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From "Ghettoization" to a Field of Its Own: A Comprehensive Review of Street Harassment Research

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# **From “ghettoization” to a field of its own: a comprehensive review of street harassment research**

**Keywords:** street harassment; public intrusion; intersectionality; sexual violence; policy

## **Summary Table 1: critical findings**

- Street harassment is a common and harmful occurrence for women and marginalised communities globally.
- There is considerable slippage in the conceptual framing and definitions of street harassment used in research to date, making comparison across studies and research contexts challenging.
- While research on this topic is expanding rapidly, much of this research lacks an intersectional understanding of street harassment.

## **Summary Table 2: review implications**

- Policy and practice responses require ongoing and systematic evaluation in order to monitor their impact and effectiveness.
- Policy and practice responses should reflect the identified needs of people who have experienced street harassment and should be informed by an intersectional approach.
- Further research is needed that focuses on perpetrators, community attitudes, state-perpetrated harassment, and the relationship(s) between technology-facilitated and public harassment, and as well as in contexts outside of the Global North.

Street harassment represents one of the most prevalent forms of sexual violence, though it also manifests as racist, homophobic, transphobic, and other forms of abuse. Despite its apparent commonality, street harassment has frequently been positioned as a ‘trivial’ or harmless occurrence (Bowman, 1993; Laniya, 2005; Tuerkheimer, 1997; Vera-Gray, 2016).

Subsequently, it has received minimal attention in both research and policy, though it was addressed in early feminist work on ‘everyday’ manifestations of men’s violence and intrusion (Fileborn, 2021; Vera-Gray, 2016b). Given this general silence, it is heartening to see a resurgence of research on this issue, particularly over the past five years. Arguably, this renewed interest has been driven by the work of international activist groups such as *Hollaback!*, the *Everyday Sexism Project*, and *Catcalls of NYC*, who have drawn attention to the prevalence and impacts of street harassment, particularly in the lives of cis-gender women (Fileborn, 2021). In contrast to the widespread trivialisation of street harassment, the body of research that has been conducted to date – in conjunction with the thousands of stories collated by activists (Hollaback!, n.d.) – demonstrates that it is a profoundly harmful experience that relates to stereotypically ‘more serious’ iterations of sexual (and other) violence in intricate ways. In this article, we aim to provide a critical review of the current state of research-based knowledge on street harassment. While considerable ground has been made in advancing our understanding of this issue, our review draws attention to substantive gaps in knowledge – with implications for both future research trajectories and policy development – and highlights theoretical and conceptual challenges that require further reflection by researchers in the field.

### **Methods**

In undertaking this critical review of literature, the authors conducted an extensive search of international databases using EBSCO Discovery, following the approach utilised by (Fileborn, 2016a) and also reflecting the approach taken in conducting a scoping review (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). As Arksey and O’Malley (2005, p. 20) explain, this approach provides a ‘technique to “map” relevant literature in the field of interest’ and is particularly appropriate when undertaking a broad review of a field that draws together studies that have

utilised different methodological approaches. The search was repeated, with the first search conducted in 2015 and the second in 2020. The studies identified in this review were located by searching the key term 'street harassment' in the following databases – Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, SAGE Journals, Scopus, and PsychINFO. A secondary search was conducted using Google Scholar to identify studies not published in the aforementioned databases. Studies included in this review were peer-reviewed, written in English, and were centrally focused on 'street harassment'. Articles that made passing mention of street harassment with no substantive focus or discussion on the topic were excluded from the sample, as were duplicate items. A small number of reports and dissertations were included in the review, due to limited academic research into street harassment. In the 2015 search, 5247 results were returned through the database, and a further 1670 results through Google Scholar, with a final sample of 53 relevant articles.

Another review was conducted in February 2020 to identify new contributions to the field. The second review of literature utilised the same search term, databases and inclusion/exclusion criteria as the first, and revealed a significant emergence of new literature: a total of 20,551 results were returned through the database search, and approximately 212,000 from Google Scholar, with 122 new studies meeting the inclusion criteria. Following the search of these databases, a snowball sampling technique was utilised in the second search, drawing on the reference lists of relevant articles, with a further 32 articles included in the final sample. Following this, 27 sources were excluded due to inaccessibility. An overview of the total 182 sources included in the 2015 and 2020 reviews are provided in the supplementary file. The review revealed a majority of qualitative studies (n=118), with significantly fewer quantitative (n=31) and mixed methods (n=33) research

examining street harassment. The expansion of publishing on this topic is itself a notable finding, demonstrating how street harassment has become a burgeoning research area, and further supports the need for an updated literature review that builds on Logan's (2015) contribution and acknowledges the rapid growth of knowledge production.

There are some limitations with our approach that should be noted. The terminology used to describe street harassment varies across studies, with terms such as 'men's intrusions', 'public intrusions', 'street remarks', 'public incivilities' and 'eve teasing' also used across the literature (Vera-Gray, 2016b). Public harassment against LGBTQ+ people, and racist harassment may be labelled as hate crime rather than harassment. Likewise, street harassment is a diffuse category and can refer to forms of sexual harassment and violence that take place on public transport and in quasi-public spaces such as nightclubs. Given the slippage and ambiguity around what constitutes street harassment (something we address further below), this creates a considerable challenge in identifying all potentially relevant literature. This was mitigated by the use of a triangulated search strategy, with the snowballing component in particular assisting to identify relevant studies that did not explicitly use the term street harassment. The authors undertook an initial reading of all studies included in the sample, and from this, developed thematic categories that reflected the key focus of the research to date. We move on now to explore the dominant themes and findings from the review.

## **Findings**

### **What is Street Harassment – Typologies**

Street harassment constitutes a broad array of behaviour and in the research to date, there is considerable slippage and ambiguity in terms of what actions 'count'. The most common approach positions street harassment as a form of sexual harassment that is overwhelming

perpetrated by male strangers against women in public space. This typically includes actions such as catcalling, kissing noises, horn honking, staring or leering, following someone, unwanted conversation (e.g., repeated requests for a date or phone number), sexualised gestures, frottage, unwanted touching, indecent exposure, and public masturbation (Brundson, 2018; Campos et al., 2017; Macmillan, Nierobisz & Welsh, 2000). However, other studies have included actions such as physical abuse and violence, sexual assault, and rape (Armstrong, 2016; Campos et al., 2017; Author's work, 2013; Gardner, 1995; Logan, 2015; Stop Street Harassment, 2014). The boundaries around what 'counts' as street harassment are thus blurred and varied.

Difficulties in establishing any kind of firm typology of harassment are further complicated by the fact that what is lived or experienced as harassment can be highly context-dependent and subjective (di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019; Fairchild, 2010; Farmer & Jordan, 2017; Fileborn, 2013, 2017a; Heben, 1994-1995; McCarty, Iannone, & Kelly, 2014; Vera-Gray, 2016b). Interpretations of what 'counts' as harassment are themselves made through the discursive lens of myths and stereotypes that exclude all but the most extreme iterations of sexual violence and harassment (Hlavka, 2014; Kelly, 1988). Moreover, many forms of public harassment are not overtly sexualised and may appear ambiguous, if not 'friendly' in nature, when viewed as isolated incidents (e.g., commands to 'smile', or apparent greetings such as 'hello' – see Bailey, 2016, 2017; di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019; Vera-Gray & Fileborn, 2018; Vera-Gray, 2016a, b).

Additionally, typologies of street harassment must take into account how harassment is shaped through an intersectional lens. While street harassment is most commonly framed as sexualised in nature, it can manifest in ways that are racist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist,

Islamophobic, and so forth (Chmielewski, 2017; Datzman & Gardner, 2000; Fogg-Davis, 2006; Heben, 1994-1995; Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Stop Street Harassment, 2014; Vizvary, 2020). For Black women, it is often not possible to disentangle racist and sexist harassment (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002). Same sex attracted people can likewise encounter harassment that is simultaneously sexualised and homophobic in nature (Fileborn, 2021b). Men may be targeted with homophobic abuse or on the basis of some perceived 'failure' in their performance of masculinity (see, for e.g., Gimlin 2010; Namaste, 1996). As such, the precise forms of street harassment can shift across different groups as well as being filtered through the lens of personal experience, context, discursive norms, and structures of power.

## **Conceptualising Street Harassment**

### **Intrusion.**

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the difficulty in pinning down street harassment as a category of behaviour, the approaches taken to conceptualising street harassment have been subject to considerable debate in the literature (Davis, 1994; Kissling, 1991; Laniya, 2005; Logan, 2015; Vera-Gray, 2016a, b). Such debates have important implications for how street harassment is understood, what and whose experiences are included, and how the issue should best be responded to. Indeed, until relatively recently we lacked a language to express street harassment and its attendant harms, making it difficult for individuals to articulate their experiences in a way that is recognised and intelligible to others (Davis, 1994; Heben, 1994-1995; Kissling, 1991; Laniya, 2005; Tuerekheimer, 1997). Difficulty in developing conceptualisations of street harassment that adequately reflect and capture its nature are undoubtedly compounded by the aforementioned varied perspectives on precisely which actions fall under the banner of 'street harassment', or other commonly used terminology such as 'stranger harassment' (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Wesselmenn & Kelly, 2010),

‘sexual harassment’ (Thompson, 1994), and ‘public harassment’ (Gardner, 1995). Deidre Davis (1994, p. 155), for example, advocates for the use of ‘street harassment’ as it captures both ‘the location – the street – and the behaviour – harassment’. However, UK-based scholar Fiona Vera-Gray (2016a, b) argues that we need to reposition ‘street harassment’ as ‘men’s stranger intrusions’, as this discursive shift refocuses our attention to the actions of perpetrators, rather than whether something is interpreted or lived as ‘harassment’ per se. Additionally, harassment occurs across many public, semi-public, private and digital spaces – it is by no means limited to the literal street (Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Vera-Gray, 2016a, b). Intrusion broadens the scope of analysis and encompasses experiences that are not labelled by the recipient as necessarily harmful or harassing. Such an approach radically shifts the possibilities of what is captured in research on this topic, especially given that participants may not share experiences deemed too ‘minor’ to constitute harassment (see, for e.g., Farmer & Jordan, 2017; Vera-Gray, 2016b). However, not all forms of street harassment are exclusively perpetrated by men, so the concept of ‘men’s stranger intrusions’ also eclipses some forms of harassment. Baptist and Coburn (2019) utilise the term ‘stranger intrusion’, and this can provide a more inclusive conceptualisation, particularly when racist, homophobic, transphobic, and ‘whorephobic’ or anti-sex worker harassment is taken into account (see, e.g., Armstrong, 2016).

Nonetheless, there remains a substantial tension here, as the vast majority of public harassment is indeed perpetrated by men, and it is lived and experienced in gendered ways (Tuerekheimer, 1997; Vera-Gray, 2016b). For example, the fact that many women and gender diverse people are socialised to be fearful of unknown men and the potential for sexual violence in public spaces may amplify the harms of street harassment. Further, virtually *all* harassment is implicated in the (re)production of gendered (and other) power

relations, something which is lost in the gender neutral ‘stranger intrusion’ (see Laniya, 2005; Tuerekheimer, 1997; Vera-Gray, 2016b for a similar critique of ‘street harassment’). While this includes the (re)production of men’s power, we also refer here to the (re)reproduction of power within and across different iterations of gender. This tension is not easily resolved. We suggest that the approach taken to conceptualising street harassment must be selected with an acute awareness of *whose* experiences of harassment we are addressing, and an appreciation of what is obscured or rendered unspeakable through this choice (Vera-Gray, 2016b).

### **Continuum of sexual violence.**

Street harassment has commonly been conceptualised as a form of sexual violence drawing on Kelly’s (1987) continuum model. Dominant discursive and legal approaches to sexual violence typically order it according to apparent ‘seriousness’ and exclude forms of violence that do not adhere to limited norms of ‘real’ rape (see also Hlavka, 2014; Larkin, 1991; Stanko, 1985). In contrast, the continuum recognises all forms of sexual violence as interconnected. Street harassment is thus underpinned by the same gendered power structures and logics that (re)produce other, more ‘serious’ iterations of sexual violence – though the continuum does not order different forms of sexual violence according to a hierarchy of harm (Fileborn, 2013). Further, the continuum model understands experiences of sexual violence as lived alongside one another and operating in a cumulative way (Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Kelly, 1987; Vera-Gray, 2016; Vera-Gray & Fileborn, 2018). Thus, rather than focusing on discrete incidents, the continuum model accounts for the relational and evolving meanings assigned to encounters of sexual violence across the life-course. In addition to constituting sexual (and other) violence in and of itself, this approach suggests that

encountering street harassment can remind women<sup>1</sup> of their vulnerability to, or the possibility of, stereotypically ‘more serious’ forms of sexual violence (such as rape) occurring (Davis, 1994; Donnelly & Calogero, 2018; Author’s work, 2013; Kissling & Kramarae, 1991). However, as flagged earlier, not all forms of public intrusion are sexual in nature, something that is missed in framing street harassment as sexual violence.

### **Sexual terrorism, gender and intersectionality.**

Building on the notion that street harassment can constitute a form of sexual violence, scholars have worked to develop understandings of the *function* street harassment fulfils. Margaret Crouch (2009, p. 137) conceptualises street (and other) harassment as serving a very particular purpose. Namely, ‘to keep women in their place’. She goes on to explain:

‘Sexual harassment is a means of maintaining women’s status as subordinate in society; it is also a means of keeping women in certain physical spaces and out others, or, at least, of controlling women’s behaviour in those spaces.’ (2009, p. 137)

In this respect, street harassment is deeply implicated in the (re)production of gendered power relations, and their spatial manifestation (see also Bowman, 1993; Chafai, 2017; Davis, 1994; Fileborn, 2021b; Kissling & Kramarae, 1991; Larkin, 1991; Lowe & Hayes, 2019; Namaste, 1996; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). Street harassment can be understood as both the result of broader systems of gender inequality, as well as actively reproducing these power relations. Scholars such as Elizabeth Kissling (1991) and Deidre Davis subsequently position street harassment as a form of ‘sexual terrorism’, as it forms one aspect of ‘men’s systematic control and domination of women through actual and implied violence’ (Davis, 1994, p. 140). Relatedly, numerous scholars have argued that street harassment therefore

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<sup>1</sup> We refer exclusively to women here to reflect the approach taken in the literature being discussed, which focused exclusively on cis-gender women.

provides men with an avenue for ‘doing’ or performing hegemonic masculinity, providing ‘the currency used by men to improve their ranking on the masculine scale’ (Baptist & Coburn, 2019, p. 116). Further, these acts have been interpreted as reducing women to a series of body parts or objects, rather than fully formed human beings with rich lives (Chmielewski, 2017; Davis, 1994; Kissling, 1991; Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Tuerekheimer, 1997). In so-doing, street harassment works to ‘define a woman by her body’s value as giver-of-pleasure to the male subject’ (Tuerekheimer, 1997, p. 184), negating women’s subjectivity – she becomes purely a ‘being-for-others’ (Vera-Gray & Fileborn, 2018, pp. 89-90).

However, it is vital that street harassment be viewed through the lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Logan, 2015; Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Vera-Gray & Fileborn, 2018). Our discussion so far, and that which follows, clearly lays out the ways in which public harassment is informed by systems of power relating to gender, race, class, sexuality (or heteronormativity), (dis)ability and so forth. Moreover, these systems of power ‘interlock’ or intersect within one another in particular ways, producing different lived experiences of harassment. Street harassment can be understood as both a product of, and actively reproducing and co-constituting, these complex and fluid relations of power. Baptist and Coburn (2019, p. 116), for example, argue that street harassment must be viewed through the lens of both patriarchy and colonisation ‘to understand how street harassment is perpetuated in attempts to uphold patriarchy and the normative standards rooted in Whiteness’. Scholars such as Bowman (1993, p. 534) and Davis (1994) have argued that the experience of African American women must similarly be understood in relation to the ‘long history of disrespect, degradation, and inhumane sexual mistreatment to which Black women have been subjected over the years’, with this history compounding the harms of harassment (see also Buchanan

& Ormerod, 2002; Chmielweski, 2017; Fogg-Davis, 2006; Heben, 1994-1995). Armstrong notes that participants in her study were targeted ‘not just as a woman but as a woman who sells sex’ (2016, p. 291). Harassment of street-based sex workers must also be understood as a manifestation of whorephobia, anti-sex work ideology, and the stigmatisation of sex work – a conceptualisation that has rarely been articulated in existing street harassment literature. Our intention here is not to provide an exhaustive overview of how each interlocking system of power manifests through street harassment, but rather to highlight the necessity of undertaking such an analysis in any work aiming to make sense of this phenomenon.

### **Civil inattention.**

Others, such as Gardner (1995), Bailey (2016, 2017), Kissling and Kramarae (1991), and Gimlin (2010), draw on Goffman to suggest that street harassment can, at least in part, be understood as breaching the rules of ‘civil inattention’. In urban settings, the norm of civil inattention typically dictates that we do not speak to or interact with strangers. However, Goffman argued that certain categories of (what he terms) ‘low status’ people – particularly children and women – are positioned as ‘open persons’, who may be treated in ways that would usually breach the norms of civil inattention. Under this reading, certain manifestations of street harassment can be conceptualised as harmful not because of their explicit content - indeed, these comments are often mundane and seemingly inoffensive (Bailey, 2016, 2017; Millan, 2016). Rather, as Bailey (2016, 2017) highlights, street remarks draw on the language that is typically used in addressing a romantic partner, as opposed to a stranger (see also Millan, 2016). As a result of this breach of the ‘rules of civil interaction’, we can understand such comments as ‘an attempt to conjure and impose a fleeting moment of heterosexual intimacy’, while their non-reciprocal nature reflects and perpetuates a manifestation of unequal power with women (re)positioned as ‘open’, ‘low status’

individuals in public space (Bailey, 2016, p. 599; see also di Gennaro & Ritschel, 2019; Kissling & Kramarae, 1991; Lahsaeizadeh & Yousefinejad, 2012; Lowe & Hayes, 2019; Millan, 2016). However, the otherwise conventional and accepted language used (e.g., ‘hey, baby’, ‘how are you today?’), ‘along with the relative difficulty of articulating the implicit social conventions that they breach, may veil their harm and indirectly contribute to the perpetuation of male domination of women in public spaces’ (Bailey, 2016, p. 607). A failure to respond ‘correctly’ to these seemingly civil remarks often can escalate to decidedly uncivil speech (e.g., ‘bitch’ – see Bowman, 1993, p. 525), unveiling ‘the thinly concealed violence underlying’ many incidents of public harassment (Bowman, 1993, p. 526).

### **Prevalence and Frequency**

Research to date indicates that street harassment is both a prevalent and frequent occurrence in the lives of women and LGBTQ+ communities, though there is some variation across studies (see Joseph 2016 for a recent international overview). Moreover, there is consistent evidence that public harassment is first encountered in late childhood and early adolescence (Johnson & Bennet, 2015; Meza-de-Luna & Garcia-Falconi, 2015; Vera-Gray, 2016a).

Eighty-seven percent of young women in an Australian study reported having experienced either physical or verbal harassment. In Mumbai, Bharucha and Khatri (2018, p. 105) reported that ‘almost all women had experienced some tangible threats to their safety at some point’, including verbal harassment (77.2%, n=175), stalking (30%, n=68), and groping (29%, n=65). In contrast, Gekoski et al’s (2016) review of harassment on public transport documented prevalence rates ranging from 15% (UK) to 98% of foreign women in Egypt (and 83% of Egyptian women).

In regard to frequency, women in Dhillon and Bakaya's (2014) qualitative study in Delhi, India reported being harassed between 50-100% of the times they accessed public space. Some 80% of women in Donnelly and Calogero's (2018) UK-based study reported experiencing catcalls, whistles or stares *at least* once per month, while 35% encountered unwanted touching at least once per month, with these findings largely reflecting those of Fairchild & Rudman's (2008) US-based study. Numerous studies consistently illustrate that iterations of public intrusion such as staring, whistling and verbal comments are also the most commonly encountered (Ahmad, Ahmad & Masood, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2019; Betts et al., 2019; Campos et al., 2017; Donnelly & Calogero, 2018; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Johnson & Bennett, 2015; Lenton et al., 1999; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014; Stop Street Harassment, 2014). Local socio-cultural norms can also shape the frequency of harassment, with factors such as marital status in Nepal and non-traditional styles of dress in Pakistan linked to increased harassment (Ahmad et al., 2020; Lahsaeizadeh & Yousefinejad, 2012; Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014).

A notable gap in the extant research is the lack of an intersectional analysis in relation to prevalence and frequency of harassment. A small number of studies provide some insights. Stop Street Harassment's (2014) survey of 2,000 individuals found that Black and Hispanic participants encountered higher rates of and more frequent harassment than White participants (see also Nielsen, 2000). Members of the LGBTQ+ communities routinely encounter high levels of harassment, and this can be heightened for those expressing same sex or queer affection in public or who are otherwise visibly non-conforming in their gender or sexuality (Chmielwski, 2017; Stop Street Harassment, 2014; Ussher et al, 2020). Alcalde (2020) reflects on how social class is likely to shape the nature and extent of harassment encountered by women in Lima, Peru, particularly due to lower socio-economic status

women's reliance on public transportation. For Muslim women in the UK, public harassment may be heightened during periods of political tension and Islamophobia, particularly for women who wear the niqab (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019).

Questions of prevalence and frequency are also compounded by the definitional or typological difficulties in relation to what 'counts' as street harassment. Studies draw on different definitions of what falls under the banner of 'street harassment', while participants may not have a shared understanding of 'what counts', subsequently self-excluding or under-reporting experiences (Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Lennox & Jurdi-Hage, 2017; Vera-Gray, 2016a, b). The tendency towards quantitative work that categorises different types of harassment as discrete incidents (e.g., staring, following, verbal comments) creates a siloed picture of harassment that may obscure the lived experiences of victims. This incident-based approach tells us little, for example, about how different forms of harassment may overlap or co-occur, how they are encountered as a lived process, and does not capture participants' experiences in a way that reflects their full complexity. Forms of harassment that do not neatly fit into these pre-determined categories may also be missed. Additionally, the 'everyday', mundane nature of public harassment means that encounters may be quickly forgotten, or blur into one-another, making the retrospective recall of incidents a distorted means of measurement (Larkin, 1991). Likewise, there is considerable variation in terms of whether participants are asked about recent or lifetime experiences of harassment. As a result, it is difficult to make comparisons or generalisations across different studies (Vera-Gray, 2016a; Lennox & Jurdi-Hage, 2017), and the multi-faceted and contextual nature of harassment makes such comparison problematic if not undesirable (Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017). Despite these methodological challenges, it is nonetheless abundantly clear that street harassment in various forms is an incredibly common experience in the lives of women and

marginalised communities. Moreover, these encounters result in direct harm, as we move on to show.

### **Impacts & Harms**

Research across Western democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia demonstrates that street harassment bears substantial harms to people who experience it (see, for e.g., Bastomski and Smith, 2017; Betts et al., 2019; Lenton et al., 2003; Kern, 2005). Studies from these contexts have illustrated that encountering street harassment increases women's fear, anger, violation and repulsion, alongside other negative emotional and affective states (Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Betts et al., 2019; Lenton et al., 1999; Nielsen 1999, 2001). In particular, the fear generated through street harassment is often a fear of further forms of sexual and gender-based violence occurring (Donnelly & Calogero, 2018).

Street harassment can profoundly impact on women's use of public spaces leading to the avoidance of public space, and modification of behaviour through 'safety work' in order to enhance their sense of safety (Bastomski & Smith; Johnson & Bennett, 2015; Lenton et al., 1999; Vera-Gray, 2018; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). Vera-Gray's work (2016a) highlights how intrusion fundamentally shapes women's embodiment, or how they 'live in' their own bodies, with harassment foreclosing women's capacity to act in and on the world.

Collectively, these impacts 'seem to accumulate over time...so that you feel like you are carrying more and more weight' (Ahmed, 2017, p. 23). The harms of street harassment must be understood as cumulative and synergistic in nature – they add up to more than the sum of their individual parts – and as lived alongside other experiences of harassment and violence (Fileborn, 2017a; Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Larkin, 1991). In some instances, these harms

or impacts may indeed be fleeting and quickly forgotten. Yet, they can persist for days, months or years (Lenton et al., 1999). Additionally, the severity of the impacts of street harassment are subjectively experienced and can be dependent on context (Fairchild, 2010; Fileborn, 2019, p. 230).

The impacts of street harassment can also vary across cultural contexts. For instance, Ahmad et al.'s study of women in Islamabad, Pakistan found that a majority of participants only accessed public spaces while accompanied by male family members (2020, p. 13). Public intrusion in East Asian countries is also implicated in women and girls withdrawing from education (Ahmed et al, 2019). Research conducted in East Asian countries such as Pakistan and India indicate that the cultural gendered norms combined with the patriarchal structure of society plays a role in how women are impacted by and respond to street harassment (Adur & Jha 2018; Ahmad et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2019; Bharucha & Khatri 2017; Jabeen et al., 2017). Alcalde's (2020) research with returned migrants in Lima, Peru found that these women experienced increased fear and decreased autonomy upon their return to Lima after living abroad. Further, for participants who returned as adults with children, their fears and anxieties were both heightened and shifted towards the safety of their girl children. This highlights the contextual, temporal and relational nature of the impacts and harms of harassment.

Intersectional research shows that the impacts and harms of harassment differ according to survivors' positionality in relation to gender, race, class, sexuality and disability (Crenshaw, 1991). Utilising an intersectional lens, it is apparent that people who encounter street harassment are likely to experience it differently on the basis of the privilege that they occupy (Fileborn, 2019). Alcalde (2020) further demonstrates that migration can impact women's

experiences of street harassment, particularly by shaping the autonomy that survivors have over their bodies. Mason-Bish and Zempi (2019) note that Muslim women who wear the veil have heightened risk of experiencing street harassment in the United Kingdom due to their hypervisibility in public space. Indeed, some women are placed in situations where they must navigate their safety in public space by choosing whether or not to wear or remove their veil which, in turn, can impact how they are perceived in their communities, adding ‘layers of complexity to their harm’ (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019, p. 554).

### **Disclosure & Reporting**

Research shows that there are limitations in reporting and disclosure of street harassment to the police and criminal justice system. Although there are jurisdictions where some forms of street harassment are legislated against or covered under hate crime provisions (Mason-Bish & Duggan, 2020), many people who experience street harassment are reluctant to report to police as is the case for other forms of gender-based violence (Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Mullany & Trickett, 2018). In one Australian study, 16.1% of participants indicated that they had ever reported street harassment to the police (Fileborn, 2019). Participants from this project indicated that they perceived reporting to the police as being futile, due to the ‘trivial’ nature of what happened, being unsure as to whether the incident was illegal, believing there was nothing that could be done, and that the emotional and time-based costs of reporting outweighed the harm of the incident. Dhillon and Bakaya (2014) demonstrate that survivors in Delhi, India, considered police insensitive and apathetic, and legal avenues arduous and complicated to navigate. The perceived insignificance and normalisation of street harassment means that those who do report to police have been met with victim-blaming, inaction, or inconsistency which, in turn, diminished the confidence survivors had in police (Boutros, 2018; Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Sheley, 2020). Indeed, Mason (2005, p. 592) comments that

‘most harassment is probably considered to be too minor to be reported (or recorded).’ This suggests that sociocultural understandings of the impacts and harms of street harassment influence whether street harassment is both reported to and recorded by police. However, the vast majority of participants (95.5%) in the aforementioned study by Fileborn (2019) had disclosed an experience of harassment at least once, typically to a friend or partner. Whether any particular incident was disclosed was shaped by a range of factors, including the perceived severity, and as a form of consciousness-raising or political action.

### **Bystander Intervention**

Bystander intervention into street harassment represented a major gap in research to date, with only three studies explicitly tackling this issue. Australian-based research by Fileborn (2017b) found that bystander intervention was rare, with participants indicating they had experienced considerably more street harassment than bystander intervention (see also Vizvary, 2020). Similarly, 23% of men and 20% of women in Stop Street Harassment’s (2014) study said they had proactively responded to street harassment that they witnessed as a bystander. For those who had experienced bystander intervention in Fileborn’s (2017b) study, the outcomes of the intervention were mixed. While bystander intervention could be successful in defusing or ending the harassment, in other cases it could either escalate the harassment or result in the harassment being displaced onto the bystander. That said, bystander intervention held both practical and symbolic importance, with intervention increasing participants’ sense of safety, reducing the perceived harm of an incident, and providing a sense of justice by holding the perpetrator to account (see Vizvary, 2020). Chaudoir and Quinn’s (2010) US-based research with female college students indicates that bystanders can also be negatively impacted by witnessing sexist harassment such as catcalling, with the young women in this study experiencing higher levels of anger and fear

towards men. This is one of the only identified studies to demonstrate the impacts of street harassment beyond the individual victim, an area that requires further exploration in future research.

## **Perpetration**

Of the literature reviewed, few studies conducted had specifically examined perpetration of street harassment. Rather, perpetration was often discussed within the context of victimisation and prevalence studies. McCarty et al. (2014) conducted an online survey demonstrating that people perceived that severity of the impacts of harassment varied depending on whether the perpetrator was a stranger or known to the survivor. Participants viewed harassment perpetrated by a stranger as more severe than harassment perpetrated by someone known to them such as a colleague (McCarty et al., 2014). While the literature suggests that street harassment is most commonly perpetrated by men (Stop Street Harassment, 2014), sex workers in Armstrong's (2016) research also recounted incidents of harassment perpetrated by women. Armstrong (2016, p. 291) argues this can be understood as a performative act that allowed these women perpetrators to 'safely locate themselves within the category of "good" women and be reassured that they were not like "those" women.' Thus, while perhaps less common, street harassment can be understood as reproducing gendered power relations *between* women (see also Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019). Moreover, Meza-De-Luna and Garcia-Falconi (2015) found that adolescents in Queretaro, Mexico commonly experienced and perpetrated street harassment. Both young men and young women were perpetrators of non-physical harassment, but young men were more likely to engage in physical forms of harassment such as groping. The young men and women surveyed in this research typically perpetrated harassment against other young people

in a similar age range to themselves. These studies highlight some of the underexplored complexities surrounding the perpetration of street harassment.

Although research tended to assert a notion that street harassment is perpetrated by a broad array of men, and is not defined by age, class, race and so forth, many findings suggested that perceptions of who perpetrates are heavily shaped by these factors. Participants in Alcalde's (2020) study, for example, often suggested that it was poorer men of colour in Lima who disproportionately (if not exclusively) perpetrated street harassment. Similarly, participants in Dhillon and Bakaya's (2014) study attributed harassment to men who had moved to Delhi from conservative rural areas. Rather than reflecting the 'reality' of perpetration, these claims must be understood through systems of power and processes of othering (Fileborn, 2016b). As Alcalde (2020, p. 37) puts it, 'warnings about sexual harassment not only lead middle-class women to believe that their homes are safe, and the streets are dangerous, but they also reinforce the existing hierarchies of race and class.' Heben (1994-1995, p. 198) similarly draws our attention to the racist stereotype of the 'black male rapist', arguing that 'white women will probably be more likely to experience comments from men of color as harassing' on account of this. In other words, the identification of certain groups of men as perpetrators might tell us more about processes of the 'othering' of marginalised men, rather than reflecting some reality of perpetration (see also Gimlin, 2010; Logan, 2015; Lieber, 2018). That said, given that research on perpetrators is lacking overall, further work is required to establish any trends in perpetration, and how perpetration may be differentially shaped through adherence to masculinities, class, age and so forth. Our point here is not that particular groups of men may be more or less likely to perpetrate harassment, but rather that perpetration may be 'done' differently, and for different reasons, across diverse groups of men.

Few studies have directly engaged with perpetrators or examined how they perceive and engage in street harassment. Interestingly, Zietz and Das (2018) note that young men living in Mumbai, India, perceived eve-teasing (an East Asian term for street harassment) through a lens of misogyny and entitlement, with their harassment of girls being based on perceptions of their propriety. One participant in their focus group study justified harassment of girls who had 'loose morals' (Zeitz & Das, 2018, p. 1234). The analysis contended that men and boys in Mumbai justified their perpetration by placing blame on the women and girls being harassed (Zeitz & Das, 2018). Henry's (2017) interview study with 'self-professed harassers' similarly noted that men in Egypt justified their harassment by blaming their victims. Henry (2017) presented five central motivations that led perpetrators to engage in street harassment: normalisation, sexual objectification, women's position in society, to punish women, and because the perpetrators believed that they were oppressed. Wesselman and Kelly's (2010) study with college men in the United States also dealt with motivations in perpetrating harassment, finding that young men were more likely to harass when in a peer group context where anonymity and group bonding were central reasons leading them to harass (see also, Logan, 2015; Quinn, 2002). Furthermore, these participants were similarly motivated by misogynistic attitudes and the ability to have power and dominance over women (Wesselman & Kelly, 2010). Together, these studies suggest that in some contexts, the perpetration of street harassment is sanctioned by broader attitudes towards gender, sex, and sexuality. Indeed, the views expressed by the perpetrators in these studies signals a relationship between sexism and misogyny as an overarching influence of street harassment.

A final theme that arose in research about perpetration was concerned with theorising harassment tactics. It is worth noting that this type of research was often framed from the

perspective of survivors, as few studies have directly engaged with perpetrators of harassment. Hutson and Krueger's (2019) study is one example that sought to understand the mechanisms of street harassment, whilst also noting the affordances that physical spaces provide perpetrators. They argue that the 'harassers toolbox' is a range of commonplace practices that perpetrators utilise, often using location and mobility to their advantage to engage in harassing behaviours (Hutson & Krueger, 2019, p. 773). This further demonstrates that particular public sites such as public transport are common 'hunting grounds' for perpetration, and that harassing behaviours are an effort to exert power and control over women (see also, Gardner 1995).

## **Resistance & responses to street harassment**

### **Legal**

Proposed responses to street harassment have largely centred around the possibility of criminal and civil legal remedies. This emphasis on developing legal responses can, at least in part, be attributed to the historic and contemporary failure of legal systems to adequately capture and respond to harms experienced by women (and other marginalised groups), and the efforts of feminist jurisprudence to redress this (see, for e.g., Bowman, 1993; Brundson, 2018; Chafai, 2017; Davis, 1994; Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Laniya, 2005; Tuerekheimer, 1997). It is also likely a response to the continued failure of jurisdictions internationally to develop legal or policy responses to public intrusion and harassment (Bowman, 1993; Brundson, 2018; Fileborn, 2017a; Joseph, 2016), although this situation is ever evolving. While a detailed analysis of the specific legal remedies proposed is beyond the scope of this review, the most common approaches include the development of legal definitions of street harassment (or particular iterations thereof, such as catcalling), consideration of how street harassment may be addressed (or not) under existing legislation, and the development of new

legal frameworks (Ancheta, 2018; Arndt, 2018; Bowman, 1993; Brundson, 2018; Chhun, 2011; Heben, 1994-1995; Laniya, 2005; Olney, 2015; Sweeney, 2016). In contrast, grassroots activist organisations such as *Hollaback!* and *Stop Street Harassment* – particularly from the United States, where the vast majority of this legal scholarship stems from – have taken a stance that firmly opposes the criminalisation of street harassment (Fileborn, 2021). There is a clear disjuncture between the approaches advocated for by scholars and activist groups, with activists tending to focus on prevention and educational efforts (Fileborn, 2021) and academic scholarship focused on the development of legislative frameworks. While legal scholarship has been preoccupied with the question of whether we can regulate street harassment using criminal and civil legislation, there has been only limited critical and intersectional discussion as to whether we *should* adopt this approach.

Of more central concern to our discussion is the impact of legislation where it has been introduced. The current literature base is scant. Alcalde (2020) speculates that the impact of anti-harassment legislation in Peru has been largely symbolic to date, with little evidence that the legislation has contributed to the prevention of harassment or increased the safety of women and girls. Kirolos (2016) similarly suggests that Egyptian legislation tackling sexual harassment is poorly enforced. Activists interviewed in Boutros' (2018) work differed in their views of police, with some believing the police had no legitimacy to respond to public sexual violence (particularly as police were documented as perpetrating some of this violence), while others believed there was an onus on police to improve their responses to sexual violence. Anti-feminist backlash in Portugal resulted in proposed legislation addressing street harassment being passed in a watered-down format (Simões & Silbeirinha, 2019), though the impact of the legislative amendments that were introduced is unclear.

Several studies have considered how victims would like street harassment to be responded to. The research points to a diversity of desired responses and needs, including transformative change addressing the root causes of harassment, public education and awareness raising, bystander intervention, changes to environmental design, and criminal justice responses (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Mullany & Trickett, 2018; Stop Street Harassment, 2014; Vizvary, 2020). On this last point, participants in Fileborn & Vera-Gray's (2017) work were more ambivalent. While they often valued the symbolic function of legislation, concern was expressed regarding the challenges in responding to harassment using a criminal justice response, the perceived triviality of individual incidents, and the potential to contribute towards the over-policing of marginalised groups (see also Mullany & Trickett, 2018; Nielsen, 2000). Nielsen's (2000, p. 1070) leading work on 'legal consciousness' and the regulation of offensive public speech found that participants did not support the legal regulation of such speech, 'except in its most extreme forms'. Collectively, these findings indicate that the role of the criminal justice responses to street harassment is heavily contested at best, while there is limited to no evidence on the effectiveness or impacts of such responses where they have been introduced.

Overall, very little scholarship to date has considered how street harassment might be prevented or redressed outside of the criminal justice system, how survivors might best be supported, or how to effectively engage in prevention work with perpetrators. Feminist self-defence has been presented as one potential avenue of prevention, as well as a means of transforming women's sense of self and capacity to act on the world (Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). Boutros (2017, p.543, 2018) documents the work of activist groups in Egypt, who formed anti-harassment groups which functioned as 'patrol-type "intervention teams" composed of volunteers that operated in the streets' to either support women who had been

harassed or assaulted, or to confront perpetrators (see Joseph 2016 for other international examples). The intervention teams were developed by activist groups in the wake of ‘crisis levels’ of sexual violence in public, and inaction by the state, while activists felt that more traditional means of generating change were ineffective in this case (Boutros, 2017, p. 553). Boutros (2017) argues that the use and success (or otherwise) of these intervention teams was shaped by the *places* in which they were used. This suggests that in developing responses to street harassment, we must be mindful of the cultural, social, political, spatial/geographical, and temporal specificities that influence both the type of response and support required, as well as successful implementation. As such, future research and intervention initiatives should consider the need to examine responses at the local level.

Recommendations from the therapeutic and practitioner-focused guidelines developed by Baptist and Coburn (2019) include that practitioners should undertake processes of self-reflection and education to firstly examine and challenge their own views on public harassment. Practitioners also have an active role to play in supporting survivors and guiding them towards online communities of support (such as *Hollaback!*; see also Farmer & Jordan, 2017), to intervene as bystanders, and to engage in political advocacy around street harassment. Additionally, practitioners may work with perpetrators and have an opportunity to engage in ‘therapeutic conversations with perpetrators to deconstruct the power and control associated with perpetuating stranger intrusion and to increase accountability and awareness’ (Baptist & Coburn, 2019, p. 124). However, as Threadcraft (2014, 2015) rightly reminds us, developing responses to street harassment must also be informed by an intersectional lens that takes into account (in Threadcraft’s case) systemic and institutional racism and sexism that has denied Black communities’ access to power and resources, and shaped and delimited subject formation. In other words, responses to street harassment must

be intimately entwined with broader social and transformative justice efforts that extend beyond supporting individual victims and/or perpetrators.

Where prevention and other policy and practice-based initiatives have been introduced, they have only seldomly been subject to evaluation (Fileborn, 2021). Darnell and Cook's (2009) evaluation of screening the anti-street harassment documentary *War Zone* found that it did not shift men's attitudes in terms of how acceptable they felt street harassment was, nor did it increase their empathy towards women who had been harassed. Lieber's (2018) interrogation of Parisian policy on violence against women in public spaces suggests that efforts to improve women's safety focused exclusively on the mobility of women who reflected norms of 'respectable' femininity, contributed towards gentrification, and reinforced the racist 'othering' of men of colour. These examples illustrate how responses to street harassment can have unintended and problematic outcomes, reinforcing the need for careful monitoring and evaluation, which has been sorely lacking to date.

### **Digital responses and online justice: 'shouting back' against harassment**

Some of the most substantial responses to street harassment have occurred through (or as a result of) digital activism and advocacy on social media. A significant subset of the literature found in this review is concerned with the ways that survivors of street harassment document and 'shout back' about their experiences. Given the inconsistent formal responses of law and policy as a response to street harassment, digital responses have developed as a significant avenue for disclosure and informal justice (Fileborn, 2014, 2017a; Wångren, 2016). May and Carter (2015) discuss the origins of the global movement Hollaback!, which began in 2005 as a blog based in New York City that sought to challenge street harassment by allowing survivors to contribute their stories to the blog and by naming places in the city

where perpetration was commonly experienced. Research has also examined the potential for these digital practices to meet the justice needs of street harassment survivors by providing avenues to seek their own outcomes (Fileborn, 2014, 2017a).

Digital platforms can therefore represent sites of disclosure and informal reporting that seek to resist and challenge street harassment. Research studies show that these digital platforms are not unique to English-speaking or Global North contexts. There are several platforms where survivors of street harassment can record and map incidences of street harassment online (Fileborn, 2014, 2017a, 2020; Grove, 2015; Pechaud, 2014; Simões & Silveirinha, 2019). In Egypt, *HarassMap* and *WenDo* are examples of reporting options facilitated through social media and volunteers, providing ‘street-level action-oriented initiatives’ to survivors of street harassment (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017, p. 155). Similarly, *Hollaback!* has grown into a global initiative and continues to challenge street harassment by providing survivors with opportunities to report and map their experiences (Fileborn, 2014, 2017a, 2020; May & Carter, 2015; Wångren, 2016). Social media platforms like Instagram provide space for grassroots digital activism to proliferate. Digital reporting mechanisms constitute a substantial response to street harassment in many countries and provide a space for survivors to resist harassment in contexts where formal avenues to justice fail to hear their experiences (Fileborn, 2014, 2017a).

## **Discussion**

This critical review set out to provide a global overview of the current state of knowledge on street harassment. While our review highlights the rapid development of research and scholarship on this topic over the past five years, it has also drawn attention to some notable gaps and avenues for future research. Likewise, we have reiterated some central tensions and

debates in relation to typologies and conceptualisations of public harassment that require close attention in future work. We acknowledge here that our review was intentionally broad in scope. While this was necessary in order to establish the ‘state of the field’, it inevitably means that there has been a privileging of breadth of literature over the depth of findings in the field to date. Our discussion below outlines areas for future research, and we also encourage scholars to undertake more targeted reviews of the literature in future in order to further unpack the key debates, findings, and limitations of sub-fields within street harassment research.

Throughout this review, we have advocated for the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding and researching street harassment. With some notable exceptions discussed throughout, this remains an under-developed aspect of scholarship. For example, the bulk of research is overwhelmingly focused on the experiences of cisgender-women and reproduces a binary view of gender (see also Baptist & Coburn, 2019). To some extent, this likely stems from the conceptualisation of street harassment as a form of sexual and gender-based violence and the subsequent concentration of research within this field. While this conceptualisation is a useful and important one – much street harassment occurs as a form of gender-based sexual violence – it nonetheless presents a limited or partial framework for understanding street harassment that excludes many experiences. Black and critical race scholars have developed detailed analysis of how race operates in relation to street harassment, yet these insights appear to only occasionally inform empirical work. Other categories of analysis, such as (dis)ability and religion have received even less attention. There is heavy weighting towards the Global North in existing research, although our review illustrates that this is slowly changing with more recent studies addressing street harassment across East Asia, Latin America, and Egypt. Nonetheless, we echo the call of researchers

such as Bharucha and Khatri (2018) regarding the need for further research in the Global South. Additionally, not all of these studies explicitly consider how contextual factors shape lived experiences of public harassment, instead tending towards empirical description and quantification. Collectively, our review points towards a clear need for future research to adopt intersectional modes of research design and analysis (see also Logan, 2015). Such research is undoubtedly required to inform tailored and culturally appropriate prevention efforts and interventions – we cannot assume that experiences of street harassment are the same across different social and cultural locations.

The majority of research examining street harassment was qualitative, examining various ways of conceptualising street harassment and analysing participants' experiences through qualitative methodologies. Quantitative and mixed methods studies, although less common, documented the prevalence, frequency, nature, and harms of public harassment. Although qualitative research was more common, it is worth noting that there was a dearth in literature that examines how victims of street harassment understand and make sense of their experiences. This is not to dismiss the importance of other research methods which have provided vital insights into this phenomenon and assist with building the case for taking street harassment seriously as a pervasive and frequent harm. However, given the conceptual and definitional slippages identified in this review, there are clearly also limits to the insights that quantitative work, or work that fails to critically interrogate what street harassment 'is' and how it is lived by participants, can provide. In order to develop rich insights into the full range of public intrusion, qualitative work that provides scope for participants to articulate their experiences in detail and to probe for details that might be missed or excluded is needed to compliment and add nuance to existing findings. Moving forward, we also recommend that researchers undertaking quantitative work develop clear definitions of what is meant by street

harassment in the context of their study. This may help to overcome some of the challenges identified in this review with regards to comparison across studies and the slippages in terminology. However, challenges are likely to remain given that often subjective and context- dependent nature of harassment.

That said, there is still much work to be done in terms of documenting the nature, extent, and harms of different iterations of street harassment. For instance, something that has not commonly been included in typologies of street harassment includes harassment perpetrated by the state (e.g., police). The inclusion of state-perpetrated harassment may better capture the experiences of people who have experienced homelessness, who were found to commonly encounter harassment from both ‘authorities and non-authorities’ in one study (Vizvary, 2020, p. 27). As DeKeseredy (2020) argues, state and corporate violence should also be positioned on the continuum of woman abuse, and we suggest it is important to consider what might be gained (and lost) in taking this conceptual approach to understanding street harassment. The absence of state-perpetrated public harassment may also stem from the exclusion of marginalised groups from current research – such as those experiencing homelessness, people of colour, Indigenous communities, and sex workers - and lack of intersectional analysis. Another key gap here relates to how technology-facilitated violence and public harassment intersect or interact with one another (see Vera-Gray, 2016b).

Technology-facilitated violence and harassment is itself a burgeoning field of research, and there may be much to gain in bringing these areas together. For example, to what extent can online violence and harassment itself be considered a manifestation of public harassment? How is digital technology featuring in encounters of ‘real life’ public harassment, for example through practices such as ‘air-dropping’ pornography via smart phones? How are victims of harassment drawing on digital platforms to disclose, and to seek justice and

support in response to their experiences? How is the problem represented through these practices, and what role have they played in agitating for broader social, political and structural change? Again, while some studies have begun to provide insights, this area of scholarship remains in its infancy.

Beyond capturing the nature and extent of harassment, there are a range of other questions that require urgent attention. Firstly, we continue to know very little about perpetrators of street harassment, with this gap remaining largely unchanged since Logan's (2015) review, or since Thompson (1994) made similar observations over two decades ago. There were some exceptions to this, including Meza De Luna and García-Falconi's (2015) study which found that teenage girls were as likely to perpetrate street harassment. However, it is a significant limitation that analysis of perpetration is often subsumed within research examining the prevalence of street harassment. Thus, questions remain in terms of who harasses, in what contexts, and for what reasons. Likewise, we know little about pathways into and out of perpetrating harassment. Why, for instance, do perpetrators begin engaging in this behaviour, and why do they stop? What are the social and institutional structures that prop up their behaviour, and how might we begin to unravel these structural drivers? Given the conceptual and typological slippage around street harassment, there are further questions regarding whose actions are captured or framed as 'problematic', as well as likely implications in terms of how we best prevent and intervene into different iterations of this phenomenon.

Almost no research has examined attitudes of members of the general public towards street harassment. Some exceptions to this were Fairchild (2015), and Spaccatini et al (2019), who found that participants were more likely to assign blame to a woman who appeared 'sexy', though overall levels of victim-blame were low. Spaccatini et al (2019) also document

important contextual variables that influence perceptions of harassment, with participants rating harassment occurring on the street as more ‘serious’ than that at a party. Simões and Silbeirinha’s (2019) analysis of online commentary in Portugal similarly found evidence of victim-blaming, the dismissal of street harassment as a problem requiring redress, and the framing of harassment as an issue of individual deviant men, rather than being systemic in nature. Community attitudes towards street harassment have follow on implications for the likelihood that victims of street harassment will be believed and supported, whether community members are able to intervene as bystanders, and for whether the issue is understood and taken seriously (Fileborn, 2017b, 2018). Ascertaining attitudes and knowledge levels can also help to direct public education and awareness-raising activities. As such, this is a significant gap in the literature that demands pressing research attention.

A final avenue for future research relates to the development and evaluation of policy and practice responses to street harassment. While, as Fileborn’s work (2021) illustrates, street harassment has only rarely been addressed through formal government policy and practice responses, this situation is changing particularly in relation to the development of legislation regulating harassment. As noted, there has been no work identified to date that systematically evaluates the impact of legislative responses where they have been introduced, with the exception of Mullany & Trickett (2018). Rather, the literature reviewed continues to focus on the development of legislative frameworks for street harassment. Moreover, the small body of work examining victims’ preferred responses to street harassment suggests that they desire a diverse range of responses, and this is at odds with the strong emphasis on legislation in scholarship. Thus, there is further research needed to identify and develop victim-centred responses to public harassment and to consider how any responses might change across the diverse contexts of harassment highlighted throughout this review.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we set out to provide a comprehensive and critical review of the current ‘state of the field’ of research on street harassment. Our findings have illustrated that, while the field is rapidly growing, much work remains in terms of developing our conceptual understandings of street harassment and in building on the empirical research undertaken to date. As the thematic synthesis of findings presented here illustrates, street harassment is a common and harmful issue impacting on women and minority communities across the globe. Our hope is that this contribution continues to drive forward research on this important, yet under-explored, issue.

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