

Catcalling

In chapters four and five of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the reader learns that Offred sexually provoked a few of the teen guardians while she passes through the gate. At first she feels ashamed of herself but later she realizes the power she felt. Offred says, "As we walk away I know they're watching, these two men aren't yet permitted to touch women. They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me." (22) It is clear that Offred wants to tease the men, showing them something they can't have, she even goes as far as saying it makes her feel like she has power and control. She feels this was because women in Gilead have no power and so to experience any form of power is exciting for women. This is why men don't find catcalling inappropriate, for them it's a powertrip. Throughout the whole book, Offred was craving attention from men so it's not surprising that she seeks it out in this moment. This scene resonates with me because I've been catcalled many times over the last few years and it's something I find really annoying. Catcalling has so many effects that the cat caller doesn't care to even think about such as low self-esteem, body image, and low self-confidence. Not only is it an abuse of power but it's also rude to comment on someone's body, especially a stranger on the street. Catcalling has always made me extremely uncomfortable and leaves me in an awkward position with that person. I've noticed that I have the same response every time because I am so disgusted by it.

One of my most vivid catcalling experiences was a few years ago when I was taking the bus home from school. A young teenage boy asked for my number and I wasn't comfortable sharing that with him so I told him no. I also didn't appreciate the fact that I was being hit on by a stranger but after I said no he continued to talk with his friend casually eyeing me from the corner of his eye. This made me very uncomfortable and I felt vulnerable and violated. It's horrible to think about but every time I've been catcalled it has not been when I was dressed up. It's even more sickening when an older man comments on your face or your figure. I'm always too stunned to say something back because the audacity some men have is insane. I never knew how to respond to these sorts of situations, do I thank them for the unsolicited comments or do I just ignore them. I mostly go for the latter because I don't want to give them the satisfaction of their compliment affecting me.

Offred had the opposite experience as I did, where she appreciated being catcalled because it made her feel good about herself. Nick whistled and winked at her and although she couldn't respond verbally to him she mentions to the readers how that makes her feel looked at. Some women are scared to be catcalled while some find it amusing. Nick "begins to whistle. Then he winks. I drop my head and turn so that the white wings hide my face, and keep walking." (21?) Although in this case, Offred has the same reaction as me, to keep her head down and ignore it, she wants to respond, she craves that attention. In all of my experiences, I've never wanted to respond to a comment made towards me and continue flirting. For me, it doesn't make me feel good about myself knowing I'm being watched, studied, and sexualized.

I've had plenty of other catcalling experiences where older men have said things such as "Hey baby, give me a smile" or "you have a beautiful smile". Some have gone as far as commenting on your proportions. The response they expect from me is to blush and respond

with a thank you; however my response is more like Offreds when she says "I drop my head...hide my face, and keep walking." What they think is a compliment is not a compliment for women. For me, the actual comments made to me are not memorable, what's memorable is the feeling and emotions I felt in the moment and directly after. These catcalling scenes in the book remind me of the times it has happened to me and it makes me mad all over again. If men would look at it from the women's perspective then they'd understand why most women don't see catcalling as a thing to be proud of.