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"YOU TALKING TO ME?" CONSIDERING BLACK WOMEN'S RACIALIZED
AND GENDERED EXPERIENCES WITH AND RESPONSES OR REACTIONS TO
STREET HARASSMENT FROM MEN

by

MELINDA MILLS

Under the Direction of Emanuela Guano

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the various discursive strategies that black women employ when they

encounter street harassment from men. To investigate the ways in which these women

choose to respond to men's attention during social interactions, I examine their

perception of social situations to understand how they view urban spaces and strangers

within these spaces. Drawing on qualitative interviews that I conducted with 10 black

women, I focus on how the unique convergence of this group's racial and gender

identities can expose them to sexist and racist street harassment. Thus, I argue that black

women face street harassment as a result of gendered and racialized power asymmetries.

I found that black women rely on a variety of discursive strategies, including speech and

silence, to neutralize and negotiate these power asymmetries. They actively resist

reproducing racialized and gendered sexual stereotypes of black women by refusing to

talk back to men who harass. Understanding silence as indicative of black women's

agency, not oppression, remains a key finding in this research.

INDEX WORDS: Street harassment, Femininity, Masculinity, Intersections, Race,
                 Gender, Class, Resistance, Discursive Strategies

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

2007

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Office of Graduate Studies
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May 2007

DEDICATION

To my Mom, who embodies the perfect reconciliation between beauty and intelligence.
To my Dad, who taught me how to be a better feminist.
To my sisters Maria and Karen, who always share their happiness and laughter openly
and abundantly, and believe in the magic of serendipity!

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To my "just like sisters" crew: Makeba, Oriana, and Alpa. Thanks for everything!

To music, the perfect inspiration for writing, and dancing (when I was avoiding writing).

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

"Cities are full of people with whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either" – Jane Jacobs[1]

While some scholars have considered street harassment a primarily gendered phenomenon, few have explored the intersections of race, class, and sexuality with gender to uncover how various social positions differentially inform women's experiences with and responses to street harassment. By building on existing literature that focuses on these gendered aspects of public harassment, I attempt in this work to develop an understanding of how these intersections work during black women's social interactions with male strangers. This is not to suggest that we should recognize harassment in only one form, as this phenomenon remains so pervasive as to occur between various groups or in different configurations, such that a black gay man may face harassment from heterosexual black men, yet may in turn harass a white heterosexual woman who may harass a working class Mexican man, and so forth. Rather, I hope to expose the negotiations of harassment amidst its normalization and routinization in this society.

Examining and exposing these gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized elements should illustrate, on one level, how contextual and com plicated street harassment encounters can be, and on another level, how simple and straightforward is the

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[1] From "The Uses of Sidewalks" in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961).

phenomenon, as street harassment remains a social problem reflective of gendered power-asymmetries, expressed through a rape culture that normalizes or condones violence and various forms of assaultive behavior against women. Grappling with the ways that racial dynamics and subjectivities; gender expression; and sexual identity inform black women's social encounters with men on the street adds dimension to discussions about street harassment and draws attention to the extent to which different subject positions and social locations produce varying interactions, such that being white, working class, heterosexual, and female may interpellate different sorts of men and attendant attention than would being black, middle class, and lesbian. As I explore later, particular subjectivities may be recognized as "deserving" of regulation and inciting more attention, with certain bodies falling under the scrutinizing and sometimes appreciative surveillance of male harassers.

While I focus, in this work, on the specific forms or manifestations of harassment between men of different races and black women, I do not mean to suggest that other forms of street harassment do not occur or matter. In fact, these alternative forms of street harassment point to the ubiquity of the phenomenon, in some ways operating under the same umbrella, and such that these various strands of harassment reflect a societal-wide policing of people in general, the specificities of street harassment dependent on perceptions of and access to power or a motivation to exert this power. The controlling practices of street harassment point to its problematic nature, such that the phenomenon attempts to regulate and contain women's bodies and behavior. Such disciplinary practices have historical origins relating enslavement yet in contemporary society

continue to be employed by some of different races for various reasons, many reflective

of social sexual scripts of black women (scripts that emerged centuries ago and maintain

themselves) (Collins 2000).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to gain a sense of what black women think constitutes street harassment

and understand the parameters of the phenomenon, I inquired about how they defined and

viewed harassment (in positive, neutral, and/or negative ways) (sources). Curious about

whether they experienced such social interactions in an objectifying, sexualizing,

dehumanizing versus respectful, reciprocating, recuperative way, I explored the

possibility that street harassment could be a power-imbalanced process, but in its more

benevolent forms of street remarks, failed openings, and likewise, an iterative interaction.

In the absence of social lopsidedness, I wondered whether some of the women would

engage men who harass in such a way as to diffuse the situation, neutralizing it, and

transforming the harassment into a more palatable conversation.

Do black women recognize street harassment as a gendered experience, resulting

from power differentials established in and perpetuated by a patriarchal society; or feel

racially and/or sexually objectified in their experiences of street harassment from men?

Having women reflect on and share their personal experiences with street harassment will

uncover the continuing significance of this social phenomenon; draw attention to the

ways in which such encounters remain embedded with meanings about race, gender,

class, sexuality, and other identities or social positions that shape social interactions

between women and men in public spaces; and illustrate the ways women reproduce or resist the patriarchal and oppressive (gendered, raced, and classed) elements shaping these social interactions.

In what situations and under what conditions do women choose whether or not to respond to street remarks and harassment? How do we determine to what degree engaging in discursive practices serves as a strategy of embodied resistance or a source of repression? In other words, do women view speech and/or silence as constitutive or demonstrative of a subversive form of agency, activism, empowerment, resistance or recuperation versus a continued, sustained, or reproduced form of patriarchal power and privilege, and female oppression, repression, and subordination? Which women find speech resistant? Which ones rely more on silence as a strategic response to street harassment? Is there a qualitative difference between the two groups and across subject positions? How do we account for the variation in women's street harassment experiences without perpetuating the "street harassment industry" (Patai 1998) that relies on and reproduces a totalizing truth about women in public; and perpetuates the idea of men as all-powerful, predatory, sexual aggressors and women as powerless prey with little to no agency or capacity to respond to harassment? (Bowman 1993; Uggen and Blackstone 2004; Welsh 1999; Quina 1997). Interrogating assumptions about asymmetrical power relations entails recognizing both the overlapping and divergent experiences of women, because of race, class, gender expression, and sexuality, which creates the space for women's shared and differential experiences. Such interrogations can also uncover how people experiencing sexual harassment possess some power to

redefine and re-articulate the implicit power relations between the harasser and the harassed, or otherwise recuperate from such previous traumas by asserting agency through various discursive practices (Alcoff and Gray 1993; Gardner 1995; hooks 1989).

Through partial replication and deviation, I build on and depart from Carol Brooks Gardner's work (1980; 1989; 1995) (among others) about male-to-female public harassment and street remarks by exploring how black women experience street harassment and uncovering the nuances that stem specifically from their various social positions. While I agree with Gardner's argument about public harassment as a gendered phenomenon that puts women in our place, and works to reify patriarchal domination, I see harassment as much more complicated and contradictory even, such that not all women face the same sort of street harassment. In particular, I believe that black women may experience a kind of racialized harassment, i.e. being called a "black bitch" (Buchanan and Ormerod 2002), or being presumed a prostitute or working girl, in ways that women of other races might not be referenced and sexualized.

Different narratives about sexuality and subjectivities often problematize social relations because people frequently rely on these largely negative and controlling narratives and 1) cannot exist outside of discourses that attempt to define and limit their realities and 2) imagine others existing as individuals, rather than the clichés these discourses construct us as; i.e. being a loud, hypersexual black woman- How do you exist or operate outside of this? Only as an exception rather than the rule? Racist sexual stereotypes about black women, for example, might suggest that black women respond more often, or more confidently to street harassment from men (hooks 1989), because of

the powerful and pervasive controlling image of them as emasculating, independent, superwoman-like, and so forth (Wallace 1978; Collins 1991). Similarly, stereotypes that cast black women as hypersexual might encourage black women to embody this myth and construct such a reality, or to leave unquestioned, unexamined, or unchallenged the stereotypes about black women that street harassers reproduce when they engage black women whom they presume to be sexual freaks, sexually loose, or otherwise sexually available (Collins 1991, 2004a, 2004b).

Additionally, had Gardner considered how women of various racial groups read the experiences of street harassment in overlapping and similar; or divergent and dissimilar ways, or even considered the race of the male street harassers, the reader might have gained a better sense of the complexity of street harassment, as complicated by the fluid, flexible, and shifting subjectivities of both men and women in encounters of street harassment. For example, do women who experience street harassment get harassed mostly by a particular type of man, in terms of race, class, etc, or are women more likely to view street harassment from some men more positively, neutrally, or negatively than others? Does the race of the male harassers make any difference to the woman experiencing the harassment, in terms of how she feels, whether she feels flattered, threatened, chooses to respond, etc? Does (and if so, how does) the race of the woman impact the harassment, in terms of frequency, or quality? Is street harassment explicitly racialized in verbal discursive practices, such that the male harasser makes a direct reference to the woman or the woman must confront personally, if not socially (audibly, if not verbally), this racial reference to her presumed identity?

Additionally, I situated myself in this research, by conducting an autoethnography (Denzin 1997, 1989; Richardson 2001, 1993) that enabled me to reflect on and detail, in personal narrative form, my own discursive practices during social interactions that commence as or transform into street harassing episodes. By directly implicating and interjecting myself in this research project, I illustrate how my privileged position as a feminist "researcher" gets publicly compromised in instances that make me feel vulnerable, potentially disempowered, disrespected, or dismissed and sometimes simultaneously celebrated as the result of social markers of status/privilege: light skin; a certain dress; a middle-class decorum; etc. Through this process, I will be able to acknowledge the frequency with which I experience street harassment, and explore how the anxiety of this daily expectation has not only remained routine but has inspired and motivated me to pursue this work. I weave together my experiences with that of the respondents to illustrate the connections where they exist.

Assuming a self-reflexive positionality also allows me to draw connections or between my own experiences and those of other women, while making distinctions as well (Narayan 1997; Zavella 1997; Limon 1997). This approach recognizes the similarities in street harassing experiences among black women, along with the complexities and nuances of our experiences. Drawing on various literatures enables me to make these illustrations through an interdisciplinary lens.

Through the triangulation of three methodological approaches, qualitative interview-conversations (Blum 1999), video ethnography, and auto-ethnographic participant observation, I gathered and compiled information from these various sources

to paint a more vivid picture of the following issues: the extent to which men's street harassment of women remains routine, normalized, and dismissed as a regular part of everyday life; the ways women experience street harassment as racialized, gendered, classed, and sexual subjects; if, how, and why women choose to respond and react to street harassment; and how these choices to engage (or not) in discursive strategies of resistance (in speech or in silence) feels empowering, recuperative, or subversive versus debilitating, disabling, disempowering or repressive (Alcoff and Gray 1993). This investigation will contribute to the literature by validating, centering, and highlighting women's experiences; providing possible strategies for other women negotiating street harassment; and suggesting that street harassment remains a social problem that should not be ignored or dismissed as the victim/target's issue.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK

GENDER, SPACE, AND RACE: PUTTING US IN OUR PLACE

"As long as women rearrange their routes and lives because they don't feel comfortable in public spaces, we have a problem. We're still being put in our place." – Lisa Rundle[2]

As Doreen Massey (1994), Oldenburg (1997; 1989), Kowaleski-Wallace (1997); and others (see Beall 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Biaggio and Brownell 1996; Drucker and Grumpert 1997a, 1997b; Fayer 1997; Gardner 1980, 1995; Prior 2005; Parsons 1997; Rose 1999; Segovia 1997a; Torre 1997a) have argued, most women have traditionally and historically been relegated to the home, to attend to their presumed domestic duties and familial obligations or related responsibilities, whereas men have been expected to populate and dominate the public domain. This patriarchal gender ideology allowed men to dominate and control the public sphere (socially, politically, and likewise), while expecting women to want to take control of or being concerned with the private sphere (Fraser 2000; Friedan 1963; Habermas 1962), in part thanks to the curse of the cult of true womanhood (which framed ideal femininity largely in terms of domesticity, but not serving as a "domestic worker"). With social space organized around these assumptions, "respectable" women should only enter the public sphere (male territory) with a man as a means of maintaining their morality or presumably preserving their respectable femininity (Guano 2007; Fraser 2000; Habermas 1962; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997). Otherwise they risk jeopardizing their respectability by generating suspicions of sexual

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[2] Lisa Rundle (Summer 2003). "Summer in the City" in *Herizons* 17(1): 31.

immorality, looseness, or availability, such that they may be viewed as flawed or failed

women (Beall 1997a; Drucker and Gumpert 1997a, 1997b; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997;

Prior 2005), or thought of as prostitutes, working girls, or streetwalkers (Delacoste and

Alexander 1998; Pendleton 1997).

Such labels are not without racial and class connotations, cementing hegemonic

femininity or "true womanhood" as decidedly white and middle class, and less

decent/ideal femininity embodied by working class women and/or women of color.

These "good" versus "bad" girl distinctions build on Madonna/whore categorizations and

discourses which also possess classed, raced, and sexualized connotations. In fact, the

sexual scripts (that emerged because working class women and/or women of color

occupied the public sphere in ways that white, wealthy women did not have to due to

racial and economic privilege), labeled working class women and/or women of color as

sexually looser, more available, and otherwise accessible to men; and demonstrated that

respectability elides these women on the basis of race and/or class (Kowaleski-Wallce

1997; Collins 1991). One example of this relates domestic workers who entered public

space en route to their female employer's home. Once in the private domain, these

domestic workers encountered controlling mechanisms designed to ensure deference and

discipline; in the public domain, the domestics encountered men wanting to assert control

as well. Thus, this control involves both bodies and behavior, such that men police

women's sexuality discursively and behaviorally, in theory and in praxis, through the

perpetuation of traditional gender ideology (Butler 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987);

and patriarchal domination through the practice of street harassment, and similar phenomena (Angier 1999).

Women entering (invading or inhabiting) public space violate this gendered territoriality by trespassing on the contested terrain of what society perceives and constructs as men's space (Beall 1997a; Drucker and Gumpert 1997a, 1997b; Kowaleski-Wallace 1997; Prior 2005) and consequently may face intensified surveillance and increased visual or verbal scrutiny as a result of their presence in public (Bauman 1994; Foucault 1977; Gardner 1980, 1989, 1995; Segovia 1997a).

Of course, some scholars have argued that no clear boundaries exist between the public and the private; or that the spatial distinction has eroded to the point of artifice. Their argument adds support to the idea of gender exploitation and extermination, as violence against women occurs throughout the curved space (Gal 2004) of both spheres, such that women may encounter and confront societal desires to control and contain women's bodies and behavior. Thus, street harassment simultaneously operates as a socializing agent that reproduces hegemonic gendered sexual scripts and traditional behavioral gender norms, while also perpetuating the regulatory and disciplinary patriarchal control of women.

When men express or assert this desire to regulate and control women through street harassment, men may wear women down with words, exhaustingly assaulting women with verbal attacks of antagonism, aggression, or evaluative comments and inspiring some women to, in defensive retaliation, use their words as weapons. In this way, one could understand street harassment as a variation of violence against women, or

an illustration of a naturalized and normalized form of social control, much like feminicide (Fregoso 2003). The denial of these phenomena (street harassment and feminicide) cast them as individual problems rather than larger social issues. Rather than assume responsibility for flaws embedded in the patriarchy, the government and others locate blame on flawed women who seem to somehow provoke such attention (by "asking for it") and justifiably, on the basis of this sexist logic, warrant harassment from men or other forms of violence against women.

Instead of addressing these structural flaws, social institutions develop rhetorical strategies of deflection, through negation and disaggregation (Fregoso 2003:3). Melissa Wright echoes these sentiments, and suggests that the "valorization of female degradation" produces conditions that enable the disappearance of women, in their figurative and literal removal from public space (Wright 2004:370). Social discourses of negation, disaggregation, and degration enable the social regulation of women and facilitate and legitimate the violence visited upon us in the form of assaultive, offensive speech on the street. These discursive practices also attempt to ensure the erasure of women in public, such that women regarded as "out of place" experientially get put in their place through street harassment (Gardner 1995), street remarks (Gardner 1989), and other female-controlling practices (Herbert 1997), including potentially dangerous comments (Crawford 1993); offensive expressions (Burns, Jr. 1992); and offensive public injurious, assaultive, racist, sexist speech (discussed later) (Bowman 1993; Butler 1997; Delgado 1993; Nielsen 2000).

Understanding how women deploy their own discursive practices to negotiate street harassment entails investigating women's agency in deciding how, if, and when to respond to street harassment. For women, these choices are clearly fraught with potentially devastating consequences, including verbal retaliation, possible physical harm, or other forms of violence from men. When women repel such attention or respond ambivalently to the various performances of masculinities (Connell 1995) by male harassers (Brookbank 2002), the possibility of threat or intensified harassment becomes more visible.

Exploring how social scripts and behavioral norms related to gender, race, class, and sexuality shape the social interactions between strangers or unfamiliar others involves considering how men interpellate women differentially; how women accept, reject, or negotiate this interpellation; or how women experience multiple, possibly contradictory interpellations and shape their negotiations of street harassment around these hails (Althusser 1971). In part, one must consider how the urban social landscape provides an ideal environment in which to perform masculinity and femininity, particularly hegemonic, legitimated forms of both, which work to reproduce, rather than resist, compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1981). Since the city can serve as a social proving- and playground, men and women employ different gendered spatial practices in their respective performances of masculinity and femininity, performances shaped by race, class, and sexuality. These performances may also partially reflect how men and women may differentially envision the function of and consequently utilize urban spaces (Lefebvre 1991). Additionally, social boundaries erected to maintain distinctions along

lines of gender, race, class, nationality, sexuality, and so forth shape the spatial experiences and sense of place that people have in these public arenas (Guano 2003).

Spatial practices (Clifford 1997) may also vary by (across and within) culture, such that some groups of people may be acculturated to "hanging out" or otherwise populating public spaces in ways that remain less familiar or uncommon to others. In some ways, Miles Richardson's (1982) discussion of the market and the plaza may offer some insight into understanding street cultures with individuals involved in "engaged participation" and "disengaged observation," with both forms of social behavior reflective of people's comfort and familiarity with street life; motivation for occupying such spaces; their orientation to the utility of the spaces (more recreational, i.e. to "chill," to be voyeurs or flanuers; or more purposeful, i.e. to get somewhere specific, etc.) (Anderson 1990; Bauman 1994).

Elijah Anderson's (1990) idea about the social benefits of being "streetwise," an essential survival guide, draws attention to the consequences of unskillfully navigating certain urban terrains and potentially tumultuous social landscapes. By uncovering the various codes of street etiquette and street wisdom employed by residents of a Philadelphia neighborhood, he considers how people maneuver streets in part based on their perceptions of safety and danger and ability to navigate streetscapes with ease, comfort, and cool (Anderson 1990). Understanding street harassment then entails consideration of how men and women perceive, utilize, engage, and inhabit various spaces. This, in conjunction with men and women's social locations provide a sense of how they experience these spaces, and negotiate these social positions and roles through

social interactions. Next, I will explore this differential along gendered and racialized

lines.

UNDERSTANDING RACIALIZED AND GENDERED STREET HARASSMENT

Herbert (1997) suggests that sexual harassment remains a common and frequent

problem, often viewed as something unremarkable; continues to be viewed as an

"individual attack, a personal slur or a private put-down," but rather reflects a larger

social problem, since

> most women and girls at some time in their lives experience unwanted and
> unwelcomed sexual attention from someone in a position of power or authority
> over them. Sexual harassment of women and girls is not a private enterprise on
> the part of one man; rather it is part of a systematic social control of women
> which elsewhere I have called female-controlling practices….[via] sexist
> putdowns, sexual intrusions, sexual assault, sexualized comments, gestures, and
> innuendos" (Herbert 1997: 29).

Herbert distinguishes between the unwelcome and unwanted behavior that defines sexual

harassment and the "friendly behavior or sexual attention that is welcome and mutual"

(Herbert 1997:30). Allison Thomas (1997) agrees with Herbert with regards to the

structural level of the problem of street harassment, finding that "harassment stands as a

manifestation of a wider system of asymmetrical power relations between men and

women in society" (Thomas 1997:134). Thus, Thomas, like several others, views

harassment as a reflection of men's efforts to dominate women.

Amidst these discussions of domination, little attention has been directed to the

possibility of women experiencing multiple oppressions during street harassment. As

Sandler and Shoop (1997) note, "Women of color who may experience combined racism

and sexism (as in being called a 'black bitch')…are also vulnerable to stereotypes such as those that depict them as being more sexually available and as having greater sexuality than majority women" (Sandler and Shoop 1997:8). Darlene DeFour (1996) concurred with this assessment, arguing that researchers, by neglecting to obtain information about women's racial and ethnic identity, have failed to fully explore the relationship between race/ethnic and harassment. "As a result of this omission, we do not have a knowledge of the level of victimization of women of color" (DeFour 1996:49). Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) also draw attention to harassment across racial categories; critique the lack of research on racialized sexual harassment; and argue the following: "Despite extensive research on sexual harassment, relatively little has focused on the experience of ethnic minority women. This is surprising given that African American women have a long history of victimization" (Buchanan and Ormerod 2002: 107).

This victimization reflects an embarrassing national historical reality relating the mistreatment, devaluation, objectification, and dehumanization of disadvantaged groups, those understood as multiply marginalized or facing double, triple, or more levels of oppression or intensified vulnerability in urban public spaces (Herbert 1997). Few scholars have simultaneously considered harassment across social categories, producing partial explanations for this social phenomenon. One notable exception includes Nielsen's discussion of offensive public speech where she illustrates which groups (by gender and race) experience more sexually suggestive comments than other groups (Nielsen 2000). Catharine A. MacKinnon (1993) attempts to complicate the conversation on harassment by addressing the ways that people perpetuate the parallels between racial

and sexual harassment, rather than recognize their intersections and interrogate how mutually supportive the systems remain.

THE APPLICABILITY OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Exploring these intersections also involves considering how hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class may operate to silence some people while enabling others to express public speech that proves offensive; injurious; assaultive; sexually suggestive; racist; and/or homophobic (Beneke 1997; Bowman 1993; Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 2005; Crenshaw 2001; Delgado 1993; Duneier 1999; Duneier and Molotch 1999; Lawrence 1990; Nielsen 2000). Ignoring these intersections overlooks important dynamics that mask how social positions shape the social phenomenon of street harassment.

My larger work simultaneously considers intersections, to illustrate how women of various racial groups experience and then negotiate such examples of offensive public speech in the form of street harassment. In this work, I narrow my lens of inspection to specifically consider black women's experiences, but maintain this intersectional approach throughout this work. As Anne McClintock points out, "race, class, and gender are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways" (McClintock 1995: 5). Similarly, Rundle (1993) found that disentangling various social positions proved impossible when examining street

harassment, since men's attention may intensify at the site of particular subject position configurations.

As a result, I rely on Collins's theories of intersectionality (1991, 2000), as well as bell hooks (2003, 2001, 2000) to create a bricolage of theoretical perspectives and frameworks that allow for a richer investigation of women's experiences by hopefully unveiling more nuanced realities that work to explode over-simplistic metanarratives about how women respond to street harassment. As discussed below, a variety of theories help complicate current understanding of women's negotiations of street harassment, and should highlight both the similarities and divergences among women who encounter street harassment. An intersectional approach allows me to simultaneously consider subject positions and these street negotiations.

Althusser's ideas allow one to view the social behavior of men and women in relation to ideological discourses about gender roles and social expectations. Men who harass women reproduce the traditional, hegemonic masculinity that suggests men should be assertive, active, and likewise (Connell 1995). Women who experience street harassment from men must decide whether to reproduce social scripts relating respectable femininity by appearing (not too) receptive to, and tolerant of, men's advances on the street, or disrupt these notions of respectable femininity by asserting themselves, rejecting men's advances, and otherwise ignoring social scripts that suggest how feminine women should react to men's street harassment.

This research explores how respondents experience the raced and gendered aspects of their subjectivity, as influenced by that of the street harassers. This task

involves examining the dialectic and iterative relationship between the men who harass and the women who experience the harassment. Considering the raced and gendered identities of those who harass women recognizes how men are hailed into certain subject positions. I explore this aspect to a lesser degree, but nevertheless acknowledge how men of different races reflect or contest socially constructed scripts about their sexuality. Exploring, for example, how white men and women frequently construct black male sexuality as menacing, threatening, polluting, and contaminating, this research draws attention to the role and influence of these sexual stereotypes and controlling images on the subjectivity of male harassers and their actions or behavior. I discuss some of these narratives and mythologies below.

Acknowledging the intersectionality of identities recognizes the multiple subject positions people occupy simultaneously. This remains an important consideration of this work since I argue that women's experiences of street harassment reflect their raced and gendered identities. Consequently, the content or characteristics of the street harassment may differ based on race, but also hail women in racialized terms, based on socially constructed notions of gender and race. Thus, the experiences of black women may parallel that of white women, but the way the two are hailed may reflect these racialized constructions of gender (i.e. hailing the white woman as respectable and desirable because of higher racial caste status, etc. versus hailing the black woman as sexually liberated or hypersexual, etc.).

Intersectionality relates to another important issue relevant to this research: fluidity, hybridity, and the instability of identities. Postmodernity permits this instability

because postmodern conditions created these fragmented, fractured identities (Jameson 1984). As Chris Weedon (1997) discusses, the discursive practices related to the regulation of (women in) the public sphere remains connected to the regulation of women's bodies in general. As women occupy different social locations as the result of continued resistance to and contestation of their subordinated position in society, they are situated differently, according to these changes in status or social location.

Discussions of sexuality remain important to the social phenomenon of street harassment because the exchange arguably relies primarily on the presumption of heterosexuality among those involved, such that the male harasser behaves partially based on the expectation that the women he verbally entangles and engages will reciprocate his heterosexual desire. In many ways, then, street harassment enforces heterosexuality by imposing this assumption on others; failure to conform to these expectations may be penalized in the form of hostile, antagonistic, intensified offensive public speech, aggressive verbal entanglements, and so forth (see Duneier and Molotch 1999; Nielsen 2000). The enforcement of heterosexuality, in part, relies on the gendered performance of hegemonic femininity and masculinity (Butler 1990). According to Kilmartin (1999), among others (see Beneke 1997; Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 2005; Kimmel 2003, 2005; Mac An Ghaill 2000; Miedzian 2005; and Stoltenberg 2005), hegemonic masculinity supports heterosexuality through traditional gender socialization that encourages and condones men's sexual aggression and constant sexual and social pursuit of a woman (or several women). He draws attention to the connections between traditional or hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, by discussing how men receive

messages about the two, through expectations that men will experience validation of their manhood through sexual experiences and sex-related quantification or enumeration, such as the number of female sexual conquests, partners, etc. (Kilmartin 1999). Street harassment serves as one arena that cements the connection between men's presumed/expected masculinity and heterosexuality since this phenomenon relies heavily on men proving manhood through the pursuit of women and their attendant attention.

Street harassment also operates as an arena and social process that allows for the performance of femininity, hegemonic (respectable) femininity (Guano 2007). Because respectable femininity imposes a particular kind of subjectivity on women, understanding how women contest or disrupt these gendered expectations remains relevant and important. Most men rely on traditional notions of respectable femininity to guide/inform their social interactions. Thus, they express surprise or shock at women who assert themselves in public when responding to street remarks or harassment. Consequently, examining the role of ideology regarding subjectivity remains central. What seems clear relates men's reliance on this notion of respectable femininity to categorize women by sorting them into these crude dichotomies and oppositional binaries of "good" or "bad." This Madonna/whore categorization then arguably influences both the ways in which men harass women, as well as how women respond in relation to their self-concept and understanding of their own subjectivities, as framed by these narrow options (good versus bad).

What proves most useful in this understanding of women's sexuality relates the variations that exist or have emerged from this starting point, variations that account for

the intersections of race, sexuality, and to a lesser degree, class; and the impact that this Madonna/whore model has on people's perception and understanding of women's sexuality, and on the social interactions that people have with one another, in which sexual scripts take shape to mold, influence, guide, or otherwise influence social behavior, interactions, and so forth. In this way, the Madonna/whore model provides an insufficient framework for understanding how men may see women in terms of this sexual dichotomy (among other factors) and relate to her accordingly, in this case, in urban public spaces.

Thus, discussions about racialized gendered myths of women involving various stereotypes of, for example, black women, would include examining the following categories: divas, freaks, gold diggers, dykes, gangsta bitches, earth mothers, sister saviors, baby mamas, big girls, and so on (Stephens and Phillips 2003). These stereotypes build upon historical, controlling images of black female sexuality including the following: the asexual mammy; hot-blooded hypersexual jezebel; emasculating, powerful, independent matriarch; the black bitch; the black lady; and welfare queen (Collins 2004a, 2004b). Recognizing the multiple ways that black women's sexuality gets (generally heterosexually) scripted into the media and social life requires an acknowledgement of the history of slavery and the particular gendered and racialized oppression and abuse black women experienced at the hands of white men (Collins 2004a, 2004b; Donovan and Williams 2002; Guy-Sheftall 2003), or illustrations of victimization of African American women that Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) suggest of which "the most egregious examples were the wanton rape and sexual abuse of female

slaves by slave owners and their relatives, overseers, and even guests" (Buchanan and

Ormerod 2002:108).

They continue,

> After slavery was dismantled, and well into the 1960s, African American women were relegated to domestic employment. Black women continued to be at risk for sexual mistreatment because they worked in the homes of White families. Having few options and few financial resources increased their vulnerability and decreased their likelihood of complaining about sexual harassment (Neville and Homer 2001)….

This painful history produced a legacy of stereotypical and grossly offensive

images of black women, images that continue to get reproduced, reinvented, and

ultimately consumed for capitalist gains and cultural commodification and gratification.

Examining the lingering impact of this power asymmetrical history and society helps

illustrate how images of black women, among other less structurally powerful groups,

maintained a disciplinary and regulatory effect on people. Thus, I considered street

harassment in the context of controlling images of black women. Additionally, I

recognized that black women may hesitate to label men's behavior as harassment, as

some have argued, in order to evade embodying a cliché (being seen as consistent with

various controlling images). "Black women may not want to draw attention to

themselves as targets of sexual attention" (Kalof, Eby, Matheson, and Kroska 2001:298).

As black feminist scholars have argued, being black and female often creates a double

jeopardy for this group, and we can see this unfold as sexual/sexist and racial/racist

harassment combine to form unique experiences for black women (Buchanan and

Ormerod 2002).

The historical legacy of sexual exploitation of black women exposes why it is easy to view the sexual harassment of black women as also racially motivated (Collins 1998, 2000; Murrell 1996; Winston 1991). "Moreover, the harassment is likely to take different forms in the lives of Black women than in the lives of White women. For example, although a coworker may refer to a White woman as a whore or a slut, an African American woman may be called a *Black* whore, which creates an experience that combines aspects of both race and gender oppression (Buchanan 1999)" (in Buchanan and Ormerod 2002: 108-109).

Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) argue that for African American women, sexual harassment is inextricably linked with racism. This intersection of race and gender intensifies or multiplies the forms of harassment black women face, as related to racism and sexism. Thus, they may encounter men who attempt to harass them as a reaction to the women's identities as female *and* black. They outline the need for research to explore the possible connections between racist and sexist harassment; the consequences on black women; and any differential outcomes for this group in comparison to white women. Since Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) found that sexism and racism converged uniquely to create racialized sexual harassment, expressed in varying degrees including covert, subtly overt, and overt, the impetus for feminist scholars to further explore these nuances among many groups remains, particularly amidst colorblindness which enables racial reticence among people (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The convergence of sexist and racist harassment is not unique for black women but remains more visible since the term "black" remains synonymous with race, and the term "woman" remains synonymous

with gender (and by extension erases the existent variations within and across both categories. Thus, we should recognize how white women endure racialized and gendered street harassment but may refuse to talk about or avoid discussing these issues and intersecting oppressions.

The unique experiences and stereotypes of women of various social positions necessitate a discussion of the ways that intersections form different experiences. Engaging in intersectionality theory allows for the exploration of the unique and different experiences women have, while still providing the space for women's experiences to converge. However, while these convergences do exist, highlighting and explicating the divergences and particularities in women's experiences resulting from their unique social locations, subjectivities, and personal histories allows for a richer and more complicated understanding of women's lives.

DeFour (1996) explores prevalent and pervasive myths about the sexual morality (or immorality) and character of women. She mentions the racist and sexist undercurrents of "unwanted inappropriate and offensive sexual advances" that women of color in particular face in the academy (in her research) and discusses the economic vulnerability that she implies as particular to the experiences of women of color (DeFour 1996: 50). She continues to explore "images and perceptions of women of color" that arguably "increase their vulnerability to harassment." This imagery, consistent with Collins' discussion of controlling images of black women as emasculating, domineering, matriarchal, sexually promiscuous and hypersexual, and morally debased or loose (1991),

works to "portray the women as weak, and thus unlikely to fight back if harassed; or as very sexual and thus desiring sexual attention" (DeFour 1996:50).

By depicting black women as perpetually on the prowl for sexual satisfaction, these controlling images therefore operate by justifying the sexual exploitation of black women [a variation on the theme of women "asking for it" when they do face street harassment, or find themselves the target of other forms of men's (sexualized) attention]. It is precisely this sort of racialized, gendered, and sexualized mythology, coupled with a history of sexual exploitation of black women, which creates this vulnerability for this group. As a result, Tong (1984) argues, "Sexual harassers tend to take advantage of those whom they perceive as most vulnerable, and whether we care to face it or not, black women enflesh the vulnerability of their people's slave past" (Tong 1984:165).

DeFour (1996) posits that men's harassment marks an assertion of their personal power made possible in a patriarchal society, power that hinges on the racial status of the harasser. As indicated by Tong (1984):

> In those cases where their harassers are white men, black women generally observe that their harassers use sex as an excuse not only to control their *individual* bodies but also to exercise power over all of them as a *class* of persons: as women (sexism) or blacks (racism) or as disadvantaged blacks (classism)….That black women's reports of sexual harassment by white male superordinates reflect a sense of impugnity that resounds of slavery and colonization is, in this connection highly significant.…This is not to say that harassment is to be condoned depending on the race/ethnicity of the harasser. This is also not to imply that Black women feel less violated when the harasser is a Black male. The implication is that when racism, sexism, and classism combine, a qualitatively different type of sexual harassment is the result. (Tong 1984:165).

My own research addresses this exclusion, and advances existing understandings of street harassment as women experience, respond to, and potentially resist such social interactions. This intersectional approach also recognizes how different discourses produce discourses around different bodies, and the discourses these bodies produce vary in response to these specific social locations. The discursive practices that people produce reflect both hegemonic ideological perpetuations of traditional gendered and racialized, heteronormative scripts, and expectations, and disruptive strategies that resist these scripts. Examinations of variations such as docility, and discursive practices enable a richer understanding of women's racialized and gendered experiences with street harassment. That a black woman responds to a male harasser's attention reproduces discourses about assertive, emasculating, black femininity (but interpretations of her behavior partially hinges on the race of the harasser). A black woman who chooses silence may do so not as a disservice to herself, but instead as a powerful strategy of resistance to this racialized and gendered expectation that anticipates (and overdetermines) her (as a black woman) incitement to speak more often than not. Conversely, silence can be read as reproducing hegemonic discourses about women as quiet, or "better to be seen and not heard." Recognizing the differences between actively refusing to respond to street harassment or feeling silenced reflects the tension between agency and structure, and points to the tenuous reconciliation of the two at the site of street harassment.

While speaking up can be read through a traditional gendered lens as being polite and respectably feminine, an against the grain reading of black women's discursive

resistance requires some attention to the possibility that these women do recognize these racialized and gendered discourses but find asserting themselves verbally restores and/or affirms their subjectivity. The risk of reproducing such race and gender stereotypes may pale in comparison to the power accessed through this restoration of subjectivity. To remind male harassers of this subjectivity is to both resist myths of female weakness, subordination, or vulnerability, but also to produce new ways of negotiating power publicly, in the case of street harassment. To speak sometimes is to access power often off-limits to women who were punished for speaking such that speech can serve as an act of transforming oneself from an object to a subject of one's own life (hooks 1989).

Evaluating the disciplinary mechanisms that operate to control women, including their speech, I examine any trends and patterns that emerge in which women engage in verbal strategies of resistance and which do not (Foucault 1997). Exploring racialized and gendered narratives about who employs such speech practices will complicate notions of speech and silence, and will uncover how both can prove empowering and disempowering in various situations of street harassment (Alcoff and Gray 1993; Cvetkovich 2003; Foucault 1977). I hope that this works to disrupt the notion of women as relatively silent or passive passersby on the street, and suggests instead that women possess the power to resist patriarchy and the oppressive and disciplinary elements of street harassment from men. This goal remains important to me, since much of the literature on street harassment effectively erases the women's subjectivity and makes them seem as objectified as the street harassers themselves.

By recognizing the various discursive strategies women employ to resist street harassment, I explore the extent to which women rely on disaffiliative responses (non-response to obvious attempts by men to verbally entangle women); unreciprocated or unreturned adjacency pairs (inviting comments that seek some response); or other strategies to navigate street harassing situations in ways that reflect similar levels of maneuvering to that of the street harassers (Duneier 1999; Duneier and Molotch 1999). Additionally, I hope to explode the myth that being "streetwise" necessarily involves "disaffiliative silences" that allow women to avoid unwanted interactions (Duneier and Molotch 1999). Instead, I suspect that, for some women, silence may provoke or intensify street harassment from men and might require or inspire many women, however disinterested they may be, to respond in some way to this "stranger etiquette," in order to pacify and soothe the interests of the street harassing men.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE: SELECTION, SIZE, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In order to engage in this exploratory study of women's experiences of gendered and racialized street harassment by men, I employed snowball or "accidental" sampling to draw a sample of 20 female respondents for the confidential, open-ended, in-depth, face-to-face, qualitative interview conversations (Babbie 1998; Blum 1999). The respondents, who ranged in age from 20 to 35 years of age, had to be 18 years or older; and live, work, or attend educational institutions in the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area. Each woman with whom I spoke had a unique story to share, with experiences that converged with and diverged from that of the other respondents. In the end, because of the (largely black and white) racial demographics of Atlanta and given my own position situated between black and white, I interviewed 10 white women, and 10 black/African American women. As mentioned previously, in this work I focus solely on the black women in my sample. Centering their voices allows me to show the specificity of their experiences as race and gender converge to create street harassment that parallels and diverges from that which other groups of women (and men) experience.

Narrowing the overall sample to white and black women enabled me to make some racial connections, at times when my experiences paralleled or reflected that of the respondents. Conversely, I believe that a few of the respondents, both white and black, viewed me as unlike them and different even from how I identify myself, which may have helped and/or hindered the interview process. In either case, I felt quite comfortable

conducting all of the interview conversations, which generally lasted about an hour. I encouraged the women to shape the interview as they saw fit. In this way, the women openly shared their stories with me, as I did with them, as a means of communicating just how common the experience of street harassment can be, but also to show my appreciation for their effort to expose what they had endured in their street social encounters. Some women claimed that the everyday routine of harassment made recalling particular incidents difficult, while others seemed to have harassment experiences etched into their memory.

At the inception of each interview, I presented each respondent with a consent form (detailing the research objectives and goals, any risks or consequences of the study, and other research-relevant information), which they signed as an indication of their willingness or agreement to participate in the research. While I did not monetarily compensate respondents for their time or energy, I felt that offering respondents the opportunity to share their experiences provided potential benefits, including having the chance to express their mixed emotions about their experiences with street harassment and appeared to enjoy being given the time to reflect on and continue to make sense of these encounters. The comfort and ease with which most of the women revealed the details of the encounters partially demonstrated their trust in me and their willingness to unpack to often painful, uncomfortable realities of their street harassment, as well as the more humorous and light-hearted encounters they had with men who harassed. This should not, however, overshadow the reticence some women experienced in discussing certain aspects of harassment, such as racial dynamics, a reluctance shared by many

women apprehensive about reliving the humiliation, shame, and embarrassment of the initial harassment (Guano 2007).

THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Throughout the interview process, I encouraged the respondents to actively direct the flow of the conversation and shape the process by co-constructing any questions, deciding what directions the inquiries should take, and otherwise guiding the interview process as an active, engaged, and empowered participant (Babbie 1998; Denzin 1989; Hartsock 1983; Reinharz 1992; Phoenix 2001; Richardson 1997; Sandoval 2000; Smith 1999). This decolonizing strategy works to minimize existing and inevitable power differentials created by the social locations of the researcher (as having power over) and respondent (as having power under) (Acker, Barry, and Esseveld 1983; Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Minnich 1990; Smith 1999; Twine 2000). Conducting interview conversations enabled the dialectic relationship and captured the iterative, flexible flow of the interview. They also enabled me to generate a kind of trust and rapport necessary for non-hierarchical and productive research relationships (Acker et. al. 1983). Reinharz (1992) highlights the benefits of trusting the respondents, suggesting that the development of trust works to minimize the power differential between the researcher and the researched; facilitates the flow of information; and provides the researcher with access to information that otherwise might remain hidden or untapped, if the respondent is adversely or intrusively verbally probed during the interview process.

While Babbie (1998) encourages the researcher to envision him/herself as a miner or traveler (see also Clifford 1997), Reinharz (1992) offers up the metaphors of "learner"

or "questioner" for the researcher's role. Other scholars, including feminist

anthropologists such as Kirin Narayan (1997), Lila Abu-Lughod (1993), and Dorinne

Kondo (1990) have offered muddier metaphors that illustrate the messiness and porosity

of boundaries. For example, Narayan (1997) poses the question in the title of her article,

"How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" and suggests that many researchers occupy

an interstitial position as insider/outsider or what she calls a "halfie." Narayan

interrogates claims of objectivity, exposing the ways that scholars often situate

themselves in multiple communities rather than the assumed isolated ivory tower or

insulated community of residence. Her term forces us to consider these multiple

connections and make sense of the various roles we occupy simultaneously, multiple

identities that do not necessarily compete with one another in the way that some have

suggested. The benefit of being a "halfie" stems from recognizing one's connection to

and (previous) participation or involvement in a community, social ties that facilitate

further access to respondents who in turn may volunteer information as an informant or

respondent.

The "halfie" metaphor directly exposes intimate connections and provides a

context in which to begin understanding what motivated a researcher to conduct certain

investigations. The term partially explains why a researcher possesses interest in

particular populations, and how the researcher reveals how she might be connected to and

influenced by these communities, as an occasional member of such communities.

Narayan urges a consideration of these connections between the researcher and

researched and consequently remains critical of the social scientific notion of objectivity, as the social reality influences both parties, albeit differentially.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1990a, 1990b, 1993) similarly advocates an interrogation of claims of objectivity; explicates why she feels a need exists for her to interject herself into the process; and describes the researcher's role as that of creating the space for stories to be told. She motivates us to consider the frequently fictitious distinctions between researcher and respondent and minimize them by focusing on individuals to establish familiarity and identification with others, instead of distance. In adopting a humanistic writing (against culture) that counters the traditional "configuration of global power" and moves texts away from reproducing these power dynamics, researchers can dissolve this distance through reflexivity rather than objectivity.

Laurel Richardson (1997) reminds us, in the same feminist spirit, to focus on the "speakers whose voices matter" (Richardson 1997:52). This recognizes the role of researcher as a writer who organizes the text around the respondent and centers their experiences in possible relation to the researcher but with the goal of spotlighted sometimes silenced voices. Along parallel lines, Ruth Behar suggests the same by privileging a "subject speaking for herself rather than being spoken for" (Behar 1993: 19). For Behar (1993), academic researchers have the responsibility of considering "life as a text," and being writers/translators that reflect the experiential realities of the respondent. Participation in generating hybrid stories with respondents enables researchers to collaborate on and translate these texts into forms more accessible to others, yet recognizable to the respondents. These images prove useful in both

illustrating the researcher's role in facilitating the telling of stories (stories otherwise overlooked, ignored, or invalidated as biased, exaggerations, distortions of the "truth"); and in highlighting the importance of allowing these stories to be shared by women who often feel the need to tell in order to live (The Latina Feminist Group 2001).

Babbie describes the difficulty in embracing a foreign, unfamiliar, or objectionable point of view, "Adopting an alien point of view is an uncomfortable prospect for most people. It's one thing to learn about the strange views that others may hold. Sometimes you probably find it hard just to tolerate certain views" (Babbie 1998: 288). In some ways, Babbie's perspective parallels that of Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid who works against establishing clear and fixed positions between the native and tourist, or the researched and researcher, if you will. "That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere." (Kincaid 2003: 156). The travel and tourist metaphor remains important in serving as a reminder of both the shifting positions of the researcher (discussed above in terms of being a "halfie") and the colonial or dominating impact that researchers as privileged by virtue of their position of power must remember to recognize and regard this privilege with reluctance, such that they do not silence voices that they are really attempting to reveal and make space for.

DATA RECORDING AND ANALYSIS

In order to preserve the data for later transcription and analysis, I audiotaped the interviews. During the face-to-face interviews, I noted any salient and lucid elements of

the respondents' accounts. Writing notes during the interview, while possibly creating a distraction or detracting from the undivided attention the participants deserve, provided an additional information gathering and processing strategy (Strauss and Corbin 1998). By simultaneously (audio) recording and writing notes about the interview, I ensured that I gathered and recorded all of the information communicated and shared during the interview process. I transcribed all interviews, as a means of remaining personally involved and engaged in the process of recording and interpreting these women's lives and experiences.

In order to identify the most salient and consist themes to emerge from the interviews, I conducted a content analysis of the data. Although this content analysis could lead to a quantitative evaluation and representation of the research, I employed modified grounded theory method (GTM) to generate new theories about the research participants' experiences in negotiating street harassment in public urban spaces. By following the guidelines outlined by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998), I progressed through the stages of the coding process, moving from conceptual ordering and theorizing to microscopic analysis of data to open, axial and selective coding.

The coding process involved the fracturing, conceptualization, and integration of data during the analytic processes to formulate and generate new theoretical discoveries (Strauss and Corbin 1998; also Glaser and Strauss 1967). Initially, I gathered large amounts of data in the form of the qualitative interviews, which I synthesized and reduced into a neater package of information. The coding process enabled me to conceptualize, reduce, elaborate, and relate the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

I abandoned conventional wisdom, by thinking creatively and flexibly, since the goal of grounded theory involves building, rather than testing, theory. Coding procedures provided the necessary analytic tools to examine these interviews, and assisted me in considering different perspectives, meanings, or explanations of street harassment. By internally integrating and relating the data, I identified, developed, and related the concepts to build new theory regarding black women's experiences with and responses to street harassment. Issues of black women's intersectional identities remained central throughout the process, and related to the situatedness of street harassment, as the women's responses hinged on how they perceived the situation and how men engaged them in social interactions that could qualify to them as street harassment.

The initial stages of grounded theory involved describing, conceptually ordering, and theorizing data. In the beginning, I "played" with the data by providing descriptions of the data. Then, I created an order to the data by organizing the data into definitive categories "according to their properties and dimensions and then using description to elucidate those categories" (Strauss and Corbin 1998:19). Finally, theorizing data involved the "act of constructing from data an explanatory scheme that systematically integrates various concepts through statements of relationship. A theory does more than provide understanding or paint a vivid picture. It enables users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action" (Strauss and Corbin 1998:19).

The analytic process of microscopically investigating the data proved an important step in the process of grounded theory method since carefully scrutinizing the interviews enabled me to "uncover new concepts and novel relationships and to

systematically develop categories in terms in their properties and dimensions" (Strauss and Corbin 1998:71). The discovery of new theoretical developments illustrates the ways that this approach allowed me to create and innovate, while still remaining grounded in the data.

The next stage in the process involved questions and questioning. As I began this microscopic analysis of the data, I began an intellectual inquiry about the data itself. By asking theoretical questions, I attempted to understand the key issues, problems, and concerns that surface in the data and identify connections among concepts (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This stage allowed me to consider the relationship between concepts in the data, see their interconnectedness nature, assess their quality, and determine that I had well-developed concepts to generate theory.

Had the coding process not resulted in the complete or satisfactory saturation of categories, I would have relied on theoretical sampling to achieve the goal of theoretical saturation by deciding what data to collect next and where to find them. The basic questions remain: "What groups or subgroups of populations, events, activities (to find varying dimensions, strategies, etc.) does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose?" The emerging theory controls this process of data collection, which involves much calculation and imagination on the part of the analyst. The generation of this new, tightly woven, well-supported theoretical development offers new insight about a particular social phenomenon, in this case, how black women choose to negotiate street harassment.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The collection and representation of in-depth interviews provided lucid details about black women's life experiences. The extent to which the interviewees adequately and accurately answered the questions I posed to them in the study, and the extent to which I was able to measure the variables I intended to measure indicated the study's validity.

Although interview respondents may choose to falsify information or provide inaccurate or inconsistent responses/accounts of their life stories and experiences, they were encouraged to voice their own opinions and ideas. By creating an iterative interview atmosphere, I engaged each respondent in a meaningful exchange, which worked to ensure the validity of this research.

Because each relationship between the respondent and I was unique, the reliability of the research could have been compromised. Each time the study is reproduced, each new researcher might obtain different results, based on researcher-researched rapport and differential trust relationships. Thus, qualitative research tends to have more validity and less reliability. I obtained similar qualities of measurement in my research. I imagined that a researcher who does not identify as a feminist might not have obtained the same results that I did (Twine 2000). Additionally, because of the sensitive and personal nature of the subject matter of the study, I think that my gender (female), racial identity (multiracial), nationality (Caribbean/Canadian/American), and other social positions, as well as my personal experiences of being street harassed created a unique research environment (partially organized around this shared experience of street harassment) and

lends itself to the facilitation of discussion in interviews with women and/or with racially diverse respondents.

Despite the shortcomings in reliability, the research project remains an interesting and useful one in understanding the strategies that black women employed to negotiate gendered and racialized street harassment from men in public urban spaces. Knowledge of this information may improve gender relations, uses of urban spaces and the social interactions that occur in these spaces.

TRIANGULATION

Denzin (1989) suggests the following forms of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological. These four forms of triangulation strengthened my research endeavors by enabling me to incorporate multiple sources of information, gathered through various methods by multiple investigators, and examined and interpreted through multiple theoretical lenses. Triangulation on multiple levels allowed me to produce sound research. Valerie Janesick (1994) built on Denzin's model, suggesting that interdisciplinary triangulation be added to the list. Using this advice, I designed my research with these goals in mind. With the exception of using multiple researchers, I attempted to create triangulation in the areas of data, theory, methodology, and interdisciplinarity. To achieve this goal and illustrate the various ways women, myself included, experience the supervisory surveillance and disciplinary effects of the scrutinizing and evaluating male gaze (Mulvey 1989) that makes women a spectacle (DeBord 1990) on the street; possibly disrupt the power embedded in looking; and the

potential pleasure of inviting and averting the gaze, I conducted qualitative interviews as well as an autoethnography (Richardson 2001, 1993) that facilitated a self-reflexive process of investigation. I synthesized postmodern, structural, poststructural, feminist, global critical race and other theories to weave together a tighter framework for understanding issues of street harassment. Issues of power, desire, and scopophilia framed my discussion of how women deal with and possibly inspire visual desire of men. I relied on information from multiple sources, using an interdisciplinary approach to add depth to the discussion, help frame the research question, and provide greater understanding of the social phenomenon on the basis of anthropological, sociological, and feminist perspectives.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Much like Gwendowlyn Parker (1997) described in her memoir, *Trespassing: My Sojourn in the Halls of Privilege*, I feel a similar sense of un-belonging in ways that parallel Parker's feelings in dealing with the racism and sexism prevalence in the corporate world. When I leave my home, a home that feels increasingly unsafe after a series of events in my neighborhood that leave me feeling paranoid at best, and perpetually uneasy at worst. Despite this increasingly blurriness between the outside world that gets constructed as unsafe or dangerous for women and the inside world of my home that random people seem to want to penetrate or access, I still feel like my occupation of public space inspires the gaze, invites unwanted attention, and leaves me wishing I had a access to a wand that might make me disappear, or be invisible to those

who find me so fascinating to watch, so entertaining to talk to, or to try to talk to in any case. I think I do not really wish to be invisible, so I must resist the thought whenever it surfaces, every time it surfaces. What I wish is for equality, no patriarchy, a world where I can enter public space and enjoy a breath of fresh air, a long run in my neighborhood, and leisurely stroll in my urban neighborhood park, without the feeling of trespassing nagging at me with every necessary step.

Writing Against Culture Involves Playing with Writing[3]

"Policing is always about bodies, though, isn't it? It's not just about ideas, but about people. What real live people are included or excluded through different visions of ethnographic practices?" [4]

Rule #1: Good Girls Don't Talk to Strangers
Rule #2: Never Reject A Man's Advances
Rule #3: Break the Rule #1 If You Want to Avoid Being Called a Bitch

I am sitting, waiting, wishing I was not working class, wanting to not have to wait for a friend gracious and generous enough to pick me up from the train station since I did not yet have a car at that point. So I am sitting, sifting in and out of random thoughts, daydreaming perhaps, finding anything to distract myself from this new life I think I am about to have, having recently moved to the South, re-entering graduate school, working 9 to 5, sitting, waiting, wishing…hoping that this cocoa-complexioned black man who's walking by won't say anything to me, because I do not feel like being engaged, and I have nowhere to go, if the conversation takes a similar route (i.e., goes nowhere).

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[3] Lila Abu-Lughod (1990). "Writing Against Culture."
[4] Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 1997: 146

I suspect that if he chooses to entangle me in some seemingly casual conversation, he will be angered by my non-response, my lack of any reciprocation or notable enthusiasm. I decide not to say a word, make any movement, wish myself invisible to dissuade him from giving me the attention I do not want, did not ever ask for from this strange man. Sure enough, he travels alongside the bench upon which I am sitting, perched just outside of the entrance to the train station. He greets me, and I hold firm. Not a peep do I utter. I refuse to be cajoled into a conversation. I think he repeats the attempt to attract my attention, hailing me figuratively and literally with "Sista." In my refusal to accept that interpellation, since I have never had an affinity for the expression, I feel even less obligated to respond. I wonder, "Does he even know who I am? Can he quite possibly tell I am not of the South, but was born further South, on a small island so tiny it appears the size of a dot on most global maps, the name St. Thomas far larger in print than the cartographic illustration of the place itself? Does he sense my disconnections to a word that seems specifically and specially situated in a particular community or experience, one that is decidedly American, and African-American? Does he know that I am mixed race? In the midst of all of this wondering, I hear him say, "White bitch" and ramble on, in a mumbling tone, probably about how I thought I was better than him. That's what people usually think of me if they don't know me (rather than recognizing the quiet, cognitive side of me), because that myth seems older than time, that "light-skinned beauties" have some awareness of their privilege and perpetuate it whenever possible.

Once I experienced that verbal accusation, I remember my mind racing, wondering what I could possibly say at that point to recuperate some conversational balance. I decided against responding, partly because I felt so stunned, silenced, beyond words; and partly because I remember feeling concerned in a way I had not experienced that often before, concern over the anger in this male stranger's voice, his expressed resentment over my presumed rejection of him (his masculinity), or my refusal to create an alliance with him across race. The situation remained so ironic to me, is hailing me as black ("Hey, sista") and then meeting or countering my rejection of him with an accusatory attack on my race. It seems as though by calling me out as white, this black man could walk away with his masculinity and sexuality intact, because to him, perhaps, it was easier to be rejected by a white woman than one he perceived as similar to him racially.

The Circuitous Consequences of Autethography: Experiencing the Experience[5]

At the repeated suggestion of my committee chair, I slowly and a bit reluctantly considered the benefits of engaging in more reflexive ethnographic work, introspective inquiry, and interactive interviewing (Ellis 2004). Even in retrospect I cannot understand my initial reluctance but remain grateful at the enthusiasm she continually expressed as she encouraged my creativity and reflexivity in this project. As a result, I explored the

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[5] Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (Eds.) (1996). *Composing Ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

works of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (2000, 1996), and others in search of further inspiration. Indeed, I found what I was looking for and more, spending more time than I had planned pouring over various works, devouring the ideas and strategies for situating the self, creating a sociology of emotion and socio-poetics, and weaving myself into the inquiry in a reflexive, rather than a self-absorbed or indulgent, way. This weaving gave way to the tapestry of words here, with the women's words blending with my own at times, our stories merging together at times, diverging at others. What I provide throughout this work similarly reflects what I shared during my interview-conversations with the women who shared pieces of their experiences with me- snippets of my life where I felt objectified, celebrated, highlighted, visually consumed, and responded to by men I considered harassing. These street harassment snippets allowed women to share more of themselves with me, once they recognized the similarities in our experiences rather than getting stuck on perceived differences. I shared with sincerity, not as a strategy for eliciting more information, and hoped to connect to rather than manipulate these women. In the end, the stories we shared stay with me, as I continually reflect on how they negotiate street harassment, and consider alternate ways of socially engaging men on the street (rather than issuing fiery retorts or shooting decidedly prohibitive "don't mess with me" stares at them). My only hope is that the women gained as much from sharing their experiences and listening to mine as I did with them.

Regrettably, what follows constitutes such a small portion of the conversations that unfolded behind closed doors, where the women would share the sometimes gritty, sometimes witty details of their street harassment experiences, that I wish for the space to

make all of the women's words, ideas, emotions, and reactions available for others to understand the complexity of these women's lives, and the nuances that unfold in their often daily negotiations during their encounters and confrontation with street harassment. Alas, I have selected portions of each interview, organized them thematically, and attempted to provide the parts most illuminating, entertaining, and revealing. Perhaps specks of the mundane get incorporated into the fold as well, to serve as a reminder that in their ordinary, everyday lives, women encounter street remarks and harassment from men and must navigate these social spaces and situations as best they can, in order to preserve their safety, communicate their personality, and maintain their kind of femininity, whatever that may be. May the readers find solace, comfort, familiarity, and humor in these stories…

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

"Usually I just stay quiet because I always say to myself, they have the freedom to
say whatever they want to say, and I just have the freedom to not respond."- Susie

DEFINING AND RESPONDING TO STREET HARASSMENT

"To Them, It's a Conversation. To Anyone Else, It's Harassment"[6]

In her work, Gardner (1995, 1989, 1980) develops her definition of street

harassment, which she describes in *Passing By* as "that group of abuses, harryings, and

annoyances characteristic of public places and uniquely facilitated by communication in

public" (Gardner 1995:4; see also Sandler and Shoop 1997; Epstein 1997; Buchanan and

Ormerod 2002; Weiss 1992; Hadleigh-West 1998; Herbert 1997). The respondents in my

sample provided evidence in support of this definition, and drew attention to the range of

behaviors they felt constitute harassment. For these women, street harassment included

the persistent attempts by some men to get women's attention, behavior deemed

threatening, intimidating, invasive, evaluative, intrusive, and unwanted; and unsolicited;

but also neutral and civil.

Defining street harassment to me proved a more difficult task than recognizing

conversational vandalism as it unfolded on the street. Figuring out how to negotiate

street harassment marked an even trickier endeavor for some of the women who did not

know what to anticipate from the male harasser. While not every woman has a reservoir

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[6] Paraphrased from *Seinfeld*.

of appropriate responses and contingencies readily available to her during street harassment, everyone in my sample had some response or reaction, whether speech or silence, action, inaction, or a purposeful refusal to respond. In the following section, I outline some of the strategies black women employed to navigate street harassment and what many understood as the unpredictable yet inevitable elements of encounters that unfolded in often benevolent ways, but that frequently took sinewy turns and quickly escalated into unwanted, unsolicited scary moments that confirmed or validated their generalized anxieties and fears about the danger lurking behind the comments men make on the street.

"ARE YOU WORKING?": PROSTITUTES, LOOSE WOMEN, AND THE POLITICS OF BLACK FEMALE (PRESUMED) HETEROSEXUALITY

Historically, women of color, poor or working class, and immigrant women have entered in the public sphere for economic reasons, such that the social stereotypes surrounding these groups of women suggest a sexual immorality, indecency, or availability (Drucker and Gumpert 1997a, 1997b). Women in public were understood as having a compromised or de-legitimate femininity, because of their presence in a masculine or male-oriented sphere (Parsons 1997). These class- and race-based conceptualizations of femininity continue to inform the ways in which men engage women in public spaces. These patriarchal and (class) privileged ideologies about particular women and femininity repeatedly and constantly shape the social interactions between men and women in public spaces.

Many of the women in my sample mentioned that men had, at one point or another, followed or stalked them (discussed later) and attempted to touch them with some ostensibly "friendly gesture." The women in turn found this inappropriate and a violating intrusion of their personal space. For example, Olivia noted, "Some guys, they're not going to touch you, but they're going to reach out like they're going to touch you, to get your attention. I don't like that either." I confirmed, "So they'll get close enough." Olivia affirmed:

> Then they'll tell you, "Oh, I wasn't trying to touch you. I was just trying to get your attention." "Hmmm, don't reach out for me, because that's scary." Um, and I don't entertain anything they have to say. If the first thing they say is, "Where's your ni**** at?" I really, I really don't….and depending on my mood, I may very well say, "I have no idea because I don't date n----s." And then I tend to go into that whole political spiel that they really don't want to hear, and then they tend to walk off.

Upon realizing that the women have interpreted their attempt to touch horrifying, the men offered disingenuous apologies to the women, possibly to appear considerate of the women's feelings, even after provoking the women in a negative way in the first place. The men often mistakenly asserted their male privilege and found that many women have different triggers, in part based on pervious personal traumas and experiences with abuse (Pierce-Baker 1998), that provoked certain rejecting reactions and adverse consequences for the men who intentionally crossed that line of comfortable social distance between themselves and the women they attempted to entangle (Duneier 1999). By assuming liberties to touch women, particularly black women, black men cemented the idea that "African-American women are sexually promiscuous, potential prostitutes" who can be sexually consumed on the street through touch or other sexualized gestures (Collins 1991:

174). Reducing black women to animalized and sexualized objects through the act of touch or attempt to pet them constructs us as just that- pets and property. The controlling image of the Jezebel continually enables the black male to consume the black female body as a result of interlocking oppressions. Once black men develop an awareness that the construction of black women's sexuality in part hinges on or intersects with the construction of black male sexuality as similarly animalistic (though not subordinate to black women's sexuality), they can experience a shift in consciousness necessary to effect social change (Walker 1981; Collins 1991).

For other black respondents, occupying public space provoked accusations of prostitution. Flora, a 29-year-old, queer-identified, working class black woman spoke of being asked by black men, "Are you working?" Although she claimed to be annoyed rather than offended by the implication, the respondent mentioned the incident, which suggests otherwise, on some level, since the interpellation of black women in public as prostitutes (i.e., as "public women") remains prevalent. The respondent's comments and experience illustrated the extent to which black women presumably embody prostitution, whether they choose such a profession for themselves. This largely prohibits black women from existing outside of racist, sexist discourses that construct them as hypersexual, sexually available, animalistic objects of consumption (Collins 1991).

While in my own experience I have never explicitly been asked if I was "working," I have experienced men and their rapacious gaze in similar ways to that of Flora. Black men in particular have appeared to devour me in one visual gulp and have interacted with me as an always-already potential sexual and/or romantic partner. The

lightness of my skin makes me "exotic" and strategically more desirable in the way of enjoying more privileges given my placement in the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2004), and suggests to others that this historical exoticism of partially black bodies ensures my sexual specialty and skillfulness (Spickard 1989). As mentioned above, black men tend to visually consume me on a corporeal level, hopeful for a possible one-night-stand, never allowing me to exist outside of this hypersexual imperative imposed on my mixed race body. White men mostly stare with curiosity, mostly with sexual undertones nonetheless.

For Olivia, a 30-something, working class black woman who was questioning her sexuality at the time of our interview, encountering street harassment involved confronting the controlling images of black women as prostitutes. She explicitly critiqued this image when, upon being asked by a black man if he could "hit the skins" or some similarly sexual reference, she asked, "What would make you think that I would want to sleep with you just because you approach me on the street? Nowhere in what you see implies that I am looking for five dollars for two minutes of your time." And then he was like, 'Bitch!'" Olivia continued to describe how several of her male friends intercepted, and interrogated the male stranger forward enough to call her a "bitch", eventually scaring/chasing away the male harasser. What remains ironic about these street harassing situations, past and present, relates the way, at one moment, a black male relies on one controlling image of black female sexuality (as perpetually sexually available) in his approach of her, yet, upon her rejection of his advances made on the basis of his anticipation of her (presumed) reciprocal interest, he insults her by calling her

a female dog, whereby relying on yet another controlling image of black female sexuality (of us as animalistic).

Another respondent, Red, a 23-year-old middle class bisexual black woman, spoke about the retaliatory backlash from men when women fail to respond in an anticipated and expected way. She recalled observing a black man saying to another woman who failed to respond "appropriately," "Forget you, you ho (whore)!" In her opinion, the woman's disinterest did not warrant such disrespect. Nevertheless, the black man's derogatory and accusatory words illustrated the persistent circulation of controlling images of black women as "whores." Ironically, this man's behavior perpetuates yet another controlling image, this time of black men as aggressive, assaultive, and violent (Collins 1991). In one fell swoop, this black man and his attendant behavior cemented two controlling images, rather than rejecting the images as problematic or fallacious.

Other women mentioned finding some men's comments offensive and a definitive disincentive for interaction. Katie, a 30-something, working class, heterosexual black woman says, "[At] times it's very graphic stuff, you know. 'I like your butt' or something like that that would not be, I would not find that appealing in any circumstance." For Katie, these sorts of street remarks signified a lack of decency, since people who "were just raised better, with certain values and standards," according to her, "would just not do that." In this way, men who harass women presumably occupy a particular class standing or at least did not receive or benefit from proper training or family socialization dissuading them from interacting with women in this manner.

Katie continued to explain the class factor that she sees figuring into this street harassment equation:

> Well, here, um. I typically associate it with people of a lower socioeconomic status. And so I am not sure if that is always true but pretty typically, yeah. I associate it with being a low class kind of thing to do. You know, somebody's who was raised better or is more cultured wouldn't just yell out stuff on the street, you know? And at home, it's not acceptable from people that are more middle- or upper-class, and so that's pretty standard. It's more the lower SES folks, I guess. I don't like the word class, but you know.

While a slightly problematic class analysis of harassment, given that men of all classes have the ability to harass (Gardner 1989; Vandergeld 2005; Duneier and Molotch 1999), Katie presented one of the few classed analyses of harassment, at the intersections of race and gender. Unlike other women in the study who talked their way around these class issues, reluctant to explicitly discuss class differences, Katie, to her credit, confronted class distinctions at the risk of sounding classist. She even acknowledged and reflected on this, on her own initiation or on her own accord, yet continued to view male-to-female harassment as a reflection of social capital, or the extent to which a person "knows better" and has more decorum. Understanding street harassment as indicative of social status (or the lack thereof) framed Katie's interpretation of men's interpellation of her. Viewing street remarks and harassment as déclassé, Katie felt that being a target of such attention remained anything but complimentary. In fact, she implicitly cringed at this kind of attention, given the negative connotations she attached to this behavior.

Additionally, Katie had the horrifying experience of having people hurl a racial slur at her when she was with a group of friends. She explains,

> When I was still in college in Ohio; this was a small town and myself and a couple of other friends, one was Jamaican, and the other was of African descent as well, and the three of us had gone to rent a video, I think, and we were walking back to a friend's house to watch the video and there was a group of white high school kids and they yelled "Ni**er" out at us, so that was definitely racial….But the good thing was that they were driving away so they just kind of yelled it out and were laughing, you know, just kept driving down the street. So by the time we heard it and turned around, they were pretty much gone.

I suspect that Katie's non-confrontational style dissuaded her from directly addressing the verbal assailant and his racial border-patrolling remarks and accusations (Dalmage 2000). Her experiences paralleled that of other respondents who faced interracial regulation in public spaces.

With regards to issues of respect, many of the black women in my sample mentioned interacting with men minimally but with compassion, so as to communicate civilly but not as an incentive to inspire men's continued conversations. While not trying to reciprocate attention in an encouraging way, many women wanted to "keep it moving" but offered some gesture to signal to their harasser that they heard the men's attempt to entangle them. Some also wanted to recognize the men's bravery (bravado) and courage to communicate, albeit through harassment.

Despite frequently feeling objectified by black men, black women most often noted that they did not want to be rude to whomever verbally engaged them in public. Their gendered performance then involved a kind of respectable femininity revolving around politeness, niceness, and other "good girl" qualities that get expressed specifically to racially similar others, in expressions of community-building. The black women I interviewed did not heavily promote this fallacious connection between safety and

suburbia versus dangerous urban terrain. They recognized that this discourse reflects a generalized culture of fear predicated on misinformation and myths about dubiously threatening and treacherous elements (i.e. the black male rapist; begging poor people, etc.) (Davis 1981; Duneier and Molotch 1999).

While some respondents recognized the ubiquity of harassment and acknowledged gendered harassment from men, everywhere from gas stations in the suburbs to those up the block from the downtown campus of the university, to the local malls, movie theaters, and so on, others promoted the idea that urban spaces create and legitimate fear, because the people who populate these areas deteriorate the landscape and essentially "don't know how to act." Inevitably, then, these respondents reported encountering male strangers in these spaces and consequently received unwanted, unsolicited attention from some of the men.

Olivia offered criticism to a black male harasser who assumed immediate comfort with her, and chose to reference other black men with the "n" word. As she explained, this black man presumed an alliance with her, on the basis of their perceived similar racial identity yet his comfort crossed the line, causing Olivia to "school" him: "Like this one guy said to me, 'Where's your ni** at?" and I was like, 'What?,' and he was like, 'You know who you messing with?' and I was like, 'I date black men, white men, Asian men, Latin men; I date a whole lotta men. I don't date ni**as.'" At once, the black male stranger assumed acceptability of the usage of a charged and contested racial reference and inquiry into Olivia's romantic relationship status. Perhaps believing both to be unobtrusive, he continues to engage her, even as she admonishes him for his deployment

of the "n" word. She verbally finger-wags, "Now if I…called you a ni**er, and you didn't even know me, how would you feel?" [He says,] 'Aiight [alright], you gotta point. You must be in school.' You know? But sometimes all they do is walk off."

What Olivia illustrated here relates an ongoing debate about the use of specific racially charged words, usage that she adamantly opposes and made explicitly clear in her blunt confrontation with this male harasser. Her frankness kept the harasser's attention and convinced him to conclude that she, presumably unlike other black women he knows, is educated. While possibly off-putting, this contestation of his harassment produced an albeit fleeting moment for him to consider that black men might not be "ni**ers" or that black women may have more on their mind than their current or potential romantic partners. In this moment, we see an opportunity for consciousness raising at the intersections of identities, such that the black male harasser gathers a glimpse of an "educated" black woman who engages him, and forces him to consider other possibilities for understanding and relating to others similar to himself in racial terms, but different perhaps, in terms of class, sexuality, and gender. By critically speaking back to the harasser, Olivia produced the possibility of disrupting several narratives simultaneously, including the notion that of "good" women fearing or talking to strangers.

Through her discursive practices, Olivia created an ideal moment that expanded the repertoire of what respectable women do, by suggesting that respectability stems from enabling men to see precisely how they (the men) may be disrespecting themselves and women by extension. Thus, her critique of the male harasser's comments showcased the extent to which harassment can hinge of particular configurations of intersections to

operate effectively as a practice of social domination, yet at those very intersections, social interventions can take place in ways that motivate men to reconsider their social relationships and imagination of various groups of people, particularly those they attempt to control or dominate through harassment. This sort of reflexivity might facilitate the kind of transformation mentioned above (Walker 1981; Collins 1991) so that men who harass can envision non-oppressive, more egalitarian social interactions.

For some women, expressing reciprocity, mutuality, and equality worked as a gesture of respect, and served as a means of recognizing and supporting community. The women who chose to be nice and respond to men in the aforementioned ways symbolically congratulated the men who dared face potential rejection from women by courageously braving to communicate with various women. Some women argued that the least they could do in response to such a daring gesture was acknowledge the men as living, breathing, feeling people, and saw saying hello as a communicative gesture recognizing the men's efforts.

This discursive strategy, while seldom understood as strategic at all by these women, enabled them to express their agency, to recognize that they felt comfortable and safe enough in these various social settings and encounters to engage the men in a brief but respectful conversation, to articulate some gesture of community, rather than to flippantly and hastily read the men's comments as attempts at verbal entanglement. The women's insistence that the men were just saying hello or otherwise just being friendly illustrates that space does exist for men and women, unfamiliar strangers to one another, can engage in casual conversation that remains respectful, even playful, but altogether

benevolent and innocent, rather than always potentially dangerous, ominous, or ultimately threatening in some way.

Like Olivia, many of the women mentioned that they "keep it moving" when they do respond to men, as a means of maintaining a small degree of privacy and protection by prohibiting the possibility of access information intrusions. When asked if stopping to talk to a male verbal entangler would seem more enticing to the man, one respondent suggests that she keeps walking for the following reason: "Yeah, I think I'm trying to still be nice but I'm also trying to not let them know that they are becoming more of my world in that small exchange." Here we get a glimpse of the contradictory messages that women may send to men when they attempt to be polite, but also are offering a proverbial "fuck you smile" and conciliatory words to men that, in some way, operate to simultaneously entice and repulse men. These contradictory actions of women also reveal the competing emotions and sentiments women feel towards the men who make street remarks, evaluative comments, or verbal entanglements.

Nervous about enraging male harassers by responding in an undesirable or unflattering (male-ego-bruising) way, these women remained respectful yet fully aware that the men could misinterpret their minimal verbal response as an invitation for further conversation, something none of the women mentioned desiring from such strangers. Fearful that physical proximity would facilitate men's touch of the women targets, the women remained in constant motion to attempt prevention of potential groping, "goosing," pinching, and other forms of violating, intrusive touch. As discussed above, many male harassers feel entitled to access women's bodies, and this assertion of male

privilege perpetuates patriarchy as well as myths about the availability and hypersexuality of certain women.

Despite having previous experiences in which black men assumed this sexual forwardness of black women, some still continued to socially interact with members of this group in admirably civil ways. For Mickie, a 30-something middle class, black heterosexual woman, this entailed ignoring her mother's warning to "not talk to strangers" and deciding instead to offer a simple greeting as a means of being polite. When men did not come across as "sleazy," Mickie usually reciprocated the attention by saying hello to men who initiated such a greeting. She said, "I at least respond to the hello…. If I respond, it depends on my mood. I may be flirtatious but I'm not going to give you my number. We can chit-chat. If I'm in a flirtatious mood, I don't care who chats me up, it's only going to go so far. I may not give you my name either."

Here we see evidence of agency, as this woman, heeding maternal warning cautioning her against "stranger danger," still decides for herself who she responds to in urban public spaces, and how friendly, enthusiastic, or indifferent she may be during the interaction. By attempting to set some parameters for these conversations, Mickie believes that she exercises some control over the situation, rather than feeling silenced by the societal expectation that she not talk to or make eye contact with strangers; or limited in the emotions (i.e. flirtations) she expresses during such interactions.

When asked, "Is there a way to respond without being nasty that is effective?," Red cleverly confessed, "Um, I'm pretty sure there is; I just haven't found it." With that, we laugh, almost in mutual agreement that confronting street remarks and harassment

marks a constant negotiation that we must maneuver delicately and strategically, since we often do not know the outcome of these encounters (i.e. whether a man's attention will escalate into some unwieldy expression of anger, animosity, or likewise); nor do we see society consistently critiquing and attempting to dismantle this form of social control.

While talking back has often been described as having liberatory potential and proves resistant to patriarchal domination and silencing effects (hooks 1989), talking back also seems quite risky given that black women are not viewed as not being capable of getting raped so their attempts to restore respect between men and women (in these reciprocated gestures) seems admirable (in the context of lacking legal and social protection). This is not to say that one should presume universal truth in the myth of the black male rapist, but rather consider that if a man who initially harasses a woman decides to exercise greater power and sexual domination over her in the form of rape, should she not respond in a way that he deems appropriate, the law should recognize that not all black women are as sexually available and accessible as the prevailing racist and sexist controlling images suggest (Collins 1991) (i.e., that black women are not, by default, property of black men, and that black men should be held accountable for the sexual violence they visit upon black women). White (1999) posits,

> As a result of racist ideology developed to justify slavery, the history of rape in the United States has narrowly focused on the rape of white women by Black men…. The emphasis on white victims and Black perpetrators reflects the prevailing racist stereotype that Black men's sexuality is bestial, criminal, wild, and uncontrollable. Although many terrorist lynchings of Black men were driven by white men's fear of Black economic progress, lynchings of Black men were frequently justified by 'the myth of the Black rapist' who preys on white women. A related mythical belief is that Black women are chronically promiscuous and, as a result, cannot be raped. This myth about Black women's sexuality was used

to justify white men's sexual abuse of Black women during slavery. (White 1999:192-193).

When one black male harasser found that Susie, a 20-something, middle class, heterosexual black woman, failed to respond in the way he anticipated or hoped for, he informed her, "You just ain't acting right." Because Susie failed to reciprocate the man's interest in her, and instead fell silent in surprise at what she felt were sexually charged and inappropriate remarks, she found herself facing evaluation from this male stranger. The gender imbalance that exists in this society serves as a reminder that some women feel neither entitled nor empowered to impose their opinion of men onto men. Most of the women in my sample did not feel so emboldened as to confront men with the same sorts of evaluative comments as the men shared with the women. This partially reflects the freedom that most men enjoy with their speech, which contrasts with the constraint that many women feel with their words.

Again we see that, in many instances, black men create a social obligation by which black women, because of shared racial status, must respond or consequently get read as a race traitor, disloyal to the black community, or worse, "too good" (a.k.a., acting better than black). Rather than allow Susie to respond as she pleases, the male harasser imposed his social expectation for a particular kind of response (appreciation and reciprocation), which failed to allow much discursive freedom for Susie. Black male privilege gets asserted this way, so as to remind black women that, while they may enjoy some success in this society in relation to black men, black men can continue to maintain some control over "their" (i.e. black) women.

GIVE A LITTLE TO GET A LITTLE:

DO MEN GIVE ATTENTION TO GET SOME ATTENTION?

In some ways, many of the women recognize that asymmetrical power relations create the social space for men to initiate conversation, to verbally entangle women, in an assertion of this patriarchal power, but the women interpreted men's attention as generic, unrelated specifically to themselves, and in fact are more about the men, needing or seeking attention, and looking for it from the women who pass them by. Some of the women recognized the sublimation or substitution that made possible the harassment, because they are women, the right gender, they did not take it personally. This contrasts highly with my own experience, where everything related to attention and harassment seems personal because of the hypervisibility of biracial women, and the consequent but problematic celebration of mixed race women. I share the women's perspectives first, and then my own.

For some of the women in my sample, just being female, in their opinion, motivated men to give them attention. Red recalled, "I don't really think they care what you look like; you're just a woman." Her comments remind us not to read too much into what seems like woman-centric behavior that in some ways has very little to do with women; the interaction, she suggests, remained quite generic. "Well, it seems, it's flattering when I'm not dressed my best and they're like, 'Hey, beautiful,' or 'You look pretty today' or just something, because you know, anybody can give you a compliment and that would boost you way up." I reiterated to confirm understanding her position,

"So when you're feeling a little frumpy, it's nice to hear." Thus, Red and other women believe that harassment should not be internalized, or taken personally.

Conversely, I feel that some forms of harassment seem very personal. For example, one day last summer, while walking across campus to the classroom I was teaching in, an older black man said something to the effect, "She looks like she wants to get laid." I wondered to myself, "Did he say 'laid' or 'paid'? Why would he think I want to get laid, right there in the middle of a downtown park in the middle of the day?" I never sought clarification, and will never know for certain precisely what the male stranger said, but I do know that his comments seemed to build on this idea of the hypersexy mixed race girl, and that I could not help but take a little personally.

Years earlier, while walking in the same area of the city, I encountered a young black man around my age who, as I walked by with coffee in hand heading back to my office, "Hmm-hmm. There goes my wife." Upon realizing that I was the reference point for this man, I asked him quite indignantly and frankly, "Are you calling me your wife?" He replied smugly, presuming that my question was evidence of interest. It was not. I argued, "You don't even know me. Why would you refer to me as your wife? Did your mother not teach you how to respect women?" At this, he finally realized that I was not asking for his telephone number but instead preferred critiquing his approach. To make a long story short, the man got furious with me because I talked back to him and outlined quite pointedly how his behavior to me was rude, disrespectful, and presumably a disappointment to his mother, assuming she had taught him better. The back and forth between us could have looked like a conversation between acquaintances, not complete

strangers. When the conversation ended, I could not help but wonder what gave me, an overzealously single girl, "wife" appeal, and what made me such an acceptable receptacle of his desires? Given the kinds of reactions that my multiracial appearance has received in public, celebrated (as more than an accident of birth) by some men, and envied or despised by some women because of the permanence of a racial hierarchy that privileges lighter or whiter skin, I should not have been surprised that this darker skinned black man elevated me to the status of token light-skinned trophy wife; except that the man should have at least introduced himself before he publicly confessed how I fit his miscegenation imagination.

In another instance, I was crossing a downtown street, accompanied by a white female coworker, when two young black men in a top-down jeep drove by. As they passed us, the men rapaciously looked at me, while apparently ignoring my coworker. Envious of their consumptive gazes of me, my coworker friend said, "I wish that men looked at me like *that*." Unsure of what *that* referred to, I asked, "What do you mean, what is 'that'?" My coworker clarified to the extent that she could, and offered the following ostensibly complimentary observation: "Like that animalistic look, that desire in their eyes." In that moment of clarification, I became horrified at the men for devouring me with their gaze, their intense evaluative looks, but also by my coworker's comments, which simultaneously produced me and the men as animals, or animal-like at best. Rather than recognizing the men's stares as intrusive, unwanted, and harassing, the white female coworker viewed the behavior as (presumably) typically indicative of black

male behavior. To cast them as animalistic by extension suggested that I too, their visual prey, must also be somewhat animalistic.

Without recognizing the impact of her comments, my coworker had perpetuated a popular myth regarding black sexuality, and reproduced existing but fallacious animalistic and insatiable connotations and associations with black bodies. This became possible in part because of pervasive problematic myths about black female and male sexuality and similarly erroneously fallacious myths about white female and male sexuality. Social sexual scripts about pure, virginal, and virtuous female sexuality, coupled with the invisibility and centrality of whiteness, allowed my co-worker to construct her vanilla existence as normal and ordinary, not hypersexual like that of black people. By publicly confessing her desire to be visually consumed in such a sexually aggressive or overt manner, my co-worker showcased how people presume black sexuality takes precedence over other attributes. Had my co-worker envied some other dimension of the interaction, that the men noted that I was pretty or offered some less sexual compliment, she would have moved away from the assumption of black hypersexuality that so clearly guided her thoughts and the consequent comments she shared with me about the situation.

In these ways, I feel like the occurrence of street harassment may be generic for some women, but for others, the experience seems so personal, as the men who harass rely on popular stereotypes and common myths to inform their imagination and interactions with us. Of course, I will never know whether I would get the same amount, less, or more attention were I to look any different. Next, I will discuss how women

actively employ silence as a strategy of resistance, a mark of defiance, and a refusal to succumb to the societal pressures to passively respond to street harassment.

For many women, talking back to strangers is not an option. Fears of angering or annoying men, escalating the men's assaultive or offensive speech, or otherwise triggering some intensified reaction such as rape keep women from feeling free to respond to men's attention. Instead, women often find silence much more protective a strategy for maneuvering such street harassment. Other women refuse to speak back to men who they feel engages the women in disrespectful, belittling, or objectifying ways. As a result, silence may be a source of strength for some women, particularly if such silence reduces the harassment they experience, or buffers them from the barrage of comments, evaluations, or other street remarks they would otherwise face. Cairns (1997) explored the behavioral practices by which women respond to sexual harassment. They include the "fragmentation of women's sense of self," accommodation in women, and "silence as a form of resistance to patriarchy" (Cairns 1997:94).

Conversely, sometimes the silence of black women being harassed by black men fueled the harassment, such that the harasser escalated his verbal assaults on the women, intensifying the antagonistic interaction, and generating or increasing women's concern about their safety. Often, the black women who refused to speak, rather than those who felt silenced, noted the irony in the men's retaliatory and accusatory remarks. The men, upon confronting the women's silence, would yell obscenities or profane terms at the black women, as if such behavior would entice us to talk amidst such animosity.

Most of the women saw silence as a protective mechanism that did not give the male harasser any ammunition with which to harass; staying silent disallowed access information intrusions, otherwise prohibiting male harasser's from gaining more knowledge of the women than the women desired. By actively choosing silence, the women hoped to curb the attention from the harasser, but often discovered the futility of their attempts, as the harasser continued to socially pursue the women. Speech often gave the male harassers something to work with, a way of verbally entangling women, weaving them into a conversation that remained rather one-sided, usually initiated by the harasser, and unappreciated by the woman being harassed.

While actively selecting silence as a strategy for negotiating street harassment, women may inadvertently appear passive and non-responsive out of fear, an interpretation that might validate a male harasser's behavior, particularly when he is motivated by a desire to assert power over women. Thus, silence is a double-edged sword that symbolically shields women from escalated forms of harassment, but does not buffer or protect women altogether from such harassment in the first place. Because of its connotations with traditional gender expectations, silence can cast women as passive, dominated "better to be seen than heard" objects. These connotations make responding to street harassment through non-verbal discursive practices all the more appealing on some level, yet do not dismantle the systems of power that make street harassment so commonplace and condoned in this society. Since silence serves a limited function for some of the black women in my sample, I continue to wonder how they negotiated street harassment in their everyday lives.

In terms of other strategies she employed to navigate such spaces, Red said, "I try to stay straight ahead and don't look at anybody around me….I'm drowning people out around me so I can't hear what they're saying. I'm focused. I'm ready to get to my destination without being harassed." What strikes me as both amusing and sad about what Red said is that she sounds like she is preparing for a race, one that requires focus and concentration, to eliminate the possibility of distraction. I am left to wonder how often Red can cross the finish line by reaching her destination without distraction. Refusing to compromise either comfort or her safety, Red similarly engages in emotional work (Hochschild 1983/2003), in this case sizing up certain spaces to ensure that she feel safe and unthreatened.

According to Red, any and all strategies for dealing with street harassment proved futile, in terms of efficaciousness. She casually observed, not with absolute defeat but mild matter-of-factness: "It really doesn't matter what you do. *Someone* is going to harass you." Her words point to the seeming inevitability of street harassment, and the perpetual performance of masculinity by some man, any man.

Take, for example, a brief street encounter I had several years ago, but impressionably clever enough to remain with me since its occurrence: while walking to work through a small city park populated sparsely that morning by just a few black men, I came across an older black man who seemed eager to have a conversation with me, despite my engagement in the music I was listening to quietly, on my walkman. In an attempt to keep the conversation contained or avoid one altogether, I slowed my pace, hoping to not so closely cross paths with this man, knowing that at a certain proximity,

communication would be inevitable, and initiated by him. Of course, my efforts failed
and the man proceeded to cross in front of me, drawing close enough to inquire, "How
are you doing today?" Trying to be polite but curt, so as to dissuade him from engaging
in more conversation, I quickly replied, "I'm fine." Prematurely satisfied that the
conversation had not been derailed by some unsolicited "compliment" or otherwise
unwanted evaluation of how I looked, what I was wearing, and so forth, I celebrated the
success of the strategy of remaining polite but purposeful (and much like Olivia, Pamela,
and others did to discourage attention and entanglement from men, I had the "Don't slow
me down; I've got somewhere to go" look). Sadly, the man's wit was quicker than my
stride as he cleverly retorted, "You sure are!" Equally impressed by the man's quick wit
as I was disappointed by his persistence to entangle me in a conversation, I could not help
recognizing my mixed emotions: feeling amused at his comment, and feeling frustrated at
my albeit ageist disbelief that this man, old enough to be my father, seemingly prided
himself on appearing smooth and conversationally crafty enough to issue a compliment
before I could decide how involved, if at all, I wanted to be in this conversation.

Perhaps the man's comment could simply be read as an expression of admiration,
one that did not cross the line of obscenity, rather than as a contradictorily amusing and
frustrating vignette in my street harassment rolodex. I am less inclined, however, to
consider that my response, not salacious or indecent in any way, may have cast me as
indecent, since I failed to follow the rules and display a "show of studied indifference,"
as Cofer (2003:112) suggests. Instead, I understand my behavior as an attempt to be
polite and respectful, a courtesy I remain uncertain if the man extended to me.

Like other women in my sample who aspired to be courteous during social interactions that seemed potentially harassing, I must constantly strive to find a balance between being nice and feeling safe. Recently, I was returning to the parking lot after teaching a class and had just cross the intersection, ended a conversation with a black male student and upon saying goodbye, noticed a black male police officer standing patrol on the opposite corner of the intersection. As I walked halfway down the block, I noticed a black man approaching from a perpendicular angle. In preparation of his harassment, I looked back at the police officer (who must have also noticed the man approaching me) and moved closer to me, near the edge of the intersection. Once I gained eye contact with the officer, I proceeded, face forward, more certain now that if the approaching male stranger "tried anything," the university police officer would come to my aid and rescue. Immediately, I wished it were not so, that I did not have to have this thought, or make mental notes of who might protect me in case of an emergency but I could hardly help it. As soon as I moved closer to the main street of campus, the man had made his way closer to me, steering me through my own volition, into the street, and around the parked car closest to us (now separating us). He asked, so rhetorically and dogmatically that he sounded almost insistent: "Do you have a quarter?" "No, I don't." I winced at the reminder that many months shy of obtaining a Ph.D., I had very little money to my name and was feeling quite anxious about giving any away at that moment in my life.

Throwing a conversational curveball, the man more insistently (and tangentially) inquired, "Do you have a boyfriend?" He said as indignant as ever. How did a

presumably homeless man make the leap from asking for money to a date? Did I seem so socially and/or sexually available, so easy that my slightest refusal of his attention signaled that I had a boyfriend? I pondered the irony and annoyance all the way to the parking lot, all the way home, even a day later, I found myself sharing the story with others.

Throughout the entire exchange, I remained relatively quiet, hopeful that maintaining a low profile might minimize the attention I received from this male stranger. However, most of my respondents mentioned how often male harassers violated the social norm of civil inattention and spoke of the prolonged eye contact, conversational vandalism, or other interactional breech that men engaged in on the street. First, I will describe a few of my own experiences and then discuss that of my respondents.

I am home from college, on a visit with my parents who live in my birthplace, St. Thomas. We (my mom and I) are in a small shopping district and have just finished a quick jaunt to the grocery store. For some reason, I remember being at a distance from my mother, a distance wide enough to allow a strange man to approach me, squeeze my tank-top exposed shoulders, and ask, "Do you work out?" With shock and amazement, I remember replying in stunned affirmation and hurrying off to tell my mother about the audacious actions of this stranger. Perhaps we mutually agreed that, given our continual exposure to the elements of patriarchy weaved into our everyday lives, the incident posed no immediate danger, threat, or great harm and consequently, we made mention but little fuss over the matter. In fact, that summer, I would get used to a plethora of comments, evaluative remarks, and various unwelcome stares during my stay that summer break

from college. In some ways, that summer (and previous exposure) prepared me for all

the street harassment that would follow in future years: in the downtown of a sleepy

college town; on the streets of New York City during my graduate school years at

Columbia; on the streets of downtown Atlanta, as an employee, student, teacher….No

heel too short, no skirt too long, no outfit too unappealing or ordinary for commentary, no

day not good enough for an unsolicited remark. Now I can't even stop in to the local

grocery store for some fresh produce without the man whose restocking items asking me

how far I run, how often, how long, more, more, more access information intrusions….

Mickie described an intrusive incident, in which she had to confront a man who

took the liberty to touch her as he pleased. She recalled:

> I do remember when I have been touched before and that's in the club- this guy
> goosed me (grabbed my butt) and I just turned around and started
> swinging/elbowing him. I was just like why would you do something like that?
> And another guy kinda said hello to earlier in the night, when I was leaving, he
> held on to me like, "Don't leave" or whatever. "I'm leaving, let me go." And he
> wouldn't somehow that…I think he put his hand on my chest and that turned into
> (a scrabble).

In response, Mickie struck the man for violating her personal space. She reflected on

what happened that night: "[I thought] 'No, you just didn't hit me.' And I'm thinking,

I'm 225 pounds. Why would you do something like that to me? I'm going to hit you

back; I'm not going to go, 'That guy touched me'" (makes crying sound effects

parodying a delicate damsel in distress). In her re-telling of the story, Mickie mimicked

what a girl sounds like, suggesting that her actions often get read as (traditionally)

unfeminine. In a situation where a black man tool physical liberties with her body,

intrusions that might trigger previous experiences of sexual trauma and violation; while

establishing his behavior as consistent with controlling images of black men, Mickie

confronted the harasser's sense of entitlement and simultaneously disrupted notions of

respectable femininity, while enacting the role of the "angry black woman." While not

condoning her violent response, I did find her reaction understandable given the freedom

with which the black male stranger took with her body, and the degree to which she

wanted to protect herself from such intrusions.

Another respondent, Katie, a working class heterosexual black woman, shared an

experience in her home country in which a man manipulated a popular saying to offer a

questionable compliment that ultimately scared the woman so that she literally scurried

into a store to escape further verbal assault. She recounted the events of that situation:

> I was younger then, 18 or something. I was wearing a t-shirt and some pants or
> something and walking down the street and it was a guy who was working in a
> shop but he was kind of standing in the doorway and I think his job was to kind of
> get people to come in off the street….Yeah, and the t-shirt I had on had "Hakuna
> Matata" on the front of it and that means "No Problems" right and he made a
> comment which sounds funnier in the language. He said, "Hakuna Matata
> Hukana Matiti" which means "no problems but you got big breasts." So basically
> I think I was really, really embarrassed. It was just very blatant, very graphic, so I
> just ducked into a store again.

The respondent's use of *again* indicated that this was the second time she had to resort to

fleeing into a store searching for some semblance of security and her laughter at the

entire ordeal suggested that through these limited but admittedly embarrassing encounters

with male strangers, she has successfully managed to maintain a sense of humor.

While the women declared that hearing "You're beautiful" from a complete

stranger felt refreshingly complimentary, particularly, for example, on a bad hair day,

most expressed their reluctance about wanting to hear such sentiments from complete

male strangers. Most women who were told that they were beautiful or pretty by men offered thanks but little more as a means of recognizing or accepting but containing the compliment.

For me, when random male strangers offer compliments on my physical appearance, I grow suspicious of them, more than I already may be. For example, on a recent run through Piedmont Park, I said hello to a black man passing me by, running in the opposite direction. Instead of matching my greeting with a simple hello as well, the man proceeded to say, a little too enthusiastically, "You're so beautiful…You're so beautiful." His words, muddied by the sound of my music playing softly enough in my Walkman that I could hear him, trailed off as the physical distance grew between us. I thought, "I just said, 'Hello.' Was he thinking, 'She had me at hello?'" While very curious about what else he said, I also did not want to know. (I have since seen this man at the park, and one part of me wanted to ask him what he said and another part of me wanted to stay far, far away from him.) I joked to myself that maybe he was proposing to me, but I was also frustrated that this man so exuberantly expressed his emotion, almost in eager anticipation of my reciprocated emotions. In retrospect, I was glad that I was running the opposite way, away from all of his expectations and perceptions of me, a random runner in the park.

In another, more recent incident, I passed a group of three black men, and one of them confessed, "If I had a million dollars, I would give you half." When I inquired, "Why? You don't even know me?," the light-skinned black men gushed, "Because you're

beautiful. I love you." Quite frankly, I would much prefer the half a million dollars to

the harassment any day…

INTERRACIAL REGULATION AND SAME-RACE HARASSMENT

Some of the black respondents spoke about various sorts of racial regulation or

border patrolling they experienced, generally stemming from their presence in public

with a racially different romantic partner. The attention that these interracial

relationships provoked illustrate how some male harassers perceived women as

community property and felt betrayed or at least opposed to the women's partner choice.

For example, when Katie offered the most extreme or memorable example of street

harassment that she encountered, she detailed an incident of interracial regulation, where

others clearly expressed their opposition to her partner choice. Katie explained how

being out in public with her Japanese boyfriend prompted a black man they passed by to

ask, "Oh, what's the matter? You don't like black men anymore?" She reflected, "I

found that really insulting, and I was upset and that definitely stuck with me."

The imposition of others' opinions remained a consistent theme for this and other

respondents. Olivia detailed a similarly interracially regulating experience, which

occurred while she was dating a white/Hawaiian man. When a black man approached her

and expressed interest, she declined, informing him of her boyfriend. Upset by her

rejection, particularly to a racially mixed man, the black man fumed, "That's the

problem….That's the problem with white bitches, you know? Just because they sleep

with a white guy they think they're white." Olivia explained, "And at the time, my hair

was, it was this long, nice braid and glue job. But it was extremely long, and just straight, etc., so he said, 'She just thinks that because she's got all of that long hair and white guys want her, and then he called me a white bitch.'"

This accusation from male harassers of "white bitch" gets set in the context of close friends having used the term as an endearing one, but also one that reflected a little tinge of jealousy or envy regarding Olivia's long hair, speech patterns or voice, and other characteristics that inspired them to consider her as "acting white." Her potential relationships with (partially) white men motivated black men in particular to express their disapproval of or resistance to her interracial romantic partners, or their feelings of resentment and rejection regarding her partner choice. These black men may have been able to preserve their identities by calling her a white bitch, presumably two categorically undesirable qualities for the black men.

Many of the black women in my sample noted that men of the same perceived race or similar skin color were more forward in their harassment than men of other races. For example, most of the black or African American women mentioned encountering harassment from Hispanic and black men, and seldom from white men (and none from Native American or Asian men due to perceived lack of contact with these two groups). Red explained the exception to this social norm, "I get most horns blown by white guys…so it's less interactive personally." This less personal, interracial interaction suggests that white men might be mildly apprehensive about crossing the color line when they harass women. This apprehension might not reduce the overall harassment of women but rather curtail cross-race harassment.

Much of the racialized attention that women received resulted from the men's negotiation of rejection, such that the racialization of women reflected a retaliatory strategy employed by the men that presumed restored the power and authority of the men over the women. For many of the black women who refused to respond to a variety of men's attention, they often faced accusations of being another race, presumably because women perceived as the same race as the harasser would have enough respect to respond to a man of the same race. Thus, when black men interpellated black women as similar, familiar, and likewise, but the black women hailed as such rejected this interpellation, the black men attempted to restore their black masculinity by interpellating these women as white. For example, a black-identified (though admittedly black and Latina) woman noted that she faced accusations of being white simply because she refused to respond to the unsolicited attention of a black man.

A few of my black respondents shared similar experiences, which suggests that black men who verbally entangle black women expect a certain response, and although this expectation can be understood in a variety of ways including as a controlling mechanism or a community-building one as well, the women's response to this expectation exposes a contradiction. Black men who hold this expectation of black women do so specifically because of the women's race and gender, but then consequently change their interpellation of the women, as a result of the women's rejection of their advances (and by extension, their masculinity). This refusal to embrace men's advances arguably makes black women more like white women, more cliché in the way of fearing attention or interaction with unfamiliar black men, as well as in this perceptible "uptight"

whiteness consistent with myths of white virtuosity, purity, and so forth. This expectation of black women may be reflective of black men's desires to form social ties and build community with other black people, but gendered power asymmetries complicate these efforts and black men may remain unaware of more polite, respectful, and reciprocal ways to do so, rather than provoke anxieties, fears, concern, anger, or other emotions in black women, emotions that otherwise jeopardize the kind of casual communication that makes the social world more interesting.

This performance of black masculinity, often described as hypermasculinity, results from or at least gets informed by circulating controlling images of black hypersexuality in general and ones specific to black men. Sexual scripts that suggest a certain aggression, assertiveness, and predatory behavior among black men gets reified and reproduced by black men who see themselves in these ways, or at least finds nothing problematic with behaving in these ways. By embodying these sexual scripts and performing this hypermasculine role, black men may perceive themselves as appropriately or hegemonically masculine, without recognizing how their behavior may be reproducing racialized and sexualized stereotypes, of black men as "superfly" or "black brutes" (Bogle 2002) or otherwise potentially problematic images. Finally, black men in public, particularly those under- or unemployed, homeless, or otherwise perceived as marginal in one or multiple ways may encourage or intensify this performance of masculinity.

This study might be more useful by focusing on men who harass but by giving black women the space to speak, to voice their stories, and produce their subjectivities

within the discourse, allows some women space for disrupting the discourse; they give women agency. Simultaneously, focusing on black women helps to highlight the disruptive potential of speech by limiting analysis to the victim, instead of the perpetrator, the person who reacts to, rather than initiates the sexually violent or verbally aggressive sexual harassment.

Women who talk back may produce subjectivities that are hegemonically, conventionally or commonly, read as bad, inappropriate, unacceptable, or otherwise not respectable subjectivities or femininities. Additionally, women who talk back may be read as rebellious, resistant, or otherwise asking for trouble by initiating or provoking further undesirable attention, or prompting unpredictable responses from men, ones (men) who escalate or elevate the level of sexual violence, antagonism, or animosity towards these women. In this way, the woman who talks back to her harasser may be understood as troublesome, as deviant, as a bad ass who doesn't know or respect the bounds of public conversation and civility. She does not know better, is somehow foolish, or clueless about what "could" happen. The pregnant possibilities of this potential (though "inevitable" moment) is intended or designed to haunt the woman who talks back, is meant to contain her incitement to speak, is meant to silence her into submission. But does her speech liberate her from the subordination or sexual objectification she feels on the street, in the moments of, or leading up to (proceeding), or following encounters of street harassment (particularly if one sees street harassment as a mere expression or extension of the plethora of ways women experience patriarchal

domination and sexual intimidation, violence, or harassment in other arenas or facets of their life?

At what point, in what instances, are a woman's words, her speech acts or verbal practices, disruptive of the hegemonic discourses that so keenly shape her behavior and that of others? The disruptive potential of black women's verbal practices appears to stem from an effort to engage with and humanize the harasser, in an attempt to restore the subjectivities of both the harasser and the woman experiencing the harasser. Interpreting or determining (understanding) how black women engage in discursive strategies requires recognition of the potentially recuperative and/or repressive potential of speaking up or staying silent in social encounters of street harassment. I argue that black women often choose to talk back as a subversive strategy, one that may empower them on the streets and equip them with the tools to negotiate complicated or tenuous situations. These subversions disrupt racialized and gendered sexual stereotypes about black women and allow them to verbally articulate their agency and opposition to men's street harassment. When black women opt for silence, some attempt to actively resist harassment that might escalate or to elide embodying controlling images, while others stay silent to send critical messages to men who harass about the unsolicited, unwanted, and undesired dynamics of such social interactions on the street.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

WHY WOMEN DO NOT RESPOND TO STREET HARASSERS

In attempting to weave together the literature on the unreciprocated

openings/closings and interactional vandalism with that of the performance and social

construction of gender (Butler 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987), I find a possible

explanation, just one among many, for black women's refusal to respond to men's

entanglements. Perhaps the women, interpellated (as available for conversation or

possibly more in terms of sexual activity) by the men, considered the potential

ramifications for reciprocating or responding to such attention.

What Duneier and Molotch (1999) describe ultimately as the failure of street men

and professional women "to make life together" could be interpreted by the women as a

cautionary measure to avoid further accusation of being "the type of woman" to talk to

strangers (or talk back to male strangers, more pointedly). This depiction of the woman

would cast her in unfavorable terms, compromising the respectable femininity she may

actively be working to preserve. In such cases, then, women who get verbally entangled

by men in urban public spaces may possess a generalized fear and anxiety, not of the men

themselves or any attendant hypothetical danger or threat the may pose, but rather of not

remaining respectable and decent looking simply because they have "subversively"

enough, spoken to strangers, some thing that women of good repute should not do. While

I did not include this line of questioning in my own interviews, I suspect that this may be

a legitimate consideration and concern for women who find themselves, possibly repeatedly, encountering men who would raise the eyebrows of disapproving others.

A recurring theme from the interviews related male harasser's efforts to get women's attention. Many of the women understood this attention as positive, neutral, and negative, but also remained aware of the power asymmetries that made the harassment or attention possible but also created the possibility that men gave women attention to get attention. In this way, the women, understanding their role as "generic" or the "skirt" that walks by that signifies to men that they should harass, did not personalize the harassment or attention they received from men. Rather, they understood the situation as almost tangential to them, or issued through them as a vehicle for male homoerotic bonding. Some women felt like any woman would get harassed if she walked by, that any woman would serve as an acceptable substitute and receive the same sort of attention/harassment as they did. Additionally, other women understood harassment when issued by a group of men, presumably friends or co-workers, as a homoerotic moment, in which the women's bodies operated as vehicles through which the men could express their socially acceptable emotions about women, but not the socially prohibited or policed emotions, potentially sexual emotions, to one another. While few women mentioned this component or offered this analysis of street harassment situations, the literature suggests this as a possibility.

RECOGNIZING RACIALIZED AND GENDERED HARASSMENT

For most of the black women I spoke with, the task of recognizing the impact of race in the social interactions of street harassment proved a relatively easy task. Most offered the race of the harasser when I asked them, without an implicit fear of being called a racist. This remains consistent with the way society erroneously believes race serves as a euphemism for black, so that this group presumably would have little trouble making racial distinctions during interview conversations. Despite this awareness, many of the black women in my sample discussed street harassment generally in male-to-female terms, marking or understanding the phenomenon as predominantly gendered, rather than racialized, classed, and so forth.

Others offered anecdotes that clearly contained racial implications and highlighted the racial dynamics at play during street harassment. Due to their interracial involvement, several black women noted experiences in which the level of attention they received in public intensified with knowledge or visual evidence of their interracial relationship (i.e. the presence of the partner). For one black woman, both her physical appearance and her public appearance with her white boyfriend provoked some street harassment. At one point in her adolescence, the woman reported having long hair that from all indications approximated what others perceived as "whiteness" because of her hair's noticeable length and smooth, straight texture. This approximation of whiteness inspired others, both familiar and unfamiliar, to issue accusations at her, ones insinuating her lack of racial loyalty and authenticity. The deployment of the term, "white girl," communicated their disinterest in what they perceived as her embracement of whiteness

and white signifiers, such as long, flowing hair, and explicitly undermined her connections to blackness in terms of identity and community.

Furthermore, people's knowledge of her interracial boyfriend later on in life created an additional layer of interrogation, one that actively questioned her allegiance and raised suspicions about her desire for white men and her presumed lack of desire for men of other racial groups. Her interracial involvement escalated the attention she received, and angered or at least noticeably flustered and frustrated many men who believed themselves to be outside of her range (because of their non-white racial identity). For example, in the quasi-public space of the barbershop, the woman, when with her white boyfriend and her black son from a previous relationship, was told that someone had an interest in her. Almost immediately the barber cautioned the young black/white biracial man, "You're not white enough for her." This woman expressed dismay at the fact that the barber told this biracial man this, to which the biracial man responded, "I'm half white. My daddy's white. Does that count?" The woman had to offer the disclaimer that she was not dating her white boyfriend because of his race, and felt burdened to provide similar points of clarification at various times during her day or week.

The quasi-public space of the barbershop made such comments seem like attempts at getting to know one another better, but could also be understood as clear and concerted efforts at border patrolling, a discursive practice employed to reify the racial boundaries believed to exist between groups. Repeated racial impositions forced this respondent to defend her relationship and her partner choice, a decision made for reasons

outside or in spite of race, rather than because of it. For others, however, the partner choice clearly communicated a desire for whiteness, with others expressing their consequent disapproval (familiar and unfamiliar) in various harassing statements, questions, or other discourses.

Some black women remained a little reluctant to articulate any experiential qualitative differences in the street harassment encounters and interactions with men of various racial groups. Given the local demographics of Atlanta, it makes some sense that the women never mentioned Native American men as harassers, possibly due to the group's relatively low percentage of both the local and national population, and consequent invisibility as part of the Southeastern social landscape. Asian men similarly received little notice, but women occasionally mentioned that they were not surprised that Asian men had *not* harassed them or interacted with them in the aggressive or assertive style men of other races relied on, particularly, unfortunately, problematically, more so for Black and Hispanic men, and white men to a lesser degree. Perhaps some women fail to recognize (marginal) masculinity that exists outside of the hegemonic dominant depictions, to the degree that some Asian men may have other avenues for expressing their interest in women they see in public spaces, but rely on arguably less aggressive and insistent strategies to get women's attention.

The implicit feminization of Asian masculinity and men supports ideas posited by Yen Le Espiritu (2000) who discusses how Orientalized depictions have emasculated Asian American men in the United States by depicting them as "model minorities" who respect women to the extent that the men do not approach women in public spaces, such

as streets, sidewalks, parks, etc. Another explanation for the lack of harassment from Native American and Asian American men relates the very issues of public space and spatial practices foundational to and thematically engaged throughout this work. Men cannot harass women in public spaces unless they occupy these spaces, and in relatively meaningful numbers (not sporadically and dispersedly).

The sense that I got from the black women I interviewed is that these women simply do not come across any notable numbers of men of these two racial groups, do not visibly recognize the men belonging to these two groups, perhaps given the high intermarriage rates between Native Americans and Whites; and Asian Americans and Whites, and the consequent racial redistricting and expanding boundaries of whiteness (Gallagher 2004) which in face to face situations may result in a misreading of such racial mixture as embodied whiteness.

Returning to the issue of race, masculinity, and sexuality, an overlapping policing or regulating effect of social sexual scripts or controlling images and border patrolling converge to create hegemonic ideologies and narratives about how men should behave in public spaces. My attempts to unpack and uncover the various ways in which men pick up on and perpetuate these racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed scripts often get inhibited or subtly contested by women's refusal to make men clichés. For example, one woman clearly delineated the different kinds of men who harassed her more than other groups of men, all the while offering a disclaimer that all men have the potentiality and capacity to harass but not all men do or have harassed her in particular. She did this, seemingly, in a concerted effort to avoid stereotyping men by perpetuating the idea that

lower class men harass more than men of other class statuses. While she implied that this trend or pattern had something to do with the places she experienced harassment, she never fully explicated that or volunteered this detailed information until I probed about the race and class compositions of those spaces. In attempting to maintain an awareness about and sensitivity to the ways that lower class black men cautiously communicated who harassed her, and appeared to be cognitively grappling with the tension that result from highlighting working class black men as the most likely to harass.

In addition to avoiding the reproduction or perpetuation of existing stereotypes about black men, hypersexuality, and so forth, some of the women effectively elided directly responding to questions of race, gender, sexuality, and class as embodied, enacted, or performed by men in public spaces. They came across as being reluctant to discuss or express the extent to which men racialized their street harassment of these women. For other women, recognizing racialized and gendered experiences of street harassment proved an easier task. For those women who were paradoxically perceived as "white" black women (Olivia), and a brown skinned "white" woman (me), the experience of street harassment remains clearly racialized and gendered.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Because this study focused on black women, some might object that this gender- and race- specific investigation imposes limitations on the findings. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, which aims to further complicate and understand women's experiences of street harassment, I argue that this attempt to extend existing

literature on this subject justifies the focus on this particular group. By focusing on a

population that uniquely experiences street harassment at the intersections of power, race,

and gender hierarchies, I illustrated how women experience street harassment differently

than men might. Drawing attention to these racialized and gendered power relations

begins to illustrate how black women face a particular form of street harassment

specifically because of their gender, as well as their race, and other social locations in this

society. The gaps in the literature that this study aims to begin to fill justify the few

limitations discussed above. Additionally, this work might inspire others to look at the

particular configurations of race and gender as related to other groups of women, and

continue to investigate various women's responses to street harassment.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE: SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

"The way out is to tell: speak the acts perpetrated upon us, speak the atrocities, speak the
injustices, speak the personal violations of the soul. Someone will listen, someone will
believe our stories, someone will join us. And until there are more who bear witness to
our truths as black women, we will do it for one another. For now, that is enough."
(Pierce-Baker 1998: 270).

This work set out to expose the continued imposition of power-imbalanced social

encounters as experienced in street harassing situations of women by men. While many

people may feel persuaded or inclined to believe that the interactional vandalism that

takes place on a regular basis does not constitute a significant problem worthy of such

scholarly investigation, I believe that the sobering reality of routinized, normalized, and

often predictable harassment suggests that we should continue to—if not intensify—our

focus on this matter. Such scrutiny of this social problem would shed light on an

annoying, lingering, and seemingly unavoidable aspect of our lives. In this work, I attempted to shatter this myth about the inevitability of street harassment, by trying to understand how women resist this phenomenon and men's efforts to verbally entangle, entice, seduce, and so forth. I also wanted to examine how controlling images shape social interactions during the process of male-to-female street harassment, to see how racist, sexual social scripts inform interactions between strangers and facilitate the phenomenon on some level.

The consequence of employing an interdisciplinary approach and utilizing scholarship from numerous fields allows for the production of knowledge that offers contributions back to these disciplines. Since anthropological, sociological, and feminist perspectives inform my ideas, in turn this work reflects these influences and hopes to reciprocate the gesture by providing interdisciplinary insight and information that scholars in these and other disciplines may find useful. In sum, I hope that this work helps to heal the wounds that words create during moments of street harassment, by allowing women to discuss the assorted assaultive speech acts that they have encountered and experienced. By contextualizing these comments and interactions as discursive practices produced in a patriarchy that creates and perpetuates power asymmetries that often serve to silence and oppress women, women resist this domination with words or by actively choosing silence.

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