

Right to the City? Street Harassment and Women's Fear in a Gendered Public Space

Woman is present in cities as temptress, as whore, as fallen woman, as lesbian, but also as virtuous womanhood in danger... (Wilson 1991:6) [emphasis added].



Photo credit: Hollaback!

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Abstract

This thesis aims to shed light on an issue that is largely ignored in academia: *street harassment*. I will approach the issue from a spatial perspective, emphasizing how space is gendered and sexualized, and how gender relations have become spatialized throughout history with the public sphere construed as pertaining to men and women's place being in the home. My objective is to show how such a neglected problem like street harassment in fact has very real impacts on women's experienced access to public space, with the fear of sexual assault impeding on their sense of safety and use of the streets of their very own neighborhoods. I will utilize the theories of gender performativity and heteronormativity to examine how street harassment has become normalized and trivialized, and highlight how street harassment intersects with sexual orientation, race, and gender expression. In the end, I will point to some very concrete measures that can be taken by urban planners to design space in a way that makes it more accessible and safe for women.

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Part I)

1. Introduction

Somebody in a red Chevy kept making sexual gestures at me constantly. I was walking and the traffic kept them away but a mile away they were harassing me again. (Anonymous, Hollaback 2015).

Walking past the library today and a very old man growled ‘are you wet yet?’ at me. It stopped me in my tracks but he didn’t turn around. (Claire, Everyday Sexism 2015).

Because what men fear most about going to prison is what women fear most walking down the sidewalk. #YesAllWomen. (Mayhem, Twitter 2015).

Because my dad taught me to drive and my mom taught me to use my keys as a weapon. #YesAllWomen (Proud Feminist, Twitter 2015).

Last fall a video of a woman walking through the streets of New York went viral. Over the course of ten hours the young woman was approached more than a hundred times by strange men leering at her, following her, and making lewd gestures and comments directed at her body. Hollaback!’s ‘10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman’ generated more than ten million hits in less than 24 hours, sparked similar social experiments in cities around the world, instigated an international debate about sexual harassment and behaviors among strangers in public, but most importantly cast light on a problem that women worldwide face on a daily basis: *street harassment* (see Hoby 2014).

Virginia Woolf once wrote that: “... in a hundred years ... women will have ceased to be the protected sex... They will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them... (Woolf 1929:24). Similarly, succeeding her Betty Friedan wrote: “By 1976, I predict, even the Republicans will have a *woman* running for vice-president, if not president”. (Friedan 1977:383) [emphasis added]. Although a full hundred years have not yet passed since Woolf wrote about her aspirations for the ‘impoverished sex’, she was not completely off in her calculations. Most women living in 21st century Western democracies make more than five hundred pounds a year, and have – although this is still up for debate (and may have been meant figuratively) – ‘a room of their own’. And although Betty Friedan missed with a few decades, the Republican Party in the United States have had a woman running for vice president, albeit not being celebrated the way Friedan might have imagined. Things have indeed changed for women since the times of these feminist writers in terms of political,

economic, and social rights, much thanks to the women's movement and second- and third wave feminism. But as the stories above show, these rights do not necessarily translate into all contexts, as women are now being discriminated against and excluded in more informal and subtle ways while in public space, through street harassment.

This is where this thesis picks up the mantle. Street harassment is generally perceived to be a 'non-problem', and invisible to half the human race (Bowman 1993, Thompson 1994, Twerkheimer 1997). My aim with this paper is to show how this seemingly harmless behavior actually has major impacts on women's experienced safety when in public space, along with their use of this space. I will argue that 'space' is not simply a void where action takes place, but has been shaped by patriarchal power relations throughout history (see Koskela 1999). I aim to discern how gender relations have become spatialized and how this spatial organization of society has led to a segregation of the sexes crystallized in the public/private divide (ibid.). My thesis is that the 'spatialization of gender relations' has continued into present day Western cities in the form of street harassment, being exercised through 'the male gaze' on the streets, policing women and leading to their increased fear of sexual assault, ultimately manifesting itself in a perceived spatial exclusion.

I will support my argument by examining how the perception of women in Western cities has changed from the pre-Industrial Revolution period to today, drawing on the work of Woolf and Friedan, along with urban theorists. Analyzing the various ways in which women negotiate space in a masculine and sexualized urban environment, I aim to discern the impact that street harassment in all its forms has on women's equal access to public space. I will analyze how these sexual remarks and/or gestures from strangers lead to women's increased fear of sexual violence and how women as a consequence self-police and restrict their mobility by for example avoiding appearing alone in parks or transit areas after dark. I will challenge the assumption that women have the same access as men to the streets of big cities or even their own neighborhoods by looking at women's personal stories of harassment where they share their diverse range of emotions, along with the various 'rape-avoidance strategies' they employ when negotiating space. My paper positions itself within intersectional¹ feminist geography, having an interdisciplinary approach that draws on work within sociology, criminology, urban planning, and gender studies.

¹ Intersectional feminism has been gaining momentum the last years and looks at how oppression of various identities such as race, religion, class, sexual orientation and gender expression intersect. Terms such as 'classism', 'ableism', 'ageism' and 'bodyshaming' are now becoming more common, but will unfortunately not be given the attention they deserve due to the scope of this paper.

First, I will discuss some methodological concerns with using personal narratives gathered from websites like Hollaback! (from here on Hollaback) and The Everyday Sexism Project (from here on Everyday Sexism). Second, I will sketch out the theories of gender performativity and heteronormativity, and how they help explain harassment of transgender and queer women, along with how street harassment has become normalized and trivialized. I will then conceptualize the theory of spatialization of gender relations. This will be followed by a discussion of the state of knowledge in the field – or rather the lack thereof, succeeded by an outline of how the spatialization of gender relations has come about. In part two I will delve deeper into what constitutes as street harassment, the various forms it can take, where it tends to happen, and when. Further, I will analyze the emotional and behavioral impacts street harassment has on women in terms of negotiating space, after which I will touch upon how sexual orientation, race, and gender expression intersect. I will end with some very concrete measures that can be taken by urban planners to design space so that women can enjoy equal access to it on the same terms as their male counterparts.

2. Methodology

The research paper will have a constructivist, qualitative approach, relying on primary and secondary sources in answering my research question. I will utilize discourse analysis in my discussion of the already existing literature. My empirical data consists of women's personal accounts of experiences of harassment gathered from the New York-founded activist organization Hollaback and its British counterpart Everyday Sexism, where anyone can anonymously share their stories of street harassment and sexism. To examine this material I will use narrative analysis in order to understand how victims of street harassment make sense of their experiences and cope with it, and ultimately what impacts these social incivilities have on women's everyday lives, particularly in terms of mobility. Narrative analysis, or narrative inquiry, takes stories, autobiographies, journals and letters (among others) as the units of analysis, examining how people make sense of their lives through story-telling or narrative constructions (see Bruner 1991, Bamberg 2006, Georgakopoulou 2006).

My aim is to bring out the victims' own definitions of what constitutes as harassing behavior, in order to demonstrate the ambiguous effects it has on different people's lives. I will focus on the emotional and behavioral impacts street harassment has on its victims, particularly in terms of feelings of safety and belonging in public space. I will further examine the intersections between street harassment and sexual orientation, race, and gender expression. My research has been partly guided by grounded theory, where I looked for

patterns and recurring themes in the personal stories in trying to find appropriate theories to explain street harassment. I have chosen not to focus on one particular city or country, except for restricting my focus to Europe and North-America, as I want to demonstrate that street harassment is (also) pervasive in the Western hemisphere, and not only ‘the Global South’ (a myth that popular discourse tends to perpetuate). A national focus would thus not suffice, and the data would be limited. Needless to say, I make no attempt at covering the whole region and I make no claims of generalizability, although I believe my findings are indicative of larger patterns.

To my knowledge, this kind of study has not been conducted before. In the material I encountered the data consisted of either surveys or interviews of women’s personal experiences, but not analysis of stories shared online. This is a weakness as there is an inexhaustible amount of similar information in social media forums that is being ignored by scholars within the field.² With fourth wave feminism taking place on the internet, feminist scholars seem to be largely missing out on it. My research will thus have added-value in bridging the gap between theory and practice (i.e. academics and activists). My intersectional approach, looking at how harassment of queer-, transgender- and women of color in comparison to heterosexual, cisgender, white women is also something that has not been explored too much thus far.

I believe narrative analysis is an appropriate methodological approach because it satisfies the criteria of authenticity and credibility. The material is not edited and comes straight from the sources themselves. The subjects were not asked any probing questions, but rather encouraged to tell their story as they experienced it, emphasizing what they see as important. Hollaback and Everyday Sexism are well established and respected organizations, so there is no reasonable suspicion that the stories are fabricated. The only editing Hollaback does is adding a headline to the stories, along with classifying them according to the tags the submitters have used (e.g. ‘verbal’, ‘stalking’, ‘homophobic’, ‘groping’, etc.), which makes it easier to navigate through their material. Their archives also stretch back to 2005 when the website was first launched, which allows for longitudinal studies. One drawback with the Hollaback material, however, is that they censor any information revealed about the harasser’s race and class in order not to perpetuate stereotypes. While being for noble reasons,

² Keller (2011) also takes note of this in her study of online feminist forums such as Jezebel and Feministing, which she argues are largely neglected by feminist scholars, but increasingly are being studied by feminist *media* scholars.

this prevents researchers from coding and categorizing the demographics of harassers, which could help explain the phenomenon further.

Everyday Sexism operates with the first name of the submitter as the headline, although many users have chosen nicknames instead. Their scope is much wider than Hollaback (who exclusively focus on street harassment) with people posting stories about sexist remarks in the form of microaggressions³ or misogynist jokes in the workplace, media, among friends, etc. All that is needed to post a story on either site is a valid email address, which makes these forums very accessible and user-friendly. Both organizations take anonymity seriously, and vow not to share your email address with third parties without prior consent.

Although narrative analysis has its benefits and has been celebrated since its inception to the field, I will be cautious not to treat the stories as ‘ultimate pieces of truth’ simply because they are told by the victims themselves. Plummer (1995:102) warned against this fallacy twenty years ago arguing that personal narratives are just as much ‘constructions of reality’ or ‘making of stories’ as they are true depictions. He claims that the West has become a ‘sexual storytelling, confessional society’, with the media celebrating sensational stories and encouraging people to talk about their traumas on primetime TV.⁴ Plummer (1995:106) argues that storytelling is a form of art, reflexive and constantly changing, and can thus not be taken to reveal something innate about a person, as it is as much of a performance and presentation, as a ‘declaration of truth’. Stories are all social productions, and must be analyzed in the cultural and historic context they are being told in (ibid.). They are not stable representations of reality, especially because where, when, and who can tell stories greatly depend on the political circumstances (he uses the example of ‘coming out’ stories among gay people before the 1970s, which were simply non-existent due to the societal context).

Echoing this, Atkinson and Delamont (2006) advise against blindly celebrating the ‘narrative turn’ and not critically engaging with, questioning, and systematically analyzing the narratives. They warn that scientists have become engaged in unreflective and uncritical use of personal narratives, implying that the informants’ voices ‘speak for themselves’, effectively mirroring the informants’ claims, instead of examining them. As Plummer (1995), Atkinson and Delamont (2006:166) argue that personal narratives are not ‘routes into the

³ Microaggressions are unintended, subtle but harmful remarks that are often felt as denigrating by the receivers. See McWhorter (2014) for more on how microaggressions are the new ‘everyday discrimination’.

⁴ He takes the case of Oprah Winfrey announcing on a special edition of her show that she is a survivor of child abuse, and how the consumers are to take this as a sign of truth or something ‘essential’ about her life.

authentic self”, but must rather be scrutinized in the same way as speech acts, for their rhetorical and persuasive character. Experiences, they argue, are constructed through narrative in retrospect, and must thus be treated by the researcher as any other form of social action (Atkinson and Delamont 2006:167). I will take this into account in my analysis, examining the stories in light of the theories of gender performativity, heteronormativity, and the spatialization of gender relations, along with the existing literature. While I agree that the personal stories do not necessarily represent ‘the truth’ (especially not for everyone), I do believe they have something important to say about people’s everyday experiences of street harassment and their fear when traversing public space, and should not be disregarded.

3. Theoretical Framework

There has not been much theorizing on the subject of street harassment specifically, and thus no one theory will suffice in trying to explain this pervasive phenomenon. There has, however, been a lot of theorizing on ‘space’ within human geography, and the social (re)production of space as either gendered, sexualized, racialized or classed (see Scraton and Watson 1998, Watson 2010, Hubbard 2004). This branch of literature sees space and our use of it not as something neutral and simply existing in itself, but as being socially-constructed by actors (see Massey 1994). It follows from that then that space is not egalitarian, that is, not everyone has equal access to the same space (Fenster 2005, Koskela 1999). Arguing that women have unequal access to urban, public space, I aim to use these theories to elucidate how city space has historically been inscribed as masculine and sexualized, prohibiting women’s use of and movement through this gendered space (see Wilson 1991). One of the ways this manifests itself today is through harassment on the streets of big cities, triggering a fear of male violence among the women traversing this space.

Applying these theories will also allow me to trace the gendered production of space back to the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian Age, specifically looking at how women’s role changed from being a domesticated one, to be allowed working in factories, for then to be relegated to a life of child-rearing in the suburban home again (see Friedan 1977, Wilson 1991). By looking at how space is construed as gendered, these theories can say something about why women feel not as safe or ‘entitled’ to be on the streets of their very own neighborhoods, when statistics show that they are (ironically) more prone to experience violence in the home than in public spaces, and from someone they already know rather than a stranger (Wesely and Gaarder 2004).

Let us start with looking at gender as a performance, and how failure to perform your gender in line with society's expectations subject people to harassment.

3.1 Gender Performativity

It might seem odd to discuss gender relations and gender-specific harassment without theorizing the concept of 'gender' – because that is what gender scholars argue it is, a *concept*. Here, the work of feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler (1988) comes in, whose work on gender as a *performance* has been widely influential. The notion of performing one's identity is not new, however, but has long been the dominant view among sociologists and anthropologists. Erving Goffman's renowned *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) discusses how people present themselves when meeting others – much like acting on a stage – trying to signal information about themselves for the other person to read. The theory of gender performativity taps into this, arguing that rather than being something primordial and stable (like your biological sex), gender is an identity people come to embody, and constantly (re)perform through “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1988:519). As de Beauvoir (1956:273) famous quote has it: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman ... No *biological fate* determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that *produces* this creature...” [emphasis added].

Now how is this relevant to theorizing around street harassment? While my focus is on women in general's experience of this gender-specific harm, not all women experience the same form or amount of harassment. A group being subject to disproportionately more harassment while in public is lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women (Gardner 1995, Namaste 1996). If gender is about acts of performance, that is, convincing the public that you really are a 'woman' by ascribing to cultural and social norms dictating the appropriate dress and behavior, then 'unsuccessfully' portraying your gender in the expected or hegemonic way might cause confusion and resentment among others (Butler 1988, Namaste 1996). As Butler (1988:522) underscores, “... gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences... those who *fail* to do their gender right are regularly *punished*” [emphasis added]. This acknowledgement can help explain public harassment of 'clearly visible' transgender and lesbian/bisexual women, who are not only discriminated against as women, but also as gender variant or queer.

Namaste (1996) makes a compelling case for the acknowledgement of 'genderbashing' (as opposed to only 'gaybashing') as an issue that deserves more attention in academia, in that transgender people experience more and different forms of harassment than

queer people. Transgressing the normative sex-gender relations (also visually), transgender people are more prone to victimization in public, also in so-called ‘gay districts’. They thus employ tactics such as dressing more in accordance with their perceived gender identity, in order to be able to ‘pass’ in public spaces; something which is directly related to the cultural coding of gender (ibid.).

Much of the literature does not make a distinction between women’s gender expression nor sexual orientation, however, or simply assumes everyone to be heterosexual and cisgender⁵ (see for example the appraised work of Gardner, who neglected to ask any of her 300 female respondents if they experienced an added burden of this double-disadvantage).⁶ For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to gender as synonymous with biological sex unless explicitly stated, as in the chapter discussing intersectionality and transphobia. This is partly done due to the tendency to conflate gender and sexuality (although the two are unrelated), and is not meant to denigrate the existence of genderqueer or genderfluid people.

3.2 Heteronormativity

The practice of ‘doing gender’, as Butler (1988) termed it, also has implications for men. If women are expected to act feminine to ‘prove’ their gender (lest be harassed), that by implication means men have to constantly prove their masculinity⁷ in order to be accepted as male. One way of doing that, which has been reported by many scholars, is for men to assert their dominance over women by expressing heterosexual desire (implying that homosexual men are less masculine) (see Quinn 2002, Hlavka 2014). In explaining the disparity between women and men’s perception of workplace harassment, Quinn (2002) argues that men fail to recognize the harm their behavior inflicts on women due to the perceived requirements of the masculine identity, with ‘girl watching’ (i.e. sexual harassment) constituting an innocent (albeit objectifying) game, producing a bonding experience and camaraderie among the male employees.

Furthermore, the discourse of heteronormativity carries with it language such as ‘boys will be boys’, ‘it is just in their nature, they can’t help it’ or ‘it is just a joke, it does not hurt

⁵ I.e. identifying with their (biological) sex assigned at birth.

⁶ Gardner did report, however, of a few women identifying as heterosexual who had been harassed as lesbian due to their short haircut or androgynous style. This only goes to show how arbitrary gender acts can be, and how pervasive stereotypes about LGBT people still are in Western society.

⁷ There is a considerable body of literature on masculinity, particularly the ‘crisis of masculinity’ among unemployed working class men in the post-industrial city. See Nayak (2006) or McDowell (2000) on Chav culture in the UK.

anyone', further trivializing and normalizing sexual harassment, with women speaking up being cast as 'killjoys', 'pruders' or 'overreacting' (Hlavka 2014). Moreover, these assumptions are built on presumed inherent biological differences between the sexes, deeming men as 'natural aggressors' unable to control their sexual desire, while women are seen as passive subjects, with a 'gatekeeping' role towards sex, as opposed to any sexual agency themselves (Hlavka 2014:339). According to this line of thought, traditional gender roles reinforce women's subordination, linking their sexuality with vulnerability and submissiveness and men's with dominance. Hlavka (2014) further argues that this patriarchal system is perpetuated when children are socialized into these beliefs, with young boys thinking it is 'customary' to express their (hetero)sexual interest in girls (whatever the girl's response may be), and girls being conditioned to suppress and internalize any feelings of intimidation, instead of reporting to authority figures.⁸ This (sexualized) behavior is seen as 'just the way it is', and thus unproblematic. This rather deterministic traditional thinking ultimately renders men to a fate beyond their control, with women being subject to constantly having to endure unwarranted propositions from various men based on a presumed heterosexual preference.⁹

This strand of literature is also known as 'compulsory heterosexuality', 'heterosexism', or 'heteronormality', and focuses on LGBT people's perceptions and experiences of public space where they are subject to more harassment due to their deviating gender expression and/or sexual orientation, which lead them to experience these spaces as "aggressively heterosexual" (Hubbard 2001:5). Examining the 'geographies of sexuality', Hubbard (2001) argues that the spatial exclusion of what he terms 'sexual dissidents' constrains these minorities' citizenship rights, effectively rendering them 'second class citizens'. Challenging the heteronormality of citizenship, these sexual 'others' employ spatial tactics to 'queer space' (e.g. through PRIDE parades and the establishment of designated gay/lesbian villages with their own cafes, etc.) in order to enhance their visibility and advocate for their equal right to the city (ibid.).

3.3 Conceptualizing the Spatialization of Gender Relations

Sophie Watson (2010) is not the first scholar to make the claim that space is inherently gendered, and that space matters to the construction of gender. Feminist geographers such as

⁸ Note that Hlavka (2014) makes no claim to generalizability of her study. However, heteronormative discourses are widely recognized within queer and gender studies.

⁹ Also assuming that everyone has the same sexual urge based on attraction, not taking into account asexual or demisexual people.

Doreen Massey (1994:176) have long claimed that ‘geography’ and ‘gender’ are implicated in the construction of one another, and that not only does ‘geography matter’, but a ‘*gendered* geography matters’ too. Similarly, Elizabeth Wilson (1991) called for a ‘new vision’ of cities, where ethnic minorities, the working class and especially *women* would enjoy equal access to the male-dominated city, challenging the male/female, public/private dichotomy that she argues has come to underpin Western society. Preceding these female writers was Friedan’s (1977) famous *The Feminine Mystique*, where she discusses ‘the problem that has no name’, that is depressed housewives in the American suburbs who had been relegated to a life of servitude to her husband and children, with no opportunities for self-realization and completely separated from the public sphere. The notion, not to mention *importance*, of space is also evident in Woolf’s (1929) *A Room of One’s Own*, where she emphasizes how women need their own room¹⁰ (for privacy) and not just the common sitting room with all its interruptions, to write good poetry. She uses the example of Jane Austen who, while writing *Pride and Prejudice*, had to hide her manuscript every time someone entered the room.

What all these authors have in common is a consciousness of gender in relation to space, or more specifically how the construction of space profoundly affects women’s everyday lives, in different ways. Watson (2010:292) is perhaps most vocal on the topic, terming it the ‘spatialization of gender relations’. She argues that the way we have organized our society is not merely (or at all, in fact) reflective of gender relations, but rather that gender relations are an *outcome* of this social and spatial organization. Moreover, the way cities and suburbs are built further (re)produce and reify gender relations, particularly male dominance, by not being conducive to women. Streets that are poorly lit enhance women’s fear of assault, the perceived (and sometimes real) dangers of being alone on public transport is always existent, big trafficked roads are not built to be easily crossed with a stroller, and not to mention urban parks that have turned out to be more of a ‘hangout spot’ for adolescents (and illicit activities), than a safe playing area for children (Watson 2010:290). This spatialization of gender relations is not only a matter of safety, but also of something as mundane as inconvenience; with poor public transport within the suburb making daily chores like dropping off and picking up the children from school, doing groceries, etc. more time-consuming tasks – requiring the person doing them to have more free time, and thus not be in full-time employment.

¹⁰ Woolf’s idea of ‘a room of one’s own’ can be interpreted to mean a ‘space of one’s own’, free from (male) intrusion. See Zimmerman (2012) for more on today’s women need for a ‘virtual room’ of their own.

With this spatial ordering: jobs being situated outside of residential areas, and transportation systems mostly catering to these commuters, it is no wonder, Watson (2010:290) reasons, that we often find a large portion of the women ‘left behind’ in part-time or home-based work, as Friedan (1977) took notice of half a century earlier. This spatialization, thus, also takes the form of a ‘sexualized division of labor’ as Massey (1994) terms it, which is also evident in Woolf’s (1929), de Beauvoir’s (1956), and Wilson’s (1991) work.¹¹ Ironically while Woolf was advocating for women to get ‘a room of their own’, a few decades later Friedan (1977) seemed to believe this same ‘room’ (in the form of the home) had come to imprison women, depriving them of mobility. Watson (2010:290) on the other hand, makes the claim that women still do not have a designated room to themselves: While the children have their playroom, the husband the study, garage or shed, the woman’s space – the kitchen – is a ‘site of labor’, and the bedroom is shared with the husband. Moreover, while the home is conventionally seen as a ‘nurturing’, and safe place, it can invariably be a place of isolation and abuse, something which Friedan (1977) emphasized, but also statistics of domestic violence have further highlighted.

Gender relations have thus become manifested and reinforced spatially, with the stereotypical suburb/home equals feminine, and city/work equals masculine binary. Massey (1994) brings an important element into this debate, arguing that not only is space socially constructed but the social is *spatially* constructed. The whole separation between the spheres is a result of this spatial structuring of the social, with the home as a woman’s place and city life pertaining only to men (and ‘fallen women’, as Wilson would claim). Women thus seem to have ‘drawn the shortest straw’ in this scenario, being physically and socially imprisoned in their spotless kitchens, deprived of any mobility beyond suburbia. The construction of women belonging *in* the home (not to be confused to the home belonging *to* women), is according to Massey (1994:179) a result of a form of ‘joint control’ of spatiality and identity in the West, limiting women’s mobility and identity by confining them to particular places, i.e. the domestic sphere, closely tied up with a domestic role. As one of Friedan’s (1977:23) respondents exclaimed: “... I begin to feel I have no personality. I’m a server of food and a putter-on of pants...”. The cultural distinction between public and private has thus translated into a spatial separation (or one could claim segregation) between the home and the

¹¹ Some scholars argue that this spatialization and/or sexualized division is due to the rise of the capitalist system in the West, and that the former communist regimes promised no such distinction between the sexes. While Friedan’s (1977) work seems to suggest this, Wilson (1991) and Massey (1994) hold that capitalism has in fact thrown the traditional gender relations into question with women entering the workforce and making their own living, questioning men’s breadwinner role and becoming harder to contain in the metropolitan city.

workplace, and according to Massey (1994) been a crucial means of subordinating women. Woolf's predictions that within a century there would be no distinction between men and women's activities or occupations may unfortunately seem a bit premature.

Elizabeth Wilson (1991) also brings some important elements to the spatialization of gender relations theory. In her *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* Wilson provides a comparative perspective of how the perception of 'the public woman' has changed since the pre-Industrial Revolution. Although Wilson does not discuss street harassment or the spatialization of gender relations explicitly, her work is useful in explaining the former and she provides a comprehensive theorizing on the latter. Instead of 'blaming patriarchy', Wilson (1991) argues that urban planners are at fault for women's (among other disadvantaged groups) unequal access to the city, by throughout history trying to regulate 'the public woman' and her use of public space. She claims that women – to a greater extent than racial minorities and the poor – have been seen to represent a threat to the 'urban order', with their mere presence on the street promising 'sexual adventure' (as prostitutes), challenging the masculine order of city life. This notion of 'disruption' is also evident in Woolf's writings when her character accidentally 'trespasses' on the grass (which is reserved for men) while walking on campus, and later on being denied entry to the university library, because she is a woman.

Although not articulated, the spatialization of gender relations is thus quite evident in Wilson's (1991) work, with women representing 'nature', 'sensuality' and 'unstability', thus belonging on the countryside (or what has later become the 'suburbs'), and men embodying characteristics such as 'rational', 'intellectual' and 'orderly', making them more suited for work in the city. Women in public come to represent disorder and threaten to destabilize what men have built up, and must therefore have restricted permission to this space. Moreover, she illustrates how women in public have during some eras been synonymous with 'street walkers'¹², indecent but inevitable, forever to be policed, and separated from the 'true' bourgeoisie women. According to Wilson (1991), the false male-female dichotomy has translated itself into a conception of the city belonging to men, rendering women 'the sphinx in the city', a symptom of disorder that must be tamed. And how should it be otherwise, as Woolf's character ponders, when women have sat indoors for millions of years? (Woolf 1929:53).

¹² A term that is now being used to refer to zombies or 'the walking dead' in popular culture.

4. State of Knowledge and Literature Review

Street harassment seems to be a generally understudied issue, especially in Western, liberal democracies – where it is assumed to not exist anymore, or be too trivial to warrant any research (Bowman 1993, Gardner 1995, Twerkheimer 1997). Although numerous studies show that streets and alleys, closely followed by public parks, are the most feared spaces among women (Valentine 1989, Koskela 1999, Wesely and Gaarder 2004), research tends to focus on domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace or on public transport (see Quinn 2002), and more recently campus rape in the United States (see Sulkowicz 2015). Most of what has been written on the topic was during the 1990s, and this work is still being referenced today (see Kissling 1991, Bowman 1993, Thompson 1994, and Gardner 1995).

This begs the question: why have scholars stopped studying the phenomenon? Surely it has not gone away, when statistics show that women worldwide have felt unsafe at some point when traversing public space alone (Livingston 2015). My research will have relevance in this regard, contributing to the gap in the literature on the topic of street harassment, and its impacts on women's sense of safety in and use of public space. I will draw on the scarce literature on street harassment, and expand on it by positioning it within the broader literature on space and 'the geography of women's fear' (see Massey 1994, Valentine 1989, Koskela 1999). Demonstrating how street harassment makes women feel unsafe and unwelcome in a masculinized public space, my paper will also show how the work of feminist writers such as Woolf, de Beauvoir, and Friedan remain relevant today, decades after their writings. Shedding light on the persistence and prevalence of a largely neglected problem – and the lack of progress, both politically and legally – my work will hopefully contribute to raising (renewed) awareness around the issue.

4.1 Street Harassment

The most comprehensive and often cited work on street harassment is arguably Carol Brooks Gardner's (1995) *Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment*. In her ethnography Gardner observes interactions among strangers in various public places in Indianapolis such as on the streets, in cafes and grocery stores over a five-year period, along with interviewing more than 500 men and women of all ages and races. She makes the case that women are 'situationally-disadvantaged' in public places, where they are constantly subject to the possibility of harassment by strange men. As one of the stories from her many respondents point out, women might find themselves leaving a board meeting feeling satisfied and accomplished in their work, for then this feeling to be taken away in a second by a man's lewd comments

(Gardner 1995:63). Women's equal status in some contexts thus does not necessarily translate to or protect them in other contexts.

Gardner's (1995) study is interesting as it situates gender-based harassment within the wider context of behavior among strangers in public spaces, referring to it as 'public harassment'. While her focus is on women, she also discusses how other situationally-disadvantaged groups such as women of color, LGBT people, the physically disabled, and even celebrities¹³ are treated in public, and how these multiple group memberships intersect. Perhaps the most interesting finding of hers in terms of explaining these 'social incivilities' as she calls them is that women are seen as what Goffman (1959) terms 'open persons' in public spaces, similar to children, people walking their dogs, and the obese. This means that they are not granted the same amount of respect and 'civil inattention' as men, rendering them approachable at will by anyone. This obviously has tremendous consequences for women's use of public space, making them feel less welcome and entitled to it, thus further reifying the artificial public/private spatial division between the genders.

Much of the other work specifically on street harassment was written during the same period as Gardner (1995) and mostly focuses on the unequal power relations between the sexes, and how this sexually loaded language directly contributes to the further subordination of women. Seemingly influenced by second wave feminism (and spurring the third wave), many of these scholars position themselves as radical/Marxist feminists. Kissling (1991:456), whose work is well-renowned in the field, argues that street harassment is part of a larger strategy of social control through sexual terrorism, "... a system by which males frighten and, through fear, control and dominate females", with fear of 'male crime' keeping women from public places. Much along the same lines, Bowman (1993:7) argues that street harassment – and the law's failure to protect women against this kind of behavior – is so devastating that it leads to an 'informal ghettoization' of women, with the home being the only 'safe space'¹⁴ for women where they can escape these "...whispered messages of power and subjection". It is interesting how for these scholars street harassment is less about sex or the expression of male sexual desire, as it is an act of power in a gender-stratified society. For Twerkheimer (1997), the subordination of women is socially institutionalized through systematic sexual harassment, with fear of rape operating as a mechanism to control and dominate women in

¹³ In terms of receiving unwanted attention from passerbys, being stalked by paparazzis and unable to go to certain places without disguising themselves.

¹⁴ The reader should keep in mind that these writings were before web 2.0, with the internet becoming a new virtual space for harassment (e.g. catphishing, revenge porn, and cyberstalking). See Dockterman (2014) for more on #GamerGate, an online smear campaign that targeted female game developers.

order to maintain men's position on top of the gender hierarchy. Interestingly, preceding these scholars Friedan (1977) warned against what she saw as 'man-hating' feminists, which she believed fuelled a war between the genders, with women cast as the victims and men the oppressors.

4.2 The Geography of Women's Fear

What these scholars point to without articulating is arguably what in recent years has developed as 'the geography of women's fear' (see Valentine 1989, Koskela 1999, Weseley and Gaarder 2004). This literature examines the relationship between women's fear of male violence and their perception and (constrained) use of public space (Pain 2001). Emphasizing that space is not simply a 'void' in which actors have equal access to appropriate but is rather produced by patriarchal power relations, these scholars claim that public space is inherently gendered and sexualized (Valentine 1989, Koskela 1999, Weseley and Gaarder 2004). Women thus come to fear traversing this space alone, as they have been socialized into always being on guard and expecting the worst when unaccompanied in public places (especially at night) by parents, the police, and horror stories in the media (Valentine 1989, Pain 2001). Moreover, this socially conditioned fear of public places (closely related to agoraphobia) is sustained by public discourse and crime prevention tactics which tend to focus on measures women can take not to victimize themselves (e.g. avoiding certain places at certain times or not dressing 'loose'), instead of placing responsibility on the perpetrators¹⁵ (Valentine 1989, Weseley and Gaarder 2004).

Due to the perceived 'ever present' threat of sexual violence, women as a result limit and restrict their use of public space, ironically further perpetuating the gendered spatial inequalities they suffer from in the first place (Koskela 1999). Women's fear of violence is thus realized as spatial exclusions, when they refrain from appearing 'unchaperoned' in public places (ibid.). Developing various 'coping mechanisms' such as always bringing a dog on a walk in the park, not taking the subway alone, or not wearing 'revealing' clothing, women negotiate their fear in order to carry out everyday tasks (Valentine 1989, Weseley and Gaarder 2004). There is a widespread understanding that the most feared spaces among women are primarily large, frequently deserted areas such as parks or streets, followed by closed spaces with few exit possibilities, such as alleyways or taxis and subways (ibid.). This

¹⁵ This has of late been termed 'victim-blaming' or 'slut-shaming', and stirred a lot of debate on social media. See Nelson (2013).

strand of literature is thus preoccupied with women's¹⁶ fear of gender-based violence (fueled by scare-mongering by society), well aware that women face greater dangers from acquaintances than strangers, and are more likely to be assaulted in the home than on the street (Valentine 1989, Weseley and Gaarder 2004, Pain 2001).

Also being researched is how physical features of urban landscape impact fear of assault, with 'entrapment' (i.e. few escape possibilities) as one of the most significant factors, closely followed by 'concealment', e.g. trees or walls where a potential harasser can stay out of eye sight, and poor lighting. This also known as 'prospect and refuge theory' (Blöbaum and Hunecke 2005). Branded 'human ecology', this literature focuses on the interaction between humans and their environment, and how environmental features can positively (or negatively) affect people's perception and use of space (Luymes and Tamminga 1995:394). Research like this can thus help mitigate women's experienced fear of assault, by redesigning urban space to make it more accessible and safe for its users. I will return to this in my conclusion, pointing to possible concrete remedies for women's fear and use of public space.

Lastly, there is an increasing body of research on 'men's geography of fear' (falling under the larger umbrella of 'the gendered geography of fear'), and how men both experience being feared in public places, but also how their fears have previously been underestimated, especially as they have higher rates of victimization than women (Pain 2001, Day 2006). This could be an interesting topic for further research, as most of the existing literature is on *women's* experiences of public space. Recently, a twitter campaign erupted in Norway with men as well as women sharing their experiences of sexual harassment under the hashtag #JegHarOpplevd ('I have experienced') (Eidsvik 2015). It quickly spread to both Sweden and Denmark. This suggests that street harassment might not be as gendered as it is perceived to be, and that men are simply just lacking a forum to express their feelings. Still, however, as the overwhelming majority of the posts on Hollaback and Everyday Sexism demonstrate, it is women who bear the brunt of sexual harassment in public spaces, which is why my focus lies therein.

¹⁶ Some of the literature focuses on the intersection between gender, race, age, and class, and how depending on one's social identity, fear of crime is experienced differently: e.g. women often fear male violence, the elderly tend to fear young people, and women of color's fear is partly structured by racism (Pain 2001:910).

Part II) Evidence and Analysis

5. Tracing the Spatialization of Gender Relations

This section will examine how gender relations became spatialized, or more specifically how women's role in Western society has been cast as a 'domestic' one, with the public sphere pertaining exclusively to men. I will demonstrate the origins of this spatial divide by looking at how women and their use of public space have been discussed in feminist literary work and among urban theorists.

So how has women's access to public space developed the past couple of hundred years? Bondi and Domosh (1998) trace the contours of women's use of public space from 16th century England to the 20th century. By looking at 'the tales of three women', the authors discern how the perception of women's role in society, their presence in public, and the spatial division of labor between the sexes has developed over time. Analyzing how a female brewer is (negatively) portrayed by a male, upper-class poet in early modern England, the authors point to evidence that the origins of the contemporary social (and spatial) organization can be traced back to medieval England, along with the (ideological) separation of the spheres. With work then increasingly taking place outside the home, private space started becoming defined in opposition to public space (Bondi and Domosh 1998).

Jumping to 19th century New York, the authors examine gender and access to public space through the journal of a visiting white, middle-class woman, who writes of her daily explorations of the city's shops, parks, and museums. The picture depicted of women's 'right' to urban space is an ambiguous one, with the 'Victorian femininity' dictating women's allowed activities, mostly as an increasingly important actor in the consumer culture (Bondi and Domosh 1998). The 'feminized consumer culture' also seems to play an important role in the late 20th century city, with women's access to public space contingent on the opening hours of shopping malls – when closing at night, transforming the same space to a dangerous and unwelcome one to women. Bondi and Domosh's (1998) portrayal of the 'consumer city' has much in common with the literature on the 21st century neoliberal city, which is still seen as intrinsically masculine, racialized and classed, with women, racial minorities, and the lower classes fighting for their right to this increasingly privatized and regulated public space (see Hubbard 2004). In this postmodern city, Wilson (1991) argues, women act as both *consumers* and *objects* of (male) consumption.

Wilson's (1991) analysis of women's role in the city from the Victorian Age up until the modern day looks specifically at how women's role changed from being a domesticated

one, to be allowed working in factories, for then to be relegated to a life of child-rearing in the suburban home again. She examines how the image of the city has been constructed by architects and urban planners as 'evil' and 'dangerous' to women, with 'lawless men roaming the streets' – all incompatible with bringing up children, which thus must take place outside of the cities in the suburbs. Not only was the 19th century city seen as an unsuitable place for women, Wilson (1991) contends, but women were also seen as a disruptive element to the city, represented by the image of the mythical 'sphinx' figure at the end of the labyrinth, in the form of a lethal she-monster. Moreover, her work is fruitful as it illustrates how femininity has traditionally been seen as representing 'disorder' and 'sexual promiscuity', threatening the very 'rational' order of the masculine city life; and how women's mere presence on the city streets – whether as prostitutes, single mothers, lesbians, bohemians or career professionals – has generally been seen as challenging the patriarchal control of urban space, and in need of being contained and regulated. Wilson's writing is interesting as it sketches out how the female/emotional/nature/domestic vs. male/rational/city/work categorization has been reproduced throughout the centuries. Her study remains influential today in terms of women's access to public space, with the ambiguous role of cities for women – both a means of liberation from the husband and the domestic sphere, with opportunities at making their own living, but also with the well-known dangers of exploitation, harassment, and sexual assault.

Virginia Woolf also discusses the social and spatial segregation of the sexes in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Wondering why a famous library would even care if a woman entered it, Woolf's character jokingly ponders whether she would need to show her baptismal certificate or a letter from the Dean in order to enter the chapel on campus. It is evident through her writing that Woolf's character does not want her differential treatment as a woman to weigh her down, but her comment "but the outside of these magnificent buildings are often as beautiful as the inside" (Woolf 1929:4) suggests otherwise, signifying her spatial exclusion, having to observe the buildings as an outsider or 'trespasser'. Thinking about the locked doors of the library, she reasons however unpleasant it is to be locked out, it must be worse to be locked *in* – something in which Friedan would undeniably agree with in terms of her captive housewives.

Along the same lines, the central argument of Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* (1959) is that women have been forced to occupy a secondary role in relation to men, which has further limited their capacities to become free and independent beings. She goes as far as comparing women's struggle to that of the European Jews, African Americans, and the lower classes, who have been constructed as the 'object' in comparison to the 'absolute

human type', i.e. the masculine subject. As she says, "a man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex", "... for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right of being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong" (de Beauvoir 1959:14). In the same vein as the writings of Butler after her, de Beauvoir philosophizes about what it means to be a woman, especially when being construed in opposition to the man, who is seen to be the 'norm', while according to her the woman is often seen as a copy, an 'imperfection' or 'incidental being'. In contrast to Wilson (1991), de Beauvoir believes that women's subordination to men has always existed, and cannot be pinpointed to a certain historical event. Positioning herself as a radical feminist, she argues that 'the battle of the sexes' is perpetuated by the way parents bring up their children, teaching boys that self-realization comes through hard work, while telling their daughters that all they need for a happy life is a husband and children. In the end, she maintains that both sexes would benefit from the emancipation of women, in that women will not *solely* exist for the man, but *also* for him. Although Butler (1988) coined the term 'gender performativity', it is quite evident from her writings that de Beauvoir (1959) was onto this long before her.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1977) can be seen as a continuation of de Beauvoir's thinking, in her analysis of depression among housewives in the American suburbs. The spatialization of gender relations is particularly evident in Friedan's writings, focusing on the social and spatial organization of the American society in the 1950s and early 1960s. She demonstrates how with the wartime demand for women's labor gone, American women found themselves pushed back into the private sphere, as men reclaimed the role as sole breadwinners of the family. With 'nothing to do between 9 and 5', except for cleaning the spotless kitchen floors or changing the bed sheets for the second time that week, the American housewives took to anti-depressants and therapist sessions to alleviate their feeling of 'redundancy' and lack of fulfillment. And for those who did work part-time jobs, Friedan detected among her respondents feelings of 'neglecting' their femininity, 'betraying' their husband's masculinity, 'failing' their children, along with resentment for only making half of what their male counterparts did (all of which are arguably still relevant today). Many had college degrees, but the way gender relations and the city had been spatially organized did not allow for two fulltime working parents, with poor public transport and a lack of gender conscious city planning. As one of her respondents put it: "very little of what I've done has been really necessary or important", "in the past sixty years we have come full circle and the American housewife is once again trapped in a squirrel cage. If the cage is now a ... convenient modern apartment, the situation is no less painful" (Friedan 1977:23).

Much in the same vein, the well-known American urban theorist Jane Jacobs (1961) argues that city planners seem to have misunderstood what is appealing about big cities to people. Rather than ‘order’ and ‘openness’ (with the consequent ‘emptiness’) of public plazas, she argues, urban dwellers prefer the hustle and bustle of activity, a vibrant urban scene that is diverse and accessible to everyone. As she points out, the best (and perhaps easiest) means of making people feel safe on city streets is by residents and local shopkeepers having ‘eyes upon the street’¹⁷, being ready to step in if anything were to happen. This can only happen when residents have a sort of community feeling or sense of proprietorship of the area, and when the areas are not deserted (such as at night) (Jacobs 1961).

Some scholars also argue that not only is the city gendered, but (perhaps as a result of that) the city becomes sexualized, especially at nighttime. Hubbard and Colosi (2012) demonstrates how the sex entertainment industry in the UK have made access to these spaces even more unequal for women, giving rise to only two ‘legitimate’ figures appropriating this space, namely the male flaneur (e.g. stroller, loafer or customer) and the prostitute. The male flaneur encapsulates an objectifying gaze of women, penetrating urban space. Women are thus only allowed access to these spaces on male terms, being objects of this gaze, or as prostitutes – provocative and pitiful at the same time – unable to handle the nightlife of big cities (Hubbard and Colosi 2012:591). The ‘take back the night’ rallies that spread across the world in the 1970s were part in response to this, the police’s advice to women to ‘stay home’ as a crime deterrent, and the increasing sexual violence against women in these ‘red light districts’. Feminist activists linked the latter to what they perceived as a ‘commercial sexual exploitation’ that worked to normalize sexual violence towards women and effectively creating ‘no-go’ areas for them (ibid.:595).

Now that we have traced how gender relations became spatialized, let us turn to some of the concepts I have been using so far, notably ‘public space’ and ‘street harassment’.

6. Terms and Definitions

6.1 Public Space

What is public space, or what constitutes as urban, public space? While a student of urban planning might have strong opinions on this particular issue, I will interpret urban, public space in the widest sense, meaning any spaces that are open to the general public, such as

¹⁷ I will elaborate more on this in the next section.

streets, alleys, and plazas, but also what is called semi-public spaces such as parks, public transport, and privately owned spaces such as bars and grocery stores (see Gardner 1995). Gardner (1995:3) defines public places as “... *those sites and contexts that our society understands to be open to all...*” [original emphasis]. While it would have been easier to research one specific site, it would defeat the purpose of my research as I aim to demonstrate women’s unequal access to *all parts* of the city. Hence, restricting my focus to one particular site would not give a comprehensive picture of women’s geography of fear, and their experienced unequal access to public space. This is also reflected in the personal narratives, which tell of experiences of harassment both on crowded streets, in dark parks, and on empty buses. That being said, since my emphasis is on street harassment, the streets will naturally be my main consideration.

So what makes ‘the streets’ so interesting? While the streets may seem as a rather inanimate focal point to the ‘untrained eye’, they become intriguing objects of study once one recognizes their possibilities for shaping behavior and social relations, instead of seeing them as “... blank, undifferentiated surface which has no effects” (Watson 2010:292). The streets are, according to Gardner (1995), the quintessential public space. It is not by accident that Jane Jacobs (1961) devoted a whole chapter to sidewalks and their use in relation to safety in her critique of the 1950s urban planning in the United States. Arguing that the streets and sidewalks are the main public places and most vital organs of a city, it follows that the importance of people feeling safe on these streets is key to a successful city. “Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its *streets*. If a city’s streets look interesting, the city looks interesting...” [emphasis added] (Jacobs 1961:351). Moreover, “When people say that a city, or a part of it, is dangerous... what they mean primarily is that they do not feel safe on the *sidewalks*” [emphasis added] (ibid.). As already mentioned, Jacobs makes an interesting observation, which has later been echoed by urban planners worldwide: the fact that the design of streets greatly impact crime and assault. The more people using a street at all times of day, the less risk of anti-social behavior, as there are more ‘eyes upon the streets’. Vice versa, with fewer people using a street, the risk of crime increases (Jacobs 1961).

Jacobs takes the example of a vibrant migrant community versus a more suburban neighborhood, showing how in the former case there are less reported incidents of assault than in the latter. She attributes this fact to the frequent use of the streets in the former case, while in the latter the streets basically become deserted at night. Her analysis is interesting as it suggests that urban planning in the West has basically *failed* at keeping its residents safe on the very streets of their own neighborhoods. With shops and restaurants mostly being located

in inner cities, the residential neighborhoods (which are increasingly being situated outside the city-center) are basically rendered urban wastelands at night. With no places for the dwellers to go, they have no ‘purpose’ to be on the streets except for when going to and coming back from work, which leaves the streets unused for most of the day. This is not limited to only suburbia, however. As an interesting example, Jacobs (1961) takes the upscale Upper East Side neighborhood of Manhattan, where residents have found the need to hire professional ‘street watchers’, i.e. doormen and superintendents as an extra pair of ‘eyes on the streets’ due to the lack of shopkeepers and pedestrians on the sidewalk. She hypothesizes that if rent prices were to drop and these workers were to be fired, New York’s most fashionable residential area would become a potentially dangerous place.

6.2 Street Harassment

Now that we have established what comprises public space, along with the important function of the streets, let us turn to the issue at hand, namely: what is *street harassment*? Up until very recently, ‘street harassment’ was the ‘the problem that had no name’, invisible to many men¹⁸ (Bowman 1993, Thompson 1994, Twerkheimer 1997).). The term ‘sexual harassment’ only made its way into popular discourse and the legal framework in the U.S. in the 1960s, when it was included in the Civil Rights Act (along with race discrimination) as a form of sex discrimination barring women from work (Bowman 1993). Street harassment can be seen as a continuation of – if not more accurately precedent to – workplace harassment (since women have always been on ‘the streets’). Street harassment is largely understood to be a gender-based harm, with women cast as victims and men as the perpetrators¹⁹ (Bowman 1993, Kissling 1991, Twerkheimer 1997, Thompson 1994). The transaction normally takes place between strangers in public space, as this kind of behavior is dependent on no former interaction between the parties (ibid.). Street harassment is thus considered to be a generally urban phenomenon, as most people are strangers to each other in big cities, and perpetrators seem to prefer the cloak of anonymity, escape options, and the impunity offered to them on the crowded street (Gardner 1995).

Gardner (1995) has a relatively broad understanding of what she terms ‘public harassment’, defining it as breaches of civility among strangers in public spaces that any

¹⁸ A recurring sentiment among male respondents in the literature was that men and women must seemingly live in ‘different realities’, as they were not aware of street harassment (often because they claimed not to engage in it nor observe it).

¹⁹ This is being increasingly challenged, however, by women reporting being harassed by other women, and more and more gay or transgender men reporting being sexually harassed.

citizen can be subject to. While she contends that people of color, sexual minorities and the disabled are disproportionately targeted, she emphasizes that public harassment serves as frequent reminders for women of the ever present relevance of their gender. The most defining characteristics of street harassment are that it is unwanted or unsolicited behavior from strangers in public places, the remarks or gestures are evaluative and sexual in nature, they usually warrant no response from the subject (this is particularly noteworthy, as compliments usually warrants a 'thank you'), it is experienced by the victims as objectifying, depreciating, humiliating and/or threatening, and it is felt as an invasion of privacy (Kissling 1991, Bowman 1993, Macmillan et al. 2000).

As mentioned, the literature suggests a huge disparity between men and women's understanding of this kind of behavior. While many men report to engage in 'girl watching' as simply 'for fun', or to compliment or flatter the women, most women report feeling scared, angry or humiliated (Quinn 2002, Livingston 2015). In fact, in a recent survey by Hollaback only 3% of respondents reported finding street harassment 'flattering' (Livingston 2015). Some research in criminology suggest that men often use fairly 'innocent' street harassment as a form of 'rape testing', that is, gauging the reactions of victims in order to determine if they would put up a fight or not (Thompson 1994). Also known as 'stranger harassment' (although sexual harassment would perhaps be the most appropriate term due to its sexual nature), this behavior is very hard to predict and therefore avoid, especially because the victim can never know the intentions of the harasser (Kissling 1991). Thus, for women, as they have no way of knowing whether a simple 'hello' was benevolent, if their response would be seen as an 'invitation' for further interaction, or if their lack of response would escalate the situation, they find themselves treating every interaction with fear and suspicion (ibid.).

Street harassment can take various forms: it can be verbal, with suggestive, evaluative or lewd comments on a woman's body, or so-called wolf-whistles, lip smacking, kissing noises or snickering (Kissling 1991, Bowman 1993, Macmillan et al. 2000). The comments range in content from anything from a simple greeting, to a command such as 'smile, baby!' to invasive questions such as 'where are you going?' and repeated propositions or actual threats. The comments are invariably sexual in nature, and based on a woman's physical appearance (ibid.). These verbal gestures are commonly referred to as 'catcalling' in popular discourse, and are statistically the most prevalent forms of street harassment (Livingston 2015). Street harassment can also take the form of physical behavior, such as winking, leering, ogling, hissing, pinching, gracing, grabbing, groping, brushing, fondling, touching, flashing, masturbating, and stalking, among others (Kissling 1991, Bowman 1993, Macmillan

et al. 2000). Many women have for example reported strange men seizing the opportunity while on public transport to stand extra close to them, lean in, brush against them, or even ‘accidentally’ fall onto them (Neupane and Chesney-Lind 2014).

Feminist scholars often contend that it is not as important exactly *what* is being said, as the fact that men seem to be in a privileged position to access and evaluate women passing by, as if they were “...aesthetic objects for male admiration...” (Kissling 1991:454). According to Kissling (1991:454) it does not matter if the comments are meant to be ‘complimentary’ or not, as they still work to “... remind women of their status as women, subject to evaluation as sexual objects in ways that men are not”. What is striking is how street harassment works to reinforce the spatial boundaries between the sexes, maintaining the traditional public-private divide. Kissling (1991:454) argues that street harassment marks women as ‘trespassers’ in public space (which is seen to belong to men) with the punishment for defying this being the risk of sexual assault.

As the literature on ‘women’s geography of fear’ shows, the majority of women fear male crime, and rape in particular, so these however well-meaning comments or gestures from strange men reinforce what women have been told as young girls, and thus keep them from going to these places alone or after dark (Kissling 1991, Macmillan et al. 2000). Moreover, the ridicule or lack of understanding many women experience when telling their stories of harassment further work to shame and silence them, making this problem seem even more invisible (ibid.). Terms like ‘eve-teasing’ often used on the Asian sub-continent also work to further trivialize the problem, by implying it is a harmless ‘game’ (Neupane and Chesney-Lind 2004). While research shows that women are more likely to be victimized by someone they know or in their own home, in a study by Macmillan et al. (2000) non-stranger sexual harassment was found to have *no* effect on women’s perception of safety, while stranger harassment did. This goes to show how differently public space is experienced by the genders, and how this manifests itself in a felt unequal access to the city for women.

7. Statistics

So how prevalent is this ‘invisible’ problem, i.e. street harassment? Before analyzing the personal narratives, it might be fruitful to cast some light on the numbers. Contrary to popular belief, street harassment is an everyday occurrence in many women’s lives, regardless of class and age (Gardner 1995, Livingston 2015). A recent cross-country study conducted by Hollaback and Cornell University – the largest of its kind with over 16,000 respondents in more than 22 different countries – shows that a whole of 85% of American women (this

number is even higher for British women with 90%) had their first experience of harassment before the age of 17, 77% of women under the age of 40 have been followed by a man or group of men that made them feel unsafe in the past year, and 50% have been groped or fondled in the past year *alone* (Livingstone 2015).

In terms of location, most respondents reported being harassed in cities, primarily on the streets, closely followed by parks, and public transportation/transit areas (*ibid.*). Contrary to the mainstream narrative, most women reported being harassed during daytime (as opposed to nighttime), in well-lit areas, around a lot of people and while wearing casual clothes, as opposed to being dressed up (something the ‘10 hours walking in NYC as a woman’ video illustrates, as it was conducted during day time, on crowded streets, and the woman was wearing jeans, a plain t-shirt and sneakers) (Livingstone 2015). These findings are particularly interesting as they help to debunk the myth that women are responsible for their own victimization by wearing ‘suggestive clothing’, being intoxicated and unable to take care of themselves, or being out alone at night, when the statistics show they are actually more likely to be harassed during the day while on their way to work or school.

So how does this impact the victims? As already mentioned, most women do in fact not find street harassment flattering (hence the term ‘harassment’). Feelings of anger, fear, anxiety, depression and low-self esteem were the most reported ones in the Hollaback survey (Livingstone 2015). More interestingly, street harassment did not only show to have emotional impacts on the victims, but also *behavioral* impacts, in terms of how women negotiate space. 85% of the U.S. respondents said they had altered their route to their destination as a consequence of being harassed, 72% said they had come to avoid a certain city or area altogether, and the same amount said they had chosen to take a different mode of transportation (e.g. a taxi instead of walking or taking the bus). 70% reported not going out at night at all, 68% reported avoiding a specific area in their *own* city, 67% reported changing the time leaving an event or location, 66% reported changing their dress, 55% reported refraining from going to social events such as bars, restaurants or the movies; and 40% reported carrying a *weapon* (Livingstone 2015).²⁰

A cautionary note against the generalizability of the data is warranted, however. The survey was conducted by the local Hollaback chapters with a link posted on their websites. This suggests that the respondents are most likely frequent users and/or readers of Hollaback, which could indicate a more than average awareness of the issue of street harassment, or that

²⁰ I am focusing on the U.S. results, as they had the largest number of respondents. The numbers are overall largely representative of the other countries, however, with small variations.

they have a ‘disproportionate’ amount of previous experience with it. Although the sample was not random, it was rather sizeable, with almost 5000 respondents from all over the United States, suggesting that the results are at least indicative of some patterns. That being said, the Hollaback data does also resonate with the literature. A study conducted by Macmillan, Nierobisz, and Welsh (2000) on the prevalence of stranger harassment and its influence on perceptions of safety among women found that 85% of their respondents had experienced some form of sexual harassment from strangers, with unwanted attention being the most common (60%), followed by stalking and exhibitionism. Their results indicate that the more experiences of stranger harassment a person has, the less safe the person feels while in public places.

Street harassment is not limited to a handful of metropolitan cities. Other statistics show that 64% of British women fear going out at night, 61% of women living in the largest 26 American cities feel unsafe due to fear of sexual assault, and 54% of Finnish women fear being victimized at night (Weseley and Gaarder 2004:648, Koskela 1999:113). In a study on women’s perception of fear and use of an urban outdoor area in Arizona, the majority of the respondents reported feeling uncomfortable doing recreational activities alone, and deployed strategies such as exercising with other people, bringing a dog or always carrying their phone, although that ‘ruined’ a part of the solitary experience for them (ibid.).

The fear of sexual harassment is also *gendered*, with women being predominantly more fearful of sexual violence than men. A British crime survey shows that women fear rape more than any other crime, with 35% reporting feeling *very* unsafe when walking in the city after dark, compared to 2% of men (Hubbard and Colosi 2015:600). This fear is not completely unfounded either, with crime statistics in the U.S. suggesting the annual number of rapes being somewhere in between 105,000 and 630,000, which (at a minimum) means there are roughly 300 rapes each day, or 1 every 5 minutes (Thompson 1994:320). A study on the prevalence of sexist hate speech in the Bay Area in Northern California discerned that while a total of 61% of women reported hearing offensive remarks every day or often, only 14% of men reported the same (Nielsen 2002:271). Most women ignore the comments or leave the situation, in fear of it escalating if they talk back (ibid.).

As these statistics demonstrate, street harassment is arguably one of the most pervasive problems in contemporary Western societies, experienced by roughly half the population. In this last section I will analyze the emotional and behavioral impacts street harassment has on women, particularly in terms of ‘fear’ and ‘mobility’, as told by women themselves, along with how sexual orientation, race, and gender expression intersect.

8. Emotional and Behavioral Impacts

As the statistics and the literature have demonstrated, street harassment largely impacts women's perception of safety while in public space and consequently their use of this gendered and sexualized space. In this section I will examine victims' own stories of street harassment that they have voluntarily submitted to Hollaback and Everyday Sexism to discern how street harassment affects their sense of safety in public space and their subsequent 'spatial behavior'. The stories posted on these sites are predominantly by women, and most seem to show an above-average awareness of the gendered nature of the problem of street harassment. The following story²¹ clearly shows the woman's fear while being out alone, and how gender-based harassment impedes on her mobility:

Was on my way back to my Hall of residence from a College based event. This was early on when I had few friends to escort me back to the Hall. In retrospect, I should have had another female walk with me, but they weren't at the same Hall I was at. It was after 10 pm and I took care to walk down a well lit pathway which was busy at that time of night. It was about ten minutes walk, so I thought I could make it. I never drink ... On the other side of the road, a drunk male student called out: "Hey come over here!" In a loud drawling obnoxious voice. Fortunately, the Hall of residence was two minutes away at this point, so I dashed up the hill and didn't look back. Yes, I know I am a woman and therefore incapable of walking on my own at night for ten minutes. I know that I really should have been supervised 24/7 with female friends because I'm fragile and need to be chaperoned everywhere. However, some threatening behaviour by some men seems to be due to their lack of inhibitions after imbibing alcohol. I never feel safe and drunk people have ruined my life with their bad behaviour and their stupidity ... I hate being a woman because it just makes me a target for drunken come one and a use. (Former Student, Everyday Sexism 2015).

This former student's story is interesting as it shows a great degree of the woman's reflection on her 'status' as a woman and the possibilities limited to her as a result of her gender. The encounter in itself is offered with relatively little elaboration, except for the explanation that the harasser was a drunk, male student. While in comparison to many other stories this incidence initially seems fairly harmless, it is impossible to predict what could have happened if she did not leave the situation as quickly as she did, especially considering the man was under the influence of alcohol. Moreover, what is revealing here is that this seems to not be a one-time occurrence in this woman's life but rather something 'normal', as she says she 'never feels safe' and that drunk people have 'ruined her life'.

²¹ I have refrained from editing the stories, except for shortening some due to the constraints of this paper (marked by "..."). I have decided not to indicate grammatical errors using (sic) as this would break up the stories too much. I also want to preserve the oral language they are written in.

Further, it is interesting that her fear of male crime seems to be subordinate to a fear of ‘drunk people’. In fact, she does not mention a fear of men in general, but rather the ‘bad behavior’ and ‘stupidity’ of intoxicated people. This story thus addresses more what Gardner (1995) calls ‘public harassment’, i.e. breaches of common courtesy among strangers in public places (related to, but not necessarily contingent on gender relations). There is nothing overtly sexual or objectifying with the man’s remarks, but rather an authoritative and potentially threatening tone, as he orders her to ‘come over’.

The story also illustrates the tendency among victims to partly blame themselves for ‘allowing’ the situation to occur in the first place (see Hlavka 2014). Starting her story with emphasizing and repeating that she *knows* she should not have been out alone at that time, and then justifying her actions with the fact that she did not know too many people at that point, that she made sure to walk down a well-lit path which was usually busy (in line with the ‘eyes on the street’ argument), and that she does not drink, all goes to show how strong a hold slut-shaming and victim-blaming still has in society, when she under no circumstances could predict this happening, or more importantly be held responsible for it. Her account clearly shows how both her perception of safety while alone in public spaces and also her past experiences have come to shape her wellbeing and use of that space.

A similar story, in terms of sentiments of fear and harassment translating to a feeling of spatial exclusion, can be witnessed in this story by a jogger who feels that street harassment is preventing her from safely doing her hobby:

I randomly decided to go for a morning jog before going to work. I passed by a house and noticed a car I had never seen at this property ... The car was on and there was a guy inside. I keep jogging, to eventually turn around and jog back to my apartment. A couple of minutes after I see the same exact car parked on the side of the pavement, a little ahead of me, in front of a different house. I pass him, and take a better look at the subject. I keep running and noticed the car passed me again and parked ahead of me on the side of the pavement, AGAIN. I started freaking out but keep running towards my apartment complex. He drives past me once more and wait for me in a turn, waits for me to pass him and does the same for about three times. I was frightened and decided not run home but instead I keep running towards my Alma Matter (which is a couple of blocks away). I crossed the avenue on a red light to avoid him to catch up with my pace. I want to get inside a building but for that I need to cross a parking lot. I start running but using the cars as shields. I turn around and see that the harasser had gotten into the parking lot but was on the opposite side. I pray that he does not see me while I keep hiding among the cars. I try to get into a building but the entrances were blocked because a construction was there. I keep calling for help but no one is picking up their phones. I managed to get into a building through a back door and then I called my school’s on campus police, who gave me a ride home. Those

were the worst 20 minutes. Being followed by a guy I have never seen in my life for 10+ blocks. Why do I have to feel the most vulnerable and unsafe when I am supposed the most free when I am doing the one thing I enjoy the most: run?! People are sick and this should end. It is not okay to alter one's tranquility in such sick manner, there is no excuse! I think street harassment - of any kind - should be punishable! (Stephanie, Hollaback 2015).

Stephanie's story is interesting because it touches upon the devastating impact street harassment – in her case stalking – can have not only on one's emotional wellbeing but also in relation to one's everyday recreational activities. Stephanie says the one thing she enjoys the most is running, and her story is narrated in a way that shows how destructive her experience of being followed by this strange man in a car for multiple blocks was. The retelling of her experience makes almost like a short story, told in present tense with a clear antagonist and build up of suspense, before the protagonist finally escapes the situation in the end. She also demonstrates an awareness of the phenomenon of street harassment by using terminology such as 'the harasser' instead of simply 'the guy'.

It is also interesting to see how Stephanie consciously employs strategies as she is (morbidly) running *from* her harasser. It is evident that she is suspicious of the strange car from the onset, as this is her neighborhood, which she is obviously familiar with. This vigilante attitude is something that is often recounted in the literature on women's geography of fear, that women are always alert to their surroundings in case of a potential attack (Valentine 1989, Koskela 1999). And as she says, the second time she passes the car she looks in the window to scrutinize the man. Stephanie shows an impressive awareness of her immediate environment, almost patrolling it as she moves through it. Her running to her university instead of home – where she was originally headed – suggests that she reasoned she did not want the stalker to know where she lives, which shows a fair degree of precautionary thinking.

Stephanie's story seems like taken straight from a video game or obstacle run, where she uses her environment to shield her, hiding behind cars, crossing on a red light, trying to get into a building – all in order to escape the man following her. Not surprisingly, Stephanie ends the play-by-play of her early morning jog – which quickly turned into a nightmarish thriller scenario – with exclaiming that this form of harassment seriously damages one's 'peace of mind', and should be punishable. This is an extreme form of street harassment, however, and stalking is usually considered a criminal offense in most Western countries, punishable by temporary restraining orders – albeit not always prosecuted (see Merry 2001),

While these two incidents took place outdoors, sexual harassment can also take place in semi-public places, as mentioned earlier, such as grocery stores or on public transport. Whereas Stephanie and the woman being propositioned by a drunk man had all escape possibilities available to them due to their open environmental context, these incidents can be experienced as much worse when taking place in relatively confined places with limited escape possibilities (Luymes and Tamminga 1995, Blöbaum and Hunecke 2005). This becomes evident in Kimber's story, who needs to weigh her options of staying in the cab with a potentially dangerous driver, or walking home through the streets of San Francisco alone at night:

This is just one of many.... I was out a bar listening to live music. Although, I could've taken the bus I decided on a cab ride home. So, I get in the cab and as per usual start chatting with the cabbie. The cabbie starts to make a turn not even remotely in the right direction. So I said, "where are you going?" He said, "I'm taking you to my house." So I first cursed myself for not bringing my cell phone, then got to the task of memorizing his name and cabbie number ... I tried, until we came to a stop and I jumped out of the car. I walked through the city of San Francisco that night to get home to avoid standing in one place. Because although I did nothing wrong. And waiting for the bus obviously isn't wrong nor an invitation, sadly that doesn't stop many people from harassing or worse. So after an hours' walk home I grabbed my phone so I could call the cab company and police only to realize that I couldn't remember. All I could do was report a description. It still feels like I didn't do enough. And still I wonder has anyone else not been as lucky? (Kimber, *Everyday Sexism* 2015).

First of all, it is interesting how Kimber also starts out with stating that this is just one out of many similar incidents she has experienced. Then, similar to the first story, she justifies her choice of action, taking a cab while she 'could have taken the bus'. She thus seems to (unconsciously) put a bit of blame on herself, probably reasoning that she would have been safer with more people around her, than in a confined space with a complete stranger. However, she needs to get home somehow, and opted for the cab. Interestingly, while having her doubts (or fears, rather), this did not stop her from conversing with the driver (which is nonetheless considered 'customary' in this context). Kimber's vigilance kicked in quickly, however, when she noticed the driver did not make the right turn. Contrary to what some believe – that women are simply passive victims of harassment – she took charge of the situation and confronted the driver.

Kimber shows a commendable effort at strategizing how to get out of the situation, with memorizing the driver's name and the cab number, jumping out of the car when it comes to a stop, walking home instead of waiting for the bus – to avoid standing still and risking

more harassment, and ultimately calling the police. These efforts seem very thought through, and suggest – as she pointed out – that this is not the first time something like this has happened. Although she blames herself for not being able to do more, Kimber's story shows how victims of harassment can in fact take action against the perpetrators, albeit not always successfully. Her story is far from atypical, with the literature burgeoning with different 'rape-avoidance' strategies women deploy when negotiating public space, ranging from carrying keys in their hands as a weapon, always bringing a phone when hiking alone, telling people where they are going, dressing 'straight' or according to one's perceived gender not to be gay- or genderbashed, checking the bus schedule in advance to avoid waiting alone at the bus stop, borrowing friend's children to accompany them on walks, or getting plastic surgery to receive less attention (Gardner 1995, Namaste 1996, Weseley and Gaarder 2004).

As Thompson (1994:341) points out, people on public transport – in this case in a taxi – are 'captive audiences', meaning they are stuck in a relatively confined space, unable to escape a possibly uncomfortable or threatening situation. Thompson (1994) uses this argument to advocate for a ban of sexual harassment on public transportation (on the same grounds that panhandling has been banned on public transport in the U.S.) because it reduces women's possibilities to travel freely around in their community. The potential threat of being harassed while commuting, according to Thompson (1994), goes against the fundamental 'freedom of mobility' principle that should apply to all citizens and passengers, not only male ones, and thus needs to be combated.

Harassment also often occurs when the victims for some reason are distracted because some other task requires their attention. This might be while running, carrying grocery bags, getting ice cream for their children – basically anything that forces women to momentarily let their guard down while focusing on the task at hand (Gardner 1995:149). Gardner terms this 'exploitation of presence', where the harasser seizes the opportunity of his target's lack of full attention and/or inability to remove herself from the situation. This story by Charlotte illustrates this, but also the 'captive audience' sentiment, when she is approached by a persistent man while standing in the checkout counter at the grocery store:

Queuing in a pound store in a very long queue, a man behind me told me I had beautiful hair. I simply said thank you and ignored him, because I knew what was coming. He then kept asking if I was free that night, the next night etc. and I kept saying I was busy and didn't have time. He went on a long tangent about how I should take a holiday and enjoy life. He then told me he fancied me and wanted to go on a date. I resorted to what I always do, telling him I was 'taken'. I often find that men only back off when you tell them you are 'taken' by another man. They don't take no as an answer and assume you

can be persuaded – a product of stereotypes of 'playing hard to get', and rape culture. He then backed off and said he was 'looking for a date' and he 'fancied me'. I suggested he ask someone else and he said 'I fancy you though'. I just wanted to get my cereal and air freshener and get the hell out of there. Men like him assume that you owe them something once they have complimented you. I was stuck in the queue for ages with him close behind me. When I left, I rang my boyfriend so he didn't try to talk to me or follow me. (Charlotte, Everyday Sexism 2015).

Charlotte's story is interesting because it illustrates how her ability to do her daily chores is interrupted by a man expressing unsolicited sexual interest in her. As she says, all she wanted to do was 'get her cereal and air freshener', but she is disturbed while waiting to pay by a man who refuses to accept her polite – and repeated – rejection of his offer. This man arguably 'exploits' Charlotte's presence in the store, as he makes a move when she is preoccupied by keeping her spot in the line in order to pay for her groceries. In many ways, Charlotte is a 'captive audience' whose presence is being taken advantage of by this man. She needs to remain in the same spot for some amount of time if she wants to complete her errand and pay for her groceries. Her actions are thus limited, because if she wants to remove herself from the situation she would have to give up her place in the line. This is a good example of how such a mundane – but necessary – everyday activity can be hampered by unwanted attention from a stranger. She feels uncomfortable with having to remain in close proximity to this man for a longer amount of time, especially because he did not accept her dismissal. This incidence clearly bothered her, as she called her boyfriend immediately after in fear of being followed home. It also illustrates how public harassment in situations where you least expect it can have distressing impacts.

A large part of the negative experience victims have of street harassment is due to their feelings of not being able to do anything about the situation. Research shows that people who talk back to the harasser suffer fewer psychological effects of the incidence than people who do not say anything back and try to ignore it (Bowman 1993, Twerkheimer 1997). According to Twerkheimer (1997:181), this can be explained by the fact that street harassment serves as small trickles of 'spirit murder' or 'psychological beatings' to one's self-esteem, which over time accumulate and takes its toll on a person's psyche. When ignoring and internalizing these repeated incidents instead of 'speaking up' for oneself many feel responsible for their own victimization and even complicit in their own oppression, by disregarding their own feelings (ibid.). However, talking back can also backfire and escalate the situation, so there is no 'correct' way of dealing with harassment.

Interestingly, this also translates to contexts where there are witnesses to the incidence. According to a survey on street harassment in Amsterdam, respondents reported feeling worse after being harassed when there were bystanders present who did *not* come to their rescue. Similarly, respondents reported feeling better after an incidence with active bystanders (Aronson 2015). Cassie's story exemplifies this:

I was walking into work and three men followed me from the parking garage to the front door, whistling and making cat calls in Spanish (I have just enough broken Spanish to understand them, but not enough to retort). I ignored them and kept walking, as there was a crowd of smokers outside of the doors to where I work, and I felt safe enough to continue toward them. The men caught up to me and one of them grabbed my hair saying "Como estas bonita?" and making kissing sounds into my ear. No one, and I mean no one, did anything to help. Everyone standing by the door (about 15 people, both men and women) just stood there. I shook the man off and darted inside. (Cassie, *Everyday Sexism* 2015).

Apart from being a rather disturbing story, Cassie's account illustrates how humiliating it can be for a victim, not only the harassing in itself, but the fact that there are witnesses standing around who do nothing to come to your assistance. The 'double-damage' done here comes from the fact that Cassie felt disappointed that the group of people simply just stood by and watched her being violated and intimidated. Not only is Cassie unable to respond to her harassers due to a language barrier but her violation is completely ignored by the smokers outside the very building where she works. Cassie's case is unfortunately not atypical, as more often than not victims of harassment report that there were in fact bystanders present who did not intervene (see Aronson 2015 for the case of Amsterdam). Then again other studies show that bystander intervention²² tends to escalate the situation, which undoubtedly is what bystanders fear (Livingston 2015).

Gardner (1995:64) refers to this as 'public aid' situations, meaning any context where help from a stranger is warranted in public places, e.g. gestures such as holding up a door or asking for directions. According to Gardner (1995:65), these 'favors' or helping behavior among strangers form the backbone of civil interaction in public space, and it is widely acknowledged that anyone can ask for it and everyone should issue it, regardless of race, class, and gender. The problem arises, she contends, when men are being 'extra' chivalrous towards women, and women become hesitant to offer any attention whatsoever to strange

²² Bystander intervention is Hollaback's main strategy in tackling street harassment, by holding the perpetrators accountable for their actions and supporting the victims. See Aronson (2015) for more.

men who approach them in fear of ‘signaling interest’. In Cassie’s case, however, none of this applies, as she was a *woman* clearly in need of help, and there were both men and women present witnessing the incidence. They had ‘strength in numbers’, but still failed to come to this woman’s rescue. In the end she manages to escape the situation on her own, but it is not hard to see how this incidence might affect her feelings of safety in public space in the future, fearing that no one will come to her aid.

The feeling of not being able to move throughout your very own neighborhood due to the fear of or risk of being harassed is recurrent in the literature (Gardner 1995, Thompson 1994). Thompson (1994:322) argues that street harassment limits women’s geographical freedom, forcing them to take long detours or circumvent areas and situations that could become potentially threatening, transforming even the most trivial, daily activities such as walking to work or strolling through their own neighborhood into a ‘burdensome ordeal’. Mobility, she argues, is predominantly perceived as a *male prerogative*, not applying to women (ibid.). In a similar manner to Woolf’s (1929) character trespassing on the *grass*, women are effectively rendered trespassers in *public space*. Research on ‘objectification theory’ treats stranger harassment as the prototypical sexual objectification experience, where women are treated as though their bodies represent their personhood and their presence in public spaces is solely for the appreciation of others²³ (Davidson et al. 2015:53). As demonstrated, this inability to move freely throughout public space is an inherently gendered and sexualized experience. Daniella’s story exemplifies this, when she wonders if it is ‘too much to ask’ to get to your destination without being subject to gender-based harassment:

I’m a couple blocks away from my job, having just picked up some McDonald’s for myself and my boss. The bag is heavy and I’m overheated, just trying to get back so I can eat. I’m waiting to cross the street when a skinny white²⁴ man on a bike wearing sunglasses and sucking on a pacifier (it looked like) starts to yell at me. “Suck a dick white girl!” I tried not to look but I was in such shock that someone would even say something like that, even though I have been harassed in the past. I didn’t turn my head but I looked at him zoom by as he never broke eye contact with me waiting for my reaction. “Suck a dick!” he yelled again, smiling. All I wanted to do was get from point A to point B without being objectified and harassed. Is that too much to ask? (Daniella, Hollaback 2015).

²³ It also deals with the emotional distress inflicted upon women, and how it can lead to feelings of ‘disattachment’ from their bodies, anorexia, or self-objectification (seeing themselves through the eyes of harassers).

²⁴ Interestingly, Hollaback did not remove the race identifier from this story, most likely because the man is white (and not black), and thus does not perpetuate the racialized stereotypes of harassers.

Daniella's story illustrates the imposition of constraints on women's use of public space, with the spatial expression of patriarchy regulating women's movement through this space and their feelings of safety and entitlement to it (Neupane and Chesney-Lind 2014). Indeed, as some scholars argue, sexual harassment is not merely a means of subordinating women, but rather an expression of male privilege and ownership of space. As women in larger numbers are transgressing the private sphere, their increased spatial mobility is perceived as an act of defiance (ibid.). As is evident from this story, even with previous experiences of harassment Daniella is still astounded by the explicit sexual content of this man's remark, as well as his audacity and apparent lack of shame maintaining eye contact and repeating his remark while smiling, despite her lack of response. Needless to say, Daniella did not do anything to provoke this kind of attention, so the harasser's initiative must spring from another source of feeling of right to issue statements like this to strangers passing by.²⁵

As mentioned, the problem with street harassment is that it is nearly impossible to predict, prevent and/or combat. Moreover, what makes the experience so much worse for many of the victims is the anonymity and impunity offered to the harassers by the very character of public space (Gardner 1995). Since this space belongs to everyone, no one can be held accountable for the perpetrators' actions. For example, in terms of work place harassment the employee can report a harassing colleague or employer to the human relations department, and as Thompson (1994) encourages victims to do, complain to or even sue transportation services for harassing incidents experienced while using their services. There have also been instances where women have reported construction companies to the police for their employees harassing them while at work (see Bates 2015). More often than not though, reporting incidents of sexual harassment falls on deaf ears, like this story – which is just one out of many – demonstrates:

I was dancing in a busy club at about 1 am. My friend, whom I was out with, had gone to get us some drinks. A guy came up and started grinding against me, but I initially rolled my eyes and laughed it off. He came closer and whispered in my ear, 'want to come back to my house for a drink and some cock?' I told him I wasn't interested but he slid his hand up my skirt, into my underwear, and forced multiple fingers inside me whilst holding me with the other arm so I couldn't run away. I felt completely violated, and humiliated, and eventually managed to push him off. When I told the security guards they brushed me off, using the excuse that 'dirty dancing happens'. I've never told anyone like this before,

²⁵ In this instance one could also question the mental state of the harasser, as he was according to Daniella 'sucking on pacifier' (something which only babies do). This would then fall under Gardner's (1995) category of 'public harassment' or 'stranger harassment', as it was not necessarily directed at her gender.

even though it hurt me deeply, for fear that they wouldn't see it as much of a big deal. Most of my girlfriends have been groped while out dancing, and always laugh it off as something that 'always happens'. It's only now that I've realized that this was sexual assault. (M, Everyday Sexism 2015).

This is arguably one of the most disturbing stories so far (not that one should make a point of evaluating or ranking women's personal experiences in any kind of way) because it clearly qualifies as not only harassment, but in fact *rape*²⁶, which is a punishable offense. While this story is not as much about 'getting from one point to another' without being objectified or treated differently than men, it does illustrate quite literally the invasion of privacy many women experience when traversing urban space. It is stories like this that stand as the 'worst case scenarios' for many women, with rape being the ultimate invasion (or penetration, in this case) of their private space.

The normalization of sexual harassment is particularly evident in this story, as the woman recounts that *most* of her girlfriends in fact have been sexually assaulted, but without 'realizing' or putting a word to it. This is interesting as it shows that it is not 'only' children and adolescents who lack adequate information about what constitutes sexual harassment or not (Hlavka for example restricts her study to teenage girls), but also adults. Articulating the harm inflicted is often heralded as 'the first step' in the victims' healing process, but also in combating a problem (Twerkheimer 1997, Hlavka 2014). As Friedan (1977) rhetorically asks, how can you deal with a 'problem that has no name'?

The reactions of this woman's friends and the security guards she reported her assault to are by no means atypical, and part of what Hlavka (2014) terms 'heteronormative discourses'. The assumption that men are inherently 'sexually aggressive', and that women should just 'take it' is perpetuating socially constructed stereotypes and is both normalizing and trivializing sexual harassment. The response that 'this stuff just happens' also has damaging impacts on the victim, as his or her experience is by implication seen as invalid or exaggerated, which can contribute to the further silencing and internalizing of the pain inflicted, preventing survivors from seeking help or processing their emotions (Hlavka 2014). This has tremendous consequences on the larger picture, fueling a *rape culture* that blames the person for their own victimization, by shifting responsibility from the perpetrator to the

²⁶ There is an ongoing international debate about what constitutes rape, as the legal framework in many countries necessitates the use of force. Lawmakers in California have been celebrated by many activists in their landmark decision to make explicit consent ('yes means yes') on college campuses a precondition, as many rape victims have been unconscious and unable to consent at the time. See the Guardian (2014).

victim. This kind of victim-blaming or slut-shaming²⁷ silences and invalidates victims' experiences and becomes a perpetual cycle, with fewer and fewer feeling confident they will get the support they need by coming forth. Gardner's (1995:220) study supports this: Out of her couple of hundred respondents, the two women who made an official complaint to police officers were either laughed at or asked for their number.

Another similar example is Sandra's story, who is catcalled by a drunk man who does not pick up on her disinterest and efforts at ignoring him, but backs off right away when her male companion returns from the bathroom:

... I was waiting for my male friend in the hallway outside the restrooms ... Almost subconsciously (because it's happened so often) I was ignoring another young male who was very clearly intoxicated and was trying to get my attention. I continued to wander looking at the pictures continuing to ignore his cat calls, when finally he decided to get up off his stool and approach me. As he approached (again this happen so often that I was not alarmed) my male companion had come out of the bathroom and join me in the hall. Well, it was the exact moment that this cat caller had made the adventure all the way to me. At that point the cat caller realized I was with a man (this was not a boy friend, just a male friend). The very drunk cat caller then proceeded to apologize to my male friend for approaching me. This included fist bumps and jeering, a lot of "Sorry, Man"... and laughs.... I was not laughing. Initially I didn't think too much of this because it's such a common occurrence but the fact is the man was apologizing to the other man for approaching me, harassing me and what ever else he had in mind. This was offensive on many levels. (Sandra, Hollaback 2015).

First of all, it is interesting how Sandra is so used to sexual attention from strangers that she barely takes note of the man in the beginning. She then tries to ignore him, which is one of the most commonly deployed strategies (along with 'avoidance') (Bowman 1993, Nievesen 2002). It is also evident how she suppresses her own feelings of fear, based on her reasoning that 'this happens so often'. In the end, it is clear that she was bothered by this man approaching her, as she finds it 'insulting', mostly because the harasser was – rather 'mockingly' – apologizing to her male companion and not to her.

What is equally interesting in Sandra's story, however, is how the *presence* of another male seems to work as a deterrent towards harassment. The idea that men respect other men, or rather male authority, is also something that is asserted in the literature. Gardner (1995:207) recounts an interaction she witnessed between a man and a woman in an ice cream bar, whereupon the man's approach the woman held her hand up pointing to her wedding ring

²⁷ See Carr (2013) for more on the global 'SlutWalk Movement' that erupted in critique of a Toronto police officer's advice that if college girls did not want to get raped, they should not dress as 'sluts'.

while shaking her head. The man, in mock disbelief, bowed apologetically and withdrew, leaving them both laughing. As Sandra's story shows, however, every encounter is not that 'humorous', but the fact is that both men in these stories seemed to respect that the women were presumably 'taken' by another man. As a matter of fact, playing 'the boyfriend card' is a very common strategy deployed by women to fend off persistent 'suitors', and Gardner (1995:206) devotes a whole section to the 'my boyfriend will be back soon' excuse.

While it is all well and good that strangers respect both the institution of marriage and the romantic bond between two people, it is not everyone's love that is seen as legitimate. Lesbian couples overwhelmingly report experiencing unwanted sexual attention from strangers while *with* their partner, which within queer theory is seen as the quintessential example of heterosexism (i.e. disregarding non-heterosexual preference) (Gardner 1995). Moreover, as Gardner (1995) points out, the fact that women need a companion for 'protection' against harassment in public places infantilizes them. Why should it not be enough for a woman herself to say no? She further argues that the use of a man as a woman's private 'guard dog' is degrading to him, rendering him to a mere 'chaperone' role.

Now that we have examined how street harassment negatively impacts white, heterosexual, cisgender women, it is time to see in what profound ways this kind of harassment intersects with sexual orientation, race and gender expression.

9. Intersectionality

9.1 Sexual Orientation

As the above stories illustrate, women are subject to harassment by strangers in nearly *all contexts*, regardless of the time of day, bystanders present, or what they wear (see Gardner 1995). That does not mean, however, that all women are equally at risk of being sexually harassed, nor face the same kind of harassment. The ways in which sexual orientation, race, and gender expression intersect have generated a vast body of literature within queer theory and sexual harassment (see Namaste 1995, Hubbard 2001). Gardner (1995:228) terms racial minorities and LGBT people 'multiple situationally-disadvantaged groups' due to the fact that their membership in these groups – including already belonging to the disadvantaged group 'women' – adds an extra burden on them, as they are not only being harassed because of their gender, but also their skin color, non-heterosexual interest, or 'failure' to perform their gender according to society's expectations. These groups tend to experience more harassment overall from strangers in public than white, heterosexual, cisgender women and the harassment tends

to be more aggressive and violent²⁸ (Namaste 1995, Hubbard 2001). The harassment is also often based on *stereotypes* of these groups, with ‘identifying markers’ being short hair, a more androgynous way of dressing, and as this story shows, presumed ‘masculine’ or ‘gay’ activities:

I was on an Edmonton recreation co-ed softball league about a year ago and we played at various baseball fields around the city... I wasn't very good so I played way out field and was close enough to the road to hear a group of guys who hung out of their pick-up truck and drove by and yelling: “FAAAAAGS!”. It bothered me not only because they said it in a mocking and negative way but also because: what the heck does softball have to do with a person's sexual orientation?! Since when did organized sports determine our sexuality? This just adds to the proof of how street harassment is aimed towards sexual minorities. I've never heard anyone yell “HETEROS!” out of their car... (BP, Hollaback 2015)

This story is interesting because it touches upon the intersection between street harassment and (perceived) sexual orientation, in this case based on stereotypes about homosexuality. According to Gardner (1995) stereotypes are a prerequisite of public harassment due to our reliance on appearance when judging someone in this space, since there is no way of knowing this kind of personal information about a stranger. In this case, the stereotype is based on lesbians and sports, particularly softball. Whether this woman is queer or not is irrelevant, the point is that she is harassed based on the assumption of her group membership, derived from the assumption that softball is a ‘lesbian sport’ (and the broader stereotype that ‘all lesbians’ love sports). Had she been playing soccer or volleyball, maybe her harassers would not have been that quick to draw their conclusions.

The woman apparently does not have a problem with the gay community herself, as she does not seem to be offended by being called a ‘fag’, but rather the derogatory – and unsolicited – way it was said in, along with the false presumption that one can assert someone's sexual orientation based on their recreational activities. It is also interesting to see how she reflects on how street harassment disproportionately targets sexual minorities. With heterosexuality being the norm, it would indeed be absurd if someone were to shout ‘heteros!’ out of their car. Moreover, as her choice of words suggest there is in fact little slur for heterosexuals, while there is a large vocabulary of homophobic slur (that is not to suggest ‘heterophobia’ does not exist within the LGBT community). As both Hlavka (2014) and

²⁸ See for example ‘corrective rape’, a form of sexual assault aimed at trying to ‘convert’ queer people. Namaste (1995) argues that queer people live ‘spatially schizophrenic lives’, not being ‘out’ in public due to the fear of gaybashing.

Hubbard (2001) discuss, public space is constructed around notions of heteronormality, with quite specific codes of ‘appropriate behavior’ (and dress, according to your gender). Failure to comply with this ‘code of conduct’ makes you deviant, and subject to harassment.

Another way the harassment queer women experience differs from that of heterosexual women is that it often *fetishizes* them. While all women – regardless of sexual orientation – are invariably subject to sexual comments, lesbian and bisexual women seem to be treated as ‘exotic sexual objects’, or as Wilson (1991) says about women in general, a ‘promise of sexual adventure’ for straight men. Sally’s brief story illustrates this very clearly:

... my girlfriend and I were walking to the metro holding hands when a man whistled at us and yelled “Can I join? Get in between ya?” Both my partner and I felt disgusted, sickened and violated. I do not exist for your viewing pleasure. No one does. (Sally, Hollaback 2013).

What makes this remark different from the other ones examined is that the harasser does not target them as individuals, saying what he ‘wants to do to her’ or vice versa, but rather proposes that he ‘joins’ the two of them, in an inherently private and intimate act. This explains why Sally says both her and her girlfriend were ‘disgusted’ by his remarks, and felt ‘violated’, as his proposition was not only unsolicited and out of place, but arguably fetishized them. As she says, she does not exist for anyone else’s ‘viewing pleasure’, which is a quite common sentiment among women experiencing being objectified by strangers (Kissling 1991, Thompson 1994).

Moreover, as Gardner (1995) discusses, a companion does not seem to offer the same kind of ‘protection’ against harassment for queer women as it does for straight women. As a matter of fact, this man seems to completely ignore or disregard the courtship between these two women, effectively rendering their relationship a ‘sham’ or not worthy of as much respect as an opposite-sex relationship.²⁹ Suffice to say, this can have very negative impacts on gay people’s sense of the ‘authenticity’ of their love, being disregarded by the larger, heteronormal society. It can also lead to ‘internalized homophobia’, as objectification theory would argue, with the victims internalizing the messages of anti-homosexuality.

According to Namaste (1996:226), lesbians are more likely to be harassed in ‘heterosexual public places’ such as the streets than gay men because their presence in public without a man (but with a woman, rather) is seen as a ‘threat’ to the masculine, heterosexual

²⁹ Out of all the literature and the stories I examined for this research, I never came across a story of an opposite-sex couple facing similar forms of harassment or fetishization. While this does not suggest it does not occur, it is telling.

space. Heteronormative discourses would explain this as the ultimate example of not homophobia but heterosexism, namely that the only recognized courtships are among opposite-sex couples. As Woolf's (1929:59) character mockingly points out: "One has a profound, if *irrational*, instinct in favour of the theory that the union of a man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness" [emphasis added].

9.2 Race

As with sexual minorities, racial minorities are also subject to a different and more frequent type of harassment than Caucasian women (Bowman 1993, Gardner 1995, Twerkheimer 1997). As Gardner (1995) points out, African-American women did indeed experience a *physical* segregation of public space up until very recently, making their experience of equal access to public space quite different than that of white women, who were never actually banned from using certain facilities.³⁰ Moreover, Bowman (1993:533) points out that for African-American women to be harassed by white males evokes very particular (negative) historical associations. She argues that the notion of the white man's (sexual) dominance over black women has 'survived emancipation', with the widespread assumption that many black women on the streets are sex workers.³¹ As with lesbian and bisexual women, women of color are also often fetishized, receiving a disproportionate amount of patronizing compliments and queries about their 'exotic' physical features, such as their hair (Gardner 1995:230). Lavanya's story illustrates the intersection between race and street harassment well:

... I was walking along in my own muse when I saw a guy in mid-20s on his bike coming towards me. I didn't think twice about it. But then as he got closer I found him staring at me. As he passed me by, he yelled, "Too bad you are not white." I have been catcalled many times before and since then on three different continents. But I am always caught by surprise and disgusted by it. This time though, I was just too perplexed by the comment to even figure out the meaning right away. Later when I told my roommate and a couple of white friends about it, they said it was perhaps meant as a compliment on my good looks. Right, an unsolicited "compliment" on my appearance while putting my skin color down. (Lavanya, Hollaback 2011)

Lavanya's story is not so much about fetishizing her race, as denigrating it. It stands apart from most of the stories about race posted on Hollaback and Everyday Sexism, which tend to

³⁰ Although it is telling how the 'separate but equal' mentality seems to have been implicit in the male/female, public/private dichotomies in Western cities.

³¹ An illustrative example from the literature is when some African-American girls are approached on the street by a white man in a car who 'mistakes' them for being sex workers (for no apparent reason except for their skin color).

focus on either racial stereotypes or the erotization of their physical ‘exotic’ attributes. This story is interesting because it demonstrates the still existing ‘racial hierarchy’ in society, and the double burden experienced by women of color. Lavanya is first harassed because of her gender, and then because of her race. While the harasser implicitly expresses sexual interest in her, his remark ‘too bad you are not white’ seems to suggest while her ‘looks’ are worthy of appreciation, she has in fact the ‘wrong’ skin color. As one of Gardner’s (1995:229) respondents exclaimed: “Sometimes all this that happens in the streets make me think: Is it worse to be black, or a dyke, or just to be a woman?”

It is not clear whether the man either changed his mind upon closer scrutiny, meant it as a compliment, or in fact meant to be racist. This is often the problem with street harassment, that women have no way of knowing the harasser’s intent and thus need to treat every comment with suspicion (Kissling 1991). It is evident that Lavanya is not sure herself how to take this man’s comment. As she says, she is used to street harassment, but was too confused by the content of this remark to react to it right away. What is interesting is that her (white) friends encourage her to take it as a compliment on her ‘good looks’, while nothing the man said does in fact suggest that he found her to be good looking. Reflecting on it, she seems to arrive at the same conclusion, that it was in fact not a compliment, that it was unsolicited, and that it denigrates her race. Lavanya’s case is far from extraordinary. The twitter trend #YouOkaySis that went viral in the summer of 2014 captured the intersection between harassment and race, with African-American women tweeting about their experiences being harassed on the street, and the police’s failure to respond to harassment of black women³² (Berlatsky 2014).

While street harassment is inherently sexual in nature, some remarks – especially when directed towards women of color – can also be just downright insulting and derogatory, as the previous story shows and this one also demonstrates:

When walking into a store in Sacramento, a worker approached me and told me that I “better not steal anything”. I am Hispanic so I found it incredibly rude & irrational as I was only looking at some makeup, and did no such thing to provoke her comments. (Anonymous, Hollaback 2014)

This person’s story perfectly illustrates the negative stereotypes people have about racial minorities. While a white person is just as likely as anyone else to shoplift, people tend to

³² There is also a widespread sentiment among women of color that feminism in the West mostly centers on the experience of white women and fails to take into account the intersections with race. See Carr (2013) for more about how the NY SlutWalk movement splintered and eventually died out, due to its neglect of women of color.

have a prejudice against people of color (especially young males). This is evident in the literature on criminology, more specifically the ‘broken windows’ approach, ‘zero tolerance’ policies, and more recently the ‘stop and frisk’ practices in many larger American cities, which have disproportionately targeted blacks and Hispanics (Gelman et al. 2007, Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). The issue of the harassment racial minorities are subject to in public spaces became very evident the last year, with social media trends such as #ShoppingWhileBlack, #DrivingWhileBlack, and the recent #BlackWomenMatter and #SayHerName (the two latter aiming to raise awareness around female police brutality victims) all in response to the treatment of African-Americans at the hands of white police officers (Warren 2009, Matthews 2014, Al Jazeera 2015). According to Gardner (1995) black women are not treated on equal terms as their white counterparts in ‘public aid’ situations, with white people of both genders avoiding contact with them. As one of her respondents contended: “They act like I’m going to steal something... rape them or steal their wallets” (Gardner 1995:233).

Gardner (1995) alludes to the intersection between race and harassment, and that in many instances her respondents felt their race was the reason for their discrimination, more so than their gender (this was especially true for black women being harassed by white men). Interestingly, she also discerns how her white respondents’ fear of male crime was often structured by racism, evoked by comments such as “I’m blonde, he was black, that’s why it [harassment] happened” (Gardner 1995:140) or ‘you have to be extra careful with black guys’. This is an interesting finding as the dominating narrative in Western societies holds that only ‘some men’ (i.e. working class, men of color³³) harass women, although there is no apparent basis for this claim. Ironically then, one disadvantaged group discriminates against another (white women against black males).

In an interesting study on men’s experiences of being feared in public places, Day (2006:574) found that while slightly more than half of her male respondents reported being aware that women in public places were afraid of them, there were huge discrepancies in terms of race. While a whole of 100% of her black respondents and 82% of the Hispanic men she surveyed reported noticing strange women being fearful of them in public spaces, this number dropped to 53% and 52% respectively for White and Asian men (ibid.). In terms of explanations for why these men thought they were being feared (or not) by women in public spaces, most white men attributed this to individual characteristics such as ‘I look like a nice

³³ Ironically, Hollaback’s ‘10 hours of walking in NYC as a woman’ video was criticized for disproportionately portraying men of color as harassers, even in ‘white-dominated’ areas such as Wall Street.

guy’ or ‘I don’t dress or act threatening’, while the men of color saw themselves through the eyes of the women as a potentially violent, racialized group (which again alludes to objectification theory, and how people come to self-objectify through the gaze of others) (Day 2006:576).

9.3 Gender Expression

It is not only queer women and women of color who are subject to a disproportionate amount of harassment, however. In fact, transgender women experience arguably the most harassment. As scholars on queer theory contend (Butler 1988, Namaste 1996, Browne 2004, Doan 2010), in a society with only two perceived genders existing, this causes some problems for people who do not ‘fit’ into either category (male/female). As Doan (2010) points out, the failure to include transgender and intersexed people leads to certain gendered sites feeling inherently oppressive and hostile, as they are not accommodating to people transgressing the gender dichotomy. Browne (2004) discusses this in relation to ‘the bathroom problem’³⁴, where gender ambiguous people are being ‘evaluated’ on the performance of their gender and harassed in public bathrooms, if they fail to ‘pass’ as either male or female. The constant fear among trans- and intersexed people of being subject to hate crimes or ‘genderbashed’³⁵ in public places lead them to self-police their own presentation, either dressing according to the expectations of their gender, or simply avoiding going to certain places at certain times (Namaste 1996). As one of Namaste’s (1996:229) respondents exclaimed: “I’m so tired of faggots³⁶ thinking that they have it the worst. They don’t know the half of it! It’s not like they have to pass everyday for a genetic...”. The promising nature of the umbrella term ‘the LGBT community’ is deceiving at best for transgenders, as like Namaste (1996) points out transgenders are often shunned by queer people and excluded from queer communities, further marginalizing their role in society. Transgenders are also more at risk of violence and sexually transmitted infections due to their overrepresentation in the sex work industry, where they often face police brutality (ibid).

³⁴ There is currently a debate in the U.S. about transgender peoples access to public bathrooms, and whether they should be allowed to use the bathrooms corresponding to their gender identity instead of their biological gender. See Steinmetz (2015).

³⁵ While there is an expanding body of literature on sexual violence against women, queer women and women of color, there is still scarce research on transgender women, despite the pervasive violence against them in public spaces.

³⁶ The slur used here referring to queer people also illustrates the tensions and/or resentment between members of the LGBT community.

Many gender scholars have long been advocating for the need to see gender as with sexual orientation: something fluid, where you fall somewhere on a 'spectrum', and not into a 'fixed box'. Butler's (1988) notion of gender as a performance, as opposed to an innate and stable identity, is evident in Johnny's story:

I'm technically male but am more comfortable by dressing to look androgynous and/or more female. I wasn't dressed as a girl exactly, but while walking to my flat a guy who was perhaps in his mid 60's, who was just standing there doing nothing, grabbed me and felt my private parts through my trousers quite thoroughly. As I looked at him in horror, he nodded, grinned and said "just checking." I ran and called the police. They came down and interviewed me. They then asked me what I was "expecting them to do about it." I was very upset but I managed to ask them to press charges. They refused and just left. They weren't rude to me, but he was still out there later. I just feel so vulnerable and powerless as if the police won't help me, what can I do? I'm still trying to work out who I am and how I feel and this has really set me back and hurt me. Why did he feel to need to check me like that? (Johnny, Hollaback 2014).

This story shows the scrutiny gender non-conforming people are subject to on an everyday basis when traversing public space. As Johnny says, he is 'technically' (i.e. biologically) male, but he prefers to dress more androgynous or female. In doing that, he is not performing his 'male gender' according to cultural scripts of what is expected of him, making him a 'gender deviant'. As Butler (1988) points out, when people can't determine your gender, they get confused and possibly angry, which explains why this man felt he was entitled to 'check' what Johnny's 'real' gender was, by examining his genitalia. This incidence is an obvious invasion of privacy, and qualifies as groping/sexual assault (although the police seemed to disagree). What is interesting about this story is not only that Johnny felt violated by this stranger's actions, but rather that he is confused as to why the man felt 'the need to check' his gender. As he says, he is still trying to 'figure out' who he is himself and why is that anyone else's business? Woolf (1929) arguably preceded her time when she contemplated if one's gender identity must match one's biological gender in order to feel at ease.

This next story further illustrates the notion of gender performance, albeit in a bit more 'humorous' way with the harasser mistaking the genders of a couple:

My dad just told me that when he was dating mum he took her to Wales and this man came up behind them and obviously got their genders wrong (mum had short hair and dad had long hair that he tied up in a ponytail) and pinched dad's bum. Dad turned around and gave him the sleaziest smile he could and the man was shocked. I'm laughing so hard right now. (Anonymous, Everyday Sexism 2015).

This story also clearly demonstrates how gender is, as Butler (1988) reiterates, a ‘social temporality’, or a performative accomplishment, which the social audience and the actors themselves come to accept, reproduce, and believe. This explains why the harasser assumed the man was a woman, since he was performing what is largely seen to be a ‘female identity’, having long hair (although this aspect of ‘doing’ one’s gender seems to be changing). Needless to say, there is nothing innate about genders which dictates that women need to have long hair or wear dresses, while men should have short hair and wear jeans.

Gender is a constructed social and cultural identity or a ‘historical situation’, rather than a ‘natural fact’, as de Beauvoir (1956) claims. While the woman might have been suspected to be a lesbian (since she has short hair) in another context, since she was now with a partner with long hair, she was automatically assumed to be male. This story, however comically experienced or told, goes to show how arbitrary these reified and ‘naturalized’ conceptions we have about gender are, and that it might be time to transgress these historically and traditionally conceived gender stereotypes and roles, if we want to progress as an inclusive, gender equal society where everyone has the right to feel safe in their own neighborhood or on their way to work.

10. The Way Forward

In this thesis I have tried to demonstrate the pervasiveness of street harassment in the Western world, and the profound impacts it has on women’s use of and sense of safety while in public space. Tracing the spatialization of gender relations back to the pre-Industrial Revolution period, I illuminated how women’s role in society, particularly in terms of access to and use of public space has developed, and been segmented in the public/private divide. Moreover, I have discerned how street harassment and women’s consequent fear of sexual assault contributes to an experienced unequal access to public space. As the stories gathered from Hollaback and Everyday Sexism demonstrate, street harassment probes women to deploy various ‘rape-avoidance strategies’ while traversing this space alone, such as being hyper-vigilante to their surroundings, not going out after dark, or simply avoiding certain areas altogether. These behavioral tactics suggest that women in the 21st century still do not enjoy a right to the city on the same terms as their male counterparts. As the theories of gender performativity and heteronormativity explain, this is even worse for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, not to mention women of color: not only are they being discriminated against based on their gender, but also their sexual orientation, gender expression and race. As

the statistics show, street harassment is widely experienced by women on an everyday basis, and impedes on their freedom of movement and emotional wellbeing.

So what are some possible remedies to combat street harassment and increase women's feeling of safety in public space? It would perhaps strike the reader as strange not to discuss potential solutions after an analysis that shows how devastating this problem is. While that could make for another research subject in itself, it is fruitful to shed light on some very concrete measures that can be taken by local actors to make space more accessible to a larger segment of the population. There is a burgeoning literature within urban studies on the so-called 'safe community' approach and planning initiatives aimed at making urban space more 'user-friendly' (see Luymes and Tamminga 1995, Blöbaum and Hunecke 2005). The basic principles of this approach is that urban space should be designed so open that it allows for both 'visibility by and of others', 'choice and control', and 'solitude without isolation'; meaning that you should be able to clearly see others from a distance and they you, there should be multiple 'path options' (along with entrances and exits) in parks so that you can escape a possible threatening situation – such as stalking – and no secluded areas that cut you off from the 'public view' (ibid). More concrete measures include: more street lights (which have been shown to be one of the biggest crime deterrents), emergency phone boxes in parks and public transit areas, multilingual signs and maps in multicultural neighborhoods, a conscious vegetation design of urban greenways with a focus on trailside visibility and openness, encouragement of park area usage during low-time use periods of the day (to get more 'eyes on the street'), and community watch groups (Luymes and Tamminga 1995, Blöbaum and Hunecke 2005). With a more gender-conscious urban planning, public space could thus be (re)designed in such a way that it is much safer for at-risk and minority groups, which would effectively provide for a more equal access to public space for women.

To return to the question posed at the outset, do women have equal access to urban public space? While the stories examined would suggest otherwise, one should be careful not to victimize women. Koskela (1999) contends that although women's fear of (male sexual) violence is realized as (perceived) spatial exclusions and impacts their sense of safety in public space, that does not mean that women do not traverse this space. She emphasizes that fear is nothing innate about being a woman, but has rather been socially constructed by a still very masculine society which tends to focus on what women can do in order not to get raped, instead of teaching not to rape (ibid.). And whereas women's 'spatiality of fear' largely impacts their movement throughout this sexualized space, the vast majority of women worldwide are daily bravely *defying* these invisible constraints imposed upon their mobility.

While Bowman (1993) claimed that street harassment leads to an ‘informal ghettoization of women’, that is not the whole picture. Women in public are rarely seen as ‘indecent’, ‘lower class’, ‘prostitutes’, ‘bohemians’ or ‘lesbians’ anymore, as Wilson (1991) discussed was the case in the 18th and 19th century. And as Koskela (1999) argues, the more women appropriate space, the more other women are encouraged to use the same space and feel safe while doing so. This notion is evident in the rebranding of the ‘take back the night’ campaigns of the 1970s, which are now known as ‘reclaim the streets’, under the rallying call that the streets belong to women too.

To pose one last question for future consideration: Is there anything we can do as a society, to welcome women as equal citizens? Interesting topics for further research, which have been debated on social media as of late but not warranted any academic research is *rape culture*. The examples are manifold: High school dress code policies that at the same time shame and sexualize the bodies of pubescent girls and teach them that they are responsible for distracting boys attention (see Luxen 2015); adverts that use sex and a woman’s body to sell their products, or play into gender stereotypes (many of which are geared towards children) (see Cresci 2015); rape prevention posters that blame women for their own victimization, advising them to watch their drink, instead of teaching not to date-rape drug (see Sanghani 2015); media’s reaction and society’s disbelief in rape survivors coming forth and telling their stories, accusing them of ‘crying wolf’ because they did not report the assault right away (see Bahadur 2015); movies aimed at a young audience such as John Hughes classic *Sixteen Candles* (1984) where the male protagonist in one scene says that he could violate his passed out girlfriend in ten different ways if he wanted to (see Benfer 2009); and not to mention rap lyrics that glorify rape, like Robin Thicke’s infamous “Blurred Lines” that was banned by several British student unions when it came out due to its attitude towards consent, insinuating that not all rapes are ‘legitimate rapes’ because ‘you know you want it’ (see Linskey 2013). As already touched upon, these attitudes further work to normalize and trivialize sexual harassment, while at the same time perpetuating traditional gender roles.

All of these examples suggest that we still have a long way ahead of us in making women feel like full-worthy members of society, with their gender being irrelevant. Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood has in this respect an interesting take on women’s role in society in her dystopian *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) which takes place in a future where women have returned to being what Woolf called ‘the protected sex’, having solely a procreating role in a rigidly patriarchic society. Not only are women not allowed to write, but signs have been replaced by symbols, because women are not supposed to read. In one scene the main

protagonist reminisces to the time before when women could roam the streets as they pleased, before quickly adding that *of course* this depended on the time of day, the area, who she was with and what she would wear. That was the time of ‘freedom to’, now was the time of ‘freedom of’, as women walked down the streets chaperoned, with no men shouting obscenities after them (Atwood 1985:30-31). Hopefully there is a middle ground.

To end with the words of Woolf’s character (1929:46): “Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt, that you can set upon the freedom of my mind”. Let us only hope that by the time her predicted hundred year period is up, women can aspire to *more* than the freedom of mind, and not only will the libraries be open to them, but the cities and streets of their very own neighborhoods.

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