

#nonotallmen but #yesallwomen¹

An analysis on how men perceive sexual street harassment



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Abstract

With this thesis, I aim present a non-exhaustive perception on sexual street harassment from men's point of view. Using the theory of rape culture, sexism, gendered power relations, male domination in the public space, hegemonic masculinity and homosociality I lay out groundwork to fathom how sexual street harassment persists. In order to gain a deeper understanding of male perception on the matter, I have used both quantitative – a survey – and qualitative – interviews – as research methods. Because my research is ground within feminist methodology, I have decided to work with feminist standpoint theory. Further, I present an analysis of the information gathered from the interviews, cut into five separate sections, all linking back the theory presented. Finally, in the conclusion, I answer my research question along with the three sub-questions using the analysis of the interviews and reminisce on the theories.

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Introduction

It's 11PM. I am walking home from the bus stop. I just had a nice evening of barbecuing with some friends. It's warm outside so I'm wearing my favourite striped shorts and a white t-shirt. On my feet are simple sneakers. My hair, long as it is, is tied up on my head so as to not bother my neck, which already feels warm. I feel happy, satisfied and I've got a slight buzz on from the beers I've been drinking. I turn the corner and a group of young men catch my eye. I see them and they see me. But I ignore them, look away and automatically speed up like I have been taught. That's when I hear it: "Miss! Excuse me, missy? Hello, can't you hear me? Bitch, turn around." I can feel my heart beat increasing with every word one of the boys speaks out. I ignore it, but on the inside I am angry. I want to scream for them to go away and leave me alone. However, I know I can't. I am alone, I am a girl, and I can't see myself going up against this group of young men. So, I keep quiet. That is when I hear footsteps closing in on me. I can't bear to turn around. They're all walking behind me, asking, no, telling me to turn around. Demanding I answer their sexually tainted questions. At this moment, my legs are shaking; my heart is in my throat. I want to cry, I want to scream but I clench my teeth and walk on. They pass me. The last one passing me smacks me on the ass. His hand burns on the right side of my ass. I feel like I am about to crash. Putting one foot in front of the other costs me all the energy I have. I have slowed down. One of the guys peeks over his shoulder at me and smiles. I feel powerless, useless, I don't even feel like a person anymore, but simply a piece of meat up for grabs, like I am nothing and they are entitled to everything.

The process of academically addressing this subject was very hard for me. Due to the horrific experiences I have had with men and harassment I found it immensely difficult to properly and professionally research this phenomenon. However, I believe the personal dimension given to this thesis has made this project significantly better. Feminist research acknowledges the researcher's own emotions and feelings. Alison Jaggar (1997) inspired me by stating that "emotion is necessary for human survival. Emotions prompt us to act appropriately, to approach some people and situations and to avoid other, to caress and cuddle, flight or flee. Without emotion, human life would be unthinkable" (Jaggar 1997, 190–92). Interviewing men was the hardest part as I knew my personal experience could cloud my judgement and turn this thesis into an angry rant about how heterosexual men are all "harassers anyways".

Sexual harassment in the public space is a phenomenon that has been a topic of interest for over twenty years now and its interest to researchers of different fields of study is only increasing: psychology, sociology, law, sociology, etc. Most literature seems to be focussing on the side of women's experiences. Research done by for example Deborah M. Thompson (1993) addressing the reconquering of the public space by women; Gill Valentine (1989), addressing the fear and its explicit and implicit reasons behind the feeling women experience walking down the streets; and Cynthia Bowman (1993), addressing how street harassment is an issue as she argues it restricts women to certain areas out of fear.

This thesis focuses on the flipside of the coin. With this research I inquire on whether men perceive themselves to play an active role in sexual harassment in the public space, implicated *as men* in the problem, regardless of whether they are harassers themselves or whether they believe women do play a part as solicitors or "provokers²", within the framework of qualitative research and feminist standpoint epistemology in the study of Gender Studies. To help answer the research question, I pose three other sub-questions, addressing the socialization of men, male group bonding and their opinion on the issue as urgent.

My research question took some time to develop into the question it is now. It reads as follows: *To what extent do men perceive sexual street harassment as a male enacted phenomenon, anchored in the socialization of men in western society, threatening the safety of women?*

In order to answer the question in a more detailed and correct manner, I have fashioned three sub-questions.

1. *To what extent do the questioned men believe sexual street harassment needs to be addressed urgently?*
2. *How does it contribute to male group dynamics leading to male bonding?*
3. *According to the interviewees, what type of men is more likely to sexually harass?*

As a feminist researcher, there are many aspects one must take into account: the gendered power relations since I am a woman studying men, my own emotions, accountability and positionality (Pini and Pease 2013). My research is not with women but has everything to do with women and their daily lives. By researching how men

² I put this word in between quotation marks, as it was a word used by interviewee #3.

perceive sexual harassment in public space, I aim to map the perception of men on sexual harassment, to understand better myself and to raise awareness amongst the men I interviewed. Mapping the way men look at the issue may help focusing on bettering techniques in preventive workshops, discussions and other anti-sexual harassment projects in the future.

In the first chapter I present an extended – but definitely not exhaustive – theoretical framework in which I ground my research. I address several concepts and theories that permit researchers to conceptualize and name the social dynamics that create and perpetuate sexual street harassment.³ Firstly, by explaining what rape culture is, I aim to demonstrate how sexual harassment is conceptualized. What follows is an analysis on gendered power relations leading to sexism and a clarification of how I interpret these two concepts to contributing to sexual harassment. As a sub-section I address the way in which public space is male dominated and how men practice their privilege-induced power position as heterosexual males. As final section I address the theory of (hegemonic) masculinity elaborated by Raewyn Connell (2005) and I continue by focusing on male-bonding as a social phenomenon reinforcing stereotypical alpha male behavior. I follow the argument made by Eve Sedgwick (1985, 26) that patriarchal heterosexuality uses women to cement the bonds of men with men. In the second chapter I address the research process itself, how I positioned myself as feminist female researcher and the obstacles I came across. The third is the analysis of my survey and interviews. In this chapter I compare the theoretical framework addressed in chapter one with the analysis. Finally, in the last chapter I conclude my answering my research question(s) using the analysis of my interviews and theoretical framework.

³ With the public space I refer to the streets of urbanized cities and public transportation. My focus lies on the cities of Utrecht and Brussels, both capitalist, western cities where sexism, patriarchy and unequal gendered power allow sexual harassment.

Chapter 1. Theoretical framework

This chapter addresses the multiple theories that clarify sexual harassment against women in public space, such as the streets and public transportation. Firstly, I shall address the theory of rape culture. Using this theory, I would like to demonstrate the harmful effects rape culture has on society and contributes to the continuation of sexual street harassment. The second theory that will be addressed is that of sexism. I will try to show that this phenomenon stems from a particular sex-power dynamics contributing to sexual street harassment (Laniya 2005). The third theory is about straight, cis-gender men dominating the public space, pushing women back to the spaces they feel comfortable, such as their home or a path they know and feel safe on. The fourth and last theory discussed is the theory of masculinities, a theory that names the ideas and images society has of how men should behave and male group bonding.

Rape culture

Rape culture is a term first used by second-wave feminists in the United States. They applied the notion to the whole of the U.S. society. The notion encompasses the language, images and laws used in society that validate “violence as sexy and sexuality as violent” (WAVAW n.a). Pamela Fletcher (2010) points out that rape culture as a term is often deemed an overstatement. However, sexual violence occurs in high number. The term encompasses widespread anti-female attitudes and values. The consequences are oppressive conditions women and girls encounter in the global institution of patriarchy, for example restrictive clothing-options, double standards regarding attitudes towards sex and victim blaming. Fletcher (2010) mentions misogyny and sexism as the cornerstones of patriarchy that enable a rape culture to thrive.

Rape culture is defined as “a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women [and girls], a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent, and a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women [and girls] and presents it as the norm” (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 2005, xi). It is a global trend where women and men internalize sexual violence as normal and interminable. Rape culture – where sexual harassment is categorized in – dehumanizes women and girls. Men are being socialized to abide by values of control and dominance – thus power. They are taught

from a young age that anger, aggression and competitiveness amongst their male peers are male traits. On the flipside, western male socialization discourages the expression of vulnerability and emotions. It is all these factors that contribute to the sustention of rape culture. In order to abolish this phenomenon, societal values and attitudes must change and instead create and institute gender parity, which shall yield social justice. Deducted from her article, respect, education, consent, awareness (amongst men) and assertiveness are key to women empowerment and the end of rape culture (Fletcher 2010, 12). In research conducted by Boswell and Spade (1996) the researchers found that relations between men and women are shaped by the contexts in which they meet and interact. Furthermore, the article argues that men are more likely to be disrespectful to women they do not know, women strangers to them. They tend to call them names and/or touch them inappropriately. Rape culture is about objectifying and sexualizing the female body but also about dominance. There exist many TV-shows that normalize this kind of behaviour; particularly one TV-show called *Ex on the Beach* Double Dutch, a TV-show that clearly promotes sexual aggressive behaviour. Many of the images shown during the show are men (and sometimes also women) displaying behaviour of sexual or physical aggression towards the women on the show. They pull their hair or grab them by their breasts or genitals without their consent. On the other hand, images are shown of the same people being romantic and sweet. The show is shown every week and is available to all spectators of all ages. *Ex on the Beach* is a TV show that normalizes sexually aggressive relationships.

Sexual violence is seen on TV, billboards and other advertisement platforms, where women are portrayed in ads as solely sexual beings. One specific example is the Dolce & Gabbana ad that popped up in 2007. The ad features a woman being held down by a man while three other men are watching. The ad received many negative responses (Moss 2015), as it was perceived as having connotations of gang rape. Ads like these suggest submissive and powerless-like behaviour is normal for a woman. This advertisement follows the Dianne Herman's (1984) argument; she states that women are considered submissive and passive, whilst men are considered dominant and aggressive. Many feminist academics perceive rape culture as a destructive cultural pattern, such as Herman (1984). It reduces women to mere sexual beings and allows sexual micro-aggressions on social media, dating apps and on the streets. More than

often rape culture even allows these micro-aggressions to be coming from friends, boyfriends or even husbands.

Rape culture is a continuous feminist struggle. Rape culture not only encompasses rape as an action but every part of society that normalizes sexual aggressive behaviour. The notion contributes to explaining and naming sexual intimidation, such as harassment at work or in public spaces. Street harassment can be defined as “any action or comment between strangers in a public space that is disrespectful, unwelcome, threatening and/or harassing and is motivated by gender” (Maxwell 2013). However, sexual harassment is not as acknowledged by everyone as it should be and not all men are aware of sexual harassment in the public space. Sexual harassment is about the lack of consent. When a man sexually harasses a woman, she is not giving her consent, she is not giving permission nor asking for the man to talk to her or touch her. Sexual intimidation and aggression can potentially lead to sexual assault if not addressed properly. Considering street harassment as a compliment or joke generates a culture where disrespecting, touching or talking about someone in such a manner is considered as normal, or even funny. This seems to be true for both genders as Elizabeth Kissling (1991) argues in her paper, after interviewing both men and women on sexual street harassment. She states that men often mean it as a compliment, a “form of saying hi” (Kissling 1991, 452). Another statement of men regarding their behaviour is that women ask for the attention by dressing up, wearing make-up or even just by smiling. However, according to Gardner (1980) sexual street harassment is anything *but* compliment-like. It violates many of the social norms and seemingly serve as forms of social control (Kissling 1991)⁴. Street harassment addresses female parts of the body that are not available for public examination and on the streets the perpetrator is often unknown to the victim. Gardner argues that *if* a woman responds with a thank you, she is often met with “escalating hostility” (Gardner 1980).

The lack of punishment for and normalization of sexual street harassment contributes to rape culture and rape culture seems to contribute to sexual street harassment. The two create the impression of being in a vicious circle. Rape culture is one that demands women to be sexually subservient. Women are called out on their

⁴ Examples of social control are: to (re)enforce spatial boundaries, divide between the public sphere as men’s and the private sphere as women’s, regarding the latter as less important, street harassment is a possible punishment for women who “enter” the man’s public sphere. (Kissling 1991, 454)

“resting bitch face”, their clothing –style, their make-up and their general behaviour. They are demanded to conform to ideas and images men hold in their heads. Deviating from this path can cause women serious harm in the form of harassment or assault. Many universities categorize sexual harassment under rape culture, specifically the tolerance of sexual harassment as a perpetuator of rape culture (Marshall University n.d.). Rape culture reinforces sexual (street) harassment by incorrectly addressing the issue, or simply not addressing it at all.

Sexism and gendered power relations

The formation of gender stereotypes stems from the distribution of men and women into different social roles (Eagly and Steffen 1984). Smoreda defines it as “structured beliefs about personal attributes of men and women” (Smoreda 1995, 421). Examples of gender stereotypes are assuming women are the primary caretakers and men are the breadwinners, that men must be stoical and not show emotions, that they are more assertive while women are considered more emotional and soft.

Gender stereotypes are closely linked to traditional gender roles flowing into power inequalities, eventually leading to sexism. Sexism is defined by author Audre Lorde as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance” (Lorde 1984). Gender stereotyping, according to the United Nations, is a violation of women’s rights and when practiced, an obstacle to women’s rights and therefore gender equality⁵. Women represent a social minority in terms of power and control (Laniya 2005), resulting in prejudice which equals antipathy. It is often seen that people try to justify social systems by believing already marginalized groups deserve their disadvantaged place on the social ladder.

Wilson and Thompson (2001) argue that sexual harassment is, unlike many think, not only about sexual or physical attraction but primarily about men exercising power over women. Through the use of Dahl’s conception of power relations they aim to “demonstrate that power can indirectly be measured through the occurrence of harassing behaviours” (1957, 201). On the streets, like in the workplace, there is a gendered power structure. Women entering male preserves are most likely to get harassed. Valentine (1989) states that “the streets” is an environment that is predominantly male. Consequently, women entering the public sphere are very likely to

⁵ According to the OHCHR Commissioned Report (2013)

get harassed. Wilson and Thompson (2001) argue that sexual behaviour becomes harassment when it is considered intrusive, unwanted and threatens the safety of the marginalized group by creating a hostile environment. This hostile environment is based on unbalanced power relations. The gendered power relations are reinforced when, because of feelings of vulnerability and discomfort, women are encouraged to seek the help of acquainted men, thereby increasing their dependence on them (Ramakrishnan 2013). In doing so, the harassers maintain a certain type of control over women as they are unable to move around on their own. In the first part of their gendered power dynamics analysis, Thompson and Wilson argue that the framework used provides a “good starting point as sexual harassment often refers to male coercion, behaviour presented as sexual initiative” (2001, 65)⁶. The framework underpins the reasons why women do not report incidents of sexual harassment; there where power resides, women who file a complaint experience higher rates of physical and psychological symptoms than women who do not file charges (Livingstone 1982 in Wilson and Thompson 2001, 66). Moreover, it is the powerful who control the agenda and determine which issues are important to review and take into account and which ones are trivial. When the interests of the powerful are threatened, the individual who initiated the issue at hand is marginalized and the issue discarded. Wilson and Thompson cite Collinson and Collinson (1994) and state that another reason why women tend to keep incidents of sexual harassment to themselves, is because of victim blaming; where the blame is put on the victim of sexual harassment and where it is perceived to be the woman’s responsibility to “handle” sexual harassment. Besides that, it is argued that the sexual practices are normalized by making jokes at the woman’s expense or comments such as “it’s just a bit of fun” (Wilson and Thompson 2001, 69). Sexual harassment benefits one group at the expense of another, making it a form of social control (Wilson and Thompson 2001, 79).

Research shows that perpetrators only harass if they think they can get away with it (Wilson and Thompson 2001). The phenomenon exists in an environment where it is allowed and socially accepted. Although action is being taken to tackle sexual harassment, the existing policies are still having issues with some facets of the problem.

⁶ Thompson and Wilson mostly address sexual harassment in the workplace, whereby they use hierarchy in the workplace as a back-up force for sexual harassment. However, on the streets, men also use a variety of tools to back up their claim to authority and domination over the public space.

One of the core problems action-takers face with is internalized sexism or internalized misogyny. Internalized sexism is a notion that describes the idea that women (and men) enact the taught sexist behaviours upon themselves (in case of women) and/or women in general (when speaking of both sexes). Research shows that internalized sexism occurs daily and throughout the day almost every minute (Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne 2009). In male dominated spaces, such as the workplace or the streets, internalized misogyny is a gateway for sexual harassment.

June Larkin (Larkin 1991) argues that sexual harassment is an expression of sexual politics; politics that reinforce the unequal power dynamics existing between the two sexes. She refers to Wise and Stanley's (1987) work using their words to describe how men benefit from maintaining these inequalities; men gain "power, privilege, prestige and an entire group they can feel superior to" (Larkin 1991, 114). Larkin (1991) explains how sexual harassment in public functions as a way to repress women and maintain power. Sexual harassment has been institutionalized over the years forcing women to adopt certain coping mechanisms, such as crossing the streets, pretending to be on the phone or not looking directly at men whom she comes across. She writes that women "enter the public world under male terms and subject to male politics" (Larkin 1991, 114). As examples, she writes that women's responses to sexual street harassment often go against their emotional reactions because they choose what they believe to be the safest respond. Automatically, women try to minimize their exposure when entering the public sphere, as they are aware of the possibility of men's violence and monitoring men's behaviour has become a self-taught evidence (Liz 1987; Stanko 1985).

Male domination in public space as form of power control

In March 2001, an article appeared in *Le Monde* addressing women in public spaces. Its author argues women have been coming up with coping strategies in order to avoid being harassed on the streets (Alouti 2017). However, in 2015, a report came out revealing that a staggering 100% of the Parisian women have experienced sexual harassment in public transport⁷. The report caused the Paris municipality and several organizations tackling street harassment to dedicate more time and resources to the safe making of the streets in order for women to wander these without fear of being harassed or assaulted. Marylène Lieber, a French sociologist mentioned in the article (2017), argues that parents teach their young daughters that the streets are not entirely safe. She continues by saying that a woman alone, at night and on the streets, is (still) an available woman to harass or assault. Action has been undertaken and projects are put in place to make the streets safer. An anti-street harassment organization launched a campaign against sexual harassment and the government of l'Ile-de-France has ordered a handful of policemen to investigate sexual harassment cases. Chris Blache (2017), French ethno-sociologist and founder of *Gender and the City* (Genre et Ville)⁸ found that when women find themselves in public places, they are almost always busy doing something, like grocery shopping, picking up the children from school or are active in any other way. The opposite seems to be true for men; when they occupy public space, they are static, hanging around at a corner, on benches, in a park, talking, smoking or simply looking or staring.

When addressing public space, one thing seems to be clear: public space is mostly owned and controlled by men (Blache 2017). Yet sexual harassment in the public sphere is not only about public space; it also touches upon the issue of invasion of a woman's personal space. Central to a woman's freedom, comfort and safety stands her own personal space. This zone of privacy and autonomy, Cynthia Bowman (1993) calls interpersonal distance, must not be breached without consent, as this counts as invasion of privacy. Frieze (1978, 326) argues that "larger and better space is associated with higher status and power", concluding that once more, sexual harassment is linked to power dynamics. Women have to make themselves smaller,

⁷ Carried out by the higher council regarding equal rights between men and women

⁸ Genre et Ville is an organization, which analyzes city and territory planning through a gender lens; it is both a think and do-tank. The organization aims to building, living and organizing a more inclusive and equal urban environment. (Genre et Ville n.d.)

adopt strategies to avoid harassers. Men, on the other hand, can spread however they want and use the public space as they see fit. Street harassment limits the geographical freedom of women and restricts women of mobility. They are forced to cross the streets, avoid certain neighbourhoods, resulting in the unnecessary burdening of stepping outside. It not only silences women and promotes sexual oppression, it also causes “informal ghettoization of women” (Bowman 1993); confined to their homes or spaces they know will be safe and harassment-free. Sexual harassment in public space reflects the power differential between the genders.

Street harassment is seen as normal behaviour instead of deviant due to the lack of awareness surrounding the issue. Women on the streets have been conditioned and desensitized to the sexual aggressive behaviour of harassers. They are not only being harassed but because of the normalization of street harassment, women are often blamed for their own harassment. Because of the normalization of street harassment, women tend to internalize the blame, setting aside her experience as harmful. Instead of teaching men that women are not theirs to comment on, women are taught to adapt to their surroundings in order to not provoke men (El Moghrabi 2015).

What makes the streets feel unsafe to women is that the behaviour of strange men is perceived as uncontrollable and unpredictable (Gill Valentine 1989). Women on the streets are unable to choose whom they interact with and their private space is often invaded by comments, whistles or even a touch (Hanmer and Saunders 1984). At night, women avoid shadowy areas, areas with little to no lighting and confined spaces with no easy way out, such as alleyways, porches and overgrown bushes (Valentine 1989). It is unknown spaces where social ties and social control is lacking that women feel the increasingly unsafe in. Valentine argues that a “woman’s perception of her safety in their local neighbourhood is therefore strongly related to how well she knows and feels at ease with both her social and physical surroundings” (1989, 388). Therefore, it is important to create safe spaces by accepting feminist urban planning in order for women to feel safe during the day and at night; lighting up streets, breaking down narrow streets and exchange them for larger pathways and a focus on social control and social ties and the augmentation of awareness around street harassment.

Masculinity and sexual harassment

Connell's work on the theory of masculinity has had a heavy impact on many facets of western society. She writes "social research on masculinities had obvious implications for practical problems, including violence prevention, the education of boys, action on men's health, and the promotion of gender equality" (R. Connell n.a). Her work on masculinity is of great importance regarding the subject of this thesis because sexual harassment in public space touches upon the issues of violence prevention, education of boys and the promotion of gender equality. According to UN Women⁹ street harassment is a form of gender based violence. Recent development regarding the prevention of street harassment has argued that at the base of preventing the phenomenon lies education.¹⁰ And, as argued before, street harassment is intertwined with the notions of discrimination gendered power relations and thus gender (in)equality.

Violence against women has only been considered as a man's issue since the 1970s. Susan Brownmiller (1975) theorised rape as a tool of social control and a decade later, feminist research and activism was combined in order to further analyse and understand the men's violence against women. According to Bowman , MacKinnon (1979) and West (1987) it is necessary we understand the gendered differences present within street harassment if we want to "capture gender specific harm" (Vera-Gray 2016, 9). Bowman (1993) argues that we cannot deny these gendered differences, linking the harm done by street harassment to women's fear of rape and male hostility. Dianne Herman states that western societies, such as "the American culture produces rapists when it encourages the socialization of men to subscribe to values of control and dominance [...] and anger and aggression, and when it discourages the expression by men of vulnerability, sharing, and cooperation" (Herman 1984, 49).

In her pioneering work, Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, 77). Hegemonic masculinity is constructed through global dominance over women, as well as men who show male characteristics. Those who embody hegemonic masculinity are not always the most powerful men.

⁹ Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces> [Accessed 21 July 2017]

¹⁰ Available at: <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/male-allies/educating-boys-men/> [Accessed 21 July 2017]

However, men who hold some form of institutionalized power and correspond to the cultural ideal are more likely to form hegemonic masculinity, as Demetriou (2001) argues that (external¹¹) hegemonic masculinity is connected to the institutionalization of men's dominance over women. It is not direct violence but the direct claim of authority that marks hegemony, although violence supports and underpins authority. This is where sexual harassment – as a form of gender based violence – comes in. Men who desire to establish and maintain their authority over the public space – decades ago this happened in the private space of home – use a form of violence to underpin this claim to authority.

Connell (2005) argues that hegemonic masculinity excludes effeminate men, which Connell calls “subordinate masculinities” (2005, 78), as the latter are also perceived as a threat to masculinity. Masculinity draws strict limits on how men should behave. Men are seen as rational, whilst women more as emotional. It seems common that men are not “allowed” to be emotional, as emotionality is a trait attributed to women, and women are seen as the weaker sex, which consequently makes an emotional man the weaker link. Masculinity is about strength, whether psychological, physical, in the work place or emotionally. From her interviews, Quinn (2002) deduces that a common belief among men is that men are much greedier for work and power, which is why most men hold higher ranked jobs.

Connell presents the use of violence by the dominant gender or privileged group as a mean to sustain their dominance (2005, 83). By using violence and harassment on the streets the privileged group intimidates women. There is violence in power and power in violence. A man intimidating a woman results in asymmetrical power of gender. The gaze of the man gives him power, as if the man wishes to demonstrate a right; the right to objectify women. Connell (2005) further states that men rarely think of themselves as deviant and more than often feel the objectification is justified. Men engaging in harassment feel they are authorized to do so by an ideology of supremacy. In her research, Quinn (2002) learns from the men she interviews that the latter believe women are too sensitive and that the employment of the term sexism is because women tend to take things too seriously. According to the interviewed men, sexual harassment

¹¹ External hegemonic masculinity is perceived by Demetriou as “hegemony over women” (2001, 341). He defines internal hegemonic masculinity as “hegemony over subordinate masculinities” (2001, 341).

flows forth from the misinterpretation of men's intentions and to them, the harassment is merely a game to build shared masculine identities and social relations.

As made clear in the above, sexual harassment is a gendered power-dynamics phenomenon. According to Kimmel, masculinity is men's practice of gender or in other words, the performance of manhood in front of, and granted by, other men (1994, 128–29). Kimmel (1994) states that men often seek the approval of other men by identifying with – copying their behaviour – and competing against them. Sexual harassment in public space – more than often occupied by men – is constant and seems never-ending; arguably, a contributing factor could be that the masculinity of a man must constantly be affirmed and reaffirmed amongst his peers, whether group of friends or co-workers. Men who find themselves in a social group consisting of only males attempt to improve their position in masculine social hierarchies – these male social groups – using markers of manhood. These markers of manhood include power, status and sexual achievement.

As argued before, sexual harassment is a form of men exerting their believed naturally given or achieved dominance over women. There exists a relationship between male bonding – what Michael Flood (2007) calls male homosociality, a term first coined by Sedgwick (1985) – and gendered power. It is argued that male homosociality plays a critical role in perpetuating gender inequalities and the dominance of hegemonic masculinities (Bird 1996). Through the exclusion of women men bond with each other, which is reinforced by the ideological emphasis that men are different from and superior to women. The usage of interpersonal violence is also associated with male homosociality. Interpersonal violence expresses and maintains inter- and intragender hierarchies of power. Solidarity between men enforces men's sexual violence against women in public spaces (Boswell and Spade 1996). Researchers (Rosen et al. 2003; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997) have suggested that it is the norms of gender inequality that foster and justify abuse in particular peer cultures that promote violence against women. Boswell and Spade (1996) found that, in some peer cultures, men are seen as initiators of sex, aggressive and dominant, whilst women as either “passive partners or active resisters” (LaPlante et al. 1980 in Boswell and Spade 1996, 134). Straight men's sexual activity is praised, while women's sexuality is condemned. Boswell and Spade (1996) argue in their paper that sexual violence against women has a social basis, where both men and women enforce and reinforce masculine and feminine identities. In these abusive-prone environments, where homosociality

seems strong, “men who do not engage in the abuse of women are considered deviants whose bond to the dominant patriarchal order is considered weak” (Rosen et al. 2003, 1047). Attachment to the dominant group and cohesion within is important as it maintain the patriarchal power, which is why pressure to conform to the dominant group and its collective behaviour is high (Rosen et al. 2003).

Chapter 2. Feminist research

What is knowledge and who can be a “knower”? - Epistemologies

In her much-cited essay, Sandra Harding describe epistemology as “a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a ‘knower’; what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge; what kinds of things can be known” (1987, 3). Originally, so have feminist scholars argued, epistemologies have consistently excluded women’s voices and experiences as legitimate knowledge. Feminist researchers have tried to redefine knowledge within academia in order to rid any given epistemology of sexist biases. They have reconceptualised the way we constitute knowledge (Campbell and Wasco 2000, 781).

Harding (1987) refers to Doucet and Mauthner (2007, 37) when she points out there exist three dimensions of feminist epistemology: feminist empiricism, standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism. Feminist empiricism is an epistemological framework that focuses on how to render theories of knowledge insensitive to gender bias. Feminist postmodernism rejects the idea that there is only one truth and instead argues that there are “multiple subjective and relative truths” (Hesse-Biber 2014, 43). By doing so, feminist postmodernism moves away from arbitrary and binary categorizations. The scholars using this specific epistemology reject all fundamental assumptions and values of science, as it is always located in a specific historical and cultural context and shaped by power. Feminist standpoint theory places women at the centre of the research process, as a starting point to building knowledge. Taking into account all facets of a woman’s being – class, race and sexual orientation – standpoint theory aims to create a reality that is “complete and less distorted [...] because of their submissive position” (Nielsen, quoted in Campbell and Wasco 2000, 781). Standpoint theory thus requires a form of materiality – women’s experiences – as a starting point; whilst, on the other hand, feminist postmodernism rejects the reality of this materiality – the “real world” – outright (Bowell 2017).

In the interest of the research conducted I resolved to *standpoint theory* as (feminist) epistemology. Standpoint theory requires the feminist researcher to position herself within her research and in regard to her research participants and subject. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research – an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007, 55).

Standpoint theory is mindful of power structures and authority within the research process (Hesse-Biber 2006, 4). During the processes I undertook, it was important I kept in mind the positions my male interviewees were in and the one I found myself in. Turning to standpoint theory forced me to position myself in regard to my topic – men – as a white, heterosexual, feminist woman. It is important that the researcher considers the social bases of her knowledge, the knowledge of her research participants and the knowledge they produce together. Hearn (1998, 108) argued one must also engage in self-reflexivity, be aware of the social location of both author and topic, and be committed to the political emancipation of women and men.

Acknowledging my position as feminist woman interviewing (non-feminist) men on a topic that views men as perpetrators (90% of the time) and a threat to women made me aware of the social location of my topic and myself. Producing knowledge through cooperation with men on a topic that addresses a women's issue, my own experience regarding the issue and my positionality has rendered this thesis committed to aforementioned emancipation. Acknowledging one's gendered position is crucial to doing feminist research the right way. Studying men cannot be left to men or non-feminists. Such a thing can be considered dangerous as men's knowledge of men is at best limited and patriarchal, at worst violently patriarchal. Leaving research addressing sexual violence against women – which sexual harassment is considered to be – to men can be considered as unjust, as it is not their story to tell since it is research that considers women as victims and men as perpetrators. Naming men what they are – men - is crucial; making the social gendered category of men explicit is a necessary consequence of making women powerful in the social sciences. Moreover, gendering epistemologies used by researchers in feminist research has tremendous implications for rethinking the position and historical dominance of men in academia and how this structures what counts as knowledge (Hearn 1998, 26).

Research for social change – methodology

Harding (1987, 2) defines methodology as “a theory and analysis of how research is done or should proceed”. She states that feminist researchers have “produced feminist versions of traditional theories”. As a feminist researcher my purpose has three dimensions: first, I aim to produce new knowledge. Second, my aim is to set in motion a form of social change. It includes feminism, which DeVault and Gross define as “a set of

practices and perspectives that affirm differences among women and promote women's interests, health, and safety, locally and abroad [...], problematizes gender and bring women and their concerns to the center of attention" (2006, 174). And lastly, in my research I am required to use different methodologies and epistemologies in order for my research to be interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000). The fact that there is no *a* single feminist epistemology or methodology allows "multiple feminist lenses to wake us up to layers of sexist, racist, homophobic and colonialist points of view" (Hesse-Biber 2006, 4).

As argued above, feminist standpoint theory use women's lived experience as a starting point to construct a more accurate reality of society. Standpoint theory is a social theory that has both an explicit and implicit history. The former is a distinctive intellectual history as it has a Marxian legacy¹²; whilst the latter is a popular, or "folk" history, which becomes apparent when groups around the world are attracted to standpoint theory seeking to understand themselves and the world around them when the conceptual framework dominant in their culture prevents them from doing so (Harding 2004). These conceptual frameworks were foremost androcentric¹³, where a masculine point of view is considered as starting point, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric, where (Western-)Europe is considered as the middle point, and heterosexist; they ensured systemic ignorance and oppression. They neglected the lives of marginalized groups – women, people of color, LGBTQ community – but also established error regarding the behavior of the oppressor, resulting in misunderstandings about how nature and social relations in general worked (Harding 2004, 5). Harding wondered how, through these frameworks, it came about that "sexual violence against women [...] was interpreted persistently by the legal system as women 'asking for it' and only 'deviant' men doing it?" (2004, 5). Today, by using feminist standpoint theory, it becomes possible to do research *for women*, to produce knowledge for women as culturally diverse collectives that can answer *their* questions about nature and social relations; and, like in this thesis, counter the idea that women are "asking for it" and only "deviant" men are doing it.

¹² Karl Marx theorized class oppression from which flows feminist standpoint theory popularized and theorized by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s (Pierre 2014).

¹³ *Andro* is ancient greek for 'man' or 'male'. Androcentrism: the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing a masculine point of view at the center or one's world view, culture, and history, thereby culturally marginalizing femininity.

Feminist researchers have longer preferred using qualitative methods instead of quantitative methods. It was argued that quantitative methods would translate women's experiences into predetermined categories (Keller 1985; Mies 1983), distorting women's voices. On the other side of the spectrum, qualitative methods were favored for their ability to correct biases. Yet Cannon, Higginbothan and Leung (1988) point out that qualitative methods have their issues as well. They state that primarily white, middle-class individuals volunteer for in-depth interviews necessitating reflection. Therefore, qualitative research is, to a certain extent, susceptible to racial and social class biases. Personally, I have encountered this issue during my search for potential participants. The only requirement for my participants was that they be male. I posted on social media and sent out e-mails to all the men I work with and know, with the intention of getting a more diverse group of men. However, from the 6 men I have interviewed, only 1 was from non-white¹⁴. The rest of the men were white and middle-class. This renders my thesis biased regarding social class and race.

Because both research methods are "flawed", contemporary feminist scholars have embraced both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Some researchers have used both methodologies at the same time. Campbell and Salem (1999) have used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in research regarding the needs of rape survivors and whether community agencies could be more receptive. They first used qualitative discussion with rape victim advocates, followed by quantitative analysis, which then were reported back and discussed with the participants. Similarly, I have chosen to conduct a survey first. With the information I got from the survey I confronted my interviewees.

Designing the interview questions required more thinking and planning than for the survey. Because I interviewed men, I felt I had to be careful with my questions in order to not offend my interviewees. Feminist researchers often conduct research that is meant *for* women and done *with* women. My research is meant for women but is done with men. I opted for the qualitative method of interviewing since it is considered by Schrok and Schwalbe as providing the "best insight into how men present themselves as gendered beings" (2009, 297). DeVault and Gross (2006) argue that research conducted with *men* is much more challenging than when it is done with women. I interviewed 5 men and it was very challenging for me. Most of them were older than me and held

¹⁴ He was half Dutch, half Indian, born in India

higher paid positions as well. Many men tried to take charge of the interview, which is an issue Terry Arendell (1997) struggled with as well when she interviewed men about their divorce. Some brought up other research they had “read” proving the opposite of what they thought I was trying to prove.¹⁵ Just like Arendell (1997) experienced, some of the men I interviewed asked me “aren’t you a little too involved?” or “isn’t there another problem you feminists need to fix, like the gender pay gap?”; questions that they asked me laughing, meant as a joke, but which I perceived as condescending. Later on, in the discussion section, I explore the particular ways in which the men spoke to me during the interviews.

Writing about men and their behavior, making their voices heard through the usage of feminist methodologies and epistemologies is a risk. As feminist research is classified as being *for* women and *with* women, this research has a twist as it is *with men*. Conducting feminist research with men brings about many issues; issues regarding power dynamics, positionality, epistemology and methodology. Even though feminist research *on* masculinity/masculinities has developed significantly, research on men and masculinities have thus far failed to consider power relations in doing qualitative research with men or the appropriateness of using feminist methodologies in studying men, to only name a few. Considering the fact that I am a woman myself, I try to pinpoint that even though my research is done with men the outcome is fully dedicated to empowering women and helping sexual street harassment against women be eradicated. It is imperative that studies on men and masculinity are linked to wider analyses of gender inequality; if it is not, the former could potentially become a “regressive political project that is more concerned with the liberation of men than gender justice” (Weeks 1996). This is why, when researching men, I have kept in mind the desires and necessities of women and how to tackle the aspect of gender inequality grounded in sexual harassment.

In this delicate process of situating myself as female feminist researcher interviewing men on an issue that threatens the safety in women’s daily lives, where perpetrators are mainly male, I faced many ethical and personal obstacles. Due to the fact that my thesis is influenced by my personal experiences as a woman having

¹⁵ I put read between quotation marks because when asked if they could give me the author of the research or article they were unable to. Also, even though I told them what my intention was with the thesis, they seemed to be unable to fully understand.

encountered many forms of sexual harassment I had to distance myself from the prejudice anchored in my being in order for the interviews – and eventually research – to not be completely biased. Even though, adopting standpoint epistemology, the knowledge produced is situated, embodied and plurivocal (Halewood 1995 in Pini and Pease 2013, 42), my aim was to challenge men and masculinity, how they present themselves as gendered beings, not produce an anti-men thesis.

Methods

There is not one specific feminist method (Harding 1987) neither are there uniquely feminist methods. Often, feminist methods are “familiar methods of data collection adapted to be consistent with feminist ideology” (Campbell and Wasco 2000, 783).

In order to properly write this thesis, I have chosen to adopt a two-fold approach. First, I decided to conduct a survey consisting of 22 questions, to which I got 46 respondents. Then, I also opted for a semi-structured interview in order to complete the data gathered in the survey. Originally, feminist researchers believed face-to-face interviews allowed [women] to speak more freely (DeVault and Gross 2006). However, they (DeVault and Gross 2006) argue that data gathered through survey conducting is considered to carry more weight in public discourse. This is why I decided to do both. It allowed me to have, on the one hand, clearer quantitative data on the perception of sexual harassment and on the other more in-depth data on the motivation behind their answers. The questions from the interview were based on the data gathered from the surveys. Yet this twofold approach presented twice as many challenges for me as if I had adopted only one type of data gathering.

According to DeVault and Gross (2006, 189) qualitative interviewing is often “improvisational”, meaning that the interviewer has their own agenda and can adapt their manner of questioning, strategy or even small things like body language, tone or pitch. Surveys require a form of standardization, uniform questions and a large group of participants. Many feminist researchers struggle with the fact that surveys are often limited in the questioning because people other than them design the survey. In order to not be constricted with such issues I designed the survey myself.

DeVault and Gross (2006, 187) state that all qualitative researchers are bound by the codes of ethics of their discipline. As interviewer it is required to secure informed consent from participants. Ethical wise, it is necessary to conduct the interview in such

a manner that respects the interviewees' concerns and feelings. Before commencing the interview, I asked the men whether they were O.K with me recording the interview and typing the most important parts. All of the men gave their consent. In order to maintain my interviewees' anonymity, I decided to only use pseudonyms.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is often said to be interpretative from the interviewers' point of view. Regarding the latter, Sanna Talja (Talja 1999) argues that the researcher decides what parts of the interview they will include or exclude from the analysis. Some parts of the interview reveal themselves of no importance to the research conducted and shall thus be discarded. Participants tend to not be entirely consequent in their speech; they have many difference voices and tend to tell different stories according to how a question is formulated and in what context. During the interview, participant can express contradictory views, which every time is presented as "the participant's authentic, fundamental view about the topic in question, and powerful, persuasive argument are presented in support of that view" (Talja 1999, 4).

When using interviewing as a method of information gathering, analyzing a discourse is best done using Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA highlights the advantages and disadvantages of interviews but also the power the usage and examination of speech brings forth. Van Dijk (van Dijk 1995) points out that CDA should focus on relations of power, dominance and inequality and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text and talk. Another relevant point is that this method deals with the discursively enacted or legitimated structures and strategies of dominance and resistance in social relationships of gender, language, age and nationality (van Dijk 1995, 18). As a woman interviewing men on a topic that views men as perpetrators 90% of the time and women as victims, my usage of language – and theirs for that matter – is peculiar and note-worthy.

Overview of research design

For my research, I needed a small group of men to interview in order to gain a deeper understanding of their perspective on sexual harassment. The questions asked were questions that needed some reflection from the interviewee, which resulted in some silent moments during the interview, where I let the participant think about the question. Upon their replies, it was my turn to think about their words and cohere. The

interview resembled a discussion where I tried to keep the upper hand whilst asking questions that would cover the theory addressed in the thesis. The participants were all first asked if they knew what sexual harassment in the public space was and if they were able to give a definition, what they believed were the key words regarding the phenomenon. It was decided I would only record them and not write or type during the interview.

The recruitment of my interviewees was done in a rather unorthodox manner. I signed up for the OKCupid website, which is a dating website. The website required me to fill out a few questions and write a short summary about myself. I thus introduced my thesis, the fact that I was not on the website for dating purposes and that I needed men to interview. It was up to the men to approach me instead of me approaching them (indirectly I was but it was an invitation-like gesture). This way of recruiting respondents rendered me quite anxious about how men view the issue, as some men reacted in a very disturbing way. One man sent me a message telling me that my way of approaching was unethical. He considered it “unfair” to the men on the dating site, as OKCupid is in fact a *dating site*. I explained to him that this was for me the fastest way to get a variety of men unknown to me. The aspect of not knowing the interviewee made it easier for me to be bolder and tread less carefully around the subject. He responded by saying that my “research would not make a difference, anyway”. One said that I was a “bitch for setting up a trap like that”. I replied by asking what the trap was, in his eyes. He replied by saying I lured men in with my profile photo and then just wanted an interview and nothing more. There were a few men on the dating site who criticized feminism, some who called me a feminazi¹⁶, others telling me research was irrelevant because, as one argued, “men are not evolved enough to reflect on their own actions”.

Finally, as the interviews required face-to-face interaction, I was unable to meet up with some of the interested men because they lived in another country and I decided an interview over Skype was not an option. I received some backlash for refusing some men.

Apart from the negative, attacking, aggressive, misogynist and sexist messages I received, my profile managed to attract 6 men who were genuinely interested. All the men that had reacted ranged in age from 22 to 30. The men I have decided to interview

¹⁶ A feminazi is often defined as a radical feminist. It is portmanteau of feminist and Nazi. Many people believe feminazis want to dominate men and think men are horrible.

were all given a number in order of who was interviewed first. Participant number one is P1, participant number two is P2 and so forth.

All the participants had been in heterosexual relationships. They all expressed they had heard stories from their girlfriends (or friends who were girls) of sexual harassment in public, acknowledged it existed, but added they never had realized how harmful it was (or is)¹⁷. Five out of six of the participants were white. One (P6) was half Indian, half Dutch; he was born in India and moved here recently for a job in IT. Five out of six participants were born, raised and lived in Western society. Two out six (P2 and P4) were from the United Kingdom; one (P5) was from the United States. The other two (P1 and P3) were born and still lived in the Netherlands.

Every interviewee was middle-class and had attended university. P4 was the only who was still studying, at the moment working on this thesis. P1 was a history major and now works as a manager in a cafe; P2 majored in geography and works for a company that focuses on geographical issue in the Arctic; P3 studied journalism and works for the online newspaper *nu.nl*; P5 studied engineering and owns a creative design/tech company; P6 majored in computer engineering and now works for an IT company.

As all interaction happened online, it was quite exciting to meet the men I would interview. Their faces were known as they had profile pictures. They had all filled out the questions on their profile, which gave me some perspective on what they believed in and what they had done in their life, to some extent. It was decided that the interview would take place at a quiet café, where we would be comfortable and able to have coffee or tea. Somewhere nobody could interrupt us and we could talk freely. Upon meeting for the interview, it was customary we would sit down and talk before commencing the interview. Once sat down and I explained to them what the purpose of my research was, why I decided to interview men and not women and how the interview going to go. I asked them whether they agreed if I recorded. Afterwards I decided to give them pseudonyms as not to associate their words with their name and be recognizable. I decided not to type whilst interviewing, as this would make the interviewee more nervous.¹⁸

¹⁷ Paraphrased

¹⁸ This conclusion was drawn from personal experience as interviewee.

Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. During the interview I let the participant talk freely while maintaining the conversation focused on the subject at hand. It happened quite a few times that they would derive from the topic and I was forced to remind them of the topic we were discussing. After each interview, notes were made addressing the most interesting, remarkable statements and all that stood out or struck me as relevant and peculiar. All asked me whether they “did well” and did not say anything shocking. However, it was not up to me to state my personal reflection.

Chapter 3. Discussion

In the discussion, the goal is to compare the theories with the points made by the participants. The theoretical framework that has been elaborated in the beginning of the thesis shall back up the claims made and opinions expressed during the interviews. Using the method of critical discourse analysis I analysed the interviews I had conducted.

In order to properly structure this chapter, it is divided into five sections, all sections that are relevant to the conclusion of this thesis. The first section addresses the occupation each interviewee had during the time of the interview. It became clear throughout the interviews that each participant was interested in another side of the subject, which later became clear were all linked to what *their* subject of study or field of work was. The second section focuses on their implicit or explicit opinion on my thesis-subject, namely sexual public harassment *against women*. The third section and relevant information gathered from the interviews was their view on (hegemonic) masculinity, the way society socializes boys and men and the gendered power relations arising as a consequence. During the interviews I explained to them what the concept meant – gathered from Connell’s definition – and asked about their point of view on the matter. I also asked about their personal experience, whether they had experienced a particular form of socialisation and/or pressure from society to act in a certain manner. The fourth addresses the way my male participants used their male being as a way to try to intimidate me all the while engaging in some amusing *mansplaining*¹⁹. The fifth and last section finally focuses on how men can implicitly dismiss women’s experiences regarding sexual harassment against women by taking the issue with a grain of salt.

“What you do shapes the way you think”

Before commencing the interview, it was important I explained to my interviewees the study I was following, the background information on my thesis subject and how they were going to be interviewed. With my background in Gender Studies and feminist upbringing my personal point of view on sexual harassment is grounded within a feminist framework. However, each of my interviewees had a different background,

¹⁹ Mansplaining: a systematic and institutionalized form of oppression that silences women, implicitly disclosing the lesser value of the female voice [...] mansplaining is not only a way in which men make needless explanations to women, usually in a condescending manner, but also as the chronic interruption of women (Kidd, 2).

regarding both professional and education-wise but also slightly in their upbringing. These variations shone through whilst I was interviewing them. Especially when comparing the discourse material with the information I gathered from the talk we had before the actual interview. What struck me was that each candidate was interested in another side of the issue.

P2, the geographer, kept mentioning the type of spaces sexual street harassment could or would take place in. We discussed male domination in the public space elaborately. He admits that indeed men are often controlling and owning the public space, just as Blache (2017) mentions in her research. P2 argues that men are not aware of the threat they pose to women as strangers. He states that, “because of their unawareness and privilege they take up all the space they believe they need”; this coincides with Frieze’s (1978) argument about power being associated with larger space. I asked whether he was aware of sexual harassment and what he believes are the spaces where women feel most uncomfortable. He responded by saying he absolutely *knows* it is going on, even though it is not always “perceivable to the naked eye”. His response to the second part of the question was rather stereotypical; it is simply at night that women feel most uncomfortable because it is harder to distinguish the “bad people from the good ones”. However, as mentioned before, the threat of potential harassment is constant, as women cannot predict the behaviour of any man they come across (Gill Valentine 1989). To women, there is no distinction to be made between good or bad, as every man she walks by is a stranger and thus a potential perpetrator.

Further along P2 states that there are certain places where there is a lack of social control, which is “probably where sexual harassment is most prominent. I think. I don’t know.” Even though there was hesitation in his voice, P2 made a point. Valentine (1989) makes the same point, arguing that a woman’s feeling of (un)safety is correlated with to what extent she believes social control is present (or not).

“Why not sexual harassment against men, because they also get harassed you know...”

One of the most problematic matters that arise from discussing sexual harassment against women with men is that they get defensive, hurt or feel personally attacked. A frequent response to my questions – or to the thesis subject in general – was the men

wondering why I would not include sexual harassment against men in my thesis. Before commencing the interviews, I already got a few remarks.

P3 was the most problematic regarding sexual harassment against women. He became quite defensive starting with the first question, which was “could you give me your personal definition of sexual harassment?”, he replied with a question asking me “sexual harassment against who? In general, or...?”, I told him the thesis was about sexual harassment against women. He replied by saying men get sexually harassed as well, to which I responded that I knew this, but that my focus was on women. He proceeded to giving me a definition, that was along the lines that sexual harassment against women was when a person annoys a woman to which the woman responds negatively. He added that it was often done by men, but “not always of course”. However, drawing from my own experiences and those of my female friends and peers, 99% of the perpetrators are male.

P6 keeps on telling me that he gets harassed as well, here in the Netherlands due to his skin colour and laughed at due to his accent. However, this is not the same as sexual harassment as the power dynamics are different and the reasons for this harassment are not based solely on his gender, contrary to sexual street harassment.

After a considerable amount of researching the internet trying to find articles or stories about street harassment against men, I remain unsatisfied. There exist instances of sexual harassment against men in the workplace²⁰, many articles on street harassment against gay-and-transgender men, but none on straight cis-gender men experiencing street harassment. The question as to why sexual street harassment does not – or barely happen – towards straight men can be drawn from Connell (2005). She states that those who subscribe to hegemonic masculinity are the dominant group, exerting some form of power and dominance, using violence. Groups who do *not* subscribe to hegemonic masculinity – women and effeminate men (Connell 2005) – are considered as a threat to masculinity and shall thus be condemned with the usage of different forms of violence, such as sexual street harassment.

²⁰ <https://www.plbsmh.com/yes-men-can-be-sexually-harassed-in-the-workplace/> [Retrieved 30 October 2017]

“Boys will be boys, right?”

One of my interview questions addressed the concept of masculinity. I asked the men whether they thought the socialization of young boys, the way they were raised – resulting in their masculinity – had an effect on their behaviour against women. When confronted with the concept²¹, some were quite defensive. P5 argued that not all women were oppressed and that women should “just speak up”. I told him that I was not asking whether he thought women were oppressed but rather if he agreed or disagreed – and why – that boys and men are socialized in a certain manner, one that “could lead to the oppression of women”. P5 then proceeded to tell me that he agreed to a certain extent. He believed that because of the lack of empathy that is taught to boys, men harass. To illustrate his argument he told me a story about himself when he was young.

“When I was young yeah, I lived with my sister and brother and parents just outside of Chicago. There were loads of animals, stray cats, dogs from the neighbours, birds, you name it. And eh, my brother and I we once caught a bird and we like took away some of its feathers so it couldn’t fly anymore. Not to hurt it but we wanted to keep it, as a pet, you know, because it was a cute bird. But then my sister came and mind you, she is four years younger than me and almost two years younger than my brother. She saw what we had done and became very angry with us. She didn’t cry or anything. She became angry because we had hurt the bird. She told us we were selfish. She said something like ‘it’s not okay that you hurt another thing just so that you can enjoy it’. And we were like what the f... we didn’t get it. But now I do, I guess. I guess this applies to sexual harassment too.”

From a young age, girls are taught empathy, kindness and not to use violence. Boys, on the other hand, are often not allowed access to these characteristics as they must be different from girls (R. W. Connell 2005). Hegemonic masculinity draws strict limits on how men should behave. As I argued before, men are seen as rational. Arguably, the reasoning of P5 and his brother could be seen as rational – besides showing a clear lack

²¹ Connell’s definition of masculinity: the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy or patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women

of empathy. They did not let their feelings towards the bird cloud their decision to not tear out its feathers in order to keep it from flying and keep it as their pet.

The fact that P5 pointed out that tearing out the feathers of the bird for their enjoyment can be compared to sexual harassment – objectifying women for the man’s amusement – was very surprising to me. I realise comparing a bird to a woman could be considered as problematic, as there is no gendered power relation between the two, but the human has control over the animal. However, the “imprisonment” of the bird by plucking out its feathers and thus having control over its life and where it can and cannot go, and the harassment of women, resulting in the confinement to their homes – or at least familiar places – can be considered a legitimate comparison. The fact that the boys did not realize their action caused harm to the bird is also observed in men’s perception and opinion of sexual harassment.

Interviewing P1 was more of a challenge for me, because we had already met a few times before he approached me on OKCupid to volunteer for the interview. We were not close, but I had already seen him a few times whilst working. I expected P1 to be understanding of my subject because of his background as an anthropology major, yet, he engaged in mansplaining many times, told me sexual harassment against boys was also very common and was quite problematic about racial differences between harassers. Unfortunately, I do not discuss race in my thesis for several reasons, which is why I decided to focus on another aspect P1 was very keen on: male group bonding and social behaviours within male groups. When I enquired about his thoughts on male group bonding, he told me that “strong hierarchy in a group would play a role in sexual harassment”. Homosociality, a term coined by Michael Flood, means male bonding and there exists a strong relationship between the latter and gendered power inequalities. P1 argued that there is a difference in the level of group bonding depending on how well the men know each other. He illustrates his argument, *“I think most sexual harassment comes from men who need to prove themselves to others. In my case, when I’m with really good friends I don’t feel the need to prove anything. But I have experienced times when I was with friends of a friend out and about on the town and that I felt some urge to act cool, tough and the best way to act out your coolness is to attract the attention of women. So yeah, I guess you could say I have engaged in behaviour you could maybe qualify as sexual harassment.”*

Kimmel (1994) talks about markers of manhood, which include power, status and sexual achievement. P1 said that men (and people in general he added) try to fit the social standards of the group we want to identify with, which is the same as Kimmel (1994) has argued; the masculinity of a man must constantly be affirmed and reaffirmed in order to climb higher onto the social ladder present within the group.

It was very interesting for me to discuss this issue with a man who is familiar with human behaviour. He knew what he was talking about and admitted to engaging in a form of sexual harassment, although with difficulties. Even though he had a background in anthropology, he had no real understanding in feminism and was thus unaware of the implications of sexual harassment, but due to the moment of self-reflection during the interview he could see his behaviour had been problematic. This was a very interesting moment for the both of us.

“I think it’s best if you observe the phenomenon from both sides”

Mentioned above is the term *mansplaining*. Mansplaining is a term used by many feminists to name the continuous, systematic and institutionalized silencing of women’s voices resulting in their oppression. Mansplaining includes men making needless explanations to women – mostly in a condescending manner -, but also the chronic interruption of women (Kidd 2017, 2).

During my interviews I observed many moments where mansplaining occurred. There were incidents where my interviewer went on to explain sexual harassment to me, telling me I should have done my research in a different way, a more “effective” way. The amount of times I got interrupted cannot be counted twice on both hands. As I listened again to the interviews, I counted the number of times my interviewees cut me off or interrupted me; it was with P3 I counted the most, 11 times to be exact in a little less than 40 minutes of conversation, that is once every 3.6 minutes. There were moments during the interview I felt exasperated, but instead of asking him to stop interrupting me, I laughed and kept silent. Kidd states that mansplaining a manner of social domination is; men dominating the public sphere, interrupting women because their voices are less valued than men’s, silencing them with violence when taking up arms against the practice. Solnit compares mansplaining to sexual harassment on the streets as she writes, “mansplaining crushes young women in to silencing by indicating, the way harassment on the street does, that this is not their world” (Solnit 2012). Her

words fit into Larkin's argument that women "enter the public world under male terms and subject to male politics" (Larkin 1991, 114). There exists a power dynamic between men and women in [public] conversations, as well as on the streets. Kidd adds that women often experience a fear of being interrupted – and ultimately violence –, which confines women to a place of silence and submission; sexual harassment has the same effect on women as mansplaining. The ignorance regarding mansplaining can be compared to the ignorance towards harassment, where in both cases, men do not see the harm (Kidd 2017). She adds "though all men do not mansplain, every woman can recall a time when she has been mansplained". This exact sentence can be linked back to the twitter hashtags #notallmen and #yesallwomen (#YesAllWomen 2016).

During my interview with P3, it was difficult for me to formulate the next question, as P3 continuously came up with arguments to add which, in most cases, were not relevant to the interview.

P4, who has been familiar with feminism for a few years now²², was – besides P2 – one who did not interrupt me and let me finish my sentences. He did however tell me that it was very important to include men in the fight against sexual harassment and take into account male victims of sexual violence. I replied by saying I was aware of the issue, but that I preferred staying on the subject of my thesis. Before commencing the interview, P2 and I talked about topics that were not related to my thesis. I asked him about his life and family and why he had come to the Netherlands to study geography. During the discussion, he mentioned he was quite shy and quiet, which I understood from the way he spoke to me and the way he behaved. His voice was soft and he seemed a little bit uncomfortable at the beginning. P2 did not interrupt me once. When I asked him what type of men he thinks would harass women on the streets, his answer was "alpha males"; I asked him if he considered himself an alpha male, hence if he had ever harassed a woman, but his answer was negative, "No, I do not consider myself as an alpha male". When I asked him why he replied laughingly by saying it was because he grew up with three older sisters.

Mansplaining is linked to the theory of masculinity in the way that boys are being socialized in a way that makes them believe they have the right to speak at any given moment. Most men are not even aware of their behaviour and are acting upon internalized feelings (Kidd 2017, 9). Like sexual harassment on the streets,

²² According to himself

mansplaining is a cultural issue that must be addressed, despite the discomfort such confrontations bring. Both issues are institutionalized and a systematic cultural value embedded into our society (Kidd 2017, 9).

P4, having studied humanities and having knowledge of feminism and aware of gender inequality, tried his best not to interrupt me. However, since he knew what he was talking about, he did explain issues to me that were important for my thesis but issues I was well aware of and of which I had spoken before.

“Come on, it’s just meant as a compliment”²³

Dismissive behaviour regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape is very common. Such behaviour includes not believing the victim, victim blaming, making jokes about the issues, behaviour condoning making women feel small and powerless. This type of behaviour, where physical and emotional terrorism against women is the norm is what is called rape culture (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 2005, xii).

Four out of six of my respondents dismissed sexual harassment as a form of oppression. I was told by them that I should not take it so seriously because it happens all the time and in such a frequent way that fighting it would be a lost cause. However, men saying these words is the reason activism regarding sexual harassment is important. The internalized misogyny and unconscious maintaining of gendered power inequalities perpetuates sexual harassment. P6 wondered many times why women could not “just take it as a compliment?” or “why can’t you just ignore it?”. According to Graham (1984) and Stevens (1984), in India, sexual street harassment is known as *Eve-teasing*, which arguably, makes it sound as some sort of game, according to Kissling (1991). These were difficult moments for me, because these comments make me very angry. However, I used this anger to convince myself that I was doing something relevant. I experienced the same dismissive behaviour from my respondents as Elisabeth Kissling (1991) experienced during her interviews with both men and women on sexual harassment. Just like her respondents, my respondents were convinced that going up to a girl and asking for her attention, unsolicited, was “just a form of saying hi” (Kissling 1991, 452). However, the burden of always having to deal with sexual harassment is tiring for many women. Having to cross the streets or pretending to be on the phone or thinking about what one has to wear before going out is a result of

²³ All section titles are actual remarks made by my interviewees

gendered power inequalities, an issue most men are not aware because of the privileges they benefit from.

Another form of dismissal of the issue came from P6 when he answered my question “Do you think sexual harassment is an issue that should be addressed urgently?” by saying he believed white women here are actually “not that oppressed”. He continued by stating that feminism should focus on more important issues such as child marriage and women’s rights in developing countries, mentioning India, the Middle-East and Latin-America. When I tried to come back to the subject of my thesis and the question, P6 started a rant about women’s situation in India where he tried to convince me sexual violence in India was worse than in the Netherlands or in Europe more generally. Even though P6 was the most outspoken interviewee regarding this question, my other respondents believed sexual harassment, such as catcalling and whistling was not a matter to be addressed urgently and that I should rather “focus on issues such as rape”. However, with the tools, knowledge and time I had, taking on hard issues such as rape, child marriage or women’s rights in developing countries would have been almost impossible. These type of comments, neglecting and dismissing issues such as sexual harassment, issues contributing to a much larger societal problem; street harassment is not a product of a sexually terroristic culture, argues Kissling (1991, 456), but an active factor of creating such a culture.

Conclusion

Rape culture, unequal gendered power relations, normalization, internalized misogyny, implicit and explicit sexism, masculinity, objectification and male dominating the public space. Those are all influencers and perpetrators of sexual violence against women. Sexual violence comes in many forms and exists in many spaces; public and private, at home, in the streets or at work. From catcalling to rape. This thesis focussed on a very specific angle of sexual violence: sexual violence against women in the streets performed by men as a male-enacted phenomenon. In order to properly answer my research question I have developed a toolkit consisting of a survey, interviews, discourse analysis all grounded within feminist research practice. A practice developed to mostly work with women to do research *for women*. The outcome of my thesis contributes to the wellbeing of women in the public sphere. However, it is also meant to raise awareness amongst men.

Many men's behaviour towards sexual harassment is problematic as I have detailed in my theoretical research. Men have difficulties admitting that sexual harassment towards women is so common. The focus often shifted to sexual harassment towards men or when it did not, the issue was dismissed, considered non-important or even ridiculous. Men tend to believe women take street harassment too seriously. To them, it is nothing but misinterpretation from the women's point of view. Nonetheless, it is vital street harassment is recognized as a "tool of sexual terrorism". This is however being compromised as men refuse to take the issue and women's fears seriously. As Kissling (1991) puts it, it is considered a topic too trivial for serious women to be concerned about. Men perceive street harassment as ridiculous, which becomes a tool of silencing, which, in return, supports the system of sexual terrorism.

Catcalling and other forms of street harassment are not only meant to objectify and sexualize women and their body but they are means of social control. Men use it in order to spatial boundaries, where women are trespassers of a public sphere that belongs to men (McAllister 1978). The usage of sexual violence is argued to be a type of punishment for women trespassing such spatial boundaries (Kramarae 1985). Street harassment is used to maintain gendered power dynamics and is considered a characteristic belonging to hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity contributes to sexual harassment where men are forced to fit a certain masculine mould; they must be aggressive and powerful. It is further used to socialize men and women into

masculine and feminine roles (Gardner 1980). Connell seems to agree with Kramarae (1985) when she argues that violence is used by men as a tool to sustain their dominance over women. Quinn (2002) has argued that harassment is a way for men to construct social relations and invent shared masculine identities. In line with hegemonic masculinity and Quinn's argument lies male group bonding, another phenomenon vital to the understanding of the working of street harassment. Through the practice of street harassment men exclude women from their social groups in the public sphere to the public sphere itself. This exclusion is formed by the idea that men are different and superior to women, which is where the argument links back to gender hierarchy and the usage of violence against the marginalized group in order to maintain this power position. As Boswell and Spade (1996) have argued more than 20 years ago, solidarity between men and male bonding reinforce men's sexual violence against women in public spaces and, according to the information I have gathered, this is still a valid argument.

Through surveys, research, interviews, discussion and the reading many articles, I have come up with several responses to my research questions. First of all, I would like to point out that the data I have collected on the male perception on street harassment is not exhaustive. I have interviewed only six men, six men who were not involved in feminism or deeply intertwined with concern for women's rights and/or safety and have left out the question of race and religion throughout my research. Nonetheless, I have gained new insights on how men perceive street harassment.

My interviewees do *not* perceive street harassment²⁴ as a direct threat to women's safety and do not believe it is an issue that should be addressed immediately, as some interviewees stated, "it can wait". They were all convinced sexual street harassment against men exists as well, although none of them could give me a clear example of what this would look like. When I asked them if they would ever feel intimidated by a woman yelling an obscene remark or grabbing their behind unsolicited, they laughed and replied that they would find it quite amusing. To women, the contrary is true (Kissling 1991). They believe it is not solely a male-enacted phenomenon as women also engage in harassment. Most men argued that men are

²⁴ Which according to a general definition I formed by asking the same question to all men is: catcalling (sexual remarks such as "hey show me your pussy", calling names such as "hey bitch you can't walk here"), whistling and unwanted attention when the woman has clearly stated she does not want it.

indeed educated to be more aggressive, although they also firmly believed “shy men exist”. Four out of six stated education comes from home, from parents and siblings and that scholarly education should not get involved. They did not believe giving classes or workshops in anti-sexual harassment or in the least, the raising awareness surrounding the issue, would help in any way, as “if they don’t care to begin with, they won’t do anything with it anyway”. The other two did think teaching young boys in school about sexual street harassment and the consequences it has on women would help, however, they argued that it would depend on the school level²⁵ whether it would truly be successful or not. The interviewed men were all on the same page regarding the statement that “alpha males” sexually harass, which is in line with Connell’s theory about hegemonic masculinity. He who is powerful and he who wants to maintain this position uses violence against those who stand lower on the hierarchical ladder. Alpha males, according to most of my interviewees, want to show the rest of the group they are worthy of belonging to the group by using manhood markers. Depending on the cohesion of the group, the presence of homosociality, masculinity and social control, and its number, men will show their manliness. Drawing from the answers of my interviewees, if the number is high, the presence of both homosociality and masculinity is high but the presence of social control and cohesion is low, men will be more likely to engage in sexual harassment thus showing their manliness.

The conclusions I have drawn from my research do not apply to all men in all western societies. There are many aspects of my research that could have been done better, more thoroughly or just different. In order to paint a detailed and exact picture of how men perceive sexual harassment in the public sphere, a very large number of men should be interviewed and factors such as race, ethnicity, class, age and religion should be taken into account.

Writing this thesis has brought up many feelings; feelings of anger, sadness, powerlessness but also feelings of content, because I knew I was doing something worthwhile, addressing an issue so widespread and common while it should not be one, and raising awareness. Although my male respondents were hesitant at first, I would

²⁵ In the Netherlands, there are 3 levels of schooling: VWO, HAVO and VMBO, where VWO is the highest level, academic, taking 6 years and where most students go on to study at university. HAVO, which takes 5 years and where some students go on to study at university whilst others go to college to learn a practical skill. VMBO is the “lowest” level, taking 4 years and where the students often do not go on to study and get a job immediately – the two men were referring to VWO/HAVO with “successful” and to VMBO with “or not”.

like to believe I did change their view on sexual street harassment, even if it is just a little bit. Issues such as sexual street harassment, but also sexual harassment in the workplace, in the academic world, sexual assault or sexual violence at home are all connected and part of a horrific and still existing rape culture, an epidemic I intend to tackle, if not now, if not with research then most certainly in some other way.

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