From Confrontation to Castration:
Sexual Harassment and The Young Dutch

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Medical Anthropology
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Abstract

Since the 1970s, sexual harassment has been given more and more attention; and a lot of studies have been done on it. However, most studies focus on sexual harassment at the work place.

This paper examines the experiences of Dutch young people (university students) in relation to sexual harassment. It is based on a qualitative data collection and analysis carried out over a period of 12 weeks in Amsterdam, the capital city of Holland. A total of 13 in-depth interviews were conducted (7 females and 6 males). Data were also used from my own experiences and observations. I looked into how young people define, experience, and deal with sexual harassment. Ways they use to avoid sexual harassment and measures they suggest to keep it in check are also discussed. The analysis is based on theories of feminism, space, and the process of othering.

The findings show that sexual harassment is a significant problem especially for females. It poses a physical threat, causing them to put into consideration factors such as time and surroundings before deciding which way to deal with it. The presence of policies in universities was given as the main reason for the absence of sexual harassment in their university. However, they still face sexual harassment in other public places like streets and nightclubs. Attention given by policy makers to street sexual harassment is of key importance to reduce the problem. Sex education has also to be given in order to make people aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding sexual behavior.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Sexual Harassment: General

Incidents of sexual harassment have existed for generations. However, the problem was not regarded as a social concern until the 1970s, when feminist movements began to shed light on it. The feminist Lin Farley first coined the term 'sexual harassment' itself in the mid 1970s, in relation to the work place.

In 1974, Farley started teaching a field-study course for women at work at Cornell University in the United States of America. At the first session, she asked her students to tell her what happened to them on their jobs everyday in relation to the fact that they were women. The session made her realise that there was a certain male behavior that made all her students uncomfortable on their jobs. She named this behavior sexual harassment (Farley 1978:xî). She described it as "unsolicited, nonreciprocal male behavior that asserts a woman’s sex role over her function as worker". It includes stares, comments, touch, sexual requests, and rape (Farley 1978:14).

Since that time, different individuals and institutions have defined, (and are defining) sexual harassment in different ways. The United Kingdom Equal Opportunities Commission defined it as actions "which are unacceptable to the people on the receiving end, [and which] may include unwelcome comments, looks, physical contact, or suggestions such as requests for sexual favors."(Houghton-James 1995:6). According to the United States Equal Opportunities Commission, sexual harassment in the work place has two forms:

Quid pro quo sexual harassment (a Latin term which means ‘this for that’): conduct of a sexual nature, the response to which influences the recipient’s chances of getting a job, or having a promotion.

Hostile environment sexual harassment: conduct of a sexual nature that makes the working environment hostile and offensive, making the recipient’s work performance inadequate.
Despite the slight variations, common to all definitions are two facts—that sexual harassment has a sexual nature, and that it is unwelcomed. The latter distinguishes sexual harassment from 'flirting', which is welcome, can feel good and makes one feel attractive. The very actions that feel good when reciprocated become hostile and harassing when not. Whether the actions of a sexual nature are welcomed or not depends on who conducts them, and in what manner. As Yunker (1996) said, “Being exhorted ‘wear somethin’ tight, baby’ is not the same as hearing ‘it is a beautiful day for a beautiful lady’”. According to Mary Douglas, dirt is matter out of place (Peoples & Bailey 1997:80). Metaphorically, sexual harassment can be viewed as flirting out of place. When sexual advances are made without being welcomed, they become out of place phenomena, and thus offensive.

Since the 1970s, many explorative studies on sexual harassment were done in Europe. These studies predominantly addressed the prevalence, types, and consequences of sexual harassment at the work place. In 1997, out of 800 female police recruits in the Netherlands, half dropped out of the course. Monique Matze from the Social Affairs and Employment Ministry attributed some of the attrition to harassment. Nonetheless, the Dutch government in 1997 reported only 48 cases of harassment, which, according to Matze, is only the tip of the iceberg (www.businessweek.com).

Recently however, there is an increasing recognition that sexual harassment is a concern not only in the work place, but also in other public and private settings; like schools, streets, and the home. The most recent definition of sexual harassment found in the European Equal Treatment Directive (No 76/207) recognizes this fact and extends the definition of sexual harassment from the work place to the environment in general.

According to the Directive, sexual harassment is (www.eubusiness.com):

Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, particularly when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment in public areas like streets and parks; and semi-public areas like restaurants is termed as public harassment (Martin 1997). It includes pinching, hitting, shouting remarks, slapping, vulgarity, sly innuendo, insults, stalking, and ogling. Public harassment is “one weapon in armamentarium for indicating contempt, displeasure, and veiled loathing and hostility.” a way which most men use to remind women of their superiority. (Gardner 1995:15).
Russel (1984) found that among those who are sexually harassed, most are young, unmarried, and/or have a higher educational level. Though it is very common to find young unmarried people in tertiary educational settings, it was only in the 1990s that sexual harassment started to be given attention in educational settings; where there are power and status differences between teachers and students; rendering the latter to be more exposed to being harassed sexually (Stamler & Stone).

Most schools in the Netherlands now have their own policies against sexual harassment, and counselors who give advice during problems of sexual harassment. The University of Amsterdam, the school where the participants of my study go to, has a special sexual harassment complaint procedure and a commission of complaints for students and employees. It also has trust persons who offer emotional and practical support to those who are confronted with sexual harassment. The University’s code of conduct follows Article 2.11 Collective Labor Agreement for Dutch Universities (‘CAO Nederlandse Universiteiten’). In the university, the important thing is the way the recipient of sexual harassment perceived and experienced the behavior; not what the person intended to express by conducting the behavior (translated from Dutch, www.uva.nl).

The issue of sexual harassment is important because it is a combination of sex and rights, both of which draw public attention (Stamler & Stone 1998). The variation in definitions and the dilemma to set a single universal definition for sexual harassment arises from the fact that the terms ‘sex’ and ‘sexual’ themselves create constant confusion. As Oakley (1972:99) stated, “Behavior is sexual if it refers to the kind of relationship between male and female in which copulation is, or could be, or is imagined to be a factor”. But the behavior of sexual nature, which is expressed in sexual harassment is far more than that. It not only implies possible or imagined copulation, but also hostility and displeasure against feminism (Gardner 1995).

The other obstacle to design a single definition of sexual harassment and a single measure against it is the fact that the same actions that are recognised as sexually harassing in one context can also be complimentary and a source of pleasure in a different context (Langelan 1993). Sexual advances get offensive only when the context in which they take place is inappropriate. This contextual nature of sexual harassment makes it ambiguous, and thus difficult to prove. As one American detective said, “you are going to get into a grey area. It all boils down to a difference of opinion.”(Farley 1978:4). The
decision on where to situate the legal remedy to sexual harassment depends on its accepted definitions and the specific legal traditions of a country. For example in the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Austria, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, sexual harassment is covered by the labor law, which is applicable only in work situations (www.altindia.net).

Although most studies focus on women, who are most often found to be the recipients of sexual harassment, a number of studies also showed that men could also be harassed sexually. A local government study done in Britain in 1981 showed that 52% of women and 20% of men experienced sexual harassment. Another local government study done in the Netherlands between the years 1987-1997 showed an incidence of sexual harassment of 54% for women and 27% for men. In the same year range, in health service workers in the UK, the figures were 89% and 51% for women and men respectively (Timmerman & Bajema 1997). According to a study conducted for the European Commission recently, 40-50% of women and 10% of men have been sexually harassed at least once in their working lives (www.eubusiness.com). Even though it exists, the occurrence of sexual harassment on men is not as much as it is on women. And when it happens to men, it is usually on gay men (and men who are thought to be gay), ethnic minorities, and the disabled (Martin 1997, Rossi 1994, Grant & Chouinard 1996, Gardner 1995). Therefore, few men realise how big the problem is because they are seldom the targets themselves (Martin 1997).

Sexual harassment is associated with concepts of nature, feminism, space, and the process of othering. I will discuss the relationship of each approach with sexual harassment below. However, trying to discuss one concept without mentioning the others would be a futile attempt as all of the concepts are interrelated and determine each other in the occurrence, experience, and consequences of sexual harassment. For example, possession of a certain ‘space’ differs from one to the ‘other’; and what feminists call the ‘private/public dichotomy’ is related with a woman’s natural gift to breastfeed her offspring.

Physiology, Psychology, and Sexual Harassment

Psychologists argue that psychological development plays a role on an individual to develop a certain sexual identity; which in turn can result in, or lead to sexual harassment. They have come up with different developmental sexual models. Sigmund
Freud proposed that “sexual aberrations” occur if there was an inhibition in one of the developmental stages, which he classifies as oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. For example, if there was trauma during the anal stage (at two years of age) sadism can result (Gelles & Wolfner 1994:373). The psychologist John Money used the theoretical “love map” concept, which develops in our brain between 5 and 8 years of age. Individual trauma and cultural unwillingness to acknowledge children’s sexual development leads to what he called a “vandalised love map”, that can produce sexually harassing behavior (Gelles & Wolfner 1994:375).

It has been argued that the general natural tendencies of maleness are independence, dominance, autonomy, agency, instrumentality, and masculinity; while the tendencies of femaleness are dependence, relatedness, expressivity, affiliation, connection, nurturance, communion, and femininity (Rossi 1994). Behavioral scientists claim that these behaviors start to be observed in childhood, where boys’ brains are wired to be competitive and in search of attention while girls’ brains are wired to be cooperative, and in search of relationships (Pease & Pease 2001:140-142). They believe that this difference is because of the different levels of the hormone testosterone in males and females.

Males naturally possess a higher level of the hormone testosterone, which is necessary for sexual motivation. This hormone has been shown to have a strong and consistent relation with dominance, aggression, and antisocial behavior (Edwards & Booth 1994:249, Goldstein 1976). This finding supports beliefs that legitimise sexual harassment (e.g. “men can’t help it”) (Peterson & Runyan 1993). Generally, the fact that males have a higher level of this hormone is a seemingly significant reason to motivate men sexually and thus to initiate sexual harassment more often than women do. However, it has been suggested that although testosterone influences sexual motivation, the expression of this motivation as behavior depends on circumstances such as social control (Udrey & Campbell 1994:192).

Anthropologist Gayle Rubin developed a theory, which argues that sexuality is not determined by anatomy per se, but works to transform biological sexuality into “sex as we know it—gender identity, sexual desire, and fantasies…” (Alcoff 1996:20). This theory is similar to the social learning theory put forth by Mischel Bandura, Walter and Lynn, which views the environment as an important medium for acquiring a specific gender
identity. An environment which is filled with androcentric constructions of gender (Basow 1986:112).

The existing expression of systems in which men are socialised to be aggressive and dominant; and women to be passive and submissive seems to have found its base on the fact that many men are physically stronger than women by nature. In sexual functioning, the physical body and social self come together. Yet, studies that focus on both fields at the same time are rare (Rossi 1994). Many events of everyday life, like women preferring taller men for sexual partnership (Rossi 1994), women not wanting to initiate requests for dates (Sterk-Elifson 1994:109), men struggling for power at the work place (Silberschmidt 1999), and sexual harassment are outcomes of a combination of cultural, natural, and psychological constructions of sexual behavior (Oakley 1972:124). The gender schema theory, which is proposed by Sandra Bem, argues that gender identities are shaped through biology, social learning, and cultural factors (Basow 1986:118), the latter two of which are the main concerns of feminists.

Gender and Sexual Harassment: Feminist Views

Feminists argue that sexual harassment occurs more often towards women because of the existing gender constructions, which grant men a superior power and control over women (Farley 1978, Connell 1995, Deverell & Prout 1999). This is associated with the oppression of women by men, or the power of patriarchy (Rossi 1994, Silberschmidt 1999), which is defined by social scientists as the ability to influence other persons to do what one wants (Henley 1977).

Actions that are recognised as sexually harassing (and measures taken to deal with them) are determined by how a society constructs gender identities. As Deverell and Prout (1999:80) indicate, identity is not automatic. It is a result of a “process of interaction within social contexts”. Men and women are processed by this interaction for man to be reasonable, in control, and aggressive, and for woman to be irrational, emotional, submissive, and thus inferior, with reference to the standards of man (Alcoff 1996:15, Peterson & Runyan 1993:22). Sexual behaviors are shaped within this larger cultural context of socialization, a socialization that enables men to hold more power over women and to express this power through sexual harassment (Rossi 1994, Parker 1991, Basow 1986).
“Gender related power dynamics influence how men and women view themselves and how they are treated by others within the culture” (Stamler & Stone 1988:xiii). Gender refers to a complex set of characteristics and behaviors prescribed for a particular sex by society and learned through the socialization experience.”(Rossi 1994). Anthropologists like Bronislow Malinowski showed the difference between cultures in handling sexuality. In many cultures, men’s actions including sexual harassment are justified by what Connell calls the “ideology of supremacy” (1995:83). This ideology objectifies ‘subjects’ and naturalises the distinction between subject and object. Therefore, in the workplace for example, women are seen as sex objects rather than working subjects (Brittan & Maynard in Peterson & Runyan 1993:30). As Loe wrote (1996):

Men use women (emphasis in original) for attention, to play up fantasies of sexual prowess, to affirm and reaffirm masculinity, to assert power, and to have a good time.

When the gender identities which generally put women under the control of men are repeatedly performed, they become normalised and accepted as almost natural (Kirby 1996:54). Masculinist ideologies are deep rooted and shape behaviors which, when repeated, become “unconscious assumptions”, and are taken for granted (Peterson & Runyan 1993:28). A study done in Tanzania in 1992 showed that a large number of young students were not aware of the concept of sexual harassment. They perceived actions that are sexually harassing as normal, and internalised them as part of their lives; something they absorb passively (Tanzania Media Women’s Association 1994:80).

In many parts of Ethiopia (my home country), power differences between the sexes (whether innate or cultural) have ‘entitled’ men to sexually harass women without even feeling that they are violating the rights of those they sexually harass, because their actions are basically culturally ‘justified’.

The ways in which women cope with sexual harassment are varied. Many women in the workplace ignored it in the hope that they will be left alone. But, sexual harassment became even worse when ignored, and forced them to finally quit their job (Farley 1978:22). Therefore, instead of ignoring it, many suggest that it is better to handle sexual harassment by clearly saying ‘no’ to it (Langelan 1993, Newport 2000).
However, saying no has its own disadvantages, the reason why even those who consider themselves as "self-identified feminists" don't dare to say 'no' to sexual harassment, in order to protect themselves from more serious threats like losing a job or being hit (Gardner 1995:12). Waitresses in the United States in the 1970s talked about their experiences with customers or bosses. When they refused sexual advances, the harasser became more abusive, aggressive, and insulting. Ultimately, their refusal cost them their job (Farley 1978:105-108).

The other (less common) way by which women respond to sexual harassment is by retaliating; to which men react in a way that reflects a typical patriarchal societal arrangement, permitting them to express their superiority in a way women are not expected, or allowed to. In USA in the 1960s, 3 female and 16 male attorneys were working in a major federal agency. The males continuously sexually harassed their female colleagues. One day, one of the women said to one of the men, who was wearing tight pants on that day, "Wow! Look at that basket!" All the men went crazy. They were all angry with her and scolded her for being so 'unladylike'. She was finally forced to quit her job (Farley 1978:85).

Another story is that of a woman who was repeatedly told by her boss that her breasts were big. She had told him to stop, but he wouldn’t listen. One day, she grabbed his testicles and told him, “Your balls are big too.” He was furious and threatened to fire her on the spot. It is widely accepted to sexualise the female, while trying to sexualise the male would result in serious retributions for having distorted the ‘social order’ which entitles only men to sexually harass others (Oakley 1972).

In general, as Farley said, "economic need, the structure of the work place, and female sex-role conditioning" (emphasis added) are critical factors in the way women respond to sexual harassment (Farley 1978:23, Buchanan & Ormerod 2002).

Spaces and Sexual Harassment

Space can signify a geographical area—the physical environment that surrounds us; or a personal space—our emotional integrity and the ultimate body, which get disturbed when someone comes too close into the geographical space that surrounds us (Newport 2000, McDowell 1996). Many argue that when the physical environment is perceived to be safe, then there is no fear of sexual harassment. Based on this argument, planning strategies aim to reduce fear by encouraging people to make more use of particular spaces.
that are feared (i.e. confronting the fearful) so that they will get used to those spaces and become less and less afraid of them (Pain 2000).

In contrast, others argue that physical space and the emotional (social) space are closely related; and that it is futile to separate them and try to reduce fear by only concentrating on the physical one. According to them, fear can be successfully reduced when social concepts like gender, sexuality, and race are considered together with the physical space (OC & Tiesdell 1997 in Pain 2000).

How is a geographical space defined? In 1996, Tim Cresswell made the important point that it is difficult to get people to recognise “normative geographies until these are transgressed”. He said, “I let events themselves become the questions. The occurrence of out-of-place phenomena lead people to question behavior and define what is and what is not appropriate for a setting.”(Cresswell 1996 in Duncan 1996:139).

There is a system of space definition that is proposed by Hall, and that has four levels of “informal space” (In Henley 1977:32-33):
- Intimate distance: 0-18 inches
- Personal distance: 1.5-4 feet
- Social distance: 4-12 feet
- Public distance: 12 feet and more.

This classification is crucial in deciding at what distance welcomed actions start to become uncomfortable, and thus, harassing. For example, when a person who is supposed to stay at a social distance (for example, a business colleague) comes closer than 4 feet away, the interaction becomes too ‘personal’ and thus, insulting.

The perception of distance as appropriate or inappropriate differs from one culture to another, and during an interaction between different cultural settings. One study done by Dennis and Powell showed that black female students interacted with white classmates at a much greater distance of 12 cm average, than did black males (4.8 cm average) (Henley 1977:38). In many places in Ethiopia, respect for the elderly is expressed by talking to them at a distance, which is farther than that used while talking with peers, indicating that space gives situations different meanings.

As the perception of sexual harassment is determined by the physical and emotional space of the recipient, the way it is handled is also determined by the space in which it occurs. The style in which a person responds to sexual harassment during the day or in
public differs from how he/she would respond to it at night or when alone. Some spaces are associated with a physical threat and thus are feared more than others. The safety of spaces is determined by time of day, whether they are private or public spaces, and/or by who is found in the particular space (Henley 1977, Newport 2000).

Women are said to be ‘situationally disadvantaged’ in public spaces because they are subject to more sexual harassment in those spaces (Gardner 1995:16). In paradox, women may also perceive public spaces to be safer than those in which they find themselves alone. The very public spaces that are viewed as relatively safe in one situation (when there are others around, or when it is daylight) become dangerous in another situation where there is no one around, or when it is dark (Pain 2000).

An unpublished study by Russel Clark and Elaine Hatfield in 1981 involved American campus students being approached by researchers of the opposite sex. When the researchers asked, “I have been noticing you and I find you very attractive. Would you go out with me tonight?” 56% of women and 50% of men said okey. When asked, “Would you come over to my apartment tonight?” 69% of men and only 6% of women agreed, implying that public spaces don’t always put women at a ‘situational disadvantage’. In fact, being with a stranger in public spaces can be regarded to be safer than in a more private space-the apartment. There is also increasing evidence that women are also sexually harassed in their homes-the places that are expected to be a ‘safe haven’ for them (Pain 2000).

Henley calls the geographical space around us “territoriality”. In her terms, territoriality “refers to the behavior of staking out an area, i.e. marking it in some way, and defending it against others of one’s species.” The higher power a person (or animal) has, the greater their space, and the larger their territory-for instance in terms of possession of larger living compounds, and freedom of movement (Henley 1977:27).

Space occupied by males is different from that occupied by females. The novelist Marge Piercy demonstrated the difference of space occupations by males and females through the way they sit. Males tend to spread out their legs with their elbows out, while females cross their legs and keep their arms close to their body, reflecting the greater territory males occupy, and thus the higher power they possess (Henley 1977:38-40). Valentine (1989) also argued that the smaller space occupied by females is a “spatial expression of patriarchy”. (In Pain 2000:374).
The above arguments illustrate how ambiguous and socially determined space is. An individual is sexually harassed in a specific space not because of the physical characteristics of the space per se, but as a result of the interplay between social factors such as sex, gender, and race; especially if these factors make the individual in that particular space to be viewed as 'the other' and thus, harassable.

The Process of Othering

Space and otherness are interrelated. Familiar things in one space become strange and perceived as 'the other' in another. The example of dirt being matter out of place is a typical example. When a person is perceived to be different, then he/she is simultaneously regarded as dangerous; a threat to social and spatial order. Therefore, people start to distance themselves from the threatening other, or even attack the other in order to feel safer and more in control (Garland 1996 in Pain 2000:373).

Women, gay and lesbian communities (and those who are thought to be so), ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities are likely to be harassed because society sees them as different (Duncan 1996, Martin 1997, Buchanan & Ormerod 2002). Sexual harassment is used as a means to keep the behavior of those who are thought to ignore the 'normal' gendered, heterosexual and independent' nature of society in check (Valentine 1993). This fear of 'the other' violating the gendered rules is also reflected by men's fear of women who, according to the men, want to invade the male-dominated occupations in the labor market (Lewis 1968:113).

In a world that is ruled by androcentric masculinist ideologies, the woman is regarded as 'the other'. 'Woman' is defined by what is 'not man'; and characteristics of femininity like dependence, naivety, passivity, and gentleness contradict what is normal and masculine. Men who have the characteristics of the feminine are not regarded as 'real men' (Peterson & Runyan 1993:22).

The level of perception of a person as being 'the other' influences the frequency, experience, and consequences of sexual harassment. In a 1912 issue of The Independent, a black nurse published "More Slavery at the South", in which she wrote about being 'sexually harassed' by a white man; (though the term sexual harassment did not exist at that time, he was repeatedly trying to kiss her against her will) She took the case to court, and the judge at the hearing said, "This court will never take the word of a nigger against the word of a white man." (Farley 1978:40).
Stereotyping plays an important role in exposing black women in western societies to sexual harassment. Stereotypes are defined as images that generally and often incorrectly label groups of people with certain characteristics (Peterson & Runyan 1993:21). Black women are most exposed to sexual harassment in western societies because they are stereotypically said to be the most sexually accessible and the most economically at risk (Mackinnon 1979, Buchanan & Ormerod 2002). In addition, there are two features that make black women in western societies to be regarded as 'the other'- they are women, and they are ethnic minorities.

One way to avoid sexual harassment in a different cultural setting is to look less like 'the other'. As Newport (2000:8) suggests, one can look less different by dressing, behaving, and interacting with others “according to the local customs.” One needs to adjust themselves to appear familiar and thus avoid the danger and consequences of being sexually harassed.

Consequences of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment has mental, social, and physical consequences. It decreases the feeling of security of a person, limiting her/his freedom of movement and level of performance. The following story is told by a woman who had been sexually harassed by her professor 15 years back (Stamler & Stone 1998:38):

One day, he was standing outside the classroom talking to some other male professors, and when I walked by, they started laughing. I thought they might be laughing at me. I felt ashamed. I feel ashamed thinking about it now [after 15 years]…

As Martin (1997:1) put it:

Some women cannot pass through the day without encountering unsolicited comments, requests for their phone numbers, touching, grabbing, and so forth. They can’t just go about their business without having to ward off unwelcome approaches. Some women avoid public places because of harassment. A few develop agoraphobia (a pathological fear of open spaces) partly as a result of sexual harassment.
Some studies estimate that 80-95% of agoraphobics are women (Marks & Herst 1970 in Gardner 1995:38). It has also been argued that sexual harassment effectively reinforces social and spatial exclusion (Pain 2000).

Some feminists tend to focus only on recipients of sexual harassment in formulating prevention (Gelles & Wolfner 1994:367). Others suggest for a change in the existing culture, which is based on “submission to men’s desires and on awaiting their approval of what we do” (Louis 1994:96). For the successful transformation of the existing culture, men have to be made aware of the level of the problem and be involved in measures taken to stop sexual harassment (Martin 1997, Langelan 1993).

The aims and methods of this study will be discussed in the next chapter. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 will discuss the findings of the study. In chapter 3, definition of sexual harassment will be discussed in relation to space. The participants’ experiences in who initiates sexual harassment more will also be looked into. Chapter 4 will look at how the study participants associate sexual harassment with gender/power relations. It will specifically look at the possible reasons given for initiating sexual harassment, and who experiences it more often. In chapter 5, I will discuss the experience of sexual harassment by men and women, and the way they handle it. Chapter 6 will look at sexual harassment in relation to the processes of othering, and ways suggested to control, reduce, or avoid sexual harassment. Chapter 7 is my concluding chapter.
Chapter Two

Methodology

This study is designed to look at sexual harassment and related concepts like gender relations, space, and otherness from the perspective of young people in the Netherlands. It aims to fill the gap in literature regarding young people’s experience with sexual harassment in everyday life.

I started the study with the following central questions in mind:

How do young people in the Netherlands define, experience, avoid, and deal with sexual harassment?

How are their experiences of sexual harassment related with certain identities like gender and “othering”?

The study looks into factors that are possibly related with the definition and experience of sexual harassment. These include:

Sociopolitical factors: e.g. government policies and laws

Personal factors: e.g. physical appearance

Cultural factors: e.g. gender differences

My research is mainly oriented by theories of feminism, space, and the process of othering. It uses qualitative methods to search for a relationship between what young people think of sexual harassment and how they act toward it. The general objective is to know how young people define and experience sexual harassment, how they deal with it, and how they relate it to power, space, and the process of ‘otherness.’ The specific objectives are:

To find out how young men and women define sexual harassment

To know what actions they recognise as sexually harassing

To know how they experience sexual harassment in various contexts

To know how they deal with sexual harassment in various contexts

To know what methods they use to avoid sexual harassment

To know how they relate sexual harassment with differences in power

To know how they relate sexual harassment with ‘otherness’

To know what measures they suggest to control sexual harassment
The Sampling

The sample consists of 13 individuals: 7 females and 6 males—all found in the age range of 19-26 years. I chose this age range because I am found in it, and I started to be really concerned about, and bothered by occurrences of sexual harassment when I was about 19 years old. I was able to meet the study participants through snowballing method. All of them are university students. Their pseudonames and personal information follows:

1. Abdullah, male, 26 years old
2. Danielle, female, 25 years old
3. David, male, 24 years old
4. Deborah, female, 22 years old
5. Jake, male, 22 years old
6. Jessica, female, 22 years old
7. Lorenzo, male, 24 years old
8. Madonna, female, 25 years old
9. Maria, female, 26 years old
10. Mario, male, 26 years old
11. Peter, male, 23 years old
12. Sally, female, 25 years
13. Sofia, female, 24 years

Information was also obtained from other acquaintances who did not formally participate in the study, but who gave relevant information for its purpose.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected over a period of six weeks. The methods used were in-depth interviews, and observation. My own experience was also used as another source of data. Some days before the interviews, I told the study participants what I would like to know about, and asked them to think about the topic, and keep diaries of their daily observations for at least a week before we were to have our interview. Nobody kept a diary, but they all told me later that they had been thinking about the topic.
Interviews

A total of thirteen in-depth interviews were undertaken. All of them were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by handwriting. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. "Background and demographic questions are basically boring; they epitomize what people don’t like about interviews" (Patton 1990:295). Therefore, I obtained sociodemographic data through a questionnaire at the end of each interview (see appendix1). Afterwards, main themes were coded, each information was classified under each main theme, and then re-written using MS-Word.

As most of the participants said they were either busy with schoolwork or are leaving on a holiday, follow-up interviews were not possible to conduct given the six weeks I had to collect data. Instead, when I came up with a question after transcribing each interview, I called them and asked them to explain the things I found unclear or incomplete.

I left the choice for them to pick the places where we had the interviews. Most chose the Vondel park, one of the biggest parks in the city of Amsterdam. I always had something for the participants to eat and drink during the interview.

As I am not experienced in conducting an interview, my first thought was to follow the guiding questions that I had prepared (see appendix2), but it was not easy to follow the guide and at the same time keep an easy flow of the interview. Therefore, I abandoned my way of strictly following the guide, and let the interviews have a conversational style. That produced a much more relaxed environment and thus richer information.

Observation

Since actions sometimes speak louder than words, I closely observed the reactions of the study participants—reflected by their facial expressions, and body movements— and kept note of them. In addition, every time I went out of my room, I was all eyes and ears, and took in every form of action I perceived as sexually harassing that took place on myself, and around me. I studied people in squares, trams, parks, streets, and cafes. I kept note of my observations, frustrations, and funny experiences.
Ethical Considerations

I explained fully and honestly the purposes of my study and my intentions of doing it to the participants. I obtained their full consent in written form before each interview (except in one case, where I had to meet a participant on short notice before he had to go to Italy on a holiday. He was the first person I interviewed and I did not have a copy of the consent form with me. I mentioned this to him, and he gave me his verbal consent after I familiarised him with the contents of the consent form (see appendix3). Confidentiality was promised and reassured by the use of false names. I did not press them on matters they found too emotional, or too difficult to talk about.

Limitations, Challenges, Worries, and Sad Moments

My biggest challenge was where to find and how to approach informants. For a long time before I was due to start my fieldwork, I had been visiting three different schools, talking to student advisors and directors about my study. When they kept giving me appointments (which they later cancelled) to further discuss my research proposal, I knew they were not taking me seriously. The letter of support I had from my university did not seem to help. I was worried because, obviously, there is no research without research participants. It was a great relief when one university lecturer agreed to help me find participants from one of her classes and was successful doing so.

Then came the next challenge—the challenge of tracking some of the participants down for the interview. Most of the time, their mobile phones were switched off; either because they were in class, or they were working. I had to try several times before I could reach them.

Language was another challenge I faced. This challenge would certainly limit the results of the study in terms of literature. Most literature on sexual harassment in the Netherlands is written in Dutch, a language I have no idea about. Having them translated would have cost me a lot of time and money. So, I had to use literature that was written in English only.

English is also the medium of language I used to interview the study participants. It is a second language for both the participants and me. Therefore, it was not always easy to express our thoughts as clearly and readily as we could have if we were using our native language. There were times when I wished I had been a native Dutch
Potloodventors...the guys who wear only a long jacket and are totally naked under it. And, you walk by, and they are like, phew (opening their jacket). It is funny, haha, but it is not scary, because you know they won’t do anything.

(Danielle, female)

In general, feelings in reaction to SH can be classified based on the physical threat that accompanies it.

| Sexual harassment at night, when alone | Physical threat present | Scared and angry; but try to stay nice |
| Sexual harassment at day, when with people | Physical threat absent | Angry, funny, or ignore, but not scared |

“It is an honor”: Men’s Experience

What are men’s emotional reactions to SH? Most of them experience it as flattering, and may even welcome it. But some also get uncomfortable, or embarrassed.

If a female makes a move on me, oh, oh, I would work on her, ha. Thank you. It happened to me once in New York. I was standing in the bus and a girl was standing next to me and she just put her breasts on me. Oh, I enjoyed the ride, haha. (Me: Did you say anything to her?) No, I don’t think she did it on purpose. But she was young and I liked it. She had big boobs, and I was like, ‘oh, that’s fine with me,’ haha. To me, if she does that, I will be like, ‘you’re welcome, honey.’

(Abdullah, male)

I would love it. I would be like ‘okey!’ I wouldn’t mind.

(David, male)

I am not irritated. Uh, more embarrassed. I don’t have tools to handle such a situation in a way that I feel comfortable with it. Yeah, it’s just me. I am shy.

(Jake, male)

I would feel honored, you know. Ummm, Okey, that’s something. But if I don’t like the girl, I would call it off. (Me: How?) I’ll tell her I am not interested. (Me: And, if she persists?) Then, I’d use my physical power, you know. (Me: And if she is stronger?) Then I’ll run.
speaker; or the participants native Amharic speakers. Body languages helped a lot in trying to understand what we wanted to say to each other.

I had a sad moment-the moment I sat down to transcribe one interview and realised one side of the tape had no voice in it because of my silly mistake of having forgotten to press the 'record' button. I was infuriated because, during the interview, I did not force myself to be completely, entirely attentive since I knew everything would be on tape anyway. That moment gave me a lesson that not everything can be on tape always. From then on, I became more attentive during the interviews.

Given the accessibility of some of the informants, the limited time of six weeks I had for the fieldwork did not make it easy to obtain as much information as I desired.
Chapter 3

“Space Matters”: Definition of Sexual Harassment, On Whom, and By Whom

What is SH? This is a question the study participants had to think about for some time before responding to. Their answers did not come naturally and easily. The reason could be the fact that actions that define SH vary from one context to another. What all of them agreed on however were the facts that SH has a sexual nature, it is not welcomed, and actions become sexually harassing depending on by whom they are initiated, when, where, and how.

Abdullah’s parents are Moroccan. He was born in Morocco, but moved to Holland when he was a baby. In his teens, he lived in the United States of America, where he spent seven years. It has been now 8 months since he came back to Holland. He is studying law. He defines SH as:

(…) If someone says you are beautiful, maybe he is just trying to make a conversation. I mean, it is just a compliment. If somebody is gonna say to you, ‘nice butt, nice tits’, then it is sexual harassment. (…) It is not always dirty words. Harassment is, uh, uh, ‘nice lips, ooh, they look shiny. Can you look shiny in other place?’ I mean, it can be a lot of things, not just dirty words, but sometimes, if you are walking and somebody just says, ‘hey, beautiful’, I don’t see that as harassment. If somebody says-makes a compliment about your boobs, your ass, your lips, you have a nice body, that is what sexual harassment is, but ‘I wanna fuck you’ – that is abusive. That is verbal abuse. You cannot see it as harassment.

(Abdullah, Male)

From his definition, it appeared that he had three classifications in mind:

‘You are beautiful’- is a compliment.

‘Nice boobs, nice butt, shiny lips’- is sexual harassment.

‘I want to fuck you’- is verbal abuse.

He did not mention a condition where what has been a compliment turns to SH, and vice versa. In fact, he said that comments such as ‘I want to fuck you’ cannot be seen as SH,

* SH: is the abbreviation I will use for ‘sexual harassment’ throughout this paper.
and comments like ‘you are beautiful’ are not sexually harassing at all. He made a clear distinction between the three.

Maria, a 26 year old female agrees with Abdullah on the point that she also usually sees comments like ‘you are beautiful’ as a compliment. However, if it gets “too much complimentary”, then she will feel sexually harassed. For her, SH has a wider meaning than Abdullah. She divides it into two types:

1. “Communicative”: “saying things that aren’t appropriate to say to people, uh- maybe too much complimentary, or even direct sexual, like ‘I would like to sleep with you’”.
2. “Touching”: “Touching you in different ways that aren’t appropriate.”

Maria also feels sexually harassed when men become “over gallant”.

(... Because you are a woman, they treat you differently. (...) I can also take offense if someone is over gallant, you know. Opening the door is okay, but I am not someone who is totally helpless, you know. So, I can see that as sexual harassment as well. It is a very thin line, there. It is, uh, someone can just be nice, but I think, too much, and that becomes derogatory. They put you down.

(Maria, Female)

The generally accepted gesture of letting a woman pass first through a door irritates Maria. Though I have never observed it in Amsterdam (unless for the elderly), Ethiopian men sometimes leave their seats for a woman in a bus. A man who does this is said to have respect for a woman and thus is a gentleman. Maria sees such kind of ‘respect’ as derogatory. It makes her feel sexually harassed. Where does this concept of ‘respect’ come from, by the way? Who asked for it? Is it a reflection of the existing gender constructions of superior, stronger, independent man and inferior weaker, dependent woman who should be taken care of by a man? (See also Rossi 1994:24)

Nine of the participants mentioned the concept of space directly in their definition of sexual harassment. To express this concept, they used terms like ‘integrity’, ‘private space’, ‘border’, ‘too far’, and ‘limit’.

(...) As long as they respect each other and they keep the distance, and just don’t go too far with (calling names, making compliments about body parts), then it is not sexual harassment.

(Madonna, Female)
(SH is) acting in a way that in which you invade somebody’s **personal space**. When you come **too close** to somebody and the person doesn’t like it. It could be a remark, it could be just coming too close.

(Jake, male)

There are different types (of sexual harassment). Just standing in the subway, or in the bus, and somebody touches you or intimidates you in a certain way, maybe he don’t even know it, but you think it is personal. Most people think that their own **private space** is taken, and on the other hand, you got almost, uh, a rape-like, uh, throwing towards a certain person, jumping on a certain person- but that is the aggressive type. If someone just gives you a wink, or look at you, (they are harassing you passively), but you think they went **beyond certain limits**. Touching and those things, uh, those are more aggressive, active ways. (Sexual harassment) violates your own **private space**, or it is your own **private body**.

(David, male)

For David, SH can be classified as:
- **Passive**: which violates our *emotional space*
- **Aggressive**: which violates our physical body (anatomical space).

Jessica has a similar definition of SH. She classifies it into ‘verbal’ and ‘physical’, (which, according to David, were termed as ‘passive’ and ‘aggressive’, respectively). She puts the difference as follows:

When one person performs a sex-related act on another person that doesn’t agree with it, or doesn’t want it. (...) **Verbal thing** could be that when you walk on the street, people start making comments about your body, which you don’t find comfortable, then, you interfere with the person’s **private space**. (Physical sexual harassment) is a step worse than a verbal thing, because, it is really crossing the **integrity of your body**. That’s worse (...). It is also a gradation of acts- because, the verbal thing, although people don’t touch you, they (still) integrate into your private sphere- because you want to walk around without these things happening, of course. So, that’s also a kind of penetration of your own personal space. And then, when it is really starting to get physical, I think that is, uhm, that is uh, violating the integrity of
your own body. That is of course not only your personal space, but also integrity of your body. (Jessica, female)

Jessica and David’s definitions are in accordance with Newport’s and McDowell’s (2000 and 1996, respectively) division of personal space into the emotional integrity, and the ultimate physical body. Henley (in Farley 1978:16) also wrote that touching is one of the closer invasions of one’s personal space, and is even more a physical threat than emotional space violation.

For Deborah, the concept of a ‘border’ is important in differentiating between sexual harassment and flirting, which she called a “joke”.

It starts with a little joking, funny thing, but then, he is gonna walk with you, and you feel that they are stepping over this border, and then the fun is not there anymore. (...) When they step over this border, then, it gets harassing. And you don’t need to touch or something, but words can be threatening, as well. (...) I think everybody has a space, and if somebody steps into your space, even without touching...

(Deborah, female)

Space is also defined in terms of distance from oneself. Danielle defined space both in emotional and geographical terms.

It can just be by words, or touching your body, or your butt if you walk by. Talking rude to you in a sexual manner. (...) Well, not like ‘lekkerding’*, or, you know, something like ‘nice piece’, but, if they call any further, like ‘oh, you have nice breasts’, then it is too close. (Me: When do you say someone came too close to you?) If someone stands like this (holding her hand in front of her at a distance of about two feet) it’s too close. If they are friends, of course it doesn’t matter. But if somebody comes up in the street like this, I don’t like it. Then, it is coming too close to you-in your space. (Danielle, female)

*Lekkerding: is a Dutch term which literally means “nice thing”. It is a coarse language. Men usually say it when they see a woman who they think is ‘hot’.
The distance Danielle gave as a limit for a stranger not to come closer is supported by the limit set by Hall as a personal distance (1.5-2.5 feet), a distance that is allowed “for people bonded in some way such as wife and husband, parent and child” (In Henley 1977:32).

SH is not a simple term to define. It is contextual. This fact is clearly seen from the participants’ responses.

Yeah, it depends on what the other person thinks it is when it is harassing. There is no specific line that you cross here. If she says, ‘no-you don’t have to do it’, then, it is sexual harassment. (...) Sometimes, you just a little bit like playing around-fooling around, and sometimes, it just goes, uh, too far, you know. If somebody says, ‘stop it, stop it’, and when it is too far, what is the limit? It’s really difficult. (...) It is a big gray area when you don’t really know when you cross a certain boundary and line. (...) If you go out to a disco, it’s even more blurred. It’s like you go dance with a girl, and you never know when it becomes too close. And, it also depends on the way it is said. Even if you say ‘I want to fuck you’, if you say it with a smile, it may not be harassing to the person. (...) There is a thin line between sexual harassment and accepted behavior.

(David, male)

There was the cook here (in the café she works part-time). He did not do anything like touching or anything, but just speaking in a certain way that was really close to sexual harassment, and sometimes, it went really too far. He was always asking questions—boyfriends, uh, I don’t know, telling me I was this kind of person, I was that kind of person, like-analyzing things about me. Just, it is really difficult for me; I could not really never put my finger on it.

(Sofia, female)

It might get difficult to try and set the limits to sexual harassment. Words, uh, actions that are harassing in another context are fun if there are signs from both parties that they are interested. If I start talking about sex here, I am in the sex shop (where he works part-time, and where I interviewed him); a girl is buying a vibrator. It wouldn’t be harassing. But if I am in the supermarket and somebody is buying a cute Comoros, ‘Hey, what are you going to do with that?’ then that is harassing, you know. It depends on the situation. In this (sex) shop, I don’t think it is a problem if you talk about sex.

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It really depends on the context. Just when two people like each other and—when I am with my girlfriend, it is hard to speak of sexual harassment. But with people who don’t know each other really good...

(Peter, male)

I think it can be, uh, there is a difference between, ‘oh you are looking nice’, and ‘look at those breasts’, or something. (...) It is a borderline thing. It can be okay, but it can also cross the border of a personal privacy. (...) It depends on what they say. Sometimes, it can make you feel confident, like,’ wow, you look beautiful, what a beautiful dress’. But if they start saying personal things, then it is not nice.

(Jessica, female)

As long as people respect each other and don’t intimidate, really intimidate each other, it’s okay. (...) Sometimes, you get guys, like whistling, or calling you. But I don’t know if we really should call that sexual harassment. Uh, maybe, at night, some things can happen; but, not as long as they go-continue their way and just part again. Just go away and not, don’t go on following you. (...) If they shut up and go away, then it’s okay, but if they continue, and that is bad.

(Madonna, female)

Abdullah had labeled comments like ‘I want to fuck you’ as verbally abusive. According to him, such comments cannot even be called simply sexual harassment. On the other hand, David gave more importance to how things are said instead of what is said. He said that even comments like ‘I want to fuck you’ might not be abusive as long as they are said nicely, and as long as the recipient does not say ‘you do not have to do it’.

For Madonna, Maria, and Danielle, things are okay until they become ‘too much’. It is only when they are repeated, or when they are too much (even compliments and gestures) that they become sexually harassing. Danielle does not mind comments like ‘lekkerding’ as long as they do not go on to ‘nice breasts’. Maria accepts it if someone holds a door open for her as long as they are not “over gallant”. Madonna doesn’t care if anyone says anything as long as they say it “once” and not “repeat” it.
The definition of sexual harassment is a blur to the extent that some of the participants did not know what to even make of actions like whistling. They find them hard to decide what to do about.

When people whistle or something, I can take more offense than when they say (something) because, it is a normal way, talking to someone, while whistle is—you don’t know what to do with it. You don’t know what they want really. If they want something, or if it is just a compliment.

(Maria, female)

David has put all actions that can be defined as flirting or sexual harassment depending on the context in which they are used in a “big gray area”. On one side of this big area, he put obvious definite actions like rape. On the other side, there is no SH at all. He has put incidences of SH and flirting in the big gray area.

The difficulty in giving a simple clear definition stems from the fact that the same actions that are not sexually harassing if welcomed become so if unwelcomed. Langelan (1993) put the difference between SH and flirting as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual harassment</th>
<th>Flirting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feels bad</td>
<td>Feels good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is one-sided</td>
<td>Is shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes you feel unattractive</td>
<td>Makes you feel attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is degrading</td>
<td>Is a compliment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes you feel powerless</td>
<td>Makes you feel in control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is power-based</td>
<td>Is based on equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May include negative touching</td>
<td>May include positive touching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is unwanted</td>
<td>Is wanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is illegal</td>
<td>Is legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes you feel sad/angry</td>
<td>Makes you feel happy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only Mario did not seem to know the difference between SH and flirting. He defined SH as:

It is usually sexual flirting; but it could also be physical-like rape. It could be in words or in deeds. (Me: can you explain what you mean by sexual flirting?) Oh, uh, compliments, special looks, ambiguous sexual remarks, sexual poses.

(Mario, male)

He had named verbal forms of SH “sexual flirting” in general. He did not seem to be aware of the fact that actions are called *flirting* only when they are welcomed.

I was surprised to see that in some of the participants’ definitions of SH; there was an implicit suggestion that SH happens more often to women by men.

If someone says ‘you are beautiful,’ maybe he is just trying to make a conversation...if you are saying sexual things about her body... And rubbing against her...

(Abdullah, male)

There is no specific line that you cross here. If she says, ‘no, you don’t have to do it,’ then it is SH...

(David, male)

When you just walk over the streets, there are a lot of men that say things to you.

(Deborah, female)

For example, when I start to touch you now, it is SH. Or when I say sexual stuff to you you don’t really want...

(Peter, male)

Look at Peter’s examples. When he was trying to explain what SH meant for him, he did not say, “For example, if you start to touch me now...” He made an example of himself being the one who sexually harasses me, the female.

A man, or possibly a woman, make some sexual advances to you that you don’t like...

(Sofia, female)
Possibly a woman. If she had thought that both men and women equally could be sexually harassing, she might spontaneously have started her sentence by: “Somebody makes some sexual advances to you.” But she said, “A man, or possibly a woman…”

This subconscious association of males with the initiation of sexual harassment might be based on existing studies, which show that SH is done more to females by males. In fact, the very term SH was first mentioned by a feminist who observed a certain behavior of males towards females in the workplace (Farley 1978).

But did they make a subconscious reference to males as the sexual harassers just because of existing studies? What do they say when directly asked who they see to be more sexually harassing?

Who Does It More?

All participants said that it is man-like to sexually harass. Many studies also show a smaller proportion of men than women who complain of SH. But, according to all participants, it is not always just men who do it, but men with certain identities. These identities are expressed by age, country of origin, position and context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men of all ages, but especially 20-40 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of origin</td>
<td>Non-Dutch: especially Moroccans, Southern Europeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position and context</td>
<td>Bosses, construction workers, men in groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most agreed that those Moroccans who are seen to sexually harass often give the whole Moroccan community a bad reputation. Only Jessica told me that she is more harassed by a group of Dutch men than any other. And Danielle mentioned about men called ‘potloodventers’* who sexually harass by showing their penis to the public. Such “exhibitionism” is assumed to have something to do with a stronger sex drive in males (Oakley 1972).

Most associate SH with power differences.

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* Potloodventers: a Dutch term whose literal translation is “dick flashers”
If someone is your employer, or just has a certain power over you in other ways, and then starts to use this position to get some pleasure out of it.

(Sofia, female)

The harasser is a man, who is in a higher position.

(Mario, male)

Usually, men do it to women. (SH) can happen in offices where a supervisor harasses his secretary...

(Jake, male)

In general, their tendency to relate SH with work positions coincides with what the United States Equal Opportunities Commission calls quid pro quo SH, where unequal power positions in the work place are used as a route to make an unwelcomed sexual advance.

Let us look at what Jake said about the harasser being a male supervisor and the harassed- a female secretary. This response can show how higher positions are almost inevitably given to a man, and lower positions to a woman. Women are found mostly in jobs that are said to require less skill and thus are low-paying (Farley 1978).

When people ask me what I studied in college and I tell them, I studied medicine, I see a look of surprise in their faces, and they say, “Really! Wow!” Such comments are not given to a man as often, because as medicine is considered to be a man’s job, it is not surprising for a man to become a medical doctor. It makes me feel sad and angry to be treated as an ‘intruder’ in what is considered to be a man’s world (Peterson & Runyan 1993). And I feel sexually harassed because, the comment they give is unwelcome, and it asserts “a woman’s sex role over her function as worker” (Houghton-James 1995:6)

But, is SH solely related with the work position a person has? If it were, then male secretaries or students would not have sexually harassed females who are bosses or university professors. But, this is found not to be the case (Stamler & Stone 1998). Rather, a man who has an inferior rank or position to a woman can still harass her to “maintain the present power balance of gender relations (Louis 1994:92).

What reasons do the participants give for the people who sexually harass others? And in their opinion, who is more sexually harassed? The next chapter will discuss the reasons that are given for sexually harassing others.
Chapter 4

Why Does It happen?

Reasons and Excuses for Initiating Sexual Harassment

"She asked for it": Blaming the victim

Most of the participants gave different reasons, supporting the gender schema theory, which argues that sexual behavior is shaped through a number of factors such as biology, social learning, and culture (Basow 1986:118)

Some participants told me that men* justify their actions by saying that the woman asked for it; that she gave them an invitation to make sexual advances toward her.

Some girl is walking, and you can see her (…) boobs, the ass, (…) if dressing like that, she is looking for it. She is screaming for help (smile). She needs attention, and when they need attention, they get it. (Abdullah, male)

(…) Blaming the victim thing, which happens a lot. ‘She was wearing a short skirt, so I felt I could do this. Yeah, she looked at me like she wanted to have sex, so I did it.’ (Jessica, female)

Some studies have also shown that men tend to misinterpret any reaction from women and regard it as an invitation for flirtation (Sterk-Elifson 1994:109). This misinterpretation is one reason that discourages women to come out in public with their complaints of SH. As Gelles and Wolfner (1994:365) said,

One obstacle in the effort to place and keep sexual victimization on the public policy agenda is the tradition of blaming female victims for their sexual victimization.

Abdullah takes the very style of a woman’s dress as a possible invitation for a sexual advance, which, according to him, cannot be called SH because the female was desperate

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* Since I have found in this particular study that SH is more likely to be initiated by males than females, I will consciously make the mistake of generalization and refer to males as sexual harassers throughout my writing, unless in specific instances.
for the attention in the first place when she dressed herself in a particular way. It was written that women are rewarded for having a seductive walk and clothing, yet blamed for these behaviors when men sexually harass them (Henley 1977:16).

On the other hand, Danielle told me that let alone how a woman is dressed, even if she had been flirting with a man and at some point she wanted to stop and he wouldn’t, then, her initial interest in flirting can not be taken as an invitation for the man to end up sexually harassing her. She said, “If somebody says no, then no is no.” According to her, whatever a woman does is basically no body’s business as long as she makes it clear to those who are involved that she has changed her mind at some point. Her idea is supported by French sociologists who said (Louis 1994:86):

...a woman’s sex life, or indeed any questions about her private life leading up to the incident should not be taken into account.

However, there are men who take a woman’s mere friendliness as an invitation to sexual advances, let alone her flirtatiousness. One woman talked about the consequences of ‘being nice’ to men. She said, (Farley 1978:153):

If you are a woman, you can’t be nice. I was friendly to two colleagues and the next thing I knew, one grabbed me and pressed himself into me. He said, ‘I am getting married, so I gotta get it while I can’.

What is wrong with being nice? What is wrong with expressing one’s admiration for men without any sexual intentions? It never ceases to amaze me whenever I remember what happened to me in my job a few years back. I had a male colleague who was competent in his job. He is married. I admired him for his work and told him so a number of times. After some time, I noticed his attitude changing towards me. He was giving me looks that had a sexual implication, and throwing personal comments and questions every now and then. I felt that the admiration I held for him regarding his job performance was taken as an invitation to flirt. I blamed myself for my openness, as if that were a crime. Can’t women express their feelings about men without giving the wrong impression that they are making sexual advances? This is one form of oppression of women, stopping them from acting naturally, and speaking out what they feel?

Such misinterpretations and the subsequent occurrence of SH make women to blame themselves for ‘leading men on’, and thus not to dare to complain openly about
what they experience as SH. Their silence, in turn, is taken as a sign of acceptance, and SH therefore continues (Davies 1994).

Hunger for Control

The desire to be in control, and be regarded by others as ‘the winner’ are some of the possible reasons given by the study participants for initiating SH.

Maybe they feel like real men. (...) Guys are grown up like ‘you are the man in this house...you are in control...you are macho.’ [SH] is like an ego-boost for them.

(David, male)

Because all men are bastards, haha. (...) Maybe it is a power to, to have power, to control somebody. (...) To be able to control just the reaction of another person, basically. To know what kind of reaction the other person is gonna give and to be able to control that (...) It’s all about power, trying to get what you want.

(Jake, male)

(...) A macho behavior between men amongst each other (...) because they are in a group, and they want to be cool for each other, and maybe, they hope for a good reaction, and then of course, they really made it with their friends. (...) It is a group thing. The guys want to be tough and they want to show that they’re not afraid to go to a girl and make a move.

(Maria, female)

It is quite, uh, a masculine culture. (...) I always think that peer makes it worse. To brag a little bit to each other, showing off.

(Jessica, female)

Men, when they are in a group, they feel like... they see one innocent girl on the street and they know they can get. (...) It has got to do with power. They wanna show they are big or something.

(Madonna, female)
It is power-related. I think they want attention. And maybe, just to your friends, you know, ‘look how tough I am’ and yeah, to get attention. More showing themselves, ‘I am a man’ (Danielle, female)

A number of studies also showed similar reasons. It was argued that SH is a “runaway machismo”, a function of the way “the male chauvinist is very insecure, and takes advantage of any situation in which he has power.” SH is related to “man’s need to preserve his dominion” (Farley 1978: 180 & 11 respectively, Peterson & Runyan 1993:33)

Why is gaining and maintaining power so important for men? Behavioral scientists argue that males have a natural desire to be in control of everything, and to get all the attention they can (Pease&Pease 2001). In addition to nature, social scientists also argue that men’s desire for control is the result of cultural shaping, which is directed by natural differences. For them, nature can be influenced by how a person is culturally shaped.

Let’s look at the following section.

Hunger for sex

Some participants say that a culturally uncontrolled desire for sex motivates people to initiate SH.

(...) They are sexually frustrated. [SH] is the result of an erotic feeling. You can say it is culturally defined. (David, male)

It is a sickness, psychological thing. Perversion. Sexual needs. Sickness. It is just something you learn and develop when growing up with the guys on the street. (...) Well, you know, we have dirty minds. First thing we saw a girl, the first thing in our mind is ‘how would she look naked? How is she in bed?’ And he would look in the butt, then he will look to her breasts, then he looks at her face, hehehe. If she has good boobs, then, even if she is ugly, uh, you can put a bag on her face, hehehehe. (Abdullah, male)
Men are more explicit in their feelings about sex. Culture makes women to be less eager to sexually harass. (...) In a place where sex is allowed to a lesser extent, SH is higher. (...) They don’t have enough sex, or they are sexually attracted to somebody, and they have a sexual drive, and it asks them, ‘please’ you know (smile). (...) There is a need to have some sex by a person, and the person can’t apply it on somebody who wants to do it, and they don’t take no for granted. It comes from a natural drive, I think.

(Lorenzo, male)

(...)Because they don’t have a girlfriend and are sexually excited. They don’t have sex with a girl for a long time, they want to meet girls and just do it.

(Peter, male)

Most of the time, I experience it as a lack of control of males. The males, I think, they just want to have sex. Something went wrong somewhere. It is just growing up like that. It is – I think it’s a reaction on a problem, and I don’t know where that problem is.

(Deborah, female)

Men, I think, have a problem. They can’t control their hormones or something, while we can.

(Sally, female)

I don’t understand why men do it. Maybe it is something in their system.

(Madonna, female)

Taboo is bad. The Moroccan guys, they are more [sexually harassing] because, maybe in their home, it’s more taboo to talk about sex. So, they see the free will because the women are more naked on the street. (...) I think if you are more open [about sex] you don’t have a reason to be so focused on it, you know, on the street, or-if you never talk about it, it gets much more interesting.

(Danielle, female)

Danielle told me that the sexual revolution has made people more open about sex, naturalizing it; thus lessening SH. However, she also thinks that the revolution has negative effects. She said,
The video clips are, you see a guy with all the women around him, and slapping her on the butt. Well, I think for the young people, that seems normal, you know. It is too much. And you never see a woman surrounded by naked men in their swimming pants. And there is some belief that women should be sexual. And you normalize it. And I think it is very bad. It will make it worse.

(Danielle, female)

Peter and Jessica also have mixed feelings about the sexual revolution of the 60s.

In general, the sexual revolution was good, because, before that, it was really hard for homosexuals, [and] SH was a term that didn’t exist. And it was inherent to men that he has his needs, and it is okey if he raped a woman, and it wasn’t rape, because he had his needs. (...) And after the sexual revolution, SH became a term that was being used. Women became more free about their sexuality. [But], these porno films, ugh, I hate those. Those are very much in the old patriarchal thinking sphere, because they are made for men. It is so degrading. And the youth get confronted with it. (...) In the video clips, the girls are half naked. Girls in bikinis, and boys in a winter jacket. This is crazy. Also a lot of times, the girls are filmed without the head. You see only the body. And these awful words-bitch... It is a very troublesome development. So, it becomes normal that you, as a boy, say those things to girls because you see them in clips. (.) It is going too far on the wrong side.

(Jessica, female)

The positive effect [of SH] is that, now, people can more express themselves however they want. (...) And you can go to the whores for sex if you have the money. And, before, when going to the whores was illegal, a lot of men wouldn’t be able to react in a normal way. They would harass everyone when they want to have sex, and they couldn’t go to the whores. [But], the negative effect of it is that-the fashion industry or music channels, everything has to do with sex. (...) So, the sexual stuff is really coming into all aspects of daily life.

(Peter, male)
In their responses, one can see the reflection of the hypothesis that people seek out sexual behavior in direct proportion of how illicit or how illegal it is. Scientists wrote (Goldstein 1976):

Non-repressive society and a resurrection of the entire body and personality as an erogenous instrument of pleasure would reduce the preoccupation with sexual matters, because the risk and thrill of doing something wrong would be gone.

Culture and Upbringing

Culture and upbringing were mentioned many times in relation to the frequency and degree of initiation of SH.

(...) It is just something maybe you learn and develop when growing up.

(Abdullah, male)

Culture makes women to be less eager to sexually harass others. (Lorenzo, male)

It sort of depends on what kind of environment you grew up in. It’s something social.

(Jake, male)

I think it’s just part of their habits, part of their daily culture. (...) It’s just their lifestyle. Well, maybe until that period when they want to settle and get married or something; it’s just their style. (...) It really depends on culture.

(Peter, male)

I think lack of upbringing. The upbringing is more loose for Moroccan guys. I think they’re more let out without supervision, and they don’t get called back to say, ‘hey, I saw you harassing a girl, and I don’t want you to do that’.

(Maria, female)

In general, in all the above explanations about the possible reasons for SH initiation, one can see a combination of psychological, physiological, social, and cultural causes, all of which play a role (Goldstein 1976, Basow 1986, Davies 1994)
Who is more Sexually Harassed?

The Dress

Most of the participants said that physical appearance matters in exposing a person to more SH. When a woman wears a skirt, high heels, or exposes much of her body, then, the chances to be sexually harassed are bigger.

I noticed that if you wear a skirt, it doesn’t matter if it is short or long, as long as you see some part of the leg, guys are triggered to say something. I think a skirt does something with guys. (Maria, female)

If a woman dresses in a way-showing much skin for instance, or if she is pretty, she will more likely to be harassed. (Peter, male)

My roommate, she is more like...well, high heels, more sexy in the eyes of men, and she gets a lot more talking. (...) If you are wearing a skirt so short and your underwear is out, you can expect to have more comments. But it is not an excuse to bother somebody. I see men without their shirts too and I don’t go and chase them around. (Danielle, female)

It is common to see men half-naked on the streets of Amsterdam in the summer, but as Danielle interestingly said, they are not chased around. If a woman sees a man on the street with no shirt on, it’s less likely that she would say directly to him, ‘ooh, nice chest, sexy arms, nice breasts’. Or, if she sees him in shorts, it’s less likely that she would say, ‘Hey, you have got a big one there.’

Sadly, women’s body and the way they dress are also taken as major criteria in evaluating their skills and character. Many women complain that they are told to dress in a ‘sexy’ way if they really want to get a particular job (Farley 1978, Sobo 1993). Men seem to take it as their duty to say something about a woman’s looks and relate it with her choices in life. Comments from men like ‘Why is a good looking girl like you
interested in an office job?’ and ‘A beautiful girl like you shouldn’t be out fighting the bad weather’ are common. (Farley 1978:102)

The Insecure and The Inferior

In addition to physical appearance, insecurity is also described as a factor that exposes someone to SH more often.

In high school, there was this head teacher that was fired because he harassed pupils. (...) I think perpetrators choose their victims, maybe at some subconscious level. This teacher I told you, I think he chose the weak girls, insecure girls, at an age that you are already very insecure about your body. You get breasts, you get hair everywhere, all these hormones, and you feel very insecure. So I think the more insecure people are, the bigger the chances to be a victim. (Jessica, female)

Having an inferior position in the work place is also said to expose to SH because of a lesser opportunity to refuse in fear of losing a job. Sofia has told me about a friend of hers who worked in a homosexual bar as a cleaner. He kept silent to the sexual advances of the bar owner, because he desperately needed the job and did not want to risk losing it. The silence gave the bar owner an encouragement to keep up with his sexual advances towards the helpless man.

So far, we have seen what SH means to Dutch young people, who initiates it more, on whom, and why. What happens once SH occurs? How is it experienced and dealt with? These questions will be answered in the proceeding chapter.
Chapter 5

The experience of sexual harassment and dealing with it

Passing Through a Needle’s eye: Women’s Experience

The ways in which SH is experienced are different for the male and the female participants. Most males said that sexual advances from another person often make them feel flattered; while the females’ reactions range from awe to terror, to fun. The feeling of surprise and shock comes when they experience SH in the least expected situations or from least expected persons; while terror engulfs them when they expect a possible physical attack.

Jessica still feels the fear she experienced in a train a year ago. Her voice was trembling and there was a look of anger and helplessness in her eyes when she told me the story. She was traveling from Poland to Hungary. She had to share one compartment with four big polish men in military suits. They were armed, and drinking beer.

(...) Was really really scary. I felt very very threatened. I was afraid to move, because I thought, when I do something, that might aggravate their actions. (They were looking at her breasts, making “sexual noises” like “ooh, aah” and snapping their fingers at her face). (...) I was very scared. So, I thought, ‘oh, no! They are maybe going to drag me out of the train.’ And it was so, so aggressive. It was so stupid. It was so scary. And I always felt quite secure about myself, confident. But this time, no! But then, luckily enough, after three hours, they went out. Phew! I was so relieved. There was adrenaline all through my body and I couldn’t sleep the whole night, because it was so...(deep breath). And after that, I felt so angry. Why are they doing this to me?! I don’t ask for it. I’m just sitting in the train. I don’t do anything! That was the scariest situation of my life.

(Jessica, female)

From her story, it is obvious how threatening a situation can be when a physical attack is anticipated. Nevertheless, Jessica tried her best not to show her fear, and she was pretending to be reading a book. She was even turning the pages even though she was not reading at all. Some of the other female participants told me a similar pattern of trying to hide their fear because they think that an expression of fear would make SH worse (see also Gardner 1995).

Once late at night, Deborah was walking home alone when a group of men came toward her and started to close in on her. They were drunk.
(...) I was very angry, but also I was like this (shivering) but I didn’t show it. And I said nicely, ‘oh, I have to go’ (...) But it was such-oh! You have the feeling that you went through the eye of the needle. It was really a close call.  

(Deborah, female)

If they do not anticipate a physical threat, their expression of anger takes the upper hand.  

(...) It depends on which moment. If I’m alone at night on the street, then I will be scared and try to walk a little bit faster. Or it is daytime and there are a lot of people around, I get very angry.  

(Danielle, female)

Incidents of SH fill women with awe, shock and wonderment. Deborah still remembers how shocked she was by her first experience of SH 10 years ago.

I still remember the first time that somebody said something. I was totally shocked, like, ‘what?!’ And I am so young, and it was an old guy, and I was like, ‘huh!’ (Her palm on her chest). He said, ‘I wanna fuck you or something like that, and I was on a bike, and he was also on a bike. (...) But I was very happy he just ride fast, and he just passed. It was such a shock. (...) You have never thought that somebody could say that to you.

(Deborah, female)

I was 13, and biking, and it was very busy in the center. It wasn’t dangerous at all. But then, two boys on a scooter came by, and they slapped me on the ass, and they just drove away. I was so shocked. Because what gives them the right to do that?! To a thirteen-year-old girl?  

(Jessica, female)

It surprised me to see how incidents of SH that had been experienced even years ago are hard to forget. They remain in the memory. When recounted, these memories are still painful. This shows the significance of the mental and social consequences of SH. Sofia had told me how her sister suffered the consequence of rape in Nepal more than ten years ago.

(...) In Nepal, she was raped. And then, she came back (to Holland) and then she got really scared, and she got psychosis. I don’t know some cultural shock or something. She just went really crazy at some point. She withdrew, and she was on therapy. (...) And I was travelling last year to Indonesia. It was a big step for me to do that. I didn’t go alone. I
would never go alone now. (Silence for 6 seconds). My sister was very bad. She was three years on medicine. She was unbelievable when she came back.

(Sofia, female)

The experience and consequences of SH do not only affect the receiver. Those who are close to the receiver also suffer. Those who care also suffer. Because of her sister’s experience, Sofia would never dare to travel alone.

Jessica is filled with wonderment about why people initiate SH in the first place, about the possible satisfaction they could get from it.

(... You want to walk around without these things happening. And it should be normal to be able to walk around without people yelling things at you you don’t want to hear. I don’t do that to other people, I don’t want other people to do it to me. (...) And just because you are a woman and you have breasts, that doesn’t give people the right to say something about it. I don’t say ‘Look at your nose’ or something.

(Jessica, female)

Many agreed on the fact that SH from males is threatening because they are physically stronger.

I experience SH as a power thing, because it is threatening when a guy who is physically stronger, uh forces himself on you in any kind of way-if it’s verbal or physical, it doesn’t matter. They force themselves on you. That is always threatening and always has to do with power. Because they are stronger. (Maria, female)

If a person makes sexual advances to a woman in a context where she doesn’t feel physically threatened, then, she either finds the experience funny, ignores it, or would not even notice it in the first place.

Sometimes, I don’t even hear it. (...) I am just too busy with myself to be really paying attention. It’s just part of the street. (Madonna, female)

She (Peter’s girlfriend) was riding on a bike and construction workers were whistling at her. She just laughed about it. That time (daylight), she could joke about it. In the daytime, people expect less physical threat. But when you are walking on the street at night, and some groups of men- then the physical threat is very big. (Peter, male)
Potloodventors...the guys who wear only a long jacket and are totally naked under it. And, you walk by, and they are like, phew (opening their jacket). It is funny, haha, but it is not scary, because you know they won’t do anything.

(Danielle, female)

In general, feelings in reaction to SH can be classified based on the physical threat that accompanies it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual harassment at night, when alone</th>
<th>Physical threat present</th>
<th>Scared and angry; but try to stay nice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment at day, when with people</td>
<td>Physical threat absent</td>
<td>Angry, funny, or ignore, but not scared</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“It is an honor”: Men’s Experience

What are men’s emotional reactions to SH? Most of them experience it as flattering, and may even welcome it. But some also get uncomfortable, or embarrassed.

If a female makes a move on me, oh, oh, I would work on her, ha. Thank you. It happened to me once in New York. I was standing in the bus and a girl was standing next to me and she just put her breasts on me. Oh, I enjoyed the ride, haha. (Me: Did you say anything to her?) No, I don’t think she did it on purpose. But she was young and I liked it. She had big boobs, and I was like, ‘oh, that’s fine with me,’ haha. To me, if she does that, I will be like, ‘you’re welcome, honey.’

(Abdullah, male)

I would love it. I would be like ‘okey!’ I wouldn’t mind.

(David, male)

I am not irritated. Uh, more embarrassed. I don’t have tools to handle such a situation in a way that I feel comfortable with it. Yeah, it’s just me. I am shy.

(Jake, male)

I would feel honored, you know. ummm, Okey, that’s something. But if I don’t like the girl, I would call it off. (Me: How?) I’ll tell her I am not interested. (Me: And, if she persists?) Then, I’d use my physical power, you know. (Me: And if she is stronger?) Then I’ll run.
(Lorenzo, male)

I wouldn’t really mind, because, for me, it isn’t really offensive in a physical way. I think that is also why women feel more harassed than men do. Because, it is not only the comment, but it is also the physical part. Women are more raped than men. So, there’s always a danger. It’s related to physical power.

(Peter, male)

One study showed that men are generally indiscriminate in their desire for sexual partners and thus, if women solicit them for sex, they would take it more as a compliment than as SH (Posner 1999).

However, the male study participants did not say an “indiscriminate desire for sexual partners” is the reason why they take sexual advances from women as a compliment. Rather, they based their feelings on the absence of a physical threat from females. Their responses imply that they have the choice to enjoy sexual advances from females for two reasons:

1. They see no physical threat in it.
2. They can call it off any time they want to.

It is less likely that a woman will persist on flirting with a man once she gets a sign from him that he is not interested (Rossi 1994). If she persists when the man is not interested, she might end up being slapped.

When SH is initiated by other males however, all of the males said they don’t find it complimentary (some of them said if they were a homosexual, they might have), but rather uncomfortable, funny, or irritating. None of them mentioned being scared. Jake has had a repeated experience of sexual advances from males.

That is really funny. It does feel uncomfortable, of course. But I don’t do anything with it, basically. I just say thank you. (Jake, male)

I would feel uncomfortable. I will not feel unsafe, but uh, uncomfortable, at least. And if I go to a place where transvestites hang out, I would still accept that they would look at me in a certain way, ‘coz they have that sexual nature. If I go to a gay bar, then somebody will touch my ass. Then I would feel strange.

(Lorenzo, male)
There is a significant difference between how men and women experience sexual advances—a difference that is embedded in whether a physical threat is present or absent. Except on the rare occasions when they are physically threatened, the males find SH flattering, or slightly uncomfortable. For the females, the story is different. They are terrified of it except during those occasions when they are not physically threatened.

How is Sexual Harassment Dealt With?

For the male research participants, SH from men or women is not difficult to deal with because of the general absence of a physical threat. They ignore it, call it off, or defend themselves physically depending on the sex and physical size of the harasser and on whether the sexual advance is verbal or physical. Factors like time of day, or place where the sexual advance takes place does not make a difference in the way males deal with SH.

From my data, I found that men anticipate a physical threat that they cannot handle very rarely. However, they may suffer as much as women from a positional threat—a threat one feels when one is in a lower position, for example at the workplace. Sofia told me about her friend who could not do anything to stop unwelcomed sexual advances from his boss because he did not want to be fired.

Keeping Silent

A friend of mine, she is raped by some guy I know. And she didn’t report it or anything. And this guy comes to the place where my friends go. She doesn’t want me to tell anything to anybody. But he took some drugs, and she had a relationship with him, and they had sex. But at one point, he did something she didn’t like, and he knew that she didn’t like that, but he continued doing it. I tried to convince her many times to do something about it, but she didn’t want to—because she was afraid she can’t prove it. Especially because they had a relationship. (Sofia, female)

Many studies showed that women would rather keep silent about unwelcomed sexual advances for fear of not being believed. It is their word against the harasser. Feminists are against such ideas. They argue that implicit in the statement, ‘If you complain, it will only be your word against mine’ is the belief that, given her subordinate position, a woman’s word has no value.
(Louis 1994:89). Sofia’s friend also preferred to let her harasser go free because she was sure no one would believe her. And she suffered alone.

Others do not complain about SH because they are not sure if it is totally the harasser’s fault. They put at least some of the blame on themselves, thinking that they should not have led the harasser on with their smile, or their submissiveness. Madonna still does not know what to make of her experience in Indonesia...

It was a guy I met there, and I stayed at a place with him—the same room for one night. And he started to kiss me, and like—uh, well the sexual thing—I didn’t want to but I knew I couldn’t go anywhere ‘coz everything around me was so strange and I didn’t know where to go and I just let it happen. But at first, I was like, ‘oh no, no, I don’t want to do this. Please, please, stop. Stop.’ And then I just let it happen. But I think I could have said no stronger. I could have just run away—but I didn’t do that. I don’t know. I was just like paralyzed or something. And he just continued a few times more. It was not nice, but I wasn’t even mad at him.

Because I felt a little bit sorry for him. It was really strange. Because during the day, he was such a nice guy and he was really sweet to me. So I couldn’t really believe it was the same person. I felt sorry for him because (in the daytime) he told me his parents both died, and he was living with his aunt who didn’t want him, and he was really sweet. But then, that night, when we slept there, he became like a crazy—I couldn’t believe he was the same person. And I thought it was my fault, I don’t know. I don’t really know what to think about it. I was really confused. (Madonna, female)

Madonna kept silent when the person harassed her sexually for two reasons. She didn’t know where to go because she was in a strange place, and she thought it was her fault anyway. It was as if she thought she deserved the sexual harassment because she did not refuse more persistently, and because she liked him at first.

Sally is also not sure if she would call sexual advances from a boyfriend sexual harassment even if she did not welcome it.

I am wondering. If you get raped by your boyfriend... isn’t it just that you have sex with him without you wanting it? Well, I had sex with my ex-boyfriend without wanting it a few
times. But then, I didn’t see it as rape, because I know him, he is my boyfriend. But still, I
didn’t want him to do it, and he pushed me to do it. I don’t know where is the line of calling
something rape…

(Sally, female)

She did not seem to be aware of the fact that in the definition of rape, what is important is
the fact that the recipient did not welcome it. It doesn’t matter whether it comes from a sexual
partner, a family member, or a stranger (Silard 1994)

Most of the female participants however thought that knowing a person or liking him does
not give him the right to sexually harass.

You are two partners, and one performs a sex-related act on the other, and the other
doesn’t like it, doesn’t want it, and it still happens, then it is sexual harassment. And the
fact that you have a relationship doesn’t mean that you can do anything with each other.

(Jessica, female)

Women also tend to keep silent if they are not sure whether the person only wanted to
make a compliment, or was intending to sexually harass them. Gestures like touching lightly on the
arm or waist, and comments like ‘You are dazzling’ are less explicit than touching the breasts, or
saying ‘I want to sleep with you’. Therefore, many women find the former difficult to object to,
because if they do, there is a chance that the man would deny his action and make them
embarrassed (Gardner 1995).

Talking Back

Most believe that saying no to something you do not want is very important. A clear
statement that you do not welcome the action is the best-recommended way to deal with SH
(Farley 1978, Gardner 1995). Madonna told me that she learned from her experience in Indonesia
that it is advisable to say no early and clearly.

Really say no when you don’t want something to happen. Just learn to be clear about it.
Because sometimes, maybe girls they just laugh because they are a little shy, and they don’t
say really clear like, ‘sorry, I don’t want this. Please go away.’ You should be clear about
what you want and what you don’t

(Madonna, female)
You can be strict on it. If someone does it and you are uncomfortable, just say it immediately. Sometimes people feel it like harassment, but don’t say it in public. And then, it is difficult for the other party to know when he crossed a certain point.

Communication is important. (David, male)

Some of the participants prefer to open their “big mouth” in response to SH as long as they don’t find the situation physically threatening. In their experience, saying something back will put the harassers in an embarrassing position so that they would not carry on with their action.

When it happens to me, I say something back, like, ‘what do you want? Do you think that you can reach something by saying that to women?’ (…) When I say something, they don’t expect it, and then, they may be quiet or they say something like a joke-they make a joke over it. Or they just ignore you. (…) I feel bad when I just walk by and say nothing because, maybe it’s like I accepted them. And I don’t like that. I have some standard sentences that I can use that are ready made in my head. So, you have to think of some sentences that you can use. And then, you just have to remember them. (Jessica, female)

Jessica also told me how she would deal with SH if she witnessed it as a third party. Her response makes it clear that her decision to say something back to SH depends on whether she anticipates a physical threat or not.

I wouldn’t leave it and just walk away. But if I see a group of five men harassing a girl and I would interfere with it, then, they would harass me too. So I don’t help her, and I get myself into trouble as well. So then, I would get help. I would call someone, or 112. It just depends on the situation. If it is daylight, then I would say something about it, ‘Hey, stop that. What are you doing?’ Because then, there would be a lot of people so he wouldn’t do something. (Jessica, female)

Danielle and Maria also like to say something back in non-threatening situations, but unlike Jessica, they do it only occasionally. Most of the time, they just ignore it and walk on. Here is what they do when sexually harassed verbally.

I just pass by. And sometimes, I try to open my big mouth and say something back. (‘Je maet en grote bele hebben’). (…) And they are like, ‘huh!’ (Dropped her mouth with a look of surprise), and they stop. (Danielle, female)
Be casual about it, make a joke. When they say something, I will respond because, if I don’t respond, people can get agitated and maybe even get aggressive. This is my experience, at least. If you say something back, at least they feel recognized and they don’t get angry quick. So, I try to respond with some kind of a joke, but also with a very oppressing way. Then, they might talk to you more, but the behavior cools down. (...) I say to them, ‘what do you expect me to say? Okey, I’ll go home with you and we will have sex? But of course I am not doing that. I don’t know you.’

(Maria, female)

Getting Physical

Deborah is taking Aikido* lessons with the primary purpose of being able to defend herself from street harassers. Her way of dealing with SH depends on the type of SH.

My first reaction is just walk straight on and not give any attention. But then, when you start walking with me, or keep talking to me, then, most of the time, I keep quite nice, like, ‘I am in a hurry, I have to go.’ Because I discovered that’s the best thing to do. (...) As long as I stay nice, I feel they have no grip on me. They go away very soon. If you answer them rude, they start to get rude, like ‘you are a whore.’ So I feel I have to stay quite nice to them to protect myself. (...) But if someone is gonna touch me, I’m gonna, chu-chu-chu (making an act of fighting with her arms).

(Deborah, female)

Deborah also told me that it was not always easy to keep nice because, even after being told nicely to go away, men sometimes persist, making her lose her patience. But she always struggles not to lose it because, if she does, they might get aggressive, and even if she knows Aikido; she just hates getting involved in a physical fight, as most women do.

It was easier for the male participants to say that they would physically fight against SH if they had to. But for the females, getting physical with a male harasser is like playing with fire.

One time in Barcelona, I got so mad because people were coming to us all the time. We got really sick of it. And one guy was really annoying. So I really pushed him away really hard. And then, he got so mad, like, ‘what the fuck are you! Are you hitting me?!’ And then, people started coming in between and I was relieved. Because it was just an impulse that I

*Aikido: a martial art, that originated in Japan
pushed him. I just got so mad, and I think it was a little bit not so good to do that. Because he got really mad. (Madonna, female)

Madonna thinks that she had made a mistake not controlling her ‘temper’ because her impulse reaction put her in an even more dangerous situation. Had it not been for the people who came in between, the man might have hurt her physically. Deborah is taking Aikido lessons in order not to fall in such a helpless situation. She told me:

I just want to make sure that I have done something in my life to be a little bit stronger, and not to be the weak girl on the street. I want to be strong. I want to be prepared. (Deborah, female)

But, it is not always that men immediately get physical when they are pushed away by a woman. The action can take them by surprise, because most men do not expect a woman to be physically defensive.

One night, I had to walk home from a club. A guy followed me from the club to my house, and I told him, ‘Go home, I can get home by myself.’ But he kept on following me until I was at my door, and then he grabbed my arm. But I turned around very aggressively and I pushed him away. I think he was really shocked by the force I did that with. I was very absolute. And he was very shocked. And I just went into the door and closed it very quickly. (Maria, female)

Her impulsive physical reaction bought her time to escape a further attack by her harasser. She already reached the door of her flat and, before he could recover from the shock of being pushed by her, she managed to get into her flat and close the door behind her.

Jake is not sure if being physically strong would really bring a sense of security against SH.

It is a difficult situation, because you don’t know what their reaction is going to be. If it’s an aggressive person, he might hit back. That is probably the problem with most females. Because they don’t know what reaction they will get. It is such an uncertain situation. (Jake, male)

“Fire!” Calling For Help

Many of the participants said that calling for help is one way to deal with SH. None said they did or would call for help from a woman. It seemed as if help is something that can be asked from a man in incidents of SH. They did not say directly that they would ask for help from a man. They
implied it in the flow of the interviews as something inevitable. As something natural. When I asked Abdullah how he would like his daughter to deal with SH in the future, he answered:

Ignore him. Don’t talk to him and come tell me. That’s it. And I’ll go and kick his ass. That’s what I am going to do. Yeah. Kick his ass. (...) Because she is not stronger than he is. (Abdullah, male)

He thinks that a girl by herself cannot handle SH because she has no physical strength. She has to turn to a man for help. He did not say, ‘she has to come home and tell her mother.’ He said, ‘she has to come to me and I’ll kick his ass.’

Peter also told me how one incident of SH to his girlfriend was settled.

I was with my girlfriend in a discotheque and there was a man (who was) constantly dancing behind my girlfriend, and sometimes a bit touching her. And she said, ‘stop it. I don’t want you to touch me.’ So, he went away for a while, but then he came back. Same stuff. And then, I went to the guy at the entrance and said, ‘He is harassing my girlfriend. Could you please do something about it.’ And they went to him and threw him out. (Peter, male)

The harasser was male, the harassed was female. She had told him to stop. He did not listen. Then, it was her boyfriend who went to the man at the entrance for help. She did not go herself.

Deborah also once took refuge in the strength of her boyfriend.

In India, I was with my boyfriend and somebody just grabbed me on the crotch. And I was like ‘what?!’ And I said it to my boyfriend. He said ‘who was it?’ and I looked back and there was this guy in the whole crowd who panicked. And I said, ‘it is that guy.’ And my boyfriend ran after him, and he caught him, and they started to fight. (Deborah, female)

After she reported her experience to her boyfriend, she did not go to the harasser by herself to confront him. She just stood there and let her boyfriend take care of her. It is interesting to see that sexual harassment is mostly initiated by men, and it is men who are expected to be able to put a stop to it. This indicates how a physical strength plays an important role in dealing with SH. Since men are generally physically stronger by nature, they are also socialized to be the ones one turns to for help. In addition, there is the general acceptance of the female to be the passive innocent girl who should be protected (Rossi 1994, Silberschmidt 1999, Basow 1986).
What are ways of asking for help from a stranger? Jessica told me that she had read about screaming ‘Fire!’ instead of ‘Help!’ because the latter is ambiguous. And it is general, so it may not raise the public’s interest. But if one screams ‘Fire!’ when sexually harassed, then, it is easier to get attention, because fire draws public’s attention.

In general, no one has a single way of dealing with SH. For the females, SH is a serious problem because of the fear of a physical threat that is always present in the back of their mind. Most of them told me that they are always on the alert, and they are prepared for the worst, especially in the dark, or when they are alone. The fear is something they live with. It is part of their daily lives on the streets.

What then do they do to avoid this threat that constantly nags their mind? The following chapter will discuss the ways that they use to avoid the threat associated with SH. I will also discuss the effects of looking different on the frequency of SH, and measures suggested to control or reduce the experience of SH that occurs because of being perceived as ‘the other’, and in general.
Chapter 6

"No Catwalking": Ways Of Avoiding Sexual Harassment

A number of ways of how to avoid SH were described. It was mentioned earlier that the males experience SH more from homosexual men than from females. Therefore, one way for them to avoid it is by not going to places where there are a lot of homosexuals. By doing so, they are not missing anything because they are not homosexuals and are not interested to go to places where homosexuals hang out in the first place. They are not making a major adjustment in their lives.

It is a different story for the females, who make a lot of adjustments in order not to be faced with the threats of SH.

Fake Confidence vs. Looking Down

Some of them told me that they look straight ahead and try to look confident even when they shiver inside.

Just look straight ahead, like behind them. And especially, I don’t look down. I always (she sat straighter, and held her head up), because, otherwise, it may put you more in a lower position. I try to look confident. You look past them, like you are already past them. They don’t even try to say something.

(Sofia, female)

I don’t look insecure. I think men smell it when you look confident.

(Danielle, female)

I read a theory—it’s very funny actually, but I do it all the time. If you are walking down a street in the night, you have to walk indeed with your head up, shoulders (straight). You have to be confident. (...) You don’t walk like this, like a woman (one foot in front of the other- like a catwalk), but you walk like a man like that (she showed me walking with her legs slightly apart, and her hands in her jeans pocket). Because then, you scare potential harassers.

(Jessica, female)

Women should have the right to walk any way they want. But they are not able to exercise this right, because they might end up being hurt. Just like a person who has committed a crime, they have to put themselves in a disguise not to be ‘caught’ in the threat of SH.
Sally and Maria find it better to look to the ground to avoid SH. In their experience, looking up invites more SH.
When I feel comfortable, and when I am confident, then it’s even worse because you are looking inviting or something. And sometimes, when I had a bad day, and I don’t feel confident and I just look down, then you are really down to yourself. But when I am feeling very confident, (SH) is even worse.
(Sally, female)

When I walk on the street, I look to the ground a lot. I don’t look at people too much. I don’t see them because I’m not just paying attention.
(Maria, female)

Maria looks to the ground when she walks because that is her nature. She doesn’t do it with the primary purpose of avoiding SH. But still, she is aware of the fact that her nature of looking to the ground while walking helps her to appear busy and inattentive, discouraging people to initiate SH.

Be Home Early
Most do not dare go to isolated places especially after dark, because they know that a big physical threat hangs in the air at such times in such places.

(... I am convinced that you should be able to walk around at night here in the Vondelpark. But I don’t do it, because I know it is not safe. So of course I avoid it. So, I don’t bike around through the park in the middle of the night on my own. I think it should be possible, but I don’t do it because I know it is not possible. It’s the same way like crossing the street at the zebra crossing. People should go before the cars go, and it should be like that. But cars also just ride over it. So you should always watch. And it is the same thing. (...) You should avoid it that way. You shouldn’t walk at night. I think it is naïve to think that in reality it is safe because it is not.
(Jessica, female)

I watch out. I don’t drive alone. I just stay away from it. Maybe nothing happens, but the feeling of uncomfortable is there.
(Danielle, female)

“Maybe nothing happens.” But still, the sense of security is absent. There is always a possibility that something bad might happen. So, it is better to stay away. Their discomfort reflects how “fear reproduces traditional notions about women’s
roles and the places considered appropriate for them to use." (Gardner 1990 in Pain 2000:374).

Dressing Decent

Many agreed on the fact that dressing “sexy” exposes to more SH. Therefore, some said that they avoid clothes that make them look “sexy in the eyes of men”. Deborah is one of them.

(...) When you are wearing a short skirt, you have way more harassment than when you are wearing a skirt like here (pointing to her ankle). So, just for my own peace on the street, I wear less expensive cloths. And every two years, I shave my head. It just started with- I wanted to see how I would look, then, I think, for me, it looks quite well. So, that’s why I do it again and again. But also, I do it again and again because I feel so much less attractive to guys. And then, it’s so peaceful for the first three months.

(Deborah, female)

Deborah tries not to look attractive to men so that she wouldn’t be sexually harassed. She even goes to the extent of shaving her head. It has become her lifestyle.

The male participants also suggested that it is better to dress conservatively to avoid SH.

If she dresses conservatively, I mean, what you see today- some girl is walking and you can see her butt, the boobs all jingling. People would say something. If someone is wearing respectably, nobody is gonna harass her. But if you see a girl with something sexy, he would just try to harass her- say something stupid. He would disrespect her. (Abdullah, male)

If you work at a construction site where there is all men and you are the only secretary, and you are coming with a miniskirt, yeah, men will whistle at you. It’s more likely, you know. Some persons are like that, and you should know that take that is mind for your own safety.

(Lorenzo, male)

On the other hand, some thought that it is not necessary to modify the way one dresses just to avoid SH. For them, it is not a fair game.
Yeah, it happens all the time. So what should I do? Should I wear a cold sweater and a long skirt with no forms in it, because then, if I don’t do that, men are allowed to rape me?! It doesn’t make sense at all.

(Jessica, female)

If you dress really sexy, then you can expect it. But I think it shouldn’t stop you from dressing that way. (Madonna, female)

Maria also said that men should not see the way a woman dresses as a “ticket to be disrespectful to women.”

Even though some of them said they do not want to change the way they want to dress, they still adjust themselves in other ways-by faking confidence, or walking like a man. For example, Jessica finds it ridiculous to modify the way she wants to dress just to avoid SH. But still, she modifies herself in the way she walks; she walks like a man whenever she anticipates SH. So, in one way or another, they made adjustments in their lives. Even then, some agreed that it is not possible to avoid SH completely.

I don’t think it is avoidable. I think all girls are experiencing it, since men are everywhere—that kind of men. I don’t think you can avoid it, really.

(Jake, male)

The passive one, you cannot (avoid it). I mean, you can look. It is your freedom to look at other people. So of course, you’re only looking, and smiling, and winking. (Speaking and touching), you can be strict on it; you can keep it in check. But you cannot avoid it.

(David, male)

The Process Of Othering

Some of the participants suggested that one might be able to avoid SH in a place where one is perceived to be different by trying to look less different (See Newport 2000).

A few years ago, I was in Turkey on holiday. And here in Holland, it is normal for girls to walk on the beach on bikini-topless. In other countries, that is not accepted. If you wear a miniskirt, if you are a 2-meter Dutch blonde girl, and you walk in hot pants in a Mediterranean city where there is no blonde, people
will look at you and harass you. Because you are making visible your sexual parts. You are really saying like, 'hi, I am a sexy blonde'.

(Lorenzo, male)

Lorenzo thinks it is better not to dress in a way that can invite other people notice that you are different from them. However, even if a woman dresses in a way similar to the local community, she may still not be able to make herself totally invisible because of her natural features, which are not always easy to change. Jake has told me about the experience of his female Dutch friend in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, she got harassed a lot because she is blonde. And she dyed her hair black, and it didn’t help. (Because) she is quite tall as well. So, I think it has to do with the fact that you are a western woman as well. If you are blonde, it even helps more to evoke SH.

(Jake, male)

Most of them have travelled to countries like Turkey, Italy, Indonesia, and Spain. They have experienced more SH in those countries than in their home country, the Netherlands. They associate this increased frequency with the fact that they look naturally different.

I went to Rome with my high school friends, and the girls with blonde hair, they were like walking dolls. If you go for instance to Egypt and you walk with girls with blonde hair, people think they are European hookers. It is unbelievable.

(David, male)

David also has blonde hair, but he did not experience SH because he is a man. It is not only about being blonde, but also about being blonde and a woman.

We went to Mexico last winter (she and her female friend). It was much worse than here. (...) Maybe because we are blonde and we looked different. We couldn’t cross the street. (...) It is bad to see people looking at you as if you are something different.

(Sally, female)

In Spain, ugh. There, I experienced a l-o-t of SH. Even the policemen, the ambulance drivers, they just go out- and we were 10 girls, all blonde-so it was kind of exciting for them. They all just went out of the car (saying) ‘ooh, wow, aah’. It was really bad. Also really showing their dicks. One time, a guy asked, ‘come, come’. So we thought he wanted to know something and we walked to his car. And he was sitting there with his dick out. (In Indonesia) it was not in a
rude way. They look at you, but more because you are white and blonde and tall. Nothing happened in a rude way.

(Danielle, female)

Peter and Mario suggested that the frequency of SH in a different cultural setting might increase not because you look different per se, but also because of the existence of stereotypes that are created because of the fact that somebody looks different.

(...) A Dutch blonde in Italian streets could never pass without SH-because there are no blondes in Italy. (In the Netherlands), African girls are stereotypically easily aroused, and not selective. So, they are easily sexually harassed.

(Mario, male)

I think those stereotypes really depend on in which country you are. In Holland, the stereotype is, as far as I am concerned, is not the blonde being sexually accessible, but the blonde being stupid. But when you are in Italy, or Spain, or Brazil, there are a few women being blonde, then there is this stereotype of also being sexually accessible. (...) I think it is also the other way round. In the Netherlands, in dark women, there is the stereotype that they are more sexually accessible. It is relative. I think those you are not used to, you think they are better. And you think, 'I’ll get her.' Because they are- they look different, and act different. And you want to experience.

(Peter, male)

It had been argued that gender stereotypes have a direct effect on being taken as standards of behavior (Basow 1986: 166). Being the other is regarded as dangerously exciting, and therefore exposes one to SH.

From Confrontation to Castration

The study participants commented that an effort to avoid SH on an individual basis is not enough. Legal and educational measures need to be put to practice if a long-term and effective result of reducing the problem is to be expected. But, what kind of measures can effectively reduce incidents of SH? Lorenzo said that it is difficult to control a person who initiates SH on the streets.

It is difficult to control that sort of person in everyday life. You can’t put the police next to every person and make sure nothing goes wrong. (...) A
certain law, or a certain rule is difficult because it happens every day (on
the streets.) (...) You can maybe discuss it in schools-make it discusssible.
Sexual education. Make people feel more responsible. Otherwise, you
can't really really control a person. (Lorenzo, male)

Others also believe that sex education and psychological and psychiatric
therapy are better options than just sending sexual harassers to jail.
(...) Sending someone to jail is not the only solution. Men should also be
convinced. They should of course be sent to jail, but also a psychiatrist or
something should be involved. They should be educated. It should be possible
to respect each other. (Peter, male)

Parents should be more alert in learning (teaching) their sons. And the
government has to educate the people-give out more information about this
problem. It is also the task of the government to educate its civilians.
(Maria, female)

Putting somebody in a cage is not a solution, because when they come out,
you will do the same. Because, if you are alone in your cell, and there are
other harassers around you, you just can talk about what you did. (...) I think
something went wrong somewhere and they need help. If you know where that
problem is, you can start at the point of this problem. He should go to some
therapy. Yeah, talk about it why somebody does it. I think locking up doesn't
really help. (Deborah, female)

Most agreed that street sexual harassment (especially the verbal type) is difficult
to prove most of the time because of the absence of physical evidence. Therefore,
taking punitive measures is difficult.

It is so hard to take measures. (...) I don't think it is in Dutch law possible
to lock him up (unless) he really raped or something. I think it is very hard
to be punished. And you can't see it. You don't have any physical scar. If
you don't have any scars, or your hair pulled out, they can't do anything.
(Danielle, female)
There are some laws in a professional setting. But in a swimming pool, or in a café when somebody touches you, it is difficult to prove that he did this. It is your word against the other. (Maria, female)

It is very difficult to prove. Yeah, when you have been raped, you can prove it. And when someone is murdered, you can prove it. But when somebody slaps you on the butt, it is hard to prove. (Peter, male)

You cannot really work against it. You cannot really say, 'you must not do this, you must not do that.' Because, sometimes, it begins like a play, and you don’t know what part goes too far. And when it is too far, what is-the limit? (...) It is a big grey area where you don’t really know when you cross certain boundaries and lines. (...) Okey, in the work place, maybe you can say ‘if this, if this happens, then you get fired.’

(David, male)

The others also agreed that it is easier to set punitive measures against SH in institutions like schools, or the work place. They told me that since recent years, the laws and policies against SH are getting stricter in companies and other institutions, and cases of SH are being more and more publicised.

It was these judo women and they were sexually harassed by their trainer. This was a big, big case in the Netherlands. And then, all stories about professionals were coming up. Because the wall was broken down, and all these stories came out of the taboo sphere. But I don’t know about the punishment he got-the trainer. (Jessica, female)

They neither experienced nor heard of complaints of SH in the university they go to. They know that there are counsellors in the university called ‘de kaan’ who give support during a crisis a student or staff faces. I asked if they knew the policies and regulations of the university against SH. They did know that there exist some rules, but they did not know about the exact nature of them. They felt safer in the complex of the university (which is an institutionalised space) than in the streets (which is a non-institutionalised space).
When I asked them what their first reaction would be if they had been a judge, and a person came to them with an allegation of SH, their responses ranged from throwing the harasser to jail to castrating him.

It depends on the degree. If it goes on in the work place for a long time and it really makes your life impossible, then he should go to prison—may be a year or so. But I think just for touching somebody, you should get someone who says, ‘Hey, stop. This is bad. You have to apologise to the person.’ I would suggest that real rape and that kind of things, there would have to be much higher prison sentences. You should get at least 15 years, and a forced psychiatric help. I also think it is a good idea to castrate rapists. Let them feel it where they hurt somebody else. (Maria, female)

My first reaction is to put him in a cage very long. But it is not a solution. (...)

Yeah, castrating them is my favorite, too. But when you are castrated, is your libido going down as well? Because that is the important thing.

(Deborah, female)

For rape, it should be 20 years or more. Because that’s the worst thing after killing someone. It is violating the body.

(Jessica, female)

Cutting off the balls and penis. I think for raping, that would be a good measure. Because you can compare it to what he has done to many persons. Sending someone to jail is not the only solution. Men should be convinced.

(Peter, male)

Their response about their first reaction indicates how angry they are about occurrences of SH. It infuriates them. It is an event that they desperately want to no more witness and experience.

Deborah has a dream. She wants to change the world with the paintings she plans to draw in a few months. She wants her paintings to serve increase the public’s awareness about SH; and to make people feel what a woman experiences almost every day of her life.

(SH) frightens me a lot. And things that frighten me are interesting to me. And I want to really work it out, and give it a lot of time, and to make it really good. And I want my paintings to be especially to men. (...) I want to make a little room and I want to put all my paintings in a circle. And in the center, you have
to stand. And then I want to have speakers with all the things they say to you from different angles. But I want to make the outside attractive. (...) I have a feeling that it is accepted that a guy acts like this. And I don’t like that point. And I want to make just normal people in our society aware, especially the guys, that for females, this is life. (Deborah, female)

She also told me that she wants to make the door of the circular room made of rubber strings, which cling, to a person’s face and body while entering and exiting. She wants to do this with the purpose of making people experience how an unwelcomed touch that a woman receives from a harasser feels like. She wants them to feel how annoying and intimidating it can be.

Deborah and others believe that by making people aware of how problematic SH is, it is possible to make persons feel responsible. The more responsible people are, the lesser the problem would be. Every one of us hopes to raise our children in a world where there is no violence and fear. Let us work together to make our land worth living in.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

A lot of studies have been, and are being done on sexual harassment since the 1970s, the decade when many started to realise that it is a major public problem. Most studies however concentrate around sexual harassment at the work place. This particular study focuses on sexual harassment in the every day lives of young Dutch people.

The main findings of this study are:

1. Sexual harassment is a problem more for females than males because of the presence of a physical threat associated with it for the former. This physical threat is the result of men generally holding a greater physical power over females.

2. Because of the physical threat that always hangs in the air, females have to put into consideration their environment (for example, time of the day, and whether they are alone or there is someone to help them) before deciding which way to deal with sexual harassment.

3. Sexual harassment can be the result of differences in position at the work place, which create power differences, which in turn are perceived to be the driving forces for the initiation of sexual harassment. It can also be the result of differences in physical power.

4. The sexual revolution of the 1960s has positive outcomes in terms of making it more possible for women to complain openly about incidents of sexual harassment. At the same time however, it has also negative outcomes in terms of changing the mentality of young people towards objectifying the female body, which in turn leads to more incidents of sexual harassment.

5. The participants never experienced sexual harassment in their university, mainly because of the presence of specific laws and policies against it. However, other public places like streets and nightclubs are still constant sources of sexual harassment. To avoid this, females make a lot of adjustments in their lives without wanting to do it. They are careful about the places they go to after dark; and they try to change the way they look or walk. Sexual harassment is a part of their life, a part they do not need.
6. Experiences of sexual harassment that happened years ago are still remembered. This indicates the significance of the mental, social, and physical consequences of sexual harassment.

7. Sexual harassment occurred a lot to the female study participants in other countries like Spain and Italy, possibly because they are perceived to be 'the other' in those countries.

8. There is a strong relationship between sexual harassment and physical and personal spaces reflected by the definitions given for sexual harassment.

9. They consider sexual harassment as a major public problem. This is reflected by their responses about what measures should be taken to keep sexual harassment in check.

Based on the above observations, I recommend the following:

1. The current Dutch law against sexual harassment, which is included in the labor law, and which concentrates only in the work place must extend to protect other public places such as the streets, where sexual harassment is an every day experience.

2. There have to be strong formal and informal sex education plans in all layers of society starting from young age, in order to make everyone aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding sexual behavior. If sex behavior education starts at a young age, it will become internalised as natural.

3. The effect of programs in mass media such as pornographic movies on the youth mentality has to be carefully studied and revised accordingly.

4. There has to be a strong psychological and social support for those who suffer from the consequences of sexual harassment. This support has to be encouraging in its type for people to become more open about their experiences in sexual harassment.
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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Dear Informant; The socio demographic data that you will enter into this questionnaire is strictly confidential and WILL NOT appear in the write up of the report in a manner that would expose you to being identified.

1. **Personal Data**
   - Name
   - Date of birth
   - Place of residence
   - Sex
   - Religion
   - Educational level
   - Ethnicity
   - Marital status
   - Class
   - Siblings: number of siblings and position amongst siblings
   - Currently living with:
Appendix 2

**Guide for In-depth interview**

**Introduction**
Objectives and intentions of doing the study
Total duration of the interview
Use of tape-recorder and taking notes
Confidentiality of all information
Choice of false names
Encourage free opinion
Make sure interviewee is comfortable and relaxed
Ask if there are any questions

**Guideline topics for the interview**
1. What actions do you recognise as sexually harassing?
2. a) Who do you think is most often harassed?
   b) Why?
3. How do you relate sexual harassment with power differences?
4. If you know anyone who has been sexually harassed, how did they experience and deal with it?
5. What measures should be taken to avoid sexual harassment?
Appendix 3

Consent Form

Young people and Sexual Harassment
Engudaye Liku Alemu

Purpose of study:
The primary purpose of conducting this study is as a requirement for a master's degree in medical anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. It will explore issues related with attitudes of young people around sexual harassment in the Netherlands.

Facts
1. You must expect no direct benefit to you from the result of this study. However, your participation in the study may have the potential to open doors for larger scale studies on the same topic with the purpose of formulating specific laws that deal with sexual harassment.
2. Your participation in the study might bring up emotional and personal issues.
3. The information that you will provide will be collected using a tape recorder. All information will be destroyed after the write up of the final report.
4. Confidentiality will strictly be maintained. You will be referred to by a false name during the write up of the report. Specific personal background data will not be mentioned in a manner that will expose you to being identified. Unless required by law, the only persons who will have the authority to access your records are the researcher and her research advisor.

Requirements
1. You will be required to provide as much information as you can for the fruitful result of the study.