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Working in a man's world – An IPA study of women's lived experience in the UK construction industry

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Abstract:

Background: The UK construction industry is a gender segregated and masculinised workplace with women representing only around 15% of the workforce. The lived experience of women who work within the UK construction industry remains unexplored from an interpretive phenomenological stance. The current study aimed to address this gap within the literature. **Method:** Four participants took part in semi structured interviews which were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). **Findings:** Three main themes were identified: 'The Masculinised Lens', 'Seen But Not Heard', 'A Man's World'. All participants experienced benevolent and hostile sexism, with a sense of unbelonging, 'lack of fit' and hyper visibility presenting clear challenges for participants. In line with existing research, findings show that well embedded gendered norms underpin a working environment which disfavours women and traits perceived as feminine. Findings may be used to inform organisational training materials and workplace policy, focusing on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to gender.

Keywords: Women, UK construction, lived experience, benevolent sexism, hostile sexism

Introduction

Within the organisational landscape of the United Kingdom (UK), masculinised industries, or male dominated industries, are defined as industries where women represent 25% of the work force or less with work sectors ranging from transport, IT, finance, and insurance and many more being primarily staffed by men (Catalyst, 2021; Wright, 2014). The masculinised cultures within these industries can harm, exclude and discriminate against women who work within them (Bryce et al., 2019; Kirton & Robertson, 2018).

The current study focuses on the UK construction industry as an example of a masculinised workforce, with the Office of National Statistics (n.d.) indicating that women represent only 15% of the UK workforce. Much of the existing literature from countries such as Australia and the UK focuses upon barriers to women entering construction (Navarro-Astor et al., 2017; Wright, 2014; Worrall et al., 2010) rather than documenting and exploring lived experience of the workplace. While there is a small, emerging body of literature focusing on lived experience of women in construction in a UK context (Aboagye-Nimo et al., 2019; Suresh et al., 2023), the majority still sits within countries outside of a UK context such as Myanmar (Fold et al., 2015) and Australia (Chappell et al., 2017; Galea et al., 2022).

Analysis draws on Glick & Fiske's (1996) 'Ambivalent Sexism Theory' and its claims that the interrelated ideologies of hostile and benevolent sexism are "two sides of a sexist coin" (Glick & Fiske, 2011, p. 532) which functions to maintain a traditional gendered status quo. Accordingly, Hammond et al., (2018, p. 863) state that "hostile sexism is an ideology which characterises women as incompetent, overly emotional, and attempting to manipulate men to gain power" and define "benevolent sexism [as] an ideology that tempers these relational costs, while maintaining men's power, by characterising women as delicate, pure and in need of men's protection and care".

Women In Masculinised Industries:

Women's experiences, as a minority in traditionally masculinised workplaces such as construction, manufacturing and auto related trades, have received increasing attention in recent years (Bridges et al., 2023; Rubin et al., 2019). It is commonly asserted that feelings of unbelonging and 'outsider' status are reinforced by the masculinised culture and gendered norms that often exist (Wright, 2014; Kirton & Robertson, 2018). According to feminist scholars, organisational norms are embroiled with gendered ideals that prescribe and proscribe what are considered appropriate 'feminine' and 'masculine' forms of behaviour (Acker, 1990; Gains & Lowndes, 2014). Chappell (2006) labelled these norms as 'gendered logic of appropriateness', drawing on March and Olsen's (1996) 'logic of appropriateness' relating to the rules and behaviours within organisations. Accordingly, it is proposed that

within masculinised fields, these gendered norms are often centred towards notions of masculinity and maleness, in which ultimately 'male' is the norm (Williams, 2023). Literature highlights that such gendered norms can often create negative experiences for women working within these masculinised industries, with women often facing resistance and barriers through the form of marginalisation, social exclusion and discrimination, commonly creating a sense of unbelonging, and a 'lack of fit' (Bridges et al., 2020; Bridges et al., 2023; Rubin et al., 2019). These forms of social closure can be seen to reinforce the 'boys clubs' (Lingard & Lin, 2004) that already exist within these industries and in doing so further perpetuates the exclusion that women already experience (Marco-Bujosa et al., 2021).

For many men, expectations on them in terms of their gender appear to be congruent with what is deemed appropriate within masculinised working environments (Denissen, 2010). For the majority of women however, they are expected to 'fit in' with these masculinised workplace cultures, whilst simultaneously conforming to the societal female stereotypes placed upon them. This dichotomy has been labelled the 'double bind' (Gherardi, 1994; Jamieson, 1995). This dichotomy faced by women in masculinised workplaces can exacerbate the already challenging environment they work within and can be detrimental for women, with literature highlighting the damage it can cause to a sense of identity, and often to a sense of self (Van Veelen et al., 2019). Furthermore there can be negative effects to wellbeing and increased stress, leading women in masculinised workplaces to withdraw and/or leave industries, which is often understood as the 'leaky pipeline' theory (Gurjao, 2006).

Women In Construction:

While the aforementioned detrimental effects have been explored through other masculinised workplaces, they should also be explored through the context of the UK construction industry. Regardless of the regulations implemented around gender equality and discrimination by the UK government (UKRI, 2021; Watts, 2009), the industry remains one of the most male dominated within the country and around the world (Naoum et al., 2020; Shrestha et al., 2020).

Research suggests that gendered norms impact women's experiences in the construction industry in a variety of ways from experiences of sexism which include objectification, acts of intimidation and sexual harassment (Galea, 2018; Wright, 2013). Indeed, research focusing on the issue of gender within the industry demonstrates how masculinised beliefs and the conventional image of the male construction worker as courageous, risk-taking, technically proficient, and strong, continue to shape the way in which the industry is perceived (George & Loosemore, 2019; Iaccone, 2005; Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015), with such behaviours revered and even rewarded (Styhre, 2011; Wong et al., 2017). Research by Simpson (1998)

proposes that this culture is also encapsulated by 'competitive presenteeism' in which employers frequently feel the need to stay beyond the hours required from of them, often creating a sense of competitiveness around who can do the most (Galea et al., 2022; Powell et al., 2018).

In turn, those who display different values are seen to not 'fit in' (Cartwright & Gale, 1995). For example, women often experience a 'lack of fit' with the industry's norms and behaviours (Chappell et al., 2017; Olofsdotter & Randevåg, 2016; Watts, 2009). These gendered norms are in accordance with Acker's (1990) profound concept of the 'ideal worker', in which women are seen to contradict and somewhat threaten the masculinised and hegemonic practices ingrained within its culture (Galea et al., 2022; Iacuone, 2005; Ness, 2012). For instance, research has found that employees (most commonly females) who utilise workplace obligations such as part-time or flexible working and parental leave are perceived unfavourably and even as lacking devotion to their job (Navarro-Astor, 2017; Watts, 2009). Additionally, research shows how acts of emotion are seen as unfavourable (Chappell et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that positive changes for women within the construction industry have been documented. Research has found positive changes in relation to attitudes and values surrounding the barriers women face, as well as the reduction of blatant masculinised ideologies within such workplaces (English & Hay, 2015; George & Loosemore, 2019). However, despite these advancements it is apparent that even within such organisations, gendered norms and assumptions still remain.

The current study builds on previous literature (see Creighton et al., 2017; Raby et al., 2018) by providing a novel approach to the study of women's experiences of construction and masculinised work. Moreover, the research seeks to further the understanding of this gendered divide by exploring the experiences of women in the UK construction industry. The research questions are: 1) What are the lived experiences of women who work in the UK construction industry? 2). How do women experience feelings of belonging and unbelonging working in UK construction?

Materials and Method

The current study is an exploratory phenomenological study using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2022) to explore women's experience of working in the UK construction industry. IPA is deemed an appropriate methodology as it offers an examination of lived experiences (Smith, 2015; Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore

with small sample sizes it offers the opportunity for a detailed examination with a focus on depth of interpretation rather than breadth of analysis and the opportunity to attend to ideographic ideas (Smith et al., 2022), placing importance on the individual as well as looking for cross case themes. The study takes a critical realist epistemological approach to data analysis.

A total of 4 participants took part in the study, which is in line with IPA's small scale ideographic commitment of between 1-6 participants per study (Smith et al., 2022). All participants self-identified as a woman and were cis gender. Pseudonyms were provided; Charlotte, Kelly, Lilly and Ruby. Participants worked in a range of construction roles including construction consultancy, quality management and quantity surveying. Participant's exact ages are not provided due to the sample size and the potential for identification, however they ranged in age from 18-54. Similarly, whilst intersectional dimensions of identity feature in the analysis, geographical information is excluded in an effort to protect anonymity.

All participants had worked in a practical/physical role within the UK construction industry for 18 months or more at the time of the study. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Parker et al., 2019).

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The development of the interview schedule was informed by topics and themes from the existing body of literature examining women's experiences within the construction industry (see Galea et al., 2020; Powell et al., 2018). Examples of interview questions include:

- Can you think of an example where you felt you truly 'fit in' in your workplace?
- In what ways do you think being a woman affects your day-to-day experiences whilst at work?
- What more could be done to encourage and inspire women to work within workplaces such as yours?

Additionally, photo elicitation was used to enable the researcher to become 'experientially close' to the participants (Smith et al., 2022) and to allow both the researcher and the participants to direct the course of the interview. While photo elicitation was used as a catalyst for discussion the photographs themselves did not form part of the data set for analysis.

Prior to their interview, participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent form to read and sign. Participants were provided with an instruction sheet to support the creation of participant-authored photographs (Williamson et al., 2021), which included illustrative examples from an unrelated topic. Existing photo-elicitation research (see Bates et al., 2017 & Creighton et al., 2017) was drawn on in the development of these instructions.

Interviews took place online via 'Zoom' in line with the University's ethics procedures. Interviews began with participants discussing their participant-authored photographs and the researcher used this discussion alongside the interview schedule to inform the rest of the interview. Following the interview participants were debriefed and reminded of the two week window for withdrawal, after which time the data were transcribed ready for analysis. Identifiable features of the data were anonymised.

Data Analysis:

The data was co-analysed by two researchers. The co-analysis approach allowed both researchers the opportunity to reflect on their personal interpretations, validate and align their analysis.

Following Smith et al's (2022) approach to IPA, the researchers worked through the following steps. Firstly researchers familiarised themselves with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts. This allowed for a deep immersion in the data. Interview recordings were also listened to while reading the interview transcripts (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Following this, exploratory noting of transcript 1 took place in turn followed by the construction of personal experiential themes (PETs). In line with IPA's ideographic commitment, comprehensive and detailed notes were made for each participant's data, focusing upon descriptive, conceptual, and linguistic comments. Following this each additional transcript was analysed with exploratory noting before developing PETs. Once PETs had been developed from each case, group experiential themes (GETs) were developed. This involved undertaking a cross-case analysis to explore convergent and divergent points across all cases, ensuring sensitivity to each participants' unique experiences and creating a general picture alongside the documentation of key personal experiences (Smith, 2015).

Findings

Three themes were developed through analysis, each with subthemes: The Masculinised Lens; Seen But Not Heard; A Man's World.

Theme 1, 'The Masculinised Lens' explores participants' perceptions of how they are perceived or experienced by their male colleagues and judged against a masculinised standard or norm. Theme 2, 'Seen But Not Heard' explores the contradiction between being simultaneously hyper visible whilst feeling that their contributions are perceived as tokenistic by male colleagues. Theme 3, 'A Man's World' is about the seemingly impenetrable structural inequalities that are entrenched and embedded in the industry, serving to disadvantage participants in this masculinised workplace.

Theme 1: The Masculinised Lens

Participants talk about a diverse range of encounters which they experienced as sexism. For some participants this came in the form of benevolent sexism whilst other experiences were more hostile in nature. For example, participants talk of feeling surveilled and judged against workplace gendered norms on behaviour and appearance, as well as directly experiencing derogatory comments.

Participants discuss the idea that their experiences at work often revolve around being seen through a masculinised lens. Each participant talked of experiencing comments and implicit and explicit expectations of what is right and wrong, or what is appropriate, based on the masculinised norm of the workplace. Lily talks of the expectations around the way she presents herself.

"Men have a perception of the way women should be. So, like I said before you wear makeup when you go to dinner, you're going out. There's this expectation that you shouldn't look like that on site and that you should behave a certain way. You know you can't ... So you're expected to dress, do your face a certain way." (Lily)

For Lily, there are clear expectations and assumptions around what may constitute appropriate and inappropriate self-presentation on site, both in terms of physical appearance and behaviour, and this is constructed through her experience with her colleagues through the masculinised norm of the workplace.

For Charlotte, her experience is similar, however she focuses on the comments she hears from her male colleagues about women in construction.

“There’s girls with the hard hats on and the comment will come back about well, what have you got all that makeup on for? What’s it got to do with anybody else, you know? ... ‘Well, I’m just a traditionalist’, no, you’re not. You’re a sexist misogynistic dinosaur. Get over it. If she wants to wear makeup she can, if she doesn’t wear makeup, they might consider her less attractive I don’t know we’re not doing it for you we’re doing it for me.” (Charlotte)

Charlotte experiences traditionalist comments from her male colleagues about how women are judged in relation to their self-presentation on site, particularly in terms of appearance, which again comes from a masculinised perspective and relates to masculinised norms within the industry. She sees these ideas as old fashioned and out-dated and there is a dichotomy between the argument her male counterparts make of their views being ‘traditionalist’ and her attitudes towards these views, which she characterises as misogynistic and sexist. For Charlotte, women in this industry should not be subject to this masculinised lens and instead should have the autonomy to choose how to present themselves without this out-dated judgement.

All participants talk about times when they had been subject to disparaging benevolent or hostile sexist comments.

“They insinuated that the woman had got where she had got to because of her looks. And that, you know, she wasn’t capable of doing the job ... it was just because she was an attractive woman.” (Lily)

“Jokes were made about you only passed because they need to show representation.” (Kelly)

For Lily and Kelly, their experiences, which were either targeted directly at them or other female colleagues, delegitimise their successes of attaining and/or progressing in their role, attributing their success purely to their attractiveness or simply to improve their company’s diversity statistics. In turn this fails to recognise these womens’ capabilities and instead values and reinforces the masculinised norm of women existing for male pleasure. Comments such as these are both undermining and potentially damaging to a person’s sense of self.

Ruby recalls an experience where a male colleague on site assumed she was not meant to be there, instead attempting to direct her to the garden centre across the road from the construction site.

“Pulled onto the site ... was just a guy in a hivy and basically there’s a garden centre across the road and he went Ohh, you alright, love? Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Didn’t say anything. Anyway, Ohh the garden centre is just opposite.” (Ruby)

Ruby’s experience is an example of the benevolent sexism that may be experienced by women in UK construction. As her male colleague’s assumption that she does not belong on site and instead may be looking for the garden centre across the road highlights how Ruby is experiencing traditionalist gendered assumptions about gender and place, with the construction site seen as a ‘masculine’ place and the garden centre seen as a ‘feminine’ place. This experience has potentially detrimental effects to Ruby’s sense of belonging and also serves to undermine her professional position.

Whilst some examples provided by participants demonstrate benevolent sexism, participant’s also talk about experiences of significantly more explicit and hostile sexism. For example, Kelly talks of experiencing explicit sexist remarks in relation to her body.

“Somebody in the office said to me that I should basically buy myself some breasts with my bonus, a man in the office. Yeah, alright. You can laugh. It’s. Like, it’s ridiculous ridiculous...No excuse really for that. And I said stop, but I’m wasting my time....” (Kelly)

Kelly highlights the absurdity of this experience in the workplace and resigns herself to feeling defeated and ultimately powerless to change the hostile sexism that is embedded and normalised within her working environment.

Participants’ experiences of hostile and benevolent sexism leave them feeling objectified, belittled and undermined, leading to a sense of unbelonging and a lack of fit as a direct result of the masculinised lens through which they are judged.

Theme 2: Seen But Not Heard

This theme examines the contradictory position women in construction face. Participants talk of feeling hyper visible and of not being 'heard' or taken seriously when speaking. Sub-theme one relates to participant's experiences of how women stand out as a gendered minority in the workplace, whilst sub-theme two relates to participants feeling unheard and dismissed by male colleagues.

Seen: "All eyes on you"

When speaking about their experiences, especially on construction sites, Ruby and Lily feel they stand out. For instance, Lily, through her photo elicitation work, chose to share an image of a woman in a hard hat with men staring at her to represent her experience, in which she explained:

"For me it was just that, she stood out, she was beautiful, and the men are behind her staring... it's just a classic experience for a woman." (Lily)

Lily talks of standing out as something which is a 'classic experience' for women and something that she feels represents her experiences. For Lily, she feels that she stands out because of the gendered and masculinised environment creating a condition in which she so obviously stands out resulting in being seen in the sense of being stared at.

"Literally, as soon as you walk in like all eyes on you... a couple of whistles ... they they do literally like stare, like turn... like no one will bat an eyelid when my manager walks into site but like as soon like I get loads of double takes like they'll kind of look and then they'll like that, like as if to say what the hell." (Ruby)

Ruby's account supports Lily's description. In reference to her male colleagues she describes how "they do literally like stare". Ruby highlights this as a gendered experience by describing how her male manager receives no attention. Much like in Lily's description above, Ruby experiences the feeling of standing out in this masculine environment because of her gender.

Lily goes on to talk about the ways in which the intersections of her race and gender leave her feeling highly visible in the workplace.

"Women stick out because when they're minority and then I'm the only Black woman in the office. So, I stick out again." (Lily)

For Lily, being both a woman and being Black further contributes to her feelings of standing out. She not only recognises her minority position as a woman but goes on to differentiate

herself from her female colleagues, highlighting her racial identity as something that provides additional layers of visibility thus leaving her feeling further minoritised than her female colleagues. Indeed, Lily goes on to talk about how her intersectionality leads her to feel that she has to act with care in the workplace as she demonstrates caution about being more 'memorable'.

"Because people will remember you as well so the fact that I'm a female as well"
(Lily)

"Everything I do. I have to kind of be very careful because it might be remembered more than someone else because I'm female. Because oh I'm a Black girl." (Lily)

Experiencing feelings of visibility and feeling like she 'sticks out' leads Lily to feel that she has to be extra careful and cautious at work. She feels her additional layers of visibility potentially leave her more memorable. These layers of visibility and the intersections of gender and race compound Lily's experience, leading to feelings that her actions might be more noticeable than those of her colleagues.

Not Heard: "A token gesture almost"

Charlotte and Ruby both spoke of experiences where they felt their voices were not taken seriously:

"You get the impression that like I've had the experience where they don't take you seriously. Like they don't take you as serious as you'd want them to... But they'll just kind of brush it off or like just not take me as serious as I want to be taken... a big part is because I mean like I'm a young girl in the construction industry." (Ruby)

For Ruby, she feels that being a woman in construction and being young often means that her views are dismissed and she experiences feelings of not being taken seriously.

Charlotte reports similar feelings of being dismissed or brushed off.

"I talk to the contractors, the builders and they've answered to my male counterpart.... It's almost like dismiss there's a, there's a girl on site." (Charlotte)

Charlotte feels a sense of disregard on site and this is particularly reinforced by her reports of being 'dismissed'. Even when she talks to builders and contractors she experiences times where she is dismissed and replies are directed to her male colleagues. These experiences serve to undermine Charlotte as a professional and undermine her skills and knowledge,

and she attributes such experiences to her gender. Charlotte goes on to describe how she feels that she is not taken seriously as a woman in construction.

“Just not particularly taken seriously and I think I’m listened to, but I think it’s just after the comments I make it’s a bit of an eye roll or yeah, OK, but it’s a token gesture almost”. (Charlotte)

Charlotte echoes Ruby’s earlier statement, highlighting how she feels her contributions are often thought of as tokenistic. Considering the feelings of being seen highlighted above, participants tell a story of being ‘seen but heard’ where they experience standing out, sometimes to the extreme, and having their contributions listened to but not taken seriously or truly ‘heard’. In all cases, being ‘brushed off’ or experiencing a dismissive eye roll may serve to reinforce feelings of not being part of the club or inner circle and could lead to feelings of unbelonging. Ultimately for Ruby and Charlotte such experiences could have a detrimental impact on feelings of self worth and self esteem within the workplace.

Participants talk of being hyper visible as a gendered minority which relates to gendered expectations of place, where men are the gendered norm within this working environment. Participants are not heard or listened to, and often feel that their contributions are received as tokenistic. This leads to a dichotomy of being simultaneously hyper visible and invisible which leaves participants feeling undervalued.

Theme 3: A Man's World

This theme explores participants' experiences of feeling disempowered and underprivileged in relation to their male colleagues in this masculinised environment. The participants' accounts give rise to three sub-themes which focus on participants' sense of needing to work harder than their male colleagues to achieve the same goal, adapting their work identity as a way of attempting to fit in, and experiencing barriers to promotion which include gendered assumptions around women's reproductive potential as well as resistance to change in the workplace.

"I just feel like I have got to work maybe a little bit harder than a man of my age"

When speaking about their experiences, a clear collective narrative emerges within Charlotte, Kelly, and Lily's accounts of the feeling of needing to work harder than their male colleagues in order to achieve the same goals.

For Charlotte, her experience of working in construction is characterised by working harder and taking more 'steps' to achieve the same as her male colleagues.

"It just definitely appears as far more steps for a female to make to get to reach the same point almost like proving yourselves extra type of thing and I've experienced that throughout anyway" (Charlotte)

Charlotte talks of feeling the need to prove herself throughout her career in construction. She feels that compared to her male colleagues her journey through work has been more challenging and has required her to work harder because of her gender. As a woman in construction, Charlotte is required to demonstrate her skills and knowledge and has to prove her worth to others in ways that, from her perspective, her male counterparts are not required to do.

Lily talks of a similar idea of having to prove herself and demonstrate her skills to her male colleagues.

"You always have to show them almost immediately that you know what you're talking about to gain their respect" (Lily)

For Lily, demonstrating her skills and knowledge is an exercise in gaining respect from her male colleagues. She talks about showing them "almost immediately" that she knows what she is talking about.

Both extracts suggest that for these participants the workplace feels like an unlevel playing field and they are resigned to an uphill battle of proving worth, knowledge and skill, which provides greater challenges than those faced by their male counterparts.

Kelly talks about the need to prove herself and work harder than her male colleagues as something which is rooted in her internal self-doubt.

"I Just think, I feel maybe that's just like my own demons my, like, my own feeling. I just feel like I have got to work maybe a little bit harder than a man of my age, let's say to like prove myself. I don't know that that's just like a feeling of self-doubt."

(Kelly)

Kelly refers to her "own demons...own feelings", implying that this pressure to prove herself and work a little harder than her male colleagues may be an internalised pressure. While this may be the case it could also be an internalisation of implicit external pressures from her colleagues and the environment in which she works; an internalised sexism resulting in feelings of self doubt and pressure to perform harder to account for this and prove herself. The impact here is a feeling of self-doubt which is a result of the masculinised environment and internalised feelings of imposterism or pressure that she places upon herself.

An adaptive work Identity:

Fitting in and adapting to the workplace is key for some participants. For Lily, she talks about adapting her behaviour and appearance in different formal and informal work locations.

"I have to adjust the way I behave depending on where I am in the country. So when I go to [professional workplace location] you know, I'll be in my professional attire. Everything would be immaculate on point ... if I'm in [informal workplace location], I'll be a bit more relaxed... I have to adjust my appearances to suit where I am." (Lily)

Lily talks of behaving and presenting herself in different ways in different workplace settings to fit in. When reflecting upon how they are expected to present themselves within the workplace it was clear that for some participants, they experience the need to alter more than their appearance to fit in, and both Kelly and Charlotte adapt to the masculinised environment by presenting more masculinised traits.

"I'm not very good at asking for help, I don't want to show in work, like a weakness ... Just don't want anybody to see like see any chinks in the armour... there's very much perception from them that oh just get your head down and get on with it." (Kelly)

For Kelly, her experience of work is one in which she feels she needs to display toughness.

She talks about not showing 'chinks in the armour' and not wanting to show any weakness, with the implication that asking for help might be a sign of weakness. Here Kelly is being guided by her male colleagues where she says "that's just the perception from them...get your head down and get on with it". Kelly's behaviour here and the way she acts is being informed by her male colleagues and her approach to work is one which is reflecting the masculinised traits of her colleagues.

"You've got to act like you're strong and that if you show weakness, as in emotion being a girl ... you have to put on this game face on nothing fazes you ... be like a man almost." (Charlotte)

Similarly, Charlotte's account highlights similar themes of not showing weakness in the form of emotion and adapting a work identity which is more masculinised in nature, similar to that of her male colleagues. Charlotte talks about needing to "be like a man almost" and talks of putting on a "game face". These masculinised traits are favoured within this work environment and for Charlotte, working in the construction industry means adopting these traits as a way of belonging and fitting in.

Company Hierarchy and Opportunity for Promotion:

When speaking about the masculinised working environment, participants also describe how company leadership is dominated by senior male colleagues and is top heavy with male representation. This lack of female representation at leadership level can leave female staff questioning the attainability of promotion to senior positions in their company hierarchy.

Lily discusses her experience of working in a company which is dominated by men in senior positions. She talks about how she feels that moving into a senior role feels unattainable.

"It almost immediately presents a challenge. It looks like a challenge to me, and it it it makes me feel a little bit disheartened at times... where do I want to be in the next 10 years, and do I want to work towards that executive level, yes and then when I look at things like this is it possible? ... because I'm a logical person it doesn't look that attainable to me ... You're looking at an executive board and they're all male why would I think I could penetrate that I can't I'd just be telling myself I can't do it because it's not been done." (Lily)

Lily feels that there is a gendered disadvantage which is even stronger at the top of a managerial hierarchy, where she feels that promotion to a senior level is unattainable. She uses interesting vocabulary, describing breaking through into a senior level or joining a leadership board as 'penetrating', which in this context is a masculinised word with gendered

connotations. Promotion to a leadership level is something which Lily sees as impossible because of the lack of representation and because of a sense that it has not been done before. In turn the lack of representation of women in leadership positions could be seen as damaging to Lily's self efficacy and ultimately serve to reinforce the notion that reaching the top level of leadership positions in the industry is not achievable.

For Kelly, the prospect of having a family is a potential barrier to promotion. She talks of an experience where she was speaking to a male colleague.

"The only thing that will stop you from your next promotion is if you decide to have a sprog ...Yeah, like I am acutely aware of the fact that being in this industry and having a family, potentially how that would affect my career." (Kelly)

Kelly's interaction with her male colleague makes her "acutely aware" of the limitations that wanting a family may place on her future career opportunities. Her male colleague's use of the word "sprog" with its derogatory connotations highlights to Kelly that she can have either a family or a career but not both. She goes on to say:

"a comment was made quite recently about risk management as in not employing females of childbearing age because it's a risk to a small business." (Kelly)

Kelly's experience here is one which is underpinned by explicitly sexist ideas, in particular that she may be categorised as a 'risk' as a woman of childbearing age and that this may limit her career opportunities.

The experiences discussed so far within this theme paint a picture of construction as a 'man's world' in which the participants' position is underprivileged and disempowered in the workplace compared to their male colleagues. Participants have a sense of needing to work harder than their male counterparts to prove themselves and demonstrate their skills and knowledge as well as having to adapt their behaviour in an attempt to fit in. The challenge provided by the masculinised workplace leads to negative impacts on the sense of self, feelings of self doubt and questioning. Furthermore there are clear gendered assumptions related to female colleagues and their reproductive capacity as being a business 'risk' which again serves to disfavour female colleagues and professionally undermine them, especially in relation to promotion opportunities, as a direct result of their gender.

Participants broadly expressed the need for progress and change within their organisations which participants experience as a traditionally 'masculine' world, characterised as outdated

and 'prehistoric'. Charlotte's account highlights how her experience of working in UK construction is impacted by old fashioned, "prehistoric" or outdated ideas of masculinity:

"The dinosaur and the meteor all coming to hit it, bless. We just need to get rid of these dinosaurs." (Charlotte)

"There's people that are ' . No, it's not, because everything changes and everything evolves ... to get these people that have got these prehistoric thought processes to change is such hard work, so if we could just retire them off." (Charlotte)

Charlotte experiences resistance to change in the workplace and encounters colleagues who have old fashioned or "prehistoric" views around what the organisation should be or should continue to be. She sees these thoughts as deeply entrenched in the organisation but instead she talks of 'retiring them off' and "getting rid of these dinosaurs" as a way of being able to instigate change in what is a traditionally masculinised environment. For Charlotte, instigating organisational change needs a radical, extinction level event for new ideas and fresh perspectives to emerge in its wake.

In order to achieve organisational change and a more gender inclusive environment a radical shift in workplace culture is necessary, but with gendered ways of being so entrenched in the industry this change seems ultimately out of reach for participants.

Discussion

The current study explores the lived experiences of women in UK construction. Through an IPA approach, three core themes were developed: 1) The Masculinised Lens, 2) Seen But Not Heard, 3) A Man's World.

Throughout the findings, experiences of benevolent and hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996; 2001) are evident, with both forms of sexism occurring throughout participants' accounts and in turn support work by Glick and Fiske (2011) by further evidencing the interrelated nature of hostile and benevolent sexism. These findings add to the extensive literature base documenting the breadth and depth of sexism ingrained within the construction industry (e.g. Galea et al., 2020; Iaccone, 2005; Wright, 2013).

Findings demonstrate that the UK construction industry is a workplace where gendered norms and assumptions are deeply entrenched. Participants talk about feeling a pressure to prove themselves and to adopt masculinised traits as a way of fitting into the hegemonic masculinised culture ingrained within the industry (Heilman, 1983). Often labelled as a gendered logic of appropriateness (Chappell, 2006), this industry and its foundation is centred around prioritising and rewarding traits perceived as 'masculine' and not those

perceived as 'feminine'. These ideas of favouring masculinised traits align with Oo et al's, (2019; 2020) work, which finds the industry's masculinised culture to be one of the most difficult challenges women face. Indeed, research demonstrates how masculinised traits are the expected standard within male dominated industries while most women are the 'other', which can leave women open for scrutinisation and the need to prove themselves (Bridges et al., 2020; Bryce et al., 2019; Galea et al., 2020). Analytic findings of the current study align with these findings from within existing literature.

Analysis shows that feelings of being hyper visible also demonstrate the lack of 'fit' and sense of unbelonging that women have within UK construction. As Wright (2013) highlights, male 'bodies' are the norm within the UK construction industry, underpinning participants' experiences of a lack of fit as their 'bodies' are distinct from the male standard. In some cases participants discuss feeling objectified in ways which fit with Mulvey's (2013) notion of being perceived in voyeuristic and eroticised ways and 'the male gaze', in which Glapka (2017) relates to the patriarchal surveillance of women and their bodies. Intersections of gender and race further confound this lack of fit and hypervisibility (e.g., Buchanan & Settles, 2019) within the construction industry.

Career progression for participants in this study remains a challenge, especially in relation to promotion to senior or leadership roles and the gendered disadvantage that participants face. These findings are consistent with research which shows that professional advancement remains a significant barrier for women, regardless of experience, age, or career level (Bryce et al., 2019; Rosa et al., 2017). Sang and Powell (2013), and Salignac et al (2018), demonstrate how these barriers are often driven by gendered (and arguably sexist) beliefs around motherhood and the perceived desire to have children where companies believe that this will have a negative impact on business or provide additional challenges to business needs. This aligns with Eagly et al's., (2007) theorising of womens' career journeys resembling a labyrinth riddled with non-linear and complicated barriers to career progression, which, as argued by the authors, better conceptualises women's experiences of the path to workplace leadership than Powell and Butterfield's (1994; 2015) earlier notions of a 'glass ceiling'.

The current research highlights the need for a cultural shift in the UK construction industry which focuses on developing more inclusive practice which is not restricted by gender and underpinned by sexism. Furthermore the industry should work on deconstructing notions of the traditional male norm as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) to develop inclusive practice and establish a better sense of fit and belonging for those who fall outside this notion of the 'ideal worker' status.

Findings may be used to inform organisational training materials, focusing on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in relation to gender. Developing training materials which educate organisations and colleagues on gender inclusive policy and practice could ultimately positively impact on the working lives of women in UK construction. Furthermore, whilst the current study focuses on UK construction it is argued that there is potential for the findings to be applied to other masculinised industries, which could be explored through further research.

Whilst the current study utilises a classic semi-structured interview approach, incorporating photo elicitation centred participants' images in the first part of the interview (Samuels, 2004; Bates et al., 2017). This allowed the researcher to gain a phenomenological awareness and further understand participants conceptualisations of what it means to be a woman in their working environment (Bates et al., 2017; Collier & Collier, 1986) which is essential given the highly subjective and diverse nature of the topic (Rubin et al., 2019; Spinelli-De-Sa et al., 2017). However, the current study is limited by the challenge some participants found in authoring photos for photo elicitation. Therefore, future research may consider using an image bank to allow participants to choose images which they feel represent their experiences to aid discussion.

Whilst the importance of intersectionality became apparent at the point of analysis the current study was not initially underpinned by intersectional approaches and was designed with a limited focus on the intersection of gender and race. Future research should be designed to more fully focus on these intersectional layers of identity, and should perhaps include other aspects of identity such as class, taking a more purposeful intersectional focus.

Concluding Remarks

This research contributes to the limited number of studies that examine women's experience of working within the UK construction industry. The outcomes suggest that the workplace culture is deeply entrenched with gendered assumptions and practices that appear to favour and reward masculinised traits. In order to improve issues of EDI in the UK construction industry, organisations should encourage and promote an inclusive environment which moves away from masculinised and 'traditionalist' ideas and norms and should attempt to tackle benevolent and hostile misogynistic and sexist behaviour in order to allow women a better sense of belonging and 'fit' within the industry. UK construction is an industry steeped in gendered norms and assumptions; however with organisational sanctions it should be possible for a shift to occur which better accommodates and celebrates female staff. Findings from the current study are not limited to UK construction and can be applied to masculine industries more broadly.

Ethics:

Ethical approval was granted by Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: ER51687185).

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Disclosure of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [AA-B] upon reasonable request.

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