YOUNG WOMEN’S ACTION TEAM

411: On Street Harassment

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R.E.S.P.E.C.T
Respect my body.
Respect my mind.
Respect me.

STOP STREET HARASSMENT
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DEFINITION OF STREET HARASSMENT

- Hollering
- Unwanted Touching
- Groping
- Catcalling
- Following
Many young and older men harass young girls in different settings. In the following short stories, five young women share their experiences with harassment.

**He’s at the movies**

My name is Aqua. Last week, my friend Ashley and I went to the movies. As we were walking to the theater, we debated what movie we wanted to see.

Finally, we decided to see “How She Moves.” Once we got there, we purchased the tickets and walked over to the snack stand.
While we were deciding what to buy, two boys approached us. One said: “Can I be your popcorn so you can be my butter?” I looked at him with attitude, rolled my eyes and said nothing. Ashley, however, was not having it and replied:

“Well, I just lost my appetite so we don’t need any popcorn.” We bought some candy and started to walk away.
Suddenly, I heard him say, "Hey girl I'm trying to holla at you!" I turned around and said, "Look! Just leave us alone." Ashley and I made our way to watch our movie in peace. We didn't let the boys' comments ruin our day.

By: Feneish Hymon & Mahogany Murphy
It is my beauty

My name is Sonia and this is my story. One Friday after school, my mom sent me to the store. My friend Holley decided to go with me. We were buying food for my little brother’s birthday party. As we were leaving the store, we saw a man standing outside.

He looked at us and said, “hey lil mama, can I get your digits?” We kept walking and ignored the man.
As we walked away, he tried to grab Holley. I told him, “You have no right to touch her, keep your hands to yourself.” He responded by saying, “I’m just trying to talk to her.” Holley replied, “We don’t talk to strangers.” As we walked away, he shouted, “It’s not your beauty, it’s your booty girl.” It took a minute for me to notice that the man was following us. I pulled out my cell phone and dialed 911. In a loud voice, I said “Hello police, my friend and I are being followed by a stranger; we need help.”
The man looked at us and said "the way you girls are dressed, ya'll just asking for it anyway." Then he walked away. After the man left, I called my mom to tell her what happened. We told her that we did not feel safe to walk home by ourselves, so we asked her to pick us up. We went back inside of the store to wait for her there.
Hello, my name is Tiffany but all of my friends call me T. Ironically, my best friend’s name is Brittany. On the last day of school, she and I decided to go the carnival. When we got there, we walked around for a while. Then, we decided to wait in line to get on the rollercoaster.

While I was waiting in line, I felt someone rubbing my back. I turned around and saw two boys behind me.
I yelled, “Why are you rubbing me?” Both of them answered, “I didn’t touch you.” At this time, Brittany turned around to see what was going on. By the look on her face, I could see that she thought they were fine. This made me even angrier.

One of the boys said, “My friend and I just wanted to talk to you two.” Brittany smiled, flipped back her braids and said, “Yeah, Tiffany, they just want to talk to us. Don’t make a big deal out of it.”
I couldn’t believe it. I felt so betrayed by Brittany. I said in a salty tone: “They rubbed my back, touched me without my permission. They should have come correct if they wanted to get my attention. They should have politely asked me if I was interested in talking with them.” I told Brittany that by smiling and flirting encouraging boys to think that they can touch us whenever they want.

Brittany was angry because she felt that I had embarrassed her in front of the boys. We talked about the incident again later and she came to understand my point of view.

By: Fakaira Hymon
Hi, my name is Eva. I was waiting for the bus on my way to the mall. The bus is always late so I stood patiently listening to music on my ipod. As I turned my head to see if the bus was on the way, I saw a group of boys walking towards me.
I felt nervous. Based on my previous experiences, I was sure that at least one of them would have something to say to me. Sure enough, I heard, “lil mama, what you listening to?” I pretended not to hear the question. Another young man tapped my shoulder and said “hey, my friend’s trying to talk to you.” I looked at him and said, “I don’t know either of you guys.”

The first guy said, “Well, I’m trying to get to know you.” At that point, I just turned my head and kept listening to my music.
The first young man said, “Come on baby don’t be like that, just tell us what your name is.” I looked at him and said, “I don’t have to tell you my name. I don’t have to do anything that I don’t want to do. I’m tired of you guys walking up to young women and talking to us like you know us. What you’re doing right now is called harassment and it’s wrong. So, why don’t you just go away and maybe learn something from this experience: young women DO NOT appreciate being harassed.” They walked off mad. I was so proud of myself because I stood up against Street Harassment.

By: Joan Njei
A Hot Day

Kim was walking to her best friend’s house on a hot sunny day. She had on her favorite pink and white outfit. While she was walking, she saw a group of boys. She knew that her miniskirt would attract unwanted attention and comments so she decided to cross the street.

In any case, she heard all of them hollering at her. “Hey, come here shawty what are you scared of?” “Hey Sexy, you’re looking hot in that skirt.” One of them ran across the street to talk to her.
As soon as the boy approached, the first thing he said was: “Yo what up, give me your number” and smiled. Kim wished that she could just ignore him but she decided that she had to say something. So she replied, “Do you think girls like that? Do you think I feel special? Why do you think I crossed the street?” He just frowned.

Kim was so mad. She just wanted to be able to walk down the street in peace. She was so sick and tired of the cat-calls.
Kim frequently gets harassed on the streets. Before, she thought it was something normal and had to accept it; that was until she joined a local girl’s group. The group taught her that street harassment is wrong and that she could do something about it. She continued to tell the young man off: “When I walk down the street, I don’t want guys to holler at me, grope me, or follow me. I don’t owe you my name or my number.” After a few minutes, he just shook his head and walked away mumbling “forget you, then!” Kim felt great and she walked off proudly towards her friend’s house.

By: Adeola Matanmi, Briana Jackson and Kriana Jackson
**Do’s and Don’ts When Being Harassed**

Aqua, Sonia, Tiffany, Eva and Kim experienced various forms of Street or Public Harassment. Our past research describes street harassment as “verbal and physical violence, name calling, ‘hollering’, touching without permission, whistling, and putdowns.” Girls often get harassed in the street and in other public places. It is important that girls know how to safely exit this situation. When being harassed, it important that you do what is safest for you.

- Never enter into a fight (physical or verbal) with the harasser.
- Walk in well lit areas at night.
- Address the harasser if you feel safe enough to do so. Inform the harasser that what he or she is doing is wrong and unacceptable.
- Never go straight home when being followed. Go inside of a public place and stay there until you feel safe enough to go home.
- Always call for help and know that you do not have to accept being harassed.
Mission Statement:
The Young Women’s Action Team (YWAT) is a youth-led, adult-supported, social change project that empowers women to take action on issues that affect their lives (particularly issues of violence against girls and young women). YWAT believes that girls and young women should be free from violence. We believe that through collective action, consciousness-raising, and organizing we can end violence against girls and young women.

Daria A. Amerik (Illustrator of the book) is a professional artist as well as an educator of urban youth in Chicago. She has exhibited her work nationally and continues to work with not for profit groups like YWAT all over the Chicagoland area.
In this book, the Rogers Park Young Women’s Action reminds young men and women that “the streets belong to all of us.” The young women used fiction writing to share their experiences with Street Harassment in their neighborhood. They emphasize the importance of the issue and want to educate young women to protect themselves. All girls can do something to help stop street harassment and the Young Women’s Action Team is an example of that.