
Although much has been written about feminism and the city, little attention has been given to the incivilities that women are subject to in the public realm on a regular basis. These include pinching, slapping, hitting, shouted remarks, vulgarity, insidious insinuations, staring and stalking. Street harassment is a timely and global issue: In an attempt to deter gender based public harassment, many cities have adopted female-only transit vehicles. However, because street harassment is highly underreported, little data on the issue exists. From interviews with several women, it was noticed that the place of occurrence is often intrinsic to the memory of street harassment and to the offense itself. The primary objective of this paper is, therefore, to study the relationship between gender-based public harassment and the built environment in New York City.

This study surveyed 267 women in New York City in an attempt to understand how space affects street harassment and women’s perception of safety and space. 76% of respondents reported that they are harassed at least “sometimes”. “Vulgar remarks” on the street are the most prevalent form of street harassment, which seems to happen more frequently during the day-time than night-time. However, harassment in confined spaces, such as subways or buses, are more frightening. A male companion makes women feel safest, followed by a female companion, lighting and the presence of strangers.