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Walking down the street with a friend, we passed two men in their late 20s, a little older than us, and one of them grabbed my butt and squeezed. The men didn't miss a beat as they continued walking, both laughing. My friend didn't say a word; not that I was raised to expect a knight in shining armor to come to my rescue. For him the threat was over. The guys were gone. But for me, a memory was made that replays every time I find myself on that street, a similar street, or even a street with any groups of men laughing.

It was not the first or last time I've dealt with street harassment. I've experienced it all: leering, hooting, whistling, honking car horns, lewd descriptions of my body or what they'd like to do to it, blocking my path, following, and grabbing.

The fight for women's equality has come a long way in the United States. We can vote, become engineers and police officers, charge abusive husbands, and sue employers that create hostile work environments. We look at other countries and worry about how far they have to go before women have these kinds of rights. While hostile streets are common everywhere, in the U.S. it's one of our last frontiers toward equality.

[Studies report \[2\]](#) that 83 percent of Egyptian women experience street harassment and 95 percent of women in India restrict their mobility in public due to fear of male harassment. Here in the U.S., 100 percent of the women in a CA Bay Area study had been the target of offensive or sexually-suggestive remarks. Notably, they were the target of such speech significantly more often than they were of "polite" remarks about their appearance.

I wish I could take a "Good afternoon, beautiful," as a polite remark, but too often similar comments quickly turn into, "Well fuck you, ugly bitch," when ignored or rejected. The sum of my experiences shows me that any strange man in public could be a potential harasser and there is no recourse or help when I am harassed, regardless of aggression level. This makes me – like many women and LGBTQ individuals - live life outside my house or workplace on high alert, always tense - even when I just want to run mundane errands like doing the laundry. Is that freedom? Ain't I American?

Street harassment and the risk of sexual assault lead parents to teach their daughters that America is not free, is not the same, as the America of their brothers. They teach them what not to wear, where not to go and at what time to stay indoors "just in case."

As a result, women truly do not have the same freedom as men. [One study \[2\]](#) found 37 percent of women consciously wear clothes they think will attract less attention, 46 percent avoid being out at night, and 49 percent change travel routes. Most alarming, 19 percent have moved because of harassers, and 9 percent have changed jobs because of harassers near their workplace or along their commute.

This reality is unacceptable. On Sunday, March 20, Baltimore will join innumerable individuals and organizations in at least other 15 countries, in taking action to demand safe streets during the first International Anti-Street Harassment Day.

Street harassment expert Holly Kearl declared the spring equinox [International Anti-Street Harassment Day \[3\]](#) to help bring more attention to this pervasive problem. She says, "I regularly read and listen to women's street-harassment stories. Some days I live through my own. The warm spell reminded me how many more stories spring will bring...(but) spring is no excuse for street harassment."

For our part, women/female-bodied folks, LGBTQ folks, and male allies will celebrate the first day of spring by gathering at the [Baltimore Free School \[4\]](#) at 3 p.m., to discuss what street harassment is, its effects on victims, and possible ways to diffuse and ultimately end street harassment. Free childcare will be provided by Kidz City.

Organizations in countries like Egypt, Yemen, and India, where there are seemingly fewer rights for women than in America, are demanding safer streets for women. The US consistently demands that other countries adopt democratic policies. But how can we

demand other countries to adopt these “freedom” policies if half of our citizens are unsafe and un-free in public?
JoinHollaback! Baltimore[5] on March 20 in demanding the end to street harassment in Baltimore, the United States, and everywhere that street harassment pervades.

Notes from The Baltimore Independent Reader:

*Hollaback! Baltimore[5] is an incredible worldwide crowd-sourced grassroots movement working to end street harassment using blogging and mobile technology. Using the Hollaback! website and/or their camera phones, victims can upload their street harassment stories in effort to flip the power dynamics in place, let the world know about this little discussed epidemic, and identify people and areas to beware of in urban space. We encourage you to learn more about this amazing project that now has a revived presence in Baltimore. And get involved! Hollaback!

* Street harassment receives little to no media attention. Yet, on the rare occasion that it does, it is extremely female-centric. While the experiences may be diverging, the LGBTQ community and women/female-bodied folks dually suffer from this gender-based violence. One community cannot abandon the other in this fight. Equal attention and knowledge of the faced problems via independent media, is one way to promote the bands of solidarity between the LGBTQ community and women/female-bodied individuals, there are many others. Explore them. Find them. Fight the fight. Together.

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Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/shawna-potter>

[2] <http://www.stopstreetharassment.com/streetharassment/statistics.htm>

[3] <http://stopstreetharassment.com/ending/NationalAntiStreetHarassmentDay.htm>

[4] <http://freeschool.redemmas.org/>

[5] <http://www.Bmore.iHollaback.org>