

**Direct Action, Education, Consciousness-Raising, Activism and the Internet:
Methods for Combating Street Harassment**

Prevalence (Other Research): Various pieces of scholarship include some discussion of the prevalence of men's street harassment of women. Ross Macmillan, Annette Nierobisz, and Sandy Welsh's study, published in an article called "Experiencing the Streets: Harassment and Perceptions of Safety Among Women" (2000), found that over eighty percent of women experience stranger harassment and the harassment influences and detrimentally impacts women's perceived safety in public.¹ Laura Beth Nielsen interviewed 100 individuals in the San Francisco Bay Area, 63 were women, about their experiences with begging, sexually-suggestive and racial speech. Nineteen percent of the women respondents said they receive offensive or sexually suggestive remarks every day, 43 percent reported receiving them often and 28% said they received them sometimes.² Sixty-eight percent of women of color reporting they experienced every day or often compared to 55 percent of white women.³ Carol Gardner Brooks conducted 506 interviews in Indianapolis, IN, 293 were women and were representative of the race, age, class, and sexual orientation of the general population in Indiana and the U.S. Every single woman she interviewed could cite several examples of being harassed while every single man she interviewed admitted to at least one time when he was a harasser.⁴ Bowman found that street harassment "crosses the lines of geography,

¹ Ross Macmillan, Annette Nierobisz, and Sandy Welsh, "Experiencing the Streets: Harassment and Perceptions of Safety Among Women," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37, no. 3 (August 2000), 319.

² Laura Beth Nielsen, *License to Harass: Law, Hierarchy, and Offensive Public Speech* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 43.

³ Nielsen, 41.

⁴ Carol Brooks Gardner, *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 89-90.

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religion, race, age, and class.”⁵ Langelan wrote that men across all categories harass women across all categories.⁶

Prevalence (My research): In my [online survey](#) of 225 people, the first question I asked was, “Have you ever been harassed (such as verbal comments, honking, whistling, kissing noises, leering/staring, groping, stalking, attempted or achieved assault, etc) while in a public place like the street, on public transportation, or in a store?” Over 99% of the respondents reported having been harassed. The following table shows the breakdown of their responses (the percentage total is over 100% because three people chose two answers):

| Response | Response Count | Percentage |
|------------------|--|-------------------|
| Yes, a few times | 98 | 43.8% |
| Yes, monthly | 49 | 21.9% |
| Yes, weekly | 47 | 21% |
| Yes, daily | 19 | 8.5% |
| Never | 2 | .9% |
| Other | 15 (<i>see next paragraph for breakdown</i>) | 6.7% |

Of the fifteen people who reported “other” and wrote in a responses, nine reported that they used to receive harassment frequently when they were in their teens and twenties but now that they were middle-age or older, it was very infrequent. Two

⁵ Cynthia Grant Bowman, “Street Harassment and the Informal Ghettoization of Women,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 3 (January 1993), 531.

⁶ Martha Langelan, *Back Off! How to Confront and Stop Sexual Harassment and Harassers* (New York: Fireside Press, 1993), 51.

⁷ “Street Harassment Survey,” 2007, conducted by Holly Kearl.

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respondents mentioned they were harassed “frequently” and that it had to do with “being a dyke.” Another person wrote the “frequency depends on location.” One person wrote “1-2,” another person wrote “a few times a week,” and the last person wrote, “no because i enjoy it it isn’t harassment [sic].” So, including the “other” responses, only two people who took the survey responded that they had never been harassed. Thus my survey results support scholars’ findings that street harassment is prevalent for women, though it is hard to generalize the experiences of all women based on my survey results since many of the women who took my survey were more likely to be feminist activists and thus more likely to regard catcalls and wolf whistles on the street as harassment.

At the workshop I attended at the Street Harassment Summit, everyone in attendance (23 people) could mention at least one recent incident where they had been harassed on the street in a sexual way by a stranger, suggesting prevalence as there were people in attendance from a wide range of racial/ethnic backgrounds, ages, and sexual orientations. However, since they were attending a workshop on street harassment, they were probably more likely to view harassment as a negative experience compared with the wider population.

As not everyone knows about the anti-street harassment websites and/or has the inclination to write their experiences on the sites, it is hard to gauge from the 706 postings I studied on six anti-street harassment websites how prevalent street harassment is overall, but some demonstration of the prevalence of street harassment is shown by the fact that those who have posted have self-identified themselves as women of all ages, races, and sexual orientations from all over the U.S. and various other countries.