

Discourse of Public Sexual Harassment: Identity Construction in Sexually Harassed Teenage Girls' narratives of personal Experiences.

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Abstract

This paper reports on an ongoing research project in public sites in North West of Algeria where sexually harassed teenage girls are every day treated like a piece of public property. Its emphasis is on their narratives of personal experiences examining how linguistic resources are used to index their distinct identities. This paper expands this view by focusing up on cases where these survivors are blamed and forced to accept occupied identities and show no sign of agency when telling those narrative discourses. Many of the stories told by them reveal a picture of extensive abuse that affects their lives, but is systematically under-reported to the authorities. This underscores the several ways in which their perceptions of public sexual harassment is both *discursively* gendered in the name of the so-called honourable cultures and the social gender norms, while in turn these cultural and sexist beliefs serve to consider their bodies as objects that need self- surveillance within such panoptic patriarchal contexts and therefore legitimize the violation of their rights.

Key words: Narratives, critical discourse analysis, gender identities in discourse, performativity, Panopticon, disciplinary power, agency and sexual violence.

Introduction

Imagine hearing that someone has experienced public sexual harassment. Conjuring up an image of this hypothetical scenario, we need therefore to hear about all of it, not just what we want to hear. Now then, do you imagine a male perpetrator? If so, few would deny that men and sexual harassment are closely related. Is the imagined victim specific? If it is envisaged that a victim is female, though we do not intend to deny the violence women commit against men/women, according to the World Bank data (2012), “women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria”. Is the story then as the same as that of abusive men and victimized women? This indeed brings us to the general points with which we started this project: how is public sexual harassment talked about; how are narratives about it organized; how is blaming manifested in these narratives and how is talk about it can be used as a means for identity construction?

Talking about public sexual harassment is of great importance, it makes it possible or impossible to understand the norms, concepts, beliefs and ideologies that define what is perceived as reality on this subject. Often critical discourse analysis targets the way in which reality is constructed. Indeed, its process is largely based around critically interrogating one's own taken-for-granted expectations, Wetherell and Potter (1992) asserted. This goes hand in hand with the constructionist perspective that views the use of discourse as socially and discursively constitutive of people's relations and identities in daily life. Such a perspective links with Butler's (1990) concept of 'performativity' in which she argues that gender identities are unstable and always discursively performed. In line with this, Ochs suggested that 'linguistic features may index social meanings (stances, social acts, social activities), which in turn help to constitute gender meanings' (Ochs, 1992, p.341).

Now then, there is no escaping the fact that narratives of public sexual harassment must be told, generally the reason is that narratives are constitutive of reality and numbers alone may not lead us to the answers. As will be evident in this paper, there are many things we wish to explain to the reader, all related to the ways teenage girls talk about public sexual harassment through their personal trauma narratives. Simply by being in a panoptic patriarchal public space, they can be constantly cat-called, harassed, touched, threatened, followed, leered at and worse. Every day they are reminded that they live in a world where they must constantly have more docile objectified body. Overall, accessible yet rich, this

study gives, first, a brief introduction of gender identities in discourse; focusing on its inevitable relation with the patriarchal disciplinary power. Then, it provides a short account of the importance of narratives as ‘the representation of an event or a series of events’ (Porter Abbott, 2002, p.13) for public sexual harassment research. This is followed finally by an analysis of selected excerpts of teenage girls’ oral narratives of public sexual harassment and a discussion of the current findings.

1. Discourse, Gender Identity and the disciplinary power

Whilst one speaks convincingly of the need of the plural word ‘identities’, what is of essence hitherto is the question: ‘where do identities come from?’ According to Ivanic (1998), social constructionists share the view that identity is the result of affiliation to particular beliefs and possibilities available in the social context, in any case, they offer a possibility of resistance. Jaworski and Coupland (1999) give a quick paraphrase of what Giddens has said. Giddens sees identity as a series of ‘choices’ one continually makes about oneself and one’s lifestyle. With this result, identity is a process and not a state or set of personal attributes. Lia Litosseliti & Jane Sunderland (2002) have the same opinion that identities can be seen as emerging from affiliation and choices (though not free choices), but they further claim that identities also come from the ascriptions of others, from an individual’s different sorts of relationships with others. Identities then change as their relationships change (within a Community of Practice). Similarly, the development of gender identity can be recognized as fluid and never complete. Butler, a feminist of great renown, insists that there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. She believes that masculinities and femininities are results we perform by the activities in which we partake, not predetermined traits we possess. However that does not assume that individuals are free to perform whatever ‘gender identity’ they choose, Butler (1990, p. 33) herself acknowledges that acts of identity performance take place within a ‘rigid regulatory frame’. In this sense, if social norms are broken, then negative evaluation can occur (Tope Omoniyi & Goodith White, 2006).

One more point to make here and which ties in well with the claim we expressed earlier is the relationship between gender identity and discourse. All we know thus far is that, as Cameron (2001) argues, our words always tell our listeners something about ourselves. In

conjunction with the social constructionist approach to gender, some recent studies adopt a dual definition of discourse. Discourse, in its traditional linguistic sense, as 'language beyond the sentence', and discourse, in a much broader sense, to return to Foucault's words of pluralized discourses as (1972, p.49): "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak". The manner in which these two strands of analysis are crucially interlinked will now be fully elucidated.

Most scholars, following Ochs (1992), agree that: 'any aspect of language can become indexical of social identities, from phonological variables to individual words, to complex discourse structures such as patterns of actions in narratives' (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006, p.15). As is evident from this view, it seems reasonable then to suppose that the indexicality model explains the way in which linguistic forms relate to diverse identities. Ochs (1992, p. 341) points out that very few linguistic forms directly index gender (e.g. Mrs., Mr. s/he...). This means that, she comments, linguistic strategies should be seen as being indirectly indexed with (gender) identity (indirect indexicality). Directly related to performativity, indices are non-exclusive; Ochs (1992) said, and added that the same linguistic form can be used by man or woman. By way of example, McElhinny (2003: 35) observes, female speaker does not use a tag question simply because she is a female speaker but she may use it because she is abiding by cultural and ideological expectations about femininity. So there is no reason to catalogue speech styles according to sex because linguistic features may be employed to index social meanings (stances), which in turn help to constitute gender identities.

Following the oft-cited Foucaultian view of discourse (1972), we can say that discourses do not only represent something already existing, discourses are both representational and constitutive. This perhaps has a closer meaning to Bucholtz's view 'speakers' identities emerge from discourse' (1994, p.4). On reflection, it is arguable that identities are both discursively represented and (re) constituted. According to Lia Litosseliti & Jane Sunderland (2002), the way we speak both to and about others can be seen as affiliation (there is some space for individual choice); but the way we are spoken about can be seen as attribution/ascription. Identity therefore, is a two-way process: the result of joint production (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). Within this particular process, individuals can be

(presented) more or less active. This mention of individual's identities as embedded within discourse raises the idea of 'discourse mediating/shaping identities'. Discourse which gives meaning that, for example, women by their dress or behaviour are often responsible for rape and sexual harassment, can be regarded as having the potential to shape or mediate the identities of some women. This constitutive capacity of discourse, identified by Hollway (1984) does not only represent gendered social practices, but also maintains and re-constitutes them. Altogether this implies that there is a link between Foucault's definition of discourse and performativity. Coates (1997, p. 291) states that we all have 'access to a range of discourses, and it is these different discourses which give us access to, or enable us to perform, different 'selves'". Coates has been able to shed light on two different discourses. She (1997) defines dominant discourses, which legitimize male superiority, and resistant / subversive discourses, such as feminist discourses. What she was able to deduce is that these discourses compete and can co-occur within the same stretch of talk. Finally, while plausible, it seems that a focus on identity and discourse inevitably entails an exploration of power relations (Lia Litosseliti & Jane Sunderland, 2002).

Turning now to the discussion of how useful are Foucault's concept of 'discourse' and 'the disciplinary power' for analyzing patriarchal relations between men and women in modern societies; we need first to introduce the Panopticon model. It is unsurprising that for Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon is designed to maintain continuous efficient surveillance in prisons, whereas for the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972), the Panopticon is adopted to assure the automatic functioning of power in modern societies. In Foucault's words, unlike previous societies, modern society has seen a great emergence of new disciplinary systems that easily produce 'docile bodies'. To show the meaning of this point more clearly, since the prisoner, who is subjected to the visible tower, knows that he is seen without being able to see his watcher; he becomes to himself his own jailor. The shift here is that these disciplinary practices are not restricted only to prisons but also to schools, hospitals, factories and cities. Indeed, Foucault extends Bentham's work and shows in details how disciplinary power works and how human bodies follow the norms because of the threat of the modern panoptic societies. For him, discipline is a set of strategies associated with certain contexts which pervades the individual's general thinking (mind) and behaviour. To be clear enough, as prisoners; individuals (such as a student within a classroom, a soldier at a drill)

also turn their gaze upon themselves and discipline their bodies with the appropriate gestures and movements in various contexts according to the expected and stereotyped social cultural norms. Therefore, Foucault introduced the term “docile subjected bodies” and put it as that: “...the human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it...” (1979, p. 138).

More precisely, those gestures and movements that are required from the individual have to be internalized as being “the self”. The body is absolutely controlled not by external means but through the internal control of the person himself. That is the reason why Foucault conceives human subjectivity in terms of passive docile bodies and claims that the effect of power on these bodies results in reducing social agency and autonomy as well.

Foucault however could not escape the criticism because of his blindness to pay any attention to the gendered body: “...But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine ...” Lee Bartky (1988, p. 27). For him, the female body is as the same as the male body that is subjected to many disciplinary practices in modern societies. Feminist scholars however, assure that women; unlike men; must view their bodies as objects that need self- surveillance within panoptic patriarchal societies in particular. Like the prisoner, student and the soldier, woman follows these norms because of the way she looked at by others besides to the threat of being sanctioned (laughed at or blacklisted for instances) by male patriarchy. Her self-control is achieved through the lens of man’s perception of the ideal female body. Indeed male gaze and judgment make women confine to some stereotyped gender roles and just feel as if they are behaving naturally. In fact, as one could not ignore that Foucault’s work usefulness is quite remarkable for Feminist studies, one could not ignore too that women’s bodies are more docile than men’s bodies. In the same line of thought, what made Foucault’s work receives severe criticism is the exclusion of the subjected bodies of women. Cultural ideologies and stereotyped gender roles dictate that women are expected to have an acceptable beautiful ideal thin body (depends on the context, so certainly the list might not be exhaustive). In other words; because of the unequal power relationship between the watcher male and the watched female, women lose their sense of autonomy when trying to appear desirable to men. As shown by Lee Barkty, being a female involves internalizing these biased gendered norms. Consequently, she refers

to the expression ‘the modernization of patriarchal power’ so as to assert that the disciplinary power that specifically creates passive female body is everywhere and nowhere. Thus, this representation helps to maintain a series of unequal power relations between those who usually have an unnoticed normal body and those who constantly have more docile objectified body.

In conclusion, for feminist theorists such as Jana Sawicki, such a model makes it possible for us to think beyond a concept of power as a possession and to think about ‘how subjects are constituted by power relations’ (Sawicki 1991, p. 21). She continues asserting that Foucault’s conceptualisation of power moves beyond the idea of it being merely repressive to it also being productive, causing new behaviours, identities and knowledge to emerge, but usually through discourse. Discourse itself acts as a kind of surveillance, Foucault argues. There is no denying that through his suggestion, he gives reasons that with power comes the possibility of resistance, of course according to the ways various discourses are used because ‘[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it’ (Foucault 1979, p.101).

2. Public Sexual Harassment in Narratives

“I feel unsafe almost every day on my walk home from the subway after work. I am constantly cat-called, harassed, touched, whistled at, threatened, followed, and leered at. My neighborhood is my home, though, and I don’t want to leave. But what else can I do?”

_Anonymous survey respondent (cited in Holly Kearl, 2009) _

Public harassment describes unwanted interactions in public spaces between strangers that are motivated by a person’s actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression and make the harassed feel annoyed, angry, humiliated, or scared. Street harassment can take place on the streets, in stores, on public transportation, in parks, and at beaches. It ranges from verbal harassment to flashing, following, groping, and rape. It differs from issues like sexual harassment in school and the workplace or domestic violence because it happens between strangers in a public place. This description serves the purpose of showing

street harassment as human rights violation and a form of gender based violence. To see this point more clearly, we would like to emphasize that one of the vehicles through which this relationship is worked out is discourse. As we have already demonstrated how, in different context, discourse makes it possible to talk about things, phenomena, relations and positions; and makes it possible or impossible to talk about these issues in particular ways' (Foucault 1972), to not complicate things, this concerns how discourses set the parameters for what is regarded as normal, deviant, true, false, right and wrong, meaning that discursively, naming something as violence, implies categorizing a social action as illegitimate. In this respect, to employ what is called discourses of violence, narratives are very important.

Narrative, to put it simply, is 'the representation of an event or a series of events' (Porter Abbott, 2002, p.13) but to emphasize only those meanings of the concept 'narrative' in the sense we feel is appropriate in the given context, Sherline Pimenta and Ravi Poovaiah (2010) use a working definition: 'narrative meaning to tell a story'. In a similar way, Cortazzi (2001) asserts that when we tell stories, we make sense of past experiences by sharing them with others. Sociolinguistic research has provided important conceptual models of narratives, and most studies refer to Labov's (1972) seminal work on narrative structure to identify the key components of an oral narrative:

- abstract (a brief summary of the general propositions the story will make);
- orientation (essential background information like time, place, and people involved);
- complicating action (key events of the story);
- evaluation (highlighting the point of the story);
- resolution (how the crisis was resolved); and finally,
- coda (concluding remarks).

It must be said that not all narratives contain all components, but the complicating action and resolution are essential (Thornborrow and Coates, 2005). It must be also mentioned that scholars suggest at least five functions of narratives. Narrative creates *coherence* (re-experiencing past events and making sense of them), serves a distancing function (we distance ourselves from the immediacy of events), a communicative function (experiences become shared); an evaluative function (gives the opportunity to re-evaluate and suggest alternative

interpretations); and explorative function (to explore two sides of human experience: the real and the possible) (Hans J. Ladegaard, 2012, p.454).

3. Research Setting, Sample and Methodological Approach

Beiske (2002) states that ‘while factors such as time and costs certainly play an important part in deciding how to approach a particular research problem, the subject of the research itself should ultimately determine the methods used’. Consistent with the subject of this project, a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks were drawn on. The data was collected using an ethnographic approach: we spent periods of time observing the research settings in order to gather rich and detailed insights. Other frameworks which were important for understanding teenage girls’ narratives are social constructionism and the tenets of Fairclough's dimensions for CDA (description, interpretation and explanation).

We, as researchers, have realized that teenage girls’ narratives needed to be documented and shared with a wider audience. For this purpose, we interviewed about one hundred teenage girls (The minimum age is 14 years and the maximum is 22 years) from various areas in North West of Algeria. They were guaranteed anonymity for ethical reasons, that is to say, giving them fabricated names and omitting details that could reveal their true identities. In general, when we sat face to face with them, we quickly realized that most of them were more afraid of us, they were also curious, hesitant and sometimes indifferent towards us. Hence, before the interviews, we tried to explain the research topic and ask for their consent to use their narratives for research purposes. More importantly, it has been always advisable to take actions guided by respect for the wishes, the right and the dignity of the victim/survivor. In these instances, we conduct our interviews in private settings and with same sex interviewer. We have been good patient listeners who have maintained non judgmental manner and asked relevant questions. The questions we asked were related to what they felt they could talk about concerning problems they had faced in public spaces; including but not limited to streets, sidewalks, alleys, public buildings, such as hotels and restaurants, and common carriers such as buses and taxis; elaborating on how they had coped with. Of course, this was a question that we purposefully included to explore issues of agency

and the construction of the self. In particular, the selection of participants was governed by a number of variables including:

- Sex: It was suggested to have only female teenagers.
- Age: To see whether or not experiences of the interviewees depended on their age.
- Locale: can be identified based on urban or rural geographical areas.

4. Data Analysis

From a large corpus of narratives by sexually harassed teenage girls in North West of Algeria, this paper selected six excerpts for analysis focusing on identity construction in discourse. Based on these analyses; five themes have been identified. They illuminate the overall picture afforded by the interviews and illustrate important aspects of identity construction for teenage girls as well. Here is a selection of their stories translated in English:

- Int = female interviewer
- [...] = short pause, pause in seconds
- Italics = trembling voice

Excerpt 1: Aicha, 21 years old, from an urban village in Oran.

Aicha: When I was fifteen years old, I used to love hearing those words and compliments which mean something like "hey, gorgeous, kissing noises...etc" hissed and whispered at me by men on the street. I felt like the most beautiful girl in the world.

Int: Did this feeling last long?

Aicha: [...] just recently, as I was walking to my aunt's home at nap time, a man on a motorcycle passed by me. He turned around and followed me, telling me how pretty I am. I smiled and thanked him. But he started to circle me as I was walking and told me to hop on that he would take me somewhere fun. I told him 'no', but he was persistent, getting more visibly aggressive every time I said no. He got mad and hit the seat behind him hard enough. I

was about to cry and I felt so alone and scared, I remember exactly how I felt. [...] It was painful, emasculating, and sickening. I still have nightmares.

Int: What could you do?

Aicha: Ohhhh [...], a man came to my rescue and put himself between me and him. That man however didn't understand my feelings; he made me feel like it was my fault. [...] He shouted

angrily: 'Praise be to Allah you were not raped, you should not come alone to these places at nap time'.

▪ **Compliment or Public sexual harassment?**

We can understand that lines 1 and 2 in Aicha's narrative "I used to love hearing those words ... I felt like the most beautiful girl in the world" do not only normalize the idea that public sexual harassment is ok, but also give the message that to be sexually harassed on the street is desirable. To Aicha, this is like a compliment and she wants to hear it; she feels good and comfortable when men catcall; that gives her an ego boost and a sense of empowerment. Aicha thereby encourages such conducts and allows men to say anything they want to her anytime and anywhere. In other words, normalizing or even encouraging compliments from street harassers broadcasts the belief that men are entitled to express verbally and physically their sexual desires for women who have not consented to being a part of them. Besides, females should smile and thank them. But 'hold on', we seriously doubt if this has anything to do with compliment.

That however did nothing but made things worse. As the story progresses, we meet a sexually harassed female who feels unsafe, scared, violated and unwelcome in public spaces. We could see this when Aicha loses control of her own narrative, her voice started to tremble and we thought she was going to cry (lines 9-10). In reality, Aicha used to think that it is simply a matter of yelling something deemed to be complimentary; but her harasser takes a step further. He follows her and demanded her attention. After that, he becomes violent upon rejection because his right to her body is more important than her right to say 'no'. Aicha's use of the expression of pain 'Ohhhh [...]' also deserves comment. The same message is repeatedly sent to women, public sexual harassment is their faults. Aicha's rescue tells her that such spaces are for men and women especially alone are not welcome in them. Now then, we shall not forget to reconsider the word 'rape': "Praise be to Allah you were not raped..." (line13). This illustrates that public sexual harassment is also a harmful and serious social problem because it falls along a spectrum of violence. It can start as verbal harassment and easily turns to rape and even murder. In all, it is worth considering the heavy price Aicha pays for this status quo. In this excerpt, she claims for herself an identity of not only an easy target who does not learn how to take a compliment but also does not know what it truly means to be sexually harassed.

Excerpt 2: Fatima, 19 years old, from an urban village, Mascara.

Fatima: Well, one day, I was just walking home, minding my own business, not wearing ‘revealing clothes’. A man came behind me on his bicycle and pulled my hair saying words I cannot utter!. When I turned to face him I discovered that he was my cousin.

Int: Oh, really?

Fatima: Yeah, his face becomes red, he didn’t know it was me, my hairstyle was different.

Int: What did you do when you found out, how did you feel?

Fatima: I was speechless, it was a big problem that day, and he almost killed me. I am in continuous and direct conflict with him, he always criticises my clothes and holds me responsible for getting harassed and that’s what I strongly refuses. For him, this is due to poor upbringing of me.

Int: Did you tell your parents?

Fatima: I told my mother, but she took his side. She used to say: “eat to suit yourself, and dress to suit others”. But I said: “you see how I am dressed”, if I change my hairstyle each time or dress this way, it doesn’t mean that I am bad...It’s not by appearance. And I have already seen on TV, they said it is not a question of what we dress.

▪ **Planning Behaviours**

Excerpt 2 provides a different scenario. As Fatima claims, she was sexually harassed by her cousin on the street but definitely he did not recognize her; he was easily mistakable for her when she changed her hairstyle. In his mind, she is a complete stranger (line 4). He turned red after the incident perhaps because such behaviour is both inexcusable and unexplainable; normally he is forced to defend his honour by protecting and controlling her and not to ruin her reputation.

Fatima’s narrative reflects yet another image of victim blaming. Lines 6, 7 and 8 continue the sequence of the events. Shockingly common, rather than admitting his guilt; her cousin thinks he has the right to pass judgments on her. But worst of all is the greater tolerance for harassment. Fatima informs her mother of what happened to her but the latter considers it a natural unintentional incident. In an honest opinion, though she is the victim; she is unfairly burdened with the ways in which she has to plan her behaviours in public and above all must never think about fighting back against something that is so present in her community.

Comments such as ‘eat to suit yourself, and dress to suit others’ suggests that Fatima is obliged to ask herself daily: “have I missed anything? May be the dress is too tight. May be the Tshirt is too short. May be the scarf is too coloured or may be the make-up is too conspicuous”. She must always think in what reactions she will get; she must constructs herself through her relationships with others and through the eyes of others who imprint on her their own gaze and positioning. Lines 9 and 10 capture the inner speech of Fatima, an important point in the narrative since it reveals her rejection of the status quo idea that this situation is inevitable and unchangeable. It is possible that this reaction is only momentary but she considers the comment to be disrespectful and an insult. Notice that it is not so much her cousin’s comments themselves that are hard to deal with; but it is rather the way in which Fatima has to shift and plan her behaviour in public that is most frustrating. She referred then to the media as a source of information through which the issue is discussed and public awareness is increased against it.

Excerpt 3: Salima, 16 years old, from a rural area in Chlef.

Salima: In my family, a girl needs permission where she could go and what time she needs to come back. My mother always says: “don’t be too loud, don’t talk to boys even if they tease you, move appropriately and don’t attract too much attention towards yourself”, you know, just to keep me safe. But despite these precautionary measures, men never stop teasing.

Int: what does this mean?

Salima: Let me share with you what happened that day. “I was fifteen years old, er[...] in my final year of middle school. Because I live in a very rural area, I would get the bus to school every day, often on my own. Occasionally, it was very crowded, so I was standing holding on to a hanging handle. “Suddenly, I started to feel the back of my hair moving. At first I thought it was caused by a breeze, but it happened again, I clearly felt fingers playing with my hair. Then for a very short time, I felt someone fondling me in the back. I turned around and I was faced with a man, I guess he was in his thirties, forcing me to make the contact.

Int: mhm, did you react?

Salima: I remember I really didn’t know how to react. I couldn’t even speak, so I said nothing, like nothing happened [...] I believe if I didn’t ignore it, our neighbours who were in the bus, they would tell my father and it would be a big problem and I might stop attending school.

- **Suffering in Silence**

Salima's account of her family accepted norms is commonly heard among the informants. She is expected to be docile, shy, and not to be outspoken and opinionated. Her behaviours must be closely linked to notions of honour and shame purely and simply because she is under the close and continued scrutiny of society (Panoptic society). This means Salima is constantly under pressure to think about her family name in her daily life, ranging from the clothes she wears to the way she behaves in public. Thus she cannot stay overnight, she cannot be seen to roam around and she cannot be seen to be interacting with boys. Her experience of sexual harassment on a bus suggests that pressure exerting messages from her mother about the importance of being submissive seems pointless; it has no significant effects however. Salima, with a voice heavy with irony, puts it very aptly: "But despite these precautionary measures, men never stop teasing".

Also, here is an unpleasant truth. Salima experiences particular difficulties with transport to get education. She is transported to and from school each day and because of the lack of carriages she would often end up standing in the aisles or cramped in doorway. Even worse is the idea that if they are packed like sardines, Salima's whole body would be millimeters from others then. She reports that a strange man in his thirties played with her hair and touched her in a sexual way. Yet she has been silenced through this time by the fears of what could happen to her and how she would be perceived by the public: neighbours and her family in particular. She could not speak back to her harasser because of the social pressure to not make a fuss; that was a private event and nobody heard it. In line 14, Salima explains how simply blame might be placed on her and not the harasser "it would be a big problem and I might stop attending school". In other words, instead of speaking out against the seemingly overwhelming problem of harassment, Salima often takes steps to avoid it. Anyway, we are not sure if these are wrong or right ways to respond to harassment but we feel absolutely sure that when Salima speaks she is afraid her words will not be heard nor welcomed, and when she is silent she is still afraid. Regardless of what she does or does not do, nothing changes. But to not make matters worse she defines herself in relation to her family; that it is impossible for her to show any sign of agency (identity for the other).

Excerpt 4: Samah, 15 years old from an urban city, Mascara



Samah: I was 12 years old when I heard kissing noises. I know, it sounds awfully young, but I really looked pubescent girl when I was 12. Anyway, I was walking home alone when a group of boys who had to have been about 16/17 years old were sitting in the park just loitering. As I walked past them one of the guys yelled at me: “Hey, I want to talk to you”. He yells again: “Come here bitch, don't ignore me; I'm talking to you.” so I ran away from them as fast as I could. They followed me in the street telling me: “they know where I live and they are going to come to knock on my door and tell my father and my brother”.

Int: So you had to run again?

Samah: The problem is that daddy saw them commenting on regularly. He was not with me. Once I pointed at the perpetrators, he shouted angrily “go home [...]”. Yes, yes; he swore at me in front of them. It was a cruel punishment; my father beat me to death: “He pulled a knife and wanted to stab me”. Even my aunts were against me, they asked questions like: ‘why are you still outdoors; you already have big breasts?’ and things like that. They said they felt great shame on what I have done. They believe that brings shame on me and my father.

▪ **Victim Blaming**

Samah wants us to see that there is a misunderstanding of the difference between the victim and the harasser's conduct. Here in fact she uses no contesting strategies to challenge this view; her opening remark “...but I really looked pubescent girl when I was 12...” asserts that she expects to be a ready target for the same type of harassment that younger women might suffer more from, which is to say that she recognizes she is no longer young and perhaps more eye catching to be harassed. Probably at times Samah just gives credence to the idea that harassment is a matter of routine that she does not feel like she can take it seriously. In line 8, she says, “the problem is that daddy saw them commenting on regularly”. Once again, the problem is not that she is routinely subjected to street harassment which frightens her and reinforces fears of rape; her only problem is her family reaction. When her father witnessed what happened, though she pointed at the harassers, Samah could never be believed. Her father thinks she attracts too much attention towards herself. The repeated discourse markers ‘yes, yes my father swore at me in front of them’ and her emphasis upon the expression ‘punishment’ indicate that especially relatives do not have a lot of sympathy for the victims, Samah was beaten and shouted at. Her aunts claim that she is responsible for her sexual objectification (line 12). In other words, they simply blame the victim and detract from the harasser's behaviour. This is of course based on certain considerations such as

societal pressure. Now then, just pause and think for a moment: if the perpetrators are certain that Samah keeps quiet when she is harassed and she does not complain because she does not want to be blamed, it seems that they would really take advantage. All in all, we have no hesitation therefore to say that victim blaming is absolutely a part of an unfair culture.

Excerpt 5: Leila, 17 years old from an urban city, Tiaret.

Leila: Usually my friends and I just try to move away as fast as we can to get out of those creeps and their words: you are beautiful kitten, can I have your number, let's do something things tonight, and your eyes are beautiful [...]

Int: what do you think?

Leila: I have been educated by my mother, father, my brothers and even school to be shy because I am a girl, not speak about these things. If a guy does something, look down and walk away. This is why I could say I could not defend myself. In the past I used to get afraid. But now I defend myself and to defend other girls in the street. I'm not doing something wrong, it's him who is doing something wrong and the law should punish him, but you know the law is not applied. The people who are watching don't say anything. They don't react; they don't try to protect you. On the contrary, they ask: "what's wrong with you?" Sometimes when you go to a police officer to complain about it, the issue seems microscopic compared to the other problems happening in our society. If you go you to the police officer he may told you why you travel alone at this time and why are not you accompanied by male if you know it is not safe, go home.

▪ **Widespread Apathy**

The worst part of Leila's's narrative again is that public sexual harassment is an everyday reality for women; they have to be conscious 24×7 in their cities. As discussed previously, they have to be conscious of where they are going; what they are wearing, what time they are going to be there. They leave at a certain time and they are back at a certain time as well. Even a closer look at Leila's narrative reveals that her family advised her on more non-confrontational ways of remaining safe; not being too loud nor attracting too much attention towards herself to simply get away from the harasser. We can only conjecture that their reaction is to be safe no matter what it takes; but though Leila understood their concerns, she is not willing to adopt everything they suggested and desired to use their own judgments in determining how a particular situation should be handled. Viewed in this light, she realized

she has made no mistake; she is very explicit about what she thought was wrong with her society. To comment shortly, she believed that there is a general apathy toward women's concerns about public harassment, which was seen to extend from police to the general public. She felt that harassment was seen as a normal and regular affair and thus ignored 'the issue seems microscopic compared to the other problems happening in our society...' Policemen were seen as extremely insensitive when blaming women for the harassment they faced (lines 11 and 12). According to Leila then, the whole problem is that women cannot report since police do not investigate and law is not applied.

Excerpt 6: Hanane, 19 years old, from an urban village, Chlef.

Hanane: I was about 18 when, one day on my way to home, a fifty year old man told me: "You got great eyes, baby!" In response, I scream, "My name is not a baby, you probably have a daughter older than me", and then I asked him: "how you would like it if your daughter or sister was walking and some random strangers called them inappropriate names".

Int: Did he apologize?

Hanane: Unconcerned by this thought he burst out laughing and said: "psst [...]smile sweetie". Following this, I gave him an angry look then I said: "I am not a dog, don't whistle at me. I do not like this kind of treatment and I would report it to my father if you continue". He said: "Don't make me laugh!" He thought I would not do it.

Int: Did you call your father?

Hanane: Of course I did and he came but, unfortunately, the man ran away in fright. My father always tells me: 'if you feel overpowered then and there call me or call the police'.

▪ **Perpetrator Blaming**

What is dramatic about Hanane's story perhaps is that a fifty year old man sexually harassed her. Look, we don't pretend that there is a lower or upper age limit for harassing women but we really feel disappointed that a man of her father's age on the street just looked at her like she is a whore. No matter who that man is, through looks, sexist words and gestures including phrases like 'hey baby' and 'psst' sounds; he asserts his right to define her as a sexual object; forcing her to interact with him and telling her to smile.

What is not being talked about so far, and should be, is the decision Hanane takes. More radically, lines 3 through 6 are all in direct speech and show the confrontation between

Hanane and the harasser, each echoing two opposing figured worlds: the oppressed world of what ought to be for Hanane and the world of authority for the harasser. This is a clear episode of resistance indeed: Hanane explains her decision to speak out against sexual harassment; she did not wait a second to confront directly. Here she sounds confident; she does not care if she will be at risk; that is to say she has no fears that the situation might escalate further. One thing is certain: she just reinforced the fact that she is never at fault. This is absolutely due to certain reasons. Concurrent with this sense, we wonder: who is behind her self-emancipation?

What is specifically disturbing is that that man did not understand. His laughter and ironic reply suggest that he was not going to stop, he did not take her seriously; therefore her resistance appears futile. Given the seriousness of the issue, Hanane called her father whose feedback helps her to become an agent in her own experience. As she concludes, her father remained worried about her safety; he was advising her daughter on how to handle unpleasant situations and to take actions against harassers in particular. Note, by the way, that Hanane does not feel inhibited to talk to her father about the issue, and therein lies her power. Owing to his support, she describes the moment when the harasser finally understood.

Concluding Discussion

They show how most respondents agree that naturally males do commit public sexual harassment. They naturalize and justify it against themselves because this happens to all females and they get accustomed to that. Some of them, however, are in complete ignorance why these acts are performed because males have no reason to do that. Additionally, it is impossible and undesirable for these girls to become such agents who decide to make a complaint against their harassers because they will be blamed and may be beaten. Though there are those who think more overtly about matters and abandons, if only for some time, the typical picture we had in some of the previous narratives and decide to be no longer victims and defend themselves, they may be considered as violent hysterical and dishonourable females.

Lin (2008: 1) argues that there are at least two driving psychological motivations for identity: being-for-the-self and identity-for-the-other. There is no doubt that the identity

constructions identified in these oral narratives belong to the second category. Most teenage girls are discursively affected by the so-called honourable culture and gender norms. For them, violence is exclusive to males and no need to report these incidents to the police. As having fixed occupied identities of sacrificial daughters and pretty sisters who are doing honorable and correct things, teenage girls should not show any sign of resistance because the patriarchal culture of honour has strongly legitimizes males' sexual harassment against them. Briefly, we may find that public sexual harassment is gendered in its practice, depictions and blaming. So, in addition to this forced occupied victim's identity, it could be also generalized that sexual violence is a gendered term.

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