

Can't Hold Us Down: Linking Arms with other Women

Imagine if every woman suddenly refused to take it – ever again. Support other women on the street. Don't look the other way, it's happening. There is strength in numbers. The more we resist, the more harassers will get the message. Below are other writings on street harassment. Add your VOICE to this revolution.



Christina Aguilera and Lil' Kim imagine resistance to street harassment in "Can't Hold Us Down."

Other Women's Voices: Books: Martha Langelan (1993) Back Off: How to Confront and Stop Sexual Harassment and Harassers.

- Carol Brooks Gardner (1995) Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment.
- Kiini Ibura Salaam (2002) Colonize this! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism. Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman (editors).
- Loolwa Khazoom (2001) Consequence: Beyond Resisting Rape.

Articles: Cynthia Bowman (1993) Street Harassment and the Informal Ghettoization of Women (Harvard Law Review 106).

- Amaya Naomi Roberson. "Homeland Insecurity: The Terror of Street Harassment." off our backs 33 (31 August 2003).
- Dierdre Davis, (1997). "Street Harassment, Embodiment, and African-American Women." Critical Race Feminism, Adrien Katherine Wing (editor).

Websites: www.streetharassmentproject.org (Street Harassment Project)

- www.anti-streetharassment.uk.com (UK)
- Community Dialogue: www.hiddentracksmag.com/stopstreetharassment.htm
- Uju Asika. Africana. www.africana.com/articles/daily/index_20020312.asp
- "The Price of Being Prey." www.tolerance.org/news/article_hate.jsp?id=542

Email me at aguilera@riseup.net for a longer bibliography.

Demand Respect – Act Out Revolution

Daily Disrespects & Direct Actions



Oooh, oooh, look at that ass.

Nice tits.

I like your shirt.

Where are you going? *Can I go with you?* How old are you? *Do you have a boyfriend?* What's your number?

honks, grunts, glares . . .

Let me get me some of that.

touching, grabbing . . .

Hey, Baby.

Smile for me, Baby.

BITCH why don't you smile!!

street harassment

A Feminist Guide to Analysis and Direct Action.

for women who cross to the other side of the street before anything is said, who look down at the ground because they've learned to avoid eye contact.

for women who have yelled back: **"FUCK YOU!"**
(or wanted to).

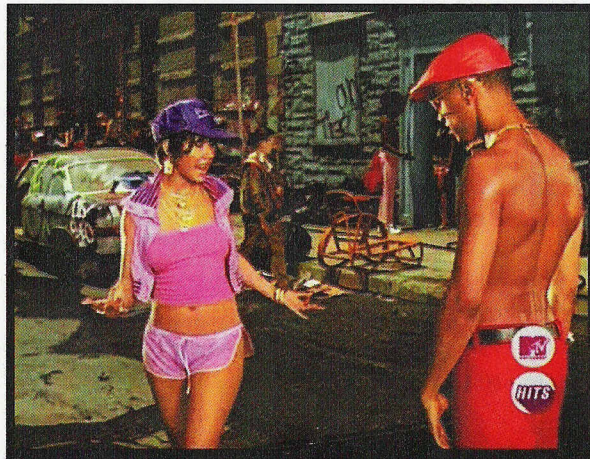
by Cathy Ramos de la Aguilera

Street Harassment

Defining It: *Street Harassment* refers to disrespect women receive daily in public spaces: streets, busses, and parks. Acts of street harassment can include lewd sexual comments and solicitations, stalking, touching and grabbing, demands to smile, cat calls, whistles, glaring, and remarks.

What's the big deal: Street harassment targets women, making them constantly aware that they – as woman – are not totally welcome or respected in public space. Harassment communicates to women that they will always stand out and be treated as sex objects – wherever they go. When women want this kind of attention, they want it on their terms. Women don't want men to control how they are defined in public. Harassers don't give a shit about what women want. Street harassment is forced. **Street harassment happens with or without a woman's consent.** Harassers impose themselves without regard to respect for a woman's own demands and desires. Street harassment is about control and power. If women assert control, harassers get angry. It doesn't matter what a harasser is *thinking*. Ethnographic on-the-spot interviews reveal they aren't thinking much. What matters is what a harasser's actions are saying, because this is the message that women deal with when it comes down to it.

The Message: If it's a compliment, then why does it offend me? Compliments are made to please the recipient, not the giver. Harassers treat women like specimens or playthings that exist for their pleasure and for their judgement. Harassment tells women that if they are not being claimed by some other man, they are and their bodies are naturally publicly **available**. This takes control and individual rights away from us.

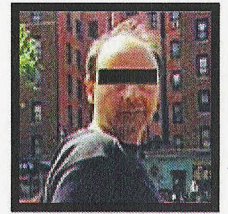


Blame: The picture above comes from Christina Aguilera's anti-street harassment video: *Can't Hold Us Down*. She challenges a man who just grabbed her but. She seems to ask: Because I am dressed this way, do I have no rights? Is my body no longer mine? Whether women resist or remain silent, they are often blamed for what is happening to them. Just like with rape and other forms of harassment, the questions often are: *What were you wearing? Why were*

Considering Race and Class

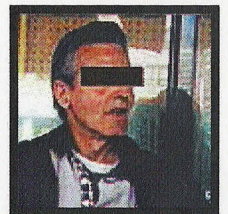
Myths

- 1.) Its only Latinos, Blacks, and the poor who harass. Some people argue that only certain types of men are harassers. Most commonly, people distinguish by race. Sometimes prejudice, racism, and racial fears can influence these beliefs. People of all races and classes street harass. To the right are pictures that the Street Harassment Project took of harassers they encountered in one counter harassment party.
- 2.) Race and class don't effect harassment. Some people believe that street harassment is only about gender. They believe that race or class differences do not effect interactions. Sometimes racial tensions, differences, or prejudices can influence the way people act toward each other (in any situation) and how people see each other. Harassment can be racist.
- 3.) You should accept it when black or Latino men harass you. It's cultural. Men from all cultures harass. Sexism and prejudice can be normalized, but it is never "ok." Many African American women and Latinas stand against street harassment!



Realities

1. Everyone's experience is different. Different people may find themselves harassed more by different people, depending on where they live and specifics of their community. Sometimes some groups of people are outside and in the streets more often than other groups. Think before generalizing.
2. All Men harass to feel Masculine. Men who don't harass on the streets might in offices.
3. Marginalized Women are Harassed More. Women of color can be further sexualized by harassers who believe that "they want it" or "deserve it." Women who don't live in gated communities and have to walk around are more vulnerable to harassment.



Many Sides to Oppression

There are many forms of street harassment, and discrimination. Do not fight street harassment at the cost of forgetting someone else's situation. Never respond with racial epithets. Think before calling cops, the criminal "justice" system is racist. Policing youth of color for hanging out on the streets or entering segregated spaces is harassment. Segregation is oppressive. So is avoiding men of color out of racist fears. Build community and respect.

Demanding Respect – RIGHT NOW, RIGHT HERE.

Direct Action

We can theorize and discuss what is happening only for so long. At the end of the day, we need an intervention that will stop harassers in their tracks. Below I share some answers to the most common question women have: *What should I do? What can I say?* These tactics are for those who want action that will have a direct and immediate impact.

FUCK YOU!! Improvisations: There are many possible responses to street harassment. The most common ones include improvised insults, “FUCK YOU!” and sticking up a middle finger. These responses communicate to harassers that women do not find what is happening is to be “cute,” “fun and games,” or “desired.” When women pretend to ignore harassment there is no consequence created for harassers. Responding with a “FUCK YOU!” communicates women’s anger and refusal to take harassment. There are many creative ways to respond.

Sometimes, harassers will get angrier or threatening when women refuse to act politely in the face of their disrespect. This reveals how forced street harassment is, because it shows how little harassers care whether women want it or not. Be aware that some people choose to call women’s justified anger – **crazy, out of control, or bitchy.**

Non-Violent Confrontation: Influenced by women’s self-defense, and principles of non-violence, this strategy for direct action emphasizes assertiveness over aggressiveness or passivity. This method can allow women to take control away from harassers. It should not include cursing or

Self-Defense: Even if a woman does not defend herself, it is not her fault for being raped, assaulted, or harassed. *No one is ever asking for that.* Learning self-defense provides tools that can help women take power into your own hands. When women fight back, they are less likely to be hurt. Self-defense is about women taking control of their bodies. **Look for self-defense classes offered in your community.** Always remember:

1. **RESIST:** Fight back as soon as you are attacked. Keep fighting.
2. **RUN:** As soon as you can, get away from the attacker. Run toward people, lighted areas, and safe places.
3. **YELL:** Tell people what is happening. Don’t stop, be loud: Keep on yelling out loudly: Its an attack!! Dial 911!! *Don’t be afraid to make a scene, its your life.*

Refuse to be an easy target.

1. **Name the Behavior.**
2. **Hold the Harasser Accountable.** (Make sure people around can hear and understand what happened.)
3. **Be Clear and Direct.** Don’t say, “excuse me,” “sorry,” or “please.”
4. **Assertive Body Language.** (Look into the person’s eyes. Don’t smile. Stand tall. Use a firm voice.)
5. **Repeat Yourself.** Stay on track.
6. Make it clear that **no woman deserves this.** This is about rights.
7. **Demand the Harassment Stop,** “now,” and “from now on.”
8. **Respond at the appropriate level.** (Gets better with practice.)
9. **End firmly and strongly.** “You heard me. Stop harassing women.”

insults. A typical non-violent confrontation might go something like this: *Whistling at women when they walk by is disrespectful. No one likes it. Don’t ever whistle at another woman you don’t know again.* When confronting, try the nine components on the left in mind.

Confronting oppression gets easier with practice. So don’t give up! If you are stuck in street harassment encounters, you can always respond with: ***That is disrespectful. Stop harassing women. No one likes it.***

This strategy is taken from Marty Langelan’s book *Back Off!*. Please refer to this amazing guide for an analysis of street harassment, success stories, and more details on this strategy and self-defense. Langelan continues to provide workshops and trainings on these techniques. The D.C. Anti Street Harassment Squad, a new activist organization of women, promotes non-violent confrontation techniques and also conducts workshops, if you have any. questions, please email them at: dontcallmebaby@lists.mutualaid.org.

Fliers: Handing out small cards to harassers is a popular strategy for those who are in a rush or still uncomfortable speaking up. Cut out this one, copy. More can be found on the Street Harassment Project website. **See reverse.**



Group Counter Harassment: Another tactic that has been practiced for years by women in groups is counter harassment. Women heckle and harass harassers back, giving them a taste of their own medicine. The Street Harassment Project (SHP) uses their own version of this, going in groups of 4-10 women to different parts of the city. Women disperse and walk around. When a woman is harassed, she yells out for others and everyone surrounds the harasser. This gives women a safe and powerful context to their resistance. Women then talk with the harasser, demand and end to harassment, or counter harass – whatever they are comfortable with.

Attack: The impact and felt threat of violence street harassment carries make encounters assaultive. One woman, Loolwa Khazoom, has decided that ultimately words can be ignored by harassers. She sometimes chooses to respond to harasser's assaults by physically hitting them. She discusses this in *Consequence*. Khazoom argues that women are too easily written off as easy targets. She believes that creating unavoidable consequences for violence against women will make us safer. Men need to stop overfighting and women need to stop underfighting. She asks women to create unavoidable consequences for harassment and violence against women.

Photography/Video: Some women have responded to street harassment by whipping out a video camera or by taking the harassers pictures. (Check out Maggie Hadleigh West's documentary, *War Zone*). This method can be used to hold harasser's accountable, especially if pictures are posted to a wider community. It also turns the spotlight onto harassers.

And More: From performances to simulation tunnels, women have come up with a variety of strategies to confront harassers directly, and to get the word out about street harassment. SHP conducts workshops throughout the community. Speak-up! Tell other men and women what you think. Strategize.

Then Stop Harassing Women !!!

Women's Turn Off's

- Any kind of street harassment, anytime, anywhere !
- Crude remarks by strange men !
- Hearing men rate our bodies like, "nice ass" !
- Being groped or rubbed up against !

Women's Turn On's

Women feel only *Hatred* for the weak, stupid men who treat us this way ! We won't take it anymore !

- Being treated with respect !
- Being treated as equals!

And remember guys, NO means NO !!!

Public Service Announcement from The Street Harassment Project

you walking alone? Why did you walk over there? Why did you look at him? Why did you get so angry? Harassment happens to all women, and blaming women only ignores the real problem. Women should be able to look and say whatever they like and still be safe and respected as human beings.

Talking with Violence: The reality of rape and assault effects the way street harassment is experienced. Interviews consistently show that women are mindful of a felt threat of potential escalation to assault, violence, and rape during encounters of street harassment – no matter how mild the "compliment." (see Carol Brooks Gardner). When "flirtation" happens on the street between strangers, it takes on this added meaning – especially when it is one sided. Women have many reasons to feel this threat of possible escalation on the street. Rapists test potential targets with harassment. Harassers often get angrier, more persistent, or intrusive. This can make many women feel like getting away and remaining silent is their only option.

Living with it: As "everyday" situations that come to feel normal or expected, many women feel like they have *learned to live with* less threatening forms of street harassment. We must ask then: How does "living with" street harassment effect us? Living with street harassment means having to take the message about our bodies that harassers bring. It means accepting assault and disrespect as normal. Many women are taught to never respond to harassers, to pretend its not happening. If they say something they be called a "bitch," blamed, or can face violence. Living with street harassment means learning that in uncomfortable sexual situations, you should do nothing. It means that when you walk outside you don't walk with freedom. It means you have come to expect and accept disrespect. Street harassment changes who you are and how you are allowed to live.

R-e-s-p-e-c-t Means: The right to walk down any street at any hour freely. Without protection or worry about protection. The right to exist without someone else defining you, demanding of you, or trying to take from you. To not be told that YOU as a WOMAN are there for someone else's pleasure, there to respond to solicitations, asking for it, or wanting and waiting for male judgement. To be a human being that is not treated as "woman," "girl," "hoe," "bitch," or "ass." We demand respect. We demand an acknowledgment of our individual autonomy. We demand freedom.

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