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Imagining a stranger harassment situation: The impact of stranger harassment coping strategies on women's emotions, self-objectification and felt power

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Master degree in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

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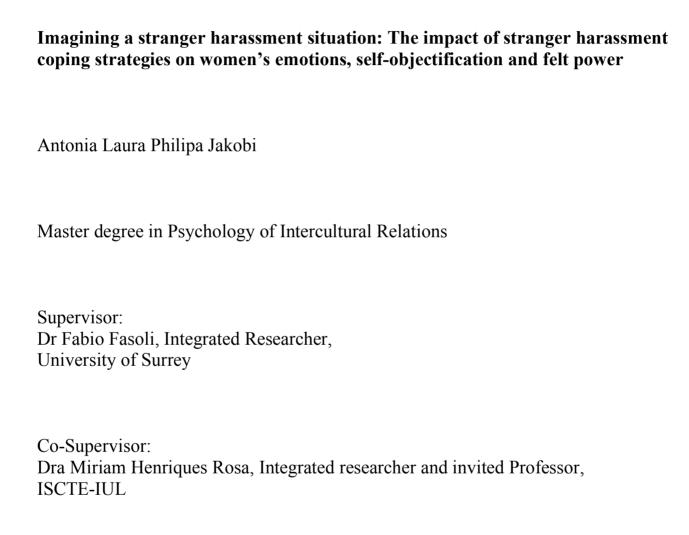Dr Fabio Fasoli, Integrated Researcher,
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Resumo

O assédio sexual de rua é uma realidade diária de muitas mulheres em todo o mundo. No entanto, somente alguns investigadores se dedicaram ao estudo deste problema. O presente estudo utilizou um desenho multi-metodológico para explorar se algumas estratégias de coping ao assédio sexual de rua são mais benéficas para o bem-estar das mulheres do que outras. Além disso, investigou se as atitudes sexistas benevolentes influenciam a escolha destas. 134 participantes femininos adotaram uma perspetiva feminina perante uma situação imaginária de assédio sexual de rua ou de uma situação neutra, sobre a qual responderam a um conjunto de perguntas de forma a avaliar as suas reações, emoções e autopercepções. Os resultados não confirmaram o sexismo benevolente como moderador da escolha de estratégias de coping. No entanto, verificou-se que as estratégias de coping ativas, passivas e benignas são mediadoras do efeito do assédio sexual de rua nas emoções negativas elevadas, enquanto que apenas as estratégias de coping passivas e benignas mediaram o efeito do assédio sexual de rua na redução do poder sentido. Além disso, as emoções negativas e o poder sentido foram significativamente diferentes entre o assédio sexual de rua e a interação neutra. O presente estudo evidenciou que todas as estratégias de coping se relacionam com aspetos negativos e positivos, contudo nenhuma diminuiu a negatividade da situação. O estudo revelou a complexidade de (lidar com) estas situações e enfatizou a necessidade de investigação futura, bem como implicações práticas para compreender melhor e combater esta problemática.

Palavras-chave: assédio a estranhos, estratégias de coping, bem-estar
Códigos PsychINFO: Processos Sociais & Questões Sociais (2900)
Papéis Sexuais & Questões da mulher (2970)

Abstract

Stranger harassment belongs to the daily reality of many women in public places all over the world. Nonetheless, only few scholars have set out to examine this issue. Those who have, identified its detrimental consequences for the target. The present study entailed a multi-methodological design to explore whether some ways of reacting to stranger harassment are more beneficial for women's well-being than others. Moreover, it investigated whether benevolent sexist attitudes influence the choice of specific coping strategies. 134 female individuals took a women's perspective in an imaginative stranger harassment situation or neutral situation, upon which they answered a set of questions to assess their reactions, emotions, and self-perception emerging from the situation. The results did not confirm benevolent sexism as a moderator influencing the choice of coping strategies. However, active, passive and benign coping strategies were found to be mediating the effect of the stranger harassment on high negative emotions, while only passive and benign coping strategies mediated the effect of stranger harassment on the reduction of felt power. Moreover, negative emotions and felt power were significantly different between imagining a stranger harassment vs. a neutral interaction. The present study underlined that all coping strategies go along with various up- and downsides, all of which do not to conceal that stranger harassment is the manifestation of gender inequality. It revealed the complexity of (coping with) such situations and emphasized the necessity of future research as well as practical implications to further understand and combat stranger harassment.

Keywords: stranger harassment, coping strategies, well-being

PsychINFO Codes: Social Processes & Social Issues (2900)

Sex Roles & Women's Issues (2970)

Contents

Glossary of Acronyms

BS	Benevolent Sexism
GMFSWY	German Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women and Youth
HS	Hostile Sexism
SOT	Self-Objectification Theory

For a man, the day has 24 hours,

for a woman only the hours of the daylight.

(Hildebrand, 2021)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Stranger harassment, also named catcalling or street harassment, is a timely issue that has received little attention in research so far (Fisher et al., 2019). Those studies investigating the issue found that it depicts an ubiquitous problem that women all over the world have to face, having detrimental consequences on their well-being (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Still, it remains unclear how women deal with such experiences and whether some coping strategies prove to be more beneficial than others with regards to women's well-being. The present study aims to understand what influences German women's choice of specific coping strategies, as well as the outcomes that these bring along. In doing so, we will examine women's emotional reactions and self-perception, and consider the role of individual differences, such as the endorsement of benevolent sexism, in examining their reactions to stranger harassment. This allows us to explore the implications of different coping responses and what can help women coping with stranger harassment situations.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Definition: Stranger harassment in distinction to compliments

Stranger harassment (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), gender and public harassment (Gardner, 1995), men's stranger intrusion (Gray, 2014), street harassment (Fileborn, 2013), sexual terrorism (Kissling, 1991), or catcalling (Fisher et al., 2019) – all these terms have been used interchangeably to describe similar or the same concepts without clear distinctions. Thus, conceptualizing a common definition of stranger harassment has been found challenging. While the term 'street harassment' may imply the phenomena only occurs on the street, neglecting other public spaces like public transportation (di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019), 'catcalling' is sometimes referred to as one of many behaviours described under the term of stranger harassment (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017). Following these critiques, this paper will use the term *stranger harassment*, which describes acts like whistles, steers, honking, grabbing,

comments or other forms of unwanted sexual attention "perpetrated by men who are not known to the victim (i.e., not a co-worker, friend, family member, or acquaintance) in public domains such as on the street, in stores, at bars, or on public transportation" (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008, p. 339). Stranger harassment can be identified as a form of sexual violence against women and gendered sexual harassment as men are the perpetrators in most cases, deteriorating the female body as vulnerable sexual object (Kissling, 1991). Moreover, scholars agreed in considering stranger harassment as a manifestation of the enduring gender inequalities and a form of everyday sexism and objectification (di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2010). Various researchers have criticized some conceptualizations of stranger harassment as a potential compliment (Fileborn, 2019; Gardner, 1995; Sullivan et al., 2010). Indeed, some suggested that "viewing stranger harassment as a compliment is a coping mechanism that some women utilize in order to mitigate the negative effects that stranger harassment tends to have on a woman's sense of safety and well-being" (O'Leary, 2016, p. 17). A study by di Gennaro and Ritschel (2019) explored the main difference between compliments and stranger harassment in the form of catcalls, underlining that catcalls occur from strangers and are not only predominantly directed at women, and "only men are permitted or expected to perform [them]" (p. 8), while compliments are usually given among friends of both genders.

1.1.2. Prevalence and frequency of stranger harassment

Despite the lack of a common definition, research on the prevalence of stranger harassment found it to be one of the most common forms of sexual violence. In a large-scale study by Macmillan et al. (2000) approximately 80% of the Canadian women reported to have faced stranger harassment. A similar number was found in another study with a representative sample of Canadian women, of whom only 9% could not recall any incident of unwanted attention from a male person in public (Lenton et al., 1999). More recent studies provided similar results across cultures and countries (see for instance Livingston, 2015; B. A. Saunders et al., 2017). These numbers thus support the fact that stranger harassment is a far-reaching issue of societies which almost all women experience in their life, making it "nearly as unavoidable as […] ubiquitous" (B. A. Saunders et al., 2017, p. 325). With regards to the frequency of these incidences, 41% of a sample of females between 18-29 years indicated to experience unwanted sexual attention once a month, while 31% reported catcalls, whistles, or stares to happen every few days or more often (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). In a recent large-scale study about everyday sexism conducted by the German Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (GMFSWY), among all locations it is in public places where most sexist episodes were experienced by women, and

they were mostly perpetrated by strangers (Wippermann, 2020). Moreover, German women indicated that sexism was expressed mostly verbally (45%) or in gestures without physical touch (39%). Although this research by the GMFSWY did not directly focus on stranger harassment, it further showed that 44% of the participating women experienced different forms of sexism in their daily life, while 63% were the direct target or saw it toward other women. Nevertheless, the author alluded to the fact that female individuals experience sexist attacks on such a regular basis, that they may cease to perceive it as such (Wippermann, 2020).

1.1.3. Perception and effects of stranger harassment

The fact that women face stranger harassment on a daily basis underlines the severity of this issue (Sullivan et al., 2010). The individual perception and understanding of stranger harassment depends on various personal and situational factors that differ vastly among women (and men). Fairchild (2010) investigated which contextual factors would influence whether stranger harassment was perceived as more or less threatening. She found that the attractiveness and age of the perpetrator, time (day vs. night), if the victim was with friends or alone, as well as the location had an impact on the stranger harassment experience and perception. Other research with female US-Americans provided evidence that the extent of negative outcomes depended on the severity of the situation, showing that experiencing stranger touching was associated with the most negative outcomes (McCarty et al., 2014). Nevertheless, another study has demonstrated that even if women did not identify themselves as victims of harassment they faced negative outcomes due to the situation (Schneider et al., 1997).

Hence, regardless of specific factors that may make perception of an event more or less likely to be seen as stranger harassment, such type of situation generally has a detrimental impact on women's' behaviour, as for instance scholars discovered that encountering such situations led women to change their way of behaving in public, namely by avoiding being alone or walking in specific areas or at night times (Gardner, 1995; Lenton et al., 1999). Also with regards to women's feelings, various literature explored experiencing stranger harassment causes a broad variety of negative emotions in women, such as fear, anger, embarrassment, discomfort and/or shock (see for example Lenton et al., 1999; O'Leary, 2016). Research particularly focused on the fear of rape, the anxiety to move around freely, to use public transportation means and to walk alone at night, as well as stress (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Macmillan et al., 2000; B. A. Saunders et al., 2017), which all were found to be associated with stranger harassment.

While these negative emotional outcomes are rather explicit, other scholars explored the effect of stranger harassment on increased self-objectification in women. According to the Self-Objectification Theory (SOT) by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), being repeatedly treated as a sexual object, as it happens during stranger harassment, leads women to see themselves as such and thus internalize these beliefs. As a consequence their own focus moves to their bodies with excessive attention to and monitoring of their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This theory has been tested by Fisher et al. (2019) who showed videos of stranger harassment situations to their participants. Surprisingly, participants who saw the stranger harassment video did not differ with regards to self-objectification or body image from participants who had seen a neutral situation video. In opposition, research that entailed an ecological momentary assessment on situations of objectification found support for the hypothesis that the level of self-objectification increased with the frequency of experiencing sexual objectification (Koval et al., 2019). Similarly, correlational studies identified a significant relation between the experiences of stranger harassment and self-objectification (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008) as well as stranger harassment and body surveillance as a manifestation of self-objectification (Davidson et al., 2015). Therefore, an association between stranger harassment and self-objectification can be assumed, but more research is necessary for understanding the direction and type of association. This is particularly relevant, as self-objectification has been found to be associated with higher prevalence of depression, eating disorders and sexual dysfunction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Szymanski et al., 2011), underlining the urgency to prevent and decrease it.

1.1.4. Reacting to stranger harassment

Despite the severity and negative consequences of the harassment, women struggle with reacting to stranger harassment in a confrontative way (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Research on the reactions to sexist remarks showed that the majority of women would not confront the perpetrator. In an experiment by Woodzicka and LaFrance (2001), most of female interviewees for a job ignored a harassing question (52%), while a study by Swim and Hyers (1999) revealed that less than one fifth of women directly spoke out to a sexist individual to make him understand the inappropriateness of his comment. Pioneering research on stranger harassment by Fairchild and Rudman (2008) showed a similar picture, while identifying and examining four different types of coping strategies with stranger harassment (active, benign, passive and self-blame). The passive strategy entailed behaviours like ignoring the man, pretending not to have heard anything or just keep on walking. Also, qualitative research as, for example, a

journaling research on catcalling experiences of eleven women in New York (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017) or interviews with thirteen Midwestern women (O'Leary, 2016) found these strategies to be the most common response to stranger harassment. Similar results have been found in the German context, for instance in the report by the GMFSWY, in which 74% of the women agreed that reacting to sexism is difficult and that there is a lack of reaction mechanisms (Wippermann, 2020). Besides such passive behaviours, another possible strategy was self-blame, meaning women assumed it is their own fault to have been approached, hence being responsible for haven gotten in such a situation for example by having dressed in a specific way that caused men's attention (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Self-blaming strategies thus redirect the blame from the perpetrator to the target and were found to potentially lead to a minimization or questioning of the harassment experience (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017). The third strategy described a benign way of coping with the situation, namely assuming the perpetrator must have meant well, taking it as a compliment or playing it down as a joke (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017). When engaging in benign strategies, a bad intention or misbehaviour of the perpetrator is denied. Finally, active coping strategies entailed behaviours like speaking up against the person to show disapproval and unacceptability of the situation or reporting him to the police, as well as talking to someone about it (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). While explicitly confrontative active coping strategies directed to the perpetrator were found to be the least frequent of all four coping strategies (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), a recent study by Fileborn (2019) revealed that most of her study's participants did disclose at least some but not every stranger harassment experience. Which experience, at what point of time and to whom it was shared was a matter of careful considerations for the female individuals.

1.1.5. Cost-analysis of reacting to sexism and stranger harassment

Despite the general tendency not to react and confront actively, scholars found that this passive style does not reflect accordance with being treated like an object. This misperception of a silent concordance and acceptance of women not reacting to sexism has been disclosed in various studies, underlining the contradiction of thoughts and actual behaviour (Kaiser & Miller, 2004). In an experiment by Swim and Hyers (1999) for instance, the majority of the female participants reported to find a sexist comment by a colleague objectionable and to perceive the perpetrator as prejudiced, but nonetheless were hindered by the cost-benefit analysis in their wish to express their disapproval publicly. Similarly, in their study with university women on the exposure to sexism, Kaiser and Miller (2004) concluded that "silence in the face of prejudice does not necessarily or generally represent contentment with the status quo and that it will be important

to consider how the costs and benefits of confronting discrimination influence this process" (p. 176). Therefore, not reacting to sexism or stranger harassment can be identified as the result of a complex cost-benefit analysis.

One of the components in the analysis is the calculation of the own safety and the reduction of the risk of an escalation as a crucial consideration for deciding to react to the situation or not (Swim & Hyers, 1999). The own safety appears to be the highest priority, while if the situation is perceived as dangerous or likely to become so, the likelihood to react decreases (Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Swim & Hyers, 1999). The second component that appears in the cost-benefit analysis of a possible reaction is its perceived effectiveness as a mean to reduce the prejudice and discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2004). In fact, a recent research by Burns and Granz (2021) found that confrontation can decrease biases. In three experiments on the confrontation of gender stereotypes they found that both confrontations focusing on negative gender stereotypes as well as on positive gender stereotypes were effective in decreasing subsequent stereotyping. There is work supporting the effectiveness of expressing disapproval to combat sexism, at least under certain circumstances such as interpersonal or evidence-based confrontations (Mallett & Wagner, 2011; Parker et al., 2018). Nonetheless, other studies found a more diffuse picture, particularly pointing out the discrepancy between the effectiveness of confrontation for racism in opposition to sexism, with the latter tending to be trivialized and more socially accepted (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Gulker et al., 2013). Adding to this diffusion is the fact that sexism appears in various shapes, defined as hostile (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS) described under the umbrella term of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). BS is characterized by appearing rather protective and subtle in oppose to a more blunt, aggressive HS (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Despite sometimes even eliciting allegedly prosocial or intimacy-seeking behaviour, BS hence perpetuates gender stereotypes and injustices as much. As suggested by Burns and Granz (2021) "benevolent sexism may be difficult to confront to the extent that benevolent sexism, relative to hostile sexism, is perceived as acceptable and/ or *not* prejudiced" (p. 504).

The third component considered in the cost-benefit analysis of confronting thus refers to the social acceptability of confronting stranger harassment. On the one hand, women face the anxiety of being perceived as overreactive, aggressive and impolite when reacting to a sexist remark (K. A. Saunders & Senn, 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999). Therefore, female individuals fear social punishment and retaliation as a consequence, when reacting to sexism. On the other hand, women showed respect and sympathy when seeing other women react with an assertive (i.e. active) response (Dodd et al., 2001). Therefore, when dealing with a stranger harassment

situation, women have to take into consideration a variety of different factors to conduct a cost-benefit analysis for decision of reacting to the situation or not.

1.1.6. Perception and consequences of stranger harassment responses

While most research focuses on the interpersonal consequences and considerations before and during stranger harassment and sexist situations, only very little is known about emotional reactions of women as a consequence of how they react to stranger harassment. As proposed by the stress and coping model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), displaying coping strategies that are directed towards the stressor, i.e. the perpetrator, may dampen the negative consequences of experiencing such situations. The limited research on this supports this assumption as it has shown that assertive and angered-based reactions made women feel agentic (Hyers, 2007), less vulnerable (Logan, 2015) and enhanced well-being in long terms (Foster, 2013). However, other research suggested that women felt better when they engaged in indirect confrontation to discrimination (Foster, 2013), although such non-assertive responses may be less satisfying (Hyers, 2007). Along with these emotional reactions comes the effect on self-perception. We have seen stranger harassment eliciting self-objectification. However, this seems to vary depending on the type of coping strategy individuals displayed: while participants with passive and benign reaction as well as self-blaming engaged in self-objectification, those showing active reactions were less likely to self-objectify (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Despite these findings, a clear picture of the type of emotional consequence, self-objectification and perception of power yet needs to be drawn.

1.1.7. Intrapersonal and situational determinants of stranger harassment responses

As much as situational and personal factors of a stranger harassment situation influence the perception of such by women (e.g., Fairchild, 2010), these as well play a role in the likelihood and style of confrontation women opt for. Swim and Hyers (1999) found that with women's increased identification as feminists, also the tendency to confront sexism prejudices rose. Ayres et al. (2009), whose work confirmed feminist identification to be a predictor for confronting sexism, offered as an explanation that a feminist identity holds an empowering effect on women, as it raises the awareness for sexist behaviours as much as the belief that tolerating such acts is inacceptable. B. A. Saunders and colleagues (2017) did a first step towards understanding the transferability of these results to the specific context of stranger harassment situations by exploring the influence of system-justifying beliefs on coping behaviours. They found that when women believed current gender relations to be fair, they were

more likely to make benign attribution for stranger harassment situations. System-justifying beliefs are linked to ambivalent sexism, as shown by Jost and Kay (2005), and BS in particular relates to the beliefs about treating women differently and making compliments. Since scholars have suggested that stranger harassment cannot be identified as compliment, but perceptions may vary, it is plausible that the endorsement of BS could affect the perception of stranger harassment and thus the reactions to it. Moreover, if the exposure to BS elicits gender system justification maybe stranger harassment is less condemned and seen as harassment by women with high levels of BS. However, so far, no research has examined this.

With regards to the effect of situational factors on the likelihood and style of reaction, research by Fairchild (2010) showed that being in company increased the likelihood of reacting actively to a stranger harassment situation. Another study by Ayres et al. (2009) revealed the type of sexism and the status of the perpetrator to be situational factors. Namely, in their experiment, women were more likely to confront sexist comments than unwanted sexual attention and the likelihood to confront was higher in familiar perpetrators of an equal-status than stranger perpetrators or familiar ones with a higher-status. This result is particularly interesting for the case of stranger harassment, which is by definition conducted by strangers, centring around unwanted sexual attention. Unfortunately, most research on the confrontation of such incidences has focused on sexist comments and sexism rather than stranger harassment as a specific form of it, challenging the transferability of these results. Therefore, future research on stranger harassment is crucial to close the gap and better understand the phenomena.

To contribute to this, the present study endeavoured to examine which self-related outcomes are triggered by different responses to stranger harassment situations. Understanding the nuances of the outcomes the different coping strategies unfold, may serve as a way to point out strategies that are most beneficial for women's well-being and, thereby, counteract the negative consequences of experienced stranger harassment. At the same time, the present study will explore if BS as a form of ambivalent sexism in women has an effect on how they choose to react to a stranger harassment situation.

1.2. The Present Study

The present study entails a mixed method relying on both quantitative and qualitative data. While most research on stranger harassment reactions has been conducted in either a qualitative or quantitative (correlational) design, the present study aims to enrich this data by using a multi-method approach. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research provides a way to

increase the validity of the results as well as the completeness of the area of enquiry (Bryman, 2006).

Participants were first asked to report their endorsement with BS. Then, using a perspective taking method, they imagined experiencing stranger harassment (experimental condition) or to be in a neutral situation in which they were approached by a stranger (control condition). Next, participants were asked to report their spontaneous reactions in an open-ended question. This allowed us to qualitatively analyse participants' expectations of how they would have reacted and felt in and after the situation. After that, we assessed coping strategies, emotional reactions, felt power and self-objectification. Hence, we aimed to replicate and extend previous work that has considered some of these variables. The following four main hypotheses were tested.

First, we predicted, coping strategies to be more likely to occur when participants take the perspective of a woman involved in stranger harassment rather than a neutral interaction (H1). We also explored whether the effect occurred for each type of coping strategies, knowing that passive strategies are the most common among women facing sexist episodes.

Second, stranger harassment situations were expected to elicit more negative emotions, less felt power, and more self-objectification than a neutral situation (H2). This is based on previous studies suggesting the negative outcomes appearing due to stranger harassment situations.

We further tested a moderation and several mediation hypotheses. Following the suggestions by Fairchild and Rudman (2008) that women reacting in a benign way may be more likely to be benevolent sexists, and based on the research of the effect of feminist identification and beliefs of fair gender relation (B. A. Saunders et al., 2017; Swim & Hyers, 1999) on the choice of a more active coping strategy, we expected participants reporting high levels of BS to engage more in passive or benign coping strategies than in active coping strategies (H3).

Finally, coping strategies were expected to mediate the effect of the condition (stranger harassment vs. neutral comment) on negative emotions, felt power and self-objectification (H4). We predicted that imagining to be in the stranger harassment (vs. control) situation would increase the likelihood of engaging in active coping strategies, that, in turn, will elicit less negative emotion, more felt power and less self-objectification (H4a). On the other hand, the higher engagement with passive, benign and self-blame coping strategies in the stranger harassment (vs. control) was expected to elicit more negative emotion and self-objectification, but less felt power (H4b).

The goal of the study thus was to contribute to the limited research on coping strategies to stranger harassment and to provide useful evidence for interventions aiming at women's empowerment.

Method

2.1. Participants

One hundred and sixty-one participants assessed the survey through a snowball sampling approach on social media. After excluding those who did not provide informed consent, who identified as men, and/or did not complete the survey in all its parts, the final sample consisted of 134 female participants. An a priori G* power (Erdfelder et al., 1996) power analysis suggested a sample size of 128 participants was sufficient to detect a medium effect size $f = .25$ for a between-participants design with two conditions and statistical power of 0.8. Hence, our sample was adequate. The assignment to one of the two conditions was done randomly, resulting in 52 participants in the control condition and 82 in the experimental condition. The participants were volunteers and their age ranged from 19 to 35 ($M = 23.93$, $SD = 2.46$), all of whom indicated to have lived in Germany at the time of the study or have lived there the majority of their life. Educational levels somewhat differed among participants, with the majority holding a university degree (n = 68, 50.8%), followed by participants who completed high school (n = 28, 20.9%) and apprenticeship (n = 26, 19.4%). A minority of the participants (n = 12, 9%) reported a diploma or state examination to be their highest level of education achieved.

Most of the women participating in the study reported to have experienced stranger harassment already a couple of times in their life (n = 71, 53.0%), while fewer experienced it once a month (n = 26, 19.4%), 2-4 times a month (n = 17, 12.7%), or every few days (n = 10, 7.5%). Only 6 (4.5%) and 4 participants (3.0%) implied to have experienced stranger harassment respectively once or never in their lives. [1]

2.2. Materials

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[1] Including the frequency of experiences of stranger harassment as a covariate did not change the results for any of the presented analysis.

2.2.1. Stranger harassment and neutral vignettes

Considering ethical reasons, and in line with previous studies on stranger harassment (see Fairchild, 2010), the experiment exploited an imaginative approach preventing participants from being directly exposed to stressful events. Previous research found that merely imagining and perspective taking approaches induced individuals to ascribe own traits to the imagined self (Davis et al., 1996). Moreover, taking someone else's perspective (in oppose to imagining oneself to be in the situation) presents an effective mean for eliciting empathy while creating less distress (Batson et al., 1997). Thus, participants were asked to imagine to be a woman named Anna and to take her perspective.

The present experiment consisted of an experimental and a control condition introduced by different vignettes. In the experimental condition, a vignette describing a stranger harassment episode was involved. In particular, an imaginary stranger harassment situation was designed based on a vignette used by Fairchild and Rudman (2008). Their original vignette ("Angie is walking down the street. She notices a man sitting on a bench. As she passes the man, he calls out to her 'Hey, sexy baby. Looking hot today!'") was modified for the present study and translated into German. The modification included letting the situation happen during daytime, which seemed crucial as Fairchild (2010) found day vs. night contexts to be influential on how women reacted to stranger harassment situations. Moreover, a question at the end was added to highlight the man's approaching intention and to make it as similar as possible to the vignette used in the control condition. The final vignette presented to the experimental condition was the following: "*Anna is walking down the street after lunch. She notices a man standing on the sidewalk. As she passes by him, he calls out to her: 'Hey sexy baby, looking hot today! Wanna come over to hang out?'*".

The control condition involved a vignette that was created to be as similar as possible in its structure as the vignette used in the experimental condition. It described a "neutral" interaction with a male tourist asking where to buy something. As in the experimental condition, the vignette was presented in German and described a situation happening during daytime: "*Anna is walking down the street after lunch. She notices a tourist standing on the sidewalk. As she passes by the man, he calls out to her: 'What a horrible weather! Do you know where I could buy an umbrella?'*".

A pre-test was conducted on both vignettes to assure that they were perceived as a stranger harassment and neutral episode, respectively. Twenty female German participants were presented with both vignettes in a randomized order and were asked to rate how much this situation described a stranger harassment situation, and how socially acceptable the situation

was. Answers were provided on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Participants also rated the valence of the situation on a scale from 1 (*negative*) to 7 (*positive*). Results showed that the stranger harassment vignette in the experimental condition ($M = 6.90$, $SD = 0.30$) was perceived to describe a stranger harassment situation more than the neutral vignette in the control condition ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 1.0$), $t(19) = 20.18$, $p < .001$. Moreover, the stranger harassment vignette ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 1.17$) was rated as significantly more negative than the neutral vignette ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(18) = -7.32$, $p < .001$. Finally, the stranger harassment vignette ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.64$) was also considered less socially acceptable than the neutral vignette ($M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(18) = -7.68$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the used vignettes were proven to work as effective manipulations for the present study.

2.2.2. Benevolent Sexism Scale

To assess Benevolent Sexism (BS) as an individual difference presenting a possible moderator, the 11-item BS Scale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) was selected. Participants had to indicate on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) to which extent they agreed to statements about (heterosexual) relationships between men and women (e.g., "A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man"). Cronbach's alpha for the BS Scale in the present study was .75. Participants' ratings were averaged so that the higher the score, the higher the BS endorsement.

2.2.3. Open-ended questions

To assess spontaneous reactions, participants were asked to take a couple of minutes to describe how they would react, feel, or deal with the situation if they were Anna. They were asked to write a minimum of 90 characters (i.e., a couple of sentences). To estimate whether the imaginative character of the vignette provided insight into the participants own experience, they had to indicate whether they ever experienced such a situation themselves and if so, if they drew from these own experiences when answering the open-ended question.

2.2.4. Stranger Harassment Coping Questionnaire

Participants completed the Stranger Harassment Coping Scale by Fairchild and Rudman (2008) that is based on the Coping with Harassment Questionnaire by Fitzgerald (1990). It consists of 20 statements that reflect four different ways of coping with stranger harassment: active (e.g., "I would let him know how I felt about what he was doing"; $\alpha = .70$), passive (e.g., "I would just ignore the whole thing"; $\alpha = .90$), benign (e.g., "I would consider it flattering"; $\alpha = .65$) and

self-blame (e.g., "I would feel stupid for letting myself get into the situation"; α = .68). Active coping is measured through four items as is self-blame coping, while benign coping consists of five and passive coping of seven items.

2.2.5. Emotional state

To assess the post-experimental emotional state of the participants, they had to indicate on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) the extent to which the person in the situation would feel the following emotions: *happy, joyous, sad, fearful, excited, indifferent, complimented, disgusted, nervous, anxious,* and *angry*. These items were selected based on previous studies on stranger harassment (see Fairchild, 2008). As in previous work, all positive emotions were reverse-scored and ratings were averaged in a negative emotion score (α = .81). Higher scores thus indicated more negative emotions participants imagined experiencing in the situation.

2.2.6. Felt Power Questionnaire

Adapted from Bombari et al. (2017), felt power was assessed by three items that described how powerful one would imagine to feel after coping with the stranger harassment situation. The items were *sure of myself, superior* and *powerless* (reversed) and their extent of appliance had to be indicated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) (α = .71). Participants' ratings were averaged, so that the higher the score, the more women felt in power.

2.2.7. Body Surveillance Scale

We assessed women's self-objectification through the measure of body surveillance by using a subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (Mckinley & Hyde, 1996). Eight items (e.g., "I would barely think about how I look to other people") assessed participants tendency to body self-monitoring statements on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*totally*). For the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .76 and the translation by Hroch (2013), which was designed with a translate-retranslate method of two certified English speakers, was used. Ratings were averaged so that the higher the body surveillance score was, the higher the women's level of body surveillance, thus self-objectification was.

2.2.8. Demographics questionnaire

Participants were asked to report their gender, age, highest achieved education level, as well as if they had ever been or were resident in Germany. The last question was necessary, as previous research gave evidence to assume (the perception of) sexual harassment and sexual

objectification to vary between cultures (Loughnan et al., 2015; Sigal et al., 2005). Therefore, we wanted to assure that all participants were familiar with the same cultural context, namely the German one. At the end of the study, without referring to the imagined situation anymore, participants indicated the frequency of their own personal experiences of stranger harassment on a scale from 1 (*never*) - 7 (*every day*).

2.3. Procedure

The study has been approved by the ISCTE ethical committee. It was conducted online via the survey platform Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) and it was advertised only to participants living or having lived in Germany. Therefore, the survey and scales were translated from English to German, either using already existing reliable translations or by the author, who is a German native speaker. These translations were double checked by an independent third-party translator until consent was reached (for originals and translations of the scales see Appendix).

After providing their informed consent, participants were asked to report their level of emotional stress by answering five screening items (*depressive, anxious, angry, happy, confident*). Those participants who reported high emotional distressed in all three negative items (*anxious*, *depressive* and *angry*) were hindered from participating in the study. Due to the nature of the study, we wanted to prevent highly distressed participants to be negatively affected by the survey. Next, participants completed the BS scale (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Then, they were asked to imagine being the woman in a situation described in a vignette and were randomly assigned to one of the conditions, namely the stranger harassment or the neutral condition. Participants were asked to describe in their own words how they would feel in and react to the situation in an open-ended question. Next, participants completed scales assessing their reactions to the situation, emotions, sense of power felt after reacting, and self-objectification measured by body surveillance. Finally, they reported their demographics, were thanked and debriefed.

2.4. Design

The experiment employed a between-subject design with two different conditions: stranger harassment (experimental) vs. neutral (control) vignette. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions representing our independent variable. In the study, BS was predicted to be a moderator of the response to a stranger harassment. Moreover, emotional states, feeling of being in power as well as self-objectification were treated as dependent

variables. Finally, coping strategies were used as mediators for the effect of condition on each depended variable.

Results

As the survey included both, an open-ended question and questionnaires, results were analysed separately. First, the qualitative data found through the open-ended question was assessed through a thematic analysis, then statistical analyses of quantitative data deriving from the questionnaires were performed.

In the survey, participants were not asked to directly imagine the situation, but instead take the perspective of the person described in the vignette. To measure if this imaginative process however may give hints on the actual, personal experiences of the participants, they were asked if they had drawn from their own experiences when answering the open-ended question. The majority of people indicated to have done so: 87.8% in the stranger harassment condition and 80.8% in the neutral condition reported to have drawn from own experiences. This is in line with research suggesting that already by taking the perspective of a character in an imagined situation is relatable to personal experiences of the perspective taking persons (Batson et al., 1997; Davis et al., 1996).

With regards to the prevalence of stranger harassment, in the stranger harassment condition, 92.7% indicated to have experienced a situation as the one described in the vignette in their own lives, while 90.4% of the participants in the neutral condition had personally experienced such a situation.

3.1. Qualitative Results

The responses were analysed through a thematic analysis following the systematic coding strategy proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). To do so, the analysis software NVivo was used facilitating the organization of the data. The development of codes and themes followed the step-by-step guide offered by Braun and Clarke (2006), entailing the initial familiarization with the data; the generation of initial codes; the search for and review of themes; and finally, the definition and naming of themes. Before doing so, multiple questions of approach were considered. Therefore, the present thematic analysis encompassed an inductive approach to the data, which is applied when data is not supposed to be integrated to frames of codes that already exist but the frame rather is created based on the data at hand. This decision was based on the idea to enrich the quantitative part of this study with qualitative data, therefore making it necessary to keep the analysis open to find patterns and meanings beyond quantitative frames

and models. For this reason, the open-ended question preceded the scales. Moreover, the focus of analysis was set on a latent approach, implying to explore the underlying concepts, notions and suppositions that are expressed through the data's semantics instead of analysing the semantic, explicit content itself. To understand a phenomenon as complex as stranger harassment, which is enforced by various factors while underlying social constructs as the inequality between men and women, it was crucial in the present study to go beyond the semantic surface of the participants answers to the open-ended question. Finally, the thematic analysis was driven by a constructionist perspective, aiming "to theorize the sociocultural context, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). While the following will focus on a more descriptive presentation of the analysis, in the discussion part of this paper interpretations, concepts and underlying patterns will be dwelled on.

The analysis resulted in 61 codes for the stranger harassment condition and 17 codes for the neutral condition. These codes made up 4 themes in the stranger harassment condition (emotions during the situation, reactions to and in the situation, context dependency and insecurity of reacting, and emotions felt after the imagined situation) and 3 themes in the neutral condition (helping, context dependency, and not helping). Following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006) we refrained from including a quantitative measure of reliability and rigidness of the data. Thematic analysis itself aims to provide an interpretative approach to analyse given data without pretending this to be done in a neutral way. This does not just apply to thematic analysis but to qualitative methodology in general, which is by its very nature based on (more or less subjective) interpretations and focus-setting of the author(s). Instead, and as attempted in the aforementioned description of approaches and decisions, being explicit and clear about the theories, methods and steps applied is expected to create rigidity in a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, the decision was informed by the discussion on the usefulness and necessity of introducing intercoder reliability in qualitative research (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020) as well as by the explication provided by Madill et al. (2000), who concluded that reliability measures are not appropriate in the framework of a constructivist epistemology that is integrated in the present study. Further supporting the refrain from reliability measures was the fact that the present study entailed a multi-method approach, and therefore did not solely rely on a qualitative approach to analysis but was also informed by quantitative methods.

3.1.1. Emerging themes in the stranger harassment condition

The 82 spontaneous answers provided by participants who had imagined to be in a stranger harassment situation could be categorized accordingly: emotions during the situation, reactions to and in the situation, context dependency and insecurity of reacting, and emotions felt after the imagined situation. A summary of these can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Summary of Themes in the Stranger Harassment Condition

Theme	Summary
Emotions during the situation	Majorly negative emotions such as discomfort, anxiety, anger, insecurity.
Reaction to and in the situation	Mostly passive reactions including ignoring the person and escaping the situation quickly. Some participants would react actively by confronting the harasser, pointing out unacceptability. Others would perform non-verbal behaviours of disapproval.
Context dependency and reaction insecurity	Context such as bustle of the street, being alone, mental state of mind played an important role on imagined emotions and reaction. General insecurity and uncertainty among participants of how to react and perceive the situation.
Emotions felt after situation	Feeling anger about oneself for not having reacted differently during the situation. Persistence of bad emotions even after the situation.

3.1.1.1. Emotions during the situation

All emotions that participants imagined feeling in the stranger harassment situation were negative. Thus, almost all women who participated in the study imagined to feel at least one negative emotion in the stranger harassment situation. These negative emotions covered a wide range of different nuances where especially discomfort, anxiety (here the anxiety of being followed was mentioned particularly) and anger were mentioned often. One participant summarized her imagined feelings as "I would feel a lot at once. I would be uncomfortable with the situation, and at the same time I would be angry and upset" (P65) while another one even stated that she "would freeze with anxiety inside" (P20). Moreover, also feeling insecure was pointed out, including specifically not daring to speak up against the harasser, as described by

a participant assuming she "would try to say something against it but [she] wouldn't be sure if [she] would dare to do so" (P9). Whenever women pointed out to feel "flattered" or "complimented", they did at the same time draw attention to feeling simultaneously negative emotions (for instance, "Probably a part of me would feel complimented in some way and enjoy the attention. Still, I would be disgusted and outraged by the invitation to come over", P69). Some participants implied to imagine being upset about the disrespectful and plump approach of the man towards the woman. "How disrespectful can one actually be when addressing a woman? Does he really think he'll be successful in any way?", one participant described her thoughts (P122). This way of thinking even climaxed for participants who reported that any kind of emotional and behavioural reaction would not be worth it anyways. One of the participating women resumed "I have no desire to deal with such people, or get involved, because you can't talk to them and they don't understand why it's so uncomfortable and inappropriate" (P81). Others imagined feeling disgusted during the stranger harassment situation or stated that they would feel objectified and sexualized. The responses showed that imagining to be in a stranger harassment situation was always connected to negative feelings and emotions.

3.1.1.2. Reactions to and in the situation

When imaging how to react to the stranger harassment, a number of participants pointed out to react passively, namely not actually reacting or paying attention to the harasser. This expressed itself most of the time in just ignoring the person and keep on walking, like for example in one woman's answer "I would be angry about the manner of the pickup line, just continue walking and ignore the man" (P27). While ignorance mostly was imagined to be done because it was felt to be the safest approach to the situation, others imagined showing this behaviour for the reason that ignorance was the worst punishment one could receive. Escaping the situation was a reaction imagined by many participants, precisely to increase the walking pace and quickly pass the man. Only few participants imagined speaking up against the harasser, thus to react actively. This was imagined to be done either in a polite way, clarifying the unacceptability of his behaviour or answering with a "no (thanks)" or something like "I would point out to him how inappropriate his comment was" (P51). But it could also entail a more aggressive approach like confronting the man with "How dare you talk to me from the side without being asked? Your behaviour is disrespectful and inappropriate. Stick your 'baby' somewhere else" (P112). Another imagined approach to react to the situation was to show disapproval through non-verbal behaviours. Particularly throwing an angry look at the person or looking away, but also showing the middle finger, rolling one's eyes, or shaking the head were mentioned as possible non-

verbal behaviours. One participant stated: "Maybe I would shake my head while passing him or throw a derogatory look at him to signalize him non-verbally that I disapprove with his behaviour" (P83). Few participants indicated that they would use their mobile phone in such a situation, either for being prepared to call someone for help or for pretending to have a call in order to feel safer. Finally, it is noteworthy to draw attention to the fact, that none of the participants imagining a stranger harassment situation would have reacted in a way that would induce any further engagement with the man, like a conversation or mutual contact.

3.1.1.3. Context dependency and insecurity of situation

A number of the participants alluded to the relevance of the context when describing their emotions and reactions in the imagined situation. While sometimes the context in general was mentioned, others specified contextual factors like the bustle of the street, whether the woman was alone or in company as well as the own mental condition. One participant summarized: "But that [the reaction] always depends on the context: for example, are several people still on the road? Am I alone or in company? Alone I tend to be silent more often" (P62). Depending on these factors, they imagined feeling more or less safe and anxious, and to react in different ways, confronting the person or ignoring him. One woman for instance reflected that "on a good day I would maybe even dare to say 'no'" (P33).

While some referred to those specific contexts, in general, the answers reflected insecurity about the situation and how they would imagine to react to it. This general insecurity also mirrored in the frequent usage of words like "maybe", "probably", "possibly" and "eventually", which many participants used to describe how they may have reacted. The overall insecurity of the situation was further highlighted by the fact that most participants did not strictly point out a reaction strategy which would reflect confidence and security in the situation, but mostly reported different possible reaction strategies, for instance "[I] would probably answer 'No, thank you' or not respond at all" (P57) or "I would probably ignore the comment and then get angry at myself afterwards that the guy gets away with it and I didn't confront him. Or I would give him the middle finger" (P31).

3.1.1.4. Emotions after the situation

Only some participants described how they would feel after the situation. Yet, those participants who did point out how they would feel after experiencing this stranger harassment situation, mostly indicated that they imagined feeling angry about themselves for not having reacted differently (i.e., more actively) in the situation. "Later, I would be angry again about the

situation and my reaction" (P33) or "These 2 seconds can sometimes ruin my whole day and I think about how I could have reacted differently, how I could have handled the situation more confidently and self-assuredly" (P62) underline this post-situational stress. The latter as well underlines what also other participants indicated, namely that the negative emotions felt through the catcall would persist even after the situation, while feeling discomfort or even "incredibly dirty" (P11).

In conclusion, most participants reported to imagine exclusively negative emotions in a stranger harassment situation as described in the stranger harassment vignette. Moreover, most of them imagined reacting in a passive way, an inactive reaction for which some participants stated to be angry at themselves afterwards. An active confrontation as well as non-verbal behaviours of disapproval were other reactions that participants imaged to show. While a general insecurity about the situation could be identified in many participants responses, also the context seemed to play an important role on the imagined emotions and reactions.

3.1.2. Emerging themes in the neutral condition

Out of the 52 answers given from participants who were part of the neutral condition, three main themes with various subdimensions emerged: helping, context dependency and no helping. The last theme only appeared in four participants, who perceived the comment as an inappropriate way of getting in touch with them rather than a neutral question and therefore indicated not to help. It will therefore not be dwelled on.

3.1.2.1. Helping

The vast majority of participants indicated that they would imagine to react by helping the tourist to suggest a place where to buy an umbrella. Despite the action of helping, the perception and thoughts on doing so diverged among participants. Some of them specifically mentioned to consider the situation to be rather "neutral" and "normal" (for example "That would be a completely normal situation for me", P5), understood helping as an act of courtesy and kindness or even felt good for helping someone. Yet, there was a noteworthy amount of participants engaging an alertness in the situation and scepticism about the tourists intentions, like one participant reflected "as a woman, I am in any case prepared at any time for the fact that more could come than the question about the umbrella" (P55). Precisely and as shown in the quote, using the question for a place to buy an umbrella as an excuse for getting in touch with the imaginative character was a common concern. Moreover, participants particularly stated they would have been surprised of being approached in this situation and would be motivated to

keep the interaction short, thus trying to leave the situation quickly. One participant stated to help, "but after that, however, I would move on immediately" (P8).

3.1.2.2. Context dependency

Some participants imagined their reaction to the situation to rely on contextual factors. Particularly the tourist's appearance was mentioned to be relevant for which reaction would be shown in the situation. This included for example whether the person looked "unsympathetic" (P80), "dangerous" (P67) or "drunk" (P25). Similarly, the (body) language proved to be relevant for some participants for deciding how to react in such a situation. For instance, one woman mentioned that she would "hesitate whether to answer at all and [to] make it dependent on the man's appearance and body language" (P114).

In sum, the answers from the neutral condition group showed that generally participants imaged to help the tourist with his request, but that the way of reacting, for example being kind or leaving quickly, would also depend on multiple contextual factors.

3.2. Quantitative Results

3.2.1. Coping strategies

A 2 (stranger harassment vs. neutral condition) MANCOVA was performed on coping strategies including the preconditional distress as covariate. A significant multivariate main effect of condition was found, $F(4, 128) = 33.52$, $p < .001$, *partial η^2* = .51. Women in the stranger harassment condition were more likely to show coping behaviours than women in the neutral condition. With regards to the follow-up ANCOVA for each coping strategy, the condition effect was only significant for the active, $F(1, 131) = 32.75$, $p < .001$, *partial $\eta2$* = .20; passive, $F(1, 131) = 15.44$, $p < .001$, *partial $\eta2$* = .11; and benign, $F(1, 131) = 37.34$, $p < .001$, *partial $\eta2$* = .22; coping strategies but not for self-blame, $F(1, 131) = 0.84$, $p = .36$, *partial $\eta2$* = .01 (for *M* and *SD* of each condition see Table 3.2). Thus, confirming our first hypothesis, active, passive and benign coping strategies were imagined to be more likely in the stranger harassment than in the neutral condition.

Table 3.2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Coping Strategies for MANCOVA

Coping strategy	Condition	Mean (*M*)	Standard Deviation (*SD*)
Active	Neutral condition	2.21	0.96
	Stranger harassment condition	3.49	1.32
Passive	Neutral condition	3.44	1.43
	Stranger harassment condition	4.57	1.67
Benign	Neutral condition	2.63	1.00
	Stranger harassment condition	1.67	0.76
Self-blame	Neutral condition	1.83	1.28
	Stranger harassment condition	1.79	0.96

3.2.2. Negative emotions and felt power

In the next step, three 2 (condition: stranger harassment vs. neutral) ANCOVAs including preconditional distress as a covariate were performed on each dependent variable (emotions, felt power and body surveillance).

The ANCOVA on negative emotions showed a significant main effect of the condition $F(1, 131) = 77.20$, $p < .001$, *partial η2* = .37, indicating that participants reported more negative emotions in stranger harassment ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 0.75$) than in the neutral ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.90$) condition. Thus, participants who were exposed to the stranger harassment condition showed higher negative emotions than those exposed to the neutral condition.

The second ANCOVA on felt power showed a significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 131) = 19.85$, $p < .001$, *partial η2* = .13. Participants reported more felt power in the neutral ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.18$) than in the stranger harassment ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.47$) condition. Therefore, imagining a stranger harassment situation influenced the feeling of power whereas imagining a situation with a neutral comment did not.

The third ANCOVA did not yield a significant main effect of condition on body surveillance, $F(1, 131) = 1.61$, $p = .21$, *partial η2* = .01. Participants reported similar body surveillance in the neutral ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.18$) and stranger harassment ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.05$) condition. This means, there was no difference between participants in the stranger harassment and the neutral condition with regards to the self-objectification measured through body surveillance. Therefore, the second hypothesis could only partly be supported, that is for negative emotions, felt power, but not body surveillance.

3.2.3. Moderation effect of BS

In order to understand whether the effect of imagining a stranger harassment on showing coping strategies was moderated through BS, three moderations, one for each significant coping strategy (active, passive, benign), were run with PROCESS Model 1 (5000 bootstrap samples; Hayes, 2017). Thus, each coping strategy was used as dependent variable respectively, while condition was inserted as the independent variable and BS as moderator in all three moderations we ran. All variables were centred. Results showed no moderation effects of BS on the effect of condition on the coping strategies (active, B= -0.14, t = -.56, p = .58; passive, B= 0.51, t = 1.62., p = .11, and benign, B= 0.19, t = 1.11, p = .27), when controlling for preconditioned distress. Hypothesis three was therefore not supported.

3.2.4. Mediation effects of coping strategies

To assess, whether the effect of the condition on negative emotions, felt power and body surveillance happened through specific coping strategies, three mediation analyses were conducted with PROCESS Model 4 (5000 bootstrap samples; Hayes, 2017). The mediations involved the condition as an independent variable, while the mediators were the three significant coping strategies (active, passive, benign) and the three dependent variables were negative emotions, felt power and surveillance respectively and in separate analyses.

With regards to negative emotions, it was expected that imagining to be in a stranger harassment (vs. control) situation increases the engagement in active coping, that, in turn, elicits less negative emotions, whereas the engagement in passive and benign coping, in turn, elicits more negative emotions. Yet the data revealed that all three coping strategies were mediating the effect of the condition on more negative emotions (active coping, B = 0.26, t = 4.81, p < .001, 95% CI [0.15, 0.37]; passive coping, B = 0.17, t = 4.08, p < .001, 95% CI [0.09, 0.25]; benign coping, B = -0.42, t = -6.31, p < .001, 95% CI [-0.55, -0.29]).

The engagement in passive and benign coping mechanisms in the stranger harassment (vs. the control) condition was expected to elicit less felt power than the engagement in active coping, which was expected to elicit more felt power. The mediation analysis showed that only passive, B = -0.29, 95% CI [-0.45, -0.14], t = -3.75, p < .001, 95% CI [-0.45, -0.14], and benign, B = 0.43, t = 3.38, p = .001, 95% CI [0.18, 0.68], coping mechanisms were found as mediators for the feeling of power, but not active coping, B = -0.04, t = -.38, p = .70, 95% CI [-0.24, 0.16]. These findings only partly our fourth hypothesis as it means that stranger harassment increased passive and benign coping, which in turn, explained a reduction of felt power, while active coping was not mediating the effect of condition on more felt power.

Finally, the engagement in passive and benign coping mechanisms in the stranger harassment (vs. the control) condition was expected to elicit more self-objectification than the engagement in active coping, which was expected to elicit less self-objectification. Contrary to our hypothesis, the mediation analysis showed that there was no indirect effect of condition on body surveillance, neither for active, B = -0.10, *t* = -1.09, *p* = .28, 95% CI [-0.27, 0.08], passive, B = -0.01, *t* = -.15, *p* = .88, 95% CI [-0.14, 0.12], or benign coping, B = 0.04, *t* = .39, *p* = .70, 95% CI [-0.17, 0.26].

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The present study contributed to the limited research on coping with stranger harassment by integrating a qualitative and quantitative approach. As expected, we found that participants in the stranger harassment condition imagined engaging in coping strategies (active, passive and benign, but not self-blame) more than in the neutral condition. Moreover, they reported more negative emotions (such as anxiety, anger, disgust) and less felt power in the stranger harassment condition, while surprisingly no difference across conditions emerged for body surveillance, a measure for self-objectification. Contrary to our expectation, BS endorsement did not moderate the effect of condition on imagined coping strategies engagement. Besides, all (significant) coping strategies, namely active, passive, and benign, functioned as mediators for more negative emotions, which partly disconfirmed our hypothesis. Regarding felt power, only passive and benign coping strategies served as mediators for the effect of the condition on felt power, while active ones did not. Therefore, the results only partly confirmed the hypothesis. Finally, the effect of condition on body surveillance was not mediated by any coping strategies.

Our qualitative data allowed us to get additional insights on how participants imagined dealing with a stranger harassment experience (vs. a neutral situation). In line with previous work (e.g., Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), passive coping mechanisms such as avoidance and ignorance, as well as non-verbal behaviours were the most common reactions for women imagining a stranger harassment situation. However, women imaging such reactions sometimes indicated feeling angry at themselves after the situation for not having reacted differently. Moreover, contextual and personal factors were imagined to play a role in the choice of reaction.

4.1. Stranger Harassment in Germany

The present study's qualitative results confirmed previous studies in their findings that stranger harassment is perceived as unacceptable and negative (YouGov, 2014). These findings suggest that participants understood the event as stranger harassment and perceived it as unacceptable, as it was shown in the pre-test. The results further reflect current developments in the German society promoting actions against stranger harassment, such as the large-scale petition on criminalizing stranger harassment (Quell, 2020) or movements like *Catcalls Of*, through which

young women chalk the street up with comments they heard on this spot (Lipkowski, 2020). Although the condition of the present study involved imagining a stranger harassment situation rather than an actual event, participants drew on their own experiences to imagine and interpret it, as indicated by previous research (Davis et al., 1996). Indeed, the present sample did report frequent episodes of stranger harassment like it was found in other studies in Canada and the US (Lenton et al., 1999; Macmillan et al., 2000; B. A. Saunders et al., 2017). The study thus confirmed that also in Germany, stranger harassment belongs to the daily reality of women in public places.

4.2. Coping with and Reacting to Stranger Harassment

4.2.1. Passive coping and non-verbal behaviours

In line with the previous research on how women react to stranger harassment and sexism (e.g., Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), the present research provided evidence for the high prevalence of passive coping strategies in stranger harassment situations. Common behaviours mentioned by our participants were ignoring and avoiding the perpetrator and trying to escape the situation, which is consistent with results other scholars found (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017). It is further in line with the assumption of the cognitive appraisal process of the stress and coping theory (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which describes that when dealing with a stressful event, one factor influencing the choice of reaction (avoidance or engagement) is the feeling of preparedness to cope with the event. The qualitative data of the present study provided insights about the high insecurity and uncertainty emerging in participants when imagining a stranger harassment situation. This insecurity may indicate low levels of feeling prepared to cope with the incident, resulting in a high likelihood to engage in avoidance, or more general, in passive behaviours.

While previous research showed that women engaged in passive coping as a means of protection and risk decrease resulting from the cost-benefit analysis (Swim & Hyers, 1999), in the present study some women chose to ignore the perpetrator because it was the worst punishment and disrespectful behaviour one could display to emphasize the unacceptability of the situation. This finding thus underlines the notion that a reaction different from verbal confrontation is far from being silent concordance, but rather the outcome of a deep internal consideration of individually and contextually dependant factors (Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Swim & Hyers, 1999). Similarly, the present study also revealed that many women tried to show their disapproval by enacting non-verbal behaviours such as shaking their heads, giving an angry

look or crossing the arms in front of the chest. Thus far, such non-verbal behaviours did not receive a lot of attention in relation to the specific situation of stranger harassment, as they are for instance concretely missing in the Coping with Stranger Harassment Scale by Fairchild (2010). While they may be counted as a form of passive coping (Esacove, 1998), they could also be labelled as a milder form of active coping as they do include an action of the target. In fact, in her study on reacting to prejudices, Hyers (2007) with referral to Swim et al. (1998) did so, as she differed only between *non-assertive* and *assertive* responses. While non-assertive responses included behaviours like self-blame, doing nothing or playing it down, assertive responses included direct non-verbal responses as the ones found in the present study, as well as direct verbal responses and questioning the perpetrator. This categorization of reactions differs from the common one by Fairchild and Rudman (2008) used for stranger harassment. In Hyers' (2007) categorization, both self-blame and benign coping strategies fell under the label non-assertive response, while assertive responses included behaviours that would belong to passive coping strategies in the categorization by Fairchild and Rudman (2008). These different conceptualizations of coping strategies underline the necessity of future research to implement clearer concepts, which should specifically take into consideration a broader definition of what active coping entails.

Regardless of the label as assertive, passive or active, non-verbal actions of disapproval may seem a good option for women to react since they possibly depict a balance between the two poles of not reacting at all despite disagreeing (e.g., by ignoring the harasser) and reacting aggressively which may cause danger. Given that women face a cost-benefit analysis including the anticipated risk of the situation, non-verbal behaviours may often be perceived as the safest option in a situation where more confrontative active strategies may appear too dangerous, but not showing any kind of disapproval may want to be avoided. Also the study by Farmer and Smock Jordan (2017) pointed out these benefits of non-verbal behaviours as making women feel less victimized and more agentic.

4.2.2. Active coping and resistance

Emerging from the quantitative part of the study, active coping strategies were found to be more likely to emerge in the stranger harassment condition than in the neutral condition. However, it was not the main type of reaction as indicated by the qualitative data in which only seldomly women imaged to react in this way. When they did report active coping, different forms like polite and brief remarks or aggressive confrontation were listed. This is consistent with previous scholars arguing that rare occurrence of active coping strategies may be explained by the fact

that women tend to prioritise their safety before confrontation in situations that are perceived as potentially dangerous or escalating (Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Swim & Hyers, 1999).

In addition, reacting actively to stranger harassment may breach the female gender roles and norms, as these describe women as nice and polite, making an active confrontation inappropriate (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Indeed, research on sexist remarks showed that male and female individuals preferred nonaggressive confrontation over aggressive or no confrontation, as it "was the only response that combined a low threat for women and a reasonable amount of threat for men, offering the best approach if one desires to promote change with the least costs for the disadvantaged group " (Becker & Barreto, 2014, p. 681). Although a change of the perception of stranger harassment may be happening, it is still today often seen as normal and trivial (Gray, 2014), therefore speaking up loudly and aggressively against inequalities may be perceived as overreaction or exaggeration (K. A. Saunders & Senn, 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999). Di Gennaro and Ritschel (2019) go even further in proposing that women are perceived to transgress social expectations and norms when initiating a conversation with individuals of the opposite sex in public, as these acts of speech are subject to being male. Overall, these results indicate a complicated phenomenon in which gender expectations and gender relations need to be carefully considered.

While some scholars thus argue that active coping does not represent the most adaptive reaction (Ayres et al., 2009), other criticize passive behaviours as inconsistent (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). A recent paper by Fleetwood (2019) advocates for yet another perspective: whichever strategy women choose to display in such a situation, they can be considered self-defence practices that women have to execute in their everyday lives. Without denying the severity and impact of stranger harassment, stranger harassment should thus be acknowledged as a place of resistance as well. Instead of viewing women as passive victims of their environment, this perspective gives credit to their active everyday struggles and challenges which emerge due to their gender (and interacting with possibly other factors such as race, class, ethnicity etc.). Already in 1989, Gardner pointed out that women's skills, strengths and strategies to deal with men's social control in public spaces kept unacknowledged. The present study supports this notion as it disclosed the functionality of ignorance as punishment and the development of non-verbal behaviours as safe way to resist to stranger harassment.

4.2.3. Overcoming self-blame

Self-blame has been identified as one of the four main coping strategies for women to react to stranger harassment (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Nonetheless, the present study did not find a

difference in displaying self-blaming reactions between the neutral and the stranger harassment condition. Likewise, in the qualitative part of the study, only very few participants imagined blaming themselves for the situation, but rather blamed the perpetrator and current societal roles for the disrespectful, unacceptable behaviour. One possible explanation may be a shift in society throughout time, or, less general, in the German context. As already mentioned, discussions on stranger harassment and catcalling specifically have been ongoing in Germany for the past years, particularly targeting young women as our participants (Hildebrand, 2021). Raising awareness on the topic of stranger harassment may function as a meaningful tool to provoke a change by decreasing self-blame and victim shame, while holding perpetrators responsible. In fact, the study conducted by the GMFSWY similarly identified the very high sensibilization-potential of *#MeToo* on sexual harassment and sexism (Wippermann, 2020). In addition, previous research on sexual discrimination suggested that when women were encouraged not to blame themselves but the society for such incidents, they were more likely to react with unconventional confrontations instead of just accepting the situation (Foster et al., 1994). Hence, through *#MeToo* as a debate and law process on sexual harassment, the notion of blaming the victim may have shifted toward holding the perpetrator (lawfully) and societal structures accountable, thereby decreasing women to react to stranger harassment with self-blame.

4.3. Factors Influencing the Display of Different Coping Strategies

Scholars identified both contextual and interpersonal factors to have an impact on the choice of coping strategies in stranger harassment (Ayres et al., 2009). Some of these were also found in the present study. With regards to the context, the qualitative part of the study revealed that indeed factors like the bustle of the street or being in company or alone were often mentioned by women as relevant for their choice of reaction to a stranger harassment episode. These factors have been found in previous research, arguing that when being in company, the experiences of stranger harassment may be distributed thereby mitigating the negativity of it while when being alone experiencing more fear which may hinder active reactions (Fairchild, 2010). Moreover, the appearance and (body) language of the perpetrator were mentioned to be relevant for the choice of coping strategy, confirming previous research that the attractiveness of the perpetrator influenced the perception of the stranger harassment (Fairchild, 2010). A new situational factor that has been mentioned by some of our participants was, that also the mental condition and mood of the target may influence how to behave in such a situation. Although there has been different research on factors influencing the perception and reaction to stranger

harassment (Ayres et al., 2009; Fairchild, 2010), the influence of the emotional condition *before* the stranger harassment experience has not yet been investigated. While in the present study the pre-conditional emotional state of the participants was used as a covariate, considering the presented qualitative results, it may be relevant to include it as a possible variable affecting the choice of coping strategy. The closest study examining such pre-experience variables is a new research by Shepherd (2019), which showed that depending on how women were expecting to feel during a sexual objectification episode, they would anticipate to react more or less assertive, i.e. active. These results thus give important indications for future research to investigate how the situational pre-harassment emotional well-being and condition may influence women's coping behaviours in stranger harassment situations.

In oppose to our expectation, the present study did not find evidence for BS to have a moderating effect on the choice of coping strategies to be more benign and passive. Previous research found that women who identify as feminist were more likely to respond actively (Ayres et al., 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999), whereas women who believed gender relations to be fair were more likely to make benign attributions for stranger harassment situations (B. A. Saunders et al., 2017). These system-justifying beliefs were examined to be linked to benevolent sexism: through internalizing sexist beliefs, women make themselves belief to live in a fair system, enabling them to adapt to the unfairness and distress of being suppressed by men and cope with the threat it entails (Sibley et al., 2007). At the same time, sexist attitudes were identified as predictors for the acceptance of violence against girls and women, particularly rape and victim-blaming (Abrams et al., 2003). Given these assumptions, it would be reasonable that also high levels of BS would affect the choice of coping strategies. The most probable explanation for why this could not be confirmed in the present study lays in the sample: the level of benevolent sexist attitudes measured were rather low and without much variation throughout the participants of the study. Participants were collected through snowball sampling based on the author, which may have resulted in a group with rather high awareness of gender inequalities and feminist identification.

In addition, levels of BS have been shown to be culturally specific. In cultures where BS in men towards women was high, also female individuals tended to endorse these beliefs themselves (Glick et al., 2000). Thus, one could reason that the German society may hold rather low levels of BS. Since an international comparison of BS by Glick et al. (2000) showed that Germany and the US, where more of the previous work on this topic has been done, were not substantially different in their levels of BS, this is however highly unlikely to be the reason for the present results. Therefore, it will be necessary to conduct further investigations on the

impact of benevolent sexist attitudes in women on the coping strategies in stranger harassment situations particularly with a different sample that entails more variations in their levels of BS.

4.4. How Coping Strategies Affect the Outcomes of Stranger Harassment

4.4.1. Coping and emotions

The present study contributed to understanding emotional reactions to stranger harassment experiences. In line with previous research (Moya-Garófano et al., 2021; O'Leary, 2016), women imagined predominantly negative emotions like discomfort, anger and anxiety to happen during stranger harassment situations. As argued by other scholars (e.g., di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019; Gray, 2014), these findings support the notion that women do not feel good or complimented when experiencing a stranger harassment, but tend to perceive it as nothing more than a threat, an injustice, an intrusion or an act of disrespect. The novelty of the present study yet was the focus on how women felt *after* engaging in coping strategies rather than *during* experiencing it possibly explaining why they engage in specific coping strategies. It was thus one of the first studies to multi-methodologically investigate how different coping strategies interact with the negative emotional outcomes of stranger harassment. Interestingly, all strategies mediated the effect of stranger harassment on negative emotions, meaning that the stranger harassment condition, compared to the control condition, elicited higher active, passive and benign coping, which, in turn, explained the more negative emotions reported by participants. This contrasts our expectation that, as suggested by the stress and coping model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and based on previous limited research on the effects of coping with stranger harassment (Foster, 2013; Hyers, 2007; Logan, 2015), only non-active coping strategies would have such mediating role. While this result does not tell us why, qualitative data may give insight on the reason for this pattern.

Each strategy has their up- and down sides. The present result of all reactions being mediators for the effect of the condition on the negative emotions thus reflects the complexity of coping with such a situation, as each coping strategy comes along with negative and positive aspects. Active responses may happen at the cost of (the feeling of) safety as they may lead to an escalation of the situation (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Gulker et al., 2013). Moreover, they conflict normative expectations by society of women to "smile in friendly acknowledgement and keep on walking" when being whistled at in public, as for instance recommended by the *Glamour* magazine in 1969 (as cited in Gardner, 1995, p. 22-23). This may explain why active responses were found to correlate with anger, disgust, fear and anxiety in a study by Fairchild

(2010). However, such confrontative responses are useful to challenge and educate the perpetrator, thereby increasing satisfaction and well-being (Foster, 2013; Hyers, 2007), as well as feeling of agency (Fleetwood, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2010).

Passive reactions may hinder a waste of resources (Fileborn, 2019), and prevent the situation from becoming more dangerous (Swim & Hyers, 1999), thereby having a positive impact on the target. At the same time, such responses come with the cost of being misunderstood as silently accepting the situation instead of challenging it (Kaiser & Miller, 2004). As indicated through the qualitative part of the study, feelings of anger towards oneself for not having reacted differently may emerge after the situation, causing negative emotions all over again. Also, Hyers (2007) explored women reacting non-assertively would carry the situation with them longer, because they planned to react differently in future occasions, thereby expending cognitive resources, and to disclose the experience with others, thereby reviving it. However, two observations challenge these explanations: firstly, disclosing experiences has been found beneficial in dealing with the stranger harassment (Fileborn, 2019), which contradicts the assumed negative effect of revival; and secondly, in the present qualitative part of the study, only very few participants indicated to ruminate about future plans how to react differently, hence expending cognitive resource. Further research is necessary to fully understand underlying processes that make non-active responses last beyond the actual incident.

With regards to benign responses, reacting in such a way may serve as conforming to the social norms and expectations of how women should react to stranger harassment, while they may also decrease the danger of the situation (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Gulker et al., 2013). Therefore, reframing such stranger harassments as compliments may weaken momentary situational negative outcomes. Nonetheless, scholars argued that benign reactions stem from internalized sexist beliefs that once again have a negative impact on women's well-being (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Hence, even reacting in benign ways does not protect the targets from the negative outcomes of stranger harassment experiences.

Overall, each strategy can only be depicted as the accumulation of various factors that finally influence how women feel about engaging in such strategies. Even though all of them go along with positive aspects as well, none of them seems to conceal that stranger harassment reminds women of the constant inequalities they have to face and the necessity to be careful and attentive in public places. As implied through the qualitative data, even those women who imagined being confronted with a neutral approach were alerted that it may be an excuse for a sexual approach. This finding underlines the fact that women are not 'free' in public places, but

face serious impairments that sometimes go as far as avoiding specific areas, times or situation as safety measure (Gardner, 1995). Hence, it may be possible that experiencing a stranger harassment episode reminds female individuals of this debilitation of their liberty and equality, causing negative emotions despite any reaction to it. This process may happen consciously, for instance for women engaging in active or passive reactions, or unconsciously, for example in women showing benign reactions as they do not necessarily perceive the situation as unjust. Due to the complexity of the phenomenon and the various factors that play a role in such situations, further research on the topic is needed to better understand it.

The qualitative data revealed that stranger harassment situations were often accompanied by a diffuse uncertainty and insecurity on how to feel and behave in such situations. This can be explained through the fact that stranger harassment is trivialized and normalized in our societies (Gray, 2014). While benign and passive reactions are rather norm-conforming, they may contradict to what women would prefer to do, that is confronting the perpetrator and standing up against the injustice. On the other hand, reacting in such way breaches the social norms, while it may be beneficial for the women herself. Thus, all coping strategies may go along with a divergence of societal and personal expectations and norms, further causing negative emotions which cannot be impeded by any reaction.

4.4.2. Coping and power

The present study was one of the first to investigate how stranger harassment impacts the feeling of power. While in the working context, sexual harassment has been found to create a feeling of powerlessness in the target (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993), the impact of stranger harassment on the feeling of power in women has received only little attention. Yet in line with the few and exclusively qualitative studies that found the feeling of powerlessness to be one of the outcomes during and of stranger harassment (Gray, 2014; Laniya, 2005), the present study quantitively confirmed this observation. Presuming that stranger harassment depicts one of the many ways of manifestation of gender inequalities and male dominance (Gray, 2014), feelings of powerlessness in these situations are reasonable. However, in a study by Liss et al. (2011) on the enjoyment of sexualization, some women were found to feel empowered by appreciation and sexual admiration. The researchers nonetheless argued that this empowerment represents not more than a form of false empowerment, because the sexualization was still associated with negative consequences for the body image or eating disorders. Hence, their assumption is in line with the findings of the present study that indeed, experiencing stranger harassment has negative impacts on the feeling of power.

In fact, the low felt power women experience during a stranger harassment depicts the starting point of a vicious cycle. Feelings of powerlessness entail feelings of resignation (TenHouten, 2016), an emotion that also our participants mentioned together with hopelessness in the qualitative part of the study. Resignation and hopelessness may consequently lead to less active coping strategies to harassing situation, as suggested by Fileborn (2019). These non-active coping strategies may impact the feeling of power, as shown in the present study, where reacting non-actively to stranger harassment mediated the effect of condition on a reduction of felt power. More precisely and presenting a novel result emerging from this research, stranger harassment increased passive and benign coping which, in turn, explained a reduction of felt power. Taking these findings together thus reveals the necessity to break this vicious cycle. Given that active coping strategies were not found as mediators for stranger harassment on reduced felt power, these may be one of the ways to regain a feeling of power. This is also in line with previous research by Hyers (2007) who explored that women who reacted assertively and anger-based towards prejudices tended to feel agentic, regaining their sense of agency (Fleetwood, 2019) and "taking the control away from the harassers" (Sullivan et al., 2010, p. 252). Nonetheless, more research is necessary to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of active coping strategies when decreasing the loss of power felt through stranger harassment experiences.

The scale to measure felt power in the present study only consisted of three items. Therefore, it may be relevant to conduct further research on the relationship between stranger harassment and felt power including scales that are more extensive and tap into different power-related concepts. The concept of *perceived control,* which has for instance been found to buffer symptoms of battered women and moderate women's adjustment (O'Neill & Kerig, 2000), as well as the concept of *feeling of powerlessness* (TenHouten, 2016), may provide promising insights for future research.

Besides, as the present study is one of the first to investigate on the feeling of power in stranger harassment situations, more research is required to understand the mechanisms behind this pattern and possible factors that may influence the feeling of power. For instance, belonging to an additional disadvantaged group (e.g., Black women, LGTBQI women) may influence the feeling of power when reacting in a certain way to such situations. As also proposed by Fileborn (2019), the role of privilege and oppression on experiencing stranger harassment has to be dwelled on in future research.

4.4.3. Coping and self-objectification

Unlike our expectation that imagining stranger harassment would lead to higher levels of self-objectification than imagining a neutral interaction, there was no difference found between conditions. This is consistent with a recent experimental study by Fisher et al. (2019), in which no difference was found between participants who watched a video of a stranger harassment vs. a video with no harassment. Moreover, it is in line with the present findings that self-blame was not different between the stranger harassment condition and the neutral condition, as previous research showed that women who responded to coping with self-blame or passive reactions would self-objectify (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). Hence, as self-blame was not different, also self-objectification was not different between conditions.

However, several correlational and self-report studies did explore a relation between stranger harassment and self-objectification (Davidson et al., 2015; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Koval et al., 2019). Also, the qualitative part of the study revealed that some women specifically mentioned to imagine feeling objectified and treated as a sexual object. Since the SOT (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) postulates that when feeling objectified by others, self-objectification becomes prevalent, it should be assumed that self-objectification happened at least to some extent in the present study. Therefore, it may be argued that the reason for the insignificant finding lays in the usage of the Body Surveillance Scale, which was used to measure self-objectification (Mckinley & Hyde, 1996). Since the scale's items are formulated in a way that measures a trait rather than a state (e.g., "I would think more often about how I look" or "I would think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me"), it may have been difficult for the participants to answer such general questions in terms of this specific situation. Possibly, results would have been different if another scale assessing state self-objectification (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 1998) had been applied. Indeed, research on sexual harassment proposed that the consequences emerging from an incident are fluid and changing throughout time (Fileborn, 2013). This may as well account for the insignificant results of self-objectification, since self-objectification may be less easily malleable through imagining one single situation than for instance the emotional state or the power felt in that moment.

This explanation may also serve for the result that unlike the expectation, no significant mediation effect of self-objectification was found for none of the coping strategies. Given that also the main effect of the condition on self-objectification was not significant, this result is not surprising. Nonetheless, it opposes partly to previous literature, for instance by Fairchild and Rudman (2008), who found that participants showing active reactions to stranger harassment

were less likely to self-objectify. A possible explanation for the inconsistent result is that other factors that were not considered in the present study may have impacted the outcome. A recent study by Moya-Garófano et al. (2021) explored that experiencing stranger harassment only increased women's body shame when they perceived it as empowering, it made them happy or they reacted with low anger. As the qualitative part of the study revealed that anger was very pertinent in the participants while happiness or empowerment was not, this may be a reason for the insignificant results. A more optimistic interpretation of the present results on self-objectification is suggested by Fisher and colleagues (2019), who argued that women may be more resilient than assumed. Thus, experiencing stranger harassment situations may have less impact on body surveillance and self-objectification as expected. In fact, resilience was found to have a buffering effect on self-objectification and psychological distress when dealing with a sexually objectifying situation (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014), which supports this line of interpretation.

Self-objectification was measured through the Body Surveillance Scale (Mckinley & Hyde, 1996). Other concepts that belong to self-objectification, as for example body shame, body image or appearance control beliefs (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), have not been measured in the present study. As body surveillance does not measure the self-perception as a sexual object, but the attention put on the own appearance, these other state measures of self-objectification could be assessed for further insights on the relation between coping and self-objectification. Given the inconsistency of different findings, more (experimental) research is necessary to explore the relations of stranger harassment and self-objectification, as well as the impact of coping strategies.

4.5. Limitations

While the present study gave important contributions to the limited research on stranger harassment, it also underlaid specific limitations. Firstly, the study was based on imagining a situation, which may differ from how participants would behave in real life (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Previous scholars found that women often imagined to react more actively to stranger harassment than they would do in real life (Swim & Hyers, 1999) and tended to imagine being more angry, while in real life they reported to be rather anxious (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). Given that imagining a situation was however found an effective way of understanding psychological phenomena that may otherwise lead to high discomfort (Batson et al., 1997), imaginative methods are reasonable. In addition, studies that encompassed other methods such as ecological momentary assessment and interviews did find similar results to the present study

(e.g., Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017; Fisher et al., 2019). Therefore, despite the imaginary context, the present results are supportive of the current literature. Still, future research to verify the results through other methodological approaches such as observations or field studies assessing real experiences, should be considered.

Moreover, the present study did not entail an intersectional approach to stranger harassment. Nonetheless, all gender issues, including stranger harassment, are intersectional topics that should be regarded intertwined with other factors such as sexual orientation and identity, race or socio-economic status (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017; Fileborn, 2019). For instance, Fogg-Davis (2006) explored that for African-American women the effects of same-race harassment may differ from different-race harassment. Moreover, she argued that depending on which of the two identities, race and sex, women internalize as primary social identity, they may perceive stranger harassment as a more or less urgent issue to tackle. At the same time, some scholars provided evidence that women of colour may experience stranger harassment more frequently and often intertwined with racism (Fogg-Davis, 2006; Kearl, 2010). Due to this study's research question, we did not ask participants for ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background, all of which may have played a role in the results. Therefore, it is crucial for future research to conduct studies through an intersectional lens.

Additionally, given that the sample was rather homogenous in age and educational degrees, the study's generalizability is limited. However, previous studies provided evidence that particularly young women, as the sample's age in the present study, are subject to stranger harassment on a frequent basis (Lenton et al., 1999). By collecting data from women ranging in the age from 18-34 years, we thus investigated the group that is most affected by stranger harassment. Another limitation regarding the sample is its collection method. The survey was spread through a snowball sampling approach within the network of the researcher, which may have reached participants who are particularly aware and interested in gender inequalities and feminism. As these attitudes have an impact on how stranger harassment is perceived and dealt with, the results of the study may be unrepresentative. In addition, considering that the data was collected during social and public restrictions implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is possible that participants' experiences with stranger harassment changed, as public and social life was detrimentally restricted. Still, other forms of stranger harassment, for instance online rather than in person, may have occurred, making this an interesting venue for future research.

Research provided evidence that specifically contextual factors play an essential role in the perception and reaction to stranger harassment. For instance, expected emotions were found to influence the reaction to such situations (Shepherd, 2019), as well as factors like the bustle of

the street or the attractiveness of the perpetrator (Fairchild, 2010). We tried to counteract this by designing the vignettes including some contextual factors (for instance that it happened during daylight), pretesting them in a pilot study and controlling for the pre-conditional emotions. Nevertheless, it is not excludable that participants may have imagined different situations which hence may have elicited different responses. Another approach to this may be to introduce a more detailed vignette including different contextual factors.

4.6. Practical Implications and Conclusion

Despite its limitations, by studying the phenomenon of stranger harassment, the present study contributed to the limited research on the issue. This is particularly important, as stranger harassment situations depict a very particular form of sexual harassment, complicating the transfer of findings about sexual harassment to stranger harassment situations. Entailing a mixed-method design, the overall negative outcomes of experiencing stranger harassment were pointed out. Being a woman in public places is not the same as being a man in public, which explicitly shows the detrimental intrusions and restrictions women face every day.

This study helped understanding the interplay between coping strategies, emotional reactions and self-perception and provided insights for future research as well as policy decisions and interventions. Inconsistent results and gaps in research emphasize the necessity of understanding stranger harassment more thoroughly. This should be done having women's well-being at its core. A first step towards this may be to include more diverse types of coping into the theorization of (active) coping strategies, thereby recognizing all kinds of coping as acts of resistance. Even though different reactions may lead to a better or worse well-being in women, as shown in the present study, the complexity of such situations and its entanglement with gender roles and norms does not yet allow final conclusions on which strategies may be most beneficial for women.

Until and while the topic is understood better, supporting the target, stopping the perpetrators, and creating awareness and discourse in the broad society will be crucial to make a change. Recognizing women's struggle and uncertainty of how to react and deal with such situations is essential when understanding how to best support and empower the fight against stranger harassment. Such support should not just entail different coping strategies to deal with emotional outcomes and burdens of stranger harassment, but also behavioural ones. Fileborn (2019) for instance argued that disclosing stranger harassment experiences may be an important tool for making the harm visible and thereby alter societal and cultural perceptions and attitudes. Similarly, Sullivan et al. (2010) recognized the potential of online platforms on stranger

harassment, as these offer a safe space as much as a place to exchange alternative coping responses.

While stranger harassment is only one facet of gendered violence, combatting all forms of gender inequality is essential for real changes. To do so, also men have to be involved in the process, transforming from perpetrators to allies while recognizing that also them are negatively impacted by gender inequalities.

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Appendix – Translation of Scales

A. Benevolent Sexism Scale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996)

Item	English original	German translation
1	A good woman should be set on a pedestal.	Eine gute Frau sollte von ihrem Mann auf ein Podest erhoben werden.
2	Women should be cherished and protected by men.	Frauen sollten von Männern geehrt und beschützt werden.
3	Men should sacrifice to provide for women.	Männer sollten dazu bereit sein, ihr eigenes Wohlbefinden zu opfern, um die Frauen in ihren Leben finanziell zu versorgen.
4	In a disaster, women need not to be rescued first.	Im Falle einer Katastrophe sollten Frauen nicht unbedingt vor Männern gerettet werden.
5	Women have a superior moral sensibility.	Verglichen mit Männern neigen Frauen dazu, eine höhere moralische Sensibilität zu haben.
6	Women have a quality of purity few men possess.	Viele Frauen haben eine Qualität von Reinheit, die nur wenige Männer besitzen.
7	Women have a more refined sense of culture, taste.	Im Vergleich zu Männern, haben Frauen tendenziell einen feineren Sinn für Kultur und guten Geschmack.
8	Every man ought to have a woman he adores.	Jeder Mann sollte eine Frau haben, die er anhimmelt.
9	Men are complete without women.	Männer sind ohne Frau vollkommen.
10	Despite accomplishment, men are incomplete without women.	Ganz egal was er schon erreicht hat, ein Mann ist ohne die Liebe einer Frau nicht wirklich vollständig.
11	People are often happy without romance.	Leute sind oft wahrhaftig glücklich im Leben auch ohne, dass sie mit einer

Item	English original	German translation
		Person des anderen Geschlechts romantisch involviert sind.

B. Coping with Stranger Harassment Scale (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008)

Item	English original	German translation
1	I would just "blew if off" and act like I did not care.	Ich würde es nicht ernst nehmen und so tun als sei es mir egal.
2	I would just let it go.	Ich würde es einfach auf sich beruhen lassen.
3	I would just ignore the whole thing.	Ich würde die ganze Sache einfach ignorieren.
4	I wouldn't do anything.	Ich würde nichts tun.
5	I would act like I did not notice.	Ich würde so tun, also hätte ich es nicht bemerkt.
6	I would try to forget the whole thing.	Ich würde versuchen, die ganze Sache zu vergessen.
7	I would pretend nothing was happening.	Ich würde so tun als sei nichts passiert.
8	I would realize that I had probably brought it on myself.	Ich würde denken, dass ich das wahrscheinlich selbst zu verantworten habe.
9	I would blame myself for what happened.	Ich würde mir selbst die Schuld dafür geben, was passierte.
10	I would realize he probably would not have done it if I had dressed differently.	Ich würde denken, dass er das wahrscheinlich nicht getan hätte, wenn ich anders gekleidet gewesen wäre.
11	I would feel stupid for letting myself get into the situation.	Ich würde mich blöd fühlen, mich selber in so eine Situation gebracht zu haben.
12	I would consider it flattering.	Ich würde es als schmeichelnd empfinden.
13	I would assume he meant well.	Ich würde annehmen, dass er es gut meinte.

Item	English original	German translation
14	I would figure he must really like me.	Ich würde vermuten, dass er mich wirklich mögen muss.
15	I would assume he was trying to be funny.	Ich würde annehmen, dass er versuchte lustig zu sein.
16	I would treat it as a joke.	Ich würde es wie einen Witz handhaben.
17	I would let him know I did not like what he was doing.	Ich würde ihn wissen lassen, dass mir das was er tat nicht gefiel.
18	I would let him know how I felt about what he was doing.	Ich würde ihm klarmachen, wie mich das was er tat fühlen ließ.
19	I would talk to someone about what happened.	Ich würde mit jemandem darüber reden, was passiert ist.
20	I would report him.	Ich würde ihn melden.

C. Felt Power questionnaire (Bombari et al., 2017)

Item	English original	German translation
1	Sure of myself	Selbstsicher
2	Superior	Überlegen
3	Powerless	Machtlos

D. Emotional state (as in Fairchild, 2010)

Item	English original	German translation
1	Happy	Glücklich
2	Indifferent	Gleichgültig
3	Disgusted	Angeekelt
4	Anxious	Ängstlich
5	Complimented	Geschmeichelt
6	Nervous	Nervös
7	Excited	Freudig erregt
8	Joyous	Fröhlich
9	Angry	Wütend
10	Fearful	Furchtsam

Item	English original	German translation
11	Sad	Traurig

E. Body Surveillance Scale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (Mckinley & Hyde, 1996)

Item	English original	German translation
1	I would rarely think about how I look.	Ich würde kaum über mein Aussehen nachdenken.
2	I would think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me.	Ich würde denken, es sei wichtiger dass meine Kleidung bequem ist, als dass sie gut an mir aussieht.
3	I would think more about how my body feels than how my body looks.	Ich würde mehr darüber nachdenken, wie es meinem Körper geht, anstatt wie mein Körper aussieht.
4	I would rarely compare how I look with how other people look.	Ich würde mein Aussehen kaum mit dem Aussehen anderer Leute vergleichen.
5	I would think more often about how I look.	Ich würde öfter über mein Aussehen nachdenken.
6	I would often worry about whether the clothes I am wearing make me look good.	Ich würde mir oft Sorgen machen, ob die Kleidung die ich trage mich gut aussehen lässt.
7	I would rarely worry about how I look to other people.	Ich würde mir kaum Gedanken darüber machen, wie ich für andere Leute aussehe.
8	I would be more concerned with what my body can do than how it looks.	Es würde mir mehr darum gehen, was mein Körper kann als darum wie er aussieht.
9	I would rarely think about how I look.	Ich würde kaum über mein Aussehen nachdenken.
10	I would think it is more important that my clothes are comfortable than whether they look good on me.	Ich würde denken, es sei wichtiger dass meine Kleidung bequem ist, als dass sie gut an mir aussieht.

Item	English original	German translation
11	I would think more about how my body feels than how my body looks.	Ich würde mehr darüber nachdenken, wie es meinem Körper geht, anstatt wie mein Körper aussieht.

F. Translation of Vignettes

Vignette	English version	German version
Neutral condition	Anna is walking down the street after lunch. She notices a tourist standing on the sidewalk. As she passes by the man, he calls out to her: 'What a horrible weather! Do you know where I could buy an umbrella?'	Anna läuft nach dem Mittagessen die Straße herunter. Sie bemerkt einen Touristen, der auf dem Gehweg steht. Als sie an dem Mann vorbeigeht, ruft er ihr zu: "Was für ein schreckliches Wetter! Weißt du, wo ich einen Regenschirm kaufen könnte?"
Stranger harassment condition	Anna is walking down the street after lunch. She notices a man standing on the sidewalk. As she passes by him, he calls out to her: 'Hey sexy baby, looking hot today! Wanna come over to hang out?'	Anna läuft nach dem Mittagessen die Straße herunter. Sie bemerkt einen Mann, der auf dem Gehweg steht. Als sie an ihm vorbeigeht, ruft er ihr zu: "Hey sexy baby, siehst heiß aus heute! Lust, mal rüber zu kommen?"