



“If you dress like a whore you have to accept being treated like one”: An Interview Study About Women’s Experiences of Misogynistic Hate Crime

Mika Hagerlid¹

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Abstract

The inclusion of gender in hate crime legislation has been the subject of scholarly debate since the 1990s, but only a handful of empirical studies have focused on victims’ experiences of gender-bias hate crime. Therefore, misogynistic hate crimes are primarily discussed as a theoretical or legal category of events. In this study, the aim is instead to shed light on how female victims define, describe, and are affected by their experiences of gender-bias hate crime. In doing so, the study contributes insights into misogynistic hate crimes as lived experiences, rather than as an abstract legal or theoretical concept.

Introduction

There is no universally agreed upon definition of misogynistic hate crime within the field of hate studies. Some researchers have argued that men’s violence against women always has a gendered dimension and could therefore be interpreted as misogynistic hate crime by default (Ault 1995; Campo-Engelstein 2016). Others hold that the justice system should only consider the presence of a misogynistic motive in extreme cases because these have a symbolic value (Maher et al. 2015). Most, however, argue that misogynistic hate crime, like other forms of hate crime, is distinguished by being motivated by prejudice or hostility towards the gender of the victim (Perry 2001; Walters and Tumath 2014; Chakraborti and Garland 2015; Iganski and Levin 2015). As such, it can be distinguished from non-bias crimes targeting women through the presence of markers of prejudice and hostility. For example, just as racial hate crime can be identified through the use of verbal slurs directed at the victim’s race, misogynistic hate crime can be identified through the use of slurs directed at the victim’s gender. On the basis of this perspective, misogynistic hate crime refers to acts that express misogynistic values and that involve threats, harassment, assault, and other acts of violence that are criminalized by law. These acts are not necessarily characterized by hatred towards all women; instead, the offenders tend to target women

✉ Mika Hagerlid
mika.hagerlid@mau.se

¹ Department of Criminology, Malmö University, Jan Waldenströms Gata 25, 214 28 Malmö, Sweden

who transgress perceived norms (*ibid.*). It is this latter approach to understanding misogynistic hate crime that has underpinned the present study.

The inclusion of gender in hate crime legislation has been the subject of scholarly debate since the 1990s (McPhail 2002; Mason-Bish 2015). A recent example can be seen in the UK, where the Law Commission acknowledged both the existence of gender bias hate crime and that it produces negative outcomes for both victims and society. At the same time, the Law Commission recommended that gender should not be included in the established hate crime legislation but combated using other forms of legislation (Law Commission 2021).

There are no recent global reviews regarding which countries have legislation covering gender-bias hate crime, but data from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) show that incidents of this type of crime are reported throughout the 57 member states. However, official statistics on gender-bias hate crimes are only presented by Canada, Belgium, Croatia, Georgia, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Ukraine and the USA.

Despite this ongoing debate, only a handful of empirical studies have focused on victims' experiences of gender-bias hate crime (Mason-Bish and Zempi 2019; Hagerlid 2020; Mason-Bish and Duggan 2020; Colliver 2021; Healy 2021). As a result, misogynistic hate crimes are primarily discussed as a theoretical or legal category of events. In this study, the aim is instead to shed light on how victims define, describe, and are affected by their experiences of misogynistic hate crimes. In doing so, the study contributes insights into misogynistic hate crimes as lived experiences, rather than as an abstract legal or theoretical concept.

The background section begins with a presentation of the relatively few theoretical frameworks within the field of hate studies that have focused on misogynistic hate crime. This is followed by a research review on the impact of hate crime victimization and misogynistic hate crime victimization.

Background

Understanding Misogynistic Hate Crime

Hate crimes are often theoretically understood on the basis of critical theory, as crimes that are used to safeguard and maintain already established social hierarchies between groups (Perry 2001; Chakraborti and Garland 2015; Iganski and Levin 2015). In relation to misogynistic hate crime, Perry (2001) has argued that its premises spring from notions of gender essentialism, described as a belief in innate differences between men and women, and a subsequent belief in a natural order whereby men and women are assigned different roles in society. She posits that there are four central institutions that play a pivotal role in enabling misogynistic hate crime: culture, labor, power, and sexuality. Within the institution of culture, women are socially constructed as having an inferior character compared to men. Within the institution of labor, women are marginalized into unskilled and low wage jobs. Within the institution of power, women are often excluded from or underrepresented in positions of leadership and decision-making. Finally, within the institution of sexuality, women are sexualized and constructed as enjoying sexual violence, a factor that puts women at risk for sexual abuse. Together, these institutions produce a hegemonic norm of female subordination (Perry 2001).

Like other forms of hate crime, misogynistic hate crimes are often triggered by perceived transgressions of this ascribed role of inferiority (Perry 2001). For Iganski and Levin (2015), the general inability to recognize misogynistic hate crime stems from inaccurate descriptions of the problem, in which hate crimes are viewed as an outcome of political extremism and are based on literal interpretations of the term "hate". This causes problems, since empirical research suggests that most hate crime incidents take place in everyday situations and are "rooted in the denigration of the victim's identity" rather than in blind hatred and repulsion directed against the victim's group (Iganski and Levin 2015:33). For example, the vast majority of hate crime incidents are committed by non-extremists in casual and everyday settings (Iganski 2008), and the same is true for crimes grounded in misogyny (Perry 2001; Iganski and Levin 2015).

In their feminist assessment of the state of misogynistic hate crime, Duggan and Mason-Bish (2020) have recently argued that the widespread reluctance to deal with misogynistic hate crimes is linked to the way the field has emphasized male experiences of hate crime, resulting in a masculinization of hate crime ideology.

In sum, these theoretical frameworks suggest that misogynistic hate crimes spring from the same institutions that give rise to hate crimes with other motives (Perry 2001), and that they, like other forms of hate crime, unfold in everyday situations (Iganski and Levin 2015). In the present study, these different ways of conceptualizing and understanding hate crime will be compared with the ways in which victims of misogynistic hate crime describe their experiences.

The Impact of Hate Crime Victimization

It is well established that hate crimes have a greater detrimental impact on victims compared to non-bias crimes. Comparative studies have found that hate crime victims report both greater fear of crime (Herek et al. 1999; Tiby 1999; Andersson 2018) and more pronounced symptoms of depression and stress (Herek et al. 1999; McDevitt et al. 2001).

Several studies have further confirmed that hate crimes have a message effect, that is, the harms extend beyond the initial victim and result in a detrimental impact on entire minority communities (Iganski 2001; Noelle 2002; Perry 2009; Perry and Alvi 2011; Garland and Hodkinson 2014; Walters et al. 2017; Paterson et al. 2019).

The detrimental impact of hate crime victimization is usually understood within the theoretical framework of assumptive world theory (Herek et al. 1999; Noelle 2002; Craig-Henderson 2009). This theory proposes three fundamental and often unarticulated core beliefs that are developed during childhood and that most individuals adhere to (Janoff-Bulman 1992). Firstly, the world is a benevolent place inhabited by benevolent people. Secondly, the world is a place where things happen for a reason, and where, consequently, good things will happen to good people. Finally, the self is deserving of good outcomes in life and is in control. When individuals holding these beliefs are confronted with traumatic events, such as crime, this conceptual framework crumbles as the individual is faced with a chaotic and unpredictable existence where other people can be hostile and dangerous (ibid.).

In hate crime research focusing on the impact of victimization, many authors further assign weight to the interaction between victimization and social stigma. From this perspective, the broader and repeated experience of stigmatization through discrimination, micro-aggressions, negative stereotyping and the like, increases the alienation, helplessness and social exclusion experienced by victims (Craig-Henderson 2009). Further, attribution

error may lead victims to perceive individuals who resemble their offender, for example by belonging to the same out-group, as potentially harmful and threatening (ibid.).

Previous Research on Victims with Experiences of Misogynistic Hate Crime

Quantitative studies show a substantial variation in the prevalence of misogynistic hate crime, with self-reported victimization varying from 17 to 78% of respondents (Perry 2011; Hagerlid 2020; Mason-Bish and Duggan 2020). Differences in sample size, operationalizations, and recruitment strategies are likely to account for most of the variation. Most of the victims are repeatedly victimized, and the large bulk of incidents consist of sexual offenses, threats, and harassment (ibid.). Moreover, qualitative and quantitative research alike shows that women with experiences of misogynistic hate crime, like victims of other forms of bias-crime, report higher levels of fear of crime by comparison with non-bias victims and non-victims (Hagerlid 2020; Mason-Bish and Duggan 2020).

The qualitative research in this field focuses on the intersection between misogyny and other hate motives that are often more well-established in a legal context. Examples include studies on misogyny in hate crimes targeting transwomen (Colliver 2021), misogyny in Islamophobic hate crimes that target Muslim women (Mason-Bish and Zempi 2019), and misogyny in disability hate crime (Healy 2021). In these studies, misogyny is described as one of many factors that shape hate crimes targeting different groups of women. For example, Colliver (2021) illustrates how stereotypical tropes of 'ideal women' are used to victimize transgender women, while Mason-Bish and Zempi (2019) show how the perceived sexual unavailability of Muslim women due to Islamic dress codes can act as trigger for harassment.

These studies make an important contribution to the field by showing that misogyny is pluralistic and assumes different expressions when directed at different groups. However, there are major limitations regarding the current knowledge base on misogynistic hate crime victimization in qualitative studies. Firstly, all these studies focus on the overlap between misogyny and a more established hate motive, such as religion or disability. The lack of more heterogeneous samples of women in qualitative studies has thus resulted in a somewhat fragmented knowledge production, especially from a comparative perspective. It may be the case that results that are currently understood as group specific may in fact be more generic and vice versa. Secondly, all the data have been collected in the USA or Great Britain. Since qualitative studies often provide situated knowledge (Braun and Clarke 2021), the lack of research outside these countries constitutes a real concern. Thirdly, studies have rarely assessed their results in relation to theoretical frameworks regarding the causes and consequences of hate crime. It is therefore often up to the reader of these studies to discern to what extent the data are in line with or contradict these frameworks. Finally, the available research on misogynistic hate from a victim perspective is very limited. As has been mentioned, this results in a disconnect between ongoing legal debates about gender in hate crime legislation and the lived reality of such events.

The present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by employing a more diverse sample of women with regard to their racial background, sexual orientation, disability, and religion. It also contributes by providing an example from the Nordic context and by critically assessing the results in relation to hate crime theory. Further, by examining how victims define, describe, and are affected by their experiences of misogynistic hate crime, the study contributes by shedding light on misogynistic hate crimes as lived experiences.

Research Methods

Aim

While ample attention has been devoted to misogynistic hate crime from a legal perspective, the empirical literature on the subject remains scarce and fragmented. The aim of the present study is therefore to examine how victims define, describe, and are affected by their experiences of misogynistic hate crime. The primary questions examined by the study are (1) How are misogynistic hate crimes defined by victims? (2) How are incidents perceived as misogynistic hate crimes described? (3) What impact do misogynistic hate crimes have on victims?

Data Collection, Material, and Ethics

The interview data were collected as part of a mixed method research project on Swedish students' experiences of hate crime, Experiences and Exposure to Hate Crime (EEHC). The project was approved by the regional ethical review board in Lund. The study was initiated using a victimization survey distributed in-class to students taking courses of at least 15 credits at Malmö University during the fall of 2013. The research group handed out questionnaires to a total of 4649 students. On the final page of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to sign up if they had experienced something they perceived as a hate crime and wanted to participate in an interview. The text read: "We are searching for students with experiences of hate crime victimization for interviews. The interview will, among other things, contain questions about how/whether one was affected by the incidents and how one was treated if the incident was reported. The interview will last about one hour and will take place during the spring semester of 2014. Participation is anonymous and you will not have to tell us your real name. If you would like to participate in an interview, write your email or phone number in the box below."

A total of 28 students with experiences of hate crime subsequently participated in an interview after being contacted by the research group in the spring of 2014. The interviews were semi-structured and contained questions about how the victims define hate crime, their experiences of such incidents, and the impact of these lived experiences. All participants consented to having their interviews recorded and to be cited in research publications. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized.

The interviews selected for the present study were those in which the participants (1) identified as women, (2) had experiences of an offense included under the Swedish penal code, and (3) explicitly categorized their experiences as based on prejudice or hostility directed towards their gender. Participants who described having experiences of hate crime with intersecting motives, for example sexual orientation and gender, were included. A total of 15 interviews met these criteria.

To protect the identity and integrity of the participants, the sample will be described below at the group level with regard to group belonging and victimization experiences. Information that could identify the quoted participants has been left out or altered if deemed a possible identifier in the result section.

Among the 15 participants included in the study, two had experiences of discrimination, two of physical abuse, two had experiences of attempted rape, two had experiences of rape, and one had experiences of sexual coercion. Many had experiences of sexual harassment,

with eight participants describing incidents in which they had been subjected to verbal slurs linked to their gender, such as ‘whore’ or ‘slut’. Six of the participants also described incidents of sexual assault in which the offender had grabbed their breasts or genitals, and two described incidents in which they had been followed or chased by the offender late at night.

Seven of the interviewed women had a foreign background with two having a background in Africa, one in the Middle East, one in South America, and two had a mixed background. Three of the participants were bisexual, one was lesbian, and one was transgender. Three reported having a disability, two of whom had a psychological disability, while one had a learning disability.

Thematic Analysis

There are many different forms of thematic analysis and for the purpose of the present study I have followed the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). They describe thematic analysis as an active analytical process in which the codes and themes are not ‘found’, ‘discovered’ or ‘emerge from the data’, but are identified by the researcher/s through a series of active choices in which the researcher makes informed decisions about what information is important to convey to the broader scientific community (Braun and Clarke 2021). As such, this is an approach to thematic analysis that acknowledges the active involvement of the analyzing researcher in the production of results.

The analysis has further been informed by a critical realist (Bhaskar 1975; Sayer 2000) view on hate crime. Through this lens, group categories such as gender or race are treated as social constructs. Similarly, the hierarchical power relationships that are enacted and enforced in hate crimes are understood to reside in a socially constructed reality. Hate crimes are not, however, limited to being social constructs since they also consist of actual events that are accompanied by well-documented detrimental outcomes for the victims (Herek et al. 1999; Tiby 1999; McDevitt et al. 2001). In contrast to group categories that vary in content over time, the broader field of victimology clearly illustrates that various forms of violence lead to detrimental outcomes regardless of whether there are social norms that reject or legitimate the violence in question (Andersson 2018). Consequently, hate crime is understood as a phenomenon residing at the intersection of social constructs and a ‘hard reality’.

The thematic analysis began by sorting the interview material, guided by the research questions (Braun and Clarke 2021). Data sorted under the first question, how the participants defined misogynistic hate crime, comprises the parts of the interviews in which participants reflected upon causes and formulated their own definitions of misogynistic hate crime. Most participants developed and/or negotiated their definition throughout the interview by giving examples of their own experiences and adding reflections as to what constitutes misogynistic hate crime alongside these examples. Data sorted under the second question, how misogynistic hate crimes are described, comprises the parts of the interviews in which participants provided examples of incidents that they had experienced. Most participants had experiences of repeat victimization. In these cases, the informants often began to describe a broader crime pattern, by giving examples of risky places such as clubs, or by describing a period of their lives during which they were very vulnerable to victimization and abuse as a result of certain circumstances. I asked those with repeat experiences to describe two to three incidents in greater detail. Data sorted under the final question, regarding the impact of misogynistic hate crimes,

comprises the parts of the interviews in which the participants described how they responded to their experiences during and after the incidents. I use a broad definition of responding, and have included data where the participants describe emotional, intellectual, behavioral, and social consequences of their victimization.

The interview material was analyzed iteratively and reflexively in several 'waves', with the research questions providing a guideline for the overall focus (Braun and Clarke 2021). The material was gradually categorized into themes and subthemes, and both themes and sub-themes were re-coded several times. The initial themes were more consistent with domain summary themes in that they shared a topic, but not necessarily a unifying meaning. Analysis and re-coding continued until I had generated themes that revolve around a unifying meaning, or what Braun and Clarke (2021) describe as a central organizing concept.

After several analytical waves, between two and three themes were generated under each question, and each theme contains two or three sub-themes (see Table 1). While the themes capture shared meanings, the sub-themes were generated to illustrate the variations within each theme. In the results section, the research questions are presented as the main headings, while the themes under each question are presented as italicized sub-headings. Sub-themes are italicized in the running text.

Results

How Victims Defined Misogynistic Hate Crime

Being Caught in a Power Structure

The participants described their experiences of misogynistic hate crime as both *intentional and coincidental*. The crimes were intentional in that they had been selected as victims because they were women, yet coincidental in that they could be replaced with any other woman. Maja reasoned about her experience of an attempted rape in the following way: "It is really nothing personal either, or not in my case. For me, it was a stranger, and it felt like anyone who is a woman and who had walked there would have been targeted".

The women who belonged to minority groups often reasoned about how this led to an increased risk. For example, Asha, who is African-Swedish, explained that men have less respect for black women and that she notices that she's singled out from white women as a suitable target. Similarly, Maja said that she believes that predatory men tend to notice her personality disorder and therefore perceive her as a defenseless target whom they can prey on.

The participants further described that their offenders forcibly *sexualized asexual settings*. Tilde for example, described the typical offender as "A person who believes that they have the right to use my body because they are higher up in the hierarchy than I am". She then described an incident in which she at age 18 had been drugged and had asked a former teacher for help. Instead of helping, the former teacher led her to an unmonitored place where he attempted to rape her. Like other participants, she explained that it was the higher social status of her offender that enabled him to sexualize her in an asexual setting.

Table 1 Results of the thematic analysis

Questions	Themes	Subthemes
How is misogynistic hate crime defined by victims?	Being caught in a power structure The shadow of doubt Out of nowhere	Intentional and coincidental Sexualization of asexual settings Not serious enough Rethinking implications Unexpected offenders Unexpected places
How are incidents perceived as misogynistic hate crimes described?	The worst is not what happened Growing out of emotional turmoil	What-if scenarios Threats of escalation Untangling emotions Assigning guilt where it belongs Creating safety
What is the impact of misogynistic hate crime on victims?	Becoming disillusioned Balancing contradictions	More complex view of reality Facing vulnerability Freedom vs. victimization risk Femininity vs. sexualization

The Shadow of Doubt

Although the participants described the link between their gender and victimization as being evident, some participants expressed doubt as to whether they could claim the label hate crime to conceptualize their experiences. For many, this doubt was related to a feeling that their lived experiences were *not serious enough* to be categorized as hate crime in the eyes of others. These feelings were primarily related to incidents of threats, sexual harassment, or sexual assault. Such incidents often take place in mundane settings, far removed from the connotations of extraordinariness that follow with the hate crime label. Cornelia compared her experiences of misogynistic slurs and racial slurs to illustrate how misogyny escapes the common perception of the hate crime label: "I would say it is a hate crime if someone yells fucking blatte (a Swedish derogatory label for individuals with an immigrant background), I would say 'report it'. But like, to be called fucking whore just because I'm a woman (...) I don't think it is taken as seriously".

A few participants were hesitant to call their own experiences of misogynistically motivated offenses hate crimes because this would require them to *rethink the implications* of their experiences. For the participants, the hate crime label designates a very serious form of crime, making it a large step to use this term to designate their own experiences. For those who had been repeatedly victimized, using this label did not merely involve adding an understanding to singular events in their life, but also had implications for their understanding of themselves in relation to society at large.

How Victims Described Their Experiences of Misogynistic Hate Crime

Out of Nowhere

Many described being targeted by *unexpected offenders*, that is, people who they did not consider potential offenders. These were often individuals with a connection to the social sphere of the victims; they might be friends or acquaintances. Vera was raped by a male friend one afternoon when they were taking a walk in a forest. She said: "I knew who he was, and I've talked with him before. So, I didn't think of it as we walked on and it got more and more desolate".

Unexpected offenders were also described as persons so high up in a social hierarchy that a sexual relationship would be either deeply problematic or outright illegal. For Ida, it was a professor at the university. She said: "It was a gentleman, a professor, who thought we should have sex, and if I didn't sleep with him it would have effects on my—well you now, you take sub-courses—on my sub-course grade".

Aside from the unexpected offenders, many participants explained that the crimes had occurred in *unexpected places*. These were places where the participants spend a lot of time without being victimized. They were often public and crowded places, such as streets or public transport. Wilma gave an example of a case of sexual assault, saying: "We were just out walking, and wearing party dresses, and that made them think it was ok (...) there was a guy who put his hand up my friend's skirt and grabbed my breasts". Consequently, the crimes were unexpected and unwelcome infringements in the everyday lives of the victims.

The Worst is not What Happened

The participants described how their experiences stirred up many thoughts, often in the form of *what-if scenarios*. Alice, who had been sexually assaulted at a festival, said: “I had a lot of nightmares about it. (...) What if he had pushed me into the tent and raped me? Ever since, it’s been my greatest fear to be raped, and I feel that it has limited my life”. Thus, sexual harassment and sexual assault can trigger fear of more far-reaching sexual offenses.

However, it was not necessarily the victim who had imagined these scenarios on their own; instead, the offenders had sometimes made *threats of escalation*. This occurred in cases in which the offender and the victim knew one another, and the threats had typically been used in order to control and silence the victim. For example, Saga described the following confrontation with her offender after he had found out that she had tried to get help from a counselor:

Then he says, ‘You’re going around telling people that I’m beating you’. I just, I said nothing. I was quiet, looked down at the floor and felt ashamed all the time. And he said, ‘You do know that if I go to jail, I’ll get out some day, and when I do, I’ll kill you’.

The Impact of Misogynistic Hate Crime

Growing out of Emotional Turmoil

For most of the participants, their experiences of victimization were accompanied by intense and complex emotions. The process of reconciling with these emotions varied greatly depending on what kind of crime they had been subjected to, at what age they had been victimized, and by whom. One common experience was the need to *untangle their emotional lives*. Several described it as being important to confront their emotions and put them into words, often in social interactions with others. Vera described the immediate period after being raped in the following way: “I was extremely sad for a few weeks, cried it all out. I would say it is a cathartic process, getting all the feelings out”.

Further, it was important to *assign the guilt where it belongs*. Ida for example, described how she outs offenders and talks openly about the continual sexual harassment and sexual assault that she experiences: “If you have a group assignment, I’m not slow to say, ‘he asked if I had shaved my pussy lately at the board meeting, I won’t cooperate with him’”. Locating the guilt within the offender was an essential part of recovery for the participants, and for some, like Ida, it could also serve as a strategy to warn other potential victims.

A central factor raised by several participants was the importance of *creating safety*. When I asked Ella about how she dealt with the feelings she described having after being sexually assaulted, she said: “You stay away from guys to a large extent, and sadly keep away from those kinds of situations”. Aside from avoiding offenders and situations perceived to be risky, it was important to surround oneself with understanding and supportive peers. Some also described how they have developed new skills following their victimization. These skills include strengthening their personal integrity, developing a stronger sense of self, being more empathic towards others, and developing a readiness

to act in similar situations. For example, Andrea said: "I haven't had a readiness to act before, but today I would, since I've been able to process what happened".

Becoming Disillusioned

When striving to regain normality, all of the participants found that something had changed in a more permanent way post-victimization. The participants described that they gained a *more complex view of reality* after being targeted due to the offender's prejudice or hostility towards their gender. Alice said: "I have a wonderful boyfriend, and lovely male friends. But generally, if I meet a guy, I assume that there is a little douchebag in him. He might not be a potential rapist, but, I don't know". The participants described this as a painful awakening, and that they missed the previous and more naïve version of themselves. There is a fundamental sorrow associated with being unable to trust other people.

As a result, the participants *face their vulnerability*. Most do not appear to have reflected over the fragility of human integrity prior to being victimized, and they have consequently needed to incorporate this insight into their understanding of themselves and society. Maja described it in the following way: "Before it happened (an attempted rape) I haven't, I haven't really been scared when I'm out at night, but thought, 'well, it won't happen'". In a similar way, the full meaning of cultural tendencies to assign guilt to the victim is realized first after having experienced a sexual offense, when the participants are confronted with a fear that others might blame them for being targeted by the offender.

Balancing Contradictions

Most described that they have to *balance their individual freedom against the risk of victimization*. Having been socialized into a value system that grants them access to Swedish society, including the freedom to spend time in public places regardless of the time of day, and to enjoy various forms of social entertainment from shopping to nightlife, most were unwilling to allow their lived experiences of sexual offenses and violence to hinder their access to these venues. Semira said: "Well, it lingers. Like, someone shouted at me from that corner, then I know. I still walk past there, but I'm a little extra guarded. So, it might not change how I act, but perhaps my psychological relaxation". Other acts that the participants described as potentially risky were having slight eye contact with male strangers, or showing common courtesy.

Aside from balancing their individual freedom, the participants also described *balancing femininity against the sexualization of femininity*. Wilma described an incident in which she had rebuked an elderly man who had sexually harassed her, to which he had responded: "If you dress like a whore, you have to accept being treated like one". Like many, she expressed mixed feelings about femininely coded clothing. Wilma said that she liked the look of short skirts and shorts, and would like to wear them more often. At the same time, she felt that she can't do this since these items are interpreted as a sexual invitation by men who don't care about whether or not she consents.

These balancing acts are accompanied by a sense of loss. Ida expressed herself in the following way, referring to both her gender and racial background: "There's not enough room for me, in myself, to be who I am, since there are so many who have issues with something that I really have not chosen to be".

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The incidents described by the participating women are characterized by the offender's belief in innate gender differences in tandem with a belief in distinctly separate gender roles for men and women. This is in line with Perry's (2001) theoretical description of the beliefs that are enacted by offenders of misogynistic hate crime. However, the results are not as clear in relation to the four institutions proposed by Perry (2001) as preconditions for misogynistic hate crime. The offenders seem to be part of a cultural context that constructs women as inferior to men, but all study participants are university students and can therefore not be described as being marginalized from the labor market at the time of the study. However, it should be noted that most participants, as repeat victims, had experiences prior to their enrolment in higher education. Further, Malmö University has an unusually large proportion of students from non-academic backgrounds, which was also mirrored in the study participants, of whom many came from socio-economically marginalized backgrounds. During their time as students, the participating women are on the threshold of professionalization, which could also be interpreted as a threat to male superiority. At the same time, it was clear that the offenders most often had no knowledge about the victims' status as university students. Here, being marginalized by belonging to a national or sexual minority, or having a disability, appears to play a larger role in victimization risk than socio-economic status. Consequently, there is evidence that the offender group targets women perceived as especially vulnerable. The latter is in line with previous research on misogynistic hate crime targeting vulnerable groups of women (Mason-Bish and Zempi 2019; Mason-Bish and Duggan 2020; Colliver 2021; Healy 2021). At the same time, the results also show that women from privileged groups with regard to class, nationality, functionality, sexual orientation and gender expression are also targeted, some repeatedly. Consequently, the results show that misogynistic hate crime is a phenomenon that affects women from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and there appears to be no form of structural privilege that provides guaranteed protection.

Perry (2001) has further argued that women are hyper-sexualized and often constructed as enjoying sexual violence. The results of the present study confirm that the women had been hypersexualized, as the offenders sexualized actions, places, relationships and settings that were asexual to the victims. But in contrast to Perry's (2001) theory, the offenders described by the victims in the present study do not seem to have expected them to enjoy sexual violence. Rather, the offenders were in most cases indifferent to whether the victim felt pleasure or suffering, and sometimes expressed direct satisfaction at knowing that the victim was unwilling. The results thereby show that the incidents are more about a construction of male sexual pleasure detached from consent and/or as sexually sadistic. However, it should be noted that the data for the present study were collected in a different cultural context from that in which the theory was developed. It would therefore be of substantial interest to examine the applicability of Perry's (2001) theory to additional places and geographic contexts.

It should be noted that there were qualitative differences in the expression of misogynistic sexualization from an intersectional perspective. The sexualization that targeted white women was often described as being directly connected to clothing, places or activities. On the other hand, the African-Swedish participants and the Latin-American participant described that they adapted their clothing on a more general level, since parts of their

bodies were sexualized regardless of place and activity. For Muslim participants, their gendered religious dress code rendered them highly visible to potential offenders. Similarly, the participants with disabilities described having a particular vulnerability, although this was more subtle than wearing a veil. For participants in same-sex relationships, the sexualization often took place when the offender identified the victims and their partners as an intimate couple. Finally, for the transgender participant, the sexualization was not so much about the way she expressed femininity, but rather that she was the wrong person to do this. Broadly, these results are in line with previous research that shows that women from different groups are stereotyped in different ways, and that intersecting group belongings co-create specific forms of vulnerability and oppression (Mason-Bish and Zempi 2019; Colliver 2021; Healy 2021).

The incidents had often occurred in everyday situations, as previously observed by Iganski and Lagou (2015). The everydayness of the incidents led many women to question whether misogynistic hate crime was a suitable label for their lived experiences of gendered hate. The interviewed women described an ideal hate crime that consisted of violence associated with certain forms of extremism, with gendered hate not evidently being a part of this picture. This image is likely to have been affected by the way hate crime is presented in the Swedish media and political debate, where these incidents are often constructed as a part of right-wing extremism (Andersson 2018). While more recent research has shown that these environments more and more frequently include ideological justifications for the use of violence against women (CVE 2020), most of the offenders described by the victims did not seem to be involved in right-wing organizations. However, the offenders might be influenced by the ideological rhetoric of these extremist environments without being actively involved in such networks.

In line with Janoff-Bulman's (1992) theory on assumptive worlds, many described growing up and being socialized into believing in gender equality and equal opportunities. The participants then described how they had revised their world view in light of both their own experiences and a realization of how common experiences of misogynistic hate crimes are in their broader social networks. Like the victims of other forms of hate crime, the participants consequently developed a weakened belief in a benevolent world (Herek et al. 1999; McDevitt et al. 2001; Noelle 2002) and began to regard male strangers as potential offenders. The latter could be interpreted as an attribution error, since the majority of men whom the participants encounter do not subject them to misogynistically motivated crimes (Craig-Henderson 2009). However, it is very difficult to discern what a 'reasonable' amount of suspicion or fear might consist of for this group. As the victims described, the offenders were most often male, but they shared little more than this with one another: they might be friends or partners who were outspoken feminists, they might be artistic role models, teachers, employers, co-students, strangers or family members. Consequently, the results show that preventive strategies need to be broad in nature, targeting men in general rather than specific risk groups. For example, since many of the incidents described in both the present study and previous research (Mason-Bish and Zempi 2019; Colliver 2021; Healy 2021) took place in public environments, such strategies might include programs to strengthen the capacity of bystanders to intervene, which have proven successful with regard to sexual offences. These programs include normative training in recognizing such incidents along with practical, non-escalatory intervention strategies (Santacrose, et al. 2020).

While the participants described balancing individual freedom and femininity against the risk of victimization, none of the participants resorted to victim blaming, as has sometimes been observed in previous studies on hate crime victims (Noelle 2002) and described

as a common coping strategy by Janoff-Bulman (1992). Instead, the participants expressed anger and frustration at their confrontations with misogyny, coupled with a strong sense of solidarity with other female victims. Having been socialized into individualistic values of self-realization and gender equality prior to being subjected to misogynistic hate crime, most had believed that misogyny was a remnant of a patriarchal past that had been removed from the current Swedish culture. Consequently, the participants' experiences did not dissolve their belief in being worthy of individual freedom and gender equality.

Limitations

Having participants from different groups of women has made it possible to point to both differences and broader similarities in how victims of misogynistic hate crimes define, describe, and react to their experiences. However, there are minority groups that are under-represented or not represented at all among the study participants. For example, only having one transgender woman limits the possibility of comparing transmisogynistic experiences to misogyny directed at cis women, and none of the participants were Sámi, an indigenous group in Sweden. Comparative studies between groups of women, and between different cultural contexts, would be beneficial in further developing the existing knowledge base.

The sample in the present study is also limited in terms of age, sample size, occupation, and lifestyle-related factors. This might have a profound impact on the kinds of misogyny that have been experienced and described by the participants, and there may be confounding cohort effects in the data. Consequently, broad generalizations to other contexts or groups of women that are very different from the one in which the study was conducted are not recommended. The field would be greatly enhanced by life-course studies, mapping vulnerable stages, transitions and turning points in victimization patterns.

Finally, the data are also based on a self-selected group of women who interpret the motives of their offender in a specific way, that is, as targeting their sex or gender. The results should not be interpreted as a representative voice for all women, or as applying to all crimes that target women.

Policy Implications

The participating women were positive to including gender in the Swedish hate crime legislation. For them, gender was perceived as a category that would fit well within the present framework. While generalizations should always be made with great care, the results stand in sharp contrast to studies focused on key actors in the justice system, who instead propose a more restrictive approach to gender in hate crime law (McPhail and Dinitto 2005; Hodge 2011).

In light of the results of the present study, previous research on misogynistic hate crime, and the rise of an extremist misogynistic environment, the author recommends that Sweden, together with other countries that currently do not include gender in their hate crime legislation, work strategically to build more knowledge about gender-bias hate crime by funding research that expands on the limited empirical knowledge that is currently available. In the Swedish case, it would be highly valuable to begin screening for gender-bias hate crime in the Swedish Crime Survey (SCS), which would produce a significant contribution to the knowledge and provide a basis for more informed policy in this area. Given

that the SCS already screens for hate crimes with racist, homophobic and anti-religious motives, this would constitute a minor alteration but would produce large knowledge gains.

Since hate crimes involve both social constructions and hard reality, it is important that future research addresses both of these aspects. There is thus a need for more knowledge on the types of gender constructions and gendered power relations that are expressed by different groups in the form of misogynistic hate crime, as well as knowledge about the incidents themselves and their post-victimization impact. In sum, while this study makes a contribution to the field, a larger body of empirical knowledge is needed to anchor the legal policy debate on gender-bias hate crime in the lived reality of those affected – a perspective that is presently broadly overlooked and unacknowledged.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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