



## CONNECT

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I would like to thank the CM on this committee for the opportunity to testify in front of you during this important hearing.

Hello My Name is Quentin Walcott from CONNECT, CONNECT is dedicated to preventing interpersonal violence and promoting gender justice. By building partnerships with individuals and communities, we strive to help change the beliefs, behaviors and institutions that perpetuate violence. Through legal empowerment, grassroots mobilization and transformative education, we seek to create safe families and peaceful communities.....

### **Issue:**

Street Harassment is a rite of passage for men and boys who derive some definite benefits from it. The young girls and women who primarily bear the brunt of it are forever changed by the experience. Street harassment is a phenomenon that is not exclusive to women and girls in NYC. In fact, it is a widespread and widely accepted behavior and it compromises the safety and freedom of women and girls. Its roots are embedded in sexism, patriarchy and misogyny. Sexual harassment is a tool that we as boys and men fall back on to publicly demonstrate our deeply embedded attitudes towards women and girls and/or to express how masculine we are to other men. Being born male comes with unearned privileges, entitlements and expectations that allow us to negotiate the world in ways that young girls and women can never experience. We are socialized to view women as objects and property, and this thinking is supported inside our homes, institutions and systems that we navigate on a daily basis. For some men, sexual harassment is a demonstration of men's attitudes and belief systems that falsely raise OUR collective esteem, value and worth. Of course this is at the cost of women and girls. I say OUR because, those of us who don't directly engage in street harassment behavior still benefit by it when we don't hold other men accountable when it happens. This behavior benefits us as men since young girls and women emerge from the experience of being harassed with damaged self-esteem and self value. They are deprived of basic human rights and autonomy that we are afforded to as men. Sexual harassment is a gendered bullying that has also to do with ones culture, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, sexual orientation and geographic location. Sexual harassment is not just verbal but it can be physical & sexual touching, isolation, stalking which can lead to rape and death.

### **Solutions:**

At CONNECT we have been gratefully funded by the city council to do domestic violence and gender violence prevention work in NYC. With that, we are afforded a vantage point about violence that is a wide and interconnected. We view many forms of violence that are viewed as private to have a very public nature, and intimate violence, often viewed as a women's issue, to be a men's issue. Street Harassment is a form of male violence against

women. It's an issue that men must take responsibility for; moving from perpetrators and silent bystanders, to allies and activists in the work to end male violence against women.

Men can play a pivotal role in eliminating family and gender violence, particularly when men commit over 90% of the reported cases of the violence. A vital element of CONNECT's work is holding men accountable for the abuse they inflict upon their victims. CONNECT has built a solid foundation of successful men's programming designed to transform male attitudes towards women, children and other men. CONNECT's work with men serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it is a strategy to keep women and children safe by doing prevention and intervention work with abusive men, bystanders and male youth. Secondly, CONNECT is helping men recognize and transform their attitudes and belief systems that manifest in abusive behavior.

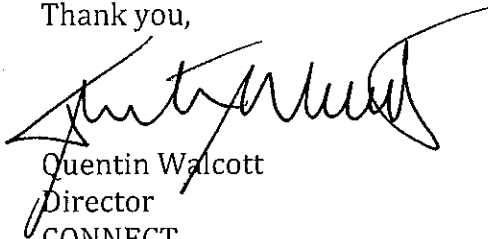
Our goal is to develop a team of men who ally with women, reach out to other men and children in their respective communities, and develop responses to male and gender violence. CONNECT provides training, capacity building, and technical assistance to organizations, unions, human service organizations (child welfare, head start, male and father involvement/engagement), veteran and reentry programs, and youth.

One program in particular that successfully addresses this goal is our young mens' project

This Manhood Development Program is designed specifically for young men in high schools and middle schools. Young men critically examine the cultural and historical belief systems and gender socializations that can lead to family, domestic, teen dating, gang and gender violence. They look at abuse with a race, class and gender analysis. Students explore how young men who are disenfranchised in society maintain power, male privilege and entitlement within their intimate and communal relationships. The root causes that lead to teen dating violence with other forms of youth and community violence are investigated. The project provides a space for these young men to have age-specific conversations about manhood, male socialization, male accountability, gender equality, healthy and unhealthy dating relationships, sibling, and peer relationships.

We are grateful to the council for supporting this and other such unique intensive programs that are contributing to changing the culture of male privilege and sexism in a new generation of NYC youth.

Thank you,



Quentin Walcott  
Director  
CONNECT

Community Empowerment Program  
& Training Institute

**Testimony on Behalf of the National Organization for Women**  
**New York City Chapter**  
**On**  
**Street Harassment Against Women and Girls**  
**October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the critical issue of Street Harassment against women and girls in New York City. My name is Zehra Ali, and I am testifying on behalf of Sonia Ossorio, Executive Director of the National Organization for Women's New York City Chapter .

Street harassment creates an uncomfortable and often hostile environment on the streets of New York City. We no longer tolerate harassment in workplaces. It should not occur on New York City streets as well.

Is it any wonder that 1 in 3 women are raped in their lifetime or that sexual assault occurs every two minutes in the United States? There are countless accounts of women who feel uncomfortable going about their daily routine, walking to work or to school or boarding a subway train, with the threat of an unwanted comment or physical interaction directed their way. We need to recognize that these are not isolated incidences. This is harassment. How can we expect a change in these statistics, when our culture is normalizing this form of harassment?

Harassment undermines the respect that women and girls have in society. There needs to be a standard established that reinforces that harassing women is illegal and not acceptable. Public education campaigns city wide is one of the first steps to address this problem. This would mean public service announcements at bus stops and in the subways that will illustrate to New Yorkers that street harassment is not okay.

A volunteer with our organization noted that while she was on a subway train, a man had grabbed her from behind. After she yelled at him and told him that it was inappropriate, the man yelled back at her. Due to the social-awareness of a near-by onlooker, who informed the police of this incident, the man was handcuffed shortly after by police officers and was walked out of the subway station.

Creating harassment free zones around schools is another measure to consider. Girls are now being victimized from a younger age and it reinforces that these streets are not safe for them. However, they should be. Especially within a close vicinity of schools, these zones would function much like drug free zones and be monitored to ensure that no harassment occurs. Drug free zones have worked, and this can too. In addition, we also support the idea of tracking the occurrences of street harassment so we can understand the magnitude of the problem city-wide. These along with powerful public service announcements and the tracking of these cases can help us combat this daily plight.

These are viable first steps to eradicate the objectification and violence that women must deal with in their everyday lives.

# RightRides

## Street Harassment of Women and Girls in New York City - 10/28/2010

By Mandy Van Deven (mandy@rightrides.org / mandyvandeven@gmail.com)

I want to thank City Council Member Ferreras and the Committee on Women's Issues for convening this hearing on street harassment, and I would also like to thank my colleagues, members of the media, and the concerned citizens who are in attendance for coming here today to speak out about this issue.

When Maggie Hadleigh West's groundbreaking film, *War Zone*, was shown at the small student-run cinema on my university campus in Atlanta, GA in 1998 I sat livid in the theater as the credits rolled, and then immediately organized with my classmates to bring Maggie to our campus to lead a discussion about street harassment. Some 500 students attended that event, and in 2003 when I moved to New York City, I organized the event again--and packed the theater so full that people stood side-by-side and blocked the aisles. Four years later, I worked with a group of teen women at Girls for Gender Equity who were so moved by Maggie's film that they created a 20-minute documentary of their own called *Hey Shorty!* that explored the impact of street harassment as experienced by young women of color in this city. Today there are several more films that have been made on this topic--including *Walking Home* and *Back Up!: Concrete Diaries*--some of which can be viewed on YouTube. Independent and mainstream media have also covered the issue--locally, nationally, and worldwide. Holly Kearl and I have both written books that illuminate the problem in the United States, and how women are responding to it--individually and collectively. Yet street harassment persists.

For me, *War Zone* put a name to a behavior I endured daily on my way to and from my college classes. But more importantly, it validated my fear and anger at having to endure this hostile behavior and impressed upon me that street harassment was not acceptable and that I shouldn't be expected to tolerate it. But as we all know, just because something is wrong doesn't mean it doesn't happen... and happen often. (Survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault can attest to that.) Although I knew what to call street harassment and that the majority of women and LGBTQ people are subjected to it regularly, the result of that knowledge was not empowerment but an overwhelming sense of futility to stop it. Like other types of gender-based violence, this one has deep systemic roots and ending it requires cultural shift in how we think of gender, race, class, sexuality, the right to public space, and safety. And cultural shifts are messy. And they take a long time. And they require resources to back them, as well as popular support from people of all genders.

Last week at a panel discussion at Barnard College on feminist responses to street harassment, a young woman made a comment near the end of the discussion that mirrored the frustration and futility I felt over a decade ago, and continue to feel today. She said that while she appreciates that conversations about street harassment now happen outside of small, intimate gatherings with friends and in institutional settings, like a prestigious college campus, that she would not be leaving the panel with the encouraging feeling that street harassment is coming to an end. She said would be leaving with the unsettling feeling of its ubiquity and (for the most part) invisibility. And the pat response to her comment that change *is* happening and that she can testify before the same city council that just three months ago cut sexual assault prevention and victim's services funding wasn't enough. Because testimony isn't going to intervene when the next guy comes at her with his entitlement to public space blazing. And it isn't going to give her the tools she needs to respond in that moment or to mobilize her community to set in motion tangible results.

The point is that while conversation about street harassment is good and necessary, it is only lip service when it is not coupled with on-the-ground action and a commitment of adequate resources in the service of social change. There are numerous groups in New York City doing work to end gender-based violence: RightRides for Women's Safety, the Audre Lorde Project, Men Stopping Rape, and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project are but a few. I ask that you support these necessary direct service and advocacy organizations. Because they are the changemakers and grassroots leaders who are on the front lines every day working collaboratively with communities to make this city a safer place for women and LGBTQ individuals.

My name is Alison Roh Park. I currently work in media relations at the Center for Constitutional Rights, a non-profit legal and education organization that was founded during the Civil Rights movement. I am a poet, cultural worker and activist, and I also teach as an adjunct professor at New York University as part of a graduate program there.

I would like to thank you for creating the time and space to hear stories about street sexual harassment in our city. Every young woman and girl I know has experienced street harassment in some way, shape or form, with national statistics saying that up to 70 percent of women will have experienced it by the time they are 41 years old. And though so prevalent, this is a rare opportunity to speak to the issue safely in a public space and engage in conversations about creating the change needed to shift the paradigm of sexual harassment. I am here as a New Yorker who has experienced street harassment daily for nearly the past two decades. I have experienced street sexual harassment up to three times while walking down one city block, often first thing in the morning when I step outside my apartment building. I have heard similar stories daily; a friend once told me she was sexually harassed 23 three times during a single commute between Jersey City and Manhattan.

I am a lifelong resident of Queens and attended New York City public schools throughout my life until I enrolled at Fordham University. Over the years I've spent a great deal of time all over New York City, Manhattan and the Bronx in particular. I am fortunate to have always been a part of multiracial, multiethnic, immigrant and mixed-class neighborhoods with visible gay, lesbian and transgender<sup>1</sup> communities.

The first time I recognized sexual harassment, I was 11 years old. My sister, who would have been 14 at the time and I'm sure already familiar with sexual harassment, and I often made the 14 block walk between home and our church and parish center that had a swimming pool and basketball court. Men would leer at us; block our path on the sidewalk, sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> Transgender is the state of one's "gender identity" (self-identification as woman, man, neither or both) not matching one's "assigned sex" (identification by others as male, female or intersex based on physical/genetic sex). "Transgender" does not imply any specific form of sexual orientation. (Wikipedia)

even preventing us from walking forward; come extremely close to us; hiss, whistle or make kissing sounds; make other obscene gestures; or follow us.

As a young girl at a critical developmental age in learning how to have healthy relationships with boys and men, these experiences left me powerless. I was too young to define sex or sexuality, or sexism and sexual violence to understand what exactly was happening to me, but the daily experience of street sexual harassment profoundly inhibited my self-esteem. The advice and comments I received from the women and men around me then and now have been to: "toughen up," "ignore them," "don't let it get to you," "what were you wearing," "then don't walk down that street," "that's just how guys are," "you're too thin-skinned" or "there's nothing you can do about it." When I tried to confront my harassers, I was met with curses and insults, derisive laughter or the situation escalated to violence or the threat of physical violence. As is common during public sexual assault or rape, passersbys were always silent or completely ignored the situation.

During those years as a victim or observer of sexual harassment, as a women of color and an Asian American woman, it was made clear that harassment is often compounded by racist slurs or sexual stereotypes. I also learned that, for women and girls, the New York City public transportation system is often as unsafe a space as its streets. I was fourteen the first time I saw a man masturbating across from me on the subway. I have been followed off the train to close to my home and nearly sexually assaulted within view of an MTA agent in a token booth. I have been stared at for the duration of an entire commute by a man who was known in my community to follow Asian women. I commonly witness sexual harassment by police officers who use warrantless stops to intimidate women who do not respond to their flirtation and sexual advances, abusing their power to demand phone numbers and home addresses. I know a woman who was propositioned for sex by a police officer in his patrol car when she was 14 years old, and another who experienced sexual assault by a police officer under the guise of a stop-and-frisk.

I cannot find the words to accurately convey the cumulative psychological and emotional effect that these daily stressors and experiences of violence—all because of my gender—have had on my life and personal development.

A group that works to fight street harassment by empowering residents to speak out against gender based harassment, called Holla Back DC!, defines public sexual harassment or street harassment as an instance that:

“[O]ccurs in a public space when one or more individuals (male or female) accost another individual—based on the victim’s gender—as they go about their daily life. This can include vulgar remarks, heckling, insults, innuendo, stalking, leering, fondling, indecent exposure and other forms of public humiliation. Public sexual harassment occurs on a continuum starting with words, stalking and unwanted touching, which can lead to more violent crimes like rape, assault and murder.”

It is important to note that my experiences of street sexual harassment only represent my specific experience as a cisgender woman. Cisgender can be used to describe the the other end of the gender spectrum as opposed to transgender, and describes someone who is comfortable being the gender they were assigned at birth. Also important to consider that while it is possible for a small fraction of men to be sexually harassed by women—and that some women do not consider to be harassment what I and many others here may consider to be harassment—because of underlying male supremacy, machismo and the persistent threat of rape, it is essential to center discussions of sexual harassment around the experiences of women and people of other historically endangered gender groups.

Street sexual harassment is about reinforcing gender roles and expectations, placing limitations on what women can or cannot do and where they may or may not go. In that way, street sexual harassment regularly results in violence against gay, lesbian, queer, genderqueer<sup>2</sup> and transgender New Yorkers. Sexual harassment both reinforces and nourishes the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Genderqueer (GQ) and intergender are catch-all terms for gender identities other than man and woman. People who identify as genderqueer may think of themselves as being both man and woman, as being neither man nor woman, or as falling completely outside the gender binary. (Wikipedia)

and systemic limitations, dehumanization, objectification and sexualization of women and violence against historically marginalized or forgotten communities—every day and all the time.

Everywhere I go, I can find images and media that values women as commodities, a persistent reminder that women and girls are worthy only as consumers; objects used to sell products from cars to technology to shampoo; and sexualized objects. And, this is all in a country with a shameful level of access to sex education and the highest rate of sexually transmitted infections in the western hemisphere.<sup>3</sup>

Young girls and boys today have unprecedented access to violent sexual images and entertainment that exploit women's bodies and the limited choices of women within the entertainment industry. Furthermore, as Jamia Wilson of the Women's Media Center notes, "With six media conglomerates controlling the vast majority of media content, we're seeing a dramatic decrease in alternative and positive representations of girls in entertainment and news media. As technology becomes advanced, the viral promotion of these images and messages becomes increasingly problematic. The media tells girls that they have all kinds of options, but starts really young offering them a limited set of choices. Studies show that the more TV a little girl watches the fewer options she believes she has in life."<sup>4</sup>

It is no coincidence that violence against women is increasing at an alarming rate. Between 2006 and 2008, for example, a government report showed a 42 percent increase in reported domestic violence and a 25 percent increase in the reported incidence of rape and sexual assault.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that some U.S. studies have found that up to 46 percent of domestic violence survivors do not contact the police.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Keynote address, SPARK Summit: Pushing Back Against the Sexualization of Girls (October 2010) Hunter College, New York, NY

<sup>4</sup> "Ypulse Interview: Jamia Wilson, Women's Media Center" (October 2010) Ypulse.com

<sup>5</sup> "US: Soaring Rates of Rape and Violence Against Women: More Accurate Methodology Shows Urgent Need for Preventive Action" (December 2008) Human Rights Watch Press Release

<sup>6</sup> "Domestic Violence Report" (2008) Minnesota Crime Victims Survey



And yet, presented with this information, views on street sexual harassment remain much like those towards domestic violence, rape and sexual violence, welfare, abortion and sex work: though hundreds of thousands of women collectively share these experiences, there still exists this notion of “personal responsibility” and a judgment of whether a person deserves or “asks for it,” as in mistreatment and even violent punishment for perceived infractions against expected roles, such as style of dress, body language or behavior.

Though I am most familiar with street sexual harassment as it occurs in my own community, I have been harassed by men of many races and ethnicities in different neighborhoods throughout New York City. Because of the racism that is so deeply embedded in all aspects of our society, and men of color are stereotyped as violent sexual predators, it is critical to recognize that while sexual harassment and violence against women has many different expressions in different cultural, racial and class contexts, it is an underlying male supremacy and existing gender roles that create and perpetuate street sexual harassment and a lack of safety for women in public spaces.

To rely solely on the legal or judicial system as a quick fix to street sexual harassment will only result in the criminalization of people of color and guarantees unequal access to or enforcement of any such policies. My organization, the Center for Constitutional Rights, released an expert report this week on the New York Police Department’s (NYPD) stop-and-frisk practice—and the findings clearly illustrate that a dramatic majority of stops are made on the basis of race and not crime. This is a clear example of how laws and policies are manipulated by institutions and their agents to the detriment of communities of color.

Similarly, relying on legal or criminal remedies will only make some communities more unsafe. Take Secure Communities for example, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) program that blurs the line between local law enforcement and federal civil immigration enforcement. This program is an example of how our own government agencies can put

communities in jeopardy, such as an undocumented immigrant survivor of domestic violence or sexual assault who will not call the police for fear of detention and deportation.

By not actively working to eradicate sexual and street harassment, we all will essentially be perpetuating the existence of an underclass of New Yorkers with less access to public space; protection under the rule of law; self-esteem; physical and emotional safety; and freedom of movement—what many would describe as fundamental human and civil rights.

The solution must be crafted by the communities whose realities are often ignored in the privileged circles that are empowered to make change on an institutional level. Namely, solutions must definitely include women of color; poor and homeless women; differently abled women; immigrant women; and our youth. And, it is essential that men are part of the solution and do the work needed to shift the attitudes of other men and young boys towards women.

Any remedy should be similarly representative in its benefit, changing the day-to-day quality of life for all women and New Yorkers, and be reflected in the kinds of relationships girls and boys; boys and boys; girls and girls; and women and men share with each other—and with themselves and their bodies—with a genuine openness and respect for every person's right to express their gender as they choose. In the way that masculinity, sexism and self-worth are learned constructs of our society, they can be unlearned if we work together for equal access to public space for all New Yorkers.

Thank you.

Submitted on October 28, 2010  
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October 28, 2010

New York City Council Committee on Women's Issues  
250 Broadway, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today about this long-neglected issue.

After spending 3 years running SafeWalk, a program aimed at preventing street harassment and assault, in addition to my current volunteer work with survivors of sexual assault through Support New York, I have been exposed to harassment and its effects in many forms. Many of us here have worked on such programs; we have been left to struggle as community members against sexual harassment and assault despite the lack of support or even recognition from the City on this issue. I echo the demands of my fellow speakers for a citywide study, street harassment-free zones, and a PSA campaign as first steps towards a safer city. But I would like us to broaden the idea of how street harassment manifests and connects to other forms of violence.

Perhaps the City has not yet acted on this issue because officials do not understand that violence happens along a continuum rather than suddenly and randomly; in other words, every harassing action has the potential to lead to violence, and frequently does. It is not merely that we are annoyed at street harassment—it's that this behavior poses a very real threat to us.

Here is an example: While volunteering for the SafeWalk program, I met many people who feared gay-bashings, and given the recent assault at Stonewall, the fatal attack on the Sucuzhafiay brothers, the near-deadly beating of Jack Price, and myriad other incidents all over the City, this is a very real and immediate concern. But these assaults do not happen in a vacuum; they begin with name-calling and other harassing behavior. This widespread fear speaks to the fact that New York is simply not a safe place for New Yorkers who do not fit gender stereotypes—people who are genderqueer, transgendered, or who are perceived to violate the bounds of binaristic gender roles or heteronormativity in some way.

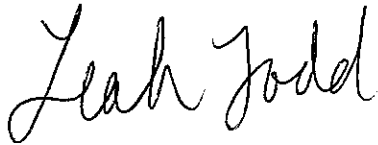
There's Sakia Gunn, a 15 year old girl who was killed in Newark when she responded to unwanted harassment by saying she was a lesbian. This happened within the past few years, within this region.

Or, take the case of seven young lesbian women who were on their way home mere blocks north of here in the West Village. They came from the same community as and knew of Sakia Gunn. They were sexually harassed by a man on the street, who despite their refusals, followed them, saying "I'll \*\*\*\* you straight, sweetheart!"—words that function as a verbal threat of rape. The

violence escalated into an attack: he pulled hair, spit on them, threw a lit cigarette, and began strangling one of the women. The women fought back. Yet, the City's response to Duane Buckle's appalling behavior was to arrest these women on charges of gang violence. At least one, Patreese Johnson, remains in jail. The women were villified as a lesbian wolf pack in the media, mocked in court for their gender expressions and sexual identities, and convicted by an all-white jury. This was a situation where the City could have done something about this issue, and instead chose to railroad these women. Unfortunately, as evidenced by the many incidents I referenced earlier, when there is no public response to street harassment and assault, people are left with the choice of defending themselves or risking serious harm, even death.

I am pleased to see that City officials may begin to take this behavior seriously, but in doing so, I urge you to take it seriously against people of various gender identities. And if the City finally starts to recognize these behaviors as the violent acts that they are, it must also recognize the actions people take in self-defense as self-defense, regardless of the victim's race, sexual identity or gender expression. Perhaps the measures many people have asked for, such as a PSA campaign and citywide harassment study, will help us move towards a city that makes harassment obsolete. For the sake of those who we have lost to violence, we can and should do more to get there.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leah Todd". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Leah Todd

218 Spencer Street #1  
Brooklyn, NY 11205

I'd like thank  
Rachel Cordeiro

Let me begin by saying that I am honored by the New York City Council's committee on women's issues invitation to speak before you today, as street harassment of women and girls is an issue my mom and countless other women and young women are forced to deal with on a daily basis. Some might say that me being a 14 year old boy doesn't qualify me to speak as an authority on this particular subject, but I disagree. I'm not just a 14 year old boy, I'm also <sup>a</sup> the big brother to a younger sister and the son of a single mother who struggles everyday with humiliation brought onto her by the unwanted, unprovoked attention of disrespectful men everytime she leaves the

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house. personally I don't think that anyone deserves to be subjected to catcalling and lewd remarks as they are only trying to go about their daily lives. In my opinion that kind of behavior is rude and degrading and there is no excuse for it. I can only speak on behalf of me and my mother when I tell you that it is offensive.

It's offensive to her as a woman and it's offensive to me as her son who believes that she along with all women deserves to be treated with the ut-most respect. I am not an advocate for violence and I don't recommend anyone take that route. Instead I decided to use my platform as a recording artist to bring attention to street harassment

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of women and girls to let the world know that such behavior is not acceptable.

I am hoping that my song titled "Stop Looking At My Mom" will serve as a wake-up call to men and women alike.

I wrote it to let men know that vulgar, aggressive language toward women, especially when they are with their children is highly inappropriate and to let women know that it's OK to expect and even demand a higher level of respect. With that said... I am not by any means telling not to speak to or look at a woman, I'm only asking that they be more respectful in their approach.

too much. Almost every woman I know has experienced a man masturbating on the subway, or other public place, or has been stopped against her will on the street so a man can talk to her.

The worst part is, although street harassment is illegal, nobody gets caught. Rarely anybody on the street helps the woman being harassed, neither standing up for her nor calling the police. And what would happen if they *did* tell the police? Most likely nothing. There must be a change to this. The threat of street harassment is escalating, because men know they can get away with it. This city has to begin taking the issue more seriously. Posting signs in the subway is not enough, clearly. Men need to know that if they commit the crime of street harassment, they will receive punishment, as will any person who commits a crime. Thank you.

\* Grace Tobin (junior)

from Elisabeth Irwin HS in Manhattan

Hello, my name is Grace Tobin. I live in Brooklyn and am in 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Elisabeth Irwin High School. Thank you so much for holding this hearing today to listen to the stories and issues faced by so many New York girls and women every day.

I cannot remember the last time I walked out of my house and returned home that night without being sexually harassed at some point during the day. Be it the slimy grin and the threatening eyes, or the erection digging into my back in a sardine-like packed train.

The subway is where I experience it the worst. My phone does not work on the subway. I cannot quickly move away or off the train. I am completely alone. But this should not have to mean that I am completely vulnerable.

The moment which I have felt most degraded, belittled, and humiliated was at 6pm on a Saturday getting onto the 1 train at Chambers heading Uptown. I got on and noticed everyone <sup>was</sup> on one side of the train. I didn't think too much about it and sat down on the two-seated bench furthest away from everyone. The doors closed and the train moved away from the station.



I suddenly noticed a man sitting across from me I hadn't seen before. He was white, old, and wearing a big tan jacket and a baseball cap. He had a friendly face.

His eyes flashed up to meet mine and I quickly dropped my gaze into my lap. I didn't want to make eye contact with him, just like with any stranger; I was worried he would misinterpret the eye contact. But it is ridiculous, really, that I feel I cannot look a stranger in the eye because it would give them reason to think I may be provoking or leading them on in some way. Has it really gotten to the point where I have to watch and reserve every move I make to ensure he doesn't make any of his own?

He shuffled his hands in his pockets.

The train stopped at Franklin Street.

No one got on.

The train doors closed and started on again.

He was fidgeting again, from what I could see from the corner of my eye.

I glanced up at him, against my better judgment.

The hands I thought were in his pockets were not. They were under the big sides of his tan coat.

Masturbating.

I can't even remember what I felt at that moment. It was such a rush of so many emotions; it all washed over me and made me feel smaller than ever.

"Don't look at his eyes," I told myself, trying to keep calm, telling myself this wasn't really happening. How could someone possibly comprehend doing this? I tried to concentrate on my hands. They were turning ghostly blue as I squeezed them so tightly for any sense of comfort or release of pain, whichever one it was. I did look up, only to realize the one thing I wished above all was not true. He was staring right back at me.

I guess I must have been angry. I don't think I could feel it though. My fear and shock overpowered everything else such as the shame and embarrassment. The vulnerability

and victimization. The fact that I was frozen. Unable to say a thing. Unable to move. Unable to fully comprehend or at least not letting myself. The train stopped at Franklin.

“Why me? Why now? What do I do?!” I screamed at myself inside. I thought I was going to explode. I knew that I should move or say something, *anything*.

The doors opened to the platform.

I wanted to get off then. I wanted to run off the train so badly. I wanted to scream at that man, who was so sick in the mind and inconsiderate, I just wanted to hurt him. I wanted to yell at the other people on the train, all huddled on the other side. They knew something was wrong, I could read right through their poker faces. I was in despair, and they did nothing. They didn't even glance in my direction. I was in an incomprehensible state.

I stared longingly at the platform. My eyes fixated, yearning to drag my body out of this nightmare, off the train, or even onto the next car. But I was stuck. Crushed.

I did not move. I did not say a thing.

The doors closed and the train moved away from the platform again. I stared down at my hands, concentrating on their wrinkles and creases.

I blame myself for the event. I could have moved to the other side of the train. I could have yelled at the creepy man. I could have gotten off at Franklin or Canal. I could have asked for help. But in the moment, I just could not do it. I ignored the masturbation five feet in front of me and suppressed my feelings. I clenched my jaw and carried on, just the way all girls and women seem to react to the harassment they face every day.

I got off at Houston, as quick as possible. I was relieved to even be that far away from the stranger. But at the same time the relief settled in, a wave of anger and regret panged

inside my chest. I almost instantly wished I could have gone back on the train and had the courage and power to stand up to the stranger and let him know, in any way possible that he was sick, that what he did was messed up, that I shouldn't be blaming myself for it. That he was in the wrong and should be punished. It's basic morals, taught from when you're a kid. He had no right. Yet he got away with it.

I walked up to the street that day and continued on. I did not think to mention it to anyone because it didn't seem to matter. Who would care? And if they did care, what could they possibly do about it now? I cannot tell you how many times I have wished I could go back in time and done something.

I did not know what I would do for a while. But once Hollaback came to visit my class, I knew there was something I would do. I did not know that what happened to me was not unusual. That men frequently masturbated openly to girls and women on the subway. I was one of many cases. I did not experience anything out of the ordinary life of a girl living in New York City.

But how messed up does that sound? How morally contorted are we that young girls are *normally* subject to such degrading public embarrassment? How messed up is this system that if I hadn't heard about the Hollaback organization, that if I hadn't heard about this hearing, I would still be burying these feelings inside, internalizing my pain and blaming myself for all the wrong that strange men have done to me.

I was not wearing anything that day to provoke him, just jeans and a T-shirt. But that should not have to matter. As my right, I should be able to wear what I want without having to worry about men taking advantage of me. I shouldn't have to leave social outings early just because it's past 9:30 PM and it's considered too "late" for a girl to be taking a long train ride by herself. I should not have to worry about the man at the Chambers Street station who every morning compliments me with a sexual subtext in his words.

Once, I was walking once just behind the playground of my school courtyard. I was not 3 feet away from the school premises when from behind, a man came up and pressed his body against mine. I could feel the heat off his skin, I could smell his hot stale breath as he blew my hair. "NICE ASS," he yelled in a loud, rude, and hostile voice. It was like he was putting me in my place, hammering me down, and reminding me of his authority and control over me. I felt helpless, a feeling I knew was exactly his goal, consciously or not.

I want other girls to know about organizations such as Hollaback. I want girls to know how to handle the terrible situations they encounter on the subway. I want people on the trains to help when they see something happening. I want to be able to ride the subways without having to be so constantly alert and cautious. I want to be able to wear what I want without it being an instigator for harassment. I want to be able to live in this city without having to feel below or undermined simply because I'm a girl.

I thank you for hearing me out. I thank you for listening to my stories that I have shoved to the back of my mind for so long, keeping them bottled up and disregarding them.

Please remember, that the experiences I shared are not unusual. They happen on a daily basis. I do not know one girl or woman in my life that has not experienced some form of sexual harassment in their life. I'm sure that this is true for almost every female you all know too. It is happening every day here in our city. I am only 16, and already I cannot remember half the traumatic experiences I have experienced due to male harassment. Thank you for listening, and please remember how great a help you all can be.

**Julie Wintrob (senior)**

Hi, my name is Juliana Hoa-Binh Wintrob. I am a senior that attends Elisabeth Irwin High School in Lower Manhattan. I find it important that the issue of street harassment is addressed because it is embarrassing, annoying, and usually degrading. Even though I have not had any terrible sexual harassment stories yet, I know friends who have stories of being sexually harassed verbally. I believe that as a young woman I find it uncomfortable knowing that one day I could get hollered at or grabbed at by a total

October 28,  
2010

To the Men and Women of New York and the NYC City Council:

It is an honor to show support today for what I believe to be **the** most pressing issue of our day.

It isn't necessary to shock you with some of the more disturbing stories of street harassment that I've heard from my friends, coworkers, and three younger sisters; if you are in this room today, you've heard them already—and chances are you can raise me one better.

The tools of violence and oppression are learned at home, but they are cultivated on the streets. A young boy watches his father whistle at a woman from his car and tries his own hand at the sport later while hanging out with friends in the park—it makes him feel bigger and more macho, and he's all of 100 lbs, no one bats an eye.

It's a compliment, anyway, right?—it's harmless.

But twenty years later, he **is** bigger and more macho, and the whistle no longer serves him well. He's just lost his job and he's angrier, his tactics have evolved. He doesn't move out of the way for a woman passing on the street, and he blocks her path as she tries to walk around. He howls at the girls laughing together on their way to school and leers at the suited executive who sits down next to him on the train. By this time, it's not just women anymore that he wants to scare—his anger is an equal-opportunity employer.

What begins with a whistle ends with intimidation and aggression. It is never a compliment; it is a thinly veiled exertion of power and masculinity that doesn't aim to flatter and please its recipient, but to silence and scare. It isn't courtship, it's provocation, and it's not harmless—**it's bullying.**

The solution to this problem isn't a self-help book or another self-defense guide, because the people for whom these sorts of materials are written are not in need of help and advice. We're in need of some real change.

This isn't a women's issue, and it's not a feminist concern. This is an American issue, and a New York City concern—if we start acknowledging this behavior for what it really is, **bullying**, we can work towards creating an effective and meaningful solution for a problem that extends to and affects every person in this city.

Thank you for addressing this problem today, I look forward to being a part of the solution.

Violet Kittappa

I am extremely glad that the New York City Council's Committee on Women's Issues called today's hearing on street harassment. Policy makers, activists, and members of the public in Argentina, Egypt, India, and Mauritius are currently collaborating on initiatives to combat street harassment, and it is heartening to see a city in the United States starting to do the same.

Street harassment has been a research focus of mine for four years. I wrote my master's thesis at George Washington University on the topic and recently authored the book *Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women* (Praeger Publisher). I also run the blog Stop Street Harassment and post stories from women around the world. In the last four weeks alone, I've received 20 stories from women in eight U.S. states and seven countries. Three stories were from women in the New York City area.

Street harassment is a global problem, particularly in crowded cities. Recent academic and government studies showed that 80 to 100 percent of women surveyed in Indianapolis, the California Bay Area, Yemen, India, Canada and Egypt experienced street harassment. No formal studies exist that track street harassment rates in New York City.

As part of my book research, I informally surveyed more than 800 women from 23 countries and 45 U.S. states. Two hundred were from New York City. Ninety-nine percent of the 800 women experienced street harassment. The most shocking findings were that men had made sexually explicit comments to more than 80 percent of the women, followed three-fourths, groped more than half, and assaulted one-fourth.

What I know is especially alarming to many of us here and why we feel so strongly about creating change is the young age at which street harassment begins. In my study, nearly 90 percent of the 800 women said the harassment began by age 19 and almost one in four said it

started before they turned 12 years old. Many women recall it beginning around puberty.

Women in their teens and twenties tend to experience it at the most frequent rate.

Studies, articles, and girls' stories from all over the world show that girls and young women traveling to and from school are particularly vulnerable to street harassment – not just on the bus or subway, but also at bus stops, on subway platforms, and at neighborhood carpool pick-up spots. This is not okay.

Street harassment is a form of sexual terrorism. Women never know when it might happen, by whom, and how far it may escalate. Because of street harassment, from a young age women learn that public spaces are male territory. They learn to limit the places they go, they try not to be in public alone (especially at night), and when they are alone, they stay on guard.

No country will ever achieve gender equality as long as street harassment continues since it prevents half of the population from having equal access to public spaces. Ultimately, street harassment is not just a “women’s issue.” It is a human rights issue.

What can we do to help women and girls achieve gender equality in New York City?

The NYC-based activist groups here today are suggesting three ideas: 1) a citywide street harassment study that would show the true prevalence and deep impact of this issue; 2) an anti-harassment PSA campaign at bus stops; and 3) creating “harassment free zones” around schools. I agree. The citywide study in particular is necessary before we can create meaningful policy. Since I have the opportunity to do so, I want to suggest four more ideas.

1. Age-appropriate sexual harassment information for students at every school and every grade level, just as there are anti-drug and disaster preparedness initiatives. Sexual harassment training is more relevant to their daily challenges both in and outside of school. They should know what it constitutes so they do not accidentally engage in it

and they should be taught empowering ways to deal with and report it when they are targeted or when they are a bystander.

2. Well-publicized protocol and sensitivity training for police officers about street harassment. On my blog, I've received very mixed feedback from New York City women who have reported harassers to police officers. There must be set, uniform and appropriate responses from all officers if we want people to report harassers and, consequently, if we want harassers deterred from their behavior.
3. Signs saying, "How's my behavior? Call XXX-YYYY if I am harassing you" posted on all public worksites, including delivery trucks, taxis, and construction sites. Employers should not tolerate harassment on company time and this simple sign and phone number could help deter employees from harassing people and provide people (including bystanders) with a straight forward way to report it.
4. "Harassment-free zone" signs for business owners to post outside their worksites. Some street harassers congregate outside stores, restaurants, and bars, and then harass women walking by and the women entering the businesses as customers or as employees. The harassment can make businesses lose customers and cause employee turnover. By enforcing harassment-free zones outside their establishments, business owners could improve their own bottom line and improve women's lives.

Thank you again for holding this historic hearing. I know it will result in positive change in New York City, and I hope other cities will follow suit and work to address their street harassment problems. I am happy to answer any questions.



A huge thank you to Councilmember Ferreras and all of you for being here. Street harassment is an issue that affects so many people, and yet I think too often the response is that we ignore it, hoping it will go away. That strategy clearly hasn't worked, and it's time for some action. I'm hopeful that the New York City council will notice how many New Yorkers are affected by street harassment, and take decisive action to end it.

At 32, I've experienced about two decades of street harassment, and I'm tired of it, which is why I wrote an oped on the issue for El Diario (<http://www.impre.com/eldiariony/opinion/opinion/2010/9/14/el-acoso-callejero-210635-1.html>)

Translated at <http://thenewagenda.net/2010/09/21/street-harassment-the-uncomfortable-walk-home/>). Like a lot of people who will speak today, I deal with street harassment a lot—on my way to the 90<sup>th</sup> street 7 train stop in the morning, on my way home at night. I've been harassed by old men, boys, weirdos, regular guys, construction workers, men in suits, New York city police officers, and many many more. I was really struck by a point that Emily May of Hollaback made at an event for Holly's book Stop Street Harassment last month: harassment puts you on edge to the point where you can't even enjoy a basic "good morning."

In my oped, I mentioned an incident that occurred when I was 13 years old—the first time I remember being harassed. A couple of men slowed their pickup truck down, and followed me down the street yelling what they wanted to do to me in graphic details. When the article came out, what really struck me about the response is the number of women who say that at 13 they were already veterans of street harassment— they first experienced it when they were 10 or even 8 years old. That, to me, is a tragedy.

I believe that no woman should deal with unwelcome commentary on the street. But I'm particularly concerned about young girls experiencing harassment at such an incredible rate—the idea that girls are being forced to contend with men and boys' desires before we even have a chance to figure out our own is really troubling. There's a great youtube video called "Real Men Don't Holla," made by a group of New York City high school students that I'd encourage you to watch (unfortunately, they couldn't make it to the hearing today).

I'd like to identify what I consider to be the obstacles to ending street harassment, and opportunities for solutions.

- 1) **Street harassment is minimized**—by both men and women. There's a sense that we really ought to relax and just enjoy the compliments, and a real unwillingness to acknowledge the pervasiveness of this problem and the fear that it inspires. I think Holly Kearl's research does a great job of challenging the perception that it's really no big deal by demonstrating that the majority of women have been followed by a man, that the majority of women have been grabbed in the street.

need to be challenged as early as possible, and I encourage New York to become a pioneer in teaching children to treat each other with respect.

- 2) **Conversation:** One of the great things about being a journalist is that you have opportunities to discuss issues with a wide range of people. I've found that young people are really eager to discuss this issue, and that while they may have conflicting opinions, they're open. A lot of young men have told me that they participate in harassment because their buddies pressure them to, but when confronted with how they're making girls feel, they often reassess their behavior. We need to start talking!
- 3) **Confrontation:** Obviously it's not for everyone, or for every situation, but I've been pleasantly surprised on a few occasions that when I respond to harassers and challenge their behavior, they get the message. Recently, a young man on a bicycle followed me up my own street. When I asked him to leave me alone, he was surprised and seemed even embarrassed, as if it had never occurred to him that a woman wouldn't enjoy being chased at night. A lot of men have just never put themselves in our shoes. Whether we're in sneakers or high heels, too often, it's a long, uncomfortable walk home.

Thank you again for putting together this hearing.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Mendez Berry,  
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Testimony  
NYC Council Hearing  
"Street Harassment of Women and Girls"  
October 28, 2010



My name is Emily May, and I am the executive director of *Hollaback!*, an organization that has been working to end street harassment since 2005. I want to thank Councilmember Julissa Ferras and the entire Committee on Women's Issues for coordinating this hearing. While street harassment has probably existed in our city since the advent of streets, this is the first ever hearing to specifically address this pervasive issue. It's a historic occasion, thank you.

*Hollaback!* is an international movement to end street harassment that started right here in New York City. It began because myself and a few friends were getting street harassed three or four times daily. When we walked on, we felt weak. When we yelled at the guys, the situation escalated, and the police didn't care. The most common suggestion for dealing with it was to plug our heads with earphones and pretend it wasn't happening. But something inside us told us this wasn't enough—we wanted to share our stories, and to get our fellow New Yorker's to share theirs. Five years later, over 1000 bold women and LGBTQ New Yorkers have told their stories of street harassment. Their stories have inspired *Hollaback!*s to launch in an additional 20 cities worldwide including London, Israel, Berlin, and Buenos Aires. Within the next couple of weeks we will launch an iPhone and a Droid app, making it even easier to *Hollaback!* and giving the public the real-time data on this pervasive problem.

At *Hollaback!*, we've heard stories of women leaving their jobs, or breaking their lease, because their commute involved too much street harassment. We've heard stories from girls skipping school to avoid harassment on their daily commute. And we've heard a surprising number of stories from women who moved out of New York City because they just couldn't take it anymore. These stories come from women and girls in all five boroughs, representation every ethnicity, from the ages of 10 to 75.

Too commonly, street harassment is believed to be the "price women pay" for living in New York City. But we're not buying it. Taxes are the price we pay for living in this city, not street harassment.

Just this week I had the opportunity to speak with young women at Barnard and the Little Red School House. Of these 150 young women, 100% of them had experienced street harassment according to our anonymous survey tool. As frustrated as each of them was about street harassment, they were inspired to hear that the New York City Council was listening. Many of them are submitting testimony today.

We have heard from New York City's women and girls. We know this is a problem. But who we haven't heard from is our legislators. Until now.

We have an historic opportunity to do something about this. Street harassment is poised to be the next big women's issue of this decade, in the same way that workplace harassment was in the 1980s. It is a gateway crime, creating a culture in our city that makes other forms of violence against women OK. And the New York City council is

well placed to lead the charge, just like they have with so many battles that have come before it.

I know what you're thinking – that this issue is going to be tough to legislate. We could choose to ignore it—after all, this is what we have done for a very long time. But I propose an alternative—we could choose to work together and take action—and for it to work, we need to move quickly.

Our ten-year plan is to build a world where all the baby girls in strollers today will never have to experience street harassment the way that girls today have. Today, on this most historic occasion, I'd like to invite you to join us.

Here are three initial first steps:

1. We need a citywide study on the impact of street harassment on women and girls, including recommendations for next steps;
2. We need a citywide public information campaign that teaches women, girls, men, and boys that street harassment is not OK; and
3. We need to establish harassment-free zones around our schools, similar to the drug-free zones that exist today.

New York City's women and girls deserve the freedom to walk down the streets of New York safely and confidently, without being the object of some creep's fantasy. And you have the power to change that. You have the power to rewrite history for New York City's tiniest.

So let's do it. Let's make today the day that New York City boldly decided to end street harassment. The women and girls of New York City are counting on us.

Thank you.

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## **Testimony for the Hearing on Street Harassment of Women & Girls in NYC**

Hello, my name is Nefertiti Martin. I'm a community organizer for Girls for Gender Equity and member of the Coalition for Gender Equity In Schools. We do work to end sexual harassment in schools and our wider communities.

Our work against sexual harassment has found its roots in street harassment, as seemingly a twisted rite of passage for young women throughout the neighborhoods of NYC. As expressed by a male Brooklyn resident in our "Hey...Shorty!" documentary, "It's something you go through in life...a little bit of harassment. The normalization of this issue is embedded deep within the cultures and communities from which our young women derive their very sense of selves.

Our young women are being told that they are only as good as they look, and they must exist in the public sphere to satisfy the heterosexual male gaze. Our young men are being told that their female counterparts are simply body parts to ogle and objectify for their personal pleasure and approval of their peers, and if a young woman rebuffs their advances to express this "nature", it is ok to reclaim their sunken pride through escalating to threats of or actual physical violence.

Here is where and why we need to draw the line at sexual harassment. We must expose sexual harassment for what it is, as it is an issue on the continuum of gender-based violence. It starts by taking it to the streets where it is intrinsically perpetuated.

We must deconstruct our preconceived notions about what it is and what it isn't.

This is not our way of not being able to take a compliment. This is an issue of safety. Street harassment is not justifiable by women who wear short skirts or have low self-esteem. This is a public health issue. This is not solely a women's issue. This is a human rights' issue. Sexual harassment is NOT something *anyone* should have to go through in life.

~Nefertiti Martin

Street Harassment of Women and Girls in New York City  
10/28/10

Thank you City Council Member Ferreras and the Committee on Women's Issues for holding this hearing in recognition of the prevalence and severity of harassment and other forms of violence faced by women and queer folks in the public spaces of NYC. My name is Meghan Huppuch, I am the Director of Community Organizing at Girls for Gender Equity.

Last Saturday I was in a room full of 13-16 year old girls of color co-leading an hour-long workshop about sexual harassment. As we were reaching the second half of the hour the topic shifted to how to stay safe. There are a whole range of beliefs in this specific area, and they are usually, and justifiably, based on wisdom gathered from a friend or family member's negative experience: stay silent and avert your eyes, make eye contact and tell the person to stop, walk confidently and it won't happen at all, respond politely so that the situation won't escalate, act crazy and scare the aggressor away. Because of the age group we were speaking with another technique was raised - tell them your age. This quickly became the most controversial tactic. Some young women in the circle had experienced success with "I'm thirteen" as a response to street harassment. Others shared responses that they had heard when they asserted their age, such as "after 12 it's lunch" and "14 and over, bend 'em over".

Young women are socialized into a world that sees them, and encourages them to see themselves, as sexual objects from extremely young ages. Young men are socialized into a world that teaches them that they are meant to exercise violence, both verbally and physically, on girls' and women's bodies. To challenge how folks are socialized is huge. It takes time and requires cultural shifts as opposed to policy changes. It necessitates education in place of increased policing. No matter how challenging, this is urgent because lives are at risk.

Girls for Gender Equity has a long history of doing community organizing and public education about sexual harassment in NYC. We have worked for years in partnership with youth, schools, and community based organizations to raise awareness and provide tools to passionate activists.

In 2008 a participatory action research project led by young women of color, and supported by GGE, provided solid evidence that sexually harassing behaviors are normalized in schools. The Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools grew out of this research. As a united group of youth, educators, parents and activists, we focus on utilizing schools as a point of intervention, and prevention, in the cycle of violence. We work to interrupt the spectrum of violence against women and queer folks in a space that is legally guaranteed to be safe, but so many times is not. Schools are much more than the site of formal education, they are social environments in which students learn what is OK to do. If sexual harassment is OK in school, it's definitely OK on the street. We believe that provided with the information and space, youth can create cultural shifts in their schools and positively influence all other spheres of their lives.

Our fellow warriors in this work to combat gender-based violence are many – Relationship Abuse Prevention Program, Men Can Stop Rape, Center for Anti-Violence Education, RightRides – and we have all found our intervention points, whether they are peer education, men as allies, self defense, safe rides home. We are out in the world, challenging existing and persistent ideas about what it means to be in public spaces – encouraging women and queer individuals to think of streets and schools as their own, and then supporting them to take action to make that real. We encourage the NYC Council to collaborate with and support these existing programs to make the necessary cultural shifts we need for increased safety.

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**Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) promotes physical, psychological, social and economic well-being of girls and women.**

GGE is a grassroots, youth development organization, founded in 2000 by Joanne Smith, Executive Director. Joanne Smith is a Haitian American Activist born in New York City who currently resides in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. With an Open Society Institute fellowship, Joanne launched GGE in 2001 as an equitable after-school health and fitness program; due, in part, to a letter signed by a coalition of seventy low-income African-American and Caribbean petitioning OSI to bring GGE to Central Brooklyn. These parents explained to OSI, *"We need your help to change the derogatory views of women and girls that plague our society"*.

Now, through a combination of advocacy, leadership and self-esteem development, community organizing, and programs, Girls for Gender Equity keeps **600 NYC boys and girls ages 8-18 off the streets** by offering them a safe place to achieve academic excellence, explore career education, and maintain healthy lifestyles. In an effort to put an end to the barriers of segregation and discrimination based on sex, GGE takes a dual approach of community organizing and service provision. GGE mobilizes girls, boys, women and men under Title IX of the Education amendment and its ten points<sup>1</sup>, to work as a collective toward systemic change in all of the support networks that shape the development and achievement of girls and women. Concurrently, GGE creates opportunities through a variety of programs and projects that nurture the optimal development of girls, women and, ultimately, the entire community.

### **Mission and Vision**

Girls for Gender Equity is an intergenerational organization committed to the physical, psychological, social and economic development of girls and women. Through education, organizing and physical fitness, Girls for Gender Equity encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives.

GGE envisions a society with optimal physical, economic, educational and social systems to foster the growth and fulfillment of all its members. To that end, we will provide programs that develop strengths, skills, and self-sufficiency in girls and women and help them make meaningful choices in their lives with minimum opposition and maximum community support. We will undertake organizing campaigns to achieve safety and equality in the social, political, educational, athletic, economic, health and media worlds of the smaller and larger communities in which girls and women live and work.

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<sup>1</sup> Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972. "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 to the Civil Rights Act of 1964). 10 key points: Access to Higher Ed, Athletics, Career Education, Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students, Employment, Learning Environment, Math and Science, Sexual Harassment, Standardized Testing and Technology.



## Programs

GGE carries out its mission through **Three Core Programs** and numerous campaigns and activities:

*Community Organizing* is an intergenerational, leadership development and peer-mentoring program that mobilizes community members to advocate and create sustainable changes within their communities through educational campaigns, research, and direct action. We recognize that solutions are not monolithic, and need to be addressed through macro- and micro-level actions that encompass the complex nature of gender and race based oppression. Activities include:

- Sisters in Strength
- Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools (CGES)
- Participatory Action Research
- Reproductive Rights
- Gender Respect Workshops
- Annual Gender Equality Festival
- World Against Sexual Harassment Campaign (WASH)

*Health & Fitness Program* establishes and maintains comprehensive programming for NYC schools and CBO's to coordinate girl's participation in equitable fitness activities, self-determination groups, educational health workshops and civil rights campaigns. Activities include:

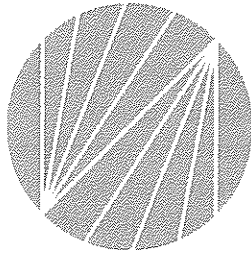
- After school Fitness Programs (basketball, boxing and soccer)
- Health education workshops (HIV/AIDS, Obesity, Puberty)
- Self-Determination Groups
- National Girls and Women in Sports Day (NGWSD)
- Mother/Daughter Health and Play Day

*Urban Leaders Academy* at MS 61 is a holistic program designed to help young men and women, of Central Brooklyn, achieve academic excellence, explore career options and maintain healthy lifestyles, while reducing violence and pregnancy risks. Support is provided by families, community members, teachers, peers and professionals who live throughout NYC and who set high standards for Urban Leaders youth to internalize community activism and self-determination as being achievable. Activities include:

- Afro-American History and Community Organizing
- Homework Help and Tutoring
- Modern Dance and Yoga
- Capoeira and Rites of Passage
- Stop the Silence of Domestic Violence and Art therapy
- Sex Education and Reproductive Rights

Despite minimal resources, GGE fights for our “forgotten girls”, improves peoples’ lives and makes extraordinary contributions to our community and to the educational, economic and cultural life of New York City. GGE believes that widespread violence against women and girls’ points to deeply rooted gender discrimination that must be tackled as a peace-building and human rights priority. Having convened a task force of parents, students and teachers in several Brooklyn schools in 2001, GGE is working to enforce compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendment.

Through countless campaigns and with community support, GGE aims to make schools, neighborhoods and homes a safer place for all children to learn and grow. Join us in this work! **For more information or to make a donation to GGE, please visit <http://www.ggenyc.org/donate.php> and contact Joanne Smith at 917.647.3157 or [jsmith@ggenyc.org](mailto:jsmith@ggenyc.org).**



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**Testimony for the City Council Women's Issues Committee Hearing on  
Street Harassment of Women and Girls in New York City**

by Harriet Lessel, Executive Director  
October 28, 2010

Thank you to the Chair of the Women's Issues Committee Council Member Ferreras, the members and staff for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Harriet Lessel and I am the Executive Director of the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault. One of the Alliance's main priorities is primary prevention of sexual violence in the city.

Sexual violence is defined as: Any completed or attempted sexual act against a person's will or against a person unable to give consent.

It encompasses a continuum of acts, ranging from unwanted sexual comments or advances to completed rape. Anyone can experience sexual violence. While the majority of acts are perpetrated by someone known to the victim, anyone can perpetrate sexual violence--a stranger, a person in a position of power or trust, an acquaintance, a relative, a friend, or an intimate partner.

Sexual violence is an issue of basic human rights that has significant impact on public health and the economy. Factoring in costs related to medical treatment, mental health care, and lost productivity, it has been estimated that sexual assaults against adult victims alone cost the victims over \$120 billion each year in the United States<sup>1</sup>.

In order to address sexual violence, it is absolutely crucial to address its root causes and the social norms that promote and permit sexual violence. I strongly believe that the prevalence of street harassment of women and girls both results from and contributes to these social norms.

The Alliance's main primary-prevention program is Project Envision, a six-year pilot project using participatory action research to examine sexual violence in three particular communities: the South Bronx, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and Williamsburg,

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Ted, Cohen, Mark & Wiersema, Brian. Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 1996.

Brooklyn. Participatory action research entails giving equal weight to input from those subjects being researched as is given to the knowledge of the “experts” performing the research.

When asked about what forms of sexual violence were most common in the community, the number-one answer for the Williamsburg, Brooklyn group was verbal sexual harassment. It is compelling that sexual harassment stood out to community members as a major problem over some of the more egregious acts of sexual violence that were cited, such as child abuse or intimate partner violence. These are acts commonly understood to be fundamentally wrong and with profound negative implications on the victims and on society.

Sexual harassment has not yet reached that level of public opinion. Sexual harassment of women and girls is a form of gender-based violence that can cause the victims to feel unsafe or inferior. However, common attitudes towards harassment are that it is harmless, that women should develop “thicker skin,” or that women ought to be grateful for the attention.

If we choose to dismiss sexual harassment, we are sending the message to everyone—women, girls, men, and boys—that we not only accept but expect women and girls to feel and be powerless. We are also creating low standards for men and boys and discouraging healthy, constructive forms of communication. These conditions form the foundation for a society that nurtures all forms of sexual violence.

The Williamsburg Coalition of Project Envision is taking steps to mobilize the community against sexual harassment by engaging young men in workshops and trainings on boundaries, communication, and gender stereotypes. Through this dialogue, the young men will become leaders in challenging harassment in their schools and communities.

The Alliance urges the City Council to advance the efforts of the coalition and others working in this field by acknowledging sexual harassment to be a serious issue. Specifically, we would hope to see a city-wide study on street harassment, including its implications for other forms of sexual violence.

I hope that the City Council will take leadership in shifting social norms by addressing sexual harassment in the city.

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For further information, please contact Harriet Lessel at 212-229-0345 x301 or [hlessel@svfreenyc.org](mailto:hlessel@svfreenyc.org).



CENTER FOR  
ANTI-VIOLENCE  
EDUCATION

327 7TH STREET BROOKLYN NY 11215 T: (718) 788-1775 F: (718) 499-2284 CAENY.ORG

October 28, 2010

New York City Council  
Committee on Women's Issues

To the Members of the Committee on Women's Issues:

On behalf of The Center for Anti-violence Education (CAE), I am pleased to offer testimony at today's hearing, *Street Harassment of Women and Girls in New York City*.

For over 35 years, CAE has provided violence prevention programming for communities at risk for violence, including women, teen women, children, LGBT individuals, and survivors of violence. CAE's programs empower participants to heal from, prevent, and counter violence, and reach over 2,000 New Yorkers each year. In addition, we partner with 70 diverse community organizations annually, and are active members of the Brooklyn Girls' Collaborative and New Yorkers for Safe Transit.

As Executive Director of CAE, I would like to share our expertise, as well as the experiences of our staff and program participants, concerning street harassment of women and girls in New York City. I am grateful for the opportunity to share this important information with the New York City Council's Committee on Women's Issues. Following are some key observations:

**Street harassment is affecting younger and younger girls.** While we used to focus on street harassment with our teen participants, we have been hearing again and again from girls as young as 10 and 11 that they are experiencing harassment on the streets, at school, and on public transit. This harassment often takes the form of sexual harassment and sexually degrading comments or innuendo about their bodies.

Three CAE students (ages 11 and 12) recently told us that as they walked down the street past a group of men, they started verbally harassing them. They made comments like, "I want some of that. Give me some of that." When we asked the girls how this made them feel, they responded with the words "*afraid, sad, confused, dirty*."

**Younger girls are deeply impacted by street harassment.** When the comments or actions of another make you "feel dirty," it means that you are deeply internalizing them. These traumatic incidents make young girls feel afraid and ashamed. They lower their self-esteem, which undermines their ability to protect themselves and make healthy choices for themselves later on. For many, this might be their first "sexual experience"—a negative one. They do not have the proper skills or language to deal with or communicate this experience. It is vital that we provide them with those resources. Young girls who experience harassment or abuse are more likely to engage in risky and self-destructive behaviors. Younger girls are even less equipped to cope with this harassment than teen women.

At CAE, our unique combination of discussions and physical activities that make them feel stronger and safer, girls and women learn that they are not to blame. They learn not to internalize abusive or traumatic incidents of harassment, but to understand the causes and context of this harassment. This in turn enables them to maintain their self-esteem and continue to make healthy decisions for themselves.

**Benefits of Physical Activity and Discussion.** Studies demonstrate what CAE knows: young people who participate in physical activity develop positive body image, increased self-esteem, and leadership skills, and are more likely to graduate from high school. Involvement in physical activity also decreases likelihood of teen pregnancy, smoking, and drug abuse. By combining physical activities with information about harassment and ways to talk about it, CAE helps girls build the strength and skills they need to respond to these issues.

### **Next Steps**

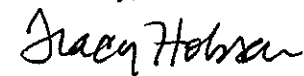
In order to address the scope of the problem, we must understand the link between street harassment and sexual harassment, and understand how scary and confusing these incidents can be for girls. Just one incident can have a lasting impact. We join with the other members of New Yorkers for Safe Transit to **request a study that addresses the impact of street harassment on girls and women.**

In addition, CAE requests an allotment of **time during the school day** for girls to build the skills they need to cope with harassment situations. They will learn what they can do and say in the moment, to feel strong and safe, and afterward, to get the support they need. For example, young women could log cases of street harassment at school. Both girls and boys could participate in this activity. By sharing the knowledge with others, it will help girls to feel like they're actively doing something. In addition, it provides education about violence to all children and empowers boys to act as allies.

CAE provides girls and women with physical and verbal empowerment strategies that enable them to build the skills and confidence they need to address these issues. For young women, hearing that no one has the right to hurt you and that you have the right to respect is transformative, especially when combined with open discussions and strengthening activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this crucial hearing. We look forward to a continued partnership with the City Council in the effort to address street harassment against girls and women.

Sincerely,



Tracy Hobson  
Executive Director

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brian Bradley

Address: 342 Lewis Ave, BK, NY 11233

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Zehra Ali

Address: 150 West 28th Street (304)

I represent: Sonia Osso (Naitkatal.org/naidens)

Address: Carson NYC

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alison Rob Park

Address: ~~334~~ alisonrobpark@gmail.com

I represent: SELF

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Natalia Aristizabal

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Plate the Road NY + Pan American High School

Address: 92-10 Roosevelt Ave.

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sihyun Song

Address: 2824 86st. Bklyn NY 11223

I represent: self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: QUENTIN WALCOTT

Address: 3 W 29TH ST, NY, NY

I represent: CONVULS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Violet Kittappa

Address: 3019 37th St. Astoria

I represent: myself and Hollaback NYC

Address: Brooklyn

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elizabeth W. R. Bery

Address: 3543 87th St. Apt. 3

I represent: Myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Beckie Weintraub

Address: 11624 Grosvenor Ln 11418

I represent: Street Harassment

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/26/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Holly Kearn

Address: 2203 Cedar Cove Ct. Reston, VA 20191

I represent: Myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nefertiti Martin

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Girls for Gender Equity

Address: 30 Third Ave Suite 103 Brooklyn NY 11217

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Meghan Huppach

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Girls for Gender Equity

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/2010

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dejin Chang

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Council member Connie

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: OCT. 28, 2010

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ana Garcia

Address: 1810 BULLOCK BLVD #46 Bx NY 10473

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: Oct 28, 2010

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Black

Address: PO Box # 1415 / NY, NY ~~10276~~

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/28/2010

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mandy Van Deven

Address: 3250 Broadway #3F NY 10027

I represent: RightRides for Women's Safety

Address: 26 Court St #505 Brooklyn 11242

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: EMILY MAY

Address: 284A 22nd St apt. 2

I represent: HOLLABACK!

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TRACY HOBBS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The Center for Anti-violence Education

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Harriet Lesse

Address: 32 Broadway NY NY 10004

I represent: NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault

Address: samoasabone

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 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leah Todd

Address: 218 Spencer St #1 BK NY 11205

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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