SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE CTA

DON'T 'HEY MAMA' ME

Ronnett Lockett and her friends are tired of the unwelcome remarks from male passengers on the CTA | PAGES 2-3
TIERED OF BEING HARASSED ON THE CTA

ROGERS PARK | Activists who battled street abuse now focus on catcalls, other behavior on buses, trains

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When Lillian Matanmi and her friends get on the L, they often hear catcalls and other unwelcome remarks from male passengers. Like: "Don't you look sexy today?" And: "I like how that little skirt fits on you."

One time, a man reached over and, uninvited, started massaging Matanmi's shoulders. "I just got up and sat down somewhere else," said Matanmi, 18, who's a student at Malcolm X College. "I felt really uncomfortable and unsafe. I was scared that if I said the wrong thing, I'd be hurt."

Matanmi is a member of the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team, a group of teen and college-age women who have fought street harassment in their neighborhood, distributing thousands of posters to businesses and homes to encourage people to show away congregating men so girls and women can walk in peace. They successfully pushed for better street lighting in the Far North Side neighborhood.

Now, the group has turned its attention to the "hey-babying" and other lewd language they hear on the CTA.

They surveyed 698 CTA riders, mostly young women, and found that harassment on CTA buses and trains is pretty common.

Next month, the group hopes to meet with the CTA's board to talk about ways to improve safety and help women deal with unwanted attention.

"A lot of people don't realize that when they're getting catcalled or someone touches them in the wrong way, that's harassment," Matanmi said. "They think that's just part of their day."

Just over half of those surveyed said they'd been sexually harassed on the CTA. Thirteen percent said they'd been sexually assaulted.

Of those who had been harassed or assaulted, 61 percent said they didn't file a complaint with the police or the CTA. The transit agency had two recorded incidents of criminal sexual assault systemwide for all of last year.

Forty-four percent of those surveyed said they'd witnessed harassment or assault on the CTA, but only 22 percent said they intervened.

Daphne Rene, 21, a DePaul University student who's a member of the Rogers Park group, said women sometimes don't report being harassed because they figure that, by the time they get to a CTA worker, the harasser is gone.

Ronnet Lockett, 20, a Northern Illinois University student and another member of the group, said one problem is that women might be frightened and not know how to respond. Ads on trains would help people know what to do, Lockett said.

The group also wants CTA employees and police to be trained in how to deal with harassment.

"Sometimes, the bus driver sees it and won't say anything," Lockett said. "They probably don't know what to do."

What if a guy just thinks he's being friendly? For Lockett, harassment depends on what's said, and how it's said.

"If you come up to me say, 'Hey, little mama, let me get your number,' you're harassing me," she said. "If you say, 'Hey, excuse me, how are you today?' I don't feel like you're harassing me."

But if someone says something nice, then keeps saying it after a woman says she isn't interested, I....
THINGS WE LOVE: THE WEST LOOP

A list just three items long can’t give a complete picture— but it’s a start. Every Monday and Wednesday, here are some of our favorite things.

1. On the last Saturday and Sunday of each month through September, checking out the Randolph Street Market Festival, featuring the Chicago Antiques Market, a European-style market at Plumbers Hall, 1340 W. Washington. More than 200 vendors sell antiques and collectibles, vintage and indie designer fashions and fine and decorative arts. Food is available. Admission: $10-$5 for students and seniors; free for those under 12. The next event is June 27-28.

The festival runs on the last weekend of each month through September.

2. Checking out the area’s burgeoning art district, more than 35 galleries. Among our favorites: the Parallel Gallery, at 1139 W. Fulton (312-225-7808).

A Taste of Randolph will run Friday through Sunday.

3. Enjoying A Taste of Randolph Street, which runs through Sunday. The festival fun is on West Randolph between Peoria and Racine. Suggested donation with proceeds to benefit the West Loop Community Organization. Hours: 5-11 p.m. Friday, 2-11 p.m. Saturday and 10 p.m. Sunday.

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1. Public university, City Colleges salary database
   suntimes.com/data
2. FBI probe focuses on North sponsor
   suntimes.com/entertainment/police
3. Q-and-A with Jay Cutler
   suntimes.com/spotlight/breaking/news
4. Letterman, Wright done in by own words
   suntimes.com/news/mitchell
5. Restaurant gets money back, despite cable
   suntimes.com/news/mitchell

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