

**Watching the Girls Go By:  
Sexual Harassment in the American Street, 1850-1980**

by

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# Dedication

To my parents

# Acknowledgements

I have been working on these acknowledgements for at least three years now, turning to them periodically when my stamina was low and I needed a reminder of all the wonderful people I have in my life. I am so pleased and proud to officially thank them now.

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One hears a lot of horror stories about graduate school, but the Women's Studies and History departments at the University of Michigan are home to some of the warmest and most intellectually challenging mentors I have known. Jay Cook was a true champion of my work, always ready with thoughtful critiques mixed with a heavy dose of positive feedback. I am grateful to him for all our conversations, and for being so generous with his time, even when chairing the department through a pandemic. Kisha Simmons has challenged me to be a better scholar in more ways than I can count, but she has especially pushed me to dig deeper and be bolder with my racial and gender analysis. Her influence on this project is enormous and still unfinished; her words and advice will continue to shape my revisions into the future. Dean Hubbs, in addition to being one of

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# Abstract

From women's first prolonged entrance into American urban space in the antebellum period, male strangers have harassed women in public places with uninvited sexual remarks, stares, and touching. These intrusive behaviors have been a persistent and pervasive feature of women's experience of the urban United States ever since. Drawing on a wide range of archival materials—including newspapers, legislation, ethnographic interviews, personal papers, and women's published and unpublished writings—"Watching the Girls Go By: Sexual Harassment in the American Street, 1850-1980" details the emergence, persistence, and normalization of men's harassment of women in public space, today commonly known as street harassment. It argues, firstly, that despite significant initial resistance to street harassment in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainstream American discourse deemed behaviors like ogling or catcalling as the "right" of white, middle-class, heterosexual men by the mid-twentieth century. Meanwhile, men of color, and especially Black men, faced harsh, often violent, consequences for the same behaviors seen as trivial in white men. Secondly, mainstream public discourses generally portrayed targets of street harassment as "respectable" white women, where respectability hinged either on a woman's middle-class or elite social status or on her perceived virtuousness. The construction of the ideal victim of street harassment as a respectable white woman obscured the experiences of women of color and the often more extreme or violent harassment they endured in public space. Thirdly, this dissertation argues that men's harassment of women in public places had a material impact on women's ability to navigate public space freely. Men's harassment contributed to women's discomfort and fear of sexual

violence in public space and thus curtailed women's freedom of mobility in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. Throughout, this dissertation considers how idealized masculinities change and adapt in the face of opposition, absorbing attacks and reconstituting critiques into new versions of idealized masculinity. Thus, though women's groups and law enforcement denounced street harassment from white men in the early 1900s, by the mid-twentieth century, behaviors like ogling and catcalling became part of the construction of an idealized white masculinity. "Watching the Girls Go By" suggests that a focus on trivialized violence can provide insight into the way white supremacist hetero-patriarchy has persisted over centuries.

# Introduction

Jaime's scariest encounter with street harassment took place in April 2016, when she was twenty-five years old. Jaime was living in Philadelphia and she was walking in the area between the Fishtown and Port Richmond neighborhoods, known historically for their working-class Irish and Polish populations, but recently gentrifying. At around 10pm on that Tuesday evening, a man passed Jaime on his bike, heading in the opposite direction. A few minutes later, Jaime noticed the man had turned around and was now following her on his bike. In recounting the story later, Jaime explained that a "few blocks later I saw him up against a wall as I was crossing the street, staring at me." Jaime hurried on, only to see the man once more, down the street, this time standing in a parking space between two cars, masturbating. "As I made eye contact and realized what was happening he said 'oh yeah baby.'" Jaime ran. A year later, she told her story to the *Billy Penn*, a local Philadelphia news blog. She asked the reporter not to publish her last name, perhaps out of embarrassment or shame. "Before that particular instance happened to me, I just thought catcalling was just an annoying thing," Jaime told the *Billy Penn*, "but when this man exposed himself to me and stalked me on my way home, it became really personal and showed me how far it can be taken." For months after the incident, Jaime did not feel safe walking in public at night.<sup>1</sup>

A century earlier, a young woman going by the moniker "A Working Girl" published a letter in the *Evening Public Ledger* and called on Philadelphia's Director of Public Safety to do something

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Orso, "Street Harassment in Philly: Unsafe, Uncomfortable and Untracked," *Billy Penn* (blog), July 31, 2017, <https://billypenn.com/2017/07/31/street-harassment-in-philly-unsafe-uncomfortable-and-untracked/>.

about the men who accosted her in public places across the city. Working Girl had recently moved to Philadelphia from the “outlying districts” and had heard the city was relatively safe. From the moment she arrived, however, Working Girl was forced to put up with a barrage of unwanted comments, “ogling,” and even touching from men in public places. She called these men “mashers” and told the *Evening Public Ledger* they bothered her “almost every day on the streets of this city.” The harassment began on her first night in town. Feeling homesick, Working Girl had decided to go for a walk through her neighborhood at around eight in the evening. She set out “without the slightest apprehension that any disagreeable experiences might overtake me.” As she walked towards the busy thoroughfare of Broad Street, she was forced to stop at Camac Street, a few blocks from her boarding house, when a man in an automobile pulled up into a crosswalk and stopped. Working Girl waited for him to drive on, thinking that his car had stalled. Instead, Working Girl claimed the man leaned his “anemic face almost into” hers and said, “Come, sweet little one, come have a ride with me!” She ignored him and walked on. Mere blocks later, Working Girl was accosted again, this time by “a fat, pink man” who stumbled out of a local drinking establishment and forcibly took her arm. She “shook him off” but returned to her boarding house with the sense that Philadelphia was no safer than New York, where “vultures waited round on the street corners and in the railroad stations, seeking to devour the fresh young things from the ‘provinces.’”<sup>2</sup>

One-hundred-and-one years and a few miles separate these two incidents. Today, it would take about fifteen minutes to drive from Spruce Street and South Camac Street, where a man in a car blocked Working Girl’s path in 1915, to Fishtown, where a man masturbated in front of Jaime in 2016. These incidents share more than location, however. In addition to taking place on the public street, they were interactions between an individual man and woman who did not know each other,

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<sup>2</sup> A Working Girl, “‘Masher’ Menace Hit by Working Girl Who Tells Experiences,” *Evening Public Ledger*, April 21, 1915. See also “Porter Blames City Magistrates and Politics for Masher Evil,” *Evening Public Ledger*, April 22, 1915; “The ‘Masher Menace’ in Philadelphia,” *Hattiesburg (MS) News*, February 17, 1916.

strangers in a city. They both took place at night. While the severity of the actions these men took appears to differ, they imply a desire for a physical or sexual interaction. Their actions were uninvited—not to mention unwanted—in both cases and were intrusive to the point of disruption. Both Jaime and Working Girl were forced to adjust their plans, to varying degrees. Working Girl’s path was literally blocked by the man in his car, and it is not hard to imagine that having her arm grabbed by an unknown man outside a cafe might have convinced her to walk home earlier than she had planned. Jaime felt the need to run from the man who masturbated in front of her, and his actions made her hesitant to go out at night for some time after. Both Jaime and Working Girl were hesitant to attach themselves to their stories, choosing not to share their full names. It is not clear why Jaime desired anonymity, but Working Girl feared notoriety and accusations of impropriety. She admitted that she had assumed only women who dress in styles “designed to attract the roving male eye” would fall victim to the behaviors she experienced. On the contrary, she argued, women who make “no bids to attract” are still likely to experience harassment from male strangers. Though legal avenues were open to her, Working Girl told the Philadelphia *Evening Public Ledger* she “would rather be ogled at 50 times a day than have to go to court and testify.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly parallel incidents exist for almost every square mile in every American city. For example, in 1916, a man accosted a seventeen-year-old Chicago teenager on an “L” train, forcibly taking her hand and insisting he knew her before snipping off a lock of her hair against her will. The teenager told the *Chicago Tribune* she was “so angry” that she “could not even ask the conductor to have the man put off” the train.<sup>4</sup> A century later, in 2016, the Chicago Transit Authority plastered Chicago “L” trains with posters warning customers to avoid “unwanted” interactions with other riders or they might find themselves breaking anti-harassment law. A local Chicagoan lauded the

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<sup>3</sup> A Working Girl, “Masher Menace Hit.”

<sup>4</sup> “Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1916.

measure as a good first step towards eradicating the harassment she regularly experienced on public transportation.<sup>5</sup> The research for this project has been rife with these oddly familiar scenarios. If a man ogled a woman on the street in the mid-1800s, I learned not to be surprised if I found examples of men leering at women on the same street in the 1910s, the 1970s, and the 2000s.

It was this continuity—the persistence of men’s intrusive behaviors like ogling, sexual comments, following, and groping in public space—that sparked this project. In 2013, I answered a call for participants for a study on street harassment. I was living in London, UK, at the time, and the researcher was completing her PhD in Child and Woman Abuse Studies at London Metropolitan University. Through participating in this study, I came to realize that street harassment could be a legitimate area of academic study. Despite the difficulty of capturing individual incidents of street harassment, one could say something meaningful and important about the phenomenon using a creative mix of research methods. Two years later, I was in the first year of my PhD program and my advisor at the time, Michelle McClellan, recommended I read Estelle Freedman’s *Redefining Rape*. That monograph included a chapter on “mashers,” men who accosted women in public places in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American cities. Freedman’s work showed me two things: firstly, that the phenomenon I knew as street harassment had existed in the past and the behaviors themselves looked remarkably similar to those with which I was familiar in the present; and secondly, that it was possible to research the history of street harassment in the United States using traditional archival methods. I began to formulate my research questions. From Freedman’s work, it was clear that women had protested and organized against street harassment at the turn of the twentieth century, and I also knew that some feminists in the 1960s and 1970s talked about the “everyday” sexism they experienced in many aspects of their lives, including on the street. What, I

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<sup>5</sup> Hope Herten, “USA: CTA Ad Campaign Is a Step in the Right Direction,” *Stop Street Harassment* (blog), June 10, 2016, <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/2016/06/ctaads/>.

wondered, happened in the interim? Had the protests against these behaviors died down and if they had, as I suspected, why?

## **Trivializing Street Harassment**

My research questions resulted in this study, an examination of men's harassment of women in public places in American cities from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. It tracks how behaviors like catcalling, leering, and groping between strangers emerged with urbanization; the way law enforcement, women's clubs, and lay people responded to these behaviors; and the trivialization of those behaviors into the mid-twentieth century. I make three key arguments. The first two relate to the way Americans discussed and understood men's harassment of women in public space, while the last speaks to the physical impact of such harassment. Firstly, despite initial resistance to street harassment in the late 1800s and early 1900s, I demonstrate that white-controlled newspapers, magazines, films, and other popular culture and discourses deemed behaviors like ogling or catcalling the "right" of white, middle-class, heterosexual men by the 1940s. These mainstream popular discourses trivialized street harassment over time, but only for some men. Men of color, and especially Black men, still faced violent consequences if whites even believed they had whistled, catcalled, or looked at a white woman in public, while white men who did the same were perceived as fulfilling their natural instincts. In the most infamous example, white men tortured and murdered fourteen-year-old Black teenager Emmett Till after he was accused of whistling at a white woman in a store in Money, Mississippi in 1955. Till's murder was a catalyst for civil rights organizing across the country. His mutilated body, which his mother insisted should be visible in an open coffin at his funeral, was a brutal symbol of the white supremacist violence that threatened Black men and boys for even the smallest infractions of the racial code, especially when white women's reputations

appeared to be at risk.<sup>6</sup> The white men who lynched Till justified their violence by accusing Till of the same kinds of behaviors that, at the time, were increasingly cast as the natural right of white men. Decades later, the woman who accused Till, Carolyn Bryant, admitted she had fabricated parts of her testimony and that she did not even recall whistle that became the focal point of the story against Till, proving that the perception and rumor of sexual misconduct was enough to get an African American man—or boy—lynched in Jim Crow America.<sup>7</sup> As this dissertation will show, Till's lynching was only the most famous example of the double standard that meant Black men and boys were severely punished for the same kinds of behaviors that were celebrated in white men as signs of their healthy heterosexuality.

Secondly, just as Americans contested who could ogle, catcall, or wolf-whistle without fear of retribution, women who were the targets of those behaviors received contrasting treatment depending on their social positions. While women of many—I would venture to say all—racial and class backgrounds could be and were targets of harassment from men in public places, they were not equally represented in dominant narratives or public discussion of such harassment. By and large, white Americans tended to portray targets of public harassment as “respectable” white women, where respectability hinged either on a woman's middle-class or elite social status or on her perceived virtuousness. “Virtuousness” was especially necessary for working women to be taken seriously as victims of harassment. Thus a middle-class volunteer clubwoman or a white-collar typist

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<sup>6</sup> For more on Emmett Till, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Christopher Metress, *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Mamie Till-Mobley and Chris Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2003); Davis W Houck, Matthew A Grindy, and Keith A. Beauchamp, *Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); Harriet Pollack and Christopher Metress, *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Devery S. Anderson, *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Pérez-Peña, “Woman Linked to 1955 Emmett Till Murder Tells Historian Her Claims Were False,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/emmett-till-lynching-carolyn-bryant-donham.html>.

were more likely to be perceived as victims than an actress or sex worker. White women of all classes were also far more likely than women of color to be at the center of depictions of harassment in mainstream discourses. White women were both the “ideal” victims when ogling or catcalling was considered unwanted or threatening, and they were the “ideal” objects of admiration when ogling or catcalling were considered normal and trivial. Meanwhile, women of color experienced disproportionately violent forms of harassment in public, especially from white men. For instance, the *Chicago Defender* reported in 1924 that a white “subway masher” had accosted a young black woman, Estelle Richardson, in the New York City subway. He approached her and when she “resented his attentions” he responded with a threat of violence, warning her, “If you were in Georgia, I would have you strung up.” The masher, John Elliot, then tried to strike Richardson and was finally arrested when the two disembarked. While the *Defender* reported the incident under the headline, “Bold Flirt is Taken to Jail,” Elliot’s clear reference to lynching and his attempted assault constituted a very different kind of “flirtation” than, for example, the man who stopped his car in the road and asked *A Working Girl* to take a ride with him.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, this dissertation argues that men’s harassment of women in public places had a material impact on women’s ability to navigate public space freely. Men’s harassment contributed to women’s discomfort and fear of sexual violence in public space and thus curtailed women’s freedom of mobility. Women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries described how uncomfortable interactions with men forced them to adjust their routes through the city, choose different public transportation options, or simply stay indoors. The following chapters are full of stories from women like Jaime and *A Working Girl*, women who felt compelled to cross the street to avoid groups of men, disembark from train cars to escape men who stared at them, or steer clear of construction sites or certain street corners or parks where they had experienced harassment before.

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<sup>8</sup> “Bold Flirt Is Taken to Jail,” *Chicago Defender*, April 12, 1924.

Once women experienced harassment on a particular street, subway line, or at a particular time of day, that knowledge affected their future decisions about whether to take that route or go out at that time of day again.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, though, both the experience of harassment and the fear of harassment (whether or not harassment actually occurred) pushed women to find creative ways to navigate urban space to avoid such behaviors. Newspaper and magazine articles, films, novels, songs, police reports, and stories from friends and family that depicted or discussed street harassment contributed to women's sense of safety or danger in public space. Women learned to navigate public space with the threat of harassment, or worse, constantly at the back of their minds, and they made decisions to protect themselves accordingly.

In examining the intersections of sexual harassment and urban space, I build on interdisciplinary feminist scholarship to demonstrate that sexual harassment is not just a problem of egregious acts like rape but also of a steady stream of more typical intrusive behaviors like ogling, catcalling, and groping. These behaviors had a discernable impact on women's mobility in twentieth-century cities. My dissertation also reveals the importance of considering how idealized masculinities change and adapt in the face of opposition. For instance, in the early 1900s, women's clubs and urban reformers succeeded in temporarily cracking down on street harassment, particularly from white men. In the 1930s and 1940s, an anti-feminist backlash undermined this work in the form of popular songs, films, and wartime propaganda that depicted street harassment as a normal—even desirable—expression of heterosexual white masculinity. My work thus opens up new opportunities to historicize the oft-used concept of patriarchy, suggesting that a focus on the normalization of

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<sup>9</sup> LaKisha Simmons charts a phenomenon like this in her work on the everyday lives of black girls in Jim Crow New Orleans. She argues that black children who moved through the streets of New Orleans had to learn unwritten rules of comportment and behavior that changed depending on their perceived social “place” in each space of the city. In part, they learned these rules based on their past experiences. “For black girls,” she writes, “this influenced things as mundane and yet as significant as their movement through the city and their bodily comportment.” LaKisha Michelle Simmons, *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 28.

certain behaviors (often but not always violent) can reveal how white supremacist hetero-patriarchy is sustained across time.

## **An Urban Story**

“Watching the Girls Go By” is a multi-pronged story, situated in histories of urban space; in gender and women’s history; and in the history of rape and sexual violence, which includes both the history of women’s experiences of and resistance to sexual violence and the history of whites using the threat of sexual violence as a tool of white supremacy against people of color, especially Black men. The following chapters encapsulate over 130 years of United States history and covers a broad geographical region. The reasons for these parameters derive from the archival research itself. I found evidence of street harassment in every decade of the twentieth century and most of the nineteenth, and in rural areas, urban areas, and everything in between, all across the country.

While street harassment can exist anywhere the story of men’s intrusive behaviors in public space is first and foremost an urban story. Is it the demographic and material changes that came with urbanization—increased anonymity, mixing of genders, races, and classes in public space, and the development of mass public transit—that made it possible for men to harass women they did not know in public space in significant numbers. The first third of the dissertation, then, is centered in the urban North, where large U.S. cities emerged in the nineteenth century and grew at precipitous rates at the turn of the twentieth century. The narrative takes detours to the South, primarily to juxtapose the racial politics of men’s stranger intrusions in Northern cities with the Jim Crow South. For two reasons, the rest of the dissertation tells a more national story. Firstly, more and more Americans lived in cities as the twentieth century progressed, thus the environments and demographics that made intrusions between strangers especially likely spread across the country.

More Americans lived in rural than urban areas until 1920, when the census revealed urban residents had surpassed rural for the first time. By 1960, more than two-thirds of Americans lived in cities.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, while the first two chapters of my dissertation rely heavily on archives in major Northern cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit, the subsequent chapters draw on sources from a much broader range of places, especially newer urban centers in the West, Midwest, and South. Secondly, for later periods when men's stranger intrusions were increasingly normalized, specific incidents of intrusions become much harder to find in the archive. When a behavior like ogling is considered normal or trivial, there is little incentive to document it. Thus the kinds of anti-harassment diatribes that were a staple of the Progressive Era are relatively absent in the 1930s through the 1960s. Instead, a national discourse that poked fun at stranger intrusions emerged: newspapers, magazines, films, and popular music, represented girl-watching, catcalling, wolf-whistling, and other forms of street harassment in a more abstract sense, as the butt of jokes or as humorous commentary on the battle of the sexes. A magazine article about girl-watching in Los Angeles might ruminate at length about how men could enjoy watching women in bikinis on the beach but never describe a specific incident of harassment. Feminist writers in the 1970s made concerted efforts to describe their experiences of street harassment in detail, but their analyses and theorizations of street harassment were not generally tied to specific locales but instead posited a national problem of street harassment that required a widespread, coalitional response.

Temporal breadth allows me to chart how reformers, activists, legislators, cultural producers, and individual men and women alternately protested men's intrusive behaviors as a form of violence against women and embraced those same behaviors as signs of playful heterosexuality. My narrative begins in the mid-1800s, when sexual harassment in public space emerged with urbanization, details

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census of Population and Housing, *Population and Housing Unit Counts*, CPH-2-1, United States Summary U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2012, <http://census.gov/prod/cen2010/cph-2-1.pdf>.

the normalization of such harassment in the mid-twentieth century, and considers two key moments of resistance to street harassment, once at the turn of the twentieth century and again in the 1970s. Through an analysis of newspaper reports, women's writings, anti-harassment legislation, policy proposals, ethnographic interviews, and cultural products, I chart women's experiences of sexual harassment in public space, how popular discourse made sense of the phenomenon, and how city officials, law enforcement, social reformers, and women themselves responded to such harassment.

"Watching the Girls Go By" begins with the growth of America's early cities. The nineteenth century saw cities like New York, Philadelphia, and later western cities like Chicago, filling with a diverse populace. As women became increasingly visible on city streets, and especially as "women's miles" and shopping districts welcomed middle-class and affluent white women to city centers, their presence sparked anxieties about the dangers of mixing sexes, classes, and races. As strangers encountered one another on busy streets, brushing past each other on the sidewalk and pressing up against each other on streetcars, there was an increasing need to delineate the rules of engagement and interaction, particularly between people embodying different racial, class, or gender categories.<sup>11</sup> These physical and demographic changes in American cities set the stage for men to ogle, accost, and catcall women they did not know in public space. Urbanization made it possible for strangers to interact with one another anonymously: on the one hand, this meant many Americans could remake themselves and try on new identities, join new urban communities, and explore the boundaries of social morés, but such anonymity also made it possible for men to harass women with little fear of being recognized, caught, and reprimanded. Defining who had the right to look at whom was a key

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Marilyn Wood Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990); Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Emily Remus, *A Shoppers' Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

point of contention in this urban world of strangers. In the nineteenth century, one's look—meaning both one's appearance and the direction one directed one's eyes—was believed to reveal one's true identity and intentions in public places. Etiquette manuals directed respectable, middle-class Americans to avoid staring at strangers and to avoid ostentatious clothing or comportment that encouraged notice from others. Gentlemen were warned of the power of their gaze to embarrass, expose, or harm others and were encouraged to contain their gaze like they did their emotions.<sup>12</sup> Respectable, middle-class, white women were encouraged to do everything in their power to avoid the searching gaze of strangers, donning inconspicuous clothing, veils that shielded their eyes, and walking with male escorts whenever possible. Women were expected to ignore all molestation and ogling and certainly never return a gaze. To look back would be to imply that the woman was open to the world, ready to engage with it. The exception that proved the rule was the urban prostitute, who was believed to advertise herself by her flamboyant dress and bold, inviting stare.<sup>13</sup>

The place of women in public space began to change at the turn of the twentieth century with the shift to industrial capitalism and consumer culture. Women were a crucial part of this transformation as they were encouraged to incorporate consumer goods into their domestic routines and shopping into their identities as homemakers.<sup>14</sup> While in the mid-1800s, city guides and social reformers had warned middle-class women against stopping to look in shop windows lest they tempt a passing rake, by the end of the nineteenth century they encouraged women to meander down urban shopping thoroughfares, admiring shop windows and fulfilling their new duties as consumers.<sup>15</sup> As women gazed at consumer goods, men on “club row” in New York City watched

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<sup>12</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*; Garland-Thomson, *Staring*.

<sup>14</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson also astutely points out that capitalism's orientation towards consumerism is deeply tied to modes of looking for “looking is at the heart” of consumption. Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 131; Emily A. Remus, “Tippling Ladies and the Making of Consumer Culture: Gender and Public Space in Fin-de-Siècle Chicago,” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 3 (December 1, 2014): 751–77.

the “passing parade” of women shoppers returning home along Fifth Avenue with their wares.<sup>16</sup>

Many women embraced their roles as urban consumers, and increasingly as workers, and their responses to uninvited looks, remarks, and other forms of harassment from men also shifted.

Instead of averting their eyes and hoping for the best, women began to fight—and look—back. As early as the 1880s, city papers in places like Detroit, Atlanta, and Los Angeles denounced the strange men, mostly, who approached women in public. They were called “mashers.”<sup>17</sup> Urban reformers and city officials began to see the masher’s public harassment as a civic problem and women were increasingly involved in finding solutions with solutions either through women’s clubs or by employing self-defense techniques on the streets. Women’s groups offered self-defense classes and both the white and Black press encouraged women to respond to mashers with clever retorts or with withering returned stares. Newspapers gleefully recounted stories of women who defended themselves, punching mashers in the face or sticking them with hatpins.<sup>18</sup> Though some of accounts of mashing smacked of the chivalric paternalism of the earlier nineteenth century, women in the

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<sup>16</sup> Remus, *A Shopper’s Paradise*; Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 79.

<sup>17</sup> “Delusions,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 30, 1882; “A Brave Act,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 17, 1883; “A ‘Masher’ Mashed,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 23, 1883; “Fable of the Masher,” *Daily Enterprise* (Livingston, MI), September 28, 1883; “Cambria Chatterings,” *Saline County (KS) Journal*, July 31, 1884; “Home and Abroad,” *State Rights Democrat* (Albany, OR), January 23, 1885; Countess Annie de Montaigu, “Mashers: Gamblers, Cigarette-Smokers and Waiters,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1889; “The City in Brief,” *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago), November 13, 1889.

<sup>18</sup> “Death Penalty for Mashing,” *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 17, 1903; “Two Little Fists Subdue Masher: Plucky Girl Resents Attentions Forced upon Her,” *Morning Oregonian*, October 16, 1908; “50 Young Women Punish a Masher,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 7, 1910; “Girl Fights a Masher,” *Day Book*, June 25, 1912; Ethel Intrapodi, “Smashing Cures Mashing—Get Busy, Girls!” *Day Book*, August 26, 1912; “Miss Nellie Hight,” *Day Book*, December 3, 1912; “An Atlanta Girl Thrashes Masher,” *Augusta Chronicle*, November 22, 1913; “Judge Both Praises and Fines the Lady,” *Macon Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 1913; Nixola Greeley-Smith, “Ravenous Police Dogs Protect New York Girls from Mashers,” *Day Book*, January 19, 1914; “Girls Punish Masher,” *Day Book*, November 23, 1914; “Detroit Club Women to Hear of Mashing Evil and How to Curb Ogling Sidewalk Youths,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 7, 1914; S.S.M., “Mashing a Masher,” *Day Book*, August 9, 1915; Esther Andrews, “Smash the Masher! Cry Gotham Women in Crusade to Rid Streets of Flirts,” *Day Book*, September 8, 1916; “Another Masher Mashed,” *Day Book*, September 11, 1916; Nixola Greeley-Smith, “Flirtation Squad of Girl Detectives Will Clear All the Peacock Alleys of the Hotel Mashers of Both Sexes,” *The Evening World*, January 2, 1917; “Avenue Flirt Is Fleet on Feet; Girls Fleeter,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 6, 1922; “Flirt Gets Knife in Breast,” *Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1924; “Punch in the Nose Isn’t All This Sheik Got,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 3, 1924; “It’s Dangerous to Flirt in a Movie Theater,” *Chicago Defender*, January 30, 1926; “Stenographer Battles White Flirt on Car,” *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1928.

Progressive Era were increasingly seen as autonomous and capable urban citizens who had the ability to advocate for and protect themselves, up to a point.

The so-called anti-masher crusades had posed a challenge to white men's dominance in urban space, but the 1930s and 1940s saw a retrenchment of white men's prerogative to accost women in public places. With the advent of women's suffrage and growing evidence that single women could live happily and safely in the city, the idea that women needed protection from something as harmless as a look or a flirtatious remark became a source of amusement in public discourse. In the 1930s and 1940s, middle-class Americans increasingly participated in heterosocial activities, engaged in sexual activity earlier in life and outside of marriage, and saw women as more autonomous in heterosexual relationships than they had in the Progressive Era. Young Americans, and the culture they consumed, often depicted flirtations between strangers as amusing and even desirable. During the Second World War, wartime jobs enticed more diverse populations and single youth to American cities, offering more opportunities for young women and men to find willing dates and sexual partners. Shifting urban demographics, however, also contributed to a string of race riots and urban uprisings, several of which began because of rumors of Black men raping white women. Thus, as it became acceptable for white men and women to socialize and engage in sexual relationships like never before, racial tensions between Black and white Americans revealed the limitations of shifting sexual mores. Popular culture, psychology, and even government bodies increasingly cast white men's ogles, catcalls, and flirtations as sign of healthy male (hetero)sexuality, but stereotypes of Black hypersexuality ensured that Black men who ogled, catcalled, or flirted with white women were cast as sexual predators.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 239-242; Amanda H. Littauer, *Bad Girls: Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion before the Sixties* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

On wartime sexual culture, see Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Littauer, *Bad Girls*.

The murder of Emmett Till and the conviction of a North Carolina farmer, Mack Ingram, on the charge of “eye rape” in 1955 and 1951, respectively, demonstrated Black men continued to face far harsher and more violent consequences for behaviors like ogling or wolf-whistling even as such behaviors became the hallmark of an emerging post-war middle-class white masculinity. After the Second World War, advertising, films, men’s magazines, and popular culture more generally began to incorporate looking into new paradigms of masculinity that emphasized gentility and consumerism.<sup>20</sup> Cultural products like *Playboy* and James Bond novels and films touted a new style of “domesticated bachelor” who expressed his masculinity through consumption, both of consumer products—tasteful liquor, home furnishings, clothing—and of the female form.<sup>21</sup> Advertising and films also increasingly relied on sexualized female models to sell products and draw in audiences, creating a post-war culture steeped in the objectification of women.<sup>22</sup> This ethos also influenced the way Americans thought about intrusive behaviors from men in public places. With the 1954 publication of *The Girl Watcher’s Guide*, a slew humorous human-interest articles, suggestive ad campaigns, and even competing Girl Watching Societies constructed a masculine cultural trope that revolved around the tasteful ogling of women in public places. *The Girl Watcher’s Guide*, and the plethora of human-interest pieces it inspired, encouraged girl watchers to enjoy the female form as a part of the urban experience. Like the respectable *flâneur* who came before him, the girl watcher

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On wartime race riots, particularly the Detroit Riot of 1943, see Walter Francis White and Thurgood Marshall, *What Caused the Detroit Riot?: An Analysis* (New York, NY: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1943), <http://archive.org/details/whatcauseddetroit00whit>; Janet L. Langlois, “The Belle Isle Bridge Incident: Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 380 (1983): 183–99; Marilyn S. Johnson, “Gender, Race, and Rumours: Re-Examining the 1943 Race Riots,” *Gender & History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 252–77; Victoria W. Wolcott, “Gendered Perspectives on Detroit History,” *Michigan Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (2001): 75–91; J Shantz, “‘They Think Their Fannies Are as Good as Ours’: The 1943 Detroit Riot,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 40, no. 2 (2007): 75–92.

<sup>20</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 302.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57–68; Annette Kuhn, *Women’s Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (New York: Verso, 1994); Elspeth H. Brown, *Work!: A Queer History of Modeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

took visual possession of the city and especially of the women who adorned and beautified it, taking care not to be too obvious with his looks or to attract attention to himself with vulgar displays of emotion. Girl watchers were encouraged to observe “total strangers” and to seek out women in their natural “habitats.”<sup>23</sup> The humor that permeated discussions of the girl watcher served to trivialize behaviors like ogling and catcalling. Girl watchers insisted that what they did was harmless and even flattering, a titillating joke that highlighted the ongoing battle of the sexes.

This dissertation ends with the 1970s and early 1980s when feminist activists and publications turned to combatting uninvited looking in the city and theorized new ways of tackling this persistent urban problem. Emerging feminist discourse positioned everyday harassment and uninvited looking in the context of widespread societal misogyny. Feminist publications like *Ms* and *Liberation* published pieces on the everyday sexism women experienced on city streets, sparking impassioned letters to the editor with similar stories of being followed, ogled, and bothered on the street.<sup>24</sup> By the 1980s, feminists called these behaviors “street hassling,” “street harassment,” or “verbal rape,” and feminist scholars, activists, and journalists regularly published pieces on this phenomenon and offered tips to avoid uninvited attention.<sup>25</sup> However, in a departure from earlier

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<sup>23</sup> Donald J. Sauters, *The Girl Watcher's Guide* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros, 1954), 15; “‘The Girl Watcher's Guide’: Highly Popular Pastime Demands a Technique Which Is Attained Only Thru Long Practice,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 16, 1955.

<sup>24</sup> Gwenda Linda Blair, “Standing on the Corner...,” *Liberation* 18, no. 9 (1974): 6–8; Claude Enjeu and Joana Save, “The City: Off-Limits to Women,” *Liberation* 18, no. 9 (1974): 9–13; Ingrid Bengis, “On Getting Angry,” *Ms*, July 1972; Evelyn Beck, letter to the editor, *Ms*, September 1972; Ava Nodelman, letter to the editor, *Ms*, September 1972; Barbara Firger, letter to the editor, *Ms*, October 1972; Andrea Medea and Kathleen Thompson, “How Much Do You Really Know About Rapists?,” *Ms*, July 1974; Letters to *Ms*, 1970–1998, *Ms*. Collection, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, MA; Letters to *Ms*, 1972–1980, *Ms*. Collection, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance, “The Verbal Rapist,” *Majority Report*, October 1971, Box PW-1 and LW-1, Alix Kates Shulman Papers, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, *The New Woman's Survival Catalog* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Elizabeth Dobell, “Self-Defense,” *Seventeen*, April 1977; Claudia Dreifus, “Travel: Tactics for Traveling Alone,” *Ms*, August 1980; Cheryl Benard and Edit Schlaffer, “The Man in the Street: Why He Harasses,” *Ms*, May 1981; Lindsay Van Gelder, “The International Language of Street Hassling,” *Ms*, May 1981; Micaela di Leonardo, “Political Economy of Street Harassment,” *Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women*, Summer 1981; Jewell Parker Rhodes, “When Your Sense of Humor Is Your Best Traveling Companion,” *Ms*, March 1983; Liz Quinn, “Learning to Confront Harassment,” *Off Our Backs*, 1984; “Verbal Abuse on the Street: How to Talk Back,” *Glamour*, February 1984.

efforts to combat intrusive behaviors, 1970s feminists were more conscious of the role of race and class in their analyses of sexism. Women of color feminists, working-class feminists, and anti-racist white feminists debated the meanings of sexual violence with women who lack a racial or class analysis in their understandings of feminism. Some feminists, like Susan Brownmiller, saw sexual violence as primarily an issue of gender oppression, thus collapsing the implications of race and class in how women experienced sexual violence and how men were punished for accusations of sexual violence. Others, like Angela Davis, insisted that no analysis of sexual violence was complete without taking into account the way accusations of sexual violence had disproportionately harmed Black men. Overall, feminists in the 1970s and 1980s worked to redefine intrusive behaviors, arguing that they were neither natural nor trivial, and debated one another about the social forces that produced and perpetuated sexual violence.<sup>26</sup>

These efforts continue today through a variety of feminist activist groups and in feminist academic research. Some activist projects explicitly address street harassment, like the online communities Stop Street Harassment and Hollaback!, while others focus on violence against women more broadly, such as the semi-regular Take Back the Night and SlutWalk marches organized in cities worldwide. The #MeToo movement, which had begun in 2006 with activist Tarana Burke but burst onto the scene with renewed fervor three years into my research for this project, has also tried to address the persistent problem of sexual harassment in women's lives, though mainstream discourses tend to focus on workplace harassment over harassment in public places. At the same time, feminist researchers have continued to interrogate the meaning and effects of street harassment, often termed public harassment or sexual harassment in public in academic writing. Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have primarily studied the impact of harassment on

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<sup>26</sup> D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 310-314; Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 277-281; Catherine O. Jacquet, *The Injustices of Rape: How Activists Responded to Sexual Violence, 1950-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

women's sense of safety or fear in public spaces. These works ask what place street harassment has in women's lives, how the existence of intrusive behaviors might account for the documented discrepancies in men's and women's fear of crime in public places, and why street harassment remains a relatively understudied phenomenon.<sup>27</sup> Legal scholars have also tackled the problem, largely debating what counts as "street harassment," whether the first amendment protects behaviors like catcalling, and the best legal methods for protecting women from harassment in public. This work tends to view street harassment in a similar realm as workplace sexual harassment, linking it to the far larger body of work in that area. Legal scholars also emphasize how men's stranger intrusions curtail women's access to public space and thus their fundamental rights to freedom of mobility.<sup>28</sup> At

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<sup>27</sup> Di Leonardo, "Political Economy of Street Harassment"; Elizabeth Arveda Kissling and Cheri Kramarae, "Stranger Compliments: The Interpretation of Street Remarks," *Women's Studies in Communication* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 75; June Larkin, "Sexual Terrorism on the Street: The Moulding of Young Women into Subordination," in *Sexual Harassment: Contemporary Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Alison M. Thomas and Celia Kitzinger (Bristol, PA: Open University Press, 1997), 115-130; Sheryl Cooke, "Street Remarks: A Cross Cultural Study," *Language Matters* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 171-96; Rhonda Lenton et al., "Sexual Harassment in Public Places: Experiences of Canadian Women," *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 36, no. 4 (November 1999): 517-40; Sally J. Scholz, "Catcalls and Military Strategy," in *Peacemaking: Lessons from the Past, Visions for the Future*, ed. Sally J. Scholz and Judith Presler (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 247-58; Kimberly Fairchild and Laurie A. Rudman, "Everyday Stranger Harassment and Women's Objectification," *Social Justice Research* 21, no. 3 (September 2008): 338-57; Margaret Crouch, "Sexual Harassment in Public Places," *Social Philosophy Today* 25 (2009): 137-48; Fiona Elsgray, "You Need to Find a Version of the World You Can Be In: Experiencing the Continuum of Men's Intrusive Practices," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (April 1, 2014): 509-21; Laura S. Logan, "Street Harassment: Current and Promising Avenues for Researchers and Activists," *Sociology Compass* 9, no. 3 (March 1, 2015): 196-211; Benjamin Bailey, "Greetings and Compliments or Street Harassment? Competing Evaluations of Street Remarks in a Recorded Collection," *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 4 (July 1, 2017): 353-73; Ashley Colleen Feely Hutson and Julie Christine Krueger, "The Harasser's Toolbox: Investigating the Role of Mobility in Street Harassment," *Violence Against Women*, October 15, 2018, 1-25; Kate Salmon, "'Well Where's the Harm?': An in-Depth Exploration of Intergenerational Women's Perspectives of Stranger Harassment in Public Space," *Westminster Sociology Anthology: A Collection of Innovative and Outstanding Dissertation Work*, 2019, 3-32; Joyce Baptist and Katelyn Coburn, "Harassment in Public Spaces: The Intrusion on Personal Space," *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 31, no. 2-3 (July 3, 2019): 114-28; Maria DelGreco and John Christensen, "Effects of Street Harassment on Anxiety, Depression, and Sleep Quality of College Women," *Sex Roles*, July 4, 2019; Mervyn Horgan, "Urban Interaction Ritual: Strangership, Civil Inattention and Everyday Incivilities in Public Space," December 6, 2019; Alba Moya-Garófano et al., "Social Perception of Women According to Their Reactions to a Stranger Harassment Situation (Piropo)," *Sex Roles*, December 14, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Grant Bowman, "Street Harassment and the Informal Ghettoization of Women," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 3 (January 1993): 517-80; Deirdre Davis, "Harm That Has No Name: Street Harassment, Embodiment, and African American Women," *UCLA Women's Law Journal* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 133-178; Deborah M. Thompson, "Woman in the Street: Reclaiming the Public Space from Sexual Harassment," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 6, no. 2 (1994): 313-348; Deborah Tuerkheimer, "Street Harassment as Sexual Subordination: The Phenomenology of Gender-Specific Harm," *Wisconsin Women's Law Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 167-206; Laura Beth Nielsen, "Situating Legal Consciousness: Experiences and Attitudes of Ordinary Citizens about Law and Street Harassment," *Law & Society Review* 34, no. 4 (2000): 1055-1090; Bunkosol Chhun, "Catcalls: Protected Speech or Fighting Words?," *Thomas Jefferson Law Review* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 273-95; Bianca Fileborn and F. Vera-Gray, "'I Want to Be Able to Walk the Street Without Fear': Transforming Justice for Street Harassment," *Feminist Legal Studies* (July 5, 2017): 1-25.

times, research and activism have explicitly converged, for instance in the work of the organization Stop Street Harassment, which worked with the University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health to conduct a study on the prevalence and impact of street harassment on women's and men's lives in 2019.<sup>29</sup>

In each of these moments in American history, women's groups, popular press, law enforcement, and government bodies debated definitions and meanings of intrusive behaviors like ogling, catcalling, or groping. These definitions were contested and remade over and over, while the experience of street harassment itself remained a ubiquitous part of urban life for many women. This dissertation will chart these turning points, battles, and retrenchments over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## **From Street Harassment to Men's Stranger Intrusions**

This is a study of the phenomenon known colloquially today as street harassment. The term "street harassment" emerged in the 1970s amongst feminist activists and researchers who tried to identify and name one of the forms of everyday sexism that plagued them.<sup>30</sup> "Street harassment" beat out "street hassling," "street compliment," "verbal rape," and "street comments" to become, by the mid-1980s, the most widely used term to describe the phenomenon of men bothering women they do not know in public places.<sup>31</sup> In one of the earliest attempts to explicitly theorize street

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<sup>29</sup> University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health and Stop Street Harassment, "Measuring #MeToo: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault," April 2019.

<sup>30</sup> The earliest use of the term I've found is from a New York feminist newsletter published in 1971. "Street Harassment Statement," *Women's Health and Abortion Project Newsletter*, August 1971, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University.

<sup>31</sup> For examples of the terminology that did not catch on, see Blair, "Standing on the Corner..." 6-8; Jim Sanderson, "Liberated Male: Confronting Street Hassling," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1980; Van Gelder, "The International Language of Street Hassling"; Veronica Geng, "Scorn Not the Street Compliment," in *The Cosmo Girl's Guide to The New Etiquette* (Hollywood, CA: Wilshire Book Company, 1979), 75-79; "The Verbal Rapist"; I. Rajeswary, "Anti-Rape Week Will Target Verbal Abuse," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1985, Box 5, Folder 1, Nkenge Touré Papers, Sophia Smith

harassment for a feminist audience, anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo offered the following definition in 1981: “Street harassment occurs when one or more strange men accost one or more women whom they perceive as heterosexual in a public place which is not the woman’s/women’s worksite. Through looks, words, or gestures the man asserts his right to intrude on the woman’s attention, defining her as a sexual object, and forcing her to interact with him.”<sup>32</sup> This definition incorrectly suggests that street harassment only occurs when a man perceives a woman as heterosexual, but it is otherwise a concise and clear definition that could be applied to many of the iterations of the phenomenon that fill the pages of this dissertation.

However, while di Leonardo’s definition is a helpful way to think about the phenomenon, the term “street harassment” itself is anachronistic and imperfect for a historian’s work. Firstly, the proximity of “street harassment” to the term “sexual harassment” speaks to the ways feminists theorized the phenomenon in the late 1970s and 1980s as a variant of workplace sexual harassment that took place on the street. Many studies of street harassment today still treat the phenomenon as adjacent to workplace sexual harassment and such a framing influences research questions and methodologies. However, the historical actors in this dissertation defined the phenomenon in a variety of ways over time. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, when women like *A Working Girl* endured ogling, accosting, and insults from mashers, law enforcement and city officials tended to view mashers’ behaviors as a form of public disorderly conduct. Cities that passed municipal ordinances designed to crack down on “mashing” often modified existing disorderly conduct and vagrancy ordinances or housed anti-mashing ordinances under the disturbance of the peace sections of the municipal code. Thus using an anachronistic term like “street harassment” risks casting the problem of uninvited attention from strange men in ways that would not have been

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Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA; Karen De Witt, “The ‘Hey, Honey!’ Hassle: Intrusive Street Comments on the Increase,” *Washington Post*, October 17, 1977.

<sup>32</sup> di Leonardo, “Political Economy of Street Harassment,” 51-52.

familiar to the police officers who arrested mashers or the women who were subjected to their uninvited advances at the turn of the twentieth century. Secondly, the term “street harassment” presupposes both a location for the action and the target’s perception of the action. My historical subjects experienced uncomfortable leers and muttered lewd comments in all sorts of public and semi-public places beyond the street. Movie theaters and public transit proved especially troublesome in the early 1900s, while beaches were the site of much girl-watching in places like Los Angeles and Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, not all women experienced ogling or catcalls as “harassment” or as negative or unwanted. In the mid-1940s, a Detroit woman remarked, “If men didn’t ogle me, I’d think I was slipping,” while another from Chicago explained, “It’s flattering to have a man whistle because I regard it as nothing more than a friendly gesture.”<sup>33</sup> If street harassment is neither always on the street nor always perceived as harassment, then other terminology would be better suited to understanding the phenomenon and to finding it in a historical archive that in any case rarely uses the term “street harassment.”

Instead, I have chosen terminology that emphasizes the intrusiveness of the behaviors known as street harassment today. I have found the work of Fiona Vera-Grey especially instructive here. In her 2017 study of street harassment, Vera-Gray interviewed fifty women about their experiences of uncomfortable looks, uninvited touching, insulting remarks, through to instances of following and attempted rape from unknown men. Vera-Gray calls these behaviors “men’s stranger intrusions” or “men’s intrusive practices,” which she defines as “deliberate act of putting oneself into a place or situation where one is uninvited, with disruptive effect.”<sup>34</sup> Shifting from the language of “street harassment” to “men’s stranger intrusions” has several key benefits: it allows for the

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<sup>33</sup> “A ‘Fine’ Figure Means Just That to Ogling Detroit Males,” *The Washington Post*, July 24, 1946; Maryon Zylstra, “Inquiring Camera Girl,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1945.

<sup>34</sup> Fiona Vera-Gray, *Men’s Intrusion, Women’s Embodiment: A Critical Analysis of Street Harassment* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11.

expansion of the terrain of action to include public places beyond the street; it eschews the legal connotations of the word “harassment” and forecloses any unhelpful attempts to categorize what kinds of actions—catcalls, whistling, following, etc.—“count” as harassment; and it foregrounds the relationship between the perpetrator and the target and the context within which the action takes place. Of course, as Vera-Gray herself notes, it is not an especially smooth transition from “street harassment” to “men’s stranger intrusions on women in public space.”<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, focusing on intrusiveness remedies the problems with the anachronistic term “street harassment.” When I went in search of the behaviors I wanted to document, it was helpful to keep Vera-Gray’s definition in the back of my mind. When I found an interesting source, I could then evaluate if the incident I found matched the precise criteria of intrusive behaviors aimed at a stranger in a public space. Thus, throughout this dissertation I will use the terminology of stranger intrusions, intrusive behaviors, and intrusive practices to identify the behaviors that are the highlight of the study. When quoting from primary sources or elaborating on historical discourses, I will, of course, rely on the terminology of the time.

## Scholarly Interventions

“Watching the Girls Go By” uses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework to understand how everyday experiences of ogling or catcalling have limited women’s ability to navigate public space despite mainstream discourses that trivialized men’s intrusive behaviors as normal or benign. While present-day debates about sexual harassment in the popular media tend to focus on violent, serial offenses, feminist scholars of sexual harassment have shown that such acts are rare in comparison to behaviors like sexual jokes, put-downs, incivility, and the more typical behaviors

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<sup>35</sup> Vera-Gray, *Men’s Intrusion, Women’s Embodiment*, 12.

associated with men's stranger intrusions, such as catcalling.<sup>36</sup> Such behaviors increase women's feelings of fear in public space because they derive power from the threat of further physical and sexual violence.<sup>37</sup> Cultural messages about women's sexual and physical vulnerability in public space, coupled with a woman's own past experience of violent attacks or even the prevalence of crime reporting in a particular area, can create a feeling that seemingly benign forms of harassment, such as a leer or a catcall, have the potential to turn violent at any moment.<sup>38</sup> As a result, women wishing to avoid sexual harassment in public have often felt compelled to constrain or modify their own movement through urban space.<sup>39</sup> For example, in the 1910s, Chicago working women complained about "nervy flirts" whose leering and groping forced them off streetcars mid-commute; while in the 1970s, readers of *Ms* magazine described how they altered their routes through the city to avoid catcalls.<sup>40</sup> Thus, in explicating the historical roots of men's stranger intrusion, this dissertation demonstrates how quieter, typical forms of harassment have impinged on women's ability to move freely through public space for decades.

In examining the intersections of gender history, urban history, and feminist theories of sexual harassment, this dissertation speaks to historical claims about how women's presence in American cities changed conceptions of gender and sexuality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historians of the antebellum United States have shown how the growth of new cities provided many Americans with increased opportunities for anonymity and social fluidity.<sup>41</sup> Monied,

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<sup>36</sup> Emily A. Leskinen, Lilia M. Cortina, and Dana B. Kabat, "Gender Harassment: Broadening Our Understanding of Sex-Based Harassment at Work," *Law and Human Behavior* 35, no. 1 (2011): 25–39; National Academies of Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering, *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Logan, "Street Harassment," 196–211; Vera-Gray, *Men's Intrusion, Women's Embodiment*.

<sup>38</sup> Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Bowman, "Street Harassment."

<sup>40</sup> "Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 30, 1916; Letter to *Ms* magazine, October 22, 1977, Folder 135, Carton 5, Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Letter to *Ms* magazine, April 16, 1981, Folder 8, Carton 10, Letters to *Ms.*, 1970-1998, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. See also chapter two and the epilogue.

<sup>41</sup> Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*.

able-bodied white women were among those who exercised greater physical and social mobility as they frequented urban leisure spots and department stores.<sup>42</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, an influx of single working women into Northern cities further contributed to a loosening of sexual mores and gender roles, especially for white women. They joined the workforce, demanded expanded political rights, and enjoyed more opportunities for heterosocializing away from their families.<sup>43</sup> My research demonstrates, however, that urbanization was a double-edged sword when it came to gender equality and sexual liberalism. The same anonymity and social fluidity that made the city an ideal place to challenge existing gender roles and experiment with new sexual subjectivities also allowed white male strangers to harass women in public space with little fear of being recognized or reprimanded. My work suggests new avenues for research that would consider how urbanization both gave women unprecedented opportunities to exercise personal, political, and sexual autonomy, but also made possible the intrusive behaviors that limited women's ability to fully exercise their newfound freedoms.

My dissertation augments the few existing historical treatments of sexual harassment in public. Historians Estelle Freedman, Wendy Rouse, and Emily Remus have studied Progressive-Era mashing in the context of legal definitions of rape, the self-defense movement, and women consumers in Chicago, respectively.<sup>44</sup> These works have identified men's intrusive behaviors as an intriguing phenomenon but have examined them to aid other historical arguments rather than

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<sup>42</sup> Stansell, *City of Women*; Ryan, *Women in Public*; David Scobey, "Nymphs and Satyrs: Sex and the Bourgeois Public Sphere in Victorian New York," *Winterthur Portfolio* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2002): 43–66; Garland-Thomson, *Staring*; Remus, *A Shopper's Paradise*.

<sup>43</sup> Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Freedman, *Redefining Rape*; Wendy L. Rouse, *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Remus, *A Shoppers' Paradise*.

analyzing them on their own terms. My dissertation expands on their work by centering men's stranger intrusions and tracing their prevalence and persistence through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Finally, this dissertation will grapple with the decades-long question taken up by cultural historians about the role of experience in historical narrative and the causal power of discourse. When gender historian Joan Scott published her iconic 1991 essay, "The Evidence of Experience," it set off debate among historians about whether the historian's job is to document the experiences of historical subjects or the "operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced."<sup>45</sup> Scott argues in favor of the latter, suggesting that historians must work to denaturalize identity categories and show how difference is created, reinforced, and normalized through discourse. In one of her more provocative passages, she suggests, "the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation."<sup>46</sup> Thus, an overemphasis on experience not only obscures the ways in which categories like gender, race, and class are constructed but can actually serve to perpetuate those categories and the social inequality they make possible. This project will build on the work of scholars who have heard Scott's warning but have nevertheless asserted the importance of taking experience seriously as a category of analysis and a necessary part of understanding difference. Historians like Judith Walkowitz, George Chauncey, Nan Enstad have blended analyses of discursive processes and experience to make convincing and

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<sup>45</sup> Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 792. For historiographical treatments of these debates, see James W. Cook, "The Kids Are All Right: On the 'Turning' of Cultural History," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (June 1, 2012): 746–71; James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley, eds., *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 778.

influential arguments about the causal roles of both discourse and experience.<sup>47</sup> Like gender historian Julie Berebitsy, whose study of sexual relationships in the workplace influenced this work, I aim “to connect the stories of actual women and men...to the dominant cultural narratives of their time, paying close attention to how shifting ideologies colored their experiences.”<sup>48</sup>

I argue that material conditions, experience, and discourse are all equally vital parts of the story of men’s intrusive practices in American cities. Firstly, the demographic and material changes that came with nineteenth-century urbanization threw strangers together in public space and created the material conditions that made it feasible for male strangers to interfere with women’s free and unfettered movement through public space. The mashing crisis marks a moment of discursive struggle over the meaning of such intrusions. Women, law enforcement, and national press pinpointed mashing as a problem of urban life. They contested definitions of mashing and argued about the best way to respond. Over time, discursive processes that trivialized and minimized women’s experiences of mashing won out and normalized men’s stranger intrusions as an expected part of city life. This normalization was bolstered through cultural categories like the “girl watcher,” that turned uninvited looking into a whimsical and humorous pastime. Women’s phenomenological experience of men’s stranger intrusions, however, continually butted up against discourse that trivialized those experiences. Their frustrated, confused, or frightened voices occasionally broke through the mainstream discourse that catcalls were compliments and ogling was harmless. With the turn to consciousness raising that came with 1960s and 1970s feminist activism, women’s groups and publications began to articulate what felt to many like a universal female experience of “street harassment.” Their discursive attempts to define and condemn men’s stranger intrusions helped to denaturalize behaviors like uninvited looking and placed them in a context of widespread societal

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<sup>47</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*.

<sup>48</sup> Julie Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office: A History of Gender, Power, and Desire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 20.

misogyny. Women's phenomenological experiences of men's stranger intrusions and their increased access to public discourse made it possible for activists to contest and remake narratives of uninvited looking and posit new methods for combatting it. Like Scott, I believe that a study of discourse is key to understanding the perpetuating of difference and inequality, but my project will also show that lived experience can be a vital source of knowledge that counters and remakes discourse.

## **Methodology**

Whenever I told people about my dissertation project, I was often greeted with the same question: "How exactly do you research street harassment?" The ephemeral nature of men's stranger intrusions presents a unique challenge for any scholar wishing to document its history. Catcalls and leers exist for mere seconds, evaporating into the air as quickly as they appear. I have had to come at research from an oblique angle, searching for references to intrusive behaviors in archival folders marked "Single Women" or "Rape" or "Public Safety." As a result, I draw on a diverse array of primary sources to excavate women's experiences of men's stranger intrusions and to trace the shifting discourses that gave meaning to those experiences. For instance, when law enforcement and city officials saw men's intrusive behaviors as a matter of public safety, newspapers reported on individual incidents and cities passed anti-moshing legislation. I use publications from activists and reformers to identify the range of responses to stranger intrusions, including self-defense training and street safety tips that were widely disseminated throughout the twentieth century. Women's published writings, personal diaries, and interviews help me to understand women's thoughts and feelings about behaviors like ogling or catcalling and how their experiences differed from or mirrored mainstream discourse. Finally, popular cultural products like songs, films, or novels help

me to trace the normalization of men's stranger intrusions until they were seen as a normal, even humorous, part of urban life by the mid-twentieth century.

Because one of the key features of men's stranger intrusions is that they occur between people who do not know one another, I have found it helpful to draw on the work of scholars thinking about interactions between strangers. This is not to say that an acquaintance, friend, or lover cannot ogle, catcall, or touch a woman without her invitation, but this is a fundamentally different interaction, bound up in the personal relationship between two people who know each other. Men's stranger intrusions, on the other hand, demonstrate the widespread cultural presumption that men (and I would argue especially white, middle-class or affluent men) are entitled to watch women, comment on women's presence in public space, or touch women, all without a pre-existing relationship. The work of Erving Goffman has been helpful for understanding the social relationships and rules of social interaction that make men's stranger intrusions possible. Goffman's work is cited liberally throughout the existing literature on street harassment and is a favorite for many studying the performance of identity categories in everyday contexts. Goffman has theorized the forms of interaction that have been socially acceptable and unacceptable in various contexts and between different kinds of people. He argues that people navigating public spaces tend to afford strangers the right to "civil inattention," or the right to be unobserved and unmolested in public.<sup>49</sup> Ogling and staring, for instance, are considered vulgar and constitute a breaking of social civility reserved for so-called "open persons," those whom it is socially acceptable to observe, speak to, or otherwise approach at any point. An open person may be an adult with a child or a puppy, whom many would feel comfortable approaching, or an open person may be someone whom society has marked as unworthy of respect, such as people with disabilities, people considered ugly or fat

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<sup>49</sup> Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 83.

according to cultural norms, or anyone presenting to the world in a non-normative way.<sup>50</sup> In her study on street harassment in 1990s Indianapolis, Carol Brooks Gardner has argued that women are often “open persons,” especially when navigating the city alone. Their solo presence in public marks them as someone who may be approached, called to, or stared at without significant social repercussions.<sup>51</sup> If, as feminist theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggests, “the freedom to be inconspicuous” is “one of the major liberties accorded to the ordinary,” then women in public are extraordinary presences in public space.<sup>52</sup>

However, perhaps the most influential theoretical framework for this project has been the feminist theory that sexual harassment exists along a continuum of sexual violence. Sociologist Liz Kelly was not the first to write about this theory, but her 1988 book on the subject has been indispensable for thinking about the way sexual violence is not just made up of violent, aberrant behaviors like rape. Kelly argues that women do not experience sexual violence in the hierarchized, clear cut way that it is often described in academic research or the legal code. Rather, women regularly experience behaviors seen as “typical”—ogling, flashing, obscene remarks—as harmful both for their own sake and because they serve as a warning of potential danger ahead. As Kelly writes of sexual harassment, “It is important to remember that although further violence may not be intended women cannot know this until after the event.”<sup>53</sup> A lascivious leer may not devolve into physical violence, but cultural messages, personal experience, and even the prevalence of crime reporting in a particular area can contribute to a feeling that such “typical” behaviors could quickly escalate to something far more “serious.” As a result, Kelly shows that women often feel they must be constantly vigilant and aware of their surroundings.

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<sup>50</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

<sup>51</sup> Carol Brooks Gardner, *Passing by: Gender and Public Harassment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 93.

<sup>52</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, 100.

This blurring of forms of harassment, which causes a behaviors like ogling to be experienced as a harbinger of physical violence, existed long before Kelly theorized the continuum of sexual violence. In the nineteenth century, women were expected to guard against the male gaze for its own sake but also because oglers were potential (if not actual) rapists. As historian John F. Kasson writes, “When middle-class women left the confines of their home to venture out into public, they entered a realm in which they felt—or were expected to feel—particularly vulnerable. From an impertinent glance, an unwelcome compliment, the scale of improprieties rose through a series of gradations to the ultimate violation of rape.”<sup>54</sup> Occasionally, this frightening escalation appears to have played out in reality. When Richard Ivins murdered Bessie Hollister on the streets of Chicago in 1916, coverage of the incident depicted Ivins as a meandering stranger who took the opportunity to accost an unescorted woman and then murdered her when she resisted his advances.<sup>55</sup> Reports explicitly linked Hollister’s murder with the mashing crisis and called on law enforcement to “arrest ‘mashers’ and young men loitering at street corners” so that Chicago women might feel safe in public again.<sup>56</sup> These examples, where a leering look or a sexual remark might be precursors to rape or murder, demonstrates Fiona Vera-Gray’s argument that “quieter forms of intrusion...rely on the possibilities and realities of the louder, criminal forms, to have the particular impact they do.”<sup>57</sup> Men’s stranger intrusions derive power from and reinforce larger societal messages about women’s sexual and physical vulnerability in public space.

Intrusive behaviors are therefore a mode of intimidation, one that reminds the target that her presence in public space is unnatural and worthy of note. Feminist philosopher Sally Scholz has provocatively described street harassment as “part of the strategy of the war within patriarchy.” A

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<sup>54</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 128.

<sup>55</sup> “Youth Strangles Society Woman to Death with Wire,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, January 13, 1906; Emily Remus, *A Shopper’s Paradise*, 180-181.

<sup>56</sup> “Terror Due to Murders,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1906.

<sup>57</sup> Vera-Gray, *Men’s Intrusion, Women’s Embodiment*, 22.

catcall, for instance, serves to dehumanize the target, to fragment her and reduce her to body parts (for instance, a “nice piece of ass”), and to justify future violence against her. The effect on the target, Scholz demonstrates, is immediate and physical. A catcall forces the object of harassment to become suddenly conscious of her body in a visceral way. She becomes aware of the way it moves and how it may appear to the stranger who has obtrusively observed it.<sup>58</sup> Feminist writer Meredith Tax described this phenomenon in her 1970 piece on everyday sexism. She writes of a group of men who catcalled a woman, they “make her a participant in their fantasies without asking if she is willing. They make her feel ridiculous, or grotesquely sexual, or hideously ugly. Above all, they make her feel like a *thing*.”<sup>59</sup> Repeated instances of this kind of harassment, experienced weekly or daily and compounded over many years, create the feeling of being always watched and always on guard. It becomes difficult for the target to move fluidly and comfortably through space, as she is constantly monitoring her every movement, bracing herself for the next catcall.<sup>60</sup> Feminist researchers Sue Wise and Liz Stanley have described this experience as the “dripping tap” of sexism. In contrast with the “sledgehammer” of sexism—those most egregious and “extreme” forms of sexual violence and discrimination—the dripping tap constitutes an endless stream of small, individual slights, put-downs, or demands on a woman’s time and energy. To extend the metaphor, these small drops can mount up over time until women feel they are drowning in sexist abuse.<sup>61</sup>

The build-up of “dripping tap” sexism, and specifically of men’s stranger intrusions, can have long-lasting affects on women’s ability to practice full bodily autonomy in public space. The experience of a million small intrusions can create the sense that one is always looking out for the next intrusion, always on edge. As cultural geographers Mona Domosh and Joni Seager argue, the

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<sup>58</sup> Scholz, “Catcalls and Military Strategy,” 250-252.

<sup>59</sup> Meredith Tax, *Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Daily Life* (Cambridge, MA: Bread and Roses, 1970), 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>60</sup> Scholz, “Catcalls and Military Strategy.”

<sup>61</sup> Sue Wise and Liz Stanley, *Georgie Porgie: Sexual Harassment in Everyday Life* (New York: Pandora, 1987), 114-117.

perpetual anxiety women face when navigating public space means “that most women live under a self-imposed ‘curfew.’ They avoid walking in certain places, at particular times, and often will not go out alone.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the women who populate the ensuing chapters describe their own attempts at self-imposed curfews, demonstrating that the threat of intrusive behaviors has physical effects even in the absence of the behaviors themselves. For example, in 1929, Chicago resident Miss Rose Sugar of West Division Street hinted at the long-term impact of encountering mashers on the city’s streets. The *Chicago Tribune* asked Sugar and five other Chicagoans if they thought it was “safe for a woman to go about alone in Chicago at night.” “I certainly do not,” was Sugar’s emphatic reply. “It is not altogether safe in the daytime. I seldom am out at night without an escort. But from any woman’s experiences in the daytime on the streets, in street cars, and in fact everywhere, one can imagine what a woman has to put up with after dark.”<sup>63</sup> And imagine I must, for neither Sugar nor the *Tribune* provided further explanation. What kinds of experiences would someone like Sugar have already endured “on the streets, in street cars, and in fact everywhere”? Was she talking about catcalls and wolf-whistles, or mugging and sexual assault? What precautions did women like Sugar take to avoid unpleasant experiences? Did they avoid certain parts of town or notorious street car routes? What impact did the expectation of public harassment—the exhaustion that comes with the constant anticipation of being catcalled or stared at—have on women’s navigation of public space? If the mere threat of harassment was enough to convince Sugar never to go “out at night without an escort,” what implications did this have for women’s full access to urban public space? These are the kinds of questions I have sought to answer with this project.

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<sup>62</sup> Domosh and Seager, *Putting Women in Place*, 100.

<sup>63</sup> “The Inquiring Reporter,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 16, 1929.

## Chapter Outline

The four chapters of this dissertation draw on a diverse array of primary sources to excavate women's experiences of sexual harassment in public and to trace the shifting discourses that gave meaning to those experiences. I devote chapter one to the emergence of "street insults" in nineteenth-century cities, that is, the intrusive looks, remarks, or touching that greeted women who entered new urban spaces. Chapter two details the so-called "mashing crisis" of the Progressive era when women's clubs, law enforcement, and urban reformers tried to crack down on "mashers," predominantly white men who harassed women in the streets of most major American cities. In chapters three and four, I show how white, middle-class discourse normalized behaviors like ogling and catcalling as the purview of white, heterosexual, middle-class men in the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter three focuses on the anti-feminist backlash that depicted catcalling, ogling, and other intrusive behaviors as the natural expressions of virile, white masculinity. Chapter four turns to the mid-century cultural trope of the "girl watcher," a middle-class, white, heterosexual man whose favorite "pastime" was ogling women. The celebration of the girl watcher in 1950s popular discourse contrasted sharply with several high-profile arrests and murders of Black men accused of behaviors like ogling or whistling, further solidifying street harassment as the purview of middle-class white men. In the epilogue, I discuss some of the ways feminist activists, writers, and researchers in the 1970s and 1980s worked to denaturalize intrusive behaviors as "street harassment," and how they debated the meaning and impact of these behaviors on the lives of people of different races, classes, sexualities, and genders. I end with some thoughts on anti-street harassment activism of the last decade and incidents of sexist and racist violence that colored the writing of this dissertation.

These chapters will build to show how culture and public discourse have been instrumental to the persistence and normalization of men's stranger intrusions. While stranger intrusions emerged

as a result of shifting demographic changes in growing urban centers, it persisted because it was trivialized, minimized, and normalized in newspapers, music, popular print culture, and legal documents, amongst other discourses. Cultural scripts and messages about men's stranger intrusions have helped to shape how women have been able to articulate their experiences of harassment and the seriousness with which their claims are taken. As Liz Kelly has argued, the difficulty activists and scholars have historically faced when trying to define and combat sexual violence often lies in the inadequacy of existing language to talk about women's experiences of violence. "Common-sense" definitions of sexual violence reflect "men's ideas and limit the range of male behaviour [sic] that is deemed unacceptable to the most extreme, gross and public forms." Thus women who want to talk about their experiences of sexual violence find themselves having to question and reinterpret dominant discourses of sexual violence at the same time that they are coming to terms with their own experiences of violence. Women "often find themselves caught between the dominant discourse and their own experience: a conflict between men's power to define and women's truth."<sup>64</sup> "Common-sense" ideas about men's stranger intrusions have likewise often conflicted with women's experiences and they have been constructed and proliferated in public discourse: the newspaper reports of mashing, the magazine advertisements that glorified the "hobby" of girl-watching, the law enforcement pamphlets that encouraged women to carry mace and never to walk alone at night. This dissertation tracks this public discourse and shows how activists, journalists, law enforcement, artists, writers, and government officials have fought over and contested definitions of men's stranger intrusions.

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<sup>64</sup> Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, 138.

# Chapter 1

## Street Insults in Nineteenth-Century Cities

Stranger! if you, passing, meet me, and desire to  
speak to me, why should you not speak to me?

And why should I not speak to you?

—Walt Whitman, “To You,” *Leaves of Grass*

On a fall afternoon in 1869, a public omnibus rumbled past the elegant homes along Fifth Avenue in New York City. The passengers were mostly fashionable, affluent men and women who could afford the extra fare to ride the horse-drawn omnibuses, or stages, rather than the louder, more crowded streetcars.<sup>1</sup> Among the passengers were two young white women riding uptown after a day in Brooklyn. At some point in their journey, one of the women felt something gently pressing against her back. At first, she “did not think anything of it,” but when the feeling continued she eventually realized it came from the well-dressed, older gentleman sitting behind her. The man, who was resting his hand on the back of the woman’s seat, seemed to be deliberately and repeatedly

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<sup>1</sup> Streetcars never ran on Fifth Avenue thanks to wealthy residents who consistently opposed the laying of the necessary rails. Facing competition from the faster horse-streetcar lines, the Fifth Avenue stage raised prices in the mid-1860s to maintain operations. The *New York Times* lamented in 1865 that the price hike had forced “work girls” off the stages and effectively divided New York public transit by class. “Stage Traffic,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1865. See also Roger P. Roess and Gene Sansone, *The Wheels That Drove New York: A History of the New York City Transit System* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 265-266.

pressing his hand into her back. In recounting the story later, the young woman described how “every minute or so” she felt his hand on her back and as time passed “he pressed more perceptibly against me.” The young woman, disturbed and “frightened” by his uninvited touching, alerted her friend to his conduct and together they decided to leave the stage before their stop. Rather than board another stage and risk similar bothersome behavior, the women were “obliged to . . . walk all the way home.”

This incident survives in the historical archive because the young woman involved told her story to the *New York Times* in a letter addressing the “outrages” women endured on public transportation. The writer, who called herself “A Young Lady,” described the uninvited attention women endured on streetcars and public stages across New York City. She claimed the worst offenders of such “insults,” as they were commonly known at the time, were “gentlemen,” or at the very least, men who dressed like gentlemen. Insults could be as small as a man who brushed his dirty boots against her clean dress or, more ominously, could be the rows of staring eyes that greeted a lady whenever she boarded a streetcar or stage. Indeed, this was not the first or only time A Young Lady had dealt with men’s intrusive actions. “Every now and then,” she explained, “in the Fifth Avenue stage, I am obliged to say to the man next to me, ‘Please, Sir, will you move your arm off the back of my seat, that I may lean back a little?’” The only surefire way to evade this behavior on public transportation was to refrain from riding the streetcars and stages altogether. Indeed, A Young Lady asserted that she often felt “more or less unsafe” on New York’s public conveyances, declaring, “I never ride when I can avoid it, only when I am going to Brooklyn.”<sup>2</sup> For A Young Lady, a seemingly innocuous action, like a man placing his hand on the back of her seat or watching her adjust her hat, was insulting and threatening to the point that it forced her off a public omnibus.

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<sup>2</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars: Testimony of a Young Lady,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1869.

A Young Lady's reaction was in line with many of the anxieties that arose with the increased presence of women—especially middle-class and upper-class white women who claimed the moniker of “lady”—in Northern urban space in the nineteenth century. Popular discourses struggled to make sense of women's place in public, on the one hand warning “respectable” white women of the dangers of the city and on the other hand warning “genteel” white men of the dangers of promiscuous “public women.” Newspaper accounts, city guides, literature, and other published works portrayed cities as confusing and dangerous places for women. Sensational newspaper stories denounced “scoundrels” who shouted at women as they walked down the street or rowdy drunkards who harassed women and then attacked the men who came to their rescue. Melodramas and fictionalized portraits of urban life portrayed the moral degradation that might befall anyone on the city street, especially the melodramatic archetype of the innocent young white girl from the countryside who easily fell prey to lascivious city men. At the same time, many city newspapers, anti-vice tracts, and moralizing fiction also decried the scourge of prostitutes who patrolled the streets embarrassing respectable citizens. Indeed, if such publications depicted uncouth “loafers” a danger to respectable ladies, they often portrayed prostitutes as equally dangerous to impressionable young men and to the moral integrity of society as whole.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992); Marilyn Wood Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1870* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Amy Gilman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820-1930* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

According to these “narratives of sexual danger” women risked humiliation and sexual degradation whenever they ventured into public.<sup>4</sup> Women like *A Young Lady* learned to be wary of seemingly benign overtures from male strangers, as popular narratives emphasized the way that small gestures could escalate quickly into physical and sexual violence. As historian John F. Kasson has argued, “When middle-class women left the confines of their home to venture out into public, they entered a realm in which they felt—or were expected to feel—particularly vulnerable. From an impertinent glance, an unwelcome compliment, the scale of improprieties rose through a series of gradations to the ultimate violation of rape.”<sup>5</sup> Few discourses suggested that women belonged in public space: women were depicted as either the targets of sexual predators or the symbols of sexual immorality and the symptoms (if not the cause) of urban vice. Either way, middle-class commentators deemed women’s presence in public space an aberration. Ideas about women’s place in public space constituted a discursive field—or a structure of feeling, to use Raymond Williams’s phrase—that encouraged women to feel unsafe and out of place in urban space.<sup>6</sup> Women did not need to be explicitly told to stay indoors at certain times or avoid certain areas of the city. Stories about the dangers women faced in urban space, coupled with real-life experiences, worked together to convince women to police their own behavior. Thus women might self-impose curfews or limit their own forays into urban space to avoid harm and humiliation, just as *A Young Lady* did when she left a public omnibus to avoid a male stranger’s intrusions.

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow this term from Judith Walkowitz whose work on public narratives of sexual danger in London has greatly influenced my own thinking on similar narratives in the U.S. context. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 128.

<sup>6</sup> Christine Stansell uses Williams’s phrase to great effect in her work on working-class women in antebellum New York. She writes, “Mostly, assumptions about women were expressed within a structure of feeling rather than a body of explicit ideas. What shaped gender relations of ordinary people were unconscious or half-conscious beliefs, intuitions, reactions—the culturally conditioned sense of what was obvious and proper, a matter of common sense.” Stansell, *City of Women*, 23.

This chapter will consider how male journalists, authors of moralizing city guides, fiction writers, and women themselves experienced and interpreted small intrusions from male strangers, like a passing greeting or a slightly too-long glance, as insulting, humiliating, and potentially dangerous for women. Discourses of urban danger and female sexual vulnerability gave meaning to intrusive behaviors that exceeded the bounds of the individual actions. While much of this chapter will focus on narratives and discourses, it will argue that such discourses influenced the way women experienced intrusive behaviors from male strangers. Women's fear and embarrassment at male stranger intrusions came as a result both of the behaviors themselves and because the discursive terrain in which they lived encouraged them to see such intrusions as insulting, threatening, and harmful. This chapter will especially examine non-verbal and non-physical intrusions to understand how seemingly innocuous behaviors derived impact from the threat of more "serious" actions. For instance, while street insults came in many forms, uninvited looking was one of the most insidious and newspaper reports and descriptions of male stranger intrusions often included lascivious looks in their reports of insulting behaviors.<sup>7</sup> Because making eye contact was often the first overture towards making a new acquaintance, a look could be threatening not simply as an intrusive behavior on its own but also as an indication that the looker was preparing to make another move. Reporting on street insults and stories of nineteenth-century urban life seemed to confirm this slippery slope mentality. Seductions, rape, murder: journalists and moralistic commentators claimed all could begin with a wayward glance or a deceptively friendly greeting. Whether or not a leer was *likely* to devolve into physical assault, nineteenth-century middle-class discourses encouraged women to believe the potential was always there, and thus to fear even the smallest of intrusions. In this discursive terrain,

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance, Letter to the editor, (Baltimore) *Sun*, April 28, 1838, America's Historical Newspapers; Bill Lounger, "Gossip with the Editor, about Men and Things in Town and Country," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, January 6, 1841, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers; "An Ingenious Method of Obtaining an Introduction," *Wisconsin Democrat*, June 9, 1849, America's Historical Newspapers; A Young Lady, "Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars"; "Street Car And Police: Outrage in a Rampart and Dauphine Street Car," *Times-Picayune*, June 16, 1875, America's Historical Newspapers.

women like *A Young Lady* might reasonably fear something as seemingly innocuous as a small but deliberate touch from a strange man, and thus adjust their movements through public space to avoid insult and harm.

Discourses of male stranger intrusions also delineated who were the worthy victims of such behaviors and whose plight would go unnoticed. Humiliating or threatening conduct from men in public space appears to have been widespread, but it took on different meanings depending on the parties involved. When the target was a white, middle-class or “respectable” working woman, newspaper reports and fictionalized accounts denounced men’s stranger intrusions as “insults” or, more precisely, “street insults.” The term suggested the humiliation a virtuous woman was expected to feel at leers, lewd remarks, or uninvited touching, all actions that implied she was sexually available to strangers on the street. In other words, a man was understood to have insulted a “respectable” woman if he treated her as—or mistook her for—a woman willing to engage in sexual activity with a stranger. White men—and especially the male relatives of middle-class white women—were expected to stand up for “ladies” and protect them from insult. Middle-class gentility and dominant gender norms gave white men the role of savior and white women were dependent on them if they wanted their purity and respectability intact. Women of color, poor women, and sex workers were especially vulnerable and male denouncers of stranger intrusions rarely depicted them victims of this urban danger. As this chapter will show, this did not mean they did not experience stranger intrusions, and far worse, at the hands of white men in particular. However, dominant racist and classist stereotypes depicted poor women, women of color (especially Black women), and sex workers as inherently disreputable and sexually promiscuous. Thus middle-class white men who bothered or threatened such women were understood to be exercising their prerogative over vulnerable women’s bodies.

Discourses of men's stranger intrusions also bolstered and re-inscribed middle-class white men's access to and power over public space in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The male journalists, authors, and urban reformers who denounced street insults suggested that white men could eliminate street insults by defending "respectable" white women and punishing those who insulted them. However, while middle-class and upper-class white men were the idealized protectors of innocent white female victims, the sources suggest that white men were the most common perpetrators of "insults" and intrusive behaviors against women in the urban North. White men who presented as "gentlemen" or held positions of official authority made up a significant proportion of these perpetrators. At the same time, while women often complained that "gentlemen" were the worst offenders of public harassment, poor or working-class white men were often the target of male writers' moralistic diatribes against "corner loafers" who loitered on public thoroughfares and insulted passing ladies.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, men of color, and Black men in particular, were rarely accused of insulting ladies: racial ideology ensured that any intrusive behaviors they exhibited were considered far worse than mere "insult." This dissertation will show how the racial discourses of men's stranger intrusions changed in subsequent chapters. Thus, whether acting as the protectors of middle-class white womanhood or as the men who insulted and humiliated women in public, middle-class and upper-class white men's racial and class privilege remained not only intact as women moved through urban space but was adapted and re-worked to accommodate women's public presence. The result was an urban environment in which white men retained control. To borrow an analytical framework from feminist philosopher Susan Rae Peterson, women were encouraged to trust white men to protect them from other white men. Like "crime syndicates who

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<sup>8</sup> "The Corner Loafer Nuisance," *New York Herald*, May 26, 1872, *America's Historical Newspapers*; W.E. Waller, letter to the editor, *Trenton State Gazette*, October 20, 1874, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

sell protection as a racket,” middle-class white men threatened women’s safety in public space while simultaneously stepping forward to save those they deemed most deserving.<sup>9</sup>

## **Sex and Spectacle in the Urban World of Strangers**

American newspapers reported incidents of men accosting women in public from the earliest moments of urbanization. In 1803, for instance, young men in Philadelphia were accused of regularly annoying young Quaker women by waiting at the doors of Quaker meeting houses to accost female worshippers as they left or knocking on meeting house windows to catch a young lady’s eye.<sup>10</sup> Some eight years later, New Yorkers complained the city was beset with “bloods” and “rakes” who accosted women with cries of “Dam’d fine girl, by g—d!” and “Where do you lodge, my dear?”<sup>11</sup> Insults like these emerged with the nineteenth-century city and many of the characteristics that defined a city also made it possible for strangers to interact with one another in this way. Indeed, the anonymity that large urban areas afforded to nineteenth-century Americans was at turns frightening, exhilarating, and sensual. In the daytime, strangers brushed past each other, jostling one another, shouting and laughing, or rushing by without a word. At night, dark streets could harbor pickpockets, drunks, or other disreputable characters. Urban commentators encouraged nineteenth-century Americans to be skeptical of strangers, as any gentleman or lady met in public might be a confidence trickster or prostitute, hiding their true nature behind an artful facade of fine clothing or genteel manner. Etiquette manuals warned against approaching strangers while popular fiction and melodramatic city guides depicted possible dangers that awaited those who

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Rae Peterson, “Coercion and Rape: The State as a Male Protection Racket,” in *Feminism and Philosophy*, ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin, Frederick Elliston, and Jane English (Rowman & Littlefield, 1977), 360–71.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Jorgensen Gray, “Mixed Company: Elite Youth and Heterosociability in Philadelphia, 1750–1815” (PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 2011), 142–147.

<sup>11</sup> *Independent Mechanic*, May 11, 18, 25, 1811, as quoted in Stansell, *City of Women*, 27.

entangled themselves with deceitful strangers. In this urban world of strangers, where one might spend a whole day surrounded by people whose true character and intentions remained undiscovered, Americans struggled to delineate rules for navigating city streets and engaging with people they did not know.<sup>12</sup>

As women, especially middle-class white women, became increasingly visible on city streets, their presence sparked anxieties about the dangers of mixing sexes, classes, and races. Much of this anxiety centered around fear of the moral degradation that might arise from the unregulated mixing of different types of people and the muddying of distinctions of social rank in the chaos of the city street. Social commentators and moral crusaders found it especially worrying that distinctions between “respectable” ladies and sex workers might blur. Prostitutes, they claimed, could be found on many of the major thoroughfares of American cities, whether in brothels or in the street itself. Importantly, women who moral reformers and social commentators labeled as prostitutes may or may not have engaged in sex work: as cultural historian Robert C. Allen has noted, for “bourgeois males,” the category of prostitute “loosely included any working-class woman whose dress, demeanor, or actions transgressed bourgeois notions of feminine propriety and respectability.”<sup>13</sup> Even a woman who met a man’s gaze on the street might find herself labeled a prostitute. The slipperiness of the category of prostitute only fueled the anxiety about the potential mixing of respectable “ladies” and disreputable working-class women. Middle-class white women, as historian

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<sup>12</sup> See for instance Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*; Deutsch, *Women and the City*; Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers*; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers*; Stansell, *City of Women*.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Clyde Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 139.

Jeffrey Wiltse convincingly argues that historians have long relied on the moralistic writings of temperance reformers, ministers, and anti-vice activists to paint a picture of social life on city streets in the early to mid-nineteenth century. However, these reformers, many of whom I also cite in this chapter, were writing specifically to convince Americans with influence to stamp out saloon culture, prostitution, and other working-class activities they believed made American cities dangerous, vice-ridden places. Jeffrey Wiltse, “‘I Like to Get Around’: City Girls in Chicago Music Saloons, 1858–1906,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 6 (2013): 1125–45.

Sarah Deutsch demonstrates, could not walk in working-class neighborhoods without “risking their status as ‘ladies,’” as if poverty, and the depravity that supposedly accompanied it, might rub off on anyone who came in contact with it.<sup>14</sup> This anxiety was exacerbated by the fact that wealthy and poor areas of the city often butted up against each other, giving one New Yorker the impression that “fine ladies” could lean out their windows and look down on their “unfortunate sisters” in the street below.<sup>15</sup> Middle-class commentators balked that “street-walkers”—prostitutes who sought clients on the streets rather than in brothels—could be found even on the most fashionable streets, mixing with the monied elite in theatre and entertainment districts. In poor neighborhoods, working women and prostitutes were often neighbors, while some working women supplemented their incomes with occasional or part-time sex work. The freedom prostitutes appeared to wield on city streets, especially streets that were considered fashionable or home to tourist attractions and middle-class entertainment, sent urban reformers and social commentators into an uproar on a regular basis.<sup>16</sup>

Social commentators feared that a prevalence of street-walkers and brothels in nineteenth-century cities would enable prostitutes to pass as respectable women and that, conversely, ladies might be mistaken for or treated as prostitutes, in a word, insulted.<sup>17</sup> An extensive literature on women in the city, including guidebooks, newspapers, dime novels, and moral reform tracts, explicitly used sexual behavior or perceived sexual availability as a “useful code for classifying and thereby organizing and controlling an apparently chaotic urban landscape.”<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, this literature warned men about the seemingly respectable women who might accost them, seduce them,

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<sup>14</sup> Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 12; Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood”; Elizabeth Wilson, *Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> James Dabney McCabe, *Lights and Shadows of New York Life: Or, the Sights and Sensations of a Great City* (Philadelphia, PA: National Publishing Company, 1872), 52.

<sup>16</sup> Sex work was especially troubling because it offered possibilities for personal and financial autonomy, particularly for working-class women, and “allowed a woman freedom from many of the restrictions and conventions that circumscribed the activities and opportunities of other females.” See Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers*, 2. For other treatments of nineteenth-century prostitution, see Deutsch, *Women and the City*; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*; Stansell, *City of Women*.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *Contradictions of Culture*, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Srebnick, *Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers*, 49.

and perhaps even rob them. On the other hand, titillating stories of the seductions, rapes, or violent deaths of attractive young women became “recurring motifs in...antebellum literature.”<sup>19</sup> Middle-class urbanites feared that the presence of brothels and prostitutes in respectable neighborhoods put respectable women at risk of insult, or worse. For instance, residents in New York City complained that “houses of ill fame” brought unwanted people into their neighborhoods. In one 1826 court case, male residents and homeowners complained that brothels encouraged people to “[collect] together” on the street. Brothel patrons then “molested and disturbed” residents to the point that “our wives and daughters cannot go out in the evening to the grocery or church without being insulted or crowded off the walk by the frequenters of these abominable houses of iniquity.”<sup>20</sup> Another complained that the mere presence of “prostitutes and other persons of ill name and fame” in the streets made it “unsafe for respectable females to pass ... after nine o’clock at night.”<sup>21</sup> Thus the physical presence of prostitutes and brothels in certain neighborhoods convinced many city dwellers that the streets were unsafe for respectable ladies, whether or not male strangers actually mistook them for prostitutes or “loose” women.

At the same time, as women were increasingly visible in public space, musings and writings on city life also depicted them as something to be visually consumed as “a part of the spectacle” of urban life.<sup>22</sup> In representations of the male gaze, women were a key part of the allure of the urban masses. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., author and father to the Supreme Court Justice of the same name, described how looking at women on the street was one of the pleasures of urban life in his

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<sup>19</sup> Srebnick, *Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers*, xiii-xiv. Srebnick follows the life of one of these narratives, the real-life murder of New Yorker Mary Rogers, and the various embellished or fictionalized stories of her death that captivated antebellum readers.

<sup>20</sup> People vs. Blanch, June 16, 1826, New York County District Attorney Indictment Records, New York City Municipal Archives. For more on complaints like these, see Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*.

<sup>21</sup> People v. Bernard Murthe, October 12, 1841, New York County District Attorney Indictment Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 16.

widely-read *Atlantic Monthly* column, “The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table.”<sup>23</sup> Holmes wrote the column from the perspective of a boarder at a New England boarding house who holds court at the breakfast table, dispensing his opinions to the other boarders. In Holmes’s June 1858 column, the autocrat laments that there are some “very pretty, but, unhappily, very ill-bred women” on city streets who do not understand “the law of the road with regard to handsome faces.” That unwritten law, opines Holmes’s autocrat, allows “all males the right of at least two distinct looks at every comely female countenance, without any infraction of the rules of courtesy or sentiment of respect.” Two looks are necessary, explains the autocrat, the first to notice a woman coming one’s way and avoid bumping into her, and the second as “an appreciating homage of the eyes.” The autocrat bemoans the “vulgar beauties” who are “morbidly sensitive” to these looks from male strangers. “When a *lady* walks the streets,” the autocrat insists, “she leaves her virtuous-indignation countenance at home; she knows well enough that the street is a picture-gallery, where pretty faces framed in pretty bonnets are meant to be seen, and everybody has a right to see them.”<sup>24</sup> Though it is doubtful that when Holmes’s autocrat refers to “everybody” he really means that anyone—prostitutes, pickpockets, Black men, con artists—had a right to admire the “pretty faces” on the street, the depiction of the street as a “picture-gallery” exemplified the way many middle-class depictions of urban space celebrated the opportunities the city street offered for watching all manner of people, including beautiful women.

Affluent, white men were particularly afforded the right to consume the city with their gaze and their experiences permeated cultural representations of the city in the mid-nineteenth century. The gentleman urban explorer, or the *flâneur*, might employ a languid, inconspicuous look and stroll through the city as a neutral observer of human life. In his most well-known form, the *flâneur* was a

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<sup>23</sup> For more on Holmes and his “Breakfast-Table” series, see William C. Dowling, *Oliver Wendell Holmes in Paris: Medicine, Theology, and the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* (Lebanon: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., “The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table,” *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1858, 109.

well-to-do, white man with an adventurous, romantic edge whose gender, racial, and class privilege allowed him to wander the city streets undetected, marveling at the great cacophony and spectacle of urban life. These men were supposed to “[take] visual possession of the city,” as their privilege protected them from notice and from censure, especially when the primary objects of their observation were the working classes.<sup>25</sup> The *flâneur* was intended to be an ideal figure or cultural trope, but writers like Walt Whitman and Charles Dickens wrote of their own wanderings through the modern city and solidified the *flâneur* as an influential trope of urban masculine privilege and curiosity.<sup>26</sup> For instance, in the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman captured the duality of admiring fellow pedestrians on the street while simultaneously knowing that such admiration would remain unfulfilled. “Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you,” he enthused, “You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass....” But social convention forbade Whitman from engaging with beautiful strangers, as he well knew, lamenting, “I am not to speak to you—I am to think of you when I sit alone, or wake at night alone....”<sup>27</sup> Many of Whitman’s musings on public space and the strangers encountered there exemplified the romantic, if idealized, exception to the rule against staring in public: namely, that middle-class white men might clandestinely observe others as part of the titillating visual scenes of the city. The *flâneur* and similar representations asserted white men’s ownership of urban space, whether or not middle-class men could actually observe strangers as freely in practice as the *flâneur* did in literature. In depictions of the *flâneur*, women were rarely afforded the same ownership over the city but were visually consumed as “a part of the spectacle.”<sup>28</sup> The presence of women on city streets was part of what

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<sup>25</sup> Feminist theorists seized upon the *flâneur* in the twentieth century as the “embodiment of the ‘male gaze.’” Wilson, *Contradictions of Culture*, 78-79.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Dickens, *Night Walks* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> “To a Stranger,” in *Leaves of Grass* (New York: W.E. Chapin & Co., Printers, 1867), 135.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 16.

made urban spaces exciting to explore and observe, provided a gentleman's observation was surreptitious and did not cross the line into insulting behavior.

Nevertheless, some middle-class commentators suggested that women who displayed themselves in public, far from being part of the beauty of urban life, instead posed a threat to gender and sexual norms. When the *Atlantic Monthly* published another depiction of the "spectacle" of Broadway in 1866 ("an experience worth patient study, and wonderfully prolific of life-pictures"), the piece detailed the clothing and comportment of the women whom one might observe on New York's thoroughfares. According to the author, an "experienced eye" would be drawn to the "street attire of ladies—or those who aspire, with more or less justice, to that title." These ladies gave a "vulgar impression":

"for the apology for a bonnet that leaves brow, cheek, and head fully exposed,—the rustle and dimensions of crinoline,—the heavy masses of unctuous false hair attached to the back of the head, deforming its shape and often giving a coarse monstrosity to its naturally graceful poise and proportions,—the inappropriate display of jewelry and the long silk trains of the expensive robes trailing on the dirty walk, and continually caught beneath the feet of careless pedestrians,—all unite to render the exhibition repulsive to taste, good sense, and that chivalric sympathy inspired by the sight of female beauty and grace, so often coexistent with these anomalies."

As historian David Scobey has noted, the writer "freighted the lady's body with worry over changes in female public demeanor": her fashion choices—"false" hair, "deforming" clothing—were "repulsive" and augmented the author's unease with the ambiguity of distinguishing between "ladies" and "those who aspire...to that title." However, the attention to detail in this account also suggested that women were fair game when it came to observing the teeming masses of the metropolis. After all, as the piece explained, women, and the clothes they wear, were "displayed" on Broadway and would "win attention" from passersby. Observing women was a central part of experiencing and understanding "New York's great thoroughfare."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> H.T. Tuckerman, "Through Broadway," *Atlantic Monthly* 18, no. 110 (December 1866): 718; David Scobey, "Nymphs and Satyrs: Sex and the Bourgeois Public Sphere in Victorian New York," *Winterthur Portfolio* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2002):

Men's observation of women on city streets was understood to be so ubiquitous that it could itself become the subject of illustrated urban scenes. In an 1874 lithograph from a popular illustrated newspaper (see Figure 1), a fashionable young woman is depicted walking down a New York street while a crowd of men line up to watch her pass. The crowd of men stand in a disorderly line, two or three people deep, on the front step of a "popular hotel in New York City." They languidly lean on pillars, smoking pipes and cigars, hands shoved casually in pockets. Their stances suggest they have been there for some time and intend to loiter a little longer, watching the crowds. After all, according to the caption, it is "five o'clock," and thus a particularly busy time of the day



Figure 1: J. N. Hyde, "Running the Gauntlet.—A Scene in Front of a Popular Hotel in New York City at Five O'Clock P. M.," Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 16, 1874.

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47-50. For more on women in public as part of urban spectacle, see Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*; Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

when the great diversity of the urban populace are likely to be hurrying up and down the street.<sup>30</sup> The object of their observation is a pale-looking white woman in a ruffled gown and hat. She is carrying a small book in one arm and her other hand is raised slightly, perhaps suggesting the speed of her walk. She is some ways from the men on the hotel steps, in no danger of touching them or being touched by them, but still well within their line of sight. She stares straight ahead into a distance invisible to the viewer, ignoring the many pairs of eyes fixed on her. Today, the entire scene might bring to mind a catwalk: a line of interested observers watch as a young woman in fashionable dress walks by with a determined gait and a stoic expression. Tellingly, the image was labeled “running the gauntlet,” an expression derived from a style of punishment in the military in which an accused man would run between two rows of men while they whipped him with sticks or rope.<sup>31</sup> Newspapers and magazines regularly used the phrase to describe the insulting looks and stares women endured along urban thoroughfares.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the *Atlantic Monthly* piece, which took the viewpoint of the male observer, this image depicted both the woman and the men who watch her. Thus the male observers join the woman as part of the urban spectacle—their ogling does not simply consume the woman passing by them in the street but also becomes a part of the “scene,” as the lithograph is captioned, to be consumed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> “Gauntlet, n.2,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed June 19, 2018, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77149>.

<sup>32</sup> Ned Buntline, *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York: A Story of Real Life* (New York: Bedford & Co., 1848); Waller, letter to the editor; Nixola Greeley-Smith, “New York Mashers, Their Insulting Tricks And the Different Brands of the Pests,” *Evening World (New York)*, July 13, 1912; “Mashers Lining Monroe Avenue Annoy Women Without Escorts When Police Relax Espionage,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 5, 1914; Rose Cecil O’Neill, “Could Man Stand Comment Which Assails Woman?,” *Day Book*, September 8, 1916; Esther Andrews, “New York Women Start ‘Smash the Masher’ Crusade,” *Tacoma Times*, September 19, 1916.

<sup>33</sup> J. N. Hyde, “Running the Gauntlet.—A Scene in Front of a Popular Hotel in New York City at Five O’Clock P. M.,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, May 16, 1874.

## The Street Insult

It is in the context of increased anxieties about women in public space that American journalists, authors, and urban reformers first identified male stranger intrusions as a specific problem. While the men had been accosting and bothering women in urban space since the early 1800s, by the 1840s, newspaper and magazine articles increasingly used the terms “insult” or “street insult” to describe the range of behaviors a man might exhibit in order to express sexual interest in a respectable lady. Despite the name, women experienced street insults in a variety of public and semi-public places. Certainly, many street insults took place on city streets, often on busy, mixed-use thoroughfares where businessmen and women shoppers mingled. This was especially true in “women’s miles,” parts of the city where department stores and leisure spots attracted women consumers beginning in the mid-1800s.<sup>34</sup> These areas, as many urban historians note, were “women’s” areas only in the public imaginary while, in practice, men and women mixed freely in those spaces. Department stores and offices often occupied the same streets, even the same buildings, in major American cities, creating scenes where men in segregated clubs or restaurants could gaze down on the women shoppers rushing by.<sup>35</sup> In the evenings, as businessmen made their way home or to bars and entertainment venues after work, men and women encountered one another on the sidewalk itself, sometimes to disruptive effect.<sup>36</sup> One shopkeeper in Trenton, New Jersey complained in 1874 that a “crowd of loafers” gathered on the sidewalk outside his store every night and “insult[ed] my lady customers and my sales-ladies.” He feared his business would suffer as a result.<sup>37</sup> Entertainment areas and venues provided another space where men could surreptitiously ogle women. Broadway was famous and infamous in New York City as a place where prostitutes

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<sup>34</sup> Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Sewell, *Women in the Everyday City*, xiv; Domosh and Seager, *Putting Women in Place*, 79.

<sup>36</sup> Sewell, *Women in the Everyday City*, xvi.

<sup>37</sup> Waller, letter to the editor.

soliciting clients and monied New Yorkers on their way to the theater shared the same sidewalks; it was also a prime location for street insults.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, the *New York Times* warned that the men who insulted women on streetcars were the same sorts of men who “cannot sit next to a lady in a theatre without revealing the vileness and depravity of their natures.”<sup>39</sup> Etiquette manuals warned gentlemen to stay with their lady companions at all times when out for a night at a theater, for men might “[peer] at women through opera glasses or [gaze] down their décolletage from seats in the gallery.”<sup>40</sup> Women were thus subject to “intense male scrutiny,” as Mary Ryan puts it, almost everywhere they went.<sup>41</sup>

Newspaper reports often left the specifics of insulting behavior up to the reader’s imagination, simply stating that a man had insulted a woman “by words and action” or “by looks and manner.”<sup>42</sup> Readers were expected not only to know what was meant by “insult” but also that it portended danger. When a local police superintendent wrote in to the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* about the outrages women endured on that city’s streetcars, he relied on his readers’ knowledge of public insults, suggesting, “You can readily perceive how a drunken brute, in the form of a man, may insult a lady and firmly convince her by tone and manner of a horrible motive or design upon her, a tone and manner impossible of description.” Similarly, in an 1849 story in the *Wisconsin Democrat*, a young man admitted to his friend that he did not know how to insult women. His friend incredulously cried, “You’re a pretty fellow! Haven’t you learned to convey an insult yet?” The supposition was that any attractive, sexually mature young man should be interested in and capable of making improper advances on a female stranger.

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<sup>38</sup> Hill, *Their Sisters’ Keepers*; George G. Foster, *New York by Gas-Light with Here and There a Streak of Sunshine* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850); Buntline, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*; “The Corner Loafer Nuisance.”

<sup>39</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages,” *New York Times*, October 17, 1869.

<sup>40</sup> Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 83. See also Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 127.

<sup>41</sup> Ryan, *Women in Public*, 86. John F. Kasson also argues that middle-class women could expect to be scrutinized everywhere they went for unladylike behavior. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 124.

<sup>42</sup> “Roughs in a Street Car,” *Times-Picayune*, January 31, 1876, America’s Historical Newspapers; “Street Car And Police.”

Nevertheless, reports of street insults offer examples of some of the “manner” that women found bothersome. Men insulted women with implicit or spoken overtures or greetings directed at women with whom they were not already acquainted. Such insults could be as simple as addressing a group of women with a “Good evening, ladies,” implying a level of familiarity and intimacy between strangers that bordered on the improper.<sup>43</sup> Such behavior clearly broke etiquette rules that dictated a gentlemen should never address a lady unless she greeted him first. A man who initiated an interaction embarrassed a lady by both presuming a relationship between them and infringing on her the right to deny the existence of such a relationship.<sup>44</sup> Newspapers were especially troubled by reports of young men who approached female strangers and offered to walk them home. A Massachusetts newspaper described how a New York man accosted a woman at night, “[taking] advantage of the darkness and her unprotected state to insult her with his base importunities to accompany her home.”<sup>45</sup> Disguised as acts of chivalry, these offers offended middle-class white Americans because they implied that the woman thus addressed was open to new acquaintances and, potentially, sexual offers.

A young man could also insult a woman without uttering a word. Some touched women without their consent, like the man who pressed his hand against A Young Lady’s back in the Fifth Avenue stage.<sup>46</sup> Others tried to make acquaintances surreptitiously, like the doctor in St. Louis who passed his card to a young white woman on a streetcar. Her brothers whipped him in retaliation.<sup>47</sup> Gentlemen who ogled ladies were considered especially suspect and rude. Etiquette manuals

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<sup>43</sup> “An Ingenious Method of Obtaining an Introduction.”

<sup>44</sup> See for instance Anne Newport Royall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the United States* (New Haven, CT, 1826); Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen’s Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston, MA: DeWolfe, Fiske & Co., 1875); Abby Buchanan Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879); Maud C. Cooke, *Social Etiquette, or: Manners and Customs of Polite Society* (Boston, MA: George M. Smith and Company, 1896).

<sup>45</sup> “Served Out,” *Norfolk Advertiser*, December 15, 1838, America’s Historical Newspapers. See also “Another Street Insult,” (Baltimore) *Sun*, May 9, 1840, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>46</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.”

<sup>47</sup> “A Cowhiding Affair: An Insult to a Lady in a Street Car Avenged by Her Brothers,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, August 1, 1870, America’s Historical Newspapers.

explicitly prohibited gentlemen from staring at ladies, and warned that looks could be as evocative as speech. One etiquette writer explicitly identified the way looks could imply inappropriate language, warning, “it is not allowable to leer, to wink, or to say anything with the eyes which it would not be entirely proper to say in so many plain words.”<sup>48</sup> Feminist theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that white middle-class men were forbidden to stare at “respectable” women for two reasons. Firstly, to stare at a woman “threaten[ed] the stable economy in which men [had] legal and economic ownership of women.”<sup>49</sup> Just as rape of a woman was legally and culturally understood to be a crime against her father or spouse, who legally owned her body, so too staring at a woman was an affront to her male relatives. Secondly, if a man stared at a woman he risked “reveal[ing] a sexual hunger that [put] a man in the vulnerable position of seeming, even being, enthralled by women.”<sup>50</sup> A man who was beholden to the sexual power of a woman forfeited his physical, emotional, mental, and legal superiority to her. To admit such a weakness would be to jeopardize all the social power afforded to white, middle-class men in a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, reports of street insults often commented on the leers women endured.<sup>51</sup> One reader of the Baltimore *Sun* insisted one could tell a gentleman apart from a “dirty fellow” liable to insult “by the brazen stare with which [he] regard[s] every passing female.”<sup>52</sup> Women also described the discomfort they felt when men stared at them. In her descriptions of insults on New York public transit, A Young Lady alleged, “if a young lady in an omnibus puts her hand to her head to arrange her veil or hat, every man’s eye is on her and kept on her until she returns her hand again to its place; and some men are not yet satisfied, but keep on staring until the lady, sometimes feeling indignant, will give a haughty return glance.”<sup>53</sup> Returning a

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<sup>48</sup> Robert De Valcourt, *The Illustrated Manners Book: A Manual of Good Behavior and Polite Accomplishments* (New York: Leland Clay and Company, 1855), 268.

<sup>49</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Lounger, “Gossip with the Editor, about Men”; “An Ingenious Method of Obtaining an Introduction”; “Street Car And Police.”

<sup>52</sup> Letter to the editor, (Baltimore) *Sun*, April 28, 1838.

<sup>53</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.”

glance could be risky, however, and the *New York Times* warned that ladies who “happen to glance...momentarily” at a man might find themselves the subject of nineteenth-century missed connections ads from men who mistakenly took their looks for romantic interest.<sup>54</sup>

The language of “street insult” used to describe men’s strangers intrusions in the nineteenth century demonstrates the way social commentators saw these behaviors as infractions of public etiquette. Etiquette manuals, which articulated many of the anxieties of middle-class Americans as they stepped out into public space, offered myriad tactics for avoiding insult, both giving and receiving. Chief amongst these tactics was ignoring strangers in public places. Etiquette writers maintained it was paramount that well-mannered gentlemen and ladies afford one another the politeness of anonymity and privacy. With the absence of walls and doors to screen and keep out undesirable people, etiquette in public places helped to delineate who was respectable and purported to give middle-class Americans control over their interactions with strangers.<sup>55</sup> As one etiquette writer put it, “Around every person there is a certain sphere of repulsion, into which no one ought to intrude. It is an impoliteness, a rudeness; it is even an affront and an outrage to come within a certain distance of any person without permission, expressed or implied.”<sup>56</sup>

Maintaining a sphere of repulsion around strangers was “still more imperative” when a gentlemen encountered a lady in public.<sup>57</sup> Nineteenth-century etiquette writers were adamant that gentlemen must show the utmost respect to ladies in public. “A man who will annoy or insult a woman in the street,” wrote one etiquette expert, “lowers himself to a brute, no matter whether he offends by look, word, or gesture.”<sup>58</sup> To avoiding insulting a lady in public, etiquette manuals placed control in the hands of women and warned men never to address a lady in public or, if they did, not

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<sup>54</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>55</sup> Kason, *Rudeness and Civility*; Garland-Thomson, *Staring*.

<sup>56</sup> De Valcourt, *Illustrated Manners Books*, 73.

<sup>57</sup> De Valcourt, *Illustrated Manners Books*, 73.

<sup>58</sup> Hartley, *Gentlemen’s Book of Etiquette*, 66.

to expect an extended conversation unless the lady wanted one. Ladies should be able to dictate the extend of the interactions they had with strangers, especially men, and thus gentlemen took their cues from a lady's demeanor. Sometimes this meant lady's could ignore men altogether if they wished to avoid an interaction, while in other cases etiquette writers warned that it was extremely rude to ignore an acquaintance and the best way for a lady to avoid an interaction was for her to give a polite but formal nod and then to continue on her way.<sup>59</sup> In an extreme example, etiquette writer Robert De Valcourt insisted a lady had every right to ignore people in the street, for "it is [a lady's] right to bow to [a gentleman] in the street.... It is her right to offer to shake hands, and not his. It is her right to dismiss him—to give him the signal to leave, if making a call together."<sup>60</sup> In all variations of these etiquette rules, the right of refusal was a lady's: she dictated how much interaction to have with gentlemen on the street, and if a gentleman respected this right, she was ostensibly protected from unwanted or unpleasant interactions.

On the other hand, contact between people on the street was certainly allowed, and some etiquette manuals suggested that ladies and gentlemen could send surreptitious signals to one another to demonstrate their interest in making contact. For instance, while one etiquette writer suggested a gentleman had "no right to draw near, speak to, or touch, any person," he qualified this rule by saying such contact was acceptable if the gentleman had "the right to believe that such presence, address, or contact is desirable." If contact was desirable, an individual would give "expressed or implied" permission to the gentleman to engage.<sup>61</sup> Rules like this one left a lot to the interpretation of the reader: "expressed or implied" permission as a prerequisite for contact with another person could give gentlemen a plethora of excuses for approaching ladies in public. A

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<sup>59</sup> See John A. Ruth, *Decorum: A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society* (Chicago: J.A. Ruth & Co., 1878), 117-119; Hartley, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette*, 66-68; Samuel R. Wells, *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1856), 101.

<sup>60</sup> De Valcourt, *The Illustrated Manners Book*, 103. See also Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York*, 21-23.

<sup>61</sup> De Valcourt, *Illustrated Manners Books*, 73.

perceived smile or a glance from a lady could easily be interpreted as “implied” permission if it suited the gentleman seeking to make her acquaintance. It is little wonder, then, that the same etiquette writer who acknowledged that permission could be implied also lamented that the “right of individual privacy; to be alone; to have command of one’s time, thoughts and actions, is continually violated. Husbands and wives; children and parents; brothers and sisters; friends and neighbors; and even strangers, are continually intruding upon the lives and rights of each other.”<sup>62</sup>

This advice stemmed from one of the primary anxieties associated with navigating city streets: the knowledge that by entering public space one put oneself on display. As historian John Kasson suggests, the “offering of self to public scrutiny was one of the central adjustments of nineteenth-century urban life.”<sup>63</sup> The rush of strangers on the city sidewalks promised adventure and danger, while etiquette promised to limit the possibility of those strangers meeting. The sense of being always on display produced a dual preoccupation with the gaze of others and one’s own appearance. Etiquette manuals directed respectable, middle-class Americans in strategies of “self-discipline” and “self-effacement” that were intended to ensure they did not embarrass strangers by scrutinizing them too obviously nor embarrass themselves by encouraging notice from strangers.<sup>64</sup> As Kasson notes, fear of embarrassment was a “powerful instrument of social regulation.”<sup>65</sup> According to middle-class etiquette and discourse, the primary method of protecting oneself from embarrassment, and affording strangers the same protections, was to make oneself invisible and to treat everyone else on the street as if they were invisible, too. Defining how to direct one’s gaze and how to deal with impertinent looks from others was thus a key point of contention. As a rule, middle-class Americans were expected to practice what sociologist Erving Goffman has termed

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<sup>62</sup> De Valcourt, *Illustrated Manners Books*, 73.

<sup>63</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 112.

<sup>64</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 117.

<sup>65</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 114.

“civil inattention.”<sup>66</sup> This meant being careful not to meet any one individual’s gaze for too long nor to obviously and fearfully dart one’s eyes away if one’s gaze was met. The point was to give strangers the impression that they were not seen and therefore not in danger of exposure. The preference for civil inattention was bolstered by the distaste for direct eye contact, which could be interpreted as a social overture. One’s gaze could be as evocative and meaningful as speech and required similar censorship and regulation to be acceptable in public places.<sup>67</sup>

Accordingly, etiquette writers admonished gentlemen to beware of the insult and embarrassment they could inflict simply with their eyes. Etiquette writers warned gentlemen of the power of their gaze and their ability to embarrass, expose, or harm others if they stared. White, middle-class men were supposed to contain their gaze like they did their emotions, keeping overt displays of interest or observation hidden so as not to embarrass others.<sup>68</sup> One etiquette writer acknowledged, “It is a great temptation, I am perfectly aware, on a wet day, to turn and look at a pretty ankle.” However, a well-bred gentleman must resist and should not see, “or, if that is impossible, [should not] seem to see, or to have seen, anything that another person would choose to have concealed.”<sup>69</sup> The wording of this rule is telling as it does not prohibit look *per se* but more precisely prohibits looking in a way that is too obvious or will be noticed. More important, a gentleman was supposed to pretend he had not seen anything that a stranger would rather he not see, that is, he should not “seem to see.” Thus a gentleman was supposed to ignore a blemish or an inadvertently exposed ankle. In this version of the “no staring” rule, the problem is less the fact of a gentleman looking at or observing the world around him. Instead, a social rule was broken when a gentleman stared too obviously and made his interest, attraction, disgust, or curiosity evident. To

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<sup>66</sup> Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places*, 83.

<sup>67</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 126. See also Deustch, *Women and the City*; Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 66. Garland-Thomson argues that as more and more Americans found themselves navigating the urban world of strangers on a daily basis “people needed to know what to do with their eyes.”

<sup>68</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*; Garland-Thomson, *Staring*.

<sup>69</sup> De Valcourt, *The Illustrated Manners Book*, 267.

look at a stranger was thus not inherently bad, the key was to conceal one's gaze, affording strangers privacy and respect, however contrived. Tellingly, etiquette writers also acknowledged that part of the reason men's gaze was so potentially dangerous was because men held the right to visually consume beauty. *The Illustrated Manners Book* included a section on the "rights of organs" that declared the "eye has the right to see pleasant forms and colors, and motions."<sup>70</sup>

While etiquette writers preferred ambiguous, confusing advice about how men could look at others in public space, they encouraged middle-class, white women to do everything in their power to avoid the searching gaze of strangers. However, such women were simultaneously supposed to advertise their gentility and position as "ladies" to all who would encounter them in public. Etiquette manuals advised genteel women to don inconspicuous clothing, including veils that shielded their eyes, and to walk with male escorts whenever possible. Etiquette manuals discouraged overly sumptuous outfits, including obvious jewelry, which were considered vulgar. Even a woman's walk was supposed to be carefully calibrated to be unassuming and graceful.<sup>71</sup> One etiquette manual instructed women to abandon the "habit of running through the streets [as] in childhood, and lounging through them as school-girls, laughing and talking aloud as you go." Rather, "when you become young ladies, your deportment in the street should be more guarded and reserved."<sup>72</sup> Etiquette manuals assured middle-class women that failure to follow these rules would be noticed. As one manual put it, a lady's "dress, carriage, walk, will all be exposed to notice; every passer-by will look at her, if it is only for one glance; every unlady-like action will be marked."<sup>73</sup>

If her dress and comportment failed to communicate her middle-class gentility, even the most respectable lady risked insult, embarrassment, and physical harm. Etiquette manuals promised

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<sup>70</sup> According to the manual, the eye also had "a right to protection from the opposites of all these." De Valcourt, *Illustrated Manners Book*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies*, 114-115; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 117-124.

<sup>72</sup> John Farrar Mrs., *The Young Lady's Friend* (Boston, MA: American Stationers' Company, 1836), 333.

<sup>73</sup> Florence Hartley, *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston, MA: J. S. Locke and Company, 1876), 109.

to protect middle-class white women from these dangers but, by the same token, women risked being blamed for any insult or harm they experienced from men. If proper street etiquette was supposed to keep women safe, then it was presumed they had only their own impropriety to blame if they were molested.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, unlike her white male counterparts, a woman's gaze was more likely to communicate something about her own respectability than it was to harm or embarrass others. Women were expected to ignore all molestation and ogling and certainly never return a gaze. To look back would be to imply that the woman was open to the world, ready to engage with it. The exception that proved the rule was the urban prostitute, who was believed to advertise herself by her flamboyant dress and bold, inviting stare. Thus a woman's gaze threatened to expose her as sexually immoral or available if she offered it too liberally to others.<sup>75</sup> As Kasson notes, a lady's "very respectability and physical safety might depend upon the signs she communicated through her appearance."<sup>76</sup>

While etiquette writers insisted that middle-class ladies ought to do everything in their power to avoid a look from a male stranger, there is evidence that the freedoms and anonymity associated with urban life allowed some women to exhibit themselves willingly and enjoy the attention they received. Sex workers are of course one example: while many women who turned to sex work did so out of economic necessity, others saw the trade as an avenue for personal and economic freedom and male attention was evidence of their professional success.<sup>77</sup> Christine Stansell has also argued that a subculture of working-class women in the Bowery neighborhood of New York City deliberately dressed and acted in ways that drew attention to themselves in public. Whereas middle-class and elite white women tried to minimize the notice others took of them by dressing in subdued

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<sup>74</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 129.

<sup>75</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 128; Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 70.

<sup>76</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 121.

<sup>77</sup> Rachel Boyle, "The Public Women of Biler Avenue and Chicago's Intimate Economy, 1876-1882" (Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., 2020); Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 210-214. Boyle's paper was delivered virtually as OAH 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19.

colors, covering their faces, and avoiding eye contact with strangers, Bowery girls, or “gals,” deliberately eschewed these “genteel” styles and comportment. Bowery girls’ “studied departure from ladyhood” allowed working-class women of the Bowery to align themselves with some of the freedoms of the prostitute, but “nonetheless advertised their own singularity.” They favored showy clothing, bright fabrics, and comported themselves with a kind of “self-conscious boisterousness.” Bowery girls’ styles that emphasized their status as working women whose earnings allowed them to express themselves through fashion. Stories and guides to city life often portrayed Bowery girls as independent, strong-willed women who felt at home in public space.<sup>78</sup> As New York author George Foster noted, the Bowery girl’s “very walk has a swing of mischief and defiance in it.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, in Chicago, mixed-gender music saloons offered spaces for women to enjoy a thriving, raucous nightlife. Working women and “ladies” frequented music saloons to drink, socialize with friends, dance with men, and sing along loudly to the bands. As Jeffrey Wiltse has argued, many female patrons of Chicago’s nineteenth-century music saloons created a “a public identity based on sexual expression and allure.” While some may have engaged in sex work—and reformers certainly argued that music saloons bred prostitution—the women who lived loudly and publicly in these spaces did so for a wide range of complicated, ambiguous reasons. Finally, working-class women often engaged in work that necessitated or benefited from their public display. Actresses, dancers, burlesque stars, and singers often cultivated a public persona that emphasized their sexuality and physical appearance. Even waitresses learned that flirting and showing a little skin earned them more generous tips from male patrons.<sup>80</sup> Many women, especially working-class women, thus found ways to publicly express their sexuality, seek male attention, and receive it willingly. None of this precluded those same women from resented “insult” if they experienced it, as is clear later in this

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<sup>78</sup> Stansell, *City of Women*, 93-94.

<sup>79</sup> Foster, *New York by Gas-Light*.

<sup>80</sup> Wiltse, “I Like to Get Around”; Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*.

chapter, but this is not a story of a simple dichotomy in which women either always invited or always avoided male attention in public.

### **The Victim of Street Insult**

Streets insults distressed many middle-class commentators because they highlighted the slippage between women deemed “respectable” ladies and women assumed to be sexually available. In essence, a street insult took place when a male stranger let a woman know that he found her sexually appealing, considered her sexually available, or wished to make her acquaintance in a way that suggested improper intentions. Defining when a street insult had taken place depended on the man’s conduct but also on the conduct and perceived respectability of the woman insulted. The distinction between respectable ladies who were perceived as victims and women who were perceived as having invited street insults generally fell along class and racial lines. Middle-class white women were the most likely to appear as victims of street insults in newspaper reports and fictionalized accounts, with white working women making appearances as well. These were the idealized victims of street insults. The language used to describe such victims emphasized their status as “ladies” or as “virtuous” working women, classifications that were often synonymous with whiteness. For instance, city guides and melodramas about the dangers of city life emphasized the whiteness of their heroines as proof of their virtuosity. One city guide dwelled on the central character’s “large blue eyes, golden hair and figure” and the “great tears [that] ran down her blushing cheeks” when her way was barred by a group of men.<sup>81</sup> Newspapers similarly harped on white women’s supposedly inherent innocence in the face of harassers. Insults were said to bring a “blush to the cheek of the modest and virtuous,” a phrase that did dual work to emphasize the whiteness

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<sup>81</sup> Buntline, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, 10-11. These descriptions not only accentuated the woman’s whiteness but made her whiteness part of her sexual allure.

of the victims and the humiliation they felt when they received uninvited attention.<sup>82</sup> As the *Baltimore Sun* put it, the street “insult is an offence [sic] against the majesty of virtue and purity of female innocence.” While the *Sun* also claimed “those spiritual essences are the same in all conditions” and thus a woman’s “rank...can make no difference” to how much she was insulted, the fact that the *Sun* only defended white women from insult in its pages exposes the limits of that claim.<sup>83</sup> White men who defended white women from insult also liked to view themselves as fulfilling their natural duties as gentlemen. Several editorials on the street insult problem emphasized that any true gentlemen would be called to action if they saw a lady insulted in public.<sup>84</sup> One New York man lamented that the man who insulted his daughter had “erronious [sic] ideas on the divine right of gentlemen to insult those whose duty it is to protect from insult.”<sup>85</sup> White men who insulted white women were thus seen to fail in their obligation to defend white women’s purity and virtuousness. Indeed, as historian Wendy Rouse has argued, street insults could stand as proof of white men’s failure to uphold “white racial solidarity.”<sup>86</sup>

On the other hand, Black women rarely appear in the mainstream white press as victims of street insults, though they were by no means exempt from stranger intrusions in public. Racist myths of Black sexuality cast Black women as hypersexualized and were used to justify rape and sexual assault by white men for centuries.<sup>87</sup> Sexual assault served as a form of social control in the Reconstruction South when white men routinely attacked Black women as retribution for Black

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<sup>82</sup> Letter to the editor, (*Baltimore Sun*, April 28, 1838; Lounger, “Gossip with the Editor.”

<sup>83</sup> “Street Insults,” (*Baltimore Sun*, December 28, 1840, *America’s Historical Newspapers*).

<sup>84</sup> Letter to the editor, (*Baltimore Sun*, April 28, 1838, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Street Insults”; “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages”; “A Naughty Boy.”

<sup>85</sup> “Served Out.”

<sup>86</sup> Wendy L. Rouse, *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women’s Self-Defense Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 6.

<sup>87</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

men's newly acquired political rights.<sup>88</sup> Mythologies of hypersexualized Black women permeated the North as well, and free African Americans fought to undermine “derogatory narratives of Black womanhood” by controlling Black women's appearance, sexual practices, and cultural activities.<sup>89</sup> The same derogatory narratives made it especially unlikely that white-owned newspapers or white-produced fiction would cast Black women as victims of street insults. As shall become clear in a moment, male commentators sometimes accused middle-class or upper-class white women of inviting insult with immodest clothing or demeanor, even though myths about inherently virtuous white womanhood protected many women from accusations of impropriety. Given that Black women did not have access to the same claims of inherent purity and virtuousness, white editors and readers rarely came to their defense. Free Black women who moved visibly through urban spaces, especially those who presented themselves as respectable or middle-class, in fact risked public censure from white commentators. As art historian Jasmine Nichole Cobb has argued of antebellum Philadelphia, a city with a thriving free Black community, whites in the North were threatened by the visibility of Black freedom and especially the potential for a “Black gaze” to be turned on whites in public.<sup>90</sup> This unease was often funneled into a contempt for Black urbanites and particularly for any perceived pretensions towards middle-class status. White Northerners often commented on the clothing and appearance of Black “dandies” whose fine clothes made them more conspicuous on Northern city streets.<sup>91</sup> For instance, when illustrator Edward Williams Clay published a series of Black caricatures in *Life in Philadelphia* in 1828, he mocked the perceived self-importance of free Black Philadelphians and especially lampooned Black women's attempts to

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<sup>88</sup> Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>89</sup> Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 74.

<sup>90</sup> Cobb, *Picture Freedom*, 117.

<sup>91</sup> Shane White and Graham J. White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 91.

exhibit respectability by dressing and comporting themselves as ladies.<sup>92</sup> Thus Black women who attempted to lay claim to the status of lady—and all the protections that came with it—threatened dominant racial and gender hierarchies and risked ridicule in the press as well as in public.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, Black women endured threatening and humiliating actions from men in public places, actions that were often both racially and sexually motivated. When pro-slavery advocates rioted in Detroit in 1863, the *Liberator* argued that such violence was the result of a white culture that indoctrinated white people with hatred for Black Americans from infancy. White children were taught “by word and example, that the negro is to be hooted and kicked by all respectable people.” To prove the point, the *Liberator* told the story of a young Black woman who was “accosted and insulted” on the street. A “red-faced, whisky-bloated fellow” yelled at her as he left a saloon, asking her “Have you heard from your father Abe, lately?”, referring to President Abraham Lincoln.<sup>94</sup> The insult questioned the legitimacy of the woman’s birth and implied that she was the product of an interracial relationship, thus targeting both her race and her sexual reputation. While the insult was likely intended to embarrass or frighten the young woman, or at least to assert the dominance of the white assailant, the Black “servant girl” countered with her own rejoinder. “Yes,” she responded, she had heard from Abe and “he wants somebody to black his boots, and would like to give you the job.” The man “beat a sudden retreat” back into the saloon, apparently embarrassed at being outwitted by a young, Black, working-class woman. In this case, a Black woman effectively chastised a

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<sup>92</sup> Cobb, *Picture Freedom*, 114-145. For more on Clay’s *Life in Philadelphia*, see White and White, *Stylin’*, 95-124.

<sup>93</sup> At the same time, free Black communities often encouraged “respectable” modes of comportment and presentation as a way of “safeguarding” their new, fragile communities that were constantly under threat. This included instilling in Black women the values of piety, purity, and virtuousness. For example, Black churches and women’s mutual aid societies in Philadelphia took an active role in monitoring the personal lives of free Black women, encouraging them to follow ethical codes and refrain from behaviors like public drinking or profanity. Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 52.

<sup>94</sup> S.S.H., “The Riot in Detroit,” *The Liberator*, March 20, 1863, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers.

white man for accosting her, but the racial and sexual overtones of his remark demonstrate the way that Black women endured dually racist and sexist “insults.”<sup>95</sup>

The racial and gendered aspects of freedom of mobility are made strikingly clear by the story of Ellen Craft, an enslaved woman who escaped to freedom in 1848 by passing as a white man. Ellen’s fair complexion meant she could dress in men’s clothes and ride public transportation with her husband, William Craft, who pretended to be the white man’s Black valet. Together they rode trains and steamships to freedom in Boston. Ellen’s ability to navigate through public space with her husband was dependent on her ability to pass not only as white but also as man. As William Craft later explained, “we knew it was not customary in the South for ladies to travel with male servants; and therefore, notwithstanding my wife’s fair complexion, it would have been a very difficult task for her to have come off as a free white lady, with me as her slave.”<sup>96</sup> Here Craft hints at the white fear of Black male sexuality that made it not only “not customary” but potentially dangerous for a white woman and a Black man to travel together. In contrast, as a white man, Ellen Craft could go where she pleased with whomever she pleased.<sup>97</sup> In a later section, this chapter will delve further into Black women’s experiences of insult, threats, and violence on public transportation.

Though newspapers and city guides tended to cast white women as the primary victims of street insult, white women still needed to act the part of lady or virtuous working woman in order to

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<sup>95</sup> The interlocking, intersecting, or compounding effects of racism and sexism on Black women’s lives has been a major theoretical concern for Black women scholars and activists for decades. See for instance, Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” 1977; Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): S14–32; Deborah K. King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 42–72; Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.

<sup>96</sup> William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: William Tweedie, 1860), 35–36.

<sup>97</sup> For more on Ellen and William Craft, see Barbara McCaskill, “‘Yours Very Truly’: Ellen Craft--The Fugitive as Text and Artifact,” *African American Review* 28, no. 4 (1994): 509–29; Barbara McCaskill, *Love, Liberation, and Escaping Slavery: William and Ellen Craft in Cultural Memory* (University of Georgia Press, 2015); Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

secure sympathy from white male commentators. Only a woman who could credibly claim respectability could convincingly accuse a man of insulting her with a suggestive remark or a flirtatious ogle. Women who could not rely on being perceived as pure and virtuous or could not perform respectability could not credibly allege that they were insulted on the street, whether or not they experienced intrusive, insulting, or violent behavior from male strangers in public places. Even the most privileged women had to continuously prove and uphold their ladyhood. As feminist psychologist Greer Little Fox puts it, “the lady is always in a state of becoming: one acts like a lady, one attempts to be a lady, but one never is a lady.”<sup>98</sup> Ladies stood on a shaky ground. For instance, if a woman was perceived to have been open to flirtation or a more explicit sexual overture, she risked confirming for others that she was exactly the kind of woman the offending man had taken her for. She also forfeited her ability to cry insult. If, however, an insulted woman demonstrated she was not open to sexual overtures and was thus perceived as chaste, then she could claim harm if a man failed to treat her with the reverence and courtesy to which she was entitled as a virtuous woman.<sup>99</sup> A woman’s ability to claim the status of “lady” was central to her ability to seek redress if she endured stranger intrusions from men in public space. Therefore, while the moniker “street insult” was reserved primarily for women of whose social identities afforded them the presumption of chastity, purity, or virtuousness in mainstream culture, a woman’s social position alone was not a guarantee of her victimhood.

A woman’s protestations against street insults were more powerful if she responded to intrusions in the way a lady should. When the *New York Times* ran a series of articles about the problem of street insults on public transportation, male and female readers debated proper ladylike

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<sup>98</sup> Greer Litton Fox, “Nice Girl!: Social Control of Women through a Value Construct,” *Signs* 2, no. 4 (1977): 805–17. See also Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

<sup>99</sup> Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 142.

response to street insults. Male readers expressed their skepticism and disbelief that ladies endured insult in spite of their respectability. One reader admitted he had seen “silly men” insult women from time to time, but insisted, “I have never seen the ‘ladies’ resent, or even show disapprobation of, these acts.” In fact, he argued, the women were themselves to blame, for until they “deport themselves modestly” they cannot “complain of ‘insults,’ of which there are fewer than is supposed.” Women whose social positions ensured some degree of protection thus still risked challenges to their respectability if they alleged a street insult. Other readers asked why women did not denounce insulting behaviors as they happened, if they disliked them so much. As reader F.S.D. asked, “have they not tongues, and can they not use them pretty freely?” On the contrary, he suggested that women were actually the worst offenders when it came to improper conduct in public. Whenever he boarded public conveyances, he claimed, women stared at him in a way that embarrassed him. He feared his blushes would mark him as the offending party, even though he felt he was a victim of women’s impertinent looks. From this perspective, women’s deportment was the most effective protection from insult and women who complained of insult were likely to be guilty of impropriety themselves.<sup>100</sup> Thus, while white women, and especially white “ladies,” were more likely to be perceived by male commentators as victims of street insult, they were sometimes required to prove their chastity and virtuousness through their actions.

### **Gentlemen and Corner Loafers**

Just as the definition of a street insult depended on the perceived respectability of the woman involved, male commentators suggested that only men perceived as morally deficient insulted women. When newspapers and magazines reported on the general phenomenon of the

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<sup>100</sup> “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1869.

street insult, they often blamed harassment on young, belligerent white men who were coded as working-class or unemployed. Reports used monikers like “corner loafer,” “street loafer,” and “Broadway statue” to imply that these men had nothing better to do than loiter in public places and insult women who passed.<sup>101</sup> At other times, newspapers described harassers almost as if they were their own species of animal. One newspaper diatribe against the “outrages” women faced on street cars described male harassers as “base-minded creatures...who have a sort of instinct for insulting every woman they meet.”<sup>102</sup> According to this writer, harassers’ actions betrayed such men as the dregs of society or as lacking the manners of a proper middle-class gentlemen. As feminist theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notes in her history of staring, ideal conceptions of nineteenth-century masculinity prized virility, physical prowess, decisiveness, and mental and bodily control. “Middle-class men were doers not lookers,” she writes.<sup>103</sup> Men who leered and insulted women in public thus demonstrated ill-breeding or an ignorance of middle-class etiquette and supposedly exposed themselves as deadbeats who had nothing better to do than to ogle the passing crowds.

Despite this tendency to paint harassers as uncouth and vulgar men who’s lack of regular employment encouraged a habit of loitering on street corners, when women complained about individual incidents, they often pinned street insults on “gentlemen” and white men in positions of authority. The offending men’s clothing and appearance provide clues here: more often than not, women reported that the worst street insults came from men who dressed “genteelly,” that is, like “gentlemen.”<sup>104</sup> Such descriptions marked harassers as predominantly white and middle or upper-class. One New York woman went so far as to insist that she preferred riding street cars to public stagecoaches because the “poorer class” of clientele on streetcars “are generally better behaved.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> “The Corner Loafer Nuisance”; Waller, letter to the editor.

<sup>102</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>103</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 67.

<sup>104</sup> “Served Out”; A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars”; “The Corner Loafer Nuisance.”

<sup>105</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.”

Women also complained that men in positions of authority—including police officers, soldiers, and streetcar conductors—abused their power by insulting women. A Minneapolis woman complained in 1876 that, though she endured “ill-treatment” from men on the streets, she could not rely on law enforcement to protect her as police officers had “taken a hand in the disturbance.”<sup>106</sup> In New Orleans, the city’s police superintendent apologized to residents for the behavior of one of his officers who, rather than arresting the drunk U.S. soldier who was bothering two women on a streetcar, had instead joined the soldier in “grossly and wantonly” insulting the women.<sup>107</sup> Streetcar conductors were also perpetrators of insult and violence against women in public. In one sensational story, a New York streetcar conductor who had “leered insultingly” at two women passengers murdered the man who came to their rescue.<sup>108</sup> Far from the loitering, loafing, dregs of society that came to represent the quintessential insulter of women, these intrusive behaviors and violent outbursts came from men who were explicitly tasked with keeping the public safe, or at least conveying them safely through the city.

Nevertheless, when accounts of street insults made their way into local newspapers, the press discussed harassers’ gentlemanly appearance as if it were a disguise. Thus “fellows *in the garb of gentlemen*” approached schoolgirls in the streets and “men *dressing and appearing like gentlemen*” bothered young women in public street cars.<sup>109</sup> On other occasions, newspapers mocked harassers’ clothing as overly fussy or fashionable: a young man accused of insulting women in the street might be described as “foppishly dressed” or as a “pretty fellow,” while the *Baltimore Sun* warned its readers to be on the look out for “fellows...easily recognized by being dressed in a peculiar fashion,

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<sup>106</sup> “Depraved Humanity,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, December 22, 1876, Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>107</sup> “Street Car And Police.”

<sup>108</sup> “The Street-Car Murder,” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 20, 1871, HathiTrust. Also see treatment of this incident in Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 140.

<sup>109</sup> “The Corner Loafer Nuisance”; A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.” Emphasis added.

half gentleman, half groom.”<sup>110</sup> According to such accounts, men who insulted women were not true gentlemen, they only appeared as such. Their clothing and comportment allowed them to pass as respectable gentlemen until their actions betrayed their true characters. As a result, while women continued to report that middle-class and upper-class white men regularly accosted them in public places, public discourses upheld the narrative that the worst offenders were ill-bred, lazy loafers.

Conversely, white Northern commentators, both men and women, rarely accused Black men of street insults, not because Black men were perceived as sexually benign but because they were perceived as especially sexually dangerous, particularly to white women. Since the colonial period, white enslavers and lawmakers criminalized sexual relationships between Black men and white women and reserved the harshest punishment for Black men. Interracial relationships between Black men and white women threatened to upset a racial and gendered order that gave white men legal ownership over the white women in their families and justified white men’s unfettered sexual access to Black women, especially enslaved women. In cities with visible free Black communities, fears of interracial sex often justified anti-Black violence and attacks on Black businesses, infrastructure, and other symbols of Black autonomy. When in 1838 a white mob burned down Pennsylvania Hall, an anti-slavery meeting space in the free Black community of Philadelphia, whites justified the attack in part on “the fraternal commingling of the races and the sexes in and around” the hall.<sup>111</sup> In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the rape of white women by Black men became a primary justification for lynchings, regardless of whether such rapes actually took place.<sup>112</sup> A Black man who

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<sup>110</sup> “An Ingenious Method of Obtaining an Introduction”; “Another Street Insult”; Letter to the editor, (Baltimore) *Sun*, April 28, 1838, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>111</sup> Ira V. Brown, “Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall,” *Phylon* 37, no. 2 (1976): 128. See also Elise Virginia Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 88; Cobb, *Picture Freedom*, 124-125.

<sup>112</sup> John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 37, 217-219.

expressed—or was perceived or accused of expressing—his sexual interest in a white woman in the nineteenth century committed an offense deemed far worse than insult.

One account of a Black man accused of street insult is an exception that proves the rule: Black men might be accused of street insult, but only when they were perceived as subservient, non-threatening, and devoid of agency. Thus, when the Baltimore *Sun* reported that a “foppishly dressed” Black man followed a young white woman to her door one evening, the paper brushed off the insult as an example of an enslaved man copying his “masters’ vices.” These vices included imitating European manners, fashion, and the practice of taking “a night cruize [sic] about the streets in search of an opportunity of insulting unprotected females.” The *Sun* portrayed the Black man as comical and effectively harmless, stripping him of agency and placing the blame for his behavior at the feet of his “master and his master’s associates” who had failed to teach him good manners. “[I]t is nothing more than can be expected,” lamented the *Sun*, “from the example set him by those who are presumed to be his betters, but who are in reality on par with him in gentlemanly behaviour [sic].”<sup>113</sup> According to this account, the enslaved man’s potentially insulting conduct was neutralized because, incapable of acting on his own, he was simply copying the white men he saw around him. Had he been perceived as behaving of his own accord, his offense would likely have been interpreted as far more serious and garnered a response far more extreme and violent than a slightly amused write-up in the *Sun*. The paucity of examples of Black men accused of street insults was thus not a sign of a lack of anxiety about racial mixing or Black male sexuality. On the contrary, it was white men’s racial and gender privilege that protected them from the violence directed at Black men who were perceived to have made sexual overtures to white women. The relatively tame moniker of “street insult” was reserved for behaviors that were deemed distressing and bothersome

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<sup>113</sup> “Another Street Insult.”

when perpetrated by white men, but were understood as grounds for murder when Black men were accused of the same conduct.

Accounts of street insults worked to bolster middle-class and upper-class white men's power over urban space. While women tended to accuse middle- and upper-class white men of street insult, these men were also the primary interpreters of street insult. As the owners of city newspapers, professional white men in particular had significant power to decide when an insult had taken place, who could be accused of insult, and who could seek retribution for insult. Newspaper accounts scapegoated working-class white men for the intrusive behaviors of "gentlemen," who themselves continued to bother women in public places and punish working-class men and Black men for the same offenses, and sometimes for far less. Professional white men's power over the discourse of street insults was not monolithic, however, as the next section will discuss.

### **Outrages on New York City Streetcars**

Despite middle-class white men's influence over interpretations of street insult, a look at intrusive behaviors on public transportation in Northern cities illuminates some of the ways that women, white and Black, contested dominant narratives of street insult. Public conveyances proved especially contentious urban spaces, not least for the opportunities they provided for observing strangers in public. Streetcars were unique spaces in the urban landscape. Streetcar manufacturers designed and decorated cars to imitate the tastes and comfort of a middle-class living room, providing a veneer of home-like privacy. Yet streetcars were also public spaces where strangers pressed together in closer proximity and for longer periods of time than passersby on the street.<sup>114</sup> As the cheapest form of transportation in many cities, streetcars also attracted a variety of

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<sup>114</sup> Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 41; Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City*, 6.

passengers, from middle-class women shoppers to laborers to businessmen.<sup>115</sup> Sex workers were known to ride certain routes and solicit clients.<sup>116</sup> In 1865, *Godey's Lady's Book* captured the experience of riding public transportation and the wide array of passengers one might encounter. The piece offered vignettes of fictional passengers who came and went on a Philadelphia streetcar in the course of a day. The passengers were based on literary archetypes and were described in sentimental portraits, like the young working girl with the sick mother whose premature employment had given her a “sad, patient expression of her face, so unusual in one so young,” or the kindly old gentleman who cradled a small child, both illuminated in a “sunbeam playing over them.” The piece captured not only the variety of passengers that might ride a streetcar but also suggested the thrill of watching these strangers as their paths briefly and romantically overlapped. The thrill of observation was part of the point of the journey, as *Godey's* advised its readers, “it is as well to look around you in your trips and read a page from human nature in the daily journey of life.”<sup>117</sup>

Newspaper reports of insults often singled out streetcars as especially troublesome and insults on streetcars became a heated point of discussion in New York in October 1869.<sup>118</sup> The debate transpired in the pages of the *New York Times* and illuminated how men's stranger intrusions served as focal points for debates about women's presence in public.<sup>119</sup> In early October, the *Times* reported the arrest of Alexander J. Hamilton, a 60-year-old businessman who had bothered a young female passenger on a Third Avenue streetcar. The arresting police officer, Detective George Elder, claimed Hamilton used a newspaper to obscure his hands from view, allowing him to “take improper liberties” with the young woman. When the officer “snatched the paper” away, he found Hamilton's

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<sup>115</sup> Domosh and Seager, *Putting Women in Place*, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 151; Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 214.

<sup>117</sup> “A Trip in the Street Cars,” *Godey's Lady's Book*, June 1865, Accessible Archives.

<sup>118</sup> “Miscellany,” *Constitution* (Middletown, CT), March 22, 1865; “A Cowhiding Affair”; “The Police and the Street-Cars,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1871; “Street Car And Police”; “Roughs in a Street Car”; “A Naughty Boy,” *St. Louis Dispatch*, January 10, 1877.

<sup>119</sup> For more details of this debate and nighttime travel in streetcars, see Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 138-178.

“hands...upon the lady.” Hamilton protested that he had been wrongfully accused, claiming he was a “respectable citizen” who had simply been reading his newspaper “with both hands.”<sup>120</sup> Despite his protestations, the incident matched what many women claimed as their experience of street insults. The offender was an older, professional white man who wielded authority and clout as a result of his social location and his position as Secretary of the Central American Transit Company, a company that regularly appeared in the pages of local papers for its interests in shipping in Panama.<sup>121</sup> Hamilton’s actions also appeared to confirm reports that men who insulted women often did so with surreptitious actions intended to be easily dismissed as harmless. Indeed, in defending his decision to arrest Hamilton, Detective Elder and his defenders argued, “it was a common practice in cars, stages and other crammed places for men to take unwarrantable liberties with the persons of females in the crowd, and it was done in such a manner that the women themselves would scarcely notice it; and further, it was almost invariably old men who were engaged in this bestial business.”<sup>122</sup> In this context, Hamilton’s actions were neither unusual nor surprising.

The Hamilton case appears to have caught the public’s eye. Two weeks after the initial reports, the *New York Times* published excerpts from letters by several women readers who complained about the frequency with which they encountered men “who habitually use public vehicles in order that they may insult defenceless [sic] women.” Over the course of next few weeks, readers wrote in to respond to the allegations that women were “treat[ed]...as if they were cattle” on New York streetcars and stages.<sup>123</sup> This month-long exchange in the pages of the *New York Times* offers a microcosm of the debates and negotiations about the nature of street insults that were

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<sup>120</sup> “Outrage in a Street Car,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1869. Hamilton even lodged a counter-complaint against Detective Elder, claiming he used “unnecessary violence” during the arrest.

<sup>121</sup> “The Central American Question: Execution of a New Transit Contract,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1858; “Isthmus of Panama: Important from Nicaragua Seizure of the Property of the Central American Transit Company by the Nicaraguan Government,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1863; “The Central American Transit Company,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1863; “Nicaragua: The Central-American Transit Company,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1868.

<sup>122</sup> “A Detective on Trial,” *New York Herald*, October 2, 1869.

<sup>123</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

taking place across the country among white, middle-class and affluent Americans. Readers debated what constituted an insult, who were the worst offenders, and what were the appropriate responses to insult. Some wrote in to support women's claims, some wrote in to refute them, while still others implored women to speak up more often if they were bothered, otherwise the daily insults would continue.

Wrapped up in these debates were ideas about the proper behavior and place of ladies and gentlemen in public space. Firstly, white women harnessed their culturally imposed roles as moral arbiters to castigate middle-class white men for inadequately performing their roles as gentlemen. Women letter-writers claimed that white men too often failed to respect ladies or protect them from insult, humiliation, and harm. A reader who identified herself as "A Mother" accused "men dressed in the garb of gentlemen" of routinely insulting women in public. Her choice of words suggested that the offenders performed gentlemanly respectability in their appearance but their treatment of ladies fell short of the ideal. A Mother lamented that the insults were so bad they "would make a man of honor and principle blush for his sex," further suggesting that any true gentlemen would not stand for such behavior.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, a reader calling herself "Another young lady" demanded, "I would like to see how you would act, were it a sister of your own who was insulted." She went on to suggest that "half of the so-called men," far from defending ladies, were "mere tailors' blocks," that is, they stood motionless, like a mannequin. Instead, the writer challenged men to "imagine that in protecting any defenceless [sic] woman, he [was] paying respect to his own sister."<sup>125</sup> The *New York Times* agreed, stating "it is a safe rule to act toward a woman upon the supposition that she is honest and respectable."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> "The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars."

<sup>125</sup> "The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars."

<sup>126</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 25, 1869.

The *New York Times* initially took a sympathetic stance towards the women complainants. The editors argued that accusations of insulting behavior were usually backed up with “only too much foundation” and they warned that “ladies” were “liable to more annoyances now in our streets than at almost any previous time.”<sup>127</sup> Garnering particular sympathy were the several women correspondents who the *Times* explained were trying to “earn a respectable livelihood” and rode public transportation “on their way to business.” Such respectable working women were, according to the *New York Times*, “in a position which of itself appeals to every chivalrous sentiment” a gentlemen ought to have.<sup>128</sup> And yet the working women “find themselves the objects of the loathsome attention of gray-headed profligates,” gentlemen who should have known better and embarrassed both themselves and the women they insulted with their behavior.<sup>129</sup> The consequences of this ungentlemanly behavior were all too clear to the *Times*: if it was allowed to continue, New York’s “honorable reputation for the freedom with which ladies could go about the streets” would soon evaporate and the city would be little better than “London or Paris” where “a woman can scarcely ever stir abroad without being dogged by men, or otherwise insulted.”<sup>130</sup> For the editors of the *Times*, insults against ladies in public threatened the very fabric of a democratic and free American metropolis and foretold a degradation of the bodily freedom enjoyed by “American girls.”<sup>131</sup>

The insults that took center stage in these exposés were often non-verbal and sometimes non-physical. One female reader complained of a common move where a man would lean back and stretch his arms across the back of the streetcar seats so that he could “insult” women sitting next to him without them noticing.<sup>132</sup> The reader calling herself “A Young Lady” singled out uninvited

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<sup>127</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 21, 1869.

<sup>128</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>129</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>130</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>131</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>132</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 21, 1869.

looking as an intrusive practice. She peppered her letter to the *Times* with references to men who watched her on public transit and complained of the discomfort it caused her. Her descriptions of riding a New York omnibus evoked the feeling of being constantly under observation, even if such observation was not immediately apparent: she wrote, “if a young lady in an omnibus puts her hand to her head to arrange her veil or hat, every man’s eye is on her and kept on her until she returns her hand again to its place; and some men are not yet satisfied, but keep on staring until the lady, sometimes feeling indignant, will give a haughty return glance.”<sup>133</sup> The *Times* confirmed her experience, arguing that too many men took a casual, unintended glance from a woman as an open invitation to engage. Furthermore, streetcar conductors “corroborated” the women’s complaints. Conductors both witnessed and heard secondhand about insulting behavior and were “sometimes strongly tempted to take the law into their own hands.”

Nevertheless, the descriptions of non-verbal and non-physical insults left space for ambiguity and for other readers to reinterpretate such behaviors. By the end of October 1869, male readers had begun to defend themselves. They blamed street insults on women who they claimed failed to act as ladies by dressing provocatively, inviting attention, or approaching men in public rather. Male letter-writers exclaimed they could not look away from the women who dressed and comported themselves as immodestly as those on New York street cars. In a change of tune, the *New York Times* suggested, “the insults respectable women receive often originate in the shameless behavior of the depraved members of their sex.”<sup>134</sup> That is, the way that “depraved” women acted in public created an environment in which men felt entitled to approach and proposition any woman in the streets or streetcars. In fact, a letter-writer going by the initials F.S.D. explained that, in his experience, women were some of the worst offenders: whenever he boarded an omnibus or

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<sup>133</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.”

<sup>134</sup> [No title], *New York Times*, October 25, 1869.

streetcar women “will commence casting side glances at me—putting on roguish smiles, and all that sort of thing—which to a bashful person (such as myself) is anything but pleasant, for it causes the color to mount my cheek, and it apt to give people in general an impression that I am the guilty one.”<sup>135</sup> One reader pointed out that some women even rode public transportation “for the express purpose of forming an acquaintance,” alluding perhaps to the prostitutes who met clients on certain streetcar lines.<sup>136</sup>

Men’s defensive maneuvers met with mixed results, for while few disputed the fact that men might encounter disreputable women in public space, this did not always convince New Yorkers that men were absolved of guilt when it came to insulting lady riders. For instance, on the one hand, a reader calling herself “Another young lady” bemoaned the conduct of some women, recounting, “I have seen disgusting behavior on the part of some—of course, they were ‘ladies!’—in our stages, and on such occasions I do not wonder that the men forget to be gentlemen.” Still, this reader was skeptical of the argument that a few bad behaviors “on the part of some” thus excused men of all insults. She wondered how male riders could confuse real ladies from imposters, asking, “where are your perceptions, that you cannot tell wheat from tares.”<sup>137</sup> Similarly, the *New York Times* acknowledged that “dissolute females” often rode public transportation, but editors also suggested “men are not often deceived in these matters, although it may suit them to pretend to be. The depraved woman soon betrays her character.”<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the *Times* lamented that there existed in society an “idea that every woman’s mind is a well of corruption, and that she cannot resist the advances of the first empty-headed puppy who approaches her.” The proliferation of “disgusting publications” and “indecent prints” on sale on any street corner abetted this wrong-headed

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<sup>135</sup> “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars.”

<sup>136</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 25, 1869.

<sup>137</sup> “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars.” No question mark in the original.

<sup>138</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 25, 1869.

assumption.<sup>139</sup> Thus New Yorkers generally agreed that there were at least two classes of women—“ladies” and “dissolute females”—who navigated public space. However, New Yorkers disagreed on whether one could easily discern the distinctions between women and whether the existence of a few bad actors meant men were the true victims and could never be held responsible for mistaking a “lady” for a “dissolute female.”

These debates over whether men or women were primarily to blame for intrusive behaviors illuminates how the boundaries of ladylike and gentlemanly behavior remained in flux and up for interpretation. The performance of ladylike and gentlemanly behavior proved to be one way of establishing one’s respectability. When, as the *New York Times* pointed out, it was “impossible to place an official at the door [of a public conveyance] to demand a certificate of moral character,” men and women had to prove their respectability in other ways.<sup>140</sup> For instance, one way that women could perform their respectability and distinguish themselves as “ladies” was through their responses to intrusive behaviors from men, but New Yorkers disagreed on what constituted a ladylike response. Some men asked, if women disliked being ogled or touched so much, why did they not speak up more often? “Virtue is said to be bold and fearless, and vice, mean and cowardly,” wrote one male reader, so why “do not the ladies when insulted in stages and cars speak out, so that all eyes may be turned upon the offender. The ladies themselves have the most effectual remedy for the evil complained of.”<sup>141</sup> Similarly, a correspondent asked ladies to speak. If they did, men would learn “better manners.”<sup>142</sup> However, women made it clear that speaking up was not always an option for them. As one woman explained, she would never call out an offending man or go to law enforcement for help. It was not worth the notoriety she believed would come with such an

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<sup>139</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.” For more on nineteenth-century pornography, see Amy Werbel, *Lust on Trial: Censorship and the Rise of American Obscenity in the Age of Anthony Comstock* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

<sup>140</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 25, 1869.

<sup>141</sup> “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars.”

<sup>142</sup> “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars.”

action.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the *Times* noted that men could more easily escape embarrassing situations than their female counterparts, noting, “even in the worst case, a man can easily protect himself, while ... [ladies] are obliged to submit quietly to indignities which they cannot effectually resent and are unable to punish.”<sup>144</sup> Thus ladies who resented insult on public transit found themselves in a no-win situation. If women did not speak up, they could be perceived as wanting the attention or at least tolerating it. If women reprimanded men who insulted them, they risked “notoriety” and might even be accused themselves of inviting the attention. This double standard left at least one letter-writer, A Young Lady, feeling helpless. She commented, “No matter how quietly a lady sits in a stage, she is liable to insult.”<sup>145</sup>

### **Racial Segregation as “Insult”**

While advocates for white women’s safety emphasized their status as “ladies” to demand respectful treatment on public transportation, the treatment of Black women on public transportation demonstrates the limitations of that claim. Segregated public transportation was a common fixture in Northern cities in the antebellum period. As free Black communities grew in cities like New York and Philadelphia, white-owned transit companies attempted to control the mixing of white and Black passengers in their public conveyances.<sup>146</sup> While public transportation companies’ racist and segregationist policies were not law, they nevertheless affected African Americans’ access to public space and transportation. As historian Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor has argued, “Through a combination of social customs, racial codes, and popular culture, U.S. whites

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<sup>143</sup> “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars.”

<sup>144</sup> [no title], *New York Times*, October 25, 1869.

<sup>145</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.”

<sup>146</sup> Philip S. Foner, “The Battle to End Discrimination Against Negroes on Philadelphia Streetcars: (Part I) Background and Beginning of the Battle,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 40, no. 3 (1973): 262; Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 15.

worked vigorously to construct a system that surveilled, curtailed, and discouraged black mobility,” with public transportation emerging as “one of the most notorious spaces for antiblack aggression.”<sup>147</sup> White Americans who supported such a system often saw desegregated public transportation as the start of a “slippery slope” that would lead to interracial relationships far beyond the streetcar. In 1864, for instance, Ohio Democratic congressman Samuel Sullivan Cox warned that “black suffrage” and “African equality in street cars” would lead “steadily forward to perfect social equality of black and white, and can only end in this detestable doctrine of— Miscegenation!”<sup>148</sup> Ironically, while Cox’s alarmist tone and conflation of desegregated streetcars with miscegenation were intended to frighten white Americans into voting Democrat, he was correct that desegregated, and safer, public transportation would give Black citizens greater mobility and freedom, especially in urban areas.

When African Americans in the North began to protest segregation on public transportation in the mid-1800s, Black women were often at the forefront of such activism. As historian Blair L. M. Kelley has argued, the very existence of Black women disrupted the logic of segregated transportation: if, as many argued, racially segregated streetcars and railcars were designed to protect white women from supposedly predatory Black men, then segregation should not extend to Black women. The fact that Black women were nevertheless not only denied entry to segregated public transportation but often attacked and beaten if they tried to ride in whites-only cars belied the logic of segregation and revealed it was “about not separation and protection but violence and stigma.” Black women became some of the “most effective leaders and protesters” in the fight to desegregate public transportation across the country.<sup>149</sup> In Philadelphia, for instance, some of the most

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<sup>147</sup> Pryor, *Colored Travelers*, 1.

<sup>148</sup> For more on the concept of miscegenation and fears of a “slippery slope” of racial equality, see Lemire, “*Miscegenation*,” 118.

<sup>149</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 11.

compelling evidence of the injustice and violence of segregation came from stories of “respectable” Black women, laundresses, or elderly women who were forcibly expelled from streetcars time and time again. For instance, two Black women who boarded a street car in Philadelphia were subjected to dangerous speeds and “the most insulting language” until one of them jumped from the careening car. Their experience became part of the Black community’s rallying cry to end the “shameful” practice of racial segregation on public transportation.<sup>150</sup>

Desegregation campaigns used the language of “insult” to describe the indignities suffered by Black women and men alike at the hands of white passengers and conductors. However, the kinds of behaviors implied by the term “insult,” when applied to Black women, were differed in telling ways from the behaviors white women denounced. In high-profile incidents in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., Black women endured racial slurs and physical attacks. In some cases, white conductors forcibly dragged Black women off segregated public conveyances. Fifteen years before *New York Times* readers debated the insults white women endured on street cars, a young Black schoolteacher and organist named Elizabeth Jennings sued New York’s Third Avenue Railway for the treatment she received on one of their streetcars. On July 16, 1854, the twenty-five-year-old Jennings tried to board a Third Avenue streetcar on her way to a church meeting but the white conductor stopped her. At the time, the company’s policy dictated that Black passengers had

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<sup>150</sup> “Shameful,” *Christian Recorder*, September 23, 1865.

For more on the efforts to desegregate streetcars in Philadelphia and elsewhere, see “A Social Question in Philadelphia— as to Colored People Riding in the Street Railroad Cars,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, February 27, 1865, America’s Historical Newspapers; “A Brief Narrative of the Struggle for the Rights of the Colored People of Philadelphia in the City Railway Cars and a Defence of William Still,” Afro-American History Series, 1867; “Philadelphia Affairs,” *Christian Recorder*, February 9, 1867; “More Outrages,” *Christian Recorder*, October 12, 1867. See also Foner, “The Battle to End Discrimination... (Part I)”; Philip S. Foner, “The Battle to End Discrimination Against Negroes on Philadelphia Streetcars: (Part II) The Victory,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 40, no. 4 (1973): 354–79. Hudson, *The Making of “Mammy Pleasant”*; Kelley, *Right to Ride*; Hugh Davis, “We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less”: *The African American Struggle for Equal Rights in the North during Reconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Geoff D. Zylstra, “Whiteness, Freedom, and Technology: The Racial Struggle over Philadelphia’s Streetcars, 1859—1867,” *Technology and Culture* 52, no. 4 (2011): 678–702.

For more on attempts to claim respectability for free Black women, and the ways Black women defied “white middle-class standards of behavior” to exert power within their communities, see Jane E. Dabel, *A Respectable Woman: The Public Roles of African American Women in 19th-Century New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

to ride on the outside platforms, rather than inside the cars, unless no white passengers objected. The company also ran a number of special cars open only to Black passengers. The conductor who stopped Jennings insisted that she wait for a the next car, which he said would have “[her] people in it.”<sup>151</sup> When she refused to leave the car, arguing that none of the white passengers objected to her presence, the conductor grabbed her and tried to force her off the car. He “got her down to the platform, jammed her bonnet, soiled her dress, and injured her person,” but she resisted and remained onboard.<sup>152</sup> The conductor then solicited the help of a passing white policeman and together they succeeded in dragging Jennings from the car by her feet.

Like her white counterparts, Jennings asserted her respectability and status as a lady to argue for respectful treatment on public transportation. Jennings claimed the conductor asked her to leave the car and she “told him [she] was a respectable person, born and raised in New York.” “I had never been insulted before while going to church,” she told the conductor, and accused him of being “a good for nothing impudent fellow for insulting decent persons while on their way to church.”<sup>153</sup> The Black newspapers that reported the incident likewise emphasized Jennings’ respectability and piety but also her parentage, as she was descended from a prominent free Black family in New York. This strategy had some success in the court system, even if it did not convince the conductor in the heat of the moment. Jennings’ suit against the Third Avenue Railway made it to the New York State Supreme Court, which awarded her five hundred dollars in damages plus court costs. The judge in the case ruled that the conductor had used unnecessary force against Jennings. He further suggested that Black New Yorkers should have the same rights as white citizens, provided they conduct themselves, like Jennings, in a respectful and peaceful manner.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 18.

<sup>152</sup> “Legal Rights Vindicated,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, March 2, 1855, Accessible Archives.

<sup>153</sup> “Outrage upon Colored Persons,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, July 28, 1854, quoted in Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 19.

<sup>154</sup> For more on the Jennings case and the anti-discrimination cases it inspired, see Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 15-32.

In a strikingly similar incident ten years later, a white conductor ousted the famous Black orator and abolitionist Sojourner Truth from a Washington, D.C. streetcar. As Truth tried to board the streetcar in the fall of 1865, another passenger challenged her right to ride, drawing the attention of the conductor. The conductor tried to forcibly remove Truth from the car, grabbing the 80-year-old by the arm. As Truth told it, the conductor “slammed me against the door.” At that moment, Truth enlisted the help of white philanthropist Laura S. Haviland, a fellow passenger, and threatened to report the conductor to his employer. At this, the conductor left Truth alone. When Truth lodged an official complaint, the conductor lost his job and faced charges of assault and battery. Before his trial concluded, Truth remembered “the inside of the cars looked like pepper and salt” and conductors were addressing Black women passengers as “ladies.” For Truth, this marked “a great change” in the treatment of Black women on public transit in D.C. For Black women to be identified as “ladies” was to be afforded some of the protections and respect white women took for granted.<sup>155</sup> However, this was not a widespread or permanent change.<sup>156</sup>

Jennings’s and Truth’s experiences demonstrate the chasm between what counted as “insulting” to white women versus Black women in dominant narratives of street insult; the bar was far higher for the latter than the former. Black women were even less likely than their white counterparts to garner sympathy or protection from intrusive and even physically violent behaviors. Indeed, even when Black activists won key legal victories in the battle to make public transportation safer for African Americans, this did little to change everyday experiences of Black women and men on public transportation. While lawsuits against discriminatory policies on Philadelphia streetcars

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<sup>155</sup> Laura S. Haviland, “The Assault on Sojourner Truth,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 14, 1865, America’s Historical Newspapers; Sojourner Truth and Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Boston, MA: 1875).

<sup>156</sup> Indeed, Ida B. Wells suffered similar treatment on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in 1883. When Wells attempted to ride in the “Ladies Only” car she was forcibly dragged from the car by the conductor, to cheers from the white passengers. Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 18-19; Willie Coleman, “Black Women and Segregated Public Transportation: Ninety Years of Resistance,” *Negro History Bulletin* 63, no. 1–4 (December 2000): 17–22; Sarah Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism* (University of Georgia Press, 2015), 49.

and railroads were often successful, especially when women were the plaintiffs, they did little to actually change streetcar company policies in that city.<sup>157</sup> When Black women tried to assert their rights as respectable women and ladies, primarily by demonstrating their “ability to deal politely with inhumane treatment,” abolitionist and Black newspapers defended them, but this rarely translated into better treatment in the everyday spaces of the street or streetcar.<sup>158</sup> As later chapters of this dissertation will show, Black women continued to endure insulting behavior and physical violence at the hands of whites on public transit long after women like Elizabeth Jennings and Sojourner Truth had won legal victories against their assailants.

### **Narratives of Sexual Danger and Vulnerability**

As Americans debated the meaning of street insults in urban spaces, newspaper accounts, city guides, and melodramas offered readers ways to make sense of their interactions with strangers, including what behaviors counted as street insults and who could claim the status as a “lady” and a “victim.” As historian Judith Walkowitz argues in her work on narratives of sexual danger in Victorian London, compelling “myths” and narratives about human experience can produce discussion and disagreement amongst people, but they also can form “a story that powerfully [orders] people’s experiences and their own self-representations.”<sup>159</sup> In the case of nineteenth-century America, narratives of urban space encouraged women to fear stranger interactions in public and especially to be wary of escalation in stranger interactions. Stories about street insults often emphasized the likelihood of violent escalation. In newspaper reporting and fictionalized accounts, a lascivious leer could easily turn into an uncouth remark, which in turn could become an

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<sup>157</sup> Davis, “*We Will Be Satisfied*,” 30.

<sup>158</sup> Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, 50

<sup>159</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 7.

unwelcome touch, culminating in seduction, destitution, and even murder. Ideas about female sexual vulnerability and male chivalry also suggested that women always needed male protectors to prevent insult and attack in public. Taken together, these narratives lent street insults an ominous tint, suggesting that a leer or a passing remark could portend something far worse. Street insults affected women's perceptions of their own safety in urban space and ultimately contributed to some women's decisions to restrict their own mobility in exchange for a greater sense of security.

The expectation that male relatives or gentlemen would protect white women from insult was the first indication that street insults might prove dangerous. In newspaper accounts of street insult, women were rarely expected to take matters into their own hands, to stand up for themselves, or to admonish harassers. Newspapers often describe how brothers, fathers, or even benevolent male strangers stepped in to protect the honor of white women accosted in public places.<sup>160</sup> White male relatives had a vested interest in protecting the women in their families as they were protecting their own property. A father effectively owned his daughter and his daughter's labor until she married, at which point her husband took control. Under the legal classification of coverture, married women did not have legal autonomy separate from their husbands and thus an insult, sexual overture, or sexual assault aimed at a married woman was understood "as a harm done to her husband."<sup>161</sup> An insult against a young woman could then translate as an insult against her male kin. Newspaper reports often excused violence on the part of male relatives, instead justifying men's desire to mete out justice. When a reader calling himself "A. Brother" wrote into the Baltimore *Sun* for help identifying a man who had been insulting ladies, the *Sun* sympathized with his struggle: "If any thing can justify a man in taking the law into his own hands, it is in a case like this, where a

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<sup>160</sup> "Served Out"; "A Cowhiding Affair."

<sup>161</sup> Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 29-30. For more on coverture in American history, see Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 11- 12.

dastard indecently accosts an unprotected female and outrages every feeling of delicacy by language and behavior endured by none but the most abandoned.”<sup>162</sup> This remark did dual duty to affirm white men’s right to protect their women from insult and betrayed the assumption that any woman who “endured” insult must be “abandoned,” that is, destitute and without male relatives to defend her. Newspapers similarly insisted that white male strangers who intervened when they saw street insults were fulfilling their masculine duty.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, when white men did not protect white women from insult, newspapers noted their complacency. When three men boarded a streetcar in New Orleans and insulted a white woman passenger, the *Times-Picayune* disclosed that two male passengers had “witnessed this scene” but had failed to protect the woman.<sup>164</sup> If a true gentlemen saw a woman being insulted, common sense dictated that it was within his rights to act as “one of *nature’s police officers*, if not judge and executioner at the same time.”<sup>165</sup>

This expectation that “nature’s police officers” would keep the peace may also have persisted because official law enforcement, such as it was, proved ineffective at reducing street insults. Policemen were still relative newcomers to urban space: New York City had established its police department in 1845, just two decades before the *New York Times* debate over streetcar insults.<sup>166</sup> Still, urban residents expected enough from police departments to be disappointed with their responses to street insult. The New Jersey shopkeeper who lamented that the “disgraceful practice of sidewalk loafing” was affecting his business also complained that local police refused to help him. In fact, rather than enforcing the city ordinance against congregating on the sidewalk, police officers actually joined the “crowd” of loafers. The police told the shopkeeper the loiterers had right to congregate

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<sup>162</sup> Letter from A. Brother, (Baltimore) *Sun*, April 28, 1838, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>163</sup> “A Naughty Boy”; “The Street-Car Murder.”

<sup>164</sup> “Roughs in a Street Car.”

<sup>165</sup> “Street Insults.” Emphasis in original. The *New York Times* noted that streetcar conductors often must “take the law into their own hands” to protect women from insult. “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>166</sup> Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers*, 95-97.

wherever they pleased.<sup>167</sup> In some cases, law enforcement maintained they could not get involved with street insults. Police Commissioners in New York explained that “an actual breach of the peace” had to take place for police to get involved, and in their estimation street insults were rarely severe enough.<sup>168</sup> In other cases, policemen were themselves the offending parties, drunkenly insulting women on streetcars or joining in when other men leered or made comments about women.<sup>169</sup> Even when law enforcement were willing to get involved on behalf of victims of street insult, women often did not want the attention that came with criminal proceedings. Some feared their names appearing in the “Police-court’s news,” while others did not want to deal with the psychological gaslighting they saw as inevitable. As one woman explained, “We shrink from any such notoriety as the attempt [to alert police] would give us; it would be met, of course, by a strict denial of any intention to annoy, so we can only find relief for our wounded and insulted feelings in the sympathy of our friends.”<sup>170</sup>

The general distrust in the effectiveness of the police must only have bolstered narratives that gave the impression that any interaction between a woman and an unknown man could descend into sexual danger and violence. Such narratives suggested that a street insult was the first step down a slipper slope. Newspaper exposés explicitly warned women that street insults could escalate into violence and even murder and that any strange man a woman met could mean her harm. When the *New York Herald* ran a piece denouncing the “corner loafer nuisance,” the paper perpetuated narratives that depicted the city as a treacherous place for women and warned that in “the less reputable streets the loafer is not only a nuisance, but a danger.” According to the *Herald*, a corner loafer might be a “thief” and possibly even a “murderer.” Because of their violent reputation,

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<sup>167</sup> Waller, letter to the editor.

<sup>168</sup> “The Police and the Street-Cars.”

<sup>169</sup> “Street Car And Police.”

<sup>170</sup> “Served Him Right: A Wolf in Sheeps Clothing,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1870; “The Treatment of Ladies in Stages and Cars.”

“respectable citizens often suffer insult and outrage without daring to offer resistance.”<sup>171</sup> Even a man who stepped up to help a woman might have nefarious motives. The *Wisconsin Democrat*, for instance, reported that two “nice young gentlemen” had devised a “particularly felicitous as well as villainous” plan to meet women: one man would approach unescorted ladies on the street and insult them, allowing his companion to swoop in and play savior, knocking him over and escorting the women home himself.<sup>172</sup> The story warned women to be wary of men’s intentions, for even one’s protectors could turn out to be scoundrels hoping to take advantage of an unaccompanied lady. Significantly, the young gentlemen’s appearance belied their wicked plan, feeding into anxieties about the inability to discern a person’s motives based on their dress or comportment.

In 1871, the murder of Avery D. Putnam, a rider on a streetcar who defended two lady passengers from insult, served to confirm fears that seemingly harmless intrusions could devolve into violence. On the evening of April 26, Putnam was traveling uptown on a Broadway streetcar in New York along with a Madame Duval and her daughter. The younger Duval had stuck her head out of the car window to admire some passing buildings when she was “insulted by the driver” and an off-duty conductor, William Foster. Foster had “leered insultingly at the ladies” and then opened the door of the carriage so he could stare at them longer. Putnam, observing this, claimed the women were with him and asked Foster not to “annoy the ladies.” Foster proceeded to sit down next to the women anyway and threatened Putnam with violence. Putnam and the two women decided to leave by the back door, only to have Foster follow close behind. Foster grabbed an “iron hook” from the driver and hit Putnam in the head with “this heavy implement.” Putnam died three days later.<sup>173</sup>

For some, the incident was proof of the dangers of everyday city life. Days after Putnam’s murder, the *New York Times* declared “ruffianism” a persistent problem in New York City and

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<sup>171</sup> “The Corner Loafer Nuisance.”

<sup>172</sup> “An Ingenious Method of Obtaining an Introduction.”

<sup>173</sup> “The Street-Car Murder.” See also Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night*, 138-141.

lamented that “nobody who has any experience of the night-cars will be greatly astonished” at Putnam’s violent end.<sup>174</sup> When *Harper’s Weekly* reported on Foster’s indictment for murder, the piece included an illustration of “a car crowded with rowdies and thieves,” which the magazine claimed “is a sight to be witnessed every day on almost every line in New York” (see Figure 2). The image, captioned, “Beauties of Street-Car Travel in New York,” depicts a woman and a young girl, presumably meant to represent Madame Duval and her daughter, ascending the steps of a streetcar. At the front of the car, a slogan reads “All Hope Abandon Ye Who Enter Here,” a misquotation of the inscription on the gates of Hell from Dante’s *Inferno*. The car’s conductor stands in a commanding position at the top of the stairs, while male passengers—including what appears to be



Figure 2: “The Street-Car Murder,” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 20, 1871, *HathiTrust*.

<sup>174</sup> “Ruffianism in Street-Cars,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1871.

an intoxicated man and a gentleman in a shiny top hat—peer out the window at the mother and the girl. Across the top of the streetcar, signs warn of the “murderers” and “pickpockets” to be found aboard.<sup>175</sup> Stories and illustrations like this reinforced the idea that public places, especially the confined and semi-private spaces of public transit, were rife with unsavory characters who might begin an interaction by ogling and end it with murder.

Depictions of dangerous urban spaces and threatening strangers were not confined to reporting on street insults. Fictional accounts and melodramas sold as city guides or exposés on urban life often featured stories of interactions between strangers, including street insults, that precipitated tragic ends. The genre of city guides promised to give readers an insider’s view of life in the big city. Such guides were often written by urban reformers or religious leaders and they emphasized the dangers and hedonism of urban life, with ominous titles like *Sunshine and Shadow in New York*, *Boston Inside Out! Sins of a Great City!*, or *The Secrets of the Great City: A Work Descriptive of the Virtues and the Vices, the Mysteries, Miseries and Crimes of New York City*.<sup>176</sup> Many used fictionalized accounts and melodrama in an allegorical portrayal of the moral downfall that threatened reckless or foolish city dwellers. Stories of prostitution, drinking, thievery, and murder abound. The deception, seduction, and ruination of young white girls by conniving men was a popular narrative that served both to explain the origins of prostitution in American cities and to warn women of the slippery slope that might befall them if they got in with the wrong crowd. As Marilyn Wood Hill has noted, city guides generally portrayed these women as young, white, and “pure, trusting, and affectionate, while men were characterized as unprincipled lechers.” Generally, the young woman in the story was either “immediately forsaken after...illicit sex” or the man convinced her to elope and then

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<sup>175</sup> “The Street-Car Murder.”

<sup>176</sup> Matthew Hale Smith, *Sunshine and Shadow in New York* (Hartford, CT: J. B. Burr and Company, 1868); Henry Morgan, *Boston Inside Out! Sins of a Great City!* (Boston, MA: Shawmut Publishing, 1883); Edward Winslow Martin, *The Secrets of the Great City: A Work Descriptive of the Virtues and the Vices, the Mysteries, Miseries and Crimes of New York City* (Philadelphia, PA: Jones Brothers, 1868).

abandoned her.<sup>177</sup> In a handful of these cases, the primary characters met in public places: art galleries, taverns, and in the street.<sup>178</sup>

A typical example in *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* told the story of a young woman who was set onto a path of ruination after a chance encounter with a group of male strangers in the street. At the beginning of the volume, the author explained that the stories he told were “drawn from *life*, heart-sickening, *too-real* life.” The author claimed to have explored “every den of vice” portrayed in the story and alleged, “Not one scene of vice or horror is given in the following pages which has not been enacted over and over again in this city, nor is there one character which has not its counterpart in our very midst.” What followed was a story that was intended to capture the dangers of New York life and particularly the dangers that faced young women on the street. In the opening vignette, a young woman walks home after a long day of work, past the prostitutes who plied their trade on Broadway. This young woman, whose whiteness and virtuousness is emphasized with descriptors like “pure” and “innocent” and musings on her “blue eyes” and “golden hair,” struggles to avoid “the depraved beings of her own sex” and the “things wearing the garb of men” who drunkenly carouse along the same sidewalk. Suddenly, one of these groups of men stops her, blocking her way and then surrounding her. They call her pet names and ask her where she is going, finally tossing a coin to decide “who shall have her.” Just as her fate seems sealed, a large, imposing woman attacks the men, allowing the young girl to run home.<sup>179</sup>

Throughout this encounter, looks and looking served to distinguish between the different types of people and dangers found on the city street. The prostitutes “[paused] before the large-windowed hotels to show themselves to the cigar-smoking loungers” inside and “stared each man

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<sup>177</sup> Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 69.

<sup>178</sup> Foster, *New York by Gas-Light*; McCabe, *Lights and Shadows of New York Life*; Morgan, *Boston Inside Out*; George Thompson, *The Gay Girls of New-York, or, Life on Broadway Being a Mirror of the Fashions, Follies and Crimes of a Great City* (New York, 1853).

<sup>179</sup> Buntline, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, 7-14.

rudely in the face who passed them.” These looking practices marked them as “street-walkers” who invited the notice of men. In contrast, the young girl, whose name is later revealed as Angelina, “trembled as she hurried along” and “shrank aside” as she passed prostitutes and drunk men. Looks also marked men as potentially dangerous: Angelina “saw [young men] rudely stare at her” and she responded as a well-bred and innocent young woman was supposed to, by pulling “closer the front of her black hood” and shielding herself from view. This worked for a time as she managed to pass “free from insult,” until she encountered the group of men who accosted her. These men took her presence in public as an open invitation to engage, despite her attempts to avoid their glances and pass unnoticed. Among their many infractions, these men “rudely turned her face so that the lamp-light could shine upon it,” gazing on Angelina in the same way the hotel patrons had gazed on the prostitutes. The young men treated Angelina as sexually available despite her protestation, “I am not what you take me for!” In essence, they treated her like a prostitute, if not mistook for one, and the author made the injustice of this treatment evident in Angelina’s “blushing cheeks” and “queenly dignity” when she refuses the young men’s advances.<sup>180</sup>

Angelina’s fate served as a warning of where a street insult, in the form of a rude look, can lead. The stares of the young men on the street start Angelina on a dangerous path and the full consequences of her nighttime encounter soon become apparent. One of the young men who stopped her in the street decides to become the family benefactor as a way to get closer to Angelina. He provides lodging for her and her mother and then badgers Angelina with proposals of marriage. Angelina resists as long as she can before going on the run. A tragic character from the start, Angelina dies of a fever after spending the duration of the story running from the man who had accosted on the street at the start of the narrative. From the moment the strange men “rudely stare at her,” Angelina’s fate is sealed. The escalating actions unfold relentlessly: the men leer insultingly at

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<sup>180</sup> Buntline, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*, 7-14.

Angelina; they stop Angelina so they can admire her more closely in the lamplight; from there they threaten to ruin her, but she manages to run away; one of her accosters then decides to involve himself in her livelihood and her family; Angelina is forced to spend the rest of her short life running from his persistent sexual overtures; until finally she catches a fever while on the run and dies in destitution. The impertinent looks started Angelina on a slippery slope that led to insult and finally to her death. Stories like Angelina's, though fictional, compounded real-life stories of women like Madame Duval and her daughter who were subjected to insults that ended in physical violence. In these narratives, women who ventured out into city streets confronted an urbanscape teeming with potentially dangerous strangers who at any moment might catch their attention and ruin their reputation, or their life, forever.

### **Avoiding Street Insults**

Because narratives of sexual danger depicted even small social interactions with strangers could precipitate sexual degradation and even death, nineteenth-century women who went out on city streets moved through a space they had been told threatened their bodily safety and autonomy. Newspaper reports documented how street insults left women feeling humiliated and afraid and encouraged women to employ evasive tactics to minimize the harm done by insults. In many of these reports, street insults functioned as a first warning of potential danger ahead. As John F. Kasson has argued, middle-class women who ventured into public “entered a realm in which they felt—or were expected to feel—particularly vulnerable. From an impertinent glance, an unwelcome compliment, the scale of improprieties rose through a series of gradations to the ultimate violation of rape.”<sup>181</sup> Women, especially white, middle-class women, were expected to monitor their own

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<sup>181</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 128.

behaviors to avoid attracting attention from those who might harm them, going so far as to live under a self-imposed curfew and refrain from going out in public without an escort or after dark.<sup>182</sup>

At least five different etiquette manuals suggested it was indelicate for their middle-class women readers to out alone at night, offering this identical advice: “After twilight, a young lady would not be conducting herself in a becoming manner, by walking alone.”<sup>183</sup>

Women would thus self-monitor and modify their own behavior in order to avoid insults and potential violent escalation. Some women might put up with a persistent man in order to avoid angering him. One New York woman allowed a white male stranger to walk her home one evening, despite his insulting conduct, because she “fear[ed] he might take further advantage of her unprotected situation.”<sup>184</sup> Her decision to endure a personal humiliation to avoid worse behavior suggests she experienced street insults not simply as uncomfortable or humiliating conduct but also as harbingers of physical harm. Women also chose alternate routes, avoided parts of town or times of the day, and chose their transportation options based on their likelihood of encountering insult. “Loafers” apparently blocked “chief thoroughfares” in New York City, creating a hostile environment that women tried to avoid.<sup>185</sup> Public transportation proved especially tricky as it was essential to navigating large cities safely and efficiently, yet women found that certain streetcar lines or certain times of the day were more problematic than others. One New York woman claimed it was “impossible to ride down to the ferries without feeling more or less unsafe” and that she only felt safe riding public transportation in Brooklyn.<sup>186</sup> Another explained that women who rode

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<sup>182</sup> Domosh and Seager, *Putting Woman in Place*, 93, 100.

<sup>183</sup> Emily Thornwell, *The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 78; Arthur Martine, *Martine's Book of Etiquette and Guide to True Politeness* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1866), 131; S. L. Louis, *Decorum: A Practical Treatise on Etiquette and Dress of the Best American Society* (New York: Union, 1882), 119; Richard A. Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress of the Best American Society* (Springfield, MA: King, Richardson, 1891), 129. See also Remus, *A Shopper's Paradise*, 50.

<sup>184</sup> “Served Out.”

<sup>185</sup> “The Corner Loafer Nuisance.”

<sup>186</sup> A Young Lady, “Outrages on Ladies in Street Cars.”

streetcars sometimes had to disembark before their destinations to escape insulting conduct; if the conduct persisted over multiple rides, it could “prevent her taking that course” and she might decide to either find other means of transport or forfeit trips that required riding problematic streetcar lines.<sup>187</sup> Men also denounced street insults, especially if it inconvenienced them. A shop owner in New Jersey explained that “loafers” were having an effect on his business as their presence “compel[led] ladies to cross to the opposite side of the street, rather than run the gauntlet of their insults and obscenity.”<sup>188</sup> While the street insults were not directed at the shop owner, he acknowledged that their effect on his women customers in turn affected his ability to do business.<sup>189</sup>

Women who held professions that kept them out late at night also developed codes of conduct intended to keep them safe. Actress Clara Morris, who walked the boards in New York City in the 1870s, recalled in her memoir that “one of the most unpleasant experiences in the life of a young actress” was the “frightened lonely rush through the city streets at twelve o’clock at night to her boarding-house.” After dark, Morris explained, men became dangers to young women in ways they were not during the day. “The kindest old drake of the farm-pond,” she lamented, “becomes a vulture beneath the midnight street-light.” To protect herself from unwanted attention, Morris developed a set of rules to follow that she called the Clara Code. Morris’s rules urged women to navigate city streets vigilantly, leaving plenty of physical space between herself and any potential danger. To that end, Morris instructed young women to avoid passing “between two advancing men...lest they might seize hold of and so frighten her to death.” The rest of the rules continued in a similar manner: never walk on the inside of the pavement when meeting a stranger, never pass an alley without putting the entire length of the pavement between oneself and the alley. In some cases,

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<sup>187</sup> “Outrages on Ladies in Cars and Stages.”

<sup>188</sup> Waller, letter to the editor.

<sup>189</sup> Emily Remus has documented how department store managers partnered with women’s clubs and law enforcement at the turn of the century to drive away harassers from the sidewalks outside their stores. For store managers, harassers were bad for business. Remus, *A Shopper’s Paradise*.

Morris advised walking in the “street itself” rather than walk too close to an unknown man. “When in doubt,” she intoned, “take to the centre of the street.” Morris shared her code with her fellow actresses and claimed that they told her stories about how the Clara Code had saved them from harm.<sup>190</sup>

Black women, who had far fewer avenues than white women to seek justice for street insults and who were more likely to endure physically violent attacks, might take even more extreme measures to protect themselves. Eliza Potter, a successful hairdresser and a freeborn Black woman, carried a gun in her purse to protect herself from the dangers she encountered on a regular basis in Cincinnati. In her autobiography, she described the kind of violence she feared as a Black woman. Rather than rely on white men to defend her womanhood, as some white women might have felt was their prerogative, Potter knew that she would need to protect herself in public. In one incident, a group of men followed and threatened her while she was on her way to dress hair for a party one evening. As she walked down the street, “several persons” were “hallooing and hooping” and she heard one say, “Let us frighten to her death.” Potter took courage from the gun, her “good protector,” in her basket and continued on. At the party, she dressed the “ladies” hair and enjoyed watching the festivities, staying “rather later than I intended.” As she walked home from the party, she encountered “two men standing on [a] corner.” One turned and headed away from her while “the other walked a little distance behind me.” He “walked close to” Potter, not speaking, but following her down the street. Suddenly, he stopped in front of Potter. She took a step back and, referencing her firearm, she “told him if he took another step he would fall at my feet.” Taken aback, the man insisted he had not been following her but rather looking for a nearby doctor’s

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<sup>190</sup> Clara Morris, *Life on the Stage: My Personal Experiences and Recollections* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1901), 88-90. Morris’s rules may ring a bell for some readers. A few of the rules are very similar to advice women still receive from parents, schools, popular media, and law enforcement about how to avoid attack and rape in public spaces. For more on Clara Morris, see Barbara Wallace Grossman, *A Spectacle of Suffering: Clara Morris on the American Stage*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009)

office. Potter watched as he pretended to ring the bell of the doctor's office and then "ran away as fast as he could" as soon as he thought she could not see him. For Potter, this was proof that "any man who will attack a woman on the street is an arrant coward, and a woman can frighten him to death." All the same, after the incident, Potter resolved not to attend any more late-night parties that required walks home in the dark.<sup>191</sup> Her experience speaks to both the degree of violence Potter feared and the lengths she felt she needed to go to protect herself. As a Black woman, she did not expect any "gentlemen" to come to her aid nor could she rely on her social position to protect her: her life was in her own hands.

Intrusive behaviors, then, had a real and observable effect on women's freedom of movement in urban space. Men's stranger intrusions could be unpleasant in and of themselves, but the narratives of sexual danger this chapter has charted could also turn street insults into frightening omens of violence to come. Street insults did not force women from the streets entirely, but women incorporated the existence of stranger intrusions into their conceptions of the city and adjusted their actions accordingly. They self-monitored their comportment to ensure they could not be accused of attracting attention. They avoided parts of the city or public transportation lines where they believed they were likely to encounter insult. Some may have stayed home when they would rather have gone out. The fact that white men were the primary perpetrators of such behaviors, as well as the men who were supposedly the ideal protectors against insult, suggests that street insults and the narratives that gave them meaning helped white, middle-class men exert and re-assert their power over public space as the increased presence of women threatened to diminish it. In short, the threat of street insults, and the physical and sexual dangers they were believed to portend, curtailed women's access to public space even as that access grew.

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<sup>191</sup> Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 135.

## Conclusion

The period from about 1840 to 1880 marked a shift in the way Americans understood and interpreted men's stranger intrusions in urban space. While men had harassed women on city streets since the city themselves existed, by the mid-1800s such behaviors were so prevalent and perceived as such a problem that they deserved their own name: street insults. This chapter has shown how women experienced street insults in the context of the narratives of sexual danger that proliferated in newspapers, city guides, and fiction. Stories of virtuous white women falling prey to conniving, sexually aggressive men suggested that a simple, short interaction between strangers on a city street could quickly devolve into harassment, rape, and death. Newspaper accounts of street insults reinforced the sense that street insults were more than just insults—they were also dangerous. Women who complained of street insults described their experiences in the context of these narratives, emphasizing how frightened they were at men who touched them, ogled them, or spoke to them without an invitation. They described how men sidling up to them on streetcars or staring at them on sidewalks forced them to modify their behaviors and paths to through the city. Street insults' impact thus derived not just from the behaviors themselves but also from the meaning ascribed to them by the discourses of the time: they were frightening because of the danger they implied.

Discourses of street insults also delineated who the mostly white male writers considered to be “worthy” victims of insult and who invited such attention. Middle-class and upper-class white women and supposedly “virtuous” white working women enjoyed the sympathy and promised protection of their white male counterparts. In their complaints about street insults, white women played off these narratives to chastise white men for failing to protect women from intrusive behaviors and insisted on they deserved better treatment, both from the men who insulted them and the men who were ostensibly supposed to come to their rescue. Black women, on the other hand,

were denied the same sympathy that white women enjoyed while also enduring significantly more physical violence. They turned to the Black press and to the legal system to demand the respectful treatment they deserved in public space.

Contestations over women's rights to navigate urban space were just beginning, however. While women in the mid-nineteenth century often did not trust law enforcement or state institutions to protect them from men's stranger intrusions, by the turn of the twentieth century the political terrain looked quite different. Women increasingly called on police, city officials, and men in positions of authority to finally do something about the "menace" of harassment that followed them wherever they went. The next chapter explores these struggles and considers how intrusive behaviors themselves acquired new meanings—and evoked new responses—in the Progressive Era.

## Chapter 2

# Resisting the Genus “Masher”

On the morning of Sunday, February 4, 1906, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* posed an urgent question to its readers: “What can be done to rid the Palmer House block of Mashers?” The headline, scrawled across two pages, was accentuated with an illustration that dominated the top half of the section. The drawing depicted a young white woman walking down a Chicago street while a group of well-dressed white men, ten in all, stood in a line and watched her pass (see Figure 3). These men were the “mashers” of the headline, men who leered at, spoke to, followed, and otherwise bothered women they did not know in public places. According to the *Tribune*, Chicago’s city streets were teeming with mashers who “smirk and leer at every pretty woman who passes the corner without a male escort.” Prominent local clubwomen explained that mashers “infested” Chicago and that women were “growing tired of running the gantlet of staring looks” wherever they went. The *Tribune* reported that mashing was particularly prevalent in the popular shopping districts of downtown Chicago: “thousands of women [were] insulted between the hours of 10 a. m. and 11 p. m. each day” at the corner of Monroe and State Street, where the elegant Palmer House hotel stood (and still stands today). White clubwomen described how mashers followed them down the street, accosted them in movie theaters, and pressed up against them on public transportation. Lucy A. Boone Carpenter, president of the Chicago Women’s Club, highlighted the masher’s leering looks as especially insulting: she declared “ogling” was “as disgusting and offensive to a good woman...as

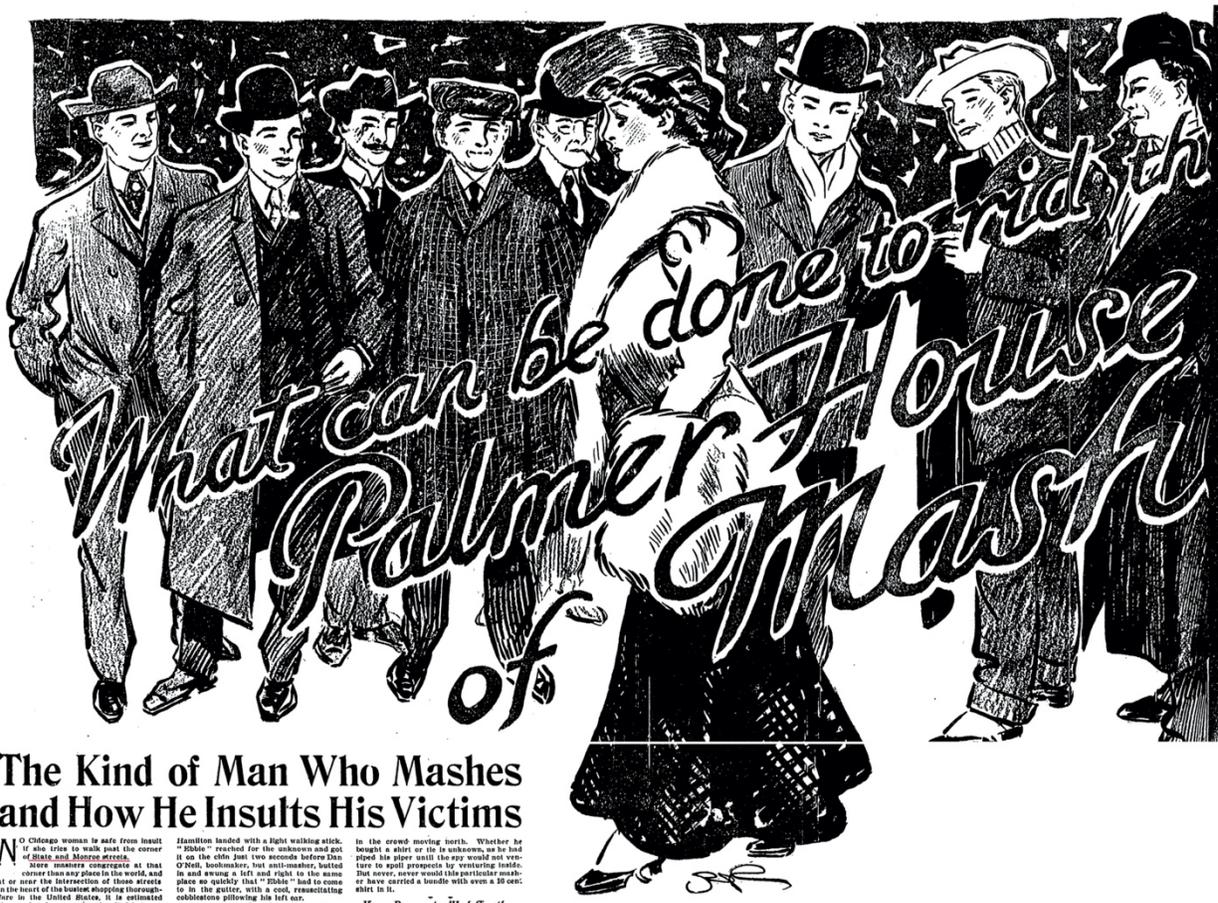


Figure 3: "What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers," Chicago Daily Tribune, February 4, 1906.

any other mode of attack." Still, lest *Tribune* readers mistake mashing for an annoying but essentially harmless pastime, Evelyn Allen Frake, president of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs, insisted the "masher and the murderer...belong to the same species. It is positively dangerous for a woman to go on the streets nowadays."<sup>1</sup>

Chicago women had endured these intrusive behaviors for decades. Beginning in the 1880s, newspapers denounced the new "species" of man known as the masher and applauded efforts to

<sup>1</sup> "What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1906. Most of the women in this piece were quoted using their husband's names. I found their full names elsewhere. See John William Leonard, *Woman's Who's Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada* (American Commonwealth Company, 1914); "The Sixteenth Annual Report" (Ottawa, IL: Illinois Farmers' Institute, 1911).

drive him from the streets.<sup>2</sup> However, no campaign had successfully freed Chicago from the men that Emeline Thomas, wife of a prominent Methodist minister, called the “bane of the streets.”<sup>3</sup> Then, on January 13, 1906, the city awoke to the shocking news of the murder of Bessie Hollister, a thirty-year-old white society woman who was attacked on a Chicago street near her Lincoln Park home<sup>4</sup>. As details of the murder emerged, it became clear that Hollister’s murderer, twenty-four-year-old white man Richard G. Ivens, had killed Hollister when she had rebuffed his advances on the street.<sup>5</sup> Because Hollister’s murder was apparently instigated with a random sexual overture between strangers, Chicagoans linked the murder to the city’s failure to quash mashing. White clubwomen like Evelyn Frake and Lucy Carpenter, cognizant that earlier calls for a law enforcement crackdown had failed, demanded a stronger response to mashing in the *Tribune’s* 1906 exposé.<sup>6</sup> Carpenter insisted “detectives should be sent out to arrest every man who makes a business of mashing.” Once

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<sup>2</sup> “The Matinee Masher,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, September 23, 1880, America’s Historical Newspapers; “The ‘Mashers’ Mashed,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, May 5, 1881, America’s Historical Newspapers; “A Healthy Ordinance,” *Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, May 17, 1881; “A Trounced Scoundrel,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, September 5, 1881, America’s Historical Newspapers; “Policeman Dismissed for Flirting,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 7, 1895; “Women Talk of Masher,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 6, 1899; “The Crowd Cheered Because a Bright Little Woman with an Umbrella Put a Cheeky Masher to Flight,” *Washington Bee*, February 9, 1901, America’s Historical Newspapers; “Smashed the Masher,” *Washington Bee*, February 23, 1901, America’s Historical Newspapers; “Police Aim to Check Mashers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1901; “Women Applaud War on Mashers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1901; “Urge War on ‘Mashers’: Women of Protective Association Want Streets Cleared,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 17, 1903; “Girl Thrashes a ‘Masher,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1903; “Squelching a Masher,” *Washington Bee*, December 19, 1903, America’s Historical Newspapers; “Whip State Street Mashers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 25, 1903; “Whipped, Burned, and Fined,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 28, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> “Women Applaud War on Mashers.” Again, I discovered Emeline Thomas’ full name through additional archival research, see “Dr. H. W. Thomas: Presentations to Himself and Wife by His Parishioners,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1875; Hiram Washington Thomas, *Life and Sermons of Dr. H.W. Thomas* (Chicago: Smith & Fobes, 1880).

<sup>4</sup> For more on Hollister’s murder in the context of the mashing crisis and Chicago politics, see Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 198-199; Emily Remus, *A Shoppers’ Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 180-181.

<sup>5</sup> “Youth Owns Brutal Murder of Woman,” *Chicago Daily News*, January 13, 1906, Newberry Library, Chicago; “Almost Averages Wanton Murder,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1906. Ivens also confessed to sexually assaulting Hollister, though the details were left vague or euphemistic in accounts of the murder. “In Defense of Her Honor,” *Courier-Journal* (Louisville), January 14, 1906; “Woman’s Life Proved Price of Her Honor,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 14, 1906; John Sanderson Christison, “The ‘Confessions’ of Richard G. Ivens: Did an Innocent Man Confess to a Great Crime?,” 1906, Google Books.

<sup>6</sup> “Women Talk of Masher”; “Urge War on ‘Mashers’”; “Doom of ‘Mashers,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 8, 1903.

prosecuted, clubwomen suggested punishments like “the whipping post,” “the horse whip,” “torture,” and “a month in the bridewell at hard labor.”<sup>7</sup>

The problem of the masher was not unique to Chicago. When the *Tribune* published its exposé on the Palmer House block masher, the nation was in the throes of what some newspapers were calling the anti-masher crusades.<sup>8</sup> Women town and cities across the country, but especially in the teeming metropolises of the North, complained that they could not go out in public without suffering insulting remarks, leering looks, or even physical attacks from mashers. Newspapers, law enforcement, and victims of mashing disagreed on whether the worst offenders were old or young, rich or working-class, U.S.- or foreign-born, but most agreed that mashers were white men. At a moment when middle-class white Americans emphasized self-restraint and temperance as ideal qualities of “civilized” white “manliness,” the masher embodied all that was potentially harmful about uncontrolled white masculinity. The masher was lascivious and unrestrained, more interested in appeasing his vanity and chasing his sexual desires than practicing the cool self-control that many white Americans believed was an “essential element of civilization.”<sup>9</sup> Thus the masher posed a threat not only to women’s ability to navigate public space but also to the supposed superiority of white American manhood. In response to the masher’s dual threats, public commentators, law enforcement, and women’s groups began to demand a range of interventions from harsh punishment for mashers to self-defense training for women.

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<sup>7</sup> “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers.”

<sup>8</sup> See for instance John T. McCutcheon, *An Incident in the Anti-Mashers Crusade*, June 4, 1903, John T. McCutcheon papers, Box 1, Folder 11, Newberry Library, Chicago, [http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/ref/collection/nby\\_chicago/id/1402](http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/ref/collection/nby_chicago/id/1402); “To Drive the Mashers Out of Chicago,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 27, 1907; Esther Andrews, “‘Smash the Masher!’ Cry Gotham Women in Crusade to Rid Streets of Flirts,” *Day Book*, September 8, 1916; “Smashing the ‘Masher’: Nation-Wide Crusade Cities of America Unite to Protect Women,” *Duluth News-Tribune*, October 8, 1916.

<sup>9</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 52.

Because mainstream white publications and popular culture represented mashing as a white man's activity, the anti-masher crusades posed a significant, if short-lived, challenge to white men's dominance in public space. This challenged stemmed from the increasing implausibility of the idea that white male relatives and benevolent gentlemen strangers would protect women from sexual violence in public. As it became clear that white men were the primary perpetrators of intrusive behaviors, white women in particular scoffed at the idea that they should rely on those same men to defend them. Instead, they called on the state to intervene on their behalf and, when the state failed, they encouraged women to learn to defend themselves against white men's intrusive behaviors. These tactics emerged at the same time as white Southern anti-lynching activism disrupted narratives about white men as the natural protectors of white womanhood, suggesting a "fissure in white racial solidarity" in both the North and South.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Black women and men harnessed the mainstream outrage at white men's intrusive behaviors to demand stronger responses to the public insults, sexual propositioning, and violence that had been a fixture of Black women's urban experience for decades. Black commentators and reformers reprimanded white mashers for assuming Black women were sexually available and cautioned Black men to set a positive example by treating Black women with respect.<sup>11</sup> In tandem, these efforts sought to curtail white men's sexual and political power across the country. At the center of these efforts was an awareness that intrusive behaviors impeded women's freedom of mobility and that women could not reap the benefits of their increased access to public spaces until they could navigate those spaces unmolested.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wendy L. Rouse, *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 74. For more on white women's anti-lynching activism in the South see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Crystal Nicole Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York: The New York Age Print, 1892); Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (University of Chicago Press, 2013); Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895).

<sup>12</sup> For more on the linkages between women's rights, suffrage, and anti-mashing activism, see Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 191-209.

It is no coincidence that the rise of mashing corresponded to an enormous influx of single women, Black and white, who moved to Northern cities at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> In Chicago, for instance, where mashing proved especially problematic, the female labor force increased by 1000 percent from 1880 to 1930. Until 1910, most of these women were U.S.-born white women, though many were also foreign-born or the first-generation children of immigrants.<sup>14</sup> Soon after the turn of the century, these single white working women were joined by thousands of African-American women who migrated alone or with their families from the South to cities in the North and the West.<sup>15</sup> Newly arrived women spilled out onto city streets, into movie theaters and department stores, into dance halls and soda shops, and onto public streetcars and omnibuses. A cultural theorist Elizabeth Wilson has shown, philosophers, anthropologists, early urban planners, government officials, and journalists grappled with the dual anxiety and excitement aroused by women's presence in public space. On the one hand, the visibility of women in urban space represented both the sexual possibilities of the city, particularly for white men, and the danger and sexual degradation that threatened female virtue. As the previous chapter demonstrated, this titillating juxtaposition fed into cultural discourses of the "urban spectacle." In this conception, the modern city was a place of visual pleasures—cafes and bars teeming with colorful characters, busy boulevards where elite women shoppers and prostitutes brushed shoulders, working-men filling the

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the migration of Southern Blacks to Northern cities, see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011)

streets with protest and revelry—all ready to be consumed by the nineteenth-century trop of the male wanderer, or *flâneur*, who “[took] visual possession of the city.”<sup>16</sup>

If women were a key part of the urban spectacle in the mid-nineteenth century, they became even more so at the turn of the twentieth century. Depictions of women in urban space from the period cast them as objects to be admired, lusted after, or romanticized, but above all observed. In particular, paintings, newspaper reports, films, and fiction portrayed white women as focal points for white men’s sexual desire in urban space. Tellingly, these depictions often referenced places or situations associated with mashing. For instance, cartoonists and postcard printers produced images of women as titillating sights on the streets of urban America. A representative postcard from New York City depicts a young white man in a suit and hat admiring the ankles of a young white woman as she holds up her skirts to cross the street. The famous Flatiron Building looms in the background and the caption informs the postcard’s recipient, “I am seeing great things” (see Figure 4).<sup>17</sup> The postcard’s caption and image made it clear to anyone who viewed the postcard that the “great things” one could view in New York City included both famous architectural landmarks and the bodies of attractive young women. Seen from another perspective, however, the postcard depicts a classic mashing scene. In the early 1900s, the corner of Twenty-Third Street and Broadway, where the Flatiron Building still stands today, was notorious as a spot where the placement of buildings produced a wind tunnel. Men were known to stand on the corner waiting for a gust of air to blow

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2000), 78. For more on the urban spectacle and the *flâneur*, see also Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999); Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> *I Am Seeing Great Things*, circa 1915, Museum of the City of New York, <https://collections.mcny.org/Collection/1%20am%20seeing%20great%20things-2F3HRGOOXXK.html>.

women's skirts up, revealing their legs.<sup>18</sup> The high numbers of "shop girls" who "pour[ed] out of the big stores and wholesale houses" made the corner a "Masher's Mecca," while the gusts, according to *The New York Times*, "furnished fun for throngs of rubbering mashers and strewed the streets with maddening lingerie." Depending on the perspective, the same New York corner could be either a prime spot to admire the female form or a spot where "seedy middle-aged men" chased down young working women.<sup>19</sup>

In some cases, depictions of women on the street as sexual objects literally butted up against newspapers' mashing accounts. When the *Chicago Tribune* published its exposé on the Palmer House block masher in 1906, the story ran just one page away from a feature about the beautiful women one could find on the streets of Chicago. The piece celebrated the crowning of Miss Katherine Winterbotham, a "loyal Chicagoan" and the daughter of banker John R. Winterbotham, as "The Most Beautiful Woman in Chicago."<sup>20</sup> Winterbotham's crowning reportedly marked a sea change in the number and quality of beautiful women in the city. "A generation ago," the *Tribune* recalled, "Chicago was poor in beautiful women." The hard life of

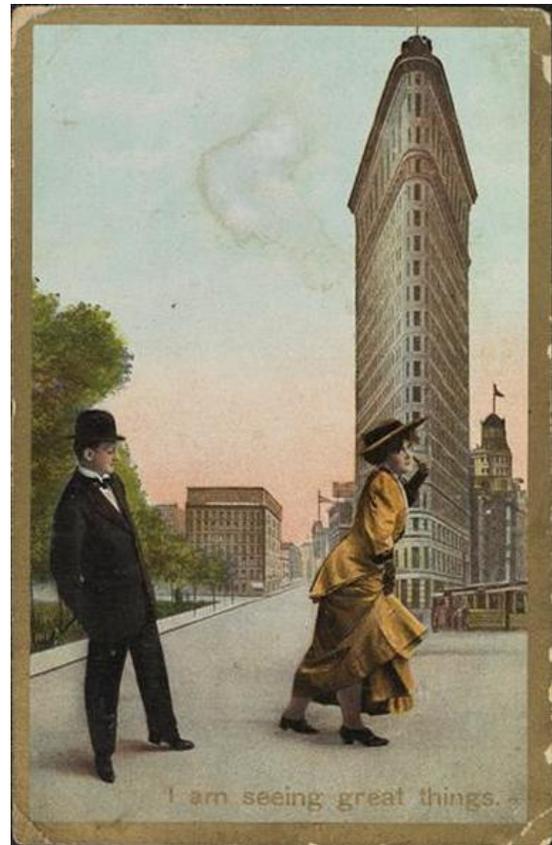


Figure 4: I Am Seeing Great Things, c. 1915, Museum of the City of New York.

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Nevius and James Nevius, *Inside the Apple: A Streetwise History of New York City* (Simon and Schuster, 2009). Nevius and Nevius, among others, trace the slang term "twenty-three skidoo" to this phenomenon and suggest the "skidoo" referred to the policemen who shooed ogling men from the corner when they became too much of a nuisance.

<sup>19</sup> "Masher's Mecca," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 15, 1912; "A Flatiron Soliloquy," *New York Times*, April 19, 1903. The latter quote comes from a poem published in the "voice" of the Flatiron building.

<sup>20</sup> For information on the Winterbotham family, see "Inventory of the Winterbotham-French Family Papers," The Newberry, accessed September 1, 2018, [https://mms.newberry.org/xml/xml\\_files/WinterbothamFrench.xml](https://mms.newberry.org/xml/xml_files/WinterbothamFrench.xml).

“the pioneers” had “denied beauty to the daughters of the early settlers and their overworked wives.” Now that Chicago had established itself as a modern metropolis, Chicago’s women were understood to have more comfortable lives and, as a result, were becoming more beautiful. In fact, a “noted Parisian artist” had proclaimed the beauty of Chicago’s women much improved since he visited the city fifteen years ago. On a previous trip, the artist complained, “I could walk the streets for two hours and not see more than one woman whose portrait I would care to paint.” In contrast, on a recent walk in downtown Chicago, the artist rejoiced, “I passed a hundred women I would have been glad of the opportunity to paint. Several of the faces were so beautiful, so fresh, so brilliantly colored that I scarcely could suppress the desire to stop them and ask them to sit for me.”<sup>21</sup> On his walk, the Parisian artist had begun on Randolph Street and strolled down State Street to Adams Street, then over to Michigan Avenue. His route took him within half a block of the Palmer House hotel. Anyone reading the *Tribune* that day could have turned the page and read about that “notorious” spot for mashers. Thus, in the space of three pages, the *Tribune* celebrated the women to be admired on the streets of Chicago and denounced the men who ogled them. These two competing perceptions of the streets of Chicago were nevertheless complementary. If modernity brought more beautiful women to Chicago’s streets, it also brought the men who lined the sidewalks to watch women pass.

While the opportunity to admire women on city streets inspired artists and titillated tourists, it also worried self-appointed moral arbiters and reformers who feared the increased opportunities for heterosexual encounters in public places. The influx of single women into Northern cities set off a “series of moral panics” and women’s “everyday behavior in public areas of the city ... was watched carefully and monitored for propriety.”<sup>22</sup> White reform movements tried, on the one hand,

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<sup>21</sup> “The Most Beautiful Woman in Chicago,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 4, 1906.

<sup>22</sup> Hazel V. Carby, “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (July 1, 1992): 738–55; Domosh and Seager, *Putting Women in Place*, 93.

to protect white women from the dangers and temptations of urban life, and on the other hand, cast Black women and their perceived sexual promiscuity as a problem that needed fixing.<sup>23</sup> White reformers and sympathetic journalists cast white working women as “women adrift” whose precarious position in urban life was associated with “immoral sexual behavior.”<sup>24</sup> Reformers worried that dire financial situations could force many white women into prostitution, or so-called “white slavery,” and they responded with efforts to eliminate prostitution in urban areas.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, white reformers targeted Black women for their perceived reputation as sexually immoral. Black women reformers tried to contradict stereotypes of lustful Black sexuality by encouraging Black women to conform to white expectations of respectability and purity.<sup>26</sup> However, when anti-vice reform pushed sex workers out of white neighborhoods and into African-American neighborhoods in cities like Chicago, the association of Black women with sexual availability was further solidified.<sup>27</sup> These stereotypes encouraged white men to proposition Black women on the

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<sup>23</sup> Carby, “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context.” See also, Cynthia M. Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’: Black Women’s Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*; Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*; Mumford, *Interzones*; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure*; Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*;

<sup>24</sup> Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*; Carby, “Policing the Black Woman’s Body,” 739; Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). For discussion of Black prostitutes in Chicago, see Blair, *I’ve Got to Make My Livin’*.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the respectability movements and racial uplift ideology among Black communities in cities like Detroit, see Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See also Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women’s Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Martha S. Jones, *All Bound up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

The hyper-sexualization of Black female bodies has a long, devastatingly documented history. During slavery, male slaveowners were given free reign over the bodies of enslaved women to the point that sexual intercourse with Black women was seen as a “rite of passage for young white men.” Mumford, *Interzones*, 5. For studies of the intertwining constructions of race and sexuality in early America see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Chad C. Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). White men and women who went “slumming” in Black neighborhoods understood that such areas of the city gave them an opportunity for sexual expressiveness unavailable in white, middle-class neighborhoods. For a history of sex districts in Chicago and New York and their affect on notions of Black women’s respectability, see Mumford, *Interzones*.

street regardless of the woman's sexual reputation. As this chapter will show, the African-American press denounced such men as entitled white flirts and strove to defend the respectability of the women in their communities.

Many of the women reformers who concerned themselves with new female arrivals to U.S. cities, and decried the mashers who harassed them, were members of the growing women's club movement. Begun in the mid-nineteenth century, women's clubs originally were spaces for predominantly educated, middle-class and elite women to converse and work together on a variety of projects, including self-development and literary criticism. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, founded in 1890, represented some 200 clubs and 20,000 members upon its founding. By 1900, that figure had risen to 150,000 members. As the movement gained steam, women's clubs increasingly took more interest in what they saw as the social problems of the era. Much of this work centered around issues affecting women and children, in part because stereotypes about women's natural maternal and care-giving instincts meant women were considered uniquely suited to these concerns. Women's clubs could prove formidable political contenders, advocating for legal reform, police reform, and labor reform to better the lives of women and children in cities across the country. In Chicago, the Woman's Club of Chicago founded an offshoot, the Protective Agency for Women and Children, later the Juvenile Protective Agency, that fought for protections against unfair labor practices, sexual abuse of women and children, domestic violence, and incest. The mostly middle- and upper-class clubwomen considered themselves essential protectors especially of working and poor women. At times, this desire to protect manifested as superiority, as clubwomen considered it their duty to educate working women in middle-class ideals of dress, comportment,

and morals. At other time, clubwomen worked instead through a socialist lens, insisting that their work protected women from the dangers and indignities of industrial capitalism.<sup>28</sup>

Black women's clubs, excluded from the General Federation of Women's Clubs, took on the pressing matters of their own communities. Black clubwomen, too, were concerned with issues affecting women and children, but their work especially interrogated the role of racism in exacerbating these issues for the Black community. Ida B. Wells' campaign against lynching spurred many Black women's clubs to focus on the issue of interracial rape, both false accusations leveled at Black men and the lack of accountability for white men who assaulted Black women. Black clubwomen especially worked to counter prevailing stereotypes of Black women as sexually promiscuous and immoral. Some Black women's clubs did their work through a politics of respectability, arguing that their job was to uplift their less fortunate sisters—mainly working-class and rural Black women—and ensure they conformed to middle-class, and often white, moral standards. While many Black clubwomen strove to form alliances with white clubwomen, believing that their goals of easing the effects of racism and sexism on Black women's lives would not succeed without white support, white clubwomen offered only occasional and tepid support for Black clubwomen's causes, keeping any kind of effective coalition work out of reach.<sup>29</sup>

Many of the women who spoke out against mashers in America's urban press identified themselves as members of women's clubs, and their analyses tended to fit into the larger battles

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<sup>28</sup> Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 61-62; Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (Simon and Schuster, 1997), 150-152. See also Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980); Maureen A. Flanagan, "Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman's City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990): 1032-50; Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Jayne Morris-Crowther, *The Political Activities of Detroit Clubwomen in the 1920s: A Challenge and a Promise*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 104-119; Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912-20; Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*; Jones, *All Bound up Together*; Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

those clubs fought. At times, clubwomen couched calls for eradicating sexual violence within other reform efforts. For instance, in their regular publications on “Legislative Needs in Illinois,” Chicago’s Juvenile Protective Agency (JPA) suggested that existing rape and seduction laws did not protect women from random assaults on the street. In 1912, when a man assaulted a woman at night on a Chicago street, she charged him with rape found few avenues for support. Under pressure from her family and friends, she married the man who had assaulted her. The man “immediately deserted her” and the JPA reported she led a “disreputable life in order to support her child.”<sup>30</sup> In other cases, clubwomen encouraged women to do their part to eradicate the masher. Florence Spofford of the West End Woman’s Club in Chicago told women who encountered a masher to “call a policeman” and have the offender arrested. Spofford argued that victims of mashing must then follow through by testifying in court, something that many women were reluctant to do.<sup>31</sup> Some clubwomen proffered advice on the best way to punish mashers, sometimes opting for elaborate public shaming rituals, perhaps as a way of getting the attention of journalists, law enforcement, and influential men. For instance, one clubwoman suggested mashers should be “doused with water in the public streets.” As Chicago Woman’s Club member Katherine Knowles Robbins put it, “those vain individuals who wear the clothes of men should be held up to public scorn and ridicule.”<sup>32</sup>

Affluent and middle-class clubwomen, especially white clubwomen, were especially concerned with protecting working white women from mashers. Settlement workers interviewing residents in the working-class immigrant neighborhoods of Chicago noted that young girls and working women endured intrusive behaviors from men in their neighborhoods. As one settlement

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<sup>30</sup> Louise de Koven Bowen, “Some Legislative Needs in Illinois” (Chicago, IL: Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, 1912), Box 10, Folder 133, University of Illinois at Chicago, Juvenile Protective Association. The same pamphlet also noted the prevalence of children on the streets after dark and suggested laws that forbade children from selling goods in public spaces in order to keep them indoors at night, reflecting a more general distrust of the activities that took place on dark city streets.

<sup>31</sup> “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers.”

<sup>32</sup> “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers.” Robbins would later become a Vice President of the Club. “Forty-First Annual Announcement” (Chicago, IL: Chicago Woman’s Club, 1918).

worker explained, “on every corner crowds of boys gather and, to quote the girls, ‘pass remarks’ upon all who pass.” This behavior, according to the interviewer, “of course leads to conversation of a vulgar nature” and “rough housing” amongst the boys.<sup>33</sup> Reformers especially feared that naïve young women who did not understand the dangers of the city could fall victim to confidence men, swindlers, or “white slave traders,” who accosted women on trains or at stations and led down a path of ruin.<sup>34</sup> Wealthy and middle-class women set up Travelers Aid Societies to help the thousands of new arrivals to the cities across the country. Travelers Aid Societies believed it was imperative that respectable and reputable men and women were ready at train stations and transportation hubs to meet newly arrived women and young people to ensure they did not fall into the wrong hands. Travelers Aid brochures promised to prevent “minor difficulties from developing into serious problems” and vowed to help “young girls” who arrive in big cities “with no idea of the dangers in their paths.”<sup>35</sup> As the Travelers Aid Society of Chicago explained in their 1916 annual report, “[y]oung people are coming to Chicago from all directions” and many “are on the streets, once from good country homes, now lost to all worthy aims and ideals because met by the wrong friends on first arrival.” One young woman who traveled from Dallas, Texas to get into the movies found herself, according to the Society, “entirely at the mercy of any person who might befriend her.”<sup>36</sup> According to reformers in places like Chicago, then, interacting with strangers on the street came with high stakes.

As reformers worked to protect women from the city’s sexual dangers, women’s greater presence in public spaces in the urban North also contributed to a loosening of sexual mores.

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<sup>33</sup> “The Pre-Adolescent Girl,” February 1917, Box 7, Folder 4, Lea Taylor Papers, Chicago History Museum, Research Center.

<sup>34</sup> Bowen, “Some Legislative Needs in Illinois.”

<sup>35</sup> “Travelers Aid: The Badge That Marks The Trusted Friend from Journey’s Start to Journey’s End,” Box 1, Travelers Aid Association of America Records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota. See also Travelers Aid, “At the City’s Gates,” Box 1, Travelers Aid Association of America Records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>36</sup> Travelers’ Aid Society of Chicago and Illinois, “Second Annual Report,” April 1, 1916, 8.

Members of the opposite sex enjoyed more opportunities for heterosocializing in urban settings. This was especially true for young, unmarried men and women of the white and immigrant working-classes. Women who worked outside the home were granted an unprecedented amount of freedom in the Progressive Era. Many lived in boarding houses, away from their families and the social networks that were the foundation of small-town and rural life. Working women earned wages—albeit less than men—that allowed them a degree of economic independence. They spent their money on elaborate fashions that exhibited their status as earners and participated in burgeoning leisure activities unchaperoned. Large public leisure spots like movie theaters, city parks, or amusement fairs allowed working-class women and men to heterosocialize as never before, flirting openly, arranging dates, and generally enjoying themselves in public. Semi-public spaces like movie theaters and dance halls, that were often dark and anonymizing, also gave working-class youth the opportunity to engage in sexual activity away from chaperones in ways that their middle-class counterparts would not enjoy for several more decades. Many of the spaces that women’s clubs deemed most dangerous and frightening for naïve female arrivals to the city—dance halls, drinking establishments, movie theaters—were also, according to those same “naïve” women, some of the most fun.<sup>37</sup>

The leisure spots that most frightened middle- and upper-class clubwomen also provided prime cover for mashing. Some men were aware of the advantages of semi-public places, like stores and dance halls, that allowed them to approach women in ways they would not be able to on the street. As one man who frequented a Chicago dance hall explained, “when you see a cute looking

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<sup>37</sup> For more on working-class urban cultures and their affects on sexual mores and practices, see Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*; Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure*; Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); D’Emilio and B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 194-201.

For a discussion of middle-class heterosocializing and sexuality in the Gilded Age see David Scobey, “Nymphs and Satyrs: Sex and the Bourgeois Public Sphere in Victorian New York,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 37, no. 1 (2002).

girl in the street you can't go up and talk to her but at a dance hall you can."<sup>38</sup> Stores proved especially problematic from the perspective of middle-class women advocates who deemed working women especially susceptible to mashers. Clubwomen often cast mashing as part of a larger problem of conniving white men tricking poor working women into prostitution. For instance, the Protective Agency for Women and Children in Chicago believed mashers were "more responsible for the demoralization of young women in Chicago than is any of the other pernicious influences of the city." The Agency particularly highlighted the way mashers hounded "poorly paid shop girls" who were vulnerable to "this class of grinning, idiotic criminals."<sup>39</sup> The mention of shop girls' pay was a reference to anti-prostitution activism of the Progressive Era that argued for higher wages for women's work as a deterrent against sex work. If women were paid more, the logic went, they would not be susceptible to men who would try to drag them into prostitution. In this example, the masher is one of those predatory men, not just an annoying ogler.

Indeed, at times the street masher was compared or even conflated with men who harassed women where they worked. Thus "mashers" accosted women who worked in stores, known as shopgirls, and women who worked in the entertainment industry, especially as performers.<sup>40</sup> These working women were not helpless, however. As one Los Angeles woman argued, chorus girls may have been vulnerable to "Johnnies," who assumed the women were up for grabs because of their work, but such women could stand up for themselves with a "sharp stinging rebuke," while the "plucky department-store girl" had no qualms about hailing a policeman if a man acted out of line.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Constance Weinberger and S.D. Alinsky, "The Public Dance Hall," 1928, Box 126, Folder 10, Ernest W. Burgess Papers, University of Chicago Library, Department of Special Collections.

<sup>39</sup> "Urge War on 'Mashers.'" In another example, a Chicago clubwoman suggested that department stores should hire forewomen to "look after" the shop girls who "come pouring out of the downtown stores at the noon hour." "What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers."

<sup>40</sup> Laura Jean Libbey, "Laura Jean Libbey Talks Heart Topics: False Modesty of Women, and the Would-Be Masher," *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 1914; Anna Carroll, "Invalids, Old Men with Whiskers, and Policemen—All Males Flirtatious," *Day Book*, August 12, 1916; "Fight on Dep't Store Flirts Is Thrown; Is Ash Heap," *Day Book*, September 11, 1916; Jack Lait, "Counter Attraction," *Nashville Tennessean*, December 11, 1921.

<sup>41</sup> Libbey, "Laura Jean Libbey Talks Heart Topics."

In one striking example, a young Black woman working at the Caswell Hotel in Baltimore organized a walk out to protest her treatment by white male patrons. Maggie Boyer was the hotel's elevator operator and a white man had tried to hug her one day in the elevator. She fought him off and convinced the rest of the Black hotel staff to threaten a "walk out unless the cowardly masher were asked to leave." Remarkably, the guest was indeed asked to leave. Boyer's friends told the Baltimore *Afro-American*, "if white mashers get this kind of treatment a few more times, it will not take long to make work in hotels safe for colored girls."<sup>42</sup> Mashers were everywhere and both middle- and working-class women had to find creative ways to deal with them.

## Defining the Masher

The Progressive-era masher constitutes a specific category of man that is unlike any other in the history of men's stranger intrusions. Unlike the nineteenth-century diatribes against "street insults" that fixated primarily on intrusive behaviors—that is, on the "insults" themselves—Progressive-era discourses of men's stranger intrusions shifted towards constructing and explicating the category of the "masher." Accounts of intrusive behaviors used a variety of terms to emphasize the masher's various failings: "male flirt" was used to link intrusive behaviors to feminine coquettishness; "corner loafer" emphasized the physical locations and perceived class positions of men who bothered women in public; "ogler" and "goo goo man" highlighted looking as a particularly troublesome behavior.<sup>43</sup> However, the term "masher" was by far the most commonly

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<sup>42</sup> "Plucky Elevator Girl Fights Off White Masher," *Afro-American*, November 1, 1918.

<sup>43</sup> "Winking Male Flirts Land in Workhouse," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 12, 1913; "Mitchel to War on Male Flirts," *Detroit Free Press*, January 6, 1914; Dorothy Dix, "The Male Flirt," *Boston Daily Globe*, February 10, 1922; "Street Corner Loafers Due for Rude Shake-Up," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, May 24, 1918; "Bargain Counter Oglers Must Go," *Evening Statesman* (Walla Walla, WA), March 2, 1907; "Nashville Streets Free from 'Oglers,'" *Nashville Tennessean*, May 24, 1907; "Sidewalk Oglers," *New York Times*, March 31, 1909; HLT, "The Oglers in Harlem," *New York Times*, April 5, 1909; "Oglers in the Subway," *New York Times*, January 26, 1912; "Watch Out for the Goo Goo Man," *Oregonian*, December 1, 1906.

used as it encapsulated the widest variety of behaviors and could be adapted to many situations. The list of behaviors attributed to the masher was long and ran the gamut from staring to touching to physical assault or threats of violence. Mashers followed women down the street, shouted to them from cars, rubbed against them in movie theaters, even accosted women with “an exposure of person.”<sup>44</sup> What these behaviors had in common was a perceived inability to control one’s sexual desires and impulses. As Gail Bederman has shown, the ideal version of white manliness in the late nineteenth century emphasized restraint, self-control, and the ability to resist sexual temptation. To succumb to one’s base sexual instincts as the masher did was to fail as a civilized white man.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while the category of “masher” began as a humorous, almost eugenic category of a different “species” of man, as this section will show, it quickly morphed into a descriptor for white men whose intrusive behaviors marked their masculinity as deviant and threatening, especially to “respectable” white women.

Early depictions of the masher humorously played up the sense that he was a new category of man, even using faux anthropological or biological language to depict him as a separate species. In 1880, the Chicago *Daily Inter Ocean* claimed to have employed a “naturalist” to classify the masher. The naturalist established that the masher came from the same class as either the “earth-worm” or

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<sup>44</sup> For examples of men following women in public places, including streets and department stores, see Solomon Shingle, “The Owl Papers: The Doo-de-Duden Dude,” *Beadle’s Weekly*, September 8, 1883; “Smash the Street Masher,” *St. Paul Daily Globe*, August 9, 1885; “Slashed Masher’s Ear, She Says,” (New York) *Sun*, January 1, 1903; “Girl Stenographer Uses Glove on Masher,” *Bisbee Daily Review*, June 17, 1909; “Finds Chicago Men Do Flirt,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1911; “Flirt Is Fined \$25,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1926.

For examples of men who shouted from cars or offered women rides in their cars, see “Our Dirty Automobile Mashers!,” *Chicago Defender*, August 10, 1912; “Is an Auto a License to Flirt?,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1921; “Mashers and Auto Cruisers Infect City Streets, Is Claim,” *Afro-American*, August 1, 1925; “Police Drive on Auto Mashers; 17 Boys Seized,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1928.

For examples of uninvented touching in movie theaters, see “Woman’s Fists Land on Masher,” *Evening World* (New York), December 3, 1903; “Gay Film Flirt Flirts Himself Into Flirt Cell,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 7, 1916; “It’s Dangerous to Flirt in a Movie Theater,” *Chicago Defender*, January 30, 1926.

For examples of indecent exposure, see Margaret Barnley to Abraham S. Hewitt, March 21, 1888, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1365, Folder 239, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives; “Insulted White Women,” *Arizona Republican*, June 11, 1895.

<sup>45</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

the “order *Blatta*, class *Orientalis*,” that is, the cockroach.<sup>46</sup> In other venues, detractors of the masher referred to him as a “creature” or the “genus masher” and described his presence on city streets as an “infestation” or an “epidemic.” This kind of language drew on phrenological and scientific racist discourse that delineated different categories of humans and placed them in a hierarchy. By describing the masher as a new species of man, it marked him as “other” and as less than human: a “homo insignificantur,” as one newspaper put it, literally an insignificant human.<sup>47</sup> The masher was thus more than just a man who had misbehaved. He was a new kind of man, and one who failed to live up to the expectations of civilized white manhood. In some cases, the depictions of the masher as a separate species drew on an existing visual culture that depicted ethnic whites as subhuman, as in an 1882 cartoon in the humorous magazine *Puck*. The cartoon, entitled “A Curious Creature at Coney Island,” depicts a masher who “crawl[ed] up out of the sea” and accosted two fashionably dressed white women strolling along a beach (see Figure 5). In comparison with the delicate features of the two women, the masher is drawn with cartoonish dimensions: an oversized head, a broad chest and a short jacket that emphasizes his tiny waist, a bowler hat far too small for his head, slicked back hair and a large mustache that curls up at the edges. He appears grotesque and ridiculous beside the slight feminine bodies. The “creature’s” features, combined with his arrival “out of the sea,” echo late-nineteenth-century xenophobic depictions of recent immigrants, especially those from Italy and southern Europe. This ethnic othering of the masher is strengthened when the cartoon depicts him following the two women and “making strange motions and noises,” as if speaking in an unknown language. The creature is soon thwarted by a tall white man in a top hat who hits the masher with his cane. The gentleman rescuer, in contrast with the masher, is drawn with a perfectly

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<sup>46</sup> “The Masher,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, December 23, 1880, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>47</sup> “A Curious Creature at Coney Island,” *Puck*, July 19, 1882; “Masher Will Be Clubbed,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, April 4, 1895; “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers”; “Texas Reformer Is in Portland,” *Oregonian*, November 28, 1906; Ethel Intrapodi, “Smashing Cures Mashing—Get Busy, Girls!,” *Day Book*, August 26, 1912.

## A CURIOUS CREATURE AT CONEY ISLAND.



It is supposed to crawl up out of the sea, and is called the "masher." It fixes its attention upon ladies—



—and if they are unprotected it will frequently follow them, making strange motions and noises—



—and, unless it is promptly dealt with, it will cause great annoyance.

Figure 5: "A Curious Creature at Coney Island," Puck, July 19, 1882

proportioned body and a tastefully conservative suit, highlighting his white manliness. In this early depiction, the masher is a distinctly othered “creature,” perhaps a recent immigrant but certainly a “creature” that cannot compare to the respectability and composure of the white male rescuer.<sup>48</sup> In other cases, mashing was depicted as a humorous and youthful pastime of virile young men. The *Harvard Lampoon* cast Harvard students’ mashing tendencies as a bit silly but doing little harm besides distracting the young men from their studies.<sup>49</sup> These trivializing narratives, which cast mashing as an irritating but relatively harmless and even amusing pastime, would persist throughout the masher crusades, but by the early 1900s they were far outnumbered by the anti-masher diatribes that denounced the masher in all his forms.

As reports of the masher mounted, the meaning of the category shifted from something humorous and cartoonish to a threatening and frightening aspect of urban America. Local and national press took notice of the masher from his first inception in the 1880s, but coverage of his antics sky-rocketed in the early 1900s, peaking in the mid 1910s.<sup>50</sup> By the late 1890s and early 1900s mashing was a subject of public debate and outrage across the country, from Boston, Massachusetts to Portland, Oregon and from St. Paul, Minnesota to Dallas, Texas.<sup>51</sup> Headlines described how “vile-tongued mashers” “scare[d] poor, timid girls” and “lured” them into “unforeseen dangers” with their “insulting tricks.”<sup>52</sup> These accounts of mashing drew on existing narratives about women’s

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<sup>48</sup> “A Curious Creature at Coney Island.”

<sup>49</sup> “By the Way,” *Harvard Lampoon*, November 30, 1883, HathiTrust.

<sup>50</sup> Of the 564 newspaper articles read for this chapter, forty-two were published in the 1880s, thirty-one in the 1890s, 136 in the 1900s, 230 in the 1910s, ninety-two in the 1920s, and twenty-eight in the 1930s. These numbers are derived from newspaper reports that explicitly mention mashers, male flirts, etc., and also reporting that tangentially linked men’s stranger intrusions to prevalence of vice or other kinds of crime.

<sup>51</sup> I collected a total of 185 newspaper articles from Chicago newspapers, compared to forty-two from Detroit, forty-one from Washington, DC, thirty-two from New York, twenty-three from Los Angeles, fifteen from Boston, and the list goes on. For examples from the cities listed, see “Masher Nearly Killed,” *Boston Daily Globe*, April 15, 1901; “Two Little Fists Subdue Masher,” *Morning Oregonian*, October 16, 1908; “Smash the Street Masher”; “Urges Workhouse Sentences to Drive out Masher Evils,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 27, 1912.

<sup>52</sup> “Vile-Tongued Mashers Nightly Insult Women on Downtown Street, Untouched by Police,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 18, 1914; “Girls Lured to City Face Unforeseen Dangers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1906; “Now Jitney Flirt Bobs Up to Scare Poor, Timid Girls,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 15, 1921; Nixola Greeley-Smith, “New York Mashers, Their Insulting Tricks And the Different Brands of the Pests,” *Evening World* (New York), July 13, 1912.

sexual vulnerability in urban space and mashers were portrayed, at best, as annoying pests and, at worst, as akin to pickpockets, rapists, and murderers. Most alarmingly, the masher represented a ubiquitous and frightening manifestation of white male privilege in urban space. As this chapter will elucidate later, white women increasingly insisted that able-bodied white men, of various ages and economic positions, were the most common—and dangerous—mashers. Newspapers and magazines began to adopt a panicked narrative that mashers lay in wait around every corner. A typical piece in the *Detroit Free Press* described the “army of men” that congregate “in commanding positions on the downtown thoroughfares and about public places, where they smile and smirk at every prepossessing girl or woman who passes.” Accompanying illustrations depicted the masher engaged in his signature activities, including giving a young woman a ride on his motorcycle and buying her a drink in a roadhouse. The main illustration pictured a dandily dressed white man smiling at two white women passing on the street and bore the caption “The Masher is Ever Present” (see Figure 6).<sup>53</sup> The masher was no longer a babbling, grotesque monster but a seemingly ordinary white man who betrayed his depravity with intrusive behaviors. Neither a man’s social position nor his perceived respectability guaranteed he would not “mash” a woman if given the opportunity.

By the early 1900s, the masher was so ubiquitous he was a common trope in popular culture. The masher popped up in films, popular songs and sheet music, humorous poems, plays, satirical cartoons, and fictional stories about life as a woman in the big city.<sup>54</sup> Many of these depictions

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<sup>53</sup> “What to Do with the Masher,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 15, 1911.

<sup>54</sup> See for instance Gustav von Moser, *On Change* (New York: Samuel French, 1885); Maggie Hunter, “The Masher,” in *Pearls of a Woman’s Heart* (Peoria, IL: J. W. Franks & Sons, 1886); Mrs. J. S. North, *Essays and Poems* (Wakefield: C. W. Carr, 1892); George Du Maurier, *Society Pictures: Selected from Punch* (London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co, 1899); Clara Morris, “The Masher, and Why He Exists,” in *Stage Confidences* (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1902); Walt Kuhn, *A Little Bird Told Me!* (New York: Life Publishing Company, 1908); Berton Braley, *Sonnets of a Suffragette* (Chicago: Browne and Howell Company, 1913); Charles Noel Douglas, *The Hired Girl’s Dream* (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1913); Everett Franklin, *Tanglefoot vs. Peruna: A Mock Trial* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1913); Evan Y. Davies, “A Masher Mashed!” in *Poems Wise and Otherwise* (Newark, NJ: Essex Press, 1920); “Charley He’s a Masher,” Box 45, Folder 3421, American Broadsides Collection, Music Division, New York Public Library.

played off perceptions of the masher as ridiculous and absurd to humorous effect, including a scene in L. Frank Baum's *The Emerald City of Oz* where anthropomorphic potato mashers exhibit flirtatious qualities.<sup>55</sup> Mashing also appeared as a major plot point in several plays and films at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>56</sup> The 1907 film *The Veiled Beauty* poked fun at the masher's apparent tendency to chase any woman he saw, without discernment. In the film, a "dude" beats out "two other mashers" for the affections of a veiled lady, whom he follows and engages in conversation. The couple visit an amusement park together until finally the masher convinces the woman to lift her veil. To his dismay, she is revealed to have "a most horrible face—Cross-eyed, warts, whiskers, etc." The dude "falls over, horror-stricken" at his mistake. A white man plays the masher in an elegant top hat and coat, suggesting a certain refinement. However, his baggy, untailed pants betrayed him as a "dude," to use the film's terminology, a man who liked fashion and put on elegant airs but lacked the funds to successfully pass as a member of the elite.<sup>57</sup> He was, in other words, a fairly ordinary young man with a taste for nice clothes and a penchant for annoying ladies in public places. The working-class



Figure 6: "What to Do with the Masher," Detroit Free Press, October 15, 1911

<sup>55</sup> L. Frank Baum, *The Emerald City of Oz* (Chicago: Reilly and Britton Company, 1910). Baum uses the dual meaning of the word "masher" to construct a joke in which the main character, Dorothy, who speaks to an array of kitchen appliances, must put up with a potato-masher who winks at her "impertinently."

<sup>56</sup> For an example of a play, see F. L. Cutler, *The Mashers Mashed* (Clyde, OH: Ames Publishing, 1891).

<sup>57</sup> Thanks to John Finkelberg for his help deciphering male fashions in the film's stills. For more on men's fashion and the cultural messages it could convey in the nineteenth century and earlier, see Christopher Breward, *The Suit: Form, Function and Style* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016); Peter McNeil, "Macaroni Masculinities," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 4 (November 1, 2000): 373–403; Farid Chenoune, *A History of Men's Fashion*, trans. Deke Dusinberre and Richard Martin (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

men and women who would have been the intended audience for this film would have recognized the man's demeanor and laughed at the young woman's successful deception of an entitled and deluded masher. The film suggests that the masher's unbridled sexuality and inflated sense of self is rightly rewarded with his quarry's "most horrible face"—it serves him right for mashing!<sup>58</sup> A number of other films gleefully depicted mashers getting their just deserts, slapped by offended women, beaten by angry husbands, and thrown out of various establishments for their behavior.<sup>59</sup>

One mashing film also demonstrated the racial dynamics of mashing, especially as it concerned the whiteness of the "ideal" masher target. In *What Happened in the Tunnel*, a Thomas Edison production from 1903, a young white woman encounters a masher, also white, in a train carriage. The white woman sits with her "colored maid," according to the Edison film catalog description. The white woman, or "young lady," reads a book and does not notice the masher at first, but when she drops her handkerchief, the masher picks it up for her. He "takes advantage of the opportunity" to flirt, kissing her hand and leaning over her seat to get close to her. She smiles and bites her lower lip, but does not seem entirely taken in. The screen fades to Black to signify the train entering a tunnel. When the picture comes up again, the white woman and the Black woman have switched places and the masher is kissing the Black woman on the cheek. When he realizes what has happened, he jumps up in surprise and turns away in embarrassment, burying his head in a disheveled, torn newspaper. The two women laugh and point, satisfied that they have shamed the masher into submission. *What Happened in the Tunnel* is a classic masher short, where a presumptuous young man is outwitted by his seemingly innocent victim and is revealed to be a fool. However, the film also demonstrates the way that white-owned media generally portrayed targets of mashers as

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<sup>58</sup> "Vitagraph Films: The Veiled Beauty," *Billboard*, October 26, 1907. For more on *The Veiled Beauty* and working-class consumption of early films, see Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 139-162 and

<sup>59</sup> "Film News: Lady-Killer Foiled," *Billboard*, August 22, 1908; "Film News: Susceptible Youth," *Billboard*, August 29, 1908; "Biograph: Father Gets in the Game," *Billboard*, October 17, 1908; "Pathe Freres: Hunting for Her Better Half," *Billboard*, October 31, 1908.

white women. Within the logic of the film, the Black domestic worker is so undesirable, so lacking in beauty or sexual intrigue, that she is used as the butt of a joke to embarrass a white man. The idea that he would want to kiss her is so ridiculous that he cowers in shame when he has been tricked. As will become clearer later in this chapter, Black women were by no means exempt from the masher's advances, but in the larger cultural discourse—in depictions of the masher in popular culture and in much of the mainstream, white-owned press—white women were the ideal victims.<sup>60</sup>

### **Intrusive Looking and the Masher**

While the meanings of mashing shifted over time, there was little disagreement about the kinds of behaviors that constitute mashing. From the emergence of the masher category in the 1880s through the early 1920s, mashers were denounced for intrusive behaviors that embarrassed and frightened women. However, these intrusive behaviors tended to fall on the “typical” end of the continuum of sexual violence. Mashers spoke to women they did not know, calling out greetings without provocation. Some sidled up to women on the subway or on streetcars and surreptitiously brushed against their arms or legs. Others followed women down the street, sometimes silently and sometimes shouting epithets or pet names.<sup>61</sup> Many women found these behaviors annoying and embarrassing on their own, but mashing could also portend other kinds of dangers. Journalists,

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<sup>60</sup> *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Edison Manufacturing Company, 1903), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694331/>.

<sup>61</sup> For examples of speaking, see “Indignant Girls: Think That They Have a Right to Stand on the Street without Insult,” *New Haven Register*, June 5, 1895; “Give Him to a Policeman: George Street Tramps Infest Crown Street and Insult Pedestrians,” *New Haven Register*, July 6, 1895; “Masher’s Slang Cause of Faint,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 28, 1910; “Drunken Men Insult Women on the Street,” *Morning Olympian*, May 18, 1911.

For examples of mashers on public transit, see “Cold Doesn’t Save ‘Flirt,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 1, 1914; S.S.M., “Mashing a Masher,” *Day Book*, August 9, 1915; “Another Masher Mashed,” *Day Book*, September 11, 1916; “Voice of the People: ‘A Smile for a Ride,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1921; “Two Girls Complain and ‘Mashers’ Are Held,” *Detroit News*, August 31, 1928, Archives of Michigan.

For examples of mashers following women, see “One Masher Scared,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, April 6, 1895; “Masher Laid Out by Woman,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 27, 1905; “Professor Held as Masher,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 1909; “Rout State Street Mashers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 3, 1909; “Three Months for Masher,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 28, 1915; “Mashers to Have Hard Sledding,” *Ottumwa Tri-Weekly Courier*, April 25, 1916; “Masher Put to Flight by Girl’s Hatpin,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 10, 1921.

concerned citizens, and law enforcement argued that mashing posed a threat to women's safety because such behaviors could escalate into sexual degradation, sexual assault, or physical violence. Indeed, mashers were often depicted as sinister and calculating men whose tactics were designed to lure young women down a ruinous path. In the influential urban novel, *Sister Carrie*, the eponymous heroine encountered a masher on a train to Chicago. She became aware of his presence when she "felt him observing her mass of hair." Eventually, he spoke to her and began to use his well-honed mashing skills to wheedle his way into Carrie's good graces. He began with banal conversation about the weather or mutual acquaintances and slowly built up compliments and familiarities until he and Carrie were well enough acquainted that he could renew the interaction any time he saw her. The interaction set Carrie off down an immoral path as she engaged in two illicit affairs, including with the original masher, and sought money and fame on the stage.<sup>62</sup> The description of the masher in *Sister Carrie* suggested that the masher's quiet, surreptitious needling posed a moral danger to respectable women. His tactics mirrored newspaper accounts of real-life mashers who tried to "trick" women into conversation by brushing up against them, coughing loudly, or helping them with umbrellas or packages in poor weather.<sup>63</sup> One New York masher claimed he ensnared his targets with reading material that he knew would be "likely to attract a woman." Whenever he boarded the train, he made sure to have "Harper's Bazaar, or some pictorial" paper that he would "rattle" loudly in front of a pretty woman to catch her eye. The "ruse generally succeeds," he told a newspaper correspondent, and once he has locked eyes with the woman, he offers her the paper and strikes up a conversation with her about some article inside.<sup>64</sup> In these descriptions, the masher was not physically violent but his behaviors could lead to questionable relationships, always with an

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<sup>62</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1900). For more on the masher in *Sister Carrie*, see Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 195-196

<sup>63</sup> "Masher Will Be Clubbed"; S.S.M., "Mashing a Masher"; "Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1916; Carroll, "Invalids, Old Men with Whiskers, and Policemen."

<sup>64</sup> Countess Annie de Montaigu, "Mashers," *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1889.

undercurrent of illicit sex, or worse. Thus, mashing constituted behaviors that embarrassed or frightened women but were rarely deemed as egregious or aberrant as rape, assault, or murder. Mashing could lead to such physical and sexual violence, but as the anti-masher crusades argued, its defining feature was its ubiquity. If mashing was anything, it was common and wide-spread. This was increasingly true into the early 1900s as discourses of mashing shifted from depicted the masher as a kind of monstrous species of his own to discourses that instead depicted the masher as a white man whose sexual impulses had got the better of him.

In 1879, Mrs. Hugh L. Brinkley published one of the earliest definitions of the masher in her monograph, *A Woman's Thoughts About Men*. In her introduction, Brinkley purported to act as a “naturalist” who would describe man “as he is, and if the likeness be not flattering, it shall at least be life-like.” At a time when white men and women were contesting and renegotiating the meanings of middle-class masculinity and femininity, Brinkley classified different kinds of manhood, including “The Dandy,” “The Betting Man,” the “Imaginative Man,” and “The Careless Father.”<sup>65</sup> What emerged was a breakdown of middle-class white masculinity in all its most frivolous, decadent, and troubling manifestations. Though the category was relatively new, Brinkley thought “The Masher” was an important enough masculine type that she devoted an entire chapter to him. In her definition of the masher, Brinkley described the “pest” in terms and descriptors that would endure for decades in diatribes against the masher and his antics. She began by insisting that “every woman has at one time or another” encountered a masher and “suffered” his annoying behavior. The breadth of his influence was unsurprising to her given that a “male menagerie...infests” major thoroughfares in places like New York. She acknowledged that the masher had “generally a good looking face” that

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<sup>65</sup> For more on Victorian middle-class gender politics and masculinity, see Clyde Griffen, “Reconstructing Masculinity from the Evangelical Revival to the Waning of Progressivism: A Speculative Synthesis,” in Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

he combined with an “everlasting smirk” to entice women into conversation. The smirk hinted at his conceited sense of his own attractiveness, as he “fancies there is enough in his tolerable countenance and intolerable impudence to cause a woman to forget alike, modesty, etiquette and common sense, and to form his street acquaintance.”<sup>66</sup> When it came to the masher’s actions towards women, the behaviors that made him such a “pest,” Brinkley focused almost exclusively on his propensity to stare. Indeed, to read her description, one might assume that the masher spent all his time ogling women. She explained:

“...[The masher] is always to be found during the promenade hours at the club and hotel windows overlooking Broadway and Fifth Avenue; there he stands for hours biting his cane, or with his lazy, light gloved fingers stroking airily his whiskers and staring with all his might at every woman who passes. He might be designated the champion starrer of the period, for he is all eyes. ... [H]e sees every curve of a woman’s foot, every glance of a woman’s eye as she passes. He ogles her as she steps along, he smirks at her as she glides by; if she be a modest woman he seeks to stare her out of countenance, and if he thinks he sees a chance he bows, bows with an air of conceited puppyism; bows with a smile as silly as it is impertinent. ... Walking, and bowing, and smiling—he does nothing else—he is a peripathetic piece of impertinence, a walking insult, ever ready to take his hat off at the slightest glance of a woman, while she is ready to take his head off.”

All the markers of the typical mashing diatribe are here in this early example: Brinkley likened the masher to a different species of animal with words like “pest,” “male menagerie,” and “infests;” she emphasized his appearance and use of good looks and clothing to entrap his victims; she scoffed at his inflated ego and misplaced confidence in his ability to woo women; and she fixated on his ogling stare.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Brinkley’s definition also includes some ideas and anxieties that proliferated in the earlier 1800s, including the fear that one could not distinguish strangers’ social location based on their looks. In a nod to changing economic realities, Brinkley points out that “the credit system” has allowed the masher to buy and wear good clothes, making it hard to determine his economic class. For more on how urbanization and the rise of market systems created fears of deceptive strangers, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*.

<sup>67</sup> Mrs. Hugh L. Brinkley, *A Woman’s Thoughts about Men* (New York: Derby Brothers, 1879), 4, 10, 62-66. In her introduction, Brinkley pitched the book as an antidote to the many definitions and diatribes that men have written about the “woman of the period.” Men, she argued, have been allowed to define women for too long. They have painted women as capricious and flirtatious temptresses, never considering how men’s positions of power influence women’s place in society and thus their behaviors.

While the masher engaged in a wide variety of behaviors, the act of looking intrusively at women, or “ogling,” was his signature. Intrusive looking exemplified the relative mildness and ubiquity of mashing: it was annoying to those who endured it and it could feel threatening under the right circumstances, but it was also the quietest of the masher’s behaviors and it was close to impossible to catch him in the act. In a shift from descriptions of the “street insults” that were the subject of the previous chapter, which included stares and leers but did not mention them disproportionately, intrusive looking appeared in almost half of the newspaper reports of mashing cataloged for this research. Of 318 newspaper accounts of mashing, published between 1880 and 1939, looking came second only to insulting or sexual remarks (also about half of mashing reports) as mashers’ most common intrusive behavior. Looking also eclipsed other behaviors like following (about one-quarter of reports), or whistling (less than one percent of reports).<sup>68</sup> Intrusive looks went by a variety of monikers, such as a “stare,” “glance,” “goo-goo eyes,” “smile,” “making eyes,” “lustful gaze,” but was most commonly referred to as “ogling.”<sup>69</sup> Mashing was associated so strongly

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<sup>68</sup> I consulted 569 newspaper reports of mashing published between 1880 and 1939 for this research. Thus far, I have cataloged intrusions in 318 reports. Of these, 149 mentioned some form of intrusive looking. In comparison, 157 mentioned intrusive greetings or insulting remarks, eighty-three described men following women, sixty-eight mentioned unwelcome physical contact, two mentioned whistling, and one described an incident of indecent exposure.

<sup>69</sup> Sixty percent of mashing accounts that mentions intrusive looking used the term “ogling,” or 88 of 149 reports.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of representative examples of each of the terms used to describe intrusive looking. Note the breadth of the cities represented.

Stare: “Street-Car Sketches,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 20, 1880; “The Matinee Masher”; “Police Aim to Check Mashers”; “Attempt to Kidnap Washington Woman from an Express Train,” *Washington Post*, July 1, 1906; “Texas Reformer Is in Portland”; “Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 14, 1916.

Glance: “The ‘Mashers’ Mashed,” *Daily Inter Ocean*; “From The State’s Capital,” *Cleveland Gazette*, August 7, 1886.

Goo-goo eyes: “Goo-Goo Eyes,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 8, 1905; “Goo-Goo Eye under Ban in Houston,” *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 9, 1905; “Fines for ‘Goo-Goo’ Eyes,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 10, 1905; “The Goo-Goo Unlawful,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1905; “Watch Out for the Goo Goo Man”; “Goo Goo Gnat,” *Flint Daily Journal*, August 2, 1911.

Smile: “A Healthy Ordinance”; “The Masher,” *Evening Bulletin* (Maysville, KY), November 24, 1882; “Death Penalty for Mashing,” *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 17, 1903; “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers”; Lillian Collins, “The Girl or the Dress,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1912.

Making eyes: “Poses as Masher,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 30, 1905; “The Masher Was Game,” *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, February 27, 1906; “Cold Doesn’t Save ‘Flirt.’”

Lustful gaze: “Vile-Tongued Mashers Nightly Insult Women.”

Ogling: “Man About Town: He Watches the Toughs as They Ogle the Girls,” *Trenton Evening Times*, January 19, 1893; “A Warning to Others,” *State Ledger* (Topeka), November 20, 1897; “On Indiana Avenue,” (Indianapolis) *Freeman*, April 25, 1903; “Negro Masher Is Fined \$50,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, November 9, 1905; “Need New Ordinance,” *Fort Worth Telegram*, August 24, 1906; “Fight in Front of Ansonia,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1908; “Mashers Must Move;

with ogling that newspaper reports often used the term “ogler” interchangeably with “masher,” even when the man in question had engaged in behaviors other than looking.<sup>70</sup> The emphasis on looking also existed beyond newspaper accounts. The *American Slang Dictionary* described a masher as “a well-dressed loafer who spends his time ogling women on the street,” while *A New Dictionary of Americanisms* defined him as a “species of the ‘dude’ variety, who rudely ogles women on public thoroughfares, in a belief, mostly always mistaken, that his charms are irresistible. Hence to *mash*, to ogle, or ‘to be spoons on’ where the object of such attention is an unwilling victim.”<sup>71</sup> Even the medical journal *Modern Medicine* identified the masher as a man who stood on “nearly every prominent street ogling women.”<sup>72</sup>

This fixation on looking came, in part, from women who complained that mashers’ stares followed them throughout the city, causing them discomfort and embarrassment. A New York visitor to Chicago expressed frustration at the volume of intrusive looks she had to endure on the street in 1914. In an essay in the *Chicago Tribune*, she explained she did not have room to document the “the leers and ‘size-ups’ that have come to me from the insulting eyes of men standing before cigar shops, on car platforms, on street corners, or from those who, having walked past me, grinned or merely stared into my face as they passed.”<sup>73</sup> Intrusive looks like these seemed designed to annoy and embarrass women while making it nearly impossible for women to protest. As one woman put

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Complaints of Ogling,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 6, 1911; “Detroit Club Women to Hear of Mashing Evil and How to Curb Ogling Sidewalk Youths,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 7, 1914; “Ogling by Mashers on Public Streets Banned in New City Ordinance,” *Flint Daily Journal*, June 7, 1921.

<sup>70</sup> For examples of “masher” and “ogler” being used interchangeably, see “Masher Will Be Clubbed”; “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers”; “To Drive the Mashers Out of Chicago”; “Bargain Counter Oglers Must Go”; “Oglers and Mashers Must Leave Streets,” *Nashville Tennessean*, May 12, 1907; “Nashville Streets Free from ‘Oglers’”; “Victim Calls Masher Fool,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1911; “Mashing Don’t Go, Not in Phoenix Says Moore,” *Arizona Republican*, March 29, 1912; “Woodward and Beavers Join in a Crusade Against Vice,” *Atlanta Constitution*, January 12, 1913; “Judge Blames Girls,” *Washington Post*, October 15, 1915.

<sup>71</sup> James Maitland, *The American Slang Dictionary* (Chicago: R. J. Kittredge & Co., 1891); Sylva Clapin, *A New Dictionary of Americanisms: Being a Glossary of Words Supposed to Be Peculiar to the United States and the Dominion of Canada* (New York: Louis Weiss and Company, 1902).

<sup>72</sup> “Where the Menace May Be Feared,” *Modern Medicine* 2 (1920): 834.

<sup>73</sup> Alice M. Johnson, “The Truth About Mashing!,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 18, 1914.

it, mashers worked hard to “convey the impression that they are rather shy” as a feint designed to let the masher ogle “without detection.”<sup>74</sup> The ogling was itself enough to frustrate women, even without any other intrusive behaviors. One woman described how she disembarked from a New York City subway car because she became “embarrassed” when the man sitting opposite her tried to “draw my attention by moving his eyes.”<sup>75</sup> In Detroit, a “throng of idlers” parked themselves on the steps of the downtown post office and subjected “everyone woman who passes...to scrutinizing attention.” Working women who had no choice but to use the post office in the evening, after they finished work, showed “signs of vexation and even anger when subjected to the appraising scrutiny” of the mashers.<sup>76</sup> These words distinguished “bad” kinds of looking, like that practiced by the masher, and “good” kinds of looking, like that practiced by the Parisian artist who gave his professional opinion on the beauty of Chicago’s women.

Looking proved a troubling intrusion in part because, while the distinction between “good” and “bad” kinds of looking might have been clear in writing, on the ground there was frequently confusion about what counted as acceptable and unacceptable looking. For instance, when New York’s Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children organized a “Masher Squad” to patrol the streets on behalf of working women and girls who had to be out late at night, they quickly embarrassed themselves by mistaking a concerned father for a masher. The man in question had been following a young girl from her place of employment, a large department store, to her home every night. Members of the Masher Squad quickly identified him as a masher and kept an eye on him for several nights before finally nabbing him. To their surprise, he explained he was the girl’s father and had been following her each night to make sure she stayed safe and was not bothered by

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<sup>74</sup> Anna Carroll, “‘He-Flirt’ More Deadly than ‘She,’” *Day Book*, August 11, 1916. In another example, the *Chicago Tribune* described how the masher’s “methods often are so artistic that he scarcely is to be detected. He ogles, tips his hat, and whispers.” “To Drive the Mashers Out of Chicago.”

<sup>75</sup> “Oglers in the Subway.”

<sup>76</sup> “‘Masher’ on the Postoffice Steps Annoy Women Nightly,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 7, 1910.

mashers.<sup>77</sup> What constituted appropriate observation and inappropriate ogling thus depended a great deal on who was doing the looking.

## Who is a Masher?

Like the men who offended women with street insults in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, the term “masher” was reserved for certain kinds of men and not others. In the white mainstream press, the typical masher was a white man, usually quite well-dressed (or, at least, considered himself to be so), and often coded working-class, though there is plenty of evidence that men of all classes and many occupations harassed women on the street. Newspaper reporting on the masher tended to emphasize his excesses in fashion as a way of ridiculing him, though some reports noted that his fine clothes are the only thing that protected the masher from being mistaken for a “loafer of the worst type.”<sup>78</sup> A masher could be any age, and various reports claimed unhelpfully that either young ruffians, middle-aged married types, or lecherous old men were the worst offenders, though in general old mashers were particularly reviled as they were supposed to know better.<sup>79</sup> Mashers also held a variety of jobs, from policemen (one officer was discharged from the service after he was caught flirting), office workers and clerks, store managers, businessmen who frequent

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<sup>77</sup> “Bargain Counter Oglers Must Go.” Another example of this kind of confusion occurred when a *Chicago Tribune* approached a saleswoman in order to award her \$100 and the title of the best smile in the City. The saleswoman at first took great offense until she realized the man’s intentions. “Winsome Smile of a Girl Clerk Wins Third \$100,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 14, 1922.

<sup>78</sup> “The Masher,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, December 23, 1880. For more discussion of the masher’s style, see “Masher Will Be Clubbed”; “Girls Be Careful,” *New Iberia Enterprise and Independent Observer*, July 2, 1921.

<sup>79</sup> “The Masher,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, December 23, 1880; de Montaigu, “Mashers”; “Police Aim to Check Mashers”; W.L. Bodine, “How the Board of Education Is Trying to Protect School Girls from the Pest,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 27, 1907; “‘Official Flirt’ Finds No Masher,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 1, 1911; “How Pretty Miss Wallace Punished the Naughty Mashers,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 19, 1927.

members-only clubs, actors, ticket collectors on trains, conductors on streetcars, and at least one “wealthy stock broker.”<sup>80</sup>

The moments when non-white or foreign-born men were accused of mashing are telling. In places with an influx of recent immigrants or large, visible communities of color, white newspapers and white residents alike were wont to pin intrusive practices on non-white men. In New York, a local correspondent claimed that while most mashers “devote a great deal of time to personal adornment, many of the most persistent annoyers of women and girls are day laborers, generally men who have been in this country only a short time. Their grimy appearance does not prevent them from ogling women or addressing remarks to them.” This description pitted presumably white male mashers who cared about “personal adornment” against “grimy” recent arrivals, and insisted that while the former may be most common, the latter was more annoying.<sup>81</sup> White residents who sought protection from harassment on the street also harnessed racist and xenophobic stereotypes to strengthen their complaints. For instance, New York Mayor Abram Hewitt received a slew of letters in the 1880s from white residents who complained that “Italian bootblacks” were obstructing sidewalks with their vending carts, throwing garbage on the streets, and accosting women and girls.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Policeman Dismissed for Flirting”; “Masher’ Must Go, Says Kiely,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, December 11, 1901; Greeley-Smith, “New York Mashers”; “Urges Workhouse Sentences to Drive out Masher Evils”; “Flirt-Proof Jury Fails to Convict,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 21, 1914; “Women Police Grapple with the Masher Evil,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1924.

<sup>81</sup> “Urges Workhouse Sentences to Drive out Masher Evils.”

For more examples, see Clarence L. Cullen, “The Judge and the Mashers,” *Hawaiian Star*, July 8, 1911; “Seek Woman Who Accused Flirt Shot by Police,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 18, 1915; “City-Wide Hunt for Masher Slayer of Policeman,” *Day Book*, December 19, 1916; “Chinese Flirt Fined \$25,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1923; “Flirt Is Fined \$25.”

<sup>82</sup> Joe to Abram S. Hewitt, May 25, 1887, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1357, Folder 173: New York Police Department, Captains’ Reports, 1887 June, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives; A. Citizen to Abram S. Hewitt, July 12, 1888, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1366, Folder 240: Captain’s Reports, Streets, 1888 April-July, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives; A Taxpayer of the 7th Ward to Abram S. Hewitt, July 21, 1888, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1359, Folder 188: New York Police Department, Captains’ Reports, 1888 June-July, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives; Tenants to Abram S. Hewitt, August 7, 1888, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1366, Folder 241: Captain’s Reports, Streets, 1888 August-October, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives; John McCullagh to William Murray, October 8, 1888, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1366, Folder 241: Captain’s Reports, Streets, 1888 August-October, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

A number of complaints focused on the ages of the women and girls, claiming that “little girls from 10 years up to 16” were especially vulnerable to disrespectful “insinuations” from Italian men.<sup>83</sup> In general, however, most mashers were understood to be native-born white men.

Significantly, African American men were unlikely to be labeled as mashers in the white press. In white mainstream discourse, the title of “masher” was primarily reserved for men whose race and gender privilege protected them from the violence and public outcry that could accompany a rude remark or uninvited look from a Black man. As Estelle Freedman has pointed, a Black man who “looked a white woman directly in the eye ... could be construed as a sexual assailant, not merely a flirt.”<sup>84</sup> African American mashers do appear in white newspapers on occasion, and more so in the South than in the North, but their treatment differed significantly from white mashers. For instance, in Atlanta, a Black man was tried in court for waving a white handkerchief at several white women in Inman Park, the city’s first planned suburb. The frustration and annoyance white Atlantans expressed towards white mashers paled in comparison to the vitriol and threats of violence leveled at this Black man. Inman Park’s white residents asked a police officer to stake out the neighborhood in order to catch the masher in the act and the white officer indeed claimed he saw the Black man “pull a white handkerchief from his pocket and begin to wave it in the direction of [a] young lady.” So enraged was he by this scene, the white police officer later said he was “tempted to pull his pistol and empty the contents immediately.”<sup>85</sup> Instead, he arrested the masher who was eventually fined twenty-five dollars. White newspapers were also far more likely to emphasize physically violent behaviors from Black mashers than from white mashers. Thus white

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<sup>83</sup> A Taxpayer to Hewitt, July 21, 1888, Early Mayor Records; Tenants to Hewitt, August 7, 1888, Early Mayor Records. Police officers who investigated these complaints did not always agree with the complainants’ characterization of New York’s streets and they often suggested that tenement streets were as clean and safe as could be expected, though they rarely articulated what was a reasonable expectation. Joe to Hewitt, May 25, 1887, Early Mayor Records; A. Citizen to Hewitt, July 12, 1888, Early Mayor Records.

<sup>84</sup> Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 192. See also Remus, *A Shoppers’ Paradise*.

<sup>85</sup> “A Colored Masher,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 26, 1895.

readers in St. Louis and San Jose learned of Black mashers who grabbed women in the street, while Louisville sustained an hours-long “reign of terror” in 1916 when a Black man was accused of trying to kidnap three separate women in one night.<sup>86</sup>

Coverage of mashing in the Black press tended to include a much wider array of players than the white press. Both Black and white men were depicted as mashers and both Black and white women were identified as victims of mashing. In some cases, the reporting was very similar to the white mainstream press. For instance, early reports of mashing in the *Washington Bee*, a newspaper that regularly reported on crime outside of the African American community, often identified both the masher and the woman he accosted as white in images and copy.<sup>87</sup> Some mashing accounts in Black newspapers were actually identical to, or very similar to, reports published in white papers.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, Black newspapers also reprimanded Black men for mashing Black women as early as the 1880s. These articles drew on a politics of respectability that encouraged African Americans to conform to white middle-class appearance, taste, and comportment in public in the hopes that such “respectability” would make it impossible to deny Black Americans full civil and political rights. A newspaper reporter in Washington, D.C. thus reprimanded local Black business owners for letting uncouth crowds of men gather in their stores or restaurants. The reporter suggested D.C. needed Black businesses with a more refined atmosphere and clientele, places where “ladies...will be free from the gaze of ogling and brainless dudes, who stand in front of our churches, pool rooms and bar rooms and barber shops and make insulting remarks of women, and who rush out of bar rooms like carrion birds scenting a dead horse if a lady enters the private door

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<sup>86</sup> “Girl Tells of Negro Masher Hugging Her,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, February 16, 1906; “Negro Seized a White Woman on Street,” (San Jose) *Evening News*, August 22, 1906; “Negro Masher with Revolver,” *Courier-Journal* (Louisville), March 19, 1916.

<sup>87</sup> “Cure for a Masher,” *Washington Bee*, September 1, 1900; “The Crowd Cheered Because a Bright Little Woman with an Umbrella Put a Cheeky Masher to Flight”; “Smashed the Masher,” *Washington Bee*; “Squelching a Masher.”

<sup>88</sup> See, for instance, these articles which are almost verbatim reprints of articles in mainstream newspapers: “Official Flirt in Chicago,” *Cleveland Gazette*, October 7, 1911; “Girls, Don’t Flirt,” *Broad Ax* (Chicago), November 10, 1923, America’s Historical Newspapers.

of a restaurant or hotel in quest of food or refreshment.”<sup>89</sup> A reporter for the prominent Indianapolis Black newspaper, the *Freeman*, similarly lamented that Indiana Avenue in that city was filled with “‘Jim Crow’ Negroes” who spend their time “ogling the women and getting off cheap, flippant remarks as they pass.” The *Freeman* drew a distinction between respectable Black men and the “exodus Negro, the newcomer,” that is, a recent migrant from the South whose lack of good breeding was supposedly on full display in his treatment of ladies in public.<sup>90</sup> Discourses like this tended to frame Black mashers as problems because their behavior reflected poorly on African Americans in general and the Black press feared Black mashing undermined arguments that Black Americans were as respectable as white Americans and thus as worthy of freedom and autonomy.<sup>91</sup>

From the mid-1910s the Black press reported on Black mashers less and less and became increasingly indignant at white men who accosted Black women and began reprimanding white men for their entitlement and their assumptions about Black women’s sexuality.<sup>92</sup> Such indignation echoed the denunciations from prominent Black activist Ida B. Wells who, in her famous anti-lynching tract *A Red Record*, had argued that “colored women have always had far more reason to complain of white men” when it came to instances of rape “than ever white women have had of Negroes.”<sup>93</sup> Thus reports of white male mashers accosting Black women mirrored Black activists’ larger campaigns to debunk the myth that Black men posed a sexual threat to white women while white men were the natural protectors of womanhood. On the contrary, sometimes these reports of white mashers depicted Black men as protectors of Black womanhood, such as when Black men attacked white men who insulted Black women. For instance, when a white man “made insulting remarks” towards a Black woman in Atlanta in 1916, her husband, a Black man working nearby, responded by

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<sup>89</sup> “Joe Bunkers Budget,” *Washington Bee*, January 28, 1888.

<sup>90</sup> “On Indiana Avenue.”

<sup>91</sup> For more, see Rouse, *Her Own Hero*, 86.

<sup>92</sup> An early example of a Black woman who had a white man arrested for mashing can be found in “News of Interest,” *Washington Bee*, January 24, 1891, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>93</sup> Wells-Barnett, *A Red Record*, 127.

crushing the white man's head with a piece of ballast from a construction site.<sup>94</sup> Twelve years later, another Black man stabbed a white sailor after the sailor had flirted with "several girls."<sup>95</sup> At other times, Black women demanded and expected legal and state protection from white mashers. For instance, in 1924, Estelle Richardson, "a musician and a young woman of culture," confronted a white masher on a New York subway car. The man, John Elliot, "attempted to flirt" with Richardson on the subway and made "insulting remarks." When she rebuffed his advances, Elliot threatened, "If you were in Georgia, I would have you strung up." Richardson quickly left the train and managed to grab Elliot, with the help of a white woman passenger, and held him until police came to arrest him. Elliot was sentenced to the work house and the judge who oversaw the sentencing congratulated Richardson on her "pluck."<sup>96</sup>

Elliot's lynching threat reflects the distinctly racialized insults and sexual insinuations that Black women faced from white men in public. Much of the time this manifested in white men's expectation that Black women were sexually available in a way that white women were not. As the *Chicago Defender* put it in one report of mashing, a white man might believe "that because he was white and well dressed he could command the favorable attention of any pretty girl not white with whom he was not acquainted."<sup>97</sup> White men's sense of entitlement over Black women's bodies, accompanied by a racist ideology that cast Black women as naturally sexually promiscuous, meant that they often accosted, harassed, and humiliated Black women in the women's own neighborhoods.<sup>98</sup> A Black woman living in Chicago wrote to the mayor to complain of this

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<sup>94</sup> "Slays Masher," *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 1916.

<sup>95</sup> "White Sailor Masher Cut Fifteen Times," *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1928.

<sup>96</sup> "Bold Flirt Is Taken to Jail," *Chicago Defender*, April 12, 1924.

<sup>97</sup> "Stenographer Battles White Flirt on Car," *Chicago Defender*, July 21, 1928. Earlier in the century, the *Defender* had denounced the way the white press villainized Black men as sexual predators when they engaged in interracial sex with white women, the case of Jack Johnson being the most notable example, while white men who raped Black women and girls received next to no attention. Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*.

<sup>98</sup> On the presumption of Black women's sexual promiscuity, see Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body," 738-55; Mumford, *Interraces*, 112-113.

phenomenon, describing how white men wandered the Black neighborhoods of the city, soliciting any Black women they encountered.<sup>99</sup> In a particularly striking example of this phenomenon, two white men “attempted to flirt” with two Black women as they were “driving peacefully” down Central Avenue, the main thoroughfare in the Los Angeles Black community.<sup>100</sup> Mrs. Clyde Howell and Grace Garth “ignored” the “two white men” who pulled up alongside them. Resenting this reaction, the men “soon became quite insulting” and forced Howell and Garth to pull over to the curb. Seeing that Garth was “very fair,” one of the men commented, “You are out of place down here; I bet you are some society girl on a lark.” The man’s reaction demonstrates his knowledge of the area—he expected to find only African Americans in the segregated neighborhood—but it also suggests he had chosen to harass the two women with the assumption that they were Black. The two women proceeded to “give their tormentors a sound thrashing” and were soon joined by a male friend.<sup>101</sup> This incident took place in late 1928, at a moment when white newspapers were less and less likely to report on men’s stranger intrusions involving white women and men.<sup>102</sup> However, Black newspapers continued to denounce white mashers into the 1930s and 1940s, well after the white press had lost interest, a phenomenon that will be explored further in the next chapter.

Though the Black press focused increasingly on white mashers over Black mashers in the 1910s and 1920s, that does not necessarily mean that no Black men mashed. It is quite likely that Black men accosted, ogled, catcalled or otherwise harassed Black women in public space in those

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<sup>99</sup> Letter from Anonymous to William E. Dever, October 1, 1926, Box 4, Folder 29: Dever, William E. –Mayorality Papers, Police Department, 1926-1927, William E. Dever Papers, Chicago History Museum. I am indebted to Nora Krinitsky’s excellent dissertation for highlighting this letter for me. Nora C. Krinitsky, “The Politics of Crime Control: Race, Policing, and Reform in Twentieth-Century Chicago” (PhD diss., Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> Reginald Chapple, “From Central Avenue to Leimert Park: The Shifting Center of Black Los Angeles,” in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, ed. Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 60–80.

<sup>101</sup> “Girls Whip White Mashers,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 27, 1928; “White Mashers Whipped by Two Girls,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), October 27, 1928.

<sup>102</sup> Five years before the incident with Howell and Garth, the *Los Angeles Times* had declared “No Masher Problem in Los Angeles.” Mary E. Walter, “No Masher Problem in Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1923.

decades. Perhaps, then, Black women and the Black press were reluctant to publicize these incidents as the anti-masher crusades gained steam in the white press. Historians Wendy Rouse and Estelle Freedman have posited that the relative silence of the Black press on Black mashers after 1910 may be the result of anxieties about feeding into anti-Black stereotypes of dangerous Black male sexuality. To accuse a Black man of mashing, especially if he mashed a white woman but also if he mashed a Black woman, would be to risk confirming such stereotypes in the minds of whites. As Freedman argues, Black women “may have felt constrained from reporting insults lest they fail to express solidarity with men of their race.” The Black press may have had similar motivations, in addition to a “broader press strategy of exposing white men’s sexual crimes as part of the anti-lynching effort to deconflate rape and race.”<sup>103</sup> As later chapters of this dissertation will show, Black women began to report intrusive behaviors from Black men again in the 1930s and 1940s, so the momentary silence of the 1920s and 1930s likely does not reflect an absence of Black mashers.

## Mashing and the Right to Public Space

Given the narratives that linked mashing with sexual immorality, vice, and even murder, it is not surprising that mashing posed a significant threat to women’s ability to navigate public space comfortably and without fear. In 1903, *McClure’s Magazine* published a short story that encapsulated the feelings of fear, bewilderment, and helplessness that the mashing stoked. The story follows Anita Gibbons as she navigates New York City trying to meet up with her husband. Throughout the story, Mrs. Gibbons endures the stares of strange men that fill her with dread. At one point, she realizes she is being “watched by a couple of men from the car-house. Her heart was in her mouth as one of them came forward; but he only glanced at her and went in the saloon.” Though none of

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<sup>103</sup> Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 208; Rouse, *Her Own Hero*, 84.

the men approach her, their looks are enough to frighten Mrs. Gibbons. Due to a series of delays and mishaps, she keeps missing her husband and becomes increasingly frightened as night falls. Near the end of the story, Mrs. Gibbons finds herself alone on a trolley platform, crying and attracting the attention of unknown men. At the last minute, her husband appears unexpectedly, and he is as upset as she is. “You don’t know *what* might have happened,” he gasps. “I’ll be afraid to go off and leave you home alone. . . . You ought to be looked after like a child.” Chastened, Mrs. Gibbons tells her husband how relieved she is to see him and to be safe at last. In response, he tells her, “Don’t you stir out of this house to-morrow until I come home—do you hear?” Mrs. Gibbons is perfectly safe at the end of the story—she has had a few misadventures and met some new people, but no harm has come to her. Nevertheless, the fear both she and her husband felt at her wandering the city unaccompanied results in her effective house arrest.<sup>104</sup>

Newspaper accounts are full of examples of women curtailing their own mobility to avoid intrusive behaviors or women who were denied access to public space by those who worried for their safety. In Indianapolis, both Black and white women made “it a study to avoid the objectionable places” where mashers congregated, while women in Chicago would “cross to the other side of the street” to avoid “notorious” street corners.<sup>105</sup> Department store saleswomen in New York were known to leave stores in groups to protect one another from the advances of mashers who loitered outside, while others quit their jobs altogether because they were scared to leave work after dark.<sup>106</sup> Other women were forced to change their planned routes or compelled to disembark from public transit, all to avoid the “gantlet of insult” that seemed to follow them

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<sup>104</sup> Martha Stewart Cutting, “A Little Surprise,” *McClure’s Magazine*, May 1903, HathiTrust. For more on “A Little Surprise” and fears of urban nighttime, see Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820-1930* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> “On Indiana Avenue”; “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers.”

<sup>106</sup> “Bargain Counter Oglers Must Go.”

wherever they went.<sup>107</sup> Nighttime was considered particularly frightening and dangerous and women often made a point to describe how dark and deserted streets made them feel unsafe.<sup>108</sup> Nighttime also brought different kinds of activity that increased women's chances of being harassed. Residents in New York City complained that the existence of sex workers and their clients made it impossible for women and girls to walk outside, especially after certain times of the night. An anonymous writer who lived near a sex worker complained to the city's Mayor that "decent women cant [sic] go in or out of the house but men insult them and we dare not say anything to them for they have so many men they would do something to us."<sup>109</sup>

If they did not curtail their own mobility, parents or concerned family members sometimes forbade young women and girls from visiting certain parts of the city or from going out at night. Settlement workers in Chicago noted that "decent" working-class girls were "not safe from insult on the street," and their mothers often insisted girls stay indoors after nightfall.<sup>110</sup> Given the real and imagined dangers that women faced at the height of the anti-masher crusades in Chicago, Sadie T. Wald and Evelyn Allen Frake, two prominent clubwomen, both forbade their daughters from going out after dark.<sup>111</sup> However, women who were sequestered in the home were not immune from unwanted sexual advances from men. Single women living in boarding house were especially susceptible to, as one settlement worker put it, "insults from any man who comes into the house."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers"; "To Drive the Mashers Out of Chicago"; Greeley-Smith, "New York Mashers."

<sup>108</sup> See for instance "The Season of Flirting Is Now at Its Dizziest Height," *Washington Times*, July 13, 1902; "Girl Tells of Negro Masher Hugging Her"; "Smashing the Mashers Newest Aim of Police," *Washington Times*, July 10, 1910; "Drunken Men Insult Women on the Street."

<sup>109</sup> Anonymous to Abraham S. Hewitt, April 28, 1887, Early Mayor Records, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1357, Folder 172: New York Police Department, Captains' Reports, 1887 May, New York City Municipal Archives. See also A Citizen to Abraham S. Hewitt, May 10, 1887, Early Mayor Records, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1357, Folder 172: New York Police Department, Captains' Reports, 1887 May, New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>110</sup> "The Pre-Adolescent Girl in Her Home," 1917, Box 7, Folder 4, Lea Taylor Papers, Chicago History Museum, Research Center. The same report noted that men on the streets insulted and even robbed girls as young as nine.

<sup>111</sup> "What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers."

<sup>112</sup> "The Pre-Adolescent Girl."

Still, imposing a curfew on women's activity in urban space, whether self-imposed or instituted by a girl's family, was for some a necessary curtailment of her freedom if it saved her the humiliation of mashing.

Mashing revealed the lie behind the supposedly equal access to public space enjoyed by white men and women in the United States. A well-known cartoonist, Rose O'Neill, suggested in 1916 that her experiences of the city streets differed significantly from men's. "A man walks along the street without a sense of being watched or commented upon as he goes," she wrote. "I sometimes wonder if he could maintain that vigorous and conquering stride if he were aware of laughter in his rear; if he had to pass the gauntlet of quaint and contemptuous comment with which a woman is assailed."<sup>113</sup> Thus to protest mashing was to assert a woman's right to navigate public space unmolested, and women explicitly described their desire in this way. An Oakland woman, who attacked a man who followed her down the street and then grabbed her, defended her actions this way: "No man has a right to seize my arm and attempt to detain me on the street and I am sure every fair-minded person will uphold me in my action."<sup>114</sup> The Chicago newspaper *Day Book*, which catered to a working-class readership including many working women, was especially adamant on this point. Actress Ethel Intrapodi advocated self-defense for *Day Book's* women readers, explaining that to feel "safe on the streets...is a great deal to a woman who has to make her way in the world."<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Louise Hadduck Koven Bowen, a Chicago clubwoman and philanthropist, noted that the ability to go out and enjoy leisure and nightlife after hard day of labor was an essential part of a working woman's life. She implored influential Chicagoans to act to protect working women's right to leisure and entertainment. In her pamphlet on *Safeguards for City Youth at Work and at Play*, Bowen

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<sup>113</sup> Rose Cecil O'Neill, "Could Man Stand Comment Which Assails Woman?," *Day Book*, September 8, 1916. Rose O'Neill was the creator of "Kewpies," a brand of dolls and cartoons featuring baby cupids.

<sup>114</sup> "'Masher' Laid Out by Woman."

<sup>115</sup> Intrapodi, "Smashing Cures Mashing."

wrote “As to the working girl who goes back at night after a long day in the shop or the factory to the place that she calls home, shall we say to her, “Think only of your work, stifle your desire for pleasure or else take that which is bad.” No, she implored her reader, likely other Chicago clubwomen, lawmakers, and reformers. Instead, wrote Bowen, “shall we say to her, ‘Laugh and dance and sing, and be merry, for joy is the heritage of youth, and the city, the protector of her children, has opened for you many avenues of pleasure, any one of which you may safely enter.’”<sup>116</sup> To demand protection from mashers was thus also a demand for the right to one’s own time and leisure. As women raised their voices to describe the humiliation and dangers associated with mashing, municipal governments and police departments across the country began to respond.

## Fighting Mashing

In the fall of 1911, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that conditions on the streets of Detroit were “well nigh unbearable” for the city’s women. An “army of men” congregated on street corners and “smile[d] and smirk[ed] at every prepossessing girl or woman who passe[d].” The police reported they were “constantly in receipt of complaints from women who have been annoyed, even insulted.” According to the *Detroit Free Press*, the city had become “overrun” with mashers “so brazen” with their advances that city officials were forced into action. Police Justices Christopher Stein and Edward Jeffries responded by promising “a heavy fine or a house of correction sentence” for any man who came before the police court on mashing charges and police were vowing to do

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<sup>116</sup> Louise Haddock Koven Bowen, *Safeguards for City Youth at Work and at Play* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 49-50.

everything in their power to provide the justices with guilty mashers.<sup>117</sup> The ability to arrest and charge men with mashing offenses was made possible by a recently updated city ordinance that, for the first time in Detroit's history, explicitly targeted the behaviors most associated with mashing. Police Justice Jeffries had first noted the need for such an ordinance in January 1910 when he explained it was "impossible" to convict men for mashing under the existing disorderly persons statute. "A special law should be drafted and passed by the common counsel," he suggested.<sup>118</sup> Soon after, the police and members of the city government began researching anti-mashing legislation in other municipalities and drafted an amendment to the indecent language ordinance for review by the city council. The city council approved the changes to the municipal code within a month. It was then possible for city courts to convict individuals who "improperly, lewdly, wantonly or wrongfully accost, ogle, insult, annoy, follow, pursue, lay hands on, or by gesture, movement of body or otherwise wrongfully molest any person in any public street, lane, alley, square, park or space in said city."<sup>119</sup> The ordinance, thus worded, was designed to give police the "utmost power" in arresting and convicting mashers.<sup>120</sup>

Detroit followed in the footsteps of other cities and towns across the county that had tried to find legal solutions to the problem of mashing. From the beginning of the mashing panic, newspapers, women's groups, local politicians, and law enforcement variously demanded a forceful response to mashers. White women's clubs in particular appealed to police to arrest mashers as it became clear that male relatives could not be relied on to protect white women from harassment,

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<sup>117</sup> "What to Do with the Masher." Police Justices Jeffries and Stein were close friends and served on the court together until Jeffries' death in 1939. "Judge Jeffries Dies Suddenly Leaving Court," *Detroit Free Press*, September 12, 1939. Tangentially, Police Justice Jeffries was also the father of Edward J. Jeffries, Jr., who served as Detroit mayor from 1940 to 1948.

<sup>118</sup> "New Anti 'Masher' Law Is Sought by Police," *Detroit Free Press*, January 13, 1910.

<sup>119</sup> Detroit, Michigan, Municipal Code ch. 147, § 3 (1912) (passed February 8, 1910).

<sup>120</sup> "Trouble Brewing for Masher," *Detroit Free Press*, January 19, 1910.

and that in fact white men were the most likely perpetrators of intrusive behaviors.<sup>121</sup> In response, lawmakers and city officials in cities across the country—from Boston to Portland, Oregon—and in towns of many sizes—from New York City to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Mount Vernon, Iowa—passed a variety of new ordinances, reinterpreted disorderly conduct and vagrancy ordinances, and instituted police crackdowns on mashing.<sup>122</sup> As early as the 1880s, police began arresting mashers in places like Chicago and St. Louis using existing disturbance of the peace ordinances.<sup>123</sup> Beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, city councils and state legislatures began debating the utility of passing explicit anti-mashing legislation. Some attempts were more genuine than others. In Kansas, for instance, a state legislator tried to pass an anti-libel law that he claimed was designed to punish mashers who made rude or defamatory remarks about women on the street. The proposed measure was met with incredulity and contempt from the likes of Chicago settlement house founder Jane Addams, who called it “another cumbrance on the statute book.”<sup>124</sup> Houston was the first major city to successfully pass a standalone anti-mashing ordinance when the City Council passed an ordinance banning “goo goo eyes” in 1905.<sup>125</sup> After some initial confusion over what counted as “goo goo eyes,” a Houston judge settled on “any contortion, unusual movement or any fixed, unusual attitude of the eyes, providing such contortion, unusual movement or unusual fixed attitude is made with the intent of attracting, alluring or conjuring the attention of any woman or female.”<sup>126</sup> Soon after, the

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<sup>121</sup> “Urge War on ‘Mashers’”; “What Can Be Done to Rid the Palmer House Block of Mashers”; “Immunity to Endearing Young Charms Alone Will Qualify for ‘Masher’ Jury,” *Washington Post*, November 20, 1914; “Detroit Club Women to Hear of Mashing Evil.”

<sup>122</sup> “Bill to Punish Mashers Advanced,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1914; “Law Aimed at Loafers: Council to Take Steps to Stop Ogling of Women,” *Morning Oregonian*, October 25, 1910; “Ogling by Mashers on Public Streets Banned in New City Ordinance”; “Milwaukee’s ‘Masher’ Law Pending,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 16, 1910; “Planning Rule Against Mashers,” *Ottumwa Tri-Weekly Courier*, July 23, 1914.

<sup>123</sup> “A Healthy Ordinance”; [no title], *Las Vegas Daily Gazette*, January 28, 1883.

<sup>124</sup> “Women Talk of Masher.”

<sup>125</sup> Effective September 5, 1905. Houston, Texas, Charter and General Ordinances, ch. 127, § 3 (1910).

<sup>126</sup> “Judge Defines ‘Goo-Goo’ Eyes,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1905.

mastermind of the Houston ordinance, lawyer and urban reformer T. H. Stone, was advising cities like Portland, Oregon on how to develop and implement their own anti-mashing ordinances.<sup>127</sup>

For those cities that did not pass separate anti-mashing legislation, law enforcement and judges found other ways to appease public pressure and crack down on mashing. Judges and law enforcement in Portland, Oregon, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Chicago simply re-interpreted the breadth of their existing disorderly conduct ordinances and used these to arrest mashers.<sup>128</sup> Other places, like New York City, similarly expanded vagrancy or “move-on” ordinances that were designed to clear the streets of anyone deemed undesirable.<sup>129</sup> In places where school-aged girls were targets of intrusive behaviors, some Boards of Education suggested using age of consent laws to prosecute the men who hung around schools and waited to accost young girls who emerged at the end of the day.<sup>130</sup> While re-interpreting existing ordinances was often the quickest way to crack down on mashing, arrests under vagrancy and disorderly person laws were vulnerable to dismissal in court. Like Justice Jeffries’ initial dismissal of disorderly conduct arrests in Detroit, a New York judge decided in 1900 that an ordinance that banned “loitering and lounging” only applied to persons “obstructing the thoroughfare” and therefore could not be used to arrest mashers. (Ironically, that

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<sup>127</sup> “Texas Reformer Is in Portland.” For more reporting on Houston’s goo goo eyes ordinance, see “Goo-Goo Eyes”; “Goo-Goo Eye under Ban in Houston”; “Fines for ‘Goo-Goo’ Eyes”; “Propose New Law Against Mashing,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, September 22, 1905; “The Goo-Goo Unlawful”; “Snap Shots,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 22, 1905.

<sup>128</sup> “Watch Out for the Goo Goo Man”; “Dr. Quinn Arrests Alleged Masher,” *Saint Paul Globe*, October 17, 1904; “Police Aim to Check Mashers.”

<sup>129</sup> “Social Legislation,” *Survey* 34, no. 6 (May 8, 1915): 143. See also “Need New Ordinance”; “Law Aimed at Loafers,” *Morning Oregonian*, October 25, 1910: *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Wants ‘Move-on’ Ordinance,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 5, 1915: *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Street Corner Loafers Due for Rude Shake-Up”; “Work or Fight,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 24, 1918.

Vagrancy laws were especially popular solutions to mashing near the end of World War I. For more on vagrancy laws, see Risa Lauren Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>130</sup> The Chicago Superintendent of Compulsory education offered this solution in 1907. Bodine, “How the Board of Education Is Trying to Protect School Girls from the Pest.”

Other cities also tried to use disorderly conduct and vagrancy ordinances to protect school-aged girls. Andrew J. White to Abraham S. Hewitt, June 9, 1887, Early Mayor Records, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1339, Folder 27: Courts, Police Court, 1887-1888, New York City Municipal Archives; “An Unqualified Nuisance,” *Charlotte Daily Observer*, January 15, 1911; “Mashers Jailed,” *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1929.

same law was already in use to arrest women for “immoral acts” in public places.)<sup>131</sup> In response to the judge’s decision, then-Governor Theodore Roosevelt called on the New York state legislature to pass legislation that amended the vagrancy law to include mashing.<sup>132</sup> In some cases, creative efforts to eradicate mashing appear to have been designed to garner maximum press attention, like the Omaha judge who instituted a “Masher Schedule” that leveled fines for men who addressed women they did not know with pet names and terms of endearment. His schedule of fines varied depending on the severity of the insulting name, thus “chicken” would cost a masher five dollars, “honey-bunch” would set him back ten dollars, and “little cutie” was punished with a whopping twenty-five-dollar fine.<sup>133</sup>

The efforts that were unsuccessful are also revealing. In 1902, for example, the Indianapolis City Council debated and voted down an ordinance designed to protect women from any “word, look, gesture or action” that offended them.<sup>134</sup> While the measure received support from members of the “committee of morals,” it was defeated when council members argued the ordinance was redundant because only immoral men and women ever gave or received offensive looks. As one council member explained, “If the good women won’t make ‘googy’ eyes at the good men there won’t be any trouble with the rest.” In other cases, proposed legislation reflected the moral outrage of legislators more than the needs or desires of women who experienced mashing. When the Chicago Chief of Police suggested segregating movie theaters by gender and marital status—with a

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<sup>131</sup> A similar law, passed in Milwaukee in 1910, was designed to crack down on male mashers but resulted in several women being fined soon after it was implemented. “Milwaukee’s ‘Masher’ Law Pending”; “Girl Fined for Flirting,” *Rock Island Argus*, February 16, 1910; “Girl Is Fined \$25 for Flirting on Street,” *East Oregonian*, March 29, 1910.

<sup>132</sup> “No Law for the ‘Masher,’” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 10, 1900.

<sup>133</sup> “Judge Fines the Mashers; “‘Baby Doll’ Costs ‘Em \$20,” *Tacoma Times*, May 12, 1913; “Omaha Judge Smashes the Masher,” *Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader*, May 12, 1913; “Omaha Judge Smashes the Masher,” *Day Book*, May 13, 1913; “Schedule of Fines for Omaha Mashers,” *Ann Arbor News*, May 24, 1913.

<sup>134</sup> “Act as Obstructionists,” *Indianapolis Journal*, June 3, 1902.

section for “bachelors,” a section for unescorted women, and a section for married couples or escorted women—movie patrons were far from thrilled. The ordinance never saw the light of day.<sup>135</sup>

The existence of anti-mashing laws and police mashing crackdowns did not guarantee that mashers were arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced smoothly or to constituents’ satisfaction. Despite the groundswell of support for tougher responses to mashing, when police actually began arresting white men for mashing and courts began fining them, they were at times met with resistance. In an early example, a police justice in the New York police court who had fined a man ten dollars for “insulting and annoying School Girls” found himself on the receiving end of criticism from local reporters. He defended his decision to New York mayor Abram Hewitt by asserting, “I will mete out such punishment as I think the case warrants, even should I displease the Reporter of the ‘World’.”<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, if residents complained about troublesome sections of town or thoroughfares that were popular with mashers, there was no guarantee that the police would take these complaints seriously or do anything to remedy the situation. For instance, a New York resident complained to local law enforcement that Harlem bridge was often lined with “tramps, drunken loafers, and ribald young men” that made crossing unpleasant. According to the resident, “women and young girls make its passage only at the expense of lewd glances, insulting words, and indecent jostlings.”<sup>137</sup> When a police officer investigated, he found this description to be “utterly untrue” and took no action.<sup>138</sup> White citizens also used disorderly conduct and anti-mashing sentiment to try to clear the streets of anyone but themselves and thus to assert their dominance over public spaces. For

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<sup>135</sup> “At the Movies,” *Daily Gate City*, November 11, 1914; “To Isolate Movie Mashers,” *Star-Independent*, November 12, 1914; “Favor Segregation,” *Evening Public Ledger*, November 14, 1914.

<sup>136</sup> Andrew J. White to Abraham S. Hewitt, June 9, 1887, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1339, Folder 27: Courts, Police Court, 1887-1888, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>137</sup> S. H. Vial to Abraham S. Hewitt, June 5, 1887, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1357, Folder 172: New York Police Department, Captains’ Reports, 1887 May, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>138</sup> Captain Phil Cassidy to Inspector George W. Dilks, June 14, 1887, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1357, Folder 172: New York Police Department, Captains’ Reports, 1887 May, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

example, a New York resident going by the name “A. Citizen” asked the police to clear his neighborhood of “alot of colored would be dudes who congregate in this block.” These men blocked the sidewalks, he alleged, and had insulted both himself and his wife when they tried to pass through. Furthermore, he claimed “there is no white lady passing through there that is not insulted.”<sup>139</sup> A. Citizen’s attempt to rile up New York City law enforcement by appealing to white supremacist ideas about the sanctity and innocence of white womanhood fell flat. The local police captain who investigated the complaint reported that “147 colored families” or “750 people” lived in the neighborhood and acknowledged that these Black families were “nearly if not quite all respectable and are entitled to some privileges on the street and sidewalks where they live.”<sup>140</sup>

When lawmakers passed anti-mashing legislation and police enforced it, law enforcement and judges soon encountered another problem: the reluctance of women to come forward and testify against the men who bothered them. Richmond, Virginia encountered this problem in 1894 when city officials passed an ordinance prohibiting loitering near women’s-only schools and colleges. The measure was intended to protect women students who were accosted on school property and, indeed, police made several arrests in the two years the ordinance was in effect. However, it soon became apparent that prosecuting men under the anti-flirting ordinance required testimony from women students. In one case, the President of a “prominent Richmond female college” dropped charges against a male flirt when the defendant’s counsel threatened to subpoena women teachers and students as witnesses.<sup>141</sup> The publicity that came with bringing a mashing case to court plagued

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<sup>139</sup> A. Citizen to Abraham S. Hewitt, June 4, 1887, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1365, Folder 236: Captain’s Reports, Streets, 1887, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>140</sup> Captain Alexander S. Williams to Superintendent William Murray, June 11, 1887, Series XXVII: Abram S. Hewitt, 1887-1888, Box 1365, Folder 236: Captain’s Reports, Streets, 1887, Early Mayor Records, New York City Municipal Archives.

<sup>141</sup> “Flirting Is Forbidden,” *Washington Post*, October 5, 1894; “Anti-Flirting Law a Failure,” *Washington Post*, January 14, 1896; “Law to Prevent Flirting,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, January 15, 1896. When the Richmond ordinance was repealed, legislators tried to pass a state-wide law. The proposed law was defeated when all the bachelors in the state legislature voted against it, despite winning a provision that would have given them immunity if they chose to flirt with Virginia’s schoolgirls. “A Bill to Stop Flirting,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, December 26, 1897; “Another Anti-Flirting Bill,” *Washington*

efforts to legislate against intrusive behaviors into the twentieth century. In 1901, Chicago Chief of Police O'Neill practically begged women to come forward with charges against mashers. "While of course I know that the masher is more or less annoying to women, no complaints have been made to me," he explained to the *Chicago Tribune*. "I do not see how we can do much unless complaints are handed in," he lamented, "but one or two arrests will go a long way toward putting a stop to the evil."<sup>142</sup> Sometimes city officials' frustrations became an excuse to blame women for the mashing problem. W. L. Bodine, a superintendent in the Chicago public school system, insisted the "police should not be blamed" for the lack of masher convictions. Chicago, he argued, "would be ridden of mashers if women would be brave enough to throw aside false modesty and treat these fellows as they would a pickpocket—call for assistance and turn them over to a policeman, and go into court next morning and testify against them. . . . The entire question of checking mashers is up to Chicago womanhood."<sup>143</sup>

Women had good reason to fear the notoriety that could come with prosecuting mashers. Women who accused men of mashing regularly found themselves blamed for the men's behaviors. Some judges went so far as to suggest that women accused mashers in order to get their "names and pictures in the newspapers."<sup>144</sup> Despite ample evidence that women dreaded going to court, one New York magistrate maintained, "many complaints are wholly insincere, seeking merely the publicity that accompanies their thrashing a masher." This opinion, the magistrate claimed, "many other persons had formed but did not dare to express."<sup>145</sup> In other cases, women found themselves

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*Post*, January 21, 1898; "The Virginia Legislation," *Washington Post*, January 21, 1898; "Bachelors Oppose It," *Washington Post*, January 29, 1898; "Virginia Anti-Flirting Bill Lost," *New York Times*, January 29, 1898.

<sup>142</sup> "Police Aim to Check Mashers."

<sup>143</sup> Bodine, "How the Board of Education Is Trying to Protect School Girls from the Pest." For more discussion of the potential notoriety of bringing mashing cases to court, see Herman Schuettler, "Police Are Handicapped by Unwillingness of Women to Appear in Court Against Mashers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 27, 1907; "To Drive the Mashers Out of Chicago"; "Urges Workhouse Sentences to Drive out Masher Evils."

<sup>144</sup> "Urges Workhouse Sentences to Drive out Masher Evils."

<sup>145</sup> "Judge Blames Girls."

on trial for their conduct, sometimes quite literally. Near the end of the anti-mashing crusades, a woman brought a case against a man whom she said pinched her leg in a movie theater. By the end of the court proceedings, the accused had been freed and his accuser had herself been charged with disorderly conduct. The man claimed his accuser had been the one who rubbed his leg, not the other way around, and that she had slapped his face in an attempt to make it look like he had been touching her inappropriately.<sup>146</sup> At other times, police and mashers alike blamed women for mashing by implying that their clothing or behavior incited intrusive behaviors from men, thus delegitimizing any complaints they made to law enforcement. Black women may have been especially nervous that such a fate might befall them. As historians Wendy Rouse and Estelle Freedman have argued, the relative paucity of Black women's accounts of mashing in Progressive-era newspapers may be in part the result of their anxieties about being labeled sexually immoral if they came forward with stories of sexual violence. As Rouse suggests, Black women may have avoided reporting mashers "in a conscious attempt to resist the depiction of themselves in the white press as hypersexualized and immoral," and thus seem to confirm whites' stereotypes about Black sexuality.<sup>147</sup> Darlene Clark Hine has identified the protective silence around Black women's personal lives as a "culture of dissemblance" that allowed Black women to construct public identities for themselves that emphasized their virtuousness and dignity and hid much that was private and intimate.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, the white press often portrayed white women accusers as sexually suspect or immoral, so it would not be surprising if Black women feared the same and worse. The white press at times told white women accusers that their clothes were too "extreme," their glances too inviting, or their smiles too

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<sup>146</sup> "Man Accused as Flirt Freed; Accuser Held," *New York Times*, January 26, 1922. In 1924, the *New York Times* claimed the days of counter-accusing women victims of mashing were over, though it provided little evidence of this. "Women Police Grapple with the Masher Evil."

<sup>147</sup> Rouse, *Her Own Hero*, 84; Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 208.

<sup>148</sup> Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women."

ready.<sup>149</sup> For instance, a New York woman who delivered a masher to a police station was stymied by a display of white male solidarity between the masher and the police officer on duty. When asked to account for his actions, the masher had asked the police officer, “You can dope what she is, can’t you? Why, she gimme the lamp!” By this, the masher meant the woman had “made eyes at him” and thus encouraged him to speak to her and touch her on the street. Convinced by this version of events, the police officer had told the woman to “beat it” and refused to follow up on her complaint.<sup>150</sup> It is easy to imagine how treatment of this kind may have convinced some women to refrain from reporting mashing altogether.<sup>151</sup>

## Policewomen and Self-Defense

The uneven success of anti-mashing policing by white men led some to conclude that women ought to take on the role of catching and arresting mashers. As early as the 1880s, police departments and correctional facilities had employed women to help with women and children who were arrested or who found themselves in the criminal justice system because their relatives were accused of crimes. It was thought that a woman’s touch was needed to help with the “weaker” sex and minors.<sup>152</sup> In 1903, white clubwomen in Denver went a step farther and suggested that women might be better at policing mashers than the male police officers.<sup>153</sup> The Denver Business Woman’s

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<sup>149</sup> See for instance “Not Always the Men,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 20, 1892; Martin Green, “The Man Higher Up: A Good Reason for the Masher’s Success Lies in Woman’s Vanity,” *Evening World* (New York), October 8, 1904; Herman Schuettler, “Police Are Handicapped by Unwillingness”; Doris Blake, “The ‘Ogled,’ Rather Than the ‘Ogler,’ Is to Blame,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 10, 1914.

<sup>150</sup> Clarence L. Cullen, “Special Cop Squads,” *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), March 2, 1907.

<sup>151</sup> A 1915 short story in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* suggests this. In the story, a Mrs. Jarr has a twitch in her eye and accidentally winks at a man on a streetcar. He takes this as an invitation to talk to her and when she protests the masher insists that she enticed him. The streetcar conductor and several the passengers all side with the masher and Mrs. Jarr must disembark from the streetcar in shame. Roy McCardell, “The Jarr Family,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, July 16, 1915.

<sup>152</sup> Mary E. Mumford, *The Relation of Women to Municipal Reform* (Philadelphia, PA: The Civic Club, 1894).

<sup>153</sup> Colorado passed women’s suffrage in 1893, a fact that may have contributed to this early attempt to involve women in law enforcement.

Club organized a “patrol of the streets by a score of young women.” This patrol would be on the lookout for mashers and would report any offense they observed to the nearest policeman. They split their work up by type of workplace, concentrating the most womanpower on department stores where mashing was perceived to be most prevalent. Well aware that they could not trust policemen to believe their accusations, the clubwomen worked in pairs so they always had “corroborative testimony.”<sup>154</sup>

Women reformers in other cities soon began advocating for similar programs as well as for more positions for women within the official police force. In 1912, the Juvenile Protective Agency in Chicago demanded more women police officers to patrol “public dance halls,” or more generally, any place where “young girls are to be found in large numbers.”<sup>155</sup> Prominent Chicago clubwoman Louise Haddock Koven Bowen argued that women police officers could “mingle with the crowds” at amusement and leisure spots more easily than policemen, and were thus uniquely equipped to protect women from men with “disreputable intentions.”<sup>156</sup> Bowen noted that women already worked as truant officers, probation officers, and with social service organizations that helped protect women and children in the city, but that these private organizations could only do so much: “we need the police power which the city might vest in women trained for the work,” she argued, “giving them the authority to cope with certain dangerous situations with which private organizations have tried in vain to deal.”<sup>157</sup> Chicago’s mayor Carter Harrison caved to clubwomen’s demands and began hiring women police officers and the city had twenty women police officers by 1914.<sup>158</sup> The next year, cities across the country had hired women on to their police forces including

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<sup>154</sup> “Doom of ‘Mashers’”; “Wage War on the Masher,” *Times-Picayune*, December 20, 1903.

<sup>155</sup> Bowen, “Some Legislative Needs in Illinois.”

<sup>156</sup> Bowen, *Safeguards for City Youth*, 47.

<sup>157</sup> Bowen, *Safeguards for City Youth*, 48.

<sup>158</sup> Bowen, *Safeguards for City Youth*, 49. Other sources report there were thirty-six women police officers in Chicago in 1913, but I have gone with the more conservative estimate. Eva L. Corning, *Women Police Service* (Topeka, KS: [n.p.], 1915), 6.

Asbury Park in New Jersey, Philadelphia, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Kansas City, while places like New York continued to debate the utility of women police officers.<sup>159</sup>

Women had worked with the police and juvenile courts for some time as probation officers or matrons in women's prisons, but the women police officers hired during the masher crusades were explicitly tasked to help arrest criminals. In one widely-reported example, the Chicago police department hired an "official flirt" in 1911 to entrap mashers on the street.<sup>160</sup> In actuality, the "official flirt" was two women, both members of the Race Betterment League in Chicago, who acted as decoys to entice men into accosting them so nearby police officers could arrest them. Police departments in several cities had already tried this tactic in an unofficial capacity. Police in Los Angeles and Pittsburgh had caught persistent mashers by enlisting women complainants to serve as the "lure" to catch mashers in the act.<sup>161</sup> These efforts were successful enough that police departments soon began officially hiring women as police officers with the authority to arrest individuals. The mid-1910s saw a large uptick in mashing arrests conducted by these newly hired policewomen, with some women serving regularly as arresting officers in mashing cases.<sup>162</sup> Most of these women worked in plain clothes, patrolling problematic areas of the city and waiting for mashers to present themselves, either by accosting other women or accosting the policewoman herself. Indeed, in the majority of cases that made it into the newspapers, policewomen arrested mashers because the man had attempted to flirt with her, unaware that she was an officer of the

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<sup>159</sup> "Heiresses Join Ranks of Policewomen," *Ogden Standard*, July 24, 1915.

<sup>160</sup> "'Official Flirt' Finds No Masher"; "Finds Chicago Men Do Flirt"; "The Flirt-Catcher," *Irish Times*, September 2, 1911; Richard Henry Little, "Round About Chicago: The Official Flirt in 1950," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 4, 1911; "Official Flirt in Chicago."

<sup>161</sup> "Smiles Are Lure to Trap Masher," *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 1910; "Chief Brushes Away the Web," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1911.

<sup>162</sup> For example, Chicago police officer Alice Clement arrested at least three men for mashing from 1912 to 1915, and likely many more. "Letter Masher Caught," *Day Book*, October 7, 1912; "Woman Cop Arrests Masher," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1913; "Flirt Case Lost by Policewoman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1915.

law.<sup>163</sup> One of the first women police officers, Mary Hamilton, explained in 1924 that policewomen were useful precisely because they could “ensnare ‘mashers’ who lie in wait for more innocent victims.”<sup>164</sup> To aid them in these duties, police departments gave women pointers on how to attract mashers. The Chicago police department asked its policewomen to “be shy, patrol the downtown section, flirt back if flirted with and then arrest<sup>165</sup>,” while the Los Angeles chief of police dismissed one volunteer decoy because her clothes were “a trifle loud” and might unfairly entrap otherwise respectable men.<sup>166</sup>

Most of the first women police officers were white women who were expected to deal primarily with white male offenders or to protect primarily young, working-class white women. Early theorizing on women police officers drew on ideas about white women’s moral authority to suggest that white women were uniquely qualified to enforce chaste and proper interactions between white men and women and to protect women and children from dangerous elements.<sup>167</sup> However, Black communities in the urban North soon called on police departments to also employ Black women as police officers in hopes they could better protect African American women from urban dangers. As the *Chicago Defender* explained in 1914, Black women police officers would be able to “mingle with the crowds on the street, in the cars, in the public and private parks and places of amusement to protect the women of the race from those who go beyond ‘mashing’ and insult the girls and women of the race.”<sup>168</sup> While police departments apparently took their time following these suggestions, by

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<sup>163</sup> “Alton’s Woman Chief of Police,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, January 17, 1909; “Woman Cop Arrests Masher”; “Flirt Case Lost by Policewoman”; “Heiresses Join Ranks of Policewomen”; “You’d Better Make Your Eyes Behave,” *Ogden Standard*, October 23, 1915; “Smashing the ‘Masher’—A Nation-Wide Crusade,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 31, 1916; “Flirt’s Head in Bandage; She Was a Policewoman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 6, 1922. One woman police officer described how she patrolled the streets with her police officer’s “star” hidden beneath her coat lapel. Corning, *Women Police Service*, 19.

<sup>164</sup> Mary E. Hamilton, *The Policewoman: Her Service and Ideals* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1924), 80.

<sup>165</sup> “‘Beauty Squad’ after Mashers,” *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, September 16, 1916; “Police Women to Flirt Back,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1916.

<sup>166</sup> “Chief Brushes Away the Web.”

<sup>167</sup> Mumford, *The Relation of Women to Municipal Reform*, “New Bedford’s Policewoman: Motherly Care of Girls Her Principal Work, Explains Mrs Cody, Now a Regular Member of the Force,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 2, 1919.

<sup>168</sup> “Policewomen Badly Needed,” *Chicago Defender*, June 13, 1914.

the late 1920s, Black women police officers were helping to investigate vice in dance halls in New York, patrolling the West Park district of Chicago in an attempt to eradicate mashers, and arresting white men who bothered Black women on streetcars in Washington, D.C.<sup>169</sup>

As it became increasingly clear that the police and justice system could not be relied on to effectively address mashing, both individual women and women's groups began to advocate for and practice self-defense techniques as a way to tackle the problem themselves. Through the 1880s, women who sought extralegal solutions to mashing were expected to enlist the help of male relatives or, if they were white women, the help of benevolent white male strangers. Beginning in the early 1900s, women increasingly took matters into their own hands and newspaper accounts gleefully reported the results. Women stuck mashers with hatpins, hit them with umbrellas, and even used their fists or martial arts like jiu jitsu to beat off mashers.<sup>170</sup> Some women described how self-defense techniques made them feel safer because they could not rely on the police to intervene when needed, while others suggested that dealing with mashers themselves was easier than appearing in court and sustaining the publicity and notoriety that came with giving testimony.<sup>171</sup>

By and large, most early adopters and proponents of self-defense were middle- and upper-class white women. In her book on the origins of the women's self-defense movement, Wendy Rouse has argued that much of the reporting and dominant discourse around women's self-defense emphasized stories of white women defending themselves against "racialized others." Women's self-defense was palatable to a white male-dominated discourse "when it was suggested as a means of

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<sup>169</sup> "Ten New Policewomen Appointed by Enright," *New-York Tribune*, May 28, 1919; "Death on Mashers," *Chicago Defender*, January 29, 1927; "D. C. Policewoman Nabs White Masher," *Afro-American*, November 16, 1929.

<sup>170</sup> "Hatpins for Defense," *Washington Post*, June 27, 1909; "Masher Put to Flight by Girl's Hatpin"; "The Crowd Cheered Because a Bright Little Woman with an Umbrella Put a Cheeky Masher to Flight"; "Fifty Girls of Spokane Train to Whip Mashers," *Washington Post*, December 26, 1914; "She Smashed Masher with Her White Fists," *Albuquerque Evening Citizen*, August 29, 1905; "Four Girls, Using Fists, Put 3 Mashers to Flight," *St. Louis Post - Dispatch*, June 21, 1908; "Two Little Fists Subdue Masher"; "Mashers and Thugs Beware! Girls Plan Jiu Jitsu Club," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 29, 1906; "Girl's Wit and Jiu Jitsu Land Masher on Back," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 4, 1909.

<sup>171</sup> "Women Must Fight Back at Mashers, Is Advice," *Seattle Star*, September 11, 1911; "Girl Stenographer Uses Glove on Masher"; Intrapodi, "Smashing Cures Mashing."

protecting white women against attacks from nonwhite men and therefore helping to preserve their bodies for white men.” Because white men in fact remained the primary perpetrators of intrusive behaviors and thus the primary targets of women’s self-defense skills, Rouse suggests self-defense became “a means for white women to empower themselves against their alleged natural protectors—white men.”<sup>172</sup> As one Los Angeles woman put it after she attacked a would-be masher, “I didn’t see anyone to protect me, so I protected myself.”<sup>173</sup> Middle-class and elite white clubwomen also organized self-defense training for working-class white and immigrant women, who they perceived as especially vulnerable to opportunistic mashers.<sup>174</sup> In a now familiar pattern, Black women increasingly used self-defense to ward off white mashers in the mid to late 1920s just as white women were using it less and less. When a white man tried to take a Black woman’s hand on a Chicago streetcar in 1928, the *Chicago Defender* cheered the “attractive stenographer and court reporter” for defending herself. The man in question, according to the *Defender*, believed “because he was white and well dressed he could command the favorable attention of any pretty girl not white with whom he was not acquainted.” His target, Helen Waters, apparently shared the *Defender*’s indignation and she “battered the face and body” of the masher when he touched her knee after she ignored his ogling.<sup>175</sup>

### **Returning the Masher’s Gaze**

For women who did not want the notoriety of a court case nor the potential danger that came with self-defense, they could employ subtler responses. One of those was returning a masher’s look. In the spring of 1916, for instance, a man on a Chicago streetcar turned his gaze onto a fellow

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<sup>172</sup> Rouse, *Her Own Hero*, 114.

<sup>173</sup> “Plucky Phone Girl Fights a Masher,” *Seattle Star*, June 22, 1912.

<sup>174</sup> Rouse, *Her Own Hero*, 2.

<sup>175</sup> “Stenographer Battles White Flirt on Car.”

passenger, a woman he did not know who was on her morning commute. The object of his gaze, who called herself JEH, wrote to the *Chicago Tribune* about her experience. She described the stranger as the “nerviest flirt I have ever met” and explained that he rode the street car with her every morning as she made her way to the office. He never spoke but spent each ride staring and smirking at “his chosen victim.” “I could never look up,” wrote JEH, “without seeing his eyes glued upon me and the ever ready smile upon his face.” Finally, she had had enough of his “forced attention” and decided to put an end to it in creative fashion. One morning, when she boarded the streetcar, JEH confronted the ogler. “I took one look at him,” she wrote, “staring squarely into his eyes. As I took my seat I dropped my glance to his feet, where I continued to gaze with an amused expression on my face.” Her brazen looks had the desired effect. The man “began to shift and finally he became so annoyed and uncomfortable that he left the car before reaching his destination.” JEH, eager to share this effective tactic with others, urged the *Tribune’s* women readers to “try it some time, girls.”<sup>176</sup>

In fact, JEH was continuing in the footsteps of women who had for decades used their own stares to unsettle men who ogled them. Women gave “haughty stares” or a “passing glance of contempt” or a look of “genuine loathing” to signify their distaste for mashers.<sup>177</sup> One Detroit woman even stared at a masher, a fellow passenger on a streetcar, through a pair of opera glasses. Her “cold, cruel, tyrannical, invincible, irresistible” stare looked him up and down slowly, taking in every inch of him with “dreadful monotony” until he made a “wild, impulsive dash” for the back door and disappeared into a crowd.<sup>178</sup> Anti-mashing reporting even encouraged this kind of response. For instance, the *People’s Advocate*, a Black newspaper published in Washington, DC,

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<sup>176</sup> “Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 14, 1916.

<sup>177</sup> “Lonely Mr. Hixson Is Lonelier Still in Flirt’s Cell,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 23, 1916; “Street-Car Sketches”; “Masher Will Be Clubbed.”

<sup>178</sup> “How to Cow a Masher,” *Omaha World Herald*, August 14, 1892.

echoed JEH's advice when it suggested a "lady" who wanted to throw a masher off his game "has only to cast her eyes modestly down and fix her gaze intently on the feet of the masher." Her look should be "sympathetic," explained the *People's Advocate*, so the masher is seized with the "horrible fear" that his shoes are out of style or his feet are too big or something is the matter with his trousers.<sup>179</sup> However, with the few notable exceptions above, staring at a masher was not an especially effective strategy as men often excused mashing by suggesting that women invited intrusive behaviors with their looks or smiles.<sup>180</sup> As one Michigan barkeeper put it, men "don't mash in Detroit. They don't have to. ... I had six chickens smile at me ... tonight."<sup>181</sup>

That said, women who returned a masher's gaze as a way to intimidate or discomfit him recognized the power of a stare could work in their favor. Staring broke the social convention that dictated that strangers should not acknowledge one another in public places, or what sociologist Erving Goffman has termed "civil inattention," the right to be unobserved and unmolested in public.<sup>182</sup> Breaking this rule and staring at a stranger demonstrated two things: firstly, it demonstrated that the person staring felt they had enough power or social cachet to break this social convention with few consequences and, secondly, it demonstrated the starees position of power in relation to the starrer. As sociologist Carol Brooks Gardner has noted, ogling and staring are considered vulgar and constitute a breaking of social civility reserved for so-called "open persons," those whom it is socially acceptable to observe, speak to, or otherwise approach at any point.<sup>183</sup> In the Progressive-era American cities, women were "open persons," especially when navigating city streets alone. Their solo presence in public marked them as someone who may be approached, called to, or stared at without significant social repercussions. Women who looked back disputed this power dynamic.

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<sup>179</sup> "How to Paralyze a 'Masher,'" *People's Advocate*, April 21, 1883, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>180</sup> "Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 16, 1916.

<sup>181</sup> "Detroit Club Women to Hear of Mashing Evil."

<sup>182</sup> Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 83.

<sup>183</sup> Carol Brooks Gardner, *Passing by: Gender and Public Harassment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 93.

They attempted to put their would-be harasser in the position of an “open person” and asserted themselves as individuals who deserved the same respect and anonymity as those with greater social power, namely, as white men. When a woman stared at a masher who ogled her, the two engaged in a miniature, street-level battle that contested who had the right to stare at strangers and who had the right to navigate the city without suffering intrusive stares.

## Conclusion

The anti-masher crusades marked a new moment in Americans’ understanding of intrusive behaviors. After the initial outcry over street insults in the mid-nineteenth century, women’s clubs, urban reformers, and journalists began to articulate intrusive behaviors as the antics of a particular kind of man: the masher, a man almost always depicted as a white man with indecent intentions. As more and more women complained of humiliating and frightening treatment at the hands of white men, it became clear that white male chivalry could not be relied on to eradicate mashing. Instead, women’s groups and urban reformers began to consider new ways of resisting men’s stranger intrusions in urban space. Firstly, they looked to official channels and state actors to protect women. In response to demands from women’s groups, reformers, and law enforcement, city councils across the country passed new anti-mashing laws that criminalized intrusive behaviors and gave police and courts the ability to arrest mashers and punish them with fines and jail sentences. Some police departments also hired women police officers to help entrap and arrest men for intrusive behaviors. Secondly, women began learning self-defense techniques to protect themselves from men who would dare to accost them in public. As it became clear that state responses to mashing were failing to eradicate men’s intrusive behaviors, self-defense became an increasingly important resistance tool against male violence, especially white male violence, in public. Indeed, by 1920, anti-masher

diatribes from prominent middle-class reformers continued to call for the same kinds of police interventions and crackdowns that had been the fixture of anti-masher discourses since the 1880s, suggesting little of substance had changed in the intervening forty years.<sup>184</sup>

At the same time, popular representations of the masher and his victim in white-owned media left an indelible mark on the way Americans would articulate and understand stranger intrusions in the coming decades. White women's outrage over mashing demonstrated the limits of white racial solidarity in the Progressive Era. The fact that mainstream white-owned media portrayed both the category of the masher and his victim as white suggested that many white women were suspect of their white male counterparts and understood that white men could not be relied upon to protect them. However, those same discourses limited who could claim the status of a masher's victim, and the albeit limited protections that came with it. White women, especially middle- and upper-class white women, were the "ideal" victims of stranger intrusions in white-produced media and thus could claim protections more readily and with fewer grievances. Black women, on the other hand, were less likely to be viewed as victims or as requiring help from mashers unless they experienced especially severe attacks, including threats of violence and murder. Indeed, their experiences rarely featured in white press coverage of mashing and would all but disappear from the white press by the 1930s. The next chapter will consider how the the discourses that cast both the masher and his ideal victim as white would morph and distort into discourses that portrayed intrusive behaviors not as the unique violence of white men but as the natural right of white men, and would cast white women as the natural object of white men's harmless admiration.

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<sup>184</sup> "Where the Menace May Be Feared"; "Urges Greater Force of Policewomen Here," *Chicago Daily News*, October 25, 1921, volumes 1-3, Louise Hadduck DeKoven Bowen collection, Chicago History Museum, Research Center.

# Chapter 3

## Wolves, Sailors, and the Trivialization of Stranger Intrusions

Detroit was coming down from a summer heatwave on Tuesday, July 23, 1946.

Temperatures had peaked at 100 degrees a few days earlier, but in the early morning hours of the twenty-third, it was a refreshing sixty-one degrees.<sup>1</sup> At three that morning, Detroit police officer Earl Johnson was patrolling in the Canfield district, a neighborhood about two miles northwest of downtown Detroit.<sup>2</sup> Also on the street that morning was William T. Jansen, a white Detroit resident. It's impossible to know why Jansen was out on the streets of Canfield at three A.M. on a Tuesday morning. Perhaps he had a late shift, or a very early shift, at the automobile factory where he worked.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps he had spent the evening with a friend and had decided to take a stroll home in the relative cool of the early morning hours. It's also unclear what about Jansen's behavior caught Officer Johnson's attention. Jansen might have been flirting with a woman on the street, or perhaps he let out a whistle as a woman passed him, or perhaps Officer Johnson was suspicious of the way

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<sup>1</sup> For historical weather data, see July, 1946, *Weather Underground*, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.wunderground.com/history/monthly/us/mi/detroit/KDET/date/1946-7>.

<sup>2</sup> The neighborhood had been a prosperous, middle-class neighborhood in the late nineteenth century but had fallen into decline in the 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression and the development of Detroit's suburbs. "West Canfield Historic District," *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, Detroit Historical Society, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/west-canfield-historic-district>.

<sup>3</sup> Jansen's race and occupation was recorded in the 1940 census entry for John Jansen, his father. 1940 U.S. Federal Census, 1940 U.S. Federal Census, MyHeritage.com, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://records.myheritagelibraryedition.com/research/record-10053-775908862/william-jansen-in-1940-united-states-federal-census>.

Jansen looked. Whatever the case, the Detroit newspapers reported later that morning that Officer Johnson had charged Jansen with “ogling” and issued an ordinance violation ticket.<sup>4</sup>

Jansen was charged under the “anti-ogling” ordinance that the city council had updated in 1910 to crack down on the intrusive looking, sexual remarks, and following of mashers. However, rather than applaud the police officer’s efforts to eradicate ogling on the street, as they might have done in 1910, local newspapers expressed astonishment that a man could be fined for something as innocuous as ogling. The *Detroit News* claimed that Jansen was “the first citizen charged with ogling,” as if the preceding thirty-six years—and decades of anti-masher crusades—had never happened.<sup>5</sup> While the ordinance was likely spottily enforced from its inception, the same newspaper had reported previous ogling and mashing charges as late as 1929.<sup>6</sup> Just a month earlier, the *Detroit Free Press* reported the arrest of a “tool and die maker” who had been harassing “socially prominent women” over the telephone. One of his targets cooperated with police, caught him in the act, and he was sentenced to ninety days in jail.<sup>7</sup> The concept of mashing, and the idea that one could be arrested for it, were thus not quite so ancient and forgotten as the *Detroit News* suggested. Yet in response to his arrest, Jansen’s sister said her family was confused about what her brother had done. “What is ogling?” she asked the police.<sup>8</sup> Despite these questions, Lieutenant Charles Witherite, the white supervising officer who had directed his men to target oglers, explained he was just following the law.<sup>9</sup> In defending his anti-ogling campaign, he did not reference mashing or complaints from

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<sup>4</sup> Don Lochbiler, “Sheep’s Eyes to Get Wolves in Trouble,” *Detroit News*, July 23, 1946, Library of Michigan.

<sup>5</sup> Lochbiler, “Sheep’s Eyes to Get Wolves in Trouble.”

<sup>6</sup> “Fined \$50 for Annoying Young Girl at Belle Isle,” *Detroit News*, July 18, 1927, Archives of Michigan; “Two Girls Complain and ‘Mashers’ Are Held,” *Detroit News*, August 31, 1928, Archives of Michigan; “40 Movie Mashers Caught; 15 Jailed, Others Pay Fines,” *Detroit News*, February 10, 1929, Archives of Michigan.

<sup>7</sup> “Masher Talks Way to Jail for 90 Days,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 10, 1946.

<sup>8</sup> According to the *News*’ tongue-in-cheek reporting, the Detroit Police Headquarters looked up the word for her in an “unabridged dictionary,” as if such an obscure term was unlikely to be found in an abridged version.

<sup>9</sup> For details on Witherite’s race, family, and age see entry for Charles Witherite, 1940 U.S. Federal Census, MyHeritage.com, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://records.myheritagelibraryedition.com/research/record-10053-736804788/charles-witherite-in-1940-united-states-federal-census>.

women who endured men's stranger intrusions on the street. "It's right there in the compiled ordinances," he explained, "You can look it up. Ogling is against the law."<sup>10</sup> His answer implied that he thought the letter of the law was justification enough.

The day after Jansen's charging, the Associated Press picked up the story. Newspapers from Lewiston, Maine to Los Angeles, California ran near-identical stories about the "ancient law" that was wreaking havoc for oglers in Detroit. The article cast Officer Johnson and Lieutenant Witherite as prudish men enforcing an outdated decree. It called Detroit's anti-ogling ordinance "ancient" and "recently unearthed," suggesting it had lain dormant in the municipal code for centuries. The Associated Press interviewed Dale Belmont, a twenty-two-year-old white woman described as a "curvaceous showgirl" and "pinup favorite of overseas veterans." Belmont made it clear that no campaign against ogling had her blessing. "I think it's a crazy ordinance," she said. "I think it's a wonderful thing that men turn around and stare at girls. If they didn't ogle me I'd think I was slipping." Nineteen-year-old Dorothy Mahon, a student at "a local finishing school for young ladies," echoed Belmont's take. She explained, "It seems silly in this day and age to have an ordinance like this. Why most girls want boys to whistle at them."<sup>11</sup> Next to the testimony of these young women, forty-two-year-old Witherite appeared uptight and out of touch as he insisted that ogling would no longer "go unchallenged" in his district.<sup>12</sup> The conspicuous absence of a victim's perspective added to the sense that Jansen had not committed a serious offense. None of the Detroit papers nor the

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<sup>10</sup> Lochbiler, "Sheep's Eyes to Get Wolves in Trouble."

<sup>11</sup> "\$25 Per Ogle Is Detroit Rate," *Palm Beach Post*, July 24, 1946, Google News; "A 'Fine' Figure Means Just That to Ogling Detroit Males," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1946; "Detroit's Oglers May Be Ogling Jail Cell Bars If They Disobey an Old Law Frowning on Ogling," *Lewiston Daily Sun*, July 24, 1946; "Ogling Detroit Girls Is to Flirt with Jail Term!," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 24, 1946; "Old Law Bans 'Ogling' Girls, but Pinup Favorite Likes It," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1946.

Ads for Belmont's shows appeared in the *Detroit Free Press* in July and October of that year. "Centennial? Premier Brings Film Stars to Fox," *Detroit Free Press*, July 17, 1946; ad for Dale Belmont at Penobscot Club, *Detroit Free Press*, October 21, 1946.

<sup>12</sup> Lochbiler, "Sheep's Eyes to Get Wolves in Trouble;" "War on Ogling (What Is It?) Opens," *Detroit Free Press*, July 24, 1946.

Associated Press article mentioned the person who was supposed to have been the target of Jansen's actions. No woman was ever named or interviewed. Newspaper reports did not even describe what Jansen did to catch the attention of the police officer. Newspapers seized on "ogling" as the action deemed criminal, but none described what actually transpired on the street on that early Tuesday morning. Without a victim's statement or even an outsider's account of the exchange between Jansen and the woman who was presumably the object of his look, Jansen's "ogling" appeared to be a victimless crime. The substitution of Belmont and Mahon's testimony for a victim's account bolstered the sense that Jansen's actions hurt no one, and that some women even welcomed them.

The responses to Jansen's charges exemplify how shifting discourses trivialized and normalized men's stranger intrusions in the 1930s and 1940s. In this period, public commentators increasingly cast intrusive behaviors as the purview of white men and as an expected and unremarkable part of urban life. The nationwide ridicule of Witherite's drive against oglers stood in contrast to the denunciations of mashing that peppered national and local press a few decades before. The cries of "smash the masher" that had permeated discourses of intrusive behaviors in the Progressive Era gave way to the insistence that these same behaviors, when practiced by white men, were now not only acceptable and benign but what women wanted. Newspaper reports mocked anti-ogling campaigns and films and popular culture cast intrusive behaviors as humorous flirtation. Women, even middle-class white women, expressed a desire for flirtatious interactions in public places and suggested that their self-worth derived in part from how many men they attracted on the street. Taken together, white, middle-class commentators contradicted and refuted the city officials, law enforcement, and women who they had called on to condemn stranger intrusions in the Progressive Era. In this new cultural context, stranger intrusions were nothing to worry about, were to be celebrated and enjoyed as part of a more sexually liberated society.

Crucially, the idea that men's stranger intrusions were a harmless, even enjoyable, part of urban life only applied when white men were the instigators. When white men ogled, wolf-whistled, or remarked on a woman's appearance in public space, their behaviors were cast as the natural expressions of healthy male sexuality. In some cases, these behaviors were cast as one way to find a romantic partner, perhaps even a wife. In contrast, Black men who whistled at, spoke to, or even looked at white women were likely to be cast as sexual predators or rapists. In the eyes of white Americans, the mere perception that Black men had engaged in these behaviors was often enough to justify violence and lynching.<sup>13</sup> Rumors that Black men had raped white women were a common justification for white anti-Black violence throughout the twentieth century, including a concentration of race riots in 1943.<sup>14</sup> One of those riots took place in Detroit in the summer of 1943, just three years before Detroit police charged William T. Jansen with ogling. The city was in a moment of tense transition, dealing with a housing shortage, a transition to wartime manufacturing, and an influx of migrants, both Black and white, from the South. Interracial violence erupted on June 20, 1943 with skirmishes between Black and white youth at Belle Isle in the Detroit River. The skirmishes quickly escalated, drawing in hundreds of Black and white Detroiters who were escaping hot summer temperatures at the popular beach destination. The violence spread across the city, lasting four days until June 23, 1943. While many factors contributed to the tensions and antagonism between white and Black Detroiters in the 1940s, at least two rumors about interracial gender or sexual violence also fueled the rumors. One rumor claimed that a white mob had thrown a Black woman and her child into the Detroit River. This story confirmed for many Black residents what they already suspected: that white Detroiters had no regard for the lives of Black Detroiters. Black

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<sup>13</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Sarah Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism* (University of Georgia Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Marilyn S. Johnson, "Gender, Race, and Rumours: Re-Examining the 1943 Race Riots," *Gender & History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 252-77.

residents took this rumored incident as a sign to step up and defend their families and homes from whites. On the other hand, white residents justified their violence in part by spreading a rumor that a Black man had raped a white woman at Belle Isle. Some versions of the rumor stated the Black man had murdered the white woman's sailor boyfriend, which drew in sailors stationed at Detroit's naval armory. Neither of these rumors were ever confirmed but they demonstrate the power of residents' anxieties about interracial gender and sexual violence. White residents feared Black male sexuality as especially violent and targeting white women, while Black residents feared that Black women were vulnerable to white men's sexual and physical attacks. In the end, the violence fueled by these rumors resulted in thirty-five deaths and over 700 injuries. The vast majority of those killed, injured, and arrested were Black.<sup>15</sup>

Intrusive behaviors like ogling, catcalling, or wolf whistling were not, therefore, deemed universally harmless or trivial. When Dale Belmont and Dorothy Mahon told the Associated Press that they enjoyed being ogled or whistled at, they were almost certainly referring to white men's ogling or whistling. If they had been in Detroit in 1943, or had read about any of the other riots that took place in the mid-1940s, it seems unlikely they would have forgotten the lessons such riots seemed to offer about the dangers of interracial sexual relationships and sexual violence. This chapter will thus argue that, in a kind of backlash, white mainstream discourses normalized intrusive behaviors as specifically the purview of white men in the interwar and immediate postwar period. If the Progressive-Era crackdown on mashers posed a challenge to white male dominance in public space, the normalization of stranger intrusions in the 1930s and 1940s marked a retrenchment of that dominance.

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Francis White and Thurgood Marshall, *What Caused the Detroit Riot?: An Analysis* (New York, NY: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1943), <http://archive.org/details/whatcauseddetroit00whit>; Janet L. Langlois, "The Belle Isle Bridge Incident: Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots," *The Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 380 (1983): 183–99; Johnson, "Gender, Race, and Rumours"; Victoria W. Wolcott, "Gendered Perspectives on Detroit History," *Michigan Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (2001): 75–91; J. Shantz, "'They Think Their Fannies Are as Good as Ours': The 1943 Detroit Riot," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 40, no. 2 (2007): 75–92.

This chapter charts the normalization of stranger intrusions as it manifested in four overlapping realms. First, changing sexual attitudes and practices that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s produced new expectations for “modern” heterosexual relationships that emphasized women’s newfound freedoms—and responsibilities—in sexual relationships. Second, popular culture depictions of intrusive behaviors in the 1930s and 1940s incorporated the new conceptions of modern womanhood and cast women as powerful players in heterosexual interactions who could choose to rebuff, ridicule, or accept men’s advances at their pleasure. With the onset of the Second World War, the United States government contributed to the normalization of stranger intrusions by proliferating images and discourses that depicted servicemen’s consumption of women’s bodies as a vital part of the war effort. This chapter will thus secondly examine the ways that the United States military used women’s sexuality to boost troops’ morale and encourage heterosexual desire over same-sex relationships during the Second World War. These efforts further reinforced developing discourses about the “naturalness” and desirability of men’s intrusive behaviors. The state’s investment in the normalization of white men’s intrusive behaviors helped to solidify their normalization into the postwar period.

By emphasizing women’s sexual autonomy, such discourses fueled the idea that women had the power to choose the sexual attention they desired and, thus, if they did not protest intrusive behaviors then they must desire them. Indeed, many women drew on and bolstered new ideas about female sexual autonomy in their own narratives of stranger intrusions. Many saw intrusions as natural and desirable affirmations of their attractiveness. However, the discourses that normalized intrusive behaviors were by no means universal. The Black press in particular offered a significant counter-narrative that shared more in common with Progressive-Era anti-masher discourses than with the mainstream white press of the 1930s and 1940s. This chapter will thus also consider how Black women and men interpreted stranger intrusions differently from whites and what it meant that

the Black press did not always see stranger intrusions as signs of sexual liberation. Fourth and finally, newspaper coverage of arrests under Progressive-Era anti-mashing ordinances ridiculed such legal frameworks as obsolete, prudish, and dangerous for men. White male newspaper reporters supplemented their pro-ogling diatribes with quotes from white women who voiced their desire for men's ogling and whistling. Taken together, this chapter argues that the 1930s and 1940s were a period of contestation and retrenchment when it came to men's intrusive behaviors: if the Progressive Era saw the construction of the "masher" as a bugbear upon whom social reformers, elite women's groups, law enforcement, and individual women could heap their criticism, the interwar and immediate postwar period saw the rehabilitation of intrusive behaviors as part of the naturalized rights afforded to white, middle-class American men.

This chapter frames the above arguments through the theoretical lens of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, according to sociologists Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt, describes a "normative" ideal of masculine behavior—a "pattern of practice"—that "embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man" and "require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it."<sup>16</sup> Like any hegemonic discourse, hegemonic masculinity relies on the compliance of both those who directly benefit from its ascendancy and "consent and participation by the subaltern groups."<sup>17</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is also subject to contestation, disruption, adaptation, and change. It is not static or transhistorical but necessarily incorporates shifts in discourse, material circumstances, and social relations in order to remain dominant. If it has a constant, it is that hegemonic masculinity legitimates patriarchy or, as Connell has put it, it "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of

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<sup>16</sup> R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 832.

<sup>17</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 841.

women.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, a hegemonic masculinity that had come under attack in the Progressive Era was being reconstituted. Those with a vested interest in the maintenance of patriarchy—from cultural commentators to Hollywood filmmakers to the United States military—worked to reinstate a hegemonic masculinity that legitimated the dominance of masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexuality. An ocular desire for the female body was a crucial element of this version of hegemonic masculinity. While ogling had been cause for legal crackdowns in the Progressive Era, by 1946 it was part of the “pattern of practice” that constituted a white, heterosexual hegemonic masculinity. The shifting meaning of ogling, and men’s stranger intrusions more broadly, can thus serve as a case study for the way that hegemonic masculinities are reconfigured in the face of changing historical conditions.

## **The Modern Woman and Shifting Discourses of Stranger Intrusions**

The sexual landscape that produced the backlash against Witherite’s anti-ogling campaign differed significantly from the context that welcomed the anti-masher crusades. When *Vogue* assistant editor Marjorie Hillis wrote her 1936 bestselling advice book for single women, *Live Alone and Like It*, she knew she could not replicate the tips in advice books of the early 1900s.<sup>19</sup> From Hillis’ perspective, the modern women of the 1930s had come a long way from their turn-of-the-century counterparts, and they needed frank, modern advice for a new age. This was especially true when it came to sex. Hillis devoted an entire chapter to the decision of whether or not to have extramarital sex with a man. In it, she conceded, “It would be foolish to pretend that things are as

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<sup>18</sup> R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 77.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the life of Marjorie Hillis, see Joanna Scutts, *The Extra Woman: How Marjorie Hillis Led a Generation of Women to Live Alone and like It* / (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018).

they used to be.” While there was a time when a “Woman’s Honor” was “mentioned with bated breath and protected by her father, her brother, and the community,” the decision to have sex was “now her own affair.”<sup>20</sup> Some of these changes had happened quite recently. According to Hillis, a modern American woman “can be a lot more aggressive now than you could have been a few years ago.” Hillis attributed this change at least partly to the economic reality of the Great Depression. In a context where fewer and fewer young men could treat their dates to dinner, a movie, and a drink, “it began to be quite usual for the girls to pay for practically everything” and thus to dictate more of the terms of the relationship.<sup>21</sup> Single working women, freed from economic dependence on men, had the ability to choose their mates and choose the kinds of relationships they wanted like never before.

Hillis was not the first to note a change in the American sexual landscape, but the enormous success of her book made it clear that her view of life as a single white woman of the 1930s resonated with many Americans.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, life for American women was demonstrably different in 1936 than it had been twenty years earlier. When *Live Alone and Like It* was published, many women had had the vote for sixteen years. With that new civic right, they gained the power to demand and effect change through the legal and electoral system, at least in principal, though Black women in particular faced significant barriers to exercising suffrage. At the same time, the concept of separate feminine and masculine spheres that had characterized dominant, middle-class white ideology of the Victorian era was crumbling. American youth were increasingly attending high school into their late teens, rather than working, where they mingled in heterosocial spaces and groups and dated without their parents’ supervision. The increasing affordability of cars gave middle-class young people semi-

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<sup>20</sup> Marjorie Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It: A Guide for the Extra Woman* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1936), 94.

<sup>21</sup> Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It*, 97-98.

<sup>22</sup> Scutts, *Extra Woman*.

private (but also semi-public) spaces to engage in “necking” or “petting.” Indeed, young women soon found that not engaging in this kind of sexual activity could earn them the label of prude. Changes in sexual mores only intensified with wartime mobilization, which uprooted many young people and offered new opportunities for extramarital sex and sexual experimentation. As young people moved in large numbers to cities for work, more women and men found dates and sexual partners in public or semi-public places like bars and dance halls. At the same time, new forms of birth control gave women, married and unmarried, the option to engage in heterosexual sex without fear of pregnancy. Importantly, while premarital and extramarital sex and heterosocializing had been a fixture of working-class communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the 1920s and 1930s saw middle-class, white sensibilities begin to adopt these social mores, shifting mainstream discourses and ideas about sex.<sup>23</sup>

In this context of new experimentation around sexual mores and an expansion of women’s rights, it became more acceptable for middle-class white women to seek out and pursue romantic and sexual relationships with men. In some cases, this translated to a new acceptance of, or even desire for, interactions with male strangers in public. The kinds of middle-class white women who might have organized their clubs against mashers in the Progressive Era, now often described intrusive behaviors as harmless and even romantic and desirable. This new interpretation of intrusives behaviors appeared as early as 1926 in a short story in the *Survey*, a widely-read periodical for social reformers. In the story, a young white woman living in a boarding house in a big city deals with her crippling loneliness by documenting every minor interaction she has with men. She writes them down in her diary and waxes rhapsodic about the potential romances that could start with a

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<sup>23</sup> John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 239-242; Amanda H. Littauer, *Bad Girls: Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion before the Sixties* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

On wartime sexual culture, see Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Littauer, *Bad Girls*.

“street flirtation.” She even invents instances of street flirtation, and gushes about them to her roommate, in order to feel less lonely.<sup>24</sup> As unchaperoned dating and heterosexual socializing became more widely acceptable, men and women alike began to see brief encounters in public places as potential romantic overtures. An ogle may still be unwanted from time to time, but it could also be a non-threatening opening to a romantic encounter. Indeed, in her advice book, Hillis encouraged women to approach men in public and to seek out interesting conversation and acquaintances. “This was once considered a Grave Danger,” Hillis noted, capitalizing her words to indicate how silly and outdated she thought were the prudish anxieties of the past, but “any modern girl” knew how to handle herself.<sup>25</sup>

As women’s desires became ever more apparent and women began to assert themselves more forcefully in sexual relationships, their newfound agency came at a price. While social mores were shifting to acknowledge and even accept that men and women could both pursue sexual relationships outside of marriage, women were far more likely to shoulder the blame if something went wrong. By the 1940s, a sexual double standard had replaced the older ideal of universal sexual self-restraint.<sup>26</sup> Studies of high school students conducted in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s demonstrated that they held different expectations of sexual experience and permissiveness for boys versus girls, and that girls were expected to be both open to sex with their male partners and also responsible for not letting it go too far.<sup>27</sup> Women and girls who were too enthusiastic about the potential for sexual intimacy risked being thought of as “easy” or disreputable. Historian Amanda Littauer has suggested that the debate over premarital sex was a defining feature of “postwar sexual culture.” As an increasing number of sex educators, sexuality researchers, and social and political

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<sup>24</sup> Harvey Zorbaugh, “Roomers,” *The Survey Midmonthly* 46, no. 8 (July 15, 1926): 461–63.

<sup>25</sup> Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Littauer, *Bad Girls*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 262.

activists tried to push American culture towards sexual liberalism, Littauer argues women still faced “punitive beliefs” about premarital sex because “confining reproductive female sexuality to marriage was central to the traditional patriarchal sexual value system.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, as women found space to exercise sexual agency in mid-century United States, they navigated a complex framework of cultural, social, and scientific discourses that at turns encouraged sexual liberalism and punished women if they were perceived to have taken their sexual desires too far.

The sexual double standard sifted into ideas about intrusive behaviors and public flirtations. Women had to tread a fine line between being open to sexual advances from men in public places and being too eager for sexual interactions. One young man who liked to go out and “flirt” with women in the early 1930s thus explained that he felt “better” when women “snub[bed]” him. He explained, “When I meet a girl that way,” that is, by flirting with her in public, “I don’t think much of her.”<sup>29</sup> Women were more likely to be named as the responsible, if not deviant, parties in public heterosexual interactions in the interwar years than they had been in the Progressive Era. The rhetoric of Progressive-Era social reformers and women’s advocates may have cast women, especially working-class women, as helpless and in need of guidance from their “betters,” but it also afforded them a degree of protection. In her book on wanted and unwanted sexual interactions in the workplace, historian Julie Berebitsky argues that as Americans began to become more aware of and accept women’s sexual desires, they were also less likely to see women as victims of sexual violence. “Women gained a small measure of autonomy,” she writes, “but they lost the limited degree of protection that had existed when a large segment of the population believed they were inherently innocent.”<sup>30</sup> For instance, social workers who worked with young women continued to

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<sup>28</sup> Littauer, *Bad Girls*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Marquis Alderman, “Life History: Albert Caputo” (1931), Ernest W. Burgess Papers, Box 126, Folder 10, University of Chicago Library, Department of Special Collections.

<sup>30</sup> Julie Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office: A History of Gender, Power, and Desire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 7.

worry about the slippery slope from a wolf whistle to a “pick-up” to extramarital sex, but the grammar had changed. One settlement house worker noted that police officers picked up one of her female clients “in company with a young fellow with whom she flirted,” thus emphasizing the young woman’s agency in the relationship. The settlement house worker worried that her client “is flippant—flirts with passersby.”<sup>31</sup> One young woman confirmed social reformers’ fears when she linked early experiences of men’s stranger intrusions with her later sexual activity. She told a Travelers’ Aid worker, when she was a girl, “men were always trying to pick her up” and she “could not walk down the street without being whistled at.” These stranger intrusions convinced the young woman that she might be able to use her sexual desirability to her advantage, and she soon began going out with men and having “sexual relations.”<sup>32</sup> During the anti-masher crusades, such clients would likely have been cast as victims who fell foul of conniving mashers. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, as this phrasing suggests, women were likely to be held equally responsible as men for indiscrete flirtation, if not more so. As a result, as Berebitsky puts it, “the array of individual, social, and legal responses to sexual mistreatment narrowed.”<sup>33</sup>

## **Men’s Desires and Women’s Agency in Popular Culture**

As brief romantic or sexual encounters became increasingly acceptable, stranger intrusions from white male strangers took on different meanings than they had held in the Progressive era.

Prior to 1920, much of the uproar about intrusive behaviors centered around white women’s

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<sup>31</sup> Case record notes, 1924, Part One, Folder 10, Mary McDowell Settlement Records, Chicago History Museum, Research Center.

<sup>32</sup> “Case #3721: Adams, Muriel,” August 1944, Box 26, Folder 3721, Travelers Aid Association of America, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota. The young woman described these interactions as “just pick-ups,” that is, not serious or intended to result in long-term relationships, a fact that was particularly troubling to the social worker. For a similar example, see Ethel R. McDowell, “Report of the Municipal Court of Chicago Social Service Department, 1936” (Chicago, IL: Social Service Department, January 1, 1937), Box 8, Folder 1, Pearl Hart Papers, Chicago History Museum, Research Center.

<sup>33</sup> Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office*, 7.

perceived vulnerability in public space. The “street insults” of the mid-1800s and the “mashing” of the Progressive era seemed to confirm the dominant narrative that middle-class and elite white women risked their respectability when they ventured out into public space. With the passage of women’s suffrage and the emergence of a whole host of new attitudes, laws, and customs pertaining to heterosocial and heterosexual relationships, the narrative of women’s inherent vulnerability lost some of its currency. The same behaviors that had sent urban reformers into an uproar and been the subject of anti-mashing legislation were increasingly cast as flirtatious, harmless, and normal.

At the same time, the use of the female body as erotic object in popular culture and advertising ballooned in the interwar period. Advertising and Hollywood films—not to mention pin-up drawings and girly magazines—all highlighted the physical attributes of models and actresses in accessible forms. In her groundbreaking essay on the “male gaze” in Hollywood cinema, Laura Mulvey has argued that the rise of a particular “Hollywood style” of cinema bolstered patriarchal “ways of looking” that reduced women to sexual objects for the pleasure of implied male viewers. In the dominant style of filmmaking that rose to prominence in the late 1930s and 1940s, women characters were largely passive, there to inspire male desire or paternalism. As Mulvey puts it, the passive female characters of classic Hollywood cinema “connoted *to-be-looked-at-ness*.” Hollywood producers cast women as passive erotic objects for both the male characters and for the audience<sup>34</sup>, encouraging a way of looking that reduced women to sensually-lit body parts. As this chapter will show, this way of looking specifically influenced representations of stranger intrusion and permeated even cartoons.

Merchandisers and advertisers also relied on the “implied sexuality” of the feminized body to sell products. As Elspeth Brown has shown in her history of modeling, modeling as a profession

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<sup>34</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57–68. Originally published in *Screen* in 1975.

emerged as advertisers were beginning to turn their efforts to selling not just products but the affective and intangible by-products—happiness, sex appeal, a better life—that supposedly came with the purchase of consumer goods. Beginning at the turn of the twentieth century but really gaining steam in the late 1920s and 1930s, advertisers relied on the sexualized feminized body, in the form of models, to add “surplus value” to a variety of products. As one model photographer said of his subject in 1930, “She sells the stuff by making it desirable.”<sup>35</sup> Keen to avoid accusations of seediness or associations with pornography, advertisers and merchandisers constructed what they saw as a safe, sanitized version of sexuality, devoid of eroticism but nevertheless capable of conjuring ideas about sex that were then connected to consumer products. As Brown notes, this “merchandizing of sexual appeal” was also deeply racialized as it “constructed a definition of ‘American’ beauty that was both white and Anglo-Saxon.” By sanitizing white female models’ sexuality, advertising and fashion photography implicitly marked nonwhite models as the “sexualized, racialized ‘other,’” as the contrast to the safe sexuality of white models.<sup>36</sup> Advertising also relied on idealized notions of heterosexual partnering, drawing especially on women’s anxieties about their marriage prospects to sell products. Advertisements encouraged women to view consumption as a means to becoming attractive to men and encouraged men to buy products as a means to enticing attractive women. Thus an advertisement for mouthwash warned unmarried women that bad breath could be a barrier to finding a husband.<sup>37</sup> With the ascendance of Hollywood and the advertising and modeling industries, it thus became acceptable and even respectable to look at the female body and derive erotic pleasure from doing so.

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<sup>35</sup> J. B. Kennedy, “Model Maids,” *Collier's* 85 (February 8, 1930): 61. Elspeth H. Brown, *Work!: A Queer History of Modeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *Work!*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 278.

Ogling, in a sense, was becoming central to American cultural and consumer industries. Indeed, films, popular songs, and other cultural products increasingly depicted men's intrusive behaviors in normalized and humorous ways. In the 1931 film *Street Scene*, and the 1929 Pulitzer Prize-winning play on which it was based, a quick vignette depicted a "girl...glancing apprehensively, over her shoulder, at a man who is walking down the street behind her." While not presented as desirable—in the film, the young woman turns her head back several times to look at the man, suggesting her discomfort at having a stranger follow her down the street—the interaction is presented as a common urban scene, part of the world of the play and the fabric of New York City.<sup>38</sup> Fifteen years later, in the Frank Capra classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, a very similar interaction was played to comic effect in a scene where a man is nearly run over by a car as he pauses in a crosswalk to ogle Gloria Grahame's blonde bombshell.<sup>39</sup> This latter depiction, of an ogle or a wolf-whistle as a humorous comment on the relations between the sexes, would become the norm by the World War II.

Nowhere is this shift more evident than in the Tex Avery cartoons *Little Red Walking Hood* (1937) and *Red Hot Riding Hood* (1943).<sup>40</sup> Avery, who produced some of the most recognizable and popular cartoons of the 1930s and 1940s, was instrumental to the creation of legendary cartoon characters like Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Porky Pig. Both his *Little Red Riding Hood* cartoons are modern retellings of the classic fairy tale, but they depict starkly different ideas about the power of female sexuality and women's agency in heterosexual relationships. In *Little Red Walking Hood*, released in 1937 while Avery was at Warner Brothers, the fairy tale story is retold in a generic urban setting, but the gender dynamics of a powerful masculine character seducing a young girl are intact.

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<sup>38</sup> Elmer Rice, *Street Scene: A Play in Three Acts* (New York: S. French, 1929), 74; King Vidor, *Street Scene* (United Artists, 1931).

<sup>39</sup> Frank Capra, *It's a Wonderful Life* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1946).

<sup>40</sup> Tex Avery, *Little Red Walking Hood* (Warner Bros., 1937), <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3m22u4>; Tex Avery, *Red Hot Riding Hood* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943), <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x262srt>.

In the cartoon, a “Mean Old Wolf” is “lurking in a pool hall” where he catches sight of a young girl with blonde curls, a frilly dress, and a telltale hooded red cloak. As she passes by the pool hall, the Wolf sticks his head through the doorway and lets out a long wolf-whistle. He rushes to his car and begins slowly trailing the girl down the street. His car is outfitted with mechanical devices that augment his flirtation, including a button that can make his tail lights “wink” at the girl. “Hello, pretty girl,” he croons, “Going my way, babe?” (see Figure 7). The rest of the story proceeds predictably, with the Wolf sweet-talking the young girl and the girl giving him the cold shoulder.<sup>41</sup> Finally, he speeds ahead to Grandma’s house, goes through the requisite disguise and reveal with Little Red Riding Hood, and is finally defeated when a diminutive man, who has been following the



Figure 7: Tex Avery, Little Red Walking Hood (Warner Bros., 1937).

<sup>41</sup> Quite literally. At one point, her shoulder drips with ice and snow.

couple throughout the cartoon, pulls out a mallet and hits the Wolf over the head, saving the little girl.

Throughout, Little Red Riding Hood is depicted as a slightly snooty, refined young girl who is visibly exasperated with the Wolf and does her best to keep him at bay. The Wolf's antics are neither surprising nor new to her. As she laments, "Really, in this modern age of flaming youth, a girl has to put up with such embarrassing situations." She suggests that her experiences will be familiar to the women in the audience, remarking, "Two-thirds of you girls out there have gone through just what I'm going through now. You know how it is, don't you, girls?" Though she successfully puts off the Wolf's flirtation for a time, his trick to dress up in her grandmother's clothing works and he chases Little Red Riding Hood around Grandma's cabin. She is saved only when the other male character in the cartoon attacks the Wolf. Her ultimate helplessness both amplifies the danger of the Wolf's advances and maintains a gender hierarchy where masculinity is expected to save vulnerable femininity.

Six years later, Avery's second retelling of Little Red Riding Hood depicts a more "modern" heroine. *Red Hot Riding Hood* begins with a revolt, as the characters refuse to reenact a traditional version of the fairy tale. "I'm fed up with that sissy stuff," complains the Wolf. To appease them, the cartoon begins again, this time at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, the Los Angeles intersection known for its concentration of film and recording businesses. Rather than stalking the woods looking for Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf drives a black limousine, wears a top hat, and wolf whistles and howls at a pair of shapely, feminine legs passing by. This Wolf is better dressed and does not lurk in a pool hall but instead heads to an exclusive nightclub. It's there that he encounters Red, a grown-up version of Little Red Riding Hood, who eschews the cloak and hood for a red mini-dress and croons a lounge song from the stage. The Wolf responds with the exaggerated gestures that made this cartoon famous: he jumps out of his seat with a "boing!", his eyes bug out



Figure 8: Tex Avery, *Red Hot Riding Hood* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1943)

of his head, his tongue rolls out of his mouth and onto the table, and he bangs on the table and stamps his feet (see Figure 8). When her song finishes, the Wolf tries to seduce Red, to no avail, and then rushes to Grandma's house, now a penthouse apartment above a nightclub. There, the traditional story is turned on its head as Grandma, a sexually aggressive madam character modeled on Hollywood actress Mae West, chases the Wolf around the apartment trying to kiss him.<sup>42</sup> The Wolf finally escapes and ends up back at Red's night club where he swears off all women. Within seconds, however, Red is back on stage and, rather than succumb to her temptations again, the Wolf

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<sup>42</sup> A flashing neon sign above Grandma's penthouse reads, "Come up and see me sometime," Mae West's most famous one-liner. West was a legendary sex symbol of the 1930s known for her playful, bawdy characters, her double entendres, her sexual independence, and a bold yet feminine sex appeal.

shoots himself in the head. His ghost proceeds to whistle and catcall Red from the audience, and the film ends. Tellingly, there is no male hero who comes to the rescue. In this iteration of the story, Wolf is soundly defeated by Grandma and Red. Far from being the vulnerable little girl of *Little Red Walking Hood*, Red is a full-grown woman who can hold her own with the Wolf. She tactfully rebuffs his advances in the nightclub and, in the end, her sex appeal drives him to suicide. Red's sexuality is deadly. The Wolf is entirely at the mercy of her charms.

These cartoons were hugely popular upon their release and established some of the most recognizable tropes of the suggestive, bawdy cartoons of the 1930s and 1940s. Audiences went wild for *Red Hot Riding Hood* when it premiered, and fifty years later animation professionals voted it the seventh greatest cartoon of all time.<sup>43</sup> The resonance and staying power of Avery's Little Red Riding Hood films speak to their cultural relevance and the way they drew upon and reflected mainstream, yet changing, ideas about heterosexuality. As Little Red Riding Hood herself contends in 1937's *Little Red Walking Hood*, the women in the audience would have recognized the Wolf's unwelcome advances as the kind of intrusive behaviors that occurred on the street all the time, albeit with a different kind of "wolf." The term "wolf" was widely used to describe men who unabashedly flirted with and chased women, including in public places, making the connection to real life experiences even more explicit.<sup>44</sup> When *Red Hot Riding Hood* premiered in 1943, a different sexual dynamic

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<sup>43</sup> Jerry Beck, *The 50 Greatest Cartoons: As Selected by 1,000 Animation Professionals* (JG Press, 1998).

Avery and fellow artists remember the cartoon being especially popular with overseas troops and also claimed it was racy enough that the film censors cut several scenes, though there is little evidence to support this. Karl F. Cohen, *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (McFarland, 2004), 37-38.

The 1994 film *The Mask* spoofed the nightclub scene from *Red Hot Riding Hood*, using special effects to turn Jim Carrey's character into the Wolf. Upon seeing Cameron Diaz's character performing in a nightclub, Carrey's tongue rolls out across the table, his eyes bug out of his head, and his face momentarily turns into the Wolf's as he hoots and howls in sexual appreciation. The audience may not have known that these mannerisms were cribbed from *Red Hot Riding Hood* per se, but they would have recognized them as signifiers of a certain style of mid-century animated film. Chuck Russell, *The Mask* (New Line Cinema, 1994). A similar nightclub scene also appears in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, albeit without the special effects employed in *The Mask*. Robert Zemeckis, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Buena Vista Pictures, 1988). For more examples of Avery's influence on American film and popular culture, see Floriane Place-Verghnes, *Tex Avery: A Unique Legacy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 179-183.

<sup>44</sup> "How To Handle A 'Wolf,'" *Afro-American*, September 15, 1956; "Blond Wolf Whistler Slain by Irked Husband," *Afro-American*, September 8, 1956; "What Method Do You Use To Get Rid Of A 'Wolf?'" *Afro-American*, April 28, 1956;

reigned. The second iteration of the Wolf, along with many of Avery's male characters, could not withstand the power of female sexuality.<sup>45</sup> The Wolf was overtaken by desire at the sight of Red and his uncontrollable lust resulted in his death and her triumph. As Avery scholar Pierre Floquet has argued, Avery's cartoons did not necessarily reflect social norms and trends, but they "modif[ie]d and play[ed] with them." Thus, in the earlier *Little Red Walking Hood*, Avery played with "the moral standards" of the 1930s, when "a ladies' man was not a good thing." By the time he made *Red Hot Riding Hood*, those moral standards had shifted and a "ladies' man," while not exactly a desirable quality, was at least now harmless, even amusing.<sup>46</sup> American audiences who saw *Red Hot Riding Hood* would have come away with a sense that women could hold their own against flirtatious men. A wolf-whistle or an eye-popping ogle were simply humorous manifestations of a natural masculine sexual urge.

### **Servicemen's State-Sponsored Ogling**

Between the release of 1937's *Little Red Walking Hood*, where lascivious wolves still endangered little girls, and 1943's *Red Hot Riding Hood*, where a vulnerable wolf is destroyed by a grown woman's explosive sexuality, the United States entered World War II and the federal government enlisted millions of citizens in the war effort at home and abroad. Wartime mobilization had a profound impact on the meanings of heterosexual relationships and men's intrusive behaviors. On the one hand, as millions of men joined the armed forces and the men-only spaces of the mess hall, barracks, or battleship, the United States military worried that troops might engage in

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Sheila John Daly, "He Cries 'Wolf' over Feminine Eager Beavers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 9, 1949; Associated Press, "Wolf-Call Protester Told to Go Whistle," *Detroit News*, July 19, 1947, DEER, Detroit News Clipping Files, Whistlers and Whistling, Archives of Michigan; "Wolf Finds Self in the Dog House Over Ogling Law," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 22, 1946; "Try Ogling Boys: Police Tame 'Wolf Call' in Howling Flint," *Detroit Free Press*, August 6, 1946.

<sup>45</sup> Place-Verghnes, *Tex Avery*.

<sup>46</sup> Alex Marshall, "The Surprising History of the Wolf-Whistle," *Guardian*, March 23, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180322-the-surprising-history-of-the-wolf-whistle>.

homosexual relationships when no women were available. To discourage same-sex relationships, the federal government invested in programs and messaging that encouraged troops to channel their sexual urges towards female USO workers, overseas entertainers, military personnel, or women they encountered on leave, not to mention local women in overseas war zones, rather than towards other male troops. On the other hand, the military worried that troops who engaged in heterosexual intercourse put themselves at risk of venereal disease, which could weaken the ranks. The United States military and federal government found itself in the tricky position of both encouraging heterosexual relationships and discouraging reckless sexual behavior. Endorsing troops' right to admire and flirt with women at a distance—a kind of “look but don't touch” expression of sexuality—proved the safest and most effective way of promoting heterosexual desire within the military without sanctioning potentially dangerous sexual behaviors. The United States government was thus both a proponent and manufacturer of discourses that naturalized and encouraged men's intrusive behaviors.<sup>47</sup>

Wartime mobilization created new social contexts in American cities as millions of young men and many young women signed up for military service or wartime jobs and left the familiarity of their hometowns for urban areas. Released from the expectations and watchful gaze of relatives, neighbors, and childhood peer groups, many young people began to experiment with new forms of sexual expression or new kinds of sexual relationships. In these circumstances, men and women who were strangers to one another could intermix relatively freely. One social worker noted the dual danger posed to both men and women in these circumstances: first, “young men whom the girls of a neighborhood might count on as friends began to disappear” and, then, “in their place came

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<sup>47</sup> Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire*; Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (New York: Free Press, 1992); John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, “Searching for Dorothy Lamour: War and Sex in the South Pacific, 1941-45,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1999): 3–18; Hegarty, *Victory Girls*; Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

hordes of strangers in uniform eager for the company of girls, any girls,” leading to an exciting but volatile sexual landscape.<sup>48</sup> Premarital sex was more available and less stigmatized, leading to many stories of young men and women engaging in multiple sexual relationships without the expectation of marriage. This was true for heterosexual relationships as well as for same-sex relationships. Indeed, the circumstances of wartime, in which young people spent much of their time in sex-segregated working and living spaces, made same-sex relationships accessible in a way they had not been not during peacetime.<sup>49</sup> As historian John D’Emilio has described it, World War II “created something of a nationwide coming out experience.”<sup>50</sup>

The opportunities for sexual exploration facilitated by wartime mobilization drew much concern from the United States military. On the one hand, as the federal government expanded and strengthened during World War II, government officials also solidified their definitions of homosexuality and used it to exclude those they deemed homosexual from military service and welfare benefits.<sup>51</sup> To counteract the potentially erotic same-sex environment of the military, government officials contributed to and endorsed portrayals of servicemen enjoying female company and they called on American women to boost troops’ morale with innocent flirtation. Women who practiced such “sensual patriotism,” as historian Marilyn Hegarty terms it, might attend dances or clubs frequented by servicemen to offer conversation and the allure of sex, if not the actual practice of sex. Thus, the military encouraged men’s heterosexual desire as a deterrent against both homosexuality and low morale. On the other hand, the specter of venereal disease hung over heterosexual relationships. Military administrators feared the new opportunities for heterosexual

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<sup>48</sup> Richard H. Anthony, “The Girl and the Man in Uniform” (Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene, 1942), p. 6, Entry 44, Box 4, Record Group 215, National Archives at College Park.

<sup>49</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 289.

<sup>50</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire*; Canaday, *The Straight State*, 138-139. Canaday has shown how the exclusion of homosexuals was not new but that World War II marked the moment when the federal government solidified the criteria it used to define homosexuality and preemptively exclude individuals they deemed homosexuals from military service and from receiving veterans’ welfare benefits.

socializing that could put servicemen in contact with sex workers or women who believed it was their patriotic duty to bring comfort and pleasure to the troops, but who may carry venereal disease. In response, the military cracked down on sex work, encouraged men to use “rubbers” and other prophylactics, and warned servicemen that the “Victory Girls” (or “V-Girls”) who promised a night of pleasure were not always what they seemed. The United States military thus enlisted female bodies and female sexuality for the war effort but also cracked down on the versions of female sexuality thought to pose the greatest threat to servicemen.<sup>52</sup>

In the former instance, government-produced pamphlets encouraged servicemen to enjoy American womanhood before they left for overseas combat.<sup>53</sup> The Naval Training Station in San Diego, for example, published a guidebook that suggested a variety of wholesome activities for sailors who found themselves on leave in the city. Attractions included the San Diego Zoo, local golf courses, ice rinks, and movie palaces. However, the guide made it clear that the women of San Diego were also part of the city’s charm. Tellingly, the text itself said little about how to find dates or where to pick up women in San Diego—perhaps Navy administrators knew that would be taking the encouragement too far—but cartoonish images scattered throughout the guide depicted sailors in titillating entanglements with women. Illustrations depict sailors going to the movies, dancing the jitterbug, and rollerskating arm-in-arm with women, often to humorous effect. They were also depicted engaging in intrusive behaviors, ogling women and trying to pick up dates in public places. For example, in a plug for the local United Service Organization’s (USO) clubs, the guide depicts a sailor in a moment of distraction, watching a young woman walk by. Her long legs, short skirt, and

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<sup>52</sup> Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 7. As Hegarty puts it, during World War II, women found themselves in a double-bind and “it became difficult to separate acceptable morale-maintaining sexuality from dangerous promiscuous sexuality at a time when female sexuality was simultaneously needed and feared.”

<sup>53</sup> Women who worked for the military or volunteered with organizations that catered to servicemen were explicitly directed to keep a pleasing appearance, including wearing make-up and doing up their hair, as a way to boost troops’ morale. Thus, women were as aware that they were being watched and admired as men were encouraged to do the admiring. Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 129.

sharp cheekbones have distracted him from the game of checkers he is playing with a matronly older woman in Victorian-style clothing. Cartoon motion lines indicate the speed with which he has whipped his head around to watch the young woman, suggesting his reaction is reflexive and automatic (see Figure 9). Elsewhere in the guidebook, a full-page illustration depicts a sailor trying to pick up a woman on the street by asking

## *Services United for You*



Figure 9: A sailor is distracted. “Ashore in San Diego” (Welfare Department of the Naval Training Station, 1942).

her the way to Lincoln Square. The fact that the two figures are standing next to a statue of Abraham Lincoln emblazoned with the words “Lincoln Square” betrays the artifice of his question. The sailor does not need to know the way to Lincoln Square because he is already there. He just needed an excuse to talk to a pretty woman on the street (see Figure 10).<sup>54</sup>

These images exemplify what Marilyn Hegarty has described as a silent but “official acceptance of...men’s need for sex” on the part of the armed forces.<sup>55</sup> The military expected a certain amount of sexual boisterousness and eagerness amongst servicemen, and hoped to control and direct it rather than suppress it altogether. A doctor tasked with evaluating the military’s recreation programs espoused this belief when he insisted on men’s “normal desire for feminine companionship.” The doctor worried that recreation programs that employed older women as motherly figures for homesick servicemen would not fulfill servicemen’s needs. If the military did not put servicemen in contact with young, attractive women, the doctor warned, servicemen might seek such feminine charms in less safe conditions. Better to let them flirt with military-approved

<sup>54</sup> “Ashore in San Diego” (Welfare Department of the Naval Training Station, 1942), Entry 44, Box 1, Record Group 215, National Archives at College Park.

<sup>55</sup> Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 85.

women than end up in brothels or contracting venereal disease.<sup>56</sup> Thus cartoonish depictions of servicemen ogling women and trying to pick them up on the street conceded that such behaviors were amusingly predictable. They implied that “boys will be boys” and servicemen were no different from the average, virile American male. The military bolstered such messages by using images of male heterosexual desire to boost morale. They might even pull strings and work around government regulators to get them. For instance, Tex Avery claimed the U.S. Army asked for an uncut and uncensored version of the 1943 cartoon *Red Hot Riding Hood* to screen for troops. Cartoons like *Red Hot Riding Hood*, with the sexualized Red and the panting Wolf, stood in for actual heterosocial interactions and could serve as a validation and encouragement of servicemen’s heterosexual desires and an outlet for them.<sup>57</sup>

Such depictions of white male heterosexuality dovetailed with expectations of wartime masculinity. As scholars and historians of masculinity have shown, periods of wartime have often involved a retrenchment of patriarchal concepts of masculinity as a way to boost troops’ morale and convince men to volunteer for military service. For decades of American history, militarized armed conflict was thought to be necessary for men to become truly “manly.” World War II thus provided American men an opportunity to prove their masculinity and manliness, which included a desire for heterosexual sex.<sup>58</sup> The celebration of American masculinity at wartime also served to normalize and forgive behaviors that might have been unacceptable or worrying in other periods. After all, how could anyone deny troops a last flirtation before they were shipped off to combat zones? Indeed, the San Diego guide book was printed in 1942 when millions of American men were about to leave

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<sup>56</sup> Statement of Joseph Earle Moore, M.D., Chairman, Subcommittee on Venereal Diseases, National Research Council before the Joint Army and Navy Committee on Welfare and Recreation, Washington, DC, February 28, 1941, Box 10, Record Group 52, National Archives at College Park. See also Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 87-88.

<sup>57</sup> Place-Verghnes, *Tex Avery*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 86. Importantly, World War II marked the first time that the United States military made a concerted effort to identify and discharge “homosexuals” from the ranks. Previously, the military had punished instances of sodomy but had not thought of the “homosexual” as a particular kind of person whose sexuality made them unfit for military service. Bérubé, *Coming out under Fire*.



**"Ah, er, uh—pardon me, Miss, but could you tell me which streetcar to take to Lincoln Square?"**

*Figure 10: A sailor seeks directions. "Asbore in San Diego" (Welfare Department of the Naval Training Station, 1942).*

the United States for fighting in Europe and the Pacific for the first time. The desire for one last flirtation with a pretty American girl could be understood as not only natural but essential for maintaining troops' morale.

At the same time that servicemen's (hetero)sexual antics were fodder for knowing chuckles, military administrators dealt with a growing anxiety that servicemen's sexual dalliances could endanger their health. Government officials worried that venereal disease had the potential to put thousands of servicemen out of commission, depleting manpower at a time when a strong military was crucial to victory. The Office of Community War Services, headed by famed lawman Elliot Ness, set to work researching the effects of venereal disease on American troops. They developed educational materials for servicemen and civilians alike, emphasizing the potential dangers of sexual relationships outside of marriage. The overall tone of these materials was not so dissimilar to the social welfare literature of the Progressive era. Sex work and extramarital sex were the bugbears that could not only ruin lives but, against the backdrop of war, could also destroy entire armies. However, while Progressive reformers, especially elite white women, depicted the problem of sexual promiscuity as one of excessive white male sexuality preying on white female innocence, the wartime narrative placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of women.<sup>59</sup>

The federal government identified sexual relationships between strangers or acquaintances as especially dangerous to servicemen. While during World War I, military and public health officials had worried most about sex workers, fears had shifted during World War II to focus on women who were perceived as personally rather than professionally promiscuous.<sup>60</sup> So-called "pick-ups"—women that servicemen met in public places but who were not sex workers—accounted for more

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<sup>59</sup> Hegarty, *Victory Girls*, 14-20.

<sup>60</sup> D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 261.

venereal disease diagnoses than “paid prostitutes,” according to one government pamphlet.<sup>61</sup> Servicemen were likely to meet pick-ups in the same kinds of places and situations where mashers had lurked in the Progressive Era. A field representative for the Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene declared that “girls are flocking to public parks and places of commercial amusement where they meet soldiers and sailors. We can be sure that many become promiscuous sooner or later.”<sup>62</sup> One government tract warned troops of the “local girls who haunt the hot-spots, streets, and bus stations for dates.” An interaction between a serviceman and one of these women “may start with a cold drink and dancing. But when it ends in a trip to the nearby fields, a car, or a hotel room, look out for trouble!”<sup>63</sup> The “trouble” referred not to the woman’s sexual degradation, as it might have in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but to the man catching venereal disease followed by his decommissioning from military duty. To drive the point home, an army advice manual for servicemen on furlough cautioned that “girls who make a habit of hanging around railroad and bus stations and juke-joints, waiting to be picked up, are to be especially avoided—just as you would avoid any other Booby Trap.” An accompanying illustration depicted a white woman, dressed in a pink shirt dress and pink hair bow, standing in the waiting room of a bus or train station. The words “BOOBY TRAP” were stamped across the illustration in large, bold type.<sup>64</sup>

These warnings draw on familiar fears of the dangers that might lurk behind the friendly face of a stranger. They mirror the decades-long anxieties about sex work and the difficulty of telling “respectable” women apart from prostitutes. However, they also describe some of the same types of interactions that raised fears during the anti-masher crusades, and the organizations who

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<sup>61</sup> Eliot Ness, “What About Girls?,” November 1943, p. 17, Entry 44, Box 5, Record Group 215, National Archives at College Park.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony, “The Girl and the Man in Uniform,” 5.

<sup>63</sup> Ness, “What About Girls?,” 21.

<sup>64</sup> “So You’ve Got Furlough?,” 1944, Entry 44, Box 1, Record Group 215, National Archives at College Park.

disseminated such rhetoric, like the American Social Health Association, were often the same groups that had railed against the masher. In 1911, if a white man approached a woman in the street with flirtatious remarks and she was not a sex worker, he risked arrest on charges of accosting, ogling, or molesting a respectable woman. At the least, he could get a write-up in a local newspaper as an example of the mashers that infested downtown streets. In 1943, the roles were reversed. If the man were a white serviceman, he needed to watch out for respectable-looking women who might lead him into temptation and infect him with a disease. In the “Booby Trap” image, the woman’s unassuming and welcoming appearance illustrated the oft-repeated warning to servicemen that a woman’s good looks, pleasant dress, or appearance of cleanliness could not guarantee that she was free from venereal disease.<sup>65</sup> Thus, women served a dual purpose as the supposedly natural object of desire for servicemen and as potentially the greatest danger servicemen would encounter in civilian spaces.

As veterans returned to the United States at the end of the war, anxieties about the dangers of venereal disease and sexual relations with strangers began to ease. Because a strong military force was no longer an immediate need, venereal disease ceased to be a significant threat to national security. There was no need to control servicemen’s sexuality in the same way. Indeed, government officials, psychologists, and national media encouraged returning veterans to celebrate victory and begin the peacetime process of finding wives and starting families.<sup>66</sup> Some of the most enduring images of the nation’s victory celebrations depict this new attitude to servicemen’s sexuality. Alfred Eisenstaedt’s now-infamous photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse on VJ Day in Times Square exemplifies the celebration of victory and white heterosexuality rolled into one. The woman, in her white nurse’s uniform, contrasts sharply with the man in his dark sailor’s uniform, as the iconic neon

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<sup>65</sup> As one army pamphlet put it, women “can look as clean as a hound’s tooth, fresh as daisies—and be carrying a deadly disease.” Ness, “What About Girls?,” 22.

<sup>66</sup> Canaday, *The Straight State*.

signs of Times Square and the celebrating crowds frame their embrace. As the original caption in *LIFE* magazine reads, the nurse “clutches her purse and skirt as an uninhibited sailor plants his lips squarely on her” (see Figure 11). This kind of “uninhibited” sexuality had been of great concern to the federal government during wartime, but in August 1945 the image earned a full-page spread in *LIFE*. It was a representation of the joyous outpouring of pent-up sexuality that came with victory overseas. The photograph was part of a feature on “Victory Celebrations” across the United States: it ran next to similar images of white servicemen kissing white women in Washington, D.C., Kansas City, Miami, and Hollywood, as well as racy photographs of white women skinny dipping in San Francisco, members of the Navy’s women’s auxiliary having a pillow fight, and white sailors stealing alcohol from liquor stores to fuel their celebrations. The message was clear: now that the war had been won, Americans—and white veterans in particular—were entitled to a little fun.<sup>67</sup>

However, even in times of celebration, there was a dark undercurrent to some of these images. The *LIFE* feature recounted how Americans engaged in a “coast-to-coast frenzy of kissing” that included the occasional “mob-assault upon a single man or woman.” “Some servicemen,” reported *LIFE*, “just made it a practice to buss everyone in skirts that happened along, regardless of age, looks or inclination.”<sup>68</sup> Eisenstaedt’s couple in Times Square appear to have been one example of a serviceman kissing a woman “regardless of...inclination.” Eisenstaedt described how he captured the image by following a sailor through Times Square: “I noticed a sailor coming my way. He was grabbing every female he could find and kissing them all—young girls and old ladies alike. Then I noticed the nurse, standing in that enormous crowd. I focused on her, and just as I’d hoped, the sailor came along, grabbed the nurse, and bent down to kiss her.”<sup>69</sup> As the nurse herself recalled

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<sup>67</sup> “Victory Celebrations,” *LIFE*, August 27, 1945, 21-27.

<sup>68</sup> “Victory Celebrations.”

<sup>69</sup> Alfred Eisenstaedt and Arthur Goldsmith, *The Eye of Eisenstaedt* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 56.



Figure 11: "Victory Celebrations," LIFE, August 27, 1945.

in 2005, “It wasn’t my choice to be kissed. The guy just came over and kissed or grabbed.”<sup>70</sup> Perhaps most ominously, the caption for the image of sailors looting a liquor store told how the “revel turned into a riot” as servicemen destroyed public property and “attacked girls” across San Francisco.<sup>71</sup> These examples suggest that supposedly enthusiastic, joyous embraces were not always expected, consensual, or desired by all parties. Rather, many were likely examples of intrusive behaviors and sexual violence from male strangers that came to symbolize an unbridled sexual enthusiasm that spilled out onto city streets across the country.

In the immediate postwar years, depictions of servicemen and veterans ogling women in public spaces continued to normalize stranger intrusions as the purview of white veterans. These depictions ranged from cinematic portrayals, like the sailors of *On the Town* running around New York in search of female companionship, to humorous and tongue-in-cheek images and human interest pieces in newspapers.<sup>72</sup> For example, in October 1945, just a few months after Eisenstaedt took his iconic photograph, an Associated Press wirephoto depicted three white sailors “ogling” women on the street. In the photograph, the sailors are sitting in phone booths, receivers to their ears. They have all turned their heads in the same direction to watch two women, backs to the camera, walk by on Navy Day in New York City. According to the caption, the sailors were “review[ing] the passing parade,” suggesting that the real spectacle on Navy Day were not the sailors

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<sup>70</sup> Greta Zimmer Friedman, interview by Patricia Redmond, transcript, August 23, 2005, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.42863/transcript?ID=sr0001>. Greta Zimmer Friedman was in fact a dental hygienist, wearing a white uniform similar to those worn by nurses at the time. In recent years, feminist theorists and activists have re-cast Eisenstaedt’s photograph as an example of non-consensual sexual activity and the kind of sexual entitlement that women endure from men on a daily basis. See for instance one of the first of these critiques to be cited widely by news sources, “The Kissing Sailor, or ‘The Selective Blindness of Rape Culture,’” *Crates and Ribbons* (blog), September 30, 2012, <https://cratesandribbons.com/2012/09/30/the-kissing-sailor-or-the-selective-blindness-of-rape-culture-vj-day-times-square/>.

Further, historian Brooke Bower has argued that drunken assaults from men was in fact a persistent fear for women in the 1940s, not something they romanticized or desired. Brooke L. Bower, “WWII’s Most Iconic Kiss Wasn’t Romantic — It Was Terrifying,” *Washington Post*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/02/22/wwiis-most-iconic-kiss-wasnt-romantic-it-was-assault/>.

<sup>71</sup> “Victory Celebrations,” *LIFE*, August 27, 1945, 21-27.

<sup>72</sup> Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, *On the Town* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949).

but the women on the city streets. The photograph's title, "Phone Calls Can Wait When There's Ogling to Do," playfully portrayed ogling as pressing business that required a man's full attention (see Figure 12).<sup>73</sup> Here, white American servicemen, perhaps newly returned from fighting in the Pacific, were transitioning to normalcy by establishing and exercising their right to ogle American women's bodies. The passing women did their part by not resisting.

Freed from the restrictions and government control that came with wartime, veterans readied themselves to rejoin civilian life and enjoy American women as part of the deal. As GIs

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### *Phone Calls Can Wait When There's Ogling to Do*



**Sailors attached to fleet units in New York for Navy day celebration Saturday pause from their telephoning to review the passing parade.**  
[Associated Press Wirephoto]

Figure 12: "Phone Calls Can Wait When There's Ogling to Do," Chicago Daily Tribune, October 26, 1945.

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<sup>73</sup> Associated Press Wirephoto, "Phone Calls Can Wait When There's Ogling to Do," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 26, 1945.

returned home, state and cultural institutions encouraged men to transition from the homosocial world of the military to what Margot Canaday has called the “heterosexual and familial imperatives of postwar America.”<sup>74</sup> Legislators worried that the country faced potential unrest if veterans were not given outlets for the pent-up energy they brought home after serving in combat zones. Federal legislation like the GI Bill attempted to direct veterans’ energies into education, productive employment, and domestic pursuits. Marriage and fatherhood were the ultimate goal as the stability of the American family was increasingly seen as crucial to national stability. The investment in the nuclear family as the protector of American ideals only intensified as the United States entered the Cold War era.<sup>75</sup> Establishing men’s rights to ogle American women’s bodies fit neatly into the project of rehabilitating and domesticating veterans. On the simplest level, American servicemen and veterans were encouraged to see sexual and romantic relationships with women as part of their reward for serving their country. After the war was over, the military continued to stage USO-style shows featuring young female performers as entertainment for servicemen. For instance, in 1946, as Detroit police made headlines for arresting men on ogling charges, the Army put on a beauty contest for troops at Fort Meade. Soldiers chose the contest winner by “whistling, stamping of feet, and choruses of wolf calls.” The Associated Press covered the beauty contest as a foil to Detroit’s anti-ogling ordinance, warning that if servicemen exhibited such behavior in Detroit, they might find themselves under arrest.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, behaviors like whistling, ogling, or wolf calls were also seen as necessary to the domestication of veterans. After all, if returning servicemen had a political obligation to settle down and start families for the sake of the American way of life, the first step towards that goal was

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<sup>74</sup> Canaday, *The Straight State*, 142.

<sup>75</sup> Canaday, *The Straight State*, 143; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 3rd ed., (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 9.

<sup>76</sup> Associated Press, “Soldiers May Ogle in Beauty Contest,” *Spokesman-Review*, July 26, 1946.

finding a wife; and the first step towards finding a wife, some men argued, was ogling a pretty girl. When confronted with laws like Detroit's anti-ogling ordinance, veterans expressed exasperation that, after serving their country overseas for years, they now faced censure if they flirted with women upon their return.<sup>77</sup> As one Detroit man complained, "I, like many other fellows, spent two years in the South Pacific and when I got back all the nice girls were married. Now how are we going to find a girl friend if we don't ogle?"<sup>78</sup> This Detroiter's frustration suggests he knew he was expected to marry upon his return to the United States and anti-ogling ordinances prevented him from achieving that goal. As this chapter will show, he was not alone in his protestations.

### **"Every Woman Wants to Be Ogled"?**

With an increasingly dominant perception that intrusive behaviors like whistling or ogling were normal expressions of white male sexuality, white women's interpretation and feelings about these behaviors also shifted. White women's positive perceptions of stranger intrusions often served as proof that such behavior was harmless, if not wanted. In newspaper accounts by white male reporters, female interviewees appear to have been specifically picked for their perceived expertise on gender relations or women's desires. Thus when the Associated Press interviewed "curvaceous showgirl" Dale Belmont and finishing school student Dorothy Mahon about Detroit's anti-ogling law, both women's endorsement for ogling were bolstered by their identities. By describing Belmont as the "pinup favorite of overseas veterans," the Associated Press signaled her knowledge of and experience with male sexuality. She made her living by appealing to male heterosexual desire and thus was uniquely qualified to comment on its formulation. Her popularity with veterans only helped her by implying that her interest in attracting men's glances was an act of patriotism. In case

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Sturgiss, "Women Rush to Defense of City's Outlaw Oglers," *Detroit Free Press*, August 22, 1946.

<sup>78</sup> Ogler 1/C, "Voice of the People: Ghost Town Ogling," *Detroit Free Press*, September 4, 1946.

Belmont's occupation as a showgirl, with its potential seediness and working-class associations, turned readers off, Mahon's pedigree offered another perspective on ogling. As a student at a lady's finishing school, Mahon represented a middle- or upper-class white femininity laden with connotations of respectability and prudence. Her theory that "most girls want boys to whistle at them" derived credibility from her pedigree. Though only nineteen years old, Mahon was learning the socially preferred ways to comport herself, including with men, and thus her schooling added weight to the notion that stranger intrusions were something to be coveted.<sup>79</sup>

Similar interviews with female "experts" abounded in Detroit papers after Lieutenant Witherite announced his renewed enforcement of the anti-ogling ordinance. The *Detroit Free Press* ran a special article highlighting opinions from women who defended ogling. Their responses drew on ideas about women's evolutionary desire to attract male mates with their physical appearance and men's natural inclination to admire women's efforts. Virginia B. Barnett, the manager of a charm school in Detroit, reportedly wondered what was offensive about an "admiring glance at some slick chick who has dressed to the teeth just so she will be noticed?" She claimed, "Every woman wants to be ogled." The head of a modeling agency, Ann Evans, echoed Barnett's dismay when she asked, "Why do you think women spend hard-earned money for those low cut and form-fitting dresses? Certainly not to please fuddy-duddies in City government." Dorothy Cloudman, a white woman and the fashion director at a Detroit advertising agency, chimed in, "Ogling is a natural reaction."<sup>80</sup> Almost all these women benefited from a cultural paradigm in which women's bodies were ogled and enjoyed by male consumers. A showgirl, the head of a modeling agency, the fashion director at an advertising firm: these women's livelihoods were dependent on the visual consumption of women's bodies, often if not exclusively, by men. Where would Belmont be without her admiring

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<sup>79</sup> "Detroit's Oglers May Be Ogling Jail Cell."

<sup>80</sup> Sturgiss, "Women Rush to Defense of City's Outlaw Oglers."

audiences of overseas veterans? How would Evans find work for her models if men did not want to see scantily clad women in the advertisements that Cloudman produced for her agency? The women who professed to enjoy the odd ogle or wolf whistle endorsed such intrusive behaviors as part of the patterns of practice that were subsumed under hegemonic masculinity.

This performance of a white femininity that took pleasure from men's entitlement over women's bodies is well explained by the concept of emphasized femininity. Theorists of masculinity posit that hegemonic masculinity is strongest when it enjoys the consent and support of those whose domination is part of its configuration. Emphasized femininity, like hegemonic masculinity, describes a patterns of practice, a socially normative or ideal femininity to which women relate and in comparison to which they perform and understand their own gender. Emphasized femininity, according to Raewyn Connell, is "defined around compliance with ... subordination and ... oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men."<sup>81</sup> If the ability to intrusively admire women's bodies in public places was a feature of an emerging hegemonic masculinity, then the acceptance of such intrusions was necessarily a feature of emphasized femininity. Such a femininity, while only one version of femininity among many possible variations, derives "status and power" through its role in sustaining hegemonic masculinity. Women who are able to associate themselves with an emphasized femininity receive social benefits in exchange for their compliant subordination to men.<sup>82</sup> Thus while women like Belmont, Evans, and Cloudman benefited *materially* from their compliance with hegemonic masculinity, women could also benefit *socially* from their willingness to put up with, even enjoy, ogling or wolf whistling from male strangers. Women could align themselves with the power and prestige of hegemonic masculinity by demonstrating their willingness to permit intrusive

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<sup>81</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 183. Importantly, Connell chose the modifier "emphasized" rather than "hegemonic" to describe this form of femininity because, by definition, femininity could never be hegemonic in a society where hegemonic masculinity reigned.

<sup>82</sup> C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, "Exploring Masculinities: History, Reproduction, Hegemony, and Dislocation," in *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity and Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 20.

behaviors. If a woman professed enjoyment of these behaviors, her allegiance to hegemonic masculinity—and the power and status it could bestow—was only strengthened. White women in particular, who already held more social and cultural power than women of color by virtue of their race, could bolster their power by acquiescing to a gender order that rewarded them based on their perceived sexual attractiveness. When Dale Belmont explained that stares from male strangers reassured her that she wasn't "slipping," she acknowledged that her attractiveness to men was a part of her social value, something to be guarded and maintained. The fact that her ability to pay her bills depended on men's desire to see her perform as a showgirl only reinforced the social and material value of her attractiveness and her acceptance of men's sexual attentions.

Because emphasized femininity describes an idealized or normative pattern of practice, as opposed to an actual type of woman, it does not preclude women's qualified and ambivalent efforts to perform such a femininity. The ambivalence of some white women's responses to intrusive behaviors suggested the unevenness of their adherence to an emphasized femininity. A 1945 column in the *Chicago Tribune* offers a rare glimpse at the various reactions women had to intrusive behaviors. That summer, the paper's "Inquiring Camera Girl" asked six white Chicago women what they do "when a strange man whistles at" them. Some women offered unqualified endorsement of this behavior. Lorraine Michaels, a sales manager, said she thought it was "kind of cute when men whistle." "They don't mean anything by it," she explained, and admitted that sometimes she whistled back. Mrs. Robert Reed, a housewife, agreed. "It's flattering to me to have a man whistle because I regard it as nothing more than a friendly gesture," she explained. "It doesn't annoy me in the least and I don't think it's rude." Other respondents expressed more ambivalence. Inez Taylor, a key puncher, suggested that it depended "upon the surrounding circumstances" and said that if she is "alone at night and someone whistles" she "ignore[s] it." Ruth Selig, an office worker, argued that the man's physical attractiveness played a role in whether or not she felt good about a whistle. "If

he's good looking I put my glasses back on and take another look. I may even talk to him, but only to say a few words, and then walk on." Ultimately, however, Selig saw "no harm in smiling at a stranger."<sup>83</sup> In rare cases, women's public reactions to stranger intrusions were unequivocally negative. In 1944, student Shirley Chlebowski told the *Tribune's* Inquiring Camera Girl that it was "embarrassing to walk down the street and have strange men say, 'Hi, Babe' or 'Hey, Mabel'—and then whistle or howl." Such remarks made her feel "self-conscious" and she lamented that there was "no reply that fits the comment."<sup>84</sup>

White women's responses to intrusive behaviors were varied, conditional, and ambivalent, but they were also a far cry from the vitriolic outrage expressed by Chicago clubwomen in the early 1900s. The women who spoke to the Inquiring Camera Girl in the 1940s may not have been unreservedly happy to be the target of men's stranger intrusions, but their willingness to accept and even enjoy them suggests that stranger intrusions were not only viewed as more normal or benign but actually experienced as such as well. Importantly, many of Inquiring Camera Girl's interviewees and the women who spoke to the *Detroit Free Press* about ogling worked in white-collar jobs or positions helping other young women and girls, and in many ways they were the counterparts to the some of the middle-class anti-mashing advocates of the Progressive Era. Their starkly different reactions to intrusive behaviors, despite their similar social positions to many turn-of-the-century clubwomen, suggests that middle-class women's perceptions of intrusive behaviors, in particular, were a good deal more diverse by the 1940s than they had been during the anti-masher crusades. As the meaning ascribed to stranger intrusions changed, women's experiences of those intrusions adapted to a new framework. Without the anti-masher diatribes that fueled and gave credence to their protestations in the Progressive Era, women's negative perceptions of stranger intrusions also

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<sup>83</sup> Maryon Zylstra, "Inquiring Camera Girl," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1945.

<sup>84</sup> Maryon Zylstra, "The Inquiring Camera Girl," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1944.

lost their cultural fluency. Denunciations of ogling or catcalling made less sense and held less power in a new context in which the danger of stranger intrusions was called into question. Little wonder, then, that women began to make sense of their experiences differently and to view stranger intrusions as benign or desirable. Would anyone have believed them if they said otherwise?

These women's varied reactions to stranger intrusions demonstrate some of the ways that women asserted sexual agency in a social and cultural context that did not always give them sexual autonomy. Historian Amanda Littauer has argued that women and girls in the 1940s and 1950s often practiced sexual agency through sexual exploration, making decisions about what sexual acts they would engage in, who they would have sex with, and acknowledging their own sexual desires throughout. However, young women and girls lived in a context in which their decisions were limited by a variety of factors: the availability of birth control, social stigma attached to sexual activity, and the sexual double standard all dictated women and girls' ability to be sexually autonomous.<sup>85</sup> Thus women who professed a desire for flirtatious interactions with men in public places may have fed into a narrative that normalized intrusive behaviors, but it did not always follow that they were open to stranger intrusions from all people at all times. Just as a woman may desire sex and still be a victim of rape, women may have desired or enjoyed a flirtatious conversation with a new acquaintance while still bristling at an intrusive look or catcall. Women like Taylor and Selig acknowledged a pleasure in intrusive behaviors in certain contexts but not others. Their responses suggest that they were aware of the power associated with welcoming or tolerating stranger intrusions, but that their negative experiences of intrusive behaviors made it difficult to endorse

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<sup>85</sup> Littauer, *Bad Girls*, 12. Littauer distinguishes sexual agency and sexual autonomy this way: "Though people's ability to practice sexual autonomy depends upon their access to certain social, cultural, political, and economic resources and conditions, sexual agency, in my view, does not. A girl who chooses to have intercourse with her steady boyfriend and then experiences unintended pregnancy, for instance, might exercise sexual agency without being able to enjoy sexual autonomy (which would require access to birth control and abortion, for instance, as well as freedom from social stigma)."

them categorically. The contestation of the meaning of men's stranger intrusions thus continued even as a new cultural paradigm took hold.

White women's ambivalence, hedging, and acceptance of men's intrusive behaviors may have allowed them to access the social caché associated with hegemonic masculinity, but this also meant that the moniker of "ogling" was unevenly distributed when it came to race. When women like those interviewed by the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Chicago Tribune* discussed men's stranger intrusions, there was an unspoken implication that they were talking primarily, if not exclusively, about *white* men's stranger intrusions. For intrusive behaviors to be defined as desirable, flirtatious, or, at worst, as annoying and embarrassing, was a privilege afforded primarily to white men. In the white, middle-class press of the 1940s, when a white man looked intrusively at a woman, it was considered "ogling." The same could not be said of an intrusive look from a Black man. As civil rights leader Aaron Henry recalled of his boyhood in 1930s Mississippi, he learned at an early age to be vigilant when interacting with white women. Though the rules of Jim Crow segregation in the South were not explicitly laid out to him, he knew "that Negroes were lynched" for "violations of the code, such as speaking an alleged obscenity to a white lady or even looking at her the wrong way."<sup>86</sup> In cities across the country, whites' fears of interracial sex—in particular, Black men's supposed lust for white women—fueled violent attacks from lynchings to race riots. In the 1940s, as racial demographics in many major cities shifted during wartime, rumors of interracial sex or sexual assault were often an instigator for violent clashes between white and Black residents, including in Detroit, as noted earlier.<sup>87</sup> White newspapers, courts, and mobs treated a look between a Black man and a white woman as a serious infraction on the part of the man, akin to sexual assault. (A

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<sup>86</sup> Aaron Henry, with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 28.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, "Gender, Race, and Rumours"; Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance— a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 24-28.

particular stark example of this is explored further in the next chapter.) Ogling was thus never universally trivialized: in white middle-class discourses an intrusive look was deemed flirtatious and flattering when it came from a white man while the same look was grounds for violent retribution when it came from a Black man.

The double standard that cast white men's intrusive looks as normal and Black men's looks as violent was not lost on Black Americans. For decades, prominent Black activists and commentators had noted the hypocrisy of lynching Black men accused of raping white women while white men raped Black women without consequence. Ida B. Wells had argued in 1892 that, while rape was often the excuse for lynching Black men throughout the South, the accusations were rarely true. At the time, Wells suggested that white men had implemented laws designed to punish Black men seduced by white women, while leaving white men "free to seduce all the colored girls he can."<sup>88</sup> Given this legacy, it is not surprising that some of the most vehement opposition to stranger intrusions in the 1930s and 1940s came from the African American press. The ogling double standard was, in many ways, an iteration of the rape double standard that had been documented for decades.

A counter-narrative against men's stranger intrusions thus emerged with particular force in the Black press in places like Chicago, New York, and Baltimore. This counter-narrative, like many seen in the past, focused on white men's victimization of Black women. White men's stranger intrusions were often catalysts for outrage or exposés in the Black press. As it had during the height of the anti-masher crusades, the Black press continued to call for harsher treatment of harassers, especially (though not exclusively) white men. Stories of Black men who defended their wives, girlfriends, or sisters from white harassers were especially popular. These stories highlighted the

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<sup>88</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (New York: The New York Age Print, 1892), Alexander Street Press. For more on Wells' diatribes against white men's hypocrisy and sexual predation, see Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*.

entitlement white men exhibited towards Black women and celebrated the lengths Black men would go to defend Black women's honor. For example, Rudolph Henry, a Black man, confronted a "blond wolf whistler" who had honked his horn at Henry's wife. The white man had asserted his perceived right to honk at a Black woman, exclaiming, "I don't give a damn if it is your wife, if I want to make a date with her I will!" A scuffle ensued and the white man was killed.<sup>89</sup> Stories like this highlighted both the sexual aggressiveness of white men and the lack of resources available to the Black women they harassed.

Black newspapers noted how the realities of a white supremacist society made it near impossible to crack down on white men who harassed Black women. Black men who confronted white harassers risked violence at the hands of the white harassers, other white people, or white law enforcement. Even Black police officers had to deal with violent resistance from white criminals, including white "mashers," who challenged the authority of Black men to arrest white men.<sup>90</sup> This perhaps explains why a "crowd" of Black Baltimoreans took justice into their own hands when a white "auto masher" drove through their neighborhood in 1933. The masher was driving down Presstman Street in the heart of the Black community at one in the morning when he "grasped a young woman by the arm" and tried to force her into his car.<sup>91</sup> Two men who saw the incident stopped the masher's car, dragged him into the street, and began to beat him. They were soon joined by a large crowd, some of whom joined in. At one point, a man in the crowd tried to run the masher over with his own car. The Baltimore *Afro-American* reported that a passing woman called the police only because she thought that all the men, including the man being beaten, were "colored," and so the "ofay flirt" escaped "being lynched." The *Afro-American* reported that such "approaches by white

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<sup>89</sup> "Blond Wolf Whistler Slain."

<sup>90</sup> "Arrests White Man; Negro Cop on Spot," *Chicago Defender*, January 17, 1948.

<sup>91</sup> Presstman Street was in a neighborhood of Baltimore that was over 92% Black in 1940. Percentage of Black Residents in Baltimore, 1940, Social Explorer, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/ac8d7116d5/view>, (based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau; accessed May 12, 2020)

men” were common in the “northwestern” Black neighborhoods of Baltimore, though they rarely took such a “serious turn.” In the end, the police did not charge the white masher and instead went in search of the Black men who had beat him, confirming the need for the Black community to take Black women’s safety into their own hands.<sup>92</sup>

As the Baltimore example suggests, reported incidents of white men accosting Black women tended to be significantly more violent than reported incidents of white men wolf-whistling or ogling white women. As historian Sarah Deutsch has argued of white men’s public harassment of Black women in this period, while white women had “won almost universal acceptance as public, respectable persons on the street in the 1920s ... Black women who claimed respectability in the 1930s found their place on the streets as virtuous women contested by whites.”<sup>93</sup> If a Black woman dared to resist a white man’s advances, she was particularly susceptible to his violent ire. Twenty-two-year-old Marjorie Trent found this out when she responded to a white man’s lewd comments in Boston in 1932. As she and another Black woman walked down Tremont Street, two white men began making sexual remarks about them. When Trent resented the insult, the two men attacked her. When her friend ran to Trent’s aid, three white men in a nearby store ran out and began beating and kicking her as well.<sup>94</sup> According to the Boston Black press, the two women became “martyrs for a righteous cause—the right of women to walk the streets unmolested by young ruffians.” Trent and her friend had fought back on behalf of the many women who “patiently submit to this treatment in our streets.”<sup>95</sup> The white men who had attacked Trent tried to pay them off once the police arrived, but the women refused to be appeased. The gesture is reminiscent of the ways white men

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<sup>92</sup> “Ofay Flirt Escapes Being Lynched,” *Afro-American*, July 8, 1933. The masher later told police he had approached the woman because he thought she “was white” and then accused the Black men of trying to rob him.

<sup>93</sup> Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 265.

<sup>94</sup> “Gangsters Insult and Kick Two Women,” *Boston Chronicle*, May 7, 1932. For more on this and similar incidents in Boston, see Deutsch, *Women and the City*.

<sup>95</sup> “To Parents of Girls,” *Boston Chronicle*, May 7, 1932.

often propositioned Black women, offering money for sexual intimacy and implying that any Black woman was sexually available to any white man if he paid enough.<sup>96</sup>

The fact that the Black press continued to denounce mashing and similar behaviors long after the white press speaks to Black women and men's continued awareness and resistance to intrusive behaviors, especially from white men. Frustrated with the reality that white men felt entitled to ogle and objectify Black women without consequences, the *Afro-American* imagined an alternative future in which Black men could protect Black women from white male sexual aggression. In early 1946, the paper ran a short story set five years in the future at a time when "our girls can walk around without being molested by white would-be mashers." In the story, the narrator looks back at the last five years and celebrates how far the Black community has come. "It used to be so bad," laments the narrator, that Black women "couldn't walk a block without being accosted or tooted by those pests." Black women and men complained to the police commissioner, but to no avail. As the narrator muses, "you know how white cops are about colored people being molested by whites. We should have saved our breath and our stamps." So a local war veteran, Ben Robins, called a meeting of all the local Black men to discuss what they should do with the masher problem. They decided to distribute piles of bricks to the doorsteps of every Black household so that when white mashers followed Black women, residents could drive him away with a barrage of bricks. In response, the police sent officers to suppress the resistance. The narrator snidely remarks that this was what the community was after all along, "only just the other way around." In the story, the increased police presence works in their favor and it "became less and less necessary" for the "little group of vigilantes" to confront white mashers. Thus in this imagined future, Black women can now

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<sup>96</sup> "Ofay Masher, Accused by Young Woman, Is Fined \$5 and Costs," *Afro-American*, April 18, 1936; "White Masher Gets Only a Reprimand," *Afro-American*, August 6, 1938.

“walk up and down our street freely, without being bothered by anything more than a few whistles from the corner wolves.”<sup>97</sup>

The story is a fantasy. The author, Albert Jefferson, offered an alternative reality in which law enforcement could be tricked into policing on behalf of Black communities. He did not entertain the idea that an increased police presence would disproportionately target Black residents but imagined a world in which Black vigilantes and (presumably white) law enforcement could work together towards the overall safety of the Black community. He positioned Black women as a valuable part of the Black community who deserved protection from, and respect from, white men. Tellingly, he also suggested that equality between Black and white Americans would mean equal opportunity wolf-whistling. In the story, part of the success of the imagined crackdown on mashers was that Black men could “whistle at the sisters of corner wolves” without fear of “a sudden lynching.”<sup>98</sup> In this alternative reality, white men faced consequences for molesting Black women and Black men could whistle at white women without fear of violence. Even in an imagined utopia, the *Afro-American* did not dare to suggest that stranger intrusions were eradicated, simply that they carried less potential for violence against both Black women and men. In the imaginary world of the story and the real world of 1946, stranger intrusions were an expected part of the urban landscape. What mattered for Jefferson were the consequences of those intrusions on his community.

Despite the emphasis on entitled white men in the Black press, Black men were not exempt from Black Americans’ denunciation of stranger intrusions. While it was often easier for the Black press to attack white mashers, Black women complained that both white and Black men accosted them in public places. Even in reports of Black men bothering Black women, the trivializing rhetoric of the mainstream white discourses was largely absent in Black conversations about stranger

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<sup>97</sup> Albert Jefferson, “Remember Way Back in 1945?,” *Afro-American*, January 12, 1946.

<sup>98</sup> Jefferson, “Remember Way Back in 1945?”

intrusions in the 1930s and 1940s. For instance, while the term “masher” had all but fallen away from dominant white discourses of intrusive behaviors, Black newspapers continued to report on mashers and mashing into the 1960s.<sup>99</sup> When the Baltimore *Afro-American* solicited stories of “wolfs” and mashers from women readers in 1956, the results looked strikingly similar to the stories that defined the mashing era. Lascivious men “press[ed] against” women in subway cars or stopped women in the street to ask directions as a way to initiate a date invitation. Women rebuffed such advances with an “icy stare” or stabs of their “8-inch hat pin[s].”<sup>100</sup>

Just four months after white papers across the country had laughed at the idea that ogling could incur a fine in Detroit, the *Afro-American* published an exposé on the “sex-crazed males” who lurked in the New York City subway, frightening the Black women who had to ride it everyday from their homes in Harlem to jobs in other parts of the city. Reporter Alvin White warned readers, “If you’ve never been in one of Harlem’s cavernous subway stations late at night—when they are practically deserted—you’ve never experienced the dread of running smack into terror at the next turn of the corridor.” He described how the poorly lit, sparsely patrolled New York subways were “giving Harlem their worst scares.” This set-up introduced a story from a young Black woman named Ethel Blank. Blank had to walk the frightening, deserted streets from the subway station to her Harlem home at one every morning after finishing her “job downtown.” Three nights in a row she noticed a Black man who “star[ed] at [her] intently” on the train and disembarked whenever she did. Finally, employing a technique that may be recognizable to women today, Blank tried to trick the ogler one night by pretending to get off at an earlier stop. The man started to disembark but then

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<sup>99</sup> “Obscene Letter Traps Masher,” *Afro-American*, September 7, 1940; “Subway Masher Gets Penitentiary Sentence,” *Afro-American*, August 30, 1941; “White Masher Cries ‘Holdup’; 5 Arrested,” *Afro-American*, September 18, 1943; “Shot By Masher,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, January 15, 1957; “Coed, 18, Shoots Masher In Car: Wounds Postal Clerk In Legs,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, February 13, 1958; “Husband Shot Defend Wife From Masher,” *Chicago Defender*, June 30, 1958; “Order Woman Held In Fatal Auto Assault On ‘Masher,’” *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 29, 1958; “Masher Dies From Blow On Head With Glass: Hold Neighbor In Fatal Assault,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 18, 1960.

<sup>100</sup> “What Method Do You Use To Get Rid Of A ‘Wolf?’”

stayed on the train when he realized Blank was not leaving. When Blank reached her true stop, she turned to a white man who had got off at the same stop. He agreed to escort her to the next level to change trains, though he was not going out onto the street. Stuck in the subway station, Blank was “tempted to stay in the station all night” as she knew “the wolf was lurking around the exit, waiting for me to make a move in that direction.” Finally, her husband, who had grown concerned that she had not returned home yet, went in search of her and found her at the station. The timing of the *Afro-American’s* exposé suggests that, while the mainstream white press had eschewed the anti-masher rhetoric of the turn of the century, at least some prominent Black newspapers continued to denounce intrusive behaviors from both white and Black men. White railed against the “moronic sex perverts” who sidled up to women “riding the subways” and “whose wandering hands annoy females and cause their discomfiture and embarrassment.”<sup>101</sup> As will become clear later in the next section, the reaction of the mainstream white press to claims of intrusive behaviors in that same year was decidedly more tempered. Far from denouncing such behaviors, white male reporters defended their white male ogler counterparts, insisting that such behaviors, at best, derived from natural urges and should be interpreted as compliments or, at worst, merely silly.

### **The Pro-Ogling Backlash**

In a social context where women expressed desire for approving wolf whistles and American troops laughed at cartoons of ogling wolves, laws designed to crack down on intrusive behaviors looked out of touch to many white middle-class commentators by the 1940s. The old anti-mashing policing patterns or city ordinances passed in the early 1900s were still in use in the 1930s and 1940s, if unevenly enforced. From time to time, police in major American cities still arrested or fined men

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<sup>101</sup> Alvin White, “Danger Lurks for Unescorted Women in N.Y. Subways,” *Afro-American*, November 30, 1946.

under anti-mashing legislation. The uproar that came when those arrested were white men are some of the starkest examples of the shift in attitude towards white men's stranger intrusions. The backlash began as early as 1931 when Chicago's Acting Police Commissioner John Alcock vowed to crack down on "sheiks and hoodlums hanging around street corners" who try "to flirt with unescorted young women and girls who pass by." As the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "No longer may young men in automobiles edge over to the curb and honk their horns at pretty girls on the sidewalk. They must quit ogling women from loafing places in front of drug stores, cigar stores and other public hangouts." The *Tribune* scoffed at Alcock's "old fashioned edict" and questioned the relevancy of the anti-flirt drive. After all, as the paper implied, the "old and new fashioned pastime of flirting" had been around since time immemorial and was going nowhere. The paper similarly claimed that the "last occasion" for an anti-flirt drive was "in the days of yore when 'O, you kid' was considered quite a daring remark when addressed to long haired girls in long dresses."<sup>102</sup> The allusions to outdated fashions and slang cast the anti-flirt campaign as belonging in a bygone time, and thus as an inappropriate response to flirtation in the 1930s. The *Tribune's* reporting appeared on the paper's front page and established a tone of mocking contempt for Alcock's seemingly prudish responses to flirting.

Tellingly, despite the *Tribune's* suggestion to the contrary, attempts to crack down on intrusive behaviors had gone relatively unquestioned, if not lauded, as little as three years previously. In July 1928, police arrested seventeen young men in the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago on charges related to "automobile mash[ing]." This anti-masher drive had been greeted with relief. As the *Tribune* reported, "residents smiled as they learned the anti-flirt campaign was on again."<sup>103</sup> Just

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<sup>102</sup> "Alcock Revives Old Custom of Jailing Flirts," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1931. The *Tribune* may have had an ulterior motive for publishing their mocking article, namely to discredit the police commissioner who had been appointed by corrupt, and recently defeated, Chicago mayor William Hale Thompson the previous year. "Alcock Pledges Police to Drive Gangs from City," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1930.

<sup>103</sup> "Police Drive on Auto Mashers; 17 Boys Seized," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 12, 1928. The *Tribune* also reported, without comment, that 225 men had been arrested on similar charges in 1927.

fifteen years earlier, the *Tribune* had solicited readers' stories of intrusive behaviors for their column on the mashing problem.<sup>104</sup> In fact, Alcock's 1931 crackdown on Chicago flirts was in response to complaints from city residents. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that district stations had received complaints "[f]or some time" before Alcock announced his anti-flirt drive.<sup>105</sup> This crackdown on intrusive behaviors was thus not the result of an autocratic decree from law enforcement bent on eradicating ogling at all costs. It was rather evidence that, for some, intrusive behaviors were still objectionable and unwanted. Contrary to the *Tribune's* characterization, anti-flirt drives were not a hangover from "days of yore," but a long-established and resident-supported response to intrusive behaviors. The contempt for anti-flirt policing that began to bubble up in the early 1930s was new.

When Detroit Police Officer Earl Johnson arrested William Jansen on ogling charges in 1946, the backlash from the white mainstream press was swift and emphatic. The Associated Press reporting on the arrest spread from coast to coast, supplying Americans across the country with amusing stories about the puritanical sensibilities of Detroit's police. The story became a humorous foil with which to measure the relative prudery of various police departments. In response to the news out of Detroit, Newark police announced they would not arrest men for "ogling" unless it was "accompanied by sound, such as wolf calls or remarks." Police Chief Philip Sebold explained that they simply couldn't criminalize ogling in Newark because enforcing the law would overwhelm the police. "I'm afraid that if ogling were against the law," Sebold said, "we would have to lock up a lot of women in addition to men."<sup>106</sup> Some responses to the Detroit arrests echoed the dismay over Chicago's anti-flirt drive. The *Chicago Daily News* mocked the Detroit anti-ogling crackdown by suggesting only a man who had been dormant or secluded in the "Michigan woods" for decades and

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<sup>104</sup> "Have You Met a Nervy Flirt?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 30, 1916. The *Tribune* ran a weekly column with reader's stories of "nervy flirts" from February through May 1916.

<sup>105</sup> "Alcock Revives Old Custom."

<sup>106</sup> "Oglers Get the 'Aye,'" *New York Times*, July 29, 1946.

missed the changes in women's fashions would stare at women "in a manner disturbing to the public peace." No modern urban man would bat an eye at women on the street, the *Daily News* suggested, or if they did so, they knew how to do so surreptitiously and to avoid offense or detection.<sup>107</sup>

Meanwhile, Detroit residents themselves grappled with the meaning of the anti-ogling ordinance and debated whether it remained relevant in their city thirty-six years after its passage. Responses ranged from confusion about what ogling meant—the *Detroit Free Press* assured readers that no ogling charge could stick because "not even a great eye specialist can tell when a man looks at a woman whether it is a wanton ogle or just a gander"—to suggesting that ogling encouraged women to dress inappropriately and act foolishly in public in order to grab men's attention.<sup>108</sup> Misinformation proliferated as several reports dated the passage of the anti-ogling ordinance to 1870, rather than 1910, and one newspaper column even claimed that it had been passed to protect men from "certain brazen hussies who walked up and down Woodward avenue and openly flirted with the innocent male citizens."<sup>109</sup> Given these attitudes, it is unlikely that any white man arrested for ogling from the mid-1940s onwards was convicted of an offense, including Jansen. Many probably had their charges dismissed, like the four men accused of ogling who were let off when the two women they ogled did not appear in court. The judge in that case argued that ogling was permissible and legal if no woman objected. This ruling reflected the contemporary attitude to women's sexual agency, suggesting that women might enjoy being ogled or, at the very least, put up with it.<sup>110</sup>

The local Black press, which in other cities were often the most vehement denouncers of stranger intrusions, did not comment on the resurfacing of the anti-ogling ordinance. They had

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<sup>107</sup> The *Chicago Daily News* editorial was quoted in Malcolm W. Bingay, "Good Morning: What Is an Ogle?," *Detroit Free Press*, July 31, 1946.

<sup>108</sup> Bingay, "Good Morning: What Is an Ogle?," July 31, 1946; Jack Freeman, "The Voice of the People," *Detroit Free Press*, August 19, 1946.

<sup>109</sup> Bingay, "Good Morning: What Is an Ogle?," July 31, 1946.

<sup>110</sup> "It's Up to Girls: You Can Ogle, but Ask First," *Detroit Free Press*, August 10, 1946.

bigger fish to fry. In the weeks following Jansen's initial arrest, the Detroit-based *Michigan Chronicle* was investigating the rapes and murders of two Black women that had so far gone unsolved. These two women, Frances Harris Smith and Ruby Kay Wobington, had been killed within two weeks of each other. Police suspected both women had been attacked while "they walked the streets in the late evening or early morning hour."<sup>111</sup> The *Chronicle* linked their deaths to other complaints from women who said they had been followed or attacked on Detroit streets in recent weeks. The police were fielding call after call from Black women who felt unsafe in public space, including multiple accounts of men who had offered rides to women and then tried to assault them. In one case, a man faced kidnapping charges after he offered a ride to Mattie Senior, a 36-year-old Black woman, but then didn't take her to her destination. Senior leapt from the car to escape.<sup>112</sup> Detroit, the *Chronicle* exclaimed, was in the midst of "a wave of rape and attacks on women walking the streets alone."<sup>113</sup> In such an atmosphere of fear and outrage, an anti-ogling ordinance that appeared to target primarily white men who looked at white women was the least of Black Detroiters' concerns. In the narrative set forth by the *Chronicle*, Black women were being raped and murdered on the city's streets. Little wonder that the white, middle-class outrage over intrusive looking garnered little to no comment from the Black press at the time.

Much of the white mainstream press' response to the 1946 ogling arrest drew on assumptions about men's "natural" inclination to ogle and women's desire to be ogled. The most vocal disseminator of these assumptions was the *Detroit Free Press* managing editor, Malcolm W. Bingay.<sup>114</sup> Bingay wrote several columns addressing the resurfaced anti-ogling ordinance and each reiterated that men were destined to ogle and women were destined to enjoy it. Bingay argued that it

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<sup>111</sup> "Rape-Deaths Puzzle Police; Clues Meager," *Michigan Chronicle*, August 17, 1946.

<sup>112</sup> "Holds Girl in Car, Man Faces Kidnap Charges," *Michigan Chronicle*, August 17, 1946.

<sup>113</sup> "Women Complain of Assaults to Police Officers," *Michigan Chronicle*, August 10, 1946.

<sup>114</sup> *TIME* magazine called Bingay, "one of Michigan's best known citizens, but hardly one of its best loved." His acerbic and controversial editorials regularly got him in trouble with his employers and Detroit residents. "Bing's Song," *TIME*, 53, no. 10 (March 7, 1949): 64-65.

was part of a woman's "instinct" to enjoy being looked at on the street. "I am quite sure," he asserted, "that if nobody looked at her, after she had gone to all the trouble to make herself appear beautiful, that she would be very much discouraged and disappointed."<sup>115</sup> He trotted out a fake anthropologist to argue that women have dressed for men's attention since "the time of Adam and Eve."<sup>116</sup> He claimed he had "never yet found a good looking woman who did not enjoy being admired—even when she pretends the opposite."<sup>117</sup> Some Detroit residents agreed with Bingay's interpretation of ogling. Letters to the editor in the months following the anti-ogling arrests were peppered with allusions to the naturalness of ogling. A reader calling himself Ogler 1/C insisted, "The good Lord gave us eyes to look at beautiful things and why should man take it upon himself to give his fellowmen a ticket for using his eyes to the best advantage." Indeed, Ogler 1/C contended, if men could be arrested for ogling, soon all the men of Detroit would be behind bars and all the women would have "died old maids."<sup>118</sup> Michigan resident Arvo Wain declared he was "staying out of Detroit" as long as ogling was against the law. After all, "Who among us," he asked, "unless he or she be an old prude or prune, is not guilty" of ogling now and again?<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

On July 27, 1946, the *Detroit Free Press* editor Malcolm W. Bingay published his first blistering attack on the Detroit anti-ogling law. In it, he employed humor and faux legalese to argue that ogling was constitutionally protected. History was full of venerable oglers, he argued, including former

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<sup>115</sup> Malcolm W. Bingay, "Good Morning: The Experts," *Detroit Free Press*, August 6, 1946.

<sup>116</sup> Bingay, "Good Morning: What Is an Ogle?," July 31, 1946. Bingay, the *Free Press* managing editor at the time, remarked that Detroit police "can't arrest a man for looking at a good looking girl any more than they can forbid him looking at the glories of the heavens."

<sup>117</sup> Bingay, "Good Morning: What Is an Ogle?," July 31, 1946.

<sup>118</sup> Ogler 1/C, "Voice of the People."

<sup>119</sup> Arvo Wain, "The Voice of the People: What Price Beauty," *Detroit Free Press*, August 9, 1946.

Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Oliver Wendell Homes, Jr. The revered justice had apparently ogled pretty girls on the street with some regularity. The Detroit ordinance thus set “a heavy price for a look” and ought to be revoked. However, Bingay was careful to distinguish between ways of looking. He acknowledged that there was a difference between “ogling” and “looking ’em over,” and that the former may indeed be worthy of punishment. To ogle, he argued, meant to “stare amorously” while to “look ’em over” was merely to admire from afar. “Ogling” obscured a nefarious intent—whether to seduce a woman or simply to make her squirm—while “looking ’em over” was “purely academic.” The difference, according to Bingay, distinguished a lascivious, disturbing action from a refined and harmless diversion.<sup>120</sup> This discourse, which cast certain kinds of looking as not only normal but as a refined hobby, a pastime that required skill and sophistication, would lead to the blossoming of a new breed of white heterosexual man: the “girl watcher.” This category is the subject of the next chapter.

But Bingay’s remarks also tapped into a new cultural zeitgeist. Detroit’s anti-ogling law reflected the social and sexual mores of another time, when a white man’s leer at a white woman could be perceived as dangerous and insulting. In Bingay’s world, such interactions were natural expressions of hegemonic heterosexual desire. With advances in women’s rights and an increasingly liberal acceptance of extramarital sex, it was ridiculous to think that a mere look could harm a sexually liberated woman of the 1940s. Popular culture reinforced the idea that women could hold their own as sexual equals with men and that ogling, wolf-whistling, and catcalling were part of the game of flirtation and seduction. In practice, women held ambivalent feelings about white men’s stranger intrusions. Some desired such attention and saw it as validation of their physical attractions. Others, like their Progressive-Era counterparts, felt discomfort and even fear when men ogled or

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<sup>120</sup> Malcolm W. Bingay, “Good Morning: What Is an Ogle?,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 27, 1946.

whistled at them. Such ambivalence would persist into the 1950s, as white men's monopoly on stranger intrusions only intensified.

## Chapter 4

# The Girl Watcher in Mid-Century Consumer Culture

Lester Gaba was an artist. A weekly columnist for the fashion trade publication *Women's Wear Daily* from 1947 to 1961, Gaba was renowned for his inspired fashion shows, elaborate store window displays, and the light-weight mannequins, known as “Gaba Girls,” that he modeled after real-life New York debutantes. His most famous mannequin, named Cynthia, had graced the windows of Saks Fifth Avenue, and he literally wrote the book on the art of window display.<sup>1</sup> So when Gaba ruminated on the best way to display women’s sweaters in store windows in his May 3, 1955 column for *Women's Wear Daily*, the fashion industry listened. There were lots of reasons to love sweaters, Gaba began: sweaters were comfortable, warm, and colorful. But the paramount reason to love knitwear, Gaba suggested, had as much to do with how sweaters appeared to onlookers as with their comfort or warmth for the wearer. “Boys like to look at girls who wear sweaters,” he declared. Consequently, Gaba suggested displaying sweaters around the theme of “girl-watching,” a practice that was “sweeping the country.” According to Gaba, “girls who are watched the most are girls in sweaters.” Display artists could capitalize on this fact by framing their windows

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<sup>1</sup> “Lester Gaba, Mannequin Artist,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 1987, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/14/obituaries/lester-gaba-mannequin-artist.html>; Lester Gaba, *The Art of Window Display* (New York: Studio Publications in association with Crowell, 1952).

with “cut-out painted eyes.” Well-placed signs might encourage women shoppers to “Dress For The Girl-Watchers In Your Life!” Girl-watching would help department stores sell their stock.<sup>2</sup>

A recently published book on the subject of girl-watching, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* by Donald J. Sauer, had inspired Gaba’s display. The guide, published a few months earlier in the fall of 1954, was a spoof of a bird-watching manual and promised to teach its readers how to surreptitiously watch women in public places across the country.<sup>3</sup> Just as a bird-watching manual might include tips for successful birding, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* offered techniques for effective girl-watching, including suggestions for how to remain hidden so as not to frighten quarry. Illustrations depicted proper ways to girl-watch as well as pointers on “How to Recognize a Girl.” The section “Types to Look For” included drawings of the myriad specimens a girl watcher might encounter, complete with faux ornithological names like the Hatboxtoter, the Clock-Watching Bossducker, the Horn-Rimmed Booklugger, and the Quarterback-Collecting Sweatersweet.<sup>4</sup> The guide’s illustrator, Eldon Dedini—a cartoonist for the men’s magazine *Esquire* and a soon-to-be regular contributor to *Playboy*—supplied humorous caricatures of each female subspecies, all featuring pouty lips, minuscule waists, and ample bosoms (see Figure 13).<sup>5</sup> Gaba seized on these illustrations for his window display recommendations,



Figure 13: “Quarterback-Collecting Sweatersweet.” Donald J. Sauer, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros, 1954), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Lester Gaba, “Ideas For Sweater Windows: Sweaters Offer Display Men Wide Range Of Effective Presentations,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, May 3, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> “Books Published Today,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Donald J. Sauer, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Harvey, “Dedini, Eldon Lawrence,” *American National Biography Online*, 2008, <http://www.anb.org/articles/17/17-01703.html>.

advising clothing stores to “show sweaters on mannequins labeled as some of the sweater-girl types in the book.” Stores could also display copies of *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* alongside their merchandise, suggested Gaba, as a way to tie in with the increasingly popular phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

Gaba was one of the earliest adopters of the girl-watching trope after the publication of Sauers’s guide, but he was far from the last. By 1962, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* had reportedly sold 32,500 copies and the girl watcher was everywhere.<sup>7</sup> From 1954 to the early 1970s, the girl watcher appeared in periodicals, television commercials, films, books, and popular music. He appeared in magazines helping to sell nylons, liquor, and airline tickets and he was the subject of hundreds of humorous human interest pieces in local and national press. *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* inspired girl-watching societies and a copycat manual, “The Official Girl Watchers Manual,” that improbably made its way onto a list of instruction manuals compiled by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.<sup>8</sup> Both Bob Crewe, known for co-writing such tunes as “Big Girls Don’t Cry” and “Can’t Take My Eyes Off You,” and pop group The O’Kaysions had hits about girl watchers in 1967 and 1968, respectively. As early as 1962, local DJs and chambers of commerce hosted beauty pageants where men could rate women on their “watchability,” an idea that especially took off in the temperate climes and beach culture of California.<sup>9</sup> Even teenagers got in on the fun. *Seventeen* ran a humorous piece on girl-watching in 1963 while *The Seventeen Guide to Your Widening World*, an advice manual from the magazine’s editors, warned teenage girls they were always “being watched” and proffered advice for how to increase one’s “girl-watchability.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gaba, “Ideas for Sweater Windows.”

<sup>7</sup> Myron Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching,’” *New York Times*, July 27, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Smith, “Can’t Give a Hoot: Girl Watcher Forms Club to Watch Form,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1963; “Girl Watching,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 1963.

<sup>9</sup> “Girl Watching Week is Mall Coming Attraction,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1972; Cecil Smith, “Time Is Ripe for Girl-Watching,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1962; Bruce West, “Girl-Watching,” (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, November 11, 1970; Bruce W. Farcau, “Girl Watching,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1971; Larry Townsend, “Girl-Watching Champ Views Beauty Contest,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 21, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Shulman, “Girl-Watching,” *Seventeen*, June 1963, 92-93, 143. Enid (Annenberg) Haupt, *The Seventeen Guide to Your Widening World* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 54.

Most “experts” agreed the key to successful to girl-watching was found in furtive, surreptitious glances. As *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* put it, “A girl watcher never leers, nor does he utter a sound which might betray his joy. His reaction is secret. His pleasure is warm, quiet, internal” (see Figure 14).<sup>11</sup> Advocates insisted that girl-watching was a “genteel sport,” “a matter of subtleties,” practiced only by the most reverent and “congenial” men “who appreciate women.”<sup>12</sup> The insistence on girl-watching’s gentility marked it apart from the “ogling” of Progressive-era mashers and even of the sailors and wolves of the 1930s and 1940s. Girl-watching was self-consciously not ogling, leering, or any other kind of disruptive or conspicuous looking. If a girl watcher was noticed by the object of his gaze, he had failed. Proponents of girl-watching coded this form of looking as a refined, middle-class pursuit, and girl watchers accordingly regarded themselves as gentlemen. Thus discourses of girl-watching explicitly separated out certain kinds of intrusive behaviors as the purview of refined (that is, middle-class), white, heterosexual men. For the first time since the emergence of men’s stranger intrusions and the “street insults” of the nineteenth century, middle-class white American discourse fully embraced a specific, defined practice of intrusive looking as the explicit purview of middle-class white men. By condemning leering or ogling as “vulgar,” girl-watching discourses distinguished these forms of intrusive looking as uncouth, practiced by laborers,



Figure 14: “The girl watcher’s pleasure is warm, quiet, internal...” Donald J. Sauer, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros, 1954), frontispiece.

<sup>11</sup> Sauer, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Kandel, “Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching’”; Linda Kramer, “American Society of Girl Watchers Has 50,000 Card Carrying Members,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, October 15, 1970; “Girl-Watching Guide Catalogs Specimens,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1970.

construction workers, teenage hoodlums, and others marked as working-class. At the same time, a number of high-profile arrests and murders of Black men for intrusive behaviors in the 1950s cast into sharp relief white Americans' attitudes towards Black men's versus white men's intrusive looks. When in 1951 a North Carolina court sentenced Mack Ingram, a farmer, to two years hard labor for "eye rape"—he was accused of looking at a white woman from a distance of seventy-five feet—the contrast with the genteel, distant glances of the girl watcher were inescapable.<sup>13</sup> As this chapter will show, though Ingram was later acquitted of all charges, his ordeal demonstrates the way looks were interpreted differently depending on the race and class of the looker.

Through an examination of girl-watching as it appeared in popular literature, newspaper articles, advertisements, and popular media, this chapter will parse apart what made the girl watcher such a resonant cultural trope in the 1950s and 1960s. It begins by charting how the girl-watcher emerged as a new category of man: a white, middle-class professional who took care to look at girls surreptitiously and with restraint. It goes on to consider how girl-watching acquired the trappings of an organized activity, complete with societies and contests devoted to the activity. The investment of money in girl-watching guides, societies, and contests was a feature unique to this iteration of intrusive looking, so this chapter will also look at the commodification of girl-watching, both how it was used to sell other products and how it became a product itself. In the 1940s, heads of modeling agencies and advertising companies argued that women enjoyed being ogled, a belief that fit well with their business goals. With the emergence of the girl watcher, ogling became ever more enmeshed in the mid-century selling of sex and the female form. It is not an accident that both the author of *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, Donald Sauers, and the founder of the International Society of Girl Watchers, Joe Beagin, were in advertising. This chapter will thus further demonstrate how

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

the specific form of intrusive looking popularized as “girl-watching” was incorporated into a postwar melding of sexuality and consumption. Girl-watching discourses and products wove this style of furtive looking into the fabric of American consumer culture.

## From Cold War to Sexual Liberation

This chapter spans a turbulent period of American history, from the economic prosperity and baby boom of the immediate postwar years, through the social movements and sexual liberation of the 1960s, and finishing up just prior to the economic recession and political scandals of the early 1970s. Throughout this period, the United States waged a Cold War at home and abroad, characterized by a persistent fear of subversive outsiders who threatened to undermine the American way of life. Threats ranged from concrete dangers such as KGB agents to an amorphous fear of anyone perceived as undermining a normative American lifestyle. In the eyes of the dominant American culture, people of color, women, homosexuals, and organized labor all threatened to destroy the fabric of American postwar strength and prosperity at one time or another.<sup>14</sup> As historian Elaine Tyler May has demonstrated, a policy of containment—better known as the political justification for the U.S. invasion of foreign lands to stem the spread of communism—reigned supreme in the American Cold War mentality at home. The American family acted as the “sphere of influence” entrusted to contain and neutralize potentially threatening outside forces. The white, middle-class nuclear family, touted as the bedrock of American postwar values,

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<sup>14</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

was charged with safeguarding the nation from subversives in the form of non-normative racial, class, gender, and sexual identities.<sup>15</sup>

While the championing of the nuclear family proliferated much of the domestic discourse of the postwar period, in recent decades historians have meticulously dismantled the nostalgic image of the supposedly stable, moral, traditional family life of the 1950s. Historians have demonstrated how the idyllic surface of 1950s domestic bliss—characterized by low divorce and illegitimacy rates and high birth rates—hid a more complex reality. Politicians and academics lauded the nuclear family as the moral foundation of American postwar society, but the prevalence of such family structures was a relatively new development and marked a departure from the extended kin networks of the nineteenth century rather than a “return” to a prewar traditional family structure. Many families experienced economic prosperity and moved into the middle class and out to the suburbs, but many were intentionally excluded from this prosperity. Redlining and discriminatory housing policies denied social mobility to non-normative families, especially racial minorities and same-sex couples. Pseudo-Victorian gender norms reigned supreme. Women who had found personal fulfillment in wartime jobs were encouraged, even forced, to leave the workplace and seek fulfillment in the home and in their roles as wives and mothers.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, feminism and rebellion lurked just beneath the surface, threatening to expose the false promises of the gender roles and sexual double standards that formed the basis of Cold War sexual politics.<sup>17</sup> The postwar faith in the sheltering influence of the stable nuclear family masked a nation in transition.

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<sup>15</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*; xxiv.

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: “All Girl” Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>17</sup> For an example of the ways female delinquents and youth rebellion in the 1950s laid the groundwork for the women’s liberation movements of the 1960s, see Amanda H. Littauer, *Bad Girls: Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion before the Sixties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

The immediate postwar period was also plagued with an anxiety over the state of American masculinity. Literature, cultural commentary, psychology, and sociology all documented this masculinity anxiety in its many forms. Veterans of the Second World War faced disillusionment as they returned to the domestic life and nine-to-five jobs they had put on hold as they proved their bravery and manhood in combat. Psychiatric evaluations of veterans revealed epidemics of anxiety, exhaustion, and depression—as well as cases of impotency—that threatened to weaken American masculinity.<sup>18</sup> The rise of the middle-class and white collar workforce in the 1950s was accompanied by a growing sense of alienation from work as middle-class men in office jobs were beholden to employers, rigid working hours, and sterile work environments.<sup>19</sup> The stereotype of the stunted, conformist manhood of the postwar paper pusher compared unfavorably to the independent, self-made men who populated nostalgic narratives of rugged nineteenth-century masculinity.<sup>20</sup> By the 1960s, even the traditional path of military service could not save American manhood as the United States became embroiled in an increasingly unpopular war in Southeast Asia. Instead, the army of cookie-cutter, be-suited office workers of American suburbia who served as the country's first line of defense against communism appeared woefully unprepared for the task.<sup>21</sup>

The anxiety over a weakening American masculinity only intensified as Cold War rhetoric identified homosexuality as a threat to the fabric of American life. With the 1948 publication of Dr.

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Sobel, "The Battalion Surgeon as Psychiatrist," *Bulletin of U.S. Army Medical Department*, November 1949, 38; Stephen Ranson, "The Normal Battle Reaction: Its Relation to the Pathologic Battle Reaction," *Bulletin of the U.S. Army Medical Department*, November 1949, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 103-108; K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 105-141; Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8-10.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussions of the making of nineteenth-century manhood, see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993); Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 4-19.

Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Americans were forced to confront the prevalence of homosexuality in their midst. As historians like George Chauncey have shown, homosexuality is a modern invention. While Americans would have encountered non-normative sexual activity and gender expression prior to this period, the articulation of the "homosexual" as a man who slept with other men, regardless of gender expression, was a relatively new category. Unlike the visually identifiable "fairies" and "pansies" whose gender deviance defined non-normative sexual communities in early twentieth century America, the postwar homosexual was defined by his sexual object choice rather than his gender expression.<sup>22</sup> Psychologists and government officials argued the homosexual could come in any shape, size, race, class, and social position and thus could pass as straight and infiltrate any part of American life. Historians have demonstrated how a Cold War anxiety about hidden enemies within found fuel in this new conception of homosexuality.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes the connections between Cold War and anti-homosexual rhetorics were amorphous, such as the fear of a faceless "insidious other" whereby, as cultural historian Nadine Hubbs puts it, "'communist' or 'homosexual' became interchangeable as terms that could fill in the menacing blank."<sup>24</sup> At other times, the conflation of homosexuality with enemies of the state was far more explicit, as when newspapers and popular press evoked the "homintern," a "supposed homosexual international conspiracy in the arts parallel to the Comintern, or Communist International, in politics."<sup>25</sup> Cultural commentators and politicians alike feared homosexual infiltration of the elite echelons of American society and the potential such individuals had to destroy American society

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<sup>22</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Michael S. Sherry, *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>23</sup> See especially Sherry, *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture*; Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Hubbs, *Queer Composition of America's Sound*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Sherry, *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture*, 1.

from within.<sup>26</sup> The House Committee on Un-American Activities led an investigation into subversives in American government and cultural industries that ended the careers of more accused homosexuals than Communists.<sup>27</sup> President Richard Nixon himself described “homosexuality, dope, ... immorality in general” as “enemies of strong societies,” in 1971, adding, “That’s why the Communists and the left-wingers are pushing it. They’re trying to destroy us.”<sup>28</sup> In this muddled Cold War logic, the security of the nation depended on the elimination of a homosexual-cum-Communist threat and the maintenance of a strong moral character epitomized by the white, suburban, middle-class, heterosexual family.

One of the primary ways families could ensure the strength of American society was to engage in mass consumption. Cold War culture was heavily influenced by what historian Lizabeth Cohen has termed a rising “consumer republic.” In the postwar rush to return to normalcy, Cohen charts the emergence of a “strategy...for reconstructing the nation’s economy and reaffirming its democratic values through promoting the expansion of mass consumption.” Good citizenship was predicated on mass consumption, not only as a means of bolstering capitalism in the United States, but also as a primary means of expressing one’s freedom and autonomy in a capitalist democracy.<sup>29</sup> Consumer culture touched nearly every facet of American life, including the familial and sexual. Government programs in the 1950s helped white, heterosexual couples move into the middle-class and, as a result, much of the postwar growth in gross national product stemmed from the consumption habits of middle-class white families, primarily in the form of household goods and residential construction.<sup>30</sup> Sexuality was also increasingly linked to consumption. Middle-class youth, whose growing purchasing power and mobility made them excellent targets for mass consumption,

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<sup>26</sup> Sherry, *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *Lavender Scare*, 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Sherry, *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 11, 8, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, *Consumer’s Republic*, 152; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 25.

began experimenting with the boundaries of sexual propriety. Many flocked to urban centers, creating singles cultures and spending money on parties and the increasingly respectable bar and club scenes in cities like New York. While working-class youth had been seeking—and finding—sexual expression in urban “amusements” for decades, the postwar cohort of white, middle-class youth faced neither the moral panic nor the censure that had confronted early twentieth-century working-class youth culture.<sup>31</sup> Their consumption habits were deemed crucial to the maintenance of a free American society. White, middle-class college students continued the trend as they forged new paths in permissive sexual relationships and dating life compared with their pre-war peers.<sup>32</sup> Publications like *Where the Girls Are*, an early-1960s Princeton guide to dating women students on other college campuses, solidified the importance of sex and dating in the lives of respectable—that is, white and Ivy League-educated—young men.<sup>33</sup>

While advertisers had been using female sexuality to sell products to both men and women since at least the 1920s, the use of sex in advertising reached new heights in the 1950s. Family television comedies like *Father Knows Best* capitalized on images of white, middle-class family life as a backdrop for selling products through mass media, furthering the commercialization of love and sex in American popular culture.<sup>34</sup> Print advertisements frequently used female sexuality to sell everything from cleaning supplies to cars to cigarettes. The use of female bodies to sell beauty products to women consumers gave rise to a new version of American womanhood increasingly

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<sup>31</sup> John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 305. For examples of turn-of-the-century working-class youth cultures, see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Peter M. Sandman and Editors of The Daily Princetonian, *Where the Girls Are: A Social Guide to Women’s Colleges in the East* (Princeton, NJ: Daily Princetonian Publishing Company, 1965); Peter M. Sandman and Editors of The Daily Princetonian, *Where the Girls Are: Or the Academic Truth about Curfews, Hangouts and Driving-Time* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 174-175.

concerned with physical appearance.<sup>35</sup> Historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg has tracked the use of female bodies in advertising, from the emphasis on clear complexions and good teeth in the Victorian period, to depictions of hairless legs and underarms in the 1920s, to the invention of specialized adolescent underclothing intended to emphasize waists and breasts in the postwar period. Advertisements like these not only pushed products but also contributed to girls' sense of self and self-worth.<sup>36</sup>

Sex also became a way to sell a consumerist lifestyle to men. The extension of the “logic of consumer capitalism to the realm of sex” provided a means for American men to reclaim what some perceived as a flagging masculinity.<sup>37</sup> With the demise of nineteenth-century obscenity laws, pornography entered the mainstream and men's magazines offered a new style of masculinity based in mass consumption. Publications like *Playboy* and *Esquire* departed from similar men's magazines of the 1930s and 1940s that had featured brawny men thrashing through jungles to save bosomy damsels in distress. The new iteration of men's titillating entertainment presented an ideal “upscale, masculine identity based on tasteful consumption and sexual pleasure.”<sup>38</sup> Hugh Hefner's ideal playboy took pride in his good taste, adapting the postwar responsibility to consume for the bachelor lifestyle. Historian Elizabeth Fraterrigo has shown that publications like *Playboy* encouraged men to live “the good life” through their consumption practices. By his choice of apartment, furnishings, clothes, cocktail accessories, and other household goods previously associated with women, the ideal postwar bachelor literally bought into a “new ethos” that “encouraged pursuit of pleasure, personal expression, and self-fulfillment.”<sup>39</sup> As a reward for their consumption, the men of the *Playboy* world did not need to traipse around the jungle to find sexually available women:

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<sup>35</sup> D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 278.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 302.

<sup>38</sup> Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life*, 7.

“playmates” flocked to them and lounged in their lush bachelor pads. The popularity of publications like *Playboy* and the success of Helen Gurley Brown’s memoir *Sex and the Single Girl*—which encouraged women to engage in sexual relationships with multiple men in exchange for material comforts—further cemented the merging of sexuality and consumption in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>40</sup>

Into this world of consumerist sexuality, voyeurism-as-popular-culture, and Cold War paranoia stepped the girl watcher, advocating the visual consumption of American womanhood and the use of evasive, espionage-like tactics to avoid detection. The 1954 publication of *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* spawned a plethora of reviews and human interest pieces in U.S. newspapers from New York to Los Angeles as well international publications as far away as Dublin and Jerusalem. Early pieces relied heavily on *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* and often featured excerpts or interviews with author Donald J. Sauers. The tone was generally amused and pseudo-scientific, playing off comparisons between girl-watching and birdwatching. Some girl-watching pieces adopted the language of the environmental movements and emphasized girl-watching’s role in preserving women as an important “natural resource.”<sup>41</sup> In the 1950s and early 1960s, journalists and columnists wrote whole articles explaining the characteristics of girl watchers, as if readers needed introduction to this new species of man. As the term gained traction, however, girl-watching increasingly became part of common parlance rather than a subject for a full exposé. Girl-watching turned up in all sorts of stories: for instance, an air hostess strike threatened to curtail mile-high girl-watching, a summertime photo essay identified Chicago’s best spots to watch girls, a woman blamed her husband’s parking fine on the fact that he was too busy girl-watching to remember to plug the meter, and men lamented the increasing popularity of the midi skirt and its detrimental impact on

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<sup>40</sup> Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 170-175; Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life*, 105-128.

<sup>41</sup> “Girl-Watching Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1970; Jeff Prugh, “Girl Watching, Si! Football? Well...,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1971; “Girl Watching Week is Mall Coming Attraction.”

girl-watching.<sup>42</sup> When taken together, these human interest pieces and interviews with men built an image of the new category of man known as the girl watcher and the new practice of intrusive looking known as girl-watching.

In particular, girl-watching privileged a furtive style of looking as the preferred way to look at women in public places. At the same time, images and stories about girl-watching garnered winking comments about men's natural desire for the female form, turning the practice of intrusive looking into a joke, a humorous aspect of the age-old battle of the sexes. Discourses of the girl watcher worked to articulate who had the right to look at women in public places by laying out "rules" for comportment that emphasized furtiveness and propriety. The insistence on furtiveness marked girl-watching as the purview of respectable middle-class men, a designation bolstered by the ad men and white-collar middle managers who gave interviews as girl-watching experts in newspapers and magazines. Girl-watching appears to have been paradoxically showy in its restraint,<sup>43</sup> as girl watchers insisted in interviews that they were different from playboys or uncouth oglers whose lascivious leers besmirched the civilized pastime. Girl-watching was about admiring beautiful specimens of womankind from afar; girl watchers never succumbed to their baser animal instincts by approaching women or expecting a date. This meant girl-watching was compatible with heterosexual marriage and indeed the most vocal girl watchers in the press were married men. Furtiveness also cemented girl-watching as a marker of white heterosexual privilege. Only white, heterosexual, middle-class men could clandestinely watch strangers on the street without arousing suspicion in the age of Jim Crow and Cold War paranoia. Through its articulation in the 1950s and 60s, girl-watching thus made it acceptable for white, heterosexual, middle-class men to watch women

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<sup>42</sup> "Strike May Cut Into Airliner Girl-Watching," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1965; Ron Bailey, "Girl Watching: Always a Chicago Spectacular," *Chicago Tribune*, July 29, 1962; "Girl Watcher Forgets Meters," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1961; Kramer, "American Society of Girl Watchers Has 50,000 Card Carrying Members."

<sup>43</sup> Thank you to Dean Hubbs for this turn of phrase "showy in its restraint" which stayed with me and ended up on the page.

in public places, naturalizing this expression of power and differentiating it from the “leering” and harassment that were presumably the purview of uncouth working-class men and sexually aggressive men of color.<sup>44</sup>

## When Watching a Girl is “Eye Rape”

As this chapter will show, girl-watching was defined in large part by what it was not: it was not ostentatious or obvious, it was not lewd or insulting. The most visible and vocal girl watchers were also primarily middle-class and professional white men, often middle-aged and married. The association of whiteness and middle-class status with furtive, polite girl-watching marked looking from men of color and working-class men as its opposite: uncouth, lascivious, even dangerous. Nowhere was this more clear than in the “eye rape” case of North Carolina.

On June 4, 1951, forty-four-year-old Mack Ingram, a Black farmer in Caswell County, North Carolina, went in search of a trailer to haul some hay. He drove his 1936 Chevrolet to the farm of Mr. W. L. Boswell, a white man who had helped him in the past.<sup>45</sup> Ingram hoped to borrow Boswell’s trailer for a few hours that day. He drove through the small farming community slowly, stopping at a stop sign and then coasting his way towards Boswell’s farm before parking and getting out of his car to walk the rest of the way. These are the facts, relatively undisputed, as Mack Ingram and his lawyers told them. What happened next, however, was the subject of heated debate both in and out of the courtroom. Ingram said he looked around Mr. Boswell’s farm and, seeing no one but

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<sup>44</sup> For examples of the perceived dangers of working-class sexuality and Black male sexuality, see D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 201, 217-218, 231, 263.

<sup>45</sup> “State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case,” 1951-1953, Papers of the NAACP, Part 08: Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, 1910-1955, Series B: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1940-1955, Library of Congress, ProQuest History Vault, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001532-027-0372>. W. L. Boswell had taken Ingram to the gas station to buy petrol a few days after Ingram had first moved to the area. The NAACP file includes court transcripts for the first trial and several appeals, as well as related court documents and filings and an NAACP fundraising pamphlet entitled, “Assault...at 75 Feet.”

a few young boys working off in the distance, decided to leave and find a trailer elsewhere. The State of North Carolina and Caswell County resident Willie Jean Boswell told a different story. Willie Jean Boswell was Mr. Boswell's seventeen-year-old granddaughter. On June 4, she had awoken after her father and younger brothers, had dressed in overalls and a turtle shell hat, and then headed out to the cornfields between her father's house and her grandfather's house to help her brothers as they worked. According to Miss Boswell, she noticed Ingram driving down the highway that went through her community. She saw him stop at the stop sign, but then, she claimed, Ingram "came up the highway and he kept watching me." As she turned towards a wooded area to get off the road, Ingram pulled up and stopped his car on the side of the road. This frightened Miss Boswell, who quickened her pace, but Ingram "kept on coming" until he "stopped and stood and watched" her. When she finally reached her brothers in the cornfield, Miss Boswell said she told them what she had seen. They ran to tell their father, who called the police, and two weeks later Mack Ingram stood before the Caswell County Recorder's Court on the charge of criminal assault with intent to rape.<sup>46</sup>

The Ingram case came to be known as the "eye rape" case or the "assault from seventy-five feet"<sup>47</sup> and it garnered widespread interest across the country as well as overseas. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took up Ingram's cause after the first trial resulted in his conviction. On June 18, Ingram was sentenced to two years in the county jail and assigned to work on road projects for the county. By mid-July, NAACP attorney W. Frank Brower was investigating the incident and the NAACP had published a pamphlet, *Assault...at 75 Feet*, to raise awareness and funds for Ingram's legal fees.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the case received little coverage in

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<sup>46</sup> "State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case."

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, these headlines: "Rape by Look' Case Fizzles As Jury Locks," *Cleveland Call and Post*, November 24, 1951, sec. A; "Ingram Put On Probation For 'Eye-Ball Rape,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, November 13, 1952; "Appeal Guilty Verdict in N.C. Eye-Rape Case," *Chicago Defender*, November 22, 1952; "Carolina Hi Court Frees Ingram Cannot Commit Rape at 75 Feet," *Arkansas State Press*, March 6, 1953.

<sup>48</sup> A. M. Rivera, Jr., "Gets 2 Years for 'Looking' at Girl," *Courier* (Pittsburgh), July 21, 1951; "State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case."

local or national press at first, but thanks to the NAACP's efforts—as well as some rabble-rousing from a local member of the Communist Party who sent exposés to European newspapers—Ingram's case soon appeared in newspapers all over the world.<sup>49</sup> Most press coverage cast the Ingram case as, at best, foolish and, at worst, a shocking example of the racism of the Southern American criminal justice system. The case generated a range of responses. English housewives wrote to the Mayor of Yanceyville, demanding justice for Ingram, and American newspapers worried that such a miscarriage of justice would provide fodder for the Soviet Union's anti-U.S. propaganda.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, Ingram's case traveled through the North Carolina court system on appeal after appeal. His first appeal ended in a mistrial, but a new jury convicted Ingram in the North Carolina Superior Court in November 1952.<sup>51</sup> In subsequent appeals, Ingram's lawyers argued that discriminatory jury selection practices had stripped Ingram of his constitutional right to a jury of his peers.<sup>52</sup> In the final appeal to the North Carolina Supreme Court, the State Attorney General agreed

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For more on NAACP's initial offer of help, see "Convict Man For Assault 75 Ft. Away," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 14, 1951.

<sup>49</sup> "Assault At Fifty Feet," *Arkansas State Press*, July 27, 1951; "November 1951," November 5, 1951, Claude A. Barnett Papers: The Associated Negro Press, 1918-1967, Part 1: Associated Negro Press News Releases, 1928-1964, Series B: 1945-1955, Chicago Historical Society, ProQuest History Vault, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001584-047-0160>.

As part of their efforts to move Ingram's second trial to a court outside of Caswell County, his attorney's included the text of several articles by or about the Communist Party's support for Ingram in pre-trial motions. They hoped to prove that the local white community would be poisoned again Ingram because the involvement of the Communist Party and that the local Black community would be biased in favor of Ingram because of the inflammatory nature of the Communists' rhetoric. "State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case."

A reporter for the London *Daily Mirror* reporter covered Superior Court retrial. A. M. Rivera, "N. C. 'Eye-Balling' Case Ends Mistrial," *Courier* (Pittsburgh), November 24, 1951.

<sup>50</sup> "State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case;" Cliff Mackay, "Stalin Just Loves N.C.," *Afro-American*, February 2, 1952; "'Look' Case Verdict Brings Varied Editorial Comment," *Afro-American*, November 22, 1952.

<sup>51</sup> "Convict Negro of Assault for Leering at Girl," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 12, 1952; "Dad of 9 Found Guilty Of 'Leer' Attack on Girl," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 12, 1952; "Guilty of 'Assault by Look,'" *Manchester Guardian*, November 12, 1952; "Jury Find Mack Ingram Guilty in 'Reckless Eye-Balling' Case," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 12, 1952; "'Leering' Assault Draws North Carolina Conviction: 'Assault' Defined," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 12, 1952; "Negro in North Carolina Convicted Of Assault by 'Leer' at White Girl," *New York Times*, November 12, 1952; "Ingram Put On Probation For 'Eye-Ball Rape'"; "'Leerer' to Appeal Assault Conviction," *Detroit Free Press*, November 13, 1952; "Leers at Girl, Gets 6 Months Suspended Term," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 13, 1952; "Negro Escapes Jail in Assault by Leer," *New York Times*, November 13, 1952; "Assault By Leering: Negro Given A Suspended Term By U.S. Court Yanceyville, N.C.," *South China Morning Post*, November 14, 1952; Rufus Wells, "'Look' Attacker On Trial 3rd Time," *Afro-American*, November 15, 1952.

<sup>52</sup> "'Leering' Conviction Appealed," *New York Times*, December 11, 1952; "Jury Discrimination Charged In 'Look Attack,'" *Afro-American*, December 20, 1952.

with Ingram's lawyers and the court voided Ingram's conviction in 1953, almost two years after Boswell's initial accusation.<sup>53</sup>

Just a couple of years before Sauers published *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, the Ingram case raised questions about whether a look was just a look or if it could be considered tantamount to rape. In her testimony, Willie Jean Boswell had described Ingram watching her, but nothing else. Not a word was uttered between them and Ingram had not followed Boswell, though witnesses for the prosecution argued that Ingram's path on June 4 indicated he was trying to "cut off" Boswell.<sup>54</sup> Boswell testified that Ingram only ever came within seventy-five, perhaps sixty, feet of her in the entire time of the incident. As Ingram's case wound its way through the appeals process, the question before each court, then, was whether a look could constitute criminal assault. Boswell and her attorney emphasized the fear she felt as Ingram watched her. Boswell told the Recorder's Court that Ingram "was going real slow and had his head turned watching me the whole distance." She said she began running from Ingram at some point, not because he had changed his behavior in any way but, "Because I was scared. If it had been anyone else, I wouldn't have run, but he kept watching me, and when I went to the woods, he pulled up to the side of the road and stopped." In later testimony, Boswell used the term "leer" to describe Ingram's look and one of her attorneys tried to

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<sup>53</sup> On jury selection: "New Turn in Race Case: North Carolina Joins Defense in Plea to High Court," *New York Times*, January 29, 1953; "N. C. Attorney General Joins NAACP in Ingram Case Plea," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 1, 1953; "N. C. Attorney General Joins NAACP in Ingram Case Plea," *Arizona Sun*, February 6, 1953; "Leering' Case Has Sudden Turn," *Detroit Tribune*, February 7, 1953; "N.C.'s Attorney General Joins NAACP In Asking Review Of Ingram Case," *Afro-American*, February 7, 1953.

On voided conviction: 'Assault by Leer' Verdict Voided in North Carolina: Suspended Sentence Thought Her a Boy," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 25, 1953; "Leer Attack' Conviction Thrown Out," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 26, 1953; "Leering at Girl Held Not Assault; Conviction Upset," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, February 26, 1953; "Negro's Conviction Quashed," *Manchester Guardian*, February 26, 1953; "North Carolina High Court Reverses 'Assault By Leer' Conviction Of Mack Ingram," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 26, 1953; "N. C. High Court Overrules 'Leer' Case Conviction," *Courier* (Pittsburgh), February 28, 1953; "Carolina Hi Court Frees Ingram"; "North Carolina Supreme Court 'Frees' Mack Ingram," *Plain Dealer*, March 6, 1953; "Free Mack Ingram In Look Assault Case," *Chicago Defender*, March 7, 1953; "North Carolina Supreme Court Free Mack Ingram," *Jackson Advocate*, March 7, 1953; "Sharecropper Freed as Court Voids Old Law," *Cleveland Call and Post*, March 7, 1953; "Along the N.A.A.C.P. Battlefront," *The Crisis*, April 1953.

<sup>54</sup> "State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case."

imitate the leer in the courtroom to demonstrate how it should be considered a legitimate threat.<sup>55</sup>

As an Associated Negro Press reporter put it, Ingram was a “victim” of a “strange interpretation of rape.”<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the trial and appeals, Boswell’s legal team and, at times, the presiding judges, tried to prove that a look—or a leer—was enough to charge someone with assault. For example, while the presiding judge in Ingram’s appeal to the North Carolina Superior Court, Judge J.A. Rousseau, ruled there was insufficient evidence to try Ingram on the charge of intent to rape, he maintained it was possible to find Ingram guilty of assault on a female. Rousseau encouraged the jury in that trial to think expansively about the charge of assault. “[I]t is not always necessary for one to be guilty of assault that there be some physical contact with the person alleged to have been assaulted,” Rousseau told the jury. Indeed, looking at someone in a “leering manner” might be sufficient grounds for a guilty verdict if the defendant “causes another to reasonably apprehend imminent danger.”<sup>57</sup> Rousseau’s comments, and the state’s evidence, must not have been convincing enough, however, because the first appeal ended in a mistrial, with two Black jurors refusing to vote guilty.<sup>58</sup> Judge Rousseau, disappointed with the lack of decision, admitted he at least thought there was evidence of a “display of violence—evidence that the defendant chased the girl.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Rivera, “N. C. ‘Eye-Balling’ Case Ends Mistrial.”

<sup>56</sup> “November 1951,” Claude A. Barnett Papers: The Associated Negro Press, 1918-1967, Part 1: Associated Negro Press News Releases, 1928-1964, Series B: 1945-1955, Chicago Historical Society, ProQuest History Vault, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001584-047-0160>.

<sup>57</sup> “State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case”; “Legal Department Monthly Report,” November 1951, Papers of the NAACP, Part 01: Supplement, 1951-1955, Library of Congress, ProQuest History Vault, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001410-002-0184>.

<sup>58</sup> The jury in this first appeal trial included eight white jurists and four Black jurists, all men. “Calls Mistrial in Leering Case, Hits Hung Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 17, 1951; “2 Jurors Halt Attempt to Jail ‘Looking’ Dad,” *Afro-American*, November 24, 1951; “‘Rape by Look’ Case Fizzles”; “Mistrial Declared in Case of ‘Assault at 75 Feet,’” *Negro Star*, November 30, 1951.

<sup>59</sup> “Man Wins Mistrial in Assault on Girl Who Wasn’t Touched,” *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), November 16, 1951; “November 1951,” Claude A. Barnett Papers: The Associated Negro Press, 1918-1967, Part 1: Associated Negro Press News Releases, 1928-1964, Series B: 1945-1955, Chicago Historical Society, ProQuest History Vault, <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001584-047-0160>.

Ingram's defense team, unsurprisingly, strongly disagreed with the interpretation that Ingram was guilty of assault simply because Willie Jean Boswell feared that was his intent. In written objections to Rousseau's rulings, Ingram's lawyers argued Ingram was a victim of Boswell's "suspicion and unbridled imagination." In the absence of evidence that Ingram did anything other than look at Boswell, it was "thus abundantly clear," the lawyers argued, that "the fright of the prosecutrix should be attributed to her imagination rather than to any overt, intentional, or unlawful act of the defendant." Boswell, they said, could not even define a "leer" when pressed, so how could she argue that Ingram had leered? If the court found Ingram guilty, his lawyers warned, "all men regardless of color and irrespective of intent may be summarily brought into Court and criminal sanctions imposed against them upon the mere whim or caprice of a young, immature, and perhaps unstable girl."<sup>60</sup>

The idea that Boswell's complaint was a figment of her imagination drew on decades of similar arguments used to discredit women's rape accusations, against both Black and white men. A deep mistrust of women accusers—who legal scholars and psychiatrists often constructed as liars or fantasists—permeated legal literature and consensus from the seventeenth century onwards, and would persist after the Ingram case, proving fodder for feminist antirape activism in the 1970s.<sup>61</sup> However, the circumstances of Ingram's case were also familiar to antiracist activists in the South who had been denouncing the rape double standard since Ida B. Wells' forceful editorials. Indeed, twenty years before Boswell accused Ingram of "eye rape," two white women riding the rails in rural Alabama had accused nine Black youths of rape. The nine teenagers were convicted at the county seat of Scottsboro, eight of them sentenced to be executed. The plight of the Scottsboro Boys, as they came to be known, garnered national attention and became "synonymous with racial injustice."

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<sup>60</sup> "State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case."

<sup>61</sup> Catherine O. Jacquet, *The Injustices of Rape: How Activists Responded to Sexual Violence, 1950-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 15-26.

The fact that one of the white female accusers admitted she had lied to avoid getting into any trouble herself cemented both the idea that women lied about rape and that white women would willingly send Black men to their deaths to save their own reputations.<sup>62</sup> The Scottsboro case, which went through a round of appeals with an NAACP defense team, may have been on Ingram's lawyers' minds as they drafted objections to the rulings and testimony presented in the case. As one of Ingram's NAACP attorneys Martin A. Martin told *Jet* magazine in 1952, "It is unfortunate that a lot of young white girls feel that every time they see a Negro man, he wants to rape them."<sup>63</sup> For Ingram and his supporters, the case was just another example of rampant Southern racism and the familiar story of a Black man severely punished for an insignificant or fabricated slight against a Southern white woman.

The eye rape case and Ingram's eventual acquittal demonstrate two concurrent but contradictory narratives about the power of looking in the years leading up to *The Girl Watcher's Guide's* publication. On the one hand, Ingram's arrest and initial conviction were yet again confirmation for many that a Black man's wayward glance at a white woman, even if imagined, could be grounds for disproportionate punishment, at least in the South. Fred Upchurch, Jr., the local Caswell County attorney who was the first to defend Ingram in court, summed up the sentiments of many Northern and African American newspapers when he declared, "my home county and not Mack Ingram is on trial here."<sup>64</sup> In an *Afro-American* editorial published soon after the first appellate court upheld Ingram's conviction, columnist Cliff Mackay pointed out the continued double-standard applied to cases of sexual violence in the South. "Mack Ingram, who looked at a white girl from a distance of 75 yards, drew two years," he wrote. Just four months later, three white men who

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<sup>62</sup> Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 253-270.

<sup>63</sup> "'Evil Eye' Ingram to Appeal 'Leering' Conviction," *Jet*, November 27, 1952.

<sup>64</sup> "2 Jurors Halt Attempt to Jail 'Looking' Dad"; "'Rape by Look' Case Fizzles."

had “committed a brutal mass rape of 19-year-old Mrs. Lula Artes,” a Black woman, “got only 16 months.”<sup>65</sup> Ingram’s conviction is thus evidence of a narrative that ran counter to the rhetoric that trivialized and normalized white men’s ogling. This counter-narrative, far from trivializing a look, instead equated looking with attempted rape, but only when the looker was a Black man and the target of his look was a white woman. Ingram’s case exemplifies how Black Americans faced severe, often violent, consequences for seemingly trivial violations of racial etiquette.

On the other hand, the defense lawyers and newspaper columnists who supported Ingram (or at least did not want to appear racist) espoused the idea that looking was harmless and natural for all men as part of their defense. Ingram’s lawyers had warned the North Carolina Superior Court that to uphold Ingram’s conviction would be to open up “all men regardless of color” to legal repercussions if a woman thought he had looked at her funny.<sup>66</sup> Despite the obvious racial dimensions of the case, this argument suggested that there was something about looking or watching that was natural for a man, “regardless of color,” and that crying “eye rape” was unsurprising coming from a woman. The *New York Post* went a step further in late 1952. While Ingram’s defense team were understandably reluctant to admit that Ingram had even seen Willie Jean Boswell, let alone watched her with any hint of sexual desire, the *Post* argued that even if Ingram had watched Boswell, that was no reason to charge him with assault. The Ingram case, the *Post* argued, “provides grotesque material for the human comedy. For if men can be hauled into court for allegedly thinking carnal thoughts about women whom they see from an automobile window, one of democracy’s most precious freedoms is lost.”<sup>67</sup> This facetious comment echoed the Detroit residents who, in 1946, insisted that the city’s anti-ogling ordinance infringed on the right of every man to admire feminine figures. However, while the naturalizing discourse of the 1940s in most

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<sup>65</sup> Mackay, “Stalin Just Loves N.C.”

<sup>66</sup> “State of North Carolina v. Ingram Rape Case.”

<sup>67</sup> “‘Look’ Case Verdict Brings Varied Editorial Comment.”

cases omitted any mention of race, here the *Post* took the example of a racially charged court case—where most commentators agreed Ingram’s race was the primary reason for his arrest and conviction—and deliberately evacuated it of its racial stakes. The case instead became a prudish attack on “men,” not a Black man, and on the “precious freedom” of “thinking carnal thoughts” about women supposedly afforded to all men.

Syndicated columnist Robert Ruark echoed the attitude that the Ingram case was a warning to all men. In a December 1952 editorial, he interrogated the fine line between an insulting leer and a complimentary glance in light of the Ingram trial. Ruark was born and raised in North Carolina, and he wrote his editorial from South Carolina, so he was not unaware of the racial implications of Ingram’s case.<sup>68</sup> Still, Ruark opened his column by explaining he would “ignore the racism” of the case and instead “progress to the purely scientific aspects of when a smile deserves a slap and when an ogle becomes an insult.” Ruark proceeded in the tongue-in-cheek humorous tone of the girl-watching pieces that would soon follow. Even the descriptions matched the way newspapers, magazines, and humor pieces would talk about girl-watching. For instance, while Ruark admitted that any “God-fearing girl will tell you an eyebrow raiser is up to no good,” a true ogler does not seek to “approve, disapprove or lust after. To look at is enough.” Ogling, Ruark explained, was a “spectator sport” that was a “heap more fun than tennis.” He outlined techniques and tips for proper ogling, foreshadowing again the rules of proper girl-watching. “The true rule of ogling,” Ruark finished, “is that the starrer just wishes to appraise. ... And in the interest of justice, I might append the fact that no ogle, leer, frown or stare is deadly unless the subject has an overdeveloped sensibility to public appearance. Not even on a clear day at 75 yards.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Robert Ruark,” American Society of Authors and Writers, accessed May 26, 2020, <http://amsaw.org/amsaw-ithappenedinhistory-122903-ruark.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Ruark, “Watch That Eyebrow, Buster,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 1, 1952.

The Mack Ingram case was a fitting and complex lead-in to the ascendance of the girl watcher. Ingram's initial conviction provided one example of the way white Americans interpreted intrusive behaviors from Black men directed at white women, especially in the South, as sexual threats akin to rape. Thanks to national publicity and a team of NAACP lawyers, Ingram walked a free man, but there is no guarantee he would have escaped conviction without significant help, resources, and public attention. Indeed, the much more famous lynching of Emmett Till suggests how horrifically Ingram's situation might have turned out under different circumstances. Just one year after the publication of *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, two white men murdered Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Black teenager, following accusations that he had flirted with a white woman in Money, Mississippi. Till's murder became an important rallying point for civil rights organizers and it revealed the lie behind the idea that stranger intrusions were harmless fun. Had Till been white, his young age and his alleged offense—which varied from whistling to flirting verbally with a twenty-one-year-old white woman, Carolyn Bryant, in her husband's store—would have solicited knowing chuckles and acknowledgements that “boys will be boys.” Because Till was Black, Bryant's male relatives saw Till as a dangerous sexual assailant and interpreted his actions—which were at least partly, if not entirely, fabricated—as a sexual overture, if not a threat of sexual violence.<sup>70</sup> The white men who tortured and murdered Till understood that intrusive behaviors could be powerful and dangerous, but they had the power to choose under what circumstances this was true.

In contrast, Ingram's case ended in his acquittal and those who came to his defense at times relied on language that cast intrusive behaviors as trivial and natural. Newspaper columnists and

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<sup>70</sup> For more on Emmett Till see Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Christopher Metress, *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Mamie Till-Mobley and Chris Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2003); Davis W Houck, Matthew A Grindy, and Keith A. Beauchamp, *Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

Ingram's own defense team argued that Ingram's fate was wrapped up in the fate of not just all Black men, but all men, period. Men naturally looked at women on the street, they admitted, even with lustful or "carnal" intent, but that was not grounds for criminal conviction. Ingram and Boswell's races were the only reason a slew of North Carolina judges and juries found Ingram guilty of assault. In contrast, as the *New York Post* would have it, if Ingram had watched Boswell as she walked down the road to work in the nearby cornfield, he would only have been practicing "one of democracy's most precious freedoms." Thus the case of Mack Ingram shows how discourses that trivialized intrusive behaviors were so ubiquitous by 1951 that they were used to defend men from accusations of assault and harassment. Crucially, it also demonstrates the power of race in dictating who could watch whom in public space and who could claim that their looks were harmless. One year after Ingram's case was finally dismissed, *The Girl Watcher's Guide* would stake a claim that the most harmless looking of all was the furtive, polite looking practiced by middle-class white professional girl watchers.

## The "Genteel Sport" of Girl-Watching

Mack Ingram's case was a moment when the debate over whether or not an intrusive look was trivial held enormous stakes; in jarring contrast, journalists, humorists, and girl watchers discussed and described girl-watching in a light-hearted humorous tone that made it clear they viewed their favorite pastime as a bit of a joke. Girl-watching was meant to be funny. The cartoonish illustrations in *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, over-the-top suggestions for girl-watching techniques, and the marketing of gag gifts like girl-watching sunglasses all revealed the humor of girl-watching.<sup>71</sup> The

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<sup>71</sup> Frances Cawthon, "Try Boy-Watching in Eskimo Sunglasses," *Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution*, February 28, 1965.

fact that girl-watching discourses often read like a long, suggestive wink and a nudge gives the sense that girl watchers felt they were getting away with something.<sup>72</sup> The way girl watchers spoke suggested they thought had found a way to ogle women in public without risking accusations of impropriety, and they could not wait to share this trick with others. The humor also makes the sources difficult to interpret. They are often written in a mock-serious tone: *The Girl Watcher's Guide* emulated bird-watching language in both a convincing and silly way, making it difficult to know whether one should lean into the humor or try to separate oneself from it. However, the humor of girl-watching was also part of what gave the trope its cultural power; it is humor that makes girl-watching seem harmless and trivial even today.<sup>73</sup> The reason girl-watching discourses were funny is the same reason why people have laughed at rape jokes for decades: because both forms of humor trivialize sexual violence and the objectification of women.<sup>74</sup> Cultural critics and feminists would soon note the way humor was used to normalize sexual violence in the 1970s and 1980s. As journalist and communications scholar George Gerbner lamented in 1978, rape had become so normalized in American popular culture, it had “even been made a topic of humour.”<sup>75</sup> Girl-watching contributed to that normalization and trivialization twenty years earlier.

Nowhere was humor of girl-watching more apparent than in the way girl watchers imbued the practice with the language and trappings of a club sport. Characterizing the pastime as an organized sport emphasized the way girl watchers viewed the pastime as ultimately trivial and harmless. The use of sporting metaphors to describe girl-watching in the popular press also lent it a

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<sup>72</sup> Girl watchers often remind me of the famous Monty Python sketch in which Eric Idle's smarmy, cheeky bar patron sidles up to Terry Jones's stuffy professional and tries to talk to him about pornography and sex using only euphemisms and suggestive winks and nudges.

<sup>73</sup> When I give presentations on girl-watching, the images, songs, and stories that feature in this chapter always get the biggest laughs.

<sup>74</sup> In recent years, the rape joke as a genre have come under fire from feminists, both in comedy and in other professions, who argue that rape jokes contribute to a “rape culture” that treats sexual violence as normal and trivial. Sharon Lockyer and Heather Savigny, “Rape Jokes Aren't Funny: The Mainstreaming of Rape Jokes in Contemporary Newspaper Discourse,” *Feminist Media Studies* 20, no. 3 (April 2, 2020): 434–49.

<sup>75</sup> George Gerbner, *The Dynamics of Cultural Resistance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 48.

sense of leisure and gentility, marking it as a middle-class pursuit. Girl-watching was repeatedly dubbed a “fine sport,” a “genteel sport,” a “superb sport.” It was also a “masculine spectator sport” or, to use the terminology of organized athletics, an “individual, free-style sport.”<sup>76</sup> CBS Radio commentator Andy Griffith went so far as to describe girl-watching as a healthy hobby. “It gets you into the open,” he told the *Los Angeles Tribune* in 1959, “and that’s a good thing.”<sup>77</sup> The multiple attempts to equate girl-watching with bird-watching aided its claims to respectability: while girl-watching was supposed to be far superior to bird-watching in terms of the entertainment it could provide, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* insisted, “these two hobbies do share one important feature. They are both *genteel*.”<sup>78</sup> Sporting metaphors linked girl-watching with decades of discourse that emphasized gentlemanly sportsmanship as a key facet of American idealized masculinities. Victorian Americans saw competitive sports as an antidote to a masculinity they perceived as softening in the face of industrialization. Organized sports were supposed to encourage “strength, vigor, and physical assertiveness” in men and boys while also teaching discipline and self-control.<sup>79</sup> Girl-watching may not have fulfilled the requirements of physical strenuousness, but with its language of furtiveness and secrecy it certainly fulfilled the requirements of discipline and self-control. In a mid-century context where the monotony of office jobs supposedly threatened masculine virility and

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Bell, “Girl-Watching Fine Sport In Breezy Buenos Aires,” (Toronto) *Globe and Mail*, May 21, 1960; Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching’”; Richard Joseph, “On Crocodile Wrestling, Girl Watching in Jamaica: And What Else You’ll Find on Tropic Isle,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 13, 1963; Smith, “Can’t Give a Hoot;” Ken Lubas, “Girl Watchers International: Furtive Leer Comes Out in Open,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 7, 1969. For other examples, see Bob Talbert, “Girl-Watching Readers Irate at Suggestion of ‘Lost’ Challenge,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 31, 1969; David Fortney, “On Girl Watching: Do the Sexes See Eye to Eye? The Watchers,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1973; Gay Pauley, “When Heat’s on Women Play Old Skin Game,” *Flint Journal*, August 12, 1973, America’s Historical Newspapers; Cheryl Pilate, “Unhand Us, Ya Perverts,” *Michigan Daily*, May 23, 1974, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>77</sup> “Standin’ on the Corner,” *Los Angeles Tribune*, August 14, 1959, America’s Historical Newspapers. Alas, I was unable to determine wif this was the Andy Griffith, though it seems likely it was the same man who would soon have a hugely popular eponymous television show.

<sup>78</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 9. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>79</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 239-244; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

independence, girl-watching was one way for middle-class, white collar men to prove the robustness of their heterosexual masculinity and the self-discipline with which they exercised it.<sup>80</sup>

Humorous newspaper coverage of the girl-watching “sport” described the transition of girl-watching from an amateur sport into something more organized and professional. With the introduction of girl-watching societies, girl-watching enthusiasts could become “card carrying members” whose own watching styles might be judged by the society’s constitution or official manual.<sup>81</sup> Journalists interviewed girl watchers like field experts, asking them to elaborate on proper technique. Girl watchers assumed this mantle gladly, providing “lectures on proper girl spying” at girl-watching events and offering advice to aspiring girl watchers.<sup>82</sup> Girl watchers’ expertise could come in handy in myriad circumstances. The improbably-named bra designer Larry Van Tassel submitted his credentials as a girl watcher as proof of his knowledge of cutting-edge fashion trends: “If a man happens to be a girl watcher as I am, you know that the American woman couldn’t give up the bra,” he intoned in a 1968 issue of *Women’s Wear Daily*.<sup>83</sup> In one book review, the Pittsburgh *Courier* championed *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* as an answer to Dr. Alfred Kinsey’s reports on human sexual behavior, of which the latest had been published the year before. According to the *Courier*, Donald Sauers and his guide “might convince the omnipresent Dr. Kinsey that men, women and sex were old hat eons before reports on ’em were found to be of any value, except to census-takers.”<sup>84</sup> Girl watchers’ expertise gave even the foremost sexologist of the time a run for his money.

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<sup>80</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*.

<sup>81</sup> Lubas, “Girl Watchers International: Furtive Leer Comes Out in Open;” Linda Kramer, “Girl Watching Is—Wait, There Goes One Now!,” *Flint Journal*, September 17, 1970.

<sup>82</sup> “Girl Watching Week Is Once-a-Year Happening;” “He Guides Girl-Watchers,” (Dublin) *Times Pictorial*, Jan. 15, 1955; “The Girl Watcher’s Guide: Highly Popular Pastime Demands a Technique Which Is Attained Only Thru Long Practice,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 16, 1955; “Girl-Watchers’ Rules,” *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 21, 1967.

<sup>83</sup> “Nude Look To Dress Up Bra Business: Bare Bosom Look Will Boost Sales, Makers Say,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, Sep. 5, 1968, 24.

<sup>84</sup> George F. Brown, “No Cover Charge: Answer to Kinsey Report and Theatrical Tattle,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Nov. 6, 1954.

While girl-watching's professionalization was tongue-in-cheek—no girl watcher was actually making money from his ogling—girl-watching did begin to accumulate the trappings of a sport, including official organizations (complete with dues-paying members), competitive events, and training manuals. Donald Sauers's own American Society of Girl Watchers (ASGW) claimed 2,500 members after its first mail campaign in 1954 and 50,000 by 1970.<sup>85</sup> Sauers's main competitor was educational film producer Joe Beagin, who made headlines in 1963 when his “Official Girl Watchers Manual” appeared on a list of available program instruction materials at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.<sup>86</sup> Beagin was the founder of the rival International Society of Girl Watchers (ISGW), which he started in San Diego in 1960. According to Beagin, the idea came to him when he spotted a pretty flight attendant on a flight to Denver. To show his appreciation for her appearance, he handed her a small card on which he had written the words, “You have been observed by a member of the International Society of Girl Watchers.” Soon after, Beagin began printing these cards with a list of “compliments” that a girl watcher could check off, thus informing the women they watched of their most attractive features. Each member of the ISGW received a stack of these cards in the “Girl Watchers kit” that came with their \$10 annual membership fee. In comparison with Sauers, Beagin was a more active promoter of girl-watching as a social or club activity. Beagin held regular meetings of the San Diego chapter and published a quarterly magazine. Members chose a “Watchable of the Month” and compared notes for the best places to find “Watchables,” that is, women they deemed worthy of watching.<sup>87</sup> In 1966, photographers from Keystone Features (who photographed such 1960s icons as The Rolling Stones, Omar Sharif, Joan Collins, and The Beatles) shot a series that depicted demonstrations of different girl-watching techniques from ISGW

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<sup>85</sup> Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching’”; Kramer, “American Society of Girl Watchers Has 50,000 Card Carrying Members.”

<sup>86</sup> Joe Radoff, “1500 Male ‘Vigilantes’ Are Busy Putting Gals Under Scrutiny For Good Tastes In Fashions,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 27, 1965; Smith, “Can’t Give a Hoot.”

<sup>87</sup> Radoff, “1500 Male ‘Vigilantes’ Are Busy.” To my ongoing disappointment, I have yet to find a surviving copy of the ISGW quarterly publication.

members. Joe Beagin himself demonstrated the “ploy of stretching his shoulder in order to leer unnoticed at a seated woman” (see Figure 15). The photographs, featuring middle-aged white men in suits and ties, confirmed a reporter’s description of ISGW’s members as made up of “attornies, CPA’s, salesmen, insurancemen and bankers [sic].” “Most are married,” observed the reporter, and “the average age is 40.” The various girl-watching societies began to dissolve slowly in the late 1960s. Beagin’s International Society of Girl Watchers reduced its annual membership fee from \$10 to \$6 in 1972, perhaps to encourage more sign-ups.<sup>88</sup> By 1969, no one was answering the phone at Sauers’s American Society of Girl Watchers.<sup>89</sup>



Figure 15: Keystone Features/Getty Images, “Joe Beagin, Founder of the International Society of Girl Watchers Uses the Ploy of Stretching His Shoulder in Order to Leer Unnoticed at a Seated Woman,” August 1, 1966, Hulton Archive.

<sup>88</sup> “Me, a Girl Watcher? Just a Humble Man Doing His Job,” *Detroit News*, January 27, 1971, America’s Historical Newspapers; Lyle W. Price, “On the Art of Girl Watching—Or, Phooey on the Guys,” *Ann Arbor News*, October 2, 1972, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>89</sup> Phyllis Battelle, “Too Much Girl Repels True-Blue Watchers,” *Detroit News*, February 10, 1969, America’s Historical Newspapers.

In their heyday, however, girl-watching societies were some of the first to organize or sponsor girl-watching events, pageants, and contests. Most of these events were simply beauty pageants by another name. For instance, the First International Girl-Watching Pageant, held in 1962 at the Freedomland amusement park in Bronx, NY, crowned “The Most Watchable Girl in the World” from twenty-five entrants. The event was endorsed by Sauers's American Society of Girl Watchers and, like most girl-watching events, was essentially an advertising campaign. Trans World Airlines conducted the voting for the competition. Voters cast ballots at boxes that Trans World placed at its ticket counters across the country. Prior to the competition, Sauers told a *New York Times* reporter that he hoped the event would be a “Miss Rheingold contest on a nation-wide scale,” referring to the long-running advertising ploy from Rheingold brewery that asked customers to choose a “Miss Rheingold” from six contestants.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Joe Beagin’s International Society of Girl Watchers hosted a “Most Watchable Golfer” contest to promote local San Diego golf courses, while Los Angeles’ Century City shopping mall hosted a Girl Watching Week every year from 1970 to 1974 to encourage shopping during the presumably slow days of late September.<sup>91</sup> While most of these events crowned girls deemed most watchable, girl watchers could also win recognition for their skills. Addison, Illinois native Rick Braun, for instance, was chosen as a judge for the 1972 Miss U.S.A. Pageant after winning a girl-watching contest hosted by a local radio DJ. (It is unclear what exactly Braun had to do to win this honor.)<sup>92</sup> In 1964, a girl-watching contest designed to promote

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<sup>90</sup> Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching’”; “History,” Miss Rheingold, accessed November 11, 2019, <http://missrheingold.com/history/>.

<sup>91</sup> Radoff, “1500 Male ‘Vigilantes’ Are Busy”; Farcau, “Girl Watching”; “Girl Watching Week is Mall Coming Attraction”; Associated Press, “International Girl Watcher Tells What Techniques Are Best to Use,” *Florence Times-Tri Cities Daily*, September 26, 1972; Lyle W. Price, “On the Art of Girl Watching—Or, Phooey on the Guys: In Los Angeles,” *Ann Arbor News*, October 2, 1972, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Girl Watching Week Is Once-a-Year Happening,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1972; Skip Ferderber, “Cheesecake Capital?: It’s Girl-Watching Time Again in Century City Girl-Watching Time in Century City Again,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1973; “Girl Watching Week Slated,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1974; “Girl Watching Judging Slated,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1974.

<sup>92</sup> Townsend, “Girl-Watching Champ Views Beauty Contest.”

the film *Under the Yum Yum Tree* was simply a raffle. Only men could participate and the winner walked away with a chest filled with \$350-worth of jewelry to give to the “gal” he “like[d] to watch the most.”<sup>93</sup> These contests harnessed the popularity of girl-watching, both as an activity and as a cultural trope, to aid commercial ends. Businesses knew they could entice potential costumers to sponsored events if they promised the possibility of girl-watching. But the commercialization did not stop there.

## Consuming Girl-Watching

At a moment when advertisers increasingly relied on sexualized imagery to push the latest products, girl-watching became the subject of several high-profile advertising campaigns and lent its name to a variety of products. Soon after the publication of *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, the American Tobacco Company partnered with Sauers to create a series of ad campaigns featuring illustrations and excerpts from his book. The ads ran in 205 college newspapers and 200,000 college students reportedly joined Sauers's American Society of Girl Watchers as a result.<sup>94</sup> In the mid-1960s, fashion advertising increasingly capitalized on the idea that girl watchers kept an eye on women, scrutinizing their bodies, make-up, and clothing. One fashion writer suggested that girl watchers were good for the fashion business: girl watchers “[praised] women who avoid the conformity of slovenliness,” thus raising the standards of dress for women in general.<sup>95</sup> Advertisers advised women to look their best for girl watchers by investing in the “gamut of girl-watcher colors” from Revlon lipstick or the “Girl Watcher panty” from Warner’s<sup>96</sup>, designed to be worn with ever-shortening skirts. Hosiery-

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<sup>93</sup> “Radio Station Grabs Zany Promotion For ‘Yum Yum,’ a Girl Watchers Club,” *Boxoffice*, January 13, 1964.

<sup>94</sup> Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching.’” Examples of these ads can be found with a quick search of large university dailies, such as *The Michigan Daily*.

<sup>95</sup> Radoff, “1500 Male ‘Vigilantes’ Are Busy.”

<sup>96</sup> “Advertisement: Lipstick (Revlon, Inc.),” *Vogue* 155, no. 7 (April 1, 1970): 14-15; “Fall Foundations: Stand-Up For Stripes,” *Women's Wear Daily*, May 19, 1966; Marji Kunz, “Girl Watcher,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 4, 1966.

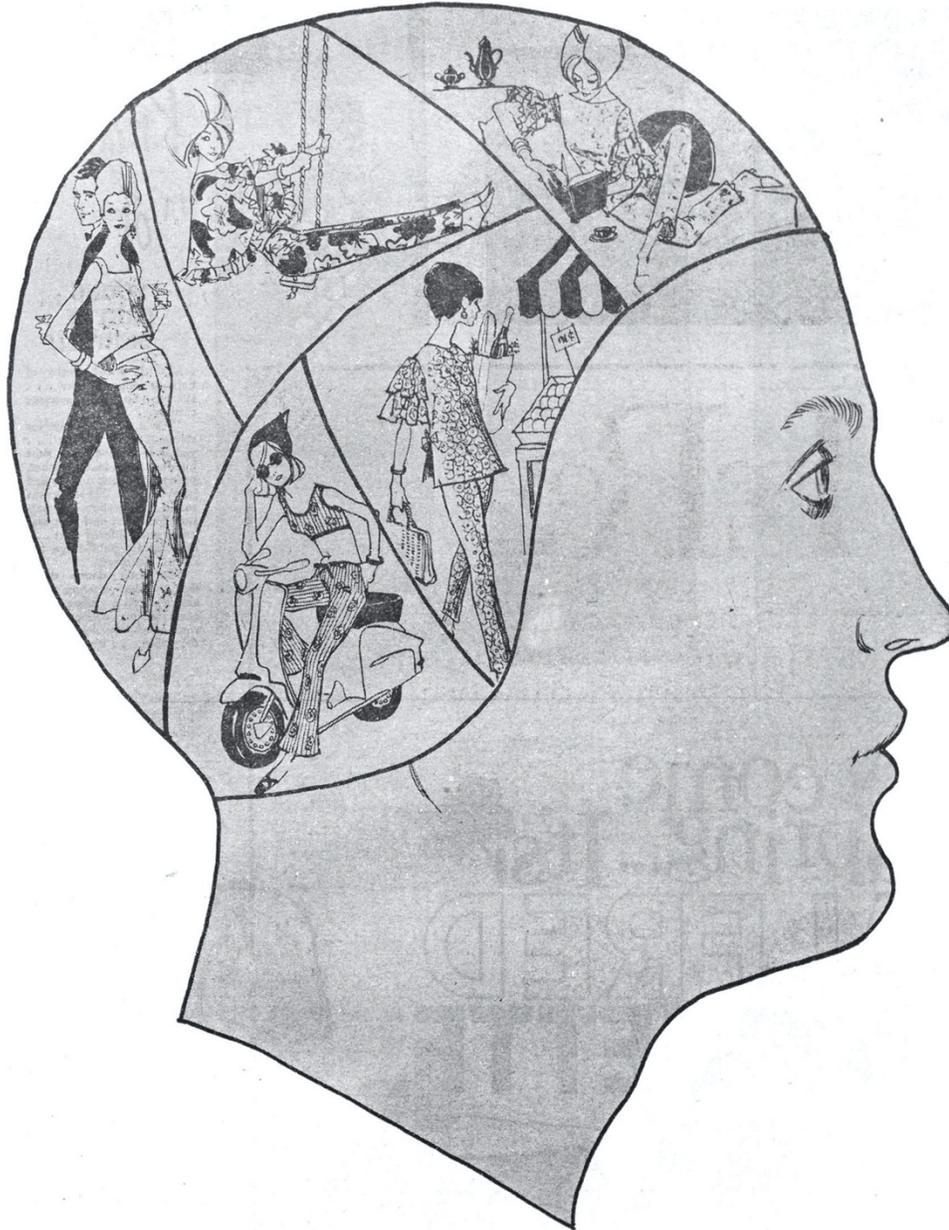
makers J. P. Stevens claimed, “Every United Air Lines Stewardess wears Finesse” stockings because they could “stand up to a full flight of ogling.”<sup>97</sup> Ten years after Lester Gaba’s window displays encouraged women shoppers to “Dress For The Girl-Watchers In Your Life,” the advertising hook was still fresh enough to appear in a 1965 television spot for Diet Pepsi. The twenty-second commercial featured a woman in a bikini walking through a marina, the sun shining and her towel and gauzy head scarf blowing in the breeze. A man lounging in an inner tube and another in full scuba gear smiled admiringly at her as jaunty Tijuana Brass Style music played in the background. The narrator announced, “The girls girl watchers watch drink Diet Pepsi Cola with only one calorie. Diet Pepsi: try it! Someone will be watching.”<sup>98</sup> Advertisers thus harnessed the promise that men were always watching to convince women to buy products that would have them looking their best. Girl-watching became part of the explicit justification for consumption.

In 1966, California-based garment company Phil Rose ran an ad in *Women’s Wear Daily* that played up many of the major themes of girl-watching: that it was a natural and timeless pastime, that a girl watcher was a specific type of man, and that women should dress and comport themselves with the assumption that men were watching them everywhere (see Figure 16). The ad features an illustration of a man’s head in profile, which took up the entire page. In a spoof of nineteenth-century phrenology charts, the top and back of his head is divided into sections, as if we are seeing into his brain. Each section features a different image of a woman. One woman sits on a swing, leaning back with her legs outstretched, her flowy blouse trailing out behind her to suggest she is in motion. A woman in a kerchief, sunglasses, and cropped top sits casually on the seat of a European-style moped. Some of the women look coquettishly out at the reader, as if aware that they are being watched. Others seem engrossed in their own activities. One woman sits on a divan, quietly reading a

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<sup>97</sup> Diana Vreeland, ed., “Advertisement: J. P. Stevens & Co., Inc.,” *Vogue* 152, no. 7 (October 15, 1968): 44.

<sup>98</sup> Gaba, “Ideas For Sweater Windows,” RetroGoop, *DIET PEPSI girl-watching Tv Commercial 1965*, accessed March 14, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1RXYEr4O\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1RXYEr4O_g).



Years and years ago Phil Rose dreamed that girls would wear pants everywhere.  
 Of course then it was just a dream, for the man whose great love it is  
 to manufacture pants for women, it was just too good to be true.  
 But season by season, Phil's collections became more and more exciting...  
 and now, as any dedicated **girl watcher** will tell you,  
 girls not only wear pants anywhere—they look even more sensational than ever.

FOLLOW THE INNOVATOR...

*Phil Rose*

3751 SOUTH HILL STREET AND CALIFORNIA MART, LOS ANGELES    1497 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY    821 MARKET STREET SAN FRANCISCO  
 MERCHANDISE MART, DALLAS    MERCHANDISE MART, CHICAGO

Copyright © 2014 Fairchild Fashion Media

Figure 16: Phil Rose advertisement, Women's Wear Daily, January 5, 1966

book with a cup of tea by her side. A woman with dark cropped hair walks through a food market, groceries in hand, seemingly unaware that she may be the object of a girl watcher's gaze. All of them are wearing Phil Rose pants. The copy at the bottom of the advertisement suggests that the eponymous Phil Rose had long "dreamed that girls would wear pants everywhere." Now in the liberated mid-1960s, women wear pants everywhere and "as any dedicated girl watcher will tell you...they look even more sensational than ever." By drawing on the imagery of nineteenth-century phrenology, the advertisement coyly suggests that girl-watching is a natural impulse, rooted to a man's biology. The women in the illustration are mapped on to different parts of the man's brain, as if each section of the brain is devoted to observing a different kind of woman or to observing women in different scenarios. While clearly meant to be humorous and playful, the ad still relied on the idea that girl-watching was a natural pastime. The ad winked at the store managers, trend setters, and fashion writers who were *Women's Wear Daily's* primary readership, as if to send knowing glances between worldly adults who knew that men could hardly help themselves from watching women. It also linked the seemingly natural inclination to watch women with a specific brand of clothing. Stock Phil Rose pants in your store, it suggested, and women would wear those pants and your girl-watching would visibly improve. The alternate message in the ad was the confirmation that men were watching women wherever they went, including while running errands or lounging at home.<sup>99</sup>

Self-proclaimed girl watchers also had a great deal to say about women's fashions throughout the 1960s, but especially in the latter half of the decade. As skirts shortened and styles grew more revealing, girl watchers debated whether such changes made girl-watching more or less entertaining. As early as 1965, the International Society of Girl Watchers expected its members to have an "awareness of fashion and style" and to judge women based on how well their outfits were put

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<sup>99</sup> "Advertisement (Phil Rose)," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 5, 1966.

together.<sup>100</sup> Such a neutral statement quickly gave way to strong opinions with the introduction of the mini skirt. Girl watchers loved and hated the mini skirt. They variously condemned the mini skirt for taking the fun out of girl-watching or declared their intentions of fighting any attempts from the fashion industry to repopularize long skirts. Sometimes, girl watchers shared both these stances nearly simultaneously. In 1967, Donald Sauers declared he hoped to form a “subsidiary” to his American Society of Girl Watchers that would specifically advocate for “the prevention of longer skirts.”<sup>101</sup> Two years later, however, Sauers was adamant that “TRUE GIRL watchers, like bird watchers, are happiest only when the subject is alive and moving and well clothed.” It doesn’t count, he argued, if a girl watcher “watches” a girl in the “center spread of a man’s magazine” or admires a “too-nude girl” he encounters in public.<sup>102</sup> A woman who revealed too much of herself in public took the challenge out of girl-watching. Similarly, a local Detroit newspaper columnist lamented that revealing fashions took the “sport” and technique out of girl-watching. Columnist Bob Talbert particular worried that girl-watching no longer required finesse or “style.” He bemoaned, “Why a 13-year-old myopic raised by two old maid recluses can now play as well as the professional who worked his way up from street corners to ball park crowds.” Using the tongue-in-cheek discourse that cast girl-watching as a professional pursuit, Talbert reported that girl watchers were going into “retirement” all over the world.<sup>103</sup>

Winking depictions of girl watchers helped advertisers sell a variety of products, but in several key moments, girl-watching was itself a commodity to be bought and sold. The commodification of girl-watching began, of course, with *The Girl Watcher’s Guide*, which sold for \$1

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<sup>100</sup> Radoff, “1500 Male ‘Vigilantes’ Are Busy.”

<sup>101</sup> Patricia McCormack, “Chief Girl-Watcher May Found Society to Prevent Longer Skirts,” *Flint Journal*, July 18, 1967, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>102</sup> Battelle, “Too Much Girl Repels True-Blue Watchers.”

<sup>103</sup> Bob Talbert, “Seeing Through the Quarry Takes Sport Out of Girl-Watching,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 8, 1969.

Talbert’s column precipitated angry response from Detroit readers who insisted that they still enjoyed girl-watching and had no intention of retiring. Talbert, “Girl-Watching Readers Irate.”

in 1954.<sup>104</sup> Soon after, enthusiasts could purchase membership in the American Society of Girl Watchers or the International Society of Girl Watchers, whose annual membership fees ranged from \$1 to \$10 in the period 1962 to 1973. Perks of membership included membership cards, lapel pins, and girl watcher kits with other novelty items.<sup>105</sup> Self-proclaimed girl watchers purchased dark glasses to facilitate surreptitious looking.<sup>106</sup> By the late 1960s, manufacturers of joke and gag gifts were selling products with girl-watching themes. If one wished to show off his propensity for furtive looking, he could buy an iron-on transfer featuring a bug-eyed man in a “Girl Watcher” shirt and decorate his own shirt with the image.<sup>107</sup> Such products were apparently purchased both by self-proclaimed girl-watchers and by their friends and relatives. In at least one case, girl watchers bragged that their wives bought them memberships to girl-watching societies.<sup>108</sup> One can imagine friends buying each other *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* for a humorous birthday gift. The fact that such purchases were likely tongue-in-cheek or gag gifts does not diminish the fact that girl-watching—that is, a version of intrusive looking—was now an activity that men paid money to participate in.

The commodification of girl-watching coincided with commodification of sexualized looking more broadly. Like girl-watching products, pornographic men’s magazines such as *Playboy* sold sexual looking to a middle-class male audience who claimed respectability. Men’s magazines like *Playboy* existed alongside advertisements featuring female models meant to allure and titillate. Advertisements and pornography had in common an emphasis on looking as the means of transmitting their sexual messages. Indeed, as cultural historian Michael Denning has argued, 1950s

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<sup>104</sup> For context, the median family income in the United States in 1954 was \$4,200 a year. US Census Bureau, “Family Income in the United States: 1954 and 1953,” The United States Census Bureau, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1955/demo/p60-020.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching?’”; “Me, a Girl Watcher?”; Elling, “On the Art of Girl Watching.”

<sup>106</sup> Marjory Smith, “Smoked Glasses Badge of Girl Watcher Cult,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 26, 1956.

<sup>107</sup> “Girl Watcher Sweatshirt T-Shirt Iron on Transfer for Tee Vintage #49,” eBay, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www.ebay.com/itm/Girl-Watcher-Sweatshirt-T-shirt-iron-on-transfer-for-Tee-vintage-49-/400769258744>.

<sup>108</sup> Radoff, “1500 Male ‘Vigilantes’ Are Busy.”

popular culture was steeped in “the voyeuristic eye.” Everything from lipstick advertisements to Hollywood films to James Bond novels drew on a “narrative structured around the look,” with the object of the look constructed as a woman and the viewer constructed as a man.<sup>109</sup> Even the pornography of *Playboy* is better defined as a representation of voyeurism than of sexuality: the pornography of the 1950s, that is, does not so much depict “sexual activities” as it depicts “women’s bodies in various states of undress.”<sup>110</sup> As such, girly magazines of the 1950s were just one part of what feminist media scholar Annette Kuhn has described as “a continuum of representations of women” with pornography occupying one end of the continuum and “such commonly available and highly socially visible representations as advertisements” at the other end.<sup>111</sup> Girl-watching products—and the advertisements that used the concept girl-watching to sell other merchandise—sat firmly on this continuum and reinforced a culture of male looking and female objectification that defined postwar consumer and popular culture.

## Furtive Looking

While girl-watching centered on consuming the female form in a variety of realms, girl watchers themselves insisted that their style of looking was furtive and thus polite and respectable. Girl watchers’ furtiveness was supposed to distinguish their chosen pastime from the more obscene practices of leering or picking up women. Girl-watching might have been a pastime, a noble hobby, or an amusing sport, depending who you asked, but girl watchers and their chroniclers almost always

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<sup>109</sup> This analysis is greatly indebted to Laura Mulvey’s groundbreaking work on Hollywood cinema, discussed in the previous chapter. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57–68.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 109.

<sup>111</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Women’s Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (New York: Verso, 1994), 112. Originally published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1982.

defined it as refined and unobtrusive. According to Donald Sauers's *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, a girl watcher cared about the object of his gaze and did not want to disturb her any more than a bird watcher wanted to disturb a rare breed of bird. A girl watcher that spoke to a girl or, worse, "ask[ed] for name and telephone number [was] like a bird watcher who [stole] eggs." To that end, his watching must be discreet: "A girl watcher *never* leers, nor does he utter a sound which might betray his joy. His reaction is secret. His pleasure is warm, quiet, internal."<sup>112</sup> Newspaper and magazine articles about girl watchers overwhelmingly agreed with this description. Readers were told it was "indiscreet ... to ogle a beautiful girl until you almost run her down."<sup>113</sup> As Ray Bauer, president of the American Society of Girl Watchers, warned succinctly in 1965, "Never get caught watching girls."<sup>114</sup>

Sauers and his followers encouraged would-be girl watchers to follow specific guidelines in order to watch girls in the most unobtrusive way possible. One of the best ways to watch girls without detection, according to these self-proclaimed experts, was to make one's eyes do all the work. Humorists and journalists claimed that turning the head to watch a girl pass or, worse, doubling back and following a girl down the street were amateur moves and not condoned by "real" girl watchers. The proper way to girl watch, according to guides and newspaper articles, was out of the corner of one's eye, using one's peripheral vision as much as possible. A glance or a quick once-over was enough to take in a girl without the watcher needing to move his head at all.<sup>115</sup> If all else failed, sunglasses could hide the watchers' eyes, so long as it was summer and sunglasses did not look out of place.<sup>116</sup> Veteran girl watchers encouraged their less experienced comrades to practice

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<sup>112</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher's Guide*, 8-9.

<sup>113</sup> "He Guides Girl-Watchers."

<sup>114</sup> Patricia McCormack, "It's Swell For Girl Watchers," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 2, 1965. Patricia McCormack was a columnist for United Press International in the 1950s and 60s. She wrote several columns on girl-watching that appeared in diverse publications like the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American*.

<sup>115</sup> Associated Press, "International Girl Watcher Tells What Techniques Are Best to Use;" West, "Girl-Watching;" Shulman, "Girl-Watching;" Smith, "Smoked Glasses Badge of Girl Watcher Cult."

<sup>116</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher's Guide*, 33.

“eyeball dexterity” and offered helpful techniques and exercises.<sup>117</sup> *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* proved the gold standard when it came to advice on the right and wrong way to watch a girl. Illustrator Dedini’s drawing of “amateur” girl-watching depicted a man who has turned his head to watch a girl (see Figure 17). His eyes bulging, he cranes his neck to ogle her. His tie flies out in all directions, suggesting the speed and suddenness with which he has whipped his head around. A pipe, still smoking, is suspended in mid-air where the man was just puffing it. It hovers briefly in that moment before it inevitably falls to the ground, forgotten by its leering owner. This illustration of the improper way to girl watch was accompanied by a variety of exercises a girl-watcher-in-training could employ to increase his “eye dexterity.” For instance, the “Triangle Test” provided a way to practice watching two girls at once. In this test, the “student” would choose two pictures of watchable girls and place them ten feet apart. He then stood ten feet from the pictures, making an equilateral triangle, and practiced looking at one picture and then the other without moving his head. Another exercise helped a girl watcher master the “once-over.” Here, the “aspirant” would stand six feet away from a coat rack and practice scanning the length of the coat rack from bottom to top, without moving his head. The exercise promised to help girl watchers who wished to admire a girl’s entire body without her noticing.<sup>118</sup>

Girl watchers justified this need for furtiveness in three main ways. Firstly, some sources suggested the girl watcher’s subtle tactics hid lewd intentions. “Furtive glances



The sign of the amateur

Figure 17: “The sign of the amateur,” Donald J. Sauer, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros, 1954), 22.

<sup>117</sup> “Montreal Said Girl Watchers Paradise,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 17, 1967.

<sup>118</sup> Sauer, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 22-25.

and shy smiles hide what lurks in the mind,” warned the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>119</sup> Furtiveness shielded women from concealed lascivious thoughts. Secondly, girl watchers claimed they did not want to scare away the objects of their gaze. The frequent comparisons between birdwatching and girl-watching helped to articulate this fear. Donald Sauers told a Reuters reporter in 1967, “Girls like to be watched, but if the watcher is flagrant the girl, like a bird, gets frightened.”<sup>120</sup> The last thing a girl watcher wanted was to lose sight of his object of admiration because she was disturbed. Finally, girl watchers did not want to be the target of a woman’s ire. As *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* warned its readers, “beautiful girls...are instinctively suspicious,” and a girl watcher who raised those suspicions might be in danger of a firm dressing down.<sup>121</sup> Furtiveness served the added purpose of bolstering a girl watcher’s sophistication and social status. *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* took pains to warn readers against behavior that could be construed as unrefined. A “knowing glance or nudge...should be considered vulgar,” so Sauers implored his readers to maintain “self-control” and to refrain from “undisciplined displays of emotion.” Girl watchers were meant to be “honorable” men who practiced their art with “dignity and personal discipline.”<sup>122</sup>

Some of the strangest and most obviously jokey suggestions for clandestine girl-watching played off prevailing Cold War anxieties and tapped into the popularity of thrillers about debonaire gentlemen spies in the vein of James Bond.<sup>123</sup> After all, like any good spy, a girl watcher was more successful if he was also hard to spot. To that end, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* instructed its readers to avoid dressing ostentatiously. Conservative dress ensured the girl watcher blended into his surroundings in such a way as to be invisible. *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* went so far as to warn, “the

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<sup>119</sup> “Girl Watching Week Is Once-a-Year Happening.”

<sup>120</sup> “Girl-Watchers’ Rules.”

<sup>121</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 32.

<sup>122</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 8-9, 29-33.

<sup>123</sup> Ian Fleming published his first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, in 1953, one year before the publication of *The Girl Watcher’s Guide*. The first installment in the wildly popular James Bond film franchise, *Dr. No*, hit theaters in 1962. Fleming said of his most famous literary creation, “I write for warm-blooded heterosexuals in railway trains, air-planes and beds.” Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life*, 152.

man who attracts attention to *himself* does not have the proper ‘soul’ for girl-watching.”<sup>124</sup> The “girlie” magazine *Girl Watcher* took it one step further and suggested that girl watchers should use the urban environment to hide their activities. Jokey photographs depicted men crouching behind garbage cans or peeking over the tops of newspapers and from behind tree trunks on urban boulevards. A woman appeared in just one of these three photographs, suggesting that girl watchers lay in wait in their hiding places whether or not a girl was present. Indeed, one caption read: “The true Girl Watcher...is dauntless and omnipresent.”<sup>125</sup>

Some publications encouraged girl watchers to channel secret agents by using code words and signals to alert friends to an approaching girl. For instance, if a group of watchers took a lunch break together, a spotter could keep on the lookout for watchable women and signal the group when one drew near. A nudge might be sufficient, but if there was a large group the spotter would be better off with an auditory signal. Various sources suggested a cough, a shout of “Tallyho,” or an “unusual word such as ‘wickiup.’”<sup>126</sup> For spotters with a dramatic flair, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* suggested an attention-grabbing technique used by a veteran girl watcher: when this spotter saw a girl worth watching, “he interrupt[ed] the conversation by saying in a loud voice, ‘Say, Hank!’ The trick, of course, [was] that no one in the group [was] named Hank, so everyone look[ed] up.”<sup>127</sup> With such evasive redirection tactics, a girl watcher could comfortably enjoy a passing woman without being discovered.

Girl-watching advocates went to great lengths to distinguish what they did from more objectionable forms of looking or flirting. In particular, girl watchers emphasized that their sport rarely had an end game. The point, according to girl-watching’s representatives, was never to solicit

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<sup>124</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 35.

<sup>125</sup> “An Introduction to Girl Watching,” *Girl Watcher*, March 1959, 5.

<sup>126</sup> Smith, “Can’t Give a Hoot;” Sauers, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 32. According to Sauers, a “wickiup” is a “hut used by the nomadic Indians of the Southwest.”

<sup>127</sup> Sauers, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 32.

dates from women but merely to watch them from afar.<sup>128</sup> This rule not only made girl-watching acceptable behavior for married men, but also lent credibility to assertions that girl-watching was quiet and genteel enough to avoid detection. Thus, it did not disturb or bother women. In a (funhouse) mirror of the Progressive-Era laws against ogling, girl-watchers in the Century City shopping district of Los Angeles said they wanted to regulate proper forms of looking from improper ones. During the shopping area's annual "Girl Watchers Week" in 1972, event organizers recruited "a corps of local secretaries and models" to ticket "offenders" who did not abide by girl-watching etiquette. "We abhor improper watching," claimed Joe Beagin of the International Society of Girl Watchers. "Being obvious and ungentlemanly about it spoils the pastime for everyone."<sup>129</sup> The distinctions between girl-watching and other forms of intrusive behaviors were also reinforced by women. When in 1974 a young woman wrote in to her local paper to ask how she should deal with the annoying leers, whistles, and sexual remarks she received from men on the street, the advice columnist, Jane Lee, responded by insisting that "we girls would never want boys to stop looking" but admitted that not all men were looking at women in a respectful way. Lee went on to interview several self-proclaimed girl watchers who insisted they what they did was different from the kind of behaviors that upset the letter-writer. "Being whistled and yelled at is a nuisance," one girl watcher conceded. "Remember, though, that the men who do this are in the minority. . . . Just looking . . . never harms anybody, unless it's made too obvious." Another insisted that as "a man of refinement and good taste, I would plead innocent to any charges of whistling or calling at girls walking down the street or otherwise constructively occupied. But as a longtime admirer of the feminine gender, I must confess to a little discreet leering now and then. I've never seen anything

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<sup>128</sup> Radoff, "1500 Male 'Vigilantes' Are Busy"; Battelle, "Too Much Girl Repels True-Blue Watchers."

<sup>129</sup> Price, "On the Art of Girl Watching."

wrong with just looking (by either sex).”<sup>130</sup> Such protestations drew clear lines between what was perceived as inappropriate, upsetting, and disruptive behaviors—looking that was “too obvious,” verbalizing, or whistling—from the innocent and supposedly unobtrusive practice of girl-watching.

Like many a cultural category, then, girl-watching was defined at least in part by what it was not. It was not lascivious; it was not leering; it was not an insult but a sign of respect; it was not dangerous. It was also not a pastime of working-class men, homosexuals, or racial minorities. If these men engaged in the furtive glances of the girl watcher—clandestinely watching strangers out of the corner of the eye—they would be labeled at best as uncouth oglers and at worst as menaces to society. While the working-class mashers and sexually suspect dandies of the early twentieth century had risked censure and even arrest for ogling women on the street, girl watchers created their own clubs, guides, and advertising campaigns without protest. The usual discussion of girl-watching as a harmless, even amusing, pastime speaks to the degree to which it was accepted in American postwar society. In casting the girl watcher’s favored pastime as a genteel, unobtrusive show of admiration, girl-watching discourse naturalized observation of strangers as the prerogative of white, middle-class, heterosexual men.

A true girl watcher’s self-control, discipline, dignity, gentility, were all supposed to mark him as a man of breeding, refinement, and high social status. His furtive glances were not the animalistic leers of the construction worker nor the appraising ogling of the masher but the surreptitious glances of the cultivated gentleman. Indeed, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* hinted repeatedly at the class position and social status of its readers, especially in its illustrations. Girl watchers were depicted almost exclusively in business attire, except when they were shown participating in leisure activities

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<sup>130</sup> Jane Lee, “Girl Watchers Sprout in Summer...Annoy,” *Detroit News*, August 7, 1974, *America’s Historical Newspapers*. One girl watcher insisted that an “ignorant comment” was best addressed with a “proper putdown” or else “ignored.” Another acknowledged that “adding outright verbalizing to the looking” must be annoying, but it wasn’t strictly girl-watching then.”

like fishing, lounging on the beach, or playing tennis. By and large, the *Guide* suggested that girl watchers were white-collar professional workers whose favorite hobby could be practiced on lunch hours and in the breaks of their normal nine-to-five jobs. Illustrations depicted elderly college professors watching young coeds, bosses admiring their secretaries, library patrons turning to gaze at beautiful bookworms, or tourists watching Pacific island girls through binoculars. A few men were shown in other types of jobs—the deli worker serving coffee to a girl watcher on his lunch hour, the cowboys branding a bull as a woman walks by in tight jeans and a western-style shirt—but they were few or, in the case of the cowboys, made up for their manual labor with hyper-masculinity.<sup>131</sup> The class distinction of girl watchers was reinforced by depictions of girl watchers in other newspaper and magazine articles. Girl watchers were almost always white and white-collar: ad-men, college professors, stock brokers, that is, men who worked in office blocks in bustling urban downtowns.

This characterization of the girl watcher as an urban professional makes sense, considering Sauers's own day job as an advertising copywriter in Manhattan and the *Guide's* origin story. According to the *New York Times*, Sauers decided to create the American Society of Girl Watchers and write a guide to girl-watching during an “informal Madison Avenue luncheon” with “a handful of advertising men.”<sup>132</sup> In these post-*Mad Men* days, it is hard not to conjure up a picture of sharply dressed advertising executives excitedly sketching out the idea for a girl watcher's guide over a lunch of martinis and Lucky Strikes. Whether or not such a picture is accurate, the Madison Avenue world peaked through in the pages of Sauers's guide. For instance, because “thousands of girl watchers [are] employed in nine-to-five careers” in city centers, *The Girl Watcher's Guide* suggested taking up girl-watching over the lunch hour. During this prime time, the guide pointed out, thousands of

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<sup>131</sup> Karen D. Pyke has argued that, unlike middle-class men, working-class men could revive a flagging masculinity by more closely associating themselves with a work life that emphasized brawn and brotherhood. Karen D. Pyke, “Class-Based Masculinities: The Interdependence of Gender, Class, and Interpersonal Power,” *Gender and Society* 10, no. 5 (1996): 527–49. See also Ava Baron, “Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69, no. 1 (March 2006): 143–60.

<sup>132</sup> Kandel, “Advertising: Pageant to Hail ‘Girl Watching.’”

watchers and the girls they like to watch spilled out onto city streets ready to play their parts in this urban sport.<sup>133</sup> A helpful illustration depicted two men in suits walking down a city street, surrounded by skyscrapers and throngs of women waiting to be admired.<sup>134</sup> These men were presumed to be employed in the city and their neat attire and refined demeanor—their noses are tilted slightly in the air and they are careful not to ogle or leer too obviously—suggest the refinement and gentility of a true girl watcher (see Figure 18).

While the story of Mack Ingram demonstrates the ways that whites cast Black men’s looks as “eye rape” rather than “genteel” girl-watching, girl-watching as a category was not entirely inaccessible to Black men. From girl-watching’s inception, but increasingly in the mid- to late 1960s, the Black press in places like Los Angeles,

Baltimore, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia discussed the merits of girl-watching and ran girl-watching human interest pieces that looked similar (and were sometimes identical) to those that ran in the white press. Prominent Black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* and the Baltimore *Afro-American* ran white reporters’ and columnists’ pieces from wire services like the International News Service or United Press International. Thus, a pieces by noted white columnist Patricia McCormack on the pleasures of girl-watching (and man-hunting) appeared in the *Afro-American* and the *Defender*



First Field Trip

Figure 18: “First Field Trip,” Donald J. Sauer, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* (New York, NY: Harper & Bros, 1954), 26.

<sup>133</sup> Sauer, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 31.

<sup>134</sup> Sauer, *Girl Watcher’s Guide*, 26.

while the Norfolk, Virginia *New Journal and Guide* published white journalist Phyllis Battelle's interview with Donald Sauers just weeks after the release of *The Girl Watcher's Guide*.<sup>135</sup> Battelle and McCormack's articles helped to spread girl-watching discourse into the Black press, complete with the language of "gentility" and tips on how to watch women surreptitiously. In 1968, as girl-watching waned, white journalist Robert Musel interviewed a fashion boutique owner in London who lamented women's lengthening skirts. One of life's "innocent pleasures" was on its way out, sighed the boutique owner, namely "following a miniskirt up the steep steps to the top of a doubledecker bus."<sup>136</sup> The *New Journal and Guide* reprinted Musel's interview in its Home section, next to announcements of the "Ten Best Coiffured Women," debutante celebrations, and sorority charity events. These girl-watching pieces—produced by white journalists and published in Black newspapers—suggest that the discourse of girl-watching was a part of the way Black media and readers made sense of heterosexual desire, relationships, and intrusive behaviors. The white-produced girl-watching articles published in Black newspapers rarely depicted specific women or men, letting readers fill in the details and thus allowing for the possibility that Black men could be girl watchers and Black women could be the ones who girl watchers watched.<sup>137</sup>

On the other hand, Black journalists' girl-watching pieces often explicitly depicted Black girl watchers. Photo essays about summertime vacationing, a popular context for discussing girl-watching in both Black and white papers, might show a row of Black women in bikinis and a Black man admiring the view. The *Afro-American*, for instance, advertised the vacationing opportunities in

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<sup>135</sup> Patricia McCormack, "Girl-Watching Can Be Pleasing And Profitable To Engineers," *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 26, 1965; Patricia McCormack, "Catch a Man?: Hunt for the Male Is Exhilarating Sport," *Afro-American*, January 1, 1966; Phyllis Battelle, "The New, And Ever Old, Art Of Girl Watching," *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), January 29, 1955.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Musel, "Hemlines: What Goes Up Eventually Comes Down," *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), January 6, 1968.

<sup>137</sup> An exception is the photograph of a young, white boy watching a grown white woman in a bikini on a beach that the *Chicago Defender* reprinted from United Press International in 1964. "Tiny Tot's Double-Take," *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 18, 1964.

Atlantic City with a spread on the beautiful women one could encounter on the beach. Not less than eleven young Black women in swimsuits and beachwear illustrated the piece. The main photograph featured a row of eight Black women, all in swimsuits, standing arm-in-arm in a line (see Figure 19). A young Black man in swimming trunks and a beach hat sits casually in a beach chair in the foreground. In the microfilmed copy available for this project, the man's facial expression is not discernible, but according to the article copy, he has a "grin on his face" and is "obviously tickled to death." Indeed, the unnamed author lamented that the man was an example of an "ogglers [sic]," the loud, obnoxious, "amature [sic]" leers who were replacing the "bonafide girl watchers." The article was humorous in tone: the *Afro-American* scoffed that one of the men was "idolizing" his own wife. This was no anti-masher tirade against leering men on street corners, but a tongue-in-cheek reprimand leveled at men who were too outwardly admiring of beautiful women. Indeed, far from



Figure 19: "On the Beach at A.C.," *Afro-American*, July 29, 1967.

censuring Black men for ogling Black women, there is an undercurrent of fun and celebration in the piece. Everyone in the photographs is smiling. The women pose with one leg slightly in front of the other, to show off their figures for the camera. Everyone appears to be having a wonderful time, soaking up the sun and admiring the beautiful people around them. The men may not have been part of the “vanishing breed” of girl watchers, but they certainly were not “eye rapists” either. Overenthusiastic, perhaps, but as the *Afro-American* suggested, that was to be expected since the women were as pretty as they ever had been: if the girl watcher was on the wane, “thank heaven girls haven’t changed,” the author reflected.<sup>138</sup>

While the Black press used the girl watcher trope far less frequently than white newspapers, its inclusion even in small doses suggests that there were circumstances under which Black men could be girl watchers. Namely, when the object of their admiration was a Black woman. Thus a 1968 fashion spread in the *Milwaukee Star* advertised “Girl Watcher Fashions” with Black models in the latest styles of dresses and slacks. While not the bikini-centered photo essay that was possible in articles about summertime vacationing, the use of the girl watcher moniker suggested that the fashions on display were designed to draw the attention of a girl watcher, who would himself presumably be Black.<sup>139</sup> A similar spread in the *Afro-American* a year later made only tenuous connections to the world of fashion. The spread featured three “professional models” and college students who sported swimwear and flares. However, the piece began, “Now that we have your attention you’ll be glad to know that this week we’re not concerning ourselves so much with the fashions the models are wearing.” Instead, the piece went on to discuss the three women, Trina Taylor, Frances Ladimirault, and Rosalyn Smith, all three “rare and precious” examples of the

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<sup>138</sup> “On the Beach at A.C.,” *Afro-American*, July 29, 1967. A similar piece published in a Black Milwaukee newspaper included a photo essay of beachgoers enjoying Lake Michigan on the first hot day of the year and mused on the excellent girl-watching that could be had there. “Heat: Common Denominator Equals Love on the Lake,” *Milwaukee Star*, June 12, 1968.

<sup>139</sup> “Girl Watcher Fall Fashions,” *Milwaukee Star*, October 19, 1968.

“species” “Gloriso Corinitus” as defined by *The Girl Watchers’ Manual*. The lack of brand or store names, coupled with the article title, “For Girl Watchers Only,” suggested the article was not intended to get women shoppers into stores but to titillate male readers.<sup>140</sup>

Sometimes Black men called themselves girl watchers, though not until the late 1960s and early 1970s. When the *Milwaukee Star* profiled local teen Kenneth Coulter, Jr. in 1969, for instance, he listed his hobbies as “reading Black History, writing, playing football, and girl watching.”<sup>141</sup> A couple years later, boxer George Foreman bore the title of “Champion Girl Watcher” when he posed with a *Playboy* bunny, also Black, in a photo in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*.<sup>142</sup> The relative lateness of these examples might be insignificant but it might mean that the moniker of “girl watcher” could really only be applied to Black men once it lost its specificity. By the late 1960s, girl-watching was no longer associated so closely with Sauers's *Girl Watcher’s Guide*. It might still have a whiff of tongue-in-cheek “gentility,” but the imagery and strict “rules” of Sauers's brand of girl-watching were largely forgotten by the end of the decade. Girl-watching had become part of the American lexicon and girl watchers no longer needed to fit the mold set out by Sauers and his followers.

What effect did this imagery have on Black women’s experiences of public space? Previous chapters have shown how Black communities more broadly, and some Black women themselves, especially resented intrusive behaviors from white men but that the Black press sometimes also reprimanded Black men who molested Black women and supposedly cast the entire race in a poor light. The adoption of the girl-watching trope in the Black press in the late 1960s, even in the few examples here, suggests that it was acceptable for some Black men to ogle Black women under the guise of genteel girl-watching.<sup>143</sup> It is possible that such an acceptance meant Black women would

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<sup>140</sup> “For Girl Watchers Only,” *Afro-American*, May 3, 1969.

<sup>141</sup> “Fancy Fox: Kenneth Coulter, Jr.,” *Milwaukee Star*, January 4, 1969.

<sup>142</sup> United Press International, “Champ,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 25, 1971.

<sup>143</sup> A few other examples of the use of girl-watching in the Black press, see Brown, “No Cover Charge”; The Duffer, “Girl Watching Puts New Dimension in His Golf,” *Afro-American*, August 20, 1966; “Now Hear This!” *Los Angeles*

have faced more resistance to complaints of intraracial stranger intrusions than they might have in earlier decades. While specific examples of stranger intrusions are difficult to find in general for this period, and especially for Black women, a researcher for the University of Minnesota collected interviews with thirty-some Black teenage girls in California in the mid-1970s that speak to the prevalence of stranger intrusions in their lives. Conducted half a decade after the publication of most of the girl-watching pieces above, these interviews describe the daily intrusions Black teenage girls experienced as they walked down the street. Twenty-two of the thirty-three girls interviewed said they had experienced a “boy” or “man” making “a pass at” them in a public space. Their reactions ranged from embarrassment to validation to disgust, but not one seemed to think such behaviors were anything other than normal and expected.<sup>144</sup>

While the vast majority of girl-watching discourses depicted white women as the “girls girl-watcher’s watch,” there are a few notable exceptions. For one, *The Girl Watcher’s Guide* and subsequent girl-watching publications suggested that traveling was one way to find girls worthy of being watched. While this often meant visiting Western capitals like Rome, London, and Paris, the advice could also take on a flavor of exoticization. For instance, the *Guide* explained that, just as a birdwatcher would travel to the “South Seas” if he wished to see a “South Sea Island bird,” so a girl-watcher should travel to see “rare, South Sea Island girls.” On the adjacent page, illustrator Dedini had drawn an image of two white men watching a “South Sea Island girl.” The men are in suits, one with a bowtie, and both wear hats. The shorter, portlier of the two has binoculars pressed to his face and is staring through them at a passing woman. The binoculars are probably not needed as the woman looks to be about ten feet away from the two men, and so the presence of visual aids adds a bit of telltale girl-watcher humor to the image. The woman herself appears to be completely naked

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*Sentinel*, May 25, 1972; Reverend James A. Pollard, Sr., “Can Christians Be Girl Watchers?,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 28, 1977.

<sup>144</sup> Box 5, Project Girl Records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

save for a see-through grass skirt and a beaded necklace. She has long dark hair and eyes so dark there appear to be no whites. A bird perched on her shoulder strategically covers her breasts with its tail, and she wears a flower in her hair.<sup>145</sup> A similar piece in a 1963 issue of the *Chicago Tribune* suggested that American men visiting Jamaica would benefit from the island's excellent girl-watching. The "local girl" was the most desirable object of girl-watcher's gaze, according to author Richard Joseph, because unlike "tourist girls" they were not "leery of the tropical sun" and did not "cover up." Joseph specifically went into the racial and ethnic make-up of "local girls," describing the "Jamaican people" as "a melange of African, Chinese, European, and East Indian." He noted, "whenever you see an outstanding beauty—which is often—chances are strong that she's of at least partly Chinese descent."<sup>146</sup>

The image of an exotic woman of an island nation turning the heads of white American men was not new. For decades, American popular literature from Herman Melville to classical Hollywood cinema had popularized the idea that women in foreign lands, especially non-white women, were sexually exciting, dangerous, or promiscuous. The "South Seas" in particular were supposed to be "a sensuous Arcadia where, unrestrained by western social mores, Islanders engaged freely in sexual relations within and outside the bounds of marriage - doing so with an oft-envied abandon and lack of remorse."<sup>147</sup> These ideas persisted into World War II. American servicemen stationed in the South Pacific often exoticized the local women they met and the military propagated the idea that local cultures were sexually permissive.<sup>148</sup> The image of the South Sea Island girl in *The Girl Watcher's Guide* may have brought to mind such images for many Americans, including many

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<sup>145</sup> Sauers, *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, 12.

<sup>146</sup> Joseph, "On Crocodile Wrestling, Girl Watching in Jamaica."

<sup>147</sup> Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, "Searching for Dorothy Lamour: War and Sex in the South Pacific, 1941-45," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1999): 5.

<sup>148</sup> Brawley and Dixon, "Searching for Dorothy Lamour." See also Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

veterans who spent time overseas themselves.<sup>149</sup> Or perhaps it brought to mind the popular Broadway musical *South Pacific*, which had just won the Pulitzer Prize and multiple Tony awards in 1950. In either case, *The Girl Watcher's Guide* made it clear that girl-watching was not reserved solely for buxom white women.

## Women Respond

While women were encouraged to dress and choose their soft drinks to please potential girl watchers, women and girls also occasionally joined in the watching themselves. After *Seventeen* magazine published its piece on girl-watching in 1963, girls wrote in to insist that girl-watching was a “two-way street.” As reader F.S. explained, “Any boy who thinks he is alone while staring at a prize specimen is probably being stared at that very moment by a girl who’s admiring *his* handsome masculine features.”<sup>150</sup> Human interest stories on “man watching” appeared periodically in newspapers from about the mid-1960s through the 1970s. Many closely mirrored girl-watching discourse in their humorous tone and emphasis on discreetness and gentility.<sup>151</sup> Others clung to postwar gender roles, conflating man watching with husband hunting.<sup>152</sup> Still others carried an homophobic undertone like the 1966 column that ridiculed men who used cosmetics like hairspray to make themselves more attractive to women: “yes, ‘he’ is using that staple from ‘her’ beauty chest,”

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<sup>149</sup> The Guide’s author, Donald J. Sauer, was himself an Army veteran. “Donald J. Sauer,” Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938-1946 (Enlistment Records), Record Group 64, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893&mtch=1&cat=WR26&tf=F&q=donald+j.+sauers&bc=sl&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=794185>.

<sup>150</sup> “Your Letters: Two-Way Street,” *Seventeen*, August 1963.

<sup>151</sup> Cawthon, “Try Boy-Watching in Eskimo Sunglasses”; Kramer, “American Society of Girl Watchers Has 50,000 Card Carrying Members;” Joyce Carter, “Man-Watching,” (Toronto) *Globe and Mail*, February 10, 1972; “Boy-Watching,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 16, 1974.

<sup>152</sup> “Man Hunt? Work and Prey,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1965.

smirked the piece.<sup>153</sup> Such cosmetic tricks seemed to work, however, and by the 1970s women could join their own Men Watchers' Society and vote for the most watchable male celebrities each year.<sup>154</sup>

Despite girl watchers' insistence that their pastime was furtive and undetectable, women were far from oblivious to the practice. As one woman told the Associated Press in 1972, "I can tell when somebody turns around to look at me. You know, it's like you can tell when someone's staring at you."<sup>155</sup> Women had varying reactions to the knowledge that they were being watched. In the 1960s, married girl watchers claimed their wives did not mind the hobby and even occasionally attending girl watchers' meetings or bought their husbands girl watcher club memberships.<sup>156</sup> Such endorsements from wives lent girl-watching further credibility and gentility, but they also suggested that some women considered themselves to be in on the joke. That being said, women were called upon to defend or denounce girl-watching far more frequently in the 1970s than they ever were during the 1950s and 1960s. This was in part because women's liberationists were attacking girl-watching and other forms of intrusive behaviors and so newspaper reporters and girl watchers themselves began turning to women to either confirm the feminist analysis of girl-watching or to refute it. Some women interviewed for pieces on girl-watching explained that they enjoyed being looked at because it validated their physical attractiveness. In language strikingly similar to that seen in the 1940s, middle-class white women in particular claimed they would be disappointed if they didn't receive the odd glance from a man now and again.<sup>157</sup> One married Los Angeles woman claimed she especially liked going to parts of the city where she was watched because otherwise she

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<sup>153</sup> Patricia McCormack, "The Boy-Watching Game," *Boston Globe*, October 31, 1966.

<sup>154</sup> "Men-Watchers Society Opens For Membership," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 11, 1973; "Morning Briefing: O. J. Simpson Among Men the Man Watchers Watch," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1976; "O.J. Is Watchable," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 17, 1977; Jennings Parrott, "Women Pick a 'Stallion' and 'The Fonz,'" *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1977.

<sup>155</sup> Price, "On the Art of Girl Watching."

<sup>156</sup> Radoff, "1500 Male 'Vigilantes' Are Busy."

<sup>157</sup> See for instance Lee, "Girl Watchers Sprout in Summer."

felt “downgraded.”<sup>158</sup> Some women explicitly refuted the claims of women’s liberationists. A woman calling herself Mary L. told the *Chicago Tribune*, “Any woman who pretends to be offended because she gets complimentary glances is a little bit psychotic.”<sup>159</sup> However, women were not universally fans of girl-watching and sometimes their opinions differed along generational lines. For instance, when a teenage girl wrote in to a *Detroit News* advice columnist about how much men’s ogling and catcalling annoyed her, the older woman responded with a string of responses from girl watchers who insisted that what they did was respectful and subdued.<sup>160</sup>

### **Girl-Watching on the Wane**

Girl-watching’s last great hurrah took place in the Century City shopping center in Los Angeles, California. For five years in the early 1970s, the Century City Chamber of Commerce hosted a “Girl-Watching Week” that featured the crowning of Century City’s Most Watchable Girl. The event ran from 1970 to 1974 and, each year, the event garnered press coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* as well as other local and national newspapers.<sup>161</sup> Girl-watching was meant to attract shoppers to Century City mall and coverage of the event often placed advertised deals alongside tips for proper “girl-watching etiquette.”<sup>162</sup> Reporting on the event sometimes made reference to “press agents” and “publicists” who encouraged reporters to highlight the event’s sponsors. The winning Most Watchable Girl also received prizes from event sponsors. In 1973, the winning contestant walked away with \$1000-worth of prizes, including a weekend getaway at Century Plaza Hotel and a

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<sup>158</sup> Ferderber, “Cheesecake Capital?”

<sup>159</sup> Fortney, “On Girl Watching.”

<sup>160</sup> Lee, “Girl Watchers Sprout in Summer.”

<sup>161</sup> “Girl-Watching Week”; Farcau, “Girl Watching”; “Girl Watching Week is Mall Coming Attraction”; Associated Press, “International Girl Watcher Tells What Techniques Are Best”; Price, “On the Art of Girl Watching”; “Girl Watching Week Is Once-a-Year Happening”; Ferderber, “Cheesecake Capital?; “Girl Watching Week Slated”; “Girl Watching Judging Slated.”

<sup>162</sup> “Girl Watching Week Is Mall Coming Attraction.”

“soft drink known for its girl-watching advertising,” likely *Diet Pepsi*. The Most Watchable Girl also held the honor of officiating at Century City events for one year. If this sounds like an irreverent take on a more traditional pageant, organizers admitted as much to reporters. The twenty-three-year-old Century City Civic Council executive director, Steve Lantz, told the *Los Angeles Times* that Girl-Watching Week was “not...like an onerous beauty pageant. It almost comes off as a spoof.”<sup>163</sup>

Almost from its inception, Century City’s Girl-Watching Week sparked mixed reactions, including protests and letters to the editor from “women’s libbers” and their supporters. In 1971, local resident Bruce W. Farcau chastised the organizers for endorsing “blatant staring accompanied by suggestive looks.” Farcau forcefully denounced the week as the “organization of this mental rape” and explained that girl-watching was “at best embarrassing and at worst highly degrading for the hapless young lady.” Farcau emphasized it was particularly unfair to subject women employees to girl-watching, as they could not choose to avoid Century City during the week.<sup>164</sup> The following year, the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) released a similar statement denouncing Girl-Watching Week “because it invades the privacy of women who work or shop in Century City ... forcing them either to remain indoors for a week, or to submit meekly to the unwanted, leering scrutiny of girl watchers.”<sup>165</sup> In response, subsequent reporting on the event highlighted comments from women who enjoyed being watched, as if to counter feminist protests. In 1973, women told a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that they were “flattered” at being watched and even that they wished men were more “aggressive” and actually approached women. That year, event organizers expected “little problem” from organizations like NOW and commented that feminist protests had actually raised the profile of the event and brought more “oglers” to Century

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<sup>163</sup> Ferderber, “Cheesecake Capital?”

<sup>164</sup> Farcau, “Girl Watching.”

<sup>165</sup> Associated Press, “International Girl Watcher Tells What Techniques Are Best.” Note here the almost verbatim similarities to anti-masher rhetoric that scorned the “scrutinizing attention” of mashers and warned that such leering looks forced women to change their routes through the city. For example, see, “‘Masher’ on the Postoffice Steps Annoy Women Nightly,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 7, 1910.

City.<sup>166</sup> Despite such grandstanding, Girl-Watching Week's days were numbered. Whether because of changing cultural norms, the influence of the feminist movement, or disorganization and lack of leadership on the Century City civic council, the event petered out without much fanfare by the mid-1970s.

The protests of Century City's Girl-Watching Week were indicative of a wider feminist backlash against girl-watching as an organized activity. As the feminist movement gathered steam in the late 1960s, both girl-watching in particular and men's intrusive behaviors more generally faced more and louder opposition. A group of women organized an "ogle-in" on Wall Street in 1970 to turn their gaze and jeers on the businessmen who harassed women as they walked to work each day.<sup>167</sup> An article in a local paper in Ann Arbor, Michigan epitomized feminist reactions to girl-watching. The *Ann Arbor News's* Liz Elling eschewed the language of "pastime" and "sport" and instead labeled girl-watching an "age-old problem women face" and an "invasion of our [women's] privacy." Elling proclaimed she would rather get a "bomb in the mail" than have a man wolf whistle at her.<sup>168</sup> Elling's article ran alongside an older style piece about the International Girl Watcher's Society, complete with quotes from founder Joe Beagin, as if the paper wanted to pitch the two views of girl-watching against each other. However, by the mid-1970s, articles about "women's libber" reactions to girl-watching, while not necessarily sympathetic to feminism, were becoming more frequent and the tongue-in-cheek articles about girl-watching as a sport were dissipating.<sup>169</sup> The next chapter will explore how feminist writers like Elling—as well as feminist activists, theorists,

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<sup>166</sup> Ferderber, "Cheesake Capital?" This article also claimed that feminists had tried to sabotage the event in previous years by submitting "ugly girls" to compete in the Girl-Watching contest. These claim seems dubious at best.

<sup>167</sup> "Women's Liberation," *Now*, hosted by Marlene Sanders, May 25, 1970, video tape, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives; United Press International, "Females Retaliate: 'Hi Sweetie' Greets Men on Park Avenue," *Chicago Tribune*, June 10, 1970; Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to Present* (New York: Modern Library, 2011), 240; *Dr Karla Jay at HOLLARev 2014*, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJBQ\\_xs350U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJBQ_xs350U).

<sup>168</sup> Elling, "On the Art of Girl Watching--Or, Phooey on the Guys."

<sup>169</sup> See for example Ingrid Bengis, "On Getting Angry," *Ms*, July 1972; Fortney, "On Girl Watching"; Pilate, "Unhand Us, Ya Perverts."

and academics—began to denaturalize men’s intrusive behaviors and define a problem they called “street harassment.”

## Conclusion

As the popularity of organized girl-watching waned, girl-watching as a cultural trope lost its specificity. By the 1980s, girl-watching as a term was still in use, but it had become detached from the societies, manuals, and prescribed rules that had given the pastime a more specific meaning and currency in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>170</sup> Girl-watching slowly became synonymous with ogling and other forms of looking that men directed at women. In its heyday, however, girl-watching was a potent cultural trope that articulated a specific kind of white men’s intrusive looking as respectable and natural. The humor with which girl watchers and their chroniclers described girl-watching effectively trivialized uninvited looking, the kind of looking that women said they found uncomfortable in previous *and* successive decades. Girl-watching was a joke, and it was the joking that trivialized this form of men’s stranger intrusions for many Americans in the post-war years. By emphasizing their furtiveness and respectability, girl watchers also argued that they watched women in a respectful way that set them apart from uncouth oglers. Indeed, the girl-watching of middle-class white professional men contrasted starkly with the charge of “eye rape” leveled at black farmer Mack Ingram. Though Ingram’s lawyers would try to argue that men had a natural impulse to look at women, and thus Ingram’s conviction would endanger all men who enjoyed looking at women, it

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<sup>170</sup> For post-1970s examples of “girl-watching” as a more generic term, see Dick Mayer, “‘The Lady Stroh’s Open’: Great Days for Golf and girl-watching,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 13, 1978; “Watching All the Persons Go By,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1980; “Paris Has Decided on girl-watching,” (Toronto) *Globe and Mail*, November 26, 1985; Jim Sanderson, “Galled by Her Girl-Watching Fiance,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1987; Abigail Van Buren, “Girl Watching Upsets Girlfriend: Dear Abby,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1989; Chuck Stone, “Two August ‘Exercises’ Changing with the Times,” *Flint Journal*, August 23, 1993, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Girl Watching: An Inevitable Outcome of Living in New York Where Someone Is Always Taller,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2005; Jennifer Medina, “Girl-Watching, Tanning And (of Course) Lifesaving,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2005.

was clear from his arrest and trial that Black men's looks carried a different meaning for whites than white men's looks. The lynching of Emmett Till only solidified the double standard that cast white men's looks as "girl-watching" and Black men's looks (or whistles) as akin to rape. Still, the fact that some Black men embraced the moniker of girl watcher in the late 1960s suggests that, as girl-watching as a term became detached from the rules and middle-class white associations of Donald Sauers's *The Girl Watcher's Guide*, girl-watching became accessible to Black men, especially when they looked at Black women.

Girl-watching's potency lived on in later years, even if its specificity did not. A final anecdote suggests how discourses of girl-watching like these successfully linked furtive ogling with respectability and gentility by the 1970s. In the July 1972 issue of *Ms.* magazine, writer Ingrid Bengis published an essay describing her everyday experiences of sexism, from fellow commuters groping her in the subway to the men who "make psst psst noises at me from the sidewalk or from the safety of their cars."<sup>171</sup> A key moment in her piece revolved around one experience of street harassment from construction workers, which Bengis described as "their usual number."<sup>172</sup> This is a telling description, for Bengis did not have to explain what the construction workers' "usual number" was: their leers and catcalls were self-evident and linked to their working-class identity. Bengis goes on to explain that she held men like her book editor and "other 'average guys' responsible ... [for] the construction workers," but she did not expect seemingly respectable "average guys" to do the ogling themselves. In classic girl-watcher style, such "respectable men edge[d] up to [her] surreptitiously instead of staring openly" and "insist[ed] on wearing...a veneer of courtly respectability."<sup>173</sup> While Bengis found this behavior irritating, these genteel displays of sexism were clearly distinguished from the construction workers' "usual number." For this writer, at least, the construction worker had

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<sup>171</sup> Bengis, "On Getting Angry," 66.

<sup>172</sup> Bengis, "On Getting Angry," 70.

<sup>173</sup> Bengis, "On Getting Angry," 71.

become the ubiquitous ogler while his white collar counterpart was protected by his middle-class respectability and blended into the urbanscape, just as *The Girl Watcher's Guide* hoped he would.

# Epilogue

## “The Problem of Every Woman”

In the summer of 2014, feminist activist and academic Karla Jay spoke at an anti-street harassment conference in New York City. Jay had led a distinguished career in activism and academia. She had worked as Distinguished Professor of English at Pace University where she ran the school’s women’s and gender studies program. She had been active in the Redstockings feminist group, the Gay Liberation Front, and had been part of the Lavender Menace group that protested the exclusion of lesbian women from mainstream feminist activism in the 1970s. The non-profit group Hollaback had asked her to speak at their conference because of her role in organizing an “Ogle-In” in New York City in 1970. The Ogle-In was a piece of comic theater where feminist activists “turn[ed] the tables on the men on Wall Street” who harassed them daily. Jay and a dozen or so of her friends wandered up and down Wall Street ogling and catcalling businessmen on their way to work. As Jay described it in 2014, “When the men emerged from the train station, the subway station, we called them names, we made whistling noises, we sucked our mouths at them, we made the gestures that they made. ... The men’s jaws fell and they ran. They started running down the street. They didn’t know what to do.”<sup>1</sup>

The Ogle-In arose in response to a spate of girl-watching episodes that made their way into national newspapers between 1968 and 1970. The first and most famous object of these incidents

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<sup>1</sup> *Dr Karla Jay at HOLLARev 2014*, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJBQ\\_xs350U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJBQ_xs350U).

was Francine Gottfried, a twenty-one-year-old computer operator for Chemical Bank New York Trust Company in New York City. In September 1968, Gottfried's shapely figure attracted a crowd of onlookers as she emerged from the subway station near the New York Stock Exchange. Men working in the area had apparently discovered the exact time Gottfried usually arrived at the subway station and had begun waiting for her at the entrance. According to the *New York Times*, the crowd was so large that it stopped traffic and police had to escort Gottfried to her work. Bemused, Gottfried told the *Times*, "I think they're all crazy. What are they doing this for?" Gottfried's story made international headlines and was followed by several similar stories in 1968 and 1969, all featuring "busty" women who drew crowds and stopped traffic on Wall Street.<sup>2</sup>

Karla Jay recalled reading these stories, and particularly remembered Gottfried's experience as the "most egregious example" of street harassment that she had seen.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by the

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<sup>2</sup> "Girl on Wall St. Turns Bull and Bear Into Wolf," *New York Times*, September 20, 1968: The New York Times with Index; United Press International, "Wall St. Waits in Vain for Francine," *Boston Globe*, September 21, 1968: The Boston Globe; "10,000 Wait in Vain for Reappearance of Wall Street's Sweater Girl," *New York Times*, September 21, 1968: The New York Times with Index; "Bulls' and 'Bears' Become 'Wolves,'" *Washington Post*, September 21, 1968: The Washington Post; "New York Girl Watchers Strike Out," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 21, 1968; "Prominent Figure on Wall St: Standout Stands up 15,000," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 21, 1968; "Wall St. Gang Goes Wall-Eyed," *Detroit Free Press*, September 21, 1968: Detroit Free Press; "Wall Street Bulls, Bears Turn Wolves Over a Woman," *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1968: Chicago Tribune; "Wall Street Figure," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 21, 1968: The Atlanta Constitution; "Wall Street's New Statistics: 43-25-37," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1968; Thomas Herman, "Buxom Wonder Girl Of Wall Street Gets Raft of Show Biz Bids: Friday Crowd Waiting to See Her Walk to Work Tops Prior Day, but She Fails to Appear," *Wall Street Journal*, September 23, 1968; "Boxers Want to Guard Francine: New York, Sept. 24," *South China Morning Post*, September 25, 1968 "Wall Street Traffic Jam Waiting for Francine," *Jerusalem Post*, September 25, 1968; "Girls Project Figures To Give Wall Street Even Rosier Outlook: Contests Held in Los Angeles, Cleveland for Challengers To New York Wonder Woman," *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 1968; Kenneth J Fanucchi, "She Out-Figures Wall St.'s Francine," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1968; "43-25-37 Balances Out at \$100,000 a Year," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1968; "Francine's New Figure Is a Beaut--\$100,000!," *Detroit Free Press*, October 3, 1968; Associated Press, "3 More Enter," *Florence Times-Tri Cities Daily*, October 5, 1968; Associated Press, "Another Boom, Bust Day on Wall Street," *Observer-Reporter*, October 5, 1968; Associated Press, "Bust Boom Brings Police," *Kentucky New Era*, October 5, 1968; Associated Press, "It's Boom or Bust Day for Wall Street," *Tuscaloosa News*, October 5, 1968; Associated Press, "More Buxom Beauties Invade Wall Street," *Normal Hour*, October 5, 1968; Canadian Press, "Real Battle 'Busts' Out," *Montreal Gazette*, October 5, 1968; Arthur Everett, "Wall St.'s Day of Boom, Bust," *Boston Globe*, October 5, 1968; "The Bedlam Over Busts: Two Beauties Saved From Pushing Wall Street Crowd," *Washington Post*, October 5, 1968; Erma Bombeck, "Wall St. Inflation Takes New Shape," *Detroit Free Press*, October 16, 1968; Betty Flynn, "Francine Brought 'Sunshine,'" *Washington Post*, February 23, 1969; "43-25-37 Still Able to Attract Dividends," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1969; "Wall Street Welcomes Its Traffic Stopper," *Detroit Free Press*, April 4, 1969; Sara Davidson, "Francine's Budding Career a Bust," *Boston Globe*, May 11, 1969; Ernest A Schonberger, "Waiting Game Best Ploy for Wooing Fannie Mae?," *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> *Dr Karla Jay at HOLLARev*. While Jay clearly recalled Gottfried's story most vividly, those news stories date from two years before the Ogle-In. It is likely that Jay organized her Ogle-In after reading a similar story involving a woman named Ronnie Bell that hit papers in March of 1970. Perhaps this was the last straw for Jay. Associated Press, "Figure

counterculture activist street theater she had encountered in the late 1960s, Jay decided to stage her Ogle-In as a humorous, facetious action designed to attract the attention of the press. She contacted local television stations in New York and at least one, ABC, showed up to document the protest. ABC producer Marlene Sanders included the footage in her documentary on Women's Liberation, which aired in May 1970. Jay featured prominently, in a floppy knitted hat and a cheeky grin. In the footage, she walks down the street, a sign in her hand, and turns to the camera to say, "Oh they're so beautiful, all of them. Oh, those men, those sex objects! What a nice tie. Look at the legs on that one! I'm so turned on!" A man says something to her as she walks past him and, expressing faux concern that she has neglected him, she apologizes: "Sorry, you're beautiful, too!" Jay is joined by about a dozen other women, joking, pointing, and making kissing noises. One holds a sign that reads, "OGLE DAY." Another young woman hugs an older man in glasses as Jay shouts, "Oh, I love grey hair! Makes men so sexy!" The protestors stop in the middle of street to give interviews, surrounded on all sides by onlookers. One woman explains, "We're trying to point out ... what it feels like being whistled at, put down constantly sexually every time we walk down the street." She makes kissing noises to illustrate her point and some of her companions cheer in agreement. "We're supposed to dig it," she goes on, "because we're supposed to dig that we're sexual objects and we don't want to be sexual objects anymore."<sup>4</sup>

A few days later, Jay and some of her fellow activists went on a local radio show in New York City to further raise awareness of the scourge of street harassment in the city. The women tried to describe the obscenities they endured on city streets, but struggled to do so within the

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Sways Stock Traders," *Spokesman-Review*, March 6, 1970; Associated Press, "Stripper Triggers a Bullish Market," *Lewiston Daily Sun*, March 6, 1970; "44-24-35 Staggers Wall Street," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 6, 1970; Associated Press, "A 44-24-35 Conglomerate," *Virgin Islands Daily News*, March 7, 1970; "Sexual Urge Dictates Stock Prices?," *Irish Times*, March 7, 1970; "Spiro Greeted Effete Intellectual Snob," *Detroit Free Press*, March 7, 1970; "Frontal Attack on Market," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> "Now: Women's Liberation," 1970, Box 6, Marlene Sanders Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives; "Women's Liberation," Video tape, *Now*, May 25, 1970, Marlene Sanders Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

confines of the Federal Communications Commission censorship rules. Jay became frustrated with the male radio host who, she said, “just really didn’t seem to be getting it, because he was a guy and he was probably doing it, too.” However, the spot made an impact on women listeners. Hundreds wrote to Jay thanking her for shedding light on an experience that was so ubiquitous to them. “They understood what was happening to us,” Jay recalled. “Most of them said, ‘Yes, this has happened to me, too.’” At the 2014 conference, hosted by the online platform Hollaback that was designed to document incidents of street harassment, Jay noted that the internet made it much easier to share experiences of harassment and find a supportive community. In 1970, Jay and her fellow activists relied on events like the Ogle-In, radio spots, and their own feminist consciousness-raising meetings to raise awareness and bring women together. Indeed, Jay described coming to the realization that street harassment was such a widespread problem through multiple conversations with activists in the Redstockings feminist group. “We discovered in sharing our bitterness that all of us had been treated in this way on the streets,” she recalled. “It wasn’t just a problem of one woman, it was the problem of every woman.”<sup>5</sup>

Hollaback’s decision to feature Karla Jay at its conference highlights the continuities and ruptures in the experience and perception of men’s stranger intrusions in the last fifty years. Activists in the 2010s, as in the 1970s, felt a need to point out street harassment, to name it, to argue that it was a problem that required attention and response. Hollaback, an online platform designed to bring women together to document and discuss their experiences of street harassment, shares a mission with Jay, who tried to raise awareness about street harassment through the media, connecting with women who had had similar experiences. However, anti-street harassment activists of the 2010s have a distinct advantage over Jay and her contemporaries because they are able to build on the theoretical and activist work that came before them. Indeed, the women’s liberation

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<sup>5</sup> *Dr Karla Jay at HollaRev.*

movement of the 1970s marked a watershed moment for Americans' understanding of men's stranger intrusions. As feminists like Jay gained confidence from their shared grievances, they began to push back against the previous four decades of rhetoric that cast much men's stranger intrusions as trivial, harmless, and natural. Feminist activists and theorists developed a new way of talking about catcalling, wolf-whistling, and other intrusive behaviors that emphasized the way they inflicted fear and harm on women. They argued that intrusive behaviors were neither natural nor harmless but part of a larger infrastructure of gender oppression that kept women in a position of vulnerability and subservience to men. Some of anti-street harassment organizing is remarkably reminiscent of the Progressive-era anti-mashing campaigns: women's liberationists, like women activists of the Progressive era, taught for women's self-defense classes, advocated for legal reforms, and described the fear women felt in public places. However, 1970s feminists argued that "street harassment," as intrusive behaviors became known, was a symptom of a sexist society that saw women as fundamentally sexual objects rather than as full, autonomous human beings. Such an analysis saw men's stranger intrusions as part of systemic and institutionalized sexism, rather than as the problem of a few bad actors (such as the "mashers" of the Progressive era).

What will become clear in the ensuing pages, however, is the challenges and pitfalls feminists faced as they tried to come to a consensus about the causes of—and solutions to—street harassment. These challenges arose in part from the diverse experiences of feminists themselves, for while many may have experienced men's stranger intrusions at some point in their lives, they did not experience such behaviors in the same way nor did they share a similar view of what such behaviors meant. In particular, feminists argued about the roles of class and race in women's experiences of street harassment and the appropriate responses to it. For instance, while Jay's Ogle-In targeted the middle-class white businessmen of Wall Street—the white collar "Mad Men" types, as she called them, referencing both a cultural trope of the 1960s and a popular television show of the 2010s—a

dominant thread of white feminist rhetoric of the 1970s instead cast street harassment as the particular problem of working-class men. White feminist activists and theorists often struggled to articulate the “everyday sexism” of middle-class white men, describing a vague unease and frustration with such men without a vocabulary to identify it and call it out. On the other hand, they confidently decried the sexist catcalls of “hardhats” or the leering looks of “strangers” in “urban” alleyways, the latter a dog whistle for Black and Latino men. Feminists who worked on working-class issues, women of color feminists, and lesbian feminists pushed back on these depictions of street harassment, highlighting how their experiences contradicted such stereotypes and complicated any monolithic understanding of intrusive behaviors. White feminists’ privileging of gender analysis over racial analysis was particularly problematic and hotly contested. Black women activists in particular had seen how white women’s claims of sexual violence had sent Black men to their deaths for decades. Women of color and antiracist feminists insisted that no understanding of men’s stranger intrusions, and sexual violence more broadly, was complete without an understanding of its impact on women and men of color.

## **“Little Rapes”: Anti-Rape Activism and Men’s Stranger Intrusions**

Critiques of men’s stranger intrusions like Karla Jay’s emerged out of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s. So-called “women’s libbers,” many of whom had cut their activist teeth in political, antiwar, and antiracist movements of the 1960s, began to critique the persistent sexism that plagued other anti-oppression movements. As women began to speak out about sexism in and outside activist spaces, they began to discover that their experiences were not unique but shared by many women from many walks of life. In the late 1960s, these women began to form feminist

groups of various levels of formality and to participate in “consciousness-raising” groups where they spoke about their experiences of sexism. Consciousness-raising became a key methodology of the feminist movement and was foundational for feminists’ political theorizing and for the development of a feminist epistemology. In consciousness-raising groups, women described the empowerment they felt as they began to realize that they were not alone in feeling ignored and sexualized by men in their lives, in feeling powerless in traditional political institutions, in feeling like second-class citizens before the law.<sup>6</sup> The cathartic realization that one was not alone in one’s experiences extended to the experience of men’s stranger intrusions. Thus, Karla Jay described how she and a group of New York feminists felt that street harassment was “the problem of every woman.” From there, men’s stranger intrusions became part of the feminist analysis of a sexist society and women’s liberationists set to work denaturalizing the catcalling and wolf-whistling that had been trivialized for decades as mere “girl-watching” or playful flirtation.

Feminists’ discourses of men’s stranger intrusions developed out of two main subsets of the women’s liberation movement: consciousness-raising, or the use of personal experiences as the basis for political analysis and activism, and the anti-rape movement, which emphasized self-defense and legal reform as the primary solutions to sexual violence. The former constituted personal memoirs, informal group conversation, and structured speak-outs as a means of unearthing individuals’ experiences of sexual violence and connecting them to feminists’ emerging political framework that viewed gender (or sex, to use the terminology of the time) as the primary factor in the oppression of all women in a sexist and male supremacist society. The latter included nationwide efforts by anti-

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<sup>6</sup> John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 310-314; Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 277-281.

rape activists to debunk “rape myths,” reform rape laws, teach women self-defense techniques, and establish rape crisis centers and battered women’s shelters.<sup>7</sup>

As historian Catherine Jacquet as shown in her history of sexual violence activism in the post-war period, the mainstream discourse of the feminist anti-rape movement put the issue of gender oppression at the center of a feminist understanding of rape. This analysis arose primarily from prominent white feminists, like Susan Brownmiller, who saw the axis of gender oppression as the primary oppressive force in all women’s lives. White feminists argued that rape victims of all classes and races faced harsh treatment and skepticism at the hands of sexist law enforcement and courts, proving that gender oppression mattered most in women’s experiences of rape. Jacquet points out that the Black freedom movement, working concurrently but not in tandem with the women’s liberation movement, theorized rape within the context of racism rather than sexism. Thus racial justice activists argued that Black men were disproportionately punished, and punished more harshly, than their white counterparts for sexual violence offenses, while white law enforcement and courts rarely believed Black women who accused white men of harassment or rape. These two movements thus worked to reform the legal system as it pertained to sexual violence, albeit for different reasons and with different outcomes in mind. However, because the women’s liberation movement and the Black freedom movement rarely overlapped—save for a few key cases involving Black women rape victims—the most common feminist analyses of sexual violence often lacked significant discussion of race.<sup>8</sup>

Because much of the feminist analysis of stranger intrusions emerged from anti-rape activism, it mirrored the gender-forward analysis of that larger movement. Thus, in feminist anti-rape materials, intrusive behaviors like ogling, catcalling, or whistling were analyzed in the context of

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine O. Jacquet, *The Injustices of Rape: How Activists Responded to Sexual Violence, 1950-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Jacquet, *Injustices of Rape*.

the larger societal threat of rape that feminists' viewed as the lot of all women. For example, journalist Gwenda Linda Blair described stranger intrusions as a tactic men used to remind women that the street was men's domain and women were only there by men's "permission." A catcall or ogle was for Blair a "common ground of experience" that brought women together and reminded them of their shared vulnerability to gender and sexual violence.<sup>9</sup> Even the terminology feminists used to talk about stranger intrusions demonstrated the way they analytically linked it to rape. In the early 1970s, as women's liberationists began to consider their own experiences of men's stranger intrusions, they used terms like "verbal rape" or "little rape" to describe what would later be known as "street harassment." The use of the term "rape," modified to signify its non-physical manifestation, was a shorthand for the larger feminist argument that men's stranger intrusions felt like a violation of one's bodily autonomy. Thus, a "verbal rape" or "little rape," were just a few steps away from the legal category of "forcible rape."<sup>10</sup>

Men's stranger intrusions similarly appear in almost all feminist literature on rape, generally as an example of the way women's omnipresent fear of rape colored everyday interactions with men in public space. When Detroit-based anti-rape group Women Against Rape published a collection of essays and safety tips for women, they emphasized the way that the fear of rape kept women off the streets and away from public space. As a member wrote in the group's 1971 *Stop Rape* pamphlet, "Women have lost a basic civil liberty—the right to be on the street—going to a neighbor's, to the store, or just for a walk." One way to restore this civil liberty was to institute "anti-rape squads,"

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<sup>9</sup> Gwenda Linda Blair, "Standing on the Corner..." *Liberation* 18, no. 9 (1974): 6.

<sup>10</sup> "The Verbal Rapist," *Majority Report*, October 1971, Box PW-1 and LW-1, Alix Kates Shulman Papers, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; Ida Monico-Lemay, "Speaking Out: A Case of the Wrong Target," *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter*, December 1971, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; Ann Sheldon, "Rape: The Solution," *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, 1972, Box 10, Folder 9, Women: A Journal of Liberation Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA; Andrea Medea and Kathleen Thompson, "Little Rapes," *Kitty Genovese Women's Project*, March 8, 1977, Box 6, Folder 2, Violence Against Women Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

groups of women who went out into public space together to ensure safety in numbers. In *Women Against Rape's* analysis, these squads would specifically protect women from stranger intrusions: "Groups of women (4-8) are not hassled by men on the streets. The man who calls 'chick' or 'babe' to a woman alone hurries by a group of women. Rape most commonly occurs when a woman is alone and the male knows he can overpower her." The quick leap from the "man who calls 'chick'" to rape illustrates the way many women's liberation groups saw the two as deeply intertwined, if not versions of the same kind of sexist oppression. The catcaller and the rapist were one and the same in this analysis, and the eradication of one necessitated the elimination of the other.<sup>11</sup> The lack of any racial or class discussion in analyses like these demonstrates what Jacquet describes as white feminists' theorization of rape as "only the result of sexism and male supremacy." This meant that "any woman assaulted by any man was politically salient to the movement," but collapsed women's diverse experiences of rape as always politically salient in the same way, that is, as examples primarily of gender oppression.<sup>12</sup>

## Race in Feminists' Analysis of Sexual Violence

Racial analysis, when it came, often came from individuals rather than organizations.<sup>13</sup> Discussions of race in anti-street harassment discourse ranged from confident antiracist analysis, backed up with statistics, to dog-whistle racist discourse about dangerous "strangers" in "dark urban alleys," to confused and inconsistent ruminations from white feminists struggling to articulate their attitudes towards men of color who might catcall them. In the first category, some anti-rape feminist

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<sup>11</sup> "Women Will Stop Rape," in *Stop Rape* (Detroit, MI: Women Against Rape, 1971), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Jacquet, *Injustices of Rape*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Jacquet notes a similar phenomenon in anti-rape discourse writ large. In both the Black freedom movement and women's liberation movement, individual women tried to complicate the movements' dominant discourses of sexual violence and legal injustice. Jacquet, *Injustices of Rape*, 4.

organizations did highlight the ways that men of color—and especially Black men—were disproportionately punished for acts of violence against women—especially white women. The Kitty Genovese Women’s Project disseminated a version of this argument in the late 1970s. Feminists in Dallas, Texas started the Kitty Genovese Women’s Project as a way to raise awareness of the ongoing threat of rape in women’s lives. The Project was named after the 28-year-old bartender who was raped and stabbed to death outside her home in New York City in 1964. According to newspaper reports of the time, thirty-eight people in the nearby apartment buildings either saw or heard Genovese’s attack taking place and did nothing to help her. The reports, though later debunked, fed nationwide anxiety that modern city life diminished individuals’ empathy for strangers and willingness to help those in need. Winston Moseley, a Black man from Manhattan, confessed to Genovese’s murder six days later. He served fifty-two years in prison after his death sentence was commuted.<sup>14</sup> The Kitty Genovese Women’s Project consisted primarily of a 20-page anti-rape pamphlet that featured essays, poems, and artwork about sexual violence. The starring role, however, was reserved for a complete list of every man indicted on sex offender charges in Dallas County between 1960 and 1976, as well as a list of alleged rapists who were yet “unapprehended.”

Strangely for a project named after a white woman who was raped and murdered by a Black man she had never met before, the pamphlet tried to debunk both the idea that rape happened primarily between strangers and that Black men were the primary perpetrators of rape. For instance, the pamphlet included stories of “normal” middle-class white men raping women and girls they knew. In an essay entitled “Racism and Rape,” an unnamed writer for the Project noted that the printed list of Dallas County sex offenders included “a disproportionately large percentage of

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<sup>14</sup> A. M. Rosenthal, *Thirty-Eight Witnesses: The Kitty Genovese Case* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Kevin Cook, *Kitty Genovese: The Murder, the Bystanders, the Crime That Changed America*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Marcia M. Gallo, *“No One Helped”: Kitty Genovese, New York City, and the Myth of Urban Apathy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). Since the early 2000s, a number of investigations and documentaries have tried to debunk this version of events, arguing that far fewer people would have heard or seen Genovese’s murder. See for instance James Solomon, *The Witness* (FilmRise, 2017).

minority and low income males.” “In a classist, racist society,” the essay explained, “the people lowest on the ladder of privilege are first to be punished—and usually overly punished—while white middle and upper class males often have seeming immunity.” The myth that “most rapists are Black men who attack white women” had persisted for decades, the essay argued, but it was far more likely that a white man would rape a Black woman because of white men’s “nearly institutionalized access to Negro women.” The essay was intended to disclaim the list of sex offenders, cautioning readers against assuming the data showed the full breadth of the reality of rape and who was likely to perpetrate it.<sup>15</sup> It argued that most rapists attacked women of their own race and described how “interracial rape has been used by our racist society to keep white women in fear and Black men in line.” Whether or not the majority of readers caught the essay before flipping to the list of offenders, it suggested ambivalence on the part of some feminist anti-rape groups about the impact their awareness-raising tactics might have had on Black men’s lives, especially when so many official rape crime statistics reflected the racist society and institutions in which they were produced.

On the other hand, white feminists writing about their experiences of men’s stranger intrusions often discussed race in a way that suggested a discomfort with men of color and with racial analysis more broadly. As one feminist writing in 1971 put it in an article on rape prevention, “it isn’t racist or anti-humanitarian to FIND OUT if you are being followed.” Her defensiveness in the absence of a critique suggests she felt the need to justify her advice to look out for suspicious men.<sup>16</sup> White women writing about the Wall Street types or construction workers who stared at them in the street rarely mentioned these men’s race, which was likely to be white. However, when men enacting stranger intrusions were men of color, white feminists often noted this. For instance, a feminist writer going by the unabashed pseudonym “B. Razen Cunt” described two examples of

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<sup>15</sup> *Kitty Genovese Women’s Project*, March 8, 1977, Box 6, Folder 2, Violence Against Women Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>16</sup> Cate Stadelman, “Fighting Back,” in *Stop Rape* (Detroit, MI: Women Against Rape, 1971), 15

being harassed on the street, one in which she highlighted the men's race and one in which she did not. In the first incident, a "gang of boys about eleven years old" were "terrorizing women" by going up to women on the street and wrapping their hands around the women's necks, in mock strangulation, then running away in laughter. While it is not certain that this first "gang of boys" were white, the author's decision to elide their race suggests that their race was invisible to her, and thus likely white. In the second incident, the writer described a group of "young Puerto Rican men" who she encountered swinging "stick-ball sticks" on the street of Manhattan. They were "playfully swatting at women" and the writer "had been frightened." For this writer, race was irrelevant in the first case but worth mentioning in the second. It is unclear how old the "Puerto Rican men" were but the author's choice of the word "men," in contrast to the first group of "boys about eleven years old," does not necessarily mean that the second group were adult men. Indeed, the description of the group running down the street "playfully swatting" brings to mind a group of boisterous adolescents rather than a menacing crew of adults. A long history of youth of color being described—and tried and convicted in courts of law—as adults when they are perceived as dangerous to whites means this group may well have been in their teens. While it is impossible to tell what exactly the author saw and how she decided to interpret it, her ambivalent and inconsistent descriptions are an example of the nonexistent or superficial racial awareness of much white feminists' writing on stranger intrusions.

A similar discomfort, however, appeared in instances of interracial or interethnic stranger intrusions, even when both parties were people of color. In a 1977 exposé on "street hassling," a Black woman from New York explained her complicated feelings about catcalls in Black neighborhoods versus in Latino neighborhoods. "I can handle the comments from the men in Harlem," she told the *Washington Post*, "the 'Hey, mommas,' and the 'What's happ'ins.' I know what to say, when to say it, and when not to say anything. But I really don't know how to respond in Spanish

Harlem when the men make those sucking, kissing and groaning sounds. Maybe the Spanish girls do.” The unnamed woman suggested that behaviors that were familiar to her, from men who shared her racial identity, were less problematic than unfamiliar behaviors from other racial groups. This woman had learned a repertoire of responses to the kind of comments she received from Black male residents in Harlem. She knew what worked from experience. When she encountered unfamiliar behaviors, however, she was at a loss for how to respond and as a result felt less able to “handle” herself. The *Washington Post* concluded, “when dealing with street comments, there is the need to cut through cultural peculiarities before deciding whether the comment is aggressive or not. One man’s ‘Hey, little momma’ is another’s ‘Good afternoon.’”<sup>17</sup>

That said, it was white feminists’ lack of attention to the racist dimensions of stranger intrusions and sexual violence that produced the most heated controversy amongst antiviolenace activists. The most famous example of a white feminist privileging gender over race in discussions of stranger intrusions came from Susan Brownmiller, author of the groundbreaking monograph on the politics of rape, *Against Our Will*. In *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller discussed the complicated and intertwined history of rape and violence against Black men in the United States. She specifically discussed Emmett Till, the Black teenager who was murdered for supposedly whistling at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, in Money, Mississippi in 1955. Brownmiller conceded that “nothing in recent times” could match Emmett Till’s murder “for sheer outrageousness, for indefensible overkill with community support.” “We are rightly aghast that a whistle could be cause for murder,” wrote Brownmiller, but she argued that Till’s whistle was also “a deliberate insult just short of physical assault, a last reminder to Carolyn Bryant that this Black boy, Till, had in mind to possess her.”

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<sup>17</sup> Karen De Witt, “The ‘Hey, Honey!’ Hassle: Intrusive Street Comments on the Increase,” *Washington Post*, October 17, 1977.

Brownmiller went on to describe how the knowledge of Till's murder affected her own reactions to men's stranger intrusions:

“At age twenty and for a period of fifteen years after the murder of Emmett Till whenever a Black teen-ager whistled at me on a New York City street or uttered in passing one of several variations on an invitation to congress, I smiled my nicest smile of comradely equality— no supersensitive flower of white womanhood, I—a largess I extended with equal sincerity to white construction workers, truck drivers, street-corner cowboys, indeed, to any and all who let me know from a safe distance their theoretical intent.”

Brownmiller described how she felt it was “white women’s” responsibility to “to bear the white man’s burden of making amends for Southern racism.” She thus tried to take every “whistle or a murmured ‘May I fuck you?’ [as] an innocent compliment.” After fifteen years of struggling through these experiences, she explained, she came “to understand the insult implicit in Emmett Till’s whistle, the depersonalized challenge of ‘I can have you’ with or without the racial aspect. Today a sexual remark on the street causes within me a fleeting but murderous rage.”<sup>18</sup> Brownmiller plainly articulates here that, for her, the vector of male privilege is the one that really matters in the analysis of Till’s murder, that “with or without the racial aspect,” a catcall or wolf whistle was a symbol of male power, no matter who wielded it. Brownmiller went so far as to argue that Till and the white men who murdered him “shared something in common. *They both understood* that the whistle was no small tweet of hubba-hubba or melodious approval for a well-turned ankle.”<sup>19</sup> Brownmiller’s analysis of Till’s murder was the most controversial and denounced portion of *Against Our Will*. Black activist and scholar Angela Davis rebuked Brownmiller for perpetuating racist myths about Black men’s lust for white women and for depicting Till as “a guilty sexist—almost as guilty as his white racist murderers.” Anne Braden, a white Southern woman and long-time civil rights activist, also admonished Brownmiller for diminishing the impact of racism on claims of rape and sexual assault and particularly the way Black men were routinely murdered both by white civilians and by the state

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<sup>18</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 245-248.

<sup>19</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 247. Emphasis in the original.

as a result of white women's spurious rape claims. Braden wrote of Brownmiller that her analysis of sexual violence "ignores the fact that in a society anchored by racism, there can be no liberation for anyone until the race issue is met head on."<sup>20</sup>

Women of color also became some of the most prominent faces of the anti-rape movement. The cases of Joan Little and Inez García were the two most prominent cases in the 1970s involving women of color who faced punishment for protecting themselves against sexual violence or retaliating against men who had attacked them. Joan Little, a Black woman incarcerated in Beaufort County Jail in North Carolina, killed a white guard who tried to rape her in 1974. The state of North Carolina charged her with first degree murder. Feminist, antiracist, and prison reform activists saw her trial for first-degree murder as a rallying point for their different but (at least momentarily) aligned projects. Importantly, Little's case brought a renewed focus on violence against women to antiracist antirape activism, which had previously foregrounded whites' false accusations of rape against Black men.<sup>21</sup> That same year, two men raped Inez García, a Latina woman, in Soledad, California. The men attacked García outside, between two apartment buildings, thus cementing in the minds of many antirape activists the connection between the threat of rape and women's vulnerability in public space. Less than a half hour after the rape, García retrieved a shotgun from her home and went out in search of her attackers. She found them, killing one with shotgun fire but missing the second. A California court sentenced her to five years in prison for second-degree murder. Cases like García's and Little's particularly illuminate the way that women of color rape survivors faced extreme scrutiny and sometimes counter-charges when they defended themselves against rape. García's case also became a rallying cry for feminists who saw self-defense

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Jacquet, *Injustices of Rape*, 144-145.

<sup>21</sup> Jacquet, *Injustices of Rape*, 109-112. Anti-rape activists argued that Little's case demonstrated the vulnerability of Black women to white male violence in a white supremacist society. Antirape activists focused on Little's victimization, firstly, as a woman living in a sexist society and, secondly, as a victim who was charged with a crime after defending herself from attack. Finally, prison right's activists saw Little's case as an example of the violence that daily threatened incarcerated people.

and street safety tactics as important tools to fight both rape and the “little rapes” of street harassment. As one feminist flyer in support of García put it, “If the law and order groups are serious about the rights of women to be safe, they should fight for a law that gives women the right to go armed onto the battlefields of our streets.”<sup>22</sup> However, like much of the white feminist analysis of rape, mainstream feminist discussion of García’s case emphasized her status as a woman as the primary reason she faced the oppression she did.<sup>23</sup>

## Catcalling and the “Great White American Hardhat”

Class awareness was a different matter. While not always analyzed self-consciously, much white feminist writing on men’s stranger intrusions discussed men’s class position in some fashion. Early on, as women began to share their experiences of men’s stranger intrusions, some struggled to articulate the behaviors they endured from men they often identified as construction workers versus from middle-class, white collar men. Middle-class white women had a particularly difficult time articulating the subtle sexism they experienced from men of their own racial and class positions. Writer Ingrid Bengis exemplified this phenomenon in her 1972 book, *Combat in the Erogeous Zone*. The book—a rumination on love, hate, and sex that was a finalist for the National Book Award—included a long section entitled “Man-Hating” that detailed the author’s many experiences of harassment, rape, and sexual assault and the anger she felt towards men as a result of these experiences. In one essay, Bengis described the “almost daily” intrusive behaviors she experienced from male strangers in public places, from fellow commuters groping her in the subway to the men

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<sup>22</sup> Working People’s Health Project, “Free Inez Garcia” poster, c. 1974, Box 113, Meredith Tax Papers, Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture, Duke University.

<sup>23</sup> Jacquet, *Injustices of Rape*, 126-128. Again, this was not a universal phenomenon, however. The same flyer that called for women’s armed self-defense on the street also argued, “The only thing that Inez Garcia did ‘wrong’ was to be born Latino, poor, and a woman.” Working People’s Health Project, “Free Inez Garcia.”

who “make *psst, psst* noises at me from the sidewalk or from the safety of their cars.”<sup>24</sup> A key moment in the piece revolved around one experience of street harassment from construction workers, which Bengis described as “their usual number.”<sup>25</sup> This is a telling description, for Bengis did not have to explain what the construction workers’ “usual number” was: their leers and catcalls were self-evident and linked to their occupation. Bengis went on to call the construction workers’ “verbal advances” “extremely crude” and described the violent anger that rose up in her when they catcalled her.

In contrast, Bengis self-consciously ruminated on the difficulty she had seeing and denouncing sexism from men she encountered in less “impersonal circumstances,” men she described as “average guy[s]” or men who “at one time or another I had thought might make good platonic friends.” Bengis’s writing became more opaque, less specific as she struggled to articulate how these men angered or mistreated her. “I knew that those men were the ones I really had to come to terms with,” she wrote. “And knew, too, that from here on the situation would become more subtle, more ambiguous, and more confusing.”<sup>26</sup> Bengis remembered feeling shock and confusion when men who appeared unthreatening, normal, or familiar to her exhibited more egregious behaviors. Men began bothering Bengis in public places when she was twelve and she recalled “noticing with a mixture of horror and bewilderment that those men didn’t look any different from anyone else, that in fact they usually looked nice enough and couldn’t be told apart from Mr. Jones who ran the grocery store.” They were not “‘marked’ in any way” and thus Bengis began to “suspect every other similarly ‘unmarked’ male of possessing the same kind of inclinations in varying forms.”<sup>27</sup> These “unmarked” men were very specifically not construction workers, and

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<sup>24</sup> Ingrid Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1972; Reprinted with forward by Martin Duberman; New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1991), 24, 18. Citations refer to HarperPerennial edition.

<sup>25</sup> Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*, 36-37.

<sup>27</sup> Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*, 21.

thus not working-class men. Their unmarkedness likely arose from their proximity to Bengis's own racial and class position. They were people she might have grown up with, whose life experiences, manner of address and presentation, and social position made them appear to her as "unmarked," as "average," as "normal."

Whatever affinities or allegiances Bengis felt towards "average" men made it difficult for her to articulate their sexism with the same pointedness and anger she reserved for the construction workers who disturbed her walk. Indeed, Bengis had an easier time describing her disappointment with the unmarked men who did not stand up to construction workers on her behalf than she did describing their own sexist behavior. Bengis explained that she held unmarked men, men like her book editor, and "other 'average guys' responsible ... for the construction workers." She resented that these middle-class white men "seemed to lack the courage to 'betray their sex' by repudiating the attitudes of construction workers (except in conversations with women, where words are often cheap)."<sup>28</sup> Even more distressingly, Bengis knew that the men she saw as potential allies could be as guilty of intrusive behaviors as construction workers. Far worse than ignoring construction workers who whistled and catcalled, Bengis fumed that once a construction worker had chosen a target, "most men...will usually join in the ogling...except more covertly."<sup>29</sup> Such "respectable men edge[d] up to [her] surreptitiously instead of staring openly" and "insist[ed] on wearing...a veneer of courtly respectability."<sup>30</sup> The striking similarities between Bengis's writing and the language used to describe girl-watching suggests the wide-reaching influence of the girl-watcher as a cultural meme. For Bengis, the "surreptitious" displays of sexism from "respectable" middle-class, white men were clearly distinguished from the construction workers' "usual number." The construction worker was the ubiquitous ogler, his intrusive behaviors expected and over-the-top, while his white collar

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<sup>28</sup> Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*, 48. Second ellipsis in the original text.

<sup>30</sup> Bengis, *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*, 49.

counterpart was protected by his middle-class respectability and blended more effectively into the urbanscape.

The trope of the catcalling construction worker remained a mainstay of street harassment literature long after the publication of Bengis's book. Feminist writers and activists called out construction workers as especially problematic when it came to street harassment. In Meredith Tax's classic essay, "Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Daily Life," a pivotal scene revolved around a "walking-down-the-street scenario" in which a young woman had to pass a line of construction workers having lunch "in a line along the pavement." The physical "revulsion" and "terror" she felt were meant to demonstrate the impact of harassment and intimidation that women experienced on the street everyday.<sup>31</sup> The construction workers appeared again in journalism about street harassment and early attempts to define and theorize street harassment.<sup>32</sup> When Nkenge Touré's Coalition for a Hassle-Free Zone began publishing advice manuals for women in the 1980s, "construction sites" appeared on a list of places to avoid if one wished to escape being harassed on the street.<sup>33</sup>

These discussions and portrayals of catcalling construction workers rarely, if ever, mentioned race. However, due to decades of racist policies and discrimination against Black workers in the construction unions, the construction industry and building trades on the East Coast were overwhelmingly white.<sup>34</sup> In 1970, 93 percent of men employed in construction in New York state

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<sup>31</sup> Meredith Tax, *Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Daily Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bread and Roses, 1970), 5, Labadie Pamphlet Collection, University of Michigan.

<sup>32</sup> David Fortney, "On Girl Watching: Do the Sexes See Eye to Eye? The Watchers," *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1973; Micaela di Leonardo, "Political Economy of Street Harassment," *Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women*, 1981; Lindsay Van Gelder, "The International Language of Street Hassling," *Ms*, May 1981; "Give Women a Break," 1985, Box 5, Folder 1, Nkenge Touré Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>33</sup> Coalition for a Hassle Free Zone, "Fact Sheet on Street Harassment," c 1986, Box 5, Folder 1, Nkenge Touré Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA; Sharon Kass, "Dealing with Street Harassment" (Coalition for a Hassle Free Zone, 1986), Box 5, Folder 1, Nkenge Touré Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA. A decade earlier, a *Chicago Tribune* article on girl-watching also noted that construction sites were areas rife with ogling, though in this piece, the ogling was not considered as problematic. Fortney, "On Girl Watching."

<sup>34</sup> David A. Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Thomas J. Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945-1969," *Journal of American History* 91,

were white.<sup>35</sup> Both feminists' silence on race and the reality of construction workers' demographics suggests that by and large the construction worker trope was a working-class white man. (A notable exception appeared in the *Washington Post* when an article on Toureé's Coalition for a Hassle-Free Zone featured an illustration of construction workers leering at a white woman on the street. One of the workers was coded as Black.)<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the anti-construction worker stance of much feminist street harassment literature reflects larger tensions between working-class white men and middle-class American liberal youth. As the 1960s faded into the 1970s, the building trade unions expressed increasingly pro-war and pro-Nixon stances in the face of a growing anti-war movement. On May 8, 1970, construction workers and anti-war protestors clashed in the streets of New York City. The so-called Hard Hat Riot was a visible and violent manifestation of the tensions between the student and radical youth movements and Nixon's Silent Majority.<sup>37</sup> The clashes between construction workers and American radical youth were not confined to federal policy in Southeast Asia but extended to sexual culture at home as well. One month after the Hard Hat Riot, in June 1970, a group of New York women calling themselves Bitches staged a street protest colorfully titled the First Official Ladies Floating High Tea, Picnic Lunch, and Ogle. Perhaps inspired by Jay's Ogle-In of a few months earlier, the event included street theatre where women played the parts of both harasser and harassed, ogling and catcalling one another. Unlike Jay's critique of leering Wall Streeters, however, these demonstrators whistled and

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no. 1 (2004): 145–73; Joshua B. Freeman, "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 4 (1993): 725–44.

<sup>35</sup> "1970 Census of Population: New York" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, March 1973), 292.

<sup>36</sup> Carol Dana, "Talking Back to Street Harassers," *Washington Post*, August 19, 1986, Box 5, Folder 1, Nkenge Touré Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>37</sup> Philip S. Foner, *U.S. Labor and the Vietnam War* (New York: International Publishers, 1989); Freeman, "Hardhats." The protestors, mostly high school and college students, were marching against President Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and the police shooting of student demonstrators at Kent State University. Members of the local building trades unions, known as "hard hats," violently confronted protestors in New York's financial district then stormed City Hall and forced officials to raise the American flags flying there to full mast (they had previously been lowered to honor the students killed at Kent State). The following evening, local television stations filmed the 300 or so construction workers who made their way through downtown New York, attacking students and anti-war demonstrators with lead pipes and crowbars.

ogled construction workers working at the corner of 57<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Avenue. One woman even “pinched the protruding fanny of a construction worker.” The demonstration, according to organizers, was intended to “give the Great White American Hardhat a taste of his own chauvinism.”<sup>38</sup>

All of this begs the question, did men of different class positions indeed practice different kinds of intrusive behaviors or did women’s liberationists simply perceive that they did? Were middle-class white men’s intrusive behaviors more surreptitious because they were different, quieter behaviors or did their social position shield them and make the same behaviors harder to identify from middle-class men than working-class men? The “Great White American Hardhat” chauvinism was no doubt partly stereotype but, as historian Joshua Freeman argues, it was also part of a shifting post-war working-class masculinity that centered around construction work. Freeman notes that construction workers were the most visible blue-collar workers of the 1960s and 1970s just as auto factory and assembly-line work declined in its cultural and material prominence. As construction workers increasingly served as the “archetypical proletarian” in the popular imaginary, hard hat culture became self-consciously anti-bourgeois in a way that emphasized a “desire to shock” middle-class sensibilities. This included a highly (hetero)sexualized culture that included frequent discussion of sexual matters and sexually explicit slang for common workplace activities (thus work that was easy was “tit work,” loafing was “fucking the dog,” and a very small length of measurement was said to be a “cunt hair”). The nature of construction also facilitated actual sexual activities, most notably voyeurism, as workers were able to see into high windows and view “naked women or couples engaged in sex,” a practice known as “watching the windows.” When live women were unavailable, pornography took its place and construction worksites featured a great deal of nude photography,

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<sup>38</sup> Robin Reisig, “Biting the Hand That Feels You: Bitches Ogle Hardhats,” *Village Voice*, June 18, 1970, Box 112, Meredith Tax Papers, Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture, Duke University.

while work relationships might be cemented with gifts of pornographic media. Construction sites themselves also facilitated the catcalls and ogles that many feminists defined as the construction workers stock-in-trade. Like cars, most construction sites are closed-off to passersby but provide full view of goings-on on the streets and sidewalks. Construction workers could (and still can) leer, whistle, and catcall from “within a zone of psychological and physical safety.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, the inherent danger of much construction work required workers to establish strong, trusting bonds quickly with complete strangers or risk bodily harm. In such a culture, the exchange of pornography or a shared experience of whistling at a passing woman became an easy way to build a tight-knit, overtly male community that relied on such bonds for physical safety. As Freeman puts it, “Solidarity, safety, and sexism thus reinforced one another.”<sup>40</sup> Sociologist Karen D. Pyke noted this very phenomenon in the 1990s in her study of class-based masculinities. Whereas working-class men lean on displays of physical strength, “pervasive talk of sexual prowess and a ritualistic put-down of women” to assert themselves as “real men” in comparison with their white collar counterparts (who wield more social and economic power), middle- and upper-class men define themselves in opposition to what is perceived as working-class hypermasculinity by displaying a self-conscious restraint and “civilized demeanor of polite gentility.” Thus, “privileged men reaffirm their superiority over lower-class men and disguise themselves as exemplars of egalitarianism in their interpersonal relations with women.”<sup>41</sup>

While women like Bengis held no love for the surreptitious “sidling up” of “respectable” middle-class men, some women (mostly white) admitted they preferred what they viewed as the middle-class version of intrusive behaviors over the louder, more sexually explicit behaviors

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<sup>39</sup> Freeman, “Hardhats,” 730.

<sup>40</sup> Freeman, “Hardhats,” 726-733.

<sup>41</sup> Karen D. Pyke, “Class-Based Masculinities: The Interdependence of Gender, Class, and Interpersonal Power,” *Gender and Society* 10, no. 5 (1996): 531-532.

assumed to be the purview of construction workers and other working-class men. White feminists' comparisons of these behaviors at times also blurred the lines between class and race, putting working-class men and men of color in the same category of obnoxious, loud catcallers without delineating the complicated ways that class, race, and gender interacted and intersected. As journalist Gwenda Linda Blair explained in a 1974 issue of *Liberation* magazine, she felt less tense and on edge when "hippy-types or middle-class professionals" approached her on the street than compared with working-class men and men of color. Of hippies and professionals, Blair wrote, "I know that they will be judging me, but they won't take over all the space available—they're not so clearly threatening me.... Their less obnoxious approach may be the more insidious, but at least it allows me to get from one place to another without having to use up all my emotional energy surviving another 'Would I like to fuck you, baby.'" For Blair, "street hassling," as she termed it, is a "major outlet for racial and class antagonisms, as well as sexual frustration." Thus while a catcall may be an expression of sexual frustration, she wrote, "more often I think [it] means, 'You may think you're hot shit and I'm scum, but don't you forget you're just a cunt that I can fuck.' [The catcaller is] also getting back at white or middle-class men by verbally 'spitting' on their property." Thus the insidious "judging" from men of Blair's racial and class group was not as destabilizing, or frightening, as what Blair perceived as the "class (or racial) antagonisms" that were "just beneath the surface" of intrusions from working-class men and men of color.<sup>42</sup>

Assertions like these were by no means shared by all feminists writing about men's stranger intrusions in the 1970s. Women from working-class backgrounds or with a keen awareness of class inequality spoke out about what they saw as the classism of anti-street harassment activism. Ida Monico-Lemay, a member of the New York Radical Feminists, called out her fellow feminists for "closing in on the wrong target" in their conversations about what was known at the time as the

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<sup>42</sup> Blair, "Standing on the Corner...", 6-8.

“verbal rapist.” At a group discussion of the verbal rapist, Monico-Lemay “began to feel apprehensive” as she noticed women “narrow their attack to the ... working class.” Disheartened, she wrote to the New York Radical Feminists’ newsletter to ask, “Why was the obsequious middle class with its impotent intellectuals, its Madison Avenue creators of the ‘beautiful piece of ass’ image being ignored? ... [W]eren’t [the working class men] just doing what had filtered down to them from above? By making the working class the target the rest of mankind was free to perpetuate their decayed view of womanhood.” While even Monico-Lemay admitted she thought the “working class” were “the worst perpetrators of this crime,” she argued that feminists had bigger fish to fry. Monico-Lemay’s analysis, while critical of feminists’ fixation on working-class catcallers, also cast such men as entirely powerless, simply mimicking the sexist culture and ideology of those with more social and political power. She urged her fellow feminists to focus their attention on deconstructing the nuclear family, tearing down institutions that sexualized women, and eliminating “marriage,” “racism,” and “religions.” For Monico-Lemay, catcalls were simply one small manifestation of a vast solar system of sexist ideology that permeated society. “The raping of womanhood is done on many levels,” she wrote, “and to visualize it as only a sport if the working class confuses the issue.” In the process, the middle-aged Monico-Lemay also managed to trivialize stranger intrusions and cast working-class men as unable to control their impulses, suggesting that the “bouncing boobies and exposed bodies” of her younger counterparts brought out in working-class men what “they were trained to do.”<sup>43</sup>

## Legacies of Women’s Liberation

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<sup>43</sup> Monico-Lemay, “Speaking Out.”

Over time, the women's liberation movement began to coalesce in agreement with Monico-Lemay's critique that a focus on catcalls and wolf-whistles took energy away from bigger fights. Anti-rape activists, who had argued that men's stranger intrusions kept women in fear of rape, did not, in the end, focus their efforts on eradicating such intrusions. It is likely that sexual violence activists concluded that if they eliminated the acts on the extreme end of the spectrum of sexual violence, such as rape, the acts on the other end of the spectrum, such as street harassment, would fall soon after. In any case, by the mid-1970s, groups like New York Radical Feminists' Street Harassment Committee found they struggled to recruit members and pull off significant actions. In January 1975, the Committee reported it was struggling to recruit new members. Though street harassment remained a "vital and exigent topic, women did not respond by coming to organize." A few months later, the Committee announced it was going "underground." Its last hurrah was a letter-writing campaign that encouraged members to inform on businesses where male employees had harassed women. Businesses like the famous Zabar's grocery store in Manhattan made it on to the feminist blacklist and New York Radical Feminists encouraged their members to apply pressure via a boycott.<sup>44</sup> An organized response to men's stranger intrusions would not emerge again for a decade.

Individual reports and analysis of street harassment continued, however, and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, major feminist publications, as well as the occasional national women's magazine or newspaper, published stories about women's experiences of street harassment. Much of the mainstream reporting on street harassment fully embraced the trope of the catcalling

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<sup>44</sup> Joan Goldman, "The Street Harassment Workshop: A Progress Report," *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter*, January 1975, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; Flora, "Announcements," *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter*, July 1975, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; Joan Goldman, "Street Harassment Goes Underground," *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter*, August 1975, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; "Campaign Against Street Harassment Letter," *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter*, November 1975, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University; "Women in the Law Courts: A Victory," *New York Radical Feminists Newsletter*, November 1975, Box 1, New York Radical Feminists Records, Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Duke University.

construction worker, perhaps the most widespread legacy of 1970s discourses of street harassment. Even if an article was not specifically about the problem of “hard hats,” newspapers and magazines often illustrated their street harassment pieces with photographs or drawings of construction workers ogling women.<sup>45</sup> (When I wrote my own blog post on the history of street harassment in 2018, the publishers chose a stock image of a construction worker looking down on a passing woman as the header image on the website.)<sup>46</sup> Some mainstream reporting on street harassment employed trivializing rhetoric that should be familiar to the reader by now. For instance, in a 1977 exposé that claimed “street comments” were on the rise in Washington, D.C., Minnie Massey, director of the D.C. Women’s Commission for Crime Prevention, argued that such comments were “less significant” than other urban threats. A resident of the District since 1934, Massey had herself been the target of similar behaviors in a time when men’s stranger intrusions were increasingly trivialized. “Men have always made ‘wolf whistles,’” she said. “It’s a very natural thing. You always hated to walk by a crowd of men because you knew they were going to say something. Perhaps the comments are less sedate nowadays, but that’s the tendency in everything.”<sup>47</sup>

The fact that Massey both “hated” wolf whistles but also saw them as “natural” is arguably the central tension in women’s experiences of men’s stranger intrusions in the latter half of the twentieth century. Massey’s comments echoed women and men who expressed tolerance for, even desire for, ogling, whistling, and other intrusions between strangers in public places throughout this dissertation. Trivializing rhetoric of men’s stranger intrusions indeed persists to this day. In 2014, the

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<sup>45</sup> De Witt, “The ‘Hey, Honey!’ Hassle”; Jim Sanderson, “Liberated Male: Confronting Street Hassling,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1980; di Leonardo, “Political Economy of Street Harassment”; Cheryl Benard and Edit Schlaffer, “The Man in the Street: Why He Harasses,” *Ms*, May 1981; Van Gelder, “The International Language of Street Hassling”; “Verbal Abuse on the Street: How to Talk Back,” *Glamour*, February 1984; Coalition for a Hassle Free Zone, “Fact Sheet on Street Harassment”; Kass, “Dealing with Street Harassment”; Carrie Lamson, “Off Women’s Backs: Making Washington, DC, a Hassle Free Zone,” *Off Our Backs*, April 30, 1986; Dana, “Talking Back to Street Harassers.”

<sup>46</sup> Molly Brookfield, “Why It’s Bad When It’s ‘Not That Bad,’” *Nursing Clio* (blog), May 1, 2018, <https://nursingclio.org/2018/05/01/why-its-bad-when-its-not-that-bad/>.

<sup>47</sup> De Witt, “The ‘Hey Honey!’ Hassle.”

Fox News show *Outnumbered* (a show premised on the idea that a male host was “outnumbered” by his four female co-hosts) spent an episode repeating the same kind of rhetoric that has been used to trivialize men’s stranger intrusions for decades. One of the show’s female cohosts, Kimberly Guilfoyle, defended street harassment, saying, “let men be men...look, men are going to be that way. What can you do?” Another co-host explained that she did not like catcalls as a young woman, but now that she was approaching middle-age, she was offended if she did not hear them. The Fox News piece was met with protestations from anti-street harassment organizations, feminist publications, and other mainstream news outlets.<sup>48</sup> Tellingly, the segment was in response to a *New York Post* opinion piece by a woman who said she enjoyed being catcalled and was happy to be “that objectified sex thing for” the “hard hats” she encountered on the street. The article included photographs of the author, Doree Lewak, posing with construction workers on the streets of New York.<sup>49</sup> Both the trope of the catcalling hard hat and the trivializing rhetoric of street harassment as “natural” are rooted in the longer history of men’s stranger intrusions this dissertation has sought to tell.

Seventies feminists’ debates over the racial politics of street harassment discourses also persisted long after Susan Brownmiller sparred with Angela Davis and Anne Braden over the

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<sup>48</sup> Colin Campbell, “Fox News Hosts Defend Catcalling Women,” *Business Insider*, August 28, 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/fox-news-outnumbered-defend-catcalling-women-2014-8>; Holly Kearn, “FOX News Is Wrong about Street Harassment,” *Stop Street Harassment* (blog), August 28, 2014, <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/2014/08/foxnews/>; Olivia Kittel, “‘Let Men Be Men’: Fox News Hosts Defend Catcalling,” *Media Matters for America* (blog), August 28, 2014, <https://www.mediamatters.org/fox-nation/let-men-be-men-fox-news-hosts-defend-catcalling>. Fox News came under fire again after the release of a viral video showing a woman’s experience of street harassment in New York City. A male host at Fox News reported on the video by “adding” his own catcall to the barrage depicted in the video. Ella Alexander, “Fox News Presenter Adds ‘101 Calls’ to Shoshana Roberts Street Harassment Video by Declaring ‘Damn, Baby, You’re a Piece of Woman,’” *Independent*, October 30, 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/fox-news-presenter-misses-the-point-of-shoshana-roberts-catcalling-video-she-got-100-catcalls-let-9827752.html>; Jenny Kutner, “Fox News Host Offers Predictably Repellent Response to Viral Catcalling Video,” *Salon* (blog), October 30, 2014, [https://www.salon.com/2014/10/30/fox\\_news\\_host\\_offers\\_predictably\\_repellent\\_response\\_to\\_viral\\_catcalling\\_video/](https://www.salon.com/2014/10/30/fox_news_host_offers_predictably_repellent_response_to_viral_catcalling_video/); Kelsey McKinney, “Fox News Covered Street Harassment by Catcalling a Victim on the Air,” *Vox* (blog), October 30, 2014, <https://www.vox.com/xpress/2014/10/30/7131613/fox-news-covered-street-harassment-and-it-was-exactly-as-awful-as>.

<sup>49</sup> Doree Lewak, “Hey, Ladies — Catcalls Are Flattering! Deal with It,” *New York Post*, August 18, 2014, <https://nypost.com/2014/08/18/enough-sanctimony-ladies-catcalls-are-flattering/>.

meaning of Emmett Till's murder. Discourses that cast Black men and other men of color as especially likely to be catcallers fed into powerful narratives about white women's vulnerability to men of color in urban space. These narratives had devastating consequences in 1989 when a white female jogger was attacked and raped in Central Park. Five Black and Latino teenagers went to prison for over a decade for the attack, after the New York City police had coerced confessions from them. DNA evidence exonerated the "Central Park Five" over a decade later and pinned the assault on a single individual, a serial rapist known to have been operating in the area at the time of the Central Park attack. The police had never pursued him as a suspect. Some feminists insisted that race had not been part of the "rush to judgement" but others, including legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, argued that coverage of the case at the time contrasted sharply with the lack of attention to or outrage over attacks and rapes of women of color.<sup>50</sup>

Such narratives persisted into the 2010s and influenced the work of anti-street harassment organizations. In 2014, the same year that Karla Jay spoke at the anti-street harassment conference organized by Hollaback, the organization came under fire for a film they produced to highlight the ubiquity of street harassment. The film, titled "10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman," featured a young Jewish woman, actress Shoshana Roberts, walking through the streets of New York. The filmmaker walked ahead of Roberts, a camera on his backpack, capturing all the interactions she had with men on the street. The film opened with a caption reading, "Ten hours of silent walking through all areas of Manhattan, wearing jeans and a crewneck t-shirt." The caption was intended to dispel any suspicion that Roberts was inviting such interactions, implying that her silence and conservative clothing made her an innocent victim. The rest of the two-minute video showed men whistling, staring, at propositioning Roberts. One man walked shoulder-to-shoulder alongside

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<sup>50</sup> Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 286. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1267-69.

Roberts for several minutes without saying a word. The overall effect was of an onslaught of intrusive behaviors that punctuated her silent walk through the city.<sup>51</sup> The video was hugely popular, garnering tens of millions of views and a slew of copycat videos, both serious and comic. Some praised the video for its depiction of what many saw as the ever-present threat of street harassment.<sup>52</sup> However, the video also came under fire for its skewed depiction of street harassment as primarily perpetrated by men of color. The majority of the men featured in the video were Black and Latino, despite the director's protestations that Roberts, a Jewish woman, had been harassed by men of many races and ethnicities. Hanna Rosin, a writer at *Slate* magazine, argued that the video had effectively portrayed the onslaught of harassment women often face in public space but "unintentionally [made] another point: that harassers are mostly Black and Latino, and hanging out on the streets in midday in clothes that suggest they are not on their lunch break." Author Roxane Gay put it more bluntly, tweeting, "The racial politics of the video are fucked up. Like, she didn't walk through any white neighborhoods?" Both the video's director and Hollaback later issued statements or apologies, but the criticism brought into sharp relief the way that the meaning and effects of men's stranger intrusions remain contested today, especially where race is concerned.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Rob Bliss Creative, *10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1XGPvbWn0A>.

<sup>52</sup> Cavan Sieczkowski, "Watch This Woman Receive 100 Catcalls While Walking Around For A Day," *HuffPost* (blog), October 28, 2014, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/walking-in-nyc-as-a-woman\\_n\\_6063054](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/walking-in-nyc-as-a-woman_n_6063054).

<sup>53</sup> Hanna Rosin, "The Problem With That Catcalling Video," *Slate*, October 29, 2014, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2014/10/29/catcalling\\_video\\_hollaback\\_s\\_look\\_at\\_street\\_harassment\\_in\\_nyc\\_edited\\_out.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/10/29/catcalling_video_hollaback_s_look_at_street_harassment_in_nyc_edited_out.html); Alicia Lu, "The Catcalling Video Edited Out White Men, Undermining the Video's Entire Purpose," *Bustle* (blog), October 30, 2014, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/46801-the-catcalling-video-edited-out-white-men-undermining-the-videos-entire-purpose>; Dave Schilling, "Is That Viral Catcalling Video Racist?," *Vice* (blog), October 31, 2014, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/av4qjk/catcalling-viral-video-racist-twir-131](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/av4qjk/catcalling-viral-video-racist-twir-131); "Statement: Hollaback! On Rob Bliss' Viral Street Harassment PSA," *Hollaback! Together We Have the Power to End Harassment* (blog), October 30, 2014, <https://www.ihollaback.org/blog/2014/10/30/statement-about-recent-street-harassment-psa/>; Kat Chow, "Video Calls Out Catcallers, But Cuts Out White Men," *NPR.org* (blog), November 1, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/11/01/360422087/hollaback-video-calls-out-catcallers-but-cuts-out-white-men>.

The actress who featured in the video reported a deluge of rape and death threats after it went viral and later sued the video's director for additional compensation for her work. Hermione Hoby, "The Woman in 10 Hours Walking in NYC: 'I Got People Wanting to Slit My Throat,'" *The Guardian*, December 17, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/dec/17/the-woman-in-10-hours-walking-in-nyc-i-got-people-wanting-to-slit-my-throat>; Ben Mathis-Lilley, "Star of Viral Catcalling Video Sues Director, YouTube, T.G.I. Friday's," *Slate*

On the other hand, once the women's liberation movement identified "street harassment" as a symptom of a sexist society, this analysis remained a persistent thread in mainstream, discussion of men's stranger intrusions. Whereas the anti-mashing activism of the Progressive era buckled under the weight of trivializing rhetoric and arguments that "liberated" women did not require protection from the odd ogle, seventies feminists' analysis of men's stranger intrusions as harmful, embarrassing, and frightening survived a variety of ebbs, flows, and backlashes. Women continued to debate the meaning of these behaviors and, as the *Fox News* female hosts can attest, some women insisted they enjoyed these behaviors into the present. Yet both the term "street harassment" and the analysis implied—that intrusive behaviors in public were a form of harassment and thus not something to be desired—never disappeared once they were introduced in the mid-1970s. It is this analysis that has made this dissertation possible, as it influenced a generation of sexual violence scholars—especially sociologists, psychologists, and legal scholars—to theorize the impact of "small behaviors" like street harassment on women's lives.

## Conclusion

Many of the contestations and struggles over the meaning of men's stranger intrusions that this dissertation has documented echo into our present. On the one hand, anti-street harassment organizations and activists are still fighting to document, denaturalize, and condemn street harassment, much like the anti-mashing activists of the early 1900s and the women's liberationists of the 1970s. On the other hand, today sexual harassment researchers are trying to understand why gender harassment is still not taken seriously despite its prevalence and the impact it has. These

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*Magazine* (blog), July 14, 2015, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/07/street-harassment-video-lawsuit-actress-shoshana-roberts-sues-director-others.html>.

researchers are grappling with discourses that trivialize gender harassment, much like the books, articles, and advertisements that trivialized girl-watching in the 1950s or the women who said they enjoyed wolf-whistles in the 1940s. This dissertation has sought to bring both threads into focus, to show how catcalls, wolf-whistles, and other intrusions have at turns been behaviors to condemn and resist while at other times they have been cast as trivial and harmless.. Sometimes both meanings of intrusive behaviors have coexisted, struggling against one another as women especially have tried to understand why something that they are told is so harmless can feel so frightening.

Emergent scholarship on the nature and impact of sexual harassment documents continued trivialization of men's stranger intrusions. In the wake of sexual assault and harassment allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein in 2017, the #MeToo movement has put the issue of sexual harassment and misconduct at the forefront of American social and political discourse. A slew of new reports, surveys, and research have begun to give Americans some idea of the breadth and impact of sexual violence on people's everyday lives. For instance, a groundbreaking 2018 report released by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine demonstrated that what researchers call "gender harassment" is by far the most common form of sexual harassment. Gender harassment includes a wide range of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility, objectification, exclusion, or second-class status based on someone's gender or gender expression. That can mean anything from demeaning remarks about bodies, the use of sexist slurs, or even something like sabotaging someone's work or equipment because of their gender. The National Academies study found that this kind of gender harassment can create an environment where unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion are more likely to occur. In part, this is because the acceptance of seemingly lesser forms of harassment can make more severe forms appear normal or acceptable. This study also found that the public are far less aware of gender harassment than they are of the rarer behaviors like sexual coercion. The legal system, the lay public, and even people who

experience sexual harassment do not tend to view gender harassment as part of the range of behaviors that count. Thus, mainstream understandings of sexual harassment focus only on the extreme tip of the iceberg leaving hidden the vast depths of gender harassment beneath (see Figure 20).<sup>54</sup> To study street harassment is to study this very problem. The masher, the girl watcher, the catcalling construction worker: they do not live in the tip of this iceberg, they live beneath the surface. The most common forms of street harassment are forms of gender harassment—catcalling, ogling or staring, perhaps a man standing just a little too close on the subway—and like gender harassment in the workplace, gender harassment on the street is not taken seriously. Yet, as this dissertation has demonstrated, it has historically had a significant impact on women’s sense of safety and comfort in public space.

Anti-street harassment activists have also begun to use this newly rejuvenated interest in sexual harassment to advocate for the inclusion of men’s stranger intrusions in the research and theorizing of sexual harassment more broadly. For instance, the anti-street harassment organization Stop Street Harassment has spent the last few years conducting surveys across the United States to document the impact of street harassment on Americans’ everyday lives. The organization co-directed a 2019 study with help from a variety of activist and non-profit organizations, including the University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health. The study surveyed 2,219 adults in the United States and sought to measure the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in the United States. It found that 81% of women surveyed had been sexually harassed at some time in their life, and 68% of those experiences had happened in a public space. The study also found that some “demographics were more likely than others to say they had experienced street harassment at least once in their lifetime.” Thus 91% of queer women said they had experienced street harassment

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<sup>54</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering, *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.17226/24994>.

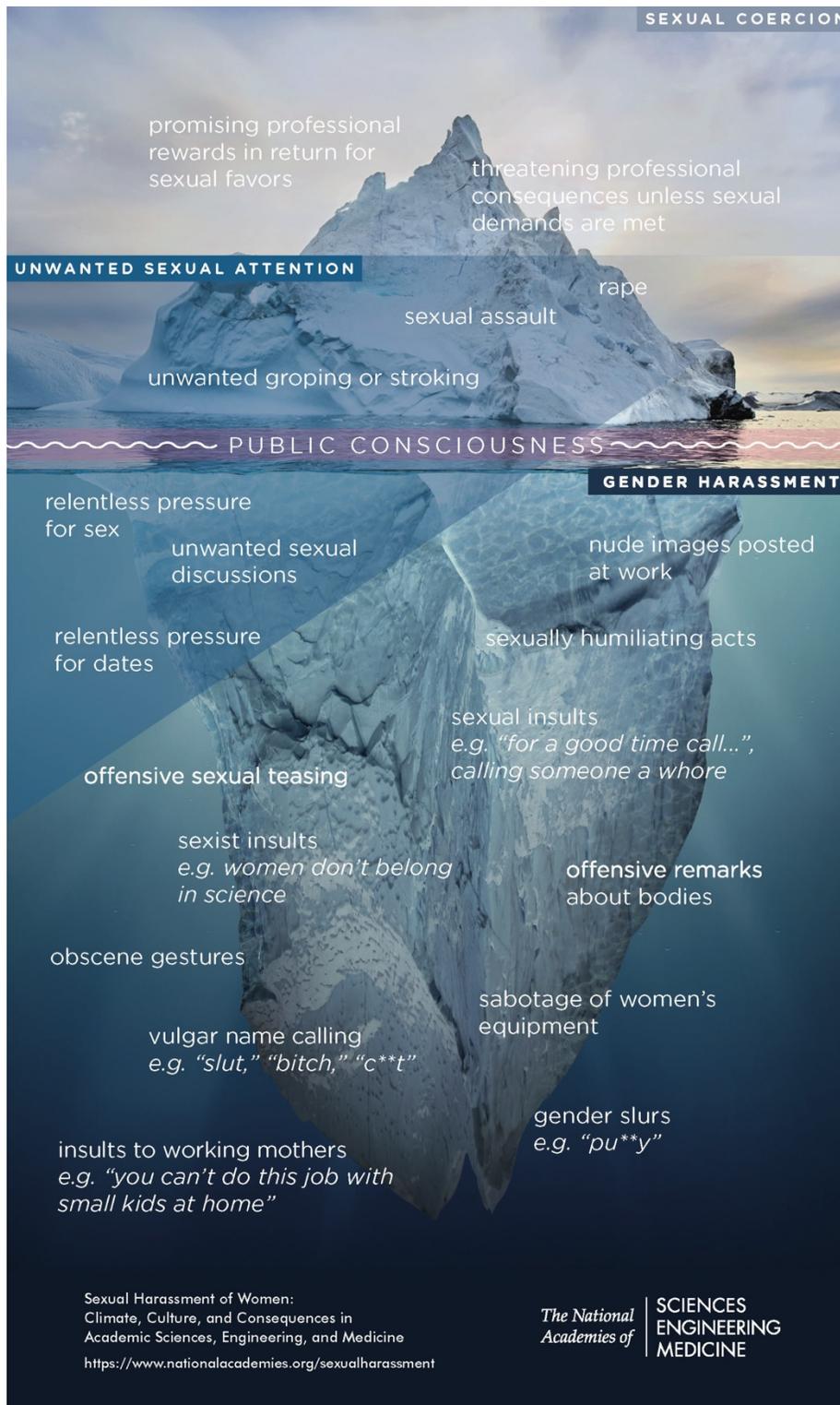


Figure 20: The iceberg of sexual harassment. National Academies of Sciences, Medicine, and Engineering, Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2018).

at least once, compared with 70% of straight women, while Black women and queer women were the most likely to say they had experienced street harassment in the last six months. These numbers suggest that street harassment remains a widespread phenomenon and that it may in fact be the most common form of sexual harassment.<sup>55</sup> However, popular ideas of sexual harassment do not tend to include harassment in public places as part of the problem. Street harassment is noticeably absent from most discussions of the #MeToo movement. As a result, anti-street harassment organizations continue to do the work of documenting and denaturalizing men's stranger intrusions across the country.

One of the most striking things I encountered while writing this dissertation was the extent to which men's stranger intrusions themselves have differed little across the last 150 years. From the "Where do you lodge, my dear"s of the 1810s to the "What's happening, baby"s of the 2010s, men's stranger intrusions have remained remarkably constant in terms of the behaviors themselves. That said, the way these behaviors have been interpreted has shifted considerably over time. As this dissertation has shown, "street insults" were met with some initial bemusement and denunciation in the mid-1800s. This resistance ramped up with the anti-mashing activism of the Progressive Era, only to be tamped down with the trivialization of the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s, intrusive behaviors had become the purview of "girl-watchers"—white, middle-class men who were humorously described as connoisseurs of the female form—while several prominent cases of Black men facing criminal charges or even death for ogling or wolf-whistling demonstrated the double-standard of men's stranger intrusions in the twentieth century. By the time I wrote this epilogue, the penultimate writing of this project, I had come to empathize with the feminists of the 1970s who

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<sup>55</sup> University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health and Stop Street Harassment, "Measuring #MeToo: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault," April 2019; "2019 Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault," Stop Street Harassment, April 2019, <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/our-work/nationalstudy/2019study/>.

struggled to grasp the shifting, amorphous discourses of ogling, catcalling, wolf-whistling, and other intrusive behaviors. Just as feminists of many backgrounds and political persuasions debated the meaning of these behaviors, I have sifted through multiple interpretations of men's stranger intrusions, trying to ascertain the implications of these behaviors for understandings of race and class in particular. My hope is that, while the meaning of stranger intrusions may remain contested, complicated, and at times opaque, this dissertation has at least shown that they have a significant impact on the lives of the individuals who enact them and who experience them, and thus they are worth our close scrutiny, however trivial and unimportant they may seem.

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As I type the last words of this dissertation, I have been reflecting on all the ways my thinking around it has changed over years. The five years that I have worked on this dissertation have not be quiet ones. I wrote the first words of this project in a writing seminar in the spring of 2015. Seven months later, a videotape depicting a candidate for the United States presidency bragging about sexually assaulting women threatened to upset his run. He won anyway. A year after that, several women came forward to accuse Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment and assault in an explosive set of newspaper articles that sent the country into an extended self-reflection about the prevalence of sexual violence. The ensuing conversations, debates, and activism fell under the moniker of #MeToo, a phrase that was meant to highlight how many millions of women had experienced sexual harassment and assault in their lives. The Weinstein accusations were followed by a slew of similar stories: it seemed like every week some new male celebrity was revealed as a harasser. Researchers in sociology, psychology, and feminist studies have heard the call to shift their attention or redouble their existing efforts to understanding the role of sexual violence and harassment in people's lives, including how sexual harassment and misconduct affect people differently depending on their race, sexuality, and gender identity. Time and again,

these events revealed to me new facets of this project, new ways I could think about its stakes, and I continually felt a renewed commitment to unearthing the ways that sexual violence appears in the smallest gestures.

Then, as I was polishing off the final edits to this dissertation in May 2020, a white police officer in my home state of Minnesota murdered a Black man, George Floyd. The police officer, Derek Chauvin, held his knee on Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes. Earlier that same day, a white woman in Central Park called the New York Police Department and falsely claimed that a Black man was threatening her life. That man, Christian Cooper had simply asked her to leash her dog in accordance with the law. Like so many white women before her, Amy Cooper knew she could get a Black man in trouble, that she could even get a Black man killed, by claiming he assaulted her. Had police officers shown up, they could so easily have murdered Christian Cooper as they had George Floyd.

When I started this project, I thought it would be about the way sexual violence can live in even the most mundane interactions between men and women. And it is about that. But through my research and even more so through guidance from my committee members, especially the patience and wisdom of LaKisha Simmons, I know that this is also a project about how white supremacy lives in those very same mundane interactions.

I do not know what Amy Cooper was thinking when she called the police. I do know, whether she could articulate it or not, that Amy Cooper lives in a society where her safety as a white woman is placed above the life of Christian Cooper as a Black man. It is a society where sexual violence is a multifaceted tool of oppression, against those who survive it, and those who do not survive, but also sometimes against those who are accused. This is a society where white male senators can trash the reputation of a well-off, credentialed white female professor by the name of Christine Blasey Ford because she credibly accused one of their own of sexual assault, as they did in

the fall of 2018. Blasey Ford's many privileges did not protect her from white male entitlement and wrath. This is also a society where someone with Blasey Ford's social position—someone whose race, class, sexuality, and education places her in a position of relative power—can wield the power that position affords against those in more, or differently, vulnerable positions. That is what Amy Cooper did when she used her position as a middle-class white woman to take the threat of gender and sexual violence, that is a reality for many women, and used it as a tool of racist violence against Christian Cooper.

So yes, this story is about patriarchy and sexual violence and the objectification of women. But it cannot be about any of that without dealing with the white supremacy threaded through it all. Patriarchy does not operate uniformly and white women who experience sexual violence can also use the threat of sexual violence to wield power over men of color, especially Black men. This project has helped me understand how the violence of intrusive behaviors is obscured when white men are the perpetrators: whiteness elides the violence of an ogle, a muttered sexual remark, or a groping hand. The other side of that story, however, is that it has become easy for white women (and men) to see violence in the actions of Black men and other men of color that they do not see in white men. White women like Amy Cooper see violence in Black men even where it does not exist. Meanwhile, white men continue to ogle, catcall, grope, assault, and rape with relatively few consequences. So I have told part of the story, but I feel I have yet to fully explicate how sexual violence and racial violence are deeply intertwined in men's stranger intrusions and women's responses to them. I am committed to bringing the thread of white supremacy even more to the fore in future revisions of this project. I want to use my work to help us to understand this one more way that white supremacy and racism—not to mention homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, and many other vectors of oppression—manifest in our everyday lives. I look forward to sharing it with you.

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