

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

Street Harassment and Sexuality: A few scholars discuss issues of sexuality in their scholarship. Cynthia Grant Bowman notes that lesbians are subjected to a uniquely offensive experience because they are both “punished” for being women and assumed to be heterosexual when they are not, yet if it is obvious that they are lesbian, men may harass them for that status as well.¹ Hawley Fogg-Davis discusses both of those points and actually focuses her article around the murder of a young black woman by a male street harasser when she identified herself as a lesbian to deter him from bothering her and her friends. In response, he stabbed and killed her. In examining the intersectionalities of race, sexuality, and gender, Fogg-Davis states, “street harassment indicates a sexual imbalance connected to broader systems of patriarchy, racism, and homophobia.”² A self-identified lesbian woman interviewed by Carol Brooks Gardner during her study of public harassment in Indiana said she only feels “normal” if she is in public with a man because “public places are for straights, and straight couples at that. If that’s not what you are, you have to prove yourself.”³

¹ Cynthia Grant Bowman, “Street Harassment and the Informal Ghettoization of Women,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 3 (January 1993), 532.

² Hawley Fogg-Davis, “A Black Feminist Critique of Same-Race Street Harassment,” Presentation at the Philadelphia Political Theory Workshop, University of Pennsylvania, 30 September 2005, <http://www.polisci.upenn.edu/programs/theory/Fogg-Davis.pdf> (20 October 2006), 32.

³ Carol Brooks Gardner, *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 97.

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From My Data: Throughout my data, a few people mentioned receiving homophobic slurs, sometimes right away and sometimes after they ignored the harasser. In my [online survey](#) of 225 people, two women mentioned being called “dykes” as part of the harassment and they, as well as another person, said they felt they were harassed frequently in part because of being perceived as homosexual. On the six anti-street harassment websites I studied, a few women noted in their street harassment posting that men shouted “dyke” at them frequently and it was probably because of their short hair cuts. For example, one woman wrote, “I always get the Dyke call, i [sic] presume it is because men always think women with little or very short hair are Dykes, but it inflames me even more, because then it becomes an anti-gay slur, ontop [sic] of an anti-woman slur.” Another woman wrote, “Last night I was standing outside my dorm smoking a cigarette. An SUV full of men drove up to me. 'What the fuck is wrong with you? You look like Sinead O'Connor! Fuckin' dyke!' they yelled, and drove away.”

Some women specified that they were often harassed when walking with their girlfriends. For example, one posting said, “My girlfriend and I were walking up 4th street in the village when 2 men who were smoking and spitting in front of a deli said, as we passed 'fucking dykes.' Now, since we're direct-action feminist (and yes, dyke) activists we turned around and said 'What? What did you say to us, in the middle of Greenwich Village?' and one of them looked at us up and down, came closer to us, and spit on us.” Another woman posted, “Why do men think that two women together is for their sick fantasy pleasure?”

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A few women indicated that they were called dyke or faggot or lesbian when they rebuffed the harasser's attentions or made him angry. For example, one woman wrote on the UK anti-street harassment website:

I was walking across a zebra crossing [cross walk] this morning and a car suddenly appeared, it was traveling fast and had to brake sharply. One of the male occupants leaned out of the window and called out "stupid dyke" - I turned but of course, the car speeded off - so I just gave the finger. The reason for this cretinous remark - the male driver had to stop in order to let me continue across the road. I, a woman had actually made a male driver stop for me, so because I had insulted his male pride, the only insult he could make was a homophobic one, which clearly proved he was a bigot."

At the Street Harassment Summit workshop I attended in New York City in May 2007, no women volunteered experiences where homophobic slurs or comments were included with the harassment but one of the men in attendance talked about how, since he is visibly gay, he is often harassed by men. He said that just the previous day as he was walking with female friends, men in a passing car yelled out loudly, "Yo, why do the fags always get the girls."