

ISLAMOPHOBIA & PSH

Since the inception of the concept of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1989), our understanding of the ways that many systems of oppression work to construct our identities and limit access to power has grown over the last 30 years. For example, Lloyd (2005) explains how Black women do not experience racism and sexism separately; instead, they experience racism because they are Black and sexism because they are women simultaneously, as these aspects of their identity 'interlock' and impact one another.

However, despite the significant rise in hate crimes faced by the Muslim community recently in the UK, particularly in the post-Brexit climate, there is exceptionally little academic research investigating the distressing experiences of this population. Specifically, the current brief research shows that Muslim women are more likely to face abuse than Muslim men, the nature of which frequently involves misogynistic and Islamophobic elements (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014).



According to Davis' (1994) theory of the characteristics associated with street harassment (the locale, gender of and relationship between harasser/target, and references to body parts), this elevated level of exposure to harassment and violence is only exacerbated if a woman is visibly Muslim. This is the case, for example, of Muslim women who wear the hijab or niqab (Perry, 2014). The lack of insight regarding Muslim women's experiences limits the ability of policymakers and campaigners to fully understand the victim experience and issues relating to identity characteristics when attempting to implement change and reduce harassment.

Mason-Bish and Zempi's (2019) study of veiled Muslim women experiencing Islamophobic hostility in public places found that all participants felt unsafe in public, based on previous incidents of verbal and nonverbal remarks as well as more serious incidents of physical assault or stalking. Below is a compiled list of the types of incidents faced by the women in this study, with the typical perpetrator being a White male aged between 16-25 years:

- ~ Verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment.
- ~ Sexual and lewd comments and/or noises often accompanied by sexual gestures.
- ~ Questions about an individual's sex life or sexuality.
- ~ Wolf whistling, catcalling, sexist jokes, swearing.
- ~ Having photographs taken of them without being asked for their permission.
- ~ Being followed and/or stalked.



ISLAMOPHOBIA & PSH cont'd...

Some experienced severe physical harm, such as: being pushed, slapped, spat at, shoved, had their niqabs pulled off, had objects thrown at them (e.g., alcohol bottles, eggs, stones), had weapons used against them, and vehicles attempted to run them over. The severity of such behaviours may be approached with equally strong reactions of shock. However, sadly these were common occurrences for the women in this study, with incidents being part of a 'process' of being targeted in public. This sentiment echoes Armstrong's (2016) study of sex workers, finding that they too were at risk for escalating abuse with more 'sinister undertones'. The similarities between these two populations' experiences of dehumanisation and hostility are striking, with both groups facing more specific and severe forms of harassment because of what others believe they represent.

As men are often used to visualising the female body as they wish and objectifying women in the street, in this study, wearing the niqab was seen as performing gender 'inappropriately'. Veiled Muslim women refuse to conform to the expectation of today's neo-liberal patriarchal society to be the

'object of the [male] gaze', disrupting the assumed power relations of the public sphere. As such, men in this study were often seen to be 'punishing' the veiled Muslim women for their deviant behaviour and rejection of their values and desires.

Overwhelmingly, the women in this study found themselves in a state of increased fear and vulnerability, often in anticipation of going outside and sometimes influenced by factors such as the type of area they would be attending. This increased awareness of the geography and boundaries of safety is not limited to veiled Muslim women, with many women's wider experiences of sexual harassment mirroring this, with PSH allowing men to establish the guidelines that define a woman's participation in the street.

Though some of the more common harassment behaviours may be considered 'low level', they are indicative of a larger system of sexual terrorism faced by women who, through enduring PSH, are reminded of their vulnerability to sexual violence in general, regardless of the possibility of actual rape. Specifically, in the case of veiled Muslim women, unknown men's comments and 'jokes' surrounding the woman's body underneath the niqab were tangible demonstrations of the intersections of gender and religion at play in public sexual harassment. Such men were frustrated at their inability to visualise the woman's body. Therefore, the concept of the forcible removal of the niqab links male entitlement with misogyny and Islamophobia. This specific and nuanced nature of hate crimes and harassment is frequently overlooked by policymakers, allowing for crucial experiences and their impacts to be missed when developing policy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, previous literature demonstrates how veiled Muslim women are frequently at high risk of harassment, which has previously been considered an 'invisible' harm yet severely impacts the women's access to public spaces and forces them to alter their routines, removing their autonomy. The punishment of veiled Muslim women for not performing gender the way such male perpetrators wish them to must be considered to allow for nuanced and thoroughly developed policies. Policymakers and practitioners should ensure that they involve Muslim women and other minoritised communities at every stage of development. Future research must be done to inform further our understanding of the intersectionality between misogyny and Islamophobia.



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RACISM & PSH

Finding information and work done around the intersection between race and PSH is a lot like sifting for gold. It is mentioned in a sentence or two and in between the lines. But actual data on the experiences of women of colour (especially in the UK) is near impossible to find. The location of academic work is, in this case, incredibly important as racialised PSH is informed by racial stereotypes highly dependent on historical context.



One thing all studies making mention of race agree on is that women of colour experience higher rates of PSH than white women, and that their fear of escalation and violence is higher (Cortina, Swan, Fitzgerald, & Waldo, 1998; Mansfield, Koch, Henderson, & Vicary, 1991; Paludi, 1996; Kearl, 2014). Additionally, insights gleaned from anecdotes and survey participants show that PSH experienced by women of colour is inextricably tied to their ethnicity (Mecca & Rubin, 1999; Logan, 2006), making it particularly important for research and studies to consider the specific and different experiences faced by individuals from each racialised category. South-East Asian women, for example, often report receiving exoticizing and fetishizing comments (Kearl, 2014).

Similarly, studies lack recognition of research concerning Black girls' experiences of PSH showing how they are often erased and excluded from this conversation due to adultification bias. Adultification bias refers to 'the perception of Black girls as older and more mature than their age or what their current developmental stage would indicate. Further, adultification bias is thought to result in the erroneous view that a child does not need the protections usually afforded to children' (Epstein et. al., 2017). Therefore, it is possible that adults don't afford Black girls the same protection, support, and comfort when faced with PSH. Strauss (2012) highlights that as a group, girls report the adverse effects as a result of PSH (Strauss, 2012). However, when data is analysed as a group, it is likely that Black girls' experiences may be made invisible or erased by the experiences of their white peers, since their impact of adultification is not considered. Thus, it is important to acknowledge Black girls' further marginalisation of PSH due to adultification and understand how to provide support for these impacts.

Studies have also found that racialised PSH is or can be dependent on both location and the race of their harasser (Fogg-Davis, 2006). Participants in Logan's 2006 study mentioned that they were treated differently depending on whether their harasser shared their ethnicity or not. Some of Logan's participants understood this to be, among other things, a function of differing beauty standards. One African-American participant, for example, noted that, while she received punitive comments from white harassers relating to her weight, she received far more sexually inviting harassment from African-American men.



There is also some evidence that shows women of colour are less likely to report sexual harassment if perpetrated by men who share their ethnicity (Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2007; Kearn, 2010). Given the history of structural racism in the U.S., many women of colour still distrust law enforcement to handle cases appropriately (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Most studies mentioned above were done in a US context. It would be interesting to see if these findings hold in a UK context as well where race relations are informed by England's colonial history and migration waves from commonwealth countries. While there are a smattering of studies looking into sexual violence and workplace harassment that are attentive to race, so far there has been no academic enquiry into the sexual harassment women of colour face in public spaces.

There have however been reports on PSH that have broken down demographic data and they mirrored US findings in that certain racialised groups experienced higher rates of harassment, with 88% of mixed-race girls, and 82% of Black, African Caribbean and Black British girls having experienced PSH as opposed to 75% of white girls (Plan International UK, 2021).

Theoretical Frameworks

While studies on PSH and race are thin on the ground there has been plenty of theoretical work dealing with the impact racism has on the sexism experienced by women of colour. The most famous example, of course, is Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw originally introduced the concept in 1989 in a legal context to explain the inadequacies of anti-discrimination laws in the US when applied to the experiences of African-American women. The central tenet is that racism and sexism are inextricably linked and one cannot be experienced or judged without the other (Crenshaw, 1989).

Moya Bailey and Trudy coined the term "misogynoir" in 2008 to describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience in the context of representations in visual culture and digital spaces. Since then the term has been more broadly used to describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience as a whole at the intersection of race and gender that Crenshaw identified.

Next to identifying and naming the various intersections of oppression, work has also gone into explaining why these intersections occur in the first place. A woman's race matters to the sexism she experiences because (Western) ideas of femininity and womanhood are built on ideas of (white) racial superiority (Davis, 1994; Kearn, 2010). As Davis (1994) put it, "street harassment evokes the institutional memory of slavery", with African-American women being positioned once again as a form of "property". This insight follows a whole host of maxims that impact how women of colour experience PSH such as who is deemed beautiful, "acceptably feminine", or worthy of protection (Davis, 1994; Kearn, 2010). This may explain why women of colour are more likely to experience PSH than white women and why studies around the perception of crime universally show that people across different racialised groups are more likely to imagine victims of PSH and abuse to be white women even when, statistically, this is not the truth.





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GENDER EXPRESSION, SEXUALITY & PSH

Little has been written about how queer/trans women and non-binary persons are impacted by PSH. The studies that do exist are few and far between and have several shortcomings. All are based on small sample sizes (i.e., author's often quote the difficulty of reaching a sizeable enough queer population), the majority are US-centred, most focus on urban centres, and most are outdated. Plenty has changed worldwide, and any conclusions drawn 10+ years ago might not hold today. Here is what we do seem to know:

- ~ Queer women are more likely to encounter sexual harassment in which perpetrators assume they are straight than homophobic harassment (Logan, 2006).
- ~ When queer women experience homophobic harassment, it is most often sexualised (Logan, 2006).
- ~ Trans women are at a far higher risk than either queer or heterosexual women for "verbal, physical and sexual harassment" (Jauk 2013, 808).
- ~ It is unclear if queer women experience the same amount or more sexual harassment than straight women. Studies have found evidence of both (Calabrese et al., 2015; Collier et al., 2013; Kearl, 2014).



Our Streets Now

“ There should be some level of **education**, especially when we have to take public transport home at a **young age**

- OSN Survey 2020



safeguarding
network

Queer/trans women's harassment tends to be spontaneous, while attacks on gay men tend to be premeditated and concentrated around gay spaces (Comstock 1991; D'Augelli 1992). Queer/trans women are more likely to encounter PSH:

- ~ On public transport: Transport for London found that LGBTQ+ passengers were three times more likely to encounter unsolicited sexual behaviour on public transport in London than heterosexual people (TfL 2012; see also Future Thinking 2017).
- ~ In and around public restrooms (Ceccato, 2017 & Stringer, 2007).
- ~ In locales that draw a large concentration of heterosexual men (sports venues and the like) (Ceccato, 2017 & Stringer, 2007 & Logan, 2006).

Theoretical Frameworks

As mentioned, there is not a lot of literature specifically on queer/trans women's and non-binary people's experiences of PSH. Still, there are theoretical concepts that explain the experiences of being a queer, trans or non-binary in public:

- ~ Heterosexual matrix
- ~ Gender hegemony
- ~ Gender policing
- ~ Heterosexism
- ~ Patriarchal femininity vs pariah femininity

Judith Butler, in her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), coined the term “heterosexual matrix” to describe how our patriarchal society structures and views sex, gender (expression) and sexuality. The heterosexual matrix is, essentially, a collection of assumptions we use to organise our lives:

- ~ Gender is binary: based on two sexes: female and male.
- ~ Gender is hegemonic: one gender is superior.
- ~ Sex, gender, gender expression and sexual orientation necessarily follow from each other naturally: men, who are male and masculine, are attracted to women, who are female and feminine (and vice versa).

This matrix (obviously) is unstable and has to keep being enforced. PSH is a form of this kind of gender policing, as Butler calls it. Queer/trans women and non-binary persons by existing violate the matrix by “misaligning” themselves through their gender expression and/or sexuality. But, because the matrix relies on gender expression to make sexuality visible (masculine gender expression shows attraction to women and vice versa), not every “misalignment” is immediately recognisable in public. Thus, Laura Logan (2006) argues that queer women are vulnerable to two kinds of public harassment: homophobic and heterosexual harassment.





Heterosexual Harassment

Feminine queer and trans women (who “pass”) are read as straight and, so, encounter heterosexual harassment the same way that straight women do (Hoskin, 2019 & Logan, 2006). But it is a form of heterosexism; the phenomenon of negative reactions and attitudes to homosexuality (Rye & Meaney, 2010) that are broader than homophobia - irrational, fear-based responses to homosexuality (Blumenfeld, 1992; Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). It is heterosexist because, as Tiffanie Heben highlights in her 1994 article “A Radical Reshaping of the Law: Interpreting and Remediating Street Harassment”, it serves to deny and erase queer women’s sexuality.

Homophobic Harassment

Logan (2006) states that queer women only become targets of homophobic PSH when identified as non-straight. Queer women become publically visible by either “acting queer”, engaging in public displays of affection (PDA) or “looking queer”, violating the gender matrix by appearing gender non-conforming in dress, mannerisms etc. Logan (2006) found that the type of PSH queer women receive when “acting queer” depends on their gender expression. Two feminine women engaging in PDA will receive comments that fetishise their actions, such as wanting to “join” or vocal expressions of sexual pleasure at the sight of queer PDA (Logan, 2006). One masculine and one feminine woman engaging in PDA are more likely to receive comments directed at the feminine woman along the lines of “needing a real man” (Logan, 2006).

Hoskin’s (2019) concepts of “pariah” and “patriarchal” femininities help to explain these reactions:

- ~ Patriarchal femininity is a form of gender expression that fits the patriarchal ideals of womanhood: demur, passive, pretty, sexually available (but not sexual!) and, of course, straight.
- ~ Pariah femininities are expressions of femininity that do not conform.

Feminine queer women perform a “pariah” femininity: femininity not accessible to men and not performed for their benefit. Hoskin argues that PSH is a power demonstration that uses sexualised language to transform queer women’s pariah femininity back into a femininity that is “available” to men (Hoskin, 2019 & Kearl, 2010). The second way in which queer women are identified is by “looking queer” (Logan, 2006). According to the heterosexual matrix, being masculine means being attracted to women. Thus, masculine women are identified as queer, regardless of their sexuality. The PSH masculine queer women face, according to Logan, will sometimes attempt to use shame to re-feminize masculine women through comments on their appearance as “gross” or “ugly”. But, more often, will carry the more violent threat of corrective or punitive rape. Masculine queer women, though studies are scarce, seem less likely to experience PSH, but when they do are at a higher risk of violent assault (Inness & Lloyd, 1995 & MacKay, 2019 & Rosario et al., 2008 & Levitt & Horne, 2002 & Levitt et al. 2012).



Transphobic Harassment

Like masculine women, trans women and non-binary persons are at a heightened risk of violence due to their gender nonconformity. PSH carries greater risk and threat for trans women as it is more likely to escalate (Ussher et al., 2020). If a trans woman “passes” in public, she experiences heterosexual public harassment, but if she is identified as a trans woman, PSH can turn to fetishisation and outright assault (Ussher et al., 2020). Trans women face scrutiny from both cis women and cis men over “what” they are, as both feel an increased entitlement towards trans bodies (Kearl, 2010). Trans women in surveys report experiencing a strange hybrid of bashing and catcalling when someone simultaneously mocks their gender presentation and sarcastically expresses attraction (Kearl, 2010).



Effects of Homophobic & Transphobic PSH

- ~ All queer/trans women and non-binary persons live with a heightened sense of minority stress.
- ~ “Invisible” queer women or non-binary persons experiencing heterosexual harassment often feel invalidated in their gender and sexual identity (Hoskin, 2019)
- ~ Visibly queer/trans women and non-binary persons live with a greater risk of being sexually harassed for transgressing gender roles in more ways than heterosexual women (Logan, 2006). This includes being fetishised for their sexuality or gender identity and threatened with punitive or corrective rape.

Queer/Trans women & non-binary people avoid PSH by:

- ~ Walking the fine line heterosexual women also walk: dressing and acting feminine enough to not be seen as transgressing gender roles, but “modestly” enough to not be seen as “inviting” commentary (Hoskin, 2019 & Logan, 2006)
- ~ Avoiding public displays of affection (Hoskin, 2019 & Logan, 2006)
- ~ Masculine presenting participants of surveys also mention “passing” as male in public to avoid PSH (Logan, 2006). But this is risky because it can lead to more violent attacks if found out.



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