

Summary Report on Hollaback! Street Harassment Data

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This report summarizes the data available from 99 street¹ harassment incidents that occurred in New York City and were reported to Hollaback! between October 2005 and February 2011. Hollaback! collected the data from women who self-reported an incident description either through the Hollaback! website or via a personal cellphone. Respondents were asked to submit their names, email addresses, the closest street intersection to where the incident occurred, and a description of the incident. Data was de-identified and cleaned prior to analysis.²

Since the incident survey form is open-ended, the data available was inconsistent from one submission to the next. For this reason, we should be cautious about drawing conclusions from this summary, as the details reported varied substantially. Nonetheless, the data available provides an excellent foundation for further inquiry, and the summary below could be used to develop a detailed survey instrument at a future date.

Overall, the data presents a few major themes. First, the vast majority of reported incidents occurred in Manhattan and Brooklyn, suggesting that street harassment clusters geographically (please see the accompanying spatial analysis for further exploration). In addition, nearly all victims were female and all but two perpetrators were male. Summary statistics are organized into four categories: incident location and context, incident description, victim description, and perpetrator description.

Incident Location and Context

Table 1: Street Harassment by Borough

Borough	Frequency	Percent
Manhattan	59	59.6%
Brooklyn	22	22.2
Queens	17	17.2
Bronx	1	1.0
Staten Island	0	0.0
Total	99	100.0

Table 2: Street Harassment by Type of Location

Type of location	Frequency	Percent
Street/sidewalk	60	60.6%
Subway/subway station/bus	22	22.2
Bar/restaurant/private business	13	13.1
Park/square	3	3.0
Other	1	1.0
Total	99	100.0

Most reported incidents took place in Manhattan and Brooklyn, and no reported incidents occurred in Staten Island. About 60% of reported incidents happened on the street, followed by about 22% perpetrated on public transportation vehicles or in subway stations. This suggests that

¹ In this report, I use Hollaback's term "street harassment." However, it should be noted that not all of the incidents actually occurred in a street or public space- 13 narratives described incidents that occurred in bars, restaurants, etc.

² For details, please see the methods discussion in the Appendix below.

stranger-perpetrated street harassment is more likely to occur in places where many people cross paths, and where there is a high degree of anonymity.

In addition, 34 respondents noted that the event occurred during the day, and 32 incidents happened at night, suggesting that street harassment does not necessarily occur more often at night, as is commonly perceived. However, 33 reports did not indicate the time of day, so it is hard to draw firm conclusions here. 7 respondents reported that the harassment occurred in a crowded environment– for example, a street fair or packed subway car. Most cases did not indicate if there were witnesses or crowded conditions.

Describing the Incidents

Nearly 80% (79) of the reported incidents included verbal harassment. Stalking, lewd looks, assault, and flashing also occurred with significant frequency. Some incidents included more than one category of harassment, so the frequencies below add to more than 99, and the percentages add to more than 100. In addition, I analyzed the verbal harassment incidents to identify patterns in the language content. Verbal harassment often included more than one content category, so frequencies in Table 4 below add to more than 99 and the percentages add to more than 100.

Examples of different verbal harassment content categories are as follows. Examples of uninvited greetings from the data include “Hey, baby, hey, how you doing?” and “Hey, baby, come over here.” Physical evaluations could be positive or negative, for example, “Hey, gorgeous,” or “...they are ugly,” respectively. Sexually suggestive harassment included “Yo, baby, you’re gorgeous! I wanna hit that!” or “Girl, I wanna be your pony.” Instances of explicit sexual and/or violent language include “I want to kick you in the cunt” and “You’re gonna sleep with me tonight.” An example of racist language is “You don’t even belong in this country, bitch.” Finally, an example of homophobic remarks is “Why are gay people always trying to befriend me?” As Table 4 indicates, uninvited greetings are the most frequent type of verbal harassment reported, and physical evaluations and sexually suggestive language are indicated significantly in the sample.

Table 3: Harassment Categories

Category	Frequency	Percent
Verbal	79	79.8%
Stalking	18	18.2
Lewd look or other staring	14	14.1
Assault	11	11.1
Flashing	10	10.1
Catcalling or other lewd noises	6	6.1
Groping	6	6.1
Other types	4	4.0
Rude gesture	3	3.0
Uninvited/lewd picture	2	2.0

Table 4: Verbal Harassment Language Content

Content Type	Frequency	Percent
Uninvited greeting	49	49.5%
Physical evaluation	31	31.3
Sexually suggestive	26	26.3
Explicit sexual and/or violent	14	14.1
Racist	4	4.0
Homophobic	4	4.0

Victims responded to harassment in a variety of manners. In 41 (41.4%) of cases, the respondent indicated that she tried to ignore the perpetrator, and/or avoided the person by walking away (of course, this is more feasible in cases of verbal harassment that do not escalate to stalking or assault). 39 (39.4%) of respondents reported that they verbally engaged the perpetrator. In 6 (13.3%) cases, victims reported physically defending themselves from an assailant. Lastly, respondents indicated that they reported the harassment to police in just 6 (13.3%) incidents.

Describing the Victims of Street Harassment

Nearly all victims – 97 out of 99 – were female. This makes sense, since the Hollaback! movement is geared toward fighting street harassment against women. Additionally, research has indicated that women are specifically targeted for street harassment (Gardner 1995), and are more often subjected to strangers’ rude behavior (Smith, Phillips, & King 2010). Street harassment appears to happen more frequently when victims are travelling, rather than when they are at a destination. Specifically, 80 respondents indicated that they were in transit when the event occurred (for example, riding the subway or walking to a store), while only 17 described themselves as stationary – for instance, sitting on a park bench or at a bar. Two submissions lacked this information.

Furthermore, victims most frequently reported being alone when the incident occurred. 77, or about 78%, of reported incidents took place when the victim was alone. 13 (13%) incidents occurred when a female victim was accompanied by one female companion, and 6 (6%) happened when the victim was part of a group. No respondents reported being accompanied by one male companion when the incident occurred, suggesting that women may face less harassment when accompanied by a man³. Four respondents reported that a stranger harassed them while they were at work.

Significantly, about 50% (50) of respondents reported feelings of anger and/or frustration in response to harassment. 27 respondents indicated that they felt threatened and/or fearful as a result of the incident. Finally, in 10 cases, respondents noted feelings of disgust or shame after being subjected to harassment.

Table 5: Victims’ Emotional Reactions to Harassment

Type of Emotion	Frequency	Percent
Anger/frustration	50	50.5%
Fear/feeling threatened	27	27.3
Disgust	7	7.0
Shame	3	3.0

³ Perhaps potential perpetrators are deterred by the presence of a male companion, suggesting that heterosexual norms are relevant. For example, in one case the respondent explicitly stated that she was subjected to harassment when travelling with her girlfriend, and yet there are no examples of a woman being harassed while accompanied by a male partner. This is also in line with Gardner’s theory that women travelling alone in public are “situationally disadvantaged” and more frequently targeted for harassment when compared to men (1995:15).

Describing the Perpetrators of Street Harassment

In all but two cases, the perpetrator(s) was male, following the pattern found in the research literature on street harassment (Gardner 1995). In the vast majority of reported cases (75 out of 99 incidents, or about 76%), the perpetrator acted alone. In 12 cases (12%), two perpetrators acted together. In 9 cases, 3 or more perpetrators harassed the victim. In 9 cases (9%), respondents indicated that the perpetrator was in a vehicle when he harassed them. Notably, in 13 cases, the perpetrator was working when he harassed the victim: for example, one respondent indicated that the perpetrator was delivering goods, and a different respondent reported being harassed by a store clerk.

Appendix: Methodological Notes

As of March 2011, the Hollaback! street harassment data set included a total of 710 entries submitted from various locations across the globe. I used ArcGIS spatial analysis software to identify incidents with geocodes for New York City, reducing the number of entries to 156. I then examined each entry individually and removed invalid entries. Invalid entries included duplicate entries, “test” entries presumably submitted by Hollaback! staff, a handful of submissions that failed to describe a specific incident of harassment, as well as one entry that was blatantly sarcastic and fictional (I can provide the ID numbers for all invalid entries if requested). The final data set included 99 cases.

I used Microsoft Excel’s random number generator to randomly select 10 of the 99 cases (about 10%). Drawing from qualitative research literature on street harassment (see Gardner’s *Passing By*), as well as Smith, Phillips, and King’s (2010) recent quantitative study on rude behavior in public places, I closely examined these 10 cases to create the categories specified above. I analyzed the 99 entries and used Stata 10 statistical software to calculate the descriptive statistics found in this report.

References

- Gardner, Carol Brooks. 1995. *Passing By: Gender and Public Places*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Smith, Philip, Timothy L. Phillips, and Ryan D. King. 2010. *Incivility: The Rude Stranger in Everyday Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.