The female tourist experience in Egypt as an Islamic destination

Abstract

In Islamic destinations female tourists face the added challenge of negotiating their way through male constructed local norms. This paper fills the gap in gender and tourism research with a focus on female tourists' experiences in Egypt as an Islamic destination, outlining the diverse ways in which gender shapes and influences their experiences. A qualitative approach was taken to explore women's coping strategies with the male sexualised gaze that they encountered during their holiday in Egypt, and sheds light on measures taken towards safeguarding themselves. Their experiences were highly influenced and often involuntarily altered by unwanted male attention and sexual harassment, as the women felt the need to fit into local female norms of behaviour in order to safeguard themselves.

Key words

Female tourists- gender - Egypt- Islam - sexual harassment - coping

Introduction

In sociology, gender is viewed as an important explanatory variable that shapes opportunity and behaviour. In 1995, Swain called for a feminist approach to tourism research, grounded in an understanding of gender as a significant variable in any study of human relations. Women and men are involved differently in the consumption and construction of tourism (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Perez, Morgan & Villace-Moliero, 2015). Indeed, researchers have increasingly focused on the female tourist experience, specifically on the motivations for and the benefits and challenges involved in travelling either in company or alone. The current study builds on this body of work by offering a focus on the female tourist experience of holidaying in an Islamic destination, in this case Egypt.

It is widely acknowledged that the cultural norms of the host destination will affect the reception offered to tourists by the host community: travel is uniquely linked to the social context, as well as to religion (Battour , Ismail, & Barrur, 2010). It is also recognised that Islam occupies a central role in Islamic societies in informing accepted values and behaviour (Ghadami, 2012), and that the role of and attitudes towards women are shaped by both religion and culture (Al-Hibri, 2000; Ali, 2015). Islamic societies are generally governed by Shari'a law (Stephenson, 2014), which organises relationships between individuals, and is driven from the Qu'ran and the Sunnah (Zaman, Afridi, & Saleem, 2013). While the Qur'an offers a detailed source of information on the principles of Islam, the Sunnah offers an account of the life of the prophet Mohammed and his disciples, as chronicled in the Hadiths (Ali, 2015). Together the Qu'ran and the Sunna provide a social and moral structure for day to day life in Islamic societies (Sanad , Kassem, & Scott, 2010). This is reflected in the following: "and He is with you wherever you are" (the Qu'ran, 57:4).

Stephenson (2014) observes that Islam is embedded within the commercial provision of hospitality including food and accommodation. While the relationship between Islam and tourism has stirred significant academic interest (see Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004; Aziz, 2001; Battour et al., 2010 ; Din, 1989; Sanad et al., 2010; Timothy and Iverson, 2006; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010; Stephen, 2014), the experiences of Western non-

Muslim female tourists in Islamic destinations have received scant attention. As Wilson and Little (2008) state in their qualitative study of solo female travel, negotiating unfamiliar spaces and places can be daunting for tourists, particularly those travelling independently. This is exacerbated for women travelling in patriarchal societies, where attitudes towards women may inform the treatment they receive (Jordan and Gibson, 2005), whether they are in company or not. It is this issue that we wanted to investigate in this exploratory study of female tourist experiences in Egypt as a Muslim destination, which will help to illuminate how gender shapes women's interactions and how they negotiate movement in patriarchal cultures. Cultural norms in Egypt enable men to act on the basis of gendered privilege (Al Hibri, 2000; Ghadami, 2012). This results in an atmosphere of gender inequality that is felt in everyday life. Women are less socially valued in Egypt than men (Goldschmidt, 2004), thus female tourists in Egypt may be challenged by the attitudes associated with Egypt's patriarchal society.

Despite the tumultuous events of the Arab Spring in 2011, the Middle East attracted 54.9 million international tourist arrivals in 2012 (UNWTO, 2012), a decrease however of 5.6% from 2010. Egypt is the second most popular tourist destination in the Middle East after Saudi Arabia which, as the home of the Islamic pilgrimage, is heavily visited by Muslim pilgrims all year round. Egypt's tourism market more than doubled from 5.5 million in 2000 to 14 million in 2010 (Mintel, 2011; World Bank Group, 2015). However, following the 2011 Egyptian revolution calling for freedom and social justice, then the ousting of Mubarak's government, tourist arrivals declined to 9.7 million in 2011, and to 9.1 million in 2013 (World Bank Group, 2015). During the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in 2012/2013, Egyptian society became highly conservative as its aim was to rid Egypt of Western influence through the adoption of an Islamic path (Munson, 2001). This further reduced its attractiveness to tourists. Declining arrivals led to hotel closures (Egypt Independent, 2013). Furthermore, the terrorist attack on the Russian airplane in Sharm El Sheik in 2015 led the British and Russian authorities to suspend flights into Sinai (The Guardian, 2015). This undermines the progress that Egypt has made to revive its tourism market since the 2011 uprising (Knell, 2015). Historically, Egypt has endured major acts of terrorism directed at tourists, such as the Luxor incidents in 1992 and 1997 and the attacks on Taba hotels in 2004 (Wilson, 2011). The country, however, has continued to aggressively promote tourism and to work towards eradicating acts of terrorism (Mintel, 2011).

Egypt is known for its Nile cruises which accounted for 10,000 trips per year prior to 2011 (Ward and Machan, 2015). The Egyptian cities of Sharm El Sheik, Dahab, Hurghada, Cairo and Luxor are among the top 10 destinations in the Middle East, attracting tourists from a mix of nationalities, particularly Russia, the UK and Germany (Mintel, 2011). In 2006, over 1 million British tourists visited Egypt, making the UK the biggest source market (Research and Markets, 2013). Emerging tourist markets include Eastern and Central Europe. Egypt's ancient history and archaeological sites and its rich marine life make it a unique travel destination for cultural and heritage tourism and nature-based tourism (Shaalan, 2005). Ayad and Shujun (2012) found that visiting the pyramids and the historical sites, taking a Nile cruise and seeking business opportunities were Chinese travellers' key motives for visiting Egypt. However, it must be noted that little research has focused on the motivations of tourists to Egypt.

Much of the literature on Egyptian tourism focuses on attitudes to risk and decision-making. Ahmed and Kadir (2013) for example investigated the impact of information sources on travel behaviour post the 2011 uprising. They highlighted the role of the mass media in shaping people's intentions to visit Egypt. Sustainable tourism is also a theme of research on Egypt, with Ghanem and Saad (2015) and Shaalan (2005) highlighting the role of the government in protecting natural heritage. Finally, some research has been conducted on women's employment in Egypt, finding that women's participation in tourism work is limited and that sociocultural norms confine women to the home (Zaytoun, Heiba, & Abdelhakim, 2010; Abou-Zeid, 2006). Given the importance of tourism to the Egyptian economy, an understanding of the female tourist experience in Egypt should be of value to the tourist authorities. There is also clearly sociological value to the study in terms of both increasing our understanding of what it means to be a woman travelling through an Islamic destination and shedding light on life for women in Egypt.

Literature review

Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2001) argue that female tourists have different expectations of and attitudes to travel. In their study of women travelling independently, Cockburn, Friend & McIntosh (2006), for example, cite a desire for self-discovery, enlightenment, education and respite from the confines of their domestic environment. In Poria's (2006a) study of an Israeli lesbian woman's travel experience, anonymity and existential authenticity are noted as motivating factors. Meanwhile in their research into all-female holiday-makers, Junek , Binney, & Winn (2006) highlight pampering and social interaction. In their quantitative study of graduate female tourists, Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter (2001) cited nature, education, shopping and excitement as benefits of the trip. This is supported by Lin and Lehto (2006) who add self-development opportunities, and by McNamara and Prideaux (2010) who also note rest and relaxation, visiting friends and family, and spending quality time with their family.

Escape from familial responsibilities is a recurrent theme. In research on the holiday experiences of women with a child under the age of 15, Small (2005) reports a desire for freedom from domestic roles especially from childcare. Though family holidays offered the benefits of bonding and education for children, the women yearned for a space of their own. Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Poria (2013a) also comment on the promise offered by tourism of freedom from a restrictive domestic role. According to Durko and Petrick (2013), however, independent holidays are not just a source of escape, but can be attributed to work constraints necessitating separate trips. Conversely, they state that family holidays are increasingly the only way for families to bond in the face of decreasing family time.

The feminist notion of resistance has received some attention in studies on female tourists. As Wearing (1998) notes, it is in their leisure space that women can challenge and resist dominant discourses of subordination. Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia (2016), for instance, found that female Asian tourists resisted cultural expectations of women simply by travelling solo. Other scholars have referred to resistance to gendered expectations of appropriate sexual behaviour (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Poria, 2015). Indeed, Berdychevsky, Poria, & Uriely (2010) and Berdychevsky, Poria, & Uriely (2013b) identify liberation from social norms for sexual behaviour as a motivating factor for travel. Their qualitative studies reveal

that the tourist trip is perceived as a liminoid time-space where women can explore alternative sexual behaviour with steady or casual partners. Berdychevsky et al. (2015) explain that tourism offers a unique atmosphere that permits a freeing of sexual behaviour away from the home environment; it is a 'stage for performing alternative subjectivities' (p. 68).

Studies on female tourists also highlight the challenges that women face on holiday. Cockburn et al. (2006) report that danger and security are important themes: men are always viewed with suspicion by female tourists. Jordan and Gibson (2005) conceptualized their female participants' feelings of vulnerability, self-conspicuousness, and fear of harassment as a kind of surveillance, deriving from the male sexualized gaze, which they attribute to the objectification of women. Their study's focus is on unwanted, uninvited and sexualised male attention that can be considered to constitute sexual harassment. Described as a kind of sexualised surveillance, the gaze is exercised by men (usually local) on women (the tourists).

In their qualitative study of solo female tourists, Wilson and Little (2008) use Valentine's (1989) concept of the 'geography of women's fear' to explore their experiences. Prior to their trip, women perceived access to certain tourist destinations and places to be restricted due to local attitudes toward solo female tourists. Entire countries and regions were perceived as 'unsafe' or 'off-limits'. Of interest to this paper is that as a generically-described region, this included the Middle East. Meanwhile, McNamara and Prideaux's (2010) study of solo female tourists in Tropical North Queensland found no safety issues, leading the authors to conclude that the importance of this factor is a function of the safety of the destination.

In an extension to Valentine's thesis, Wilson and Little (2008) argue that there is a 'geography of women's travel fear', which works to perpetuate the notion that solo travel is somehow unsafe, and in places, inappropriate. It is important to acknowledge that vulnerability is experienced both at home and on holiday: fears, constraints and structural inequalities impact on women's lives every day and everywhere (Aitchison, 2005; Wilson and Little, 2008). Nevertheless, vulnerability may be greater in an unfamiliar destination

whose norms and values are distinct from the tourists' own. Scraton and Watson (1998) observe that public leisure space should be conceptualised as a gendered and sexualized arena. From a feminist perspective, space and place are increasingly critically analysed as sociocultural constructions rather than simply as physical locations (Wilson and Little 2008; Aitchison, 1999).

It must be acknowledged that, though outside the remit of the current study, women are not the only group that is prone to feelings of vulnerability and subject to the gaze of the other. Brunt and Brophy (2006) highlight the prevalence of the victimisation of gay tourists, whilst Poria and Taylor (2001) point to the reassuring anonymity of the internet for gay tourists booking holidays. Meanwhile, Poria (2006b) notes in his study of gay and lesbian hotel guests that personal safety and equal treatment from hotel staff and guests are highly important factors in the hotel experience. As Pritchard and Morgan (2000) observe, the polarizing male, heterosexist gaze still dominates, and remains to be challenged. Heimtun (2010) also notes the dominance of the 'heterofamily reality', whose gaze acts as a judgment on those who do not conform to accepted norms of interaction.

Due to their fear of harassment or male violence, studies on female tourists often document the measures women take towards warding off male attention. Wilson and Little (2008) state that fear develops as a result of personal experience and word-of-mouth or media stories of attacks on women, and as such women use a number of avoidance strategies in their use of public space, such as restricting their movements to certain areas and certain times of the day. Outside their home environment, it may often be difficult to decide what space is safe, thus women may retreat even more. Much of women's fear of violence is based on perception; nevertheless there are good grounds for their fears, as around the world, women are the primary victims of sexual attack (World Health Organisation, 2014). Indeed, in Egypt, foreign reporters Lara Logan, American network CBS, Sonia Dridi, France 24, and a reporter from the Netherlands (unidentified) were victims of gang rape at the height of the uprisings in 2011 and 2013.

Women use a number of coping strategies, including modifying dress, conforming to local norms of behaviour, being vigilant, and avoiding unsafe places. Although these negotiation techniques allow women to respect cultural norms and continue to travel, they become weary

of having to constantly gauge the tourist landscape. Such strategies are often resentfully adopted (Cockburn et al., 2006): whilst covering their hair may result in less male attention it also undermines their sense of identity. Jordan and Aitchison (2008) also observe the female tourist tendency towards what they call self-surveillance. To avoid the sexualised gaze, women frequently remove themselves from public view; their opportunities for walking around the streets alone, for meeting members of the host community and other travellers are seriously curtailed. The sexualised gaze, primarily exercised by men, prohibits them from being the flaneuse they might like to be on holiday. If she ignores local rules, the female tourist puts herself at risk. The authors indicate the impact of surveillance on the embodied experiences of female tourists, and at the same time point to a gap in the literature on this subject.

The above studies have focused on female tourist motivations and experiences in a variety of destinations. In our study on the female tourist experience of holidaying in Egypt, we hope to extend the literature on gender and tourism by incorporating an extra dimension, that of women taking a holiday in an Islamic destination.

Methodology

Pritchard and Morgan (2000) argue that a feminist analysis of tourism encompasses a critique of gender relations in the production and consumption of tourism experiences. We categorise this as a feminist study because our participants are all female tourists who were encouraged by us, the female researchers, to reflect on how gender impacted on their holiday experiences and on what life is like for women in Egypt. The data are interpreted through a feminist lens, in the understanding that gender and power relations inform tourism activities. As Wilson and Little (2008, p. 183) observe, travel experiences are 'gendered, sexualised, socially and culturally constructed' because the structural constraints that impact on women's lives in a given destination will influence the tourist experience. Tourism is a site for the maintenance and reproduction of complex power relations, and women's leisure is therefore shaped by gender (Scraton and Watson 1998). Finally, the Egyptian author of the paper offers a privileged insider perspective on the findings, and has a feminist understanding of the role of women in Egyptian society.

Qualitative research was selected as the approach to data collection as it is the approach most suited to address complex and sensitive topics (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015). It also allowed participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely. The semi-structured interview method was chosen and an interview guide with a list of topics was prepared. These include: date and frequency of visits to Egypt; places visited; participants' view of travelling in a Muslim country; challenges faced while travelling as a woman; awareness of the current political situation and whether it had an effect on their trip; how the locals influenced their experience; and general impressions and willingness to return to Egypt in the future. A flexible approach was taken allowing participants to lead discussion; this is particularly important in an exploratory study on a topic on which relatively little is known. Thus each interview proceeded differently, depending on the bias of the interviewee. As Jones, Brown & Holloway (2013) note, the hallmarks of the semi-structured interview are its flexibility and spontaneity. This is important in a feminist piece of scholarship in which often silenced voices need to be heard.

Throughout 2013, interviews were held with 14 women who had been on holiday to Egypt from 2010 to 2014. Egypt is a primary destination for arrivals in the Middle East (Mintel, 2011) and therefore ideal for exploring how gender shapes the experiences of female tourists in Islamic destinations. Egypt was also chosen because the Egyptian author of this paper is highly familiar with its culture and product. Furthermore, Egypt has a unique identity that combines a modern tourist product with a conservative culture whose values, we believe, could impact on the way Western women travellers are perceived and treated in the country. This research conforms to the researchers' university ethical guidelines. Participants were provided with information on the research and its aim. They were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used to protect identity.

Purposive and convenience sampling was employed in order to select information-rich individuals (Jones et al., 2013). It was felt that data saturation was reached after conducting 14 interviews. All participants were non-Muslim, unmarried, white British women, aged between 20 and 55. Ten were accompanied by a male partner or parents, and four travelled alone. All participants had visited Egypt from 5-16 days for leisure purposes on an independent travel basis. The authors acknowledge that this may have affected their experiences as packaged holidays may offer some degree of protection to female travellers.

Twelve participants were unfamiliar with Egyptian culture prior to travelling; two had prior knowledge, having previously visited Egypt five times. The destinations visited include Cairo, Luxor, Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheik. Frequency of visits did not prove to be relevant: the data showed a commonality of experience across the themes generated. Eight participants occupied an educational or administrative role at the university where the researchers work and the rest, recommended by interviewees, occupied a professional role in fields such as tourism and retail. The authors were unknown to the participants prior to the interviews. While some of the participants had dark hair, none of them looked Egyptian. This is noteworthy to this research as looks proved to be significant.

All interviews were carried out in the UK where both researchers reside. The interviews took place in venues chosen by participants, including places of work, cafeterias or the researcher's office. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour, and were digitally recorded. Participants appeared keen to talk about their experiences despite the sensitivity of the subjects sometimes raised. Furthermore, as the interviews were carried out by a female researcher, they reported feeling at ease about providing intimate details about their time in Egypt.

Thematic analysis was used to generate research categories. The first step involves immersion in the data (Jones et al., 2013), thus transcripts were repeatedly read, in order to get a sense of the whole. Subsequently, a process of coding was conducted whereby the transcripts were separated into manageable chunks and labelled as discretely as possible. Codes were then placed into broader categories, which represent the main themes of the research, as reflected in the section headings of the results section. The authors worked independently to code the data in order to establish coding validity. A consensus was then reached on the emergent themes. As is appropriate in an inductive study, the research categories are emergent from the data and reflect participants' particular biases. The findings below, as is common in much qualitative research, are discussed using new literature that the researchers were led to through the process of analysis.

Findings and discussion

A dominant male presence

This study highlights the dominance of men in tourist destinations in Egypt. All participants commented on the lack of local women either working in or consuming tourism. Most public spaces appeared to be male-dominated: "everybody was male, even in the museums: store people, taxi drivers, tourist staff, they were all male" (Katherine). Participants deduced from this absence of women in tourist areas that men engaged more in Egyptian society than women:

> I spent quite a lot of the time talking to the male staff who worked there, about the culture with regards to the male and female roles, it is often a dominant male who goes out to work. And a lot of them, actually all of them that I met, had wives looking after the children and cooking. (Dawn)

This observation is supported by Sobaih's (2015) statement that participation of Egyptian women in tourism employment is minimal, between 5% and 13% (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2008). This is attributed to "strong traditions concerning women's roles" (Zaytoun et.al, 2010, p. 18): women's inferior position is institutionalised and manifested in modern Islamic Egypt (Ali, 2015).

The underrepresentation of women and the dominance of men in Egypt's tourist destinations was a cause of concern, instilling a sense of anxiety and vulnerability in participants: "it was male members of staff in hotels; there weren't that many women at all. It was intimidating at times" (Emma). In a patriarchal system, where men manipulate women's use of public spaces, fear prevails (Jordan and Gibson 2005). For Egyptian women, the fear of becoming a target for sexual harassment or being stigmatised as 'improper' tends to disincline them towards using leisure spaces. This is corroborated by the Egyptian author of this paper, and it was found to be the experience of six of the participants who felt that having a male companion would protect them from harassment.

This study showed that participants' self-esteem and self-confidence were affected by the position held by women in Egyptian society. A sense of gender inferiority was undermining

and the issue of equality between men and women was prominent in their minds: "What amazes me is that women out there don't go out to work or you don't see them. I think that makes a difference because I think people respect men perhaps a bit more than women" (Gina). Indeed, Ali (2015) notes that in Islamic societies, women are considered to lack reason and religious aptness; therefore they are excluded from fully participating in society. As an example, it takes two women's testimonies to replace a man's:

> And get two witnesses out of your own men. And if there are not two men
> (available), then a man and two women, such as you agree for witnesses, so
> that if one of them (two women) errs, the other can remind her (the Qur'an
> 2:282).

It is uncommon to see female judges, religious clerics or frontline public servants in Arab countries. The influence of religious and cultural norms is felt in all areas of everyday life, both in and outside the home (Ali, 2015), thus it is little wonder that the female tourist experience would be affected.

Furthermore, participants complained that they did not find the opportunity to interact with Egyptian women simply because they were less visible in public spaces than Egyptian men were. One could argue that the tourist gaze is diminished if women, being part of society, are absent from view. This is reflected in Ann's comment:

> The street cafes where you could buy mint tea or something like that, there
> were no women in any of them, so very male dominated, and I just thought, I
> don't want to go in there. I do remember thinking, where are the women?
> Where do women go when they want a mint tea? I didn't engage in going into
> those little shop type cafes, it was quite obvious that women didn't go.

As Swain (1995) argued, women are involved differently from men in their consumption of tourism, and this is particularly the case in Egypt and in Islamic destinations generally, as women may be socially prohibited from accessing the same leisure activities in tourist destinations as men (Zaytoun et al. 2010).

The under-representation of local women in tourist destinations in Egypt is part caused by an absence of modern tourist facilities that cater for conservative families. Sehlikoglu and Karakas (2014) report a fast growth of the Tesettur (veiled) hotel brand with over 112 open and planned hotels throughout Turkey. These hotels adopt gender segregation practices and provide halal food, drink and entertainment. The lack of similar hospitality outlets in Egypt may be a factor in limiting local women's consumption of tourism. This is not to make a case for gender-segregated facilitates; rather it is an attempt to explain the absence from view of local women in mixed facilities within tourist destinations in Egypt.

Unwanted male attention

This study indicates a high degree of attention from Egyptian men towards female tourists, which coloured the experiences of all participants who described feeling exposed, noticed and vulnerable. This was more prominent for white, tall and/ or blond and blue-eyed female tourists, thus the importance of body type is noted: I think being a white tall female and blond is a novelty in their country and I did experience a lot of attention and I did feel uncomfortable (Jean). This was supported by Patricia:

> To be honest I did what I could to kind of fit in particularly in the fact that I am blonde and blue eyed. I noticed I got a lot of stares from people so I wanted to do what I could to try and alleviate it.

Unwanted male attention ranged from staring, gesturing and touching to verbal and sexual assault:

> One guy just stared at me. When I was in my bikini, he would come over and he'd lean against a palm tree ...he would just stare at me up and down my body really slowly. I don't get bothered very easily so for that to bother me, it was quite offensive. (Grace)

Participants were uncomfortably aware of the male gaze, and one woman noted that "male attention in Egypt is definitely sexual" (Olivia). As Francombe (2014, p. 595) notes, "bodies are lived and experienced in a sense that impacts on everyday life". This was found in our study, where the uncomfortable impact of the gaze on the embodied experience of the trip was pronounced. One participant was subjected to sexual assault by a masseur at a reputable hotel:

> He was massaging my back, and when he ran down the side of my body and went down there (the sides of the body) once, which I've had a lot of massages there, that's normal, but he actually went down and right over and across my breasts, and that's never happened before, and I sort of jumped up, and as I jumped up, he pushed his body into the side of me, and he had an erection. I said, "oh stop, stop, stop!" Then he said, "oh I'm sorry, I'm sorry, you're just so attractive", and I was absolutely mortified. (Elizabeth)

The incident described above went unreported. In the arena of sexual harassment and assault, non-reporting is not an uncommon social phenomenon (Orchowski and Gidycz, 2015). Similarly participants were reluctant to report less serious incidents, such as persistent staring and unwanted approaches. However non-reporting led to delayed feelings of anger, remorse and self-loathing; all unexpected outcomes of a tourist trip:

> I should have said something or reported it. (Grace)

> I felt stupid at the time and I felt maybe it was my fault. (Elizabeth)

> If that happened to me in this country (UK) I would be writing to everybody. Why didn't I do it there? (Patricia)

One of the reasons why such offences went unreported, as explained by the participants, was empathy. Participants did not wish to be responsible for someone's dismissal from work or for their prosecution: "I feel I never really want to complain about anything because I would never want anybody to lose their job because of me even if they've done the wrong thing". (Annie)

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Participants persuaded themselves to disregard incidents of sexual harassment and assault in order to ease conflicting feelings; a state of cognitive dissonance (see Solomon, 2013) was produced. However, a feeling of unease surfaced when participants returned home. Participants noted differing reactions to sexual harassment at home and abroad, and they were mystified as to the reasons for their distinct responses. In 2015, a similar case received media coverage: a female tourist was raped in Egypt but refused to press charges due to compassion for the attacker's family (Arafa, 2015).

By reporting on sexual harassment and assault, this study helps to fill a gap in knowledge on a topic that has not received much coverage to date. It also allows the authors to shed light on the experiences of Egyptian women. In their report, The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women stated that 99.3% of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment (Shalaby, 2013). The Egyptian author of this paper has also experienced much verbal sexual harassment as well as numerous sexual looks and gestures whilst living in Egypt. She confirms that sexual harassment is unavoidable on the streets of Egypt and women are forced to tolerate it. She also observes that in Egypt, women are commonly blamed for sexual harassment because of the way they dress. As Hunnicutt (2009) notes, it is important to keep a theoretical focus on patriarchy because it anchors the problem of violence against women in social conditions, rather than individual attributes.

Sexual assault against female tourists and foreign news reporters has been reported by local and foreign newspapers in the past few years (The Guardian, 2014). The security vacuum that resulted from political turmoil has seen an escalation in sexual assaults (Egypt Independent, 2013). Meanwhile, a law criminalising sexual harassment was introduced in 2014 as a result of new political and social reforms in Egypt following the revolutions (BBC News, 2014). This law imposes a punishment of a minimum six month jail term and a fine of 5,000 Egyptian Pounds (USD 714) if found guilty. Penalties are increased for employers and repeat offenders. It may take some time for such a law to translate into a change in behaviour however. Indeed, participants agreed that they would avoid Egypt as a tourist destination if

the country continued to be unstable. As noted by Cockburn et al. (2006), perceived danger is an important deterrent for female tourists.

The participants largely limited their interactions with Egyptian men to those employed in the tourism and hospitality industry. They stated that they had no reason to suspect that these men might sexually harass or assault them, as they occupied a professional position: "I didn't really think about it because they are in a position of authority" (Elizabeth). While some degree of non-physical male attention was reluctantly accepted by some participants as part of the tourist experience, sexual assault and sexual harassment left some participants feeling shocked and distressed. As stated by Orchowski and Gidycz (2015), sexual assault is a serious public health problem that has a range of consequences for victims. Nevertheless, all participants including the one who had been subjected to assault intended to return to Egypt once it stabilises.   They stressed that, despite the challenges, they had had the "holiday of a life time". However, all participants (accompanied or unaccompanied) confirmed that they would not travel to Egypt alone.

Conformity to local norms

Participants, who are all British and come from a culture where women enjoy independence and equality, felt bound to conform to local gender norms in order to have a more enjoyable experience. Firstly, all those who travelled with a male companion (whether partner, husband or father) experienced taking a secondary position in various dealings with local people: "if you are with a man, it's always the man they talk to. I think people respect men perhaps a bit more than women" (Olivia). Similarly, Jean commented:

> I would have the tickets and hand them over, but they would hand them back
> to Richard (boyfriend) and talk to Richard, and if I asked a question, they
> would always answer Richard, and as a Westerner, I was like, 'hello, I'm
> here!'

Respecting local cultural norms for behaviour was seen as a way to be a culturally responsible tourist; however, taking a secondary role to men was only occasionally accepted

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by participants. Some struggled with the idea of gender inequality and could not fully subscribe to it even as a way to respect local norms. Thus some participants internally and outwardly resisted the backseat imposed by cultural norms in Egypt. The secondary role they were forced to inhabit made them want to assert themselves: "of course we have a Western mentality; we think we are equal so if I said something, then they should answer me. They thought they should address my partner because he is the more important person" (Katherine). Efforts made to redress the situation were unsuccessful, as even when women tried to interject in the conversation, they were ignored in deference to their male companion.

Other participants willingly conformed to local norms, knowing it was a temporary situation. Meanwhile, some interpreted being overlooked in conversations as a gesture of respect paid by the locals to their partner. In effect, they defended the dominant male role in Egyptian society: "effectively you (the reference is to men) are supposed to be looking after your woman, aren't you? You're supposed to be doing all those things so that she does not have to do it. It didn't bother me" (Ann). It is interesting to note that some participants were happy to occasionally relinquish the hard-earned feminist sovereignty achieved in their home country and to conform to a culture of gender inequality. When asked about this change in attitudes, Emma said: "I could do it because we went on holiday only for a week, I knew it wasn't forever". Such conformity allowed them to enjoy their trip in a conservative destination as rebellion may have spoilt it:

> I think it's because you have to accept that when you go into another culture,
> there are going to be differences and if you were not to enjoy your time
> because of cultural differences, then it almost defeats the point of going
> anywhere at all, so you just accept it. (Dawn)

Furthermore, having a male companion altered participants' experience. The way they were perceived and treated obliged them to seek protection in male company:

> Having a guy with me was almost like a God warding off… because if I was
> with a girl, attention could have been a lot more intense and they would have
> probably tried to chat to us a lot more but because I was with a boyfriend it
> was more like I'm with someone, I'm not on my own. (Emma)

> Usually there is a guy (an acquaintance) who comes and picks me up, because
> I tried once to walk alone along the Nile and it was not very nice as so many
> people tried to talk to me so many men, it was annoying. (Yvette)

In an Islamic male-dominated society, women are socially vulnerable and undervalued (Ahmed, 1993). This vulnerability often lessens women's role in society and prohibits them from being regarded as capable beings (see the Qur'an, 2:282).   It is argued that a woman needs a man to feel complete, as traditionally, a man takes on the role of the provider, the protector and the decision maker (Drolet, 2010). These cultural attitudes to gender were long felt by the Egyptian author while living in Egypt and by our participants.

Perceived marital status was found to be important. While non-married Egyptian couples cannot share the same hotel room in Egypt (Eltahawy, 2015), an exception is made for non-Egyptian couples. However, locals were often curious about the status of relationship and it was felt that the only approved one was marriage. Some participants felt the need to label their relationship accordingly to gain the locals' acceptance and be treated with respect:

> They would respect me more If I would say I was married. If I was in a shop
> on my own, I would say 'my husband is just coming', even though we're not
> married … if they hear the word husband, they respect you more. (Emma)

An important way in which to conform to gender norms in Egypt is by dress. Arab women in general are supposed to dress in a non-seductive way so that male sexual desire is not elicited (Ali, 2015). Many Egyptian women wear the hijab, a head cover, as well as loose fitting clothing to hide their body shape. Non-Muslim female tourists attract considerable male attention by dressing differently and/or exposing body parts such as arms, shoulders and legs, which are expected to be covered in a conservative Islamic culture (Rugh, 1986). Participants felt they needed to conform to the dress code to respect/ protect the local culture: "It's a different culture, it's the way it is and to be honest good for them for having a culture that they are sticking to" (Gina). Some also wanted to ward off unwanted attention and thereby boost their enjoyment of the trip: "It makes a big difference to your enjoyment because you get less attention if you make the effort to cover up" (Jean). Some used the conservative dress code to blend in: "I would just cover up, wear loose cotton clothes. The more you look like traditional dress, the more that you blend in" (Olivia). Others used it to

save locals from feeling embarrassed as a result of looking at an immodestly dressed woman: "I felt uncomfortable that they would feel uncomfortable and I didn't want this embarrassment for me or them, and so it's adhering to their culture and at the same time I still feel that I can relax on holiday". (Angela)

Conformity by dress denoted respect for cultural norms and also acted as a shelter from potential danger, from unwanted male attention. Blending in was a strategy to allow women to use a public space without being sexually harassed. This was a coping mechanism that would enable them to manage the host's behaviour and lead to a more fulfilling tourist experience. They felt that such self-surveillance would help to keep them safe. However, adhering to the dress code can be restrictive and comes at the expense of personal comfort, as expressed by Grace and Yvette respectively: "I think it was the actual dress code, which was probably the biggest challenge", "having to cover all the time in the heat, making sure that I was properly covered in the right place. Yes, I think it was a challenge, really, it was the dress code".

Adopting a restrictive dress code in temperatures of around 40 degrees in the summer was deemed to be a considerable challenge. Furthermore, participants felt the need to be constantly conscious about the way they were dressed, which added an element of anxiety to their trip. Some felt that the dress code lessened their enjoyment of their holiday, and the impact on the embodied experience is again noted. Conformity to a foreign dress code was experienced as a burden, but a necessary protective screen to avoid male attention. It was not seen as a way to enhance the authenticity of their experience.

Participants in this study gained a flavour of what it is like to be a woman in Egypt. This was not one of their reasons for travelling, but it was imposed. Despite their empowered position at home, they had to conform to a culture of gender inequality in order to gain acceptance, or simply to be left alone. This was made possible through the medium of a male companion, as Egyptian society dictated as well as conforming to a strict dress code.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to and extends the literature on the female tourist experience by focusing on the experiences of women holidaying in an Islamic destination. The literature review reveals that some of our findings have been noted in other studies of female tourists. However, we argue that the Islamic sociocultural context has a direct impact on the way in which female tourists are treated and expected to behave because of the position of women in Islamic society. Thus there are degrees of difference in the experiences female tourists will have in Islamic and other destinations. This study identified three major themes, including: a) responses to a dominant male presence in the destination; b) harassment from local men and c) conformity to local cultural norms for women.

The women interviewed in this study were unsettled by the absence from view of Egyptian women. There was a sense that their grasp of the culture was only partial, given their inability to interact with local women. They were discomfited and made vulnerable by the fact that they could not see or interact with local women. They drew conclusions about Egyptian culture from the dominant presence of men, related to women's role in society, and they felt that their own presence was conspicuous, that it met disapproval. An increased presence of women in public and leisure spaces in the destination would have been reassuring in terms of the balance it would have offered.

Participants were further discomfited by the unwanted sexualised male attention they received in the destination, which sometimes manifested as harassment and, in one case, assault. Jordan and Gibson (2005) define sexual harassment as unwanted, uninvited and sexualised male attention. Harassment mostly took the form of intense staring, which made participants feel uncomfortable and unsafe. It negatively impacted on the enjoyment of their trip, as they often felt exposed and vulnerable. This study highlights that the use of public and leisure spaces by women can be problematic: their embodied experience as tourists is impacted by the sexualised gaze of local men. Pritchard and Morgan (2000) state that 'space and place are cultural constructions' (p. 899), and in this study, this is reflected in the influence of culture on the tourist experience. The number of female solo tourists is on the increase (see Heimtun and Abelsen, 2014), despite safety fears in many destinations. In this study, four of the participants were travelling alone, yet all 14 cited harassment as a

problematic factor that would prevent them returning to Egypt alone. Even in company women experienced unwanted attention: they were convinced that this would be amplified if they were alone, a feeling that is supported in the literature on solo female tourists. Sexual harassment and sexual assault are phenomena that are documented in countries throughout the world. Also well documented are the coping strategies that women adopt to ward off attention and danger (see Vera-Grey, 2017). What is noted in this study is that the female participants found male attention to be relentless. The Egyptian author of this paper corroborates this observation: she states that women face constant harassment on the streets in Egypt even if they are covered, and like Eltahawy (2015), she attributes this to the influence of religion on society. Whether or not the new laws on and penalties for sexual harassment result in a change in behaviour that improves women's experiences on the streets of Egypt remains to be seen.

Participants felt placed in a position whereby their own conformity to local gender roles and behaviour was required to smooth their journey through Egyptian society. It was a means to an end to adopt the local dress code, to defer to their male companion, and to use men as protectors. However, this did not always sit comfortably, given the contrast with the practice followed in their origin culture. The temporary nature of the trip meant that locals' deference to the male tourist was tolerated by some participants; others resisted the subservient role they were forced to occupy as female companions, though this did not result in a change in behaviour. By contrast, participants travelling with men were glad of their company, and imbued their male companion with the power to ward off danger, to limit the unwanted attention they received. Hence there is a contradiction. Among some participants, safety and comfort were paramount. Jordan and Gibson (2005) state that tourism is an arena where women can practise resistance to gendered stereotypes, resulting in feelings of empowerment. However, our study shows that the opposite may be true if the sociocultural environment doesn't permit experimentation. When resistance may meet harassment and even assault, our study shows that conformity to local norms for behaviour is more common. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, participants would not return to Egypt unaccompanied because of the unwanted attention they received. Thus they weren't liberated, but rather confined by their tourist experience in Egypt. Wilson and Little (2008) note that some women may resist the

geography of women's travel fear, but this was not the case in our study: safety outweighed identity concerns.

Coping strategies were adopted to ward off male surveillance. The most important coping mechanism used to try to reduce attention was the adoption of the local dress code. This was a practical decision participants made, in part to respect local cultural norms but mostly to minimise their own discomfort. The Egyptian author of this paper also covers herself when she visits Egypt, in order to ward off harassment, which is intensified if a woman is not covered. This study highlights the impact of self-surveillance on the embodied experience of being a female tourist in Egypt. As Wilson and Little (2008) state, women on holiday have to constantly gauge the tourist landscape for danger and "strategise accordingly" (p. 181). The tourist landscape is used differently by men and women; women need to do "what's safe, right and sensible to keep themselves out of harm's way" (p. 182). In addition, as Light and Young (2014) observe, habits are a form of learned behaviour that are stable and resistant to change if the contexts in which they are enacted also remain stable. In our study setting, the sociocultural context had changed, and behaviour was adapted accordingly.

Qualitative researchers acknowledge that a small sample makes generalisation impossible (Mason, 2002); instead they refer to the transfer of theoretical concepts found in one situation to other settings. Egypt was the focus of this qualitative study, but the authors feel that the experiences of the participants in Egypt could be transferred to other Islamic destinations where similar social norms apply that may affect the female tourist experience. Eltahawy (2015) states that women are highly controlled and treated as inferior in all Arab states, owing to the impact of religion on sociocultural norms for behaviour. This carries implications for the way female tourists will be treated in such destinations. However, context is all important in qualitative research, and as such, the authors very cautiously propose transferability to similar situations. Further research would help to establish the extent to which women's experiences as tourists in Egypt may be shared by female tourists in other Muslim countries. Research could also focus on the female tourist experience in a less conservative Muslim country such as Turkey, as well as on the solo female tourist experience in an Islamic destination.

To conclude, as feminist scholars, we have to hope that our research will help shed light on the way that women are perceived and treated in a patriarchal society such as Egypt. As stated previously, the female tourist experience offers a mirror on the host society: as women's status improves in Egypt, so will the female tourist's treatment at the hand of the host. By disseminating our work, including to and beyond the academic audience, we hope to contribute to a dialogue about and an eventual shift in social attitudes to Egyptian women's position and value.

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