GENDER AND GENERATIONAL BARRIERS AND TECHNOLOGICAL INDUCEMENTS TO COMMUNICATION OF PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT (PSH) EXPERIENCES

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By

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This study seeks to better understand how recipients of public sexual harassment (PSH) communicate about their experiences. By combining research on public sexual harassment (PSH), microaggression theory, sexual objectification, and other forms of violence against women, I created a framework of analysis and then conducted a content analysis of the two most popular online forums in the US for reporting incidents of PSH—Hollaback! and StopStreetHarassment. The coding provided basic information about what is posted in these forums along with interesting insights into conversations about PSH offline and online. The analysis suggests that generational differences do not impact conversations about PSH but gender differences do—in a negative manner. Further, the study demonstrates that PSH forums are a strong technological inducement to communication of stories that might not get shared in the offline world.
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Many thanks,
Jacqueline F. Beilhart
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Conversations surrounding public sexual harassment, also termed in common parlance as “street harassment,” “catcalling,” and “wolf whistling,” have become rampant online. Whether on a personal blog or on a reporting board hosted by a nonprofit, women are connecting electronically to discuss this harassment. The nonprofits encouraging these discussions include Collective Action for Safe Places, Don’t Be Silent, Hollaback!, and Stop Street Harassment. All of these organizations’ websites feature forums for women to report harassment along with resources and articles on harassment. Many even host workshops, and some organize political action. In addition to these groups, special projects like *Catcalled, Harassment of New York,* and *How Many Women Find Street Harassment Flattering?* exist, all of whose sole purpose is talking about street harassment. Public sexual harassment has attracted the attention of the mainstream media as well. This past August, *The Daily Beast* published an article, “Hey Stranger, Stop Telling Me To Smile,” on an artist doing anti-street harassment work. Then in September, *The Atlantic* had “An App to Help Women Avoid Street Harassment,” an article on Hollaback!’s new version of their smartphone app. Public sexual harassment came up again in October this time in *The New York Times* with their article “A Worldwide Fight Against Street Harassment.” However, the academic community has remained largely silent on this issue only producing a few pieces on the subject over the last decade. And while women do seem to be doing a lot of talking with each other, anecdotally there does not appear to be much discussion between the sexes.
In analyzing public sexual harassment (PSH), I must first define it. There are very few studies in the academic literature on PSH, and thus the definition has not crystalized in that arena. Further, the anti-street harassment movement continues to grow daily with several grassroots organizations shepherding it. Given this organic nature of the situation, I have looked to how women in the online anti-street harassment communities define it. The posts on these sites deal with encounters in public spaces that the woman interprets as sexual in nature—generally through objectification—and as threatening. As the female CNN reporter Emily Smith describes it, “Fear and discomfort are what define sexual harassment” (Smith, 2012). These interactions can range from anything from a stare to assault. Liz Gorman wrote on the Collective Action for Safe Spaces website about an incident in which a man riding by on a bicycle stopped and quickly groped her vagina while she waited at a bus stop. Her article is part of Collective Action for Safe Spaces’ “ongoing series on personal writings on street harassment” (Collective Action for Safe Spaces, 2012). On the other end of the spectrum rests two journal entries as part of the Catcalled project. Participant five writes, “I was afraid not just of catcalls but of looks; the way anyone would look at you. I was afraid of being a person people could look at, because when they saw me, they would see woman, not person. Object, not person. Sex, not person.” Participant three echoes this sentiment, journaling, “it was constant leering. These heavy, unblinking stares. I absolutely hate it, and I hate my own reaction to it” (Catcalled, 2012). Thus, two separate sites dedicated to talking about public sexual harassment include stories ranging from an assault to a stare. Therefore, I keep my definition the same: public encounters ranging from a stare to an assault in which the victim feels threatened. I also contain the harassment to that of a sexual nature; so, harassment based on race, gender identity, and sexual preference will
not be addressed, though many women in these online communities discuss sexual harassment in relation to their own race, gender identity, and sexual preference.

While there is an occasional man who recounts a personal experience with public sexual harassment (PSH) or witnesses an act of PSH, the posts on the online forums are dominated by women relating their experiences. Further, when these women reflect on how their harassment relates to society as a whole, they describe what they see as the state of women. Women also experience greater frequency of sexual violence than men. The Centers for Disease Control’s 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that one-third of women experience non-contact, unwanted sexual experiences compared to 12.8 percent of men. The same study found that almost one in five women had been raped in their lifetime compared to one in seventy-one men (Centers for Disease Control, 2010). In a study by Holly Kearl in 2008, more than 99 percent of 811 female participants reported experiencing public sexual harassment at some point in their life (Kearl, 2008).

Unfortunately, there are no studies I could identify on whether or not men and women communicate on this issue. My supposition that young women only talk with other young women about their public sexual harassment experiences comes partially from personal experiences and conversations; male friends, colleagues, and classmates all express shock at the extent of harassment I and my female friends and acquaintances have been subject to, and my female friends tell me that the topic is not one that they discuss with men. The absence of men on the online anti-street harassment communities is also telling of a female-only conversation. Several women in these forums also reflect that this is a topic they only discuss with their female friends. Naomi Zeveloff remarks in her article “The Toll of Street Harassment” for Forward, that on the one hand, street harassment is “so pervasive in my life and in the lives of my friends that
it’s like commenting on the weather,” but on the other, it “feels unseemly to talk about something so personal and so sexual that I have no control over” (Zeveloff, 2012). The vital importance of the sexual element of this experience on discussion can be understood with a reading of a recent study by Tamar Saguy that found that when women believe men to be focusing on the woman’s body, that woman is more likely to be silent. The study is suggestive of how sexual objectification can impact women’s contributions to intergender conversation. Finally, many harassed women in the online forums express an inability to respond to their harasser’s comments—a quiet that might spill over into any possibilities of intergender discussions on the topic. As participant eleven in Catcalled journals on the topic of verbally responding to harassers: “I know myself. I dream of eloquence and rage. And then I walk away, my tongue paralyzed” (Catcalled, 2012). This inability to speak in response to harassment in the moment could be suggestive of hesitancy to speak about the incident to a man.

To investigate this possible communication barrier, I will undertake a content analysis of the online forums dedicated to public sexual harassment. For this textual study, I look at a variety of online sources to understand the inducements to communication that technology has provided on this topic. These special blogging projects are specifically focused on public sexual harassment. Through this study, I hope to find answers to the following questions: How do people communicate about their experiences of public sexual harassment online? Do they mention in real life (IRL) conversations? Does gender and age seem to play a role in who people talk to IRL about PSH? How do these forums encourage conversation? Does there seem to be an information gap between those who are on the forums and people posters talk to who are not on the forums?
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Sexual Harassment

Holly Kearl (2010), founder of Stop Street Harassment and author of a book by the same name, defines public sexual harassment (PSH), or as she terms it “street harassment,” concisely as “gender-based harassment in public spaces” and more explicitly as “unwelcome words and actions by men in public places that invade the physical and emotional space of unknown women in a disrespectful, creepy, startling, scary, or insulting way” and excludes clubs and bars from her definition of “public place” (p. 6-7). This last definition was developed out of an informal survey in which she asked women to define street harassment themselves. Kearl’s definition is a conglomeration of these women’s responses with their most popular word choices informing Kearl’s definition. While Kearl’s definition genders victims as females and perpetrators as males, I do not hold to these markers in my own definition of public sexual harassment. Oraia Reid and Emily May, founders of RightRides and Hollaback! and leading experts on PSH, define this societal problem as “when men I do not know have harassed me in public because I am female” (in Kearl, 2010, p. xix). These definitions highlight the three main criteria of the phenomenon: (1) a public setting, (2) an act by a stranger, and (3) harassment based on the gender presentation of the recipient.

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1 A nonprofit dedicated to documenting and ending gender-based street harassment worldwide. The organization provides a forum for women to share their stories in addition to providing resources on their site, conducting DC information sessions and workshops for dealing with PSH, and doing advocacy work with local government and businesses.
2 A nonprofit that fights gender-based harassment and sexual assault through community mobilization, policy advocacy, community education, and providing rides at night to vulnerable populations.
3 A nonprofit that works to end PSH through a network of local activists around the world. The group also curates an online forum and app where women can report instances of PSH.
Wesselmann and Kelly (2010) also use these three markers in their recent study on PSH, defining it as “experiencing unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public contexts” (p. 451). When looking for a more concrete definition of harassment, Wasselmann and Kelly’s “unwanted attention,” a phrase that echoes Kearl’s longer definition, works well given some harasser or bystander sentiments that the attention should be taken as a compliment. Even if the original intent was for the action to be complimentary, if the recipient finds it unwanted, it is harassment. Gardner (1995), author of one of the first books on PSH—Passing By, underlines the importance of our first criteria of “a public setting” in her definition: “that group of abuses, harryings, and annoyances characteristic of public places and uniquely facilitated by communication in public.” Here, Gardner suggests that the very fact of the act occurring in a public place allows for a harassment that would not be possible in another setting. This suggestion will be explored later in this literature review in consideration of potential motivations of the perpetrators of harassment. A final useful definition is that of US Equal Employment Commission on workplace sexual harassment. This definition is helpful as workplace sexual harassment has been a problem recognized by our country’s legal system more expansively at the state and federal levels and for a longer period of time than public sexual harassment. While the knowledge of the harasser is the key difference (in workplace harassment, one knows one’s harasser while in public sexual harassment, one’s harasser is a stranger), the actions themselves and the ways that they make the receiver feel are quite similar. The US Equal Employment Commission define it as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.” They further clarify that harassment “does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person’s sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about
women in general” (US Equal Employment Commission, 2013). When we explore the common actions termed as PSH, we will see how the workplace sexual harassment dovetails with the variety of sexual harassment experienced in public settings.

Much of the early academic undertakings on PSH were theory building to attempt to explain PSH. These articles focused on why PSH is threatening to women (Kissling, 1991), how PSH restricts women’s activities outdoors (Bowman, 1993), and the legalities of PSH and how the law might help to fix the problem (Thompson, 1994). Outside of academia, several municipalities including Beijing (2002), Chicago (2003), Tokyo (2004), New York City (2007), Cairo & Giza (2008), Sana’a (2009), and New Delhi & Old Delhi (2009), have undertaken research to determine how widespread of a problem PSH is. In all of these studies, the majority of women surveyed reported experiencing PSH. These women found PSH to be threatening behavior, and many reported experiencing PSH frequently on public transit (Kearl, 2010).

One of the first academic studies to interview women about their experiences with PSH was conducted in the late 1980s through the beginning of the 1990s in Indianapolis. Gardner sat in public places to observe instances of PSH. She would then approach the perpetrator or the receiver of the harassment and ask to interview him or her. She ended up interviewing 293 women who had experienced instances of PSH. 97% of the women agreed that these experiences were “troublesome.” 66% of the women interviewed mentioned experiencing “violence or near-violence by men in public places: 12 had been stranger-raped; 22 had been in a situation that they thought was likely to turn into stranger-rape but had not; and 32 had experienced serious physical harassment from a stranger” (Gardner, 1995, p. 7). Following Gardner’s work, a Canadian study from 2000 explored similar questions with a larger dataset. Using data from a 1994 survey of 12,300 Canadian women; the researchers found that 80 percent of the women
surveyed had experienced PSH and had found it to have a significant, negative impact on their feelings of safety in public spaces (MacMillan, 2000).

**Actions.**

Expanding upon considerations of the frequency and general negative effect of PSH, Kearl conducted two informal surveys, one in the spring of 2007 with 225 respondents and one in the fall of 2008 with 811 female respondents and 90 male respondents. These in-depth surveys sought to understand how women defined PSH themselves, what types of actions women regarded as PSH, how often these actions occurred, and how these experiences specifically made them feel. Kearl (2010) published her results in her book *Stop Street Harassment* where she also drew on other research and theories to suggest what might be done to fight the problem. In this survey, she broke down the most popular reported forms of PSH to: leering, honking, whistling, making vulgar gestures, saying sexually explicit comments, following, sexual touching or grabbing, masturbating, assaulting, and other (sexist comment, kissing noises, blocking path). Similarly, Gardner (1995) listed forms of PSH as: pinching, slapping, hitting, shouted remarks, vulgarity, insults, sly innuendo, ogling, and stalking. How these actions affect the recipient will be explored in the next section.

**Recipients.**

While the studies have found that the great majority of women surveyed and interviewed have experienced PSH at some point in their lives, there has not been much evidence to point to circumstances that might make PSH more likely to occur. However, based on her own research, Kearl (2010) postulates:

> If a woman lives in a community where she knows everyone, she will not experience street harassment there, since street harassment occurs between
strangers. A woman in a rural area probably will experience less frequent street harassment than a woman in a city because she will encounter far fewer people on any given day. Older women tend to face less harassment than younger women, perhaps because they are seen as less vulnerable and because they are not as sexually objectified. Women who are not in public often or who are not often alone there will experience less harassment than women who are in public often or who often are alone. Women who drive are usually harassed less than women who walk or take public transportation; however, they can still face harassment walking to or from their car or at stop lights. Women who experience other forms of harassment, such as racism or homophobia or transphobia also may experience an increase in street harassment compared to women who do not. Last, women who live in areas with more gender equality likely will face less harassment than those who live in places with less gender equality. (p. 95)

My content analysis looks more closely at the types of harassment women experience and how women internalize and react to those experiences. In addition, the public online forums tend to be used anonymously, and the women write in very little demographic information.

Receptions and reactions of recipients.

While Kearl (2010) notes that the perception of which actions by strangers in public places constitute harassment varies from woman to woman, she finds that the main characteristics that inform how a woman reacts to an act that could be received as PSH are: type and severity, frequency, sense of safety, and the perceived intent of the perpetrator. For these reasons, an action that can make one woman feel harassed might not register high on another woman’s radar; therefore, it is difficult to measure PSH based on an objective standard of
harassment. When women were asked how perceived acts of PSH made them feel, the women used words such as “unwanted,” “uncomfortable,” and “threat.” Further, Kearl’s survey found that “most women experience harassment when they are alone, and about 94 percent say that being alone makes street harassment feel very threatening” (p. 98).

More specific work on women’s emotional and physical responses to PSH were conducted in two more recent studies. The first, conducted by Fairchild and Rudman (2008), asked women how PSH made them feel and how they coped with the harassment. They found that women who used passive strategies—both in the action the woman takes in the moment (ignoring the harasser) and in how the woman feels about the harassment in the moment (blaming herself)—were more likely to feel upset, unsafe, and victimized than women who took more active coping strategies (confronting the harasser). Finally the study also found that women who were harassed were more likely to objectify themselves; self-objectification was measured using McKinley and Hyde's Objectified Body Consciousness Scale looking at body surveillance (concern with body appearance over body functioning) and body shame (how respondents feel about their bodies’ imperfections). These women also perceived a greater risk of being raped and reported a restricting of their activities in public due to these experiences of PSH. Fairchild’s next study (2010) investigated how the context of PSH affected how women experienced the incidences. This study found that if a harasser was younger and more attractive, the woman would be less likely to feel threatened or harassed by the behavior.

Finally, Kearl (2010) notes how the very nature of the spectrum of possible harassments influences how women experience the event:

The inability to gauge the total severity of an incident until after it is over may
make some women simultaneously feel flattered at the attention, but also worried that it may go further. If it does not go further, then women may be relieved and say that it was a harmless compliment. The reality of severe street harassment and the chance that “complimentary” harassment can escalate into severe harassment must be taken into consideration. (p. 94)

The threat and fear that women experience when sexually harassed in a public space clearly demonstrates a negative psychological effect. Of particular interest as well is that the “perceived intent” of the perpetrator is important to how the recipient responds to the act and that, as Kearl demonstrates, the range of possible outcomes when PSH begins is a strong factor in upsetting the recipient.

**Intent of the perpetrators.**

It is important to understand the intent of the perpetrators as knowing their motives might better inform strategies for anti-PSH activists to discourage this behavior. More research is needed to understand what kinds of men participate in PSH and why. Kearl’s survey found that many women begin to experience PSH at a young age and that many of the perpetrators are men old enough to be the recipient’s father or grandfather. Kearl speculates (based on a few informal surveys) that men might harass due to negative presentations of masculinity in society, to exert power over women and show them disrespect (particularly when the woman in question is perceived to be in a higher socioeconomic position than the man), and to impress their friends. This final concept was explored in a study by Wesselmann and Kelly (2010) that found that the men surveyed believed that the average college male was more likely to commit PSH when in a group than by himself. The study also explored how likely college men believed another college male would be to commit PSH when the harasser is in a group as opposed to being alone. This
study found that men believe other men to be more likely to publicly harass an unknown female when he has other male friends with him.

**Microaggressions**

As there have been few studies specifically on public sexual harassment, it is helpful to draw from an emerging field of research called microaggressions. In fact, one gender microaggression study by Swim et al. (2010) actually prominently discusses PSH. In this study, focus groups of women were asked to discuss forms of subtle sexism that they dealt with frequently. One of the main experience types that was discussed was PSH.

**Microaggression definitions.**

Sue (2010a), a pioneering scholar in the field, differentiates microaggressions from overt forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia by marking them as smaller incidences that tend to be indirect or subtle and in which the underlying message conveyed to the recipient invalidates her at “the personal or group level,” threatens and intimidates, or relegates her “to inferior status and treatment.” While recipients are targeted “solely upon their marginalized group membership,” according to Sue, society frequently dismisses these acts as trivial or harmless “small slights.” Further, the perpetrator of these incidents might not even be consciously committing the microaggression. The key to the harmful nature of microaggressions is that these actions occur with such regularity that individual microaggressions add to the sum of the total experienced microaggressions. Thus, one incident is not experienced in isolation, but rather reminds the recipient of all of the previous iterations; therefore, a single microaggression can have a much larger effect on the individual than what one “small slight” might normally cause. This cumulative effect certainly echoes PSH studies discussed earlier. Research on microaggressions has found that they can have a significant effect on the psychological well-being of marginalized
groups, causing “humiliation and pain” and “reduce[d] self-determination,” denying equal access in society, and confining them to an inferior societal status.

In the definitions of PSH, the act occurs because of the recipient’s perceived gender, or as microaggression theory would phrase it, the recipient’s marginalized group membership; therefore, the victim is targeted because she is female, or African-American, or a lesbian, etc. Kearl (2010) defines PSH as disrespectful, creepy, startling, scary, or insulting, a phrasing that certainly echoes the microaggression’s effects of “humiliation and pain, reduce[d] self-determination” (Sue, 2010a, p. 6-7). Finally, Gardner’s (1995) use of the words “that group of abuses, harryings, and annoyances” [my emphasis] in her definition demonstrates her view that PSH has a collective effect similar to that of microaggressions. Further, in the U.S. Equal Employment Commission’s description of sexual harassment in the workplace, they include: “Although the law doesn’t prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment” (US Equal Employment Commission, 2013). The government’s recognition that the strength of sexual harassment can be cumulative in nature gives further strength to understanding the harmful effects of PSH as a repeated microaggression.

Sue (2010a) himself uses PSH as an example of microaggression by listing “whistles or catcalls are heard from men as a woman walks down the street;” therefore, I believe that this theoretical framework will prove helpful to better understanding PSH. Sue goes on to state that the recipient of such an act as described above might hear an underlying message of “Your body/appearance is for the enjoyment of men. You are a sex object” (p. 4). While most microaggression studies have focused on race, these studies can help to fill the gaps of scholarship on PSH on the psychological effects for the recipients. Capodilupo (2010), another
microaggression scholar, conducted a study exploring microaggressions from a gender
perspective defining them as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and
environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative sexist slights and
insults toward women” (p. 197). As we next look at the actions considered microaggressions and
the ways in which the recipient interprets and internalizes these harassments, we will better
understand how PSH fits within Capodilupo’s parameters for a gender microaggression.

**Microaggression actions.**

The actions described by Kearl and Gardner as PSH match with those reported in the
gender microaggression study by Capodilupo. In these focus groups of women discussing
microaggressions they frequently encountered, he found that in addition to “verbal comments
and nonverbal gestures such as staring, participants discussed being approached and even
touched by strangers in public places,” in particular, the women reported many incidents on
public transportation (p. 202).

Microaggression theory breaks down the actions that fall under its umbrella into four
different types, which can help explain the variety of types and effects of PSH. Sue (2010a) lays
out the main forms of microaggressions as microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations, and
environmental microaggressions. Sue asserts that *microassaults* are direct and public “racist,
sexist, or heterosexist statements (using racial epithets or making catcalls towards women, for
example)” or nonverbal attacks like avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions.
Moreover, microassaults are often conscious attacks on the part of the perpetrator.

Unlike microassaults, Sue (2010a) suggests that *microinsults* are often unconscious; these
verbal or nonverbal interactions “communicate rudeness, insensitivity, slights, and insults that
demean a person’s racial, gender, sexual orientation, or group identity and heritage.” Further,
Sue demonstrates that many microinsults are disguised as a compliment: the “contradictory communication starts with what appears to be a positive statement but is undermined with an insulting or negative metacommunication.” Certainly many specific acts of PSH, like yelling “Hey sexy!,” fall into this category of demeaning metamessages disguised as compliments. This disguise can complicate the study of PSH as the perpetrator's intent might, in fact, have been to compliment, but because it was taken as harassment by the recipient, it would still be considered PSH. Further, some victims might be unsure of whether or not they should be offended or if they are justified in feeling offended by a harassment cloaked as a compliment.

Another often unconscious microaggression is microinvalidation. Sue (2010a) defines these as “Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a [minority]” (p. 8). This type of microaggression will be particularly important when we explore how and why women communicate about their experiences of PSH. The dismissal of these experiences as trivial can be particularly damaging to the psychological wellbeing of the recipient according (Sue, 2010a). Lastly, environmental microaggressions are microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations that occur at the macro-level (systemic and environmental levels) (Sue, 2010a). An understanding of the environmental level of microaggressions is important to understanding Kearl and other anti-PSH advocates’ argument that this form of microaggression so affects women that it leads to women feeling unsafe in public places and thus unable to fully participate in public space (Kearl, 2010).

**Reception and reaction of microaggression recipient.**

Capodilupo’s gender microaggression study (2010) found that the women in his focus groups had similar responses to those found in the PSH studies: “the majority of women (across ages) in this study reported being leered at, ‘picked up,’ and even touched by complete
strangers—experiences that made them feel ‘unsafe’ and ‘vulnerable.’” Capodilupo goes on to point out that according to microaggression theory, “the impact of being on the receiving side can cause emotional or physical discomfort, confusion, or even more significant mental health problems” (p. 197). In fact, group-specific microaggression experiences have been shown to have far from trivial effects on the recipient:

Studies reveal that racial microaggressions, while seemingly trivial in nature, have major consequences for persons of color and women. They have been found to (1) assail the mental health of recipients, causing anger, frustration, low self-esteem, and emotional turmoil, (2) create a hostile and invalidating campus or work climate, (3) perpetuate stereotype threat, (4) create physical health problems, (5) saturate the broader society with cues that signal devaluation of social group identities, (6) lower work productivity and problem-solving abilities. (Rivera, 2010, p. 51-52)

These findings allow us to more fully understand the potential effects of frequent and sustained PSH. As there are no studies that deeply dig into PSH’s psychological effects, these microaggression findings are of major import to demonstrating just how damaging PSH can be on a recipient’s emotional and physical health.

The feelings that a victim of PSH experiences after an incident of PSH can be better understood using the framework of Microaggression theory. To start, they experience “attributional ambiguity,” a state in which the recipient questions whether or not a microaggression has actually occurred. In particular the recipient experiences considerable confusion over trying to ascertain the motives of the perpetrator—was he trying to be sexist and make me uncomfortable?, was he trying to pay me a compliment?, was he trying to make me feel
threatened? This questioning could lead to “denying experiential reality” in which the recipient convinces herself that the event did not actually occur. Next is “response indecision” when the recipient debates if she should respond, and if yes, then how. If the recipient does not respond, she may be disappointed in herself and judge herself for being unable to respond. However, should a recipient decide to respond, should she express outrage or attempt to educate the perpetrator, who possibly was unaware of the negative effects of the microaggression? This query leads to Sue’s next step “fearing the consequences.” Should the recipient decide to confront the perpetrator, she might experience negative consequences as a result. As many in minority positions hold less power in some form from the perpetrator of the microaggression, the recipient is likely to fear retaliation from calling out the perpetrator. Another hurdle to action is the recipient’s belief in an “impotency of actions.” Many minority groups believe that any response that they might attempt will have no positive change on the situation or the microaggressor, based on past personal or group experiences. The final hurdle to responding is “time-limited responding.” Microaggressions tend to be very quick interactions, and, therefore, the incident is frequently over before the recipient can decide how to best respond to the situation. The possible range of these mental questionings over every microaggression causes the recipient to expend a considerable amount of energy, mental and psychological, that could have been spent more positively by the recipient. In the end, Sue finds that the most frequent response to a microaggression is to do nothing (Rivera, 2010).

**Intent of the microaggressors.**

Microaggression theory holds that microaggressors might act intentionally or unintentionally as many perpetuators are unaware of the biases that they hold and that these beliefs might be psychologically harmful to the group in question. Of significance to the
Wesselmann and Kelly study is Sue’s (2010b) findings that many microaggressors will engage in a microassault when “they feel relatively safe, such as being in the presence of people who share their beliefs and attitudes or knowing that they can get away with their offensive words and deeds. Safety often relies on the inaction of others in the face of biased actions” (p. 29-30). Thus, Sue’s findings correspond to Wesselmann and Kelly’s that PSH, a form of microaggression, is more likely to occur when the perpetrator is in a group of friends. Also important to understanding perpetrators of PSH is Sue’s assessment that microaggressors feel that they have some degree of anonymity—certainly a criteria well covered by harassing a stranger.

**Cumulative Impact on Recipients**

While we have explored the struggles that recipients of PSH experience in the immediate wake of this type of microaggression, and we have seen how microaggression theory shows that the cumulative nature of these acts can have major psychological impacts on the recipients, it is important to consider in what specific ways PSH impacts women’s lives.

**Objectification.**

Capodilupo (2010) defines sexual objectification as “behaviors and verbal and nonverbal indicators that reduce a woman to her physical appearance and/or sexuality” (p. 202). Acts of PSH frequently involve sexual objectification of the recipients of the attentions—from leering to shouts about a woman’s appearance. Many studies have found that objectification can be incredibly detrimental psychologically; in fact, “women who reported high instances of being gazed at also reported viewing themselves on appearance-based terms” (Capodilupo, 2010, p. 196). Further, Capodilupo (2010) reports that “objectification of women is associated with depression, low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, and body image issues” (p.
While women likely experience objectification in many aspects of their lives, PSH adds yet another instance of it and renders its own psychological damage.

**Fear in public spaces and equality.**

As the objectification of PSH feeds into the larger context of the recipient’s life experiences with sexual objectification in other situations, many recipients of PSH situate the event in the context of other forms of sexual harassment or violence that they have been subjected to. Gardner (1995) refers to this contextualization as “a continuum of possible events,” a range that she argues begins “when customary civility among strangers is abrogated and end[s] with the transition to violent crime: assault, rape, or murder.” Gardner’s study found that women linked incidents of PSH with the possibility of a violent assault. Kearl’s (2010) surveys collaborated this fear of escalation. She notes that this fear is not unwarranted due to several known crimes of PSH that lead to a rape. Further, she found that 75 percent of women who took her survey reported being followed by an unknown male on at least one occasion. Reid and May even refer to PSH as a “gateway crime” that can lead to more violent crimes like stalking, assault, and rape. Gordon and Riger’s (1989) study demonstrated how impactful the fear of rape is in a woman’s average day. They found that one-third of the women in their study worried at least once a month about the possibility of being raped. These women reported the fear as being “one of those things that’s always been there.” Further, a third of the women who claimed that they never worried about rape still reported regularly engaging in preventative measures to avoid rape. Finally, Fairchild and Rudman’s (2008) study demonstrated that women who experienced PSH were more likely to report higher perceived risk of rape. Given the evidence that women link experiences of PSH with potential escalation and the evidence that fear of rape is a common
part of a woman’s reality, it would suggest that an act of PSH could trigger a large amount of fear (whether conscious or unconscious) in a recipient.

As a result of the fear that PSH instills in women, many recipients restrict their time by themselves in public and are vigilant about being prepared for a possible escalation when out (Kearl, 2010). MacMillan, Nierobisz, and Welsg’s (2000) study found that the women who had experienced PSH felt a significant decrease in perceived safety while out in public. Gordon and Riger’s (1989) study found that more than 60 percent of women they surveyed who lived in urban areas reported feeling “very unsafe” or “somewhat unsafe” when alone in a public place at night. This lack of security for women has led to them being constantly on guard when in public. Kearl’s (2010) study found that women would employ strategies like: “constantly assessing their surroundings, crossing the street or taking another route, scowling, avoiding eye contact, wearing headphones, talking on a cell phone,” holding keys in one hand defensively, “avoiding being out after dark, avoiding going out alone, avoiding a specific neighborhood, purposefully wearing clothes [they] think will attract less attention, [and] exercising at the gym instead of outside” (p. 105).

The decision to take on these proactive measures are reinforced by messages women receive by authority figures like: they should not go out by themselves, they should not go out at night, or they should wear shoes that they can run in (Kearl, 2010). This advice further emphasizes the experiential reality of women that public spaces are not safe spaces for them in particular and that they might not use the space in an equal way to men. Further, Buchwald (1993) demonstrates in her anthology Transforming a Rape Culture how a fear of attack and rape restricts the options a woman feels she has that are “safe.” This very restriction is a major piece
of what she defines as rape culture. Therefore, we see how PSH infringes on women’s use of public spaces.

In fact, Kearl (2010) sees PSH as “one of many manifestations of global gender-inequality” due to its push to keep women in private places (p. 24, Kearl). Microaggression theory agrees, arguing that microaggressions confine the recipient to “the margins of existence in mainstream life,” an act that he sees as an oppression that denies one the “denied full rights of citizenship” by restricting a person’s life choices due to his or her minority status (Sue, 2010a). In Sue’s study with Capodilupo (2008), they found that gender microaggressions can potentially be just as damaging to the recipient as blatant and overt sexism. What makes this subtle form of inequality all the more destructive is that the severity of its effects is frequently denied. Despite how an individual might suffer from these acts, society frequently will cast these feelings as oversensitive and misplaced, thus not respectfully acknowledging a minority group’s experiential reality.

These experiential realities of PSH can in fact be quite debilitating to women’s psyche. I turn to a few online projects outside my coding analysis to demonstrate these feelings. Alice Xie (2012) created a blog project to discuss her PSH experiences. In reflecting on how the sexualization affected her, she writes, “the tiny, illogical, and unshakable fear that no matter how hard I worked, I would never amount to anything more than a body…. That my only worth was sexual. That I was less than human. That I was nothing.” This sentiment was repeated by many of the Catcalled participants—an online journaling project about PSH. Participant five journaled, “I was afraid of being a person people could look at, because when they saw me, they would see woman, not person. Object, not person. Sex, not person” (Catcalled, 2012). Participant six also feels like an object when a man shouts “hey beautiful!” at her when she walks by; she writes, “It
made me feel my appearance is not my own, that it’s not something I can take joy in, but rather something that’s consumable by others” (Catcalled, 2012). Finally, participant eleven discusses how public sexual harassment works to destroy any of her nonphysical self-worth:

for all of my hard work—my Ivy League degree, my multilingualism, my gainful employment—all a man has to do is make a flip comment about my ass, or even just ask me how my day is going in a particular tone, and I am nothing. I am a visually striking set of curves with an inconveniently independent brain stuck up at the top, way above the tits and the hips and the ass.” (Catcalled, 2012)

These feelings of degradation underline how strongly these women see public harassment as a serious issue.

Others link their experiences with public sexual harassment to other forms of sexual violence. Participant four in *Catcalled* writes: “catcalling is a verbal assault and it is a constant reminder of all the sexual violence perpetrated on women worldwide. I know women who have been raped, some whom I'm very close to. I know what it feels like to feel violated, unsafe, ashamed. Catcalls are a trigger for me” (Catcalled, 2012). Participant five in the project clearly fears for her safety when she thinks about standing up for herself in the streets. Tellingly, she comments, “I have no choice. The world is everywhere, and I am just one woman. I want to be empowered, but I also want to survive” (Catcalled, 2012). These women’s journaling of the horrors of the violence inherent in public sexual harassment forcefully demonstrates the severity of the issue.

**Denial of experiential reality and victim blaming.**

Kearl’s surveys found just how much PSH has become engrained in women’s way of experiencing daily life. Therefore, having these experiences dismissed as “a compliment” or a
small slight and being told by a majority group that a reaction is “overly sensitive” can be incredibly detrimental to the minority party and lead to what microaggression theory terms a “clash of realities” between the dominant group and the socially devalued group. These differences in experiential realities are fairly common between majority and minority groups; for example, studies have shown that African-Americans generally believe racism to be a constant and continuing problem for society while most Whites minimize the issue (Sue, 2010b). This divergence in understanding the same event can lead to individuals feeling alienated from society by not having their experiences believed, to individuals not trusting majority groups, and to individuals even blaming themselves for the harassment, feeling as though they deserve it (Sue, 2010a). Victim-blaming appears frequently in sexual harassment research. Kearl (2010) points out that women are frequently forced to bear responsibility for an act of PSH because of “what they wore, where they went, or what time of day or night they were in public” (p. 149-150). Not only are these women denied their reality because of their minority status, as microaggression research would suggest, but the very fact that PSH is an act of sexual objectification also decreases outside sympathy for the recipient. A study by Loughnan, Pina, Vasquez, and Puvia (2013) found that women who are sexually objectified are more likely to be found at fault for their rape and more likely to have their suffering from the assault to be deemed less by an outside party. Denying a person’s experiences and suggesting that those harmful experiences are in fact that person’s fault is psychologically damaging, and, one would assume, it would lead to a disinclination to share one’s story with the majority group. I believe that a lack of sharing is detrimental to fighting public sexual harassment and a more active societal conversation could lead to a decrease in PSH.

**Fighting Street Harassment with Communication**
Thanks to many of the advocacy organizations focused on PSH, the issue has gained much more attention in the media. There are many nonprofits working to spread the word online and in local neighborhoods in addition a range of activities and advocacy work from hosting training sessions for what to do when you are harassed in public to petitioning local governments to install better lighting in high PSH zones (Kearl, 2010). Many of the online boards of these nonprofits and blogs are dedicated to simply providing a space for women to tell their stories. My study hopes to better understand how online public communication works alongside interpersonal conversation to battle the prevalence and detrimental nature of PSH.

Microaggression studies on race have found that while groups in the minority party are well able to identify the microaggression and why it might be problematic, when the issue is presented to the majority party, they are unable to grasp the severity of the offense (Sue, 2010a). By having the majority group deny the experience of the minority group, no unified progress towards fixing the problem can be made. Therefore, microaggression theory would suggest that it is important for men to be more aware of the extent of women’s experiences with PSH. In Kearl’s work with the organization Stop Street Harassment, she has found that recipients sharing their PSH stories is “one of the most effective ground-level methods for raising awareness” as people are more likely to listen and believe people they know. Given the simple fact that most women are harassed when they are alone, it makes sense that many men, who are not harassers, would not be aware of the extent of the problem (Kearl, 2010).

**Affirming recipient’s experiential reality.**

Earlier we saw how microaggression research demonstrates the negative toll that may result from denial of a person’s experiential reality. This denial often occurs because the majority group is not aware of the minority group’s true experiential reality. Majority groups tend to
dictate conversation in mainstream society; therefore, the minority issue is not given the attention that it might deserve. Because of this denial by majority group members and mainstream society, many minority group members seek other minority group members to tell their stories to, so that these stories and their reality might be affirmed (Sue, 2010a). This understanding is echoed by Kearl’s (2010) research, which found that women who shared their stories with other women were able to discover that PSH did not only happen to them, helping them to be better able to break free from self-blame for the event. Research also suggests that women being part of the same group experience are able to provide comfort to one another.

**Muting & co-cultural groups.**

A study by Saguy (2010) found that when a woman believes a man to be focusing on her body, she is more likely to be silent. As we have already seen how women experience objectification, this study would suggest that acts of PSH could also encourage this silence. This muting can also be found in a study based in co-cultural theory—a theory that looks in particular at dominant versus marginalized group interactions. In this theory, dominant groups tend to be unaware of marginalized group realities and thus have a “partial and perverse” view of reality (Orbe & Roberts, 2012). Burnett et al. (2009) used this theory framework to study how men (dominant group) and women (marginalized group) communicated about date rape in a campus environment through a series of focus groups. Their study found that there was a muting of women discussing date rape after the event occurred. Part of this muting they found was due to a distrust of dominant structures like the court system to handle the issue properly. Another reason for muting was found to be women’s own (unwarranted) self-blame for the rape. In particular, the “ambiguity” of date rape leads many women to stay quiet after being raped; this ambiguity makes many women unsure of how others will respond to her telling of her experience. The
research also found that women remained silent on the topic because they did not wish to “relive a physically and emotionally violent experience.” Finally, the researchers suggest that because of this muting, date rape becomes “part of the social milieu,” and then this very normality mutes further discussion of the incidences. Certainly these reasons for muting can also be found in PSH. Many acts of PSH are not illegal, thus dominant structures like the court system are unable to assist the recipient. We have also seen that many recipients of PSH blame themselves, which Burnett’s study would suggest causes muting. Finally, given that PSH victims tend to be confused as to whether or not the act of PSH was truly harassment or not, further muting is likely to occur.

**Online Support Groups.**

As the two forums under investigation for my study are online, it is also important to understand how online conversations might differ from those offline. Social psychologists have conducted a lot of research on online support groups. Martin Tanis (2007) gives a very helpful overview of these studies in a literature review in the Oxford Handbook of Internet Psychology. He describes these online support groups as, in general, a forum where people can post messages to seek help from others in a similar situation and these others can reply if they wish. These forums tend to offer both informational and emotional support. Someone can read first hand stories or tips for coping and handling the situation. Further, a person can share their own story, a disclosure which can have a therapeutic effect in and of itself, and can have an audience who understands what she is going through and show compassion. The internet also allows for a person to interact with others without the geographical and time constraints of offline conversation. The anonymity of online forums can give a person greater freedom to express herself without feelings of shame or embarrassment. The lack of identifiers can also increase
feeling of similarity between group members as they are discussing the common issue that brought them together instead of other parts of their lives that might differentiate them more. These feelings of commonality and groupness can then lead to stronger feelings of trust within the group.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, no research has been conducted to date that investigates how women communicate about PSH and what effect that might have on PSH advocacy, which represents an important oversight in the literature. This study seeks to fill that gap, using a content analysis of the online message forums dedicated to PSH allow for a better understanding of why women choose to share their stories online. Given microaggression research on experiential reality affirmation, I hypothesize that: (H1) women generally only share their stories of public sexual harassment with other women of a similar age due to feelings of shared experience and the belief that the listener will respond in a desired fashion. Further, I pose the following research questions: How do women use online forums to discuss PSH? What characteristics of the PSH incidents do the women discuss most often? What emotions do women express about the incidents? How do women report talking to others about PSH?
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Textual Analysis

In doing a textual analysis of two popular PSH public, online forums, I am able to get to a group who already believe PSH to be a problem and who are looking for ways to express their unhappiness with the societal situation. Additionally, given that these forums are public and that the posters are able to reveal as much information as they feel comfortable doing, I am able to access information that could be emotionally sensitive and would be difficult to obtain through interviews without causing distress on the participants involved. Unfortunately, the public forum also greatly limits the portion of the population that I can research. Those who go to these sites already consider PSH a problem; therefore, I am not able to reach those who are not harassed and those who are harassed but who have not felt driven to discuss it online. Further, harassers themselves and men outside of the PSH forums are also unreachable for this study; therefore, this study is unable to look at harasser intent or what men generally think about PSH themselves. Participants have to be aware of these sites to post to them, and while both Hollaback! and StopStreetHarassment are the leading site in the domestic fight against PSH, they are not so common that one is likely to stumble across their sites without some looking. Further, there may be some recipients of PSH who think that it is wrong, but who find enough coping methods in their own IRL (In Real Life) environment that they do not need to turn online to discuss their experiences. Finally, as the sites do not provide prompts for the posts, I am only able to code what the posters themselves deemed important to share. Thus, some of the incidents discussed might include other features that I was coding for, but as the poster chose to not include those details, they are not able to be part of my research.
Subjects.

I coded postings from the websites www.stopstreetharassment.com and www.ihollaback.com. Both of these sites are dedicated to fighting public sexual harassment. One of the features of both sites is a section where people can choose to share their stories of public sexual harassment. Contributors may post their stories anonymously, but some chose to add their name. Stop Street Harassment and Hollaback! were chosen as sites to code as the organizations themselves are well respected leaders in the anti-public sexual harassment community, the “share my story” sections of the sites were frequently contributed to, and both sites had contributions from the last year. I coded 200 postings from each of these sites. This number was chosen as an average of 17 postings occurred a month on StopStreetHarassment and an average of 16 postings occurred a month on Hollaback! over the course of a year. Therefore, a coding of 200 posts covers about a year for both sites. On StopStreetHarassment, I coded posts from September 10, 2012 to September 28, 2013. On Hollaback!, I coded posts from November 16, 2012 to September 30, 2013. Only posts from Hollaback! and StopStreetHarassment that were tagged as “story” (Hollaback!) or “stories” (StopStreetHarassment) were coded as both sites occasionally posted news stories or videos pertaining to PSH on their blogs. Coding was done over a period of eight weeks, during the Fall of 2013.

None of the posters were alerted to the fact that I coded their contributions. As all of these postings were available on public sites, this lack of knowledge on the part of the posters is acceptable. While posters could choose to reveal as much of their own identity as they wished, all names and usernames were anonymized in my coding and analysis with a simple letter and number combination. These subjects are appropriate to the study as all identified their experiences as public sexual harassment by posting to a website explicitly about public sexual
harassment. If the poster indicated that she or he was underage or lived outside the US, this information was coded. These two characteristics were the only identifying information recorded about the poster in addition to whatever name the poster used. These data were stored on a password-protected computer on a secure network. The data will be removed from the hard drive in two years.

**Data.**

The codes selected to study the posts were informed by my literature review and a preliminary review of the contributor submissions on the websites: Stop Street Harassment, Hollaback!, and Catcalled.org. Codes fit under these main categories: given name, type and location of harassment, activity of recipient, response of recipient, response of harasser, recipient’s planned future action, and communication about the incident (chose to share, chose not to share, with whom, listener’s response, sharer’s response). The named identity was coded as given the sensitive topic, I felt that it would be interesting to see how much personal information posters felt comfortable sharing on the site. The different options were created based on an initial read through of posts on both sites. I was also sure to mark posters who were male, underage, or not from the US. The literature on PSH suggests that males being harassed is uncommon, so I wanted to pay special attention to how they were involved with the anti-PSH forums. Other studies have discussed the early onset of PSH in young women’s lives, so I wanted to highlight incidents that were underage (Kearl, 2010). Finally, international posters were marked as the global reach of the projects is something more easily attained in an online community as opposed to offline relationships.

In creating the list of types of harassment, I used Kearl’s 2010 and Gardner’s 1995 studies in which they both asked women to describe the types of activities they experienced. I
selected the most common incidences from these (Leering, Honking, Whistling, Vulgar gestures, Sexually explicit comments, Following, Sexual touching or grabbing, Public masturbation, Assault, Kissing noises, Blocking path, and Told to Smile). I also added four additional codes (Unwanted “compliment” or pet name (Hey baby, Hey beautiful, Hey sexy, Hi sweetheart), Calling the woman profane names (“bitch,” “c-nt”), Invasion of space, and Nothing specific mentioned other than “harassed” or “catcalled”) after my initial sample coding as they appeared a few times in my sample. These two studies also informed the locations that I coded for the posts (Street, On public bus or at bus stop, On public metro or at metro stop, and Public park). I added “LGH: Store” as several women in my sample coding discussed being harassed in or just outside a store. Given that both microaggression theory (Sue, 2010a) and PSH theory (Kearl 2010) argue that harassments can lead to people experiencing certain environments as hostile, it is important to understand the types of activities women engage in before the harassment as the women then may associate those activities with a threatening environment. If these activities are everyday activities like commuting to work, it is all the more important to understand if they are tied to feelings of being threatened as microaggression theory would argue that this fear entering daily activities would be even more psychologically stressful for the recipient (Sue, 2010a). Further, these women may then alter their behavior in response to these feelings of hostility directed at them. Therefore, I coded both for the activities that women were engaged in (Commuting to work, Biking, Running, Errands, Walking Dog, With females, With mixed gender group, and With group of males), including if they mentioned being alone as PSH literature suggests these situations as higher risk, Kearl, 2010. Additionally, I coded for any changes in future behaviors that the poster decided to make as a result of the PSH experience
(Not wear that outfit/dress more conservatively, Will change route, Will not go out alone, Will not go out at night, Will not exercise outside, and Will start to carry a weapon).

PSH research suggests that questioning the perceived intent of the harasser can change how the recipient can be affected by the experience (Kearl, 2010). Microaggression theory goes further suggesting that this “attributional ambiguity,” or questioning whether or not the harassment was actually harassment, creates confusion for the recipient and can make her feel like she should not be as upset by the incident as she is (Sue, 2010b). Therefore, I also coded for questioning the harasser’s intent (QHI Code if yes and QHC Code if the recipient expresses a confusion over her outfit being alluring). I used PSH literature to inform the ways that PSH make women feel, Complimented, Creeped out, Ashamed, Angry, Afraid, Confused, and Disgusted, (Kearl, 2010, Gardner 1995). Microaggression research suggests that the debate a recipient of harassment goes through to try and decide if she should respond is emotionally wearing, particularly when it happens frequently. These studies also suggest that minority populations might fear the negative effects they will receive by responding to a harasser from a majority power position. Given the quick nature of these interactions, many victims freeze in the moment while debating, and thus end up not being able to do anything as the harasser has moved on. This lack of action can leave victims feeling ashamed for doing nothing (Rivera, 2010). Given these studies’ emphasis on the importance of recipient response, I coded for that as well (VRI Ignores it, Puts in/on headphones/earphones/earbuds, Flicks the harasser off, Yells at the harasser, and Attempts calm rationalization with the harasser). Several of the PSH studies I examined discussed women’s fear that PSH could escalate into something more violent (Fairchild, 2008, Kearl, 2010); therefore, I also coded for this fear of escalation (“Does the recipient express a fear that the harassment would lead to something worse?”).
Finally, I also coded for conversations that the harassment recipients discussed having with others. I coded for how the communication happened and with whom given my own suspicion that women tend to talk to other women of their same age about their experiences. In particular, I coded for mode of communication: In person communication, By phone, By text, By email, By electronic chat, Social media interaction, Unknown mode, and Other, and I coded for the reported listener to the story: A woman of the same age (“friend” will be assumed to be the same age), A woman of an older generation (like a mother), A woman of a younger generation, A man of the same age (“friend will be assumed to be the same age), A man of an older generation (like a father), A man of a younger generation, A woman of unknown age, A man of unknown age, A person of unknown gender of the same age, A person of unknown gender of an older generation, A person of unknown gender of a younger generation, A person of unknown age or gender.

Microaggression theory strongly demonstrates that when a victim tells her story and is told that her reaction is an overreaction or her feelings are invalid or she is not believed, it can have a very negative effect on the psyche of the victim of harassment. As such, I was sure to code for a confirmation or denial of the recipient’s experiential reality by the listener. Specifically I coded listener reactions as: Suggests that the recipient should be flattered, Expressed surprise, Confirmed experiential reality, Denied experiential reality, Said it was the recipient’s fault, Gave advice on what the recipient should do, Told of a similar experience, and Other. I then coded for the story teller’s response to the listener reaction (Positively, Negatively, and Other). Further, Burnett’s muting theory suggests that women might not talk due to a distrust of dominant power structures. As such, I was sure to flag any instances where a woman shared her story with a person in power (like a police officer) and was dismissed (Burnett, 2009). I also
marked posts that discussed why women had decided to come online to talk about PSH (Wanted other women to know that they weren’t alone, Wanted to do something about the incident, Wanted emotional catharsis, Gives advice on what to do (this worked for me), and Other).

Finally, I also coded for women who specifically said that they chose not to talk about the experience. I coded the type of person they mentioned not talking to: A woman of the same age (“friend” will be assumed to be the same age), A woman of an older generation (like a mother), A woman of a younger generation, A man of the same age (“friend will be assumed to be the same age), A man of an older generation (like a father), A man of a younger generation, A woman of unknown age, A man of unknown age, A person of unknown gender of the same age, A person of unknown gender of an older generation, A person of unknown gender of a younger generation, and A person of unknown age or gender. Additionally, I coded for the reason they did not discuss: They had a bad reaction to sharing a story once, They don’t think the person will understand, They don’t think the person will believe them, They feel uncomfortable talking about a sensitive/personal topic, and Other.

The codebook is attached in Appendix A. The codings were kept in excel spreadsheets stored on a password-protected computer on a secure network. A fellow graduate student in my program coded a sample of 10% of the posts used in my study to verify that the codes were reliable. One code “SHM: Public sexual harassment as a microaggression” was removed due to inconsistencies in coding between myself and my peer coder. All other codes achieved reliabilities of at least 65% agreement, with an average percent agreement of 94%.

Setting.

All work was done on a password-protected computer on a secure network. It is unknown from what locations the posters made their contributions, but all had to have access to the
Internet. Some posters identified their city or country of residence. Those who mentioned living outside the US were coded as such.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

A table of all codes with the percentage of total posts that were marked for that code is available in Appendix B.

Demographics

On both Hollaback and StopStreetHarassment, users can choose how they wish to identify themselves. 1.5% of users identified themselves with a “username,” I defined this as self-identifier that did not appear to be a first or full name or initials, for example “stopharassingthis girl.” 42% of commenters used his or her first name and 5.75% his or her full name. 12.5% of commenters identified themselves with initials, and 36.75% remained completely anonymous. Of the 400 posts coded, only 1.5% were from a commenter who declared himself as a male. Of these men, three reported being sexually harassed in a public place themselves, and three reported witnessing a woman or women being sexually harassed in public. Of these three, two stepped in to confront the harasser while one wrote in to express his feeling of guilt about not doing anything. There were three women who wrote to report the harassment of someone else. One posted on the harassment she witnessed towards her female live-in nurse, and two were mothers who were sharing the stories that their daughters told them about being harassed. 20.25% of posters were identifiably not living in the US, and 13.25% specified that they were underage during at least one of the incidents of PSH that they were posting to the site.
The Incident Itself

While not very common, some of the posts discussed what the recipient of PSH was doing prior to the act. Less than 5% of the postings described their prior activity as biking, running, walking the dog, being out alone (again this was only coded when the poster made it clear that she was by herself), being with a mix gendered group, being with a or a group of male(s). 6.25% of postings mentioned being with another or other female(s). 10.5% said they were running errands, and 14.5% of posts mentioned commuting to work.
Many commenters shared more than one incident in their posting. These incidents were combined for one single line of coding for each post. Not every post mentioned where the incident occurred, and some posts mentioned incidents in several locations. However, of the 400 postings, 57% made it clear that an incident happened on the street (posts that mentioned moving cars were coded as street even if no street was mentioned). 7.5% of the postings had an incident that occurred on a public bus or at a bus stop, and the same percentage included an experience with PSH on a public metro system train or platform. 2.75% of the total postings listed an incident that occurred in a public park. Harassments in a store were mentioned in 11.25% of posts; incidents that occurred just outside the store or in the store parking lot were coded as store locations.

8.5% of postings discussed an experience with PSH in some other location. These included physical locations of in or just outside of school (8 posts), at a beach (2 posts), at a fair (2 posts), at a temple (2 posts, both of these were outside the US), at a theme park (1 post), at an Amtrak station (1 post), at court (1 post), at a public pool (1 post), at a gym (1 post), at an airport terminal (1 post), and at a library (1 post). Four posts discussed an incident at a club or bar and one at a casino, which most PSH literature does not consider the same type of public place as those listed above due to different cultural mores in these locations. Two postings included an incident that occurred while the poster was in her own yard, three while the women were in their own homes (two were peeping toms), and one who was in her dorm. Finally, three postings included incidents inside a cab where the driver refused to let out the woman until she completed a desired action (call him “baby” or give him her phone number). Two of the postings included a form of stranger sexual harassment that occurred online, one on sites like Craigslist where she was selling old clothing, and one on Facebook with the harasser using a fake account.
As mentioned previously, many posts discussed multiple incidents; in addition, many single incidents involved several forms of harassment. The most common type of harassment mentioned was an unwanted “compliment” or pet name (“hey baby,” “beautiful,” “sexy,” “sweetheart” etc.) with 32.5% of postings including this form of harassment. Sexually explicit comments, including solicitation (“hey baby, how much?”), were mentioned in 26.25% of posts; following was mentioned in 26.25% of posts as well. In 29% of posts, an incident was described unspecifically only as harassment or catcalling. 12% mentioned an invasion of space, 17.25% calling the woman profane names (i.e. “bitch”), 17.75% sexual touching or grabbing, and 18.75% leering. Finally, less than 10% of postings mentioned an incident involving honking, whistling, vulgar gestures, public masturbation, kissing noises, blocking path, or being told to smile.

8.5% of posts described a type of harassment that I had not set up in my codebook. There were: taking photos of a woman (5 posts), cab driver locking her in (3 posts), attempted kidnapping (2 posts), public exposure without masturbation (2 posts), watching porn in public view (1 post), throwing less revealing clothing at a woman (1 post), and holding up photos of
lingerie-clad female models to a woman (1 post). Some of the incidents mentioned I coded as nonsexual, these involve incidents of road rage (3 posts), homophobia (7 posts), transphobia (2 posts), racism (2 posts), and ageism (1 post). Finally, several postings reported being harassed by someone in a special position of power. Three posts discussed being harassed by a police officer (one of whom was in a patrol car with his partner who did nothing), one post by a metro security guard, and one post by a teacher (though this incident would not be considered a case of stranger harassment).

The Reaction

Some posts mentioned feelings they has while they were experiencing PSH. 22.25% said that they were afraid, 20% of the postings referenced feeling angry, 11.75% mentioned feeling disgusted, and 11.15% discussed being creeped out. Less than 10% of all postings mentioned feeling complimented, ashamed, or confused. 6.25% of posts mentioned that they were afraid that the situation would escalate and become more violent. In fact, several postings describe how such an escalation actually occurred. After rejecting or ignoring the harasser, one woman had
food thrown at her, another had water dumped over her head, one had a bottle thrown at her, one had a gun pulled on her, and one was physically assaulted.

Commenters occasionally mentioned specific action they took as a result of the PSH in the moment. Less than 10% of posts mentioned flicking the harasser off. Also, putting on headphones was discussed in less than 10% of posts. 15.75% of postings explicitly mentioned ignoring the harasser, and both yelling at the harasser and attempting to calmly rationalize with the harasser are brought up in 16.75% of the posts. 8.75% of posts discussed different types of responses like: taking a photo of the harasser (5 posts), recording the incident of PSH (1 post), hiding (2 posts), talking in a childish voice (1 post), or having a security guard escort her a few blocks to a safer space (1 post). Seven of the posts mentioned taking violent action against or pulling a weapon on the harasser.
Some commenters mentioned that taking action made them feel better. HB174 spoke back to her harasser, and she wrote “it felt good to respond in that moment.” Another woman confronted her harasser using a calm rationalization technique and was delighted that he ended up apologizing. Others discuss why they did not do anything in the moment. HB22 wrote of a PSH experience on the metro “I didn’t feel like I could speak up because I was scared that the other passengers wouldn’t support me, since there were no other women in the immediate area.”

Of those who mentioned not doing anything in the moment to respond to the harassment, two said that they felt ashamed for not doing anything. Another woman (HB54) said “I wish I was as brave as my sister she always yells at people who harass her.”

6% of postings said that an incident was reported to a person in authority. 13 reports were to police, four to male managers, three to security guards, and one to a bus driver, the transit authority, a transit guard, and a teacher. Some of these reports went well. Two women said that the security guards responded positively, a police officer also took a reporting seriously, and one reporting resulted in the firing of the harasser. Other reporters did not have such positive experiences. In two postings, a woman reported the incident, and then she was harassed by the
man she reported the incident to (one a security guard and the other a metro guard). One teacher merely gave the reported student harassers a slap on the wrist. A gym manager said that they couldn’t do anything “without witnesses” (HB88). Three reports to male managers resulted in no punishments for the harassing employee. According to one poster, when she confronted the manager, “he explained to me that this happens regularly and while he was sorry we were offended it ‘was all in good fun.’ I asked him if he thought it was acceptable for male members of his staff to treat female customers in such a way and he responded that it was ‘just the way it is.’” (SSH104).

Six posters were unhappy with the response of police officers when they reported the incident. HB71 posted that her officer told her that “she shouldn't be wearing that dress.” One harasser was taken in by the police, but they told the harassed woman that she couldn’t press charges as “he hadn’t actually done anything” (HB177). HB95 reported a stalker in her dorm to campus police, and they “refused to do anything until he became violent.” Finally, a woman called the police to report a man masturbating against the glass door to her backyard while watching her in her kitchen. According to the woman’s post, the police told her “it was ‘just masturbating’” and that she should just keep her curtains closed (HB41).

Two posters commented on a bad response from security guards. When a harassed woman reported the incident to a female security guard, she responded that she had caught him doing this several times but had never reported him to his manager (HB132). Finally, one woman went to a transit guard to report an incident. According to SSH170, the guard down played the incident saying “that happens all the time and his friend asked how old I was and that if I’m not underage, I shouldn’t be offended and it’s 2012. He implied that I should take it as a compliment and said if I found the guy attractive, I probably wouldn’t be so offended.” The harassed woman
explained why the PSH was so offensive to her; however, the man still would not acknowledge her concerns as valid. He then asked her out for a drink. The woman’s post continues:

I actually got the creeps from him because I could see him getting angry when I was explaining how I had every right to be offended. Obviously I didn’t go get a drink with him and didn’t give him my number but took his when he insisted. Only reason I took it (then deleted it) was because he gave me the creeps and seemed like he would be the type if I hurt his ego, he may end up getting rough and I could see the guard at the station who was his friend thought this was no big deal so if anything were to happen. I know I wouldn’t have backup.

Interestingly, one post mentioned that because of a previous bad experience when she had tried to report a harassing grocery employee, she no longer tried to report incidents if a male was the manager that day, but that she would feel comfortable reporting such an incident to a female manager (SSH19).

Very few posts made any mention of changing future actions as a result of the PSH experience. Dressing more conservatively, changing their route, not going out alone, not going out at night, or not exercising outside were each mentioned in less than 5% of posts. 5.25% of posts referenced plans to carry a weapon in the future. Only six posts mentioned a future action not set up in my codebook: recording license plates, reporting future incidents to the police, taking photos of cab driver info, moving neighborhoods (2 posts), and wearing sneakers when out so that running away would be easier.
Communication

Extremely few postings mentioned why they chose to share their experiences online in a manner that matched my codebook. Specifically, I coded for: Wanted other women to know that they weren’t alone, Wanted to do something about the incident, Wanted emotional catharsis, and Gives advice on what to do (this worked for me). None of these codes were marked for more than 1.5% of posts.

Only 8.5% of posts referenced the poster discussing the event with another person outside of the site’s forum. Of these conversations, eight were with a woman of the same age, six were with a woman from an older generation (a mother for example), and one with a woman of unknown age, for a total of 15 conversations with women. Another eight were with a man of the same age, three with a man of an older generation, and one with a man of an unknown age, for a total of 12 conversations with men. Finally, seven conversations were with a person of unknown age and/or gender. The listeners of the stories responded in different ways. One suggested that the recipient of PSH should be flattered, ten confirmed the recipient’s experiential reality (understood why the person was upset, agreed that it was an awful thing to go through).
However, 24 of the listeners denied the recipient’s experiential reality (expressed disbelief of the person’s story, thought that the sharer was overreacting, told the sharer that she should be flattered by the attention, or just thought that the person’s story was funny), and nine said that it was the recipient’s fault. Of these negative responses, five of the posters mentioned having a negative reaction to the listener’s response. Only four posts specifically mentioned choosing not to talk about the incident, one because of a bad reaction to sharing a PSH story earlier, one because she did not think someone would believe her, and two because they felt uncomfortable discussing such a personal topic. One post extensively discussed why she did not talk about it, saying “I didn’t tell many people because I didn’t know how I felt about it. I didn’t want people to overreact, I’d dealt with it. I’m okay with it. It happened, it’s over, it doesn’t make me who I am, it doesn’t take away from who I am. It happened, and it’s over. I’m not mad. I’m not sad. I am free, and free from that experience as well” (HB77).

As just discussed, many posters expressed unhappiness at how the situation was handled when it was reported to a male. There were also some immediate reactions by people in the vicinity of the PSH. One poster who yelled at her harassers had a female witness tell her it was her fault and called her a “whore, slut, skank” (SSH15). On the other end of the spectrum, when HB99 stood up to her harasser several female witnesses clapped for her. Finally, after HB35 ignored her harasser, he yelled after her that the attention was her fault because of the outfit she was wearing.

Some women chose to share their experiences with other women after the event. Two posters wrote that their female friends could not understand why they were so upset. SSH53 was told by her female coworker, “Well, that’s the price of being a pretty young woman.” SSH76 had more sympathetic female friends who discussed with her “how our male friends—allies though
they were—just didn’t understand. It wasn’t just about how often it happened.” This feeling that men did not get it cropped up in several other postings. SSH121 wrote, “I’ve heard men say, ‘I’d be happy if a female stopped to tell me I was good looking.’ But because that rarely if ever happens, and it almost never turns into something more dangerous, like groping or rape, they have no clue. Really no clue.” One poster shared that she had posted her experience on a local message board. While the response was mostly supportive, “there were a surprising number of men who tried to shame [her] for getting harassed, the response was mostly supportive” (HB138).

SSH95 had similar experiences with her male friends, posting:

“What’s even more frustrating is some of the reactions to my experience from some of my close guy friends. Things like, “I can’t believe the police caught me!!” or “I know I shouldn’t laugh but that’s hilarious!” or “If that were me I’d take it as a compliment” or “You must be flattered.” Are you kidding me? THERE IS NOTHING FUNNY OR FLATTERING ABOUT BEING FOLLOWED!”

These negative stories with male friends continue. One male friend told SSH132 that is was “obvious” that the harasser would follow her given how she was wearing her hair that day. When SSH63 wrote on FB about an experience with PSH, her male cousin (who she had respected) responded that “It lets you know that YOU GOT IT!” and insisted that she should not treat PSH as a bad thing. Two posters reported being able to get a male to change his opinion. SSH5’s male friend did not believe her stories of PSH until she had him walk ten feet behind her through her neighborhood. HB180’s brother was similarly convinced to run just behind his sister to witness the harassment. After the run, “He was utterly shocked at how watched and violated he felt after
experiencing the level of attention I received. He had an entirely new perspective on how poorly women and girls are treated in public” (HB180).

Some posters like HB180 mentioned discussions with family. When SSH38 told her family about her experience with PSH, “they took it as a joke and laughed away the serious conversation.” However, three posters mentioned that their mothers were concerned about the incidents. One expressed herself as “very worried” (SSH167), another went on to the forums to share her daughter’s story (HB67), and one mother sat down with her daughter to share it on the forum together (HB80).

A few additional posters discussed their general experiences with sharing stories of PSH. SSH67 writes:

I have had many reactions to this story. Many reactions were to blame me. One woman behaved as though I should be ashamed. “Oh my god, I hope that you don’t tell this story to anyone?” Many questioned me. “What were you wearing? Why were you walking alone? Why were you walking at night? Only w****s walk alone, especially at night” Some even blamed where I lived. “What do expect living there? If you want respect, move to a good neighborhood. You can’t blame those poor boys. All the broads in Hull are either selling it or giving it away. Why else would anyone go to Hull?”

SSH170 experienced similar blame after others learned of her story, she shares, “Ignorant people will say, ‘What do you expect? The way you dressed and all, you were asking for attention.’” Finally, SSH146 wrote in after witnessing an incident of PSH that escalated into a violent assault:

People ask me—often, in fact—why I feel so strongly about street harassment. They—mostly men (who, it’s understood, are not very often victims of this offense)—tell me
that I’m overreacting, that I’m making a big deal out of nothing. They ask me why I don’t focus my energy on more important issues plaguing women worldwide. But this is why. This is why street harassment is a problem. This is why we fight so hard to stop it. Because no, it’s not a compliment. It doesn’t make women feel better about themselves. It’s horrifying and anxiety-inducing because this could happen.

Finally, when discussing conversation, we turn to how these posters view the online PSH community. Several woman clearly use it as way to speak out. SSH13 turned to the online forum to share her story after having a bad reaction when she tried to tell someone about it in person. SSH151 writes that she posted her story on her personal blog, on Hollaback!, and on StopStreetHarassment “because the last thing [she] want[s] is to be silent about this.” Immediately after an incident with PSH, SSH50 posts, “I have just come through the front door and straight to my macbook, this is the only thing I could think to do. I am so mad. I feel powerless and this infuriates me further. I just want to share this because I know reading the stories that others share makes me feel as though I’m not so alone when this happens.” HB108 reports that though her incident happened years ago, it was not until she found the PSH forum that she felt she could “share it safely.” SSH100 echoes this sentiment, saying “As wrong as I knew it always was, I never thought I’d see the day when there would be a place to talk about it.”

Other posters commented on the sites helping them understand the extent of PSH. SSH92 wrote, “I feel great knowing I can share this story and know I’m not alone.” HB118 found the forum enlightening, sharing “I’m really glad there are sites like this, because some people really don’t know how bad it is until they read these stories.” For SSH157, these kinds of forums help, she says “it has helped me so much to read the stories and the tips for how to deal with street harassment.” SSH37 also feels more empowered; she posts:
As always, I credit this community for the awareness and encouragement of standing up against street harassment. These stories and dialogues enable me to envision how I could handle harassment before it occurs, so when it does I am prepared and not flustered or caught off guard. I love that this community helps us all stand up for ourselves, influence others, and ultimately effect positive change.

A different poster, SSH102, shares an almost identical sentiment:

I have said it before but I completely credit the SSH community for empowering and encouraging me to take on street harassment in this productive way. The conversations that stem from this community allow me to think about appropriate responses to street harassment before they happen in my daily life. That way, when an instance does arise, I already know what to say and do. The difference between confronting someone for their bad behavior instead of sadly or fearfully hurrying away is monumental.

So great is the sense of community for some posters, that one commenter wrote in several months after her first post to tell everyone that she appreciated all the words of support and wanted everyone to know that the harassment issue in her neighborhood had improved.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The textual analysis generated a solid background on more general characteristics of PSH; in addition, it helps us understand our first two research questions on how people use online forums to discuss PSH and what characteristics of the PSH incidents the posters discuss most often. As only six of the 400 postings were from a male, the problem does seem to be specifically impacting women. 13.25% of the postings specifically mentioned an incident occurring while under age (several of these incidents in which the victims were pre-teens); therefore, we can lend greater credence to the suspicions that this problem is one that frequently presents itself early in women’s lives, at a time when they might be even more powerless to defend themselves. With 10.5% of posts reporting the act of PSH while running errands, 14.5% while commuting to work, 57% occurring on the street, 7.5% occurring on a public bus or at a bus stop, 7.5% occurring on a public metro system train or platform, and 11.25% occurring in or just outside a store, we can see how PSH happens in women’s regular lives. This harassment does not occur just in special scenarios; it strikes as women go about their daily lives. Microaggression theory would suggest that this kind of daily threat would be very damaging to women’s feelings of safety and freedom to use public spaces. In fact, 22.25% of posts explicitly stated that the poster was afraid during the incident.

When looking across all coding categories, the type of harassment was more than twice as likely as any other category to have been mentioned in the post. Therefore, the type of harassment seems to be the main driver to the site and the primary topic of conversation online. I would speculate that this finding is due to recipient’s need to report the incident somewhere, and thus the fact of the harassment supersedes the importance of how it made her feel or how she
handled the situation. The most common form of harassment seems to be an unwanted “compliment” or pet name (“hey baby, “beautiful,” “you’re sexy,” “hey sweetheart”). As microaggression theory has shown, microaggressions that are disguised as compliments can be particularly difficult for the receiver as she will experience confusion about the perpetrator’s intent behind the statement, will be unsure whether or not she should be insulted by the statement, and if she is insulted, she will wonder if she has a right to voice her displeasure (Sue, 2010b). When looking further into the issue, I found that over half of the reports of leering were in posts that mentioned at least two other forms of harassment. Of posts that reported more than five types of harassment, 80% of these posts mentioned leering and of posts that reported five types of harassment, 62% of these posts mentioned leering.

Quite disturbingly, at least to this researcher, over a quarter of the posts involved women being followed in some manner by their harasser. This type of behavior is very likely to be received as threatening. Over a quarter of posts also mentioned an incident involving sexually explicit comments. Also fairly common (brought up in 17-19% of posts) were leering, calling women profane names, and sexual touching or grabbing. I did find it surprising that leering was mentioned at almost the same rate as sexual touching or grabbing, but I suspect that women were simply more likely to report on an incident as extreme as sexual touching or grabbing while they might be so accustomed to leering that it did not seem worth reporting. As Burnett’s 2009 study showed, when a harassment becomes “part of the social milieu,” this very normality dissuades conversation about it (Burnett, 2009).

H1 was: women generally only share their stories of public sexual harassment with other women of a similar age due to feelings of shared experience and the belief that the listener will respond in a desired fashion. My data are unable to prove this hypothesis true or false given the
sample size, though it does lean towards being false. Of the eight posts that mention discussing the topic with a female friend, two of these listeners responded positively while six did not. In instances where the age of the women listeners were unknown, one responded very positively (clapping), and one negatively (“that’s the price of being a pretty young woman”). Finally, one woman reported having a negative experience reporting an incident to a woman in power, while another said that she would only feel comfortable reporting incidents of PSH to a female manager. As this data set it too small to draw any real conclusions, no real conclusions can be made with regards to H1. I did suspect to hear many more stories of supportive female friends, so I was surprised to see the opposite.

My final research question was: how do women report talking to others about PSH? While not many of the posts discussed other conversations, a few did. In the stories shared with older women, five of the six reported positive responses, many more than I would have originally suspected. In all of these positive responses, the listener was the victim’s mother. The older woman who did blame the younger women was a bystander to the harassment. No posts were coded as having an experience about PSH shared with a person from a younger generation. Seven of the eight posts in which a woman told her PSH story to a male friend or brother I coded as denying the recipient’s experiential reality. Two of these six changed to a “confirming experiential reality” after the woman had him shadow her in the street. Only one post reported only positive reaction. The fact that two of these men changed their minds after they were able to witness the behavior might suggest that they were not aware of the severity of the issue prior to forming their original opinion. While this number is too small for real conclusions, it is suggestive for further studies.
23 of the posts mentioned reporting the PSH incident to a male in a position of authority (police office, security guard, manager, etc). Only four posters commented on these authority figures responding in a positive, affirming way. 13 posters reported negative experiences with these men. Though this sample size is very small, it is suggestive of Burnett’s argument that women have reason as a minority to distrust dominant structures like the court system to handle the issue properly, and thus women might be more likely to not report an incident at all.

Finally, it is important to consider how the online forums might have affected the women posting to them. The very fact that these stories are shared is suggestive that the women might have come online to talk about the issue when they did not receive the desired response in real life. Additionally, 42% of posters chose to use their first name and an additional 5.75% chose to use their full name. Given the ability to be anonymous in these forums, I found it surprising how many of these posters gave themselves a more specific identity. Several possible explanations come to mind, but none that we can prove from this study. Does the use of names create a greater sense of community and trust by sharing this unneeded information? Is the fact that the forums are predominately female and concerning women’s issues lead the women to use a first name that identifies them specifically as female? It could be interesting to research this further and see if gender-specific online support forums are more likely to use first names than those that are not gender-specific.

As discussed in the results section, one woman even wrote back several months later to thank the people on the forum for their support and to let everyone know that her bad situation had made a turn for the better. This action suggests a strong sense of community within the forum. Further, 20.25% of posts were from someone identifiably outside the US. Without online access to these types of forums, an international discussion would be very difficult to have. As
shown in the results shared earlier, SSH13, SSH151, SSH50, HHB108, SSH100, SSH93, HB118, and SSH157 felt like these forums gave them a safe place to share their stories and get support in a way that they were not able to achieve elsewhere. SSH37 and SSH102 went even further, discussing how these forums have helped them to better respond to harassment in the moment and have hope to eradicating the issue in the future. This incredibly strong positivity about a site that discusses such a negative issue demonstrates how these online spaces can act as catalysts for communication.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Though not much research has been conducted on PSH, studies on microaggression theory, sexual objectification, and other forms of violence against women can be helpful to create a framework to understand how PSH affects its recipients. Using this research as a background, I did a content analysis of the two most popular online forums in the US for reporting incidents of PSH—Hollaback! and StopStreetHarassment. My goal behind the coding was to better understand how women chose to communicate about PSH. I hoped to learn if gender or generational differences between the recipient and potential listeners would have a negative impact on conversations, either in leading to the conversations not happening at all or in creating conversations that are unsatisfactory to the victim of PSH. Further, I wished to discover whether or not technology encouraged discussion about PSH.

The coding did result in generating some basic information about what is posted in these forums. Additionally, several of the posts yielded interesting insights into conversations about PSH offline and online. Unfortunately, not enough data was gleaned from these postings to yield definitive conclusions. They do suggest that generational differences might not create as much of a barrier as I had suspected. This would imply that victims of PSH might then be more likely to be able to talk about their experiences with women already in their support system like their mothers, aunts, or older female coworkers. Gender differences do seem to result in more negative conversations. These negative conversations would then make it more likely for women to not discuss their experiences with PSH with men. By not hearing these conversations, men will likely not understand the frequency of PSH or the severity of the problem. Given this lack of understanding, men might be less likely to understand the limits that women experience when
trying to use public space, and they might be more likely to respond negatively when a rare woman decides to share her story with them. Female peer conversations were not as positive as I would have expected. This finding implies that women might then be less likely to seek out female friends for comfort and support after incidents of PSH and more likely to go online to get that reality affirmation. Additionally, if women they respect who they think should understand are telling them that PSH is not a big deal, then a woman might begin to doubt her own response and reaction to the incidents.

Further, conversations with persons in authority when reporting incidents of PSH appear to have a high prevalence of being negatively received by the victim of PSH. These posts are very important to how we can understand the problem of PSH. When women are unable to trust dominant structures for reporting like the police, they are less empowered to fight the harassment they experience. This lack of empowerment can then lead to feelings of helplessness that nothing can be done to fix the problem. Further, if women are told by authorities that their experiences are “no big deal,” they then might doubt their own experiential reality, which as microaggression theory demonstrates and very emotionally exhausting and harmful for an individual. The coding did demonstrate that posters to these forums seem to use them as outlets in which they can tell their stories in a safe and affirming place when they are unable to do so in the real world. These forums help the women to not feel alone and to gain knowledge on how they might handle experiences with PSH in the future. There appears to be a sense of community on these sites, and they have an international following. Therefore, my study demonstrates these forums are a strong technological inducement to communication of stories that might not get shared in the offline world.
This study suggests a few possible policy concerns and future practices to improve the problem. First, there needs to be a wider societal recognition that PSH is not a compliment but a form of a microaggression against (mostly) women. Poster fen1994 writes:

“Street harassment is not a compliment. Yes, it might show that you are hot, you are fit, you are feminine, but it is not a compliment. A compliment admires you, maybe even respects you, but street harassment is a threatening acknowledgement of your femininity and a reminder that you are being seen as a sexual commodity. Street harassment is an unfriendly and unwelcome reminder that you have no control over the constant sexualization of your body even as you walk around the street in broad daylight. It is a reminder that women are sexual objects AT ALL TIMES regardless of circumstance, and it implies that if you are at all attractive to this man, you must be made aware of it, because you are made to be consumed and admired. It is not a compliment to be threatened for being attractive.” (fen1994, 2012)

To achieve this recognition, more conversations need to happen. Two women wrote of positive change in male friends when they had the men shadow them down a street. Perhaps some of the nonprofits committed to stopping PSH could sponsor an activity during International Anti-Street Harassment Week (March 30 – April 5, 2014) where women have a male friend walk or run behind them during commutes or daily workouts, sort of like an individual walk/run fundraiser.

Kearl conducted an online questionnaire in late 2009 with 85 male allies. 95 percent of the men said that they would be better aware of the situation if women in their lives talked to them about their experiences with PSH and how it made them feel. Further, 87 percent of these men said that knowing women personally who had experienced PSH would make them take the problem more seriously. Kearl also suggests from her research that men are more likely to listen
to other men in advocacy issues, and therefore, it is important to bring in male allies to fight PSH (Kearl, 2010). Group theory also would argue that women can better fight PSH by talking more. Gordon Allport’s contact hypothesis asserts that communicating with people outside of one’s group can lead to better understanding of and greater sympathy for those in the out group, leading to a decrease in stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice (Allport, 1979). Rothbart and John furthered study in this arena, demonstrating that prejudice and stereotyping can be reduced through contact if the group behavior does not match the stereotypes (Rothbart, 1985). Men might stereotype women in these instances as “asking for it,” “not knowing how to take a compliment,” or “making a big deal over nothing.” By not talking for themselves with men, women miss an opportunity to be their best advocates. In Bratton’s study of token women in state legislatures, she found that women were seen as better sources for legislation pertaining to women’s issues (Bratton, 2005). Better communications between males and females could bring down these stereotypes whether actually held or merely perceived, or perhaps help men to better understand women’s feelings of vulnerability.

People in authority positions also need to take PSH seriously. Stop Street Harassment, a DC-based group, has made some excellent steps forward with WMATA in DC to punish those who engage in PSH on the transit system and, very importantly, to train their employees in how to not harass women themselves and how to respond to reports of PSH. As the online forums have proven to be a place of solace for women, they should be more frequently advertised. While funding for such a project would be difficult for a nonprofit, some city transit authorities might be persuaded to give free advertising space to these forums with just a simple ad of “want to talk about public sexual harassment? Join us at stopstreeharassment.org.” Having more women join these sites might not only help those women to better emotionally work through their
experiences, it might also help to mobilize the women as well. Further, it is important the populace be aware of what types of PSH are illegal. The laws for this vary from state to state, so I was unable in my analysis to break down the types this way. However, Stop Street Harassment just launched a new resource on their site that breaks down the laws on PSH by state. Making the public aware of this resource will be a very important step in the anti-PSH movement. Further, this resource can help policy makers to see if an action that is legal in their state is illegal in another. This ability could then help policy makers to see if these laws have been successful in combating PSH and then adopt them into their own system.

Some of the women who experience PSH start to draw tries between these experiences and other forms of sexism in their lives. The online journaling project *Catcalled* is a great example of this ideology building. Participant two in the project reflects on how her own experiences with street harassment relate to the larger patriarchal system, sharing:

“decades of exposure to sexism of all stripes and flavors has created a shortcut in my brain called, ‘Your life is easiest when you give that guy what he wants,’ and that shortcut gets accessed almost every time some random guy says ‘hello’ to me on the street. It’s about wrestling a submission (a tiny submission, but a submission nonetheless) out of a strange woman, to give your day a little buzz…. To give you a piece of her time, her energy, herself.” (Catcalled, 2012)

Participant four also challenges her readers to question our societal setup. She writes:

“It’s like because I (or anything with legs and a vagina, really) happen to walk into a guy's line of sight, I become their property, something that they have the right to scrutinize, judge, and comment on. I don’t know why they said what they did, and it
doesn’t really matter to me what their personal reasons were. What matters to me is what makes it okay in our culture to do that to women.” (Catcalled, 2012)

These women are calling each other to come together to question women’s oppression and find the strength to change the forces that cause it. Participant five continues this rallying cry with emotion, calling out to other women oppressed, “It’s not fair it’s not fair it’s not fair. I know that a LOT of things aren’t fair, but this is the point, this is the whole point of me participating in this project. It’s not fair. And everyone needs to know that, and dammit if I will not keep saying it, to anyone who will listen, forever” (Catcalled 2012).

Given the dearth of research on PSH, much could be done in the future. Microaggression theory provides a very strong theoretical framework that I believe future PSH could greatly benefit from. Its theories along with group theory researching and co-culturing muting theory demonstrate how important communication is to societal problems like PSH. Therefore, a greater understanding of who women talk to about PSH and why is needed. What factors make a conversation a negative one for the victim of PSH? What factors make it a positive one? Knowing these factors could help activists create situations more conducive to good conversations. While it is important to do further studies on just how much PSH actually occurs, it is also necessary to see how the general populace views PSH. Does the perceived severity of the issue vary by gender or age? Such questions could be answered by a survey of the general population. Though PSH incidences can be quite small, in accumulation they can be highly damaging to a woman’s feeling of safety and ability to enjoy public spaces without objectification. These experiences are tied to other forms of sexism that women experience in their lives, and thus is one well worth researching further and fighting.
Appendix A

Coding Online Forums for Public Sexual Harassment

You will code three websites; two are online forums for Public Sexual Harassment, and one is Tumblr postings with the hashtag “street harassment.”

1) Code postings on [http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/category/stories/](http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/category/stories/). Code posts that are tagged both as “stories” and as “street harassment.” Do not code posts with the tag “correspondents.” Start with postings beginning at the end of August, and move chronologically backwards until you have coded 25 postings. The anonymizing ID should be “SSH” followed by a number (number chronologically as you go through posts).

2) Code postings on [http://www.ihollaback.org/blog/category/story/](http://www.ihollaback.org/blog/category/story/). Start with postings beginning at the end of August, and move chronologically backwards until you have coded 25 postings. The anonymizing ID should be “HB” followed by a number (number chronologically as you go through posts).

For all of the following categories, if the object is present, enter 1 for the category. For any postings that you’re not sure how to code, please place a “1” in the FLAG column (second to last column in the document) and include a note in the NOTES column (last column in the document) describing the problem you had. Also use the NOTES column for anything that seems unusual or confusing, or you think would be interesting in some way for future research. Flag anyone who is under 18 or who seems to not be in the US.

**Identity:** Is the commenter’s identity known?
- IDU Poster uses a username
- IDF Poster uses her/his first name
- IDN Poster uses her/his full name
- IDI Poster uses her/his initials
- ID? Poster is anonymous
- IDM Poster is male
  (Flag if the poster is trans)

**Type of Harassment:** Does the recipient describe the type of harassment?
- THL Leering
- THH Honking
- THW Whistling
- THG Vulgar gestures
- THC Sexually explicit comments (including solicitation)
- THF Following
- THT Sexual touching or grabbing
- THM Public masturbation
- THA Assault
- THK Kissing noises
- THB Blocking path
THS Told to Smile
THO Unwanted “compliment” or pet name (Hey baby, Hey beautiful, Hey sexy, Hi sweetheart)
THP Calling the woman profane names (“bitch,” “c-nt”)
THI Invasion of space
THX Nothing specific mentioned other than “harassed” or “catcalled”
Other

Location of Harassment: Does the recipient describe the location of the harassment?
LHS Street
LHB On public bus or at bus stop
LHM On public metro or at metro stop
LHP Public park
LHG Store
Other

Activity of Recipient Prior to Harassment: Does the recipient describe what activity s/he was involved in prior to the harassment?
ARC Commuting to work
ARB Biking
ARR Running
ARE Errands
ARD Walking Dog
ARA Alone
ARF With females
ARX With mixed gender group
ARM With group of males
Other

Questioned Harasser Intent: Does the recipient expression confusion over the harasser’s intent?
QHI Code if yes
QHC Code if the recipient expresses a confusion over her outfit being alluring

Recipient Reaction: How does the recipient feel about the harassment?
RRC Complimented
RRO Creeped out
RRA Ashamed
RRM Angry
RRF Afraid
RRP Confused
RRD Disgusted
Other

Recipient Response: What does the recipient do in response to the harassment?
VRI Ignores it
VRE Puts in/on headphones/earphones/earbuds
VRF Flicks the harasser off
VRY Yells at the harasser
VRR Attempts calm rationalization with the harasser
Other

Fear of Escalation: Does the recipient express a fear that the harassment would lead to something worse?
FOE Fear of Escalation

**Microaggression:** Does the recipient discuss how the experience is in a long line of similar experiences that have built to have a collective effect?

SHM Public sexual harassment as a microaggression

**Online Expression:** Does the author say why she is sharing her story in an online forum?

OM? Motivation unknown
OMA Wanted other women to know that they weren’t alone
OMS Wanted to do something about the incident
OME Wanted emotional catharsis
OMW Gives advice on what to do (this worked for me)
Other

Does the author express an identity as a group (women who are harassed)
OEI Code if yes

**Change of Action:** Does the recipient plan to or already did alter her behavior?

FAC Not wear that outfit/dress more conservatively
FAR Will change route
FAA Will not go out alone
FAN Will not go out at night
FAE Will not exercise outside
FAW Will start to carry a weapon
Other

**Communication:** Does the recipient of PSH mention talking about an experience with PSH outside the forum?

If so, choose the mode of conversation:
CMV In person communication
CMP By phone
CMT By text
CME By email
CMC By electronic chat
CMS Social media interaction
CM? unknown mode
Other

Who does the person mention talking to:
CFP A woman of the same age (“friend” will be assumed to be the same age)
CFG A woman of an older generation (like a mother)
CFY A woman of a younger generation
CMP A man of the same age (“friend will be assumed to be the same age)
CMG A man of an older generation (like a father)
CMY A man of a younger generation
CF? A woman of unknown age
CM? A man of unknown age
C?P A person of unknown gender of the same age
C?G A person of unknown gender of an older generation
C?Y A person of unknown gender of a younger generation
CP? A person of unknown age or gender

Is the listener’s reaction one of the following:
CRF Suggests that the recipient should be flattered
CRS Expressed surprise
CRC Confirmed experiential reality
CRD Denied experiential reality
CRB Said it was the recipient’s fault
CRA Gave advice on what the recipient should do
CRT Told of a similar experience
Other

How does the listener’s reaction make the person feel?
CFP Positively
CFN Negatively
Other

**No Communication**: Does the recipient discuss choosing to not talk about their experience?

If so, who do they chose not to talk to:
XFP A woman of the same age (“friend” will be assumed to be the same age)
XFG A woman of an older generation (like a mother)
XFY A woman of a younger generation
XMP A man of the same age (“friend will be assumed to be the same age)
XMG A man of an older generation (like a father)
XMY A man of a younger generation
XF? A woman of unknown age
XM? A man of unknown age
X?P A person of unknown gender of the same age
X?G A person of unknown gender of an older generation
X?Y A person of unknown gender of a younger generation
XP? A person of unknown age or gender

Why do they not discuss:
XFE They had a bad reaction to sharing a story once
XFU They don’t think the person will understand
XFB They don’t think the person will believe them
XFD They feel uncomfortable talking about a sensitive/personal topic
Other
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Harassment:</strong> Does the recipient describe the type of harassment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THL Leering</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THH Honking</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THW Whistling</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THG Vulgar gestures</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THC Sexually explicit comments (including solicitation)</td>
<td>27.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THF Following</td>
<td>26.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THT Sexual touching or grabbing</td>
<td>17.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THM Public masturbation</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THA Assault</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THK Kissing noises</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THB Blocking path</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THS Told to Smile</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THO Unwanted “compliment” or pet name (Hey baby, Hey beautiful, Hey sexy, Hi sweetheart)</td>
<td>32.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THP Calling the woman profane names (“bitch,” “c-nt”)</td>
<td>17.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THI Invasion of space</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity:</strong> Is the commenter’s identity known?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDU Poster uses a username</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF Poster uses her/his first name</td>
<td>42.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDN Poster uses her/his full name</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDI Poster uses her/his initials</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID? Poster is anonymous</td>
<td>36.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDM Poster is male</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location of Harassment:</strong> Does the recipient describe the location of the harassment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHS Street</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHB On public bus or at bus stop</td>
<td>8.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHM On public metro or at metro stop</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHP Public park</td>
<td>2.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHG Store</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity of Recipient Prior to Harassment:</strong> Does the recipient describe what activity s/he was involved in prior to the harassment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC Commuting to work</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioned Harasser Intent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the recipient express confusion over the harasser’s intent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QHI Code if yes</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QHC Code if the recipient expresses a confusion over her outfit being alluring</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient Reaction: How does the recipient feel about the harassment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRC Complimented</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRO Creeped out</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRA Ashamed</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRM Angry</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRF Afraid</td>
<td>22.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Expression: Does the author say why she is sharing her story in an online forum?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OMA Wanted other women to know that they weren’t alone</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMS Wanted to do something about the incident</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OME Wanted emotional catharsis</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMW Gives advice on what to do (this worked for me)</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change of Action: Does the recipient plan to or already did alter her behavior?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the author express an identity as a group (women who are harassed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEI Code if yes</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| THX Nothing specific mentioned other than “harassed” or “catcalled” | 29.00% |
| Other | 8.50% |

<p>| ARB Biking | 1.50% |
| ARR Running | 2.25% |
| ARE Errands | 10.50% |
| ARD Walking Dog | 1.25% |
| ARA Alone | 3.75% |
| ARF With females | 6.25% |
| ARX With mixed gender group | 2.00% |
| ARM With group of males | 1.00% |
| Other | 0.50% |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RRP Confused</th>
<th>1.25%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RRD Disgusted</td>
<td>11.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recipient Response:** What does the recipient do in response to the harassment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VRI Ignores it</th>
<th>15.75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VRE Puts in/on headphones/earphones/earbuds</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRF Flicks the harasser off</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRY Yells at the harasser</td>
<td>16.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRR Attempts calm rationalization with the harasser</td>
<td>16.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fear of Escalation:** Does the recipient express a fear that the harassment would lead to something worse?

| FOE Fear of Escalation | 6.25% |

Communication: Does the recipient of PSH mention talking about an experience with PSH outside the forum?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMV In person communication</th>
<th>2.50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMP By phone</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMT By text</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CME By email</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC By electronic chat</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMS Social media interaction</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM? unknown mode</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is the listener’s reaction one of the following:

- CRF Suggests that the recipient should be flattered 0.25%
- CRS Expresses surprise 0.00%
- CRC Confirmed experiential reality 2.50%
- CRD Denied experiential reality 6.00%
- CRB Said it was the recipient’s fault 2.25%
- CRA Gave advice on what the recipient should do 0.00%
- CRT Told of a similar experience 0.00%
- Other 0.25%
- How does the listener’s reaction make the person feel?
  - CFP Positively 0.00%
  - CFN Negatively 5.00%
  - Other 0.00%

Who does the person mention talking to:

- CFP A woman of the same age (“friend” will be assumed to be the same age) 2.00%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFG</td>
<td>A woman of an older generation (like a mother)</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFY</td>
<td>A woman of a younger generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMP</td>
<td>A man of the same age (“friend will be assumed to be the same age)</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMG</td>
<td>A man of an older generation (like a father)</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMY</td>
<td>A man of a younger generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF?</td>
<td>A woman of unknown age</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM?</td>
<td>A man of unknown age</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C?P</td>
<td>A person of unknown gender of the same age</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C?G</td>
<td>A person of unknown gender of an older generation</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C?Y</td>
<td>A person of unknown gender of a younger generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP?</td>
<td>A person of unknown age or gender</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Communication</td>
<td>Does the recipient discuss choosing to not talk about their experience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XFP</td>
<td>A woman of the same age (“friend” will be assumed to be the same age)</td>
<td>0.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XFG</td>
<td>A woman of an older generation (like a mother)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XFY</td>
<td>A woman of a younger generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMP</td>
<td>A man of the same age (“friend will be assumed to be the same age)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMG</td>
<td>A man of an older generation (like a father)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMY</td>
<td>A man of a younger generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XF?</td>
<td>A woman of unknown age</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XM? A man of unknown age</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X?P A person of unknown gender of the same age</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X?G A person of unknown gender of an older generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X?Y A person of unknown gender of a younger generation</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XP? A person of unknown age or gender</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why do they not discuss:

| XFE They had a bad reaction to sharing a story once | 0.25% |
| XFU They don’t think the person will understand | 0.00% |
| XFB They don’t think the person will believe them | 0.25% |
| XFD They feel uncomfortable talking about a sensitive/personal topic | 0.50% |
| Other | 0.00% |
References


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