Everyday Heroines

Stories of change by the Akshara team
So, I saw a film yesterday.

Hey! We saved you a seat!

The hero chases and stalks a girl until she gives in and says yes. What rot!

Do you know of any girl who has done that!
Only happens in Hindi films.

It’s supposed to be romantic but it’s rubbish.

They want to show how macho the boy is.

Give the girl a chance to think and say yes or no.

And what about those everyday “heroes”...

...who pull at duppatas, whistle...

...stare, touch you up?

When I enter my lane I walk with my eyes down...

...so I don’t have to see the group of boys hanging around.

Sometimes I feel like having a tea at our nearby stall but I dare not go. The looks I would get!

When I travel in the local train, I put my rucksack in front so no one will touch my breasts.

What about those guys...

...who spread their legs in bus seats?
Face it, girls, all of us are frightened.

Frightened but safe.

I don't go out at night, at least, not alone.

I avoid buses and go by the ladies boggy in trains.

What would you have us do?

If we tell our parents, they will stop us going to school.

Can't call the police every day, can we?

It all feels so bleak.

If you tell your parents, they place restrictions on you, like not letting you go to college.

If you tell your friends, you are no longer ‘cool’, they might laugh or talk behind your back. If you tell your teacher or boss, it becomes official and you are likely to be called before a committee, or even fired on other pretexts.

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It’s your word against the harasser’s – there is seldom ‘hard evidence’, so it’s likely you will not be believed. Suddenly, you become unpopular!

“Don’t be difficult” is what you hear, or “Don’t you have a sense of humor?” Very few people want to stick their necks out for you.
What if we were to teach boys a lesson? What if we harass them? Then they would understand why girls get angry and frustrated.

What fun! I would like to pull a shirt off a boy! I would blast his ear with a loud whistle. I would get my friends to crowd and frighten a guy.

I guess the answer is not to behave as badly as they do. Maybe if we were not that scared we could react differently. I had gone to a self defense session in which they said the same thing.

Let’s just admit that we are too scared to do anything, let alone touch boys.

Walk confidently on the streets. If someone is following give the message that you don’t like it. Move away from the person or group of boys who are harassing you without feeling scared.

Use everyday things like your purse or umbrella to dissuade a harasser.

But the most important thing, they said, is to ask yourself what are you scared of? Look at your own fear and try to get over it.
Sexual harassment is such a terrible thing yet no one wants to take it seriously. My teacher called it a man’s world. Not that there are less women in the world. I think half the population is female.

Plan your own Strategy. Fear can be overcome by knowledge. Read up what harassment is and what can be overlooked. You will find info on www.standupagainstviolence.org. Websites like www.howrevealing.com or www.stopstreetharassment.org gives you a lot of stories women have posted about their experiences. It will help you in understanding the different types of harassments.

Read up the law. IPC 354 and 509 are concerned with word or gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of women. These laws are generally used for street sexual harassment.

Remember that harassers are basically bullies who prey on girls and women. They usually try out their stunts in crowds so they are anonymous. You have to show them that you are not afraid. Look at the harasser and shame him with direct statements like “Why do you keep touching me?” “Please move”.

Share your stories on blog.blanknoise.org, an Indian blog created in Bangalore. Don’t allow harassers to defeat you or curtail your mobility.

Take some action or the situation might get worse. Either talk to the person to back off or find a way to avoid him. Remember the emotional impact of not doing anything is severe. Silence will breed more fear. Explore your options carefully. For one off instances, you can either confront the harasser or find support to help you to confront him.

If you think of going to the police, take some friends or elders with you so there is pressure on them to register your complaint. If you can, consult a lawyer beforehand. For official complaints you will need to gather evidence like conversations on your mobile, letters, sms or emails, etc.

In many cities there is a helpline for women. Call them and talk to them about your case. In Mumbai, 103 is the helpline number for women. Nationally, the helpline number is 181.
Akshara’s focus is on half the population of India or its women and girls, especially those who are socially and economically underprivileged and bear the brunt of violence. Akshara, a Mumbai-based, non-profit women’s organisation and resource centre, has for 22 years been working for the empowerment of women through educational scholarships, building livelihood skills and understanding one’s gender rights. In order to curb and prevent violence against women so that women can lead productive and dignified lives, Akshara engages with young men to introspect and work towards gender equality and the State to implement laws and provide services for a Safe, Inclusive and Sustainable City.

www.aksharacentre.org