort making themselves look attractive, as noted by P8:

> P8: "The amount of effort that we feel that we need to put into our figures and clothes and not having wrinkles and hair and nails and shoes and, you know, basically our appearance."

This seems to be related to the gendered social expectations whereby a woman's value is closely tied to her looks instead of her accomplishments or abilities, as discussed earlier.

Exploring the intersection of sexism and racism, P2 (an Asian woman) reflected on how women from ethnic minority backgrounds can experience sexual objectification in ways in which White women do not, namely, through exoticisation.

> P2: "I definitely think there is a massive issue of objectification and exoticisation of women from different [Black and ethnic minority] backgrounds. Particularly Black women, especially in music, especially in TV adverts, media."

Thus, the experience of sexual objectification for women from ethnic minority backgrounds can be a combination of both racism and sexism. P3 (a Black woman) summarised the process of exoticisation as follows: "It's being dehumanised […] being sexualised for being different".

Nevertheless, speaking of her interpersonal experiences as a Black woman living in a predominantly White area, P3 noted that instead of being sexualised, she was ostracised:

> P3: "Having grown up in a predominantly White area – So actually, what was deemed attractive or whatever, I didn't really fit into the norms of, you know. And I wasn't exoticised either. It was just like, cast out as being, like, you – No."

That is, as a woman whose appearance was seen to deviate from the Eurocentric beauty standards, P3 experienced a reduction of her value as a woman: "someone would look at me and think 'oh, is she a woman?'". Although manifested in reverse, this illustrates the essence of sexual objectification whereby a woman's appearance is used as a primary measure of her value. Still, what was highlighted by P3 is that the way in which Black women

experience sexual objectification can be qualitatively different to White women's experiences: "I didn't get the catcalling or anything like that" (P3).

In contrast, other participants shared an abundance of examples of direct and obvious sexual objectification within interpersonal contexts. These encompassed a variety of experiences where the women felt their personal boundaries or autonomy had been violated, ranging from objectifying comments and gazes to more extreme incidents, such as sexual assault. The perpetrators of these incidents were always men and included strangers, friends, teachers, colleagues and managers.

The experiences with strangers included incidents of street harassment, such as catcalling. The following are just a few of the examples shared by the women.

> P1: "I was riding my bike once and I went past a building site and a builder on some scaffolding said: 'I'd love to be your saddle'."
>
> P2: "I've had things from, like, literally to, like, 'Oi, legs!' or 'Oi, skirt!' Like people just shouting out what I'm wearing."
>
> P8: "Cars have, like, driven up alongside me, and made me feel really uncomfortable. Or like men have told me to smile."
>
> P1: "A man outside the bookies went 'cheer up'."

These examples capture a range of ways in which women can experience unwanted attention in public, with some being more explicitly sexual (e.g., "I'd love to be your saddle") than others (e.g., "smile"). Nevertheless, the participants discussed how even the more seemingly benign comments essentially communicate a reduction of a woman's personhood to an object of a man's desire, as explored by P1:

> P1: "I was thinking about the 'cheer up' thing because it, it makes me so angry because it's like women are there just to look pretty and look happy […] It sort of seems like, the Stepford Wives [a film portraying women as submissive housewives], like that kind of, like, perfect pristine smile and nothing could possibly be wrong. We're just there for men to admire and god forbid that you, like, that you don't look peacefully happy the whole time."

Not surprisingly, the women reported a variety of negative emotional reactions to being sexually objectified by strangers, including feeling "uncomfortable", "objectified", "powerless", "belittled", "shaken" and "scared". In the following excerpt, P6 describes how she felt being catcalled by a group of builders on the first day of her new job:

> P6: "In that instant, like, it totally just, like, invalidated all that stuff that I'd built and felt really proud of and I was just like this object, and it didn't matter who I was or what I'd done or what I wanted to do. I was just like this this piece of something and I think that, like, impersonalisation of it and that like, it – Yeah, it's so undermining."

Thus, experiences of sexual objectification can strip a woman of her self-confidence.

P2 further explained how the impact of being harassed in public can have far-reaching effects beyond the event itself: "I experience that as being quite, sort of, belittling of my character and it took away a lot of my confidence in other areas as well." Still, due to the sheer frequency of these types of experiences, some of the participants reported having become "desensitised to it" (P6) and would often just "brush it off" (P7). P5 explained this process as follows: "When something is happening so often, you can't let it get to you every single time. Even if it, even if it was going to, you can't."

Many of the participants also described a sense of powerlessness when being harassed in public, feeling as if there was "no right way to respond" (P1) or that there was nothing they could do to stop it from happening. This can lead to women feeling trapped, seeing circumventing as their only option: "You don't make eye contact you just keep going" (P7). However, as the following quote from P2 exemplifies, adopting an avoidant stance can lead to women feeling even more defeated:

> P2: "I think the more I started to look at the floor the more I started to feel really self-conscious about myself and really start to think about, my gosh it's something about me, is it what I'm wearing, should I do this, should I walk on this side of the road, should I avoid big groups altogether."

Thus, it appears that the lack of good options for women in situations of stranger harassment can lead to women feeling trapped and powerless,

precluding women from standing up to the harassers, thus further diminishing their self-perception and self-confidence.

In addition to stranger harassment, some of the participants discussed experiences of sexual harassment by authority figures. For example, P7 shared the following request by a senior colleague: "He asked me to go back to his hotel room and sleep with him." P8 also recounted an incident of being sexually assaulted by an authority figure:

> P8: "My driving instructor, when I was like 17, was a total creep and […] he like would reach over and like, you know, grab my knee. <P10: Ohh, no, ohh> Or like my thigh actually, like, he'd like squeeze my thigh."

It seems clear that an additional layer to the gender power imbalance can leave women feeling even more trapped and powerless to respond, as highlighted by P3, (Black woman, 27 years): "Older white men in positions of power. It's not very safe to challenge those kind of experiences."

Based on the participant's narratives, it is evident how damaging sexual objectification can be on a woman's confidence and self-worth. This can leave women assuming a submissive stance thereby reinforcing the gender order.

3.2.2. Punishing Transgression

The second main category, *Punishing Transgression,* was also constructed from narratives across all the focus groups. It refers to the process by which women who violate gender status rules and thereby threaten the gender order are reprimanded and quashed in order to bring them back down to their "rightful" place. It encompasses three further subcategories: (1) *Penalising Anti-femininity*, (2) *Chastising Women with Sexual Agency* and (3) *Silencing Dissent.*

3.2.2.1. Penalising anti-femininity

> "There is the idea of what is allowed to be feminine and what isn't. And then, when you violate it, you really do feel you're being questioned." (P11)

This subcategory refers to the admonition of women who do not behave in accordance with the feminine role prescriptions.

There was a sense among the participants that eschewing the feminine role is perceived as an unwelcome invasion of the male territory, leading men to defend their position. P13 described this as follows: "I feel like men get really offended by that, like you know, 'you should be in your place, why are you coming to my place?'".

As an example of this, P12 described her experience of participating in traditionally masculine activities, followed by criticism by her male peers:

> P12: "I used to take part in sports such as football, and everyone assumes that's like a male sport. And um yeah, and I would have guys like saying, 'why are you trying to be like a guy?'"

Similarly, other participants discussed how women in high-status, professional roles are seen to be intruding upon a male terrain, resulting in rebuke by male colleagues. The reproach can be further exacerbated if the woman disagrees with a male coworker or otherwise challenges his authority, as demonstrated in the following example by P6:

> "A male professional [...] saying to a female member of staff that how she did things was, was kind of problematic. [...] [She] fought back against that, kind of, quite strongly [...] and he obviously didn't like it cos he just, kind of, came back at her again. [...] In going against his instruction, that, that was maybe what fuelled how, kind of, <u>rude</u> he was to her. [...] It felt like he was just really, like <u>really</u> asserting his power there. [...] I'm not sure if he would've done that if she was a man."

Based on the participants' accounts, a reverse power imbalance whereby a woman is in a position of authority in relation to a man makes her even more liable to backlash. That is, men who are lower down in the professional hierarchy may attempt to counterbalance their lack of power through subtle verbal and behavioural cues which undermine a female superior's seniority. As an example of this, P8 discussed a situation at work whereby a male employee regularly likens a female manager to a mother: "There is a guy at work who [...] calls our CEO 'mum' or 'mother superior'". The intention behind this was thought to be to undercut the woman's professional status by giving her a prompt reminder of her primary role of being a mother.

Further exploring the female role prescription of being a mother, P9 described how a female professional, who is also a mother, was indirectly condemned by a male colleague:

> P9: "My CEO commented, where is everyone? And I said, oh, it's half-term so people are taking time off. I should mention that the people not in the office were men who were on holiday, taking half-term […] And then he said, if they have children, they should be looked after by their mothers. But he said this to our COO who is female, who is a parent, who is not with her children, and I think he wanted to get a rise out of her."

P9 interpreted the intention of the male CEO to be two-fold: (1) to shame the female COO for failing to fulfil her duties as a mother and (2) to shame women who are not mothers for violating the gender norms. In relation to the latter, P9 stated:

> "As someone who's chosen not to have children, you then feel like, hang on a minute. Are you saying then that I haven't – that there is something missing in me because I've chosen not to have kids?"

Thus, such subtle criticisms of women who go against gender-status rules can lead to women perceiving themselves as deficient. P12 explained: "Because you're not ladylike enough, you feel like you're not okay, like something's wrong with you". These quotes convey a sense of shame resulting from the environmental critique of a woman who behaves in stereotype-incongruent ways.

In relation to this, P3 (a Black woman) discussed a negative stereotype combining both racism and sexism: "that angry Black woman profile". That is, she experienced "demonising" of her character due to the view that, as a Black woman, she violates the gender role prescription of a quiet, agreeable woman. P3 spoke of how, as a child, she encountered this stereotype and sought to disconfirm it by behaving in an opposite way:

> "Black girls were perceived as, like, being a headache, being like really feisty, like, really defensive. And I'd be like, oh, I'm nothing like that, I'm really quiet […] Feeling like, being a Black girl was actually quite a threatening thing and I always wanted to reject that stereotype as much as I could. So that would be, like, to pacify, to be funny, be silly."

That is, in order to fit the feminine role and be socially accepted, P3 made a conscious effort to appear more discreet and amenable. In this way, penalising anti-femininity can preclude women from challenging the gender order. The processes involved in restricting women's emotional expression are explored further in section 3.2.2.3.

3.2.2.2. Chastising women with sexual agency

> "Being sexually promiscuous or performing sexual acts is something to be ashamed about as a woman." (P2)

This subcategory relates to the shaming and rebuking of women who violate the gender order by exhibiting sexual agency.

The participants explored the concept of "slut shaming", which has been defined as "the act of criticising a woman for her real or presumed sexual activity, or for behaving in ways that someone thinks are associated with her real or presumed sexual activity" ('Slut shaming', 2014). In other words, slut shaming is the practice of maligning women who are seen to deviate from the gender role prescription of sexual submissiveness. P3 described how these narratives can be expressed in interpersonal relationships with men.

> "I've seen a lot of Black guys, kind of, using body counts of a number of guys you've slept with in your life as a way of putting you down and kind of not making you material, wifey material or somebody who could be seen as, you know, being the girl that you bring home to your parents and a respectable woman."

Thus, men may make value judgements about women based on their sexual history and ostracise women who are seen to display sexual permissiveness. This can have a negative impact on the woman's self-perception and self-esteem, as described by P3:

> "I would've sheepishly said a number and if somebody didn't agree with it then feel like absolutely awful about myself. Like my self-esteem would be, like, equated to that person's reaction."

The participants noted that women, too, can perpetuate these harmful narratives by slut shaming other women: "I feel like girls often use those sorts of language against each other, like, 'you're a slut, you're easy'" (P2). This may be

a reflection of women's internalisation of the sexually objectifying culture. It was noted that slut shaming was typically linked to judgements about the woman's appearance, most commonly her clothing. P2 shared the following incident where she had been slut shamed by a female peer:

> "[She] told everyone that I […] gave this guy a blowjob in a park in front of people. And she linked it all back to how I dressed. And so obviously, it must be true because 'look, she wore a skirt'."

Based on the participants' narratives, a woman's value seems to be closely attached to the idea of her as a sexually submissive being, and suggestions about sexually promiscuous behaviour or clothing can be used to tarnish her reputation.

The participants further explored how women can be rebuked for wearing revealing clothing and, by extension, blamed for being sexually assaulted. As an example of this, P2 recited the following incident in the media:

> "I read on paper this morning about Donna Karan [fashion designer] making comments about how the producer who has been, sort of, arrested for sexually assaulting lots of women, erm, had said, 'oh but women bring it on themselves, they shouldn't dress like that, or you shouldn't dress so provocatively'."

Such victim blaming narratives are based on the sexist notion that men have a right to women's bodies and that women have a responsibility for limiting men's sexual behaviour through covering up their bodies. The participants in Focus Group 4, one of whom (P13) wore the hijab, highlighted the discrepancy between such attitudes and reality.

> "[P12:] Clothing is like a massive factor in sexism. Because, you know, when like, obviously, rape happens oh, because of the way she was, looked or whatever. <[P11:] Yeah> But you could literally be covered head to toe, and you will still get harassed, and you'll still could, and you will still be raped. /[P13:] I can vouch for that."

These shaming and blaming narratives can be internalised by women, leading them to feel ashamed and blame themselves for sexist attacks. As a result, women may be less inclined to confront or report such incidents. P7 described this in relation to her experience of being sexually harassed:

"I definitely felt like I had somehow given him the wrong impression. Or somehow led him on. Or s- somehow, somewhere given him the idea that I was, kind of, inviting that. <[Tanja:] Right> Um, so I, that was probably a big part of why I didn't talk about it, you know, straight away <[Tanja:] Mm-hm> Cos I absolutely questioned my own behaviour".

This illustrates the power of the slut shaming and victim blaming discourses in maintaining women's subordination.

3.2.2.3. Silencing dissent

"Me speaking up, it wouldn't achieve anything, because it'd be put back on me." (P11)

This subcategory refers to the process by which women are discouraged from challenging sexism. It encompasses techniques used to belittle, humiliate, criticise and intimidate women who do speak up, thus controlling the means of communication and discourse.

The participants discussed how women are often mocked and ridiculed for challenging sexist oppression. P6 explained: "They make fun of the fact that you're getting annoyed". Moreover, a woman who contests sexist behaviour is often dismissed as over-sensitive or humourless, instead of addressing the issue itself. P11 and P12 described:

"[P11:] [They] say 'what's your issue?' 'You're being sensitive' or something else / [P12:] That a lot, 'why are you so sensitive?'"

"Or 'you're so boring, why do you not have fun?'" (P12)

This simultaneously shames the woman for raising a concern and denies the validity of her complaint. Effectively, this can lead to women feeling ashamed for speaking up, as P7 noted: "It feels like you're making a big deal out of something", and perhaps less likely to challenge injustices in the future.

The participants also spoke of the gender role prescription that women should not get angry, which can lead to self-silencing by women. Notably, P1 highlighted a gender disparity in social expectations related to emotional expression: "I think of this kind of discourse around women, sort of, don't get

angry […] Whereas men can have fights and punch walls and that's fine." That is, while aggression is considered an acceptable way for men to express themselves, women are expected to withhold their anger. As a result, many women may be more inclined to circumvent as opposed to confront situations of oppression. For example, P9 described how a female co-worker responded to verbal harassment: "The lady who he said it to was trying not to bite, basically. And he kept going until she eventually just got up and walked away".

Moreover, the participants discussed how women who confront sexism with aggression often face retaliation and intimidation by perpetrators. For example, P5 described a time when she confronted a catcaller and the backlash that followed:

> "I turned around and told him to fuck off and pulled my finger up at him […] and then I kept walking. But then he had turned around and started following me into Tesco. <[P7:] Oh no> So I […] couldn't leave Tesco because I felt like he was just gonna be waiting for me as soon as I left Tesco. And I was like, well I'm never gonna fucking do that again."

P5 explained that this incident had impacted on her ability and readiness to challenge and confront perpetrators in the future:

> "I don't know what they might then do in retaliation. <[Tanja:] Mm-mm> So then that scares me, so that's why I keep my mouth shut and I just suck it up and I keep walking."

Thus, aggressive backlash from perpetrators can result in women feeling (justifiably) frightened for their safety, precluding them from confronting aggressors. P11 also described how the retaliation from perpetrators can silence women and make them feel powerless to fight sexism: "And then you end up just being more quiet, so you end up going well what's the point? If I'm just, like, gonna face that". That is, intimidation and other forms of backlash can stop women from challenging sexism.

Other participants discussed the accumulative impact of the different types of silencing (i.e., ridiculing, intimidation) and the resulting feeling that there is no good way for a woman to challenge sexism. P7 noted: "Responding in any kind of way you feel like you're just never gonna come out of that situation well".

However, the participants noted that *not* responding is also disadvantageous because it can leave women feeling guilty for perpetuating sexism. P11 explained: "If I'm silent then I'm condoning it. Silence only continues it".

On a similar note, P5 described how she blamed herself not addressing sexism in her workplace:

> "I'm angry at myself because I- I fundamentally, like, I went against everything that I fundamentally believe in […] So I was so angry with myself for not doing what I would tell anybody else to do. And what I would've assumed that I would've done to protect myself and protect other people."

These narratives highlight a paradoxical injunction experienced by women, whereby challenging sexism is often met with ridiculing or intimidation leaving women feeling ashamed or frightened; while passively accepting sexism can lead to women feeling guilty for perpetuating the gender order.

3.2.3. Coping with Sexism

Exploring ways in which to manage and cope with the effects of sexism, the participants spoke of two primary processes: *Contextualising* and *Connecting*. These mechanisms can help women overcome the negative emotional effects of their experiences and take action towards ending sexism.

3.2.3.1. Contextualising

"Society is an arsehole." (P11)

Contextualising refers to a mechanism whereby women consider the contextual factors involved in sexism and thus avoid individualising their experiences, as described by P1: "See[ing] it in a more, in a broader sense and not as an individual thing". Crucially, the participants noted that viewing sexism as a societal problem has helped them be less self-critical in relation to these experiences. P2 expressed this as follows:

> "It's helped me stop thinking about it, us as individuals and think about it as a wider problem and it's not just me being singled out or shamed here. This is like, it happens a lot. And I think it helps me stop making me

attack myself so much. And, kind of, seeing it within a wider, sort of, system, I guess, is helpful."

That is, recognising sexism as a broader issue that impacts numerous individuals can help women to address the shame and self-blame elicited by these experiences.

Many of the participants described how their thinking had evolved over time and how they were more able to contextualise sexism now than when they were younger. For example, P6 explained:

"When I was younger, I was more naïve to it and maybe some of the, kind of, like, societal, like, reasons why that might happen. I, kind of, didn't really or wasn't really aware. I just thought it was, like, creepy builders or workmen or whatever. And whereas now I, kind of, feel like I'm more aware of, I guess, how gender is viewed in society."

Thus, it is likely that the ability to consider sexism in a wider context of patriarchy requires a certain level of maturity that comes with age and experience. When asked what had helped her in developing this viewpoint, P6 stated: "the kind of feminist reading that I've done".

Other participants also explicitly linked the process of contextualising to a feminist ideology, which they described as a protective factor against the negative effects of sexism. For example, P8 noted: "Feminism empowered me […] to feel like it wasn't me and it's not always stuff that I'd done wrong". Again, this highlights the importance of addressing the self-blame induced by sexist experiences. More broadly, P8 noted the impact of feminism on her overall wellbeing: "When I realised that I was a feminist, like, it made a big difference on my mental health." Feminism, or contextualising, therefore seems to allow women to make sense of sexism in a way which protects them against psychological distress.

Moreover, feminist consciousness can help women feel empowered to stand up to sexism. For example, P8 described how she no longer feels obligated to engage in sexual acts which make her feel uncomfortable:

"When a man would be like […] 'don't be a prude', I would have just gone along with it. […] Feminism helped me to recognise that it's not my fault if

a guy makes me feel uncomfortable. That that's his fault and I can say something about it."

Thus, feminism can help women redirect the blame away from themselves to the perpetrators.

Still, the participants noted that blaming individual men is not a helpful long-term coping strategy as it does not address the root causes of sexism. Therefore, many of the women discussed the importance of considering the behaviour of the men, too, within the wider system of patriarchy. P8 expressed this thinking as follows:

> P8: "It's a product of, like, our mutual gendered upbringings."
>
> P8: "That guy is also suffering from being brought up in patriarchy, with these horrible masculine hierarchies."
>
> P8: "It's because of patriarchy and because of masculinity and the gender norms and gender stereotyping, that's the problem, not the men."

Thus, contextualising sexism can allow women to empathise with individual men and further redirect blame onto the wider society. Nevertheless, it appeared that, for many of the participants, the empathising position was not a satisfactory end-point. P5 explained:

> "I can understand where, where they're coming from in that respect, but it doesn't excuse it. It's like, where do we go from here, now. Because people now should know that it is not, that it is not the right thing to do."

It therefore appears that, although contextualising can help women to understand why a man may act in a sexist way, it is important that men are held accountable for their actions and expected to change their behaviour.

3.2.3.2. Connecting

> "I realised, actually, there's like loads of other women who feel the same way." (P8)

Connecting refers to the process by which women seek camaraderie and solidarity from other women in order to feel more supported and cope with the impacts of sexism.

The participants discussed the positive effects of talking about sexism with other women. Reflecting on their experience of participating in the focus group, the participants shared the following:

> P2: "There is something quite lonely about sexism […] So just the act of what we've been doing here today has been quite important."

> P4: "I can just say that I didn't want this time to end [laughter]. This is actually a good thing to talk about more often."

> P12: "I'm really happy with this. Like, I'm glad we spoke about it. Because I feel like it's something that we don't necessarily talk about, um, because we don't want to confront this situation. And nothing makes me more happier than seeing like females supporting one another."

What the participants seemed to be highlighting was a sense of "sisterhood" or an emotional connection with other women whose experiences correspond to theirs. Like *Contextualising*, *Connecting* can help women to resolve the shame and self-blame elicited by sexist experiences. P8 explained:

> P8: "Knowing that you're not alone […] That made it easier not to, sort of, blame yourself for what's happening. And I think that makes like women's spaces really important, to like have women's space in public and in private."

The participants also expressed that sharing their experiences of sexism with other women had empowered them to take action against it. For example, P5 described that telling her colleagues about being sexually harassed at work allowed her to feel supported and report the incident:

> "I just thought that it was just me initially. […] But I mentioned it to people in work, like a couple of the girls, and they were like, yeah, like yeah that person's such a creep. […] So I went and I made a comment about it."

That is, social support from other women can be an important factor in helping women to challenge oppressive practices and behaviours.

Some of the participants also noted that connecting with other women had made them more aware of insidious or nuanced forms of sexism. P4 explained:

"Talking about it in general is helpful. And I think sometimes, when people talk about things that they've had, like things that I probably wouldn't have even seen before. So, now I would, like, see that. So I think even the, kind of, the raising awareness or looking out for the, kind of, small moments of sexism is quite helpful."

Thus, hearing other women's experiences can make women more cognisant of subtle sexism, allowing them to name and make sense of their experiences. Building on this, P1 described how the support of other women had helped her to feel validated and confirm her experiences as sexism.

P1: "It's very validating, kind of, cos sometimes you're not really sure if that sexism or was it not, am I just making a big fuss, and it's nice to sit down and talk and kind of have things validated."

It is hence likely that using other women as sounding boards can help women to resist the impact of silencing and feel that the emotional distress caused by sexism is justified.

Finally, the participants considered the importance of connecting with people outside of their immediate circles and involving men, too, in conversations about sexism.

P8: "I wanna have these sorts of conversations, I think, with women that aren't naturally, and with men, who aren't like really interested in it."

P9: "It would be nice to have a way to draw people in who maybe don't consider themselves to have a need for it."

P8: "I want people to feel welcome. I want men and women, because we need to work together."

This demonstrates the motivation of many of the participants to engage in collective action in pursuit of ending sexism on a societal level.

4. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss and critically evaluate the present study. The chapter begins with an interpretation of the findings in light of the previous literature, followed by a review of the research aims. I then evaluate the methodological quality of the study and provide a reflexive account of the research process.

4.1. INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study sought to explore women's experiences of sexism in contemporary UK. The grounded theory model, *Establishing and Policing the Gender Order* (see Figure 1, p. 57), captures two interrelated processes of *Reinforcing Inferiority* and *Punishing Transgression* which support and complement each other in perpetuating women's submission to the gender order. The theory also included processes related to *Coping with Sexism*, whereby women aim to contextualise their experiences and seek connection from others in pursuit of resisting the oppressive norms. In this section, I discuss how the findings relate and contribute to the literature.

4.1.1. Reinforcing Inferiority

This study highlighted the often-insidious nature of contemporary sexism whereby women are socialised into the gender order through cultural narratives and everyday interactions that reinforce women's inferiority. The participants experienced sexism as being so intrinsically interwoven into societal norms and codes of practice that it can be difficult for women to identify let alone challenge.

This finding corresponds with previous literature on modern forms of sexism, noting that the social pressures on individuals within contemporary societies to endorse egalitarian values can lead them to express their sexist beliefs in subtle rather than blatant ways (Swim et al., 1995; Swim & Cohen, 1997). What this study added to the literature was women's perspective on the matter. That is, while much of the previous research has investigated the extent to which

individuals endorse modern sexist beliefs and attitudes, this study provided insight into women's lived experiences of such discrimination.

Crucially, the participants reported a deep sense of disappointment resulting from the realisation that, despite women's increased advancement in the workforce and other social domains, many people continue to perceive women as inferior to men and assume that they will behave accordingly. For some of the participants it was the unthinking and automatic nature of this form of sexism which made it particularly hurtful, even more so than times where an individual was seen to be aware of his (or her) sexist behaviour. That is, the ability to conceive the behaviour of an individual as intentional bullying can make it easier for women to brush off such events as "he's just being an arsehole" (P8). In contrast, when the behaviour seems to reflect deep-seated, but unacknowledged, prejudiced beliefs about women, these incidents are more difficult to bypass.

Central to the participants' experiences of sexism was the internalisation of negative stereotypes and cultural portrayals of females, whereby women come to perceive themselves as inferior to men, and, therefore, as deserving of their lower social status. This is consistent with quantitative studies demonstrating the mediating role of self-esteem (Fischer & Bolton Holtz, 2007; Kira et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2016) as well as self-objectification (Carr & Szymanski, 2011; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014) in the link between sexist experiences and psychological distress. These findings also correspond with Powell and Sang's (2015) qualitative study which demonstrated how women in male-dominated professions may endorse sexist views which serve to justify or naturalise women's subordination. That is, being repeatedly undermined by others can lead women to view themselves as "less than" and accept their inferior social status.

This study offered richer insight into women's experiences of this process, explaining how everyday experiences of sexism can communicate to women that their accomplishments are not important, that their knowledge or abilities are inadequate, or that their value is purely based on their looks, thereby

stripping women of their self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-worth. In this way, sexism maintains gender equality by indoctrinating women into believing that their lower social standing is justified, thereby precluding them from challenging such oppressive norms.

In relation to the intersection of racism and sexism, the participants discussed cultural narratives and images of Black women reflecting a specific type of sexual objectification, namely exoticisation. This also emerged as a predominant theme in Lewis et al.'s (2016) qualitative study with Black women on a predominantly White US campus. However, contrary to Lewis et al.'s (2016) findings, this study found that the interpersonal experiences of Black women living in the UK do not necessarily correspond with the exoticising narrative. This exemplifies the importance of considering women's experiences of sexism within the socio-cultural context in which they occur.

Interestingly, a young Black woman in this study spoke of her experience of being ostracised and viewed as less of a woman by her White peers because she was deemed to be unattractive. This exemplifies how the essence of sexual objectification, namely the measuring of a woman's value on the basis of her appearance, can be made manifest in reverse when a woman is not seen to fit into the Eurocentric beauty standards. More research is needed to explore the multiple and interlocking forms of discrimination of women from different ethnic backgrounds, as well as women whose appearance contravene the narrow Western beauty ideals of thinness, beauty and youth.

4.1.2. Punishing Transgression

In addition to the insidious and subtle ways in which sexism operates in contemporary society, this study also offered understanding about women's experiences of blatant and hostile forms of sexism. That is, in contrast to the suggestions that expectations related to political correctness have resulted in sexism being expressed in less obvious ways than before (Swim et al., 1995; Swim & Hyers, 1997), this study demonstrated that blatant hostility and intimidation continues to be a central part of women's everyday experience of sexism.

The participants' narratives highlighted a sense of being punished for contravening the gender order, for instance, by entering traditionally masculine terrains, exhibiting sexual agency, or standing up to oppression. The punishment can take many forms, including shaming, ridiculing, intimidation, and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes, such as "the angry Black woman". These mechanisms can be viewed as a form of patriarchal "law-enforcement", reminding women of their "rightful" place in the hierarchy and discouraging them from infringing the norms.

This finding corresponds with the concept of hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001) defined as open antipathy towards women who oppose traditional gender norms. The backlash and stereotype maintenance model (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick & Phelan, 2012) further explains this process, denoting that, by inflicting penalties, members of social groups are precluded from attempting to enact a social role for which that group is stereotypically mismatched. That is, when a woman exhibits high-status qualities (e.g., agency or aggression), she is seen to violate gender-status rules, and backlash (e.g., withholding of social acceptance) is used to coerce her into conforming to gender norms. It follows that the fear of social rejection associated with violating gender role stereotypes can lead to women behaving in stereotype-congruent ways (Rudman et al., 2012).

Previous research exploring the influence of hostile sexism and the backlash effect on women have focused on the ways in which women internalise these expectations, typically studied using an experimental design under laboratory conditions (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). An examination of internalised sexism without an examination of the ways in which sexism manifests itself can contribute to the false notion that the issue is a problem internal to women rather than a result of systemic patriarchy. Therefore, the current study is an important addition to the literature as it provides deeper insight into women's experiences of the social processes whereby such backlash occurs.

Notably, the findings of this study highlighted a paradoxical injunction experienced by women in contemporary society. On one hand, if a woman

challenges the gender order she is likely to face backlash and feel ashamed of her behaviour, or feel frightened about the prospect of further reprimands. On the other hand, submitting to the gender role expectations can diminish a woman's sense of worth and leave her feeling responsible for perpetuating gender inequality. This "catch-22" whereby women feel like there are no good options for them was central to the participant's experience of sexism.

4.1.3. Coping with Sexism

This study also provided understanding about mechanisms which can help women withstand and resist sexism. Firstly, the participants' narratives highlighted the helpfulness of considering sexism in a wider societal context of patriarchy instead of as isolated, individual incidents. Secondly, the participants spoke of the importance of connecting with other similar women to support one another, as well as with men and the wider public in pursuit of societal change. These ideas reflect the two central organising principles of 1970s feminism: "the personal is political" and "sisterhood is powerful", indicating that, contrary to suggestions about post-feminism (e.g., Cole & Crossley, 2009), young women in contemporary UK society do appear to support collective feminist action.

These findings can be linked to Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development, which provides a framework for understanding the developmental process women go through in confronting sexism in contemporary society. According to this model, in becoming feminists, women move through the following five stages: (1) passive acceptance of traditional sex roles, (2) feeling angry about sexism and feeling guilty about one's own participation in the maintenance of gender inequality, (3) developing connections with other women, (4) developing a positive self-concept, and (5) active commitment to working toward societal change.

Many of the participants of this study expressed feelings and ideas congruent with several of the stages, including stage 2 (i.e., anger and self-blame), stage 3 (i.e., connecting with other women) and stage 5 (i.e., pursuing meaningful action). This indicates that the development of one's feminist identity is likely not a linear, step-by-step process as Downing and Roush's (1985) theory would

suggest but, instead, women may negotiate these differing positions on a concurrent and circular basis. Still, consistent with previous literature indicating that stages 3 to 5 are associated with lower levels of psychological distress while stages 1 and 2 correlate with greater distress (Fischer et al., 2000; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996), the participants of this study noted the positive impact of feminist consciousness on their mental health. That is, the women expressed how feminist reading and connecting with other women can help them resolve the anger, shame and self-blame elicited by sexism, thereby reducing the emotional toll of the oppressive experiences. This finding is significant because it informs implications for clinical practice, as discussed in section 4.3.1.

4.2.   EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH AIMS

This study sought to achieve the following aims:
- Develop fresh and in-depth understandings of the social and psychological processes involved in women's experiences of sexism
- Prioritise the voice of women in the production of knowledge about them
- Consider women's intersectional experiences of oppression

In this section, I evaluate the extent to which these aims were accomplished.

4.2.1. Fresh and In-depth Understandings of Social and Psychological Processes

The previous literature on sexism is rife with conceptualisations which are based on theoretical reasoning and as such may not fully reflect women's lived experiences. Furthermore, prior studies have focused on examining women's experiences of interpersonal sexism, investigating the psychological correlates of these experiences. That is, previous research has not sufficiently explored women's experiences of the social processes by which sexism is made manifest at various levels of society.

To achieve the fullest possible understanding of how women experience sexism in contemporary UK society, I felt that it was important that the concept of

sexism was not predefined for the participants but that the women were free to discuss anything that they considered to be a part of sexism. This approach yielded interesting data on a wide range of experiences, including subtle and blatant types of sexism, as well as interpersonal and cultural forms of sexism. The qualitative methodology also allowed the participants to provide elaborate explanations of their experiences, which facilitated the construction of a model encompassing both psychological and social processes.

However, while this approach produced novel and interesting findings, it also limited the depth in which particular ideas could be analysed. Indeed, the topic of women's experiences of sexism proved to be extremely broad with a lot of overlap and complexity. It is also possible that some experiences of sexism were not covered by the participants' data, because the women may not have deemed them to be relevant to the research or may not have remembered them at the time of the focus group. For example, while the women shared several examples of subtle forms of sexism, their accounts did not reveal incidences which could be termed "benevolent sexism", that is, the expression of seemingly positive, but in fact patronising, attitudes towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). It would not be accurate to conclude on the basis of this study that benevolent sexism is not a part of women's experience of sexism; instead, it may be that such events are rarely reported unless specifically asked for. Future qualitative studies may wish to narrow their research focus to a particular aspect of women's experience, especially when studying milder manifestations of sexism that can be easily missed.

In order to determine the transferability of these findings to other contexts, it is important to consider the characteristics of the participant sample. Firstly, the participants in this study were relatively young (18-37), which may have made them vulnerable to particular types of sexism. For instance, experiences of street harassment and other forms of overt sexual objectification accounted for a major proportion of the participants' data, which could be less prominent among older age groups of women. Secondly, all of the participants identified as cisgender and heterosexual, thus their experiences do not capture the added forms of oppressions encountered by lesbian, bisexual, transgender or gender-nonconforming women.

It is also expected that the participants' interpretations of their experiences would have been shaped by their specific educational backgrounds and world-views. Most of the women in this study were educated to a degree level or higher and therefore their views may differ from those of the wider public. Specifically, university education can enhance an individual's ability to think critically about socio-cultural issues, which may have helped the women in this study to contextualise their experiences of sexism. Furthermore, the majority of the participants did not identify with a specific religion, which may have impacted on the coping strategies they employed.

Thus, it is clear that the findings of this study do not represent the experiences of all women experiencing sexism; however, this was not the aim of the study. Instead, this study provided an in-depth exploration of the dynamics by which sexism operates within the socio-cultural contexts of the women who participated in this research.

4.2.2. Prioritising Women's Voices

This study aimed to prioritise the perspectives of women in the generation of knowledge pertaining to them. I sought to achieve this through the chosen methodology. That is, the open research question and the qualitative methodology allowed the participants the freedom to express themselves and provide rich descriptions of their experiences of sexism. However, while the focus group methodology was helpful in gaining data on women's collective experiences of sexism, it may have prevented some individuals from voicing views which deviated from the group's dominant narrative (Hennink, 2007; Lehoux et al., 2006). Such tendency toward conformity is considered to be one of the main limitations of focus groups as a data collection method (Sussman, Burton, Dent, Stacy & Flay, 1991) and may have created an inflated representation of a shared voice among the participants. That is, the model constructed from the participants' data may have prioritised the voice of some women over others.

A further issue in any research involving participants is the researcher-researched power imbalance. While the focus group methodology helped to minimise the power differential (Wilkinson, 1999), and the GT data analysis techniques allowed me to stay close to the participants' accounts in constructing the theory, I still had a final say over how the findings were interpreted and presented, thus, ultimately prioritising my voice over that of the participants.

Ashby (2011) criticised the very notion of "giving voice" within research as it assumes that participants' reality is there for the researcher to uncover and bring to light as opposed to being discursively created. Therefore, rather than attempting to "give voice", researchers should "facilitate voice and agency", further levelling the power hierarchy between the researcher and the participants (Ashby, 2011, p. 276). To do this, participants need to be engaged in all phases of the research process from project development to data collection to dissemination (Ashby, 2011). Thus, future research on women's experiences of sexism could take the form of participatory action research which is considered democratic, equitable, liberating and life-enhancing qualitative inquiry (Koch, Selim & Kralik, 2002).

4.2.3. Intersectional Experiences of Oppression

One of the aims of this study was to bring together the experiences of women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and explore the impact of intersecting social identities on women's experiences of sexism. Nevertheless, as the study was not focused on exploring the experiences of any particular minority group of women, the depth to which the women's experiences of intersecting forms of oppression could be explored was very limited. Furthermore, although I attempted to address the participants' experiences at the intersection of sexism and racism through my style of questioning (e.g., "What are your experiences of discrimination as a young Asian woman?"), the participants' descriptions were mainly related to sexism alone. It is possible that, as the study had been advertised as an exploration of sexism, some of the participants may not have considered other forms of oppression as relevant, precluding them from sharing such experiences in the focus groups. It is

recommended that future research will focus on exploring a specific aspect of intersectionality in order to gain a better understanding of these experiences.

4.3. IMPLICATIONS

This section discusses the implications of this study, including recommendations for clinical practice, social action and future research.

4.3.1. Clinical Practice

Based on the participants' accounts, it seems clear that sexism can be a major source of distress for women in contemporary society. Clinical psychologists can use these descriptions to better understand women's experiences and develop skills to better serve women through clinical practice. Most notably, this study highlights the importance for clinical psychologists to consider how living in a patriarchal society may contribute to the development and maintenance of female clients' presenting difficulties, instead of viewing psychological distress as a purely intrapsychic phenomenon. This finding is in accordance with the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2007) *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Girls and Women*, which call on psychologists to consider the problems of women and girls in their socio-political context. This study also reinforces the BPS's (2011) *Good Practice Guidelines on the Use of Psychological Formulation*, which advocate for broad-based formulations that locate "personal meaning within its wider systemic, organisational and societal contexts" (p. 2).

One of the most salient practical implications of this study relates to the power of feminist identity development in helping women to cope with the impact of sexism. Clinical psychologists should draw on this finding to support a female client in exploring the extent to which her difficulties are social in origin and thus facilitate her critical consciousness (i.e., "conscientização"; Freire, 1970). Assisting women to appreciate how their lives may have been constricted by the colonising influences of the larger society could diminish self-blame and support their personal esteem (Brown, 2010).

Furthermore, as highlighted by this study, other women can be a significant source of support and empowerment for women. Clinical psychologists could facilitate these connections by providing women with open spaces to share and explore their experiences. This could assist women in developing positive esteem and empower them to work together to effect socio-political change. The participants also noted the importance of including men, too, in conversations about sexism. Therefore, group-level interventions could also take the form of action-oriented, inter-gender workshops, similar to Calder-Dawe's (2014) programme for adolescent girls and boys, which facilitate an open discussion about feminist perspectives on sexism, gender, activism and power, encouraging participants to explore resonances and dissonances of such ideas in their lives. While the focus of such workshops is not the production of pre-determined outcomes (Calder-Dawe, 2014), they can further both men and women's critical consciousness about sexism and feminism, allowing them to change their personal outlook and behaviour, and ultimately use these perspectives to effect wider change.

However, as highlighted above, it is important to remember that the model constructed in this study does not represent the views of all women encountering sexism. Therefore, the findings should not be generalised to all female clients but clinicians should aim to understand each client's difficulties within the context of her personal experiences. Furthermore, while interventions focused on developing a feminist identity, as well as group-level approaches, can be helpful ways for some women to overcome the impact of sexism, other interventions may be more beneficial for others. As emphasised by the BPS (2011) guidelines, any intervention undertaken should be informed by a psychological formulation. Thus, while this study suggests some specific ways in which clinical psychologists can attend to female clients' experiences of sexism, they should not be seen to override the principles of formulation-based clinical practice.

Finally, it is important for clinical psychologists to attend to their own implicit and explicit gender biases. As demonstrated by this study, sexism is knit into societal norms and practices and may be communicated through subtle verbal and behavioural cues which can negatively impact on women. It is likely that,

like most people, psychologists hold some internalised sexist attitudes which may also enter the therapy process. Indeed, an exploration of women's experiences of gender microaggressions in short-term therapy (Owen, Tao & Rodolfa, 2010) indicated that female clients can encounter a range of sexist messages by therapists, both male and female, including stereotypical comments and beliefs about women, objectification of the client's body and sexist intervention suggestions. The experience of microaggressions in the therapeutic relationship can weaken a working alliance, which in turn may negatively affect clinical outcomes (Owen et al., 2010). It is therefore vital for psychologists to remain reflexive towards their own personal biases to stop the perpetuation of sexism within the therapy process and institutionally.

4.3.2. Social Action

This study draws attention to some of the social and cultural realities which impact on the lives of women. It has been argued that, as professionals with power and resources, clinical psychologists have a social responsibility to address these root causes of distress and promote meaningful and lasting change towards a more just society (Kagan et al., 2011; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The APA (2007) guidelines also advocate for psychologists to work to change systemic and institutional biases, underlining the importance of social change.

As a political act, research can seek to publicise the effects and processes of injustice and oppression (Patel, 2003). To this end, the findings of this study can be used to stimulate debates and inform campaigns raising public consciousness about the pervasiveness of sexism. However, it has been suggested that attitude change may be harder and slower to achieve than behaviour change (Williams & Aldred, 2011). Therefore, effecting laws and policies may be the most straightforward way to attain social change. The results of this study can be used to influence policy, for example, through providing consultation to policy makers and publishing policy briefings. Changing laws can then influence moral attitudes by re-characterising behaviour previously thought as harmless, as harmful (Bilz & Nadler, 2014).

An encouraging demonstration of the operationalisation of anti-sexist policies is the local example of Nottingham, which in July 2016 became the first city in the UK to expand definitions of hate crime to include misogynistic acts. Data is currently being gathered to evaluate the success of this policy change (Nottingham Women's Centre, 2018), however, preliminary findings have been promising, suggesting that over 150 incidents have been reported to the Police, and women are feeling more supported and confident to speak up against street harassment and other forms of overt sexism (Forrester, 2018).

Nevertheless, addressing more subtle forms of sexism, such as gender microaggressions, may require a different approach, possibly starting at an institutional rather than criminal justice level. For example, companies' ethical standards could be improved to include more inclusive diversity statements and HR policies can be used to create an open and supportive environment where complaints are taken seriously. Clinical psychologists can be involved in offering training to workforces to underline the seriousness of microaggressive incidents. This could foster a culture change within organisations, allowing subtle forms of sexism to be more easily detected and addressed.

4.3.3. Future Research

More feminist research is needed to ensure a continued and persistent dialogue about sexism as it operates in today's society. It is recommended that this research continues to focus on women's experiences as targets of contemporary sexism, as a way to facilitate the voice and agency of women. As already noted, these studies could take the form of participatory action research in order to minimise the researcher-participant power differential and to ensure that the research is conducted *with* women rather than *on* them (Ashby, 2011).

It is also desirable for future research to apply an intersectional analysis to the study of the unique experiences of contemporary forms of sexism among different racial, ethnic and cultural groups of women. Researchers may also wish to ask more nuanced research questions that explore the complexity of the experiences of sexism among specific populations, including groups of women who are considered to contravene the cultural ideal of women. For example, these studies could explore how gender microaggressions impact the lived

experiences of older women; or how transgender women experience hostile sexism. Furthermore, more research is needed to explore what has been termed *triple jeopardy* (Greene, 1994), that is, the intersections of sexism, racism and heterosexism among LGBT women from ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as the other multiple intersecting social identities.

Another line of research could focus on women who are not negatively impacted by sexism. Such studies could provide useful information about coping strategies or other variables that might serve as protective factors against the negative effects of sexism. Again, an intersectional approach is recommended to explore how women from different ethnic, cultural, social and religious backgrounds cope and make sense of their experiences. This information is important because it can have clinical practice implications, assisting professionals in meeting the needs of different populations.

4.4. EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGY

In this section, I evaluate the methodological quality of the study on the basis of Yardley's (2000) criteria: (1) sensitivity to context, (2) commitment and rigour, (3) transparency and coherence and (4) impact and importance.

4.4.1. Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2000) propounded assessing sensitivity of the analysis to the data itself, demonstrated by corroborating theoretical predictions and discriminations with compelling empirical evidence. I achieved this through the GT coding methods, including line-by-line coding and in vivo coding (Appendix 14), to ensure that the resulting categories and theory remained grounded in the participants' data. To further aid this process, I wrote memos on participants' quotations to analyse their significance and meaning in relation to the emerging theory (Appendix 12). Summarising the emergent theory at the beginning of focus groups 3 and 4 and eliciting participants' feedback allowed me to affirm the contextual fit of my analysis and establish respondent validity (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Yardley (2000) also advocated sensitivity to socio-cultural setting and consideration of how the beliefs, expectations and conversations of participants and researcher are influenced by socio-contextual factors. Drawing on intersectionality theory, I sought to remain attentive to how the sociocultural histories had shaped each participant's experiences and aimed to interpret the women's accounts within a matrix of oppression. In presenting the findings, I have provided detailed information about the characteristics of the participants, thus enabling readers to make inferences on the transferability of the findings outside of the present study.

In facilitating the focus groups, I remained attentive to the diverse social positions of the participants and the possible power imbalances resulting from this diversity. Specifically, I acknowledged that grouping women of varied ethnic backgrounds together may privilege the views of White women. Thus, a separate focus group was conducted for women of ethnic minority backgrounds to reduce this impact. While this study was not focused on exploring a specific aspect of intersectionality, care was taken during the analysis and write-up to represent the voices of ethnic minority women. I also reflected on the power imbalances between myself and the participants and considered the impact of this on the findings. This is evidenced through the extracts from my reflective diary (Appendix 3). I also considered these issues in section 2.1.1. of the Method chapter and will discuss these further in section 4.4.2. below.

4.4.2. Commitment and Rigour

The concept of commitment refers to the extent to which the researcher demonstrates in-depth engagement with the topic and thoroughness in data collection, use of method and analysis (Yardley, 2000). This was achieved through a detailed process of initial and focused coding (Appendix 14), and, subsequently, theoretical coding supported through memo writing (Appendix 12). The memos also demonstrate my engagement in a constant comparative method, whereby emergent hypotheses and assumptions were scrutinised against the data. These techniques allowed me to become fully immersed in the data.

The concept of rigour refers to the completeness of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Yardley, 2000). The data collected supplied the detail needed for a comprehensive analysis and theory development. To ensure the rigour of my analysis, I sought guidance from my supervisor throughout the process. The rigour was further enhanced by consulting a subsample of participants (P2, P11), who considered the model to be a meaningful and accurate representation of their experiences.

4.4.3. Transparency and Coherence

Yardley (2000) emphasised the importance of coherent and transparent presentation of the research. Effort has been made to depict this research project in a clear and transparent manner.

There was coherence between my research aim of highlighting the perspectives of women and the use of GT to produce an analysis grounded in the narratives of the participants. In obtaining a diverse sample of participants, I was consistent with my critical realist perspective, which would question the notion of a unitary experience of sexism.

4.4.4. Impact and Importance

Yardley (2000) argued that research utility is the most critical evaluative criterion of qualitative research. This study adds to the existing literature on sexism by providing a novel, theoretical understanding of women's experiences. The results of the study can help professionals to better understand and meet the needs of female clients (see section 4.3.1.) as well as to strive for meaningful macro-level change (see section 4.3.2.). To facilitate the research impact, I hope to publish the findings within an academic journal and am considering other avenues for dissemination in order to reach a wider audience. For example, I am exploring ways in which to disseminate the findings within the women's rights organisation involved in the study.

4.5. REFLEXIVE REVIEW

Gentles, Jack, Nicholas and McKibbon (2014) advocated reflexivity within GT to be used to account for interactions between the researcher and the participants, and the researcher and the research. I now consider each of these in turn.

4.5.1. Researcher-Participant Interactions

My interactions with the participants, from pre-recruitment to the completion of the focus groups, all played some role in their perceptions of me and the research, and ultimately the data they provided.

I believe my gender facilitated a trusting rapport with the women, as it implied a level of commonality of experiences. My position as a Trainee Clinical Psychologist may have informed the participants' expectations of appropriate discussion topics, such as experiences of distress. This also influenced how I engaged in the focus groups. I noticed that I often asked questions similar to those I would ask in a therapy session (e.g., "How did that make you feel?") thereby shaping the data provided by the participants. It is possible that a researcher with a non-clinical background may have prioritised different types of questions. I also found myself empathising with the participants as I would in a therapy session. Nevertheless, I believe this approach, recommended by Charmaz (2014), helped build rapport and was respectful of the women's experiences.

In interactions with the participants from ethnic minority backgrounds, I noticed that the topic of race felt sensitive and perhaps difficult to discuss due to the differences between myself and the participants. I noticed that I monitored myself more carefully and, at times, felt unsure about the phrasing of certain questions as I wished not to inadvertently offend the participants. It is possible that my race and self-censorship during the focus groups influenced the participants' proclivity to share issues pertaining to their race. I used the reflexive diary to facilitate my reflection on this matter (See Appendix 3).

4.5.2. Researcher-Research Interactions

The awareness of researcher influence on the data analysis is built into GT methodology by means of theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978; Hall & Callery, 2001). Thus, the process of analysing required me make constant comparisons between my personal experiences of sexism and the participants' accounts. In order to maintain the primacy of the empirical data, I used the reflexive diary to consider how my personal experiences corresponded with and deviated from those of the participants.

I also reflected on the impact of the research process on me and my position on sexism. Most notably, I felt that the research made me more aware of subtle forms of sexism. While, generally, I see this as a positive outcome as it allows me to address such incidences, it also led me to notice sexism more frequently than before. As a result, I have felt more irritated and disillusioned with the lack of progress made to combat sexism, similar to what many of the participants expressed. Reflecting on my personal experience using the reflexive diary (see Appendix 3) allowed me to see this phenomenon more clearly in the participants' data and bring it out in the analysis.

During the process of writing up the research, I have been aware of the responsibility I have in representing the views of the participants. My desire to do justice to the participants' experiences has, at times, lead to self-censorship, especially since many of the participants expressed a keen interest in reading the findings. Balancing the need to sufficiently anonymise the data of individual participants and the need to provide enough information has required sometimes arbitrary decisions about how much detail to provide. While being mindful of my responsibility as a researcher has ensured close adherence to ethical standards, this form of self-censorship may have also dulled the richness of some of the accounts provided.

4.6. CONCLUSION

This study provides insight into the social and psychological processes involved in women's experience of sexism in contemporary UK. The results suggested

that sexism impacts on women through two interrelated processes. Firstly, women encounter repeated, often casual, reminders of their inferiority in relation to men, and, secondly, women face judgement and punishment for violating gender-status rules. Both these mechanisms obstruct women's positive self-perception and ability to challenge the oppressive norms. Feminist identity development can help women to understand and cope with their experiences of sexism, and strive for meaningful social action. Psychologists can assist this process within therapy settings as well as by initiating macro-level change. Further feminist and intersectional research is needed to ensure a continued dialogue about women's oppression as it operates in today's society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Sample items of quantitative measures

<u>The Schedule of Sexist Events (SSE, Klonoff & Landrine, 1995)</u>

1. How many times have you been treated unfairly by teachers or professors because you are a woman?

2. How many times have you been treated unfairly by your employer, boss, or supervisor because you are a woman?

11. How many times have people made inappropriate or unwanted sexual advances to you because you are a woman?

12. How many times have people failed to show you the respect that you deserve because you are a woman?

<u>Gender Discrimination Inventory (GDI; Kira et al., 2015)</u>

Gender discrimination by parents:

3. I have been told by some family members that girls have less worth than boys

4. One of my parents (or both parents) neglected me because I am a girl

11. My parents trust and give greater liberty to boys than girls in choosing their education and career paths

13. My parents set stricter curfew time on me compared to my brother/s

Gender discrimination by society:

1. How many times have you been treated unfairly by strangers because you are a woman?

2. How many times have you been treated unfairly by neighbours because you are a woman?

3. How many times have people failed to show you the respect that you deserve because you are a girl / a woman?

Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale (ISOS; Kozee et al., 2007)

1. How often have you been whistled at while walking down a street?

2. How often have you noticed someone staring at your breasts when you are talking to them?

11. How often have you been touched or fondled against your will?

20. How often has someone grabbed or pinched one of your private body parts against your will?

Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1995)

Have you ever been in a situation where any individuals:

1. Habitually told suggestive stories or offensive jokes?

2. Made unwanted attempts to draw you into a discussion of personal or sexual matters (e.g., attempted to discuss or comment on your sex life)?

13. Touched you (e.g., laid a hand on your bare arm, put an arm around your shoulders) in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?

16. Implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative?

Stranger Harassment Index (SHI; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008)

1. Have you ever experienced offensive sexual remarks, jokes, or actions from a stranger?

2. Have you ever experienced seductive behaviour, remarks, or "come ons" from a stranger?

3. Have you ever experienced catcalls, whistles, or stares from a stranger?

6. Have you ever experienced direct or explicit pressure to cooperate sexually from a stranger?

7. Have you ever experienced subtle pressure or coercion to cooperate sexually from a stranger?

APPENDIX 2: Search strategies for the literature review

The Overarching Guiding Questions

Qualitative studies:
- How do women experience sexism?

Quantitative studies:
- What processes might explain the correlation between women's experiences of sexism and negative outcomes?

Stage 1: Initial Search

An initial scoping literature search was conducted using the search terms listed in the below table. The Boolean operator 'AND' was used to separate the different categories of terms. The Boolean operator 'OR' was used to separate terms within the same category:

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Woman	Sexism	Experience
Female	Discrimination	Experiences
Women	Prejudice	Perspective
Females	Harassment	Perspectives
Gender	Objectification	Influence
Sexual	Microaggression	Impact
Sexist	Microaggressions	

Limiters included:
- Publication year: 2007 – current
- Peer reviewed journal only
- English language only
- Adult only (18 and older)
- Human only
- Female only

These search terms and limiters were entered in the following databases: PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES and Academic Search Complete via EBSCO, and SCOPUS. A total of 4,545 articles were identified.

Stage 2: Review of Titles and Abstracts for Relevance

All titles and abstracts were checked for relevance to the topic. At this stage, the following questions guided the review:
- Is it about women's experiences of sexism?
    - o Studies examining sexist beliefs or attitudes were excluded

- o   Studies examining perpetrators' perspective were excluded
- Is it about *everyday* experiences of sexism?
  - o   Studies on severe or specific forms of sexual violence were excluded (e.g. rape, torture, domestic violence)
  - o   Studies examining sexism within highly specific contexts were excluded (e.g. Army)
- Is it about women's *lived* experiences
  - o   Studies using experimental manipulation were excluded

This stage identified 62 studies.

Stage 3: Full Review of Content

All the 62 studies were read in full and reviewed for relevance to the topic. At this stage, the following questions guided the review:
- Has it focused on examining the processes by which women experience sexism?
  - o   Studies focused on defining concepts or validating measures were excluded
  - o   Studies using two-variable correlational designs (i.e., sexism $\leftrightarrow$ distress) without examination of variables which explain the relationship were excluded

This stage identified a total of thirteen studies. This included ten quantitative studies and three qualitative studies. All of these studies were discussed in the literature review.

The diagram below summarises the step-by-step literature search process.

Step-by-step literature search:

Initial Search on EBSCO & SCOPUS — 4,545 studies

Review of Titles and Extracts

Is it about women's experience of sexism? → YES

546 studies

Is it about everyday sexism? → YES

277 studies

Is it about women's lived experiences? → YES

62 studies

Full Review of Content

Has it focused on processes involved in women's experiences? → YES

13 studies

10x Quantitative   3x Qualitative
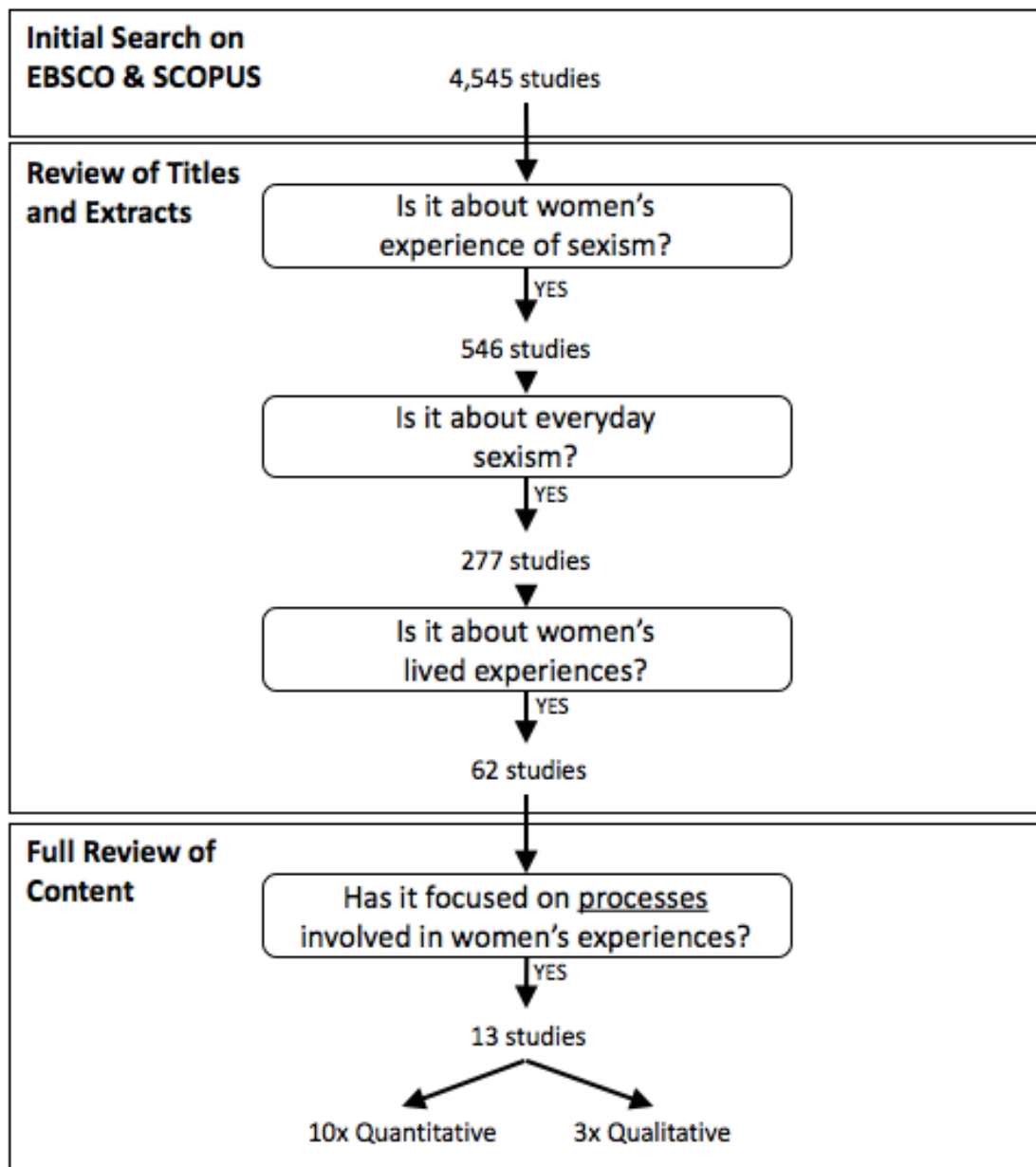
List of studies included in the literature review:

Quantitative Studies	Carr, E. R. & Szymanski, D. M. (2011). Sexual objectification and substance abuse in young adult women. *The Counselling Psychologist, 39*(1), 39-66.
	Carr, E. R., Szymanski, D. M., Taha, F., West, L. M. & Kaslow, N. J. (2014). Understanding the link between multiple oppressions and depression among African American women: The role of internalization. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 38*(2), 233-245.
	Davidson, M. M., Butchko, M. S., Robbins, K., Lindsey, W. S. & Gervais, S. J. (2016). The mediating role of perceived safety on street harassment and anxiety. *Psychology of Violence, 6*(4), 553-561.
	Fairchild, K. & Rudman, L. A. (2008). Everyday stranger harassment and women's objectification. *Social Justice Research, 21*, 338-357.
	Fischer, A. R. & Bolton Holz, K. (2007). Perceived discrimination and women's psychological distress: The roles of collective and personal self-esteem. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 54*(2), 154-164.
	Kira, I. A., Hanaa, S., Kucharska, J., Abu-Ras, W. & Bujold-Bugeaud, M. (2017). The dynamics underlying the negative mental health effects of gender discrimination in two samples: Poland and Egypt. *Journal of Mental Health,* 1-8
	Miles-McLean, H., Liss, M., Erchull, M. J., Robertson, C. M., Hagerman, C., Gnoleba, M.A. & Papp, L. J. (2015). "Stop looking at me!": Interpersonal sexual objectification as a source of insidious trauma. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 39*(3), 363-374.
	Szymanski, D. M. & Feltman, C. F. (2014). Experiencing and coping with sexually objectifying treatment: Internalization and resilience. *Sex Roles, 71*, 159-170.
	Watson, L. B., DeBlaere, C., Langrehr, K. J., Zelaya, D. G. & Flores, M. J. (2016). The influence of multiple oppressions on women of color's experiences with insidious trauma. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 63*(6), 656-667.
	Watson, L., Marszalek, J., Dispenza, F., & Davids, C. (2015). Understanding the relationships among White and African American women's sexual objectification experiences, physical safety anxiety, and psychological distress. *Sex Roles, 72*, 91-104.
Qualitative Studies	Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., Browne Huntt, M. (2016). "Ain't I a woman?": Perceived gendered racial microaggressions experienced by Black women. *The Counselling Psychologist, 44*(5), 758-780.
	Mukkamala, S. & Suyemoto, K. L. (2018). Racialised sexism/sexualized racism: A multimethod study of intersectional experiences of discrimination for Asian American women. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 9*(1), 32-46.
	Powell, A. & Sang, K. J. C. (2015). Everyday experiences of sexism in male-dominated professions: A Bordieusian perspective. *Sociology, 49*(5), 919-936.

APPENDIX 3: Excerpts from reflexive journal

Journal entry following Focus Group 4:

In this group, I was particularly conscious of the power imbalance between myself and the participants. Asian women are such a marginalised group (especially during the current time of increased Islamophobia) that they deserve to have their voices elevated. I feel uneasy about the fact that I have the power to represent the voices of these women, yet there is so much that I don't know about their experiences. Even though I have been making an effort to reduce the power imbalance through my methodology, it is still ultimately my voice and not that of the participants which is represented in the final thesis. I also feel that one focus group is not enough to fully unpick the complexity of what these women experience, you would need an entire project only devoted to that aim!

I also feel that my style of questioning of the intersectional experiences of oppression did not yield much data which would be qualitatively different to the experiences of the White majority women in this study. I wonder whether, in agreeing to take part in the focus group, the participants were expecting to only discuss sexism and not their experiences of other forms of oppression.

I also feel that I was not able to ask certain questions as directly as I would have liked because I was worried that they may be seen as offensive. As a White woman, I do not know what it feels like to be oppressed because of the colour of your skin or your cultural heritage, so I found that I was second-guessing my approach a lot in this focus group. I am conscious that my self-censoring may have limited the richness of the data that I was able to gather in this focus group.

Journal entry during theory development:

I have a strange analogy in my mind regarding the theory: domestic violence. I imagine 'Reinforcing inferiority' as the daily, ongoing emotional abuse that a victim of domestic violence would experience from the abuser. That is, constantly being told that they are not good enough, that they are stupid, that they are not worthy, that they could never do better etc., which would stop the victim from leaving the relationship. 'Punishing transgression' is like the violent backlash that follows should the victim make an attempt to flee the relationship. Although living in a patriarchal system can sometimes feel like being in an abusive relationship, I do recognise that domestic violence is a very serious and severe form of oppression, impacting numerous women (and men) across the world. As I do not wish to downplay or override the experiences of the victims, this analogy is not suitable for the theory of this study.

Journal entry on a personal experience of sexism:

I got really annoyed on the tube on my way home today. Just the way in which that man was looking at the woman made me feel so uncomfortable. I wonder if the woman even noticed it and, if she did, whether she thought anything of it.

This is another example of me becoming more alert to sexism as it happens in day-to-day interactions. It is making me feel quite disillusioned with the lack of progress made to combat sexism. (I mean, how are we still here!) I remember that some of the participants (e.g. P10, P9) were talking about the same thing so I shall revisit the transcript and see how this fits with the emerging theory. More than ever, I feel like this study is of vital importance and I need to keep going to fight for gender equality.

APPENDIX 4: UEL Ethics application and approval

<div align="center">

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON
School of Psychology

</div>

<div align="center">

APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

</div>

<div align="center">

FOR BSc RESEARCH

FOR MSc/MA RESEARCH

FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL,
COUNSELLING & EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

</div>

*Students doing a <u>Professional Doctorate in Occupational & Organisational Psychology</u> <u>and PhD candidates</u> should apply for research ethics approval through the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and not use this form. Go to:
http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/

If you need to apply to have ethical clearance from another Research Ethics Committee (e.g. NRES, HRA through IRIS) you DO NOT need to apply to the School of Psychology for ethical clearance also.
Please see details on www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/external-committees.
Among other things this site will tell you about UEL sponsorship
Note that you do not need NHS ethics approval if collecting data from NHS staff except where the confidentiality of NHS patients could be compromised.

Before completing this application please familiarise yourself with:

The *Code of Human Research Ethics (2014)* published by the British Psychological Society (BPS). This can be found in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard (Moodle) and also on the BPS website
http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/code_of_human_research_ethics_dec_2014_inf180_web.pdf

And please also see the UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics (2015)
http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/

<u>HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION</u>

1. Complete this application form electronically, fully and accurately.

2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (5.1).

3. Include copies of all necessary attachments in the **ONE DOCUMENT** SAVED AS **.doc** (See page 2)

4. Email your supervisor the completed application and all attachments as **ONE DOCUMENT**. INDICATE '<u>ETHICS SUBMISSION</u>' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD OF THIS EMAIL so your supervisor can readily identity its content. Your supervisor will then look over your application.

5. When your application demonstrates sound ethical protocol your supervisor will type in his/her name in the 'supervisor's signature' section (5.2) and submit your application for review (psychology.ethics@uel.ac.uk). You should be copied into this email so that you know your application has been submitted. It is the responsibility of students to check this.

6. Your supervisor should let you know the outcome of your application. <u>Recruitment and data collection are **NOT** to commence until your ethics application has been approved, along with other research ethics approvals that may be necessary</u> (See 4.1)

ATTACHMENTS YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS APPLICATION

1. A copy of the invitation letter that you intend giving to potential participants.

2. A copy of the consent form that you intend giving to participants.

3. A copy of the debrief letter you intend to give participants (see 23 below)

OTHER ATTACHMENTS (AS APPROPRIATE)

- A copy of original and/or pre-existing questionnaire(s) and test(s) you intend to use.

- Example of the kinds of interview questions you intend to ask participants.

- Copies of the visual material(s) you intend showing participants.

- A copy of ethical clearance or permission from an external organisation if you need it (e.g. a charity or school or employer etc.). Permissions must be attached to this application but your ethics application <u>can</u> be submitted to the School of Psychology before ethical approval is obtained from another organisation if separate ethical clearance from another organisation is required (see Section 4).

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates:

- **FOR BSc/MSc/MA STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS:** A scanned copy of a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. <u>A current certificate is one that is not older than six months.</u> This is necessary if your research involves young people

(anyone 16 years of age or under) or vulnerable adults (see Section 4 for a broad definition of this). A DBS certificate that you have obtained through an organisation you work for is acceptable as long as it is current. If you do not have a current DBS certificate, but need one for your research, you can apply for one through the HUB and the School will pay the cost.

If you need to attach a copy of a DBS certificate to your ethics application but would like to keep it confidential please email a scanned copy of the certificate directly to Dr Mary Spiller (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) at m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk

- **FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS:** DBS clearance is necessary if your research involves young people (anyone under 16 years of age) or vulnerable adults (see 4.2 for a broad definition of this). The DBS check that was done, or verified, when you registered for your programme is sufficient and you will <u>not</u> have to apply for another in order to conduct research with vulnerable populations.

<u>Your details</u>

1. **Your name**:

Tanja Takala

2. **Your supervisor's name**:

David Harper

3. **Title of your programme**: (e.g. BSc Psychology)

Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy)

4. **Title of your proposed research**: (This can be a working title)

An Exploration of Women's Experiences of Discrimination in the UK

5. **Submission date for your BSc/MSc/MA research:**

6. **Please tick if your application includes a copy of a DBS certificate** ☐

7. **Please tick if you need to submit a DBS certificate with this application but have emailed a copy to Dr Mary Spiller for confidentiality reasons (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) (**m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk**)** ☐

8. **Please tick to confirm that you have read and understood the <u>British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014)</u> and the <u>UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics</u>** (See links on page 1) ☐

2. About the research

9. The aim(s) of your research:

To develop a model that conceptualises the social processes associated with women's experiences of gender-based discrimination in the UK.

10. Likely duration of the data collection from intended starting to finishing date:

Data collection will start in May 2017 and finish by May 2018.

Methods

11. Design of the research:
(Type of design, variables etc. If the research is qualitative what approach will be used?)

The study will use the qualitative methodology of Grounded Theory.

This will involve data collection using focus groups of four to six participants. The researcher will write memos as data is collected, coding the data into theoretical concepts and interpreting it into tentative analytic categories. Further focus groups, and possibly interviews, will be carried out to check and refine these categories until the emergence of a hypothetical model. In line with Grounded Theory, research questions will evolve and interview questions will be amended accordingly, in an iterative process as analysis from each interview is generated. Focus groups will be approximately 1.5 hours in duration, and individual interviews will last about 50-60 minutes each.

12. The sample/participants:
(Proposed number of participants, method of recruitment, specific characteristics of the sample such as age range, gender and ethnicity - whatever is relevant to your research)

Participants will be recruited from University of East London (UEL) campuses and the surrounding neighbourhood. Participants are hoped to represent the wide ethnic and social diversity of the UEL student population and the communities of the nearby boroughs. Posters will be distributed in public areas requesting research assistance. Prospective participants will need to be 18 or over and identify as women in order to participate.

All potential participants will be given an information sheet regarding the research and a consent form which will be signed prior to commencement of focus groups.

13. Measures, materials or equipment:
(Give details about what will be used during the course of the research. For example, equipment, a questionnaire, a particular psychological test or tests, an interview schedule or other stimuli such as visual material. See note on page 2 about attaching copies of questionnaires and tests to this application. If you are using an interview schedule for qualitative research attach example questions that you plan to ask your participants to this application)

An interview schedule will be used for each focus group and interview. An open-ended demographic questionnaire will ask participants to provide

information about their backgrounds. The initial interviews will consist of four questions. However, this schedule will evolve as the analysis is developed. An audio-recorder will be used to record interviews and facilitate transcription onto a password-protected computer, which will also be used to store transcripts.

14. If you are using copyrighted/pre-validated questionnaires, tests or other stimuli that you have not written or made yourself, are these questionnaires and tests suitable for the age group of your participants?

<div align="right">NA</div>

15. Outline the data collection procedure involved in your research:
(Describe what will be involved in data collection. For example, what will participants be asked to do, where, and for how long?)

Posters will be hung at the facilities of University of East London and distributed to female students at the campus. Posters will also be distributed at local shopping centres. Participants can express their interest to participate to the researcher in person or via email address provided.

Those who agree to participate will be given an information sheet and a consent form to read through. The researcher will arrange a time and date for the focus groups which will last approximately 1 hour 30 minutes each.

At a later stage in the research, it may become appropriate to collect data through individual interviews. Participants for the interviews will be recruited using posters as above. The interviews will be about 50-60 minutes in duration. The interview schedule for the interviews will be developed at a later stage on the basis of data analysis.

The focus groups and the interviews will take place in a room at the University of East London Stratford Campus and only commence after the consent form is signed. The focus groups and the interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis by the researcher within three months. After each focus group (or interview), research questions will be reconsidered and interview schedules amended, in consultation with Supervisor.

3. Ethical considerations

Please describe how each of the ethical considerations below will be addressed:

16. Fully informing participants about the research (and parents/guardians if necessary): Would the participant information letter be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary?

Participants will be given an information sheet regarding the research. The researcher will be available to answer any questions about the research.

17. Obtaining fully informed consent from participants (and from parents/guardians if necessary): Would the consent form be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary? Do you need a consent form for both young people and their parents/guardians?

A consent form will be provided to potential participants before the commencement of focus groups or interviews. There will be an opportunity to ask for further information or clarification about any parts of the research. Each participant will be required to sign the consent form before focus groups or interviews commence.

18. Engaging in deception, if relevant:
(What will participants be told about the nature of the research? The amount of any information withheld and the delay in disclosing the withheld information should be kept to an absolute minimum.)

The proposed research involves no deception.

19. Right of withdrawal:
(In this section, and in your participant invitation letter, make it clear to participants that 'withdrawal' will involve deciding not to participate in your research and the opportunity to have the data they have supplied destroyed on request. This can be up to a specified time, i.e. not after you have begun your analysis. Speak to your supervisor if necessary.)

Participants will be advised that they have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without any disadvantage to them and without being obliged to give any reason. This will be made clear to participants on the information sheet and consent form. Withdrawing from the project would include deleting any audio recordings and interview transcripts if the participant indicated this was their wish. Because of the iterative nature of Grounded Theory analysis, the researcher reserves the right to make broad reference to themes or issues generated out of a participant's interview even if they have withdrawn from the study, if this is necessary to justify any amendments made to the research questions, interview schedules and development of analysis. Care will be taken that no particular extracts or details will be referred to in such a circumstance.

20. Anonymity & confidentiality: (Please answer the following questions)

20.1. Will the data be gathered anonymously?
(i.e. this is where you will not know the names and contact details of your participants? In qualitative research, data is usually not collected anonymously because you will know the names and contact details of your participants)

NO

21. If NO what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?
(How will the names and contact details of participants be stored and who will have access? Will real names and identifying references be omitted from the reporting of data and transcripts etc? What will happen to the data after the study is over? Usually names and contact details will be destroyed after data collection but if there is a possibility of you developing your research (for publication, for example) you may not want to destroy all data at the end of the study. If not destroying your data at the end of the study, what will be kept, how, and for how long? Make this clear in this section and in your participant invitation letter also.)

Due to the nature of focus groups, each participant will share information about themselves with the others in the group. The researcher will encourage all participants to keep confidential what they hear during the session and not repeat any portion of the discussion outside of the group.

The researcher will be aware of the identities of the participants. Participant details will be kept in a secure environment and not shared with anyone else.

They will be omitted from the interview transcripts. Measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of participants through the use of pseudonyms or other non-identifying references in the final thesis and any resulting publications. Audio recording files will be stored on a password-protected computer and erased after analysis. Only the researcher will have access to these files. Transcripts will be stored on the same password-protected computer, and only the researcher, Supervisor and Examiners will have access to them. Transcripts will be deleted three years after the study.

Participants will be informed before the focus groups commence that confidentiality may need to be breached in the event of them disclosing anything that causes the researcher to have serious concerns about the safety of the participant or others. These concerns, should they arise, will be discussed with the Supervisor before confidentiality is broken.

22. Protection of participants:

(Are there any potential hazards to participants or any risk of accident of injury to them? What is the nature of these hazards or risks? How will the safety and well-being of participants be ensured? What contact details of an appropriate support organisation or agency will be made available to participants in your debrief sheet, particularly if the research is of a sensitive nature or potentially distressing?)

There are no potential hazards or risks of injury or accident to participants. Participants may become upset if they discuss topics that are difficult or emotional. The researcher will be alert to any signs of distress in participant, and ask the individual what he or she would like to do. Contact details of organisations that can offer support will be given to all participants.

N.B: If you have serious concerns about the safety of a participant, or others, during the course of your research see your supervisor before breaching confidentiality.

23. Protection of the researcher:

(Will you be knowingly exposed to any health and safety risks? If equipment is being used is there any risk of accident or injury to you? If interviewing participants in their homes will a third party be told of place and time and when you have left a participant's house?)

There are no specific risks to the researcher. Interviews will be conducted at University of East London Stratford Campus, and Campus Security will be aware of the times and locations of the interviews.

24. Debriefing participants:

(Will participants be informed about the true nature of the research if they are not told beforehand? Will participants be given time at the end of the data collection task to ask you questions or raise concerns? Will they be re-assured about what will happen to their data? Please attach to this application your debrief sheet thanking participants for their participation, reminding them about what will happen to their data, and that includes the name and contact details of an appropriate support organisation for participants to contact should they experience any distress or concern as a result of participating in your research.)

Participants will be given time at the end of the interview to ask any questions. There is no deception involved in the study. Participants will be reminded of what will happen to the data and asked if they are still happy to take part in the study.

25. Will participants be paid? YES

If YES how much will participants be paid and in what form (e.g. cash or vouchers?)
Why is payment being made and why this amount?

Each participant will receive an Amazon voucher for the amount of £5. This amount is thought be optimal in serving as a gesture of appreciation without exerting undue pressure on any individual to take part in the research. Thus, the payment is not believed to over-ride the principles of informed consent. The participants will be informed that they can refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any point without losing their payment. The researcher will also offer to reimburse the participants' travel costs.

26. Other:
(Is there anything else the reviewer of this application needs to know to make a properly informed assessment?)

4. Other permissions and ethical clearances

27. Is permission required from an external institution/organisation (e.g. a school, charity, local authority)?

NO

If your project involves children at a school(s) or participants who are accessed through a charity or another organisation, you must obtain, and attach, the written permission of that institution or charity or organisation. Should you wish to observe people at their place of work, you will need to seek the permission of their employer. If you wish to have colleagues at your place of employment as participants you must also obtain, and attach, permission from the employer.

If YES please give the name and address of the institution/organisation:

Please attach a copy of the permission. A copy of an email from the institution/organisation is acceptable.

In some cases you may be required to have formal ethical clearance from another institution or organisation.

28. Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee?

NO

If YES please give the name and address of the organisation:

Has such ethical clearance been obtained yet?   NA

If NO why not?

If YES, please attach a scanned copy of the ethical approval letter. A copy of an email   from the organisation is acceptable.

PLEASE NOTE: Ethical approval from the School of Psychology can be gained before approval from another research ethics committee is obtained. However, recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your research has been approved by the School and other ethics committees as may be necessary.

29. Will your research involve working with children or vulnerable adults?*
                                                                                 NO

If YES have you obtained and attached a DBS certificate?   NA

If your research involves young people under 16 years of age and young people of limited competence will parental/guardian consent be obtained.

NA

If NO please give reasons. (Note that parental consent is always required for participants who are 16 years of age and younger)

* You are required to have DBS clearance if your participant group involves (1) children and young people who are 16 years of age or under, and (2) 'vulnerable' people aged 16 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, and people living in institutions and sheltered accommodation, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability of vulnerable people to give consent should be used whenever possible. For more information about ethical research involving children see www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/involving-children/

30. Will you be collecting data overseas?   NO
     This includes collecting data/conducting fieldwork while you are away from the
     UK on holiday or visiting your home country.

* If YES in what country or countries will you be collecting data?

Please note that ALL students wanting to collect data while overseas (even when going home or away on holiday) MUST have their travel approved by the Pro-Vice Chancellor International (not the School of Psychology) BEFORE travelling overseas.

IN MANY CASES WHERE STUDENTS ARE WANTING TO COLLECT DATA OTHER THAN IN THE UK (EVEN IF LIVING ABROAD), USING ONLINE SURVEYS AND DOING INTERVIEWS VIA SKYPE, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD COUNTER THE NEED TO HAVE PERMISSION TO TRAVEL

5. Signatures

TYPED NAMES ARE ACCEPTED AS SIGNATURES

Declaration by student:

I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor.

Student's name: Tanja Takala

Student's number: u1120059   Date: 28/11/2016

Declaration by supervisor:

I confirm that, in my opinion, the proposed study constitutes a suitable test of the research question and is both feasible and ethical.

Supervisor's name: David Harper   Date:

YOU MUST ATTACH THESE ATTACHMENTS:

1. **PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER(S)**

See pro forma in the ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on Moodle. This can be adapted for your own use and must be adapted for use with parents/guardians and children if they are to be involved in your study.

Care should be taken when drafting a participant invitation letter. It is important that your participant invitation letter fully informs potential participants about what you are asking them to do and what participation in your study will involve – what data will be collected, how, where? What will happen to the data after the study is over? Will anonymised data be used in write ups of the study, or conferences etc.? Tell participants about how you will protect their anonymity and confidentiality and about their withdrawal rights.

Make sure that what you tell potential participants in this invitation letter matches up with what you have said in the application

2. CONSENT FORM(S)

Use the pro forma in the ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard on Moodle. This should be adapted for use with parents/guardians and children.

3. PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

<u>OTHER ATTACHMENTS YOU MAY NEED TO INCLUDE:</u>

See notes on page 2 about what other attachments you may need to include – your debrief document for participants? Example interview questions? A questionnaire you have written yourself? Visual stimuli? Ethical clearance or permission from another institution or organisation?)

SCANNED COPY OF CURRENT DBS CERTIFICATE
(If one is required. See notes on page 3)

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates

REVIEWER: Poul Rohleder

SUPERVISOR: David Harper

COURSE: Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

STUDENT: Tanja Takala

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: An Exploration of Women's Experiences of Discrimination in the UK

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

1. As the researcher will be recruiting UEL students, there may be a duty to report any incidence of gender-based discrimination or harassment taking place at UEL by a member of UEL staff or student body. This should be made clear in the information sheet around confidentiality and in the ethics form.

2. In the demographic form, asking participants for their postcode may be asking for too much personal detail. Is this information needed? If so, I suggest asking for the first part of their postcode (e.g. E15; N22 etc), which will indicate area but not street.

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

	HIGH
	MEDIUM
X	LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*:   Poul Rohleder

Date: 07/06/2017

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):*   Tanja Takala
Student number: u1120059

Date: 16 June 2017

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title

An Exploration of Women's Experiences of Sexism in the UK.

Project Description

Every day, many women in the UK experience discrimination because of their gender. Over the past decades, sexism has become less obvious, but modern, more subtle forms of discrimination can be just as harmful. The aim of this research is to hear about women's experiences of discrimination; specifically, how women are impacted by these experiences and what they do to manage them. The research will be written up in the form of an academic thesis and I may develop this into an article that is submitted for publication. This research could help professionals and the public to better understand the nature of modern discrimination in the UK. This will hopefully lead to the development of better services and support systems for women who are impacted by such experiences, and to actions to address and put an end to the discrimination of women on a societal level.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

You will be invited to take part in a focus group consisting of four to six women talking about their experiences of discrimination. Each woman will only be asked to attend one focus group which will usually last around 1.5 hours. If you decide to take part in a focus group, I will ask you to think about times when you may have been discriminated against because of your gender; how you reacted in that situation, how you felt after the event, and what you make of what happened. The discussion will largely depend on what each person decides to talk about in the focus group.

Where and when?

Focus groups will take place at the University of East London Stratford Campus, E15 4LZ, between Monday and Friday after 5pm. I will contact you to agree on a date and time that suit you.

Who can take part?

Anyone aged 18+ who identifies as a woman, lives in London, and can communicate fluently in English.

Will I be reimbursed for my time?

As a thank you for helping in the research, I will offer you an Amazon voucher for the value of £5. You will receive the voucher even if you refuse to answer questions or choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Travel costs will also be reimbursed.

What are the benefits of taking part?

I hope that participating in this research will offer an empowering experience, as you discuss with other women experiences of sexism and contribute to a study which aims to address gender inequality in our society.

Is it private?

If you decide to take part in a focus group, you will share information about yourself with the others in the group. Group members, including yourself, are requested to keep confidential what they hear during the meeting and not repeat any portion of the discussion outside of the group.

I will record all of the focus groups on a digital voice recorder so I can remember what we talked about. The audio-recordings will be immediately transferred to a password-protected computer file on a secure network and deleted from the recording device. I will be the only person to listen to the recording and I will type it up into a transcript. If you mention any names, including yours, and if you say some information that someone could identify you from, it will be changed (anonymised) in the typed version. This typed transcript may be read by my supervisor at the University of East London and the examiners who test me when I hand the research in to be marked. No one else will be able to read the transcript.

The only time that I would need to share what we talked about with someone else is if you disclose involvement in criminal activity and you or another person is believed to be at significant risk of harm. I would do my best to let you know first if I needed to tell someone else.

How will my data be used?

The final write-up will include a small number of quotes from the focus groups. I will make sure any of the comments that I include in the final write-up are altered so that you will not be identified from them.

How long will my data be kept for?

After the examination, I will delete these recordings from the computer. The written transcript will be kept as a computer file for three years and might be used to write the research up into an article to be published in a psychology journal.

What else should I be aware of before making my decision?

Although this research is not designed to cause you discomfort or distress, it is possible that you may find talking about your experiences of sexism difficult or upsetting. Should you become distressed during a focus group, I will ask you what you would like me to do. I will provide all participants with details of organisations that can offer support. You have the option to request the group

to take a break at any time or you can I decide to leave before the end of the session.

You do not have to take part in this study and should not feel that you have to. If you decide to participate, you will be able to withdraw at any time, even after the focus group, and you don't have to say why. If you do pull out, your contribution to the focus group will not be included in the write-up.

In this research, the discussions in one focus group may change the questions I ask the next group. As a result of this, if you pull out of the study after participating, I might need to mention a theme or an issue that was raised by you. This may be if I need to make clear when I am writing up the research why I asked other people particular questions, or if the examiners ask me why I made certain decisions. Should this happen, I would only refer to the themes in a very general way and not use your exact words. As stated above, your name or any other identifying information will not be linked to what you said in the focus groups.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

The researcher can be contacted at: moderndaysexism@gmail.com

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor: Dr David Harper, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Tel: 020 8223 4021. Email: d.harper@uel.ac.uk)

Or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. (Tel: 020 8223 4493. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk)

APPENDIX 6: Consent form

Consent to participate in a research study

Project title: *An Exploration of Women's Experiences of Sexism in the UK.*

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. What the research involves and why it is being done have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to talk about it and ask questions. I understand what I am being asked to do and what will happen if I take part.

I understand that I will be sharing personal information with the others in the group, and that everybody, including myself, is expected to keep confidential what they hear during the discussion. I understand that the researcher will keep confidential my involvement in this study, and the things I say in the focus group. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to audio-recordings of the focus group. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) .

....

Participant's Signature

....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

....

Researcher's Signature

....

Date: ....

APPENDIX 7: Debrief form

Thank you for taking part in this research.

If you have been affected or feel distressed by any of the issues discussed in this study, please see below contact details for organisations that can offer you support.

Samaritans: 08457 909090

Women's Aid: 0808 2000 247

Victim Support: 0808 1689 111

NHS 24/7 Helpline: 08454 242424

Mind: 03001233393

Rape Crisis: 0808 802 9999

National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 999 5428

National Centre for Domestic Violence: 0800 970 2070

Yours sincerely,

Tanja Takala
Researcher

APPENDIX 9: Interview schedule

Setting up:
The purpose of the study is summarised at the beginning of the focus group and participants are given a copy of the participant information sheet. Main points relating to confidentiality and data privacy are reiterated and participants are invited to ask questions. Participants are then asked to read and sign the consent form. Participants are given their vouchers and asked to sign receipt.

Participants are given an idea of what to expect from the focus group (e.g., length of time, informing that they can speak directly to one another, reminding that they can take breaks if needed). Participants are asked to respect the privacy of one another and not discuss details of the conversation outside of the focus group. After this, the focus group will commence:

Introductions and motivation to participate:
  - Please introduce yourself
  - What made you want to take part in this study?

Examples of sexism:
(If the first question elicits examples of experiences of sexism, return to these and ask the participant to tell more. If not, ask:)
  - Would anyone like to talk about a time when they experienced sexism?

Initial reactions and responses:
  - How did you feel in that situation?
  - What did you think was their intention?
  - How did you react in that situation?

Outcomes:
  - What happened after you reacted?
  - What did you think of their reaction?
  - How did you feel afterwards?

Reflections:
  - How do you feel talking about it now?
  - Looking back, what do you make of what happened?
  - Is there anything you would like to have done differently?

Coping:
  - Have you found a helpful way to make sense of your experiences?
  - Is there anything that has made it easier for you to cope with your experiences?

Eliciting responses from others:

- Does hearing [Participant X] describe that situation remind you of anything you have experienced?

Closing the focus group:
- How did you find the discussion?
- What, for you, was the most important point of the discussion?

Thank participants for their time and remind them about what will happen to their data. Participants are given a debrief form.

APPENDIX 10: Demographic information form

Demographic Information Form

1. What is your name?

   _____

2. What is your date of
   birth?_____

3. Which borough do you live in?

   _____

4. Which of the below best describe your ethnic group or background (please tick **one** box)?

   A. White
      English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
      Irish
      Gypsy or Irish Traveller
      Any other White background (please
      specify)_____

   B. Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
      African
      Caribbean
      Any other Black background (please
      specify)_____

   C. Asian / Asian British
      Indian
      Pakistani
      Bangladeshi
      Chinese
      Any other Asian background (please
      specify)_____

   D. Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
      White and Black Caribbean
      White and Black African
      White and Asian
      Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background (please specify)

      _____

   E. Any other ethnic group (please
      specify)_____

5. With what (if any) religion do you identify?_____

6. Which one of the below best describe your sexual orientation:

    Heterosexual
    Gay
    Lesbian
    Bisexual
    Other (please
    specify)_____

7. What is your current relationship status?

    Single
    In relationship but not living with partner
    Living with partner
    Married / Civil Partnership
    Other (please
    specify)_____

8. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

    Left school before 16
    Secondary school qualification
    College / sixth form qualification
    Diploma / vocational qualification
    Undergraduate degree
    Postgraduate degree
    Other (please
    specify)_____

9. How would you describe your current employment status?

    Working (full or part-time)
    At college or university
    In training
    Unemployed
    On long-term sick
    Retired
    Other (please
    specify)_____

10. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

    No
    Yes – I have a physical disability
    Yes – I have a sensory disability
    Yes – I have a learning disability

APPENDIX 11: Transcription scheme

(Amended from Banister et al., 2011)

- To signify researcher's speech: Tanja (researcher's name)
- To signify participant's speech: participant's number (e.g., P1, P2, P3)
- To signify a pause / hesitation: (.)
- To signify a longer pause / hesitation: (number of seconds)
- To signify a word spoken with more emphasis than others: emphasis
- To signify laughter: [laughter]
- To signify a brief interruption by another speaker: <>
- To signify a longer interruption by another speaker: / /

APPENDIX 12: Excerpts of memos

(A) Analysing participants' quotations for significance and contribution in the evolving theory

<u>Memo 28/10/2017: "Women are just there to look pretty" (P1)</u>
This appears to capture the essence of women's experience of sexual objectification, especially in relation to street harassment. These experiences seem to highlight that a woman's value is measured purely on the basis of her appearance.

<u>Memo 29/10/2017: "Being sexually promiscuous or performing sexual acts is something to be ashamed about as a woman." (P2)</u>
This relates to "slut shaming" whereby women are maligned for exhibiting sexual agency. There is a strong sense of a double standard whereby men are allowed to have numerous partners, but women's reputation can be easily tarnished is she engages in casual sex.

<u>Memo 05/12/2017: "Feminism empowered me to feel like it wasn't me" (P8)</u>
Feminism appears to be a protective factor for women, helping them cope with the impact of sexism. It seems to be important in helping women resolve self-blame elicited by sexism. Feminism is empowering and allows women to feel part of something larger and feel supported by other women.

<u>Memo 04/03/2018: "Me speaking up, it wouldn't achieve anything, because it'd be put back on me" (P11)</u>
This is an outcome of silencing. Women are holding themselves back from challenging sexism because they feel that it will not have a positive outcome. Moreover, there is a fear that the woman will be blamed for raising a concern instead of the concern itself being addressed.

(B) Explaining focused codes and categories

<u>Memo 28/11/2017 – 'Contextualising'</u>
This category relates to the processes whereby women consider the contextual factors involved in sexism. It seems important to be able to externalise the experiences of sexism into the wider context. This appears to prevent women from internalising their experiences, thus resolving self-blame. It is also helpful for women to try and understand what the perpetrator wants and to see his behaviour within the social context. It is important for women not to be seen as an individual being attacked but considering oneself in context and thinking about how gender is viewed in society.

<u>Memo 10/04/2018: Assuming traditional gender roles</u>
This category relates to the presumption that women will behave in accordance with the traditional female role which, essentially, holds less social value than the male role. This captures women's role as mothers, caregivers and as male servants. Such assumptions are displayed in interpersonal encounters where men expect a woman to take on a job below her grade and essentially act as their assistant.

Memo 10/04/2018: Penalising Anti-femininity
This category refers to the punishment women received for not behaving according to the female role prescriptions (e.g., motherhood). There was a sense that eschewing the feminine role is perceived as an unwelcome invasion of the male territory, leading to backlash from men.

Memo 28/04/2018: Core category: Establishing and Policing the Gender Order
The uniting feature of the two main categories of reinforcing inferiority and punishing transgression is the way in which they perpetuate the gender order. Reinforcing inferiority can be seen as the way in which the gender order is established while punishing transgression refers to the policing of the gender order.

(C) Comparing emergent hypotheses and assumptions against data

Memo 03/02/2018: Emerging theory: Shaming and Blaming
Women's experiences of sexism can be conceptualised under two categories: blaming and shaming. Shaming reflects the way in which women are shamed for something that they "are" (e.g., over-emotional) and for breaking gender norms (e.g., women should be sexually submissive). Blaming refers to how women are held morally responsible for causing sexism (e.g., by not covering their bodies) and for not stopping sexism. Women also blame themselves for not stopping sexism.

Memo 06/03/2018: Discarding emerging theory for lack of fit
While shaming and blaming are central elements in women's experience of sexism, such a binary categorisation does not appear to best account for the participants' data. That is, many of the participants' experiences relate to *both* blaming and shaming. For example, "slut shaming" relates to shaming *and* blaming as women are being blamed for violating the gender role prescription of sexual submissiveness. Thus, this theory is discarded.

Memo 10/04/2018: Emerging theory: Reinforcing inferiority and punishing transgression
Reinforcing inferiority and punishing transgression appear to capture the essence of women's experience of sexism. Reinforcing inferiority refers to the way in which women are socialised into oppressive gender-status rules and how these norms are displayed in interpersonal encounters. Punishing transgression is like a patriarchal "law-enforcement" which aims to make sure that women "stay in line".
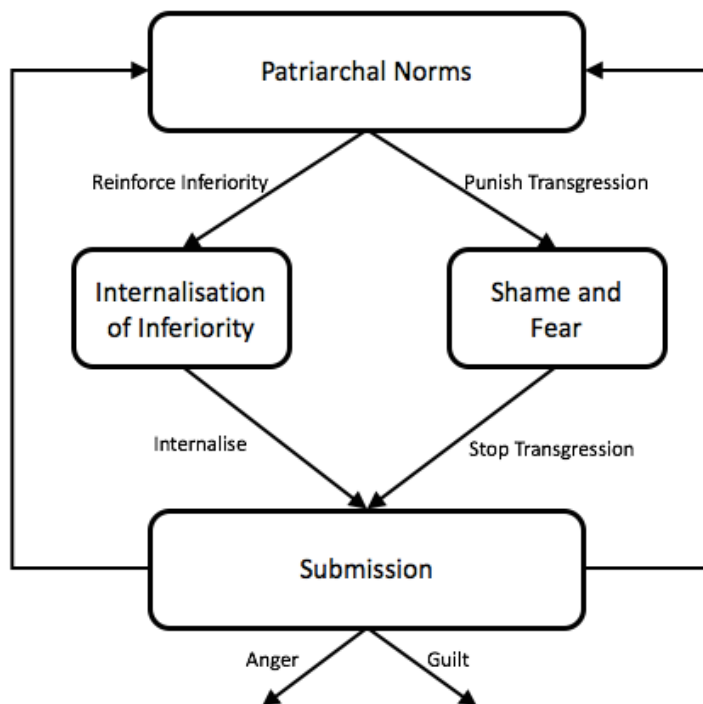
APPENDIX 13: Diagramming

Initial mapping of the relationships between the primary processes:
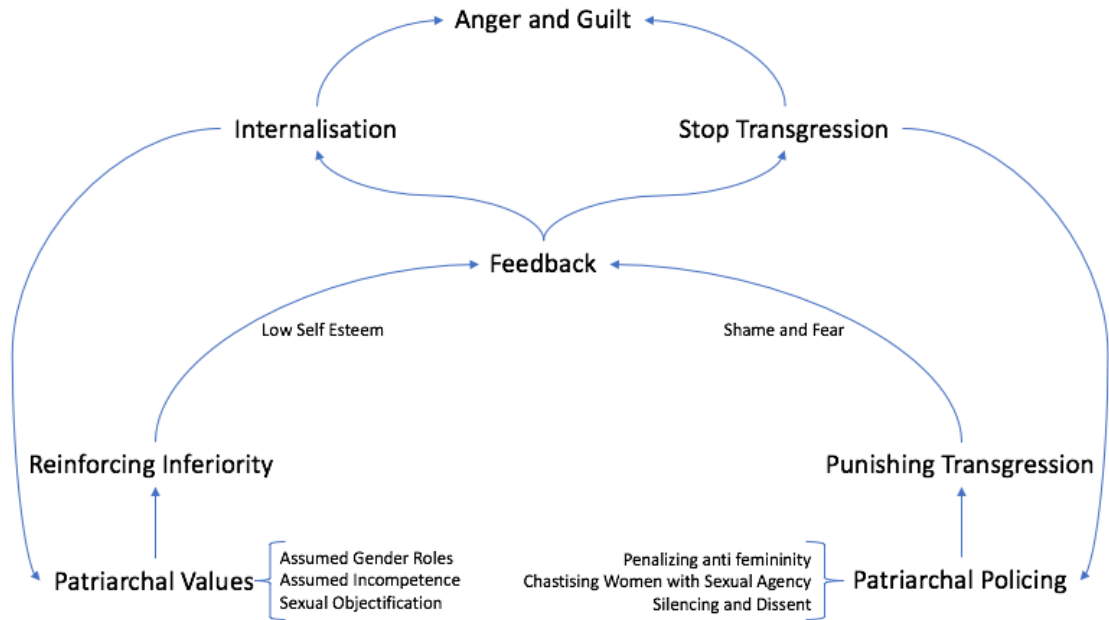
(Date: 15 April 2018)

Defining and restructuring of the initial diagram to better depict processes:

(Date: 30 April 2018)

APPENDIX 14: Examples of initial and focused coding

Focus Group 1		
Focused code	Initial code	Transcript
Exoticising Ostracising Dehumanising Objectifying Sexualising	Growing up in a predominantly White area Not being seen as attractive Not being exoticised Being cast out Fetishisation coming with age Being dehumanised Being sexualised for being different BME women being objectified Black women being objectified in TV adverts, media Not allowed to be pretty Playing a certain role as a black woman Talking about it with friends Music videos sexualise black women Wanting to look like that when younger Seeing things differently with age Feeling sorry for women in music videos	P3: I think when I mentioned the intersectionality initially it was to do with having grown up in a predominantly White area. So actually, what was deemed attractive or whatever, I didn't really fit into the norms of, you know (.) And I wasn't exoticised either (.) It was just like, cast out as being, like, you (.) no. Erm, and then as I've kind of got older there has been that sort of fetishisation or exotici- all these words [laughter]. But, I think there is an aspect of, erm, that sort of being dehumanised on the grounds of you're (.) not like a (.) or you're really different or you're really this or, I don't know like (.) something like (.) yeah there is (.) being sexualised for being different to whatever (.) It wasn't explicit or I wasn't called anything, but I would wonder if that was something (.) Tanja: Right, right (.) Ok. P2: Can I (.) Just to pick up on that. Like, I definitely think there is a massive issue of objectification of women from different BME backgrounds. Particularly Black women, especially in music, especially in TV adverts, media, things like. I do think there is this discourse and it is like(.) yeah, yeah. So it may not be that someone had to make a comment, but it feels like there is something about (.) yeah, the way you're allowed to be pretty (.) or, or (.) I guess the role that you play as a black woman. I-I guess I talked a lot about, more about, sort of, black women because I see that a lot more in the media. I talk a lot about that with my friends. Yeah, so I do think that, yeah (.) just to throw that in there [laughter]. But yeah, just like thinking about the culture of music videos and that being a very modern-day form of sexism which, when I was younger, I was kind of like, oh I really (.) they look really nice, I really wanna look like that. And then now looking at it through completely different eyes, I'm like, oh my god, I feel really sorry for some of these women and what have to do and wear and

Focus Group 2		
Focused code	Initial code	Transcript
Catcalling Losing confidence Objectifying Losing confidence	Starting new job Feeling strong Feeling confident Wanting to enjoy self Getting most out of job opportunity Being unfamiliar with surroundings Feeling doddery Being given unwanted attention Feeling invalidated Losing confidence Being treated as an object Not mattering Being a piece of something Impersonalisation Feeling disappointed with own reaction Minding own business Have the right to be here Feeling angry Being stripped of confidence Wondering about impact Being catcalled Being on a main road	P6: It reminds me like, I just started a new placement, a couple of weeks ago. And I had that kind of like, okay I'm gonna be strong, I'm gonna go there and be really confident and kind of, you know, I'm gonna enjoy this placement, I'm gonna get the most out of it. And I was kind of walking on the way to this, this hospital. And it's not a part of London I've been to before but so sort of a bit like, looking around a bit doddery. And, but kind of like, this is gonna be good, and then yeah, then this group of like builders just kind of, can't remember exactly what they said to me but it was something, like, leery and creepy and just like, in that instant, like it totally just, like invalidated all that stuff that I'd like built and felt really like proud of and I was just like this object, and it didn't matter who I was or what I'd done or what I wanted to do. I was just like this this like piece of something and I think that, like, impersonalisation of it and that like, it, yeah it's so undermining. And I, I walked, I was just like, I can't believe like I've gone from that to that in this instant because of these like random guys that I don't even know. And I'm minding my own business, I'm on the street, like I have a right to be here and yeah. And like how does someone, or a group of people have the power to do that to someone else. And I was so angry. And it really reminds me of what you were saying that I was just kind of (.) completely stripped of anything that you are. Tanja: Yeah, it sounded like, in that, in that moment, like the first instance is that kind of like, it shocks you to a certain degree and then you kind of, the confidence that you have felt prior to that, it's just kind of taken away from you. Perhaps, because you're kind of put in the position of, um, feeling powerless. Um and then, a moment later you kind of feel angry about your own reaction almost or how did that just happen. Almost like, um, you become angry that they managed to have effect on you. <P6: Mm-mm. P5: It makes me wonder that, um, like what do we, so they have that effect on us, but then why

Confronting	Being in back street	does it have an effect. And then when I think about it more it makes me think well (.) if there's a group of these builders and they say that to you (.) even if you are on a main road or in a back street or an estate, like (.) when they, when they, if that was to happen to me, if they say things like that. I always want to say something back. Like I want to just be like, oh fuck off, or like, fuck you, or like, like really give it to them. But the one thing that refrains me from doing that is (.) well I just think, well one, if there's more than one I'm not gonna win, right, but two, like, what if they got angry and they decided to come and grab you and then just, take you somewhere or whatever. And that's what always stops me from turning around and saying something. <Tanja: So the kind of threat of actually> Yeah, and that, I suppose, when I say like it made me feel, it makes me feel like powerless. I suppose in that respect it kind of ties in with that a little bit. Like (.) I am powerless because I'm not standing up and really giving it to them back because I don't know (.) what they might then do in retaliation. <Tanja: Mm-mm> So then that scares me, so that's why I keep my mouth shut and I just suck it up and I keep walking, like. <Tanja: Yeah, yeah so there's the actual reality that these are potentially dangerous situations and you don't wanna make yourself any more vulnerable than you already are> Exactly. I don't know if you guys ever think about what you would say or, or if you ever do say anything, or, I don't know.
	Wanting to confront	
	Wanting to shout back	
	Refraining from confrontation	
Fearing retaliation	Being outnumbered	
	Losing fight	
	Being assaulted Stopping self	
Feeling scared	Feeling threatened	
	Feeling powerless	
	Feeling disrespected	
Feeling powerless	Feeling powerless	
	Fearing retaliation	
	Feeling scared Keeping mouth shut Withholding anger	
Protecting self	Protecting self	
	Not wanting to make self vulnerable	

Focus Group 3		
Focused code	Initial code	Transcript
Being dominated	Being talked over Being dominated Men behaving according to hierarchy White men more likely to oppress	P10: Yeah, like, every day. Yeah I feel, like, for me, the two main things that really get to me are… being talked over. Routinely, men dominating me. I don't think (.) There's definitely a bit of a hierarchy that is not all men, like (.) depending on how high a status they're perceiving themselves at (.) so there's definitely a racial hierarchy, White men do it much more than other men, though not exclusively at all. And also, to do with social class, and how they perceive themselves, the more likely they are to dominate me. But, I definitely notice, I find routinely, men will just dominate, not even notice that they're dominating the conversation and just, um, you know, cutting me off as soon as I start to speak, and (.) what I've noticed, um, a little while ago (.) It's happened lots of times but this one stuck out in my mind, was that, a man asked me what I thought about something. You know that kind of technique that some people do when all they really want to do is voice their opinion. And he asked me what I thought and before I could even finish my sentence… so he didn't even know what I was gonna say, he interrupted and dismissed what I said and said, oh that's stupid or that's wrong or something. And I was completely calm, completely polite, and I said oh please let me finish my sentence. And he looked really shocked as if I'd been aggressive. But the thing is, because it's so normal in our culture for men to talk over women and dismiss what they have to say, he doesn't perceive that as an aggression. It's only when I defend my territory (.) it's perceived quite differently to when a man defends his territory. That he perceives that as being aggressive. And his own behaviour isn't visible to him as with this conversation had (.) All of these things, his own privilege and his own sexism is completely invisible to him. He didn't see any of it.
Being dismissed	Being dominated Being cut off Being asked what think Being asked for opinion Not wanting to hear woman's opinion Not allowing to speak Being interrupted Being dismissed Being disregarded	
Witholding anger	Being calm Withholding anger Being misjudged Being seen as aggressive Defending territory Men being perceived differently Men allowing anger Men having privilege Not seeing own privilege Confronting	
Confronting		P9: It's true though, the minute you (.) almost pull them up on it. Even, even in (.) by saying,

Appendix 15: Raising focused codes to categories:

Main Category	Sub-Category	Focused Codes
Reinforcing inferiority	Assuming Traditional Gender Roles	Belittling Expecting women to serve men Expecting women to please men Expecting inferiority Expecting traditional gender roles Assuming women are mothers Having to be reserved Being restricted
	Undermining Women's Competence	Being interrupted Being mansplained Being treated as inferior Being seen as inferior Not being taken seriously Being dismissed Being disregarded Being cut off Being dominated Being interrupted Being invisible
	Sexual Objectification	Being catcalled Being leered at Being harassed Being told to smile Getting unwanted attention Being objectified Being groped Being intruded upon Being exoticised Being seen less of a woman Dehumanising Exoticising
Punishing transgression	Penalising Anti-Femininity	Punishing anti-femininity Not being allowed in male arenas Being seen as anti-feminine Being demeaned Being reprimanded Being disrespected Being shamed for not having children Reminding of motherhood
	Chastising Women with Sexual Agency	Slut shaming Being called a slut Being shamed Victim Blaming Being judged Feeling ashamed Feeling embarrassed Losing confidence
	Silencing Dissent	Being ridiculed

		Being laughed at
		Being silenced
		Being mocked
		Being called over-emotional
		Being called a bitch
		Being followed
		Being intimidated
		Being assaulted
		Asserting power
		Being punished for speaking up
		Withholding anger
Coping with Sexism	Contextualising	Empathising with perpetrator
		Considering context
		Externalising
		Becoming more confident
		Developing feminist identity
		Contextualising
		Witnessing change
		Resisting individualising
		Feeling empowered
		Resolving self-blame
	Connecting	Talking to others
		Listening to others
		Educating others
		Making a change
		Coming together
		Becoming more alert
		Being validated
		Being supported
		Supporting each other
		Supporting others
		Feeling liberated
		Giving women space
		Widening conversation