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WOMEN'S EXPEREINCES OF INTERNALIZED SEXISM

Syeda Rahmani

Women's Experiences of Internalized Sexism

Syeda Farzana Rahmani, MA

Torrey Wilson, PhD
Chair

Penelope Asay, PhD, ABPP
Member

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This is to certify that the Clinical Research Project of

has been approved by the CRP
Committee on

as satisfactory for the CRP requirement
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Examining Committee:

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Committee Chair

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Reader

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Reader

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to the women who took the time to respond to this study. Every single response was read and fawned over for hours. Without you speaking up this would not have been possible. The responses were moving and at times heartbreaking. My deepest wish is that this research provides a platform for these experiences to be seen and heard collectively. This research is a call to action to respond to women in ways they demand.

I continue to remain impressed by the deep strength and resilience women possess as they navigate their way through the world. To those in my life, my deepest gratitude for your ongoing support without which this would not have been possible. You keep my fire lit and remind me of who I am when I am in doubt. I truly believe I have the most genuine, authentic, compassionate, and supportive people in my life.

I am eternally grateful to those who came before me.

Abstract

This study involved exploring the lived experiences of women with sexism and its internalization. Ten women participated in the study to share their experiences through personal narratives. The study was qualitative in nature and results yielded coded phenomenological themes related to the experiences of sexism and how it can become internalized. The study's results are divided into themes and subthemes and supported by direct quotes from the participants. Themes included development & socialization across a range of environments, gender expectations, family of origin, intergenerational sexism, relationship conflict, sexism at work, career expectations, loss of income, intersectional experience of discrimination, appearance & objectification, conditions of worth, resilience, resistance, adverse health impacts, and rape culture. The themes highlighted significant areas that were commonly experienced across multiple identifiers within the heterogenous group of women. Results provide a complex and more comprehensive way of understanding women's experiences of internalized sexism.

Chapter I: Introduction

Women can experience sexism in a number of ways starting from an early age. Given the pervasive nature of patriarchy in the dominant culture, there is much pressure to cope with sexism through internalization (Becker, 2010). It may appear counterintuitive that women can at times observe rules and values that diminish their own freedom and autonomy. Yet, Glick and Fiske (2001) discussed instances throughout history of women supporting ways of thinking and behaviors that do not serve them. In this way, it is important to better understand the nature of women's internal experience of sexism. Internalizing is one mechanism that is implemented to deal with societal stressors. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) agreed that internalizing is a maladaptive coping method that leaves women at risk for further adverse mental health. "Internalization is the process in which social norms and values established by the society are adopted as one's own" (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 56). Research supports that oppressed individuals often cope in sexist environments by internalizing the discrimination and prejudice they are experiencing. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) described that a woman's experience following sexist events often includes "shame, confusion, powerlessness, and inferiority" (p. 160). It has been argued that discriminatory experiences become understood through a lens in which individuals feel negatively about their own group and status (Watson, Scarinci, Klesges, Slawson, & Beech, 2002).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand the complexity of internalized sexism. The objective of the study was to better grasp the mental health implications of sexism (a form of daily oppression) experienced by women. The intent of studying such narratives was to use this information to deliver better treatment and improve clinical skills when treating women who are reporting such experiences. Understanding this

perspective facilitates breaking through the silence surrounding these women's experiences as has been seen in the #MeToo movement, and never has it been more relevant. The results of such a study can be used in making clinical judgements and gaining a better understanding of the lives of clients and patients. Clinical implications include sitting in a session and enhancing the clinician's understanding of the nature and essence of the patient's experience before diagnosing and creating treatment plans. To diagnose without taking such everyday pervasive experiences into account could unnecessarily pathologize clients without a complex or accurate understanding of their lived experiences. In light of the vastness and scope of the topic of sexism, the researcher specifically focused on the central phenomenon of internalized sexism. In particular, focus was given to the lived experiences of 10 female participants who wished to share their experiences surrounding sexism and internalized sexism. The study was explorative, defined, and influenced by the responses provided by these 10 women. For this reason, no hypothesis was put forth, although given recent movements such as #MeToo there is reason to believe there is much information that remains unseen and unheard. The responses were examined by a coder who became familiar with the depth and meaning behind the narratives. A qualitative approach was chosen for the richness of data narratives can provide that can often be lost in quantitative studies. Through the phenomenological approach, the researcher used the data in a reflective manner to extract the essence of the lived experiences of the participants.

The study was designed to pay attention to women's narratives and better understand themes that are a part of the process of internalizing sexism. The qualitative research available provided little information surrounding the internalized experience of sexism. The study was intended to address this gap in the literature using a sample of women from a variety of backgrounds.

Chapter II: Literature Review

According to research, there is vast gender disparity between men and women in the areas of inequality of pay, gender violence, objectification, and adverse mental health outcomes (Landry & Mercurio, 2009; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014). This is a significant issue that is reflected in many cultures around the world. Davidson, Gervais, and Sherd (2015) highlighted the rates of violence against women by men in the United States as being significantly high. In a 5-year longitudinal research study, White and Humphrey (1997) revealed "88% of the women sampled reported at least one incident of physical or sexual victimization from adolescence to the fourth year of college" (p. 121). Though it should be noted that sexual victimization is a severe expression of misogyny, research has demonstrated multiple ways in which sexism can transpire and be experienced by women. It often starts at an early age and continues to be embedded in messages, interactions, and events through one's life. This can become a key part of a woman's experience of the world and the message of misogyny can become internalized. In fact, internalized sexism is a psychological phenomenon that is prevalent in many societies. Its manifestations are common, can be seen in everyday interactions, and are maintained systemically via institutions and various societal messages. As the #MeToo movement has been mobilized it has shed light on valuable dialogues around the disparities between the way men and women are treated, specifically in terms of the sexualization and abuse of women. The current study was designed to extend that conversation and provide an increased understanding of the way in which women are psychologically affected by sexism. How do women cope with these persistent and pervasive sexist messages?

Sexism, Misogyny, and Patriarchy

Sexism is a form of oppression. Becker (2010) and Glick and Fiske (2001) described misogyny as "hatred for women" and patriarchy is the system in which men are the authority and make the decisions for all. According to Ussher (1991), misogyny is a term that originated in 17th century Greece that has had a pervasive influence in many countries, societies, and cultures both in the developed and developing world. The basic premise is women are sexual objects of desire, are physically and intellectually inferior, and their societal role is to support men. These definitions can become more elaborate, nuanced, and comprehensive depending on the specific society, country, culture, politics, and time in history. Patriarchy is the system designed to position men at the top of the societal hierarchy. This system is upheld through mechanisms of sexism and misogyny in which women are devalued in comparison to men. These beliefs and behaviors encourage and ensure power is maintained by men. The idea that women are inferior often justifies inequality, hostility, and violence as permissible toward girls and women. As a result, girls and women are diminished and degraded in a variety of ways. When these ideas go unaddressed, the support and even encouragement for gender disparities become vast and apparent. Misogynistic and patriarchal culture cooperate to create systems and individuals who ensure these systems stay in place to provide privileges to one group while marginalizing another.

The subjective and experiential nature of women's lived experience is therefore heavily influenced by these elements. This is particularly crucial to understand in the context of the current study. In order to discuss internalized sexism in depth, the pervasive and relentless nature of sexism must be understood. Landrine and Klonoff (1996) emphasized that research consistently indicates discrimination is associated with adverse physical and mental health. The

stress associated with sexism is particularly detrimental as a result of its inherent, chronic, and inescapable nature. Many women are not given the language or education to help them understand their own subjective experience that may be colored by these ideas. However, there is disparity in various diagnoses, primarily depression, anxiety, and borderline personality disorder (BPD), between women and men. In order to better grasp why it is imperative for mental health clinicians to understand the psychological impacts for girls and women, a key question would to be to ask what are the clinical implications of oppression for the mental health of women? According to the White House Council on Women and Girls (2011), statistically women accounted for 50.8% of the total population in 2010. By definition, they are not a minority. However, they are systemically and individually marginalized. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) provided evidence to demonstrate the oppressive and unequal treatment toward women in the United States. What is the impact of internalizing this message? One outcome that can be seen among women is the ambivalence toward how they feel about themselves. At times they may make choices based on rules and values that would appear counterintuitive for their own best interest, such as by diminishing their own freedom and autonomy. History provides many examples of this. However, this does not reveal the psychological power of internalizing oppressive messages about oneself. It is therefore crucial to gain a better understanding of the experiences of women who are influenced by varying degrees of sexism.

Sexism is defined as "prejudice or discrimination based on sex" ("Sexism," n.d.). Therefore, sexist events can be understood as a form of oppression. Women are frequently exposed to various forms of gender-based discrimination to varying degrees, whether perceived or not. The experience of oppression is compounded when a woman possesses multiple statuses within her personal identity that are discriminated against (e.g., race, sexual orientation,

disability, socioeconomic status, etc.). These oppressive systems can be enacted through educational institutions, places of employment, religious institutions, social groups, the legal system, the media, and familial and interpersonal interactions. Gender disparity is systematically maintained and endorsed throughout U.S. culture. Sexism is maintained primarily through misogynistic ideas and behavior.

Internalizing is one mechanism that is implemented to deal with societal stressors. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) agreed that internalizing is a maladaptive coping method that leaves women at risk for further adverse mental health outcomes. "Internalization is the process in which social norms and values established by the society are adopted as one's own" (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 73). Research supports that oppressed individuals often cope in such environments by internalizing the discrimination and prejudice. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) described that a woman's experience following sexist events often includes "shame, confusion, powerlessness, and inferiority" (p. 160). It has been argued that the discriminatory experiences become understood through a lens in which individuals feel negatively about their own group and status (Watson et al., 2002).

This study involved using a qualitative phenomenological approach to focus on women's narratives, reactions, and responses to better understand the process of internalizing sexism. The existing qualitative research provided little information surrounding the internalized experience of sexism, specifically reoccurring themes that may be present in sexist events, coping, and the internalization of sexism. The current study was designed to address this gap by using female participants from a variety of ethnic, racial, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation, education level, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The intention was to use a heterogenous sample to allow for the resulting themes to be more generalizable to the population. In many

studies surrounding sexism, the samples used have been college students, Caucasian, or women from a certain socioeconomic background (Mazur, 1986). These results make it challenging to extend the meaning of the results to the women beyond those who share some or all of the homogenous sample used. In this way, the current study provided a more inclusive and meaningful range of the sample. The significance of looking for themes from a wider group of women means the results and possible clinical implications from the study can be applied to women from all backgrounds and are therefore more generalizable. This study therefore has the potential to effect change and contribute to expanding the understanding of internalized sexism. The researcher intended to use the results to suggest practices in a therapeutic relationship. It was also hoped that the results would show the experiences of various forms of sexism and oppression depending on the various differences within the sample. For example, age related sexism, socioeconomic related oppression, immigration status related, race, or ethnic related oppression and sexism. These are only a few ways in which sexism can intersect with other oppressive systems. The researcher paid attention to this when it appeared in the responses and results. This is a vital piece of understanding the complexity of women's experience because it is not a monolith. These variations in experiences are important to understand and the majority of prior research did not mention or focus on the importance of this intersectional aspect of women's experiences.

Internalized Sexism

Internalized sexism is a psychological phenomenon that can be understood through the process of coping. There has been much research and study on this topic. According to various stress coping models, the perception of a discriminatory experience heavily affects the level of stress the individual undergoes. In coping theory, the stressor is considered "discrimination"

(Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Internalizing is one mechanism implemented to deal with societal stressors. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) agreed that this is a maladaptive coping method that leaves women at risk for further adverse mental health outcomes. The research shows internalization is a coping method for stress. "Internalization is the process in which social norms and values established by the society are adopted as one's own" (Ryan & Connell, 1989, p. 752). Piggott (2004) pioneered the expression "internalized sexism" following her research via cross cultural studies of the impact of misogyny and homophobia on lesbian women's mental health. Becker (2010) pointed out that women range in the degrees to which they internalize hostile or benevolent sexism. This is important to note as it has implications for how women view themselves and other women. These implications include mental health outcomes that are disproportionately diagnosed in relation to male counterparts according to research focusing experience of coping with sexism (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, & Stewart, 2009). Wei, Alvarez, Ku, Russell, and Bonett (2010) confirmed that "coping with oppressive experiences via internalization was a unique predictor of depression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction in a racial ethnic minority sample" (p. 340). Carr, Szymanski, Taha, West, and Kaslow (2014) supported the theory that internalization is often used as a maladaptive coping method.

Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) stated the influence of oppression can be both external (includes harassment, prejudice, and discrimination) and internal (believing negative stereotypes around one's own group). According to Szymanski and Stewart (2010), the adverse experience of oppression is worse for those who align with the oppressive attitudes that justify oppression. Moradi and Subich (2004) insisted that the women who are harmed the most by sexist events are those who internalize negative views about women versus women who do not.

Research supports that oppressed individuals often cope in such environments by internalizing the discrimination and prejudice. Szymanski and Feltman (2014) described that a woman's experience following sexist events often includes "shame, confusion, powerlessness, and inferiority" (p. 160). It has been argued that discriminatory experiences become understood through a lens in which an individual feels negatively about their own group and status (Watson et al., 2002). This is the process of internalization. Many measures designed to operationalize and quantitatively measure constituents of internalized sexism include self-objectification (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). The other key element of internalized sexism within quantitative studies is the acceptance of ascribed gendered behaviors and norms.

Objectification Theory and Self-Objectification Theory

Objectification theory. A woman's value is measured by her physical attractiveness according to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). There is a pervasive cultural message compounded by interpersonal interactions. The theory can be used to address the lived experiences of women more accurately than other theories. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) discussed the mental health ramifications of sexually objectifying this group. Furthermore, the theory highlights differential socialization creating many of the "differences" between men and women. This can start early in life for many women, as discussed by Oswald, Franzoi, and Frost (2012). Oswald et al. paid attention to benevolent sexism within the homes and focused on the detrimental effect of the profile of a "doting father" who infantilizes his daughter. By offering differential treatment, a different message is received by sons and daughters, in essence limiting daughters from exploring autonomy and self-efficacy. These paternal roles often encourage strict gender roles that assume feminine characteristics to their daughters such as caregivers who are nurturing and less able (both cognitively and physically). These messages can start early on and

continue through collaborations of culture and systems. Enns (2004) argued that the prevalence and rates of psychopathology among women can be understood through the lens of systematic oppression, which influences the well-being of women.

Self-objectification theory. One example of internalized sexism is self-objectification, "the internalization of objectifying experiences that occurs when women treat themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance" (Szymanski et al., 2009, p. 102). This form of internalized sexism has been shown to influence anxiety, depression, other health problems, eating disorders, and, in some cases, cognitive performance decline (Harper & Tiggemann, 2008). Unfortunately, self-objectification is frequently practiced in patriarchal societies and has been linked to eating disorders (Franko et al., 2012). Body image disturbances are influenced by sociocultural factors such as standards of beauty, gendered norms and expectations, mass media, and so on. All of these influences collectively can cause body image disturbances (Heinberg, Thompson, & Stormer, 1995). These are the same cultural expectations and ideas that cause women to internalize messages that lower self-esteem and influence the way in which they conceptualize themselves and other women. For example, if thinness is a constituent of being "attractive" in a culture and meeting ideals is rewarded by "acceptance," this can create body image disturbances. As early as 1987, Franzoi and Herzog noted Western societies thought "beautiful is good." When this is the dominant belief in a culture it is believed these traits will guarantee success, praise, and acceptance. Not meeting such ideals can often result in punishment and ostracism. Internalizing the idea that "beauty" is a coveted aspect of the female identity leaves girls and women vulnerable to internalizing these values and beliefs. Female beauty traits and trends are ever changing, as reflected in cosmetic trend changes. Mazur (1986) addressed the historical changes in standards of beauty and aesthetics. These body image

disturbances can result in eating disorders, body dysmorphia, obsessive compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). Body image disturbances are examples of mental health issues directly related to sociocultural context. The ideal aesthetic is often extensively and inescapably represented in the media.

Ambivalent Sexism Theory

The ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 2001) includes two ways of categorizing and understanding sexism, benevolent and hostile. Oswald et al. (2012) defined the differences as:

> Hostile sexism involves negative attitudes that are directed toward women in nontraditional gender roles, such as career women and feminists. In contrast, heterosexual intimate interdependence results in many men idealizing women in traditional feminine roles, these traditional relationships fulfill their dual desire for social dominance and intimacy. Benevolent sexism reflects seemingly favorable response to women who are in traditional gender roles. (p. 1114)

According to Glick and Fiske (2001), both of these types of sexism correlate with support for gender inequality. These power dynamics in which men are dominant and superior are widespread and systemic, making it difficult for women to individually challenge these systems.

Feminist Therapy Theory

Feminist therapy theory was developed following second wave feminism during the late 1960s to better serve women and the issues they faced in their environments. A crucial part of the theory is rooted in understanding the social, political, and cultural contexts in which women exist. The second wave feminists understood "the personal is political." This theory offers critical information surrounding the origin of women's mental health issues, therefore providing

clinicians with additional data points with which to conceptualize and create appropriate and relevant treatment plans that will be effective. Feminists insist that women's social beliefs regarding physical attractiveness and self-esteem are linked. "These theorists assert that in general women have overidentified with their bodies and that a woman's sense of self-worth often contingent on conforming to the prevailing norms for thinness and attractiveness" (Bergner, Remer, & Whetsell, 1985, p. 26). In conclusion, feminine therapy theory asserts that women can often organize the way they conceptualize themselves through the lens of self-objectification. How deeply they internalize this message relates to how successful and acceptable they believe they will be in interpersonal relationships (Murnen & Smolak, 1997).

Conclusion

The research thus far has consistently reported an undeniable relationship between sexist events and increased rates of psychological distress and other adverse effects among women (Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995). There is much evidence for the pervasive nature of gender bias in daily life. Enns (2012) indicated sexism is insidious within U.S. culture. Feminist theory explains that in order to better understand and effectively treat women, a larger contextual understanding is required. Social, political, and cultural aspects should not be overlooked when working with this population. It would also appear there is a link in the disparity between the treatment of men and women in sociocultural context and the impact on the mental health of girls and women. This research was designed to provide a crucial understanding and improved implementation of clinical practice when working with girls and women. Providing insight into the mechanisms that occur following oppressive experiences will allow for better practices in therapy to raise awareness and insight around the client's symptoms.

A noticeable gap in the literature is the lack of diverse populations used as samples. When these groups are researched, they are often a small proportion of a sample and the results are extended to them without any account for cultural, racial, socioeconomic status, or education differences. There is little research covering the experiences of those who face discrimination across multiple areas of their identities. There is limited research accounting for overlapping discrimination, frequency of discrimination between different groups of women, and whether these variables affect psychological distress levels between participants (Carr et al., 2014; Landry & Mercurio, 2009). Studies commonly used sampling methods that were biased and resulted in the use of convenience samples, often collegiate students from predominately Caucasian backgrounds. It has been assumed that the findings are generalizable to women from other races. There is also a gap in the research when it comes to better understanding the experiential nature of internalizing sexism. Quantifiable data, measures, and operationalization help provide data regarding risk factors and outcomes but not the experience.

This study was designed to address the issue of diversity among the participants by including women from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, and races. It was important to build on what was established on the topic so far to gain a better understanding of these women. The clinical implications of this research include a better understanding of women's gendered experience, increased sensitivity during treatment, and better practices developed for this population. Results provide clinicians with more effective tools to work with clients from a multi-dimensional (sociopolitical and cultural) perspective.

Chapter III: Method

The methodology of the study was qualitative with a transcendental phenomenological focus. Transcendental phenomenology originated from Edmond Husserl's concept that to study a person's individual conscious experience and collective consciousness, the researcher must differentiate between the two (Moran, 2005; Welton, 1999). The aim of transcendental phenomenological research is to describe an experience impartially; that is, without bias or presupposition.

This transcendental approach can be used to provide the researcher and reader an understanding of the meaning and essence of participants' experiences (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). According to Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004), the phenomenological approach to research is used to derive meanings of the human experience. The procedures used to understand the essence of the experience include differentiating significant statements into clusters of meaning and then synthesizing the themes to create a textural description (i.e., "what") and structural description (i.e., "how"). These constitute what is described as the "phenomenon," which in this case was the women's lived experiences with sexism (Moustakas, 1994), specifically what they experienced and how they coped with experiences of sexism. This method is employed to use the narratives of individuals' experiences and additionally expose any larger patterns that may occur from these collective experiences.

Participants

The participants of the study were 10 women who identified as having experienced sexism. Transgender women were eligible for this study. The exclusion criteria for participants included those who were under 18 years old, did not identify as female, had not experienced sexism, and were unable to recall experiences without inducing distressing trauma. The

exclusion criteria extended to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances of the principal investigator (PI), and students of Illinois School of Professional Psychology (ISPP) were asked not to participate in this study. Women from a variety of backgrounds were encouraged to participate. The goal was to target a diverse population of women to represent the experience of sexism and internalization among women. These various identifiers included gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, ability, socioeconomic status (SES), highest level of education, country of origin, U.S. citizenship, and immigration status. The purpose of collecting these demographic identifiers was to determine whether there were similarities or differences between identifiers (i.e., could some aspects of the experience transcend culture, race, nationality, ability, and so forth?). Through the ADDRESSING model, P. A. Hays (1996) described the importance of understanding and conceptualizing individuals from nine main identifiers in order to better grasp a sense of the individual from a comprehensive standpoint.

Procedures

The study was submitted for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at ISPP, and once certified the data collection began. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling through the PI's social media as a platform for promoting the study. Noy (2008) reported that snowball sampling according to "constructivist and feminist hermeneutics generates a unique type of social knowledge—knowledge which is emergent, political and interactional" (p. 330). Furthermore, "interrelations were found between sampling and interviewing facets, leading to a reconceptualization of the method of snowball sampling in terms of power relations, social networks and social capital" (p. 331). This made this type of sampling particularly appropriate and relevant for this study given the topic (i.e., social hierarchy, oppression, sexism, and social

capital). This sampling method was used to increase and expand access to individuals who would have been challenging to include.

The PI posted a message on her Facebook account and forwarded it to others to post on their accounts (see Appendix A). The message requested participation from women who were eligible, details about the study, and a link to the online questionnaire. Participants were informed the aim of the study was to examine and better understand their experience of sexism and the ways in which it may have been internalized. The participants were informed the process would take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Prior to beginning the questionnaire, the participants were asked to fill in a demographic form, received an informed consent, and were provided a list of supporting resources.

Data Collection

Demographic questionnaires were used for screening purposes and to better understand the sample of participants. Information collected included gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, ability, SES, highest level of education, country of origin, U.S. citizenship, and immigration status. When an individual chose to participate she was provided a link to an online survey on SurveyMonkey and asked to provide her demographic information (see Appendix C). Following this, the participant was provided an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Participants were reminded they were able to leave the study at any point. The participants were also provided a resources list (see Appendix D). Participants were encouraged to keep a copy of the informed consent and resources list for their own records. Friends, acquaintances, colleagues, or students of ISPP were asked not to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

All participants' identities were and are kept anonymous and confidential throughout the study. The participants were de-identified with an ID number when entering the SurveyMonkey link. The responses were saved to the account ID number of the participant. SurveyMonkey saved the information containing participant responses. Interviews were not distributed or used for other purposes. All data, consent forms, data analysis, and related notes will be destroyed within 3 years of the completion of the study.

Measure

Qualitative data derived from the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C) were analyzed by the PI to observe any categories, themes, and subthemes described in the results of the study. Online surveys were used to explore the experiences of women with sexism, how they experienced sexism, and possible coping methods via internalization. The data were intended to assist in comprehensively understanding the essence of internalized sexism by coding the what and how of the experiences of sexism reported by the women. By asking a range of open-ended questions about the participants' experiences, it was understood that there would be themes among the participants that showed evidence of a shared experience and provided evidence of a phenomenon that transcends a variety of identifiers.

Qualitative Research Approach

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to better understand the sexist experiences women encountered and how they internalized sexism. A phenomenological approach was used to understand the individual narratives provided by the participants regarding sexism and internalized sexism. The goal of using a phenomenological investigation was to offer an in-depth understanding of the experiences being explored as the participants lived them (D. G. Hays &

Singh, 2012). The results of the study provide a unique narrative of many different women and enabled the researcher to draw larger conclusions about how the women experienced themselves as they internalized the chronic and relentless nature of sexism, with a specific focus on mental health implications. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) described a phenomenological study as searching for "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 115). The purpose of using such an approach is to condense multiple lived experiences to create what Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell described as a universal essence. This was captured by the transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach.

Data Collection and Analysis

The PI received approval from the IRB at ISPP prior to collecting data. Following data collection, the PI engaged in phenomenological data analysis to examine the participants' responses to open-ended and probing questions. Open and axial coding were used to analyze the data. Blair (2015) described the methodology in open and axial coding as reviewing each sentence of each participant's data for core themes. To conduct this level of analysis, all data were reviewed in order to identify significant and meaningful statements from the interviews. From this analysis, the PI composed a list of core themes. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) described the process as "the inquirer collects data from the persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (p. 21). According to Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, this description consists of what they experienced, which is the textural description. The structural description is described by how the participants experienced it. This can include conditions, situations, and context. Collectively, this approach to analysis can provide and capture the "essence" of the experiences. These statements were then grouped into themes or categories.

In order to uncover the themes, the PI organized the data into experiences of what, how, and the essence. Following the compilation of this information, the categories, themes, and subthemes emerged. Each response was evaluated and meaningful statements were separated by the coder. The PI also noted her own reactions, prejudgments, biases, experiences, and presumptions before analysis to ensure these did not interfere with the analysis. This increased the effectivity and objectivity of the analysis. Ultimately, the PI looked for themes that best described a universal experience.

Ethical Considerations

Recalling experiences of sexist events may have been triggering for some participants. To account for this and as a way to minimize risk for the individuals who participated in the study, a list of resources was provided to each participant who completed the study prior to the interview. The study was confidential and no identifying information was collected. An informed consent form was included (see Appendix B). Potential participants were able to review the consent form and determine whether they wished to participate. If they did agree to an online questionnaire, they answered questions pertaining to the study. If not, they were able to decline the interview by closing the browser and their data were not used. As indicated in the informed consent, if a participant experienced distress as a result of participating in the study, there was a list of resources to which she could refer for support in addition to contacting the PI, Syeda Rahmani. Her contact details were provided along with contact information for the PI's chairperson, Dr. Torrey Wilson.

Trustworthiness and Biases

When conducting this qualitative study, it was important for the PI to acknowledge her own assumptions and biases. To accomplish this, assumptions about women who have

experienced sexism and internalized these experiences were identified as best as possible. As a

woman who has also experienced sexism, there was potential for the PI to assume the

participants' experiences would be similar to the PI's experience and coping methods used. This

needed to be acknowledged in order for the PI to remain impartial and increase the

trustworthiness of the study. Strategies implemented to ensure trustworthiness included seeking

consultation from the PI's clinical research project team to ensure biases did not interfere with

the research. An outside reader from the committee also reviewed the data and compared the

findings as a way to decrease subjectivity by the PI.

Chapter IV: Results

The results of the study offer an in-depth account of the 10 female participants'

experiences. In order to understand the results of the study, general background information of

each participant is provided in Table 1. A total of 10 women ranging from 24 to 54 years old

participated in the study. The participants' education levels ranged from lower than high school

to the graduate level and their SES was working class to upper middle class. Nine of the

participants were able bodied and one individual identified as "disabled (but high functioning)."

Of the 10 participants, eight identified as heterosexual and two as bisexual. The participants

ranged in nationality, country of origin, race, ethnicity, and immigration status. The immigration

status of the participants included permanent resident, U.S. citizen, UK citizen, legal, and

nonimmigrant-international student. The country of origin for participants ranged from the

United States, Mexico, India, UK, and Malaysia. Ethnicities of participants ranged from

Mexican, Irish, Indian Filipino, Native American, and African American. One participant

identified as "mixed ethnicity" but did not identify specific ethnicities.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Study Participants

ID	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Religious beliefs (if any)	Highest level of education	SES	Sexual orientation	Ability status	Country of residence	Nationality	Country of origin	Immigration status
3	54	African	African American	Christian, non-denominational	Graduate degree	Working class	Hetero	Able bodied	United States	U.S.	Unknown	U.S. citizen
7	44	African	African American	Christian	Graduate degree	Upper middle class	Hetero	Able bodied	United States	U.S.	United States	U.S. citizen
8	31	Native American	Native American	Catholicism Native American	Associates degree	Upper Middle Class	Hetero	Able bodied	United States	U.S.	United States	U.S. citizen
14	24	Caucasian /Hispanic	Irish	God of my own understanding	Less than high school degree	Working class	Bisexual	Able bodied	United States	U.S.	United States	Legal
15	29	Mexican	Mexican American	Catholicism	Graduate degree	Working class	Hetero	Able bodied	United States	U.S.	Mexico	U.S. citizen
16	41	Caucasian	Caucasian	None	Graduate degree	Upper middle class	Hetero	Disabled high function	United States	U.S.	United States	U.S. citizen
21	32	Caucasian	Mixed	None	Bachelor's degree	Lower middle class	Bisexual	Able bodied	United States	U.S.	United States	U.S. citizen
25	24	South Asian (Indian)	Indian	Catholicism	Bachelor's degree	Upper middle class	Hetero	Able bodied	United States	Indian	India	Non immigrant - international student
33	32	Asian	Filipino	Christianity	Bachelor's degree	Lower middle class	Hetero	Able bodied	UK	British	UK	UK citizen
41	28	Asian	Indian	Hinduism	Graduate degree	Lower middle class	Hetero	Able bodied	United States	Malaysian	Malaysia	Permanent resident

Participant Interviews

The online surveys involved asking the following open-ended questions:

1. Tell me about your experience with sexism. Please be as detailed as possible.

2. What is your earliest memory of sexism?

3. How did you feel about it at the time?

4. How does how you feel about it now differ from then (if at all)?

5. How, if at all, do you think other aspects of your identity (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, ability status, religion, size) were also a part of the sexism you have experienced?

6. How did you and/or do you handle/manage, cope with sexism?

7. Who, if anyone, do you speak to about it? Do you feel supported?

8. What is your familial attitude toward sexism?

9. How do your peers, friends, or other people respond to sexist behavior? This may include men and women.

10. What are the benefits of being a woman?

11. How do you define being a woman?

12. When is the first time you became aware of your appearance?

13. If you think appearance is important, can you explain why?

14. Are you happy with your appearance? Please describe why you answered this way.

15. What benefits does your appearance provide, if any?

16. What are the disadvantages of your appearance, if any?

17. How do you feel sexism has affected your personal life (if at all)?

18. How do you feel sexism has affected your career/professional life (if at all)?

19. Thinking back, were there ever any physiological responses to sexism that you recall?

20. How has sexism affected your health (if at all)?

21. Are there any other aspects about the experience of sexism that I may not have asked? If so, please share.

In analyzing the data from the online questionnaire, the PI phenomenologically coded the contents of all of the interviews. The PI identified and coded significant statements within each interview from each participant. In many instances, statements converged with research from the literature review or provided a different perspective. Categories, themes, and subthemes emerged from the data, but the prior research provided a helpful framework for organizing the data. The themes and subthemes were used to determine and explore how the coded data related to the study and better understanding women's experience of internalized sexism. After classifying and arranging the data, significant statements and additional themes emerged. In total, following phenomenological coding, the process yielded nine categories, 16 themes, and 22 subthemes. In order to understand the responses to these questions, they were broken down into themes and subthemes to better grasp the essence of the what and how where possible. Each is listed in Table 2 followed by a detailed exploration under the respective section.

Table 2

Categories, Themes, and Subthemes of the Study

Category	Themes	Subthemes
Sexism across the life span	Development and socialization	Early socialization
		Differential socialization
	Sexism across environments	
Gendered norms	Gender expectations	Obedience
		Policing and gendering
		Expectations of appearance
		Behavioral expectations and consequences of disobedience
Family and sexism	Family of origin	Familial expectation
	Intergenerational sexism	Traditional patriarchy
	Relationship conflict	
Career and sexism	Sexism at work	Abuse of power
	Career expectations	Appearance and competence
	Loss of income	
Intersectionality	Intersectional experience of discrimination	Sexism and racism
		Sexism and culture
		Size discrimination
		European standard of beauty and White supremacy
Appearance and internalization	Appearance and objectification	
	Conditions of worth	Internalized sexism
Protective factors from internalized sexism	Resilience	
	Resistance	Speaking out
		Counseling
		Positive attributions
Health impacts of sexism and internalized sexism	Adverse health impacts	Psychological health impact
		Physiological arousal impact
		Biological arousal impact
Hostile sexism	Rape culture	Verbal abuse

Analysis of Results

To better understand the experience of internalized sexism for women, the essence was

explored through questions delivered in an online format. In order to appreciate the essence of

the experience, there was a focus on how and what was experienced. These are also referred to as the structural and textural descriptions of the experience. The analysis is broken into categories, themes, and subthemes. Each category section provides an overview of the phenomenon and the themes and subthemes provide more detail. The themes and subthemes provide a way of understanding the elements that made up the categories.

Category: Sexism across the life span. The first category summarizes the variety and range of sexist experiences that span across the lifetimes of many girls and women. This theme arose as a category following the salient nature of sexist experiences described by the participants across the life span. The PI extracted from the responses the ongoing and chronic nature of sexism starting at a young age and continuing on. No responses included an end date or age at which sexism ended. In fact, many of the participants described the saliency of sexism across all phases of life. Core themes that arose within this category included development and socialization as well as sexism across environments. It is meaningful that the theme of sexism during development and socialization was demonstrated by every participant in the study, highlighting the unique challenges girls and women face during their development as a result of socialization. Much of this socialization and learning (through modeling behavior) starts within families of origin or at school (classrooms and playgrounds). Interactions and relational styles are embedded in socialization and gendered behavior is often taught through early experiences and maintained across the life span. This was unpacked during the analysis.

Theme: Development and socialization. The core theme of development and socialization refers to the insidious ways in which behaviors and expectations are learned and taught to both girls and boys. Development and socialization are therefore inextricably linked. These normed behaviors and expectations are then internalized and enacted in order to "fit in" to

society. This is key for those who want to avoid social ostracism and punishment. These norms are in many ways synonymous with "good." They are taught during childhood and maintained into and throughout adulthood. The normed behaviors and expectations are communicated early on for girls. They are communicated verbally, modelled by adults, and at times punitively maintained through punishment by adults and ostracism, shaming, or bullying by peers as highlighted in some of the responses. Understanding sexism through the life span was a subtheme demonstrated in the responses provided by participants. The responses provided insight into the unique developmental challenges girls and women face as a result of these messages from childhood into adulthood. Furthermore, the theme of development and socialization contained the subthemes of early socialization and differential socialization.

Subtheme: Early socialization. The pattern of early socialization was a common subtheme. Participants provided many clear examples of being given messages directly, overtly, and covertly regarding gendered norms. Some participants provided examples that upon reflection elicited negative emotions such as discomfort and resentment. Participants described experiences where the process of sexist messages started for them. They provided responses that illustrated the ways in which these behaviors were taught and modelled.

One participant stated, "As a 3-year-old. When I was enrolled in a beauty pageant contest for young girls in a church program." Although this is a very young age, the ideals of appearance and beauty are stressed from a young age for girls in a way that is absent for boys and men. Another participant responded:

> I remember strangers in the town I grew up in following my mom home. I also grew up in domestic violence where my father was physically abusive to my mother. I was also repeatedly told in school that girls aren't good in math.

This response highlights the predatorial nature to be expected even as a young girl along with messages of physical dominance from men inside the home and outside. Additionally, this participant's ability academically was determined by others based on her gender. The expectation that she belonged to the gender that is poor at math communicated to her that weakness was dependent on her sex. Other participants noted becoming aware of the importance of appearance "as a preteen." Another respondent stated, "Once I started developing physically, I was no longer a player, I was seen as cheerleader material. My identity was changing too fast. I resented the changes because I became an object and not a person." This highlights that the physical development of this girl took away her ability and morphed her into an object. Earlier this was described as "an object of desire," which is another way to describe the sexualization of girls and women. She reported she felt resentful and in this way internalized that she was now an object and unable to perform in the same way. She was no longer considered a player. One participant reported, "Fifth grade when other girls started whispering about me stuffing my bra. I didn't want to wear one, but mom insisted." This was an example of being pressured by other peers (girls) and authority (mother) to ascribe to norms, in this case surrounding appearance.

Several participants disclosed negative feelings surrounding early socialization experiences. This included one participant asserting, "I can be defensive because I have been flirted with since I was 14. As an introvert that was very difficult." Another declared "being forced to do girl things as a child when I made it clear I didn't want to." The elements of discomfort in self-betrayal appear to be part of the process of internalized sexism. Pressure from others and eventually to conform by sacrificing one's own true and authentic desires that were not aligned. One participant reported:

Father and daughter date, I was probably 5 or 6 years old. I dressed up in my Sunday's

best and to see the ballet with my dad. I hated dresses and loved sports. My brother could

care less about sports. He got father and son dates to basketball games and to meet

players from our local NBA team. I had a miserable time and pitched a fit and we left the

ballet at intermission. My brother and my mom were watching Aladdin in the theatre

with our best friends, I was pissed.

These responses reflected a range of experiences that highlighted the differences in expectations

and being raised as a girl as well as some of the negative emotional effect even at such young

ages for girls. Resentment, sadness, anger, and confusion were emotions frequently reported.

Subtheme: Differential socialization. This subtheme referred to the ways in which boys

and girls are treated differently according to their genders during and throughout their

development. The participants provided many examples of clear and distinct differences in how

they were and are treated. Participants indicated overwhelmingly the difference in the

introduction of subtle and obvious messages regarding expectations toward gender coded

behavior. Often these messages and behaviors were presented by trusted people in the girls'

lives, such as grandparents, parents, siblings, and teachers. This is what is particularly powerful

about the process of internalizing sexism. Many of the participants reported sexist events

occurred from an early age and by people they trusted. Some examples include statements such

as:

Girls don't play with tools . . . when my father had friends over working on his car, I was

happy to lend a hand. One friend made the comment I should be playing with the other

little girls (dolls, house) instead of playing with tools. Those were for boys.

Another participant reported:

I was confused. I knew what I was doing, and my father had taught me well. I didn't like

playing with dolls it made me feel awkward. At that age I felt like an outcast from not

only boys but girls as well. I knew a lot of "boy" stuff and wasn't good at "girl" stuff.

One participant stated, "Hearing statements like 'A woman's virginity is like a flower.

Once you crush it, it's ruined' but cheering the boys on with their conquest." These responses

provided a distinct understanding of the expectations of girls and women versus those of boys

and men and revealed a little about the negative emotional meaning for the participants, which

included confusion, awkwardness, and being "othered." This was the described impact of placing

such limiting expectations on the participants as girls.

Theme: Sexism across environments. This theme arose from the participants responding

with examples of sexism across a variety of environments and settings. These included, but were

not limited to, home, school, playground, classroom, graduate classroom, and work (e.g., offices,

interactions with coworkers and boss). Participants noted experiences of sexism within and

across these environments, including systems that perpetuated and rigidly held sexist beliefs and

behaviors (e.g., institutions such as work and school). One participant spoke to this by stating:

I think you forgot how SYSTEMIC sexism works? For instance, there are institutions that

work to keep sexism and instances of sexism committed by individuals covered up and

hidden. So how have these patterns worked in tandem and been kept hidden/worked for

individuals for so long. How have we survived/coped with these patterns of trauma!?

This reveals some women noticed the relationship between oppressive beliefs and trauma. This

participant used the terms "cope and survive" to demonstrate the severity of the effect of such

treatment. Another participant reported:

I used to be really angry and exasperated because when I voiced my opinion to my

school's department or the department I would work with, they would dismiss it. Or they

would say please talk to so and so. So, I would have to say that it goes BEYOND

race/ethnicity/sexual orientation, but power structures that perpetuate these instances.

What else keeps professors that commit acts of sexism for DECADES in their positions?

Why else hire people and lawyers to defend universities? Why else isolate individuals

that have experienced sexism rather than help bring them together and help them cope

with their experiences at the university/college level?

These responses touch on not just the experiences of interactional sexism but also systemic

oppression. These ranged from experiences that can occur in graduate school, employment,

throughout one's career, in leadership positions, and reaching the "glass ceiling." This

participant asked many questions. She highlighted the length of time (i.e., decades) and

described living through sexism at such institutions while being "dismissed." The dismissal of

her experience and denial of her reality were particularly damaging. There is much research to

point to societal or tribal gaslighting being particularly harmful to women's mental health

(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Landry & Mercurio, 2009). The #MeToo movement has provided

hundreds of examples of women describing the same mechanism used to silence individuals.

Category: Gendered norms. This category was prevalent throughout the study. All of

the participants identified that there were expectations for them based on their gender. This

highlighted how normalized and universal their experiences were given this was represented

across identifiers. This was particularly meaningful for this reason. From the participant

responses, common themes involved "obedience," "policing," and "gendering." Expectations

regarding behavior and appearance (e.g., clothing, body size, shape, makeup, and so forth) were

frequent and common. In addition, another theme that was prevalent among participants' responses included the "consequences of disobedience." This could be seen through punishment, ostracism, shaming, and abuse (verbal and physical). Participants also reported at times this was enacted and modelled by women (grandmothers, mothers, female teachers, female friends). This is important to highlight because it is telling that it is not solely men who are enforcing such rules for girls and women but also other women. One explanation for this phenomenon is internalized sexism. Girls and women who enforce these expectations have normalized the behavior and replicate the patriarchal messages to others.

Theme: Gender expectations. This theme included ascribed roles and stereotypes of girls and women. This was broken down into subthemes that were presented in the responses. Gender expectations can be expanded to beliefs, behaviors, appearance, life trajectory, and so forth.

Subtheme: Obedience. This subtheme was littered among the responses from participants. It included examples of compliant behavior and of submission to authority figures and dominant cultural expectations. Examples included, "I was told that I should be looking to get married and have kids as a teenager" and "When I was 8/9, I was sweeping the floor and was told by an uncle to bend down lower and sweep 'like a woman should.'" Although these are only two examples, they provided ways in which these messages were communicated to the participants in a clear and direct manner about the behavior expected of them. These both provided examples of obedience within the context of behavior (immediate and long-term goals). They were both expressed to young girls.

Subtheme: Policing and gendering. This subtheme describes the traditional ascription of genders based on stereotypes that include characteristics and behaviors. Furthermore, the subtheme embodied the enforcement, regulation, and maintenance of expected behaviors by girls

and women. This was imposed and implemented in a variety of ways according to the responses. One participant noted, "When I was a teenager/young adult I was promiscuous and had a lot of one-night stands. Others, including my friends, thought I was being a slut. Our guy friends who did the same were ladies' men and players." The expectation of sexual exploration is often coded differently for men and women. Men are described as having sexual prowess and this is related to power in traditional patriarch with phrases such as "sowing his seed" and "boys will be boys" to support such behavior. However, when girls and women are seen to observe the same behavior, it is often coded as the participant described as "being a slut." Instead, this group is shamed and encouraged to think of the morality of their actions. This stems from traditional patriarchy when women were considered chattel, something to be traded by men for men. As a result, the behaviors of girls and women are often subject to "slut shaming" as a consequence for not adhering to such beliefs and behaviors. Another participant reported:

> I still think it's unfair. I was a curious kid who loved playing sports with the boys and biking in the dirt. I should have been allowed to enjoy my childhood the way I wanted and not the way others tried to fit me into their gender norms.

This participant echoed sentiments of a sense of loss, hurt, regret, and resentment. Another participant expressed, "My husband doesn't like me doing yard work, taking out trash or doing anything that is remotely male oriented, but I do them anyway." This last statement was an example of benevolent sexism that was not as hostile and punitive as some of the other examples. However, coding behaviors and tasks by gender is inherently a societal choice.

Subtheme: Expectations of appearance. It is meaningful that all of the participants reported they had experienced instructions of what was expected of their appearance. This included clothing, size, weight, hair, skin, nails, and makeup. Participant reports included:

Another instance of sexism I experience is with clothing- being told I am attracting

trouble or inviting unwanted attention to myself if my clothes are too short or revealing

of my figure. Being raised in India I have had to get my parents approval before wearing

anything simply because I am overweight, and I might wear clothes that are too figure

hugging. There have been instances when I have been catcalled while I was with my

parents and my father turned around and yelled at me for wearing a low-cut top. Another

instance of sexism I have experienced in the United States is while I was still single and

casually dating, I would be shamed by my female and male colleagues for going on too

many dates or even have casual sex after the first date, while it seemed acceptable to

them for a man to have casual sex. I would get indirect comments and sly remarks which

were belittling.

This participant revealed she had to be careful and spend time to think about what would be

pleasing to others based on the country and culture she was in. Being expressly told "you are

attracting trouble of unwanted attention" is part of the process of victim blaming and removing

perpetrators from the narrative. That is to say she was being held responsible for the behavior of

men toward her and this heightened her attention to her appearance for the male gaze. She was

essentially blamed for sexual harassment; this is a big part of how rape culture works and aids in

internalizing sexism.

Another participant reported:

I got into wearing jeans and trousers when I was 4-5. To the point where I shunned

dresses completely for a while. In the beginning adults found it amusing but after a while

I remember them making comments like "girls don't wear trousers" and "people will

think you're a boy" said with disapproving and concerned tones.

This highlighted how the expectations are made clear even to young children.

Another participant expressed, "When I was 5, some adult men told my mom that if I was older, they'd ask me out on a date. That was when I started thinking about myself in terms of attractiveness." Though this is disturbing it is not uncommon for girls to become sexualized at young ages. Appearance and sexualization are key parts of understanding oneself as an object of desire for the consumption of men. This is a powerful part of the internalization of sexism.

A participant declared, "If I don't wear makeup, I am always asked if I am exhausted or sick. If I do a full makeup, I get asked why I am so done up or get attention from men that I don't want." These quotes provide a host of sexist beliefs that are communicated to very young children (girls) and women throughout their lives in a variety of instances. The statements came from participants from various cultures and highlight the insidious nature and expectations placed on women's appearance, once again demonstrating the ways in which male gaze is part of their experience of themselves and the world.

Subtheme: Behavioral expectations and consequences of disobedience. All of the participants reported instances in which behavioral expectations were communicated to them based on their gender (female). As discussed earlier, this can start in childhood when girls are exploring and learning. One participant noted, "I was thirteen and a tomboy. I played neighborhood football. I was thirteen when boys from both teams tackled me." The participant also noted at the time she felt "discriminated against because I was the best player on the field." This sent her a clear message that she was not accepted in her own team because she was a female. This was an example of hostile sexism where the male team members physically "tackled" the participant because she was not male. She was essentially ostracized from her own team. Another participant noted her negative emotions connected to behavioral expectations; she

expressed, "Just more anger. Enraged about the idea that the mundane act of sweeping had to be associated to gender." The general sentiment among a few participants regarding behavioral expectations based on gender can be summarized as, "Like it was unfair and that boys have all the fun."

Category: Family and sexism. Across the interviews, many participants included and described the role their respective families had played in their process of internalized sexism. Many participants touched on the experiences they had within a family context at various times in their lives. Collectively, they discussed the manner in which sexist messages were delivered and enforced within the home and via interactions. The category of family and sexism was divided into themes of family of origin, intergenerational sexism, and relationship conflict. These themes were further divided into subthemes of familial expectations and traditional patriarchy. Participants included experiences with immediate family and extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, husbands, and boyfriends. The relational and intimate nature of these relationships appeared to be significantly influential and memorable to many of the participants.

Theme: Family of origin. This theme relates to the strong theme of family and the gendered expectations and norms many of the participants reported. Family of origin can be understood as those individuals who constitute an individual's first social group. This includes biological, foster, and extended families. From the responses it was clear that early and primary caregivers have a substantial influence in a child's life. Additionally, those messages are further enhanced by siblings and extended family members as reported by the participants. The family of origin was often the first place many of the participants reported they experienced gendered expectations.

Subtheme: Familial expectations. From the responses provided there was a clear and undeniable pattern of the role familial expectations played in the participants' experiences of internalized sexism. One participant reported:

> My father would never allow me to leave the house or play sports since it was not proper for girls to do so. My mother always ate last because my father had to eat first. Girls were not allowed to sleep over at friends' houses for fear of "rape" or sexual predators. And as mentioned before, I was always deemed bossy as early as 10 years old because I was outspoken.

This particular participant used the word "proper" in a way that communicated the correct way to behave. Labelling a 10-year-old girl as "bossy" is a tactic used to describe women in workspaces who are often assertive. The participant labelled behaviors such as "leaving the house" or "playing sports" as improper in her house. It appears clear that these rules and expectations were purely based on her gender.

However, not all participants reported stark and strict parents but still noted other experiences that were more insidious in their upbringing. For example, one participant reported:

> My nuclear family gave me a lot of freedom to choose my career path, make my own decisions in life and did not expect marriage until I was ready. However, there are always subtle forms of sexism like curfew, and what I wear and ideas around sex and gender-based roles.

This illustrates that sexism does not always look the same for each individual. Where they may be some freedoms allowed there may be other areas that are policed. Each family may have different expectations depending on their cultures and values but still apparent in a framework of patriarchal traditions and rules.

One participant reported her feelings toward sexism within her immediate family, stating "I am irate about it now. My mother is still not aware of some sexism and structural oppression." This is an example of women who have grown up and realized more problematic behaviors in their family and internal conflict as they attempt to address internalized sexist messages and come head to head with families of origin. Participants noted the familial conflict this can cause between loved ones.

Theme: Intergenerational sexism. Many participants reported sexist practices and expectations were multigenerational and not only from immediate family members. In fact, there appeared to be an intergenerational component to the sexism enacted. For example, one participant revealed:

It's something I was taught. My grandmother was a woman who took pride in her appearance. She was a schoolteacher for many years and a beautiful woman. She was always stylish and glamourous to me. Her hair was well maintained, she kept her weight to a size that she liked, she cared for her skin, nails, and appearance. I think I learned a lot from her. From an early age I gathered that people respond positively or negatively sometimes based on your appearance. . . . Within the family, being told I'm a girl, I need to act lady like and not play rough like the boys my age.

Deductions such as these were made at a young age and modelled from women in their respective familial environments. Another participant expressed:

My mother doesn't really have a good understanding about what sexism really is (I asked). My mom and her immediate family don't really understand sexism. My mom's family very much has the old ideals of men being the providers and the women tending to

the home/kids. It's evident in some of their lives, the comments they make, and their

beliefs.

Another participant reported, "In my family it is usually treated as a joke and laughed off." These

statements all provide insight into the participants' experiences from family members

(immediate and extended). It is important to note the influence of unexamined norms that are

passed down from generation to generation.

Subtheme: Traditional patriarchy. This subtheme relates to having extended family

members and from different generations hand down traditions, including sexist practices. One

participant disclosed, "Having my grandma tell me that women should wait to have sex until

marriage, or it will ruin the relationship and result in divorce - using my mom and her sister as

examples." Another discussed traditional patriarchal rules from a female family member:

> Growing up with a woman who was raised with traditional beliefs, I was not pushed or
>
> praised for things that would have benefited me in life. I was just taught to uphold what
>
> she was taught. It has effected [*sic*] how I see myself, what I thought I could accomplish
>
> in life, it has made me silent so many times in uncomfortable or abusive situations with
>
> men.

One participant revealed, "It has left me thinking I was not able to accomplish much in

my professional life, that I needed to settle and settle down." This is an example of internalized

sexism. Another participant expressed:

> I feel like I'm surrounded by it, every moment of the day. Statements like "you know
>
> how women are." Or being cat-called when I'm walking out and men getting angry when
>
> I tell them to stop. Being asked to smile and cursing at me when I don't. Not having an
>
> idea taken seriously but it being taken seriously when another male relative/friend says it.

Having my opinions dismissed or looking for confirmation from another male. Being

worried about my safety each and every time. Not being allowed to stay out late when I

was younger but my brothers not being questioned. Being asked to think about marriage

and my role as a woman to the family. Assuming that I have to do certain things around

the house or even now from other family members. Bills/checks being handed to my

partner/brother/father/male friend even though I said I was going to pay the bill. Being

told that "I'm way too independent for a woman." While I understand now that it is

internalized sexism, hearing women inhibiting other women (e.g., my grandmother used

to force me to get up and serve my brothers and male cousins breakfast because it was

"my duty" as a woman while I was expected to prepare my own food). Hearing an elderly

man telling my female cousins and I that a woman should never correct her husband in

front of people-but only in private. Not being looked at when someone speaks to other

males even though I am right there in the group. Assuming that I would like something

because I'm a woman.

These statements provided insightful and rich dialogues surrounding the internal

experiences of these women.

Theme: Relationship conflict. This theme was highlighted by a number of participants

who had experienced sexism in heterosexual relationships and the way in which sexism appeared

in their intimate relationships. Interactional sexism can be described as sexism in a one-on-one

interaction rather than by an institution. Examples of interactional sexism provided were sexism

within heterosexual intimate relationships (in some instances this included a boyfriend or a

husband figure), another participant provided an example with her sibling (brother). It can be

argued that the contrast in differential socialization created conflict for relationships later on

when the women who had not internalized sexism challenged gender norms they did not feel were aligned with their experience of themselves. One participant noted, "I also work with my boyfriend to get him to see how complicit he is in his own area of perpetuating sexism even when he is unaware." Another participant expressed:

> I have to coach my boyfriend constantly; one time I got him to listen to the phone conversations I have with men so he could see how it is that I struggle with sexism on the phone. He saw the difference. I also vent to him about the sexism I have dealt as a graduate student; he can sympathize. But he fails to see how his own manhood is threatened when my authority or knowledge is greater than his.

This statement revealed the participant as playing a role of educator while being oppressed as inferior in a romantic relationship. Both of these statements revealed the duality in playing the role of a partner while experiencing sexism on an intimate level. This can be described as intimate partner sexism. Participants demonstrated a sense of frustration toward partners who enacted these oppressive behaviors within the relationship. Another participant disclosed, "My husband is from Mississippi, and he has sexism ingrained in some ways. He is learning, but it's a constant challenge and feels lonely." This revealed there is a level of isolation and burden in playing the role of educator within a romantic relationship.

Category: Career and sexism. This category arose as all of the participants interviewed identified there were obvious and unfair ways in which sexism played a role in their jobs and careers that affected their quality of life and income. This category summarized the lived experiences of sexism at work throughout various jobs and for some participants the various stages of their careers. This category was broken down into themes and subthemes that covered a multitude of ways sexism influenced their lived experience with respect to jobs and careers.

Themes in this category included sexism at work, career expectations, and loss of income. These were further broken into subthemes of abuse of power and appearance and competence.

Theme: Sexism at work. This theme was included because of the emerging patterns among women who reported experiencing and noticing links among positions of power, power differentials, and abuse of power at work. Some of the responses included:

> The glass ceiling does exist. Some companies I've worked for have been better than others are recruiting women and promoting them to top positions and that be visible to others. But then there are the less progressive companies where you seldom see women at the top and there's an "old boys club" feel amongst the leadership.

This participant highlighted she had experienced both "types" of companies. Another participant described her experience of sexism at work as "feeling I am fighting for myself on a regular basis when in job situations." This response demonstrated an ongoing struggle for this individual; the participant can be described as someone who feels her experience at work is one of survival.

Subtheme: Abuse of power. This subtheme was noted from a pattern of responses from participants that included intimidation and harassment at work based on gender. For example, responses such as:

> When I was starting out my career 10 years ago, I remember a director came up to me during the Christmas party drunk and made a joke which I didn't get. He then called me a "stupid little girl." It made me think had I been a man or a woman in an equal position in the company as him, would he address them in the same manner?

This is an example of hostile sexism toward this participant by the director. Another example of hostile sexism included:

I've felt that male colleagues were trying to intimidate me by using loud and stern voice tone during discussion at work, or by coming physically close to me in my personal boundary space well making a request. I have also been asked by a boss when he first came on the job and I was already there, if he could give me a reference to work elsewhere. He provided me with no logical reason for this. After several negative experiences with him I gathered that he was threatened by my gender and my race. I have also been treated very poorly and ignored in meetings or while I tried to initiate leadership actions at my job, ignored and was poorly treated by male colleagues or a male boss.

Another participant provided a few examples of sexual harassment and hostile sexism at various places she was employed. These included:

Before I was married, I was once asked on a job interview if I would be looking for a husband at my place of work. I was also once asked by a customer at that job why I didn't wear nail polish because I was supposed to look sexy (it was a construction company). At my current place of work (university), my boss repeatedly comments on my appearance and weight and has implied that he thought I might be pregnant. He also once charged in my office and said he remembered talking with me about hemming my pants (we never talked about it) and seemed upset that I refused to hem his pants. He also openly talks about preferring men and once mocked a female provost for smiling during a speech. He also said that female college students who go to frat parties deserve to get raped. I reported this behavior to upper management and he and they have done nothing. HR once told me to look for another job.

These behaviors reveal the overt hostility, intimidation, and micro and macroaggressions these women have experienced. They demonstrate clear examples of the misogyny throughout a range of environments regardless of industry or level of job and education. It would appear the progression of these women's careers was highly dependent on male evaluation and not on ability. As a result, levels of competency were dictated by objectification and the appearance of the woman based on the male evaluator. Overall, the experiences described by the participants were of discomfort and distress. Many of these women were reminded they were thought of and treated as inferior by their male counterparts who openly discriminated against these women.

Theme: Career expectations. Many participants echoed similarities in their experiences of sexism in the workplace. Much of what they reported overlapped with systemic institutional sexism. Almost all of the interviewed individuals involved sentiments where they felt they had unequal and unfair expectations placed on them in comparison to their male colleagues. This was further broken down into a subtheme that described how they were held to a different standard based on their gender. Participants described these expectations to include career choices, roles, and limiting career goals; limitations on their abilities and skills; and linking appearance and competency together based on the male gaze.

Subtheme: Appearance and competence. This subtheme is linked to appearance, and specifically standards of beauty for women. Many participants noted their appearance determined others' perceptions of their level of skill, competence, and ability to work effectively. In many cases it determined and influenced whether they were thought of as unskilled and incapable. Responses included, "I feel like I am taken more seriously if I am appropriately groomed, neatly dressed. It is an important part of my professionalism." It could be argued that the subjective idea of professionalism is extended into appearance with women in a way that it is

not for men. The difference being women are objectified and sexualized even in a job where they may be fully qualified or even more qualified than a male counterpart. Another participant noted:

> I teach in front of people who rate me for my appearance—if I smile, if I look at them judgmentally, if I don't smile, I get graded/valued a certain way. So I have to put an effort into how I look.

This was not the only participant who noted she felt she had to smile in order to make others comfortable and to be evaluated in a favorable way. Appearance can extend to monitoring one's facial expressions in order to be aesthetically pleasing to others. Another participant noted she was "pigeon holed because of appearance." These are a few responses that revealed the important link between the workplace and gendered appearance, beyond appearing appropriately professional and presentable.

Theme: Loss of income. This was an important theme that arose among the responses provided during the interviews. The following statements are examples of how sexism was reflected in the women's incomes and they were adversely economically affected. One participant disclosed, "Not receiving certain promotions or acceptance to lead something because someone feels a man or a White Caucasian person should do it" and another reported she was "Not being taken seriously, being passed on an opportunity, being told women can't hold leadership positions because women are emotional. Being passed on for interviews a lot easier than some of my male colleagues." Another participant expressed:

> I am a woman in a "man's" industry. I am a woman who owns a large construction and preservation company. I work with some of the world's largest brokers and still that is the sentence that always is said. While my day to day work usually consists of paperwork and daily functions it always surprises the contractors when I am on a roof re-sheeting or

when I am conduction a large concrete pour. My work is no less than a man's and I take

pride in my craft. While building my company there was a point where I was scared to be

a woman owned company because of the response I might get in the industry (people not

wanting to hire a woman) I have lost many jobs to huge corporations solely based on a

woman can't do a man's job. Not based on my numbers or work. Solely based on my

gender. It took me three times as long to build the company I wanted and a hundred times

the hurdles because I am a woman.

And another participant revealed:

It has definitely led to me getting and not getting jobs. It also leads to me not being taken

as seriously in my work as I see people take my male boss. He gets credit for my work on

a regular basis.

These experiences exemplify the multitude of ways in which misogyny is insidious in systems

and institutions. Experiences of sexism provided were beyond interactional as they affected the

limitations placed on women's income. Economically disadvantaging this group by design is

another way of practicing overt hostility toward women and maintaining the idea they are

inferior. This is reflected in the larger society as women still do not have equal pay for equal

work as their male counterparts (Enns, 2004). Economic disadvantages such as these have been

shown by research to be classified as a stressor that has adverse mental health implications.

These examples clearly demonstrate the material outcome of sexist practices that were a part of

many of the participants' experiences.

Category: Intersectionality. Intersectionality can be better understood as the

interconnected dynamic of identifiers individuals possess. It is a theoretical framework used to

understand individuals in a comprehensive manner that takes into account the multiple ways in

which their identities can lead to multiple discriminations at the same time. This has real life political, social, economic, and mental health ramifications that can be experienced in many different ways, but this section contains a focus on the experience of discrimination. For women who belong to other marginalized groups who are also discriminated, the experience of oppression can be amplified.

    Theme: Intersectional experience of discrimination. A number of participants noticed their personal experiences regarding sexism were tied to various other parts of their identities. At times discrimination was noticed as a cumulative experience and often difficult to tease apart when the individual attempted to better understand the discrimination. For example, was I discriminated because of my gender, race, ability, SES, nationality, or ethnicity (which part of the participant's identity?). This was highlighted in the following responses:

> Potentially race. Maybe size but I don't have strong evidence for it. It's more of a hunch. I feel any time you belong to a category that may deviate from the norm i.e. being an immigrant or being overweight could make you a target for sexism. Whenever you're vulnerable, you can be a target.

From this response it can be garnered that the burden of disentangling the experience is left on the victim. This is yet another burden placed on the woman who is oppressed, as it reveals she is left to try to understand it so she can be less "vulnerable" and understand what part of her made her a "target."

    Subtheme: Sexism and racism. This subtheme was commonly reported among women who were non-White. One participant expressed, "I think in cases where I interacted with White males, it is paired with racism. In cases where I was harassed by Black males, it was gender based but not racism." Another disclosed:

I have always strived to maintain my dignity. At times I have confronted the behavior.

The last incident I had, I reported it to my Interim Dean, a female, regarding the behavior

of my present supervisor and Director. But it was not just sexism, it was also racism.

Subtheme: Sexism and culture. This subtheme highlights the importance of cross-cultural

sexism. One of the advantages to using a sample that was heterogenous was that this was clear.

Many participants noted sexism manifested in different beliefs, behaviors, and practices

depending on their respective culture. Sexism across cultures was described as both benevolent

and hostile. Participant responses included:

I definitely think it adds on to the sexism experienced. I think as a woman of color, there

is a different level of misogyny both associated to race and culture. I think there's a

heavier emphasis on women's role in certain cultures. I can't speak for everyone. But I

know in my own experience that that has been the case. I was also a lot taller and bigger

growing up-so I often hear statements about needing to lose weight or having trouble

finding a man who is taller than me. Therefore, my prospects would have sucked in terms

of matrimony.

This participant was aware that culture and race played a role in the types and levels of misogyny

experienced, but that regardless women from all groups experience misogyny. Another

participant expressed, "I have had White female friends who find the sexism in my culture

'horrifying' while being oblivious that sexism exists everywhere." This was a particularly

interesting statement that touched on racism within and among groups of women who all share

the experience of gender-based discrimination. A participant from a South Asian background

reported, "Indian cultural values in my opinion have been inherently sexist when comparing the

roles of women with the roles of men in our social context. Everything from entertainment to

careers has its roots in sexism." This showed the pervasive nature of sexism and misogyny across cultures, countries, religions, and race.

Subtheme: Size discrimination. This subtheme is an important extension of appearance, but given the frequency of it appearing in the responses it was crucial to mention. Size is often considered one way to measure attractiveness and value for women. One participant noted:

Size definitely played a role. I have always been overweight, even as a child. I recall the overweight boys of my class being told their [*sic*] "adorable" but when it came to me, I was told to be more active and to exercise. Since I was rarely allowed to play football with the boys my age, a compromise was swimming. Even though I enjoyed it, it still felt like I needed to do it to fit a standard of desirability or gender norms.

This participant recalled her experience of how others responded to her size in comparison to her male counterparts as a child. It is meaningful that she was told to exercise as a means to strive for the ideal size even as a child. This was a way in which the messages of sexism could be internalized as she mentioned she "compromised in order to fit a standard of desirability." This assisted in her conceptualization of herself as a child to an object of desire.

Subtheme: European standard of beauty and White supremacy. This subtheme arose frequently among participants who identified as women of color. The participants explored the European standards of beauty imposed on them through all forms of media (e.g., Internet, movies, magazines, music videos, etc.), family, and larger society. The responses also highlighted colorism within communities of color and internalized sexist and racist beliefs. Many responses were nuanced and contained similarities to other participant responses, for example:

I see NOW that both cultures have very different sexist practices embedded into them. Whereas Mexican culture has sexism embedded into a father figure, American culture

tends to use Black figures and White figures as pillars of their sexism. The White female

figure stands as the chaste women and then, White society demonizes the Black man or

the migrant man all to sustain the purity of White women. I see it all integrated as a

power dynamic for Whiteness and manhood to win.

Another participant described her experience and process with the following statement:

It has taken a lot of reflection to be happy with the way I look with and without makeup.

Growing up with darker complexion in a society obsessed with European standards of

beauty, I had to unlearn years of those toxic messages in order to fully accept and love

my skin, hair, size and other features to feel happy with my appearance.

Another woman disclosed her experience of colorism within her family as:

Well, in my family I am part of two siblings that are darker and my other two siblings

that are lighter. So, there was always a rivalry in my family based on those that were

"hueros" and those that were not. I think it was a way for my parents to tease us. I don't

think it internally affected me because I relied on my preference for books to affirm my

self-confidence, but it did affect my two brothers.

Yet another participant also mentioned her experience of colorism:

I feel like I get attention from some men on the streets or men saying things like "I'm

gonna let this one go because you're pretty." But I feel like these kinda statements

sometimes sting at the same time. I also want to acknowledge that I am a light-skin

woman of color. I have received different treatment/better treatment from male

relatives/friends/strangers compared to my darker skin sisters.

This statement highlighted how sexism for women of color cannot be separated from race. This

participant expressed and acknowledged "being privileged" as a woman of color among her own

group. These statements provided rich details and data of how standards of beauty and self-objectivation can be racialized for non-White women.

Category: Appearance and internalization. This category is a reflection of the responses participants revealed as a critical element in their process of internalizing sexism, appearance, and self-objectification. This is an early part of the female experience surrounding appearance. One participant declared, "Being told that I was pretty was the biggest compliment I could receive - and as a child was taught to smile and say thank you - even when the compliment made me uncomfortable." This reveals elements of obedience and objectification. Another participant disclosed, "Being told my whole adolescence and young adulthood to 'smile.'" This is a process that started early in their lifetimes for many of the women who participated. This expectation to smile regardless of their emotional state adds to young girls' understanding that they are mere objects that exist to be aesthetically pleasing for others (men). Much of the socialization of women, regardless of culture and country of origin, surrounds appearance and beauty, specifically making beauty synonymous with good and valuable. Hence, the participant who was told "being pretty is the biggest compliment you will ever get."

Theme: Appearance and objectification. This theme became apparent from the responses that highlighted the strong connection between appearance and objectification. As noted earlier, for girls and women the awareness of appearance can start at an early age. One respondent described an example in which she had an ambivalent attitude toward being sexually assaulted in public. This was an example of internalized sexism.

> I also remember being groped on the train. It was a packed carriage and a young man was
>
> sitting next to me. I felt him brush my breast underneath my bra wore but shrugged it off
>
> as the train being full. He then did it again and I got off because I didn't want to cause a

scene. In that moment I experienced first-hand the objectification of women by men. I also questioned why I didn't say anything, I didn't call him out. I think it's social conditioning. For a woman not to speak up. Not to cause a scene as a reserved Briton. And an acceptance that "that's the way some men are" and giving him a pass for that.

Another respondent expressed her internalization of sexism by stating:

In a way I always think sexism will always exist. That's not me saying we should tolerate it but my coping mechanism to accept that it has happened and move on from it. I've never let it affect how I proceed with life . . . at least not consciously anyway!

There was a sentiment of acceptance and coping that was part of the internalization process. Another participant described the experience of being objectified as, "I felt my mind was ignored because my body was noticed." Other participants described some of the benefits they felt of being a woman, including "I get doors opened for me, smiles" and "being feminine. Being a mother and caretaker," and "Getting to wear makeup and fake nails is normal and not frowned upon like it is if a male does it. Woman [*sic*] are beautiful." Though there may be truth in some of these statements, they also reveal the gendered ideas and roles that have been predetermined and some internalized sexist ideals. One participant revealed that her experience of being a woman was "being treated like meat. My appearance doesn't give anyone permission to touch. Sadly, most try and do." Nonconsensual touching was a theme among a number of the participants. Another participant noted size played a key role in how she was treated:

I have been heavy and "normal" weight, and my weight greatly impacts how people treat me. Also, even something small like flat ironing my hair makes people take me more seriously. People frequently comment on my appearance and clothing. If my outfit works or doesn't work, I know it by noon.

Another participant reported something similar: "My weight is a subject of my relatives' existence. I'm often told I need to lose weight, or no man would want me. Or I get teased a lot by others, especially men." Another participant stated, "I love some of my features but I am not happy with my weight. I wish I was thinner-while actively being aware of the media and what it tells women everyday about their body type." There was a clear link between appearance, standards of beauty, and size.

Theme: Conditions of worth. It was revealed from the responses that appearance can equal attention and this is a form of social currency that is often translated by many to success. The idea of appearance equating to value can be internalized as a condition of worth. This was highlighted in many responses from the participants. Statements to demonstrate this included participants reporting:

> Being sexually attractive to anyone gets you more. It's sad but true. When I was a young adult, I failed my drive test twice. The third time I wore a low-cut top and short skirt and flirted with my male instructor. I passed. Probably shouldn't have but did.
> It is for shallow assholes. So, looking well-kept and "pretty" gets more attention than looking "average." There was a pattern in which the message was the more "attractive" you are the more social currency you have and are treated as "superior."

This was further demonstrated by responses such as, "Have an industry dedicated to making me feel like I need to live up to some ideal and make money off the insecurity they planted - and the fact that women's products are almost always more expensive" and "I think that make-up makes you look like you put in effort. In comparison to other people who don't wear make-up, it makes you look freshened-up. Like you 'tried.'" Although some of these responses demonstrated an awareness around the role of the media, capitalism, and standards of beauty, many of the

responses reflected a rejection of this message but an internalized understanding of how the system worked.

Subtheme: Internalized sexism. Although the study was focused on internalized sexism, the responses provided an overwhelming pattern of sexist incidents that played an influential role in the process of internalization. One participant's response included, "It [sexism] always has been a problem and probably always will." This response highlighted a sense of defeat and acceptance of sexism that was internalized and was expressed by multiple participants in various ways. Another woman's response to a question asking about the positive aspects of being a woman was:

> Wow. This one took me a while to really think about. Not much. I can give life. While
>
> men cannot. I can fit in smaller places for the most part. I have a better selection of
>
> hygiene products and clothing.

This demonstrates the participant did not view being a woman as having any meaningful positive attributes. It could be argued she had internalized sexist experiences and the ideals, which made this a difficult for her to answer.

Category: Protective factors from internalized sexism. This category summarizes the responses participants expressed as ways they coped with the persistent and daily experience of sexism. They expressed the various methods they used to reject sexism. In this way, this theme encompasses the protective factors that assist in the resistance of internalizing sexism that arose from the interviews. There were themes that could be broken down from this category that fell under the broader understanding of protective factors from internalized sexism. These included participant responses that showed they felt supported, buffered, and guarded from the internalization process.

Theme: Resilience. This theme encompassed responses that were indicative of resilience. The responses highlighted the various coping skills and the ability to resist the impulse to internalize the sexist messages. Responses included a rejection of restrictive and limiting sexist ideals, behaviors, and beliefs. One example of this was the response from a participant who expressed:

> I think a woman can be defined in multiple ways, without assuming gender as a binary. To me, a heterosexual, able bodied female identifying Indian woman, being a woman is equivalent to a warrior, fighting against the patriarchy for equality, safety, peace of mind and basic rights to even be heard by the laws to ensure me and my sisters voices are heard. Being a woman to me is using my voice to empower my sisters. Being a woman is a gift and an opportunity to be the active ingredient that explodes patriarchal systems of oppression.

This participant highlighted a theme that arose from multiple respondents and contained many of the themes of resilience covered in other participant responses. She also understood and denied women outside of the gender binary and refused to ascribe her understanding to the limiting serotypes that are ever present.

Theme: Resistance. This theme reflected the variety of ways in which the participants revealed they resisted internalizing sexism. It was noticed from the responses that resistance could be either active or passive. Active resistance involved speaking out against sexism, engaging in counseling and education, and using support systems to process thoughts and feelings related to sexism. Passive resistance examples were more internal conversations that did not require any interactional exchanges but more reflective practices. Resistance was a key

theme that arose when the women were asked about how they coped with sexism. Some participants had similar approaches. These are expanded on in the subthemes that were extracted.

Subtheme: Speaking out. This subtheme highlights the number of women who actively engaged in resisting through speaking out. For example, one participant disclosed:

Then - I think I ignored it and stayed silent. I don't even think I knew that any of the things I was experiencing was sexism. So much of it was covert. I didn't grow up hearing about or learning this at home or in school. Now - Now I speak up if someone says something sexist to me. If I don't feel comfortable talking about it or I have to unpack and process it, I will talk to a friend or read about it. Education has also been a tool. I have educated myself about sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy.

This participant described the influential and empowering role reading and educating herself had on her development and experience. Another participant commented, "I speak up more now about it and educate my family members about it. Being older and more educated has worked in my favor to finally being heard." These responses highlight the importance of speaking up, support, and education as adaptive coping methods. The following respondent expressed the importance of taking action in the workplace but also mentioned the consequences:

I think for a lot of years it made me feel defeated. Now, I am perceived as hostile in my work environment because I call out every micro-aggression and macro-aggression. I tell them exactly how and what makes me uncomfortable and pursue every avenue of HR to get people fired.

Subtheme: Counseling. This subtheme summarizes a number of the participants who reported they used counseling as a method of coping with sexism. Many participants revealed part of protecting themselves from internalized sexism included having a support system in

which they could foster trust, validation, acceptance, and understanding. One participant explained, "As a child I was confused. I went to counseling a lot and spent many hours reading. Now I just stand tall and hold my ground." Another woman expressed:

> I speak to my therapist, other female/femme-identified individuals, my partner and other friends whom I trust. I do feel supported. I realize it took me some time to find a circle I trust to talk about these things because oftentimes, my stories would be quick to be dismissed by other males and also females.

Both of these reactions highlight the value of counseling and the space it can provide for women who need to have their experiences acknowledged in comparison to other spaces where their concerns and experiences can often be dismissed and gaslighting can occur by family and friends. One participant spoke to this clearly in her response: "I speak to like-minded peers (mostly women) and some male friends. I still do not feel supported by my family when discussing my experience with sexism in the family or in the society." The common thread of being dismissed and disregarded came up for many of the participants as a frequent response to speaking about sexism. This played a key role in the internalization process. Participant responses that highlighted this included:

> I have a few select people that I can talk to about this, really mainly one friend who understands the systems and deep-rooted messages Yes, in that relationship I feel heard and supported. It validates my feeling and experience, where others might excuse or dismiss them.

And, "I've probably told a handful of close friends who are female. They too have their own stories so they can relate. As such yes, I did feel supported." It would appear the key gain to sharing their experiences with other women, family, friends, and therapists was the experience of

validation and therefore support. This was critical in the process of resisting the internalization of sexism.

Subtheme: Positive attributions. This subtheme resulted from the responses that displayed positive attributions to being a woman. It should be noted many participants were able to provide responses that showed they held positive views of being women without engaging in benevolent sexism, which is also a form of internalized sexism. Some of these examples included participants who expressed some positive attributions of being a woman such as "warmth, strength, patience, wisdom, empathy, intelligence and passion to recognize and fight back systemic oppression" and "strong, resilient, kind, compassionate, passionate, smart, feminine and masculine, my connection to my own body and the amazing things it can do, my connection to other women for the same thing." Another woman expressed, "I feel more empowered now. I am a woman. I am a strong no nonsense plays with tools and wears makeup and a cocktail dress woman. It has made me tougher." One participant reflected and revealed the following:

> This question made me think. I feel like there are so many benefits and I am so privileged to be at this point in my life where I can experience that. We're courageous and resilient beings who have fought hard and just sustained through the toughest of times. We are intelligent, compassionate and have a sense of ambition despite every obstacle that has been placed in our way.

Other responses included "femininity, intelligence, wisdom, grace, class, intuition, feeling, nurturing, beauty, and spirit that we have and cultivate," "strong and multifaceted," and "being smart, loving, beautiful, and courageous. A woman is who [she] wants to be. A woman's purpose is as she creates and defines it." These responses illuminate the many ways in which women understand themselves in an unlimited, unrestricted, and positive manner. These are all helpful

factors in buffering misogynistic ideals and internalizing sexist beliefs into a woman's understanding of her own identity as inferior. Attributing positive aspects to one's identity is crucial in mental health and well-being. Other responses included:

> There is no one way to define a woman. Or being a woman. Strength. Women are mentally and physically stronger in my opinion. We can do anything a man can and then add raising 3 kids and cooking meals without losing our minds.

And, "Not emotional compassion-- that is a learned behavior . . . At this point, I don't know. It seems that everything is a learned behavior. So, I would say perhaps it is being a person." This response I thought was insightful and indicative of someone who rejected the gender binary without explicitly saying so in her response but also seeing the humanity in the person beyond gender ascription and all that can entail.

Category: Health impacts of sexism and internalized sexism. This category summarizes the way in which internalized sexism negatively affected participants' health. Themes among the responses included psychological, medical health, and physiological arousal. The category was separated into the theme of adverse health impacts that was further subdivided into subthemes of psychological health impact, physiological arousal health impact, and biological health impact. These were the subthemes that were revealed most commonly among the participant responses. Many participants noted a variety of ways in which they felt their health was influenced by the ongoing and chronic experiences of sexism across their life span.

Theme: Adverse health impacts. This theme arose from a large number of participants reporting the impact they believed to be directly linked to sexist experiences and encounters. They reported these experiences started in childhood and persisted throughout their lifetimes across environments (e.g., home, social, and work). It is meaningful that none of the impacts

reported (e.g., biological, medical, or psychological) were beneficial or positive to the participants. Across all interviews the participants were adamant that the effect of sexism was adverse and negative. One participant articulately framed her experience as:

Sexism, because it is tied to power, makes you feel powerless. Like walking down a dark street, you have to be aware of who is in the bushes, you have to be aware of who can rape you, of you can grab you, that is what dealing with sexism feels like. Being a woman means you have to always be aware of what is against you.

This is a powerful statement and themes within this statement were reiterated by other participants in a variety of ways. It highlights fear, hypervigilance, and powerlessness being elements integrated into understanding oneself as a woman.

Subtheme: Psychological health impact. There was an overwhelming response to this question in the interviews and overall many of the participants reported significant adverse mental health implications as a result of sexism and internalized sexism. Many of the women's experiences included elements of terror, intimidation, and a lack of safety. There were notable similarities regarding the types of distress experienced by the women. It is also meaningful that many psychological traits and disorders resulted from internalized sexism, including anxiety, depression, hypervigilance, PTSD, and self-esteem. Some responses to exemplify this include "growing up it has significantly impacted my self-worth, and thus my mental health," and "I do think I am more wary around men than they are around me. I do [feel] more vulnerable around men than women." Fear of boys and men from girls and women was a common thread among respondents. Examples of this include, "At times feeling intimidated or fearful of certain men. Not wanting to be alone with a man or men. Feeling wary of certain men," "I have received countless unwanted advances therefore I let myself go to stop the advances," and:

Every compliment I was uncomfortable with and had to say thank you, the

embarrassment would make me feel hot and flushed in my face. If I was walking alone

and felt unsafe, my heart would race. If I felt unseen or ignored my heart would beat

loudly and I would feel like my blood was boiling.

One respondent mentioned she was told by a classmate as a child he would rape her. She

disclosed:

I was terrified. I probably went home and told me mother. I made sure to avoid this boy

as much as I could. I prayed that he would forget what he said and find something to

distract him. He continued to harass me several more times. I'm sure that was the

beginning of some kind of PTSD as a female child, that I carried with me in later life.

Mental health outcomes reported included PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Some of the

responses that represented this idea were, "Maybe I developed anxiety later in life because of

early trauma from sexism. But I'm not exactly sure," "I am not sure. I am sure it has contributed

to my anxiety and depression at one point or another," and "It has impacted my self-esteem and

self-worth." Another participant stated the effects on her mental included feeling "angry, jealous,

sad, invisible, misunderstood. I remember thinking how unfair it was." Another mentioned, "I try

to speak up about it now and start conversational to raise awareness. In the past I definitely

internalized it, and it affected confidence and kept me from reaching my full potential." These

responses highlight the cost of sexism and internalized sexism on the psychological state and

well-being of individuals. Many of these psychological disorders and traits could be directly

linked back to the women's experiences of sexism.

Subtheme: Physiological arousal impact. This subtheme touched on the physiological

arousal of the nervous system. It emerged as a subtheme from many of the responses noting a

phenomenon of feeling unsafe, fear, hypervigilance, powerlessness, and a loss of control of one's

body. One participant disclosed:

> I remember having a panic attack when I first went back to campus after the semester was
>
> over and the professor who harassed me was publicly vindicated even though he was still
>
> being tried to be fired. It made me quite furious!

Another responded that she felt her "heart beating faster, chest pain, anger, fear." Both of these

responses highlight the anger and fear of encountering the situation and its experiential nature.

Ongoing raised heart rate and blood pressure can contribute to panic and anxiety, coupled with

feelings of hopeless, helplessness, and depression. Carr et al. (2014) stated that long-term

physiological arousal overstresses the nervous system and lowers immune functioning within the

individual. Many of the hyperarousal symptoms reported by the participants overlapped with

mental health disorders related to anxiety, panic, depression, and even PTSD.

    Subtheme: Biological arousal impact. Multiple participants expressed they felt their

medical health suffered as a result of sexism and internalization. Participants disclosed they felt

this was the result of the accumulation of sexist experiences across their lives and had manifested

in medical symptoms and illness. These included weight gain, lowered immunity as a result of

increased stress, exhaustion, and maladaptive behavioral coping skills such as increased eating,

smoking, and drinking. Examples of responses include, "I have gained weight because of the

stress. I have also gotten sick more frequently from it," "weight gain and illness," and "It has

definitely taken [a] toll." Some women both recognized it was wrong but had internalized it by

accepting it, as demonstrated in the following response: "I feel like it's almost part of my life.

It's hard to sit with especially since you have to experience it day in and day out." Another

woman addressed she had learned what worked for her when coping with internalized sexism: "It

took me a while to get there. Till today however, it is hard. I try to speak up whenever I can and when I am tired, I pick my battles. It can get tiring to engage." The burden and exhaustion of having to address sexism were relayed in a number of the responses from participants. One participant expressed, "I'm forced to be on birth control because it's 'the woman's job.'" Though this is not a medical illness, she did note it was medical. This statement revealed she believed she had the sole responsibility to prevent an unplanned pregnancy and a lack of control of her own body. The word forced highlighted that she did not feel she had a choice.

Category: Hostile sexism. Hostile sexism reflects overtly misogynistic beliefs and behaviors. It is rooted in the hatred of women and understanding that women are inferior to men (Becker, 2010). Almost all of the participants provided strong responses to questions that touched on hostile sexism. Themes within this category can be used to better understand the experiences of women who experience hostile sexism. Hostile sexism can manifest in a multitude of ways. These can include examples of verbal and physical examples that are merely an expression of an underlying belief system. The section also provides some insight into why women might internalize sexism. The category was broken down into themes that included rape culture, verbal abuse, and physical abuse.

Theme: Rape culture. Rape culture can be defined as societal beliefs and attitudes that normalize and minimize sexual abuse (Becker, 2010). It is often used to explain the lack of change or outrage at the disproportionate rates of gender violence toward women. This includes nonconsensual touching to domestic violence. Rape culture often protects the perpetrator and blames the victim. This is also known as "victim shaming" or "victim blaming." A clear example of this is the response from a participant who stated, "I've been told if I didn't wear tank tops I wouldn't have been raped." This could also explain why there is a collective cross-cultural

experience where women feel unsafe, "Not feeling like I am safe walking in a bad area alone, in the dark alone, or late at night alone." This was a common thread among the responses. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a phenomenon of fear of men by women because rape culture permits and encourages women to be blamed for their own oppression. In this way it is a major contributor to internalized sexism. Many of the women reported elements of being invalidated, dismissed, and even a victim of gaslighting when trying to express their experiences. One woman reported, "They deny it or resist any challenging conversations," this was in reference to her family. This was also an example of what is often described as societal gaslighting, in which the individual's experience of her reality is denied by society. This is a manipulative and abusive tactic used to silence victims and survivors.

Subtheme: Verbal abuse. This subtheme was critical to highlight that verbal abuse was a key part of the hostile sexism reported in the interviews. Participants reported many instances of verbal abuse. Reponses included cat-calling to one-on-one interactional verbal abuse. Examples included, "A boy in elementary school telling me he was going to rape me after school on the playground. I must have been 8 or 9 years old. It was terrifying." This participant revealed this incident continued to have mental health implications for her in the long term. The impact of hostile sexism and verbal abuse should not be underestimated or minimized. It should also be noted how young both the participant and the boy who said it were, as this happened on a playground at school. These experiences are difficult for grown women to process and are that much more intense for a child in her formative years. Another participant provided an example of her experience of cat-calling: "Being catcalled and whistled at, when I ignored them or talked back - getting called a bitch, ugly, or some other insult." Cat-calling was revealed as a frequent and common experience for many of the participants. This is a form of sexual harassment that

can be seen in public spaces. Currently, there are no laws that protect women from this type of

gender-based harassment. The participants reported similar patterns of behavior when they did

not respond to the cat-calls in the desirable manner (for the cat-caller) as they were then called

derogatory names or threatened (verbally and sometimes physically). These show the

consequences that have and can ensue as a result of not responding to the harassment in a way

that pleases and encourages the harasser. In many instances women are unsafe if they respond in

a way that shows they are disapproving of such harassment.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study involved an exploration of women's experiences of sexism and its internalization. The research highlighted ways in which internalized sexism can be measured. The link for research participants was posted for 2 weeks in January of 2018. The feedback was overwhelming. In total, 95 women participated; 43 completed the questionnaire and the remaining 52 failed to complete the survey in its entirety, skipping one or more question. From this sample of 43 women, 10 were chosen to further analyze their responses. These 10 participants were chosen based on the length and depth of their responses in order to get the richest data from the participants. It should be noted that the overwhelming response to the questionnaire came at a time where speaking up about gender-related disparities, relational and systemic power, and sexism has been amplified following the #MeToo movement. This makes it likely that the number of participants was affected by the current political and social climate.

However, this study was an exploratory study aimed at better understanding the lived experiences of women. The study involved an analysis of qualitative data in the form of understanding the essence of the narratives provided by participants by exploring how and what was experienced. This information was used to create the respective categories, themes, and subthemes from responses provided. Using the phenomenological approach to coding these interviews allowed for arguably more insightful data about women's experiences of internalized sexism, specifically providing details regarding the range and nuance of the experience of internalized sexism. The pervasive and ongoing nature of the experiences provided a level of insight and increased awareness surrounding sexist events, interactions, and messages. It also provided a level of insight into the insidious nature of sexism. Furthermore, it aided in explaining how the nature and experience of oppression can become internalized. The participants

responded to questions that pulled for responses that may or may not have related or demonstrated internalized sexism. Many participants described their experiences and cognitive processes to the questions.

The results of this study add to the greater body of knowledge on internalized sexism. Much of the data revealed the variety of ways in which sexism contributes to the process of internalized sexism. In order to further understand internalized sexism, additional questions should be added to target the phenomenon rather than the process by which it occurs. This may mean an increased number of questions that focus on the internalized experience of sexism. The results are from an exploratory study of 10 participants who provided narratives that reflected their intersectional experiences of sexism, highlighted the unique developmental challenges girls face, and reflected the adverse impact on mental health. The phenomenological approach revealed and provided rich data regarding the experiences of women. The 10 women interviewed in the study varied from one another in a variety of ways (e.g., country of origin, race, sexual orientation, age, level of education). Although results are not generalizable, they were also not homogenous.

Clinical Implications

There are many clinical implications for mental health professionals, including therapists and psychologists, when working with girls and women. These results should be used to better serve and implement treatment with girls and women in the clinical setting when relevant. Treatment considerations should include heightened attention to the societal context in which the individual exists. This is important when conceptualizing the girl or woman, as well as in diagnosis and treatment. It would be harmful to pathologize individuals without accounting for the context in which they exist, making it crucial to view their lived experiences through their

lens. Many of the experiences reported by the participants in this study started very early on in their lives. This is an area that could be explored to better understand how the individual operates relationally and interpersonally. It could provide helpful information regarding core beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Another clinical implication is increased insight and awareness regarding the unique developmental challenges girls and women face. This finding should encourage mental health professionals to incorporate this information into clinical work. These findings are not currently addressed or accounted for by the frequently used developmental models. Understanding how these experiences affect development are additive to therapeutic effectiveness and will most likely improve rapport.

Another notable clinical and therapeutic consideration when working with girls and women is the intersectional nature of identity. In some cases, individuals may not express other aspects of their identity as a salient part of their experience. However, some may express other areas of their identity they feel are critical to their experience (e.g., race, disability, sexual orientation, etc.). From the study it can be gleaned that women of color described experiences of internalization and discrimination as racialized. These experiences were difficult to tease apart unless it was made clear by the perpetrator, which was rarely the case. Therefore, clinical and therapeutic considerations could include assessing levels of distress experienced by the client. As a mental health practitioner, attempts should be made to understand the cumulative experience of oppression for the client.

Additionally, discussing and preparing the girl or woman for self-advocacy is a method that can be used to counteract the harmful impacts of sexism and internalized sexism. Using therapy as a place to develop self-advocacy skills and to build a sense of community can be a

powerful tool. Savage, Harley, and Nowak (2005) used such methods with LGTBQIA clients to increase a sense of empowerment and develop a positive identity.

Prior literature has shown one of the main ways of coping with oppression is to internalize the oppressive messages. It therefore is logical that this would be linked to mental health disorders including, but not limited to, anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Based on the knowledge provided by the study it could be helpful to explore, discuss, and process thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors connected to any mental health issues that may be in part related to internalized sexism. Furthermore, the study provided valuable information about protective factors that are adaptive and can help create a positive counter to the internalizing negative internalized messages. These are a few of the ways in which the study can be used to better serve the population of girls and women.

Overall, the study highlighted the role of counseling, support, and validation in improving the mental health of women who describe experiences of sexism or internalized sexism. Clinical implications therefore can mean finding safe spaces where the client is supported and validated. Psychoeducation regarding what is happening to clients can benefit them in a way that can theoretically decrease some symptoms. All of these suggestions provide alternatives and adaptive coping methods to internalization.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There were some limitations to the current exploratory study that have been considered. This study was an exploratory study with a small sample size. This means the results are not generalizable. That is not to say the study did not provide rich data that can be used to better understand the experiences of women. In fact, the sample was not a homogenous sample and

results reflect the voices and experiences of women from a range of different backgrounds. Future research could be improved by using a larger sample size.

The current study was conducted and analyzed by one researcher, the PI. This increased the likelihood of bias being present within the analyses of data. Future studies would benefit from having additional researchers involved to provide greater reliability during the coding process.

The current study did not have any transgender participants. The study also included women who had access to a computer and the Internet based on the nature of the study. Future studies should address this issue in order to provide a heterogenous sample where all women are included in the study if they so wish to participate.

The current study had a significant number of interviews that remained incomplete. These responses could not be used but did contain answers to questions that were rich with data. Future studies should address this issue by sending the interviewees a reminder to make sure all answers are complete before moving on. No skipping should be allowed.

Directions for future research could include questions focusing on the internal experience of sexism and internalized sexism. Many of the responses provided in this study related to sexist events and the link to internalized sexism. Future studies could also include an increased number of questions regarding the experiences (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) associated with internalized sexism. The current study included many questions about sexism, and therefore the responses were related to sexist events. Future studies could include more questions with a focus on capturing more of the experiential nature of internalized sexism. These questions could be based on the findings of the current study and used to expand specific categories, themes, and subthemes. One participant noted that in future studies she would like to be asked more about her

personal definition of sexism and systemic oppression. These types of questions could provide additional valuable data to the field and should be factored into future research.

Conclusion

The current phenomenological study expanded the understanding of women's experiences of internalized sexism. The study is additive to the body of research that exists and increases insight and awareness surrounding the many ways in which internalized sexism can occur. Furthermore, the study provided meaningful clinical implications for mental health professionals. The study revealed purposeful and relevant information when working with girls and women through the data they provided about their lived experiences.

The main categories that emerged from the responses provided by the participants included sexism across the life span, gendered norms, family and sexism, career and sexism, intersectionality, appearance and internalization, protective factors from internalized sexism, health impacts of sexism and internalized sexism, and hostile sexism. Although the participants were a heterogenous sample, their collective experiences reflective the above-mentioned areas as common areas that were affected by internalized sexism and sexism. The phenomenon became obvious and apparent once the data were collected and coded. The data provided transparency and clarity surrounding the insidious nature of sexism and the ways in which it can often become internalized. Many women expressed it was a daily, chronic, and persistent occurrence across a variety of environments throughout their life span. It is therefore not surprising that many girls and women internalize sexism as a method to manage ongoing oppression from a young age. Having a better understanding of these experiences can assist in increasing treatment efficacy when working with populations that are vulnerable to experiencing or internalizing sexism.

      Overall, the PI was able to capture the essence of the lived experiences of these women with regard to sexism. Despite much progress being made for women, it seems the oppression of women is very much still alive. The responses provided by these women were heartfelt, sincere, and authentic. The themes they shared were not uncommon and can be seen within the news, media, and legislation. Therefore, it is of absolute importance to address sexism within the clinical setting, as those in the field of psychology have yet to make the necessary strides to better serve women. in dealing with the effects of internalized sexism.

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Appendix A: Message for Participation in Qualitative Study

Dear Participant,

Thank you for expressing your interest in participating in an interview for the study titled Women's Experiences of Sexism and Internalized Sexism. The next step for participation is to enter your demographic details on the Survey Monkey and sign the Informed Consent. Please keep a copy for your own records. You will also be provided a resources list if you feel emotionally evoked and need support following the interview. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. Please note that friends, colleagues, acquaintances of the PI and/or students of National Louis University are asked not to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Syeda Rahmani

Clinical Psychology Doctoral Student (4th Year)

Illinois School of Professional Psychology – National Louis University

Appendix B: Informed Consent

This study is being done by Syeda Rahmani who is a student in the Clinical Psychology department at National Louis University, Chicago working on a CRP. This study is a requirement to fulfill the researcher's degree and will not be used for decision-making by any organization.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in the research study, Women's Experiences of Internalized Sexism. I was selected as a possible participant because I am female, over 18 years old, and have experienced sexism. I understand it is anticipated that approximately 10 people will participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of sexism, in particular internalized sexism in women. I understand friends, colleagues, acquaintances of the PI and/or students of National Louis are asked not to participate in this study.

I understand that if I participate, I will be asked to answer interview questions via an online questionnaire. This will take approximately forty five to sixty minutes to complete. I understand this interview is confidential and that no uniquely identifying information is being collected. The interview consists of questions that will ask about my experiences of sexism and internalized sexism. The data from this study will be anonymous and it will be secured in a password-protected computer file.

I understand that I have a right to choose not to participate at any point in the survey, and I can close the browser at any time without submitting the interview. I understand that my data may not be used if my survey is incomplete. I understand data will be kept in a secured file and destroyed after three years following the completion of the study. Should the PI become unable to continue the study the Chairperson, Dr. Torrey Wilson will destroy the data.

I understand there are minimal risks associated with participating in this survey. I understand that reflecting on sexist experiences and my internal experiences surrounding sexism may elicit feelings of distress. If I do experience any psychological distress as a result of participation in this study or research I have been provided with a resources list prior to the interview. In addition I can contact the Principal Investigator with related concerns/questions. I understand the PI is a mandatory reporter and must do so if I intend to harm myself, another, or report child or elderly abuse. Syeda Rahmani at National Louis ; 122 S Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60603 ; Phone: (808) 333 9723; Email: syerahmani@gmail.com I may also contact the faculty Chairperson of this study, Torrey Wilson, Ph.D., by phone at (312) 777-7616.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board, National Louis University-Chicago. For research-related problems or questions regarding participants' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board at National Louis University.

I have read and understand the above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By continuing this survey, I consent to participate in the study. I understand that I am entitled to a copy of this consent form, and I should print out a copy of this page for my records.

Appendix C: Qualitative Interview Protocol

***Friends, colleagues, acquaintances of the PI and/or students of National Louis University are asked not to participate in this study.

Demographics

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Sexual Orientation

Level of Education

Socio Economic Status (SES)

Ability

Semi-structured interview questions (open ended questions)

Experience(s) of Sexism

Tell me about your experience with sexism?

What is your earliest memory of sexism?

How did you feel about it at the time?

How does how you feel about it now differ from then? (if at all)

How, if at all, do you think other aspects of your identity (race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, ability status, religion, size) were also part of the sexism you have experienced?

How did you handle/manage/cope with sexism?

Who, if anyone, do you speak to about it? Do you feel supported?

What is your familial attitude toward sexism?

How do your peers and/or friends respond to sexist behavior?

What are the benefits of being a woman?

How do you define being a woman?

Appearance

How important is your appearance?

Why?

When is the first time you became aware of your appearance?

Are you happy with the way you appear?

What are the benefits? What are the disadvantages?

Personal, Career & Relationships

How do you feel sexism (if at all) impacted your personal life?

How do you feel (if at all) sexism has impacted your career/professional life?

Thinking back, were there any physiological responses to sexism that you recall? How (if at all) has sexism affected your health?

Are there any other things you wish to share about the experience of sexism that I may not have asked?

Appendix D: Thank You for Your Participation

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation. It is most appreciated and valuable in furthering the research in the field. I hope the following resources are of help to you should you need them.

CARES line (Talk with a mental health professional)

1-800-345-9049

National Institute of Mental Health

1-866-615-6464

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml

Psychology Today.

psychologytoday.com

Best Regards,

Syeda Rahmani

Clinical Psychology, Doctoral Student

Illinois School of Professional Psychology at National Louis University-Chicago

syerahmani@gmail.com