STREET HARASSMENT LIMITS WOMEN'S PEACE OF MIND AND FREEDOM

Women who took the 2008 Stop Street Harassment survey said they do the following because of actual of feared harassment:

Behavior categorized as staying "on guard" was most common. At least monthly women:

*Constantly assess their surroundings – 80% (62% said always) *Avoid making eye contact – 69% (32% said they always do this) *Purposely wear clothes to attract less attention – 37% (10% always) *Talk or pretend to talk on a cell phone – 42% (10% always)

Behavior that limits access to public spaces was most common. At least monthly women:

*Cross street/take other route – 50% (16% said always) *Avoid being out at night/after dark – 45% (11% always) *Avoid being out alone – 40% (8% always) *Pay to exercise at a gym instead of outside – 24% (11% always)

Most alarming was how street harassment prompted some women to make a significant life decision:

*Moved neighborhoods (at least once) because of harassers in the area – 19% *Changed jobs (at least once) because of harassers along the commute – 9%

From anecdotes and women's stories, it's clear that street harassment also impacts women's:

*Hobbies and career choices

*Decision to go to evening networking events, night classes, political forums, and go on business trips

*Ability to go to restaurants or movie theaters alone

*Finances when women "choose" to pay for taxis rather than walk or take public transportation, drive their car short distances, pay to exercise at a gym rather than outside, pay for a more expensive hotel in a city center while traveling, pay for room service rather than go out to eat when on a business trip

*Ability to go places without a male escort who often can help keep harassers at bay by showing a woman is "owned" or "spoken for"

*Desire to be nice to strangers because they never know which one will turn into a harasser. *Individually, any one of these strategies and restrictions may not seem like a big deal. Collectively, however, the long list of ways women tend to change their lives is extensive.

The ways most women are told to and "choose" to restrict their lives are myriad and often so ingrained that we may not even realize why we do them anymore. Instead of universal outrage about this as a human rights issue, most men live in ignorance and most women try to adapt and usually live more restricted lives.

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