

Neither appeasement nor counteraggression works as a reliable defense against sexual harassment, and both strategies can have substantial costs for women. Women who choose to appease and passively endure harassment suffer all kinds of stress-related illnesses, from migraines to backaches to ulcers; their job or school performance often declines (with serious economic consequences), and both their self-esteem and their emotional relationships with family and friends may be seriously damaged as well. Women who use aggression as a countermeasure, however, can find themselves in an escalating situation of physical violence on the street, or characterized as erratic, unpredictable, and emotionally out of control in the workplace or the university. Their colleagues begin to avoid them, they lose prime assignments and promotions, and they too can suffer both emotional and economic repercussions. All too often, managers and supervisors will label the woman, not the harasser, as the "problem employee."

When appeasement and counteraggression fail to deter the harasser, women are often forced to take more drastic action: quitting a job, withdrawing from a class, or even moving to a different neighborhood or a new city to escape the harasser. Such avoidance has severe costs for women (for example, unemployment). Furthermore, it does nothing to prevent the harasser from continuing his abusive behavior. One woman may have escaped him—at a high cost to herself—but his next chosen victim is likely to be the very next woman he hires to fill the job, the next woman in his class, or the unsuspecting new female tenant who moves into that vacant apartment in his building.

Like appeasement, avoidance is a passive strategy. It works in the limited sense of enabling the woman to flee from her harasser, but not in any larger, meaningful sense. Personally, she still feels victimized and defeated, and bears all the costs of the harasser's actions; and on a societal level, avoidance tactics in no way reduce her abuser's ability to harass or eliminate the rewards that he receives from engaging in this behavior. In fact, in cases of strategic, territorial

harassment, avoidance is a victory for the harasser—he has succeeded in forcing his victim out.

EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO HARASSMENT

The responses that work best are active strategies—techniques that enable women to regain control of the interaction, disrupt the harasser's agenda, minimize the possibility of escalation or retaliation, and create a social context that changes the underlying risk and reward structure for the harasser. The tactics that work are neither passive nor aggressive; they are principled, assertive, strong, and self-respecting. From the actual experiences of thousands of women, faced with thousands of harassers in all kinds of situations, it is clear that there are three strong defense strategies that do work well: (1) using straightforward, direct-action confrontation tactics, (2) building a support network to deal with a persistent harasser or a hostile environment, and when possible, (3) filing official charges with the university, the school board, the church board, the union, the corporate EEO office, or the appropriate government agency.

All three defense strategies can be used in combination, but of these three, direct confrontation is the one that is most likely to be successful in breaking off the harasser's behavior at the outset. A well-executed confrontation leaves the woman in control, reduces the risk of retaliation, and provides a powerful incentive for the harasser to rethink his behavior. A good confrontation can make legal action unnecessary by cutting off the harassment immediately; it also strengthens the woman's case if she subsequently decides to file a complaint or take the harasser to court. And a successful confrontation helps to restructure the social context in which the harasser operates; it undermines the legitimacy of harassment as a social practice and sets up a new social norm, a new cultural standard for acceptable male behavior.

Confrontation works against all types of sexual harassment. It is a new form of behavior for many women—not an angry, emotional outburst, and not part of the standard repertoire

of passive and accommodating female behavior in a sexist culture. The first time a woman steps outside the predictable pattern of response to harassment, confronts a harasser with a powerful statement, and leaves her abuser staggering with astonishment can be exhilarating. It is also a new phenomenon for the harassers—this is a victim response that violates their most basic expectations about the power dynamics of sexual harassment. This is not the deference and intimidation effect they expect, nor is it angry aggression, which they would understand. Confrontation is something very different, and it leaves them in the dust. For most harassers, the only reaction to a strong, clear confrontation is stunned silence. Some harassers are so taken aback that they apologize on the spot.

LEARNING TO CONFRONT

Confrontation involves some very specific actions, using behavioral guidelines from the assertiveness and self-defense skills of the women's movement and the nonviolent social change tactics of the civil rights movement. A woman who confronts is not lashing out in anger; she is applying a very powerful, nonviolent social control technique to flip the power dynamics in the interaction. Confrontation takes self-control, preparation, forethought, and practice.

As a self-defense technique, confrontation is part of a range of well-developed responses to interpersonal aggression: *assertiveness, confrontation, self-defense, and martial arts*. The spectrum of effective action does not include passivity, aggression, or evasive, manipulative passive-aggressive behavior.

Assertiveness involves defining the problem clearly, stating one's feelings openly, and negotiating a change in behavior or some other mutually satisfactory solution to the problem at hand. For example, if Sally's roommate Ellen constantly leaves dirty dishes in the sink, there are many possible ways to address the situation. Sally could say nothing, suffer in silence, and just do the dishes herself every

time (passivity—often accompanied by stress, resentment, long conspicuous sighs, and other signs of martyrdom). On the other hand, Sally could get angry and throw the dishes at Ellen when she walks in the door (aggression). Or Sally could be devious and indirect, put up with it for a while, and then pile all the dirty dishes on Ellen's bed one day, when she finally gets fed up (passive-aggressive behavior). These are not useful problem-solving techniques. In an assertive response, Sally would name the behavior directly ("Ellen, you keep leaving your dirty dishes in the sink"), state her feelings ("It upsets me to come home to a mess in the kitchen"), and then open the negotiations by suggesting a solution ("I want you to wash your dishes before they stack up"). The actual solution could take many forms—Ellen might start washing her dishes, Sally and Ellen might agree to take turns doing the dishes, or Sally might do all the dishes in exchange for Ellen doing all the laundry. Both Sally's and Ellen's feelings matter. The behavior has to change in one way or another, but there is a lot of room for compromise. It is not the particular solution but the format of this approach—naming the problem, stating one's feelings, and stating the change one wants—that makes this procedure work as an assertiveness technique.

Note that assertiveness does not involve any name-calling, any threats, or any rude, nasty comments about character and motives. Sally does not call Ellen a slob, or assume that she leaves all those dirty dishes on purpose just to drive her roommate nuts. The discussion centers strictly on the concrete behavior, the participants' own feelings, and the solution: when you do A, I feel B, and I want you to do C from now on. Assertiveness techniques target the behavior, not the person.

Assertiveness is a firm, clear response to a problem. It is milder than confrontation, and can sometimes be an appropriate initial response to casual, low-key male-dominance harassment when the harasser is a boss, coworker, neighbor, classmate, or other acquaintance with whom the woman has regular contact. If for some reason the woman wishes to give

the harasser the benefit of the doubt at first, she can begin with this level of response. If the harasser truly did not realize that his behavior was offensive, an assertive approach is often enough to take care of the problem.

However, if he fails to change his behavior, it is perfectly fair to conclude that he now knows he is committing harassment. Assertiveness is very clear, and at that point, no woman should be under the illusion that the harasser doesn't really mean it. She should move up to the next step—confrontation—immediately.

Confrontation is a stronger action—a forceful response to deliberate power abuse and unwelcome behavior of many kinds, including sexual harassment. Like assertiveness, a good confrontation involves naming the behavior very clearly: targeting the harasser's specific actions, but not the harasser personally. Like assertiveness, confrontation involves no threats, no name-calling, no insulting statements about the harasser's character or manhood. But in a confrontation, one does not talk about one's feelings, or discuss the harasser's feelings; the only issue is his behavior. What he did is intolerable, and he is responsible for it. The woman does not suggest, request, or negotiate possible solutions, but *demand*s that the offensive behavior stop. "Keep your hands off my breasts" is not a statement that is open to negotiation. There is no other possible option here, no room for compromise. The only acceptable solution is for the harasser to revise his behavior immediately.

While a woman using assertiveness may take the time to discuss the harasser's motives with him and explain her own feelings when she is on the receiving end of his behavior, a woman who confronts a harasser goes directly to the abusive behavior, labels it publicly as harassment, and holds the man accountable for it.

When the harasser is a stranger, there is no possible excuse for his behavior. A strong, immediate confrontation is warranted whether he is engaging in predatory harassment, dominance harassment, or some form of strategic, territorial harassment. When the harasser is an acquaintance, the

woman has a choice between the assertive and the confrontational approaches. Assertiveness works in some circumstances; confrontation works in almost every case. A man who runs his hands down a secretary's body, propositions his coworkers, or mutters, "Hey, baby, I sure would like a piece of that," to a woman on the street deserves to be confronted on the spot.

Sexual harassment includes physical actions as well as verbal abuse—unwanted touching, rubbing, leaning over or standing too close, and many other types of physical intrusion. Physical harassment requires a measured, reciprocal, physical confrontation response, in addition to a verbal confrontation. Decisively remove the harasser's hand from your body, for example, as you make your statement.

In dangerous, life-threatening situations, full-scale self-defense is justified. *Self-defense* involves not only verbal skills but the ability to block an assailant's blows, break free from choke holds and other attacks, and disable the attacker, if need be, in order to prevent him from harming his victim. If the harasser presents a threat of sexual assault or other serious physical injury, self-defense—strong, immediate verbal and physical resistance—is usually the safest strategy. There is no reason for women to be macho; it is perfectly sensible to avoid encounters with men who are physically threatening and to run from danger as soon as you can break free. A strong verbal confrontation can help to stop an assault at the outset, but no woman should stick around and deliver a lecture just to make a point, if she is in physical danger of further attack.

Martial arts training is one step beyond self-defense. All of the martial arts—judo, karate, aikido, and the many other variations now available—provide excellent training in mental discipline and physical defense techniques. Women studying martial arts focus on the athletic, artistic, and spiritual aspects, as well as the self-defense skills involved. While it is possible to learn a good basic set of physical self-defense tactics in just a few classes, martial arts proficiency usually takes several years.

With respect to sexual harassment, the circumstances of the incident determine the level of response: assertiveness, confrontation, or self-defense. All women (and girls!) should learn how to use these three basic levels of response, simply to equip themselves to handle the kinds of situations they are likely to encounter. Martial arts training can be very rare-able-bodied to learn a basic set of skills. In fact, many women with disabilities are not only assertive, but successful at confrontation, self-defense, and martial arts.

SELF-DEFENSE GUIDELINES

Confrontation is a self-defense strategy, and learning to confront means knowing some basic self-defense guidelines. No book can replace the experience of learning and practicing in a class, but here are the fundamentals that every woman should know:

1. *Be alert.* Pay attention to your surroundings, indoors and out, notice the body language of people around you, and anticipate situations before they develop into full-blown threats. On the job or at school, notice how male supervisors, colleagues, clients, professors, and other acquaintances talk about women and how they treat the other women employees, customers, or students. Notice how you feel when different men are around. Wherever you are, talk to the women around you about the kinds of situations they have already encountered. Break the silence that protects harassers—find out who has harassed the women around you, and let those women know what you yourself have experienced. On the street, pay attention! Notice street harassers before they are right up against you. No harasser should ever again be able to abuse women anonymously in the neighborhood or work his way down the corridor at school or on the job, harassing woman after woman without being held accountable.

2. *Trust your instincts.* If a situation feels wrong in some way, get ready to confront, fight back, or get yourself out of there. Many women report feeling uneasy before an attack

occurred (particularly in cases of rape-testing, date rape, and acquaintance rape), but discounted their feelings and failed to take action because the assailant "hadn't really done anything specific" yet. Don't wait to react—your gut reaction is usually right. Trust your intuition when you don't feel safe.¹ With harassers, this means trusting your own reactions to the harasser's behavior; if a comment or action feels invasive, your discomfort is real. Take it seriously.

3. *Be prepared.* Be mentally and physically ready to take action. Know what your options are and think about what you would do *before* an incident happens. Because both harassment and sexual assault are so common in our society, being ready to act is a bit like the defensive driving skills taught in driver's education classes. A driver's ed teacher might ask her students, "What would you do if a child or a dog ran out in the road right now?" Women should practice the same kind of mental rehearsal. What would you do if you were accosted in this parking lot, or on that street corner, or on the job? Who is around at this time of day, to hear you if you yelled? In which direction would you run to get help? What escape route would you use to get out of your own house or worksite, if an intruder broke in?

One very simple preparation exercise, used in self-defense classes, is designed to ensure that women know their surroundings well: on a sunny afternoon, with a friend, take a "walking tour" of the areas where you live, work, or shop. Find out where that alley goes, what's behind the supermarket or the gas station, what's hidden behind that hedge or fence—check out any place that could be the site of an assault. Just knowing which way an alley opens out to the street, and which way is a dead end, can be critically important in an attack. That kind of knowledge has saved women's lives.

That was the case in one recent attempted rape, for a woman in Washington. She lived on a block with a T-shaped alley running through it. One corner at the top of the "T" was a dead end: nothing but some Dumpsters and the back of an office building that was deserted on evenings and

weekends. The other side of the "T" connected to a side street and came out next to a convenience store that was open until midnight. Late one evening, less than two months after she had done her "walking tour" of the neighborhood, she was grabbed and dragged into the alley. She broke loose from her assailant in the middle of the alley, but could not get back out, past him. She turned and ran further up the alley. He came after her. At the top of the alley, she had to make a choice: left or right. She knew that the left side was a dead end, and took off to the right, heading for the convenience store and yelling all the way. As she burst into the store, the clerk was already on the telephone, dialing the police. The rapist ran back into the alley, and the police caught him a few minutes later, based on her identification.

4. *Rely on your own resources.* Your own intelligence and your verbal and physical skills are your first line of defense against harassment or assault. You may often be on your own. Don't assume that you will be rescued; know what you can do, yourself. Practice your confrontation skills and your basic self-defense tactics with your women friends. Know the vulnerable points on an assailant's body—eyes, nose, throat, solar plexus, elbow and finger joints, kidneys, knees, shins, arches (go after any of these while he is protecting his groin). Know your weapons—your brain, voice, hands, elbows, knees, feet, keys, umbrella, pens, and so forth. (What do you have within arm's reach right now, that could be used as a defense?) One woman, cornered in a laundry room in the basement of her apartment building, actually managed to knock out her attacker by slamming a shoulder-high dryer door into his face, and women have fought off knife attacks by using a sturdy wicker laundry basket as a shield. Take a basic self-defense class and share your skills with the women and children around you.

5. *Be loud and clear if you do need help.* If you are attacked, don't leave room for anyone to misinterpret what's happening. In a sexual assault, this means yelling "no!" at the assailant, and shouting "kiya!" or other karate yells to startle him and get your own adrenaline going. Then let ev-

eryone around know exactly what's going on. Yelling, "This is an attack, call the police," not only makes the situation clear, but is often effective in getting help—people tend to do what they are told, and they are more likely to actually call the police if you tell them to do so. Keep on shouting—it may take a minute or two for people to figure out where you are. In cases of sexual harassment, a good confrontation works much the same way: You don't usually need to shout, but your confrontation statement, loud and clear, lets everyone around know exactly what the harasser has done, and can help to generate support from potential allies—even strangers on the street.

6. *Intervene to help others who are under attack.* There are many ways to intervene from a safe distance, without endangering yourself. Armed rapists have fled when, in response to a victim's shouts, a neighbor has done something as simple as turning on the porch lights and yelling out the window, "I heard you! I've called the police!" In cases of harassment, intervening may mean standing up for another woman on the street, at school, or on the job, helping a child to confront harassment on the playground, working with a woman to plan an individual or group confrontation, talking to the harasser yourself, or asking his male friends to confront him about his behavior. Intervening can also mean standing up for men or women who are experiencing racial, anti-Semitic, or homophobic harassment—sexual harassment is not the only kind of power abuse.

Here's a success story from Maria A. describing a street harassment incident where simple intervention worked beautifully:

TEAMWORK

In June 1991, I was working in Washington, D.C. I was walking on a busy street downtown, on my way home from work. There were dozens of people on the sidewalk. Suddenly, about 100 feet in front of me, I heard a woman shout,

"Keep your hands off me!" I saw who it was—I didn't know her, but she was standing there with her hands on her hips, looking very pissed at a young man in a suit. The man stopped when she said that, and he began to argue with her, calling her a "bitch" and a few other things. This went on for almost a minute, as I walked toward them. She yelled, "I don't even know you! Who do you think you are, putting your hand on my butt as I was walking down the street!" I knew right then what was going on: harassment. I could tell that she would appreciate some reinforcement—he was a persistent and very obnoxious harasser—so I yelled, from about 40 feet away, in the middle of a crowd of people, "She's right! Stop harassing women! No woman will put up with it!" Well, that really floored him. He whirled around in shock, looked wildly up the street to see who was coming after him now, and then took off running in the opposite direction as if an entire feminist army was after him. I walked over to the woman, introduced myself, and we walked down the block together.

Intervention does make a difference. There's no need to jump in and tackle the assailant bodily, so don't let fear stop you from doing the right thing.

These elementary self-defense guidelines apply in all kinds of situations. They are part of any general community strategy for reducing the risk of sexual assault and harassment. But many women never learn any form of self-defense, either because they believe the sexist, defeating cultural myth that there is nothing they can do (movies and television programs constantly portray women as helpless victims of violence), or because they want desperately to believe that it couldn't happen to them (denial is a very common, and very risky, response to the real threat of sexist aggression). It's not that women are unable to take action; most will fight ferociously if their children are in danger, for example. But when it comes to defending themselves from harassment, verbally or physically, many women just cave in. Women

need to overcome some important cultural conditioning in order to stand up for themselves: to re-examine their reluctance to make a scene in public, for example, or their paralyzing fear of male violence—or even their fear of unleashing their own anger.

There are many cultural and psychological factors that limit women's willingness and ability to stand up to harassers. The desire to avoid conflict is certainly understandable, especially when coupled with women's fear of male violence and retaliation. *Of course, the harasser has already created the conflict, with his intrusive actions. Passive behavior doesn't produce harmony; it just prevents the victim from handling the conflict successfully.*

Many women worry that expressing their anger or disapproval will lead to economic reprisals or just make the situation worse; they also dread the possibility of being labeled and dismissed as a "bitch" if they object to sexist comments and abusive actions. *The situation is very likely to get worse if the woman does nothing; a matter-of-fact, direct confrontation is often the best way to prevent men from labeling a woman as a "bitch" or inflicting other kinds of social or economic retaliation.*

Some women fear that if they say anything at all to a harasser, the entire weight of male violence will come crashing down on them. *It won't, especially if they use a confrontation technique, rather than counteraggression; there is plenty of real violence out there, but confrontation works to defuse it. Building an exaggerated fear of enormous, looming violence is one way that sexist men keep women in line.*

And some women believe—wrongly—that being submissive will reduce their risk of harassment and violence. *There is no evidence that being submissive reduces the likelihood of male aggression. On the contrary, men who have a bullying, macho personality, a taste for sexual coercion, or a need for dominance are likely to go after passive women precisely because they can torment them with little risk of consequences. Rapists look for unresisting victims; batterers will find some excuse to swing their fists, for any reason*

or no reason, no matter how compliant the woman is; molesters have no qualms about exploiting vulnerable children; and most harassers will target any woman they think they can intimidate.

Some women also silence themselves for fear that their own anger will get out of control. Handling the anger productively seems impossible, so they keep the lid on tight and suffer abuse with painful, self-destructive endurance, turning their anger inward, into psychological depression. Women's training in politeness takes a toll as well; women are not only reluctant to be rude to harassers, but have even been known to apologize to the men who invade their space or verbally abuse them. One of the saddest limiting factors is itself the result of previous victimization: some women have grown up with no belief that what is done to them *matters*, or have been so beaten down by sexism or male violence that they no longer presume they have any right to defend themselves. The most fundamental step in self-defense is the belief that you, yourself, really are worth defending.

SIX BASIC SELF-DEFENSE GUIDELINES

1. Be alert. Notice the people around you and anticipate situations before they develop into full-scale threats.
2. Trust your instincts. If a situation feels wrong, don't wait to react—take your feelings seriously and get to a safe place.
3. Be prepared. Know your neighborhood, think about your options, and be mentally and physically ready to take action.
4. Rely on your own resources. Practice your skills. Know what you can do yourself.
5. Be loud and clear if you do need help. Yell and keep yelling: "No! Kiy! This is an attack! Call the cops!"
6. Intervene to help others who are under attack. Let the victim know you heard her or him. Yell from a safe distance; turn on lights; call the police.

No human being can passively absorb abuse without being damaged by the experience. Psychologists have documented the deep trauma inflicted by experiences of helplessness.² It is the feeling of helplessness, rather than the abuse itself, that often leaves the deepest scars on women who have been harassed. The stress-related illnesses produced by harassment are only the most obvious symptoms of damage; the psychological injuries can be much more profound. Repeated experiences of victimization, verbal and physical abuse, and enforced subordination can destroy any human being.

It is essential for women to learn how to stand up for themselves.

CONFRONTATION

As a self-defense technique, confrontation is extremely effective—it usually stops harassers in their tracks. Like any new technique one might learn, confrontation may seem a bit challenging at first. The basic components of confrontation are not difficult to understand and learn, but they do take some practice. Because of women's cultural conditioning, this is not behavior that comes naturally. But despite that cultural conditioning, almost any woman can learn to confront.

Like any other specific self-defense tactic, confrontation can be analyzed, step by step. It is a carefully structured technique, with nine distinct elements.

1. *Name the behavior clearly.* That means understanding what sexual harassment is and labeling it accurately when it happens. Cursing and name-calling don't work; naming the behavior does. The more explicitly the woman describes the harasser's behavior, the more completely she will surprise and disempower him. (Here are some examples: "Stop making comments about women's bodies." "Stop making sucking noises at women who walk by." "Stop leering." "Stop calling women 'honey' and 'babe'." "Stop staring at my chest when you talk to me." "Get your hand off my leg." "Stop pestering women for dates when you know they're not

interested." "Stop commenting on my appearance, I'm here to do a job.") Whatever he's just done, say it, and be specific. The behavior cannot stand up to public visibility; doing the unexpected—naming it out loud and labeling it as harassment—is the first step in taking the initiative away from the harasser.

2. *Hold the harasser accountable for his actions.* Individual men decide to harass, and they need to be held publicly and personally responsible for their behavior. Don't make excuses for the harasser; don't pretend he didn't mean it; don't pretend it was a joke; don't act as if it didn't really happen—it did, and he did it. Don't laugh or smile, and don't let him off the hook. Take charge of the interaction. Let him know that his behavior is out of line, that it is harassment, and that you will not ignore it or let it slide.

Because of the fragility of their egos, harassers often crumble immediately when forced to own up to their behavior in public, in a calm, powerful confrontation. For example, one young woman, walking past a construction site, got a dose of "Legs, legs, legs—spread those legs for me, baby!" from three hardhats standing on the sidewalk. She wheeled around, marched back up to them, looked them in the eye, and demanded to know which one of them had said that. Their macho stance collapsed; each of them frantically pointed to the others and said, "He did, he did, he did." She proceeded to confront all three, and told them that each of them was responsible for the others' behavior; she was holding them all accountable and if it ever happened again, she'd report them all to the president of the construction company. They didn't say another word.

An individual, verbal confrontation is one way to hold a man accountable. With a persistent harasser, a woman should also keep a detailed log of the time, date, place, and exact behavior involved: what he said or did, what she said or did, witnesses, and other details. Women can also enforce accountability in many other ways: by demanding identification from the harasser (useful on the street and with delivery men who harass women); letting other women and men

know exactly what he did (finding allies and using the pressure of public condemnation against the harasser); holding a group confrontation; writing the harasser a letter that details his behavior (keep a copy for yourself); reporting the harasser to his employers, his peers, his wife or parents; otherwise documenting and publicizing his behavior; or filing an official complaint or a lawsuit. A verbal confrontation, in itself, removes the protection of invisibility from the harasser, and there are many additional ways to make his behavior public.

One creative woman in Great Britain, a professional photographer, began carrying a small camera with her wherever she went. Every time she was harassed, she'd wheel around, take the harasser's picture, and jot down exactly what he'd just said. She later put together an art exhibit in a downtown gallery: large photographs of the faces of dozens of harassers, complete with captions below, quoting the men in detail. It was a powerful public statement and an ingenious accountability mechanism.

Margie Boule, a journalist in Portland, Oregon, who writes for *The Oregonian*, used her newspaper column to hold her harassers accountable. She described some of the incidents she'd experienced as a television reporter—and then, when the station threatened to sue her, she used her column again to expose their threats. The public response was enormous.

Not every woman can deal with her harassers in such a devastating public way—describing their behavior in a newspaper column for a million readers or displaying their words and faces in a public art gallery. But every woman can find some way to make the harasser's behavior visible. The possibilities are endless—the important thing is to do it. Privacy protects harassers. Visibility undermines them.

3. *Make honest, direct statements.* Don't be deferential, don't say "please" or "I'm sorry" or "excuse me," and don't surround your statement with disarming and disempowering verbal fluff and padding. Be serious, straightforward, and blunt.

It is extraordinarily difficult for many women to make a

direct, critical statement to an adult male. Without even being aware of it, women tend to use indirect language and soften their statements to men. Women may tell a child to stop misbehaving without thinking twice about it, but they get tripped up by the power dynamics of male dominance and some deep, cultural, gender-based language patterns when they need to say the same thing to a harasser.³

A crisp, clear message to a harasser like, "Stop leaning over me every time you come near my desk; you are two inches from me, and I want you to move back right now," tends to come out as something entirely different: "I'm sorry, Mr. Jones, excuse me, I'm sure you don't really mean anything by it, but, you know, well, I guess it makes me a little bit uncomfortable sometimes, the way you do that, you know what I mean? Do what? Oh, well, nothing really, just sometimes you kind of stand a little close, I know it doesn't really matter but—well, this is kind of embarrassing, I probably shouldn't even have mentioned it, I don't want you to be offended, I'm sure you didn't even realize, but you know, I just get a little uncomfortable, do you think maybe you could please not lean over me quite so much?" And the woman may have had to really get her nerve up, just to say that!

Even when women feel violated and angry, they tend to apply indirect, self-denigrating language in speaking to adult males. They use questions rather than statements, make excuses for the offensive behavior, and add all kinds of padding. This is "victim language"—it does not prevent the harasser from getting angry, but it certainly does disempower the woman who is speaking. These language patterns make the woman seem submissive and uncertain, and make the message she is trying to convey seem tentative, confused, and unimportant.

Practice the kind of direct statements you want to be able to make to a hypothetical harasser in the street or workplace. Practice with a friend, or use a tape recorder if you have one. Listen to how many times "um" and "well" and "please" and "excuse me" come out, how many questions and excuses the statement contains. (Most women are amazed to find out

how much "victim language" creeps into their statements.) Practice until you can easily say something like, "Move back, you're standing too close," clearly and decisively, *with no modifiers whatsoever*. Try out similar direct statements, for other types of harassment. If you are currently being harassed, write down the statement you want to make to the harasser, and practice saying just that, straight out, in plain language, until you feel comfortable doing it.

Threatening to report the harasser may be believable; threatening that you or someone else will knock the tar out of him usually is not. A woman who tells a harasser that her boyfriend will beat him up or makes other empty threats of violence or retaliation loses credibility; she weakens her position.

Making honest, direct statements also means simply sticking to the truth. There is no reason to understate, overstate, or omit any part of the truth. What is the harasser doing, the actual behavior that angers or intimidates you? What kind of harassment is it? Say it out loud to him and name it as sexual harassment. The calm, blunt honesty of a confrontation is part of the forcefulness of the technique.

4. *Demand that the harassment stop.* Cultural norms and male-female power dynamics make it difficult for women to name the harasser's behavior in plain, direct language. For the same reasons, it is often hard for women to tell harassers, point-blank, to stop. The victim may get as far as saying, "You continually proposition me and the other women here, that's harassment, I don't like it"—but then fail to order the harasser to STOP IT. Confrontation involves an unequivocal demand: the behavior stops, right now—no ifs, ands, or buts. Language like, "Stop it," "Back off right now," and "Don't you ever do that to me or any woman ever again," is effective. It works precisely because it is so unusual for women to say anything of the sort to harassers (or to men in any context). Directed at an adult male, a sharp command is a shock.

5. *Make it clear that all women have the right to be free from sexual harassment.* Women who confront can

strengthen their statements considerably by speaking up on behalf of women everywhere. Objecting to sexual harassment is a matter of principle. This is not just your personal whim, and it's not just that you're a "touchy babe." Women know the difference between a compliment and harassment, and so do most harassers. Including a strong statement on behalf of *all* women—"That's harassment; I don't like it, no woman likes it!"—is not only honest, but adds to the power of the confrontation. It underscores the woman's seriousness, reinforces her message, and helps her to confront the harasser safely and effectively. This part of the confrontation statement weakens the harasser's confidence in his right to harass. The interaction is no longer isolated; the woman is explicitly holding him accountable to a broader, societal standard and emphasizing the principle at stake.

6. *Stick to your own agenda.* Most harassers, when confronted, are so surprised that they back off immediately. Some, however, are very slick—polished, well-practiced, and verbally aggressive. Such harassers are relatively rare, but be ready for men who come back at you with all kinds of bizarre diversionary tactics. Don't get caught up in his denials, his excuses, his attempts to redefine his actions, his personal attacks on you ("What's matter, you on the rag? You're crazy! You're ugly. You're a bitch. Why are you getting so emotional?"), or his efforts to change the subject. No matter what kind of smokescreen he tries to use, it's what he did that counts—stick to your point. Don't answer his comments or questions, and don't let him draw you into a debate about the meaning of what he did. Harassers rarely have any genuine interest in a philosophical discussion about the nature of human behavior; they are simply using these tactics to try to regain control of the interaction. Don't fall for any of it. Interrupt the harasser in midsentence and say what *you* want to say.

A "broken record" tactic can be very effective with slick harassers. No matter what he says, firmly repeat the same statement: "You did [state the behavior]. That's harassment. I don't like it, no woman should put up with that. Stop ha-

arrassing women." Repetition is powerful. It keeps you from getting tangled in the harasser's agenda, and makes you seem unshakable and decisively in control.

A few harassers also engage in face-saving behavior when confronted. It is remarkable (and very instructive) to watch the way a supposed compliment like "Hey, beautiful, nice tits!" can turn into "Hey, you ugly cunt!" when the woman does not pretend to ignore it or like it. Interrupt his face-saving remarks and continue with your confrontation statement about his intrusive, sexist behavior. He wouldn't feel the need to save face if he didn't feel he'd already lost it. If you are halfway down the hall or down the block when he makes his comment, and you have the time, it is often very satisfying to go right back and confront him all over again. It's the last thing he expects—and the second round really leaves him stunned.

7. *Reinforce your statements with strong, self-respecting body language.* Body language is powerful. Whenever there is a conflict between someone's words and her body language, the person she is addressing is very likely to believe the body language and discount the verbal message altogether.

Many women are unconscious experts in deferential body language. Women smile when they are tense or frightened, women look at the ground when they walk down the street, women avoid looking men in the eye, and women try to make themselves seem small, harmless, and invisible when they feel threatened.

No one needs a doctorate in sociology to analyze the body language of power. Watch the way people move on any public street, and you can tell who owns the turf. On K Street, in downtown Washington, D.C., the wealthy white male lawyers, stockbrokers, and high-powered lobbyists usually march down the sidewalk at a healthy clip, expecting all lesser creatures to scurry out of their way. Most women and working-class men avoid eye contact, step aside and make way without even thinking about it. Occasionally, however, a well-dressed, wealthy African-American man will chal-

lenge the assumptions of the dominant white male elite by refusing to step out of the way. It's quite a sight to see—the white males in their expensive suits will all but walk into the man, stopping only inches from him with a very surprised look on their faces. They simply presume that they will receive the physical, public deference to which they feel entitled, and they are always taken aback when someone refuses to comply.

And think about the way women usually sit in public places: with their knees close together, their shoulders hunched, their purse or packages bundled on their lap, and their arms crossed in front of their chest or tucked in close by their sides. This is clearly a defensive posture. They are taking up as little space as possible, in an environment that is often hostile to women. Now picture the way men often sit, in the park or at the bus stop, for example: legs spread, head up, shoulders back, briefcase and packages beside them, and their arms spread over the back of the bench, taking up three spaces. This is ownership body language—safe, confident, and in control.

Women do not need to play dominance games on the street or at the bus stop, just for the sake of dominance, but they do need to use their body language consciously to fortify the message they want to deliver when they confront harassers. The body language of a confronter is similar to that used by any disciplined nonviolent activist who challenges the status quo in order to stop an injustice: strong, dignified, neither passive nor aggressive, neither victimized nor victimizing.

Take your action seriously and look serious when you do it. In a confrontation, stand as if you owned the street or the hallway, keep your head up and your shoulders back, and look the harasser in the eye: physically hold your ground. Take your hands out of your pockets; put them on your hips, or point at the harasser like a stern schoolteacher. You may feel tense, but don't let tension make you smile or shrink away from that strong, commanding posture. Timid, submissive body language will undermine your message, and perhaps even demolish it; the harasser will cue in on your body language, instead of your words, if your stance is incon-

sistent with your confrontation language. If you are sitting down, stand up to confront, if possible. If the harasser is coming toward you, don't retreat; he'll just keep coming. Take a half-step toward him, plant yourself, and look him in the eye (a full step is aggressive; a half-step forward says, "I'm here, I'm going to deal with you, and I'm not running away").

Like the verbal aspects of confrontation, this kind of body language is unusual coming from a woman. Many men find it unnerving, although they may not be conscious enough of the power dynamics of body language to know exactly what it is that is making them so uneasy. Unless there is a risk of physical assault, continue to hold your ground until you end the encounter. If the harasser's behavior is invasive, don't give up your space—tell *him* to move away.

Analyze your body language with a friend or in front of a mirror. Practice various stances, in combination with various facial expressions and tones of voice. What's your strongest combination?

8. *Respond at the appropriate level.* Fine-tuning takes practice, but it is not usually necessary to blast the guy in order to be successful. Verbal harassment gets a strong, clear verbal response: name the behavior, object on behalf of yourself and all women, and demand that it stop. Physical harassment requires a dual response: if the harasser is touching you, for example, physically reach over and move his hand or knee away from your body, at the same time you say, "That's harassment. Keep your hands off me. I don't like it—no woman likes it. Don't you ever do that again."

From the mildest assertive response, to the most forceful, vehement confrontation, women have a wide range of effective direct-action tactics. Your tone of voice, body language, and confrontation message can all be varied to suit the situation. You can be perfectly matter-of-fact in telling a harasser to quit it; a simple, blunt statement, delivered in a calm, normal voice, can be devastating. You can also imitate an army drill sergeant ordering a recruit to "back off" on the double. Vary the volume and tone as needed.

Women who have been putting up with harassment for ten

or twenty years may verbally dynamite the first few harassers they finally confront, just from the accumulated anger of swallowing all that abuse over the years. That's all right—the harasser will survive, and fine-tuning will come with practice.

With a common street harasser or relatively harmless drunk on a park bench, a quick, firm statement is usually adequate: "Stop harassing women! I don't like it, no woman likes it." But with a strategic harasser who is trying to force a woman out of the workplace, one who is sexually coercive, or one who may be engaging in rape-testing, it is appropriate to use a very strong level of confrontation response: naming the behavior in explicit detail, speaking in a loud, commanding voice, using very forceful body language to back up the point, pulling in bystanders as witnesses and allies, perhaps even organizing a group confrontation. Faced with severe harassment, a woman should use every tool she can, from body language to tone of voice, and every accountability method at her disposal, from maximum public visibility at the time she confronts the harasser up to and including a group confrontation and a lawsuit, to intensify the force of her opposition to his behavior.

In no case, however, does a confrontation step over the line into aggression. Counteraggression (using insults, threats, and verbal abuse, throwing a punch, spitting on a harasser) is counterproductive. Verbal violence is dangerous, and there is no need to use physical violence unless there is an actual physical attack that requires self-defense. Most harassers stop far short of sexual assault; they are engaging in male-dominance, sexual-pastime, or strategic harassment, and a principled confrontation usually leaves them baffled and defeated. The clearer the confrontation, the more completely the woman can seize control of the interaction, with no violence whatsoever.

9. *End the confrontation on your own terms.* Women do not need to stand around and have lengthy conversations with harassers. A typical confrontation on the street lasts a minute or two, at most, and many are much shorter; even

with a persistent harasser on the job or at school, it may still take no more than three minutes. Once you've confronted the harasser and delivered your statement, wrap it up. Good closing lines include any of the following: "Stop harassing women. None of us will tolerate that kind of behavior." "Don't ever do that to a woman again." "Your behavior was offensive and obnoxious. Get out of here and stop harassing women." "If you ever do that again, to any woman, I will report you."

If he tries to argue with you or engage in diversionary tactics, steamroll right over him—interrupt him and say, loudly, "You heard me. I said stop harassing women! There's nothing more for you to say. Now back off and don't do it again!" Then leave, or tell him to leave. Cut off the interaction on *your* terms. When you've finished, take pride in your successful action—tell your friends, family, classmates, and coworkers about the incident.

CONFRONTATION

1. Do the unexpected: Name the behavior. Whatever he's just done, say it, and be specific.
2. Hold the harasser accountable for his actions. Don't make excuses for him; don't pretend it didn't really happen. Take charge of the encounter and let people know what he did. Privacy protects harassers, but visibility undermines them.
3. Make honest, direct statements. Speak the truth (no threats, no insults, no obscenities, no appeasing verbal fluff and padding). Be serious, straightforward, and blunt.
4. Demand that the harassment stop.
5. Make it clear that all women have the right to be free from sexual harassment. Objecting to harassment is a matter of principle.
6. Stick to your own agenda. Don't respond to the harasser's excuses or diversionary tactics. His behavior is the issue. Say what you have to say, and repeat it if he persists.

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7. Reinforce your statements with strong, self-respecting body language: eye contact, head up, shoulders back, a strong, serious stance. Don't smile. Timid, submissive body language will undermine your message.
8. Respond at the appropriate level. Fine-tuning takes practice, but it's not usually necessary to blast the harasser. Use a combined verbal and physical response to physical harassment.
9. End the interaction on your own terms, with a strong closing statement: "You heard me. Stop harassing women."

These nine basic steps are extraordinarily powerful when fully developed and put into action. Practice these confrontation tactics with your women friends. Pick out half a dozen actual situations in which one of you has been harassed, and role-play various kinds of assertive and confrontational responses to the harasser. See how precisely you can name what he did. How would you hold him accountable, if the same incident happened today? Can you strip away the appeasing verbal padding in your statements? What can you do to make your body language stronger? Practice!

Here are a few sample scenarios:

- You are waiting at the bus stop at 5:00 P.M., with two other women, when a man walks up, looks you up and down, and says, "Hey, baby, I sure would like a piece of that ass—how much?"
- You walk into your high-school math class a little early and find that someone has scrawled "Maryanne sucks cock," along with her phone number, on the blackboard. There are four young men in the room, all of them classmates. They are snickering, waiting to see your reaction. (A) You are Maryanne's best friend. (B) You are Maryanne.
- You are alone in the photocopy room at work, running off ten copies of a large report. The room is the size of a closet. Tom, the office sexist, sees you and steps into the room. He has no papers to photocopy. He begins

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to pressure you for a date, although you've told him twice before that you are not interested. He puts his hand first on your shoulder, then on the small of your back. You tell him no, but Tom continues to talk and move into your space. Your friends, Alice and Kathy, work just down the hall, within earshot.

- You are walking down a busy street at lunchtime, heading for a job interview. A well-dressed, older white man mutters under his breath as he passes you, "Oooh, baby, sure would like to suck those tits."
- You are a young Hispanic woman, with a brand new law degree, working in your first job in a large law firm. You are doing quite well in the firm, but Casey, one of the young male lawyers hired at the same time you were, is not; the senior partners are not impressed with his work. One day, as you are trying to finish an important assignment on a tight deadline, Casey strolls over to your desk and says, "Hey, Sylvia, is it true that Hispanic women are really hot in bed?"
- As you are coming home from work, you notice a man standing on your front porch. He is holding a clipboard and wearing a gray uniform with a patch that says "Metro Gas Company" but there is no gas company truck in sight. There is no one home in the house. Your neighbor, Mrs. Jones, is out in her yard next door, watering her petunias. You stop at the foot of your front steps and ask the man what he's doing there. He says there's a report of a gas leak, and you must let him in to check it immediately. You ask him who reported the leak; he says he doesn't know, the gas company doesn't tell its inspectors that information. He insists that you let him in at once. He is very persuasive, that you let him in at once. He is very persuasive, that you let him in at once. (Hint: Do not go up on the porch, within reach of him. Make him come down off the porch and leave the area.)
- You are in the library stacks, in the back section of the university library, trying to find some information you need to finish your term paper. There is no one else

nearby. You pull out one book, then another. Five minutes later, you look up to find a man standing at the end of the row, grinning at you and masturbating.

- You are standing in the back of a crowded elevator. There is a middle-aged man immediately behind you, a woman on your right, almost pressed against you because the elevator is so full, and three teenage girls in front of you. You suddenly feel a hand running up your rib cage, cupping your left breast, then dropping away.
- You are the new electrician, and the only woman, on a building maintenance crew. The men on your crew are okay; some of them even seem fairly helpful. You were unemployed for several months and you really need this job. You tell the foreman you'd like to work all the overtime you can, to make some extra money and pay off the bills that have piled up. Several of the men on your crew would like to work some overtime, too, and have also asked for it, but the foreman always gives the overtime assignments to the same two guys, his buddies. After two weeks on the job, the foreman calls you aside and says, "Honey, if you really want that overtime, there's one way you can get it."
- Anne is a young African-American woman, working in a bookstore near the university. She takes pride in knowing the store's stock and being helpful to the students and professors who come in. She notices that one professor never speaks to her when he comes in; he always makes a point of asking the other (white) clerk to check on his book orders and ring up his purchases. Anne realizes that she is going to take one of his classes next semester, so the next time he comes in, asking for an obscure philosophy book, she jumps right in and says, "I'll be glad to get that for you—I know just where it is." He turns to her and says, "What would a nigger bitch know about philosophy? When I want cheap sex and babies, I'll ask you." (A) You are Anne. (B) You are the white clerk, female. (C) You are the white clerk, male.

- Susan is fourteen years old, out on a picnic with the church youth group. There are thirty kids playing softball and racing around, two church women, and several of Susan's friends. In the middle of the afternoon, the new minister asks Susan to take a walk with him. He says that he wants to talk with her privately about the "difficulties of adolescence." A quarter of a mile into the woods, he pins her against a tree and tells her that ministers have special needs, and God sometimes brings very special people into our lives, and she is one of them. He quotes scripture as he unbuttons her blouse. (A) You are Susan. (B) You are Susan's best friend, Maggie, back at the picnic; you realize that she and the minister have been gone for a while.
- You are a young attorney with a promising future in a downtown government office. There are several other male and female attorneys in the division, as well as two female administrative assistants. Your boss is a conservative, sexist male who seems threatened by competent, professional women. One day he calls you into his office and begins describing a pornographic film he saw the night before. You are embarrassed and find an excuse to leave the room quickly. A week later, in the midst of another one-on-one meeting in his office, he interrupts a work-related conversation to say that there is a public hair on his Coke can.

What would you do in each case? How would you name the harasser's behavior and confront him? Who are your potential allies? When and where would you confront?

After you've practiced a variety of scenarios, then, with a friend by your side, try it for real. Make it easy on yourself—plan a simple confrontation statement like, "Stop making comments about women's bodies. That's harassment—I don't like it, no woman likes it. Stop harassing women!" Confront a lone harasser first, in daylight, in some location where you feel relatively safe (a shopping mall, perhaps, or a busy downtown street corner). Work your way up to confronting

multiple harassers, in less secure settings, as you develop confidence and skill. If you need to confront an employer, landlord, minister, neighbor, or coworker, ask your friends to help you script out what you want to say, to practice the confrontation with you, and perhaps even to accompany you when you confront the harasser.

In addition to individual confrontations, women should consider using the confrontation survey approach with common dominance harassers, and group confrontations in cases of severe or sustained harassment. Both are described below.

THE CONFRONTATION SURVEY

One of the most remarkable—and effective—forms of confrontation is the survey technique. This ingenious tactic, originated by Cheryl Benard and Edit Schlaffer in Germany, has two advantages: it often works exceptionally well, and it can produce some useful information for women who are conducting research on sexual harassment. As Benard and Schlaffer note, "If you want to transform a lewdly smirking man into a politely confused one within a matter of seconds, you need only pull a mimeographed questionnaire out of your bag and inform him that he is part of a research project."⁴

Use the confrontation survey from Appendix A of this book and carry a couple of copies with you. The next time you're harassed, whip out the survey and begin asking the harasser the questions: What's his name? What exactly did he say or do? (Tell him you want to get it right and want to get his exact words down—he will be mortified.) Don't smile. Look very serious and purposeful. Then continue: How old was he the first time he said or did this to a woman? How many times a day or week does he do this? What does he get out of this behavior? Does he harass in groups, or by himself, or both? Does he say or do other things to harass women, and if so, what? Why does he do it? How does it make him feel? How does he think it makes women and girls feel?

As you continue down the list, you are in full control of the

interaction. His invasive, aggressive macho posturing will deflate like a pricked balloon. Ask the survey questions in a rapid-fire manner. This is a confrontation, after all, and you do not want to give the harasser any opportunity to regain the upper hand in the encounter. Most harassers will be dumbfounded and meekly answer the questions, but if a harasser starts to give you a wise-ass answer or begins to go off on a long, rambling dissertation, cut him off with a curt "yes, I see" and break in immediately with the next question. If he stalls or refuses to answer a question, don't worry about it; just jump right to the next one. (If you want to, you can always go back to the ones you skipped after you've run through the list.) Keep your tone crisp and decisive; you're the one in charge here, and you're not about to put up with any nonsense from him. Harassers' answers can be truthful and insightful or incredibly stupid and self-serving—in both cases, they are very revealing. Don't get drawn into an argument about anything he says; just jot down even his stupidest answer. When you're finished, wrap up the confrontation with the firm, businesslike statement noted at the end of the survey and go on your way, leaving a very disconcerted harasser behind you.

The survey technique is a powerful way to name the behavior and hold a harasser accountable. Women who have used it report that a large percentage of men will actually give their names and answer most of the questions—the survey flips the power dynamics beautifully. It is slightly more time-consuming than a standard confrontation, but should not take more than three to five minutes.

GROUP CONFRONTATIONS

It can be very easy for a pair of women to confront harassers. The fact that there are two of you, both condemning the harasser's behavior as a matter of principle, makes your confrontation exceptionally effective. Be sure that your friends know how to confront and know that you expect them to back you up; there's nothing more undermining than to have one

woman trying to confront with a strong, decisive statement, while the other acts intimidated and tries to pull her away. If your friend is the one the harasser is targeting, step right in, stand right beside her, and reinforce her statements with your own.

With persistent or high-ranking harassers, it may take an organized group confrontation to stop the behavior. This is particularly true in dealing with predatory harassers (for example, a minister or landlord who is extorting sexual services) and in cases of strategic harassment, where male workers are systematically trying to force women off the shop floor or out of the office. Group confrontations are very powerful, but they take careful planning and teamwork.

To organize a group confrontation, gather five to ten supportive women at a safe site and hold some brainstorming sessions. An all-female confrontation team is most effective. The harasser's victims should decide what they want to say to him and script it out. Other women may also want to say a few well-chosen words. The team should research the harasser's schedule and investigate possible sites for the confrontation. Where is he likely to be at any given time of day? Which of those places would be a good site to confront him?

Working together, the harassment victims and their support team then develop the scenario for the action and choose a time and place for the confrontation that gives the confronters at least some control over the physical site. A public setting can be useful, to hold the harasser accountable in a highly visible way, but a private office where the confronters have complete control of the room can also work well. For maximum effect, a group of women might confront a minister in front of his deacons or his congregation, a corporate vice-president at his country club, or a factory foreman in the company lunchroom. For a less public action, the group might confront the harasser in his own office, home, or shop. Do not forewarn the harasser; the element of surprise is key.

The action plan should include a gathering place for the group on the day, plans for transportation, entry and exit

from the confrontation site, the order in which the victims will speak, and a debriefing site where the confronters can meet to celebrate and evaluate the action afterward. Depending on the complexity of the plan, the women who will carry out the confrontation may want to hold some practice sessions or rehearsals in private before going ahead with the action. The speakers should practice their body language and memorize what they want to say. If a victim does not want to speak for herself, she can designate someone to speak in her place.

On the day of the confrontation, at least one woman should have a camera to record the confrontation, one should carry a tape recorder, and one should bring a notebook to describe what is said and done. As the victims and other speakers file into the confrontation site and face the harasser, the support team stands beside them in a strong, silent phalanx. (The support team may also surround the harasser or block his exit for the few minutes the confrontation lasts.)

The powerful visual impact of a group of stern, unsmiling women standing shoulder to shoulder underscores the impact of the speakers' verbal confrontations. The message is clear and simple: women know what the harasser is doing, they will not tolerate it, and they will be watching him. Do not let the harasser speak (except to apologize). If he tries to regain control, interrupt him and tell him that he's said and done more than enough; it's his turn to listen now. If he persists, tell him there are no excuses for his behavior; there is nothing more for him to say. If he tries to get up, order him to sit down. A well-organized, disciplined group confrontation takes the power of direct action to a higher level; it is an extraordinarily forceful, frightening experience for a habitual or coercive harasser, and an excellent way to change his behavior.

Presenting the harasser with a written list of his actions, describing incident after incident with the time, date, place, and details of what he did, can add to the impact. The group can also provide him with a specific list of the alternative, replacement behaviors the women expect from him in the

future (for example: do not call any woman in this office "honey," use our names; do not touch any of us at any time, keep your hands to yourself; stop displaying pornography, keep it out of the office entirely; keep your sex life to yourself, never proposition any woman in this office again). That list gives the women considerable control over his future actions; there is no ambiguity at all, no room for him to maneuver around it.

MINIMIZING THE RISK OF RETALIATION

No single technique can guarantee a woman's safety in every situation. Male power is real, and harassers, by definition, are men who have already demonstrated that they are willing to abuse their power over women. There is always some element of risk involved when women challenge male power in any way. Confronting harassment can feel especially frightening because it goes against everything women have been taught about deferring to power.

But consider the alternatives. Tolerating harassment carries a high risk in itself. Doing nothing virtually guarantees that the harassment will continue; the harasser's actions often get increasingly ugly if he is allowed to proceed unchallenged, and he will continue harassing women as long as he can get away with it. Appeasement is ineffective (and dangerous with predatory harassers); avoidance does not solve the problem; and counteraggression can escalate the situation. In most circumstances, the risks of relying on the usual responses to harassment are far more serious than the risks of confronting.

The surest way to prevent retaliation is a group confrontation. It is so powerful and so public that it leaves the harasser almost no room to turn; too many women know what he has done and are ready to stand up to him. But even an individual confrontation usually makes retaliation unlikely. A strong, direct confrontation comes as a shock to the harasser; it upsets his most fundamental expectations about how his victims will behave. Confrontation turns the force of effective

self-defense and principled nonviolent action against the harasser's power. Just being compelled to face up to his behavior is demoralizing; the shock of being confronted by a woman, the principled nature of the confrontation, and the loss of power and control he experiences all serve to heighten the impact. At the same time, confrontation does not produce the kind of angry, retaliatory reaction that counteraggression can provoke. Naming the behavior and seizing control of the interaction reduce the harasser's ability to exercise his power. The use of allies, documentation, publicity, and other forms of public accountability will further undercut his ability to retaliate.

Instead of anger, a harasser who has been confronted usually feels deflated and unsure of himself. He doesn't know quite what went wrong, but something certainly did. The woman used no insults, no attacks on his manhood; everything she said was perfectly clear and straightforward, and suddenly he finds himself way out on a very uncomfortable limb. Being confronted is an emotionally upsetting experience of failure for the harasser. Predictably enough, sexist males do not feel powerful when they fail. They feel lousy. Instead of retaliating, they tend to withdraw, lick their wounds, and reconsider their behavior.

USING THE TOOLS FOR CHANGE

Women have no choice but to deal with sexual harassment, in all its many forms. *Predatory harassers* use women sexually against their will. Sexual-pastime harassment is a unilateral invasion of women's lives that bears no resemblance to mutual, freely chosen sexual activity. Sexually coercive harassment is sexual assault—rape by abuse of economic power, rape by abuse of authority, rape by intimidation and the threat of violence—the illegitimate use of power to force an unwilling partner to comply. And rape-testing is the calculated behavior of a predator stalking his prey. *Strategic, territorial harassment* is not a matter of offending women or hurting their delicate feelings; it's a cold-blooded intima-

tion strategy to defend male power, disable women in male environments, and maintain male control of public and private institutions and resources. And on a broader scale, routine *male-dominance harassment* turns public and private space of all kinds into hostile male territory. Women's taxes may pay for the streets, the parks, the schools, and other community facilities, but men still effectively own them, as long as harassers feel free to invade women's daily lives with daily acts of intimidation.

The question is not *whether* women will deal with sexual harassment, but *how* they will do so. It's time for women to step past the traditional, unsuccessful strategies of appeasement, counteraggression, and avoidance. Confrontation may seem scary at first, but it works on many levels, from individual self-defense to societal change, raising the costs of sexual harassment and making harassers fail. It does not provoke the kind of escalating, angry reactions that result from counteraggression; it actually limits the harasser's ability to retaliate. Women who know how to confront have a new behavioral skill, a powerful, ethical form of nonviolent action that undercuts the harasser's abusive behavior with great force and clarity. Although it is men who are responsible for ending sexual harassment—it is a male social practice—there is no reason for women to stand by passively waiting for that to happen. Women's direct-action tactics have changed the world before, and can do it again.



THE SUCCESS STORIES:
CONFRONTATION IN ACTION

other. Women have stopped rapists by using all kinds of resources: negotiation skills, verbal and physical self-defense abilities, and all kinds of weapons—everything from keys to a pen, a pair of scissors, or even a book or an umbrella. Think about what you might use; practice the kind of mental preparation that will help you to react quickly if you need to.

The decision about what tactic will work best depends on the circumstances of the attack. Because, over the past twenty years, rape survivors have spoken up about their experiences, we know much, much more about effective self-defense than we did a generation ago. In the final analysis, whether or not it is possible to prevent the attack, any woman who survives a rape should consider herself a heroine; She used her resources and her skills to save her life. A black belt in martial arts, a knife, a gun, or another weapon is not the crucial factor in survival. The single most important resource for any woman during an attempted rape is her own intelligence.²

In some cities, feminists have stenciled the sidewalks with a logo that says, "A woman was raped here," marking each site where an attack took place as a way of increasing community awareness. In the 1990s, perhaps we all should design a new sidewalk logo: one that says, proudly, "A woman was attacked here and fought back and won."

If you are a rape survivor, don't waste a minute second-guessing the decisions you made at the time. Whatever you did that enabled you to survive that attack was correct, and the fact that you are here today to read this book means that you did something very right.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

There Is Strength in Numbers: The Power of Group Confrontations

One of the most powerful responses to sexual aggression is an organized, well-planned group confrontation. The basic technique is discussed in Chapter 4, and the impact of a group confrontation is tremendous. If harassers do not expect individual women to stand up for themselves, they are altogether dumbfounded when women actually get together and take forceful collective action to stop abuse. It is, in fact, a very frightening experience for the harasser.

There are several factors that make group confrontation so effective. First, there is simply the shock of it—women are not "supposed to" get organized and cooperate this way. It violates all the sexist stereotypes about women being catty and unreliable for each other, women being willing to sell each other out to please a man, and women being too fearful, too disorganized, or too incompetent to ever carry out a successful action together.

Second, the women are presenting a unified force—not one is smiling, acting deferential, making any excuses for the harasser, or offering him any emotional or psychological escape from facing up to what he did. Together, they have seized control of the situation, and there is no weak link that he can play on. Sexist men count on being able to divide women, to set them against each other—but this time, there is no out. The women are united.

Third, they are angry, blunt, and disciplined. They are furious but entirely in control. Anyone who abuses power fears retaliation from his or her victims. Sexist males have a deep, subconscious fear of what would happen if women

ever really decided to get together and take revenge, retaliating in kind for all the rape, battering, and incest, let alone the political and economic discrimination. (What else did you think all those male castration anxieties were about?) Confrontation is *not* revenge, not violent retaliation-in-kind, but the harasser doesn't know that. Like individual confrontations, confrontation groups make no idle threats—they name the harasser's behavior, hold him accountable, and let him sweat it out, pondering in his imagination and his nightmares just what might happen if he ever does it again.

And finally, a group confrontation demolishes the harasser's sense of safety in privacy. His actions are *known*. It is humiliating to have one's morally bankrupt private behavior publicly labeled as despicable and exposed to the community. Just the fact that the eight or ten or twelve women in the room, confronting him, know exactly what he has done strips away his sense of safety and entitlement and leaves him feeling deeply at risk. The possibility that they may take further public action is a chilling threat, unspoken but very real.

All of these factors come into play, in addition to the fundamental power of the confrontation itself: the "truth force" of the women's direct statements; the use of language that condemns the abusive behavior as a matter of principle, on behalf of all women; and the absolute insistence that the behavior will stop. The women leave him no face-saving excuses, no possible exceptions, and no other options—the behavior is over.

Retaliation is virtually impossible—too many women are involved. Continued harassment is virtually impossible—too many people know about his behavior and are now watching him. And personally, emotionally, the power of a group confrontation must be felt to be believed. As with individual confrontations, the more sexist the harasser, the more devastating the impact. A group confrontation is so far outside the realm of expected female behavior for a harasser that it can be a life-changing event, a psychological shock right down to the core of his most basic beliefs about how the world works.

As noted in Chapter 4, a group confrontation requires detailed planning, a carefully designed scenario for the action, and very disciplined behavior on the part of the women. It is not hard to command control of the event at the outset, since the harasser will be initially stunned, but to maintain control it is important to plan the entire sequence of the confrontation, including closing lines and departure. A rehearsal is a good idea, to make sure that all of the women involved know exactly what they will do at each point in the action. Each woman should be prepared to carry out her part with controlled determination, without breaking the discipline in either direction (neither giving in to relieved laughter at the harasser's fear and powerlessness nor giving in to rage and revenge and committing violence against him).

Group confrontations work even with groups of harassers who are more than a little scary themselves, as Crindi Loschinkohl's success story demonstrates:

THE HOUSE BY THE HIGHWAY

I was working on a mailing one day at the Women Against Rape office in Columbus, Ohio, when a woman called in, very upset. She had been driving on the outerbelt highway. When she got off at the Hudson Street exit, there was a house with a group of men sitting on the porch. One of them was holding up a big sign that said, "Show us your tits." She was outraged. He was holding the sign to point toward the highway ramp, so that everyone getting off the exit saw it. She wanted to do something about it and she wanted some help.

We gathered up the women who were working in the office, called a few others, and when the woman who'd called came in, we planned out a confrontation. There were twelve of us. One woman was to be the major spokeswoman; the caller was to back her up; one woman got an old, broken camera out of a closet; one found a pad of paper and pen to write down everything everyone said during the confrontation.

tion; and one took paper and pen to write down the names on the mailbox. The rest of us were to be (mostly) silent support.

We drove over in three cars, the woman caller leading the way. We parked, got out, and walked up to the house together. Sure enough, there were six or seven men, dressed in leather and chains, looking mean and laughing as people driving by reacted to their sign. When we walked up the steps, they looked a bit taken aback. (To tell the truth, they looked a little afraid. It occurred to me that they probably thought we were going to beat them up.)

The woman with the camera pretended to take their pictures; she kept snapping away the whole time we were there. One woman went straight to the mailbox and wrote down all the names. The rest of us walked right up to the men.

The spokeswoman took the sign away from the man who was holding it (by then he was holding it face down—they knew why we were there). She ripped it up. She told them something like: "We are outraged at your behavior. Women have to take enough crap without you going out of your way to harass us. We will not put up with this. If we ever hear of any harassment in this neighborhood again, we'll be back." The woman who had called us added: "I felt slapped in the face by your sign when I drove by. I will not tolerate this. You had better not do anything like this again." A couple of the men tried to make feeble excuses, but the spokeswoman interrupted them, to reiterate that we would not tolerate this and they had better watch themselves in the future, because we would be watching them.

Then we left. The men just sat there, stunned.

We went back to the Women Against Rape office and debriefed. We felt great! We put the notes and their names in the files and planned what we would do in case we needed to confront them again. All of us went out of our way to drive by that house for the next few months, and never saw or heard a peep of sexism from those men again.

This was our first group confrontation, but not our last. And every one was just as successful as this one.

In only a matter of hours, these women planned and carried out a formidable confrontation. They may have felt fearful as they walked up to the house, but they maintained their discipline, stuck to the structure of their confrontation, and were immediately effective in controlling the situation. Although the harassers were a group of tough guys in chains and leather and were on their own home turf when confronted, the women had no trouble reversing the power dynamics—their action left the men in shock. The confronters' clarity and precise, principled statements were essential to the success of the action. And, as Crindi notes, the effect was long-lasting. One experience of group confrontation was enough to persuade even these guys that they did not want to risk it again.

Even without a full-scale confrontation, women's collective action is often an effective tool against sexual abuse. Here's another success story from Kathleen Hopwood, about a two-woman tactic that she and a friend developed when there seemed to be no way to organize a group confrontation:

THE PHONE CALL STRATEGY

I was working as the only woman painter on a plant maintenance crew. One of the painters was harassing the secretaries whenever we painted offices. He only picked on black women.

I began to notice a certain pattern: The women would be friendly at first, as we set up to paint their office, and then they would start avoiding us like we had the plague. It only happened when this one particular guy was on the crew.

One day I watched him carefully as he approached a woman who had offered us coffee. He was asking her something in a whisper, so I moved closer to hear.

He was offering her cash for "some good black pussy."

The woman was shocked and immediately left the room. I followed her to talk with her, but she didn't want to talk about it. I knew from my own interactions with this man that he was one of the most vicious sexists on the crew. I had

narrowly missed being "accidentally" hit by him many times when we were moving painting equipment.

There was no way of reporting this incident to anyone in the administration. There was no antiharassment policy, and I was already considered a troublemaker.

I found out that everyone on the paint crew, including the supervisor, already knew what this man was doing. He would boast about it in the shop. The rest of the guys seemed to think it was funny and were betting on who he could get to take up his offer.

I talked the problem over with a female friend, and she suggested that she could report it anonymously, over the phone, to the physical plant director. She decided to make the call when I was in full view of my own paint crew members so they would not assume that it was me calling. Over a period of a few weeks, she made several anonymous calls to both the paint shop supervisor and the physical plant director.

It took a while, but finally the harasser was called into the office and given a chance to explain his actions. I don't know all the details of exactly what happened in there, but I do know how it ended: He yelled at the physical plant director, threatened to hit him, and quit.

Although it would have felt better to have had a more direct solution, the phone call strategy did work. Those calls forced the upper management to take notice and deal with this harasser.

Working creatively with other women is one of the most basic steps in stopping sexual harassment. In situations in which a group confrontation does not seem possible because none of the victims wants to confront, other women can still take action—either with an indirect strategy like the phone call technique, or with a group confrontation of their own, speaking up as women who have witnessed the behavior and object to it for their own reasons. In instances of combined racial and sexual harassment like this one, the African-American women who are targeted may feel not only

threatened but isolated. It is not their responsibility alone to stop such harassers—the white women who witness the behavior can and should intervene to hold the harasser accountable, just as Kathleen and her friend did. The two-person phone call strategy was a way to take responsible action and report the harassment without jeopardizing Kathleen herself, since she had to deal with these men every day. It didn't work quite as fast as a confrontation, but it succeeded in the end.

Here's another story from women who took group action short of confrontation, but managed, through their joint strategy, to prevent a harasser from abusing them:

THE ACCOUNTANT

My name is Sonia. I'm a twenty-three-year-old Latina; I've got two years of community college and I'm taking evening classes to get a degree in accounting. I work in a secretarial pool with five other women in a large accounting office. We all sit in a big, open, central room, and the accountants' private offices are around ours; their doors open into our room. All the accountants here are men, and some of them are really nice guys. But about two years ago, this new manager, "Mr. Brown," was promoted into our division. He started harassing all of us.

Of course, at first we didn't know that he was doing it to all of us, but then we started talking to each other. I told Susan how he'd propositioned me twice in the past month and how he kept making these remarks about how I was too pretty to want to be an accountant. She said that she'd had about enough of his comments, too, and said every time he called her into his office, he managed to put his hands on her one way or another. So then we asked Alice if he'd ever been out of line with her, and she said, yeah, he made comments about her breast size when she brought him a stack of reports the week before, and that wasn't the first time, either. By lunchtime that day the word was out—he'd been hitting on all six of us. He never did it in front of anyone—but every

time he had one of us alone in his office, he'd pull some kind of stunt.

We were pretty sure that we wouldn't get anywhere by filing a complaint. We were really afraid to try that. He was a rising star with some big clients, and we figured that a complaint wouldn't accomplish much of anything except to get us fired or reassigned as troublemakers. I know that most of the time in this kind of situation, the women just end up getting disgusted and quitting. None of us wanted to quit, although he was getting to be really obnoxious.

So we got together to develop a plan. We worked out a mutual defense strategy—we watched his door, and every time he got one of us in there alone, one of the others would find some excuse to go in and break it up. If he had Barb in there, Alice or Mary would jump right up, open his door, and say, "Oh, Mr. Brown, here's that memo you wanted"—and leave the door open. If he got me or Alice in there, Susan or Barb would come to the rescue with a note about a telephone message or some other piece of business. We just set about the job of keeping that door open and making it impossible for him to get any of us alone.

And it worked. He got really frustrated, and after six months, he quit.

This was a purely defensive plan. Unlike a confrontation, it did not compel Mr. Brown to face up to his harassment, and it did not create the kind of social penalties or psychological incentives that would force him to change his behavior in the future. Sonia and her colleagues simply stymied him. They analyzed Brown's specific pattern of harassment and came up with a way to prevent him from implementing it. To make the plan succeed, they had to work together—first, making his behavior visible among themselves by telling each other what he was doing to them in private, and then, once they'd come up with their "mutual defense strategy," making a group commitment to look out for each other, watch that door, and intervene instantly. They very neatly eliminated the opportunity for him to abuse his power over them.

Once he left for another job, the next step would be to call the women in his new office and warn them as well.

A mutual defense strategy is an excellent start, but a straightforward confrontation is a much stronger form of group action, on the job or on the street, as one persistent harasser on a New Jersey sidewalk found out. Here's Linda's story:

THE SOCCER TEAM

I love soccer, and between the games and the practices, I play three or four times a week. The field where we usually play is down the street from some old yellow brick apartment buildings. The parking spots closer to the field are always taken by the time I get there, so I always end up parking up by the buildings and then walking down the block in my shorts and T-shirt. This older man, in his late thirties, I'd guess, was always hanging out in front of one of the buildings when I'd come by, and he always felt compelled to make some stupid comment about me. It was, "Hey, baby, nice buns," one day, and "Looking fine, baby," the next.

I just kept trying to ignore him, but it seemed like I had to walk past him, coming and going, every single time. Then I realized that he had figured out when we would be out there playing and was waiting for me every time. That started to feel dangerous, not just annoying. Made me start to take it personally, especially when he worked his way up to really charming sentiments like, "Mmm, mmm, sure would like to have those legs wrapped around me." This guy was getting creepier every day. It kind of worried me, and it was so unpleasant that it was ruining my game.

The day he said, "Baby, I sure would like to lick that sweat off your body for you," I decided I'd had enough. I talked to my teammates about it. A couple of them had taken self-defense classes, and they suggested a group confrontation. They explained what that involved and we all loved the idea. We laid our plans for the next practice, the following Monday evening.

That Monday, I parked in my usual spot at the usual time and started down the street. My teammates were tucked away in alleys and doorways all around, out of sight. As I got to this guy's building, he was out there as usual, and he said, "Oh, baby, that is a fine little shirt. I love the way your breasts bounce when you walk by."

For the first time, I turned and faced him. My teammates materialized out of nowhere. In an instant, there were fifteen women beside me. I looked him in the eye and took a step toward him. He backed up against the building, looking absolutely terrified.

We all just stared at him for a second, to let him get good and nervous. Nobody smiled, nobody made a sound. We just kind of loomed around him in a semicircle, glaring at him, with our arms crossed. Then I said (I'd practiced this, so I had it down, in a real cold, stern voice): "You have been making offensive comments about my body all summer long. That is harassment. I hate it. It is disgusting, insulting, sexist behavior. You are never going to say anything but 'good evening' to me ever again."

Then my first buddy chimed in: "You are harassing women. No woman likes it, not one of us. As of right here and right now, you will stop harassing women."

Then my next teammate: "All women have a right to walk down this street, or any street, without your comments. You are violating women's rights. We are here to make sure that you never harass a woman again."

He turned kind of green when she said that. He hadn't said a word since his initial comment about my shirt and breasts. I'm sure he thought we were going to kill him.

My next buddy said: "Nod your head if you understand this." He nodded. Then she said, "Are you going to say 'good evening' when we walk by?" He nodded yes. "Are you going to say or do anything else?" He shook his head no.

My next teammate (a particularly tall, strong woman) then said to him: "We are all going to be watching you from now on. You are never going to harass another woman!" She roared at him, "Is that clear?"

He nodded again and inched further back against the wall. Then I spoke: "You've been warned. Don't make us come back and deal with you again." He just stared at us all. I thought he was going to faint dead away.

Then we turned and walked briskly down to the field and had a great soccer practice. We all felt wonderful. We whooped and hollered and talked about the look on his face and how the whole thing had gone just exactly the way we planned it. I felt like I was finally free of this jerk. Liberated from a burden and free as a bird.

Just to be on the safe side, two of my buddies walked me back to my car after practice, but he was nowhere in sight. None of us saw him again until the end of the summer. When I did finally run into him again, he swallowed hard and said, "Good evening," I said, "Good evening to you," and he dashed into his apartment building.

This harasser's belief in his "right" to harass was utterly demolished. Linda and her soccer buddies reclaimed the street and changed his behavior in three minutes flat. Their teamwork in the confrontation was superb. If they play soccer half as well as they confront, they've probably won the city championship by now.

The final success story in this chapter is from Annie McCombs, one of the women who helped to invent group confrontations.¹ Annie played a pivotal role in organizing one of the grandmothers of all group confrontations. It took place in San Francisco in the late 1970s, when fifty women confronted a man who had made two rape attempts on the same young woman. Here is Annie's story:

A SUMMER EVENING IN THE ROSE GARDEN

I stayed aboard that morning while the rest of the crew went ashore to breakfast at Pier One. I had just finished polishing the brass bell up forward and had gone down below

to stow the rags and cleaner when I saw Patricia walking up the gangway. Patricia's visit during my shift on the San Francisco waterfront was not ordinary. She worked shore-side on the dock, supplying us with necessities, managing assembled passengers, following capricious orders from too many agents of management.

Patricia was very young, and had just come to work for the company. She was Native American, a lesbian, and disabled by epilepsy and dyslexia. Any of these things could have made her the target of any one of the waterfront bigots, but what was done to her was specific to her being female and accessible: She could be raped. As I was finishing my work on board after the ferry docked that Tuesday morning, Patricia came to tell me that Willie, a young white man, had terrorized her for two nights in a row.

Those of us who had broken into the male-dominated world of inland waterways, tugs, and ferries had learned about sexual harassment firsthand. We knew the tactics of terror in all their manifestations: verbal threats of violence, actual physical assaults, pervasive pornography, sexual innuendo, and outright demands. It was incessant. We were also told that we would not be taught the seamanship skills that were ordinarily passed on to new hands by so-called old salts. Women had begun to work on the waterfront only after organizing, filing a sex-discrimination lawsuit, obtaining a federal consent decree, and repeatedly proving that we were willing and able to do the job. Not every man actively participated in the hostility, but few openly opposed it. The few who did cross the line drawn by hatred made it possible for us to succeed in learning what we needed to know.

When Patricia walked up the gangway that morning, I had been working on the waterfront for five years. Those years had honed my skills in dealing with abuse, and everyone knew that I viewed sexual harassment as intolerable. Patricia sought me out because of my reputation. I listened to her story. . . .

At night, the waterfront is not romantic; it is desolate. Patricia had been working with Willie on the night shift, after

everyone else went home—everyone except the night watchman who doggedly made his rounds, punching in at intervals to document his passage. Patricia and Willie were supposed to split the work of cleaning the restrooms. Patricia had gone into the women's head to do her half of the work; she needed to use it as well. She didn't hear Willie come in, and was startled when she looked up to see him peering into the stall through the wide crack in the door jamb. He laughed when she yelled at him. With the choice of remaining trapped in the stall or coming out, she zipped up her coveralls and stepped out. He backed her up against the wall and suggested what they ought to be doing together. When the night watchman called out to Willie from beyond the room (Willie had locked the outer door), the struggle was over. Patricia got away. But it happened again the next night, this time in the tiny supplies room. Patricia fought hard and broke free on her own. When he threatened to keep at her until he got what he wanted, she decided to come to me.

I promised Patricia that I would record her story after work, since her dyslexia made it extremely difficult for her to write. When I met with her later that day, she reconstructed the events in detail. I asked questions about what had happened, how she felt, what she did, what outcome she'd be happy with, what she wanted to happen next. I even cautioned her not to let my questions lead her in any direction that was not absolutely right and true.

I also interviewed Robin, Patricia's roommate and partner, for corroborating details. Next, I approached Patricia's shop steward, Abby. We combed the deposition for inconsistencies, studied the problem, considered the possibility of a false accusation, and discussed credibility issues. I was determined to be fair to Willie. In hindsight, the way I questioned Patricia seems ludicrous—worrying about extreme fairness for perpetrators, in a world where the body count of women hurt by men grows higher every year.

The following day, Abby and I brainstormed. The company and union were both hostile to women; it wouldn't be easy to file and win a union grievance. We also discussed

approaching the superintendent, with us accompanying Patricia as advocates. If the super didn't respond satisfactorily, we could take the case to the company's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) office. Then we called Patricia and asked her what she thought of these options. She decided to talk with the super, if I would go with her.

When Patricia and I walked into the super's office, Mr. L. was cold, wary, and sarcastic. But he made a mistake by suggesting that, if it had been attempted rape, she would have called the police. At first, she and I were stunned: it had never occurred to us to call the cops, whom we mistrusted. But, in that stunned silence, something clicked for me: I told Mr. L. that filing a police report was a fine idea; maybe he would be good enough to call them right away so that they could come over and take Patricia's statement. He freaked at the thought of having to explain an attempted rape to the police and then reporting to his boss that it had been his idea to call them. We finally left his office with a commitment that Willie would no longer be assigned to work with Patricia. So far, we had succeeded in putting some distance between Patricia and her assailant. Patricia felt better, but not whole.

After Patricia and I left Mr. L.'s office, we picked up Abby and visited Mary B., the company's EEO officer. We wanted formal recognition that Willie had done something seriously wrong. Mary immediately threw out Abby, but inexplicably allowed me to stay. After listening to Patricia for a few minutes, Mary said that she intended to bring in Willie so that he could face his accuser; she wanted to evaluate them together in her presence—without me or Abby. The threat triggered a response: Patricia had an epileptic seizure. As I knelt beside her, Mary coolly stated that, when Patricia recovered, I could relay her responses. She then walked off. I was so shocked to reply or be angry. That came afterward.

Patricia made it plain that she would not submit to being in the same small room with Willie. She also refused to talk further with Mary B. Our options were narrowing fast. The police were out, the union was no help, the super had done

what little he was going to do, and the EEO officer was a washout. The three of us—Patricia, Abby, and I—were left to our own devices. We needed a new idea. Out of necessity, we invented one: a direct confrontation with the perpetrator, on our terms.

For the next week, Patricia, her partner, Robin, Abby, and I charted the course for Willie's introduction to feminism. The four of us researched what feminists had written about sexual harassment. We talked to experts as well as other victims. Robin toured Willie's haunts, photographing him at work, his car, and his house. We discussed what our objectives should be and where the confrontation should take place. I called various women with whom I'd previously done politically radical and feminist work; their response was overwhelmingly supportive. A quick explanation was enough to get their interest.

Thirty women showed up at our initial meeting, where they met Patricia, Robin, and Abby for the first time. Many of these women had already worked together on events protesting injustices, so it was a meeting of easy respect and strong focus. We discussed broad issues as well as tactical details. After an extended discussion, a veteran activist named Grace spoke up. She said that our original plan of confronting Willie in the parking lot at work could not be pulled off without his becoming suspicious or without intruders inadvertently stumbling on the scene. Grace was persuasive; it was the wrong approach. We needed to confront Willie somewhere of our own choosing at a time that suited us. The confrontation needed to be on our own ground.

We agreed with Grace's analysis, but no alternative plan leaped to mind. Grace then suggested that someone could simply pick him up for a date. The room gasped, but with her usual understatement and droll humor Grace replied, "What! We've all been trained to do it all of our lives." (Grace later remarked that she was probably "doomed" to be the bait: She had suggested the idea, was closest to Willie's age, was small enough not to intimidate him, and could pass as the traditional girl next door.) A concrete, workable plan

began to evolve as the group regained its composure. We chose the Rose Garden in Golden Gate Park as the site of the confrontation, and dusk as the time. The Rose Garden is a rectangular plot between the intersection of Fulton Street and Park Presidio, at one end, and Kennedy Drive, at the other. What roses mean in the everyday lives of women, the fundamental joy they bring to women who love growing things, made it a place that we wanted to reclaim. I visited the Rose Garden to reconnoiter and drafted a map of the area to help us with our strategy.

At our second meeting, someone raised the possibility of Willie's having a weapon. I knew that some deckhands routinely carried handguns in their seabags, so it was not a foolish fear. We anticipated this danger by recruiting women martial artists familiar with disarming techniques; half a dozen experts volunteered. Over the next two weeks, our group rehearsed the confrontation. We drilled; we practiced; we gained new confidence each time. We were ready. It was none too soon for me, because I had the dubious distinction of playing the role of Willie in our practice sessions. I was genuinely sick of being yelled at, jerked around, disarmed, and thrown to the ground with karate yells blasting in my ears. I had bruises, but beyond the discomfort, the focused anger of these women scared me, even though I knew that it was just a rehearsal that I had helped plan.

The confrontation was to take place in four coordinated phases. Phase one involved Grace riding a ferry while Willie was working on it. The tactical problems were twofold: first, how to know when he would be aboard, since he worked only part-time; second, how Grace would recognize him. We solved the first problem by having Abby serve as lookout; when she spotted him on one of the ferryboats, she'd call me and I'd call Grace, who would rush down to catch the ferry. The identification problem was solved by one of Robin's photographs of Willie; Grace taped it inside a paperback novel that she would carry with her. Grace was to call me if anything went wrong or when she had successfully completed her mission of setting up the date.

Abby's call soon came: Willie was on board. When Grace boarded the ferry, she quickly located him, but delayed approaching him until the return trip in order to limit their conversation as much as possible. On the return trip, Grace found Willie sitting just outside the fo'c's'le. She boldly sat next to him and started a conversation about his job. She claimed that her brother had worked out of the union hiring hall several months earlier, had said that it was a good job, and that a few women did it, too. She wanted to check it out, since she had just moved to the area and needed work. Willie agreed that it was a good job, but said that she wouldn't like it. Why not? He hemmed and hawed and finally remarked that only "dykes" worked on the job. How did he know this "terrible" thing? He gave a manly shrug of worldliness and merely replied, "You know!" As the ferry came into view of the San Francisco terminal, Grace decided that if he didn't soon ask her out, she'd have to ask him. Willie, however, came through like a champ: He asked for her phone number. She replied that she was staying at the YWCA and didn't have her own phone yet, but perhaps he'd give her his phone number. He did. Grace promised to call him in a couple of days.

The group had already decided that we would need three or four days of lead-time to contact everyone involved and arrange the final details. Grace called Willie two days later, and told him she'd taken an apartment near the beach, had gotten a temporary job at the De Young Museum, and there was a party Friday night. Would he like to go with her? Willie jumped at the offer. She arranged to meet him in the museum's parking lot at nine Friday evening. She added that she'd like him to see her new apartment after the party. He was thrilled.

That Friday evening, Grace and another member of our group, Lillian, posed as coworkers chatting in the museum parking lot, waiting for Willie to show up. He eventually pulled his car into the space next to them. Grace introduced Willie and Lillian; she then told Willie that she needed something from her car, which was on the opposite side of

the Rose Garden, just a short distance away. Would he walk with her? Sure. They bid good-bye to Lillian. As Grace and Willie walked around his car, he stopped to open the trunk. He reached in, took out a shirt, sniffed the armpits, decided that it was clean enough, and put it on. Grace recalls thinking that he was in serious need of some tips on dating.

Phase two of our plan involved monitoring Grace and Willie as they walked. Each step of their way was watched by women in pairs—sitting on a bench enjoying the summer evening, strolling along smelling the roses, hiding behind giant eucalyptus trees. Another woman jogged by and reported back to the rest of us. Willie was not allowed to walk with Grace unwatched; we did not intend to have another victim.

Meanwhile fifty women—more than we had dared hope—were assembled at Haight and Stanyon streets. We had kept the actual site of the confrontation guarded on a need-to-know basis until now. To my amazement, however, a vanload of country women from Mendocino suddenly pulled up; they had heard about our plans through the grapevine. We then drove to the intersection of Fulton Street and Park Presidio. This was the spot—at the end of the path leading through the Rose Garden—where Willie thought Grace's car was. Willie would never get this far.

The gathering spontaneously assumed a mood that felt very volatile. We had all agreed on a nonviolent confrontation and were prepared to force Willie to remain nonviolent, too. (Less of a contradiction than it sounds.) Troubled by the jagged edge of anger among the women in a situation in which we clearly held the upper hand, I addressed the group in the strongest possible way about our intention: No one was to touch Willie unless he made a sudden or aggressive move. I reinforced that commitment, but I know to this day that one wrong word could have changed the dynamics completely. Willie was blessed that summer evening with a disciplined and principled group of women who had purposefully organized to instruct him but not to hurt him.

Abby and I then headed for our stations to watch for cops

and stray strollers; we were the lookouts, one at each end of the Rose Garden. The rest of our large group split up into two smaller ones, positioning themselves on either side of the path and vanishing behind tall hedges. Everyone waited in silence for the signal.

Phase three began when Frankie whistled loudly from behind a cypress tree as Grace and Willie passed her on their way into the Rose Garden. Willie was startled by the sound and turned to see where it had come from. Finding nothing, he turned back to discover that he was surrounded by fifty strangers. Grace was whisked away from the scene at once.

Willie was ordered to remain still and silent. He was told to nod his head if he understood. He did. In case Willie was armed, one martial artist was assigned to check each of his limbs: Frankie his right arm and Mary his left, Lori his right leg and Phyllis his left. He was to be disarmed and immobilized if he made a wrong move. Another martial artist was to give him a head-to-toe inspection and alert the others if she discovered anything. A fifth woman was charged with helping him from behind if he forgot to nod his understanding of our instructions. He didn't forget.

The confrontation was designed to allow Patricia to say whatever she wanted to say to Willie. Her face was the only one he recognized as she emerged from the wall of women enclosing him. She was backed up by her partner, Robin, who was prepared to speak if Patricia chose not to. In fact, Robin did speak for Patricia, and then spoke for herself in no uncertain terms. When Robin finished, others stepped up to Willie to express themselves on the subject of violence against women and what he had done. Several women held up Robin's zoom-lens photos, now blown up into posters and illuminated by flashlights, so that Willie could see himself, his car, his license plates, his house. The purpose of these photos was to inform him that we not only knew where to find him, but had already been closely watching him and his activities. We meant these photographs both as a graphic reminder of male vulnerability and as a warning.

After each woman who wanted to address Willie had done

so, he was told to never again harass Patricia or any other woman. His knees were shaking visibly. He was also told not to reveal this confrontation to anyone. Finally, he was told to turn around and walk normally back to his car without looking back, to get in it, and to drive away immediately. He did as he was told.

At dusk, on a gorgeous summer evening, a solitary man, surrounded by fifty angry strangers and his victim, learned that what he had done was not acceptable behavior to be tolerated by women. It took just a few minutes to accomplish, once he was face to face with the group. It was short, sweet, to the point, and powerful.

From my lookout post, I watched Willie retreat from the Rose Garden. I did not hear the jubilant yell bursting from the participants as he left, but the police may have. As Willie disappeared into the museum's parking lot, an SFPD patrol car pulled up alongside me. I expected the worst. I carefully did not react, and after several long minutes, they drove off without a word. Perhaps it was just an unnerving coincidence. Two things might have caused them to cruise the area: the improbable massing of fifty women who were not exactly "touring" the garden, or the hue and cry of celebration. If we ever do this again, we might want to hold off on the hollering and have some obvious and plausible pretext for our presence.

The fourth and final phase of the confrontation was simple but crucial. Everyone promptly went to the waiting cars and left the vicinity. We all drove to a prearranged place to count noses, see how Patricia felt, discuss security measures for her and Robin, compare our experiences, be excited, congratulate each other, and cheerfully decompress. Patricia was disappointed that she hadn't said anything to Willie herself, but told us that she felt great about everything else. Our confrontation had come down exactly as planned.

As for Willie, he avoided the waterfront for a while. Grace had previously voiced a concern that a confrontation might intensify his misogyny; we had decided to take that chance, but it didn't happen as far as we could tell. Grace even came

to feel a little sorry for Willie, with his ordinariness and pathetic ineptitude, but Patricia knew him for the sexual bully he was.

When he did finally take another part-time job with the company, he kept his eyes on the ground whenever Abby and I were around, although he hadn't seen either of us at the confrontation. Within months, he vanished altogether.

Two weeks after the confrontation, we threw a party to celebrate our success. We handed out "Order of the Rose" awards. Grace presented one to me: "For Conspicuous Leadership," it read. Her own award, with its fading ribbon, still hangs on her bulletin board.

One of the women audiotaped the confrontation, and the public radio station, KPFA, later played it for the edification of the greater Bay Area. It created an urban legend that eventually reached all the way across the country to the Rape Crisis Center in Washington, D.C., and became part of the herstory of women confronting harassers and rapists. Then and now, all of us feel very good about what we did. We have one recommendation for all women who are facing the problem of male violence: do something about it and do it on your own terms.