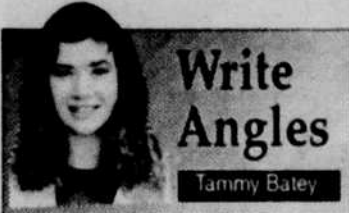


OPINION

Street harassment game is over



Let me make this perfectly clear.

For the record, I do not enjoy being ogled. I also do not like it when men whistle, whoop or yell their sexual preferences at me as I walk by.

And to those men: I am not your baby, your honey or your hot mama. I am a woman; not a child, a type of food or a female parent with a temperature.

Surprise, surprise, I do not like being sexually harassed.

I can practically sense the male — and female — eyes pause and widen when they see that last sentence.

Yes, if you've "voiced" your admiration for a woman's figure (and I'm putting that in the most sugar-coated of terms), you're guilty of a form of sexual harassment called street harassment.

But I can guess the probable response of a man who practices this form of harassment. "It's not sexual harassment. It's just paying a compliment to an attractive woman."

Oh, of course, a compliment. How could I be so foolish? Having a man scream "Come and get it, baby" at the top of his lungs out of a car going 35 m.p.h. is certainly a wonderful compliment.

I can just imagine sharing with my friends and family the reason for my recent boost in self-esteem. "Yeah, Mom, some sleazo told me he wanted my body. Wasn't that a sweet thing to say?" I don't think so.

A compliment comes from someone I know and like, not from a complete stranger who doesn't know me or respect me as a person.

All summer I worked in Springfield in an isolated part of town where I had to walk half a mile to the nearest bus stop. And all summer men kept

yelling, whistling and staring at me.

Three men who yelled at me from a car stopped about a block away from my bus stop. "Sorry we scared you," one of the men said with a smirk. But the smirk told the true story. He was anything but sorry.

Where do these men come from? How can they think women enjoy this form of sexual harassment? But, of course, that gets to the point.

The men who do these things don't care what women think, need or want. These men are saying the things they do and making the disgusting sounds they make for themselves or other men. Usually the men harassing me were with other men. I think they viewed what they did as some twisted form of male bonding.

Perhaps men who verbally harass women get off on making a woman afraid. Maybe it gives them a sense of control. This summer, however, I did something some people may consider pointless or even dangerous. I spoke back.

Usually I didn't have enough time to say anything to these men because they were in cars. But I always had enough time to point a certain finger skyward.

When I had a chance to talk back to them, I did. I usually said, "I am a human being, not an object. How would you feel if someone said something like that to your sister, your mom, your girlfriend?"

Most of the men I said things to looked taken aback. My response to their comments probably went right over the heads of many of them. But responding gave me the last word. I felt more in control of the situation and subsequently came out of it feeling less like a victim.

Talking back may not be the answer for every woman. In some situations, responding can be dangerous and ignoring the harassers may be the best thing to do. Ignoring a harasser can be a response in itself.

Women can also turn the ta-

bles on men who harass them. Make the man feel uncomfortable. It's easy to embarrass someone if other people are around. For example, if a man you don't know stares at you, point and say, "That man is staring at me."

The way some women handle street harassment is by denying it's a problem. I told a female friend of mine from high school about my summer of harassment. She shocked me by saying, "Oh, Tammy. You know you like it." The scary thing is, she wasn't being sarcastic.

Well, my friend is wrong. I do not like it, and I would bet most, if not all women feel the same way. Street harassment represents a disrespect for women.

And here's a sure-fire way to tell if you're harassing someone on the street. If you're heterosexual, ask yourself: Would I say this to someone of the same sex? If you're gay, ask yourself: Would I say this to someone of the opposite sex?

Most of the men who harassed me probably wouldn't dream of commenting on a male stranger's attractiveness. But they thought nothing of telling me what they thought of my looks, even though they didn't know me.

This summer was a sharp contrast to the summer before my freshman year of high school. My friend Dorothy and I walked down the main street of the community where we lived and counted how many yells and whistles we got. We looked at it as an innocent game and we ate up the attention.

But now I realize how sad that "game" was. We were accepting society's vision of what we should be — women who judge their worth by their appearance. But a lot of things have changed since that summer.

The game is over. Tammy don't play that.

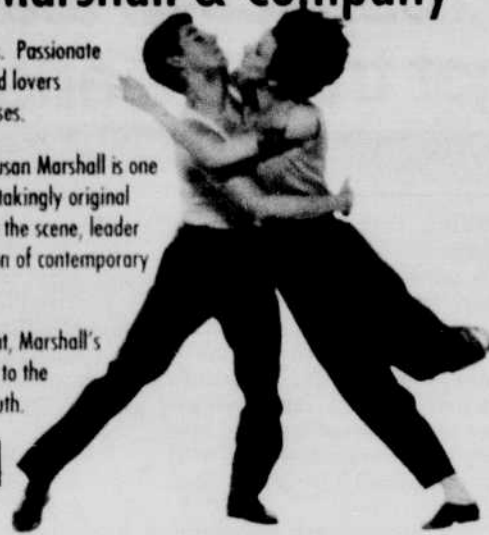
Tammy Batey is an associate editor for the Emerald.

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