A few points on counter-violence and advocacy training

* Counter-violence isn’t only about what to do when confronted with violence, but also about how to affect the social landscape, addressing popular mythologies in order to not propagate hyper-vigilance and victim-blaming.

* Counter-violence is about smart decisions, environmental- & self-awareness, as well as activism, assertiveness, advocacy, and verbal & physical tactics for dealing with a variety of situations at various levels of escalation.

* Unlike self-defence, counter-violence education redirects focus away from the actions of potential victims and onto empowering communities against violence, person by person.

Explore your options with us.

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Street harassment.

Street harassment is defined as any unwelcome words or actions that invade the space of another - whether physically or emotionally - and focus attention on the actual or perceived identity, appearance, or sexuality of the targeted person. Creepy, debasing, intrusive, intimidating, insulting, invasive, objectifying, startling... These are just some of the words that can be used to describe street harassment.

Anyone can harass anyone, but the perpetrator is most frequently a man and his target is most often “other-identified.” For instance, virtually every woman is subjected to street harassment, often beginning as soon as they are old enough to be in public alone. This can result in public places being completely unwelcoming.

Other-identified:
Someone unlike the perceiver; different in appearance, custom, or belief.

All the advice on how to confront street harassment is based on you being able to accurately assess your own safety. While most street harassers are not dangerous, you are the best judge of your own security and comfort.

Keep in mind that alcohol and other drugs can impair judgment, and a harasser who is under the influence may be less inhibited and more likely to escalate - such a situation may mean taking extra steps to ensure your safety. Assess the situation to the best of your ability and undertake only the measures you feel capable of reasonably taking.

If you choose to confront it

If you’re not the boundary holder, check in. Get consent and follow the lead of the boundary holder - don’t just rush in and try to rescue.

When confronting anybody it is best to adopt an assertive posture, maintain eye-contact, and speak in a firm, steady tone. Don’t use personal attacks, insults, threats, or obscenities. Instead, call attention to the behaviour and it’s unacceptability:

“______ is harassment. Stop it.”

Because of the dynamics of street harassment, men who step in may make a bigger difference, as the harasser is more likely to seek another man’s approval than that of his target.

Use your technology

A smart phone or other device can record evidence for either employers or police, or even the news media. Report the harasser if you feel up to it. Make note of the time and place of those in uniforms or company vehicles and contact their employer. If you felt unsafe, consider contacting police and making a formal complaint with them. Also keep in mind that any city employee likely has a radio or telephone with which to contact authorities. Business managers, bus-drivers, teachers, etc., all have a responsibility to keep their environment as safe and inviting as possible, and when one person infringes on the comfort or safety of another there may be a law being broken.

If told of harassment

Believe. Simple as that. Don’t judge the behaviour, clothing choices, company, or location of the recipient of harassment; no behaviour can logically lead to harassment. It doesn’t matter if you think a similar situation would not have felt like harassment to you; what one person sees as harmless can have devastating effects on others. The damage caused by not believing a victim of harassment is cumulative and may affect how frequently and how severely future instances of harassment may play out.

For men

Consider the effect your words and actions will have on others. Whistling, cat-calls, making kissing noises or other sounds is disrespectful at the very least, and can be scary or even illegal. Flashing, grabbing, groping and some statements are also illegal. Telling a woman what you think of her appearance is neither a compliment nor helpful. You are not entitled to her time or attention. Would you accept similar behaviour from other men? She isn’t there for your pleasure or to be picked on or humiliated, and as harmless as you may think your actions are they can be rightfully interpreted as intimidating.

A polite interaction can be a simple smile, “Hello,” or a nod acknowledging her presence before continuing on your way. Don’t engage in street harassment, and don’t ignore this behaviour in the men you know.

For more strategies, visit: tbdp.ca