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“You Look like My 14-Year-Old Daughter”: A Corpus-Based Study of Sexist Language in #everydaysexism Twitter Stories

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Abstract

The main purpose of this corpus-based study is to examine the different types of sexist language women are subjected to in their daily interactions with men, together with their hidden ideologies. To this end, we analysed a total of 1,118 English tweets posted on the hashtag #everydaysexism on Twitter over a year. Results indicate that women experience both overt and indirect verbal aggressions in different domains of life, expressed through a range of sexist linguistic markers, and that such aggressions often reflect the users’ beliefs and values about men and women. By using a category-based model to examine a feminist narrative hashtag where women’s experiences of sexism are shared, our study offers a robust and principled approach to conducting a corpus-based, cross-domain discourse analysis of sexism in daily communication.

Keywords: sexist language, sexist markers, overt sexism, indirect sexism, stereotype, hashtag feminism

1. Introduction

As with other social movements, it is hard to pinpoint the exact beginning of the fourth wave of feminism. It is clear, however, that it is still happening today and is defined mainly as a “call-out” culture online (Blevins 2018). In other words, “the internet has

created a culture in which sexism or misogyny can be called out and challenged” (Munro 2013, 23). Given the prevalence of social media use among millennials and Generation Z, digital activism has become a central part of the contemporary feminist repertoire (Clark-Parsons 2021). Within this digital landscape, hashtags—metadata tags denoted by a hash symbol (#)—act as critical tools to categorize social media content, stimulate discussions, boost campaign visibility, and foster a sense of unity (Turley and Fisher 2018).

This paper explores the sexist language highlighted in the narratives and discourse integral to “call-out” feminism, which is related to an online hashtag movement that spotlights the presence of sexism and gender bias in everyday situations, with the goal of bringing these pervasive issues to the forefront of public discourse to inspire action towards gender equality. This online platform thus provides a space for women to share personal narrations of their experiences, effectively piercing the veil of silence that frequently shrouds everyday instances of sexism and fostering candid dialogue and increased awareness (Turley and Fisher 2018). This represents a departure from traditional structures that have historically silenced women’s voices (Foster, Tassone, and Matheson 2021), and the #everydaysexism hashtag on Twitter stands as a paradigmatic instance of this phenomenon.

In this paper, we propose to integrate a category-based sexism model and a corpus-based discourse analysis to examine narratives of verbal aggression identified in tweets posted on the #everydaysexism hashtag. Affiliated with the Everyday Sexism Project launched by Laura Bates in 2012 and serving as a counter-discourse to post-feminist

sentiments, this hashtag has considerably influenced the discourse of fourth-wave feminism and has achieved global reach, especially on Twitter. Our research contributes to our understanding of the digital footprint left by the campaign by shedding light on

the systemic prevalence of aggressive and confrontational language that permeates women's everyday experiences of sexism. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the use of sexist markers in a specialized corpus of tweets collected from the #everydaysexism hashtag.

In what follows, we first review previous research on hashtag feminism, gendered verbal aggression, and then move on to the data and methodology, the findings, the discussion, and finally the conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Section 2 is divided into two parts: hashtag feminism and gendered verbal aggression. Together, they situate the present study in the wider literature about the prevalence of sexist language against women in daily life, thus underpinning the need to uncover and study such language in a more robust and principled way.

2.1 Hashtag feminism

In recent years, the rise of feminist hashtags on global digital platforms has signified a substantial shift in the way feminist discourse is conducted online. However, this evolution has not been without controversy among academics and social commentators. Critics often deride these online discussions as “Slacktivism” or “armchair activism”, viewing them as low-investment forms of online activism that lack the impact needed

for real social change (Foster, Tassone, and Matheson 2021). Furthermore, the use of feminist hashtags has led to concerns about cyberbullying and the potential harm that public engagement in these dialogues may cause to survivors (Hansson et al. 2020). Foster, Tassone, and Matheson (2021), for example, highlighted a paradoxical issue: while these digital platforms were created as counter-spaces to traditional structures that silence women, they can inadvertently contribute to the same silencing they were designed to counteract due to backlash within these spaces. Adding to the complexity of the debate, conservative critics argue that these campaigns risk overreach, potentially ruining the lives of those accused and placing unnecessary strain on the interpersonal and professional relationships between men and women (Clark-Parsons 2021).

The ongoing discussion about the role of hashtag feminism underscores a principal inquiry: Is it feasible for an online feminist movement to instigate substantial social reform? Despite scepticism from some quarters, it is imperative not to undervalue the potential influence of digital activist communities. Recent research has in fact underscored the significant role of hashtags in feminist discourse on social media platforms, demonstrating an array of consequential impacts. Suffice to mention a few studies here. Foster, Tassone, and Matheson (2021) found that tweets about sexism could drive collective action related to gender identity, demonstrating the catalytic role of hashtags. Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018) remarked that these hashtags amplified the discourse to wider, aligned audiences, breaking offline social network limitations and promoting expansive virtual communities of like-minded individuals. Clark (2016) underscored how social media hashtags, such as #WhyIStayed used during a 2014 National Football League (NFL) domestic violence controversy, expose

gender-based violent events for public scrutiny. Similarly, Kettrey, Davis, and Liberman (2021) emphasized how hashtags such as #MeToo effectively raise awareness of feminist issues, like sexual assault, by boosting their visibility. Overall, these studies reveal the potent function of hashtags as social media spotlights, unearthing concealed issues and fostering important public dialogues.

While the importance of hashtag feminism is to some extent recognized, there appears to be a scholarly gap in the literature devoted to examining personal sexism experiences—specifically, instances of daily verbal aggression against women—shared through the medium of hashtags. Hashtags like #everydaysexism provide a platform for women to share everyday sexism incidents, creating a valuable archival resource for research. In this paper, we view hashtags not only as communication tools but also as

indicators of systemic issues being discussed. We posit that these incidents are not isolated or private, but constitute a wider systemic issue affecting women worldwide, regardless of cultural, geographical, or background differences. Seen this way, while this paper is primarily concerned with analysis of sexist markers identified in a corpus of tweets culled from a popular hashtag, it also concerns the persistent gendered verbal aggression in today's society and the vital role of fourth-wave feminism in contesting the premature assertion of gender equality, reasserting the continued need for feminist dialogue and activism.

2.2. Gendered Verbal Aggression

The purpose of Section 2.2 is to provide an overview of previous research on gendered verbal aggression. Sexist language can exist in two forms (overt and indirect) and can

range from brazenly inappropriate to seemingly innocuous (Mills 2008, 10). Overt sexism refers to clear and unambiguous sexist markers that are easily identifiable (Mills 2008, 11). In contrast, indirect sexist markers take on a subtle guise and are not

necessarily present in specific words and phrases but rather in ingrained beliefs and insinuations (e.g., injustice, belittling) that are intertwined with language.

2.2.1. Overt Sexist Language

The evolution of linguistic reform efforts has predominantly concentrated on the replacement of terms identified as offensive or controversial with those regarded as more palatable and socially acceptable. This strategy, however, appears to rest on a reductionist premise: the assumption that the wholesale elimination of explicit sexism can be accomplished solely through lexical substitution. A clear illustration of this challenge is the linguistic process known as semantic derogation. Semantic derogation is characterized by words gradually acquiring negative connotations over time, demonstrating the complexity of language and its intertwining with societal norms. Mills (2008, 56) specifically pointed out this phenomenon as an instance of overt sexism, arguing that it has negatively influenced societal perceptions of certain terms. Feminists and unmarried women have particularly borne the brunt of this process. The label *feminist* is frequently encumbered with negative stereotypes, being depicted as overly-sensitive, unscientific, and even perilous (Kleinman, Copp, and Wilson 2021).¹ The disparaging term *feminazi*—which analogizes feminists with Nazi Germany—

¹ The stigmatization of feminism stems mainly from two complex factors. First, challenging existing gender norms and stereotypes can elicit discomfort and backlash. The notion that we now live in a “post-feminist” society, where feminism is obsolete, further fuels this negative view (Douglas 2010, 10). Second, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of feminism’s goals—such as the belief that feminists advocate for gender as secondary or that feminism equates to man-hatred (as in the 6B4T radical feminist advocacy)—have led to the propagation of damaging labels and stereotypes.

exemplifies widespread animosity (Bailey 2017, 366). Consequently, *feminism* is often perceived as a “dirty word” (Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 2012, 416). In a similar vein, the term “leftover women” is commonly used as a label for *single women* above the age of 27 (Yu 2021, 248). These women are often dehumanised, likened to “expired products and food”, because they are perceived to “have passed their prime time for marriage and giving birth” (Yu 2021, 260). These observations underscore the inherent challenges in thoroughly eradicating societal biases through mere lexical modifications. Consequently, overt sexism has taken on new guises and still persists.

Digitalization, with its initial goal to foster open dialogue and equality, has, somewhat paradoxically, seemed to amplify gender stereotypes and discrimination (Foster, Tassone, and Matheson. 2021, 742). Women, in particular, frequently encounter criticism and verbal abuse on social media platforms. Researchers such as Diabah (2023) and Dickel and Giulia (2022) have noted the prevalence of derogatory language within these digital communities. Commonplace phrases and slurs—such as *bitch*, *minger*, *slut*, in addition to offensive expressions like *fuck off* and *pussy*—are far from harmless banter. Instead, they represent a disturbing resurgence of outdated and sexist language. Dickel and Giulia (2022) have introduced the term “virtual violence” to encapsulate this phenomenon, emphasizing that it is not an isolated event, but rather an extension of the deeply entrenched sexism that permeates our society. However, the real danger lies in these digital manifestations of sexism influencing real-world interactions, potentially promoting the use of sexist language in women’s everyday lives.

The feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, underpinned by seminal works such as those by Lakoff (1973) and Miller and Swift (1989), catalysed a paradigm shift away from androcentric language. These movements have been instrumental in largely

eliminating such language from professional discourse; however, remnants of this bias endure in casual interactions, exemplified by the usage of the term *you guys* (Kleinman, Copp, and Wilson 2021, 61). Interestingly, female-centric terms like *Congresswoman*,

which is sometimes used instead of the gender-neutral *Member of Congress*, may not be subjected to the same level of critical examination. The *-woman* suffix, while not directly contributing to traditional sexist practices which render women less visible (Kleinman, Copp, and Wilson 2021, 78), may potentially activate cognitive schemas or stereotypes in listeners, and given the historical male domination of Congress, some people may view *Congressman* as the default or even politically correct, causing

Congresswoman to be seen as an outlier. As a result, this fosters a societal perception that traits or roles traditionally ascribed to women are of lesser value or importance compared to those linked with men (e.g., *she is a freshman Congresswoman*) (Kleinman, Copp, and Wilson 2021, 78). This phenomenon contributes to *herasure*, a term introduced by Manne (2017) to delineate the systematic disregard or downplaying of women's contributions. These small but significant slights can constitute an extra hurdle for women aspiring to high-ranking positions, contributing to the notorious "glass ceiling" phenomenon (Kleinman, Copp, and Wilson 2021). As Murray (2010, 29) aptly stated, glass ceilings are "cracked but not broken".

2.2.1. Indirect Sexist Language

In today's society, overt sexism has become more challenging to articulate (Mills 2008, 133). Instead, it is often cloaked as a subtler, discourse-level phenomenon that Mills (2008, 7) referred to as indirect sexism. This complex and pervasive issue subtly

reinforces archaic gender norms and stereotypes, contributing to the systemic subjugation of women in a multitude of ways. One such way is through the propagation of gendered expectations that embed outdated female stereotypes. Women are

Women are

frequently portrayed as domestic caretakers and objects of aesthetic appeal, establishing a binary split into "his and her" domains that earmark activities such as gaming as exclusively male (Kirkpatrick 2017, 464) and subjects like math and science as male disciplines (Carli et al. 2016, 252). This form of sexism, referred to as benevolent sexism by Glick and Fiske (1996), continues to pervade contemporary society. New media, especially emerging platforms such as social media, frequently tie a woman's

value to her physical attractiveness (Wang and Feng 2022, 4). A case in point is the "*Wanghong* face"² — a beauty trend spotlighted by Wang and Feng (2022, 4)— not only endorses a specific aesthetic ideal, but also implicitly or explicitly encourages alterations to one's natural appearance. The dedication and sacrifice required to adhere to these norms are often metaphorically compared to "military service", a concept colloquially and facetiously referred to as beauty service.

Another manifestation of indirect sexism is the use of belittling language. This occurs when women subvert traditional gender roles and assert their rights, eliciting discomfort and resentment in some quarters (Agyepong and Diabah 2021). Women perceived as

² The "*wanghong* face" (also known as "the Barbie-type") is characterized by a sharp chin, a narrow nose with a straight bridge, double eyelids, and white, spotless skin (Wang and Feng 2022, 4).

challenging patriarchal norms may be derogatorily branded as “usurpers” (Puchner and Markowitz 2022, 76). Irony is often harnessed to maintain these norms, giving rise to a phenomenon known as *herasure*. For example, the phrase *politics of ecstasy* is used to demean women advocating for political correctness, suggesting their demands are overblown (Glick 2000, 27). Similarly, terms like *mummy track* and *mum’s army* deride the career trajectories and efforts of working mothers, implying their subservience to men (Mills 2008, 57).

Indirect sexism also manifests as defensive linguistic strategies, especially in societies upholding traditional gender roles that underscore male dominance and control. Such an environment propagates *himpathy*, a distorted empathetic perspective favouring high-status men, particularly when they are seen as victims (Puchner and Markowitz 2022, 76). A concrete example of this is victim-blaming, where women’s clothing choices are blamed for instances of sexual assault, thereby further entrenching patriarchal norms. In legal discourse, the use of “civil talk”—language that avoids explicit vulgarity or threats—can circumvent the legal concepts associated with the terms “street harassment” and “sexual harassment” (Bailey 2017, 354). This type of dialogue prioritizes male interests, such as social prestige, over the rights of women, subsequently perpetuating patriarchal norms (Johnson 2014).

Linguistic sexism, as evidenced by the literature review, pervades various contexts, from casual conversations to professional dialogues. This form of sexism can manifest both overtly and indirectly and is often tied to gender-centric beliefs. This suggests that our choice of language may not only reflect but also perpetuate inherent biases. Despite

substantial progress, remnants of overt sexism persist, and more subtle forms continue to emerge, underscoring the ongoing need to scrutinize sexist language. The idea of a “post-feminist” era, implying that language reform has made feminist advocacy obsolete, seems to be challenged by the continuing existence of sexist narratives (Douglas 2010, 10). An examination of gendered verbal aggression, as seen in narratives like #everydaysexism, emphasizes the continuing necessity for gender equality in our language use. Hence, this study seeks to answer two key questions: (1) How are sexist markers distributed in a specialized corpus of tweets taken from the hashtag #everydaysexism? (2) How are such sexist markers employed both overtly and indirectly as forms of verbal aggression?

3. Data and methodology

This section sets out the data collection and analysis of this study.

3.1 Data collection

To collect data to answer the aforementioned research questions (Section 2.2.2), we searched Twitter for all English tweets posted on the hashtag #everydaysexism from April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021. In the process, we removed replies and links to avoid duplication. The resulting corpus comprises 1,118 tweets and 37,579-word tokens. To

ensure ethical and copyright compliance, we followed Twitter’s guidelines (Twitter 2022)³ and only used publicly available, unmodified tweets from genuine accounts. To protect the privacy and anonymity of the authors and other individuals mentioned in the tweets, all identifying information was removed or anonymized.

³ Twitter, 2022. *Display requirements: Tweets*. <https://developer.twitter.com/en/developer-terms/display-requirements>

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Extraction of Verbal Aggression

We conducted content analysis and extracted linguistic markers of verbal aggression from the corpus using the categories of sexist markers shown in 3.3.2. We evaluated a total of 1,118 tweets and found that 34.5% (385 tweets) contained signs of verbal aggression. Specifically, within these aggressive narratives, the sexist undertones were evident in the choice of language used by individuals or institutions (e.g., a male said to me ... “*aw don’t you look cute in your little outfits*”). The remaining tweets in the corpus fell into three distinct categories. Consisting of 48.1% (538 tweets), the first category pertained to either expressions of dissatisfaction about sexist happenings or vague references to sexist indicators. Consisting of 11.8% (132 tweets), the second category demonstrated sexist tendencies in behaviour. Consisting of 5.6% (63 tweets), the final category was semantically ambiguous, meaning that their potential sexist content was difficult to interpret. Despite these variations, the presence of verbal aggression at a high rate of 34.5% underscores that aggression and conflict related to sexism are fundamentally realized through language.

3.2.2 Identification of Linguistic Markers of Overt and Indirect Verbal Aggression

As stated earlier, one main purpose of this study is to examine two language practices, overt and indirect sexism, as defined by Mills (2008). We have seen in Section 2 that overt sexism (OS) can be readily identified through the use of specific linguistic markers (Mills 2008, 11). In contrast, indirect sexism (IS) is contextually understood and may be less obvious in its delivery (Mills 2008, 12). To identify types of sexist language,

we used a modified version of Mills’s (2008) typology of various forms of overt and indirect sexism. To reflect a broader spectrum of sexist practices and recent developments, we incorporated the concepts of *Herasure* and *Himpathy* introduced by Manne (2017), and *Mansplaining* presented by Bridges (2017). The following are the different types of sexism. (See sections 2.2 for explanations of language features associated with each type.)

Table 1. Types of sexism

Sources	Types of Sexism	Sexism Forms
Mills (2008)	Abusive, harassing, or sexually explicit	OS
	Male-as-default language, or gender superiority	OS and IS
	Female as male property, or their identity in relation to men	OS and IS
	Semantic derogation	OS
	Traditional femininity and masculinity	IS
Manne (2017)	Implicitly harassing	IS
	Herasure, belittling of women through verbal techniques	IS
	Himpathy, sympathy for men’s issues	IS
Bridges (2017)	Mansplaining	IS

3.2.3 Identification of Prevalent Domains

To identify domains of life, sexist themes and their related words in our corpus, we drew on the topic modelling by Melville, Eccles and Yasseri (2019) based on computational analysis of themes derived from the Everyday Sexism Project corpus (see Appendix). In Table 2, we can see that the seven prevalent themes under the Melville, Eccles and Yasseri’s topic modelling (Column 1) can be mapped onto three domains (Column 2). The domain of public sphere encompasses experiences of sexism manifested in professional settings or other public spaces, such as dining establishments,

and web-based discourse. The domain of street harassment encompasses unsolicited remarks made by unfamiliar individuals on the road. The domain of private sphere incorporates experiences of intimate partner sexist commentary and other manifestations of sexism transpiring in private, interpersonal relationships. In Column 3, the words linked to each topic/theme were selected based on their frequencies of use in the corpus, as shown by the concordancer AntConc (Version 4.2.0).

Table 2. Sexist themes*, domains of life, and their related words

Sexist themes	Domains	Related words (examples)
online/comments	public sphere street	feminine, game, online, feisty, sweet
work-related experiences		work, doctor, job, colleague, working, email, company, office, service, staff, customer
school-related experiences		school, class, girls, team, instructor, professors, semester, university, classmates
media-related experiences		news, watching, daily, show, TV, radio, journalist, presenter, telegraph
street harassment	harassment**	walk, car, drink, mask, out, run, smile, walking, bike, night, shouting
domestic abuse and relationships	private sphere	wife, husband, cook, curry, mum, son

*Sexist themes based on Melville, Eccles and Yasseri's (2019) topic modelling.

**While "street harassment" is listed as a separate domain, it is also considered part of the "public sphere" domain.

4 Findings

4.1 Distribution of Sexist Markers in the #everydaySexism Twitter Corpus

Section 4.1 deals with Research Question 1: the distribution of overt and indirect forms of sexism as identified in the corpus of tweets taken from the hashtag #everydaysexism

on Twitter. Table 3 provides an overview of the proportions of these two categories of sexism across the three domains investigated in the study.

Table 3. Distribution of direct and indirect sexist markers across different domains

Types	Public sphere	Street harassment	Private sphere	N (%)
Overt Sexism	95 (28%)	11 (31%)	2 (25%)	108 (28%)
Indirect Sexism	247 (72%)	24 (69%)	6 (75%)	277 (72%)
Total	342 (89%)	35 (9%)	8 (2%)	385 (100%)

Here we can see that markers of indirect sexism (72%) are more frequent than markers of overt sexism (28%) across all three domains. Of the 385 sexist markers identified in the corpus, 89% (n = 342) pertain to the public sphere, 9% (n = 35) to street harassment, and 2% (n = 8) to the private sphere.

Table 4. Distribution of types of verbal aggression across the three domains

Types of verbal aggression	Public sphere	Street harassment	Private sphere
Abusive, harassing, or sexually explicit	19	11	/
Male normativity/gender superiority	57	1	1
Women as Male Property/In Relation to Men	26	/	/
Semantic derogation	6	/	1
Traditional femininity and masculinity	124	4	5
Implicitly harassing	1	12	/
Heresure	104	3	1
Mansplaining	4	3	/
Himpathy	1	1	/
Total (385)	342	35	8

Table 4 provides a distribution of types of verbal aggression across the three domains. In the public sphere, verbal aggression frequently manifests as traditional femininity and masculinity, erasure of women's achievements (*herasure*), perpetuation of male normativity (known as assertions of gender superiority), depictions of women as male property, or as being defined solely in relation to men, and the use of abusive, harassing, or sexually explicit language. Additionally, street harassment constitutes a substantial contributor, regularly deploying implicit modes of harassment in conjunction with abusive or sexually explicit language. Finally, the private sphere also shows evidence of the perpetuation of traditional or objectified femininity.

In sections 4.2 to 4.4 below, we deal with Research Question 2, that is, how sexist markers are employed both overtly and indirectly as forms of verbal aggression. To this end, we continue to draw on Mills's (2008) discussion of sexist terminology, which includes overt and indirect sexist markers, as well as a modified version of Melville, Eccles and Yasseri's (2019) topic modelling approach. In doing so, we also seek to uncover the language users' beliefs and values about men and women.

4.2 Sexist Markers Used as Forms of Verbal Aggression against Women in the Public Sphere

As shown in Table 3, 72% of the tweets identified in the public sphere in the corpus include indirect sexism. Such a high rate is very likely to stem from the verbal aggressors' fears of incurring societal disapproval and condemnation of overt sexism in public discourse. In this context, indirect sexism tends to emanate from entrenched sex role stereotyping, as illustrated by the 124 instances highlighted in Table 4. The

sexist markers within these instances often mirror societal norms, which are moulded by stereotypes concerning the attributes deemed suitable for males and females. This phenomenon is exemplified in instance (1):

(1) Me: which would you recommend, the beef or chicken wrap? Waiter: well...*I'm a man and we men like beef. Women, they tend to like chicken more...it has less calories* Me (swearing at him in my head): beef please ... #everydaysexism

Interestingly, this tweet illustrates how the female customer deliberately selected beef (purportedly favoured by men) instead of chicken (purportedly favoured by women) in protest at the male server's sexist recommendation. Moreover, it highlights the server's view that slimness is a desirable attribute for women and presumes that women obsess over competitive femininity. This exemplifies Mills's (2008, 136) argument that the hypothecation of stereotypes frequently colours judgments about masculinity and femininity and unconsciously reinforces notions of gender-appropriate behaviour.

In fact, certain media discourses tend to portray women as sexual objects subject to visual examination or evaluation based primarily on physical attractiveness and presumed erotic appeal, as illustrated by example (2):

(2) Some 'headlines' from the Daily Heil. 'shows off *her* toned *abs* and ample cleavage' [sic] 'eye-popping *curves*', 'shows some *skin*', '*busty* display', 'ample *cleavage* on display', 'pert *posterior*'. It should not matter what a *woman* looks like, whether

their *eyebrows are well groomed*, they wear *power lip gloss and heels*.

#everydaysexism

Here physical attributes such as curves, exposed skin, and accentuated cleavage are emphasized, exemplifying the objectification and hypersexualization of women in media channels. Jing-Schmidt and Peng (2018, 401) observed that media channels frequently employ language that represents women as adornments or sexual objects for the pleasure of men, referring to this practice as “the art of seduction”. Alternatively, this can be viewed as a “traffic code” that caters to the “male gaze”.

Some tweets taken from the hashtag #everydaysexism show that in their interactions with men, women may also find that the words *women* and *feminine* are employed in a manner implying contention over possession of particular attributes traditionally affiliated with masculinity or femininity, as seen in example (3):

(3) Being told I can't like *metal/deathcore/djent* as it's "not *feminine*"

#everydaysexism

One man said that honestly, the best *electrical engineers, electronic engineers and electricians* are always *men*. The only thing that I need to highlight is that there are *Electrical Engineers, Electronic Engineers and Electricians* who are *WOMEN* (and/or non-binary individuals) #everydaysexism

The way these linguistic elements are deployed can create an environment in which women are perceived as unwelcome or unable to fully participate in these “masculine”

domains. For instance, historically, specific sub-genres such as deathcore and djent, which fall under the broad umbrella term of heavy metal and hard rock, have been emblematic of masculinity. This association is primarily attributed to the band's

aggressive musical composition, the predominance of a male demographic among their listeners, and lyricism that frequently echoes and reinforces the paradigm of “hegemonically masculine mode” (Spracklen 2020, 152). Consequently, female artists

and fans are noticeably underrepresented within these genres. Comparable gender inequities and impediments confront women in domains such as electrical engineering, electronic engineering, and skilled trades like electricians. Despite notable advances in women’s access to diverse academic and professional pursuits in recent decades, their representation remains disproportionately low in particular scientific fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. The trend

mentioned in the tweet, commonly referred to as the “leaky pipeline” in relation to the labour gender gap, is well-established (González-Pérez, Mateos de Cabo, and Sáinz 2020, 16).

The phenomenon identified as the second most prevalent, as presented in Table 4 with 104 instances in the public sphere, is *herasure*. As mentioned earlier, this term characterizes a subtle mechanism that diminishes women by either disregarding or downplaying their achievements and expressions. The mechanisms employed often involve indirect verbal techniques such as humour, irony, sarcasm, and communication steeped in stereotypes. For instance, in sales, customer service, or occupational settings, organizations may strive to eradicate or preclude sexism to uphold a constructive public

image. One tactic involves harnessing humour as a means of deflecting direct assaults by instilling a light-hearted mindset, as exemplified in example (4):

(4) Sofa shopping, taking pics so I can show Dan and get his opinion. Sales person

(man): “do you need to get approval from the *bank*? <laughs> *you choose and he pays?* <laughs again>” ... #everydaysexism

Here, the term *bank* metaphorically pokes fun at the financial disempowerment of women, leaving them in a subordinate position. The phrase *you choose and he pays* reinforces the stereotype of male domination over females. Additionally, the construction of male identities as “walking ATMs” can further strengthen the notion of women as “the weaker sex”, dependent on men for protection and survival. Likewise, example (5) describes how working women may be subjected to “linguistic infantilization”, whereby they are portrayed as unprofessional.

(5) “You look like my *14-year-old daughter*” - unprofessional reply to a young entrepreneur seeking investment... #everydaysexism

Within the realm of professional interactions, the term *14-year-old daughter* is an ironic expression, signifying unprofessionalism, limited competence or even emotionalism. Emotionalism, as defined by Merriam-Webster, relates to the tendency of individuals to interpret situations emotionally, often displaying immaturity. Characterizing a young entrepreneur in such terms may potentially compromise their credibility when seeking investment opportunities. In fact, the term *girl*, as Stokoe and Smithson (2001, 257)

noted, can sound offensive because it implies lower social standing, while the term *woman* can sound politically correct because it implies higher social standing. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this ironic expression is not readily perceived as overtly sexist; rather, it may be perceived as intended to be humorous and tongue-in-cheek.

Often, ironic (or humorous) sexism elevates one gender at the expense of the other or plays with stereotypical knowledge to express superiority or denigration toward one gender (Attenborough 2014, 145). Consider the following example:

(6) Timehop reminds me that it's 8 years since an older bloke in my 3rd year Child Language Acquisition class stated that "*women lose 20% of their intelligence by having children*", and *no one challenged him...* #everydaysexism

The ironic statement perpetuates outdated gender stereotypes and perpetuates the narrative of male superiority by undermining the intelligence and cognitive abilities of women who have given birth. More significantly, this tweet serves as a potent example of the influence wielded by "call-out" feminism. Despite their primary purpose of facilitating intellectual discourse, educational institutions have, on occasion, become settings where the voices of women are systematically stifled, as reported by Parker in 2015. In the case referred to, a disturbing silence met this suppression, with no opposition arising. However, the rise of social media has offered an alternative platform for women to shed light on and expose instances of sexism.

Moreover, women are, as Mills (2008, 13) noted, perpetually subjected to disparaging remarks about their intelligence as a means of belittling them. Another type of deliberately belittling remark by men can be seen in example (7):

(7) I thought I'd translate some common phrases which (some) men use about women in business: "*Bossy*" = *assertive, driven* "*Emotional*" = *passionate* "*Weak*" = *empathetic* *Speaking with a "Tone"* = *being informed & an authority on a subject.*
#tone #everydaysexism #womeninbusiness

Here, the male interpretations trigger the essence of a double bind: "anything you do to serve one goal violates the other" (Tannen 2008, 127). This dilemma arises from the challenge women face in navigating between traditionally "masculine" and "feminine" expectations. On the one hand, women are perceived negatively if they exhibit traditionally feminine personality traits and communication styles. For example, showing empathy, emotions and an eagerness to offer support are seen as weak or lacking authority compared to a more assertive "masculine" style (Shrikant and Marshall 2019, 397). To be perceived as leaders, women may, therefore, feel pressure to adopt a more "masculine" persona at work. On the other hand, however, women are often characterized negatively and perceived as bossy or abrasive when they display more traditionally masculine traits like assertiveness. This highlights the "double bind" dilemma whereby women face criticism and bias regardless of how they choose to navigate their identities at work.

The third most pervasive issue, identified in 57 instances within the public sphere as indicated in Table 4, is the deployment of male-as-default language or the explicit assertion of gender superiority. This form of verbal aggression constructs men as the default and women as the aberration. Specifically, the deployment of gendered terminology in occupational titles buttresses the view that certain vocations are the purview of a particular sex. The following tweet exemplifies this issue:

(8) My tally for the number of times I get asked: ‘so when is the *male doctor* coming?’... #everydaysexism

The assumption that an unidentified doctor is male epitomizes the historical gender bias within the medical profession, which has traditionally been seen as male-dominated. The incorporation of gender-specific descriptors, such as *male*, or suffixes like *-man* in professional titles, appears to be more convincing and acceptable to the general public (Mills 2008, 95). Nevertheless, in this case, these entrenched linguistic practices foregrounding gender-specific terms have inadvertently obscured or marginalized the contributions of women in the medical profession.

The conceptualization of women as male property or defining their identities vis-à-vis men constitutes another dimension of sexism. This is substantiated by 26 instances shown in Table 4 within the public sphere. This form of sexism frames women within the purview of male ownership or in relation to men, thus undermining female autonomy and individual identity. A manifestation of this phenomenon is evident in the tradition of using marital status honorifics—such as *Miss* or *Mrs*—coupled with a

husband's surname. This practice has its origins in a historical period when women were considered the legal property of their husbands. This tradition mirrors patriarchal ideologies that subordinate women to their spouses, denying them an independent legal or social existence. Specific tweets exemplify this view of women as male property, as evidenced in example (9):

(9) Council tax bill has arrived, addressed to husband and *Mrs Ruth Husband's surname*. Where'd that come from @[anonymous twitter account] because it definitely wasn't the info we gave you... #everydaySexism

Traditional honorific titles such as *Mrs* or *Miss* denote a woman's marital status, signifying whether she is "available." McMinn, Williams, and McMinn (1994, 743) argued that this asymmetry represents an inherent gender discrimination within a system where a woman's identity is connected to her spouse, while a man's remains independent. The title *Ms*, a non-gendered alternative, has gained popularity since the 1970s (Mills 2008, 64). Women often prefer the non-gendered title *Ms* to withhold marital status, assert feminist or lesbian identity, or avoid being perceived as young girls, underscoring the concept of choice (Schwarz 2003, 169). Nonetheless, despite women having more options regarding how they are addressed in contemporary society, sexism often lingers in a passive way by prioritizing a husband's name in formal correspondence over a woman's preference, as seen in this tweet. Similarly, the tweet below criticizes the media for addressing a professor by his name and title while merely referring to his wife as *his wife*, neglecting to use her name or professional title of *Dr*.

(10) #CovidVaccine #everydaysexism Please will the #media stop referring to *Prof [anonymous 1]* and his #wife. She is Dr *[anonymous 2]*.

This insinuation subtly suggests that the men's professional status and identity are more significant and noteworthy than the women's. This practice of defining her in relation to him, rather than as an individual, is regarded as dehumanizing. It implies that her identity is dependent on or overshadowed by her male partner.

The least frequent form of verbal aggression identified in the corpus is the use of overtly abusive, harassing, or sexually explicit language, with 19 instances documented in the public sphere, as delineated in Table 4. This form of aggression is overtly sexist and can appear in various guises, including "dirty jokes", which may even permeate media channels. The following exemplifies such sexist jokes, conveyed through the mechanism of linguistic wordplay:

(11) On the Japanese show, one of the hosts says she needs to go deal with a private matter and asks them to wait a bit. They start heckling her about "*you're going to pump milk, aren't you*" and then there's this watermark banner of "*pumping milk*" across the screen... #everydaysexism

This example invokes implicit "maternal frames" grounded in essentialist views of gender roles. Given that child-rearing duties, especially breastfeeding of infants, have been traditionally relegated to mothers, a working mother's ability to balance her professional and parenting responsibilities may become a subject of tacit scrutiny and ostensible concern by certain colleagues. Thus, the other participants presupposed that

she would need to pump breast milk during working hours to fulfil her maternal obligations. Then, to condone the teasing initiated by her colleagues, the viewers on their own electronic devices displayed a watermark banner that symbolized *pumping milk*. This illustrates gendered language couched in a masculinized joking register, frequently tinged with sexual overtones.

4.3 Sexist Markers Used as Forms of Verbal Aggression against Women in Street Harassment

As we have seen from Table 3, 69% of the tweets related to street harassment in the analysed corpus display indirect sexism. This prevalence is largely consistent with the rate observed in the public sphere. The most prominent form, as evidenced by 12 instances shown in Table 4, is the use of subtly harassing language in street interactions.

This type of verbal aggression constitutes a subtle yet pernicious form of harassment that engenders in the target feelings of insecurity and ostracism. One such manifestation

is catcalling. Although catcalling lacks an obvious sexual act or express threat, it is commonly cloaked in the patina of “civil talk”, as exemplified in the following:

I’m even less likely to respond positively to a creepy “*Hey there darling*” from a (12)... and shout “*Good morning beautiful... #everydaysexism*
random guy... #everydaysexism

Utterances such as *Good morning* in public spaces may be perceived as politeness or cordiality in human social interaction. However, when accompanied by unsolicited remarks, a focus on appearance (e.g., *beautiful*), and an invasion of personal boundaries

(e.g., *darling*), they can be construed as pretexts for predatory behaviour, intending to make women feel diminished and threatened while asserting male dominance in public spaces. Such interactions, when directed at unfamiliar women in unwelcome contexts,

violate the interaction order and principles governing face-to-face communication (Bailey 2017, 368). Whether it is perceived as amicable or derogatory depends upon the rapport between interlocutors, the power dynamics at play, and their degree of social distance (Talbot 2020).

Following closely, with 11 instances recorded in Table 4, is the use of abusive, harassing, or sexually explicit language in street interactions. Unlike the veiled aggression of “civil talk”, these remarks are extremely offensive in nature, as demonstrated by example (13):

(13) That moment where you get called “*a tart*” in a pub by a random man...

#everydaysexism

Some men will still find the time to yell ‘*nice tits*’ at you from a passing car...

#everydaysexism

I was called a *minger* today at a grocery store at 7.30 am... #everydaysexism

Two men decided to shout ‘*slut*’ at me for daring to walk down my road...#everydaysexism

The optimist who shrieked “*HELLO I LIKE TO SUCK PUSSY*” at me from 12 meters away... #everydaysexism

Sexually charged or offensive phrases, such as those in italics, are colloquially referred to as “chat-up lines”. However, these expressions constitute more than mere flirtation; rather, they function as a means of sexual taunting or face attack (Mills 2005; Talbot 2020). Using disparaging and demeaning words like *slut* or *minger* serves to dehumanize and objectify women, by characterizing them as merely sexual objects. In addition, referring to them as *a tart* or remarking on their *nice tits*, as well as making crude statements alluding to sexual acts, creates an oppressive and hostile climate for women.

4.4 Sexist Markers Used as Forms of Verbal Aggression against Women in the Private Sphere

As shown in Table 3, 75% of the tweets associated with domestic sexism in the analysed corpus exhibit indirect sexism. This prevalence aligns with the rate observed in the other spheres. As shown in Table 4, the most common form, represented in five out of a total of eight cases, is the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. As pointed out by critics (e.g., Mills 2008, 130), the stereotypical notion that women belong solely to the domestic sphere is an antiquated cliché that perpetuates problematic assumptions about gender roles. Naturally, conventional conceptualizations of femininity frequently depict

women as primarily responsible for cooking and housekeeping, reducing them to “generic female parent[s]”. As one tweeter put it:

(14) white male asks my husband: *did you marry her because she makes curry?*

Husband: no there was lots of reason... #everydaysexism

The question *did you marry her because she makes curry?* relies on the sexist implication that associates *she* (women) with *curry* (kitchen duties) and domestic labour. Such phrases merely reinforce beliefs that women should remain within their

“designated place”—the home—and uphold their “assigned possessions” as caregivers (Mills 2008, 147-148). These types of expressions promulgate family-unfriendly working patterns that unfairly burden women with child-rearing and household responsibilities. Moreover, they render invisible men’s participation in domestic duties and obscure the diverse roles and responsibilities that women undertake beyond the home. In short, the sexist notion of the “women’s kitchen” is a relic of the past, but it has not been completely dismantled.

5. Discussion

By drawing on a corpus of tweets taken from the feminist hashtag #everydaysexism, we have discussed:

- the different types of sexist language encountered by women in different domains of their daily lives.
- how such sexist markers are employed both overtly and indirectly by men as forms of verbal aggression.

In doing so, we have also sought to uncover the language users’ beliefs and values about men and women. Drawing on data from the hashtag #everydaysexism, which serves as a storytelling tool, our study has provided compelling evidence showing that certain individuals in day-to-day life (habitually) employ discriminatory language against a

particular gender, in part due to their internalized gender ideologies, which, as Sczesny, Moser, and Wood (2015, 944) noted, can be either intentional or habitual.

Remarkably, several key observations have emerged from this study. One is the persistent framing of traditional gender differences. Our close analysis of numerous tweets related to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity in the corpus supports

Asr et al.'s (2021, 21) comment that the choice of words and expressions, even if subtle, frames gender differences as natural and fixed, with distinct realms of influence and power for men and women. For instance, some gendered titles may limit the participation of a specific gender in certain professions (Example 8). Such stereotyping is rooted in traditional patriarchal ideologies and inaccurately assigns cognitive biases, thus resulting in underrepresentation in certain fields (Example 3). Consequently, this

coded language not only confines women's interests to traditionally "feminine" pursuits, such as "women's kitchens" (Example 14) but also reinforces hierarchical systems and exacerbates existing gender disparities and inequalities.

Another observation is that a great deal of sexism can be concealed or expressed indirectly through the use of various linguistic strategies, as our data have revealed. One is through the use of humour, sarcasm, or irony, often conveyed under the pretext of "just kidding" (Examples 4, 5, and 6). Johnson (1994, 149) referred to this as active exclusion, a mechanism that normalizes and trivializes sexist attitudes, thereby perpetuating inequality and posing a significant threat to progress in gender equality. Another strategy involves employing stereotypical communication that emphasizes women's emotions, tone, or appearance (Example 7). A possible consequence of this

communication style is the exclusion of women from higher positions, which can be likened to encountering a “broken rung” on the career ladder. This phenomenon, also known as “double bind”, subjects women to greater scrutiny than their male counterparts, thereby creating a paradoxical situation in which they are expected to exhibit traditionally feminine traits and yet penalized for doing so at the same time.

A third observation is the continued tendency to treat women as male property or to define them in terms of their relationships with men. This is particularly evident in how women are addressed. Examples 9 and 10, for instance, have illustrated the unbroken custom of emphasizing marital status when addressing women through the use of terms such as *Mrs.* and *his wife*. These terms may not inherently possess bias, and some women, as Mills (2008, 66) has noted, willingly adopt these titles to express affiliation,

loyalty, romantic attachment or shared identity. Still, a critical examination suggests that their usage frequently not only overlooks women’s preferences but also undermines their autonomy and control over their own titles, names, and identities. Indeed, one might argue that the use of marital titles without a woman’s consent exemplifies a paternalistic attitude that may inadvertently reinforce men’s roles as household heads and primary breadwinners. It is important to acknowledge, though, that marital naming practices exhibit substantial variation across cultures and have undergone significant evolution over time.

A final observation, which is also closely related to the third one, pertains to the persistent objectification of female bodies through various overt and subtle linguistic markers. This dehumanization of women is clearly seen in the context

harassment, which frequently extends beyond mere flirtation to include pejorative slurs and unsolicited remarks aimed at women (Example 13). Mills (2008, 52) asserted that such objectifying language implies a conceptualization of relationships between men and women that parallels those between prostitutes and pimps—one that is premised upon the commodification and degradation of women as sexual objects. Furthermore, even seemingly harmless instances, such as catcalling (Example 12), contribute to the objectification of women (Fisher et al. 2019, 1495) and often conceal insincerity and serve as pretexts for predatory behaviour. Moreover, as evidenced by examples 1 and 2, media commonly emphasize patriarchal constructions of femininity, with comments that sexualize or place excessive focus on women's physical attributes. This emphasis has at least two undesirable effects. First, it reinforces the common but erroneous notion that a woman's value resides in her ability to appeal to the male gaze (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Second, it systematically leads to women who do not conform to idealized beauty standards being under-represented in some domains of life.

6. Conclusion

This paper adds a new dimension to the existing research on hashtag feminism by conducting a corpus-based, cross-domain discourse analysis of the different types of sexist markers identified in women's narratives of verbal aggression culled from tweets posted on the #everydaysexism hashtag. In the process, we have also discussed the possible hidden ideologies of the sexist language highlighted in the tweets. We have seen that the subjects concerned strategically employed the hashtag to disseminate personal experiences of inequality, construct counter-discourses, and critique cultural

figures and institutions, a practice that Linabary, Corple, and Cooky (2020) have also discussed in their study. Our findings thus run counter to the “post-feminist” argument and lend support not only to the continued relevance of feminism but also to social media activism used as an instrument for sparking social change in the pursuit of equality.

It is in this sense that our study has demonstrated the potentially important role hashtag feminism plays in empowering women. By challenging the customary silence surrounding everyday sexism, it fosters open discourse and heightens public consciousness (Turley and Fisher 2018). Notably, hashtag feminism magnifies the voices that are often marginalized in various sectors, such as workplace, education, and the media, thereby providing a unified platform for feminist expression and eliminating communication barriers. With its interactivity, accessibility, and global reach, new media can not only empower women to form connections and alliances but also enable collective resistance against sexism and inequality.

Fundamentally, our study has brought into sharp relief the systemic use of aggressive and confrontational language against women in different domains of daily life, as evidenced by the large number of both overt and subtle sexist markers identified in the corpus. The primary aim throughout has been to demonstrate how such sexist markers, together with their possible hidden ideologies, can be uncovered, categorized and studied in a fruitful and principled way.

To be sure, feminist linguists and activists all over the world have tirelessly and valiantly advocated for inclusive language as a means to empower women. Yet, the persistence of gender discrimination means that achieving gender equality remains a formidable challenge. This issue, as seen above, is particularly concerning in professional domains such as workplaces, media, educational environments, and customer service interactions, where language use significantly influences

perceptions of inclusiveness. This suggests that while progressive social movements have made strides in recent years, the evolution of language usage has been woefully gradual. Doubtless, changes in language usage in daily communication are urgently needed more than ever to combat gender discrimination, to challenge patriarchal systems and to promote inclusiveness.

Despite their authenticity, it is worth pointing out that in some of the tweets posted on the hashtag #everydaysexism and other similar ones, those who were accused of using sexist language may have done so inadvertently, partly because they were unaware of the underlying implications or connotations involved. Still, all forms of sexist language—be they intentional or inadvertent; overt or indirect—hurt and sting. They are demeaning and socially unacceptable.

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Appendix

1.Melville, Eccles and Yasseri's (2019) topic modelling

Topic number	Assigned words	Annotation
S0	Friend man guy one hand away back tri get walk look said grab time start got go around felt ask told stop say us bus next like behind night happen went turn could touch would came sit feel even move way out very bar train know want club tell face	Public space/ Street harassment
S1	Women men because like make woman feel think people sexism get say thing comment male would even know one man want sexual way female why many very time sexist only really any friend also girl never look much something made person joke need call tell right seem use tri life	Online/Comments
S2	Work male ask job one said female told colleague manage would get husband boss man time woman because office only women company name say look need year go call custom day want meet new make even could take men staff got help first know pay question talk boyfriend use marry	Work/ office/ company/ customer
S3	Walk car man men street shout home guy get look one call past go stop us time friend said got follow way drive yell road day back like say two ask whistle start pass around driver bus group window run work wear old make turn park even fuck feel bike	Transport/ Street harassment
S4	Boy girl school wear year told because class like one teacher said look old would get dress ask male friend day say make only guy play hair student go short want age high skirt even time thing us got comment female shirt group why tell really call good laugh cloth	School/ Teacher/ Uniform
S5	Women girl men woman female like look show why only male man play one game say watch picture read comment get ad article pink see new Facebook love photo page boy buy advert today shop post video news book use mum football http sexist sport magazine TV because everyday sex ladies	Media
S6	Friend told because want would said year time go guy ask one get like boyfriend tell say rape never know tri even got sex happen start went house girl home feel still thing day talk could thought really make night call brother think sexual stop only back old dad made	Domestic abuse/ Relationships/Home