



Discursive Constructions of Race and Gender in Racial Hate Crime Targeting Women in Sweden

Mika Hagerlid

To cite this article: Mika Hagerlid (2022): Discursive Constructions of Race and Gender in Racial Hate Crime Targeting Women in Sweden, NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, DOI: [10.1080/08038740.2022.2076738](https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2022.2076738)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2022.2076738>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 16 May 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Discursive Constructions of Race and Gender in Racial Hate Crime Targeting Women in Sweden

Mika Hagerlid 

Department of Criminology, Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Research and official statistics alike identify women from racial minorities as a high-risk group for racial hate crime. Still, the construction of women in racial hate crime remains largely unstudied and the current knowledge on racial hate crime against women can at best be described as fragmentary. Therefore, aim of the present study is to explore the constructions of race and gender from the perspective of female victims of racial hate crime. The study draws on intersectional theory and consists of a discourse analysis based on nine interviews with women who have been targets of racial hate crime. The results show that the construction of race in hate crimes targeting women differs distinctively from the construction of race in hate crimes targeting men. The female victims of racial hate crime often find themselves entangled in racial power struggles between men: a power struggle in which men may show their status vis-à-vis out-group men by sexually controlling or abusing women. Thereby, women's bodies are used as a tool in racial status conflicts between groups of men, as identities, scripts, and stereotypes found primarily within conservatism and right-wing ideology are enacted on the bodies of the victims.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 January 2022
Accepted 7 May 2022

KEYWORDS

hate crime; gendered racism;
racial hate crime;
victimization; intersectional
theory

Introduction

Research and official statistics alike identify women from racial minorities as a high-risk group for racial hate crime (BRÅ, 2018, 2019; Hopkins, 2016; Perry, 2014; Zempi, 2020). Still, the racial construction of women targeted by racial hate crime remains largely unstudied and the current knowledge on racial hate crime against women can at best be described as fragmentary. Instead, men's experiences are located in the foreground of the academic scholarship on hate crime (Duggan & Mason-Bish, 2021). Insofar women's perspectives are included, they tend to focus on the psychological and emotional impact of hate crime victimization (Iganski & Spiridoula, 2014; Powers & Socia, 2019), not on how victims perceive and create meaning from their experiences. Therefore, the aim of this study is to use an intersectional perspective to explore constructions of race and gender in the racial hate crime that targets women (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). The study consists of a discourse analysis based on nine interviews with women who have been targets of racial hate crime. Central questions are: 1) Which are the racial discourses that women describe encountering when subjected to racial hate crime? and 2) Which are the discursive stereotypes that the women encounter in racial hate crime? The study contributes with an account of how racial hate crime is interpreted and understood by female victims from diverse national, ethnic and racial backgrounds—a perspective that is currently under-researched and overlooked.

CONTACT Mika Hagerlid  mika.hagerlid@mau.se  Department of Criminology, Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

A stereotypical hate crime, based on men's experiences of victimization, is usually described as a violent crime with an evident racial motive, preferably committed by members of an organized hate group, and involving white offenders and black victims (Lantz, Gladfelder, & Ruback, 2019; Lyons & Roberts, 2014; Mason, 2007). Further, the incident should have a single clear motive, rather than being motivated by a mix of prejudices against different aspects of the victim's perceived identity (Atak, 2020; Mason, 2007). At the same time, research and theory on gendered racism show that this stereotype rarely applies to the ways in which women interpret and describe their experiences of everyday racialization (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Crenshaw, 1991; Eduards, 2007; Lundström, 2008, 2010; Mulinari & Neergard, 2010; Sawyres, 2008; Zempi, 2020). Corresponding research and knowledge within the field of hate crime studies is lacking, thus, the present study makes an important contribution. The study views race and gender from an intersectional perspective, that is, as factors that produce independent forms of gendered racialization (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991).

In the Swedish context, hate crime is a non-legal umbrella term that encompasses the legal provisions on unlawful discrimination and agitation against a population group. Agitation against a population group is defined as incidents where the offender threatens or expresses contempt for a population group, such as a racial minority. Unlawful discrimination refers to situations where the victims are denied access or use of services provided by private or public actors. Sweden's hate crime umbrella also includes a sentence enhancement for any offence in the criminal code in so far "a motive for the offence was to insult a person or a population group on grounds of race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, sexual orientation or transgender identity or expression, or another similar circumstance" (Swedish Crime Code, Chapter 29, Section 2.7). The Swedish criminal code includes a broad range of acts that might not be considered criminal in other countries, such as hate speech, verbal harassment and threats under the legal categories of molestation, defamation, libel and slander. For example, both district courts and the court of appeal have sentenced offenders for defamation because they have called the victim "nigger whore" or "nigger cunt" (Åklagarmyndigheten, 2016).

According to previous research and theory (Schweppe & Perry, 2021; Wigerfelt, Wigerfelt, & Kiiskinen, 2014), so-called minor incidents like these are linked to more severe forms of biased violence, such as assault, by normalizing and providing justifications. Viewed from this perspective, there is an escalation process where the threshold for acceptable behaviour is gradually raised (ibid). Therefore, all acts the interview participants describe that fall under the Swedish hate crime umbrella have been included in the present study, regardless of their severity.

The concept of racial hate crime usually designates hate crimes that target the victim's race, nationality, or ethnic origin. The Swedish legislation does not distinguish between minority and majority populations, though statistics show that racial minorities are targeted more frequently than the white majority (BRÅ, 2018, 2019). While majority-on-minority hate crime has been the primary focus in much hate crime research and theory, scholars have continuously acknowledged the presence of self-reported experiences of minority-on-minority hate crime and minority-on-majority hate crime (Drakulich, Fay-Ramirez, & Benier, 2022; Perry, 2002). Consequently, all these forms of racial hate crime will be included in the present study. However, there are important theoretical differences between these different kinds of hate crime which need to be considered (ibid.). These are further described throughout the present study.

Gendered racism in the Swedish context

Intersectional theory and research show that the female body is an important symbol in the construction of nationality and race (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Eduards, 2007; Lundström, 2008). In their intersectional assessment of race and gender, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1996) notes that "The boundary of the ethnic is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specific ethnic identity: much of ethnic culture is organized around rules relating to

sexuality, marriage and the family, and a true member will perform these roles properly.” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996, p. 113). The Swedish context is no exception (Eduards, 2007; Lundström, 2008). Several studies on gendered racism in the Swedish context have shown that women are often constructed as bearing the responsibility for maintaining national boundaries by physically giving birth to, and fostering, members of the nation (Eduards, 2007; Lundström, 2008; Mulinari & Neergard, 2010). One example of such racialized sexualization is presented by Sawyes (2008) in a study on the racial construction of African-Swedish women. Sawyes (2008) found that the women were confronted with norms regarding sexual loyalty towards their racial in-group: they described being expected to consciously choose an African-Swedish male partner in order to ensure that they would “give your roots to the next generation” (Sawyes, 2008, p. 101).

Interview studies with individuals who have experiences of being racialized have been used to examine constructions of race, racial relationships and racial stereotypes. In these, women across nationalities and ethnicities describe that they can become drawn into racial tensions, conflicts and identity projects, as hierarchical boundaries unfold in their everyday lives (Bäckman, 2009; Lundström, 2008; 2010; Sawyes, 2008). One common thread in these studies is the everyday sexualization of women carried out by outgroups. African Swedish women and Latina women alike describe how they are perceived as hypersexual by Swedish men (Lundström, 2008; 2010; Sawyes, 2008), and Muslim women describe being constructed as submissive and loyal housewives with no interests of their own apart from pleasing their husbands and caring for their children (Lundström, 2008). Further, Bäckman’s (2009) interview study with Swedish girls in a suburb in which Swedes constitute a local minority also informs us about how racial hierarchies can be spatially situated. The girls, who all attended upper-secondary school, described how the Swedish norm of having sex before marriage led the local Muslim immigrant boys and girls to attach a whore-label to Swedish girls (*ibid.*). Such spatial variations in racial hierarchies can be understood through the concept of racial contestation, by which groups engage in struggles over racial positions (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). These studies mirror the notion of women as a central symbol in constructions of nationality and race (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991).

Race and gender in hate crime victimization

Most of the police-reported and self-reported incidents of racial hate crime in Sweden consist of threats and molestation (58% and 79% respectively), with women being overrepresented among the victims (BRÅ, 2018, 2019). Men on the other hand are more likely to be targets of violent crime. The offender is often unknown to the victim, or is an acquaintance rather than family or friends (*ibid.*). Incidents most commonly occur in public spaces, followed by the home and on the internet (BRÅ, 2019). There is an overlap between anti-religious and racial motives in 16% of the self-reported incidents (BRÅ, 2018), however, the overlap between race and gender remains unknown since the Swedish hate-crime legislation does not encompass gender, and official surveys do not include gender as a possible motive in their questionnaires.

Given that women are a risk group for racial hate crime, the lack of research into women’s experiences of racial hate crime is disheartening. In the few empirical studies that contain data on racial hate crime in Sweden, women’s gendered experiences are often mentioned in passing in relation to an increased risk of racialized sexual assault (Kalonaityte, Kawesa, & Tedros, 2007, 2008; Wigerfelt et al., 2014). Similarly, international studies have presented gender differences in the negative outcomes of racial hate crime (see for example Iganski & Spiridoula, 2014; Powers & Socia, 2019). However, none of these studies made women’s experiences their primary focus, and while several of the authors have pointed to the need for studies dedicated to the overlap between race and gender in racial hate crime targeting women in the Swedish context, this knowledge gap remains. Thus, this study provides richer and more nuanced perspectives on how female victims of racial hate crime interpret the racial dynamics of these “non-stereotypical” and often sexualized incidents.

Perry (2014) and Zempi (2020) argue that the lack of research into the gendered dynamics of racial hate crime is due to how gender-based violence is often framed as a private matter, and as being distinctively different from hate crime. Gendered racism in hate crime targeting women remain unstudied apart from a limited number of studies on the gendered and racial dynamics of Islamophobic hate crime (Hopkins, 2016; Perry, 2014; Zempi, 2020) and homophobic hate crime (Meyer, 2012).

Two of the publications are review articles in which the authors piece together the fragmented knowledge on how the intersection of gender, race and religion produces a specific form of vulnerability among Muslim women (Hopkins, 2016; Perry, 2014), while two are based on interviews with victims (Meyer, 2012; Zempi, 2020). The results show that Muslim women are over-represented among victims of Islamophobic incidents in both self-report and police-report data (Hopkins, 2016; Perry, 2014). The negative stereotypes that Muslim women describe being confronted by in hate crime incidents are directly associated with their gender. These stereotypes centres around being submissive in romantic and sexual relationships, or as being a militant threat (Perry, 2014; Zempi, 2020). Meyer (2012) also found that black women with a butch gender expression in lesbian relationships often described being accused of having made their partner homosexual while harassed, threatened or subjected to violence by homophobic offenders. Queer women of colour were also accused of being bad representatives for their racial group, something that the white participants did not experience (Meyer, 2012).

Materials and methods

Data selection and material

The present study is based on interviews from a larger mixed method research project on hate crime victimization among students at a Swedish university. The study included hate crimes that targeted the perceived race, cultural background, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and/or disability of the victim.

As presented in the research background, interview studies with individuals who have experiences of being racialized is an established method for examining constructions of race, racial relationships, and racial stereotypes (Bäckman, 2009; Lundström, 2008, 2010; Sawyes, 2008). It should be clarified that the study does not aim to examine the intentions of offenders, but to explore how victims describe and interpret their lived experiences.

The interview study took place during the spring of 2014, and participants were recruited via a previous survey study in which questionnaires were distributed in-class to students at the university. Survey participants with experiences of hate crime were encouraged to leave contact information on the final page of the questionnaire if they wanted to participate in the forthcoming interview study. Approximately 50 hate crime victims showed interest in the interview study, all of whom were contacted in the spring of 2014. Slightly more than half of these participated in an interview and the most common reasons spontaneously given for not participating was having moved to another city or country, or lack of time. It should be noted that no one was required or expected to provide a reason for being unable or unwilling to participate, but many chose to provide an explanation when asked if they were still interested in participating in an interview.

A total of 28 interviews were conducted with students who had experiences of hate crime victimization based on various motives. The interviews focused on hate crime victimization throughout the participants' life. The interview began with questions on how the participant defined the hate crime context, and then focused primarily on their own lived experiences of hate crime.

The project was tried and approved by the regional ethical board as it contains sensitive information with regard to health, race, sexuality, religion, and victimization (DNR 2013/221). Aside from examples that are needed to illustrate the results of the study, the participants will be

described at group level in order to protect their anonymity. In some examples, minor details that might reveal the identity of the participant is altered. All participants have consented to the usage of quotes from their interviews in research publications.

For the purpose of the present study, interviews were selected based on three criteria. Firstly, the interview participants needed to have described experiences of racial hate crime during the interview. This criterion includes incidents in which no direct reference was made to the victim's gender. Including these incidents enables a comparison between "gender neutral" racism that targets women, and the conventional "gender neutral" image of racial hate crime that has been shaped by male experiences. Secondly, the hate crime incident/s described by the participants had to have occurred in Sweden. Finally, the incident/s described by the interview participants had to have been directed at an individual woman or group of women, rather than at a mixed group of both men and women. The inclusion criteria were specified in order to capture the aspects of racism that are specific to acts directed against women in the Swedish context, and they resulted in a sample of 9 interviews.

The ages of the participants ranged from the early 20s to the early 30s. Three of the participants had an African background, two had a Middle Eastern background, two had a Swedish background and one had a South American background. Three of the women were Muslim. The victimization experiences of the women are presented in the results section.

Analysis

The study has employed critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework. It draws on Fairclough's (2013) theoretical and methodological framework on discourses, which proposes three discursive levels: *text*, *discursive practice*, and *social practice*. *Text* refers to speech, written text, pictures, or combinations of these. In this part of the analysis, the focus is directed at the level of words and more specifically at how words are intentionally chosen and used to establish relationships (Fairclough, 2013). In the present study, this refers to the labels used by the offenders to define the victims, and the labels used to define the relationships between the offender, society, and the victim. It also includes items or symbols carried by the offender that convey textual meaning. *Discursive practice* refers to the context and production of text (ibid.). In the present study, this includes the situational aspects of the hate crime incidents described by the participants in terms of temporal and spatial factors, as well as the acts themselves. *Social practice* refers to norms, conventions, and communication as social actions (ibid.). In this study this consists of the broader social context in which the hate crime incidents are embedded, and also involves identifying the environments in which the norms and conventions expressed by the offenders constitute the dominant interpretational framework.

The analysis was conducted iteratively and included the following steps: 1) sorting out those parts of the interview material that contained the victims' descriptions of their lived experiences of hate crime, including the interactions with the offender before, during, and after the incident, 2) analysing the selected parts of the interviews individually on a case-by-case basis, focusing on the textual level, 3) analysing the selected parts in relation to the rest of the interviews on a case-by-case basis with a focus on the broader context of the exercise of power expressed, especially in the form of the meaning contexts invoked and employed by the offenders to assert situational dominance, thus focusing on discursive practice, and 4) analysing the cases cross-sectionally with a focus on similarities and differences between the different cases, thus focusing on social practice.

Since previous research about women's experiences of racism points to large gender differences, it is likely that the women's descriptions of how racism coincide with victimization also differ from conventional ideas about what a racial hate crime looks like. Moreover, since the present study uses the Swedish legal umbrella term for hate crime, it includes a large variety of offences, from defamation and molestation to violent crime and rape. The focus is on how the interview participants interpret and understand incidents they've experienced, something that offers limited

Table 1. Discourses, roles, action spaces and participants within each category.

<i>Discourse</i>	Cultural supremacy		Threat from within		Exploitable asset	
<i>Stereotype</i>	Object for acting out ideological fantasies on		Endogamy and intellectual subordination		Sexual and behavioural subordination	
<i>Participants</i>	Amal	Petra	Alyssa	Katrin	Alyssa	Olivia
	Aya	Sara	Ebba		Leorah	Katrin
	Olivia					

insight into the complex and multifaceted factors leading up the incident. Further, the identified discourses in this study do not appear to be linked to particular offences. Rather, they are more connected to the relationships between the victim and the offender and group dynamics. Consequently, these will be clearly described in the results for the sake of transparency.

Some incidents appear primarily racial and some more gendered, showing that gendered racism exists on a scale rather than as a static phenomenon. Similarly, an incident can start out as primarily racial but then develop into being primarily misogynistic, and vice versa. Many of the participants themselves explicitly said that they did not know how to draw boundaries between race and gender, as these group categories bleed together in social interactions. Despite the many nuances in play, I have conceptualized these experiences as gendered racism throughout the analysis.

Three discourses were identified in the analytical process, which I have chosen to label *cultural supremacy*, *the threat from within*, and *exploitable assets*. The stereotypes associated with each discourse are summarized in Table 1 along with the pseudonyms for the participants with experiences of each discourse.

Although there are similarities in the racial discourses described by women of different backgrounds, there are also significant differences in the broader context experienced by the women. The white participants described that they were aware that the racial construction that the offender attached to them was represented either by a small group in society, was spatially bounded, and/or represented an expression of uncommon opinions and norms. In contrast, the brown and black participants described that the discourses that form their victimization constitute an integral part of Swedish society rather than being contextual outliers. These different positions and ways of existing in society embody the very core of the difference between racism and racial constructs (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Drakulich et al., 2022; Perry, 2002). Consequently, the construction of race and gender expresses itself in a similar manner between women of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, although the context, frequency and impacts of the same experiences vary greatly. While most of the racial incidents described by the participants had gendered aspects, it should be noted that some did not. However, the absence of a gendered dynamic was limited to a few cases that were located within the discourse on cultural supremacy.

Results

The identified discourses are presented one by one and then discussed throughout the results section. Each presentation begins with a description at the *level of text* which includes the labels used by the offenders to racialize the victim, and the labels used to define the relationships between the offender, society, and the victim. At the *level of discursive practice*, a more detailed example is given to illustrate situational aspects described by the participants. The examples have been chosen to illustrate the internal variations and width of crime types represented in the interview material. The more extensive examples are followed by a briefer presentation of the remaining examples given by the interview participants. At the *level of social practice*, the ideological environments in which the sentiments that the offenders perpetuate are presented. Similarities and discrepancies between the results, previous research and theory are presented throughout the following sections. However, these connections have been kept short to be developed more in the final discussion.

Cultural supremacy

Five of the interview participants describe that they were labelled as “unwelcome others” by the offenders. These participants describe how the offenders labelled them as incompatible with, and as a direct threat to, Swedish culture, echoing the discursive scripts of exclusionary racism found in the political debate in Sweden (Bredström, 2003).

Sara, an interview participant of mixed background, described an incident of unlawful discrimination in which a bus driver had refused her access to a bus with reference to her skin colour. She described the incident in the following way: “I was a bit darker at the time, because I was tanned; I guess I looked more foreign. [...] He (the bus driver) just said, ‘I won’t drive’ and, ‘I don’t want people like you on my bus.’” At the time, Sara was in her mid-teens and this had been the last bus she could catch to get home that day. She eventually broke down in tears and the bus driver yielded.

By denying Sara access to public transport, the bus driver expressed that she was to be excluded from the basic service functions of Swedish society. Her skin colour was transformed into a problem, not only for herself but for the rest of the passengers, as he stated that he would not drive if she got on. By means of these acts, the driver established a reversed power relationship, in which he was no longer a service worker, but the dominant party in a relationship, with the power to dictate his own terms, in this case terms that are not supported by society at large.

Aside from Sara, Aya, Olivia, Petra and Amal also described incidents characterized by this discourse. Aya, an Africa-Swedish participant was pushed to the ground and kicked on by a neighbour and said that he told her, amongst other racial slurs that “This is my home country, and you are here as a stranger”. Olivia, who is of South American origin, was repeatedly subjected to physical abuse during high school by peers active in the white power movement. She said that “I was subjected to a lot of physical violence there (at school) and had to go to, er, the hospital, I mean, the emergency ward, a few times due to facial injuries, and like, due to (injuries to her) thorax, ribs, and those things”. During the interview, Olivia said “The reason that it was okay to beat me was that I was brown. There is no doubt about it, and all the things that they called me, they called me a nigger whore, and nigger monkey, and it (voice breaks up)”. Petra and Amal are both African-Swedes with experiences of molestation. For example, Amal describes being shouted and spat at by a stranger.

As unwelcome others, the interview participants describe that they are being assigned to a very narrow action space by their offenders. Preferably, they would move away from Sweden to their perceived region of origin, regardless of their own attachments to that region. The participants describe a discourse where their bodies are suitable targets for the enactment of ideological fantasies. The offenders are presented as vigilant guardians of a conservative, traditionalist, and homogenic Swedish culture. The latter is in line with right-wing populist presentations of men as defenders of Swedish culture (Norocel, 2013). Previous research on exclusionary racism in Sweden has tended to focus on the way in which this discourse targets men who are racialized as Others (Bredström, 2003; Eduards, 2007). However, the results of the present study show that this discourse is also directed against women as racialized Others.

Threat from within

Three of the participating women describe how they’ve been labelled as traitors to their race by their offender. These labels were used in situations when the participants denied the offender sexual access to their bodies, when they had sexual relationships with out-group men, or finally, when politically supporting anti-racist politics. In contrast with the previous discourse, which was centred around the Other, this discourse turns the focus inwards with the aim of controlling women from the in-group. In essence, it presupposes an ongoing racial conflict that requires honourable in-group members to commit to acts of loyalty in order to strengthen the in-group. For in-group

women, loyalty is heavily centred around maintaining sexual boundaries and the practice of endogamy, and it is ideologically mirrored in populism (Norocel, 2010) and right-wing extremism (CATS, 2020).

Ebba is a white woman who was subjected to unlawful threats and defamation online following her involvement as an organizer of an anti-racist event. Pictures and personal information, such as home addresses, relating to the organizers were posted along with the encouragement, or threats, of violent attacks were posted on nationalist forums. Ebba describes how the offenders presented both herself and women in general as a national problem for Sweden, either because they are easily manipulated or because they are part of a larger political movement that is destructive of Swedish society. Ebba said, “I still felt like we were targeted partly because of our skin color, that we were white women, and also because we were women, that a lot of the focus was about those two things.” illustrating how race and gender blend together in these incidents.

Alyssa and Katrin also described incidents and experiences that fall inside the scope of this discourse. Alyssa, an African-Swedish woman, describes being repeatedly sexually harassed saying that “The kind of crime I’ve experienced is mostly when I go out, like um, partying or out at clubs, and you always have somebody either harassing you sexually, touching you, spanking your butt and all that.”. When the offenders were African-Swedish like Alyssa, they would often get verbally aggressive and abusive if she did not comply with being sexually assaulted by them, accusing her of being sexually disloyal to her racial in-group. Alyssa described how the offenders divert attention away from their own deviance, having sexually assaulted her, by constructing her sexual boundaries as something abnormal and morally questionable, since a black woman who was loyal to her community would make herself sexually available. Katrin, a white woman, described being subjected to physical assault and verbal humiliation by her father for having romantic relationships with men who had an immigrant background “He is a racist, so it’s like, ‘you blattefucker,¹ you’re disgusting”’. While Katrin explained that the domestic violence she was subjected to could be motivated by other perceived provocations, her choice of sexual partners was a reoccurring source of conflict while she still lived at home. Overall, she described her father as very controlling “He is a perfectionist, like, he owns you, he can’t control his rage (. . .) he told me that a few times, ‘I own you”’.

Within this discourse there is an assumption that homogenic political interest follows from racial belonging. Yuval-Davis (1993) refers to such assumptions as the “mythical unity of national imagined communities”, which manifests in the belief of some form of shared essence in the collective culture of a nation. In the cases of Ebba, Alyssa and Katrin, they have become internal strangers, disrupting the internal order of the community that the offender perceive them to be part of (Bauman, 1989). Through the practices of this discourse, it is clear that these in-group women, as part of the racial construction to which they are subjected, are subjugated to an order that is determined by their offenders (Eduards, 2007), whose actions strongly resemble the role of producers of the “national stock” described by Yuval-Davis (1993).

Exploitable assets

Four of the participants described that they were labelled as exploitable assets by their offenders. As exploitable assets, the women describe being objects on whom the offender can act out fantasies of violence and domination which they cannot, as a result of prevailing social codes, act out in relation to women from their in-group. Via this discourse, the participants described that they perceived their offenders to apply different moral and behavioural codes when interacting with women from their own racial group and women from a racial out-group. Such systems of parallel expectations and norms have also been described in previous interview studies on gendered racism (Bäckman, 2009; Lundström, 2008, 2010; Sawyes, 2008).

Leorah is a woman of Middle Eastern background with who described being subjected to domestic abuse that was due to her Swedish ex-partner’s racist beliefs about Middle Eastern women. She described how her ex-partner systematically used violence against her when he

perceived her to have acted in a way that was inappropriate for women “from her culture”. On other occasions, he would take her phone and lock her out of their home, taunting her for being unable to do anything about it since she was “only an immigrant woman”. She said, “It was a lot of ‘within your culture, women are not allowed to go out’, like, a lot of prejudice, er, very strong opinions on how a girl should behave towards a guy [...] According to him, women from (country) should stay home and take care of (their husband), like, that was his way of seeing it.”

In this example, the concepts of culture, immigrant status and gender are used to perpetuate racist beliefs as Leorah describes how her partner expects women with her racial background to be primarily interested in taking care of their homes and partners, rather than pursuing their own interests and having a close network of friends. These perceptions resonate with a discourse on foreign women from specific regions as being particularly subordinate (Eduards, 2007). While the victim was not Muslim but atheist in this case, Leorah's description of how her ex-partner racialized her is strikingly similar to the results presented by Perry (2014) and Zempi (2020) on the ways in which Muslim women are racialized. In this case, Leorah described how the offender justified his violent acts on the basis of skewed expectations about Middle Eastern women, and moreover, actively and strategically made use of the social power inequality between them during the abuse, for example by claiming that she would not be protected by Swedish law as a result of her social status as an immigrant woman.

Olivia, Alyssa and Katrin also described experiences of racial hate crime that fall within the scope of this discourse. Both Olivia and Alyssa described having experiences of sexual assault founded in racial beliefs. Olivia described these racial beliefs in the following way: “They are so privileged, and they perceive me like a ‘fresh breeze’, you know, ‘she’s so exotic, like a fresh breeze’”. When reflecting about her many experiences of sexual assault, Olivia said that “I have become so incredibly aware that I am a brown woman, it is as if I am not allowed to be anything else (...) and no, I don’t want to sleep with everyone just because I’m nice”. Alyssa also said that: “You always have to be very modest with how you carry yourself around” when describing how she tries to avoid being sexually assaulted, underscoring how the incidents soared through her everyday life. Katrin instead described being drugged and raped by a man who perceived Swedish women like Katrin as morally inferior to women from his own ethnicity. Katrin describes the norms in the following way: “Er, it was shameful to be Swedish for example, like, you could not say that you were Swedish, like you just aren’t, Swedish woman equals Swedish whore. It’s the same thing: you are a whore if you are Swedish”. In the case described by Katrin, there is a clear division between the sexual morality and respectability of in-group women, who are assigned the stereotype of the mother-madonna, and that of out-group women, who are assigned the stereotype of the whore (Eduards, 2007; Lundström, 2008; Sawyes, 2008).

Within this discourse, out-group women are constructed as legitimate targets of sexual and physical abuse, either as a result of a hypersexualization of these women or as a result of them being perceived as naturally subordinate. Women who are targeted by these offenders find themselves discursively situated in a legal vacuum that leads offenders to perceive harassment, assault, and rape as risk-free.

Discussion

In line with intersectional theory (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Collins, 2004, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 1993), the results show that the different kinds of racisms directed towards women are often characterized by a hypersexualization located at the intersection of their gender and race. Hypersexualization refers here to a repeated pattern in all three discourses where the women lack a normal action space, and where instead, any action they might take is interpreted through a sexual filter.

For example, there is often no direct sexual interest taken in the victims within the discourse of cultural superiority. However, the participants describe how the offenders tend to use sexually explicit and derogatory slurs as part of their display of dominance. Petra for example, an African-Swedish participant, described an incident in which an unknown white woman had shouted, “There walks a fucking whore, go home!” at her as she was passing. The woman had no sexual interest in Petra but made active use of both sexually and racially derogative language to mark Petra’s position as both black and female in order to signal her own superior status in relation to Petra. This is very similar to the practices of gendered and racial power relations described by McClintock (1995) in her work on imperialism.

Similarly, the discourse of the threat from within is largely characterized by a fixation on women’s sexual behaviours in which sex is primarily treated as a resource to be distributed among in-group men (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996). This discourse assumes different characteristics depending on the group in which it is practiced. Within the right-wing movement, it is expressed in a recasting of women’s sexuality that transforms women into carriers of the nation in the classical nationalist setting (CATS, 2020; Eduards, 2007). Within the African diaspora, it is expressed in terms of a duty to reproduce and be loyal to the in-group on the basis of an underdog narrative (Collins, 2004; Sawyes, 2008).

Finally, sexual entitlement is an essential and substantial element in the discourse on out-group women that manifests itself in narratives of the exotic other, which may be both submissive and prudish as well as sexually promiscuous, depending on the script and sexual fantasies attached to the victim by the offender (Lundström, 2010; Meyer, 2012; Perry, 2014; Sawyes, 2008; Zempi, 2020). Here, the results show that hate crime incidents are primarily linked to certain forms of sexualization that invoke some, but not all, of the power asymmetries identified by previous research on gendered racism. For example, narratives about out-group women raising the status of their male partners in the form of being a marker of authenticity (Lundström, 2010) were not found in the current study.

In summary, in-group women are expected to be sexually and ideologically loyal, while out-group women are instead viewed as being inferior to both in-group men and women (Yuval-Davis, 1993). When the offenders can rely on established power structures regarding race and gender, these power structures legitimate and lower the threshold for committing racial hate crimes against women. As such, this racial hypersexualization provides a context for understanding the overrepresentation of racialized sexual crimes observed in previous studies on racial hate crime among minorities in Sweden (Kalonaityte et al., 2007, 2008; Wigerfelt et al., 2014). These results can be further situated in colonial heritage and post-colonial conflicts with regards to nationality, race, gender roles and state power (hooks, 1982; McClintock, 1995).

The constructs of race found in racial hate crime targeting the women in this study diverge from the established problem description of racial hate crime that has been developed based on the experiences of male victims (Lantz et al., 2019; Lyons & Roberts, 2014). While the acts described by the victims in this study by definition fit into Sweden’s legal definition of hate crime in there being a racial motive combined with an offence in the criminal code, it is questionable whether all of these incidents would be defined and treated as hate crimes within the Swedish justice system, since the “stereotypical hate crime” instead involves an unprovoked attack based on an evidently racial bias, committed by a stranger, and furthermore by a majority-group member on a minority-group member (Lantz et al., 2019; Lyons & Roberts, 2014; Mason, 2007). Instead, a large proportion of the victimization experiences of women are comprised of molestation, threats and sexual offences. Moreover, the offenders are both in-group and out-group men, and intimate partners and family members as well as strangers, who often claim sexual ownership and entitlement in relation to the victim. Finally, the gendered nature of many incidents described by the participants might lead investigators and prosecutors to overlook that the incident is also partially rooted in racism. While the Swedish hate crime legislation covers such partial motivation as well, research within the court system shows that investigators and prosecutors tend to use stricter criteria in practice. An example

of this is arguing for an application of the penalty enhancement for hate crime only in very clear cases where the racial motive was perceived as the sole driving force for the offence (Atak, 2020). Consequently, the types of incidents described by many of the participants, such as sexual offences, might lead to prosecution and conviction, but without use of the penalty enhancement for the presence of a racial motive. As such, the results question the scope and content of the range of acts that may be considered to constitute hate crimes, and they clearly illustrate how the victimization experiences of women are marginalized in relation to the justice system as a result of their absence from the problem formulation. Consequently, the legal problem with equal access to justice for women, especially those belonging to racial minorities, illustrated in previous intersectional research (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991) still remains. Recently, Schweppe and Perry encouraged researchers to “explore and tentatively (re)define the boundaries of hate crime for the discipline that has come to be known as ‘hate studies’” (Schweppe & Perry, 2021:2). It might be that the experiences shared by the participants in this study can be part of this exploration, despite being at odds with conventional notions of hate crime. The results also show that the same discourses are used in severe offences, such as assault and rape, and hate speech, as in the examples of molestation and defamation.

While the sample in the present study is more diverse by comparison to previous studies that have tended to focus on one minority group at the time, it needs to be noted that representation in the sample is still limited. For example, there are no participants with an Asian background, and some of the Swedish minorities, like the Romani and Sami, are also not represented. Consequently, there is a need for further research on the gendered dynamics of racial hate crime against women from these groups. There is also a need for further research putting special focus on the context of particularly vulnerable groups taking additional factors such as transgender status, class, or disability into account.

The discourses identified in the present study are in line with both Swedish and international research and theory on gendered racism (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Crenshaw, 1991; Eduards, 2007; Lundström, 2008; 2010; Mulinari & Neergard, 2010; Sawyres, 2008; Zempi, 2020). This can be interpreted as support for the notion that these discourses might be present more broadly in the racial hate crime that targets women. However, it could also be interpreted as an indicator that the participants have been influenced by established discourses on race and gender. Therefore, there is a need for further research, preferably using several different data sources. For example, it would be highly relevant to trace police reports and investigations that female victims categorize as partially racially motivated, to see how these are dealt with by the justice system.

Broadly, the results show that the racial construction of women in hate crime is often entangled in broader racial power struggles between men from different groups. Thereby, women’s bodies are used as a tool in racial status conflicts between groups of men, as identities, scripts, and stereotypes found primarily within conservatism and right-wing ideology are enacted on the bodies of the victims (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1996; Bäckman, 2009; Eduards, 2007).

Note

1. Blatte is a Swedish term with no direct English translation. It is a derogatory term used primarily to describe men from Balkan or the Middle East.

Acknowledgments

The data collection was co-funded by the Swedish Crime Victim Authority under Grant 03084.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Crime Victim Authority [03084].

Notes on contributor

Mika Hagerlid (PhD) is a senior lecturer in Criminology at the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University, Sweden. Their research is mainly focused on hate crime victimization, sexual harassment, and victimization of young women. They have published in journals like *International Review of Victimology*, *Feminist Criminology* and *Crime and Delinquency*.

ORCID

Mika Hagerlid  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3124-8204>

References

- Åklagarmyndigheten. (2016). *Hatbrott*. Rätts-PM 2016:8, Malmö, Åklagarmyndigheten: Utvecklingscentrum Malmö.
- Anthias, F., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1996). *Racialized boundaries: Race, gender, colour and class and the anti-racist struggle*. London: Routledge.
- Atak, K. (2020). 'Inappropriate but not a crime'? Policing racial hatred in Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Criminology*, 21(1), 32–48.
- Bäckman, M. (2009). Svenskhet i marginalen – Om en föreställd gemenskap. *Tidskrift För Kjønnforskning*, 33(4), 310–329.
- Bauman, Z. (1989). *Modernity and ambivalence*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (1997). Rethinking racism: Towards a structural interpretation. *American Sociological Review*, 62(3), 465–480.
- BRÅ. (2018) Självrapporterad utsatthet för hatbrott: Analys utifrån nationella trygghetsundersökningen 2006-2017. Brottsförebyggande Rådet, Rapport 2018:10.
- BRÅ. (2019) Hatbrott 2018: Statistik över polisanmälda brott med identifierade hatbrottsmotiv. Brottsförebyggande Rådet, Rapport 2019:13.
- Bredström, A. (2003). Gendered racism and the production of cultural difference: Media representation and identity work among “immigrant youth” in contemporary Sweden. *Nora: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 11(2), 78–88.
- CATS. (2020). Från nordiska motståndsrörelsen till alternativhögern: En studie om den svenska radikalnationalistiska miljön. Centrum för Asymmetriska Hot- och Terrorismstudier: Försvarshögskolan.
- Collins, P. H. (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. London: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41(3), 1–20.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Drakulich, K., Fay-Ramirez, S., & Benier, K. (2022). The neighborhood context of perceived and reported anti-white hate crimes. *Race and Justice*, 12(1), 3–7.
- Duggan, M., & Mason-Bish, H. (2021). A feminist theoretical exploration of misogyny and hate crime. In I. Zempi & J. Smith (Eds.), *Misogyny as hate crime*. London: Routledge. 9–22.
- Eduards, M. (2007). *Kroppspolitik: Om moder Svea och andra kvinnor*. Stockholm: Atlas Akademi.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- hooks, B. (1982). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hopkins, P. (2016). Gendering Islamophobia, racism and white supremacy: Gendered violence against those who look Muslim. *Dialogue in Human Geography*, 6(2), 186–189.
- Iganski, P., & Spiridoula, L. (2014). Hate crimes hurt some more than others: Implications for the just sentencing of offenders. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(10), 1696–1718.
- Kalonaityte, V., Kawesa, V., & Tedros, A. (2007). Att färgas av Sverige: Upplevelser av diskriminering och rasism bland ungdomar med afrikansk bakgrund i Sverige. Ombudsmannen mot Etnisk Diskriminering.
- Kalonaityte, V., Kawesa, V., & Tedros, A. (2008). Svarta(s) strategier: Att hantera rasism och diskriminering som svart svensk. *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 15(3–4), 210–220.
- Lantz, B., Gladfelder, A. S., & Ruback, B. (2019). Stereotypical hate crimes and criminal justice processing: A multi-dataset comparison of bias crime arrest patterns by offender and victim race. *Justice Quarterly*, 36(2), 193–224.

- Lundström, C. (2008). Vit respektabilitet: Den svenska nationens könade symbolik och unga kvinnors kulturella praktiker. *Tidsskrift För Kjønnforskning*, 33(4), 295–309.
- Lundström, C. (2010). ‘Concrete bodies’: Young Latina women transgressing the boundaries of race and class in white inner-city Stockholm. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17(2), 151–167.
- Lyons, C. J., & Roberts, A. (2014). The difference “hate” makes in clearing crime: An event history analysis of incident factors. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 30(3), 268–289.
- Mason, G. (2007). Hate crime as a moral category: Lessons from the Snowtown case. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 40(3), 249–271.
- McClintock, A. (1995). *Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial context*. New York: Routledge.
- Meyer, D. (2012). An intersectional analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people’s evaluations of anti-queer violence. *Gender and Society*, 26(6), 849–873.
- Mulinari, D., & Neergard, A. (2010). Sverigedemokraterna och det teoretiska fältet. In M. Deland, F. Hertzberd, & T. Hvitfeldt (Eds.), *Det vita fältet I: Samtida forskning om högerextremism*. Uppsala: Opuscula Historica, Upsaliensis 41.
- Norocel, O. C. (2010). Constructing radical right populist resistance: Metaphors of heterosexist masculinities and the family question in Sweden. *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies*, 5(2), 169–183.
- Norocel, O. C. (2013). Konstruktionen av högerradikala populistiska maskuliniteter i Sverige. En feministisk analys. In M. Deland, F. Hertzberd, & T. Hvitfeldt (Eds.), *Det vita fältet II: Samtida forskning om högerextremism*. Uppsala: Opuscula Historica, Upsaliensis 41.
- Perry, B. (2002). *In the name of hate*. New York: Routledge.
- Perry, B. (2014). Gendered Islamophobia: Hate crime against Muslim women. *Social Identities*, 20(1), 74–89.
- Powers, R. A., & Socia, K. M. (2019). Racial animosity, adversary effect, and hate crime: Parsing out injuries in intraracial, interracial, and race-based offences. *Crime and Delinquency*, 65(4), 447–473.
- Sawyes, L. (2008). Engendering ‘race’ in calls for diasporic community in Sweden. *Feminist Review*, 90(1), 87–105.
- Schweppe, J., & Perry, B. (2021). A continuum of hate: Delimiting the field of hate studies. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, in print. doi:10.1007/s10611-021-09978-7
- Wigerfelt, B., Wigerfelt, A., & Kiiskinen, J. (2014). When colour matters: Policing hate crime. *Social Inclusion*, 2(1), 1–11.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1993). Gender and nation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16(4), 621–632.
- Zempi, I. (2020). Veiled Muslim women’s responses to experiences of gendered Islamophobia in the UK. *International Review of Victimology*, 26(1), 96–111.