Dressed for Attention?
Investigating the Link Between Outfits and Catcalling Incidents

Maia Adar

Abstract– *This study investigated whether women are catcalled more frequently when wearing a conservative outfit. Six female participants recorded 25 hours of walking data in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We found that the converse is true: catcalling is more frequent when wearing a revealing outfit, particularly when showing more skin and when the top is more revealing. This seems intuitive, but it is counter to my hypothesis based on anecdotal experiences of being catcalled when wearing conservative outfits (likely an example of attention bias). The results imply that women can affect how much catcalling attention they receive by selecting a more conservative or revealing outfit.*

Maia Adar is with Cosimo Research, email: maia@cosimoresearch.com

I. INTRODUCTION

Catcalling is when a person makes a sexual comment or expression at a woman walking down the street. Being catcalled is a common occurrence for many women, especially in cities where it is culturally popular. (Many men do not realize how common it is since it typically occurs when they are not present.) As a female resident of San Juan, Puerto Rico, I perceived that I was being catcalled regardless of how I dressed. Through conversation with other women, I hypothesized that I was actually being catcalled *more often* when I dressed *more conservatively*. Perhaps this was due to a desire to intimidate rather than actual sexual interest. I organized a study to investigate whether outfits actually affect catcalling frequency.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research typically doesn't explore what factors affect catcalling frequency. When surveyed, men report that flirting and expressing sexual interest in the target are the main motivations for catcalling, and they hope to receive friendliness as a response (Walton & Pedersen, 2022). Studies have

also found a link between catcalling behavior and certain personality traits, such as self-ascribed masculinity (Walton & Pederson, 2022), low honesty-humility, and low agreeableness (Lee, Gizzarone, & Ashton, 2003).

One survey of undergraduates at an Israeli university found no correlation between women's reported style of dress and whether they had ever experienced sexual violence (Moor, 2010). But since the results are self-reported and not granular to particular incidents, it does not directly address how outfit variations impact sexual harassment.

III. METHODS

The study began in March 2023 and was re-continued in December 2023 - January 2024. Data was collected during all hours of the day.

In addition to myself, I recruited five female friends, aged 23 to 32, who live in San Juan. For feasibility, I did not assign outfit treatments, but simply asked everyone to record their outfits, the amount of time, and the number of catcalls that occurred each time they went for a walk. I offered a small payment as incentive but ensured quality by knowing each woman personally and encouraging enthusiasm about the research in a group chat.

Outfits were coded by top coveredness, bottom coveredness, top tightness, and bottom tightness. Short pants, short skirts, or revealed shoulders were considered uncovered; long pants or covered shoulders were considered covered. Overall outfit revealingness scores were a sum of one point per tight clothing piece and one point per uncovered clothing piece (e.g. 3 points for an uncovered, tight top and uncovered, loose bottom).

Catcalls were scored as two points if there was a clear catcall (e.g. kissy face, direct comment or yelling) and one point if it was unclear (e.g. a honk). See Appendix A for the instructions that were provided to participants.

In total, we collected 25 hours of walking data and 69 total points of catcalling incidents (about 35 catcalls).

Note that this is an average of *1.38 catcalls per hour*, a prevalence that may surprise people.

IV. RESULTS

Contrary to the hypothesis, outfit uncoveredness, outfit tightness, and total outfit revealingness were all associated with higher rates of catcalling.

When wearing covered top and bottom, participants received 0.69 catcalls per hour, compared to 2.46 catcalls per hour when wearing one or both pieces uncovered (p=0.0013) (Figure 1). Outfits with more tight pieces had more catcalls, but this association was not significant (p=0.136) (Fig. 2).
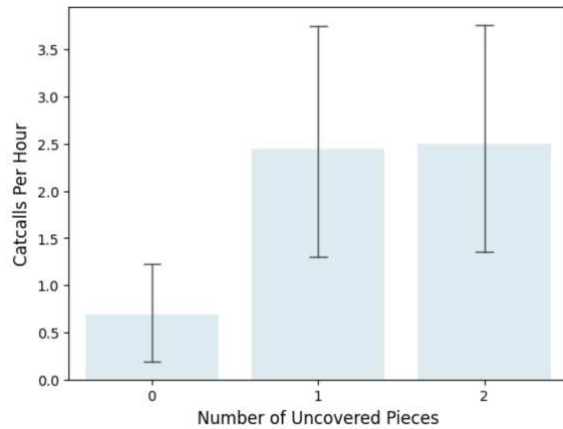
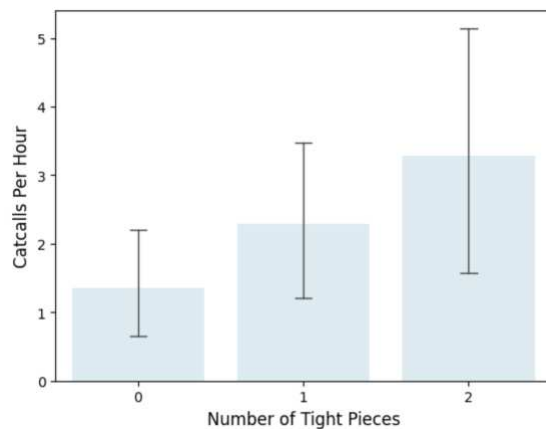Figure 1. Outfit Uncoveredness vs Catcalls.

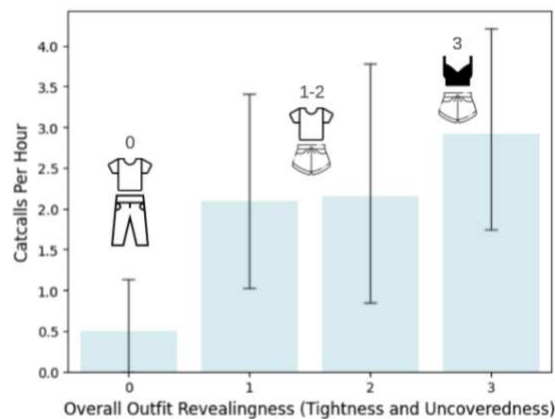Figure 2. Outfit Tightness vs Catcalls.

Figure 3. Overall Outfit Revealingness vs Catcalls.

Catcalling also increased with overall outfit revealingness, when combining tightness and uncoveredness into one measure (p=0.082) [Fig 3]. There are between 8 and 15 samples in each outfit revealingness category, but the error bars are large due to the limited sample size and the inherent variability within each category.

A tight, uncovered outfit garnered nearly 6x the number of catcalls compared to a completely conservative outfit.

Top revealingess had a mildly stronger association with catcalling than bottom revealingess, with effect sizes of 0.11 and 0.05 respectively. Effect size was calculated using Eta Squared (η^2) as part of the ANOVA procedure.

V. DISCUSSION

This study disproved the hypothesis that catcalling is higher for more conservative outfits. The converse is true: catcalling is higher for more *revealing* outfits.

I suspect that I (and other women I had spoken to about it) originally perceived this because we pay more attention to catcalls when wearing conservative outfits, since they are more unexpected. This is known as attention bias (Azriel & Bar-Haim, 2020).

In particular, it was found that top revealingness and overall outfit uncoveredness have a stronger association with catcalling. Most of the

catcalling occurred from people driving by in cars, and revealing tops and bare skin may be more noticeable from a distance.

Although participants were instructed to record all walks, and many walks did record 0 points, it's still possible that participants were more likely to remember to record data when they got catcalled. This may affect the overall prevalence, but is unlikely to have a confounding effect on the outcome since the effect is still seen within the subset of cases where participants remembered to record.

Future research can investigate other variables that may affect catcalling, such as time of day, location, local cultural norms, walking speed, hairstyle, makeup, and other factors.

It is also interesting to consider how catcalling relates to sexual attention in other scenarios. How much does outfit revealingness predict how much sexual attention a woman would receive in various social and professional situations, e.g. at a business conference?

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Catcalling is more frequent when wearing a revealing outfit, particularly when showing more skin and when the top is more revealing. These results suggest that if women do not want to be catcalled, one way to decrease the likelihood of it happening would be to wear looser and more covered clothing. Although this may be considered to be an unfair onus on women, it is a method in which they can influence the attention received within the current cultural environment. Conversely, if women wish to increase catcalling attention, they can wear tighter and more uncovered clothing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

APPENDIX

A. Instructions for Data Collection:

All you have to do is go about your regular life, wearing whatever you would normally wear and taking your normal walks, and then record in the spreadsheet what you were wearing and how many times you were catcalled. I will send you $20 for every 10 entries recorded, just as a little incentive to do it :).

Instructions:

- Walks need to be at least 10 minutes to count.

- The data we need is: top/bottom tightness, top/bottom coveredness, how long you walked for, and how many times you were catcalled. You can also add notes if anything notable happened.

- Short pants/skirts or revealed shoulders is considered uncovered, long pants or covered shoulders is considered covered

- Use your best judgment on tightness

- How long you walked for = record in minutes, rounded to the nearest 10 minutes

- Catcalling score = 2 points if you are catcalled (eg kissy face at you, making a comment, yelling at you, etc), 1 point if you aren't sure (eg they honked but you are not sure if it was at you)

Please don't participate if this makes you uncomfortable at all, I know it can be annoying/unpleasant to get catcalled or to have to think about it. Also if you have questions or if you know others who would be interested in doing this let me know! Appreciate your help❤️

B. Raw Data available at:

https://blush-agreeable-canidae-823.mypinata.cloud/ipfs/QmNY8MWptJabkaEq6AXyM6Qy6Lo817P56Tpahc51s6QmBc/Adar_2024_Catcall-Data%20_Appendix_B.csv

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