Street Harassment

Introduction
Street harassment is any action or comment between strangers in public places that is disrespectful, unwelcome, threatening and/or harassing and is motivated by gender. It ranges from leers, whistles, honks, kissing noises, and non-sexually explicit evaluative comments, to vulgar gestures, sexually charged comments, flashing, and stalking, to illegal actions like public masturbation, sexual touching, assault, and murder.

What is the prevalence?
Studies around the world show that 80 to 100 percent of women experience street harassment. In a study of 816 women from 23 countries, almost one in four had experienced street harassment by age 12 (22%) and nearly 90% by age 19.

Why does it matter?
Most street harassment affects women the most. It limits women’s access to public spaces, leads most women to stay “on guard,” when they are alone, and even causes some women to move or change jobs to avoid the behavior. It is a human rights and gender equality issue.

How does it relate to sexual assault and rape?
Street harassment can remind women of their vulnerability to rape and it can feel retriggering to survivors of sexual assault and rape. Also, sometimes street harassment is used as “rape-testing” to see how likely it is a person would fight back if attacked.

Why does harassment occur?
Most street harassment occurs as part of homo-sociality, which is when men show off or try to impress other men or women show off or try to impress other women. That’s why many harassers do so in groups. Depending on the action, some harassers try to purposely humiliate or exert power over someone while others think they’re giving “compliments.” Revealing clothing does not increase the chances of assault. Men who engage in victim-blaming behavior of women are also more likely to harass women in public.

What can we do?
- Educate youth and our peers about appropriate, respectful ways to interact in public.
- Hold harassers accountable through assertive responses or reporting them.
- Raise awareness that street harassment is a problem through sharing stories and awareness-raising initiatives.

To learn more and find more ideas, visit Hollaback Bmore! and Stop Street Harassment.

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