

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

Data Collection: To collect data on street harassment for my thesis, I conducted an [online survey](#) of 225 people I conducted, attended a Street Harassment Summit in New York City in May 2007, read through and analyzed 706 postings that people wrote on six anti-street harassment Websites about their experiences with street harassment, and conducted interviews with three of the anti-street harassment website facilitators. My research goal was to learn more about street harassment; particularly how targets of street harassment react when it occurs and measures they take or wish they could take to stop it. I was especially interested in learning how people were utilizing anti-street harassment websites like the HollaBack sites.

Data Results: The specifics of my data results were discussed in detail throughout my thesis as part of my discussion on how women perceive street harassment, women's responses to street harassment, women's feelings regarding the law and street harassment, ideas for methods to combat street harassment, and women's use of anti-street harassment websites. The following is a summary of the results for each section:

- **Perception:** Nearly everyone I studied perceived street harassment within a feminist framework, viewing it as uncomplimentary, not a man's right to call out to or touch women, an angering/upsetting experience, and simply something men should not engage in. This is to be expected though since most of the people I studied were likely to be feminists. No one in the street harassment postings, at the Street Harassment Summit workshop and none of the website facilitators I interviewed discussed harassment as complimentary. Only one person in my survey reported a positive perception.

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- **Response:** Across my data collection, the most common response that women had to the harassment was non-confrontational, then assertive confrontational, then aggressive confrontational. Non-confrontational: 48 percent of anti-street harassment website posters reported a non-confrontational response in the incident of street harassment they were reporting (such as ignoring, walking away from, or avoiding harassers), 92 percent of survey respondents reported a non-confrontational response to harassment some time during their experiences with street harassment, 72 percent of workshop attendees reported a non-confrontational reaction in a recent harassment incident; Assertive confrontational: Thirty percent of anti-street harassment Website posters, 53 percent of survey respondents, 17 percent of workshop attendees reported an assertive confrontational reaction (such as telling the harasser to stop, asking the harasser if they would want their mother or sister treated this way, or reporting the incident to the police or person of authority); Aggressive confrontational: Twenty-two percent of anti-street harassment website posters, 50 percent of survey respondents, and 6 percent of workshop attendees reported an aggressive confrontational reaction (such as cursing, shouting, pushing, hitting, or flipping off the harasser). The remaining individuals reported a combination reaction, meaning they had one reaction but as the harassment continued, they had another reaction. Even in the combination reactions, more people had a non-confrontational reaction either first or second compared to an aggressive or assertive reaction. See Table 1:

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Table 1: *Responses to Street Harassment Incidents*

Responses	Websites (response to specific incident)	Survey (they checked all responses that applied in their experiences with street harassment)	Workshop (their response in their most recent experience with street harassment)
Non-confrontation	48%	92%	72%
Assertive confrontational	30%	53%	17%
Aggressive confrontational	22%	50%	6%

- Law:** In both my online survey and in the anti-street harassment postings, few women looked to the law or police as a remedy for handling street harassment. In an open-ended question in my survey where people could write their ideas on how best to combat street harassment realistically and/or ideally, only eight percent mentioned creating anti-street harassment laws or reporting street harassment incidents to the police. Only two percent of posters on anti-street harassment websites mentioned having reported the incident of street harassment to the police while less than one percent reported threatening to call the police. Less than one percent advised others to report their harassment experiences to the police.
- Methods:** Two of the most common methods that people suggested for combating street harassment across my data collection were: 1) educating the public about the problem, such as through a nation-wide or city-wide campaign and school education and 2) taking direct action against the harasser at an individual level. Thirt-two percent of my online survey respondents listed education as a way to stop street harassment (top response) while 10 percent of the 70 people who offered

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advice on the anti-street harassment websites suggested education as a way to combat street harassment. All three facilitators of the anti-street harassment websites that I interviewed saw using the Internet as an educational tool as important in stopping street harassment. Thirteen percent of my online survey respondents advocated for direct action tactics in response to street harassment while 46 percent of the 70 offering advice on the anti-street harassment websites advocated for direct action tactics (top response). The facilitators of the Street Harassment Summit workshop I attended advocated for direct action tactics. See Table 2:

Table 2: <i>Top Two Suggested Methods for Combating Street Harassment</i>				
	Survey:	Websites:	Workshop:	Interviews:
Education	32%	10%		All 3 interviewees
Direct Action	13%	46%	All 3 facilitators	

- **Websites:** From my survey and attendance at the Street Harassment Summit Workshop, I found that few people are aware of the anti-street harassment websites, thus their overall impact so far is minimal. For example, over 50 percent of my survey respondents had never heard of the websites, despite the fact that I had heavily targeted people interested in women’s issues. However, a significant portion of those who post on the site mention how comforting it is to learn they are not alone, how nice it is to have a forum to share their stories, how they came up with ideas on how to confront harassers while visiting the websites, or how sharing their story is empowering. Each of the three facilitators of the anti-street

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harassment websites reported receiving nothing but positive comments from their communities and from users regarding the websites. Given the increasingly important role the Internet plays in American society, particularly for those in their 20s and younger who grew up with the Internet, websites educating the public on street harassment and providing women with a voice for their experiences with it will be an important method for one day ending the harassment. Fifty-three percent of my survey respondents said they believed the Internet could be utilized effectively to help stop street harassment as did all three of my anti-street harassment website interviewees.