



Cornell University
ILR School

hollaback!

FACT SHEET: The Experience of Being Targets of Street Harassment in NYC: Preliminary Findings from a Qualitative Study of a Sample of 223 voices who Hollaback! (Beth A. Livingston, KC Wagner, Sarah T. Diaz, and Angela Liu¹)

I. Findings

Street harassment is an under-researched but likely prevalent experience for many New Yorkers. . In partnership with Hollaback!, a movement dedicated to ending street harassment using mobile technology, researchers at the Worker Institute at the Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations sought to better understand how street harassment is experienced by implementing a grounded qualitative study of descriptions of experiences of street harassment taking place in New York City submitted to the Hollaback! website between 2005 and 2008.

Our key findings included insights on the following:

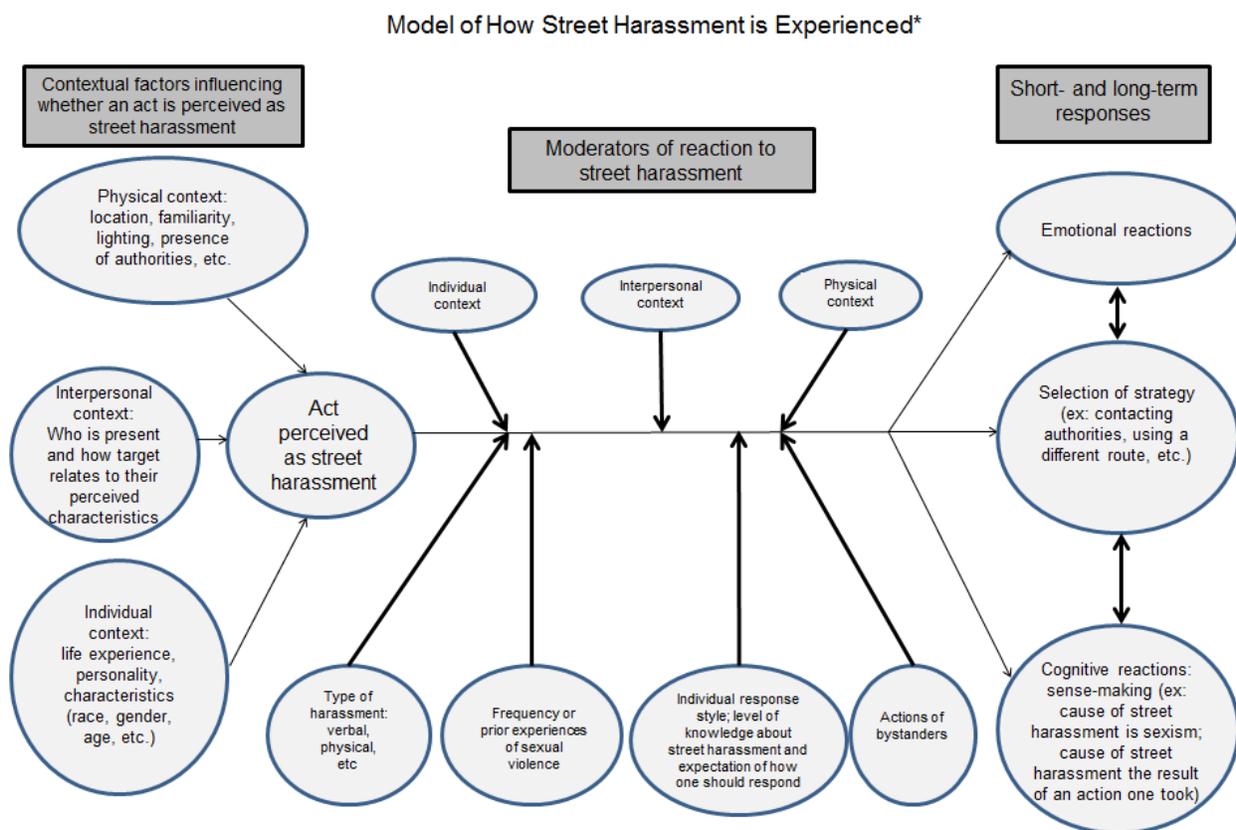
- i. **Targets feel violated by all types of street harassment.** The anecdotes that we reviewed indicated that the severity of one's emotional reaction to an experience of street harassment varied, but that any type of harassment (i.e. verbal, groping, assault) could produce extreme feelings of fear, 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.
- ii. **Taking action generally has a positive influence on a target's emotional response to the experience of street harassment.** Targets who chose to take action, whether while experiencing street harassment or afterwards (i.e. taking a photo of the harasser, reporting the harassment to an official), appeared to experience less negative emotional impact than those who did not. For example, those who responded assertively to their harassers tended to describe emotional responses that were targeted outward (e.g., anger, surprise) where as more passive responders described emotions that focused inwardly (e.g., embarrassment, helplessness, fear).
- iii. **Bystander presence can have both a positive and negative influence on a target's emotional response to being harassed, depending on the actions taken.** In cases where a bystander took action by confronting the harasser, the harassment was more likely to cease. Importantly, bystander interventions that had a positive influence on the target of harassment could be as simple as a knowing look or empathetic statement that showed support. In contrast, in cases where bystanders

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failed to act, their presence tended to compound other negative emotional responses to the experience. Those posing their descriptions generally felt this inaction by bystanders was highly unacceptable.

II. Developing an Explanatory of Model of Street Harassment

Given the lack of research on this topic, this exploratory study largely aims to describe what occurs when someone experiences street harassment based on the sample of anecdotes we analyzed. Moving beyond summarizing and analyzing the data with which we were provided, we have begun constructing an explanatory—and testable—model of street harassment that is informed by our findings, the current literature, and the expertise of the researchers. This model serves to predict when individuals (left side) are likely to perceive street harassment and what moderating effects (middle) will modify the reactions (right side) to perceived street harassment.



We ran a preliminary version of this model by a number of individuals who were not involved in the data analysis process in order to ensure the most comprehensive, testable model. The model presented is still preliminary and will be modified once it has been quantitatively tested, but we present it here in order to frame our early findings.

