basis for harassment; in fact, they are already doing so. With a combination of lawsuits and direct action, women can also redefine the societal norms that legitimize harassment as “natural,” inevitable behavior—and, in the 1990s, they are doing that decisively. With both individual and collective action, women can begin to raise the costs of sexual harassment in ways that men have never dreamed of. When harassing women no longer produces the expected male rewards—when it becomes, instead, a high-risk behavior for men—women will be able to stop sexual harassment.

Martha Langelan, Back Off: How to Confront and Stop Sexual Harassment and Harassers (Simon & Schuster 1993)

CHAPTER THREE

the Roots of Successful Resistance: Civil Rights, Self-defense, and Nonviolence

There is no need to fear the strong. All one needs to know is the method of overcoming them. There is a special jujitsu for every strong man.

—Yevgeny Yevtushenko

The effort to end sexual harassment is part of a long tradition of creative activism and social change, and the confrontation techniques we use today did not spring up out of a vacuum. Confrontation brings together in a systematic way two important strands of women's history—a centuries-old pattern of nonviolent political activism and the more recent innovation of feminist self-defense—to address the specific social practice of sexual harassment today.

In the midst of violence, individual women have demonstrated astonishing resourcefulness. More than a century ago, for example, feminist and abolitionist Lucy Stone (1818–93) came up with a brilliant tactic during an antislavery speaking tour. At a time when abolitionists were being killed, an angry mob stormed the stage in Cape Cod where she and Stephen Foster were to speak. As the crowd surged onto the platform, Stone told Foster to go ahead and run; he took off. Then she faced the thug who was leading the mob, took him by the arm, looked him in the eye, and said decisively, “This gentleman will take care of me.” To his complete bewilderment, he escorted her to safety. But she didn’t stop there. As he walked her through the riot, she persuaded him to let her speak. He gathered up the mob and kept order with a club,
while she spoke, standing on a tree stump. She even collected twenty dollars from the crowd (a lot of money in those days) to pay for the damage they’d done to Stephen Foster’s clothing.\(^1\) Doing the unexpected is one characteristic of a successful nonviolent confrontation—and in the face of impending disaster, Stone’s action was a superb example.

Women have shown the same kind of courage and creativity in devising new, nonviolent forms of political action. As the Australian feminist and author Dale Spender notes, it is in some ways ironic that Mahatma Gandhi is considered the originator of nonviolent resistance. By his own admission, it was from the British women’s suffrage activists that he learned the power of systematic, unrelenting, creative nonviolent resistance as a political strategy.\(^2\)

Gandhi successfully used nonviolence campaigns as a political tool, first in South Africa and then in India from 1919 until his death in 1948, but it was women who provided the model.

Women have been developing nonviolent strategies to stop aggression and injustice, and taking direct action based on those strategies, for a very long time. Some of the earliest literature in the world features women applying effective nonviolent action. In 412 B.C., Aristophanes wrote a play, *Lysistrata*, celebrating a successful women’s peace organization with a nonviolent antiwar strategy that was probably already ancient when he described it. (In the play, the women of Athens and Sparta, led by the heroine, Lysistrata, occupy public buildings and boycott sex to force an end to the twenty-one-year Peloponnesian War. They prevail, and Lysistrata dictates the terms of the peace agreement.)

History is full of examples of successful nonviolent direct action by women. During the American Revolution, when British troops hoarded the food supplies in New York City, women liberated the warehouses without firing a shot and distributed the food to the public. A few generations later, abolitionists women like Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883) and the Grimke sisters (Sarah, 1792–1873; Angelina, 1805–79) were demanding the right to speak in public meetings. They broke all the conventions of “ladylike” behavior to docu-

ment and condemn the institutionalized violence of slavery. Harriet Tubman (c. 1820–1913) and an entire network of Quaker women began taking direct action to help hundreds of slaves escape to freedom on the underground railroad. That kind of activism has been the backbone of every social-change and antiwar movement since. During the U.S. war in Vietnam, women organized everything from draft-board sit-ins to door-to-door neighborhood canvassing drives to national antiwar marches, to mobilize public opposition and bring the war to an end. Quaker women helped to found and run a new “underground railroad” to carry war resisters to Canada.

Women have played a particularly important role in the U.S. civil rights movement. We think of the 1960s as the era of civil rights activism, but in the 1890s, Ida B. Wells-Barnett launched and led the national campaign to stop lynching, even after her office was destroyed by a racist mob and she herself was threatened with death. One of the very first sit-ins in the movement took place in the late 1940s, in Washington, D.C., when three young African-American women from Howard University sat down at a lunch counter a few blocks from the White House to challenge the injustice of segregation in the nation’s capital. In 1955, it was Rosa Parks, a forty-three-year-old seamstress and activist, who began the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, that launched Martin Luther King’s career. And it was the sustained effort of hundreds of courageous, determined women in the churches and the community that made that boycott work despite economic reprisals and repeated threats of violence. Less than a decade later, Ella Baker was the strategist behind the founding of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the group responsible for organizing the volunteers who headed south in the dangerous and successful voting rights campaign of Freedom Summer, 1964.\(^3\)

In every generation, women have been activists, philosophers, innovators, and organizers, developing nonviolent direct-action tactics both as a personal, pragmatic method of
dealing with aggression and as a political strategy to challenge social patterns of violence and injustice.

There are many kinds of power abuse and many forms of nonviolent action. It was the U.S. civil rights movement that first began to apply a carefully structured verbal confrontation technique as part of a systematic nonviolent campaign for social justice. Elements of the confrontation technique were part of the training the Freedom Summer volunteers received: speaking from principle; naming violent or racist behavior simply and directly; holding a violent or abusive sheriff or Klan member personally and publicly responsible for his actions; forcing him to make a conscious, personal decision to stop, or continue, his unjust actions. Women have been extending the technique ever since, practicing and implementing it in many different ways.

In the United States, racism was codified in “Jim Crow” laws until the 1960s. It is still embedded in both institutional and social behavior. In a society where institutional discrimination as well as sexist and racist harassment have been a common part of the daily experience of African-American women and other women of color, confrontation has been a tool for resisting many forms of oppression in women’s lives. Here, for example, is Rosa Parks’s own account of the famous confrontation that ignited the modern civil rights movement on December 1, 1955:

**THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT**

*Having to take a certain section [on a bus] because of your race was humiliating, but having to stand up because a particular driver wanted to keep a white person from having to stand was, to my mind, most inhumane...*

*I happened to be the secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP as well as the NAACP Youth Council adviser. Many cases did come to my attention that nothing came out of ‘cause the person that was abused would be too intimidated to sign an affidavit, or to make a statement. Over the years, I had had my own problems with the bus drivers...*

On December 1, 1955, I had finished my day’s work as a tailor’s assistant in the Montgomery Fair department store and I was on my way home. There was one vacant seat on the Cleveland Avenue bus, which I took, alongside a man and two women across the aisle. There were still a few vacant seats in the white section in the front, of course. We went to the next stop without being disturbed. On the third [stop], the front seats were occupied and this one man, a white man, was standing. The driver asked us to stand up and let him have those seats, and when none of us moved at his first words, he said, “You all make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats.” And the man who was sitting next to the window stood up, and I made room for him to pass by me. The two women across the aisle stood up and moved out.

When the driver saw me still sitting, he asked if I was going to stand up and I said, “No, I’m not.”

And he said, “Well, if you don’t stand up, I’m going to call the police and have you arrested.”

I said, “You may do that.”

He did get off the bus, and I still stayed where I was. Two policemen came on the bus. One of the policemen asked me if the bus driver had asked me to stand and I said yes.

He said, “Why don’t you stand up?”

And I asked him, “Why do you push us around?”

He said, “I do not know, but the law is the law and you’re under arrest.”

Rosa Parks’s calm, resolute confrontation was a direct personal challenge in a society whose segregation was enforced by an all-white crew of bus drivers, an all-white police force, and the law itself. She understood the need to stand up to the social practice of racism, even when it was officially sanctioned by the state, and she was ready to name injustice and confront it with dignity and power. “Why do you push us around?” is the quintessential question every harasser needs to be asked—“Why do you commit this injustice?”

Her clarity in presenting that powerful question was not a
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It reflected a lifetime of thought and commitment, a habit of insisting on the basic principle of respect, even in the face of Jim Crow laws and the white power establishment. Mrs. Parks later commented, “My resistance to being mistreated on the buses and anywhere else was just a regular thing with me and not just that day.”

By posing that simple, honest, direct question of principle, she turned the tables in the encounter and forced one Alabama police officer to make a profound personal choice of his own: to enforce an unjust law, or not. He could not justify his action. Face to face with the meaning of his own behavior, he gave her an honest answer—“I do not know”—but his courage was no match for hers. He sided with injustice and the status quo, and made an arrest with historic repercussions.

Like racism, sexism is both a personal and a political form of power abuse. Day after day, in a hundred thousand different places, one man at a time decides to engage in sexual injustice and power abuse. He does it because he likes it. He does it because he can. He does it because he has the power to exploit women economically, through sexual coercion on the job, or socially, through the power of his position or the threat of physical assault. His behavior is condoned not by formal Jim Crow laws but by powerful and pervasive societal norms—the notion that men are predators and women are the prey, the excuse that “boys will be boys,” and the massive weight of cultural habit in a society where the daily practice of sexual harassment is still all too often considered acceptable. The ideology of sexism and male supremacy is doubly pernicious where sexual harassment is concerned: it not only excuses abusive male behavior as normal, but tells women that they are powerless to change it.

Every time a woman faces sexual harassment, she has to make a personal choice about how to react to the abuse. She has to stop and decide how severe the risk is, what agenda he has in mind, what she should say or do, what effect it might have. She is forced to deal with a range of powerful emotions—from simple annoyance at the intrusion, to deep anger, humiliation, and fear of escalation. At any time, any place, a man who chooses to harass has the power to yank her up face to face with her fear of physical assault or her fear of economic reprisals. He can set her adrenaline pounding as she walks through a public square or down a corridor at work. He can cost her her livelihood, her education, and her ability to sleep at night. The harasser who targets a woman invades her life on a deeply intimate, personal level.

But because harassment is a pervasive social practice, it is a political as well as a personal problem. Many men never harass women, but the cumulative behavior of those who do systematically denies women the right to walk down that street, take that class, do their jobs, or even enjoy a public park in peace. The individual harasser is part of a social structure of sexist behavior and male abuse of power that denies women some of their most fundamental civil liberties. Not many human rights are more basic or more ancient than the right to walk, to learn, and to work.

No right exists in the abstract. If current social conditions prevent significant numbers of people from freely exercising a right, that right has effectively ceased to exist. Poll taxes, Jim Crow laws, and bogus literacy tests, backed up by racist violence, eliminated the right to vote for generations of blacks in the American South. And sexual harassment—one man at a time, one incident after another—costs women their most basic human rights today. Jobs, education, housing, religion—no aspect of women’s lives is immune to destruction when harassers strike. When the minister harasses, women lose the right to worship in the congregation of their choice. When the landlord is the harasser, women lose the right to their own homes.

In any just society, the freedom to walk down a public thoroughfare, to study, to work, to live and worship where one chooses, is not negotiable; these rights are not a matter of debate. But in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, the epidemic of sexual harassment means that, for women, these are rights that are in no way guaranteed. At the whim of a harasser, these rights can cease to exist. If politics are about the distribution of power and
freedom in society, sexual harassment is profoundly political.

To reclaim and defend their human rights, women need a resistance strategy that works on both the personal and the political levels. Confrontation operates on the personal level as a specific means to break through the harasser’s destructive behavior. It disrupts his abuse of power, gets the individual woman out of the situation, and shifts the balance of power in the interaction—leaving the woman feeling strong and self-respecting, instead of angry and victimized, and the harasser feeling vulnerable, instead of powerful and successful. On the political level, harassment curtails women’s freedom. Confrontation transforms the status quo by increasing the risks of harassment for each harasser, changing the power dynamics between men and women, slowly and steadily, one incident at a time. Confrontation challenges the fundamental gender assumptions and behavioral patterns of a sexist society.

A woman who engages in a clear, principled confrontation confounds not only the harasser’s sexist expectations, but the entire social pattern of male dominance and power behind his decision to harass. She does not act like a docile, compliant victim and does not passively accept the status quo. Faced with sexist aggression, she does not relinquish her rights—she reclaims them as a matter of principle. In the process, she makes it personally difficult for the harasser to continue his behavior; she also creates the beginnings of a new social structure, one in which harassment is no longer a cost-free game for men. And because most confrontations take place in public settings, she educates everyone else around her as well. A good confrontation can be a dramatic piece of street theater, with a clear and compelling message for the audience. Each time a woman confronts, she turns up the pressure on the old social structure, weakens the old patterns of expected behavior and the old social norms that excuse and condone harassment. Like the aggregate effect of harassment, the cumulative effect of women’s acts of confrontation can change the social and political structure.

Where harassment abridges freedom, confrontation expands it.

Why does confrontation work? Why does it succeed in stopping sexual harassment? It combines the most effective characteristics of personal self-defense and nonviolent social change—the personal and the political—in a single powerful and disciplined act of resistance.

FIGHT SMART: CONFRONTATION AND SELF-DEFENSE

Feminist self-defense theory sets forth four criteria for judging tactics to deal with sexual violence: (1) Does the tactic accurately address the realities of women’s lives? (2) Does it build on women’s own strengths and expand their abilities? (3) Does it extend women’s mobility? (4) Does it promote independence and increase women’s freedom?

All too often, advice meant for women’s protection restricts women’s freedom. Advising women never to go out alone at night, for example, fails immediately on two counts: it limits women’s mobility (can’t go out at night) and curtails their independence (can’t venture out alone). It also ignores the reality of two important facts about women’s lives: many women have no choice but to go out alone at night, to work, to night school, or to family and community commitments; and many sexual assaults—both acquaintance and stranger rapes—occur not out on the street, but in women’s own homes. However well-meaning, this kind of advice severely limits women’s freedom of action, without significantly increasing their safety.

Confrontation, however, meets all four criteria. It is based on a very practical, accurate, behavioral analysis of the power dynamics of sexual harassment and the role that harassment plays in women’s daily lives. It builds women’s verbal strengths and expands their self-defense abilities. It increases women’s mobility by giving women a set of tools they can use to deal with everything from an all-male job site to the gang of harassers in the local park. It not only promotes
women's independence but empowers women, individually and collectively, to reclaim some of their most basic human rights and freedoms. On every count, confrontation meets the analytical standards for a successful defense strategy.

As a practical matter, the element of surprise is a significant advantage in stopping aggression. Most rapists do not expect women to know how to fight back, and most harassers do not expect their victims to turn and confront. In both cases, a woman who resists aggression decisively has the benefit of surprise on her side. She is breaking through societal norms that define women as helpless victims, and she is taking advantage of the assailant’s own stereotyped notions of women as easy prey. Her unexpected action throws him off balance and leaves him unsure about what will happen next. Instead of overpowering her easily, he is suddenly faced with the possibility that he may be at some risk.

The ability to react immediately is a strong defense tactic in its own right. For example, the first few minutes of a sexual assault are critical; that is the moment when the assailant has the least invested in the attack, can most easily be taken by surprise, and is most likely to be defeated if the woman decides to fight back. Strong, immediate verbal and physical resistance is the single most successful self-defense strategy in stopping rape (see Chapter 12). The same is true of sexual harassment. A woman who can confront immediately, in no uncertain terms, has an excellent chance of breaking off the harassment at the outset and preventing its recurrence. Like self-defense or martial arts, confrontation training equips a woman to analyze a situation, size up the potential aggressor, know her options, and be mentally and physically ready to act.

Another fundamental principle of self-defense is using the defender’s strengths against the assailant’s weak points. Although many petite women are excellent martial artists and very powerful fighters, women’s smaller average physical stature can be a disadvantage in physical hand-to-hand defense. Consequently, many specific self-defense moves are designed to help women “fight smart”—to use leverage points and tactics that target the assailant’s vulnerable areas, rather than trying to overcome him with brute strength. Confrontation tactics apply the same key principle in cases of sexual harassment, targeting the harasser’s most vulnerable points: his desire for respect and his indefensible behavior. Size is no disadvantage when it comes to confronting harassers; if anything, the average woman has the verbal edge.

Confrontation also succeeds as a defense strategy because it reduces the level of violence in our society. The purpose of any feminist self-defense tactic is not to beat the assailant into submission, but to stop the attack as quickly and efficiently as possible, prevent the assailant from harming his victim, and give him a reason to think twice before he tries that kind of aggression again. Confrontation stops the assailant, instead of escalating the violence.

Like other highly efficient self-defense tactics, confrontation is also designed to produce maximum effects with a minimum of engagement. It uses a quick, clear verbal statement, backed up by appropriate body language, to flip the power dynamics. The effect is usually immediate; there is no need for a prolonged physical encounter or an intense discussion with the harasser. Emotionally, a good confrontation allows a woman to be done with him and go about her business (instead of simmering with anger all day), while it leaves the harasser unsettled and disoriented.

Confrontation stops harassment by applying many of the basic lessons that have come out of feminist research on self-defense over the past twenty years. In cases of rape-testing, confrontation can sometimes even stop rape, by breaking off the attack before it happens.

**CONFRONTATION AND NONVIOLENCE**

But confrontation is more than just an effective self-defense strategy. It is also a potent tool for social change. As a social-change mechanism, confrontation works for the same reasons that other forms of nonviolent resistance work. A group of demonstrators might use nonviolent direct action to protest
an unjust law and seek new legislation. A woman who confronts harassment is doing much the same—using direct action to protest an unjust societal norm and to change the unwritten, but equally powerful, standards of socially accepted sexist behavior.

Anthropologists define these kinds of cultural norms as "laws" in a very real sense. Societal norms involve rigid unwritten codes that define appropriate behavior for both men and women—speech patterns, body language, physical appearance, mannerisms, and actions. When a woman confronts a harasser, she is committing an act of civil disobedience, defying the unwritten cultural law that says that he has a right to harass and she must passively accept that abuse.

Whether it's a picket line or a prayer vigil, a boycott or a sit-in, whatever the specific tactics chosen, every successful nonviolent act of resistance has four essential characteristics:

- A clear public statement of a moral or ethical position
- Very specific behavior on the part of the participants
- A time and location chosen to emphasize and reinforce the message
- A process, used to plan and carry out the action, that reflects certain basic human values

In many instances, the extent to which these nonviolence standards are met will determine the success of the tactics. That is true of organized political protest actions, and it is true of confrontations with harassers.

Expressing a clear moral or ethical position means communicating three things explicitly: the moral principle one's action is based on; the injustice one is challenging; and the specific remedies, changes, or responses one is seeking. In a confrontation, the moral principle is respect and human dignity: women's freedom is at stake. The injustice is sexual harassment, in any and all of its forms. And the remedy is an immediate change in the harasser's behavior.

When a woman names the harasser's behavior at the beginning of a confrontation ("Stop making those kissing and sucking noises at women on the street," "Take your hand off me right now"), she is stating the fact of his aggression in the most specific way possible. Usually, the more explicit the statement, the better. "I don't like the way you stare at my chest when you talk to me," is much more powerful than, "You make me uncomfortable sometimes." There is no defense for his behavior; naming it clearly makes the injustice clear.

When she follows up by holding him accountable for his actions ("That's harassment: stop harassing women!"), she is articulating the moral principle: her right to respect and freedom. Speaking on behalf of women generally ("I don't like it; no woman likes it!") also underscores the principle involved; this is not just an incidental whim or personal preference. It is perfectly appropriate to speak in moral or ethical terms and to name the principle explicitly: "This is about respect! Women have a right to work here without being harassed."

And when the confronter demands that the behavior stop, she is laying out the remedy she seeks in no uncertain terms. Women who confront harassers demand not only that they stop the injustice immediately, but that they cease and desist in the future: "Back off right now. Don't you ever do that to a woman again."

In fact, the verbal structure of a confrontation is a textbook example of effective nonviolent resistance. The confrontation statement contains all of the essential elements—principle, injustice, remedy—in short, direct, powerful language. Because it is so clear, it usually leaves the harasser shaken. And because his behavior is utterly indefensible, having it named out loud is very unnerving for him.

The shock value alone is effective, but making it a matter of principle adds considerably to the impact. People do not like to be told that they've violated principles that they themselves hold dear. Most men are very conscious of their status in the social and workplace hierarchy; they demand respect for themselves, their position, and, of course, their manhood itself. The most sexist men—the harassers—do not extend that principle of respect to women; women are the "other,"

right now."
the object, the prey, not equally human. In terms of respect and status, men who support sexism see women as ranking at the bottom of the male hierarchy, or outside it altogether.

Men who are insecure about their manhood and prestige often try to compensate for their insecurity and reinforce their sense of status by acting macho, using women to bolster their egos, and treating women like doormats. If all else fails, they can always reassure themselves of some status, they think, by putting women down. Because harassing women has been such an easy way for men to feel powerful and keep women in their place, it is a comfortable, normal part of the repertoire of the sexist male. That combination—a deep emotional need for respect and power for himself and an easy, reassuring habit of abuse and disrespect toward women—is the standard psychological package behind most harassers' behavior.

Consequently, it is doubly effective when the "doormat" uses a well-structured confrontation statement to challenge the harasser, explicitly and calmly, on the basis of that same fundamental principle: the essential right to respect. But she is upholding the principle in a way that uses his own sexist assumptions against him, to turn the power dynamics of the interaction upside down. She's not supposed to demand respect. He expected to feel powerful when he harassed her, but what he actually feels is shocked and confused. In his sexist world view, no one respects a man who's forcefully challenged by a woman. Now here she is, loud and clear, making it obvious that he is being an unprincipled bully and a jerk: she's holding him accountable, telling everyone within earshot exactly what he just did. Suddenly he's on the wrong end. Because of his harassment he's losing on his own terms, in status and prestige. To his astonishment, he's also just lost control of the interaction.

The contradiction she forces him to face, between his own need for respect and control and the realization that his behavior is crashing down in failure, is extremely uncomfortable. The more sexist the man, the more excruciating and disorienting the encounter is for him. If the confrontation is public, the awareness that there is an audience watching his conspicuous failure adds to his psychological pain. The emotional turmoil and sense of failure he feels are strong incentives to back off and reconsider. An individual confrontation rocks the psychological ground he's standing on, and a confrontation by a group of women is even more devastating.

To make that happen, confronters need to use not only the verbal message of a confrontation (naming the principle, the injustice, and the remedy) but all the power of the nonviolent techniques developed in social-change movements. The second basic characteristic of any successful nonviolent action—specific behavior on the part of the activists—is an equally critical component in a successful confrontation.

Honesty is a crucial part of that behavior. Nonviolent resistance is sometimes described as "speaking truth to power," and Gandhi used the term satyagraha—"truth force"—to describe the importance of honesty in producing the impact of nonviolent action. One of the essential elements of a good confrontation is the use of completely honest, accurate statements, with no verbal padding, no idle threats, no insults, and no excuses: speaking the strong, simple truth to a man who is abusing his power. That behavior alone—cutting through the fog of sexism, fear, and denial to speak from the core of the woman's own experience and lay the harasser's abusive behavior bare in the full light of day—is very powerful. Remember the child who said the emperor had no clothes?

In addition, the behavior taught in nonviolence training sessions, for activists who are considering civil disobedience and other kinds of protest actions, includes the following:
- Self-respecting, nonvictimized and nonvictimizing body language (neither submissive nor aggressive)
- Eye contact with the opponent
- Language that does not include slurs or insults of any kind
- A strong, firm, steady tone of voice
- Holding one's ground calmly (don't give in to panic or anger)
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- Refusing to label the opponent as "the enemy" (criticize the behavior, respect the person)
- Calming techniques to keep oneself centered, including support from friends and a willingness to face one's fears honestly
- Creativity (don't be afraid to do the unexpected)

Developed and tested over many years of practice, these behavioral elements are a defining characteristic of successful nonviolent social-change campaigns. They convey a strong, principled presence and increase the impact of the action.

Every one of these elements is important in confronting sexual harassment. The guidelines for confrontation require women to think carefully about all of the behavioral components of the confrontation. In more complex situations (for example, a persistent harasser in the workplace), it is often useful to plan and rehearse the confrontation beforehand, with supportive friends, just as one would plan the details of a march, a picket line, or any other protest action. The more fully a woman can incorporate the appropriate nonviolent behavior into her action, the more effective her confrontation is likely to be.

The third key aspect of nonviolent direct action—choosing a strategic time and location to emphasize and reinforce the message—is also important in making a confrontation work. Nonviolence theory suggests that confronters need to be clear about their objectives and creative about their options in designing both individual and group confrontations.

For a one-shot harasser on a public street, the time and place are easy. A straightforward confrontation statement, on the spot, is generally appropriate and sufficient. In cases of severe or prolonged harassment, however, the time and location of the confrontation are factors the confronter can determine. Whenever possible the choice should be hers, not the harasser's. These are strategic decisions, not random elements. Each woman should review the possibilities, think creatively, and choose the setting that will best meet her objectives. Deciding when and where to confront an abuser gives her an additional measure of control over the interaction and helps her to plan a difficult confrontation more precisely. When the harasser is someone who is abusing a position of authority, confronting him in front of his peers or community can be effective. Even if the victim decides to confront in private, her allies should always be present, or at least within earshot. In at least one instance, a waitress decided to confront a persistent harasser in front of his wife and mother (that worked quite well). Annie McCombs's success story, "A Summer Evening in the Rose Garden" (Chapter 13), is a good example of how decisions about time and location can reinforce the impact of a confrontation.

And finally, under the fourth criterion of nonviolent action, any successful act of resistance should reflect some fundamental human values, in both the planning and the implementation of the action. The purpose of all nonviolent action—marches, vigils, confrontations, principled resistance of all sorts—is to prevent people in positions of power from violating the basic human values of justice, compassion, equality, and respect. Men who engage in sexual harassment are violating every one of these values.

Power abuse is power abuse—on any level. When governments violate these values, human rights groups hold them accountable. The strong, disciplined confrontation techniques women use to stop sexual harassment are strikingly similar to the strategies that Amnesty International and other organizations use to confront governments around the world that violate human rights:

- Speaking the simple truth, uncensored and unafraid—naming the behavior explicitly and publicizing the government's actions, by documenting human rights abuses in clear, straightforward public statements and reports
- Naming the abusers and holding them personally and publicly responsible for their actions, from violations of civil rights to unjust imprisonment, political torture, and executions
Demanding publicly and unequivocally that the abuses stop, with no excuses or exceptions
• Speaking out as a matter of principle, on behalf of all people, to condemn violations of human rights
• Marshaling allies, applying the pressure of visibility and public condemnation, and using every other nonviolent sanction possible—from “freedom writer” letter campaigns to United Nations resolutions to economic sanctions—to increase the costs, for the government, of continuing to violate human rights
• Ultimately, through the weight of consistent, relentless, principled public action, creating a political environment in which governments in general find that the political and economic costs of violating human rights outweigh any short-term advantages they might hope to achieve.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and similar political organizations have saved thousands of lives over the years, freed thousands of political prisoners, held dictators in check, and helped to bring governments down. From the overthrow of Duvalier in Haiti and Marcos in the Philippines to the dismantling of the old regime in the Soviet Union, nonviolent action and public confrontation have forced political change.

Human rights organizations use the tools of confrontation to create an international climate in which governments’ violations of human rights cannot be ignored and are no longer tolerated. Women who confront harassers are using the same powerful tools to defend women’s human rights and create a new social and political environment—a climate in which sexual harassment, as a fundamental violation of women’s freedom, cannot be ignored and is no longer tolerated.

To be effective, the confronter’s own behavior must incorporate the basic human values she seeks to uphold. Confrontation works best when it is most principled. A confrontation is not a temper tantrum. It is a careful, planned, ethical act of resistance to a pervasive form of power abuse. Confronting out of uncontrolled rage, engaging in abusive verbal violence to humiliate and punish the harasser, or sabotaging him behind his back are forms of emotional venting, not social change. They contradict the principles of both nonviolent action and effective self-defense. Revenge is not a moral principle, and revenge is not the purpose of confrontation.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that confrontation is not simply a matter of moral persuasion. As the theorist and nonviolent activist Barbara Deming has noted, to refuse to cooperate with injustice is to exert force. In a sexist society, refusing to tolerate sexual harassment is a powerful and uncompromising action in support of social justice. Women who confront are not asking the harasser to please change and be nice.

When women confront, they are forcing a harasser to face the real meaning of his behavior in all its stark, ugly clarity. Women are insisting on telling him—and the audience of everyone around—some hard truths that he doesn’t want to hear. Women are demanding, as a matter of principle, that he stop abusing power. They are raising the costs, for him, of engaging in abusive behavior, and they are making his acts of power abuse fail. They are putting so much pressure on him that, sooner or later (and usually it is sooner), it becomes impossible for him to continue to function comfortably in his old patterns. Women are not responding in kind, trading violence for violence and ugliness for ugliness, but they are changing the context in which the harasser operates, the structure of a sexist culture, in a way that makes it increasingly difficult and increasingly painful personally for any man to continue to commit sexual harassment. Women are demanding that the harasser treat women with respect, compelling him to do so, whether he wants to or not.

Respect is the fundamental principle behind confrontation. At the deepest level of nonviolent social-change theory, confrontation works not only because it raises the costs of harassment and frees women from abuse, but because it is principled behavior: it includes respect even for the harasser himself. We do not deny his humanity with counteraggres-
sion and abuse, although he dehumanizes women. We do not excuse or dismiss his behavior; we take him seriously, show him the respect of speaking the uncensored truth to him, and hold him fully accountable for his actions. Even as we challenge his aggressive, unprincipled behavior with all the force of direct confrontation, we give him an opportunity and a motive to change. We hold out the expectation that he is capable of change, that he is capable of choices. The harasser chooses to use his power to engage in sexual harassment and limit women’s freedom; he can choose not to do so. We hold out the expectation that he can and will choose justice. We demand no less of him. That is true respect.

Because of the psychology of sexism, a principled nonviolent confrontation is pure psychological judo. Every time the harasser’s behavior is confronted, he trips over his own assumptions and damages his own self-esteem. As women throughout his environment repeatedly begin to confront him, he may never figure out exactly why harassment doesn’t work anymore, but it will dawn on him that it is not working. Whether he engages in sexually predatory harassment, dominance harassment, strategic/territorial harassment, or some combination, he can no longer count on feeling powerful, macho, or in control when he harasses a woman; he is more likely to experience embarrassment and failure. Even for a slow learner, it may take only a few confrontations before the jarring discomfort he feels when confronted starts to outweigh the rewards he expects when he harasses women.

And the effect is not limited to the harasser himself. The men around him are watching; they may be just as shocked and baffled as he is. Because most men are so conscious of ego, status, and hierarchy, they notice confrontations—one of their number has just mysteriously gone down in smoke at the hands of a woman who is neither helpless nor hysterical, and they do not want to follow him. The women around will take note as well—sometimes they’re taken aback (we’re all products of our culture, after all), but more often they smile, occasionally they applaud, and sometimes a woman who has never heard of confrontation will even join in to help.

Women who have witnessed a confrontation will sometimes ask, afterward, “What did you just do? How did you just do that?” For women, just watching a principled confrontation can be a revelation—and a source of new strength to stand up to harassers themselves.

On a broader, societal level, confrontation systematically breaks through both sides of the sexist behavioral norms that legitimize harassment—men’s long-standing “right” to harass and women’s passive, victimized response patterns. Confrontation creates a new climate of risk for men who harass, as a direct result of women’s unilateral action. There is no need (and no reason) to wait for harassers to stop on their own initiative. As a social practice, harassment is too widespread, too costly for women, and too damaging; we do not have the luxury of waiting for men to “get it” on their own. Women who confront not only demonstrate a new pattern of female behavior, but, like women who make a neighborhood harassment-free, shift the context in which the harassers operate. When confrontation becomes a standard response to harassment, the existing societal structure of reward and risk is reversed. The behavioral patterns that made harassment work no longer apply. The status quo is gone; harassment is no longer safe for men. We begin to replace sexism with the basic human value of respect.
6. Ibid.
8. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). For a powerful account of one woman who fought back, see Melton A. McLaurin, Celia, A Slave (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991). Celia, a slave in Callaway County, Missouri, was repeatedly raped by her owner, bore him two children, and eventually killed him in self-defense, in her own cabin. The state of Missouri convicted Celia of murder and hung her in December 1855, at the age of nineteen.
10. Ibid., 59.
14. Wertheimer, We Were There, 238-40.