

# You Need to Find a Version of the World You Can Be In: Experiencing the Continuum of Men's Intrusive Practices

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## Abstract

Working with the principles of poetic transcription and creative representation, this hybrid poem was constructed as a creative data set for my doctoral research into women's experiences of the continuum of men's intrusive practices in public space (commonly termed street harassment). Inspired by the works of poets/researchers, including Corrine Glesne, Monica Prendergast, and Rosemary Reilly, the poem is constructed solely from the words of 50 female participants. Sentences are taken directly as spoken within the research interviews, with every individual intrusive practice from men reported by participants interlaced with each mention made by women of their habitual embodied responses. It was designed to enable a method of data preparation retaining the phenomenological, the experiential, and evocative nature of women's accounts while contrasting women's responses against the particularity of individual men's intrusive practices.

## Keywords

feminist studies, gender and sexuality, masculinity studies, investigative poetry, methods of inquiry, feminist qualitative research, feminist methodologies, methodologies, new methods and methodologies

The principles of poetic transcription and creative representation (Glesne, 1997; Faulkner, 2010; Prendergast, 2007; Richardson, 1992; Reilly, 2011) provide exciting opportunities for researchers keen to retain the phenomenological, the experiential, and evocative nature of qualitative data. Creative representation also suggests innovative opportunities to combat the difficulty of translating gender-specific phenomenological harms, through enabling the apprehension of differing subjective experiences of shared social realities (West, 1987). The following hybrid poem was constructed to explore such possibilities, constituting a creative data set for my doctoral research into women's experiences of the continuum of men's intrusive practices in public space (commonly termed street harassment). Fifty women took part in a participatory research process involving initial in-depth research "conversations,"<sup>1</sup> a diary-stage recording intrusive encounters with male strangers in public space for up to two months, and a final interview to discuss participant findings. After transcribing the initial interviews, I recognized the need for a method of representation that would facilitate analysis of the connections and commonality between accounts, without collapsing the ways in which women experience men's violence differently based on social and personal histories. Working through each transcript, every particular intrusive encounter that women

recalled was extracted, and every time women gave a general comment about the way they responded. The choice to use women's general responses over particular responses to individual instances was in part determined by participants themselves, many of whom were unable to remember specific reactions and spoke about a habitual embodied response to the possibility of intrusion, something I have analyzed through a gendered extension of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of the "habit body." Women's words were not edited or altered in any way, each sentence in the poem is directly taken from the research conversations. To demonstrate male stranger intrusion as a shared social reality for women, the list of both particular encounters and general responses was then randomized, and I constructed the poem through interlacing men's practices with women's responses, with only the final two sentences ordered by design. The resulting piece is a hybrid poem in 50 voices which is overwhelming, repetitive, shocking and exhausting. In this way, I follow

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Sandra L. Faulkner's (2009) suggestion that poetic representations offer a useful means of producing a "shared experience between research, audience, and participant"

(p. 3), in this case illuminating gender-specific phenomenological harms through mirroring in the reader's emotional response, aspects of the lived experience itself.

## You Need to Find a Version of the World You Can Be In

He came up to me and was like my mate wants to lick you out.  
It just makes you feel like you're doing something wrong.  
He started talking to me more like saying oh where are you going?  
My thing has been to physically remove myself, not to confront.  
He followed me literally all the way home.  
I just don't see them, my eyes glaze over.

He was shouting at me and whistling at me saying sexy thing  
and all of this  
and I was 13.

He got off and he called me a tranny and a minger.  
I don't know yeah I try to brush it off.  
He's definitely having a wank, he's definitely doing it. In Morrisons.  
I built up such a barrier.  
He just had his hand there on my chest.  
It's easier just to get off.

He snapped a picture and then walked back out,  
he didn't run, he just walked back out  
really casual as if he'd just strolled in.

And then he pointed out to me his massive erection.  
I'll tuck my hair into my hat.  
I had this big long fringe and he made some comment  
about that must get in the way  
when you're giving blowjobs.  
He leaned over and asked if he could take my photograph.  
I try not to sit next to a man.

He bit my neck and he had his hand on my left breast  
and he squeezed my breast really hard.  
He hit me.

A couple of guys as I was walking were like hey babe.  
I'll wear jeans just because it's safer.  
Oi bitch, oi slag, get your tits out you slag.  
I always walk with purpose.  
The other guy waiting there goes oh cheer up love.  
I want to talk back but you're taking that risk.

Oi you come over here, sit on my face.  
His trousers around his ankles  
just jerking off.

He slapped me across the face.  
He said can I come on your tits.  
He was pushing the gate trying to get through and screaming.  
It's easier to pretend I don't hear anything.

He physically had his junk hanging out the side of his shorts.  
I can walk around with blinkers on

He asked if he could sit by me again.  
I'll always be listening to music.  
He said well I would just like to talk to you.  
I walk a little different now and I do different things with my face,

He was looking at me in a way that was just like,  
you are just a piece of meat  
and I'm loving the show.

He stayed leaning into me,  
was rubbing his crotch against me  
and he had an erection.  
I used to carry a Stanley knife.

They just started shouting at me every day.  
I would never now get onto a bus and sit by the window.  
And then he put my finger in his mouth.  
I always check men and I watch their behavior.  
He leaned across me and pinned me back and tried to take off my skirt.  
You have to have your shutters down.

He came up very close to me, like inches away from me,  
and said something like  
loving the stockings girlie.

He was constantly leaning over and being like where are you going  
and what are you doing  
and is this a holiday  
and have you got a boyfriend?  
He seemed to be slowing down as if he wanted me to pass him.  
He didn't say anything, he just attacked me.

He walked past us and went oh my god, lesbians.  
You live in this bubble all of the time.  
He turned to me and he says you look very beautiful.  
I've even taken my phone out sometimes and pretended to talk to someone.  
Someone shouted across the street at me "nice, ah, mammary glands."  
I won't make eye contact or anything, I don't want to give them the chance.

And this guy came up to me and basically tried to have sex with me  
outside the shop, when I was 14,  
dragged me around the corner and started trying to pull the coat off.  
And he kept, he kept saying  
there's no need to be frightened of me.

I had one guy who mimicked a blowjob from the car window one time.  
If you don't put make up on you can become quite invisible.  
Someone did just literally stop and say oi love you should be on WeightWatchers.  
I don't really like being in crowded places just in case.  
He got out his penis and he was trying to make me touch it.  
It wears you down in the end.

He yelled after me you whore, you whore, that was a compliment  
why didn't you say thank you,  
his friend said he wants to dog you,  
and another one said you've got a face like shit.

He was going oh c'mon, just let me take a few pictures.  
I'll try to avoid situations where I am going to be on my own.

He just reached up and grabbed my boob.  
Look straight ahead and keep walking.  
He pulled his trousers down and was having a wank.  
I just refuse to let that stop me. I can't accept it.

And a guy came up from behind and attacked me  
and stuck his hands underneath my  
skirt and tried to assault me or did assault me.  
The guy that date raped me kept asking me out for weeks afterwards.  
My husband tried to strangle me.  
He just said something really innocent at first.

This guy came up to me and said oh so you look nice,  
I've never been with a fire-crotch before.  
I won't like hit someone but I'll inch my elbows back.  
One of them jumped out and went BOO like that.  
I've developed what my friends call bitch face.  
His arm was going back like going alright, up and down my leg.  
I've just learnt to ignore them.

Sexy lady, nice tits, hello baby, hello baby.  
He was chasing us and screaming at us.  
He decided he was going to lock me in the house.

This young guy stood opposite me just sort of jiggling up and down.  
Trying to walk less sexily, trying to not draw attention to myself.  
He only just said hello beautiful.  
I don't look at anybody ever.  
All of a sudden this guy turns up and he's got it out and he's going for it,  
like actually got it out properly.  
This is not happening, I'm in a glass box.

I had a man wank off over me on the tube.  
He was like no you don't understand my cock is huge.  
There was this guy in a bush behind us jerking off.  
He just repeated it again and again following me down the street.

He just came up to me and punched me in the gut.  
I try to make myself feel not scared and fine.  
Some guy just took a swig of water out of his water bottle and spat it in my face.  
I just mock, in a banter kind of way.  
He slowed down and watched me walk on a bit and then started following me.  
I know where my keys are.

I heard footsteps behind me, fast approaching, running footsteps  
and I turned around  
and this guy just stopped in his tracks.

I went and hid under the porch bit and he didn't see me,  
and he didn't see me under my house,  
and he drove back really slowly  
looking.

He was like oh come on get in the car I'll give you a lift.  
I prepare myself by distracting myself.  
A couple of guys actually moved seats to sit in front of me.  
I usually try to sit next to women.  
And as he went past he just flashed.  
I can just power straight past them, with my head up and barely register.

They'd called me over to the car,  
wound the window down and said I need some directions.  
I asked him where to and  
he pointed to his crotch.

This other guy just came out of the shadows of a doorway and just grabbed me,  
was just holding onto me.  
He'd said something about me having epic tits.

I had somebody rubbing themselves on me.  
I'll like sit somewhere else, change seats.  
This guy just literally pulled down his trousers and started wanking.  
I normally go at the end of the carriage.  
He did a comment like oh you know, you can flirt as much as you want  
but no one really wants you anyway.  
I look down, I don't look at them.

Young boys like 14, 15 year olds,  
coming up to us saying  
are you lesbians? Kiss then.

I had one guy burp in my face.  
I'll try to cross the street.  
He kept saying my cunt stinks, about me.  
You've got to have a book with you.  
A car came up, slowed down a little bit, wound the window down, and screamed.  
I just try to ignore. I don't engage.

This man just came up to our table and starting banging on it  
and was like I want some chicken nuggets,  
give me some fucking chicken nuggets.

You fucking bitch I'll kill you. If I see you again I'll kill you.  
He was just staring at me as I walked past.

This man one time grabbed my leg.  
You've got to stay polite, stay quiet and be agreeable.  
He just said something about me having nice tits.  
I don't walk down there at night.  
And he came up behind me and grabbed both of my arms.  
Never smile, never,  
just never make any kind of contact at all with any men.

And he got out his dick and wanked off in front of me.  
This guy stands outside the window and takes a picture of me.  
He started jerking off while he was sitting next to me  
They might catch me unawares but they will never catch me without an answer.

This man came up to me and put his arm around me.  
I'll pretend to text.  
He took his hand underneath my hand and held it there.  
I've got this thing that I call the stare.  
A guy came up and literally went ugh, and walked away.  
I get this feeling of guilt sometimes.

They weren't subtle they said it like in audible range  
and they were like what do you reckon mate, an 8 out of 10?  
He raped me.

He kind of like run his hand down my back.  
 I basically have been hiding myself for the last 6, 7 years.  
 He was so obviously looking just at my boobs.  
 I always listen to music.  
 Some guy just wound down his window and started shouting at me.  
 I'd probably forget about it.

These two guys probably 40 walked past and said  
 oo you'll have a nice body on you  
 when you're 16.

He was like, I don't mind if you've got a baby.  
 I do make the choice if there is one to sit with women.  
 He started putting his hand on my leg.  
 Sometimes I'll just close my eyes.  
 And then I felt someone's hands on my butt cheek.  
 I now stay away from the color red

I had someone wind down their window and say oi love you dropped something,  
 and I looked down,  
 and they said it's your pants.

He was like oh do you have a boyfriend?  
 If I don't acknowledge him, it'll turn nasty.  
 He kind of stopped, said I just want you to know that you're a very beautiful woman.  
 I still have my earplugs in, even if the music isn't on.  
 This guy had come up to me and been like oh give us a smile  
 If I want someone to get past me I try to get my back to a wall.

This guy had actually snuck behind her  
 and put his hand down in a way that I'd think it was her  
 and then she saw too and I was just like oh my God  
 because he'd actually touched me  
 there.

He just sort of pulled his trousers down.  
 I walk quicker or I phone someone.  
 Guy walks past me and starts whispering shit in my ear.  
 I carry my keys between my hand so I can stab.  
 As we left he slapped my bum.  
 I wish I could just wear exactly what I wanted.

They wouldn't let me get around the car, they kept reversing if I tried to go behind and  
 pushing forward, so effectively trapping  
 me as I tried to cross the road.

A dodgy guy stood next to me on the platform on the tube.  
 I always try to look like I know where I'm going.  
 He was just following me up the hill.  
 I take a key and I have the sharp part in between my fingers.  
 Some guys told me to leave my boyfriend and get in the car.  
 I don't really do anything.

They circled around the block and met us on the other side  
 and were there waiting for us  
 when we got down to the end.

So there was one guy who was like come over here I want to buy you a drink  
 I use my shadow on the floor, if I'm on the street I can tell how close they are.

He took a step back and he touched my hair.  
Be polite but not too polite that they want to continue talking to me.  
He was making this weird noise, like a clicking noise or something.  
I dress with scarfs and things to just cover, take the focus away.

Some guy, very seriously in a trench coat, was following myself and a friend of mine  
from school halfway up that hill,  
in the forest, into a green space  
and then actually exposed himself.

He started talking to me more like saying oh where are you going?  
I normally ignore it and then get angry at myself.  
He followed us for like half a block telling us that his flat was around the corner.  
I'll purposely just look straight ahead  
He pointed and went crab face.  
I tend to check my phone.

He even texted my daughter saying what he wanted to do to her,  
what he wanted to do to both of us.  
This guy walked past me and just said slut.

He was just behind the hedging just looking at the girl's backs,  
furiously wanking away.  
I just kind of like glare at them  
He was looking at me and he goes oh, what's your name?  
I'm always very polite, I'm very polite.  
One of them kicked my foot, not in a hard way, just to get my attention.  
I try to tone everything down a bit, I don't want to stand out.

This guy just walked next to me on my way home  
and that night I had to actually take a really roundabout route  
and make sure I was always on a main road  
and that I wasn't actually heading home.

Men would go in and masturbate and be asking for clothes.  
I'm not looking at anybody, not engaging.  
This guy called me fat out of a car window.  
I probably would avoid, like cross the road.  
The man tried to touch me on the boobs.  
You don't smile back, you just look back in complete terror.

This guy came up behind me and said oh my god  
you're so beautiful,  
is it okay if I walk behind you and touch myself?

And I looked at him and he waved.  
In general I tend to ignore and flee.  
He essentially had his cock out and basically ejaculated all over the lawn.  
I don't engage at all.  
They were looking, very very lecherous looking.  
I'll take the long way around.

He just kind of started looking and like talking really loudly  
about some girl that they knew and how big her tits were  
and it was like yeah yeah her tits  
are really big  
while looking at me.

Then these guys kind of circled us, they made a circle around us.  
I don't think there's any way to react other than to not react.

This man turned around and just had this huge erection.  
So I just cross the road.  
A guy was trying to rape me in the ladies toilets.  
I just look straight ahead.

There was a whole row of guys who were standing down this wall  
and as you walked past they just leaned and grabbed  
whatever part of you  
that they could.

He said he'd been watching me.  
I always sit quite close to the driver.  
He just bit my lip and carried on walking.  
You always try to find the blame with yourself.  
He was just trying to get really physically close just leaning.  
I can block people out.

This car pulled up and had two guys in it  
and the entire time the light was red  
they just sat there staring at me and making comments.

A boy I sat next to put his hand on my leg and started rubbing it.  
I have my keys in my pocket.  
This guy was like excuse me, you've got a really nice figure.  
I don't really look back.  
And he just stood across the road taking pictures.  
I avoid eye contact with men definitely.

He was just staring at me and when I got up to move carriage he got up  
and loitered around the middle of that carriage.  
He tried to kiss me.

He didn't have a proper hold of me but he tried to steer me into the house.  
My coping strategy is that I move.  
One of them shouted something along the lines of I'll fuck the shit out of you.  
I'll take flat shoes with me.  
He was like have I been good? And I said yeah. And he goes tell me I've been good.  
Normally I get really angry about it.

He was like,  
I'd like to do things to you,  
don't worry you won't have to pay for the cab ride.

This guy had stuck his penis through the bottom of the cubicle and was wanking.  
I try not to look at people.  
He took a photo of my cleavage.  
I pretend to phone someone, or I look in my bag.  
Just a guy standing in the bushes exposing himself and wanking.  
I'll always look to see when the last bus is.  
One of them past me by the door and said ooo lovely.  
I avoid eye contact.  
I block it out.

This guy came up behind me and grabbed me between my legs,  
like properly grabbed me.  
He was trying to rape me.  
And this guy just took his pants off.  
I tend not to respond.

He did the whole look me up and down thing and said I think ti amo?  
I don't really go on the top deck of the bus at night.  
He said something like hi how are you doing.  
I find myself calling someone quite a bit.  
He was following me, clearly following me between train carriages.  
I never make eye contact, I just look straight ahead where I'm going.

This really creepy man walking really close behind me  
and pretty much breathing down my neck  
and whispering things.  
Never talk to a man.

He raped me.  
I will get a taxi for that walk.  
He did a u-turn to try to pick me up. In a semi-trailer.  
Basically if I just walk with my eyes closed and my earphones on it'll be fine.  
And one of them just said hi as I walked past.  
I consider what I wear more.

He just started talking to me and he wouldn't leave me alone  
and he wouldn't let me walk past.  
He said give us a blow job.

A group of guys one of them pinched my bum when I was going up the stairs.  
I wear a lot of black, I feel vulnerable when I wear too much color.  
This guy at the next table looked over and said hey sweet lips!  
I walk in the middle of the road a little bit because then no one can jump out.  
And then he said, so how do you guys relate to each other, I mean sexual relations?  
I'll stop dead and get my phone out.

I had in the street a group of guys try to stop me and be like hey  
you should totally come back to ours.  
He tried to grab my ass.  
Slag.

He was following us, he carried on like a whole block.  
I'll have my phone in my pocket rather than in my handbag.  
He turned around and went, do you know that you're beautiful?  
I wear my iPod all the time.  
This guy came up to me said hey, hey sexy.  
I always apologize, always.

Two men walking behind me talking about my behind to each other  
obviously  
in a very loud voice so I would hear.  
And he molested me on the bus on the back seat.

He said hey you know what girl, I like the way you look.  
I look at the floor. I never make eye contact with anybody.  
And then he was like oh you're such a frigid cunt.  
I just listen to my music.  
He was staring at me, drunkenly staring at me.  
I have to fight the urge to cover up so people don't look at me.

They shouted something at me, can't remember exactly what the words were  
but it was something like your ass or something about that.  
A guy was wanking in the bushes.

This guy came past and said alright love.  
I can deal with it now. I always have a comeback for everything.

He was just like oh hey how are you, do you want to come with me?  
I'll take my phone out or pretend to be doing things.  
He was eyeing me up and down and sort of shuffling closer step by step to me.  
I start to become really conscious of how I'm walking  
and what I'm wearing  
and how I'm looking.

So he sat on the corner of the chair  
and again, legs akimbo,  
whipped it out, had a go.

A guy in a doorway tried to slide his hands down me.  
Obviously I'll be looking away.  
He wasn't looking at my face he was looking at the rest of me.  
I'll call people or pretend that I'm calling people.  
He told me that I looked tired.  
Stop, check your phone, tie your shoe lace,

He was like get in the car, I want to, I want to.  
He used to corner me so I couldn't get out from my desk.  
This guy walked down the street and gave me the full up and down  
and just went "nice" as he walked past.

This guy said, really loud so everybody heard, something like can I fuck you?  
I will often look at the ground.  
Somebody from the other side of the street just yelled, hey mamacita.  
I'll always sit next to a woman.  
In the end we started running and he came banging on our front door.  
I have responded in the past with like fuck off you pervert.

This guy was like oh my God, look at your profile,  
it's so beautiful  
I just have to take a picture.  
He started spitting at me.

This guy was like I think you brought the bongos.  
You just walk faster.  
This big fat guy just staring at me the whole time.  
I am looking down, I never look at people.  
He literally just came up to me and undid my top button.  
I'm not going to cross the road, I live on this side of the road.

He is checking my suitcase to see if there is any contraband  
or any items that shouldn't be allowed through,  
and he's chatting me up.  
And then tried to kiss me.

This guy was like oh give us a chip love.  
I'd wear tights and a longer skirt.  
He started whispering into my ear you're so sexy I want to have sex with you.  
I walk with my key in my hand and then like between my fingers.  
I must have been 7 and someone wound the window down and went wahay!  
My decisions about how I look are related to this sexual danger.

Guy walking past me just stopped,  
stared out at me,  
and then carried on walking.

I had someone wanking on the underground.  
You have to text everyone to say you got home.  
They started following us home, being a bit more intimidating.  
I just block them out.  
He was looking in quite an overtly sexual way, like a dirty sexual look.  
I'll get my umbrella and have it as a stick just in case I get threatened.

And this guy was like are you alright darling?  
And kept putting his hand on mine.  
He was like hey where are you going tonight?  
Slut.

He just did this horrible thing with his tongue.  
I'll take trousers in my bag.  
The guy walked outside, across the street, to try to take a picture of me.  
I will ignore them, always.  
He went to get his coat ready, as if he was going to flash me.  
Just stepped out and groped my boob.

You turn into the street look which side has more men  
and choose the other one  
and then call somebody.

This guy had kind of walked past and looked me up and down.  
I'll just ignore it and feel quite annoyed.  
They then sent me a text message saying you're fit and you know it.  
And then kissed me on the lips.  
He absolutely came after me.

And I think that was probably the first time, from that point onwards,  
constantly scanning  
for people who would do you harm.

He started talking about football and was like oh  
so does your boyfriend like football then?  
Just as he started to follow me a car came.  
And he kept trying to engage me in conversation.  
And then he pulled down his pants.  
He raped me.

My thing is always when I get on the bus or public transport  
right where are you going to sit?  
He basically won't piss off for quite a while.

A car with a guy in it just kind of came onto the pavement.  
He stood in my way.  
He just kind of grabbed me.  
They kept eyeing us up and down.  
I'd tie my hair up for some reason.

One guy started saying, not hitting on me,  
but just saying oh beautiful, beautiful girl  
and he was walking with his little boy,  
and it was 7 o'clock in the morning.

This man was following me.  
He was obviously following me.  
All like are you alright ladies, do you know where you're going?

Sometimes I'll walk back through a very scary place  
and text on my phone saying where I am if anything happened to me  
so I can just press send.

This man exposed himself to me.  
They literally did a U-Turn to drive next to me.  
And a guy just came next to me and started talking to me.  
I used to sit in an empty carriage because I thought great  
there's no one around.

He sat next to me and started chatting.  
This guy who I was waiting for a train  
and ended up inviting me to wherever it was  
in Africa he was from.  
He went in for the kiss.

He got a coin and threw it at me.  
I was pulled off my bike by this guy.  
He just shouted after me.  
These two boys in a car wolf whistled.

I had a nice chat once with this really sweet Turkish guy  
who got on the bus at Shoreditch,  
and we had a nice chat about his job as a Graphic Designer,  
then he asked me to wake him up at Stockwell  
and that was it.

You need to find a version of the world you can be in.

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### Note

1. In addition to exploring creative means of representing qualitative data, my doctoral research is also building on the concept developed by Ann Oakley (2005) of conducting an interview as if it were a conversation, arguing that for particular questions, settings, and research relationships, conversation as method may gain the most robust data and generate the most useful knowledge. I suggest that there may be benefits for such spaces in moving beyond Oakley's concept of a joint exploration of research questions and "translation into vernaculars" (Merry, 2006), toward conducting research as a conversation. Unlike an interview, all participants in conversation are involved in the active construction of meaning. The dynamic of power shifts throughout the conversation as participants exchange, develop, and bounce ideas between one another, rather than in the one-way exchange of conventional interviewing or even more participatory designs where,

though participants interact with each other, the structure and content remains defined by an outside source.

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