

# #HARASSMENTIS

AN EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY & STREET HARASSMENT



***hollaback!***



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## **PREFACE** *and Acknowledgements*

The dramatic rise in media attention to street harassment over the past few years has brought a windfall of attention to the issue, but it has led to a somewhat stunted conversation about street harassment. The conversation is mostly about women, sometimes about LGBTQ folks, but rarely does it encompass the breadth of who we are -- and how we identify. If we continue to let street harassment be defined by the media, we run a serious risk of excluding the voices of those most impacted by street harassment. And let's face it: a bunch of people that look alike does not a movement make.

As you read through this guide you may see yourself in some of these stories, but it's likely that your story is missing. Maybe because you haven't told it yet, or maybe because we were trying to keep this short so that people would actually read it. In any case, it's time to correct that oversight; it's time to tell your story.

Tell us what **#harassmentis** to you. The movement depends on it.

I want to thank the incredible people who had a hand in writing this, our Deputy Director Debjani Roy, Program Associate Jae Cameron, and interns Sarah Scriven and Stacy Bullard. Each one of them put their full hearts into this project and brought critical perspectives to the conversation. We also want to thank our site leaders Rebecca Faria (*Hollaback! Halifax*) and Genevieve Berrick (*Hollaback! LA*), as well our board members Courtney Young and Brad Perry for their thoughtful edits, and Melanie Keller (*Hollaback! Bmore*), Rochelle Keyhan (*Hollaback! Philly*), and Anthonine Pierre (Brooklyn Movement Center) for agreeing to be interviewed. Their commitment to this project shows in every page.

*Emily May*

October 3, 2013



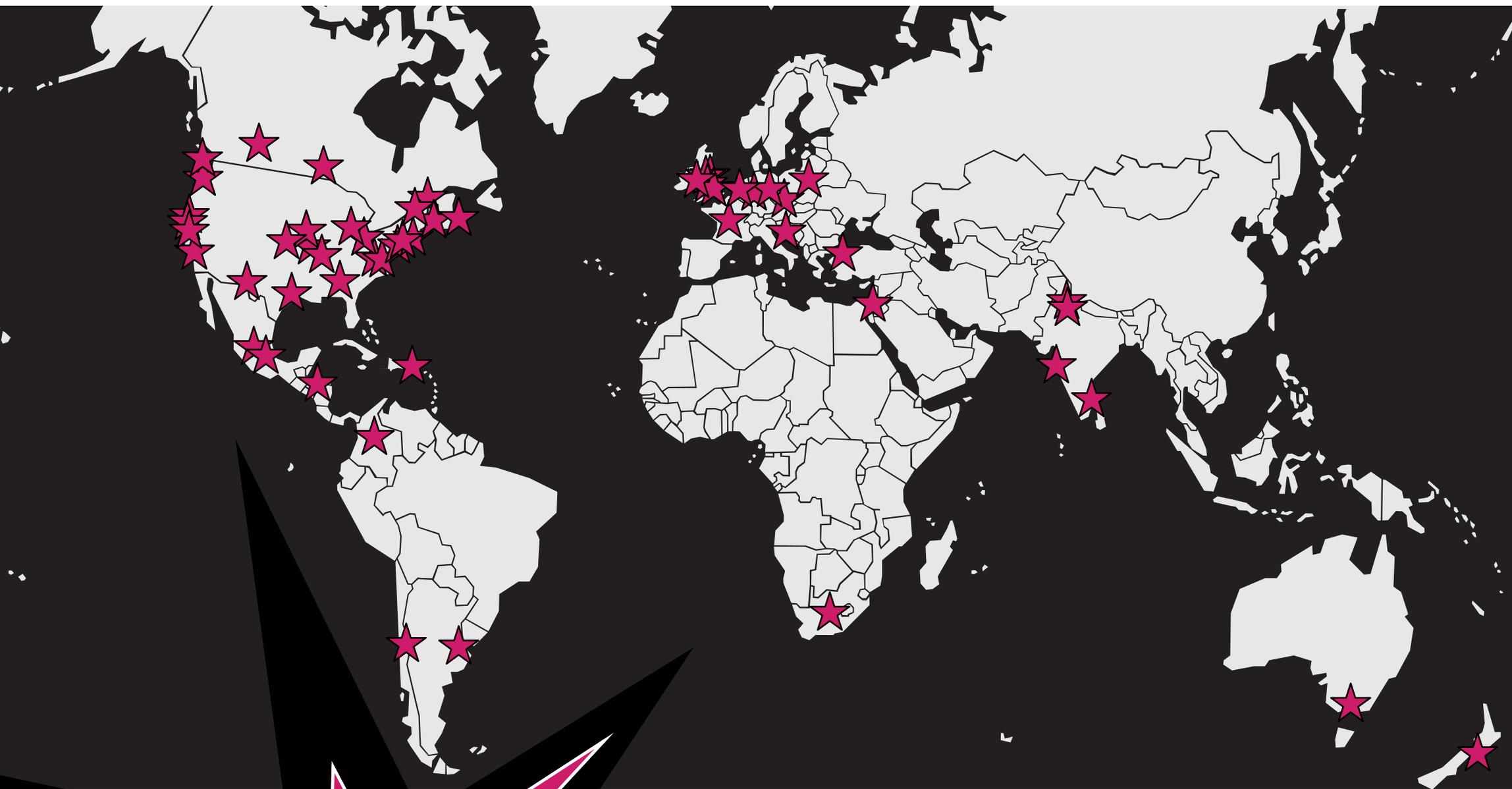
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# ABOUT HOLLABACK!

Hollaback! is a movement to end street harassment, or sexual harassment in public spaces, powered by a network of local activists around the world. We work together to better understand street harassment, to ignite public conversations, and to develop innovative strategies to ensure equal access to public spaces.





AROUND THE WORLD

***hollaback!***



# HOW DOES HOLLABACK! WORK?

Hollaback! believes that movements start when people share their stories. For this reason, Hollaback! has created a mobile web platform where everyone has a mic. Each voice counts and can make a difference. Coming from sixty-five countries, twenty-two cities, and in twelve different languages, individual stories have shifted our social and cultural understanding of street harassment. Through Hollaback!'s smartphone app, users are encouraged to speak up when they experience or witness harassment by documenting it through a blog post and an optional photo of the harasser, street where the harassment happened, or any representation of their experience. This story will be shared on a publicly viewable map. For those who read the blog, these online stories provide an understanding of what street harassment looks and feels like, and some will walk away knowing for the first time, that they are not alone. Each story redefines what it means to feel safe in our communities. These stories will inspire community members, legislators and others to take street harassment seriously, to approach it with sensitivity, and to develop policies that ensure everyone's safety.

Hollaback! also believes that a movement cannot happen with a bunch of people who look alike. Hollaback!'s decentralized leadership model means that each Hollaback! Site has its own leaders who can respond to the specific needs of their communities and collect stories of harassment within their locale. The ground level work to end street harassment in Los Angeles could look completely different from the needs in Brussels or those in Chandigarh, India. Through this model of organizing, we have found that people who historically have the least access to traditional power are the most eager to bring Hollaback! to their area.

Currently, our site leaders are:

- 78% under the age of 30;
- 55% under the age of 25;
- 36% LGBTQ;
- 29% people of color; and
- 17% identify as having disabilities

With diverse leadership comes a diverse movement and this guide is dedicated to just that.



# INTRODUCTION

Hollaback! began in a moment among a group of friends, men and women, who were discussing their experiences in the streets of New York.

Through storytelling came an understanding that people experience public spaces differently. The more stories that are told, the more we develop the understanding that we all walk different streets.

Street harassment can be sexist, racist, transphobic, homophobic, ableist, sizeist and/or classist: it is an expression of the interlocking and overlapping oppressions we face and it functions as a means to silence our voices and 'keep us in our place.'

This guide explores how the power exerted over individuals has lots to do with our identities or the identities assigned to us by harassers. Experiences of street harassment are shaped by historical context, societal prejudices, climates of inequality and the overall exertion of power attempted by those who harass. It is up to YOU, the individual, to determine whether you have faced street harassment and it is our job to support you through that. The stories submitted to [ihollaback.org](http://ihollaback.org) have inspired and informed this guide. The brave



At Hollaback!, we believe that we all have the right to enjoy equal access to public spaces and we envision a world where street harassment is simply not tolerated.

Hollaback!ers who share their unique stories of street harassment everyday are the very leaders that fuel Hollaback!'s mission to better understand street harassment from multiple and varied perspectives. As we embark on this initial exploration of identity and street harassment, one thing is certain - it is a widespread and global problem that requires us to work together to end it. So, let's start by looking at experiences of street harassment in the United States...





# GENDER & STREET HARASSMENT

“I was waiting to cross the street by work... This guy comes up next to me, gets really close and asks me repeatedly to **“let me see the pussy.”** I moved away from him, but he continued repeating the question. **I was starting to feel unsafe** and I wanted to tell him to leave me alone but **I honestly didn’t know if that would provoke him more and compel him to grab me.** So I just kept moving away and pretending like I did not hear him. It was honestly **the worst feeling in the world, to feel powerless like that** when you can feel your harasser breathing on you and you know there is nothing you can do.”

Gender is a socially constructed category, such as 'woman' and 'man.' Some people identify as women, men, neither, or many and more fluidly. Gender categories hold certain expectations and stereotypes for behavior, such as 'feminine' or 'masculine'. Women, for example, can be seen as 'weak' or 'submissive' and men seen as 'unemotional' or 'aggressive'. At Hollaback!, we think gender stereotypes are so yesterday! That said, these stereotypes, whether we like them or not, impact us:

Studies show that between 70 and 99% of women experience street harassment at some point in their lives. For many, it's a daily reality.

In situations of street harassment, gender discrimination plays out through intimidation, assumed female sexual availability, assumed female inferiority or sexism, and gender-based violence. Responses to gender discrimination includes fear, shame, and anger, with lasting and longer term impacts of depression, anxiety, PTSD and feelings of inferiority.

In Sharon’s story at left, we can see how an experience of sexual objectification on the street leads to feeling unsafe and a fear of escalation.

The rest of the stories in this guide exemplify how individuals are targeted based on their gender identity intersecting with other identities including race/ethnicity, religion, size, ability, etc. Take some time to recognize how multiple identities intersect in the following stories as you read this guide.



# RACE AND ETHNICITY & STREET HARASSMENT

People experience street harassment differently based on their racial and ethnic identities. Race has been defined as a person's physical attributes, including skin color, hair color or eye color, but racial identity is a socially constructed phenomenon, created according to the views of the dominant culture of the white, male racial norm. Ethnicity can include a person's cultural, linguistic, or ancestral identity. These basic definitions of race and ethnicity might leave us wanting, but the point is that how we are perceived racially and ethnically, shapes most of our experiences, including the way we move through and are treated in public space.

In the United States there is a long and often violent history of discrimination and prejudice against people of color. The fight for equal access to public space and against harassment has been a long battle for individuals who sit outside of the dominant culture. Throughout history, race and ethnicity have determined how a person is treated, where/if they can work, where they can live, who they can love and more generally, what spaces they are allowed to inhabit. When we read through stories of street harassment, these realities persist.

**Women of color in the United States, coming from many different backgrounds, have faced varying levels of discrimination along racial and gender lines, resulting in shame and fear.** Also, women of color have been historically objectified, exoticized, deemed sexually available, and commodified, making harassers feel they are free to access their physical bodies, as in the following example:

“I get harassed repeatedly almost to the point **I hate going outside... guys stopping their cars in traffic and blowing and yelling until I say something,** being called 'black bitch' and 'ho' for not saying more than hi, and worst of all BEING GRABBED and having to RUN... its like **WHY DO YOU DO THAT, where do you get that from...** closet full of nice clothes **I'm afraid to wear** because i know that i will be severely harassed, thing is it doesn't matter what I look like or wear – **it happens EVERY TIME.**”

[HTTP://BIT.LY/18PWRWH](http://bit.ly/18PWRWH)



Others point out the blatant racial and gender discrimination, noticing how they are treated differently from others around them:

“So here I am, a 17 year old girl, black (it matters) in her school uniform, just going to the mall to get some stuff, and I hear it. 'Hey-o, pretty girl, lemme holla! Why the long face? I got some stuff to make you smile!'... I watched this guy ask other women 'Hey, miss, would you like to buy some lotions?' But as soon as a black girl walks by you switch up your game? And you don't even care that she's obviously underage?”

<http://bit.ly/1aoKiCo>

Or how they are targeted with cultural stereotypes or racial slurs:

“passed white dude on the street who said 'ne hao' ('how are you' in chinese) in a very mocking tone as I passed. I'm Asian. I was feeling very lighthearted & happy before it happened, so walked on for a bit before it hit me how bad it was.

<http://bit.ly/1bccZHg>

“Then he walked near to me & said loudly so I could hear, 'At least a dog will bark, a black bitch will ignore you'....We need to put a spotlight on such negative treatment. No one in their right mind would consider the comments in the attached video complementary.”

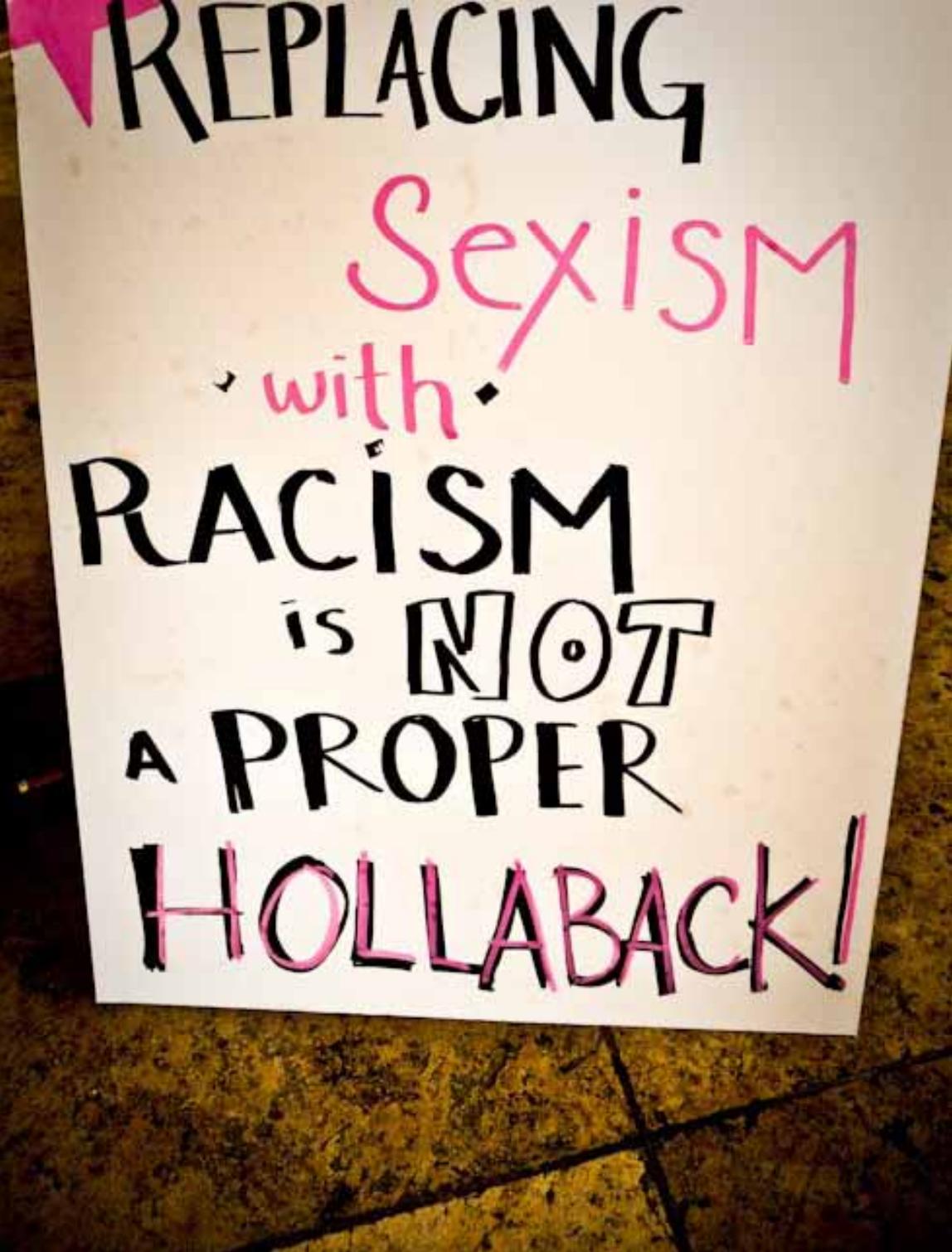
<http://bit.ly/170Ir7a>

If the person does not respond in a way that the harasser wants, the insults ensue, and there is a real fear of escalation:

"[My two girlfriends and I] passed by a group of three guys who were catcalling at us and one of them grabbed my arm as I walked by. I said, 'Ew' and shook him off. When we walked away, one of them shouted, 'Go study for your SATs fucking Chinese bitch.' I marched up to him and his friends and told them not to call me a bitch. The one who called me a Chinese bitch, who was probably about 6'2 and over 200 pounds (I am just over 100 pounds) shoved me two or three times - hard." <http://bit.ly/18pJ34l>

And the racial slurs and harassment can be VERY threatening and isolating, especially if people are watching and nobody does anything:

"I am a woman. I was harassed on the street yesterday, about a block away from my apartment...when I looked, his talking turned to yelling...He was yelling, 'You FUCKING CH\*\*K, FUCKING go back to where you came from, you FUCKING CH\*\*K.' But I'm an American. So I couldn't help myself. And I turned around to glare at him, and he said...Come round this corner and I'll FUCKING bop you one, you FUCKING CH\*\*K.'...So I walked away. Shaking my head. While everyone else on the crowded sidewalk WATCHED."



REPLACING  
Sexism  
with  
RACISM  
is NOT  
A PROPER  
HOLLABACK!

# THE TENSION OF INTRA-RACIAL HARASSMENT

For women of color, racial identity and ethnic make-up are highlighted through the intersection of racial and gender based harassment in public space. Like other forms of gender based violence, street harassers can be of the same race as the people they harass. White women are harassed by White men, Latino women are harassed by Latino men and Black women harassed by Black men. Some harassers may feel that the thresholds and boundaries shift when it comes to intra-racial harassment. A harasser may assume that a shared racial or ethnic identity gives permission or is an open door to inappropriate comments and/or behavior. They may also assume that those they target will not speak up about it. When targets of intra-racial harassment ignore or reject harassment, the situation can often escalate in different ways. The person may be called a 'sell out' to a particular racial or ethnic group, or be called 'stuck up' or 'too good'. This recurring harassment can resonate differently and may be more hurtful when coming from someone from your own community, but every Hollaback!'er knows that accepting harassment has nothing at all to do with acceptance of our community or racial/ethnic identity.



# LESBIAN IDENTITY & STREET HARASSMENT

“At the best of times, it's an annoying reminder of how pervasive and normalized homophobia can be. At the worst of times, the fear of continual harassment has stopped me from being with the people I love.” - Hollaback!er

Someone who identifies as a woman and is primarily attracted to other people who identify and/or present as women may identify as a lesbian.

When a heterosexual couple is together in public space, the chances that the female partner will be harassed decreases. Wish we could call this safety in numbers. Unfortunately, as many Hollaback!ers have pointed out, this can be because women are perceived as protected by or even 'owned by' their male partners by harassers. However, when a lesbian couple is together the chances that either female partner will be harassed increases, both because of gendered stereotypes of female passivity and availability and because of prejudices held by harassers.

Street harassment against lesbian-identified women can take many forms, including physical threats: like in PM's story whose harasser yells “lesbian...i'll fucking kill you.”

Street harassment can include objectification, including feelings of “being watched”, sexualized, judged, or considered “less than” because of your gender and/or sexuality. One Hollaback!er, Emily, writes “...the exact words never matter. It's the idea that you are **constantly being watched with eyes of lust and hatred...that is what hurts.**”

Another Hollaback!er, Sandra, highlights the consequences of objectification, the belief that “it is perfectly acceptable” to treat someone as less than human. She writes “as a woman and as a lesbian, I spend everyday of my life confined by the consequences of men's belief that **it is perfectly acceptable to verbally, physically, and sexually assault, harass, and intimidate me.**”

Many women report threats, assumed sexual availability, uninvited sexual solicitation, and objectification when street harassment overlaps with their lesbian identity. As one Hollaback!er writes, “**there's always someone who feels like they have the right to do or say whatever they want to you when you're a woman out with your partner.**” No one is flattered when a harasser wants to 'join the fun' and many people feel threatened and concerned that verbal harassment will escalate.



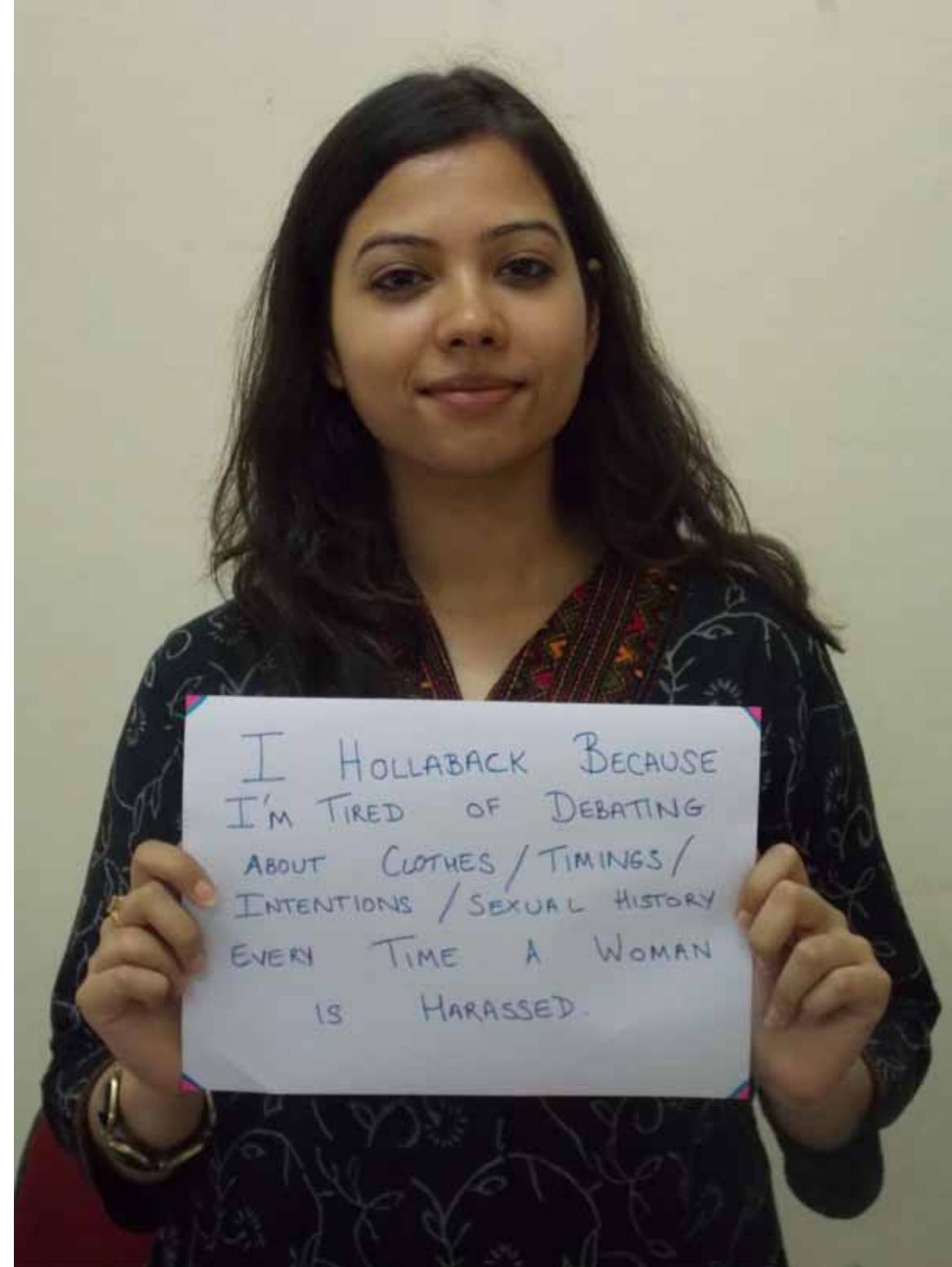
These two stories show how lesbian women are often approached and objectified by harassers and how this harassment can carry a very real fear of escalation and physical violence.

“My girlfriend and I were just walking through the front doors of our apartment building, when some red-faced guy just barked out: LESBIAN! I turned back to glare at him and he just sneered. He added: I guess I’m jealous! **I hate that our orientation defines how people view us and that so many guys see lesbians through the same scope; mere sex objects.**”

<http://bit.ly/170J6oW>

“...I moved in with [my partner] about a month ago and have since been verbally harassed three times. **It is extremely scary, and unfair** that I cannot navigate my own neighborhood without being called names, yelled at, or experiencing other forms of homophobia. Most recently there were a group of about five men outside of a bar who called us lesbians multiple times. I told them to stop and to be polite and they, ever so cleverly responded with ‘she must be the masculine one’.”

<http://bit.ly/1bG1B5C>





# GAY IDENTITY & STREET HARASSMENT

Someone who identifies as a man and is primarily attracted to other people who identify and/or present as men may identify as gay.

On the Hollaback! site, gay men and couples repeatedly report their experiences of homophobic verbal harassment and further physical threats on the street, such as in Kent's story where a harasser "yelled 'faggot' again and *threatened to beat me over the head with a bottle he had in his hand.*"

Harassment can focus on and police gender presentation, such as in one Hollaback!er's story where he was harassed and threatened for appearing feminine. His harassers promised to "break her", until they recognized him as a man and then yelled, "*Shit, it's a guy. Suck my dick, faggot.*"

In the following story, this Hollaback!er highlights how even a simple act of holding hands on the street can carry the threat of homophobic street harassment.

They write,

*"My boyfriend and I were walking into a grocery store on the Eastside holding hands when the people in the car shown below thought it would be a good idea to shout 'fag.' When we both realized where it came from and who had said it, I decided to try and confront the two guys sitting in the backseat. However, my boyfriend was against the idea and the two men (boys) refused to respond to me. **My boyfriend and I should be able to hold hands wherever we like!**"*

<http://bit.ly/19zwOmv>

In this story, Kevin speaks to the underlying threats that can accompany verbal, homophobic street harassment. In expressing his fear and discomfort, Kevin highlights the reality of violence against LGBTQ communities.

*"...We were only a block away from home and a **large, intimidating man** was walking with headphones on from the other side of the street in our direction. He takes off his headphones as he starts to pass us, and mumbles Faggots at us, loud enough for me to hear...Thinking neither of us heard him, he called Faggots at us again, louder this time, and my boyfriend hears him this time. I quietly tell him not to turn around and just ignore it, but it certainly frightened me and is discomfoting to have this happen only a block from where I live!"*

<http://bit.ly/18pxcW8>

# TRANS IDENTITY & STREET HARASSMENT

“I always fancy myself one of the bros. I’ve struggled with the idea of being transgender, but have a deep rooted belief in loving my body no matter what...but [once I was harassed] ..I didn’t feel fear.

**What I did feel though was humiliation and disconnect.**

In one comment a complete stranger disrupted my place in my group.” - Hollaback!er

Transgender people may feel that their assigned sex at birth does not match their internal sex or gender. Trans identities, like most identities, exist on a wide spectrum.

Many people exist outside of the either/or of man or women, or come to those identities in different ways. Sadly, a lot of people who identify as trans and/or gender-non conforming face violence, harassment, sexualization, fetishization, and discrimination. Sometimes this violence can be physical, and sometimes it can also be psychological. Imagine what it feels like to not be seen for who you are.

The story below highlights some of the anger, sadness, and frustration that can come along with not being seen as your gender and experiencing street harassment. Elizabeth writes,

“I was walking out of Starbucks and two college-age looking guys yelled 'faggot' at me. I am a transgender woman and I have no problem with people noticing that I am a transgender woman. **I am very offended when people call me things that I am not.** I was **so angry** that I threw my coffee to the ground and just got in my car and left.” <http://bit.ly/15UoqMs>



The next story sheds light on the very real threat of violence and escalation of street harassment as a trans\* person. One Hollaback!er writes,

“I think often when we speak about transgender issues, that human voice and visibility is missing. Therefore, I feel it is important to share one of my own stories with bathroom harassment. Often when I first was transitioning, I would do my best to avoid public restrooms... When you are transitioning from using the female restrooms to male restrooms a lot changes. You fear going into female restrooms because women constantly tell you that you are in the wrong restroom. They yell at you, and protect their children like you are going to hurt them...See, because **as much as we fear that verbal harassment, I now fear the physical assault** upon entering the men’s restroom. It’s hard to confront those who know you or strangers when they state you don’t have a penis, this means you are not a man, get out, freak, etc...**It’s not only the physical threat that scares me when this happens, but the mental damage of constantly feeling threatened or fearing another assault** as I choose what uniform to wear any given day: is it the straight male, the gay male, the butch female that will cause me the least harm, and more so why must we choose what option means least harm. Which option will disarm those directing assaults at me.”

<http://bit.ly/1fJxjPP>





# QUEER IDENTITY & STREET HARASSMENT

“...I didn’t say anything because being non-binary can already be tricky and they made me feel unsafe” - Hollaback!er

Identifying as queer means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. People who are bisexual, lesbian, gay, polyamorous, polysexual, and/or gender non-conforming may identify as queer. Some people who identify with kink culture or BDSM culture also identify as queer and some people who see themselves as 'straight allies' may identify as queer.

Like any identities that challenge gender and/or sexuality norms, many people who identify as queer face street harassment. This includes verbal harassment and the threat of physical escalation. Also, because some queer identities are 'invisible' in many public spaces, street harassment based on one’s assumed gender and/or sexuality can seem like 'not being seen as who you are' which can be painful, frustrating, and scary.

For example, in Catherine’s story, a harasser yells out “if you’re a woman you should be a woman; don’t pretend to be a man”. In Gen’s story, having a harasser shout out “Are you guys LESBIANS?” made them “**feel unsafe**” and brought up the feeling that “being non-binary can already be tricky.”

One Hollaback!er echoed this fear, saying “**I was scared that I was going to get assaulted** for appearing differently than I should. It happens occasionally, especially to people who appear at all queer.”

Harassment can compound societal pressures to look or act a certain way, as one “non-binary” Hollaback!er notes in their story of harassment: “...[harassment] made me feel **insecure about my appearance** and whether I should change the way I present myself”

In the following story, Blondie shows how they faced homophobic bullying focusing on and sexualizing their queer identity. They note that their harassment just wasn’t taken seriously and was even ignored.

“...My high school years were absolutely plagued with this, to an awful degree. While I proudly identify as queer now, at the time, I assumed I was straight and just a bit more masculine than my peers...**I was called a dyke, ugly, fat, and boys would actually ask me out and verbally harass me** (“Hey, you’re so sexy, show us your tits!”)...My ass...was also slapped regularly, almost every time I had to stand up in class...since they never did anything “worse” than that, the teachers **treated it the same as they did with minor things like name-calling**...the verbal harassment and groping I received was ignored, as was the homophobia (which, while not awful, has prevented me from coming out to people as an adult). Boys need to be taught that treating women and girls this way just isn’t acceptable, or funny - that they aren’t already is a major educational failing.”

<http://bit.ly/19F4HRv>

One Hollaback!er's story shows some of the 'gender policing' that many genderqueer or gender non-conforming people can face while being street harassed.

“...I could hear a man muttering to himself as we got on the Q train at the same time; **he was saying I looked like a man.** I called him out saying I don't need any homophobia or transphobia. **He said if you're a woman you should be a woman; don't pretend to be a man.** As I continued to tell him what he was saying was unacceptable, he acted as if I were the one harassing him rather than vice versa. He said not to worry, that we were done. I told him we were not because he needs to know **this is not OK to do to others in the future.** A wonderful gay man piped up, also telling him that what he was doing was not OK. While I feel confident in my gender presentation, it is always nice to know that someone has your back.”

<http://bit.ly/1hoXb7u>



# SOCIAL CLASS & STREET HARASSMENT

An individual can be harassed in public spaces based on their socioeconomic class. In schools, class differences are often the source of bullying. Similarly on the streets, especially in communities with significant class divides, the power imbalance creates a situation where people who may come from lower income backgrounds are targeted. People from lower socioeconomic classes have historically been treated as 'less than' or have been perceived as sexually available, or at the mercy of those from a higher socioeconomic class. There is also the longstanding myth that harassers come from lower socioeconomic classes. This idea is misleading, and in situations of street harassment people within a lower income bracket are targeted and very often exploited by those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

In the following example, the woman perceived the harasser as feeling entitled to comment on women passing by due to his socioeconomic status:

“I was walking to the bus stop and noticed the man in front of me harassing the woman walking towards us. She ignored him, but I couldn't. He slowed down and as I passed him he started in on me. I stopped, used my height to my advantage (I was a foot taller than he was), and told him that what he was doing is called street harassment. That's all it took. He took off. I can only guess that because he was well-dressed (given the area, perhaps a paralegal?) that **he felt entitled to treat women on the street that way.**”

<http://bit.ly/19zwpjL>



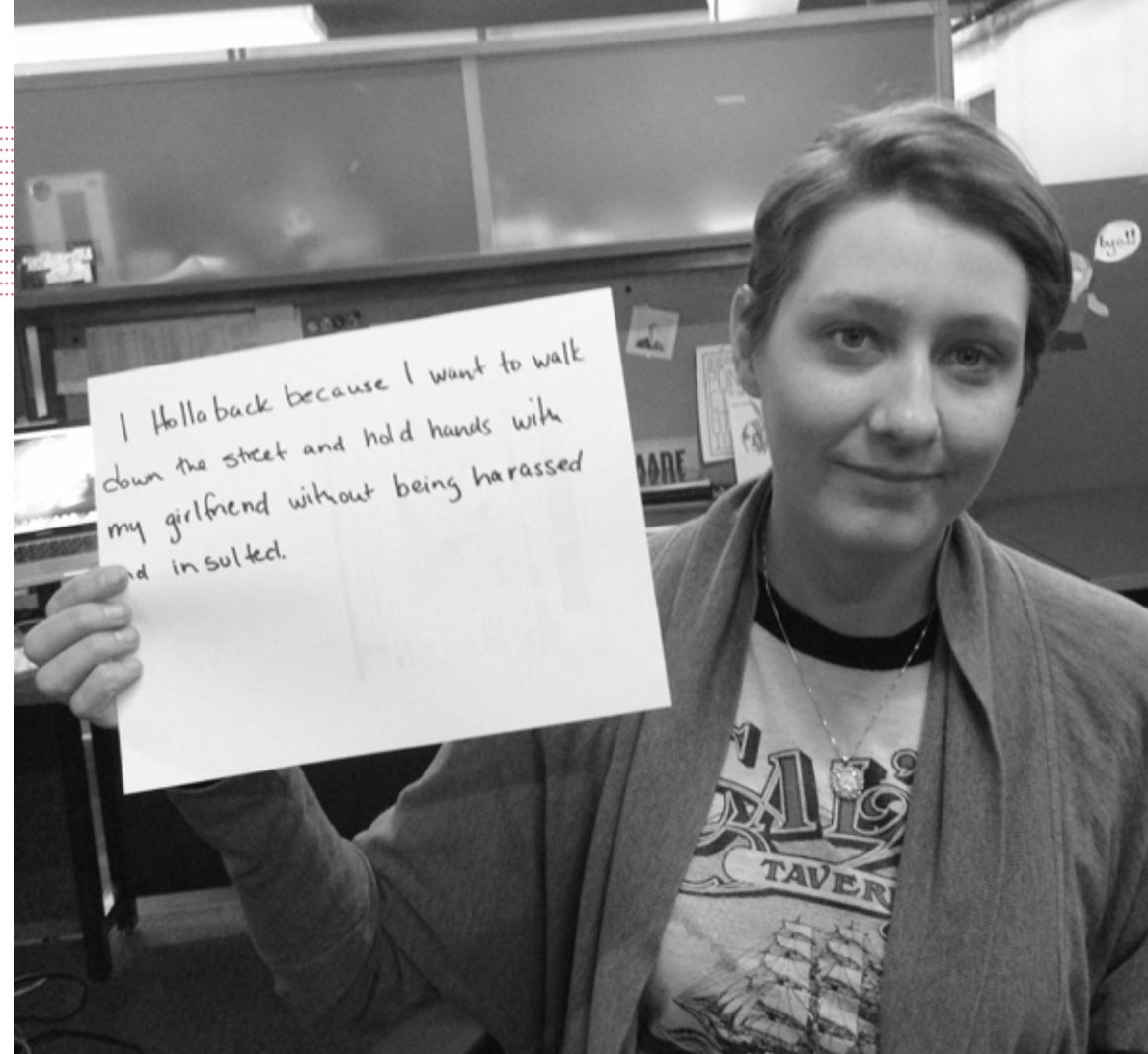
# RELIGION & STREET HARASSMENT

Many people face discrimination and are targets of street harassment because of their religious identity. Those who aren't or do not appear to be part of the dominant religion in the United States encounter different levels of harassment, which can also be tied to other identities including gender, race and ethnicity.

This example shows a woman who is targeted based on gender, race, and religion, while being called a terrorist based on her attire:

“Hi, I’m a Muslim girl and proud to be. **I wear the hijab (head scarf) every wear I go and I have been told several offensive comments and this is one of one of the many encounters I’ve had with an Islamaphobe.** One day me and my friend were shopping at the mall...we were walking by a man and his girlfriend and **while we passed he stared at me and said 'BOOM!' and him and his girlfriend started to laugh at us** but we just ignored them and continued walking. I know that isn't nearly as bad as it gets, I've known people who have been physically assaulted just because they were wearing a head scarf. **I really want to put a stop to this type of harassment and that's why I'm here.**”

<http://bit.ly/1fmP61k>





# AGE

## & STREET HARASSMENT

The cultural perception of age implies a power imbalance, and therefore enables situations of street harassment. Adult harassers may equate the young age of their targets with inexperience or naivety, perceiving them as weak or vulnerable. Conversely, the harassment experienced by adult women by young boys reflects a far-reaching norm where street harassment is an acceptable way for men to interact with women.

The following are examples of how street harassment affects younger generations and is a behavior taught from a young age. This woman has been harassed from a very young age:

**“My first experience with street harassment was about nine or ten... Ever since then men always go out of their way to honk their horn, follow me as I walk home and say I have nice ass... Women should not be objectified and judged like an item on an auction list and shouldn't have to limit themselves in the way they dress to accommodate and hopefully repel creeps like them.”**

<http://bit.ly/18ZFYXb>

This story was shared by a teenager who was violated by a man passing by in a car as she walked home:

**“I'm a 15 year old girl.** Today i was walking home from my friends house around 4pm and i was waiting to cross the street. So while waiting... this disgusting human being, in a white old car slows down and stops in front of me, I thought, to turn to the other street. I realized he'd stopped so i backed up away from him. I have no idea why i stepped forward again, but when i did i saw what he was doing (public masturbation). **I stepped away immediately and crossed the street running, I was so terrified!**”

<http://bit.ly/170Ir7a>

In this example, a teenager is harassed in a store by an older man:

**“I was just minding my own business in my local Wal-Mart when a man much older than me walked up. I'm only 15 was 14 at the time, he had to be in his late 20s.** He asked me if he could ask me a question. Me being local I assumed that he was from out of town and needed to know where the toilet paper was or something...Instead he asked me for my phone number...”

<http://bit.ly/1aoKJMZ>

The following is an example of a teenager who is objectified and harassed by a man in a car as she simply walks down the street:

“I was walking to San Leandro Bart in a short dress. **I’m 16. A man, of at least 50, leaned out of his car and said “hey baby. I like the way you walk.”** I was so gross and I wanted to barf because it’s not okay to hit on random 16 year old girls walking down the street. It’s not okay to try to hit on anyone walking down the street.”

<http://bit.ly/19zwGDt>

Some women are targeted and harassed by young men and boys. The following story is told by a woman who was harassed by five boys:

“I was walking to the store and suddenly **I heard a group of 5 twelve-year old boys yelling remarks about my body from across the street.** Then they were right behind me and as I sped up they started running ‘excuse me miss, do you have a boyfriend?’ After a few blocks I finally stopped and turned around to tell them I wasn’t going to engage in a conversation because that’s not the way to talk to women. ‘I said excuse me!’ He retorted. **I shouldn’t have to defend myself to a child half my age.**”

<http://bit.ly/18pJrQI>



# SIZE

## & STREET HARASSMENT

Many people find that their size changes how people interact with them, including in their experiences of street harassment. This can include feelings of 'being invisible' or being denied sexual agency. It can also include sizeism-based harassment, uninvited comments, verbal abuse, and threats.

Sizeism is discrimination based on the size of someone's body. It can take a lot of forms, including fat shaming and body snarking (criticizing someone's body or body parts).

This Hollaback!er shares a story of street harassment that focused on their size, showing how they were targeted and felt "mortified":

"...I'm a big girl-overweight, fat, call it what you will... Suddenly, out of nowhere, my speaking was interrupted by a young man screaming out of his car window: 'Get off that statue! You'll break it!!' **I felt my face get hot** as my companions looked shocked, staring at the passing car as it drove away. **I wanted to sink into the ground, I was so mortified.** I share this so that people will realize that street harassment is not just about cat-calling conventionally attractive women. It's also about shaming women you think are unattractive."

<http://bit.ly/1fmQ7Xf>

Liza's story below speaks to how pervasive 'body policing', or 'fat shaming', can be. How often do you feel you have the 'right' to comment on someone's body and size?

"I was standing on the F train today...my dad pointed to this guy and said 'I think he's trying to tell you something.' So I took out my earphones and looked over. **The guy made a little running motion, then mouthed 'one hour, every morning.'** It clicked that he was telling me I needed to **exercise more.** So, loudly, I said 'Are you telling me I'm fat?' ...My dad was like, 'Is that really what he said?' So I (still loudly) said 'He's telling me I need to go running every morning.' **It's just another reminder that if you dare to be fat in public – especially if you are a woman – your body is not yours.**"

<http://bit.ly/16IVVRA>



# ABILITY & STREET HARASSMENT

Ableism is when individuals are discriminated against based on disabilities. Disabilities can be physical, mental, cognitive; visible or invisible. In situations of street harassment, individuals who have visible disabilities face a different set of risks and threats, especially when it comes to mobility and physical space. The following example is told from the perspective of a bystander:

“My girlfriend and I were waiting for a bus, and some guy kept standing really close and trying to chat up a woman. She was in a wheelchair, and the street was crowded, so **when she was trying to inch away from him, he had a significant edge on maneuvering around, and kept getting close.** I stepped in between, and asked him why he had to make people uncomfortable. He was more confused than confrontational... I kept myself between him and the wheelchair using woman (as well as my girlfriend) until we got on the bus.”

<http://bit.ly/182Je74>



The following was shared by a person with a disability who was harassed alongside his caregiver by a neighbor:

“I’m an F to M, pre-op...I’m also partially handicapped by my [rheumatoid arthritis] and have had caregivers to help with this. One, a M to F I used to live with, **got so fed up with the attitudes in the neighborhood she quit,** so now I have a feisty lady who comes to help. Directly below me is an older man. Since he moved in there is a constant flow of rude people standing around on his porch, and they had taken to harassing the lady who works for me....he used it to “booty call” her, demanding she come down and suck his dick. When she told him no thank you, **he decided to direct his anger at me...Now every time I step out on my porch I get catcalls or threats, as does she.**”

<http://bit.ly/1dJenPd>

# EMOTIONAL IMPACTS OF STREET HARASSMENT

Street harassment comes in many forms and can have many emotional repercussions. It is up to the individual to determine if what they have experienced is in fact street harassment and there is no right or singular way to respond. When we talk about intersectionality and street harassment, we're talking about identities and what a harasser perceives (or does not perceive) about those identities. Often these identities carry histories of discrimination, both culturally and in an individual's own life experiences. Because of these histories, many people can have conflicting feelings about harassment that focuses on their identities.

The effects of street harassment on an individual are very similar to the effects of other forms of violence against women and LGBTQ persons, including domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and workplace sexual harassment. One of the key differences with regard to street harassment is the fact that it is not considered as serious as other forms of violence, making targets feel that they are overreacting to their experiences, or that their overall discomfort and fears regarding harassment are unfounded. This can lead to a sense of self-doubt, low self-esteem/self worth, and over time feelings of despair. This can also reduce an individual's feeling of safety, impacting their mobility around public spaces, including their use of public transportation.

According to the National Women's Law Center, "[s]exual harassment often has a serious and negative impact on women's physical and emotional health, and the more severe the harassment, the more severe the reaction." [1] Short-term and long-term effects of street harassment frequently reported by women include:

- anxiety
- depression
- weight loss or gain
- headaches
- stress
- sleep disturbance
- loss of appetite

Within a sample of 223 stories of street harassment taken from the Hollaback! website, the Worker Institute at Cornell ILR found the following:

"The anecdotes that we reviewed indicated that the severity of one's emotional reaction to an experience of street harassment varied, but that any type of harassment (i.e. verbal, groping, assault) could produce extreme feelings of fear, anger, shame, etc. This indicates that it may be the violation of being harassed, rather than the specific behavior, that is one of the main drivers of a target's emotional response. Thus an 'outsider' might deem the situation 'minor' or 'not a threat' but the reaction of the target is likely to be just as severe because of the experience of vulnerability and the latent threat of escalation."

For the full report, go here: [http://www.ihollaback.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/corrected-dataILR\\_Report\\_TARGET\\_1B\\_10232012-1.pdf](http://www.ihollaback.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/corrected-dataILR_Report_TARGET_1B_10232012-1.pdf)

*We at Hollaback! want to say that street harassment is not your fault. Let's stand up together and put a stop to it, for all of us!*

# BARRIERS TO REPORTING & CRIMINALIZING

Reporting street harassment is further complicated when race, sexuality, immigration status, and other identities are involved. For women who share the broader experience of racial discrimination and who may have been intra-racially harassed or harassed by another person of color, the thought of reporting men who already face institutional and systematic discrimination can carry with it a personal sense of responsibility. In such cases, an individual may also hesitate to report out of fear of betraying his or her community, or being perceived as someone who entrusted local officials over their family and/or community. Same goes to reporting individuals who may not be citizens of the U.S., since criminalization impacts non-citizens differently and harshly. Also, those who do not hold a visa, residency or citizenship may experience the risk of removal proceedings or may face detention.

Taking into consideration the way that people of color are often racially profiled and criminalized unjustly in our society and the interconnectedness for these communities, Hollaback! does not endorse increased criminalization. For these reasons, Hollaback! encourages community based responses and prevention-based policy recommendations, such as community safety audits, group dialogues, workshops on bystander intervention, and other efforts that acknowledge the different ways in which we all have experienced street harassment. We stand firm in our vow to not fight the movement to end street harassment at the expense of any other social justice issues.



Many groups face a variety of barriers and consequences when reporting harassment. The following are just a few examples:

**WOMEN OF COLOR** often have to think through their racial and gendered concerns in reporting harassment to the police, having faced a long history of prejudice and discrimination, including perceptions of being over-sexualized, highly objectified, and eroticized. Reports made by many women of color are not taken as seriously as she is more likely to be subjected to a line of questioning regarding what she was wearing or what she might have said or done to encourage the harasser.

Many **IMMIGRANT WOMEN** fear that because they do not look like the dominant culture, if they turn to law enforcement, they will be discriminated against through questioning regarding their immigration status. For women who do not hold a visa or who are non-citizens, they face a different level of risk when reporting.

For those **WHO ARE NOT FLUENT IN ENGLISH** or who may have apprehensions about their fluency, law enforcement can make them feel incompetent by asking them to repeat the story, saying they don't understand what they are saying, or by being dismissive of the report altogether.

**WOMEN OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES** who report harassment may be told things like "I'm sure it's much worse where you come from/your part of the world" or "isn't this normal in your culture/community?"

People in **LGBTQ COMMUNITIES** face concerns of 'typecasting' themselves and members of their community or of being disregarded or further persecuted by authority figures.

**MEN** and people in same-sex relationships face barriers to reporting sexual harassment and assault, finding that they are not taken seriously or are stigmatized and disbelieved.

The reporting process can in turn become an extension of the harassment already experienced, and lead to further trauma. Identifying as one or more of the above identities who have historically faced oppression at the hands of authorities can make reporting an absolute last resort because of the resulting discrimination one might face.

Not only are barriers faced in the reporting process, but criminalizing street harassment means certain communities that are already disproportionately targeted by our flawed criminal justice system will be further targeted, especially in a culture where there is a longstanding myth that men of color are sexual predators. This will have an overall negative and damaging impact on families and communities within already marginalized and targeted groups. For these reasons, Hollaback! prefers to take community based approaches and advocates for prevention based policy initiatives in an effort stop street harassment from occurring in the first place.



# INTERSECTIONALITY & STREET HARASSMENT

Throughout this guide, we've been asking you as a reader to pay attention to how people's identities shape how they experience street harassment. As you've looked over these stories of sexism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and sizeism, you may have noticed that many people don't identify as 'just' one thing, and that they are experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and oppression, resulting in layers of disempowerment and marginalization. This is not restricted only to the streets and other public spaces. This affects how we represent in the classrooms, in the board/meeting rooms, in the media, political spaces, in activist circles, and more generally, in life. This impacts our sense of safety, community, well-being, and freedom. Having an intersectional approach to street harassment means intentionally recognizing the interconnectedness of each person's identities and oppressions.

One Hollaback!er summarizes it perfectly. Through sharing her story, she raises the confusion that many of us experience when we encounter street harassment: why did this happen to me? She writes, *"[My girlfriend and I] aren't sure if he was harassing us because we are women or because we are Asian. What we are sure of is that he verbally and physically assaulted me and that we felt threatened and unsafe."*

*We need to change the way that we talk about street harassment and open up the conversation. So let's start with what you can do today.*



# WHAT YOU CAN DO!

*Street harassment has got to end. Not just for me or you, but for everyone!*

We want to expand the conversation about street harassment. This guide is designed to spark a much larger conversation with yourself, your friends and colleagues, your family, and your community. Let's work together to expand our definitions of street harassment and let each other know that we've got your back! Together we can change the conversation around street harassment. Together we can stand up against all forms of oppression and fight for our right to feel safe in public space. So let's continue this conversation because the movement depends on it. Tell us what #harassmentis to you.

Blog, vlog, tweet, post, or email your story of what #harassmentis because we all need to better understand your experience of street harassment in order to collectively end it. And it all begins with you sharing your story.

*Go for it! It might not be easy and you might need to muster up some courage and strength to recount your experience, but we're listening. Share your story at [ihollaback.org](http://ihollaback.org), on twitter @ihollaback, on our 'Harassment Is' Tumblr page, or on our Facebook page with #harassmentis and let your voice be heard. The future of this conversation and impending solutions to street harassment depends on everyone's voice and experience. The better we collectively understand experiences and impacts, the better solutions we will all come up with.*



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