

Hey Beautiful: Calling Out Catcalling Culture

An Ethnographic Study Detailing Responses to Catcalling

Abstract

Catcalling: almost every female-presenting person experiences it, yet everyone has a different interpretation of the experience. There is a gradient of opinions of the subject ranging from longing to experience the validation catcalling can bring to reviling the insulting nature of the act. After establishing the frequency of catcalling across age and gender, this ethnographic research project will use qualitative surveys with around thirty individuals to identify and evaluate the range of attitudes people have about catcalling. This study will contemplate the ambiguity and implications of the definition of catcalling. Participation in this study is confidential and will take place remotely with an online survey that is approved by Chapman's Cayuse Internal Review Board. This project will use open coding to identify and group the unique interpretations of catcalling. With this grouping, the project will then arrange the data in a gradient ranging from negative to positive. Each group will match with a past study that has matching theory explaining the motivation for catcalling. For example, in a group of data with mostly negative feelings towards catcalling, a theory explaining a negative motivation for catcalling will be selected. Creative activity and research become one with the deliverables of this project. Twenty individual profiles will be the center of the first deliverable, a twenty-page zine. The zine will also feature samples of the subjects' handwriting, pictures of any relevant personal effects, and artistically related collages. The second deliverable will be a traditional ten-page research paper.

Content Warning

This paper discusses sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender violence.

Introduction

I was sixteen years old, sitting on a Los Angeles bus when a man described in detail how he would like to rape me for all to hear. Walking those two blocks to the bus stop guaranteed that *at least* two different men would yell something profane in my direction—usually a description of their fantasies of having sexual intercourse with me. Cut to my freshman year of college: I am standing outside my dorm facing a busy street as my emotional support dog defecates. I hear, “Hey, you! Get into my car! I know you want to come here!” Or something like that. It was then that I realized just how prevalent catcalling is. What in the world about me wearing pajamas, watching my dog drop feces screamed that I wanted attention? Absolutely nothing.

Almost every female-presenting person experiences catcalling, yet everyone has a different interpretation of the experience. Before I can examine the emotional responses to catcalling, there is a need to review the context. First, this study will sketch the basic form of a catcall. Understanding the structure will give meaningful background information and explain, at least partially, the reason for and impact of the response. Additionally, this work will establish the frequency of catcalling and the factors that increase the likelihood of being catcalled.

Frequency is essential to understand because it multiplies the emotional impact. It is more significant to say there is an act that makes people feel strong emotions multiples times throughout their lives rather than just once. After completing these tasks, I can properly explore the variety of emotional responses to catcalling. My goal is to sort the emotional responses first generally, and then, identify recurring patterns within each general emotion.

This work intends to describe catcalling's emotional depth and moral consequence. Therefore, this study is qualitative. Participants will respond with their own words and narratives rather than picking how negative or positive they feel on a numerical scale.

Literature Review

Definition

Articulating an exact definition for catcalling is challenging, considering how many faces and forms it takes on. There are other words that share this difficulty but are still identifiable through an innate recognition. In the 1964 court case *Jacobellis v Ohio*, Nico Jacobellis was convicted of "possessing and exhibiting" an obscene film (Jacobellis). This landmark Supreme Court case further developed the standards for obscenity within the United States judicial system. Justice Stewart, in his concurring opinion, wrote in regards to the difficulty of defining pornography, "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description, and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that" (Jacobellis). This study sees a similar issue. There is no uniformly accepted definition of catcalling. The study I will review below lists several different possibilities. My work also attempts to parse out the innate traits of catcalling. I do not think a neat definition of catcalling may ever exist. There is an infinite number of ways the catcall can manifest, intentions a catcaller may possess, or reactions the target may feel. Therefore, there are only definitions that are *close enough*. However, like Justice Stewart, I believe catcalling is something that I can also "know it when I see it."

Nonetheless, I do need to identify the important components of catcalling to have a proper discussion about the implications. As such, I have selected a definition from Meghan Di Gennaro and Chelsea Ritschel's paper, "Blurred Lines: The Relationship between Catcalls and Compliments." One definition of catcalling they present is a "comment in public taking place between the unacquainted... [breaching] norms of civil interaction between strangers but often [including] innuendo and evaluative statements" (Di Gennaro & Ritschel 3). The criteria of "breaching the normal of civil interaction between strangers" is a unique stipulation that gets closer to capturing the essence of a catcall and is the reason for my selection.

Many of the proposed definitions within Di Gennaro and Ritschel's paper are over or under inclusive. For example, the organization Stop Street Harassment defines stranger harassment as "unwanted whistling, leering, sexist, homophobic, or transphobic slurs, persistent requests for someone's name, number or destination after they've said no, sexual names, comments and demands, following, flashing, public masturbation, groping, sexual assault, and rape" (qtd. in Di Gennaro & Ritschel 3). This definition is too narrow because it is ostensive and not exhaustive of all of the possible ways that stranger harassment could manifest. One overly broad example comes from You Gov: "making a whistle, shout, or comment of a sexual nature to someone passing by" (qtd. in Di Gennaro & Ritschel 3). This definition does not get at the

violation of social expectations because “someone” includes everyone the target of the act is acquainted with and, therefore, it is possible the target could be okay with if a friend were to shout something like, “Looking sexy today!”

Frequency

In the field of stranger harassment, Kimberly Fairchild and Laurie A. Rudman’s study about catcalling’s prevalence is one of the strongest and most cited. Their most striking conclusion is that many as thirty-one percent of women experience catcalling “every few days or more” (Fairchild & Rudman 346). Additionally, they found that about ninety-six percent of women have experienced catcalling at some point in their lives (Fairchild & Rudman 346). The paper establishes the pervasiveness of catcalling not only as something almost many women experience but as something many women experience nearly every day. If true, the enormous scope of the act is indicative of a common or normalized action.

M. A. Lucero’s longitudinal research addresses sexual harassment’s frequency and intensity over time. The study used mediator reports of sexual harassment to conclude that seventy percent of sexual harassers persist in their behavior over an extended period of time, thirty-five percent of which escalate the severity of sexual harassment (Lucero 337-338). This finding brings new dimension to Fairchild’s and Rudman’s work. It means that those who do catcall are not usually deterred, and perhaps this is the root cause for almost all women having experienced one form of sexual harassment or another. Sexual harassers not feeling a deterrence from their behavior could be a root cause for why ninety-six percent of women have experienced catcalling.

Fear and Anxiety

Kimberly Fairchild and Laurie Rudman’s work “reliably relate[s]” stranger harassment to a perceived risk of rape and self-objectification (Fairchild & Rudman 348). The increased perceived risk of rape is a form of worry or anxiety. This is a common finding in studies on this topic. For example, Meghan M. Davidson concludes in her research that there is an inverse direct correlation between stranger harassment and generalized anxiety disorder (Davidson 557). Rudman and Fairchild’s work, in the context of anxiety disorder, would make sense— increased fear, avoidance behavior, and increased awareness about one’s appearance all line up with the condition of anxiety.

Limitations

There are limitations of possibility and scope within this study. Limitations of possibility are goals and actions that would have enriched this project and were part of the original vision for the work. However, due to various hindrances, these goals and actions were not possible. Limitations of scope are clear boundaries on the research goals for this work.

The original research goal for this study included sketching catcallers’ emotional and physical intentions via interviews. Since catcalling is often seen as a form of harassment, it would have admittedly been difficult for people to speak about engaging in the act. It would have been preferable to have these difficult conversations and interviews in person. In the end, this was not possible because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed down University campuses and created strict social distancing guidelines. This meant the study needed to take place entirely

online, and in-person interaction would not be possible. The question screening for catcallers was still available on the online survey. However, not a single participant answered that they had catcalled someone. Yet, one participant did indicate they feel a strong urge to shout at strangers but has never acted on this impulse. Additionally, no men responded to the survey. This result pivoted the study towards exploring the gradient of responses to catcalling instead of the contrast between intentions and elicited responses.

The lack of male participation means that no first-person male perspective is available for study. However, the study's advertising occurred in online a University Facebook page, and the research team's Facebook and Instagram pages and included no efforts to target a specific gender. The fact that no men felt the need to participate in a survey about catcalling is meaningful in itself. Since no first-person male account of catcalling is available, the study relies on the catcalled's descriptions of their catcallers for parity in the conclusions about gender.

This study will not draw substantial conclusions about the intersection of class and catcalling. In the official survey, there was one question asking about the participants' occupation. Still, there seemed to be no significant relationship between profession and catcalling in the responses. This does not mean that no relation between class and catcalling could exist.

This is a qualitative ethnographic study and includes data detailing emotionality from twenty-two people. The conclusions of this study are not indicators of all human behavior because twenty-two people living in the United States is not statistically significant in the scope of the entire world or even the United States. The conclusions of this study are more descriptive than predictive. The discussion and findings will describe experiences, tell people's stories, and identify patterns within those experiences.

Methodology

In creating a methodology for the study, safety was at the center of every design choice. Using the recommendations from the University, Internal Review Board, and two papers published on the trauma-informed approach in research about sexual harassment and violence¹, I formulated the following procedures and questions.

I used an online survey service² to collect data. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an online survey that participants completed in the safety of their home entirely remotely was the best way to honor California's shelter-in-place orders. The survey was advertised online. From there, any respondent could share and repost the link. Subjects received no compensation for their participation. Upon completion of the survey, each respondent received an email, including links to free or low-cost mental health services in relation to sexual violence. Informed consent forms were collected from every participant included in the final work. The survey began with the definition of catcalling from the literature review and then included the following questions.

Survey Questions

¹ "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Sexual Violence Research Ethics and Open Science," by Rebecca Campbell, et al, "Qualitative Research on Interpersonal Violence: Guidance for Early Career Scholars." Jennifer Hardesty, et al.

² Survey Monkey

1. What is A) your gender identity? B) your gender expression (how you express your gender identity)?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your racial or ethnic identity?
4. What level of job do you have?
5. Have you ever been catcalled or experienced stranger harassment? OR Have you ever catcalled someone? If so, please describe.
6. How often do you experience catcalling or stranger harassment? OR How often do you catcall individuals?
7. How often do you experience catcalling or stranger harassment? OR How often do you catcall individuals?
8. What is your emotional AND physical response to being catcalled? OR What is your emotional AND physical motivation for catcalling?
9. Are there any other thoughts on catcalling you would like to share?

With this information, I created ethnographic profiles. Each respondent was assigned a letter of the alphabet to preserve their confidentiality during the study. The information from each participants' survey was also de-identified. Specific names of cities, locations, schools, stores, etc. were changed to generic versions, i.e. "San Diego" would be changed to "[a city]." A copy of the de-identified data was also sent to the respondents for approval. If there was anything the respondents wanted to change to protect their confidentiality further, they were able to voice their concerns during this time. After the data was de-identified, I sorted the text of the data into four categories, "action, feeling, body, time." From these categories, I used open coding to categorize segments of the qualitative data further. Finally, I wrote a short analysis of each participant and how they fit into the emerging patterns and whether or not their emotional reaction was overall positive, neutral, or negative.

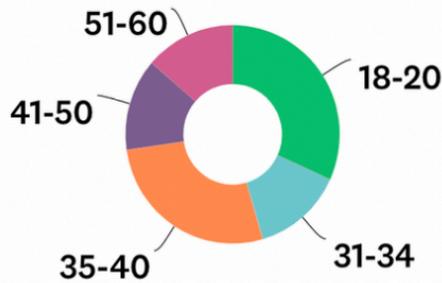
Findings

The demographics of the data are as follows. Twenty-one of the twenty-two participants were female; there was one non-binary participant. Five of these participants indicated they have a neutral or masculine gender expression. The ages are as follows³.

³ The graphs depicting age were generated by Survey Monkey

How old are you?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼18-20	31.82%	7
▼21-25	0.00%	0
▼26-30	0.00%	0
▼31-34	13.64%	3
▼35-40	27.27%	6
▼41-50	13.64%	3
▼51-60	13.64%	3
▼61-70	0.00%	0
▼71-80	0.00%	0
▼81-90	0.00%	0
▼90+	0.00%	0
TOTAL		22

Figure 1. Pie chart and table showing the ages of participants.

Significant patterns for catcalls emerged in regards to the frequency, nature of the event, emotional responses, and physical responses. This section will first detail what the respondents think makes catcalling more frequent. Second, I will include patterns of catcalling's form and content. Then, I will detail the range of emotions participants feel in response to catcalling from negative to positive, respectively.

Many respondents over the age of thirty believe they were catcalled more frequently when they were younger. The code indicating that catcalling was more frequent in the past was used nine times in total. Participants D, E, K, M, O, Q, S, U, and V all indicated this pattern in several ways. Usually, the question, "How often do you experience catcalling or stranger harassment?" generated the responses about age.

More Frequent When Younger		
Participant	Age	Description
D	51-60	"Not so much anymore. Younger: Weekly"
E	51-60	"Less now, likely due to age"
K	35-40	"When I was younger, every time we went out. Now, only occasionally (e.g. on weekend runs if I'm wearing tank top/shorts)"
M	35-40	"Less now than I used to. Now 1-2 year. Used to be every week or two."
O	31-34	"Not as much recently" "When I was younger walking by myself..." "No, depended more on age."
S	41-50	"Sorry its been too long ago now to recall an instance with specificity." "It happened routinely whenever in public in my 20's and 30's and subsided in my 40's."

U	51-60	"Rarely experience it nowadays, though it does occur, probably once a year (perhaps more), but from my 20s thru 30s (possibly 40s) it occurred more frequently, perhaps several times a year."
V	35-40	"Not often anymore, I stay home 80% of the time now."

Figure Two. Table showing participant label, age, and statements indicating catcalling occurred more frequency in their youth.

Participants perceived high population density as something that increases the frequency of catcalls. Thirteen participants believed a higher density population, in general, is responsible. Participants A, B, D, E, H, J, K, L, S, T, U, V, and W indicated that places with a high quantity of people such as a "city" are places with a high frequency of catcalls.

More Frequent in Cities	
Participant	Description
A	"Yes; more common in <u>downtown</u> areas."
B	"Yes. I have been catcalled at <u>school</u> on multiple occasions but it typically occurs in <u>populated busy cities</u> like [large city]."
D	" <u>city more</u> "
E	"Yes—when <u>attending school</u> , <u>commuting</u> by bicycle or bus (limited to transportation which was <u>more public and involved in activity like school which required daily interaction with larger groups of people</u> "
H	"Yes. If I'm <u>out and about downtown</u> , it happens <u>more often than when I'm walking in my neighborhood or at work.</u> "
J	"Walking on a street with <u>more cars vs less cars.</u> "
K	" <u>Out in public, always.</u> Never at work or school."
L	"Yes— <u>more common in cities.</u> "
S	"It happened <u>routinely whenever in public...</u> " "Never at school or work. Always in what was perceived as a <u>random public place.</u> Driving, stores, malls, largely attended events. Wherever the catcalled felt they had some sort of <u>anonymity.</u> "
T	"Yes. I don't get catcalled at school but <u>definitely do both in big towns and big cities.</u> "
U	" <u>More in city.</u> "
V	" <u>More so in the city</u> , the past year was at the <u>park and a mall.</u> "
W	" <u>In the city</u> is where the most catcall experiences have happened."

Figure Three. Table showing participant label and quotes indicating catcalling is more frequent in cities.

All but three participants said they have experienced catcalling at some point in their lives. The question asking how frequent the participant experiences catcalling was purposefully unstandardized. I intentionally avoided using a regular scale or interval of frequency because those methods lend themselves to a quantitative study. The goal is to establish the frequency based on the subjects' feelings rather than a mathematical average. I wanted the freedom of subjectivity in regards to how frequent the participant perceives their experience with catcalling. Therefore, it is not surprising that responses included phrases that have nothing to do with standardized numbers such as "rarely" (J) "occasionally" (K and B) "not often" (P). Some used loose approximations of time, such as "Once a month or so," (A) "Once every few months?" (H) "At least monthly" (L).⁴ I am not concerned with the precise frequency, whether it occurs weekly, monthly, or yearly but rather frequency first as a binary, then as perception. Catcalling seems to be something that almost every participant has experienced multiple times. Then, it is something that seems to occur with some regularity that is perceived as numerous.

The participants describe their catcallers exclusively as men. Twelve of the twenty-four people who said they have experienced being catcalled reference their catcallers as men. Not a single woman or nonbinary person was identified as a catcaller. There was one outlier, however—Participant J noted that she experiences an urge to perform something similar to catcalling saying, "Sometimes when I am driving and I see someone walking I feel an impulse to yell at them (nothing sexual) but I don't because I know it's wrong and I don't know why others can't control themselves." This is the only record of a woman in this study having any desire to perform stranger harassment or catcalling.

Catcallers Described as Men	
Type	Respondents
"man/men"	A, H, I, L, O, W
"boy/boys"	B, Z
"he/him"	J, K,
"male"	V
"guy"	K, P

Figure Four. Table showing participants indicating catcallers are men.

The basic form of a catcall is a neutral action followed by a solicitation for attention. These results mostly came from descriptions of particular instances that stood out in participants' minds. A generic example of the form would be something to the effect of "I was walking (neutral action) and then someone yelled (solicitation for attention) at me."

⁴ Interestingly two participants, A and B, both indicated specifically they get catcalled about once a month and then minimized the relevance of this frequency saying that they consider this time interval to be "infrequent."

Neutral Action Followed by Solicitation			
Neutral Action	Participants	Soliciting Action	Participants
"Walking"	A, B, O, T, V, W	"Yelled"	J, O, Z
Other	H, J, L, Z	"Made a comment"	A, B
		Other	A, H, T, V, W, L

Figure Five. Table showing participants who indicated a neutral action followed by solicitation.

Given that multiple participants mention that their catcallers often “yell” or “shout,” it is unsurprising that participants also described the content of the catcall generally negatively. Ten of the participants approximated quotes or gave brief descriptions of their catcalls.

Descriptions of Catcall Dialogue	
Participant	Description
A	"...made a comment about me being sexy."
B	"...a small group of men blocked out path and commented on our appearances."
E	"Comments about appearance (positive and negative), offers to date, requests for personal info (am I married), etc."
H	"looked at me and said- I hear that fat girl pussy is so tight."
J	"...yelled at us for being fat and asked facetiously how we f***ed."
O	"yelling things at us."
U	"...it is usually from afar, usually from one man, but sometimes more than one, usually 'good-humored' and not vulgar, though occasionally vulgar." "I find it humorous and kind of stupid."
V	"...said 'hey mami!'"
W	"...shout things like “let me take you home,” “Y’all single?,” “Come on, I’m non-violent,” “I’d hit that.”"
Z	"...yelled racial slurs at me, including mocking a language that sounded like Chinese (I look very Asian)."

Figure Six. Table showing participant labels and their descriptions of catcall dialogue.

There is a gradient of emotions in response to catcalling ranging from the negative, to neutral, to positive. The most common responses were negative.

Anxiety was the most common negative reaction. Several emotions fall under the spectrum of anxiety, including panic, discomfort, and fear. There were fourteen different participants whose responses indicated some level of anxiety in response to being catcalled.

Emotional Response: Anxiety	
Participant	Description
A	<u>“fear”</u>
B	“I was about 14 years old, walking through a shopping mall with my sister and a group of teenage boys made <u>uncomfortable</u> comments to me from a distance.” <u>“I don’t know how to respond</u> to catcalling because it is an <u>awkward</u> and <u>uncomfortable</u> experience.”
E	“I have a history of rape and incest. The catcalls were a <u>profound violation</u> , an <u>intrusion</u> . They <u>made me feel afraid</u> — I was <u>being watched</u> by others.” “My current morbid obesity status is in part a direct reaction to the catcalling- a means of <u>physically protecting myself to avoid attention</u> from others. It has not been successful because catcalling continues- now it’s <u>hate bully speech</u> about my appearance and “choosing” to look this way. My ability to lose weight is <u>significantly compromised</u> by the <u>fear that it will leave me exposed, vulnerable</u> and 'those' watching will direct <u>undesired attention</u> toward me again.”
H	“I feel <u>gross</u> . And I want to <u>get out of there immediately</u> because I feel <u>scared</u> .”
J	<u>“scared”</u>
L	<u>“fear”</u>
O	“It always makes me feel <u>uncomfortable</u> and <u>unsafe</u> . Also, it makes me so <u>anxious</u> that I will <u>go out of my way to avoid</u> situations where I might get <u>unwanted attention</u> .”
P	“When I was younger I was mostly <u>embarrassed</u> especially it was an older guy older age who was catcalling. With younger guys I found myself somewhere between feeling <u>embarrassed</u> and excited for being noticed. But mostly I felt <u>shame</u> .”
Q	<u>“Uncomfortable, guarded, tried to ignore them.”</u>
S	“I don't fully understand it. I do recognize that some on the receiving end feel a sense of approval and receive an ego boost. I don't believe most do, I think it makes most feel <u>vulnerable</u> and in <u>danger</u> .”
T	“It’s <u>weird</u> . It <u>sucks</u> . It makes me feel <u>vulnerable</u> but also angry.”
V	“I was <u>shocked</u> that 1- this happened in front of my son and 2- these were "professional" workers at a mall in [a city].”
W	“though I feel <u>anxious</u> and <u>afraid</u> , sometimes my <u>heart rate goes up</u> .”
Z	“I became <u>terrified</u> and so I <u>ran</u> home, they followed harasser follows me for a short while.” <u>“Panic”</u>

Figure Seven. Table showing participants describing catcalling as an anxiety-inducing event.

Disgust and anger were also prevalent negative emotional responses, though less common than anxiety. Five participants expressed disgust, and three expressed anger.

Disgust as a Response	
Participant	Description
H	"I was <u>disgusted</u> and walked away faster." "I feel <u>gross</u> ."
K	" <u>Grossed out</u> "
V	"A large part of me feels <u>appalled</u> ."
W	"I feel slightly annoyed and <u>disgusted</u> ."
Z	"it's <u>ugly</u> "

Figure Eight. Table showing participants describing disgust in response to catcalling.

Emotional Response: Anger	
Type	Participant
"anger/rage"	T, I, M

Figure Nine. Table showing participants describing disgust in response to catcalling.

Two negative physical responses to catcalling were evasion and fight-or-flight like behavior. Evasion was the most common response. Fight-or-flight like behavior was the second most common, with four participants describing symptoms of increased adrenaline. While evasion could be considered a component of fight-or-flight, the responses sorted specifically under fight-or-flight were marked with a more biological response.

Physical Response: Evasion	
Participant	Description
B	"I try to make myself look serious and continue with my business, <u>ignoring</u> the catcaller's comments."
E	"My current morbid obesity status is in part a direct reaction to the catcalling- a means of <u>physically protecting myself to avoid attention from others</u> . It has not been successful because catcalling continues- now it's hate bully speech about my appearance and "choosing" to look this way. <u>My ability to lose weight is significantly compromised by the fear that it will leave me exposed, vulnerable and "those" watching will direct undesired attention toward me again.</u>
F	"...I always <u>ignore</u> the person that is catcalling"
H	"I was disgusted and <u>walked away faster</u> ." "And <u>I want to get out of there</u> immediately because I feel scared."

M	"...I <u>avoid</u> it if possible."
O	"Also, it makes me so anxious that I will <u>go out of my way to avoid situations</u> where I might get unwanted attention."
Q	"...tried to <u>ignore</u> them."
S	"I <u>withdrew</u> . <u>Avoided public places</u> whenever possible. <u>Avoided interaction and eye contact</u> ."
V	"I <u>ignore, no turning my head</u> ."
Z	"I <u>stopped running</u> for a few months, and now I <u>carry a whistle and pepper spray</u> with me whenever I run alone. I also <u>avoid wearing a tank to run alone</u> , and I <u>always check the weather to make sure that it won't be dark</u> for another hour before I leave my house."

Figure Ten. Table showing participants describing evading catcalling.

Physical Response: Fight or Flight Like Behavior	
Type	Participant
Increased heart rate	B, W
Crying	J, Z
Other	B, Z

Figure Eleven. Table showing participants describing fight-or-flight like behavior in response to catcalling.

Two participants indicated neutral feelings towards catcalling. This was the second most common type of response. It is important to note that the neutral response was far less common than the negative response. Participant F was not included in those who felt disgusted in response because F's overall tone was net-neutral. Others included in the section for disgust showed the emotion as a major aspect of their response, whereas F is not significantly moved in any direction. In response to the question asking how catcalling impacts the participants emotionally and physically, the neutral group responded as follows.

The Neutral Response	
Participant	Description
D	"Not much"
F	"flattered but ewww"
U	"I don't mind it at all. I find it humorous and kind of stupid. I have rarely been emotionally affected by it."

Figure Twelve. Table showing participants' neutral response to catcalling.

There was one participant who felt positive emotions towards catcalling. Participant U says, "I don't mind it at all. I find it humorous and kind of stupid. I have rarely been emotionally

affected by it." However, six respondents implied, either implicitly or explicitly, that catcalling is somewhat of a compliment. Interestingly, three of the people who indicated that they feel some sort of praise in being catcalled also had mostly negative feelings towards the act.

Interpretation as a Compliment	
Participant	Description
U	"...it is usually from afar, usually from one man, but sometimes more than one, usually 'good-humored' and not vulgar, though occasionally vulgar." "I find it humorous and kind of stupid."
F	"Flattered, but eww"
V	"As far as emotional, a tiny part of me feels <u>flattered</u> (I personally don't feel physically pretty)"
P	"I found myself somewhere between feeling embarrassed and <u>excited for being noticed.</u> "
S	"I do recognize that someone the receiving end <u>feel a sense of approval and receive an ego boost.</u> "
	overall positive interpretation
	overall neutral interpretation
	overall negative interpretation

Figure Thirteen. Table showing how catcalling can be interpreted as a compliment.

Discussion

Nature of the Catcall

Noting that most catcalls are preceded by a neutral action helps explain why catcalling catches its subjects off guard and often elicits fear and anxiety. Paying attention to the gender dynamics apparent within catcalling also helps situate this action within the wider power dynamic.

Terms indicating the catcallers were male include guy, man, male, boy, and he/him pronouns. Catcallers completed their actions both in groups and alone. Some participants were not specific about the quantity of men. Respondent Z says that "a car filled with teenage boys slowed down behind me." A few participants named a specific number of men like Participant L, who says, "I was followed...by three men who were probably about five years older than I was." Then there were those who named a singular catcaller like Participant A, who says, "A man yelled out his truck at us."

Ten of the participants described performing a neutral action such as walking, jogging, or swimming, which would not necessarily attract any particular attention to themselves, which was followed by a catcaller attempting to gain their attention. Respondent H is a strong example of this pattern. Participant H recounted an instance when she was walking into a restaurant with her family when a man said to her, "I hear that fat girl pussy is so tight." The neutral action, in this case, would be her entering the restaurant; the solicitation was the man's comment about "fat girl

pussy." Alternatively, catcallers often follow their targets. For instance, Participant L states that as she was leaving a train station where she had been studying, three older men "kept their distance but followed [her] for several blocks." This is one of five instances of catcallers following their targets. These sorts of examples of attention-seeking behavior definitely breach the norms of appropriate behavior. Having someone trail behind for any distance is only naturally scary. This is where it can be useful to reintroduce the bigger picture. Catcalling is something that happens not only in almost every woman's life, but it occurs repetitively in nearly every woman's life. It is an action that, while it may not be accepted as polite, it is certainly accepted by many—otherwise there would not be so many instances of catcalling. This normalization minimizes the impact of threatening behavior towards women, making it easier to conceive how one might want to harm a woman. It is easy to see how studies like Fairchild and Rudman's concludes that catcalling leads to an increased fear of rape. When someone so brazenly breaks the social code of conduct, it is less difficult to then perceive the person as capable of breaching other social norms such as remaining non-violent.

Therefore, catcalling is distinguished as something that is meant to solicit a targets' attention, unprovoked. It is also an act that involves gender. Most often, within the confines of this study, men catcall women.

Frequency

The second topic of discussion is the frequency of catcalls, given the frequency each participant experiences in general and then relative to location and age. Higher frequency means the impacts are more widespread and, therefore, more severe. As mentioned before, the study is not concerned about a mathematical average. After noting almost every single participant has experienced catcalling multiple times in their life, it is clear catcalling is a common shared experience for women. Frequency is important to establish in any study because it magnifies any other findings.

With an understanding of the factors that increase the frequency of catcalling, the shadow of the motivation for catcalling becomes clearer. An increased density of population seems to increase the number of catcalls. Participant H makes a direct comparison between more populated and less populated areas saying, "If I'm out and about downtown, it happens more often than when I'm walking in my neighborhood or at work." K echoes this sentiment saying catcalling occurs "out in public, always. Never at work or school." E makes a direct correlation saying catcalling occurs more frequently "when attending school, commuting by bicycle or bus...which was more public and...required daily interaction with larger groups of people." It is possible that being around more people in general increases the likelihood of crossing paths with someone who catcalls, but it is also possible that something about the atmosphere of large populations makes catcalling feel more appropriate. Participant S drew this same conclusion when she notes that catcalling happens "Never at school or work. Always in what was perceived as a random public place. Driving, stores, malls, largely attended events. Wherever the catcaller felt they had some sort of anonymity." It is possible that in locations with more people, there is less focused attention on a person at any moment, given that no one person can observe every stranger surrounding them. This may create an effect of anonymity, as S puts it, that gives the catcaller the freedom to solicit their target, and then disappear into the other strangers. The field of psychology would call this process deindividuation. Deindividuation refers to the effect that groups have on erasing one's sense of identity, which then causes "a sense of anonymity and

diffused responsibility” (Gould & Howson). This conjecture is in line with the Sex-Role Spillover Theory⁵, which proposes that sexual harassment occurs in places where such behavior is acceptable due to its power dynamics and motivated by “gender-based expectations for behavior” (Pina 131-132). In the context of this study, this would mean that sexist attitudes cause catcalling, and locations with high population density are what enable this action to occur.

Age was the second factor that indicated an alteration in the frequency of catcalling. Given that participants were generally catcalled more frequently when they were younger, this too may illuminate something about the motivation for catcalling. The reason I believe it is a younger age that increases catcalling, and it was not only generally more prevalent in the past, is the participants’ responses. First, the younger participants still indicated experiencing catcalling with regularity. Catcalling is a nearly universal experience among women, young and old. Second, almost all of the subjects who indicated catcalling used to happen more frequently seem to attribute this directly to their age and not a shift in the social climate. For example, Participant K said, "When I was younger, [it happened] every time we went out." The word "younger" references her age, making it more personal than a phrase referring to time saying "in the nineties" or "thirty years ago." Some focused more on the increased frequency in the past, such as Participant Q, who stated that it occurred "regularly when I was younger." Others focused on the comparatively lower frequency they experience as they have aged, such as Participant E: "less now, likely due to age." What is more notable, however, is that this pattern arose despite there not being any direct questions fishing for a connection between age and frequency. This is information that several participants volunteered and felt had strong ties to the frequency. It is not clear what it is about older age that deters the action; whether it is because younger women are considered “less beautiful” and, therefore, less sexual beings, or because younger women are perceived as more vulnerable or for some other reason.

Catcalling is a distinct action that, in the confines of this study, is unsolicited and practiced widely. It occurs in several different locations and occurs several times throughout the lifetime of many women but seemingly more often when women are younger.

The Response

Of the three types of responses to catcalling, negative ones are the most common by far. As a result, greater nuance to the negative response is available for analysis. The shades of anxiety, anger, disgust, evasion, and fight-or-flight all point to a deep discomfort. Fear seems to be the primary emotion that participants experience, and physical responses, including the evasion and fight-or-flight behavior, are secondary manifestations of this fear.

Participant E is the strongest example of a negative emotional response and indicated the greatest level of anxiety: "I have a history of rape and incest. The catcalls were a profound violation, an intrusion. They made me feel afraid— I was being watched by others." The catcall evokes E's traumatic past, makes her feel fear, and gives her an acute awareness of the gaze upon her. One hallmark of anxiety is avoidance behavior, which E also displays. In his book, Anxiety

⁵ As summarized in A. Pina’s paper, "An Overview of the Literature on Sexual Harassment: Perpetrator, Theory, and Treatment Issues."

and Avoidance, Dr. Michael Tompkins defines avoidance and avoidance behaviors as “the things you do or don’t do to reduce your anxiety” (12). Participant E tries to avoid others’ gaze with her “morbid obesity,” saying it “is in part a direct reaction to the catcalling— a means of physically protecting myself to avoid attention from others.” E is more than just uncomfortable. She alters her behavior to minimize the feeling of harassment and to ease the profound fear catcalling causes her.

Several participants had physical responses suggestive of fear, the most common being evasion. Ten participants practiced some sort of behavior with the purpose of stopping or lessening catcalling. Participant H says, “I want to get out of there immediately because I feel scared.” The jump from fear to avoidance behavior is a natural progression and is the reason many people who have been catcalled alter their routines to avoid incurring catcalls. People like Participant Z may go out of their way to “stop running for a few months” in order to escape catcallers. The evasion, a common aspect of the negative response, speaks to the magnitude of discomfort participants feel.

This points to catcalling being a form of harassment. As I have previously established, catcalling is a widely practiced action with gendered implications, which can now be said to most often elicit negative emotional responses. While the intent, in this study, has not been proven to be malicious, it is clear that the resulting reaction is overwhelmingly negative. Since the bright line for harassment in many definitions⁶ only requires that the comments are “unwelcome,” and does not necessarily require malintent, I feel safe in saying that catcalling is a form of harassment.

Catcalling behaving like a compliment is not mutually exclusive with catcalling eliciting a negative response. The definition of a compliment Di Gennaro and Ritschel use is “a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker: usually the person is addressed for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (2).

In several of the responses to the survey, participants indicated that they felt somewhat grateful for being catcalled because it meant they are physically attractive. Of the five participants that indicated these feelings, one had an overall positive feeling towards catcalling, and one had overall neutral feelings towards catcalling. These people view the calls as genuine compliments. More interestingly, however, are the three participants who acknowledge the “ego-boost” catcalling gives them while also feeling an overall negative sentiment like anxiety and distress. This finding is in line with the work of Rudman, who relates catcalling to increased feelings of self-objectification. While participants like V may feel “flattered,” she is soon reminded she is value-judged based on her outward appearance. Then, her feelings of negative self-image are brought to light: “I personally don’t feel physically pretty.”

Four of the twenty-two people in the study had an overall positive or neutral feeling towards catcalling. These were far less common than the negative response—this does not make them less authentic.

⁶ According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Harassment can include “sexual harassment” or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.”

Conclusion

All too often, research of this kind reduces emotional issues into numbers. What makes this study unique is the preservation of participants' voices. In doing so, I hope to protect the integrity of each personal narrative—something that is especially important in discussions about sexual harassment, which includes the objectification of women. Catcalling is a unique form of harassment that usually sees men targeting women, causing significant and recurrent harmful emotional responses. The severity and wide-reaching nature of the impact makes catcalling a moral issue. If it is something that most often negatively impacts others, it is hardly ethical nor prudential.

It is difficult to hold on to what a “negative impact” means. Women alter their lives; they stop going out in the dark, stop visiting crowded places, stop living as freely as they could have if this phenomenon did not exist. This survey realistically reached an incredibly small portion of the population. The fact that a small, unfunded, college survey could receive such a resounding indication that catcalling is a shared experience speaks volumes.

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