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Sexual Harassment in the Egyptian Streets: Feminist Theory Revisited

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Abstract This study examined the act of sexual harassment, as perceived by Egyptian male harassers. Participants' justifications of their harassing acts were explained using feminist theory, which postulated that sexual harassment occurs due to men's tendency to blame women for this act, their failure to empathize with its victims, and their attempt to punish their competitive efforts. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine self-professed harassers. Thematic analysis of these interviews produced theory-driven themes that reflected the above mentioned assertions of feminist theory. Moreover, thematic analysis added cultural depth to this theory's explanation of sexual harassment by producing emerging themes that highlighted the roles of participants' strict interpretations of religious texts and experiences of societal oppression in justifying this act. Recommendations for mental health professionals and policy makers who design intervention and prevention programs for sexual harassment will be presented.

Keywords Sexual harassment · Feminist theory · Religiosity · Oppression · Objectification · Psychoeducation · Sexism · Extremism

The problem of *sexual harassment* (SH) in the Egyptians streets has reached epidemic proportions and has created hazardous conditions that prevented many women from walking freely in these streets (BBC 2012). A study sponsored by the United Nations revealed that 99.3% of surveyed Egyptian women reported experiencing a form of SH in their lifetime (El Deeb 2013). According to the same study, 64% of surveyed women reported that inappropriate touching was the most common form of SH. The aim of this study was to enrich *feminist theory's* explanations of SH by using a qualitative approach that would yield a deeper

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cultural understanding of this problem, explore the cultural factors underlying it, and examine the influences of these factors on its perpetrators. Proponents of feminist theory argued that SH is a form of violence against women that is rooted in deeply gendered and patriarchal society (Samuels 2003). Accordingly, this qualitative study allowed for an in-depth exploration of the applicability of feminist theory's explanations of SH in the Egyptian context and the integration of culturally-based theoretical explanations of SH with these explanations.

According to many scholars of gender in the Middle East, the Egyptian society has adopted a form of classic patriarchy that has a clear demarcation between men and women (Kandiyoti 1988). In such patriarchy, male adults are expected to be economic providers; whereas women are expected to be domestic laborers, which make them reliant on the financial support of male kin (Jowkar 1986; Joseph 1996). This form of patriarchy often creates gender inequities and patriarchal laws (Ammar 2006), and women are socialized to conform to gender expectations to increase their life chances and minimize male aggression—a process Kandiyoti (1988) described as "patriarchal bargain." Because feminist theory describes SH as a systemic attempt to control women that is deeply rooted in patriarchal societies (Kosny and MacEachen 2010), it can be readily studied in the Egyptian society whose patriarchal/gendered system might have perpetuated the problem of SH.

For the purpose of this study, SH was defined as a behavior that humiliates or derogates an individual based on sex (Berdahl 2007). According to Bowman (1993), SH can be verbal (i.e. remarks about physical appearance, sexual jokes, and verbal sexual advances). SH can also be non-verbal (i.e. staring and whistling), or physical (i.e. behaviors ranging from unsolicited physical contact to assault/rape) (Timmerman and Bajema 1999) Further, SH can result in serious psychological problems to its victims, such as depression, anxiety, and fear (Palmieri and Fitzgerald 2005); sleep problems (Gutek and Koss 1993); and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Avina and O'Donohue 2002).

The current literature on SH has mainly focused on the negative consequences of SH on victims who experienced it (e.g. Bowman 1993). It has also examined preventative and intervention methods that were used in combating this behavior. However, few studies had examined the motivation of male sexual harassers and possible psychosocial factors that might influence this problematic act. In fact, Pina et al. (2009) conducted a comprehensive overview of the current literature on SH and concluded that researchers were usually reticent to examine the perspectives of male sexual harassers on this act. Further, Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) urged scholars to conduct men's studies that can offer a necessary correction to female bias on feminist inspired research topics. Accordingly, this study attempted to examine possible motivations of male harassers and used a theory-building approach that utilized feminist theory's explanations of SH to examine how Egyptian male harassers describe, understand, and justify their SH acts.

The act of SH was subjected to a wide array of psychological explanations (e.g. Money 1986; Menard et al. 2010; Pryor and Stoller 1994; O'Hare and O'Donohue 1998). Despite their theoretical appeal, these psychological explanations seem to offer individualistic explanations for the motivations of sexual harassers and could not capture any socio-cultural markers that might influence their behaviors. In other

words, few psychological theories have incorporated socio-cultural factors in examining the act of SH. For example, the psychodynamic theorists explained sexual assaults as an expression of wishes for dominance, virility, and mastery in an effort to combat deep seated feelings of vulnerability and insecurity but ignored the socio-cultural factors that may create this sense of vulnerability (Groth 1979). Similarly, cognitive theorists argued that sexual harassers have sex schema that associates sex with power but ignored the cultural factors that shape and form these schemas (Pryor and Stoller 1994).

In response to these theoretical limitations, the current study was grounded in feminist theory which takes into consideration certain socio-cultural factors in explaining and interpreting SH. Proponents of feminist theory argued that SH must be seen in the context of women's diminished role in the patriarchal society and must be analyzed in a similar way to other feminist concerns, such as rape and domestic violence (Samuels 2003). Specifically, they argued that SH could be attributed to gender inequality and society's acceptance of male dominance over women (Rozee and Koss 2001; Kosny and MacEachen 2010), as well as its tolerance of aggression against women (Bowman 1993). That is, men are heavily socialized to use aggression against women as an acceptable way to demonstrate power and male dominance (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Bowman 1993; Anderson et al. 2008), and SH might be a clear manifestation of this socialized aggression (Malamuth and Dean 1991; Martin 2001). Accordingly, women might be targeted by men through SH if they challenged their subordinate position in the gender system by competing with them over jobs (Berdahl 2007). Feminist theorists also argued that men are socialized to believe that their SH behavior is justified, whereas women are socialized to blame themselves for it (Vaux 1993). As a result, a male-dominated society can easily justify sexual assault by failing to empathize with its female victims or blame them for their victimization (Suarez and Gadalla 2010; Rahimi and Liston 2009). In short, feminist theory does not consider SH an individual conduct that is based on a sexual desire, but a systemic attempt to control and dominate women that is deeply rooted in the patriarchal society (Berdahl 2007). This theory also views SH as a sexist hostility that resulted from gender hierarchy and men's desire to keep women in a subordinate position (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994), as well as their failure to empathize with victimized women (Schultz 1998). As Bowman (1993), put it, SH is accepted as a normal behavior and thus became an invisible problem.

Varied cases of self-professed Egyptian sexual harassers were examined closely and intensively to yield a deeper socio-cultural understanding of this phenomenon. These interviews not only allowed the use of feminist theory to explain possible motivations of sexual harassers; it also allowed for new themes and concepts to emerge so as to elaborate and modify this theory and make it more culturally relevant to the Egyptian context. In short, this study used a theory-building qualitative approach that used feminist theory to explain case observations of sexual harassers and then used these case observations to elaborate and clarify this theory and make it more culturally relevant.

Method

Participants

Interviews were conducted with nine male participants. First, the researcher used a webpage that identified public locations in Cairo where sexual harassment was very common (www.harassmap.org). After identifying these locations, the researcher visited them to observe male individuals who harassed women in the streets. A convenient sampling of participants was used by identifying harassers who committed one of the following SH acts: (a) staring at the victim's body or describing it in a sexually explicit way, (b) whistling, (c) inappropriate touching, (d) asking for sex, (e) making sexually suggestive noises, or (f) following the victim. The researcher did not interview harassers who were engaged in more violent acts. Few minutes after witnessing the act, the researcher introduced himself to the harasser (one at a time) as a scholar who was interested in understanding the process of "mo'akasat" which translates as "teasing." It is worth noting this Arabic word is usually used in Egyptian colloquial by harassers to lessen the stigma of SH and minimize its negative impact. Out of 35 requests for interviews, only nine participants agreed to be interviewed (see Table 1). Their age range was 18–45 years old, and they resided in Cairo or Giza (2 major governorates in Egypt). They also represented different socioeconomic strata based on the occupations they held. Individuals who declined to participate in the study refused to provide reasons for that. It is possible that they refused to be interviewed for fear of legal prosecution despite the researcher's assurance. Alternatively, they might have felt ashamed about their behavior and did not want to discuss it. Only participants who acknowledged that they sexually harassed women were interviewed.

Procedure

Interviews

Participants were given the option to be interviewed at a university office or at the researcher's vehicle. Six intensive interviews were privately and confidentially

Table 1 Participants' demographics

Participant	Age	Occupation	Location	Marital status
A	19	Student	Cairo	Single
B	36	Office manager	Giza	Single
C	24	College student	Giza	Single
D	21	Farmer	Cairo	Married
E	45	Shop owner	Cairo	Refused to tell
F	23	Plumber	Cairo	Married
G	31	Chef	Cairo	Refused to tell
H	41	Executive manager	Giza	Single
I	22	Construction worker	Giza	Single

conducted in Arabic at the university office. Three interviews were conducted in Arabic in the researcher's vehicle which had sealed windows to ensure the privacy of the conversation. Each interview took approximately 50 min, including a break in the middle. The interviews were semi-structured and contained many open-ended questions that sought to generate answers about participants' perceptions of the act of sexual harassment and why they did it. The author used a basic script that contained the main research question: "Why do some men engage in sexual harassment? The author also included questions that examined feminist theory's assertions about the way men perceive or explain SH, such as: How can you explain this behavior? How do you perceive the women that are harassed? How do you feel about this act? What would stop men from engaging in this behavior?" However, new open-ended questions arose during the interviews and were based on participants' output.

Note-Taking Procedure

For participants who refused to be recorded, the researcher attempted to capture their utterances using legible handwriting. Further, the researcher periodically restated the quotes to these participants and asked them to confirm or correct them. While translating and analyzing the data, the researcher did not include portions of the notes that were not clearly written and refrained from paraphrasing any quote.

Safeguards and Ethical Guidelines

Participants received a copy of an informed consent that was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board and included details of the interview, such as its purpose, taping process, and expected timeframe. Participants' anonymity was assured, so they did not sign a copy of this form. Participants were also assured that they have the right to refuse being audio-recorded. Seven participants refused to be recorded, but they allowed note-taking. Participants were also assured that they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable. To preserve anonymity, the nine participants were identified by pseudonyms (letters A–I).

Translation and Analysis of Interview Transcripts and Notes

First, the author translated both transcripts and notes, and this process was guided by Halai (2007) who suggested that researchers should first check whether the source words have any equivalent in Standard English words. If this is the case, they should adopt English words or phrases in translating the selected interviews; however, if the source word does not have a direct equivalent or are difficult to translate or interpret, the researchers should be using quotes (Halai 2007). The author then followed a procedure of thematic analysis that was adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). This procedure was very convenient to the study goals because it is a flexible research tool that could allow for both social and psychological interpretation of the data and could also help inform policy development (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, the author was immersed in reading and re-reading all

transcripts/notes in an active way to search for meanings and patterns that could address the research question of this study (i.e. how do participants describe, explain, and justify their SH behaviors). Next, the author took notes or highlighted some participants' quotes to generate initial codes. These codes represented patterned responses within the data-set reflecting the reasoning participants used to justify their SH behaviors. The coding process was thorough and inclusive and each code was based on the quotes of at least 5 participants (i.e. a simple majority of participants). Some of these quotes were made of one sentence; others were made of more than one sentence. The author then used visual representation to sort the different codes into: (a) basic themes, which were the lowest order themes derived from textual data and represented its immediate meaning, and (b) organizing themes, which organized and summarized basic themes into cluster of similar issues to enhance the deeper meaning of the data (Attride-Stirling 2001). However, it should be noted some basic themes did not emerge into organizing themes. The themes of this study were identified using both a theoretical (deductive) thematic approach and an inductive approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). The deductive thematic approach generated themes that were driven by the researcher's theoretical grounding in a number of feminist theory's assertion, such as (a) males may fail to exhibit empathy with women exposed to SH because they were socialized to justify aggression against women, (b) a male dominated society can easily blame its female victims for their sexual objectification and assault and (c) men use SH to punish women's competitive efforts. After completing the deductive thematic analysis, the author then used an inductive thematic analysis to identify emerging themes that were strongly related to the data. In other words, these data-driven themes were only based on the participants' narrative and were not influenced by the author's grounding in feminist theory. It was hoped that these data-driven or emerging themes would reflect the cultural factors underlying this act in Egypt and add cultural depth to the theory-driven themes (i.e. feminist theory's explanation of SH).

The resulting themes were then reviewed and refined numerous times. Specifically, two original theory-driven themes were collapsed into one. On the other hand, a data-driven theme was removed because some of its code extracts did not fit into it, but these extracts converged with another-data-driven theme. Throughout this reviewing process, the data was re-read more than once and new codes were created, which led to the production of a new data-driven theme. This process of reviewing reached saturation when the data within each theme was very cohesive and meaningful, while at the same time the resulting themes were clearly demarcated from each others. At the end, this analysis yielded three-theory driven themes and two data-driven themes. These resulting themes seemed to provide a thematic map that could tell a cohesive story about how participants justified SH behaviors. They were also checked against each other and in relation to the original data set.

Next, the themes were defined and named by identifying the essence of what each theme is about. A final analysis of the themes was linked to the study thesis and the appropriate literature, and this led to the production of the results section, which represents a rich description of the data and its themes. Each theme will be described and excerpts from different interviews will highlight/reflect these themes.

Results

As shown in Table 2, five major themes describing participants' justification for their engagement in SH were generated. The table contained the organizing themes, their basic themes (if any), and their concise descriptions. The table also contained examples of quotes from participants highlighting the themes or subthemes, as well as the frequency of these quotes. Rich and clear quotes that exemplified each theme will be presented below.

Theory-Driven Themes (Deductive Thematic Analysis)

Organizing Theme 1: SH is a Normative Act

This deductive theme was related to the theoretical framework that guided this study. Specifically, it reflected feminist theory's assertion that males may fail to exhibit empathy with women exposed to SH because they were socialized to justify and normalize aggression against women (Malamuth and Dean 1991). The theme was differentiated into three subthemes: SH was perceived as a normative act because everyone did it, no harm was done, and no empathy was needed for its victims.

Basic Theme 1a: Everyone Does SH

Many participants believed that their SH behavior was a common and normal act, as reflected by this quote from Participant A: "I am doing this because everyone else seems to do it." In fact he asserted that his friends would think that he was "abnormal" if he did not engage in this act. Participant C also asked the following question: "if it is okay to see this happening in the movies, why is it wrong to do it in real life? I always learned that art reflects life and real events." Using the same logic, Participant E said that he learned this act from people around him: "You grow up seeing your older brothers, uncles, and even your father doing it, so you think it is okay to do it." Finally, Participant G said that when he was young he tried to imitate movie stars by kissing his female cousin, and he was encouraged by his family members as they laughed in response to what he did. This incident made him believe that this act was funny and innocent. Overall, this basic theme might reflect the process of socializing men to normalize sexual aggression against women.

Basic Theme 1b: There is No Harm Done by SH

Many participants stressed that their SH behavior is not harmful as revealed by the following quote from Participant C: "What is wrong with saying a compliment to a pretty woman? They should like the attention and care. They should encourage it." In fact Participant H stressed that any girl's self esteem might drop if she was not exposed to SH. Echoing the same sentiment, Participant D went further to describe possible benefits of SH: "We are doing women a huge service. They might actually

Table 2 Thematic analysis of the motivations of Egyptian male sexual harassers

Organizing and basic themes	Description	Examples[a]	Number of quotes[b]
A. Theory-driven themes (Deductive thematic analysis)			
1. SH is a normative act	SH is normal		
1a. Everyone does SH	SH is normal because everyone does it	"you grow up seeing everyone doing it so you think it is okay to do it"	11
1b. There is no harm done by SH	SH is normal because it causes no harm	"what is wrong with saying a compliment to a pretty woman"	9
1c. No empathy is needed for harassed women	SH is normal due to empathic failure	"a polite woman cannot hold a grudge against anyone who tries to approach her"	7
2. SH is women's fault	SH is blamed on women		
2a. SH occurs because women are legitimate sex objects	SH occurs due to sexual objectification of women	"women are created for us to enjoy them"	7
2b. Women are responsible for SH	SH occurs because of women's actions	"women with tight clothes are probably asking for sex"	17
3. SH is due to women's desire to work	SH happens because of women's work	"women should stay home if they do not want to get harassed"	12
B. Data-driven themes (Inductive thematic analysis)			
4. SH is God's punishment to women	God punishes women by exposing them to SH	"women should not complain about SH because they disobeyed God"	14
5. Women are harassed due to societal oppression	Women are at the receiving end of societal oppression	"Sometimes men harass women to have	
5a. Women are harassed because everyone is harassed	Everyone is harassed	"We have no right or dignity"	4
5b. Women are harassed because men are angry	Men displace their oppression into women	"Sometimes men harass women to have vengeance on this society"	7

[a] Some quotes were slightly modified in this table to accommodate for its space limitation

[b] This item represented the number of quotes that were used to identify codes, which were then differentiated into themes. Each quote was formed of either one sentence or a number of sentences

suffer from a mental problem such as depression if they were not harassed. We increase their self confidence." Overall, this basic theme illustrates participant's attempts to ignore the harm SH might cause to women. Notably, this basic theme seems to overlap with basic theme 1a as they both reflect the normalization of SH.

Basic Theme 1c: No Empathy is Needed for Harassed Women

Many participants seemed to lack empathy for the women they violated. For example, Participant F stressed that women are "gebellat" (have no feelings) who

would not be bothered by any form of mistreatment. On the other hand, Participant C said that "a polite woman cannot hold a grudge against anyone who tries to approach her" Finally, when asked if he would be upset if someone harassed his mother or sister; Participant A was offended by the question and said that they would not experience it because they usually wore conservative clothes. Overall, this basic theme illustrates participants' failure to empathize with women they victimized. As Schweinle and Roseman (2015) put it, men who are deficient in empathic accuracy are more likely to sexually harass women.

In sum, it seemed that participants were unable to understand the problematic nature of SH. In fact, they experienced it as a normal rather than an aggressive act and failed to offer empathy for their victims. This theme might reflect feminist theory's assertion that SH could result from males' socialization to normalize and justify their aggression towards women, and this justification could easily result in lack of empathy for harassed women.

Organizing Theme 2: SH is Women's Fault

This deductive theme was also related to the theoretical framework that was used in this study. Specifically, it reflected feminist theory's assertion that a male dominated society can easily blame its female victims for their sexual objectification and assault (Suarez and Gadalla 2010). The theme was differentiated into two subthemes: SH occurs because women are objectified and because of the way they act.

Basic Theme 2a: SH Occurs Because Women are Legitimate Sex Objects

Many participants seemed to objectify women and believed that women were created to please men as suggested by the following quote from Participant I:

> Do you expect me to do nothing when I see an attractive woman walking in the street with tight pants? Women are created so that we can enjoy them. We are allowed to enjoy many wives because of our nature as men.

Many participants also used objectifying or sexualized derogatory Arabic words to describe women, such as "mozzah," (Sexy) "saroukh," (Rocket) and "farasah" (mare). Overall, this basic theme reflected participants' tendency to objectify women and justify SH as a result.

Basic Theme 2b: Women are Responsible for SH

Many participants believed that women asked for SH because of the way they are dressed or due to the way they act or behave, as exemplified by this quote from Participant C: "I did not intentionally want to harass women but I believed that women send subtle message through the way they are dressed. Women with tight clothes are probably sending a message that they are asking for sex." Echoing the same sentiment, Participant D blamed women for putting themselves in hazardous situations, as shown in this excerpt: "so many women decide to go alone to this

public park knowing that they will definitely get harassed. I believe that they really wanted this to happen to them." Participant G also discussed a phenomenon that reflected this victim blaming attitude:

> There are individuals who threatened to post photographs of women who are dressed provocatively during the holy month of Ramadan on a facebook page and shame them if they did not stop doing that. I totally agree with that. We need to send a strong message to these women and shame them.

Overall, this basic theme reflects participants' tendency to blame women for their sexual assault and objectification.

In sum, it seemed that participants were engaged in a process of victim-blaming that caused them to attribute their SH acts to women's actions, but they failed to identify their aggressive behavior. This theme might reflect feminist theory's position that SH could result from male's socialization to justify aggression towards women, and this socialization could cause them to blame women for their victimization.

Organizing Theme 3: SH is Due to Women's Desire to Work

This theme was related to the theoretical framework that was used in this study, as it reflected feminist theory's assertion that women may be targeted by men through SH if they compete for jobs (Berdahl 2007). Many participants believed that the optimum job for any woman was to serve her family. They also argued that when women stop taking this role, they deserve to be harassed. For example, Participant F was puzzled by men who "allow" their wives to leave their homes without male figures chaperoning them:

> This really puzzles me. I would always expect my wife to wait for me, greet me with a smile, and pamper me with a nice meal. I am not sure how other men can function if they go home and cannot find their wives waiting for them. I think these women who do not do that deserve what they get in the streets.

Echoing the same sentiment, Participant A resented the mainstream media for encouraging women to work. In fact he blamed SH on women's work:

> So the media tells women that they have to work but work destroys their womanhood. Real women are stay-home mothers. The media is destroying the fabric of this society and is brainwashing many Egyptian women and causing them to be hassled and harassed.

Some participants expressed resentment towards women who compete with them on jobs, as suggested by the following quote from Participant H:

> I am not sure why many women leave their homes and get humiliated in the streets. Why do they have to work? We do not have enough work for us (men) and we are the ones who should have a priority in getting jobs. Women should stay home if they do not want to get harassed.

On the other hand, Participant G believed that some women are preferred over men in certain jobs such as waiting tables to attract customers and flirt with them, but he felt that these women were not suitable for work because they were "too emotional." Finally, Participant F argued that women's competition with men over jobs had led many men to discharge their sexual energy into women because they could not find jobs that would make them busy.

In sum, it seemed that participants attributed SH to women's desire to leave their homes and compete with them over jobs. This theme might reflect the position of feminist theory, which viewed SH as a violent act against women who compete with men over jobs to punish their competitive efforts.

Data-Driven Themes (Inductive Thematic Analysis)

Organizing Theme 4: SH is God's Punishment to Women

This theme was not based on feminist theory, but it was purely driven by participants' input. This theme suggested possible influences of distorted religious beliefs and strict interpretations of religious text on participants' perceptions of their SH acts. In other words, some participants used an extreme form of religious reasoning to justify SH. For example, Participant G referred to a speech by an extremist cleric to justify SH.

> Do you know the honorable Sheikh El Howainy (Salafi Muslim cleric)? He once told worshippers that a woman's face is like a vagina. This face should be covered the same way a vagina is covered. What do we conclude from this? Women should be covered and should stay home so that no one can see them. They have no one to blame except themselves if they leave home and someone touches them.

On the other hand, Participant A blamed women, her male relatives, and the government for causing SH:

> The government should support women to stay home and raise kids if their husbands cannot support them. I think that women should not complain if they get harassed in the street because they are going against Allah's "Shariaa" (Islamic Law) when they walk alone.

Finally, Participant C accused women of causing men to sin if they were dressed in a provocative way that defied religious teachings and used the word "motabaregat" or "non-veiled" to describe them. He also suggested that the Islamic dress code should be an easy solution for this problem. Although this participant is blaming women for causing SH he had equally blamed men by describing their act as a "sin."

In sum, this theme might add theoretical and cultural nuances to explanations offered by feminist theory for SH. Specifically, this theme highlighted the possible role of strict interpretation of religious text in justifying SH and attributing it to women's refusal to observe religious rules that require them to be subservient to

men by staying home. However, one could also argue that this theme might reflect a cultural manifestation of theme 2, i.e. SH is women's fault.

Organizing Theme 5: Women are Harassed Due to Societal Oppression

This theme was not based on feminist theory, but was purely driven by participants' input. This theme suggested a possible influence of participants' experiences of social oppression and injustice on their perceptions of SH.

Basic Theme 5a: Women are Harassed Because Everyone is Harassed

Many participants were critical of the purpose of this study and believed that it was unnecessary. For example, the researcher was ridiculed about the topic of this study by Participant D as shown here:

> So you are worried so much about women getting harassed and are doing a study on them? Women are not the only ones who are harassed. Why do not you do a study on our harassment as human beings in this country? We have no rights or dignity. We are humiliated every day. We are not treated as human beings.

Basic Theme 5b: Women are Harassed Because Men are Angry

On the other hand, Participant I reflected a level of psychological mindedness in justifying SH:

> So sometimes you see men harassing women to have vengeance on this society and with the people who oppressed them. Yes, these women had nothing to do with these men's problems, but they just pay the price anyway.

Notable, this participant's blaming of men for SH seems to contradict theme 2, which reflected the tendency of men to blame women for SH.

In sum, this theme might add cultural and theoretical depth to feminist theory's explanations of SH. Specifically, this theme reflected the use of societal oppression as an excuse by some men to justify their seemingly compensatory act of SH. The theme also highlighted the tendency of participants to displace their anger about their experiences of societal oppression into their female victims.

Discussion

Thematic analysis of interviews conducted with self-professed Egyptian male harassers yielded theory-based themes that were in concordance with feminist theory's assertions about possible causes of SH. Specifically, many participants perceived SH as a normal and non harmful act and failed to exhibit empathy with the women they harassed. Other participants blamed female victims for their sexual assault and seemed to attribute SH to women's desire to work and their competitive

efforts. Thematic analysis also yielded data-driven themes that gave a deeper socio-cultural explanation of SH in the Egyptian context. Specifically, these themes suggested that many participants used strict interpretations of religious texts to justify SH by arguing that it was a punishment by God for women who did not observe religious rules, such as staying home and serving their families. Many participants also used their own experiences of societal oppression as an excuse for their acts of SH.

As previously mentioned, the goal of this theory-building study was to enrich and integrate feminist theory's explanations of SH with cultural factors underlying this behavior in the Egyptian context. In an effort to integrate theory-driven themes, such as theme 2 (SH is women's fault) and theme 3 (SH is due to women's desire to work) to the emerging theme 4 (SH is God's punishment to women), it appeared that some participants' strict interpretations of religious texts had led them to justify the objectification of women through SH. Influenced by extremist religious preachers, many participants were quick to blame women for being harassed and accused them of instigating it. Specifically, they believed that women deserved harassment because they ignored religious rules, such as: (a) adopting a strict dress code and (b) staying home to serve their family members. These findings may be related to studies suggesting that religious societies which value conformity to norms are more likely to have high incidents of SH (Luthar and Luthar 2002). These findings may also be related to studies suggesting that high levels of religiosity may result in conservative attitudes towards women and a narrow definition of what constitutes SH (e.g. Baker et al. 1990). Therefore, participants' strict interpretations of religious text might represent a cultural justification of SH that can further enhance explanations that were offered by feminist theory for this act.

In an effort to integrate theory-driven themes, such as theme 1 (SH is a normative act) and theme 2 (SH is women's fault) to the emerging theme 5 (women are harassed due to societal oppression), one could argue that participants' experiences of societal oppression might have led them to justify the act of SH. It is possible that participants' acceptance of SH is linked to the concept of "identification with aggressor," originally proposed by Ferenczi (1933), who argued that when people are exposed to a significant threat, they identify with those who aggressed upon them and displace their aggression into others. Some participants might have also identified with the violent behavior of those who violated, disempowered, and oppressed them and then directed their oppression to the women they harassed. This aggressive nature of SH seemed to be highlighted in a study conducted by Schweinle, Cofer and Schatz (2009), which revealed that male's SH of women was more related to aggression than seduction. It is also possible that some participants minimized the problematic nature of SH because they believed that women should not be the only ones complaining about SH, as both males and females are subjected to harassment through the daily injustices they have experienced in Egypt. Therefore, participants' experiences of social oppression might represent a social justification of SH that can further enhance explanations offered by feminist theory to describe this act. According to Connell (1995) the more the males are subordinated and denied male benefits the more they will target women through SH to compensate for their emasculation. As Hafez (2012) put it, abuse and harassment of women in Egypt are the outcome of masculinity built on deprivation. Echoing the same sentiment, Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) argued that men's violence might be

seen as a response to personal insult and an effort to affirm their masculinity. Similarly, Moore (1994) suggested that men use violence when they experience victimization by having a diminished social status or lack of access to economic resources.

The major contribution of this study lay in its effort to give an Egyptian cultural understanding of SH that would enrich the explanations offered by feminist theory for this act. According to feminist theory, SH could be attributed to gender inequality and society's tolerance of aggression against women (Rozee and Koss 2001; Kosny and MacEachen 2010). This study added to this theoretical understanding by identifying culturally shaped justifications for SH as it highlighted the role of extremist religious beliefs and societal oppression in perpetuating, tolerating, and normalizing this act in Egypt. In a sense, this study is closely related to studies that attempted to account for cultural influences on SH (e.g. DeSouza et al. 2007; Merkin 2008) by stressing the influence of Egyptian cultural context on perceiving SH. Of course, the themes gleaned from this study do not prove any generalization about this cultural understanding, but the internal consistency and conceptual coherence within these themes, as well as the richness of the quotes that were used to produce these themes lend some confidence to such understanding.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The major limitation of this study was related to its sampling method. This study has a very small sample size, which was due to the difficulty encountered in recruiting participants. Individuals who declined to participate in the study might have feared prosecution for their act despite given many assurances from the researcher. Others might have feared that their responses would be misrepresented by the researcher. On the other hand, it might have been very difficult for participants to fully express themselves without feeling judged or ridiculed given the fact that this behavior is generally frowned upon by Egyptian academics and intellectuals, whom the researcher represent. Further, the sample was self-selected, so it is possible that participants who refused to be interviewed might have different justifications for SH. Another limitation of this study was the absence of a co-rater in identifying the study themes. Although this study was not meant to provide a generalization about the problem of SH in Egypt, the absence of a co-rater might have biased or distorted the results. Finally, the SH acts that were used to identify harassers did not include very violent acts; such inclusion might have yielded different results/concepts. Perhaps non traditional methods of collecting data, such as the use of Internet blogs and social network feeds, such as twitter and Facebook could have been used; however, these data sources might not have captured the nuances of experiences that intensive interviews can usually reveal. Nonetheless, the study did not intend to provide generalizations about the motivations of sexual harassers, but rather to explore some of the reasons behind it. Accordingly, a small sample was convenient for this purpose. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study would serve as an empirical foundation for other studies to come. New studies can further examine the relationship between religious fundamentalism and attitudes towards SH. Alternatively, new studies can further examine the relationship between men's experience of oppression and sexual violence.

Practice Implications

This study provided an Egyptian cultural perspective on the problem of SH that could deeply inform mental health professionals and policy makers who are designing intervention and prevention programs for SH. Specifically, this study shed some light on the way perpetrators of SH perceive and justify their violent acts, and these programs can utilize this new knowledge by challenging and altering these perceptions. For example, the study highlighted how the problem of SH can be compounded by the tendency of sexual harassers to normalize this act and blame women for it, as well as their failure to exhibit empathy towards their victims. According to Connolly et al. (2014), SH prevention programs should focus on decreasing the acceptance of aggression of men against women. As such, this study could inform SH prevention and intervention programs as it highlighted the role of normalized aggression towards women and victim blaming in perpetuating the act of SH. Further, this study highlighted the role of failed empathy in perpetuating SH, so it could contribute to empathic accuracy training that is included in many SH training curricula (Schweinle and Roseman 2015). Equally important, this study highlighted the negative influence of extremist religious beliefs and preachers on perpetuating the problem of SH in Egypt and their disturbing roles in humiliating, attacking, and oppressing Egyptian women. As Ulusoy et al. (2011) put it, any education about SH should include the cultural context in which it was perpetuated. Revamping religious rhetoric may eventually lead to a healthier social climate for women in Egypt and may lessen the problem of SH. Finally, the study findings suggested that SH can be a part of the cycle of oppressions that many males experience in a daily basis. Women can be at the receiving end of this cycle of oppression if sexual harassers displace their own oppression into them to compensate for their feelings of emasculation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how self-professed Egyptian male harassers explained and justified SH. Participants seemed to perceive SH as a normative act or blamed women's appearances and actions for causing this act. Their narratives seemed to be in concordance with feminist theory's suggestion that SH is an act that serves to punish women's competitive efforts. Participants also seemed to provide possible cultural justifications of this act by referring to their strict interpretations of religious text or by blaming this act on their own experiences of societal oppression. In other words, this study highlighted culturally-shaped justifications for SH that perpetuated and normalized gender oppression.

Informed Consent Participants received a copy of an informed consent that was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board and included details of the interview, such as its purpose, taping process, and expected timeframe. Participants' anonymity was assured, so they did not sign a copy of this form.

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