BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH STREET HARASSMENT:

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This study begins the process of attending to the street harassment experiences of Black women in the U.S. To examine how Black women define and describe their experiences with street harassment, this phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews. Eight Black women were recruited to participate in this study. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the author and an additional reviewer. The subsequent data was coded, then reduce to categories and themes. The results of this study provided a definition of street harassment and discussed the negative experiences and consequences that come from this phenomenon. The findings of this study included the following six themes: Description of Street Harassment, Behavioral Responses, Negative Emotional Experiences, Meaning Making, Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts, and Hypervigilance. These themes contained fourteen subthemes that further describes Black women's experiences. The results of this study has some important implications for future research and practice. Specifically, conducting participatory action research and crafting bystander interventions with community members is a logical next step from this study. Finally, there are some implications for the proposed theories of street harassment. Black women's experiences did not fit neatly into previous theories. The results of this study elucidated some cultural components that influence the negative emotional outcomes that Black women experience as a result of street harassment within their community.

Keywords: street harassment, sexual harassment, Black women, bystander sexism,

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Street harassment is an often overlooked stressor that many people experience. It is difficult to define and ambiguous. The first articles discussing street harassment, published over 20 years ago, were theorized and defined by White American women (di Leonardo, 1981; Gardner, 1995). Street harassment is not a simple or isolated issue; it occurs across countries and cultures (Meza-de-Luna, 2014; Ilahi, 2010). The prevalence of street harassment has been estimated to range from 78% to 85% for all American women (Black, et al, 2014; MacMillian, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000). Few researchers have ventured to understanding the phenomenon of street harassment, and have focused instead on the motives of the harassers and the reactions of the harassed (Gardner, 1995; Kearl, 2010; Thompson, 1994). While motivation is a significant factor in this phenomenon, other factors, such as how street harassment is perceived and its effects are of importance.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to discuss the problem of street harassment and to examine its impact on Black women as the current study proposes the use of qualitative inquiry into this topic. It is important for Black women to define for themselves what they consider to be street harassment, what meaning they draw from it, and how issues such as sexism, racism, and classism combine to shape their subjective experiences. The following chapter will explore the phenomenon of street harassment, the vulnerability of women of color, and then present a proposal for a qualitative inquiry into Black women's experiences with street harassment.

Street Harassment

Sexism is a pervasive and cultural problem that trickles down into everyday interpersonal experiences (Ronai, Zsembik, & Feagin, 2014). Street harassment is arguably an expression of

sexist attitudes that impacts the daily lives of individuals. Upon a review of the literature it is important to note that several terms have been used to discuss this issue, such as "bystander sexism," "street sexual harassment," "public harassment," "stranger harassment," and other more descriptive terms such as "catcalling" or "wolf-whistling." Street harassment is, however, the most broadly used term in the literature as well as in social movements against street harassment; therefore, this term will be used to discuss the phenomenon throughout this proposal.

Research on street harassment has been embedded in, and preceded by, research on sexual harassment in the workplace. As a result, research on this particular topic is sparse. Nevertheless, scholars began considering street harassment in the 1980s with the goal of understanding the motives of the harassers and the effects street harassment has on the harassed. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo (1981) first defined street harassment as an event in which one or more strange men accost one or more women in a public place; through looks, words, or gestures, the man asserts his right to intrude on a woman's attention, defines her as a sexual object, and forces her to interact with him. Within this conceptualization of street harassment are the assumed dominance of men and the vulnerability of women.

Kissling (1991) was able to connect the phenomenon of street harassment to a larger system of sexism and its devastating outcomes. She described street harassment as a function of *sexual terrorism*, serving to remind women of their vulnerability to objectification, invasions of privacy, and sexual assault (Kissling, 1991). Following di Leonardo's (1981) conceptualization, this reflects the autonomy and intrusiveness of the harasser and the potential for victimization of the harassed. Kissling's use of the term *sexual terrorism* calls attention to the insidious role of a larger system of sexism that impacts women and the devastating effects that street harassment may have on women that go beyond temporary embarrassment.

Gardner (1995) conducted pioneering qualitative research on street harassment, and defined it as a group of abuses, harryings and annoyances characteristic of public places and that includes pinching, slapping, hitting, shouted remarks, vulgarity, insults, sly innuendo, ogling, and stalking (p. 4). Gardner (1995) acknowledged the continuum of possible events that begin with incivility among strangers that has the potential to escalate to violent crime (e.g. assault, rape, or murder). This definition does not limit the identity of the harasser to men, nor the harassed to women; instead it's a range of uncivil behaviors between strangers. In this qualitative study, Gardner (1995) explored the context of public places, semi-public places, *situational disadvantage* and civility. For example, the accessibility of public places is assumed to be available to everyone, however when some people are harassed in public while others are not, it communicates the value and dignity of some over others (Gardner, 1995, p. 16). This is a powerful statement of how power, privilege and status make some people more vulnerable to street harassment than others.

Kearl (2010) helped to expand the way that we view victims of street harassment in her book *Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women*, when she defined it as *"The unwanted interactions in public spaces between strangers that are motivated by a person's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression and make the harassee feel annoyed, angry, humiliated, or scared*. (Kearl, 2010, p. 5). This definition acknowledges the vulnerability of people of all orientations and gender identities as the targets of harassment; however, this definition does not take into account the influence of race on street harassment.

In general, the issue of street harassment has been overlooked in the literature due to difficulty identifying the perpetrators and lack of established legal consequences. Recently

combating street harassment has become a popular social movement (Logan, 2015). Websites

like stopstreetharassment.org and ihollaback.org are popular outlets for people to share their

stories of street harassment and conduct research on the effectiveness of methods used to reduce

harassment. As academic research catches up with this popular movement, a few key facts have

been established. Street harassment imposes on the freedom of people to move about public

spaces comfortably, and the targets of street harassment are mostly women, people of color, and

non-gender conforming individuals (Black, et al, 2014).

Women of Color and Street Harassment

The study of street harassment has generally focused on White women's experiences.

Though research studies on street harassment have included small samples of women of color,

the unique experiences of harassment within and across different identity groups has generally

been overlooked. Feminist scholars have warned against conducting research on women without

attention to race. For example, bell hooks (1981) asserted that women are not 'raceless' beings

and ignoring this fact causes researchers to implicitly highlight the experiences of White women

as the norm. This idea has found support with the new term *intersectional invisibility*; the idea

that individuals who belong to multiple subordinate social groups experience social invisibility

as a result of their non-prototypical social statuses (Purdy-Vaughns, & Eibach, 2008). In other

words, within American culture the prototypical woman is White; therefore, when researching

women's issues, we focus on White women's experiences and fail to consider the experiences of

women of color.

Sociocultural theorists (Defour,1996; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982) suggest that women of color

are at higher risk for harassment than are White women because of sexualized stereotypes

associated with women of color, and because women with low social status and power are more

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likely to be harassed than powerful women because there are less consequences. Supporting this assertion, certain groups of people have been shown to be at particular risk for encountering street harassment; specifically, women, people of color, poor people, lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) persons, and people who are trans or non-gender conforming (Black, et al, 2014). Despite this fact, the search for culturally embedded research on street harassment in the United States has been fruitless. The necessity for this research cannot be understated as the targets of harassment are diverse with intersecting identities.

The previously mentioned definitions of street harassment do not include motivations based on race or class, and only recently included motivation based on perceived sexuality and gender presentation (Kearl, 2010, p. 6). Kissling's (1991) emphasis on larger social causes of street harassment, such as sexism and patriarchy, leads to speculation of how other systems of oppression interact with sexism to manifest into unique experiences of street harassment for women of color. Specifically, how does the existence of racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism influence the nature of street harassment and its effects on the targets?

Black Women and Street Harassment

Davis (1993) argues for a reconsideration of street harassment of Black women through their embodiment within racial and cultural contexts (Davis, 1993, p. 136). Though all people are subject to street harassment, some are more vulnerable than others. Black women are at higher risk for frequent street harassment than are White women because of lower social status and stereotypes about them which makes them more likely targets (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982). Arguably, street harassment may impact people differently by personality, group identity, amount of exposure to harassment, social status, and coping skills. However, factors associated with race and culture may affect how street harassment is perpetrated and understood. Therefore,

the impact and meaning of street harassment is best understood by qualitatively examining the unique experiences of specific groups of women.

Street harassment has been found to be related to women's avoidance of strangers and fear of rape (Riger & Gordon 1981). This fear is historically salient for Black women. Exploration of their history requires a look at the treatment of Black American women through their history in the U.S., beginning with American Chattel Slavery. As property, Black women were subject to sexual assault, denied basic human rights and the ability to define themselves. Some scholars argue that a similar harm is being done with street harassment as it denies Black women in particular the ability to be their authentic selves in public and restricts their mobility and behavior (Davis, 1993, p. 145).

As illustrated in *At The Dark End of the Street* by Danielle McGuire (2010), in the decades after slavery was abolished and before the civil rights movement, the harassment of Black women in public spaces had commonly occurred within efforts to terrorize Black communities and often lead to sexual assault. A deeper look into the civil rights movement reveals that this movement was preceded by outrage over the realities of Black women's exposure to harassment and assault as they traveled in public spaces for work or school. Black women were often taunted, followed, harassed and raped by White men; crimes that rarely resulted in legal action (McGuire, 2010, p. 174).

Assault and mistreatment of Black women historically has been justified with the use of stereotypes. Particularly, the Jezebel stereotype portrayed Black women as hypersexual, amoral, promiscuous, seductive and exploiting of men's weakness (Woodard & Mastin, 2005). With this idea in mind, many White men were able to justify their abuses of Black women by blaming them, citing their physical features and dress as evidence of their sexual availability. Consistent

with the nature of street harassment, harassers may make comments or give suggestive looks in response to clothing or the features of the harassed. Further, the sexual harassment of Black women often includes a focus on what can be considered "racialized features" such as body type and skin tone (Mecca and Rubin, 1999).

Black women, like other groups of women, have a tendency to view street harassment as a normal part of everyday life based on their experiences (Davis, 1993, p. 149). Thus far, research on street harassment in the U.S. has included small, non-representative samples of Black women and paid no attention to any differences or nuances across racial groups. Upon a review of the literature on street harassment and Black women, Fogg-Davis's (2006) work stands out as the only in-depth assessment of the harm and potential danger of street harassment to Black lesbian women. Discussed more fully in the following chapter, the article explores the added danger of encountering harassers as a Black woman and as a lesbian. She asserts the necessity of evaluating not only White men's harassing behaviors, but also the harassment of Black women by Black men, and the patriarchal privilege that it represents (Fogg-Davis, 2006). Additionally, this article offers a critique of Black feminists' tendency to overlook issues unique to LGB populations; yet another example of intersectional invisibility, this time, within Black communities.

While the previously cited definitions of street harassment are useful, they do not account for the cultural contexts within which Black women live. As such, it becomes difficult to know how unique populations like Black women experience street harassment and what effect it has on them. Because we know so little about Black women's experiences with street harassment, it is important to explore this topic with attention to detail and context. It is not enough to look at the correlation of variables, rather this inquiry should begin with Black women expressing their

opinions, discussing personal experiences, and identifying for themselves the nature of their harassment. For this reason, a qualitative research approach is ideal to focus on the phenomenon of street harassment as experienced by Black women. Given their unique history with multiple forms of oppression, the harassment of Black women may have a unique meaning within their communities.

For the purposes of this study, a general definition of street harassment will be used so that the qualitative inquiry reveals the unique characteristics of street harassment that Black women experience. Borrowing from Kearl (2010), moving forward street harassment will be defined as unwanted attention and interactions in public spaces between strangers that is motivated by a person's physical appearance (perceived gender, sexual orientation, ability, or race) that makes the harassee feel annoyed, angry, humiliated, or scared. The use of the term "physical appearance" is to emphasize the full presentation of a person, including race, body size, skin color, dress, hair style, clothing, etc. as they are generally markers of aspects of a person's identities.

Sexism in the Black Community

Black women have been said to experience "double jeopardy" in that they are racially oppressed and also oppressed by sexism (Beal, 2008). However, the research suggests that Black women experience invisibility, and interactive effects of multiple oppressions (King, 2016). Evidence of sexism can be found in the prevalence of violence against women within Black communities. According to *the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey* (Smith et al, 2017), 40.6 percent of Black women are the victims of rape and unwanted sexual experiences. When Black women are assaulted, their perpetrators tend to be current or former intimate partners or a male acquaintance (Smith et al, 2017). Rates of intimate partner and sexual violence

vary depending on the publication source; however, the high rates of violence against Black women is consistent across research.

The interaction between racism and sexism are apparent when considering Black women's help-seeking behaviors surrounding the violence. Because of racism, Black women fear the presence of police in their communities. Black women fear the consequences of seeking the help of law enforcement due to the history of police brutality and general institutional mistrust (Smith et al, 2017. Black feminist scholars have long engaged in a critique of sexism and patriarchy that exists within and outside of the Black community. Black women's activism has largely focused on both issues of racism and sexism. Addressing street harassment is a logical step for Black women. Street harassment exists as a continuum of violent behaviors against women (Gardner, 1995).

Summary and Purpose

Street harassment is an omnipresent stressor for many women and varies across cultures and racial groups. Women of color in general, and Black women in particular, may be especially vulnerable to street harassment due to their social status in a society plagued by racism and sexism. To fully understand this phenomenon as it occurs to Black women, it is necessary for Black women to tell their stories and to identify the meaning and effects of street harassment in their lives. This can provide counseling psychology insight into Black women's lived experiences and can inform clinical practice and social justice activities.

Street harassment has been shown to be related to women's fear and avoidance of strangers, fear of rape, and anxiety. A major limitation of the research on street harassment, thus far, is the over-reliance on White women as participants. This leaves the literature on street harassment one dimensional. While the focus of research on street harassment has been on White

women's experiences, the prevalence of street harassment suggests that it is common particularly for women who live in urban areas, poor women and people of color (Black, 2014). Black women are particularly vulnerable as they are more likely to live in poverty than White people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), have lower social status, and have a history of mistreatment and lack of social power due to both racist and sexist oppression.

Psychology researchers often utilize qualitative research methods to produce data that is more meaningful in breadth and depth than what is derived in quantitative research. Psychology researchers such as Yeh and Inman (2007), and Fassinger and Morrow (2013), have demonstrated the value of qualitative research in social justice and cultural competency. Yeh and Inman (2007) argues the importance of considering culture, collaboration, circularity in qualitative research. It is with this standard in mind that the current study was designed. Fassinger and Morrow (2013) recommend that researchers should understand the importance of framing research in ways that legitimize cultural knowledge and social change goals.

Black women's experiences of street harassment has been impacted by history, stereotypes, culture, and intersecting identities. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand that experience. This project aims to add to the literature, fundamental information about Black women's experiences with street harassment. The proposed study is necessarily qualitative to highlight Black women's voices, and to understand their experiences in a culturally responsive manner. Specifically, this study aims to discover the answers to the following research questions: What Black women view as street harassment? How Black women describe street harassment? How does street harassment affect Black women? And finally, what meaning do Black women derive from incidents of street harassment.

In addition to in-depth data analysis, one of the reasons that counseling psychologists use qualitative research methods is social justice. Cokley and Awad (2013) stated the following referring to qualitative research: "it can be liberating if used by multiculturally competent researchers and scholar-activists committed to social justice" (Cokley & Awad, 2013, p. 26). Street harassment has been recognized as an oppressive experience resulting from sexism and hostility. The significance of this study lies in the centering Black women's voices around an issue that is ignored and minimized. A qualitative study on this topic promotes social justice in that this study amplifies the voices of those people who exist at the intersection of two marginalized identities. Black women's experiences are unlike any others due to their intersecting identities and multiple forms of oppression.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter one identified the issue of street harassment as a pervasive, sexist and hostile behavior that affects some populations of people more so than others. The research on street harassment is sparse, and even more so when considering the specific experiences of particular groups of people like Black women. Despite the lack of research on Black women, attitudes toward this group along with racial and cultural climate, contributes to how strangers interact with Black women in public spaces.

The following review first explores the problem of street harassment, and effects of street harassment on women. Second, the presence and study of street harassment in the lives of those who are most vulnerable, particularly women of color, will be discussed. Third, the lack of research on Black women's experiences will be discussed, including the historical factors that contribute to the unique experiences of harassment of Black women within their racial and historical contexts. Finally, this chapter concludes with details of the purposed qualitative study.

The Problem of Street Harassment

Sexism is the primary cause of hostile behaviors toward women (Spence & Helmreich, 1972). Sexism and feminist theory has been used to explain and theorize the functions of street harassment, men's motives, and the effects on women. The existence of street harassment genderizes public space by maintaining dominance for men and the subordination of women leading to exclusion, domination, invasion and the oppression of women (Davis, 1993, p. 136).

The history of thought on street harassment ventures that its purpose is the maintenance of privilege for a privileged group and the continued marginalization of an oppressed group. A review of the literature revealed speculations about men's sexist motives for harassing behaviors and the social implications. In generally, men direct more nonreciprocated gaze toward women

than women do toward men in public spaces (Cary, 1978). Most notably, Benard and Scheffler (1981) assessed men's attitudes toward street harassment and identified it as an act of male bonding among peers instead of flirting, a commonly held belief (p. 397).

The problem of street harassment cannot be overstated. Because research on sexual harassment in the workplace preceded research on street harassment, the earliest estimates of the prevalence of street harassment come from articles on sexual harassment. Generally street harassment is reported as a more frequent occurrence than sexual harassment in the workplace. MacMillian, Nierobisz and Welsh (2000) studied the prevalence and effects of sexual harassment (from strangers and non-strangers) on Canadian women's perception of safety using a large sample of N=12,300 women. Eighty-five percent of this sample reported some form of stranger harassment, compared to 51% who reported non-stranger harassment. Among those reporting stranger harassment there were three main types, 60% reported unwanted sexual attention (worded as "anything that does not include touching such as catcalls, whistling, leering, or blowing kisses; have you ever received unwanted attention from a male stranger?"), 32% reported being followed, and 18% reported someone indecently exposing themselves.

Street harassment is a difficult topic to study because it tends to occur randomly and anonymously between strangers in public spaces. However, the hostile and potentially dangerous nature of street harassment is indicative of larger social issues. Despite the scarcity of empirical research, many scholars have theorized the causes of street harassment. Particularly cultural norms rooted in sexism have been used to explain street harassment. Langelan (1993) took it a step further and typified street harassers into three categories: *predatory harassers* who become sexually aroused by the act of harassment itself, *strategic harassers* who seek to maintain hostile sexist environments in male-dominated spaces, and *dominance harassers* who use harassment to

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assert their male privilege and bolster their egos (Langelan, 1993, p. 42). Dominance harassers being the most common harassers that women encounter. Additionally, Wesselmann and Kelly (2010) found that men who score high on the Likelihood to Sexually Harass scale were more likely to harass women in groups rather than alone, supporting Benard and Scheffler's (1981) assertion that street harassment is an act of male bonding.

The goal of maintaining dominance and privilege appears later in Gardner's (1995) work where she theorizes that harassment in public is aimed at those disadvantaged populations who dare to be in places where they have been mistreated historically as if they are "asking" to be targeted (p. 76). According to Gardner (1995), there are three types of common abuses in public: exclusionary, exploitative, and evaluative. *Exclusionary* practices target a group of people to forbid or discourage them from entering public spaces. *Exploitative* practices are intrusive behaviors such as touching, scrutiny, following or starting a conversation that prevents privacy and freedom for a target population. *Evaluative* practices are those unwanted and unwarranted comments or opinions targeting a population (Gardner, 1995, p. 76). Because street harassers are typically men, and the harassed are typically women, it can be reasoned that the function of street harassment is for men to exclude and exploit women in order to maintain male dominance in public spaces.

A more recent theoretical work by Berdahl (2007), argues that harassment stems from a need to maintain social status. Any situation in which a perpetrator perceives his status to be threatened, he may lash out with harassing and uncivil behavior. In the event of street harassment, men's understanding of women takes precedence over how women view themselves (Davis, 1993, p. 147). Therefore, the use of harassment to target an underprivileged or

marginalized population, such as women, is likely to produce self-consciousness among the harassed and feelings of safety and superiority among the harassers.

Women's exposure to street harassment produces varied perceptions of these events. Gardner's (1995) research identified two ways in which women tended to view street harassment; the *politicized view* which holds that street harassment is one demeaning behavior that exists on a continuum of behaviors that are acts of violence against women, whereas within the *romanticized view* women see street harassment as a result of their appearance and typical gendered behavior (Gardner, 1995, p. 12). The men in this study, however, tended to view all street harassing behaviors as the privilege to evaluate women, and viewed it as trivial "girl-watching;" that is the act of using public places to view and evaluate women (Gardner, 1995, p. 191).

Objectification Theory is an interesting theory from which to examine the phenomenon of street harassment. According to Kissling (1991), street harassment has its origins in sexism and leads to anxiety and objectification of women producing negative outcomes. The term sexual objectification has been used by researchers to capture the specific type of objectification that women experience. Described by Bartky (1990) as when a girl or woman's sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from the rest of her (p. 26), sexual objectification is an oppressive behavior that is harmful to women. Within the framework of objectification theory, formulated by Frederickson & Roberts (1997), the model is simple: sexually objectifying experiences like street harassment lead to self-objectification, self-objectification leads to body shame, anxiety and reduced internal body awareness, and as a result women are vulnerable to eating disorders, depressed mood, anxiety and sexual dysfunction (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997).

The nature of street harassment is such that it highlights women's bodies in an effort to intimidate or violate the woman's personal space or privacy. Women often find themselves in situations that expose them to sexualized gazing which tends to be a precursor to objectification. Street harassment can very blatantly include sexualized gazing, evaluations of women's bodies, and touching/prodding of women's bodies. It is an objectifying experience in that women are made aware of a stranger's observation of their bodies as objects. Street harassment often contains sexual comments about the targets body and causes women to experience anxiety and self-consciousness (Kissling, 1991).

This attention and evaluation placed on women's bodies' results in women's self-objectifying behaviors, or their efforts to reduce likelihood of harassment. Women might feel anxiety related to aspects of their physical appearance that they believe may cause or can prevent street harassment. One study revealed some behavioral changes in response to fear of harassment; for example, people have chosen to change routes of travel (e.g. commute to work), and avoid making eye contact with strangers in order to prevent harassment (Black, et al, 2014). Participants also reported adjusting clothing choices to attract less attention, wearing headphones and/or sunglasses in order to discourage strangers from interacting with them (Black, et al, 2014). More drastic reactions to street harassment included things like moving to different neighborhoods, reducing outdoor activity, avoiding public places, and acting more assertively with harassers. This reflects the internalization of the experience of street harassment.

Despite street harassment being seen as normal and common behavior, the perceptions of the harassed and the resulting effects are more important for understanding street harassment. The effects on women are made clear in the literature; it reveals that women experience mostly negative effects; particularly as it relates to feelings regarding public safety and interpersonal

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interactions with strangers. Laniya (2005) sums up the literature by declaring that the targets of street harassment experience humiliation, fears about safety, powerlessness, reduced autonomy and emotional disturbance. Although it is possible that men intend to flirt and compliment women, researchers have consistently emphasized the derogatory, hostile, and sexist nature of comments made by strangers to women (Bowman, 1993). This indicates hostile attitudes toward women in general rather than misunderstood interactions.

Some empirical studies delve into the more personal consequences of street harassment. One study by Chaudoir and Quinn (2010) looked at the psychological responses to what was called "bystander sexism." Using a sample of college age women, they examined gender identification, gender-based intergroup anger/fear, and motivation to avoid men; all of which were measured by an intergroup emotions questionnaire (Mackie, et al, 2000) and the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954). They measured affect, gender salience, inter-group motives and emotions in response to one of two events: one event was a simple greeting (control group) and the other included a sexist remark (bystander sexism condition). Results showed women in the bystander sexism condition were more likely to exhibit gender identity salience compared to women in the control condition, they also reported greater intergroup anger, and more motivation to avoid men than participants in the control group (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010).

Fairchild and Rudman (2008) explored other potential outcomes of street harassment in women; in addition to self-objectification, they examined fear of sexual assault and restricted movement in public spaces as moderated by coping habits. They used a sample of N=228 college women, only 7% of this sample were Black women. This study used a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgrow, 1995) called the Street

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Harassment Scale with nine questions about experiences with unwanted sexual attention from strangers. This study included a factor analysis of this modified SEQ that produced two factors: *Verbal Harassment* and *Sexual Pressure* with five and four items with significant loadings, respectively. Results showed that street harassment was significantly related to self-objectification; specifically, women who reported greater body surveillance and body shame also endorsed higher rates of stranger harassment. Women's restricted movement in public was not directly affected by street harassment, nevertheless, the authors concluded that self-objectification (as a result of street harassment) was related to fear of rape and restricted movement in public (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008).

Different aspects of street harassment have been examined. For example, Ayers, Friedman, and Leapers (2009) examined women's experiences with sexism, including unwanted sexual attention, and their likelihood of confronting sexism. They used the Schedule of Sexist Events to inquire whether women confront harassment, whether women identified as feminists, and what factors lead to confrontation. Among the sample, only 1% of the participants were Black women. Of the sample, 309 women reported experiencing sexist events, 61 of those women reported the sexist events were perpetrated by strangers. The most common types of events were unfair treatment, sexist statements and unwanted sexual attention (including verbal and physical sexual harassment, sexual comments or teasing, being stared at or receiving cat calls; obscene sexual gestures; unwanted physical contact; rape or attempted rape; and other threats regarding sexual behavior). The unwanted sexual attention was the most commonly reported with 38% of the sample endorsing this experience, and this attention mostly came from strangers with 54% reporting this detail. In response to experiencing sexism participants in this

study were less likely to report confronting sexism if they did not identify as a feminist (Ayers, Friedman and Leapers, 2009).

While research on street harassment has mostly focused the negative effects, Fairchild (2010) took a different approach. She surveyed a sample of college women about their experiences with stranger harassment and the influence of contextual variables on whether the harassment caused fear or enjoyment (Fairchild, 2010). The participants reported much more fear in response to harassment when they were alone during the event or when it occurred at night, on the other hand some participants reported some enjoyment of the event when the harasser was attractive or younger (< 40 years).

However, trivial some may view street harassment, the research demonstrates that it is as harmful as it is nuanced. Arguably the harm caused by street harassment is a characteristic of sexist oppression in that it maintains privilege for men and discomfort for women in public spaces. The previously stated conceptualizations of street harassment represent different aspects of street harassment including the motivations, functions and effects of street harassment. Objectification theory is useful for identifying street harassment as objectifying and pinpointing its effects on women; Gardner's (1995) conceptualization of street harassment addresses the behavioral presentation of the harassers and the perceptions of the harassed, and Langelan's (1993) work best describes the motives of the men who harass.

Though these theoretical works provide a general sense of what street harassment is, and the previous research demonstrates the effects of street harassment, more is to be understood. Culture influences how people interpret and respond to such events. People of different backgrounds may conceptualize street harassment differently. Therefore, examining the race, culture and history of a group of people provides contextual understanding of street harassment.

Particularly, considering the perspectives of the people who are most vulnerable to street harassment is pertinent as they have the most experiences and understanding.

Vulnerable Populations

Typically, when street harassment has been researched in the United States, White women's experiences have been centered at the expense of non-White women. This phenomenon can best be described as *intersectional invisibility*. As was discussed in Chapter 1, intersectional invisibility is the idea that within American culture the prototypical woman is White; therefore, when researching women's issues, we tend to focus on White women's experiences and fail to consider the experiences of women of color (Purdy-Vaughns, and Eibach, 2008). A great example of this is a video posted by stopstreetharassment.org that shows the amount of times a woman experienced street harassment in a ten-hour time span in New York City. This video featured a White woman and the majority of her harassers were Black and Hispanic men; reinforcing stereotypes about who sexual aggressors are and who victims tend to be.

The context in which street harassment occurs for women of color is not without race, culture and history. This social context is one that contains larger issues and systems that impact the daily lives of women of color. Davis (1993) argues that street harassment occurs within cultural domination of women; and out of this cultural domination, it becomes acceptable for women to be harassed and people's understanding of that harassment to be also embedded in this context (Davis, 1993, p. 148). This is similar to Langelan's (1993) assertion that the most common type of street harasser is the *dominance harasser* who uses harassment to assert his male privilege and bolster his ego.

The existence of multiple forms of oppression puts people who occupy multiple underprivileged identities at greater peril than others. These systems of oppression collide to

characterize the way that street harassment presents itself in the lives of women of color. To this end, another helpful way of conceptualizing street harassment is through the lens of intersectionality. Kimberlè Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989) proposed the idea of *Intersectionality* as a framework in which to consider the implications, assumptions, and characteristics of events or experiences that occur particularly for people who occupy multiple under-privileged identities. In the case of street harassment, where the goal is for the harasser to assert his privilege, we must consider the harassers' source of privilege. People derive privilege from their social identities; such as male privilege, heterosexist privilege, class privilege, White privilege, cis-gender privilege and able-bodied privilege. Conversely, the targets of harassment are chosen because of their non-privileged identities. Women of color have at least two non-privilege identities, based on their status as racial/ethnic minorities and their status as women. They may have other privileged and non-privileged identities that may or may not be visible to strangers and effect how street harassment presents in their lives.

Gardner (1995) used the term *situational disadvantage* to describe how people who have non-privileged identities experience public places. It is the idea that public places allow people to see strangers in categories rather than as individuals (Gardner, 1995, p. 44). Therefore, the average women of color walking down the street may be seen as her overall identity group (i.e. Black women, Asian women, etc.), rather than as an individual. As a result, the stereotypes associated with their group, may be employed by an individual to harass them. This is supported by research that shows the history of slang terms used by men in their harassment of women of color; often the terms used for women of color reflected lower social status and gender roles (Allen, 1984). Women of color are at higher risk for street harassment than are White women because of particularly sexualized stereotypes associated with women of color, and because

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women with low societal status and power are more likely to be harassed than more powerful women because there are less consequences (Defour,1996; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982).

In recent years, internet outlets created to discuss street harassment have surfaced online and are becoming popular. For example, iHollaback.org and StopStreetHarassment.com are websites dedicated to conducting research on street harassment, telling people's stories of harassment, and ending street harassment. They utilize blogs, social media, and mobile technology with the goal of raising awareness of the issue by sharing the stories of individuals who are willing to publish their harassment narratives. These organizations have been instrumental in research and public discourse on street harassment by offering space for people to share their experiences and publically discuss the severity of street harassment.

StopStreetHarassment.org recently published results of a national survey called *Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Street Harassment Survey* (Black, et al, 2014). Estimating the prevalence of street harassment is fairly new; however, it is the best way to illustrate the pervasive harm of street harassment. This research identifies how commonly this abuse occurs and identifies the most vulnerable people. This is perhaps the largest and most inclusive research study to tackle street harassment in the United States. This survey asked participants about the following behaviors from strangers: whistling and calling out to you, comments about body parts, purposely touching or brushing against a person, yelling a sexist slur, following, sexually explicit comment, exposing genitals, forcing a person to do something sexual, and yelling a homophobic or transphobic slur. Of the 2,000 participants (1058 men and 982 women), 10% were Hispanic, 7% African American, 4% identified as other, and 3% identified as mixed race.

Street harassment was found to be a more common occurrence in the lives of women of color (Black, et al, 2014). Forty-eight percent of Black respondents and 45% of Hispanic respondents reported experiencing verbal harassment. Thirty-eight percent of Black respondents and 33% of Hispanic respondents reported experiencing physically aggressive harassment (Black, et al, 2014). This study went on to highlight the most vulnerable populations; stating that 41% of people of color reported being harassed on the street compared to 24% of White people; 70% of LBGT people reported experiencing street harassment compared to 49% of heterosexual and cis-gendered people; and more than half of the participants reported experiencing street harassment before age 17 (Black, et al, 2014). These statistics illustrate the chronic and pervasive nature of this social problem.

Socioeconomic status also plays a role in women's exposure to street harassment. People who reported household incomes of below $50,000 were most likely to report first having experienced street harassment between ages 13–17, while people in households with an income of $50,000 and above were most likely to report having first experienced street harassment between the ages of 18–25 (Black, et al, 2014). Considering the economic barriers that persons of color are subjected too, racial/ethnic minorities tend to be disproportionately represented among low income populations. The Black, et al (2014) study also examined women's fear of the harassment event escalating into something more dangerous. Thirty percent of people who reported household incomes of less than $25,000 per year were the more likely to say they were very concerned about the escalation to violence compared to every other income group.

Interestingly, Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011) explored the issue of women's objectifying experiences in situations that are particularly objectifying and provided criteria for what they considered *sexually objectifying environments*. Public places like parks, city streets or

public transportation does not fit their criteria; however, these are situations and places where women are more likely to be targeted for street harassment (Black, et al, 2014). Poorer women are more likely to rely on public transportation and therefore find themselves to be more exposed to street harassers (Giulano and Lee, 2001). These findings raise questions about the cultural norms that vary across communities.

Black Women and Street Harassment

As we begin to consider the experiences of Black women, we must also consider how sexism manifests in their lives with attention to culture, norms, and other experiences of oppression. The literature has centered whiteness by neglecting consideration of the cultural variables effecting women of difference races. It can be reasoned that Black women experience similar distress and fear as a result of street harassment as does other groups of women however this has yet to be studied in this specific population.

After reviewing the literature on street harassment, one can conclude that previous researchers have paid little attention to the differences among various groups of women. As such, the previous research findings are limited in its generalizability to Black women. While harassment may look differently across cultures, some factors remain constant. Women are far more likely than men to be the target of street harassment (Meza-de-Luna, (2014), women experience fear for their safety and limited access to public spaces (Laniya, 2005), and women with distinctive features feel more vulnerable to harassment than others (Ilahi, 2010).

The most prolific Black feminist writers have warned us of discussing women's issues without attention to race. bell hooks asserted that women are not raceless beings, and ignoring this fact causes researchers to implicitly highlight White women's experiences as the norm (hooks, 1981). In doing so, researchers invalidate the unique issues of other women, and prevents

us from developing a deeper understanding of all women's experiences. A richer source of information on Black women's experience with harassment is within the literature on sexual harassment in the workplace. Because the literature on street harassment is preceded by research on sexual harassment, it is beneficial to review relevant research findings on Black women and sexual harassment in the work place and on college campuses.

   Sexual Harassment. The differences between sexual harassment and street harassment should be noted. Sexual harassment occurs in the workplace and has direct consequences on people's ability to perform their work duties. Most importantly, there are consequences put in place to address harassers. Sexual harassment has been recognized as sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bowman, 1993). As a result, in order to ensure equal opportunity for women, there are legal ramifications in place for people who harass. If a person is found to have committed sexual harassment in the workplace, the person may be terminated. If an organization is suspected to have fostered a hostile work environment it is at risk for a lawsuit where they would be investigated by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. These are very impactful, social, legal and financial consequences to committing sexual harassment unlike with street harassment where there are no legal consequences.

   Some populations have been found to be more vulnerable to sexual harassment. For example, because Black women have historically occupied lower status positions in the workplace, they have been more vulnerable to sexual harassment as they are economically disadvantaged and racial minorities (MacKinnon, 1979, p. 53). *Interesectionality* has been used to theorize sexual harassment experiences in the workplace for Black and Hispanic women. Taylor & Richardson (2006) conducted focus groups with Black and Hispanic women regarding experiences with sexual harassment. Most notably, this study revealed that Black and Hispanic

women perceived their harassment as a result of societal racial and gender issues, and organizational culture. While this study focuses on workplace issues, it illustrates that women of color are aware of the stereotypes and larger social issues that produce their negative experiences (Taylor & Richardson, 2006). Additionally, the women felt unable to speak out about harassment from men within their race as there is an unwritten cultural code to maintain solidarity. Within the Black community, women experience pressure to protect Black men from adversity; therefore, Black women tolerate their harassment rather than speak out (Adams, 1997). This is not a new concept; bell hooks (1992) noted that the Black community has historically placed issues of racism above issues of sexism due to Black men's privileged positions relative to Black women. As a result, issues that affect Black men have been at the forefront of Black activism. All at the expense of issues facing Black women.

Using focus groups of 37 Black women, Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) used questions that were divided into race-based and sex-based harassing behaviors. The resulting themes did not fit neatly into racial harassment or sexual harassment as Black women's racial and gender identities were inseparable. They found evidence for racialized sexual harassment that was distinct from racial harassment and sexual harassment, and that this harassment was perpetrated by men and women. Some themes of the harassment were assumptions about Black women's sexual boundaries, and assumptions about their dress or appearance (Buchanan and Ormerod, 2002). The theme of racialized sexual harassment has been discovered with other populations as well (Welsh, et al, 2006).

The overlap of Black women's racial and gender identities has been studied as well, and one set of researchers attempted to highlight this as an area for growth. Lundy-Wagner and Winkle-Wagner (2013), inspired by intersectionality and Critical Race Feminism, completed a

literature review on sexual harassment and racial climate/harassment on college campuses. They found that the themes for sexual harassment were dominated by White women's experiences, individualized prevention efforts, and legal ramifications. The themes for the studies on racial climate were about students of color (ignoring the gendered experiences of students of color), community/institutional prevention strategies, and social consequences. On the other hand, sexual harassment was not seen as an issue of the larger climate of college campuses, rather it is seen as an interpersonal issues (Lundy-Wagner and Winkle-Wagner, 2013). The researchers noted that research on racial climate/harassment tends to be published in different outlets and is consumed by different readers therefore little is known about sexually harassing environments for women of color. They also point out the research on racial climate leads to recommendations for improvement, while research on sexual harassment is presented as an inevitable occurrence (Lundy-Wagner and Winkle-Wagner, 2013). The findings of this study imply that the way in which institutions, as an extension of U.S. society, view sexual harassment leads to inaction on the part of the institution.

Failure to consider the nuanced experiences of Black women has led to limited understanding of the impact of street harassment on Black women's lives. One study by Woods, Buchanan and Settles (2008) used a scarcely cited Racialized Sexual Harassment Scale (Buchanan, 2005) to examine the differences in the appraisal of sexual harassment based on the race and status of the perpetrator. This study used the Sexual Experience Questionnaire, the Racialized Sexual Harassment Scale, Feelings Scale, PTSD Checklist, and participants were asked to provide a description of their most significant experience of sexual harassment (including race and status of the perpetrator). They found that Black women viewed interracial sexual harassment as more negative than intra-racial sexual harassment, even though there were

no differences between the types of sexual harassment by race of the perpetrator. In the cross-racial harassment group, 38% of the perpetrators had status relative to the participant (ex. boss, supervisor), compared to only 9% of the intra-racial group. Also, racial content was more frequent in interracial sexual harassment than in intra-racial harassment. According to the investigators, these findings likely reflect a tendency to "trivialize" sexual harassment when the victim and perpetrator are Black (Woods, Buchanan & Settles, 2008). This was in line with other research findings and theories suggesting that Black women have a tendency to minimize harassment perpetuated by Black men.

Further evidence that Black women associate their harassment with their race was found in Mecca and Rubin's (1999) study. They initially sought a better understanding of Black women's sexual harassment experiences by administering the SEQ to a sample of 100 Black women college students along with open-ended questions about their experiences with harassment. They found that comments or sexual attention were based solely on racial stereotypes or race-based physical features such as body shape and skin tone. They discovered that although gender harassment (48%) was the most frequently reported form of sexual harassment, they also reported uncommonly high rates of seductive behavior (13%; inappropriate and offensive sexual advances such as unwanted personal discussions or propositions) and sexual seduction (19%; being touched by a professor in a sexual manner). Among the 46 participants who responded to the open-ended questions, 22 believed that their experiences with harassment differed from White women's experiences due to stereotypes about Black women. The participants described harassing events where men and women made inappropriate comments about their bodies (Mecca & Rubin, 1999).

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Shelton and Chavous (1999) considered whether Black and White women view sexual harassment between Black men and Black women differently than they view sexual harassment between White men and Black women. The participants were presented with a scenario of sexual harassment against a Black woman. The harasser was either a Black man or a White man, and the harasser was either described as a coworker or supervisor. The participants were asked what they believed the woman should do about the situation and completed the Sexual Harassment Attitude Scale (Mazer & Percival, 1989). Results showed that the Black participants in the study viewed the sexually harassing interaction between a Black man and a Black woman as appropriate behavior. All participants, on average, viewed the Black man's behavior in the scenario as more trivial than the scenario with the White harasser (Shelton and Chavous, 1999). Other research on sexual harassment in the work place reinforces the tendency for Black women to be unable to separate racial harassment from sexual harassment indicating that they experience racialized sexual harassment or sexualized racial harassment (Richardson and Taylor, 2009).

The experience of sexual and street harassment is one that is racialized for Black women. What can be postulated from the literature on sexual harassment of Black women is that their emotional reactions to street harassment may be colored by the race of the perpetrator, the drive to maintain solidarity within the Black community and the weight of racist and sexist structures contributing to their harassment. Long held beliefs about how Black men and women interact tends to undermine discussions of street harassment (Davis, 1993, p. 170). We have previously failed to talk about street harassment within Black culture and communities because it forces us to consider Black men's sexist oppression of Black women (Davis, 1993, p. 168). All of these issues likely influence Black women's understanding of street harassment, and a qualitative inquiry is suitable for unpacking this phenomenon.

Street Harassment. Davis (1993) and Fogg-Davis (2006) present the only writings on street harassment that focus on Black women's experiences. Davis (1993) used the term "*spirit murder*" for discussing street harassment because the hostile and objectifying experience of street harassment takes an emotional toll on Black women's spirits and strips them of their autonomy (Davis, 1993, p. 136). In her writing "*The Harm That Has No Name*" Davis (1993) argues for inclusion of Black women in the discourse and research on street harassment because it allows for a broader definition of street harassment and attention to the nuances of harassing behavior based on peoples' embodiment of their identities (Davis, 1993, p. 155). She explores the history of how Black women are considered outside the cult of true womanhood and how damaging stereotypes contribute to their experiences of harassment (Davis, 1993, p. 136).

Black women's unique experience with harassment extends as far back in history as American chattel slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and segregation. When Africans were enslaved by White people in the United States, they were viewed as property and were subject to sexual assault. White men's routine access to Black women's bodies was accompanied by derogatory stereotypes to justify their behaviors. Davis (1993) argues that the image of the Jezebel stereotype is the idea that Black women were sexually seductive, aggressive and immoral. With this stereotype in mind, White men slandered, abused and dehumanized Black women. The Jezebel stereotype influences present day street harassing behavior as there continues to be acceptance of this stereotype of Black women (Davis, 1993, p. 136).

Patricia Hill Collins (1997) points out that the social order of the time of slavery and immediately after slavery, racism, sexism and classism lead to the notion that all Black women can be purchased. These attitudes likely lead to many Black women being approached and disrupted by sexual harassment in public and private settings throughout history. Adams (1997)

makes the case that stereotypes about Black women being sexually available and promiscuous were used to justify their hostile and sexist treatment and therefore makes them more vulnerable to *racialized sexual harassment*.

The era after the emancipation of the enslaved was a particularly hostile one. McGuire (2010) reviews the history of sexual violence targeting Black women beginning with their enslavement and extending through the civil rights movement. The author noted that the Civil Rights Movement was preceded by the efforts of Black women to prevent sexual violence perpetrated against them by White men (McGuire, 2010, p. 174). This book tells the stories of countless Black women who were sexually assaulted without protection of the law and without regard for their dignity. Their sexual assaults were often preceded by harassment; therefore, the harassment of Black women came with an immediate threat of racialized sexual violence (McGuire, 2010, 157). The general lack of public concern or awareness of Black women's issues combined with attitudes and stereotypes about Black women, Black women may fear that they will not be believed when reporting harassment.

Oftentimes sexual and street harassment includes comments that focus on the target's physical features, and specifically for Black women, harassment has focused on "racialized" features such as skin tone and body shape (Mecca and Rubin, 1999). In a qualitative study of 20 Black women's sexually objectifying experiences (SOE), Watson et al. (2012) found that 30% of their participants reported experiencing self-blame and self-questioning when confronted with SOEs. These participants reported feeling that they may have done something to provoke the SOEs through their demeanor or the way they were dressed. Thus, some women respond to experienced feelings of shame, confusion, powerlessness, and inferiority, which resulted in

blaming themselves and internalizing their sexually oppressive experiences rather than blaming

their perpetrators and externalizing those experiences (Watson, et al, 2012).

The issue of respectability should also be considered. First postulated by Evelyn Brooks

Higginbotham in a work published in 1993, respectability describes the attempts of marginalized

groups to dissociate themselves from any cultural or moral practices associated with their group

that has been devalued by mainstream society. Later expanded upon by Harris (2003),

respectability is recognized as efforts to distinguish oneself from the negative assumptions or

stereotypes associated with one's group. Melissa Harris-Perry describes Black women's

experiences with respectability best in her 2011 book *Sister Citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and

Black women in America*. She asserts that Black women experience shame as a result of the

Jezebel stereotype (among others), and are propelled by that shame to present as respectably as

possible. Therefore, Black women may experience particular shame related to their inability to

influence whether strangers to treat them respectfully (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 110).

Due to America's history of slavery and ideals of womanhood, Black women are viewed

by strangers in different ways that White women are viewed which may lead to differing

harassing behavior and expectations of women reactions. Davis (1993) argues that Black

women's position outside of the '*cult of true womanhood'* combined with their history of second

class citizenship leads to assumptions about others' ability to mistreatment them, as well as

Black women's reactions to such mistreatment (Davis, 1993, p. 164). When black women resist

or stand up to street harassers they may be called "*uppity.*" This demonstrates other people's

assumptions about Black women's deservingness of respect and privacy (Davis, 1993, p. 165).

The intersectional nature of people's lives leads to unique experiences of street

harassment for various groups of people. Fogg-Davis (2006), the second writer on the topic of

street harassment of Black women, points out the added danger that Black lesbians experience. Her analysis of the literature's failure to be address issues of sexual terrorism targeting Black lesbians lays out the persistent neglect that feminists, Black feminists, Black community leaders, and White LGBT leaders have shown to the issues of LGBT people of color (Fogg-Davis, 2006). She goes on to describe the street harassment and murder of a Black lesbian adolescent woman highlighting the patriarchal structure that leaves such women vulnerable to violence (Fogg-Davis, 2006). Not only do Black women perceive themselves at risk for sexual assault or attack, Black women who are lesbian have the additional danger of violence in the form of hate crime against their group identity.

As stated earlier, the combined history of racism and sexism has implications for Black women's experiences with sexual and street harassment. Much of the contemporary research on the harassment of Black women has focused on the workplace experiences (Kohlman, 2006). Very few articles have addressed Black women's experiences with street harassment, but what we know is that women of color experience more psychological distress from lifetime sexist events than do White women (Klonoff and Landrine 1999). According to the literature on Black women and harassment, Black women have an awareness of the sexist and racist structures that cause their experiences of harassment. For example, Black women reported receiving sexualized comments and gazes from strangers and identified the history of slavery, sexism and stereotypes about Black women as contributors to their objectifying experiences (Watson, Robinson, Dispenza & Nazari, 2012). This qualitative study demonstrates the prominence of street harassment in Black women's lives as an objectifying experience.

Summary

Street harassment is an unfortunate occurrence that disturbs the daily lives of women. It includes catcalls, sexual comments, approaching, touching, etc. and violates a woman's privacy making the world feel unsafe. What we know from previous theoretical works are the different types of harassers (Langelan, 1993) and their suspected intentions (Gardner, 1995). Street harassment has negative effects on women including fears about safety, anxiety, avoidance of strangers and intergroup anger (Laniya, 2005; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010). Thus far the research has failed to consider the unique experiences of people at the intersections of varying identities.

Ignoring diversity in research on this topic leads to the highlighting White women's experiences and assuming its generalizability. Women of color likely have different experiences of street harassment due to their particular vulnerability to it and their social status within a society with multiple forms of oppression (Defour,1996). As the research on street harassment expands to include other populations, the limitations of the previous research have been noted. For example, Logan (2015), upon review of the literature on street harassment discussed the necessity for attention to be paid to the influence of "overlapping inequalities" on the phenomenon of street harassment. The existence of sexism in addition to heterosexism, transphobia, classism, ablism, and classism creates street harassment experiences that are unique to different individuals.

Because Black women occupy at least two underprivileged identities, they are more likely to experience harassment due to many variables like living in urban/metropolitan areas, low income, and low social status (Black, et al, 2014). Due to a history of racism and sexism, Black women have experiences with sexual harassment in the workplace. What can be learned from the previous literature on sexual harassment in the workplace is that Black women, despite

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understanding the sexist and racist social structure (Mecca & Rubin, 1999), feel the need to maintain solidarity within the Black community when Black men are their harassers (Taylor & Richardson, 2006).

While previous research has examined objectifying experiences and sexual harassment among Black women (Watson, et al, 2012; Shelton & Chavous, 1999), their experiences with street harassment has yet to be fully uncovered. Previous research on street harassment has utilized measures assessing street harassment (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008); however they have failed to capture a representative sample of Black women. Therefore validity and generalizability is unknown.

The proposed study is different from the previous research because it is qualitative and focuses on Black women's lived experience with street harassment. This study will be the first inquiry into Black women's experiences with street harassment toward a comprehensive conceptualization of it from their perspectives. A phenomenological study is best suited to address the problem of street harassment because the product of a phenomenological study is a composite description that depicts the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p.32). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to capture the essence of Black women's experiences of street harassment. While it may be a long time until street harassment is made to be illegal, a matter that is beyond the scope of this proposal, more consistent study of the effects of street harassment is necessary to establish evidence of its harm.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study aimed to explore Black women's lived experience with street harassment, and examine how they would define street harassment. The purpose of this research project was to engage the participants in a conversation eliciting their perceptions, definitions, experiences, responses to, and understanding of street harassment. This study is of importance as it allows for these women to describe their own experiences within the context of their communities, as well as supplementing the scarce literature on Black women and street harassment. This chapter presents information about the participants, procedures and method of analyses that were used for the current study. Beginning with the qualitative methodology utilized, this chapter reviews the study's assumptions and information about the researcher.

As detailed earlier, this project aimed to add to the literature, fundamental and foundation information about Black women's experiences with street harassment. The influence of history, stereotypes, and intersecting identities served as the context in which Black women's experiences of street harassment are to be understood. Phenomenology makes the assumption that there is an essence to shared experiences among people. The essence of a phenomenon exists within the core meanings that are mutually understood. The product of phenomenological studies tends to be composite descriptions that depict the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 32). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and understand the essence of the shared experience of street harassment among Black women. This study utilized a descriptive Husserlian phenomenological strategy, this is best suited for this study because it aims to identify and describe the structure of experiences as reported by the research participants (Husserl, 1970, p. 327).

The benefit of utilizing phenomenology is that it comes with specified procedures for analyzing qualitative data. As described by Moustakas (1994), a heuristic process in phenomenological analysis includes immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. Immersion refers to the researcher becoming involved in the world of experience. Incubation refers to creating space for awareness of intuitive insights and understandings. Illumination is the active knowing process that expands the understanding of the experience. Explication refers to reflexive actions. Finally, creative synthesis refers to bringing together information to show the patterns and relationships in the data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). These processes will be highlighted in the remaining sections.

Procedure

After Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University of Akron, participants for this study were recruited from an urban community in northeast Ohio through the use of emails and Facebook posts inviting them to participate in a study where Black women can share their experiences with street harassment. The following groups were contacted via email and on social media: Cleveland Young Professional Minority Women's Group, YWCA of Greater Cleveland, Urban League of Greater Cleveland, sororities and church groups in Cleveland, Oh. The target population for this study was adult Black women. Participants were recruited for this study using criterion-based sampling; more specifically maximum variation sampling was used with the expectation that common themes that emerge from a varied population would capture the essence of the phenomenon of street harassment. The recommended number of participants in such a study is 3 to 10 subjects who have all experienced the phenomenon (Dukes, 1984). In order to gain a broad sample of information, the goal was to collect data from 8 to 10 participants. In this study, participants were eligible based on their self-identification as Black women who have had multiple experiences with street

harassment. In order to obtain the sample, recruitment of Black women occurred within various communities in a nearby economically and racially diverse city. Participants were not offered compensation for participation in this study.

As potential participants responded to the email advertisement, an electronic copy of the informed consent, which is presented in APPENDIX A, was provided to the participant via email before the face-to- face interview. In addition, participants were provided with paper copies of the consent forms on the day of the interview and signed to indicate their willing participation in this study. The idea of immersion, as put forth by Moustakas (1994, p.84), refers to the researcher becoming involved in the world of experience. The author of this study is someone who is embedded in the context of Black womanhood and has experienced street harassment. As noted in the Researcher Bias section of the current chapter, the researcher shares the racial identity and experiences of street harassment as the participants in this study. Additionally, before embarking on this research study, the researcher spent a great deal of time compiling the literature review. Personal experience and time spent reviewing literature contributes to the researcher's immersion into the topic of street harassment.

Eight women responded to the recruitment emails that were sent to community organizations in Cleveland. Via email, the researcher and the participants scheduled dates and times to meet in convenient and relatively private locations in the community. The interviews began with reviewing, explaining, and signing the informed consent (APPENDIX A). Then, the participant completed the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B), followed by the semi-structured interview protocol which is listed in Appendix C.

A non-directive style of interviewing was utilized during the semi-structured interview that allowed the participants the freedom to control pacing and subject matter. Follow-up

questions elicited additional thoughts and opinions to gained in-depth information about Black women's perspectives on street harassment. All interviews were conducted in person in a private study room located in a library or secluded area in a coffee shop located in their communities. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and were recorded on a standard audio recording device. Upon completion of the interview protocol, information for mental health services was provided to the participants in case they were triggered by the content of the interviews. To maintain the privacy of the participants, the standard audio recording device was stored in a locked bag whenever it was being transported. Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, they were deleted from the device but maintained on a password protected USB device for reference throughout the process of data analysis.

Measures

Various identity variables were explored via a demographic questionnaire. This included questions about sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, age, level of education, body type, and type of community (urban or suburban) in which the participant lives. This demographic questionnaire was developed by the author and is listed in APPENDIX B. The demographic questionnaire included a question about the frequency with which the participant experienced street harassment. Following an item listed on the Street Harassment Scale (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), the question is as follows: On average, approximately how often have you encountered harassment in public spaces by strangers across your lifetime? The participant responded by selecting once, rarely (1-2 times per month), sometimes (3-4 times per month), often (every few days), or daily.

Participants

The participants' personal descriptions and demographic descriptors are presented in Table 1. They ranged in age from 21-68 years old. Each identified as Black or African American

and cis-gender women. Seven out of eight women identified as heterosexual, and one woman declined to indicate her sexual orientation. Four women reported living in suburban areas and the other four reportedly lived in an urban area. When asked about the frequency with which they experience street harassment, one woman indicated that she experiences street harassment *daily*, three women said they experienced street harassment *often*, and four woman said they experience street harassment *sometimes*. Finally, they were asked to provide a description of themselves in order to track whether/or how their street harassment experiences were related to their physical features. Each participant's name was altered with an alias in order to maintain and protect the participants' identities.

Table 1: Study Participants								
Alias	Age	Frequency of Harassment	Educational Attainment	Living Environment	Income	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Self-Description
Carmen	26	Sometimes	Graduate Degree	Suburban	0-25K	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Full figured, thick build, brown skin, kinky hair, full lips, full hips/butt, medium chest
Carol	61	Often	College Degree	Urban	25-60K	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Average height and weight
Erin	34	Sometimes	Graduate Degree	Suburban	25-60K	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Short, average build, athletic legs, larger butt
Violet	39	Daily	Graduate Degree	Suburban	60K +	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Curvy, light skinned, medium brown hair, hazel eyes
Mulan	25	Sometimes	Graduate Degree	Suburban	25-60K	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Pear shape, smile, brown skin color
Carmel Latte	68	Sometimes	Graduate Degree	Urban	25-60K	Unknown	Cisgender Woman	Large breast, curvy body
Erica	21	Often	College Degree	Urban	0-25K	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Pear shape, red hair, light skin
Tammy	34	Often	Graduate Degree	Urban	25-60K	Heterosexual	Cisgender Woman	Light skinned, dark brown hair, shapely, tattoos

Analysis

The analysis of the data occurred in four steps. The first step was transcribing the data. The interviews were transcribed utilizing the online service *TranscribeMe!*, which is a professional grade diction service. The second step included reviewing and analyzing the transcripts and identifying codes that represented the content of the data. During this step, the opportunity for *incubation* arose. As postulated by Moustakas (1994, p. 84), incubation refers to space for awareness of intuitive insights and understandings. Each sentence of each transcript was reduced to a word or phrase that summed up its meaning. This process requires attempts at insightful understanding of what the participants were describing.

Analyzing the data was reviewing each transcribed interview line by line to summarize each sentence with a word or phrase, this is a process called *coding*. For example, the codes "avoiding," "whistling," and "disrespect" often described statements expressed by many of the participants. This first step produced many codes that represented the overall content of the data. Among these codes was information that either directly answered the research questions, or provided deeper information illustrating the essence of street harassment in Black women's lives.

Analytical coding, is a process in which the codes from step one were compared to one another to identify recurring information, similar or associated meaning. The codes were then grouped together into several categories based on similarity. For example, codes like "learn to ignore" and "covering up" were grouped together into a category called *Strategies* because they both represent strategies employed by participants to avoid or deal with street harassment. Groups of codes became identifiable categories representing the dynamics of the participant's experiences. This process resulted in dozens of categories which are presented in Table 2. Some of the categories fit the question that the participants were responding to; however, there were some categories that contained codes generated from a variety of questions.

Table 2. First Reviewer's Categories						
Distinguish Harassment from flirting	*Strategies to end interactions*	*Efforts to control the interaction*	*Escalation*	*Types of harassers*	*Harsh language*	*Different levels of harassment*
Less frequent as you age	*Yelling*	*Strangers in cars*	*Invading personal space*	*Staring at body*	*Discomfort*	*Appearance does not matter*
Touching	*Hovering*	*Efforts to understand*	*Motivation*	*Status/perception of Black woman*	*Appreciate being noticed*	*Intrusion*
Exposure	*Emotional experience*	*Vacation*	*Unexpected locations*	*Victim blaming*	*Age difference*	*Physical features*
Sexual comments	*Context*	*Groups of strangers*	*Questioning of behavior*	*Following*	*Street*	*Disrespected and isolated*
Heightened risk at certain places	*Watching*	*Ignoring*	*Race- Concerns about Black community*	*Vigilance*	*Confusion*	*Racial differences in approach*
Men's role models	*Questioning of behavior*	*Avoidance strategies*	*No consequences*	*Persistent*	*Role of media*	*Dissonance about race*

For example, one category named Places included the codes representing the context in which street harassment often occurred, unexpected locations where harassment occurred, and increased frequency and severity of street harassment in certain times and locations. The category of Places is thus made up of information gathered from questions one and three of the semi-structured interview. On the other hand, the category named Descriptions, consisted of codes that were mostly derived from the first question in the semi-interview. However, one of the codes that represented the location of typical experiences of street harassment, lands in both Places and Descriptions categories.

The third step of data analysis included an additional review of the data, a process known as *triangulating analysts*. That is having two or more persons independently analyzing the same qualitative data in order to ensure trustworthy assessment of the data (Merriam, 2006). During this step, the second reviewer, Holly Kearl, also reviewed the transcripts of the interviews and identified categories and themes that she saw in the data. The second reviewer's analysis resulted in three themes and twelve categories, which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Second Reviewer's Findings
Themes
1. Fearful of the men's interactions escalating, and that fear influences how they respond and act and what they do to try to avoid harassment. The types of harassment they viewed as complimentary seem to be seen that way as the interactions did not illicit fear.
2. Feeling conflicted about wanting to be polite, respectful and acknowledging of Black men but hating the harassment they face primarily from Black men. Wanting to be respected by Black men and show Black men respect and feeling upset when that is not happening.
3. Harassment occurs more when the women were/are younger, by men of all ages (older and younger).
Categories
What is harassment and how does it make you feel:
1. There was general consensus that harassment is unwanted/unwelcome and is disrespectful/degrading. It includes touching without consent and rude or sexual comments. Several people mentioned how harassment entails comments that are repeated after you've given an indication that you're not interested; it's continuous; the men may follow you.
2. Most said that harassment makes them feel uncomfortable, objectified, disrespected and fearful.
3. A few people said they felt flattered by some benign forms ("hey pretty lady" etc.) and were more likely to perceive it positively if the man was attractive. One woman felt the attention was more positive if it was by one man (versus 2 or more) and in a social setting (versus she is just going about her day).
4. Two women engaged in victim-blaming, saying "if you respect yourself" people know not to talk to you and that women who are negatively affected by harassment have low self-esteem.
5. The older women mostly talked about experiences when they were teenagers and in their 20s, though by the end of the conversation they all had a few more recent experiences to share. One older woman talked about feeling flattered by harassment when she was younger but now she sees it as disrespectful.
6. Flirting is polite, harassment is not. Men may perceive their actions as flirting while women perceive it as harassment.
Where does it take place and by whom:

7. The most common sites for harassment were vacation spots (Miami, South Carolina), clubs, bars, beaches, one woman mentioned church and two women mentioned workplaces. A few women also mentioned men in cars harassing them on the streets.
8. Most often the harassers were Black men, both younger and older. Of the women who were harassed by white men too, they said Black men were usually more aggressive and disrespectful in comparison. A few had been harassed by women but found it to be less frightening and less common.
How to respond to harassment:
9. Many voiced their desire to be polite and have respectful interactions (especially with Black men, they want to uplift them) or that they felt obligated to be polite, but they fear the men will get the wrong idea and it will escalate.
10. Several were unsure how to respond to harassment as ignoring it may lead to escalation and responding may encourage them or give them the wrong impression and escalate it too, further they didn't want to be rude.
11. A few said they've been called "bougie" and "stuck up" if they don't respond.
Most women ignore harassers most of the time.
12. One strategy a few women shared was giving a fake phone number or name. This seemed to work better for older women, back before cell phones. The two younger women who actively have tried this tactic say men will then call the number or will force them to put the man's number into their phone.
13. A few women said they change their routes/routines, are more aware of their surroundings, alter what they wear, or carry mace due to harassment.
Other issues, race-specific:
14. Why are Black men disrespecting Black women? It hurts.
15. Black men and women haven't seen positive role models of relationships. Black men learn to harass from other men.
16. Does the media influence the harassment Black women experience?
17. Want to have dialogue among Black women and men about this issue; want to see more awareness about this issue.

Following that, the fourth step of the analysis entailed organizing the common codes into categories, and then into themes. This consisted of examining the content of the codes and establishing consistency in the data. This step required illumination, as noted by Moustakas (1994, p. 84) as the active knowing process to expand the understanding of the experience. As the researcher developed themes that described the data, a structural description of the participants' experiences (ideas, conditions, situations, or context) conveyed an overall essence

of the experience of street harassment. The data was summarized into themes and subthemes. Additionally, quotations from the transcripts that represented the essence of the theme were identified. To compare the categories identified by the first and second reviewers, the content of each category was examined to find similarity. The second reviewer's first theme matched the content of the first reviewer's category titled *Escalation*. Both categories detailed the participants' fears related to street harassment events escalating to more dangerous situations. The second reviewer's second theme matched the content of the first reviewer's category titled *Dissonance About Race*. This category captured the confusion and frustration that the participants' described in understanding and responding to harassing behaviors from Black men with whom they wished to be in community. The second reviewer's third theme matched the content of the first reviewer's category titled *Less Frequent As You Age*.

The rest of the second reviewer's identified categories were divided into general areas. The categories 1-2 and 4-6, listed under "*What is harassment and how does it make you feel,*" represent the participant's descriptions and emotional reactions to street harassment. The content of these categories match the first reviewer's categories of *Distinguishing Harassment from Flirting*, *Discomfort*, *Emotional Experience*, *Victim Blaming*, *Less Frequent as You Age*, and *Harsh Language*. There was a general consensus between the first and second reviewer's identified categories as the content of these categories converged.

Next, the second reviewer listed two categories under the title "*Where does it take place and by whom.*" The content of categories 7 and 8 match the first reviewer's categories called *Heightened risk at certain places, Racial differences in approach,* and *Age Differences.* The content of these categories converged. The second reviewer's categories 9-11 match the first reviewer's categories of *Confusion*, *Concerns about Race*, and *Escalation*. At some points of

comparison, the content of the second reviewer's categories matched the one or more of the categories identified by the first reviewer. This cross-matching lends to the consistency of the data analysis.

The second reviewer's categories 12 and 13 match the first reviewer's category titled *Avoidance Strategies*. Essentially, these categories detail the adaptive methods that the participants used to avoid and/or lessen the impact of street harassment. Lastly, the second reviewer listed race-specific issues with categories 14-17. The content converged with the first reviewer's categories titled *Status/Perception of Black Women*, *Dissonance about Race*, *Men's Role Models*, *Race- Concerns about Black community, Role of Media*, and *Confusion*.

There were two points at which the first and second reviewer's categories diverged. The second reviewer's category 3 described a participant feeling flattered by some interactions with strangers. There was one participant who expressed this sentiment; there were no other participants who expressed a similar idea; therefore, it was identified as a code, but was not included in a category. Lastly, the second reviewer's category 8 included a participant's experience with harassment from a female-presenting harasser. Similar to her category 3, only one participant reported this experience. As such, there was no support for this code as a category and is therefore subsumed into the first reviewer's category of *Types of Harassers.*

Finally, the established categories were clustered together in a way that meaningfully describes participants' experiences. Six themes emerged that reflected a general structure of the participants' experiences. Five of themes contained several smaller structures that described the dynamics of theme. In the following results section, the themes and subthemes are described in further detail.

Throughout this process, bracketing was used to attend to personal bias. Bracketing is defined as a 'scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon' (Gearing, 2004, p. 1430). This is used to mitigate any potentially biasing effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and to increase the rigor of qualitative research. This is also known as *explication*, the process of removing 'reflexive' actions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). *Reflexivity* is the process of 'self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness' (Rennie, 2004, p. 183). With this agency, the researcher proceeded to conduct this study and examine the data while maintaining awareness of personal reactions, motivations and struggles.

Bracketing for this study included maintaining a journal. The content of this journal included topics such as the researchers' reasons for undertaking the research; assumptions regarding race and socioeconomic status; the researcher's role and position of power in this research study; and the researcher's emotional reactions and assumptions during and after interviews. As Ahern (1999) suggested, reflexive journaling serves to subvert the researcher's preconceptions throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Trustworthiness

"Triangulating analysts" was used in order to ensure trustworthy assessment of the data. That is having two or more persons independently analyzing the same qualitative data (Merriam, 2006). As previously described, the second reviewer was Holly Kearl, is a writer, consultant, and expert on street harassment and Gender Studies. She runs *Stop Street Harassment*, a nonprofit organization dedicated to documenting and ending gender-based street harassment worldwide. Holly Kearl agreed to review the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews and identify codes

and emerging themes. This additional review established strength and consistency of the themes. The information that the second reviewer highlighted as themes and commonalities were congruent with the initial review of the data for the most part, and demonstrates trustworthiness for this study. Areas where the second reviewer's themes converged with or diverged from the themes identified by the first reviewer will be discussed in the results section.

Credibility

To ensure the validity of the findings of this study, credibility was also assessed utilizing respondent validation. As suggested by Yeh and Inman (2007), conducting research in a collaborative and circular manner promotes justice and quality. The participants were asked to review the results of this study and indicate whether the reviewers' interpretations of their experiences were accurate. This type of collaboration further contributes to balanced interpretation of the data. After the data from all participants was analyzed and themes and subthemes were written, a summary was provided to the participants via email. They were asked whether the themes and subthemes accurately represented their experiences of street harassment. Of the eight participants, two responded confirming that the themes were representative of their experiences. The participants who responded were identified as *Carmel Latte* and *Mulan*. A follow up email was sent to the remaining participants; however, no additional responses were obtained.

Researcher Bias

Epoch is the idea that the researcher must actively seek to remove personal bias or become aware of prejudices, view-points, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation so as to refrain from inappropriately impacting the study. Derived from a Greek word meaning "refrain from judgment" (Husserl, 1970), epoch in qualitative research is the

process by which researcher manages their own biases in order to review data as objectively as possible. Morrow (2005) argues that complete objectivity is not possible in either qualitative or quantitative research. However, attempts at objectivity are fruitful in any research study. The researcher's role in this study is therefore to set aside personal own experiences in order to understand those of the participants as recommended by Creswell (2009).

Keeping in mind the importance of acknowledging inherent bias and values, I present my personal experiences with phenomenon of street harassment. I identify as a Black woman and I grew up in inner city Cleveland, Oh. My neighborhood was industrial and urban, however there was high unemployment and/or underemployment. Poverty and high crime characterized my neighborhood. I am the first person in my family to complete a college education. Among my aunts and cousins, many dropped out of school before reaching high school. This contributed to my family's socioeconomic situation. Culturally, it was the norm for residents of the neighborhood to sit outside on nice weather days and it was the norm for people to gather outside to talk. Also, on a typical day there would be men gathered outside of places of employment (e.g. factories and convenience stores). My first experience of street harassment occurred when I was 12 years old walking home from school with my younger brother. While I don't remember what the young man said to me, I remember the feeling of embarrassment and that I was somehow delegitimized as the elder sibling who was in charge.

Since age 12 there has been an endless stream of Black boys and men, who were strangers to me, approaching me, yelling things at me, offering me a ride in their cars, and following me. There were even times when I saw my mother and older sister appear embarrassed or angered by a stranger who called out to them. In my eyes, my mother and sister were the coolest and strongest women I know. However, even they were not safe from random men on the

street. My family was poor and relied on public transportation. In public I always felt exposed for the world to see, inquire upon, approach and stalk. It wasn't until college, when I learned about women's issues and feminism that I started to connect my personal experiences to a larger system of sexist attitudes and oppression.

As a result of years of being harassed by strangers I have developed some biases. I feel safer with women and am sometimes anxious around men. I am fully aware of my tendency to avoid talking to or interacting with men when I'm in public. I often avert eye contact and avoid speaking at the risk of being perceived as rude. Seeing the recent attention to street harassment on popular websites is validating for me. I know that I am not the only woman to experience this harassment. Upon entering graduate school, I realized that I had the opportunity to conduct research. I generally find the task of research to be laborious. I am disinterested in the work of researching, rather I prefer to be a critical consumer of others research. The problem with that is that no researches Black women's issues like a Black woman. There are details and nuances that only lived experiences offer. I recognized my privileged status as someone who is highly educated and wanted to use this privilege to conduct research that is particularly meaningful to Black women.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The goal of this study is to explore Black women's experiences with street harassment. This study aims to address the gap in the literature on street harassment that leaves the influence of race and Black culture unknown. In addition, Black women's insight and beliefs about harassment were gathered in order to inform an evolving definition and description of street harassment based on intersecting identities. This chapter details the data collection process, the steps of data analysis, reviews the results of this study, and offers evidence of the credibility of the results.

Research Questions

This study set out to answer the following research questions: What behaviors do Black women view as street harassment? How would they describe street harassment? How does street harassment affect Black women? And what meaning do Black women derive from incidents of street harassment? This chapter will review the findings of the semi-structured interviews of eight participants.

Results

After rereading and further reducing the data, the categories appeared to fit into six higher order themes, containing fourteen subthemes, representing the essence of the participants' experiences. The six themes are: *Definition of Street Harassment, Behavioral Responses, Negative Emotional Experiences, Meaning Making, Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts, and Hyper-Vigilance.* Table 4 provides an overview of these themes and their subthemes.

Definition of Street Harassment. The first major theme that emerged was the *Definition of Street Harassment.* This is fitting, as the first question of the semi-structured interview directly appealed to the participants' ideas of street harassment. This definition is a compilation of all

eight participants' responses to the first question. Overall, the participants in this study tended to describe street harassment as being approached by strangers in public spaces with comments or behaviors that are sexual or intrusive in nature. These strangers are either alone or in groups, tended to be driving in cars, standing on the street, working in urban areas, or patrons of nightclubs. The strangers tended to be Black men of various ages, and more infrequently Black women. One participant, "Tammy," explains her definition of street harassment:

> "It has to do with some kind of like sexual innuendo. Or men trying to holla at me in some way shape or form. And it happens at any public setting, I could be at a gas station, I could be at a grocery store, I could literally just be walking down the street. I think there are varying levels of harassment, like staring to long, some guys will follow you, I've been touched before. Some harassment goes beyond the verbal, there is some physical shit that happens. All of its uncomfortable. Usually there some kind of sexual thing to it." –Tammy

As the participants further described their experiences, the content was broken down into four subthemes *Behavior of the Harassers, Escalation/Threat of Danger, Typical Harassers and Not Flirting*. The participants elaborated on the *Behavior of the Harassers*, which is the first subtheme of the description of harassment. The participants described behavior ranging from strangers asking for their name and number, to yelling, starring, and anything else to try to get participants' attention. Minor offenses were strangers starring too long or whistling to get attention. While more disturbing behaviors included sexual/lewd comments, following, hovering, touching, or commenting on physical features. More menacing behaviors were described as invading personal space, unwanted touch, rude comments spoken within personal space, and generally not respecting boundaries. For example, one participant described the following experience as an example of a stranger not respecting her time and boundaries:

> "I walked out there [outside of her school/workplace] to smoke, and this guy, had to be like 50 years old, on a bike, missing teeth, looked nasty as hell, and was probably inebriated-just based on characteristics that I recognized. Literally

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stopped, first he walked past me, turned around and came back and proceeded to have a conversation with me for 5 minutes. Then I stayed an additional five minutes because I didn't want to be rude. I gave him 5 more minutes then I'm trying to wrap it up like 'yo I need to go' and he wasn't talking about anything. But he wouldn't let me go, it was almost like he was holding me hostage, no matter how many verbal cues. To me that's harassment, because If I tell you I'm cool one time then you should be on your way, be happy that I had a conversation with you for five minutes and be done with it, the fact that I ending up staying an additional ten minutes because I didn't know how to get out of it, I didn't want to be rude, especially since it was right in from of my school. Then he proceeds to follow me all the way up to the door because he's not going to walk into the building. I tell them I'm married, and they do not give a shit. What else can I say to let you know I am not interested. I've said no, how can I be more clear." – Tammy

Table 4	
Themes	*Subthemes*
Definitions of Street Harassment	Behavior of Harassers
	Escalation/Threat of Danger
	Typical Harassers
	Not flirting
Behavioral Responses	Avoidance Behaviors
	Respect for Black Men
Negative Emotional Experiences	Violated/Exposed
	Frustration/Out of Control
Meaning Making	Understanding Men
	Women's Behavior
	Status/Perception of Black Women
Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts	Worst Incidents
	Triggering Characteristics
	Unexpected Person/Location
Hyper-Vigilance	

The second subtheme within Descriptions of Harassment was *Escalation/Threat of Danger*. Six of the participants indicated that no matter how they responded to the strangers,

these interactions sometimes escalated into something more menacing. Some women stated that interactions with strangers escalated whether or not they responded or even how they responded. The language the stranger uses becomes more menacing when a woman is disinterested. They described strangers as harsher, rude, forceful, and angry when they don't get whatever response they wanted. The participants reported being called derogatory names when disinterested in harassers. This aggression caused increased discomfort for women, as one participant put it:

> "I was always taught that if you ignore it, it amplifies. But what I found as I became older, was when you do speak and acknowledge them, sometimes they become more aggressive. And it becomes a bigger situation when you speak and they continue the conversation." –Mulan

The third subtheme is *Typical Harassers*. Each of the participants identified their most common harassers as Black, blue collar workers and mostly male. The participants experienced harassment from women less often; however, they would respond to a female harasser with anger and defensiveness because they perceived themselves to be in less danger. Some participants described difference experiences based on the age of the harasser. They viewed young men as less genuine, more intrusive, and motivated by peer influences. However, they felt particularly offended and angry when harassed by older men due to generational expectations of greetings and respect.

The final subtheme within Definitions of Street Harassment was *Not Flirting*. Here is where seven of the participants made the distinction between street harassment, flirting and other common interactions between strangers. They described flirting as polite and casual, while street harassment was seen as the more sexual and aggressive comments and behaviors from strangers. In instances of flirting, one participant reported feeling "good and validated." Those feelings

may have come as a result of compliments from Black men. For example, Mulan stated *"at times it makes me feel good, and it makes me feel validated. If I've got on a cute outfit, or I got my makeup done, my hair is done, I've got on a cute little dress or heels, to have a Black man say, 'Look at you,' or, 'Look at this beautiful woman,' it feels good. It makes you feel confident... Black men are noticing me."* However, when being harassed, participants felt discomfort. The same participant described the differences she perceives in men's flirting behavior and harassing behavior. *"You're not speaking to me because you care about my well-being, or because you even want to introduce me to yourself, or because you want to acknowledge a beautiful, Black woman. It just feels self-seeking."*

Behavioral Responses. The next major theme that arose from the interviews was *Behavioral Responses,* which included two subthemes *Avoidance Behaviors* and *Respect for Black Men*. The participants described difficulty deciding whether to respond to strangers and having reluctance to engage in any interactions with the stranger because the interaction might escalate to a harassing or violent situation. The participants utilized different tactics to escape or avoid harassment. Characterized by the subtheme of *Avoidance Behaviors*, with the goal of preventing interactions with strangers from escalating to something more uncomfortable, each of the participants described either ignoring strangers, adjusting their clothing choices to cover up their bodies, changing their typical route to avoid people, or making a remark back to the stranger. For example:

> "Well I usually respond with something flippant back? or just throw my hand up and ignore it." –Carmel Latte

> "I'd say I was developing strategies, because I thought about to cut off the harassment maybe I should be polite because for a long time I would ignore it, be cordial, sometimes I would give them my name or a false name or whatever, make the situation not so combative. Still they might say *'you don't want to talk to me,*

you stuck up?' Because of the frequency of it, just trying to alleviate my feeling
that anxiety that I was having when this happens to me. Not like an everyday all
the time thing, but quite often." -Carol

There was a line between engaging in a friendly greeting with a stranger and avoiding
further interaction that may lead to discomfort and harassment. As if their normal disposition is
to politely engage with the people around them, the participants struggled with deciding how to
respond to strangers who are potentially harassers. If the stranger appeared disrespectful, then
participants would choose to ignore them. Some women were more 'proactively avoidant' by
saying "hi" to a stranger to exert some control over the interaction by shortening the length of the
interaction. For example, one participant describes her approach:

> "So usually if I see somebody staring at me I'll just speak to them. I'm like 'good
> morning,' and then that way it's kind of like, 'if you're going to be staring at me
> then let me just'— Or just in some cases, I just look like I don't feel like being
> bothered. So I'm not making eye contact with anybody. But usually, I'll make eye
> contact. So if I'm honest, some cases, I go through there and I'm like 'Whatever,
> they're going to look.' I don't want to have to avoid all the time but, again, it kind
> of depends on what mood I'm in and how much tolerance I have." -Violet

Also within Behavior Responses, the subtheme of *Respect for Black Men* emerged.
Despite their experiences with harassment and their suspicion of a stranger's motives, half of the
participants felt obligated to respond politely to the strangers who were Black men out of respect
and acknowledgment. Despite this desire, some remained fearful of escalation and chose to
utilize avoidance behaviors when encountering street harassment. Participants expressed a
unique feeling of conflict about how to interact respectfully with Black men giving consideration
to the shared struggles of Black people. Some participants also discussed showing respect for
elderly Black men and feeling particularly offended by harassment coming from older Black
men. As *Mulan* puts it:

"When it's with a Black man… that, I think is the struggle for me, is because I strongly identify with my race, and I never want to make a Black man feel like he's less than or he's not worthy because every Black man deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated and loved and respected and all of that." "There is sometimes that sense of, I got to speak. I have to speak to another Black person. I have to speak to another Black man." –Mulan

Negative Emotional Experiences. Another theme that arose from the data was *Negative Emotional Experiences*. This theme contained two subthemes of *Violated/Exposed* and *Frustrated/Out of Control*. Participants described largely negative emotional responses to street harassment; specifically, anger was a common thread to most participants. Many reported feeling unsafe due to lack of insight into strangers' motives. They expressed a sense of danger and fear for their lives when approached by a group of strangers. Anger, helplessness and discomfort were most commonly used to describe their emotional responses. While others explicitly discussed feeling degraded, disrespected and objectified. When asked "how does street harassment make you feel?" the participants had the following reactions:

> "Objectified, yeah. Gross sometimes. Uncomfortable, especially, like I said, if it's-- earlier this week, there was one day where literally I just felt like all eyes were on me. And I remember I was actually not even feeling well that day either. So I said, I'm like, "I could be wearing a garbage bag and they just see a woman and it's like, 'Ooh.'" So, yeah, definitely uncomfortable. And most of the time like a piece of meat. So, you know." –Violet

> "Super uncomfortable. Like every single time. I've never been flattered. Ever. I just feel like it's very inappropriate and disrespectful." –Erica

> "It felt very isolating and scary." Mulan

> "What is wrong with you people [laughter]?" I'm not here for your entertainment. I'm not here for your amusement. A lot of people will always say, 'Oh, why aren't you smiling?' And I used to just smile. But it's just like, "I'm not here to smile for you. I don't even know you. You're a stranger." –Carmen

"Degraded. Unsafe. And I say unsafe because I'm not really sure what they would do." –Erin

There was also a sense of confusion about the harasser's motives. Further teasing apart the participant's reactions, upon further examination of the data, anger seemed to grow out of two common experiences. *Violated/Exposed,* the first subtheme represents five participants' reports of feeling like they were being intruded upon by the strangers. Some felt as if they were put on display because of their physical features (e.g. body parts, skin/hair color) leading them to feel self-conscious about themselves as if there was a spotlight on their bodies or body parts. For example:

"When I'm harassed a body part of mine is pointed out. Either the color of my skin is pointed out, I've been called light-skinned because nobody knows my name when they're trying to harass me, or they'll say I have a fat ass, just like some really inappropriate comments. They'll call me red head because my hair is red. Stuff like that." –Erica

"It almost as if, it's like you're on display, whether you want to be or not?" –Carmen

The second subtheme, *Frustration/Out of Control,* encompasses seven of the participants' experiences of frustration related to being helpless to control their daily interactions as their avoidance behaviors (i.e. changing style of dress) did not influence how they were treated by harassers. The participants generally expressed frustration regarding their ability to control the interactions with their responses and that their behavioral changes did not produce desirable outcomes as the harassment would sometimes escalate anyway. This was another area of convergence with the second reviewer. The second reviewer identified the participants' desire for respectful and polite interactions with people, Black men in particular, however they maintained the fear that strangers will get the wrong idea and these interactions will escalate into harassment.

Meaning Making. The *Meaning Making* theme arose as the participants spent a great deal of time and energy trying to understand men's motivations and thought processes. This theme included the three subthemes of *Understanding Men*, *Women's Behaviors* and *Status/Perception of Black Women*. There is a general confusion regarding the motivation and meaning of the harassment. Many participants pondered whether the behavior produces desired results for some men, whether harassers lacked positive models for how men and women should interact, whether they were motivated by maintaining manhood, if they're drunk or emotionally triggered by something, why harassers don't use appropriate ways to communicate. Within their meaning making efforts, two themes emerged.

The *Understanding Men* represents the seven of the participants' exploration of the possible reasons for Black men's harassing behaviors. They theorized a lack of role models and poor social skills as the reason that men harass. Some attributed the behavior to social learning (e.g. watching other men harass), and lack of sexual education about appropriate dating and mating. They saw some men's behavior as misguided attempts at flirting, a poor attempt to engage someone in trying to build a relationship. Some examples of the participants' thought processes are:

> "My take on it is that they were trying to meeting somebody, trying to hook up, trying to see if they can have a relationship. That's my general idea of it, they want to get a date, build a relationship somehow." –Carol

> "I sometimes wonder whether the person that's perpetuating the harassment even understands that what they're doing is uncomfortable and wrong. And I have an issue with that because if you make a comment to me and I ignore you, that should tell you that I'm uncomfortable. That should not be ammo for you to rev it up and to continue doing what you're doing more aggressively." -Mulan

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Some of the participants also commented on *Women's Behavior*, which arose as a subtheme. In considering woman's behavior, three participants expressed some different ideas. Some said women of different age groups perceive the interactions with strangers differently. Specifically, women in their 20s might see it as flirting while women in their 30s and older will have more understanding of men's behavior and have higher standards. On the other hand, women who harass other women were seen as petty, competitive or jealous.

The *Status/Perception of Black Women* is the final subtheme that emerged from the Meaning Making theme. All of the participants commented on the status of Black women within American society. Particularly the deterioration of respect for women within and outside of Black communities, the prevalence of abuse/violence against women, and the general disrespect of Black women. Some expressed concern about men's perception, and lack of consideration of Black women as street harassment is intrusive upon their personal space and time. Harassers fail to consider that women with trauma histories are triggered by harassment. In their own words, participants discuss their perceptions of Black women's status:

> "I just think, I'm not sure at what point where the respect for the woman as a whole or Black women has deteriorated." -Carmen

> "I was thinking as we were talking, I just wish there was a space where we could dialogue with Black men, Black men and Black woman, together. Because I think it starts with changing this culture of street harassment, particularly with Black men and black women. We have to talk about it. We have to talk to each other, sharing perspectives. Because I have no idea how that makes another Black man feel when he speaks to me and I say nothing, because there are hundreds of thousands of Black men who have experienced that, too. And I don't know how that makes them feel, where a Black woman walks past them. And they may genuinely just want to say, "Hello," and I don't speak, or other Black women [like me?] don't speak. And I just don't think we talk about that, on either side." -Mulan

Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts. The theme of *Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts* arose as participants recalled their most memorable experiences with street

harassment. Six of the participants asserted that they experienced more frequent, more blatant, and more aggressive harassment in certain settings. Particularly, when attending popular vacation events/destinations (eg. Mardi Gras, Spring Break, nightclubs,) harassing behavior is more common, and more likely to include physical contact (grabbing/touching body parts) due to the anonymity that large crowds provide. Participants reported feeling particularly helpless in these settings and as a result were more tolerant of verbal and physical violations, traveled in groups, and/or armed themselves with self-defense tools such as pepper-spray.

The reasons that these types of harassing events were more memorable has been broken down into three subthemes. *Worst Incidents.* The six participants' who share their most memorable experiences with street harassment described particularly unsafe incidences. Specifically, when a harasser blatantly violated personal space, touched the participant's body, asked intrusive/sexual questions, or used disrespectful/insulting language. They described these situations as particularly intense and caused them to feel "cornered," powerless, and out of control. Here are two examples of the participants' more uncomfortable experiences:

> "There was a car that drove up to the side of me, and I had my headphones in. I'm just walking. And they started shouting from the car, and at first, it was very friendly. Like, 'Hey, how you doing? Can I talk to you for a minute?' So I said, 'Hey. Hello,' and I kept it moving. I kept my head down. But what made the situation so uncomfortable was as I was walking the gentleman in the car continued to make comments and then the driver started to make comments. So I'm like, 'Okay. This feels a little bit uncomfortable.' So I noticed that my pace of walking, I started to speed up my walking, trying to walk with a purpose, get to where I'm going. I crossed the street, and I remember the car circling around. And, at that point, I felt uncomfortable because it's like, 'okay you're circling out of your-- you're circling your vehicle to continue to follow me.' And I just remember feeling so scared and just so uncomfortable and not knowing what to do. Because I didn't want to run or show them that I was fearful, but I knew I had to get out of the situation, and I knew I had to get away from there. So I just remember continuing to walk, and then the remarks became just more hurtful and more deliberate. And I remember they were talking about my shoes, and I had these shoes that I had just

bought. And they were like, 'You know, your ugly ass shoes,' or, 'You got that ugly ass-- your ugly ass hair. You ain't all that anyways.' And it just felt so hurtful, and just belittling, and just so uncomfortable, so uncomfortable." –Mulan

"I guess when I was in my twenties, I remember going to Miami for Memorial Day Weekend, and that was very different. People would actually grab, or try to grab you, or touch you. I remember walking and I had this wrap-around dress on, and I was covered in clothes when as I was walking. Someone was like, 'Oh, no, let it open.' And men in their cars honking at you. So that was a more intense experience. I remember walking back to the hotel. But just usually people honking or, 'Hey, girl. Hey, you. Come here.' Things like that." –Carmen

Triggering Characteristics. Participants seemed to be particularly bothered by some characteristics of harassing events, or their contexts. Harassers that are particularly bold, intentional and persistent were most triggering to the participants. Key characteristics including repetitive language and behavior, obvious watching, violent/degrading tone and intention caused the most discomfort for the women. These harassers tended to go above and beyond to get the woman's attention or intentionally monopolized their time. They were obviously violent and aggressive with their words. Additionally, the presence of multiple men, perhaps in a vehicle, created an added sense of danger.

"I went out to a nightclub. And we were walking back to the car. And there was a guy that said something to me, 'How you doing? Can I get your number?' whatever. And I just said, 'No. No thank you.' And it was, "…all right then? [laughter]. Okay. Okay.' And so I started walking faster. I didn't feel safe. I was glad that I was there with a lot of people. But it continued. It was, "You [expletive], you stuck-up, you this, you that, give a fuck about talking to you anyway.' It just went on and on and on until we got into the car and slammed the doors. It was just a continuous thing. You're just following me, saying inappropriate stuff, cursing, yelling, screaming." –Erin

Finally, three participants touched on additional experiences that stood, the *Unexpected Person/Location* that the harassment occurs. These experiences of harassment were characterized by the unlikely person saying something sexual or harassment occurring in an unexpected

location. For example, one participant discussed receiving unwanted attention on her physical appearance at church. A few other women talked about the inconvenience of shopping at a grocery store or gas station and being targeted by harassers.

Hypervigilence. The final theme to emerge from the data was the *Hypervigilance* resulting from experiences of street harassment. All of the Black women in this study expressed a similar idea about the consequences of exposure to street harassment. They are more cautious and vigilant and alert in public spaces. Black women are more fearful, guarded and less social with strangers as a result of experiences with street harassment. Overexposure to street harassment may lead to paranoia around strangers or desensitization.

> "Over the years its made me more paranoid about men in public settings. Maybe too hyper vigilant, like assuming every man that approaches you is trying to holla at me which may not be the case which could lead to a awkward social experience if you're out and about or whatever." -Tammy

Summary

This study set out to have Black women define, in their own words, their experiences and interpretations of street harassment. To answer these research questions, eight Black women volunteered to participate in this study. The participants ranged in age, socioeconomic status, and exposure to street harassment. They provided consent, completed demographic questionnaires, and sat for semi-structured interviews providing the qualitative data to answer the research questions.

The interviews were transcribed using *TranscribeMe!* transcription service and was analyzed by the primary researcher and a second reviewer, Holly Kearl. Analysis included coding of the data, combining the codes into categories, identifying ways in which the first and second reviewer's categories converged and diverged, reconciling the divergences, and

combining the categories to build the structure of the participant's lived experiences. This analysis resulted in six themes and fourteen categories.

In summary, the six higher order themes and fourteen subthemes that emerged from the data are as follows: *Definition of Street Harassment, Behavioral Responses, Negative Emotional Experiences, Meaning Making, Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts, and Hyper-Vigilance.* Two of the participants in this study verified credibility by confirming that the themes were representative of their experiences.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to shed some light on Black women's lived experiences with street harassment. Throughout the literature review on street harassment, it became apparent that a specific focus on the experiences of Black women was missing from the literature. The current study utilized phenomenological qualitative inquiry, in the form of semi-structured interviews, to examine Black women's experiences and definition of street harassment. Recognizing the importance of Black women utilizing their own voices to define their experiences, phenomenology was the approach used to gain insight into their experiences. The results of this study highlight the meaning, the impact and the intersecting nuances of street harassment in Black women's lives.

A review of the literature revealed that street harassment is something that most people experience at different frequencies, including men (Black, et al, 2014). However, there remains a shortage of empirical research into the topic. This construct has only gained academic attention in the 1980s as researchers were studying sexual harassment in the workplace. Though there are several ways of defining street harassment, the commonalities (or essence) are greater than the differences. The research on street harassment has incidentally centered White women's experiences because researchers have not explicitly studied women of color or considered the dynamics of different cultures. Targeted inquiry is necessary for studying this issue because certain groups of people have been shown to be at particular risk for encountering street harassment. Specifically, women of color, poor people, lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) persons, and people who are trans or non-gender conforming encounter street harassment more frequently than others (Black, et al, 2014).

Previous definitions of street harassment do not include motivating factors based on race, class, ability level or other identities, and only recently included motivation based on perceived sexuality and gender presentation (Kearl, 2010, p. 6). Factors associated with race and culture may affect how street harassment is perpetrated and understood. Phenomenology is the most appropriate method to examine Black women's experiences because it attempts to understand perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a phenomenon that occurs outside of them. This final chapter will summarize the results of this phenomenological study, formulate conclusions based on the data, discuss implications for counseling, posit suggestions for future research, consider the limitations of the study, and conclude with personal reflections.

Data Collection and Analysis

To answer the research question of what is street harassment, eight Black women were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews on the topic. In order to engage in this study, participants had to meet the following criteria: self-identify as a Black or African American woman, and be over 18-years-old. Upon completion of the semi-structured interviews, they were transcribed and reviewed by the author and a second reviewer.

As recommended by Moustakas (1994), analysis consisted of bracketing methods throughout the duration of the data collection and analysis, reducing qualitative data to codes and categories, and combining the categories into themes. Those codes were compared to the codes identified by the second reviewer. Themes and categories were constructed out of the commonalities between the first and second reviewers identified codes. Significant statements and quotes that best illustrated the themes were extracted as examples, as suggested by Moustakas, 1994, (p. 105). The results of this study is a structural description of street

harassment in these Black women's lives containing the "what" and the "how" of this phenomenon.

Summary of Results

Estimates of the prevalence of street harassment suggests that it is more common particularly for women who live in urban areas, poor women and people of color (Black, 2014). In the current study, four of the participants reported living in suburban areas and the other four lived in an urban area in a mid-western city. When asked about the frequency with which they experience street harassment, one woman said she experiences street harassment *daily*, three said they experienced street harassment *often*, and four woman said *sometimes*.

The sample also happened to be highly educated. This may have impacted the results of this study. Particularly, the spaces and resources that a person has access to once they obtain higher education may influence a person's experience with harassment in public spaces. With higher education, these participants may be able to access urban and suburban areas to live and to work. They likely own vehicles and are not dependent upon public transportation. All resulting in less exposure to street harassment relative to a woman with less income and/or less formal education. As education, income, and living situation tend mutually influence each other, it is worth noting that the three women in this study who reported experiencing street harassment *often* also reported living in urban areas. While the women who reported living in suburban areas reported experience harassment *sometimes* or *often*.

Major Findings. After an in depth analysis of the data, six major themes emerged with fourteen subthemes. The first major theme was the Definition of Street Harassment. The participants described street harassment as being approached by a stranger or strangers in public spaces (particularly in urban areas, nightclubs, and outside of their places of employment) with

comments or behaviors that are sexual and/or intrusive in nature. This definition is similar to di Leonardo's (1911) definition in its emphasis on public spaces and the presence of one or more strangers. The current study's resulting description of harassment does not venture into the idea of sexual terrorism as proposed by Kissling (1991); however, participants in the current study did allude to larger social issues contributing to their harassment. Unlike Kissling's (1991) emphasis only on a larger system of sexism, Black women in this study identified the status of Black women and the socialization of Black men within a racist and sexist society as contributing factors of their harassment experiences. Racism, sexism/patriarchy has an impact on the relationships and interactions between Black men and women.

The first subtheme of Definition of Street Harassment was the *Behavior of the Harassers*. The participants described behavior ranging from strangers asking for their name and number, to yelling, starring, and behaviors intended to try to get participant's attention. Minor offenses were strangers staring too long or whistling to get attention. While more disturbing behaviors were sexual/lewd comments, following, hovering, touching, or commenting on physical features. More menacing behavior was described as invading personal space, unwanted touch, rude comments within a woman's personal space, and generally not respecting boundaries. This is not much different from the behaviors described in previous research (Kearl, 2010; Gardner, 1995); however, it is important to note the theoretical implications. Among Gardner's (1995) descriptions of common abuses in public, exploitative practices is most similar the current study's description of harassers' behavior. Exploitative practices being those behaviors that are intrusive behaviors such as touching, scrutiny, following or starting a conversation that prevents privacy and freedom for a target population (Gardner, 1995, p. 79). If harassers seek to exploit women, one must consider their view of women as exploitable, or as a tool for some other goal.

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That this is Black women's most frequent experience within street harassment indicates the severity of the sexism that they experience.

The second subtheme within the description of street harassment is the *Escalation/Threat of Danger*. The participants indicated that however they responded to the strangers, these interactions sometimes escalated into something more menacing. This subtheme is similar to Gardner's (1995) assertion that street harassment is incivility that has the potential to escalate to violent crime. These results suggest that the locus of control and responsibility for street harassment lays outside of the target and within the harassers. Of note, Black et al (2014) also examined women's fear of the harassing event escalating into something more dangerous, and found that 30% of people who reported household incomes of less than $25,000 per year were the more likely to say they were very concerned about the escalation to violence compared to other income groups. This provides insight into the exposure to violence and harassment that poor people experience.

The third subtheme is *Typical Harassers* in which the participants in the current study identified their most likely harassers as blue collar workers, mostly men and typically Black men. The participants viewed Black men as direct in their approach to women. Though they perceived a difference in how Black men approached them, compared to other men, there was no evidence of minimizing the harassing behavior. This is unlike other studies that assert Black women's protection of Black men being central to how they respond to victimization (Woods, Buchanan, & Settles, 2008). Compared to research studies of Black women experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace (Woods, Buchanan, & Settles, 2008), the participants in this study did not align themselves with the Black men who harassed them. One could postulate that the absence of an employing institution or a "White gaze" in most instances of street harassment

factors into this difference. Without the potential judgment and consequences from an institution, Black women are able to identify the harmful nature of street harassment from Black men without pretense.

The final subtheme within descriptions of street harassment is *Not flirting*. The participants described flirting as polite and casual, while street harassment was seen as more sexual and aggressive comments and behaviors from strangers. This study failed to gather a clear since of Black cultural norms surrounding flirting. However, norms and expectations regarding how members of the Black community should relate to one another are alluded to...What is learned in the current study is that Black women can clearly identify when they are being flirting with and when they are being harassed.

The second major theme was *Behavioral Responses*. The participants described difficulty deciding whether to respond to strangers or having reluctance to engage in any interactions with the stranger because they might escalate to a harassing or violent situation. In response to this difficulty, some women choose to avoid interacting with strangers, as described by the first subtheme within this theme. The subtheme of *Avoidance Behaviors* describes behavior that is motivated by preventing interactions with strangers from escalating to something more uncomfortable or dangerous. The participants described ignoring strangers, adjusting their clothing choices to cover up their bodies, changing their typical route to avoid people, or making a remark back to the stranger. These results support Fairchild and Rudman's (2008) assertion that the consequences of street harassment are self-consciousness, body surveillance, and restricted movement in public (Fairchild and Rudman, 2008). Taking an alternate route to a destination is akin to restricted movement as Black women might feel uncomfortable traveling in their communities.

Of note, some of the participants reported being called "stuck up" or "bougie" when they ignored or turned down strangers. Yeh and Inman (2007) state "it is impossible to understand the subtle nuances and deep meanings of another culture without understanding its language." The idea of "bougie" within Black culture has been conceptualized as an adjective used to imply that someone is "fake and elitist" (Matory, 2015, p. 131). Bougie stems from "bourgeois" which refers to a set of cultural values possessed by some Black Americans who strive to achieve socioeconomic progress akin to the material successes of upper middle class White Americans (Lemke, 1998, p. 122); it involves a unique Black aesthetic that combines respectability and uplifting the race through cultural advancement (Boyd, 1997, p. 17). There is a historically classist meaning tied to "bougie" that presupposes that a person believes themselves to be too good for someone or something. Within the context of street harassment between two Black strangers, one could speculate the meaning of calling a woman "bougie" if she does not appreciation street harassment. It implies that harassers view Black women as unworthy of more appropriate and/or civil behavior.

Another aspect of the participants' behavioral responses to street harassment was the dissonance they experienced regarding responding to Black male strangers. The *Respect for Black Men* sub-theme described their obligation to respond politely to the strangers who were Black men, particularly older Black men, out of respect and acknowledgment. This theme taps into cultural values within Black communities. Ideas such as solidary, respect, and unity are values that support cooperative relationships within communities. Harassment violates the respect and unity, and may cause distrust in the relationships between Black men and women within communities. Black women may experience disillusionment when expecting to have respectful and positive interactions with Black men, yet they receive unexpected harassment.

The theme of *Negative Emotional Experiences* is most consistent with previous research findings. The participants in this study described feelings of anger, fear, danger, helplessness, discomfort, degradation, disrespect and objectification. The subthemes of *Violated/Exposed* and *Frustration/Out of Control* details the strongest and most common emotional experiences that participants have. Similar to other research findings like Kearl's work (2010), the Black women in this study experience almost exclusively negative emotional reactions to what they call street harassment.

The theme of Meaning Making included the participants reasoning and wonderings about what causes street harassment. As demonstrated by the subthemes, *Understanding Men*, *Women's Behavior*, and *Status/Perception of Black Women*, the participants contextualized the phenomenon of street harassment in a society in which people are taught unhealthy attitudes toward women, Black women in particular, and this results in disrespectful behaviors directed at Black women. The participants' ideas about the causes of street harassment are reminiscent of the findings of Richardson's (2006) qualitative study of Black and Hispanic women regarding experiences with sexual harassment in the workplace. In this study, Black women understood their harassment to be a result of larger societal issues surrounding race and gender (Richardson, 2006). Across research studies, Black women seem to be engaged both the realities of systemic sexist and racist oppression.

Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts is a theme that highlights particularly brazen harassing behaviors that occur when strangers feel protected by anonymity. Within this category, the subthemes of W*orst Incidents, Unexpected Person/Locations, Triggering Characteristics* detail what the Black women in this study found most offensive. Black women experience the most offensive harassment when they were in vacation locations during events like Spring Break

and Mardi Gra. Such events typically draw attendees from all over the country and there is a strong party culture. The only previous research known to identify Black women's increased vulnerability to harassment and assault at such events is an article written by Marian Meyers (2004). Her article exams the discourse surrounding Black women's victimization at an event called *Freaknik*. Rather than reporting the facts, media outlets reinforced stereotypes about Black people and poor people and juxtaposed them against upper-middle class communities (Meyers, 2004). Rather than examining the behaviors of perpetrators, the discourse on this topic was othering to whole communities and therefore erased Black women's vulnerabilities.

The final theme from this study is *Hypervigilance*. The result of frequent exposure to street harassment causes women to feel cautious, vigilant, fearful, guarded and alert in public spaces. This is consistent with other study's findings; specifically, women's avoidance of strangers and fear of rape as a result of street harassment (Riger & Gordon 1981). The feeling of hypervigilance of this type of harassment while out in public may feel burdensome for Black women and other targets of harassment. As Gardner (1995) pointed out, the accessibility of public places is assumed to be available to everyone, however when some people are harassed in public while others are not, it communicates the value and dignity of some people over others (p. 44).

Implications for Theory

Phenomenology does not begin with a theory, but, instead, begins with a phenomenon under consideration. The phenomenon under investigation here, street harassment, as experienced by Black women, offers new factors to be considered for theories that have been proposed in the past. In Gardner's (1995) research, she identified two ways in which women tended to view street harassment; the *politicized view* and the *romanticized view.* More

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frequently in the current study, the participants discussed ideas that coincide with the *politicized view* of street harassment which describes the behavior as demeaning and existing on a continuum of behaviors that are acts of violence against women. The participants view harassment as a result of their appearance and behavior to a lesser extent. This matters as it suggests that public opinion is evolving. Particularly as it relates to gendered norms and behaviors. Perhaps women are more able to be critical of men's behaviors now than they were over twenty years ago when Gardner (1995) conducted her research.

Within the framework of objectification theory, formulated by Frederickson & Roberts (1997), sexually objectifying experiences like street harassment lead to self-objectification, self-objectification leads to body shame, anxiety and reduced internal body awareness. (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Of the effects of objectification, the results of this study support anxiety in response to this type of behavior. In particular, the participants' report of hypervigilance, feeling out of control, and threats of escalation translates to anxiety. No body shame or reduced body awareness were reported as a result of street harassment in this study. This presents the opportunity for objectification theory to include consideration for the differing effects of different types of harassing experiences. Different types of objectifying behavior have been shown to produce some different outcomes already. For example, Moffitt and Szymanski (2011) explored the effects of working in a "sexually objectifying environment (SOE)." SOE's are spaces in which traditional female and male gender roles exist, a high degree of attention is drawn to physical or sexual attributes of women's bodies, a high probability of male contact exists, women have little power in that environment, and there is approval and encouragement of male gaze. They found that women who worked within a sexually objectifying environments

experienced extreme forms of self-objectification (i.e. disorder eating and body monitoring) relative to women who experience other types of objectification (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2011).

Aside from women's views, experiences and reactions, the theories related to men's motivation and intentions when harassing women could be reexamined. According to Gardner (1995), there are three types of common abuses in public: exclusionary, exploitative, and evaluative. *Exclusionary* practices target a group of people to forbid or discourage them from entering public spaces. *Exploitative* practices are intrusive behaviors such as touching, scrutiny, following or starting a conversation that prevents privacy and freedom for a target population. *Evaluative* practices are those unwanted and unwarranted comments or opinions targeting a population (Gardner, 1995, p. 76). The results of this study provides some insight into the types of harassers that Black women encounter.

The descriptions of exploitative and evaluative practices seemed to ring true in this study. Though the behavior described in the *Definition of Street Harassment* theme mirrors what Gardner (1995) postulated in all three types of behaviors, a few themes seem particularly connected. The theme of *Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts* represents a reaction to the type of harassment described with Gardner's (1995) *exploitative* practices. Particularly, as the women described being touched and intruded upon more so because their harassers could reasonably expect to maintain anonymity. Additionally, as the participants in this study described their experiences and reactions, *evaluative* practices can be assumed to be a common experience for Black women.

The other researcher who ventured to understand men's harassing behaviors is Langelan (1993). Langelan's (1993) theory suggests that there are three categories of harassers: *predatory harassers* who become sexually aroused by the act of harassment itself, *strategic harassers* who

seek to maintain hostile sexist environments in male-dominated spaces, and *dominance harassers* who use harassment to assert their male privilege and bolster their egos (Langelan, 1993, p. 42). As the participants' in this study described experiences in which harassers intruded upon them, asserted themselves so as to take up women's time, and demanded unwarranted attention; it can be postulated that *dominance* harassers are most commonly experienced by Black women as well.

Finally, expectations of respect and unity was not a factor in previous studies and theories on street harassment. This eludes to some unique cultural factors that characterize Black women's experience with street harassment. Black Americans, Africans, and others in the African diaspora, frequently refer to each other as "brother" or "sister." This references the familial bonds that exist within Black communities (Hall, 2006). Black women's expectations of Black men are such that they exist in a larger extended family. This is unique to Black culture and therefore contributes to the distress that Black women experience when being harassed by Black men whom they expect to be brotherly. Further, Optimal Theory, presented by Linda James Myers, presupposes that when communities adhere to western values rather than Afrocentric values, they suffer (Myers, 1993). Within this theory, she proposes Extended Self-Identity, the idea that people exist in the context of communities and time. Personal family history, as well as the history and future of one's people exists within an individual (Myers, 1993). The distress associated with street harassment is particularly meaningful because the Black community is an extension of the self or the family. Street harassment is not simply uncivil behavior among strangers, rather it represents a loss of love and respect within one's extended self.

Implications for Practice

The context in which street harassment occurs for Black women is not without race, culture and history. This social context is one that contains larger issues and systems that impact the daily lives of women of color. Davis (1993) argues that street harassment occurs within cultural domination of women; and out of this cultural domination, it becomes acceptable for women to be harassed and people's understanding of that harassment to be also embedded in this context (Davis, 1993, p. 148). Within this context of domination and systemic oppression, Black women may present with a range of symptoms and complaints.

The values of counseling psychology have the potential to address several aspects of street harassment. Counseling psychology tends to be goal-oriented (Goldschmidtt, Tipton, & Wiggins, 1981), strengths-based and emphasize societal oppression as a source of distress (Toporek, 2006, p. 279). Counseling psychologists are in a unique position to address the issues presented in this study with practical and societal interventions. In addition to clinicians being aware and understanding of the ways in which Black women are effected by street harassment, clinicians should be influencing communities to be safer places for all people. This includes conducting more research in the community, and disseminating the results more effectively to communities. Counseling psychologists should conduct participatory action research within communities and engage members in dialogue about overall community health and functioning.

Counseling psychology is also challenged to recognize the intra-racial and interpersonal dynamics within which Black women operate as they are challenging oppressive experiences. Black women have many systems and relationships to navigate, and clinicians work with this population should be as complex and nuanced and Black women's experiences are. Clinicians who work with Black women should be attentive and responsive to their daily stressors,

including the indignity of street harassment. These experiences have additive effects and contribute to generalized anxiety (Davidson et al, 2016). Interventions may include building upon Black women's self-identified strengths and Africultural coping styles to cope with street harassment (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000).

There are avenues for Black women to express themselves and get support for their experiences with street harassment. Initiatives such as www.ihollaback.org and www.stopstreetharassment.org provide a platform for women to discuss their experiences. In doing so, these sites are educating members of society about the negative effects of street harassment. Previous research on street harassment has advocated for policies to protect women from street harassment (Bowman, 1993). To advocate effectively for Black women's safety from harassment and other dangers, advocates should be thoughtful about the complexities of Black culture and expectations for unity. Community-level interventions should be mindful of the needs of Black women who do not necessarily feel compelled by efforts like *Take Back the Night* or *Slut Walk* (Reger, 2015). Following the expert recommendations made by participants in this study, clinicians, researchers and community members should co-create opportunities for dialogue on this topic within Black communities.

Implications for Future Research

This study addresses one of many gaps in the literature on street harassment. By capturing Black women's experiences, we begin to understand the layered and convoluted dynamics of oppression that manifest into harassment. The results of this study may be interpreted as part of a larger critique of oppressive behaviors directed at vulnerable populations. The results of this study indicate needs in the areas of attitudes toward women, harassing behaviors, prevention, and intersectional identities. Future research and critical writing should

facilitate social justice efforts to combat street harassment as it exists on a continuum of violence against women. Participatory action research may be an appropriate avenue for such research. Recently, research on bystander interventions has become popular in the literature. Some studies have focused bystander intervention on sexual harassment (Nickerson et al, 2014), bullying (Jenkins, Frederick, & Nickerson, 2018), and sexual assault (Galarneau & O'Neill, 2015). It time to extend these models to address street harassment.

The findings of the current study contribute to the existing literature in several important ways. First, although previous studies have found that women who experience street harassment may feel motivated to avoid men on the street, the current study is the first to identify the complexity with which Black women view their harassers. Black women in this study identify their harassers as strangers, but also their peers and elders within Black communities. The participants also view harassment as a learned behavior and a result of systems of oppression. Future research should delve into these aspects of street harassment within Black populations with as much sophistication as the women in this study. Specifically, qualitative inquiry of men's understanding and motivation for street harassment, overall unity, and community wellness.

Future efforts to understand street harassment should explore the interaction between race and class among other racial groups; particularly groups that have a history of oppression and shared struggle. Research should center the experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender-queer, gender non-conforming and trans communities. These populations are particularly vulnerable to harassment. Their experiences have the potential to expose greater complexity on the insidious nature of oppression, harassment, and intersecting identities. Another thing that is not made clear in this study is cultural norms surrounding flirting. As future research ventures into the

experiences of people at intersecting identities, attention should be paid to cultural norms regarding flirting and civil discourse as this may look different across culture and identity.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the noteworthy findings of the present study, some limitations should be discussed. First, because this is a qualitative study, generalizability is limited. The sample included a primarily heterosexual and cisgender sample of Black women. It cannot be presumed that queer or trans Black women have the exact same experiences. There are likely additional risks and threats that these women experience that are not accounted for within this study. Additionally, the issues presented in this study may be unique to the mid-western city from which the sample was recruited. The culture of cities on the east coast or in the southern cities, for example, may produce a different understanding of street harassment and responses among Black women. Different cities, for example, have different histories, varied mixtures of racial groups, cultural norms surrounding seasons and traditions.

As noted previously, prior to this study, research on street harassment has either not included Black women, or they were a small portion of the sample. The current study utilized a relatively small sample as well. There were several reasons, however, that a smaller sample was utilized for this study. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) stated "although not a formal methodological rule, the situational diversity necessary for identifying thematic patterns is often provided by three to five interview transcripts" (p. 51). Additionally, Patton (1990) recommended that "validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/ analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 185). Though fruitful results

were derived from this small sample, this does nothing to improve the generalizability of this study.

Caution must be taken when making conclusions around these results. Self-selection may have skewed the results, in that those who were interested in sharing their experiences may also have stronger opinions about street harassment. The Black women in this study may have been attracted to the advertisement for this study due to acute experiences with street harassment and/or more frequent exposure. Another aspect of the sample that should be considered is cultural diversity. There is a great deal of diversity among women who identify as Black. For example, people who immigrate to the United States from places in the Caribbean islands, Africa and South America may identify as Black and have various cultural identities. If these women experience harassment, they likely have ideas and experiences based in their worldview and culture.

Summary and Personal Reflection

This phenomenological research study examined Black women's experiences with street harassment and identified six themes that represent the structure of this phenomenon in their lives. The results of this study articulate the experience of street harassment as *Definition of Street Harassment, Behavioral Responses, Negative Emotional Experiences, Meaning Making, Heightened Harassment in Certain Contexts, and Hyper-Vigilance.* This details the weekly to daily experiences of Black women in this study. Based on the results, recommendations are made for future research, practice and theoretical considerations.

As I reflect upon my personal experience with conducting this research and analyzing the data, there were many different reactions. There were times in which I felt excited by the data because my own experiences with street harassment were validated within the data. The

participants verbalized thoughts and feelings that are all too familiar to me. Then there were times when I felt challenged to understand participants who shared perspectives that were different from my own. In journaling these experiences, I managed my biases as best as I could to produce research that was valid and representative of the participants' experiences. It is my hope that the participants felt heard and empowered by participating in this study. It is also my hope that others continue to do research on street harassment so as to alleviate this indignity in all women's lives.

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APPENDIX A
Informed Consent

A. General Information

1. Name of Researchers: Cierra Whatley, M.Ed., Collaborative Program in Counseling Psychology, School of Education, University of Akron.

2. Title of Study: Black Women's Experiences with Street Harassment: A Qualitative Inquiry

3. Objectives of Study: To understand the experience of street harassment in Black women's lives; to add to the literature, fundamental information about Black women's experiences and perceptions; to discover what Black women view as street harassment; to understand the effects of harassment on Black women.

4. Description and purpose of procedures: This part of the research consists of semi-structured interviews with Black women. This interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will include questions about street harassment. These interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed. The recordings will be destroyed after transcription. This information will be used to better understand Black women's perceptions, experiences and definition of street harassment.

5. Use of results: Data collected in this project will be used to complete a doctoral dissertation, additionally a pursuit of publication of the research results in a professional psychological journal.

6. The risks are minimal however discomfort is a possibility. Strictly the use of your time is required. No physical risk is involved, and your behavior or responses will not be manipulated in any way. The content discussed during this interview may cause distress. If at any moment, you would like to end the interview you have to the right to do so. Additionally, a referral for additional help with emotional distress will be provided to you.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may refuse participation at any time without penalty or consequence. All research information will be handled in the strictest confidence and your participation will not be individually identifiable in any reports. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the above items. If you have questions about the research that arise after this interview, please feel free to contact me at ckw12@zips.uakron.edu. Questions about the role of the university or your rights as a participant in this research should be directed to Dr. John Queener, Advisor and Professor, University of Akron, queener@uakron.edu.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

B. Signed Consent Portion

I understand the study entitled: "Black Women's Experiences with Street Harassment: A Qualitative Inquiry" as explained to me in this form and I consent to participate in the study. My participation is completely voluntary. I understand that all research information will be handled in the strictest confidence and that my participation will not be individually identifiable in any reports. I understand that there is no penalty or prejudice of any kind for withdrawing or not participating in the study.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

APPENDIX B
Demographic Questionnaire

Please indicate which best describes your gender-identity.

Woman/Cis-Gender _____   Trans* _____   Gender Non-Conforming _____   Other _____

Please choose the appropriate label that best describes your sexual orientation.

Lesbian _____   Queer _____   Bisexual_____Heterosexual _____

Gay _____   Asexual _____   Other _____

Age: _____

How old were you when you first experienced street harassment? _____

Please indicate what best describes your race/ethnic background.

        Black _____

        African American _____

        Biracial_____

        Multiracial_____

        Other _____

Please identify the *highest* amount of education achieved.

        Some middle school _____   Completed middle school _____

        Some high school _   High school degree _

        Some college _____   College degree _____

        Some graduate school _____   Graduate school degree _____

        Other (please specify) _____

Please identify what best describes your current living environment:

        rural_____, urban_____, suburban _____

Please indicate you level of household income.

        0-$25,000_____, $25,000-$60,000_____, $60,000- _____

How would you describe your body type? Physical features?

_____

On average, approximately how often have you encountered harassment in public spaces by strangers across your lifetime? (Circle only one response.)

Once   Rarely   Sometimes   Often   Daily

Date: _____

Time: _____

Interviewee: _____

Interviewer: _____

1. What do you consider street harassment?

2. How does street harassment usually make you feel?

3. What is an experience that stands out and why?

4. What have you noticed about the harassers? Does your experience differ based on the harasser?

5. Based on your understanding of street harassment, what is the result/outcome of street harassment on Black women?