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Stop Telling Women To Smile: Stories of Street Harassment And How We're Taking Back Our Power

Mio Yoshizaki
Minnesota State University Mankato, mio.yszk@gmail.com

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Fazlalizadeh, T. (2020). *Stop Telling Women to Smile: Stories of Street Harassment and How We're Taking Back Our Power*. Seal Press. 256 pp. \$16.99 eBook. ISBN-13: 9781580058476.

Written by artist Tatyana Fazlalizadeh (2020), *Stop Telling Women to Smile: Stories of Street Harassment and How We're Taking Back Our Power* is a book about employing art as a tool to fight against gender-based street harassment. Fazlalizadeh's wheat-pasting poster art series, *Stop Telling Women to Smile*, was originally launched in 2012 in New York City. She created posters with portraits of women she interviewed along with phrases that emerged during her interviews about their experiences with street harassment. She then placed the posters around the city, which inspired people in different countries to print out Fazlalizadeh's posters and put them around their cities to deter gender-based street harassment. The book is inspired by her poster project and was published to highlight her process as an artist-activist alongside interviews from her project. In this book, Fazlalizadeh challenges the expectation for women to appear happy amidst constant violations of their bodily autonomy and freedom to take up public space. *Stop telling women to smile* advocates for ending violence against women by highlighting the diverse voices who experience street harassment through wheat-pasting art activism. In this review, I address Fazlalizadeh's approach to art as social justice activism, overarching definitions of street harassment, and intersectionality, offering suggestions for how feminist educators may utilize *Stop telling women to smile*.

Throughout this book, Fazlalizadeh advocates for using art in political movements. Her wheat-pasting poster project provides more ways than traditional social justice organizing for people to take part in her activism: through interviews, putting up posters, and passerby looking at her project. According to Fazlalizadeh, "Art's unique position in social change is that it has the ability to stop people and hold their attention" (p. 260). Fazlalizadeh points out that having her art on the streets works as a direct deterrence to street harassment. She claims that her work brought an opportunity for people in the neighborhoods to initiate the conversation about street harassment, in which she hopes street harassment will be recognized as a part of the patriarchal mistreatment of women. She explains, "it moves beyond the bounds of a drawing or poster and provides women with an action to take against street harassment" (p. 251).

Fazlalizadeh's book includes interviews with eleven participants. Each interview begins with Fazlalizadeh asking how they define street harassment. Participants shared definitions that included receiving unwanted, objectifying comments from men as they walked down the street. One participant summarized objectification as instances "when people are intentionally bothering you, whether it is catcalling or discriminatory" (p. 112). Fazlalizadeh argues that women

deserve safety, freedom and respect outside their houses, and while remarks like “you’re too pretty not to smile” (p. 17) may seem harmless, and even flattering, they function as street harassment. These sexist comments reinforce men’s control over women’s bodies. Instead of normalizing such behavior and dismissing it as flattery, it must be called what it is, street harassment.

Fazlalizadeh also points out the need to address intersectionality when discussing women’s experiences of being harassed on the street. Sexism is often not the sole factor of harassment, as women experience harassment through their complex identities such as their race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. For instance, Fazlalizadeh describes how Muslim women in the United States experience gender-based harassments in addition to Islamophobia and xenophobia. One participant, Widad, describes that when wearing hijab, she feels vulnerable to street harassment. She explains, “It might be someone who’s harassing me in an anti-Muslim way or it might be someone who’s catcalling. In some weird way[,] it makes me feel like I have to rank the harassment, and anti-Muslim kind is the one that makes me feel more unsafe” (p. 181). Her experience demonstrates that Muslim women experience harassment based on their religious identity in addition to their gender identity. Women often experience harassment based on their intersectional identities.

Stop telling women to smile can offer educators a tool to discuss how people experience intersectionality. This book is suitable for introductory feminist or women’s studies courses because of its easiness to follow; the chapters are organized by interviews to understand participants’ voices based on their everyday experiences. Because each chapter highlights one participant, assigning this book as a class material allows feminist educators to develop a discussion on intersectionality through looking closely at how each participant’s experience with gender-based street harassment is impacted by their intersectional identities. Educators can create a group exercise for students to practice applying intersectionality theory by elaborating on each participant’s experience described in this book. After assigning chapters to each group of students, educators could have them find texts from assigned chapters that signify participants’ intersectional experiences, and have each group share their findings with other groups in the classroom. After the exercise, feminist educators can point out that women experience gender-based harassment in different ways because of their intersectional identities. Fazlalizadeh’s book helps educators explain how women’s bodies are socially constructed in today’s society, especially how the bodies of women of color are seen and treated.

Stop telling women to smile allows readers not only to understand how Fazlalizadeh created her unique project using art as a tool, but also to see gender-based street harassment as a way for patriarchal society to keep men entitled to women’s bodies.