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Street harassment: The invisible harm

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Abstract

Gender-based street harassment has received relatively little sociological attention despite the pervasive nature of the problem in society. The existing body of literature focuses predominantly on women's experiences and articulations of harassment. Whilst this is invaluable and indeed does require further ongoing academic investigation, there is a lack of research on men's understandings and awareness of street harassment. This dissertation represents an attempt to contribute to this limited knowledge base by conducting qualitative research with males. Adopting a feminist analytical approach, this research explores how men conceptualise harassment, the rationale behind harassment and how it can be tackled effectively. The findings reveal a wealth of misunderstandings surrounding street harassment and a tendency to diminish particular forms of injury endured by women. It became evident that street harassment is indeed an invisible form of harm which half the population, namely men, do not and perhaps cannot 'see'. Participants rationalised the act of harassment as both a form of entertainment and control for harassing men and were sceptical of various avenues to redress the harm. Contrasted against findings from research on women, this research offers insights into street harassment which are vital for better understanding and ultimately addressing the phenomenon.

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1. Introduction

Gender-based street harassment is defined by the non-profit Stop Street Harassment as ‘unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on a stranger in a public place without their consent and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation’ (2015). Women and girls of all ages, races and class are subjected to public harassment by men across the globe regardless of social or cultural context. Research has shown street harassment affects approximately 85% of women (Lenton et al., 1999). For many females, it consists of both insidious and overt intrusions by unknown men on a regular basis, embedded deeply within the fabric of their everyday lives. These intrusions are rendered routine by their frequency and indeed for many women they have become an inevitable feature of the female experience in the public sphere. The public harassment of women and girls is perpetuated by a minority of men, and those who do not engage in harassment often remain unaware of its prevalence (Bowman, 1993). Cisgender men are generally unaffected by gender-based street harassment which also contributes to its harm remaining entirely invisible. As Tuerkheimer argues, ‘The immensity of this cultural blind-spot is testimony to the power of sexual domination’ (1997:172).

The phenomenon of street harassment has remained largely under-researched academics despite accounts of the practice dating back to the late 19th Century (Johnston, 2011). The first major empirical study on the subject was conducted by Gardner in 1995 in the United States, and there have been a limited number of studies since. The lack of scholarly attention afforded to street harassment can be attributed to the propensity of androcentric malestream culture to consider it a trivial, if not non-existent, social phenomenon (Bowman, 1993:519). This trivialisation endorses male sexual domination and predation of women. Though street harassment falls on the continuum of gender-based violence, the lack of a widely-accepted definition of what constitutes street harassment has further compounded its dismissal as a form of harm with serious implications for women. As West notes, ‘an injury uniquely sustained by a disempowered group will lack a name, a history, and in general a linguistic reality’ (2000:81).

The nature of the invisibility of this gender-specific harm shall be investigated in this dissertation. The existing literature on street harassment predominantly focuses on female

targets, and men are the subjects of very few empirical studies (Logan, 2015:203). Yet, this is a social problem of *men*: it is caused by men, and men will have to change if the problem is to be tackled (Langelan, 1993:37-8). It is a problem *for* women, but is not *their* problem. For this reason, I chose to conduct primary research with men in focus groups: men must be brought into dialogue with women on the topic of street harassment for it to be addressed. Investigating the discrepancies between men and women's gendered realities represents a fundamental step in consciousness-raising around women's injuries under a heteronormative and patriarchal hierarchy. This is feminist research which, rather than giving voice to women directly, works to engage men as subjects with women's realities. The research questions which shall be addressed are as follows:

- 1) How do men understand gender-based street harassment?
- 2) Why do men harass in public?
- 3) How can street harassment be addressed?

After discussing this topic informally with peers, it was clear that many men I spoke with were incredulous that street harassment is a problem in a 'city like Edinburgh'. In the period of this research alone, from April to July 2017 in Edinburgh, I was harassed 21 times. The harassment consisted primarily of demeaning comments on my appearance, whistling and honking from cars, and attempts to startle me as I cycled or ran. These 21 incidents exclude prolonged staring and incidences I may not have heard due to wearing headphones. Like many, I have experienced verbal harassment throughout my life, and have also been followed, grabbed, groped, and masturbated at in public spaces by male strangers. These incidents have proven to me that it can take just one intrusion to fundamentally alter a woman's perception of the public sphere and her role within it. This dissertation constitutes an effort to reconcile with these experiences and to find catharsis.

In the words of Audre Lorde:

'And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is *not* speaking'.

2. Literature review

‘It is a violation of my natural external freedom, not to be able to go where I please... My personality is wounded by such experiences, because my most immediate identity rests in my body’

(Hegel in Benard and Schlaffer, 1984:70).

From an assessment of the somewhat limited empirical work on street harassment, the greatest obstacle to forming a coherent literature on the subject has been the lack of consistent labelling of street harassment. Unlike harassment in the workplace, systematically defined as sexual harassment, there is no singular definition of street harassment (Lenton et al., 1999:518). The plethora of labels for street harassment – such as ‘catcalling’, ‘street remarks’, ‘everyday sexism’, amongst others, has complicated the subject as a field of research (Logan, 2015; Vera-Gray, 2017). This problem of naming has proven to be detrimental, subtly obscuring street harassment from the focus of academic research endeavours in favour of the study of other manifestations of violence against women such as physical domestic violence which can be more clearly defined as criminal and overtly violent (Vera-Gray, 2017:6). Street harassment falls on the continuum of gender-based violence as conceptualised by Kelly (1988) which interconnects all manifestations of gender-based injury. Unlike hierarchical conceptualisations of violence, the continuum model acknowledges women’s varied responses to harm as the result of personal and contextual factors which determine the nature of the experience (Fileborn, 2013, Vera-Gray, 2017). Conceptualising the harm of gender-based violence as falling on a continuum helps prevent hierarchical definitions of harm within the criminal framework by considering the interconnections and commonalities between differing manifestations of gender-based violence (Vera-Gray, 2017:22).

Academics are in unanimous agreement about the serious and damaging implications of street harassment on its targets, including but not limited to: shame, anger, restricted mobility, depression, reduced self-esteem, self-objectification, anxiety, and fear of navigating public spaces (Kissling, 1991; Bowman, 1993; Davis, 1994; Day, 2006; Lord, 2009; Kearl, 2010). Scholars nevertheless have expressed diverging views as to the motivations behind harassers’

actions. Gardner's seminal study of 1995 in which she interviewed over 500 men and women led her to conclude that women are situationally disadvantaged in the public realm, hence men feel entitled to intrude verbally and physically on women. Laniya conceptualises this behaviour as a means of 'genderising' the street as a male domain (2005:107). Bowman goes further to posit that men's harassment works to signal that not only is women's presence in the public sphere inappropriate but in fact 'accomplishes an informal ghettoization of women – a ghettoization to the private sphere of hearth and home' (1993:521). Admittedly, this assertion is contentious: though harassment may strive to remind women of their subordination and thus relegate them back to the private sphere, women arguably do have greater freedoms and liberties in public life than ever before. Nevertheless, it must be asked, under what conditions can these be enjoyed? Bowman contends that street harassment 'restricts women's mobility in a way that substantially offsets the gains women have made in other spheres' (1993:539). There is a blatant discord between the discourse of women's emancipation under second and third wave feminism and the sheer neglect to address women's fundamental human right to conduct their daily lives free from fear and intrusion. Kissling (1991) developed the concept of sexual terrorism, noting that street harassment is just one of the many manifestations of patriarchal culture that condones and actively encourages violence and fear to sexually terrorise females. From this perspective, she argues that street harassment reproduces this culture of fear and domination of females in their everyday lives.

The role of men

Of the current body of literature on street harassment, the majority has focused on women's understandings and experiences (Logan, 2015; Fileborn, 2013). There is far less which focuses on harassers and less still on non-harassing men's understandings. This study is an attempt to contribute to this limited research. Logan notes upon reviewing the literature on male harassers that two key motivations behind harassing behaviours emerge: bonding between men and assertion of male control and dominance (2015:204). The notion that men harass in groups as a form of camaraderie and entertainment is supported by a number of studies (Benard and Schlaffer, 1984; Packer, 1986; Quinn, 2002; Wesselmann and Kelly, 2010). Quinn's 2002 study highlighted the discrepancy between the functions of harassment and men's interpretations of their behaviour: their participants cited 'girl watching' as mere fun, yet it becomes apparent that harassment is a 'targeted tactic of power' and 'potentially powerful site

of gendered social action' whilst simultaneously a form of play for harassers (392,394). Arguably, therefore, the innocuous veneer of harassment as 'just for laughs' effectively masks the dynamics of gender and power at work. A more recent study by Wesselmann and Kelly (2010) led to similar conclusions: the assertion of power and desire to bond combine to provide the impetus to harass. They define 'person' and 'situation' factors such as social context and group membership as instrumental in determining an individual's propensity to engage in harassing behaviours (2010:452). Their results highlighted how the individual does not operate independently of their social milieu, and a group dynamic which endorses harassment, whilst affording anonymity amongst the group, increases males' probability of harassing. Their study revealed that harassing behaviour is likely when 'situational norms are tolerant, ambiguous, or even supportive of such behaviour' (2010:451). Wesselmann and Kelly thereby emphasise the need to address prevailing cultural norms from the top down which normalise and condone the practice of harassment. This, they argue, is essential if it is to be tackled effectively (2010:460).

Lenton et al.'s 1999 research findings support the concept of harassment as a strategy of social control of women. The implications of harassment manifested in numerous ways in the lives of their participants; from reducing their freedom in public, to influencing how they dress, where they go, and when (1999:531-32). The tangible, every day consequences of harassment and measures taken to prevent harassment are testimony to the social control of women: put simply, women's liberties are curtailed in public and they are unable to enjoy the same freedoms men are afforded owing to their gender. This is corroborated by Logan (2015:208) who observes:

‘The spectre of street harassment is not just around the corner or outside the raucous bar or on a dark street. Street harassment is in the minds of women and other targets, shaping subjective experiences of public life, provoking fear, doubt, timidity, and uncertainty, and deterring or constraining civic engagement’.

Yet, to what extent do men realise and acknowledge this? How do men conceptualise gender-based harm? How do they perceive the differences in the gendered realities women and men inhabit in the public world? This needs to be uncovered if harassment and other forms of gender-based violence are to be addressed. Men's worlds need to come into contact with women's to formulate feasible and effective strategies against gender-based injury. This

dissertation thus constitutes an effort towards establishing this mutual dialogue on street harassment which is long overdue.

Theoretical framework

In sociology, Erving Goffman was one of the first to address human interactions in the public arena. Goffman contends that in public, citizens perform a ritual he terms ‘civil inattention’, described as a ‘courtesy of the eyes’ performed towards passing strangers (1963:84). By dropping the gaze when encountering unknown people in public, the individual signals their acknowledgement of the person’s presence, yet simultaneously shows this person is no cause for concern to them (1963:84). This social code is adhered to when citizens behave ‘properly’ in public spaces and being afforded civil inattention by strangers is a reward for this correct comportment (1963:87). He notes that staring (i.e. not granting civil inattention) is a ‘means of negative sanction, socially controlling all kinds of improper conduct’ (1963:88). Following this logic, by their very presence in public, it can be argued that solo women are construed as ‘out of place’ and thereby not adhering to their roles traditionally set in the private sphere.

Goffman also theorised extensively about behaviour in public as a form of performance, particularly in the context of teams (1959). He argues through convincing use of the stage metaphor that individuals are performers committed to projecting a convincing performance to persuade others of their authenticity. When on the ‘front stage’, the individual adopts a wholly distinct demeanour compared to when (s)he is ‘back stage’ without an audience to pander to (Goffman, 1959). The primary objective is to perform convincingly, as Goffman highlights:

‘Individuals often foster the impression that the routine they are presently performing is their only routine or at least their most essential one. [...] The audience, in their turn, often assume that the character projected before them is all there is to the individual who acts out the projection for them’ (1959:56-7).

In our desire and need to adhere to our roles on stage, Goffman compellingly argues that ‘A certain bureaucratisation of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogeneous performance at every appointed time’ (1959:64). Through exercising discipline, then, the performer on the front stage can present a seemingly innate, essential self to the outside world, proving they meet societal expectations. In the context of street

harassment, this metaphor of stage and performance can be applied to better understand men's behaviours in public.

Whilst Goffman's insights into interaction in public spaces are invaluable, he does not provide a sufficiently gendered analysis of relations between men and women in public. Indeed, Gardner contends that 'His public order occurs in a basically gender-free sphere', with no acknowledgement of the imbalance of power between the genders and the subordination of women that this entails (1989:44). Butler's theory of gender performativity proves to be a useful supplement to Goffman's work. Butler also posits that humans are conditioned to perform to a prescribed ideal: for her, gendered identities are formed through 'a stylised repetition of acts' (1988:519). By repeatedly enacting gender, the impression that gender is biological and innate is fostered. However, gender is in reality a 'publicly regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication'. (Butler, 1988:528). Therefore, by continuously and convincingly 'doing' gender, all manner of behaviours and traits are assumed to be biologically rather than socially determined. Adopting the viewpoint of 'boys will be boys' constitutes just one example of how socially constructed masculinity is not only detrimental to women, but also belittles men, excusing and normalising offensive and threatening behaviours as 'typically masculine'. The question must be begged, if this is the case, why do some men not only choose to avoid harassing behaviours but indeed actively disapprove of men who engage in the practice? That said, failing to perform gender adequately results in 'punitive consequences' for the individual, and these sanctions are an effective means to enforce rigid gender binaries by compelling individuals to embody their prescribed identities for fear of repercussions (Butler, 1988:522). In the context of street harassment, Butler's theory of performativity and sanctioning helps to explain not only why men are compelled to harass in the first place to prove their masculinity, but also reveals how men themselves police women's gender expressions. Harassment can be directed at women either as positive reinforcement for correctly conforming to a heterosexual feminine aesthetic, or as punishment for subverting gender norms – as in the case of some lesbian, bisexual and transgender women – or for not meeting the dictated prevailing ideal of beauty (Namaste, 1996; Waerp, 2015).

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful for unpacking and deciphering certain gendered behaviours within the patriarchal context. Like Butler, Connell and Messerschmidt

also emphasise the constructed nature of gendered expressions of masculinity, noting they are ‘configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action’ (2005:836). The hegemonic male represents an ideal incarnation of ‘manliness’, resembling more of an aspirational figure than a realistic human embodiment (2005:838). The hegemonic man figuratively reigns supreme at the top of the gender hierarchy, benefitting from the patriarchal dividend of male privilege, and is tantamount to an omnipotent icon for ‘lesser’ men to emulate. Maintaining women’s subordination to men secures this male domination in the hierarchy, despite the fact few men manage to reach the hegemonic ideal (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:838). There is a myriad of means by which hegemonic male power can manifest itself over women: for example, by using harassment as a mechanism to maintain women’s subordination in public.

Goffman, Butler and Connell’s work is drawn upon in chapter 4 to help substantiate and reinforce the discussion of the data where relevant.

3. Methodology

Undertaking feminist research

A number of methodological considerations arose during the research process regarding my position as a feminist researcher. It was necessary to question the implications of espousing a feminist approach as a woman using men as the research subject; a research dynamic that has received little attention in academia (Arendell, 1997). If feminist research intends to ‘give voice’ to women who have always been and still are systematically underrepresented, then ‘giving voice’ to men on issues concerning women’s emancipation perhaps ‘risks diluting the politics and practice of feminist research’ (Pini and Pease, 2013:Chapter 1). This conundrum is also raised by Gatrell who questions the ethics of including men’s accounts alongside women’s considering her desire to adopt a feminist standpoint epistemology in her research to represent the views of the marginalised (2006). Nevertheless, there is no singular or flawless feminist method, methodology, or approach to research (Letherby, 2003:4). Feminist research on men is indeed necessary because ‘Any analysis of women’s oppression must involve research on the part played by men in this’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993:31). This seems particularly pertinent in relation to street harassment which is perpetrated almost exclusively by men (Gardner, 1995).

I initially assumed that conducting this research would provide an opportunity for consciousness-raising amongst my male participants on a topic I imagined (fairly accurately) they would not have considered previously. This, I believed, perhaps naively, would contribute to the feminist dimension of my research endeavour as the participants would gain new knowledge and insights into women’s lives during the discussions. Admittedly, some participants did allude to leaving the discussions more aware and enlightened than they were beforehand. However, the overarching sense I had as the female researcher amongst groups of men was one of frustration. Given that I was eager to remain peripheral to the discussions and dispassionate in order not to unnecessarily influence the discussions, this required remaining silent when problematic or sexist views were expressed, and even led to my feeling uncomfortable at potentially colluding with views I strongly disagreed with by either nodding or laughing along out of felt necessity. Would this not mean that I ‘implicitly endorse the perpetuation of the system of male dominance’ (Arendell, 1997:363)? Despite this, I firmly

believe that remaining detached generated a more comfortable, open environment for the participants to share their opinions freely and more honestly. This, I would argue, in conjunction with the fact I withheld my position as a feminist, benefitted the quality of the data I retrieved. Despite the inevitable doubts the researcher faces when conducting gender-sensitive research, Mason urges ‘not to under-estimate the reflexive challenge posed by analysing your own role within the research process’ (2002:66). In this way, the researcher becomes accountable for their findings and acknowledges their own role in the co-construction of the data. After all, research in the social sciences is ‘always and inevitably a social interaction in its own right’ (Stanley, 1993:8).

Although I actively chose not to challenge the participants whose views I considered to be offensive, in many ways I also felt unable to. As the only female in each focus group, I certainly did feel in a position of subordinate power. Typically, the researcher is assumed to occupy a position of power in relation to their subjects of study. However, whether this is the case in cross-gender qualitative research by females is highly debatable (Arendell, 1997:343). This constitutes another source of essential reflexivity during and after data collection. The dilemma of power inversion between researcher and researched in the case of cross-gender interviews is raised by Pini who notes, ‘The availability to men of masculinity discourses presents them with greater opportunities to exert power when interacting with a female interviewer’ (2005:203). Ultimately, the research dynamic between the female academic and male subject is ‘illustrative of, and embedded in, the social relations of power, including gendered power’ (Pini and Pease, 2013:Chapter 1). Thus, whilst some participants confidently expressed problematic views, I aimed to be cognisant of the fact their male privilege and entitlement to articulate themselves in such a way in fact served as a finding in itself, and would serve to strengthen my conclusions. By actively reflecting on these aspects of the research encounter, I remain confident that my research with men is a feminist endeavour with a ‘political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women’s lives through social and individual change’ (Letherby, 2003:4).

Selected method

Five focus groups were carried out, involving 18 male participants in their twenties and thirties. Ten were of British nationality, seven were European, and one South American. The

participants were recruited by self-selection and convenience. Those who self-selected responded to an online call for participants via the University of Edinburgh, meanwhile the remaining participants were found through contacts at the University. Though these methods of recruitment mean the results will be less representative and not generalizable to the wider population (Lengnick-Hall, 1995), for the timeframe and scope of this Masters project, it was deemed appropriate and more feasible. Each group lasted 45 minutes to one hour, and was recorded using a mobile phone. The data was then coded thematically using *NVivo* into twelve nodes which were then streamlined into fewer, broader categories.

Given that this research is inductive, exploring themes which emerge from the data and that its aim is to investigate the understandings and perceptions of participants in depth, focus groups were an appropriate choice of qualitative method (Mason, 2002). From my social constructivist ontological stance, ‘Social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but [...] they are in a constant state of revision’ (Bryman, 2001:16-18). The focus group method is ideal for capturing the interactive and social element of data construction amongst participants, revealing the interplay between the self and the social by ‘getting to the very heart of the social processes social theorists argue constitute reality’ (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2014:316). I was interested to observe the collective construction of understanding the participants presented as group members and how the presence of others might influence individual interpretations, particularly because street harassment is so often perpetrated in groups. Focus groups are an appropriate method for emulating a more realistic approximation of a social encounter in which the researcher adopts the role of background facilitator whilst the participants’ role is more central (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2014:316). The group dynamic reduces the researcher’s power and lends greater autonomy to the participants, meaning we can view “mitigating authority” and ‘generating deeper understandings’ as twinned phenomena’ in this research method (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2014:325). These deeper understandings can only be generated, however, if the environment and cohesion of the group facilitate open communication. As Fern states, the participant must identify with the group on some level if they are to contribute meaningfully (2001:14). Therefore, the fact that the participants for my study either self-selected (inferring they were already interested in the subject matter and hence volunteered to participate) or already were acquainted with other group members as colleagues or friends was beneficial.

Limitations

Focus groups, like other methods, have inherent limitations for conducting social research. A primary concern which arose was concerned with social desirability bias owing to the presence of the researcher and other participants. This has the potential to influence the nature and degree of participants' contributions (Smithson, 2000). Hence, Smithson claims it is impossible to argue that focus groups are effective at 'uncovering participants' 'real' views', and instead are a 'forum for generating public discourses about a topic' (2000:114). Participants may conceal their real beliefs around a topic owing to the presence of others, or indeed suppress their views around more dominant individuals (Smithson, 2000:107). I observed during two discussions that certain individuals were far less engaged and loquacious in comparison to their counterparts, and offered fewer insights. Interestingly, upon concluding one of the discussions, one participant returned to talk with me one-to-one, which took me by surprise. Alone, he spoke with much greater ease and authority about matters concerning street harassment and gender, and it became immediately evident he had felt unable to express himself in the group context amongst his peers. This was illustrative of a major shortcoming of the focus group method of data collection: certain voices can be heard above others, and certain opinions are not heard (Smithson, 2000:107).

A further limitation of much existing research on street harassment is addressed by Lengnick-Hall (1995) who argues that the use of 'paper people' situations which detail fictional scenarios for participants to comment on is flawed. He comments, 'There is no evidence to suggest that how people respond to contrived descriptions on paper in any way reflects how they would respond in an actual situation' (1995:859-60). Indeed, he claims it is probable that individuals exaggerate their likely responses to a scenario which is presented fictitiously compared to their actual responses as genuine witnesses (1995:852). I would argue this is partly attributable to social desirability bias, as participants in the presence of others may feel obliged to appear virtuous and well-intentioned. In my own research, I was acutely aware of the tendency of participants to 'toe the party line' with fellow participants on the topic of intervention as bystanders, and felt at times their unanimous agreement on certain issues was indicative of group think rather than individually held beliefs.

Ethics

Before conducting the focus groups, ethical permission was granted by the University of Edinburgh. Participants were fully informed both verbally and in writing about the topic and nature of the research, and on matters of confidentiality. Each participant signed a consent form after reading an information sheet and discussing the project with myself. Care was taken to safeguard the participants' identities through encryption and safe storage of the audio recordings of the focus groups, which will be permanently deleted upon submission of the dissertation. In addition, pseudonyms were used throughout to protect participants' identities. Finally, care was taken to formulate the questions in a way that would not be perceived as invasive by participants. Some questions were asked which inquired more personally into participants' past experiences and behaviours (for example, whether they had harassed in the past), but were worded in an open way, inviting the participants to share information only if they felt comfortable and willing to do so.

4. Findings and Discussion

The research findings were analysed thematically, allowing me to compare the data from each focus group in depth and also draw comparisons between the different groups. I have structured the findings according to the order of each of my three research questions: what are young men's understandings of street harassment, why men harass, and finally, how can street harassment be tackled?

4.1 Part one: Understandings of street harassment: Differing realities

I was interested initially in investigating men's initial definitions of street harassment: how do they conceptualise it and perceive it? Furthermore, what can this tell us about the differences in men and women's positionalities in the public sphere? The first section of each focus group was dedicated to exploring participants' articulations of street harassment and the targets and perpetrators involved. I have grouped what emerged from the discussions into two sub-groups: *(Mis)conceptions* and *Diminishing*. *(Mis)conceptions* is concerned with the variety of ways in which the participants understood street harassment, focusing particularly on some of their falsely held beliefs. *Diminishing* examines their tendency to downplay the forms and impacts of harassment of women.

(Mis)conceptions

Both prior to and after receiving a working definition of street harassment, many participants demonstrated a lack of awareness of exactly what it consists of and who it involves. That the male participants found it problematic to define street harassment in the first place was unsurprising given that there is such a divergence in women's conceptualisations of it. For example, as Kissling (1991) has highlighted, what may be perceived as a welcome and complimentary remark by one woman may be interpreted as a significant threat or offence by another. Excusing and justifying harassment by claiming some women desire evaluative remarks by men is an effective derailing tactic which steers attention away from the perpetrator and his actions, who, at the time of harassing, is unable to know whether his intrusions shall be welcome (Vera-Gray, 2017:7). Contextual specificities such as location, time of harassment and

the characteristics of the harasser are factors which can also alter the label attached to interactions that men instigate with women they do not know in public. For example, if a female is approached by a young professional versus by a man she perceives as lower class, her interpretation of the incident can shift from pleasant flattery to threat or offence. When participants were asked to describe street harassment, responses tended to immediately stereotype the context of harassment and the perpetrator(s), assuming there is a ‘type’ of man who would harass in public:

Malcom: *Well I guess the first thing [I think of] is probably men who are working outside...*

Marcus: *Probably working class men.*

Malcom: *Yeah, like if you’re working in an office you probably don’t see people leaning out of office windows to shout at women, but a group of lads on – I keep using the building site – we’re tagging builders very badly! But that is the stereotype you have in your head, you know what I mean?*

This short exchange reveals multiple misconceived assumptions surrounding gender-based street harassment. Malcom and Marcus were eager to differentiate between the professional realm of office workers and manual labourers and the respective behaviours they engage in. Interestingly, both portrayed the office environment as a site of equality, conveniently disregarding the well-documented workplace sexual harassment evidence to the contrary! (Ross, 2016) Marcus later commented that ‘*in the office, everyone is a bit more sensible and mature*’, and Malcom noted that offices have ‘*more of a respectful culture, whereas on a building site people seem to be a bit more lax...*’. Malcom and Marcus were very quick to disassociate themselves and those they socialise with from the ‘type’ of man who publicly harasses women, who, they believe, is not middle-class like themselves. This could be attributed to social desirability bias and the desire to appease me as a feminist researcher, however the frequency with which the ‘lower class’ of harassers was raised in the focus groups suggested that participants felt that men of a similar socio-economic background to themselves are not perpetrators of street harassment. Malcom commented that street harassing is ‘*not something [he’d] ever consider*’ coming ‘*from [his] background*’, which demonstrates how he perceives clear class-based divisions as determining individuals’ behaviour. Other participants referred to ‘*white van man culture*’, ‘*construction workers*’ and ‘*neds*’ as being the main perpetrators of harassment in public. Morgan (2005:173) observes the interplay between class

and masculinities, noting that ‘Different ways of ‘doing masculinity’ or of ‘being a man’ can themselves constitute status divisions’. By projecting the undesirable practice of street harassment onto the ‘other’, namely men of a lower class, Malcom, Marcus and other participants succeed in distancing themselves from it as a stigmatised practice and re-assert their own masculine solidarity and class identities.

On the contrary, research conducted by Benard and Schlaffer (1984) and Gardner (1995) demonstrates that class is not a significant variable in determining an individual’s likelihood to harass. Indeed, a recent report on Middle East and North African countries found that the higher the level of wealth and education of the male, the greater his propensity to harass women in public (El Feki et al., 2017). Gardner posits that individuals can wear ‘group-provided blinders’ which results in a ‘selective vision’ of the harassment being perpetrated around them, rendering their own group’s behaviour invisible to them (1995:45). Her research also found that males believed that men of a lower social class than them were more likely to be perpetrators of street harassment (1995:109). Indeed, even accounts in the news are prone to drawing a distinction between harassers and ‘ordinary’ men, which successfully deflects attention away from the reality that *all* men are capable of harassing (Laniya, 2005:116). For Malcom and Marcus, the office environment served as a symbolic marker of their higher-class status than those who work outdoors and demarcates a distinction in morals and respectfulness. Yet as Langelan (1993:235) notes, regardless of location, some men harass in their places of work whether they are indoors or outdoors. The difference lies in the more overt and obvious form of public street harassment compared with the often more insidious, covert nature of workplace sexual harassment. Yet not all participants viewed class as determining a greater likelihood to harass. Some were conscious of how easy it is to use the working class as scapegoats for society’s ills:

Adam: I know that the predominant narrative is that uneducated, poor people from like a ‘backwards’ background and so on do it more, or are like less respectful... [...] This sort of stereotypical narrative of certain races and certain classes and so on feeds into like quite a pernicious ‘oh it’s not people like me, it’s other people’...

It is interesting to note that although the participants all struggled to recall instances of witnessing stranger harassment in public, and many retold accounts received second-hand from

their girlfriends, most were very quick to assume a stereotypical harassing figure, despite their inability to remember concrete examples. Adam and the group acknowledged that harassers are found across social strata and are not unique to any specific social group.

Comparing Marcus and Malcom with Adam reveals a sharp contrast in their beliefs concerning females who are harassed:

Marcus: *I guess [she would be] fairly young.*

Malcom: *Yeah, probably like a young pretty girl, which is probably the reality of it I guess...*

Researcher: *Anything else?*

Marcus: *It shouldn't be the case but maybe the clothes that they wear will like, instigate the guy to do that.*

However, Adam adopts a different position:

Adam: *I mean when we have chilling statistics, what was it – two thirds of women have or will experience sexual assault or harassment in some way in their lives – that's everyone – that covers everyone, it doesn't have one particular characteristic. It's pretty much every person.*

What do these responses suggest about the participants and why such a discrepancy between their views? The invisibility of street harassment to Marcus and Malcom is clear: they assume young, attractive women are the targets of it because the perpetrator intends to compliment them as the objects of his admiration. What they do not show awareness of is how often harassment does not take this form; that it frequently is derogatory or intentionally threatening (Gardner, 1995:110). Their misconceptions concerning the target are symptomatic of a one-dimensional understanding of street harassment on their part: any woman can be subjected to harassment as Adam acknowledged, because it is an issue of power and control and not of physical desire or attraction to the target (Kearl, 2010:28). Marcus's use of the word 'instigate' when referring to women's clothing choices is particularly problematic as it suggests implicitly that the woman carries responsibility for 'provoking' unwanted interactions, or comments from men who are driven by innate biological desire. On the contrary, men's harassment of women is a behaviour learned through processes of socialisation within a patriarchal social structure, and research studies have shown that women are harassed regardless of their clothing choices

(Thompson, 1993). In relation to this, Kearl makes an astute observation: street harassment is very prevalent in countries even where women are completely veiled (2010:35). Benard and Schlaffer emphasise that a woman in an Arab country can just as easily be harassed for appearing to be too modestly dressed as for immodesty (1984:71). Pointing the finger at women for their mistreatment in public not only reproduces misogynistic age-old victim blaming discourse, it is also factually incorrect.

Other participants suggested harassment was typically aimed at women who drew attention but not necessarily in the positive sense:

Simon: Well I guess everyone can be harassed... it can be the outside characteristics which are making someone harass [...] There isn't like a typical kind of harassment [...] Someone might whistle if a girl is pretty, another might whistle if a girl is fat...'

This echoes with Goffman's theory of civil inattention which 'regulates the social intercourse of persons in our society' as a form of courtesy to certain strangers in public (1963:84). Women in public are not granted this courtesy as they are considered 'open persons' who receive unwanted attention owing to their gender. As Bowman highlights, this serves as a reminder to women that they are not recognised as equal citizens in the public arena, and thus are stepping outside of their prescribed domain of the private sphere (1993:541). Women in public are sanctioned by harassing males for exercising their human right to lead public lives free from intrusion by strangers. There is much to be said for harassing men's sense of entitlement owing to their position at the top of the gender hierarchy and the ensuing lack of respect they grant women: it is, after all, a social taboo for men to intrude upon other men. Breaking the code of civility operates as an overt and effective means to remind women of their subordination to men on a daily basis by infringing upon their liberties in the public realm.

Diminishing

Given that males typically are afforded civil inattention in public and are not intruded upon in their daily lives means that the prevalence of street harassment and the harm it induces remains invisible to many, and is often underplayed or dismissed (Tuerkheimer, 1997:171). Carlos noted that '*Guys just don't experience it at all you know, we're just kinda blind to it happening*'.

Many participants displayed an open attitude to learning more about the phenomenon, whereas from the outset Stuart adopted a dismissive and defensive attitude, which was communicated via his intonation, body language and facial expressions. His manner of regaling the group with the story of his mother's encounter with a public masturbator was laced with a distinctly dismissive undertone, thereby implying that because his mother '*found it really funny*', public masturbation would not constitute a potentially traumatic or harmful violation for females.

Stuart later commented:

Stuart: 'Assault' and 'harassment' have a lot of connotations, and I think the connotations fall more in line with like rape, which we do have legislation about, sexual harassment in the workplace which we do have legislation about. To call like whistling at someone harassment... probably objectively true, but it's not where people's minds go. People's minds don't go to abuse when you say you whistle.

These remarks provide a great deal of insight into Stuart's conceptualisation of gender-based harm. It is interesting to note that because rape and workplace sexual harassment are validated in the eyes of the law as unacceptable practices, Stuart sees them as genuinely problematic. However, perhaps because there are few if any legislative measures in most countries which recognise street harassment as a criminal act, in Stuart's view it is therefore not an issue of genuine social concern (Kearl, 2015:104). This suggests the need for street harassment to be addressed by the law to legitimise it as an offence to be taken seriously in society, rather than dismissed. Stuart's example of whistling as being too insignificant to be considered as problematic lacks any contextual consideration or analysis. For example, under what circumstances is the woman being whistled at? Questioning the location, timing and characteristics of the harasser are just some of the variables which play a fundamental role in shaping a woman's encounter with a stranger in public.

Similar sentiments diminishing the harm of street harassment were expressed by George who doubted whether prolonged staring at women warranted the label of harassing behaviour: '*Is that considered really harassment or not?*' Later George commented that offering to buy a stranger you come across on the street a coffee is not something that he '*see[s] to be that annoying, probably*' and that intervention as a bystander to show solidarity with a target of street harassment would not be appropriate in the case of '*just some catcalling*'. The

comments made by Stuart and George expose a lack of empathy and ability to relate to women's subjectivities given men and women's asymmetrical positionalities in a gendered hierarchy in which men are privileged. For women, being propositioned on the street to go for coffee or being catcalled is very context dependent; in many cases, as Bowman emphasises, the target can feel threatened by the possibility of such an invasion escalating to violent assault such as rape (1993:550). Furthermore, harassment does not typically consist of a 'civilised' invitation for coffee, and if it were to, contextual specificities would define the impact of such a seemingly harmless invitation. This supposition and lack of awareness on George's part serves only to highlight the invisibility of the nature of harassment to him. It also alludes to a sense of entitlement, at having the right to engage at will with whom he chooses. It is a sentiment echoed by Carlos who noted '*If I smile at a person and I don't know how they're gonna react then how do I engage with anyone?*' Women challenging these ingrained liberties works to erode male privilege, puts men's entitlement in jeopardy and thus helps to explain some men's tendencies to become defensive or trivialise harm to women.

The tendency for some participants to diminish or underplay street harassment and its implications for women resonates with Hester et al.'s reflections on the divergent gendered realities men and women inhabit and how this works to silence women's voices:

‘What malestream knowledge has attempted to do is limit what counts as abuse – it operates by the strategy of inclusion and exclusion, including what men define as violating/abusive and excluding much of what women experience as violating/abusive’ (1996:20).

Male knowledge has resulted in narrow definitions of gender-based harm despite women's experiential knowledge of it as the targets of male violence. Indeed, these definitions are so powerful that women themselves often find it problematic to rationalise their own experiences which do not fall within the dominant male narrative of gender-based violence (Hester et al., 1996:21-22). As a result, women frequently repeat phrases such as 'nothing really happened' after incidents of harassment or assault, when in fact grievous harm or infringement of personal liberty may have taken place (Vera-Gray, 2017:99-100). After all, a woman can never know the intent of a harasser, nor the potential outcome of a seemingly innocuous intrusion or comment by a stranger. The construction and perpetuation of myths surrounding male violence results in blatant trivialisation often by both genders of all but the most severe

manifestations of violence. Robinson's (2005) research into sexual harassment in schools produced findings which concur with the tendency to trivialise all but the most violent forms of harassment. As she notes, 'The polarizing of physical and non-physical behaviours, or of mind/body experiences, is often perceived across a scale of 'seriousness', with physical violation and experiences of pain often considered on the 'most serious' and damaging end of the scale'. Conceptualising violence hierarchically rather than on a continuum which connects all acts of harm and their varied impacts is an effective means to reduce and diminish the injuries sustained by women at the hands of men (Fileborn, 2013). This is mirrored by how the participants categorised different manifestations of harassment: in numerous instances the men referred to verbal forms of harassment as '*less serious*', '*milder*', '*smaller*' and '*low-level*' and acknowledged that they would probably only intervene as bystanders in cases of physical harassment. There was stark evidence of this tendency to polarise interpretations of gender-based harm in the comment from Stuart cited previously: '*Assault and harassment have a lot of connotations, and I think the connotations fall more in line with like rape*'. To only suggest rape as constitutive of harassment illustrates a profound inability to conceptualise harm outside the framework of violence as defined by malestream definitions, and indicates that other manifestations of male violence are invisible to Stuart. Binaristic categorisation of intrusion is problematic, for it 'does not represent the ways in which these practices are lived' and renders certain actions mundane and normal in opposition to 'legitimate' intrusion (Vera-Gray, 2017:6).

Simon recounted an incident from his personal life in which gendered interpretations of the episode did not coincide:

Simon: I don't know what she was really feeling, or in what situation I made her feel like I was harassing her or something like that, but yeah, I guess I liked her a bit and during one night we were in a pub and I was just staring at her. [...] I heard from one of her friends that she was feeling like I was harassing her because I was staring at her [...] Like it amazed me a bit [...] How could I have harassed her in this way? And then I found out that she was a very Catholic girl... [...] It's probably this cultural difference [...] It really annoyed me that she never talked about it...

There are several aspects to Simon's story which require unpacking. It is particularly interesting to note that although he recognised he was staring, he describes himself feeling 'amazed' that this could be considered by the girl to be harassing behaviour. His next step was to then rationalise her response and justify his actions by overriding her interpretation of it and instead citing *her* religious beliefs as responsible for her negative response to his staring. Given that he does not acknowledge that she was legitimately bothered by his staring resonates strongly with Smith's assertion that women's realities do not serve 'as the source of an authoritative general expression of the world' (1987:51). Finally, that he felt annoyed alludes to a sense of male entitlement: she has rejected him, (owing to her irrational religious beliefs, no less) and he felt resentful. It is his outright denial and inability to accept her interpretation of his harassment that is undoubtedly the most troubling aspect of the encounter.

Quinn's research on sexual harassment notes that some men's seeming inability to relate to gender-specific forms of harm stems from a 'studied, often compulsory, lack of motivation to identify with women's experiences' (2002:397). In light of the invisible nature of this gender-specific harm, Tuerkheimer (1997:175) argues for the need to make it visible: women must acknowledge and communicate their subjective experiences to those blind to them. Only then can women engage men with their realities and facilitate their understanding of street harassment. She claims that 'When we are harmed because we are women, we suffer uniquely as women' in a twofold sense: when a man harasses in public, women are reminded simultaneously of their need to fear men and the potential threat they represent in a sexually terroristic culture, and they are reminded of their inferior position of power within that culture (1997:189). If men are made more aware of this reality, perhaps they will be less prone to trivialising violence and harassment in the ways some participants did in this research. As well as opening the dialogue on street harassment, the harm it causes can be rendered visible by expanding definitions of gender-based harm from the female standpoint to be more inclusive of females' experiences.

The aim of this section has been to highlight young men's understandings of street harassment by focusing on participants' misconceptions of it and their tendency to diminish and trivialise the phenomenon. It emerged through the initial stage of the focus groups that street harassment is, to a certain extent, invisible to the participants because they are '*that*

demographic that's received the least discrimination... white, western, wealthy, cisgender males' (Darren). Their positions of social privilege and the fact they all self-identified as non-harassers meant it was challenging for participants to define and fully understand the phenomenon. In the second part of the findings, I will consider the second research question, 'Why do men harass in public?'

4.2 Part two: Why men harass: Masculinities on display

The second phase of the research involved exploring participants' views on the causes of street harassment and why they think some men engage in harassing behaviours. As Laniya notes:

'By recognising that these acts are committed by 'ordinary' men, a challenge arises to understand and change those normalised behaviours, encouraged by underlying systems, which influence the average male in society to act in this manner' (2005:116).

Given that the participants identified themselves as non-harassers, they offered their views on why other men choose to harass. The overarching theme which emerged was masculinities and the varied ways in which men display and enact their gender. From these discussions, the findings were grouped into two key areas, the first of which is entitled '*It's just a laugh*', which investigates participants' beliefs that men harass because they perceive it to be a fun, ritualistic aspect of male bonding. The second is entitled *Proving alpha-maleism*: participants suggested that the desire to project an image as a powerful male is another incentive to harass women.

'It's just a laugh'

The theme of harassing women to have a laugh amongst (male) friends as a form of entertainment was a recurring narrative within each of the five focus groups. It was cited by participants as being the main reason for why men harass. Research also suggests that men are more likely to harass women when in the company of other men (Wesselmann and Kelly, 2010:458). Max described an incident he witnessed as a bystander which angered a female target. He notes that the harassers '*tried to justify what they were doing as 'just fun, just banter'*, [...] *They tried to like play down her negative reaction by saying that it was just a bit of fun...*'. These comments on the conflict between the men's interpretations of the incident and the

female's reiterate the concept of gendered asymmetrical positionality: as a group of men, they were unable to identify with her response and resorted to the defence of 'just having fun' to rationalise their behaviour. Harassers' lack of consideration for their target's subjectivity was also raised by Malcom who noted that men do it *'for the bravado, it's not about the person they're shouting at, they're like a side product of it I guess. It's more like, as you said, a male bonding type thing...'*. Quinn's research on girl watching led to similar conclusions about this game played 'by men for men' in which 'the passing woman is simply a visual cue for their play' (2002:392). For Quinn, groups of men harassing women is akin to a gendered performance in which men are able to establish and assert their own masculine identities in relation to one another (2002:394). Fundamentally, through enactment of their gender, men seek one another's approval and evaluation (Kimmel, 1994:128) which ultimately fosters group cohesion and unity. The female is thus a catalyst to initiate this heterosexual male bonding in which men bolster one another's performances as bearers of the masculine ideal. The male must present himself as a 'loyal, well-disciplined performer' in the presence of his teammates (Goffman, 1959:131). By contrast, in this game, the female object is expected to consciously perform her role of feminine passivity in silence under the male gaze as 'Her face becomes contorted into a grimace of self-control and fake unawareness; her walk and carriage become stiff and dehumanised' (Tax in Goffman, 1971:272). If she retaliates in any way, her response is deemed illegitimate and overly emotional set against the legitimacy of the male group's socially condoned, jovial behaviour. As these dynamics are constantly reproduced under the guise of 'fun', not only does the practice of street harassment become ever more normalised and mundane, but, 'gendered identities, group boundaries, and power relations are (re)produced' (Quinn, 2002:393). Hence in the context of street harassment, play and power are intrinsically linked as hierarchical relations between the genders are reinforced.

Several participants highlighted what happens when women do not follow, in the words of Karl and George, the '*rules of the game*', by reacting in an unexpected way. Max recounted a video he saw in which a harassed woman responded by striking up a friendly conversation with her harassers, who '*balked*' and '*freaked out*' because such a reaction was not a scripted part of the game. This reinforces the concept that the woman merely serves the role of the passive prop for the harassing man or men who are more concerned with one another than by the woman herself. Viktor then cited a similar video he had seen where a woman responded to a marriage proposal from a stranger by enthusiastically agreeing. This means that '*He was*

totally caught off guard. She was not following the script, so I think for a male harasser there's a script that he's following'. Similarly, the '*rules of the game*' also apply to men who are expected to uphold a front of masculine solidarity during interactions with the opposite sex. As a self-defined feminist, Darren recalled instances in which he challenged male friends on their behaviour towards women in bars and was told with eyes rolling, '*Shut up Darren, it's just a bit of fun*'. George also referenced '*the bro code*' which men are expected to maintain between themselves and the expectations to perform gender which stem from '*lad culture*' amongst groups of men. If a male chooses not to conform to the code, there are sanctions imposed as Malcom pointed out, '*His mates will probably take the piss*'. Indeed, this pressure from fellow males may prevent many from taking a stand against harassers in the first place (Katz, 2006:123).

Seemingly, for the man who harasses in a group, his identity can be intrinsically bound to that of the group. He is a complicit player in the group's performance of masculine prowess on the world's stage (Goffman, 1976). This scripted performance is a 'skilled, finely pitched production mounted on a shoestring' in which 'there is a lot of concern with face, a lot of work put into keeping up a front' (Connell, 1995:111,116). That is, the collective performance is deceptive and fragile, for when the performers are not supported by the critical mass of their male allies, the façade of bravado can rapidly dissolve (Goffman, 1959). The game is no longer quite so appealing. As George remarked:

George: When I'm with some of my friends I realise that we tend to look at things differently than when it's just me. Because of this sort of 'lad culture', call it whatever you want. [...] Probably you wouldn't do the same as one person [alone] ... '

The front stage behaviour of bravado is therefore often dependent on the presence of other men. It is important to acknowledge that many men do also harass when alone, though this is less common (Wesselmann and Kelly, 2010). George implied that the group dynamic generates a shift in perceptions of its members and a distortion of reality to the extent that it provokes behaviour towards the opposite sex that would not otherwise occur when alone. A similar view was expressed by Marcus who noted '*If you put them on their own they would probably never behave like that*'. Arguably, the game of harassment in groups is fun also because it is safe and risk-free for harassers (Quinn, 2002:453). The power in numbers of a supportive cohort means

there are few consequences for harassers. No matter how the target responds, the harasser benefits from the approval and solidarity from his ‘bros’. This ultimately serves as a reminder that street harassment is a game ‘*that only he can actually win [...] It’s all placed in his favour*’ (Viktor).

Whilst for harassers in groups, targeting women in public may be easily interpreted as an innocuous game in which ‘boys will be boys’, this must not trivialise and obscure the practice. For Marcus, there is a clear distinction in the meaning behind groups of men who harass ‘for fun’ compared with lone perpetrators of harassment:

Marcus: ...*If it’s like an individual then it’s possibly a bit more sinister or a bit strange. [...] like that person’s not quite right, potentially. [...] that person might have mental health issues or something...*

Unlike group harassers, a lone harasser is stigmatised as potentially threatening and/or mentally ill. Gardner highlights that harassing in groups ‘defuses urban paranoia toward the solitary’ (1995:91) by rendering the collective behaviour as more legitimate. As Canning argues, it is easier to label harm instigated by the individual as symptomatic of deviance or psychotic tendencies, yet when it is perpetrated by a group, it is much more challenging to dismiss (2010:855). Indeed, performing in a team ‘can help men depoliticise their offence’ (Gardner, 1995:106). The problem with such a polarised interpretation of the same act is that group harassment is consequently cast off and dismissed as inevitable boys’ behaviour and so does not constitute a valid form of harm. It is by adopting a blasé position on group harassment that has resulted in its depoliticisation and acceptance as a socially ingrained practice.

Proving alpha-maleism

The second major theme to arise concerning why men harass was the need to prove oneself as an alpha-male. In this context, the game of harassment and performance it entails are underscored by a desire to assert power not only amongst men but also towards women. Every focus group cited the desire to assert power and dominance as the other key motivation for men to harass, in addition to bonding amongst friends. The confluence of masculinity and power is an oft-cited one: as Connell notes, masculinity is frequently ‘equated with the exercise of power in its most naked forms’ (1995:42). After all, at the very nucleus of a patriarchal

gender order is women's subordination to men's power and the subsequent disassociation of masculine omnipotence from feminine weakness (Connell, 1995:74, 223). Laniya (2005:109) asserts that the desire to dominate and demonstrate power underpins all instances of harassment, regardless of other perceived motivating factors. Stuart expanded on the concept of power and how it intersects with public harassment as a manifestation of dominance:

Stuart: Some people want to feel powerful over other people, and the one tool that men have is that they can intimidate women.

Researcher: Do you think intimidation is part of it?

Stuart: [...] Some of the men doing this probably don't see it that way but I think it probably comes from that. You're kinda trying to assert your power whether that's fairly low-level, just looking impressive in front of your mates, or the reason why some men rape people... yeah, it's to feel dominant.

In the above extract, Stuart describes intimidation as the '*one tool*' that men have at their disposal which positions them at an advantage over women. By profiting from their ability to instil fear and intimidate, street harassment thus becomes not just a question of light-hearted amusement, but is underpinned by gendered power dynamics. Stuart's allusion to how gender affects an individual's interpretation of an incident of harassment by commenting that perpetrators '*probably don't see it that way*' in terms of intimidation reiterates the notion that women's experiences of harm need to be validated, independently of criteria defined by men. Stuart's awareness of how power is the underlying motivation both for perpetrators of street harassment and rapists is insightful and acknowledges that street harassment and rape have commonalities as they occur on the spectrum of violence against women.

When rationalising why some men choose to harass women publicly, some participants pointed to the expectations on men to perform to a culturally prescribed masculine ideal of dominance. They cited the role the media plays in perpetuating these problematic binary representations of gender which reproduce the narrative of the omnipotent male in pursuit of the passive female, often against her will. George noted that '*The media normalises a lot [...] It's producing and reproducing, and then you see it on TV, so [people think] it must be fine*'. The abuse of male power which leads to a multitude of forms of violence against women in society has become both a normalised and romanticised phenomenon, meaning all but the more extreme cases of

violence are routinely discounted as legitimate forms of harm (Hlavka, 2014:340-41). In a sexually terroristic culture, male power over women by means of violence is so entrenched into the fabric of gender relations that violent behaviour towards women is considered an innate, essential facet of men's natures rather than a learned behaviour in the context of a patriarchal and hierarchical society (Hlavka, 2014:344). Several participants emphasised the relationship between some men's lack of power and their subsequent perceived need to assert what little they have. As Karl commented:

Karl: The stereotype is the more obnoxious, loud-mouthed street harasser... sort of alpha male, aspirant alpha male type who clearly isn't and wants to assert very boldly some kind of sense of power...

Keith also addressed the theme of powerlessness in relation to 'neds' who harass in public:

Keith: Those types of people would find it funny or it would make them feel powerful... [...] They might be people who feel like they're powerless... [...] and they do it to acquire power.

Both participants make it clear that the need to assert power originates from being in a less powerful position in society. They thereby imply that some men's undesirable behaviour is a backlash response to their marginalised social status, whether they be classified as 'neds' or otherwise. The participants' views resonated with those of Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, who note that men in subordinate positions in the social hierarchy 'tend to overtly display exaggerated embodiments and verbalisations of masculinity that can be read as a desire to express power over others within a context of relative powerlessness' (1994:214). Nevertheless, they caution against oversimplifying the complexity of differing manifestations of masculinity, positing instead that there are diverse ways that performances of power and masculinity manifest themselves (1994:215). It is, after all, a myth to argue that it is only men at the bottom of the pecking order of privilege, specifically in terms of class or race, who are solely responsible for the ill-treatment of women.

Stuart, Karl and Keith focused on rationalising harassers' desire to wield power over the women. It is important to consider in addition, as Robinson (2005:20) emphasises, how some men also wish to exert their power in the company of other men. Theorising motivations for harassment in this way corresponds to the argument presented earlier that harassment is at its

core an androcentric activity. In turn, the woman is rendered ‘a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine scale’ (Kimmel, 1994:129). Here, Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995) is useful to help understand the complexities of men ‘doing dominance’ (Goffman, 1967:47) in one another’s presence. Broadly, hegemonic masculinity posits that there is a masculine ideal which can vary across time and space that men aspire to (Connell, 1995). The hegemonic male embodies all that is ‘manly’ in society. At the heart of this ideal is the value placed on male power and dominance over others: including both women and other less privileged men who remain outside of the hegemonic framework (Robinson, 2005:22). Performing gender to the ideal keeps certain men at the top of the gender hierarchy in society – namely white, heterosexual, cisgender middle-class men – who serve as role models for others to aspire to. In many cases, the principal channel through which this male dominance can be achieved is indeed by presenting oneself as dominant to the audience, for example, by sexually harassing behaviours which perpetuate oppression of non-hegemonic individuals (Robinson, 2005:22-23). Butler defines performativity as ‘that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names’ when enacted repeatedly (1994:33). ‘Doing’ gender in this manner – by performing under the shadow of an ideal embodiment of gender and to its prescribed standard repeatedly over time, results in the production and reproduction of rigid gender binaries (Butler, 1990:140). This renders gender ‘real only to the extent that it is performed’ yet through ritualised repetition, leads to the illusion of an innate, essential gender identity (Butler, 1988:527). Performance of power embodies what it is to ‘be’ a legitimate man within a patriarchal context and ultimately helps explain the motivations behind male harassment of women.

In this section I have presented and discussed findings regarding why some men harass women in public under the heading of *Masculinities on display*. Under the sub-heading of ‘*It’s just a laugh*’, I dealt with participants’ commonly held view that men primarily harass in order to entertain themselves as part of male bonding. The second most commonly held belief for why men harass – to assert power – was discussed in *Proving alpha-maleism*. Theories by Goffman, Butler and Connell on teams, performativity and masculinity were incorporated to substantiate the findings. In the following section, findings from my final research question are presented: ‘How can street harassment be addressed?’

4.3 Part three: Addressing street harassment: Tackling the root of the problem:

To begin the final segment of the focus groups, participants were asked broadly what preventative measures could be taken to reduce the prevalence of street harassment. Some participants focused on how the woman could manage her actions and behaviours:

Max: Well there's things she could do that would lessen the likelihood of being harassed. She could wear less revealing clothes, [...] avoiding certain parts of town, crossing the road when she sees somebody... [...] You know, just the usual.

The casual nonchalance with which Max said '*You know, just the usual*' offers a telling insight into victim blaming culture. For Max, it seems not only completely normal but is also implicitly assumed that a woman needs to monitor her appearance, where she goes and be aware of who is in the surrounding area. Yet, numerous studies show there is little a woman can do to lessen her likelihood of assault such as rape and such measures do not impact upon men's actions (Hester et al., 1996:60). Pointing to the various measures females can and indeed are *expected* to take to protect themselves is an excellent derailing tactic under a patriarchal system which deflects the crime away from the male perpetrator (Gardner, 1995). It makes women responsible for men's crimes and abuse and overtly implies they are at fault (Esacove, 1998). The responses of 'what was she doing in that area/dressed like that/at that time of night and similar variations are all too familiar in the wake of sexual assault incidents and must stop. Instilling fear and changing women's behaviour is symptomatic of the triumphing of male violence and domination (Gardner, 1995). It is for this reason I guided the discussions at this point in a more structured manner, directly asking participants their views on awareness raising, education and legislative redress as means to tackle street harassment at its root, rather than obscuring viable solutions with discussions of women's behaviour. I felt it was imperative to shift the discussion to not facilitate potential narratives of victim-blaming and to conclude the discussions constructively, focusing on addressing men and their actions which are solely responsible for street harassment.

There were an array of diverging and converging opinions on the topic of tackling street harassment, and the findings are divided into three sections. *Awareness raising* addresses the broad areas of the media, social media, formal education and the roles they play in generating social consciousness. *Intervention and solidarity* considers the importance of bystander

intervention during incidents of harassment and the significance of male solidarity in tackling gender-based inequalities. Finally, *Legal matters* considers the benefits and challenges of using legal remedies to tackle street harassment.

Awareness raising

The need for greater awareness surrounding the phenomenon of street harassment was cited as the key measure to change attitudes and instigate a cultural shift in tolerance to make the practice less accepted and commonplace in society. Participants cited the roles of the media and social media as tools to generate awareness and consciousness of street harassment. In addition to referencing social media and films throughout the focus group discussions, the frequency with which some participants referred to videos and news they had come across on social media was demonstrative of the reach and influence of online activism. These participants were notably more engaged and informed about the topic than other participants, and described the impact this exposure had:

Vernon: Honestly, before this topic appeared in the media and in the social networks as well, I think I wasn't aware of the frequency or how common it could be for women. So... before that I never, I think I never saw something similar [to street harassment]. Not because it didn't happen but only because I couldn't recognise it.

Max: [Social media] didn't even just bring it home to me, it actually revealed to me the scale of the problem. So that, that's like a really instrumental factor in my understanding of the problem.

The pivotal impact of both the media and social media on Vernon and Max here is obvious. After their exposure to street harassment via these mediums it was no longer invisible, but rather a valid social problem. Lennox and Jurd-Hage (2017) argue for the transformative and revolutionary potential social media holds for modern day activism: the more publicity street harassment generates online, the greater the potential shift in public perception and tolerance. This discourse can instigate a trickle-down effect into institutions across society which can begin to put street harassment on their agendas, leading to gradual but significant changes in policy and the law (Lennox and Jurd-Hage, 2017:34). Laniya argues that the overarching power of the media can 'alter the manner in which a phenomenon is recognised and evaluated',

suggesting it holds a power which can and should be harnessed to transform public perception of issues such as harassment (2005:111). In addition to traditional forms of media such as newspapers, newer online media platforms for activism are increasingly popular, such as Hollaback! which connects activists globally via the internet and embraces technology in the fight against street harassment. The organisation enables targets to document and share their experiences of harassment online in a personal and political manner: users can gain a sense of catharsis through sharing and solidarity within the online community, which simultaneously helping to raise awareness in the online sphere (Fileborn, 2016). The amassing of thousands of these first-hand accounts from across the globe stands as a powerful testimony to the widespread and universal social problem street harassment continues to be within all societies (Fileborn, 2016:10).

Nevertheless, the problematic role of the media in perpetuating regressive and damaging gendered representations and dynamics was of concern to some participants:

Karl: I think there's hard-wired cultural notions as well that are tied up with what a woman's role is in courtship rituals and [...] [a] seemingly residual idea that women should be passive and kind of the thrill of the chase as it were. And you get those in contexts that are represented in popular cinema, TV, like all sorts of contexts that are apparently benign but sort of do reach a certain logical end point in sex pests and sexual harassment.

Karl astutely highlighted the trouble with the contexts in which gender is portrayed in the media: they are '*apparently benign*' yet sustain harmful gendered paradigms. George agreed that such representations are heavily '*embedded*' in the media which needs to '*stop normalising that sort of behaviour*' (Adam). The media's influence is clear to the participants: it often presents sexual harassment and sexual violence in a routine and mundane manner and these representations become steadily more normalised as the gendered status quo. As Adam insightfully commented: '*Society defines what the media covers and what the media is about, but also the media influences what society perceives as normal... [...] There's a sort of self-perpetuating loop*'. He believes the media and society mutually reinforce and shape one another in a powerful way. This is corroborated by Laniya who argues that the media can be equally detrimental as it can constructive in promoting healthier representations of gender to the masses (2005:111). Notwithstanding the media's reach, it should not be used as a scapegoat

to blindly absolve perpetrators of responsibility for their actions. That said, the media undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in influencing gendered interactions across society, and so can be simultaneously a force for good and bad in the fight to end harms such as street harassment.

Participants also cited more overt forms of education as a means of consciousness raising. Seven participants all suggested the need either for more educational measures for young people or more generalised outreach and awareness-raising to directly target adult men. Malcom discussed the need for innovative methods to make harassers aware of their behaviour, for example by bringing them into dialogue with their target which would humanise her for the harasser: '*If that person puts across their point, that like 'I get this all the time, this is how it makes me feel' then maybe that would get through to them?*'. This sentiment was echoed by Jack who voiced the need for outreach:

Jack: [They harass] from a lack of not necessarily intellectual education but more from like, not realising the sort of humanity of the person they're targeting and the kind of potential effects it will have.

Jack and Malcom's contributions emphasise the need for harassing men to be exposed to women's subjectivities rather than as objectified others. This correlates with Quinn's findings which revealed a shift in her male participants' understandings of street harassment when they were made to consider the dynamic from the female position. Only then did they gradually reconceptualise their harassment as problematic (2002). Quinn argues that intrinsic to upholding a masculine front is the ability to minimise feelings of empathy for the other (2002:391-92). Hence by educating and thereby encouraging men to engage and identify with women's positionalities, their propensity to harass could be significantly reduced. Gender and street harassment scholars alike have pointed to the importance of education for tackling harassment and preventing gender-based violence (Kearl, 2010; Thompson, 1993; Connell, 1995; Esacove, 1998, Kimmel et al., 2005). *Men Can Stop Rape* is a U.S.-based non-profit that works to tackle male violence early with teenagers and young adults via education and campaigning. The organisation encourages males to identify and empower themselves as allies with women to bring about change, rather than labelling them as the problem. The efficacy of education was evidenced in a recent UN and Promundo report which profiled the work of the Egyptian NGO ACT, which works to foster men's identification with women from their

subordinate positions. This is achieved by asking men to reconsider their views on street harassment if the target were their mother, sister or wife which has proven to be ‘a message that hits home for many men’ (El Feki et al., 2017:89). Though this approach ‘plays more to male notions of guardianship and protection of women than it does to concepts of gender equality’, it is nevertheless a notable step towards reducing women’s harassment in public (El Feki et al., 2017:89). Though educating adult men is undoubtedly necessary, ideally, education should begin as early as possible as a preventative measure, and continue through to university level (Laniya, 2005:128; Flood, 2005:461). Educational policy and campaigning work by both governmental and non-governmental bodies as cited above are crucial for catalysing social change.

Intervention and solidarity

There is a consensus amongst scholars that intervention from bystanders is a key means to reduce street harassment and other forms of gender-based violence as it creates a culture of reduced tolerance (Banyard et al., 2004; Kearl, 2010; McMahon et al., 2011; Fileborn 2013, 2016). The participants holistically emphasised the importance and need for increased displays of solidarity from male allies, whether this be in the form of supporting female friends or actively intervening as bystanders to incidents of harassment in public:

Darren: I try and support females in my life [...] not just females – people with all kinds of gender expressions who’ve experienced harassment and difficulties... [...] It’s important for me to express that support.

This sentiment was also voiced by Marcus who noted that intervening as a bystander is a means to protect the target and thus ‘*might make them feel more at ease if they know that someone’s got their back...*’. Other participants who referenced their girlfriends’ experiences of street harassment demonstrated a greater level of understanding and empathy about harassment generally, and McMahon et al. note that perhaps due to this close personal connection these men are able to feel greater empathy for targets, which is crucial for intervention in the first place (2011:127). On the contrary, others expressed doubt at the efficacy of intervention and the difficulty of knowing when intervention is appropriate. Karl divulged that in his hometown, intervening would be ‘*completely fruitless*’ owing to the highly traditional gender dynamics in the region:

Karl: *If it's like catcalling and things like that, that is kind of part of the ritual of that context... [...] If you're just going around trying to illiberally police everybody's activities and that, it's completely pointless.*

For Karl, harassment is so normalised in certain contexts that intervening is not worthwhile, though it is interesting to note he interpreted intervention as a form of illiberal policing of men's misbehaviour rather than a means to show solidarity with female targets. Intervening can be challenging and its appropriateness is context-dependent – some women may not want a male to step in – however, its importance as a method to reduce sexual violence and other crimes cannot be underestimated (Banyard et al., 2004; Kearl, 2010). Other participants were sceptical about their likelihood to intervene:

Max: *I think the ambiguity surrounding [gender-based] street harassment in general, like it makes people scared to intervene. Whereas if I saw somebody being racist towards somebody on the street, I feel like I'd be much more likely to intervene...*

That Max would be more inclined to intervene in a case of racial abuse illustrates the lack of clarity surrounding what constitutes gender-based street harassment. This is further impeded by the lack of solid definition of the phenomenon which makes identification of harassment challenging. His comments also reflect a societal tendency of Western cultures' 'primacy on privacy' of family and romantically engaged partners which makes individuals less likely to intervene (Replogle, 2011:802). Variations on Max's contribution were expressed by others who also admitted they would be tentative about getting involved in a situation of gender-based harassment for reasons of personal safety or in 'less severe' cases where there is no physical element to the harassment. This reluctance concurs with McMahon et al.'s research (2011) which investigated the continuum of violence as conceptualised by Kelly (1988) in relation to likelihood for bystanders to intervene. The findings revealed bystanders are more likely act in cases of severe harassment or violence, which is indicative of the need for greater awareness raising around harm and educational measures to equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to intervene appropriately (Banyard et al., 2004:75). Banyard et al. note that in addition to having suitable strategies, for bystander intervention to be a feasible measure to reduce harassment and sexual violence, a culture which is supportive of intervention must be facilitated, thus transforming it into a social norm (2004:67).

Legal matters

This final section of findings shall present the last aspect that was discussed for tackling street harassment: implementing the law to deter and penalise offenders. The participants were predominantly sceptical at the prospect of introducing legal measures to combat harassment in public for a variety of reasons. Some suggested that introducing legal protections would be too challenging:

Marcus: How are they going to catch people with street harassment and how are they going to give them some sort of punishment?

Rory: How would you enforce it? You can't have police on every corner watching out for this stuff...

Jack: It's very difficult to, like, make good laws about it. Cos it's like the same action will vary in a slightly different context... it can be absolutely fine or harassment, depending on, like, people's intent and the reaction...

Marcus, Rory and Jack do not consider the law as an appropriate and feasible avenue by which to address harassment. Jack's comment concerning the contextual variables which must be assessed in each incident of harassment is a valid one; factors such as the setting, time, and individuals involved can dramatically alter how harassment is perceived and indeed whether it is interpreted as harassment. Consequently, this presents challenges to applying a blanket law to prohibit a practice which is not easily defined. Other participants noted that for legal measures to have impact, there would need to be tangible negative consequences for harassers:

Dave: I think the urge to preserve yourself, knowing that you will do more harm to yourself than what you will get from harassing someone will stop you from doing it.

This echoes Langelan's view it is only 'When harassing women no longer produces the expected male rewards – when it becomes, instead, a high-risk behaviour for men – [that] women will be able to stop sexual harassment' (1993:74). The benefits that males can derive from public harassment, such as entertainment, improved status or assertion of power, must be outweighed by the potential costs – namely, penalties, charges, or loss of respect from peers, amongst others. Until there is a consensus that men simply cannot 'get away with it', significant progress towards addressing street harassment is unlikely. Numerous academics are in unanimous agreement over the need for laws as deterrents in relation to street harassment

(Bowman, 1993; Langelan, 1993; Hester et al., 1996; Tuerkheimer, 1997; Nielsen, 2000; Kearl, 2010). Criminal justice redress is arguably a vital component to implement in conjunction with greater awareness and intervention as the law can ‘change behaviour and to shape perceptions, ethics, and values’ (Laniya, 2005:93).

Nielsen’s research into citizens’ views on the law in relation to street harassment found that in the absence of laws to regulate specific behaviours, people are less likely to see a need for one (2000:1080). Nielsen attributes this to ‘the seeming legitimacy of the status quo’, meaning that citizens do not recognise a phenomenon as problematic if it is not recognised formally by legal measures (2000:1080). The law thus adds legitimacy to phenomena that would otherwise be perceived as acceptable, and this crucially demonstrates the significance of introducing legislation. Plausibly, this rationale could account for the participants’ scepticism surrounding the introduction of new laws protecting targets from street harassment. This resonates with Laniya’s assertion that in the absence of laws, the individual feels less entitled to demand their rights in society when they have been undermined (2005:98). She argues, ‘When a notion of entitlement exists, there is no need to recognise the harm; all that is left is to identify the perpetrator and demand a remedy’ (2005:98). Though a law may not always be easily implemented or enforced, its introduction can catalyse a shift in public perception of the act in question and validate it as socially unacceptable (Tuerkheimer, 1997:199).

Tuerkheimer simultaneously critiques the law as having a ‘gendered, myopic vision of injury’ which renders forms of harm specific to women unacknowledged in legal culture (1997:196). Women’s realities are invalidated and this constitutes a deep manifestation of gender inequality, sustaining women’s subordination through an unwillingness to recognise their unique harms. Considering that the law defines and then limits what is considered ‘true’ violence (Hester et al., 1996:31), there is a case for a ‘dramatic transformation in legal doctrine and legal culture’ in order to incorporate women’s experiences and make justice possible (Tuerkheimer, 1997:201). This transformation would help end the ‘historical sexism’ of the law (Bowman, 1993:551). Fileborn and Vera-Gray question the extent to which traditional criminal justice is indeed an appropriate and desirable form of redress for targets of harassment, highlighting its shortcomings as a satisfactory mechanism which is ‘individualised, retrospective and retributive’ (2017:22). Proposed from their research findings with targets of

street harassment is a more transformative approach to justice which would holistically work to address the causes of harassment as a symptom of patriarchal culture. The transformative approach would represent an attempt to dismantle the prevailing gender order and its inherent inequalities by challenging men, raising awareness and educating to catalyse structural change in society from the bottom up, rather than by punishing men via the legal system after committing an offence (Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017). Transformative justice is a most promising avenue for addressing street harassment which is worthy of further study as an alternative to the evident flaws of the traditional approach to justice which has systematically failed to serve women's interests (Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017). Nevertheless, criminal justice should not be abandoned as it can offer potential remedy for targets seeking formal justice against perpetrators.

This final section of findings has discussed the key means through which street harassment can be most effectively reduced and addressed. Participants expressed mixed views on awareness raising, intervention as allies and questions of increased legislation. Whilst there is no panacea for eradicating men's harassment of women, a multi-pronged approach which incorporates education, a supportive culture of intervention and legal acknowledgment would legitimise the problematic nature of harassment, make it visible and undoubtedly lead to decreased acceptance of it as an inevitable dimension of public life. Transformative justice is a potentially innovative means of tackling this problem which should be considered in future research. Ultimately, putting the issue of street harassment onto political agendas would have powerful implications for policy which would consequently become more inclusive of marginalised groups' voices and experiences of the public sphere.

5. Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have sought to add to the limited literature on the topic of gender-based street harassment and to the even more limited literature concerning men's perceptions of the phenomenon. Carrying out in-depth interviews with men in focus groups provided the opportunity to gain a comprehensive insight into their understandings of street harassment, why they believe men harass and their views on different methods to tackle street harassment. Generating a more thorough insight into the male perspective in this research exposed the male gendered reality of the participants and how this shapes and influences their views on a form of harm committed for the most part by men towards women.

This research confirmed that to a significant extent, men's views on street harassment are shaped by a malestream conceptualisation of harm and violence which systematically works to exclude variations of injury to women which fall outside of the dominant framework. Accordingly, the men's opinions were littered with misconceptions and falsely held beliefs about street harassment. Their privileged positions in the gender hierarchy has effectively rendered street harassment invisible to them. Arguably, their lack of awareness was also compounded by a dearth of social dialogue and awareness around the issue, and the lack of a solid definition of exactly what constitutes street harassment.

In rationalising why men harass, the participants offered a number of explanations, notably connecting the desire to harass with the desire to display power and dominance and to entertain amongst peers. Their beliefs that street harassment is so normalised across society perhaps points to why they were so sceptical about combatting the problem via means such as education and awareness, increased intervention, and legislation. Conducting this empirical research on men has important implications for future research and for shaping strategies to eradicate the public harassment of women because this is a phenomenon predominantly perpetrated by men and is intrinsically linked to embodying masculinity. It has highlighted the need for greater discourse surrounding street harassment and its ensuing effects upon women. The phenomenon in its many manifestations must be made visible for it to gain the political and legal recognition

it merits as a form of gender-based violence that has profound impacts upon women and girls' daily realities across the globe. Whilst this study does not intend to be representative, it has exposed a cross-section of young men's lack of awareness of a phenomenon that is common to a vast majority of women in all social contexts. Until women's inability to conduct their daily lives free from the harm of harassment in public by strangers is acknowledged and remedied, we cannot claim to live in an equal society with equal freedoms.

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Appendix A



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Information Sheet

Project Title: Gender-based street harassment: The invisible harm

Researcher's Name:

I am a Masters student at the University of Edinburgh, in the Department of Sociology. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns exploring males' attitudes towards gender-based street harassment and their understandings of it.

Purpose

The data I gather will be used for my dissertation as part of the criteria to complete my MSc in Sociology and Global Change at the University of Edinburgh. The purpose is to collect data during the months of April and May 2017 and to transcribe the data for use in my dissertation which will be submitted in August 2017.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, I will conduct a focus group with you and several other participants, or a one-to-one interview. The format of the focus group will involve open discussion with other males between the ages of 22 – 35. I shall guide the discussion, asking open-ended questions for you to consider as a group in order to engage in dialogue.

If I have asked you to participate in an interview, it shall be one-to-one with myself. It shall also consist of open-ended questions which we shall discuss as a pair.

The focus group should last about 60 minutes (30 minutes for interview) and will be conducted at the University of Edinburgh George Square campus on a suitable evening in April/May 2017. I will audio record the discussion. The recording will be used for transcription only. If you do not want to be audio recorded I will take notes instead. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the focus group or interview I can turn off the recorder at your request.

I will request that you do not repeat what any particular person says during the focus group to anyone outside the group. However, I cannot guarantee that each participant will keep the discussions confidential.

Risks/Discomforts

If any of the topics make you feel uncomfortable you are free to decline to comment. You are also free to stop participating in the focus group or interview at any stage. I will make sure to reduce the risk that confidentiality is compromised, but as with all research there is a chance it could be compromised.

Confidentiality

The study data will be handled as confidentially as possible and pseudonyms will be used instead of individual names in the transcriptions and final dissertation. The dissertation will initially be read by a small number of University staff. It may be published online on an activist platform which aims to tackle street harassment. You are free to object to this.

To minimise the risks to confidentiality, I will store the audio recording and notes in a secure password encrypted folder on my laptop. I will save any identifying information separately. Storage of data will be in accordance with UK Data Protection Act 1998.

When the research is complete I shall not save the audio recording of the session and shall dispose of it appropriately.

Benefits

There is no compensation or direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. I will provide refreshments during the focus group and interview.

The research will benefit my learning through carrying out the research as part of my Masters dissertation and it may also benefit the Edinburgh based activist group, Hollaback! Edinburgh, with whom I currently volunteer.

Rights

You are free to decline to take part in the study and participation is completely voluntary. You can decline to answer any questions or discuss particular topics and are free to stop taking part in the focus group or interview at any time. You can also withdraw permission to use the recording or transcript at any time.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research before or after the focus group, please feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Please keep this sheet for your information

Appendix B



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Consent to Participate in Research

I confirm that: **Please tick box as appropriate**

I have read and understood the information about the study and my participation

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers

I understand that I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and without penalty

The confidentiality procedures have been clearly explained to me

The terms of consent for audio recording and transcriptions have been explained to me

I am aware that the data collected will be stored securely, safely and in accordance with Data Protection Act (1998)

The use of data has been clearly explained to me

I voluntarily agree to participate in the study

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

Participant Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the information sheet and consent form and has been given a copy.

Signature of Researcher:

Print Name:

Date: