

The definition of street harassment

- An interaction in a public space that makes you feel sexualized, intimidated, embarrassed, objectified, violated, attacked, or unsafe.
- An interaction in a public space that restricts your movement or makes you modify your behavior in an attempt to avoid the possibility of being verbally and/or physically harassed.

Behaviors that represent street harassment

Usually these behaviors are inappropriate ways to get a woman's attention:

- Whistling, kissing noises, pssst noises
- Comments like "Give me a smile!" and "Hey baby!"
- Yelling from a distance
- Blocking a woman's path
- Grabbing, groping, touching
- Following (on foot, in a vehicle)
- Honking

Excuses offered for harassing women

- **Being nice/offering a "compliment."** An unwelcome personal comment such as "Damn baby, you have a banging booty" yelled across a crowded city street may make a woman feel embarrassed.
- **The way a woman is dressed.** This is no justification for harassment. No matter what a woman is wearing, a man has no right to comment on her body. Besides, women get harassed while wearing baggy sweats and sneakers, so this theory has been disproven time and time again.
- **Some women "like it."** What one person finds offensive, another may not. Regardless, any unwanted interaction is still street harassment.

Why is street harassment so dangerous?

Women and girls experience harassment daily, often changing their behavior in an attempt to avoid it. Harassment happens while we are walking down the street, riding our bikes, on public transportation, etc. It often escalates to derogatory name-calling and even violence. Some harassers can be testing a woman to see if she is an easy target for sexual assault. **This is called rape-testing.** Street harassment should not be considered a normal interaction between men and women. Harassing a woman and/or assaulting her because she does not want to talk to a man is unacceptable behavior and should always be seen as such.

So what can we do?

Remember that each situation is different!

There is no set response for street harassment so do what you feel is best for your personal safety. Some tips that may help are:

- **Carry yourself assertively.** Don't be afraid to make eye contact (you never know when you may need to identify someone).
- **Do not ignore the harassment.** Ignoring the harassment does not make it stop and the harasser may feel like this behavior is acceptable. You will ultimately carry the angry feelings about the incident if you have not done anything to combat it
- **Avoid aggressive responses.** Keep your voice cool and collected. Remember, yelling and cursing may escalate a potentially dangerous situation.

What else can we do?

- **Try simple phrases.**
"Stop harassing women - no one likes it."
"Show some respect."
"That is not the way to approach a woman."
"Dejeme pasar en paz."
"That's my ass, not yours - remove your hand." (This may work for the groper at the club.)
"Stop staring at me, it's creepy."
Repeat yourself if you need to.
- **Don't stop to argue.** Keep walking, jogging, etc. as you respond. You decide when the interaction is finished and leave.
- **Show another woman your support.** The next time you see a woman being harassed say something positive to her!
- **GIVE THIS PAMPHLET TO A MAN!**
- **Don't be discouraged.** Even if the harasser does not immediately change his behavior, you did something.
- **Do what you feel is best for your personal safety, even if it means NOT following these tips!**

What can men do?

- Stop harassing women!!! No one likes it!
- Don't be silent when you see another man harassing a woman. Address the inappropriate behavior. Silence is considered approval and sometimes all it takes is one man stating that he is not down to make the others stop.
- Ask the women in your lives about their experiences. Every woman has a story about being harassed. The stories will surprise you!

Some of our Stories

- I was walking up Columbia Road with a male friend one night and we passed through a group of teenage boys. One of them grabbed my ass as I walked by. I was so angry that I turned and punched the nearest boy in the head. As I shouted at them, my friend dragged me away before anything else happened.
- I was walking down the street and there were two older men on bicycles. One kept yelling at me to get my attention and continued to do so as I came to a crosswalk with a large group of people. I walked over to him and told him there was an appropriate way to approach a woman and his approach was not it.
- I was walking down the street and this man kept talking to me even though I ignored him. Finally I told him to go away and he said "Bitch, you're not even cute."
- I go through Union Station everyday and I would say hello to the newspaper guy. One day he was with a friend and after we said hello, he yelled after me "my beautiful black princess". I felt embarrassed because it drew attention to me in such a public way. Who was he to call me his anything?
- I was walking home from work and there was a guy trying to hit on me. I decided to ignore him and as I was walking away he threw a bottle at my head.

What is INCITE?

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.

If you are concerned about the many forms of violence facing women of color around the world, get involved with INCITE! You can find out more about the organization and the issues around which we organize by signing up to receive the national newsletter or the national email list. The national website will also have information about local chapters nationwide.

The INCITE national website is:
<http://www.incite-national.org/>

The INCITE DC local chapter is comprised of women from the metropolitan area—DC, MD, & VA. If you are interested in getting more involved or joining the local listserv please e-mail incite_dc@yahoo.com.

Cover Graphic by Olga Francois

END Street Harassment



INCITE!
Women of Color Against Violence