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Catcalling

(Sobio)



The memory of the day which I first experienced catcalling is very vivid in my mind. It was one of those hot and arid days that we so often face here in Southern California. However, besides the temperature, it was a Saturday, a day that usually meant for a visit to the flea market for fresh fruits and vegetables. My fourteen-year-old self was wearing a bright colored t-shirt and

skinny jeans, something that was “in style” for me back then. Little did I expect what was to come. Before even having entered the flea market, I heard whistles from the other side of a wire gate that was dividing the flea market from the surrounding area. Not realizing that the demoralizing noise was for me. I went on walking, that was until my father’s reaction became obvious. My dad broke the silence within my family. He immediately yelled back, “¿Quien piensas que eres? La niña solo tiene catorce años! Puerco!” His words, meant to defend me, caused all the attention to be directed towards me. Those words, “Who do you think you are? The girl is only fourteen years old! Pig!” marked me. Created with the intention of tearing down our power, men’s objectification has led to acceptance of open harassment through the form of catcalling.

Experiences

My mind has no doubts about the severity of harassment or the effects it has on our community. We: daughters, wives, mothers, aunts, - who have all experienced or will experience harassment- are affected. Generally speaking, we are not okay with being followed around a store by a man that is a stranger. Generally speaking, we are not okay when the man that has been following us approaches us more than twice asking, “Can I have your number?” after we have already politely declined. Taking matters a step further, we are not okay when the very following day the man who followed us and refused our rejection, curiously ends up in the same store as us again. Does this situation not seem real enough? It happened to me. At a Walmart in Upland, I had my first encounter with a strange man who followed me around Walmart and refused my rejections. Then, the following day, at a Target in Rancho Cucamonga I nearly lost

my mind. I had my second encounter with the same strange man from the previous day at Target. The strange man had once again taken it upon himself to follow me around this store. Need I go any further?

Media and several other sources may suggest that we are not always in the predicament which we find ourselves in danger, but how are we, the women, supposed to be certain of this. I find myself carrying a stun gun with me everywhere. Even driving these days seems to be unsafe. I get in my car and lock the doors immediately, even if that means suffocating in the heat before the air conditioning fully turns cool. The dangers of driving can be imagined in several scenarios. Driving down a street can mean a man in a car spots you and decides to follow you wherever you go. Driving down a down a street can mean a man in car spots you and decides to drive right next to you, same speed and all. Driving down a street can mean a man in car spots you, rolls down his window and viscously shouts sexual slurs at you. Driving down a street can mean a man spots you off the street and tries to wave you down as if you would stop. Driving out of your school's parking structure can mean having to go out the entrance side in complete darkness because a man decided to stop at the exit, just as his friend who was walking toward his car decides to wave you down. Where does the root of male entitlement begin?

Effects

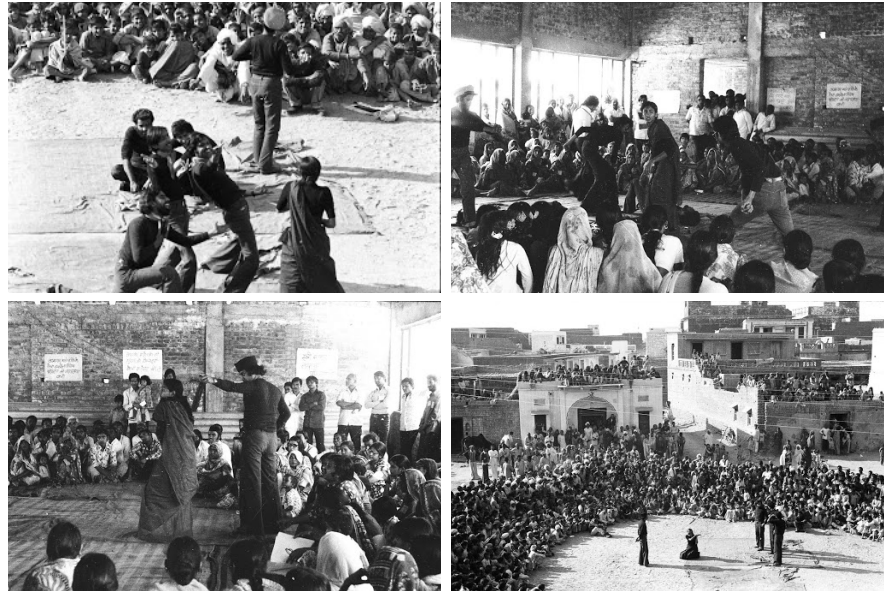
It is important to evaluate the effect that catcalling has on us. Our internalization of, “feelings of invasion, disempowerment, humiliation, and fear can lead to repressed anger and depression (Chhun).” Catcalling causes wounds. No, our wounds are not physically visible, but they exist. The wounds we are left with are mental ones. Our psychological state can become

permanently altered due to catcalling, which men consider to be harmless. Depression, which can be more dangerous than repressed anger, is associated with suicidal thoughts and sometimes suicide. Furthermore, depression is a disorder that makes for a loss of interest in everything, including in our will to fight for what we deserve. With depression, we settle more often than we fight, as we just do not have the will to do so. For us it is not difficult to see the real dangers catcalling can create beyond just our physical states.

What we feel and do when we are unfortunately faced with stranger harassment can vary, but fear, enjoyment, and verbal reactions are very important. A study found that when alone: 71.9 percent of us experience fear in response to stranger harassment, .5 percent of us experience enjoyment in response to stranger harassment, and 4.4 percent of us have a verbal reaction in response to stranger harassment. Furthermore, that same study found that when on the street: 34.7 percent of us experience fear in response to stranger harassment, .7 percent of us experience enjoyment in response to stranger harassment, and 11.1 percent of us have a verbal reaction in response to stranger harassment. (Fairchild) The data overwhelmingly shows that when faced with stranger harassment, both alone and on the street, we are more likely to experience fear than enjoyment, and less likely to have a verbal reaction. It is difficult for us to be completely independent, as we are filled with fear. Men, on the other hand, find it much more simple to become independent. Typically, men do not need to be worried as often as women when it comes to stranger harassment. The fear we experience is very one-sided, so we are the only ones that suffer from being catcalled. We are the ones that must consider the risks of being alone or on the street before we make a decision on doing either.

“In the first, the student Woman (Moloyashree Hashmi) is subjected to sexual harassment by three louts (l to r, Deepak Gulati, N.K. Sharma and Subhash Tyagi) as the policeman (Rathin Das) looks away.”

-Sudhanva Deshpande



(A Play)

Frequency

I come to a loss when I try to describe the extreme disillusion I feel inside. On a poll, on my Instagram account, I posed the question, “Have you ever been catcalled, followed, or had a persistent admirer that would not take no as a reply?” I expected the results but was also stunned. The results were as follows: of fifty-nine girls fifty-two have been catcalled, followed, or had a persistent admirer that would not take no as a reply, meaning only seven have not. Eighty-eight percent of young women that I surveyed have faced harassment. I expected for the majority of young women to say they had experienced harassment, which coincides with the evidence. However, the matter that stunned me was the fact that so many of the young women around me had experienced it. Putting those faces and names to the matter, it was shocking. You would like to think, “it is just a me thing,” but it truly is not. Out of all the young women who voted, I have heard only one or two bring up the situation. The reality is that harassment towards us has

become so widespread that if it was a song, it could have beat “Despacito” in a heartbeat last year.

Publicized on websites dedicated to psychology research and women interests, a study was able to provide data on how often we encounter stranger harassment. Under the subsection of, “Catcalls, whistles, or stares,” the table provided the following data: 29.2 percent of women encounter stranger harassment once a month, 22.6 percent of women encounter stranger harassment twice a month, 28.2 percent of women encounter stranger harassment every few days or more (Fairchild). The data provided did not investigate how many of us have experienced catcalling, but rather how often this event occurred to us. However, adding up all the frequency rates I found that only 20 percent is not represented by the data. The 20 percent is ambiguous to the exact percent of us that face “catcalls, whistles, or stares” every few months and the percent of us that have not faced this situation at all. The fact that so many of us have reported that the “catcalls, whistles, or stares” have become a regular encounter is alarming. The percentage not represented is less than one-fourth of the total. I interpret this fact as one that shows that catcalling is not a secluded event.

When I set out to investigate the reasons behind the frequency of catcalling, it led me to find two reasons, one blaming us and the other blaming men. We are naturally less aggressive than men, so it was not surprising to find that mostly we “do not respond to [our] catcaller, allowing the male speaker’s bad behavior to go unchallenged.” The second reason I found was that men find catcalling to be a, “form of ‘male-bonding.’” Furthermore, men believe that “the purpose of the verbal act is to compliment.” (Chhun) I was lead to the idea that catcalling has

become more frequent not because of blame that can be placed on simply us and men, rather it is due to the intersectionality of societal norms. Societal norms take us to be less aggressive, that is less confrontational. Less confrontation then leads into men's lack of understanding that we do not take their catcalling as compliments, but rather we take it as a form of offense. However, while men deep down must understand the discomfort we feel -without us having to tell them explicitly- they experience a diminishment of their feeling of responsibility. The lack of responsibility, according to psychology, comes from the cost of being in a group; therefore, it coincides with the idea that catcalling is viewed by some men as a, "form of 'male-bonding' (Chhun)."

Law

Catcalling, a form of harassment, would not be a legal matter in the eyes of any United States court under the classification of civil harassment. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, EEOC for short, defines harassment as, "unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information." The key phrase being, "unwelcome conduct." Catcalling, while recognized as harassment by the United States government, is still not recognized as a valid matter in the court system. The Judicial Branch of California states that harassment does not constitute a civil legal matter until, "Unlawful violence, like assault or battery or stalking, OR A credible threat of violence, AND The violence or threats seriously scare, annoy, or harass someone and there is no valid reason for it," takes place. In essence, the judicial system is limiting the resources we should be able to access. Censoring us in the process through what

government defines as a politically unacceptable issue in courts. Thus, enabling, in a sense, men's behavior, while also diminishing our power in a political view.

More than just negligence of justice for catcalling, there is actually protections put in place for the men who catcall. The First Amendment, described as freedom of speech, is most commonly associated with the political world, that is freedom to voice an opinion on U.S. politics. However, the First Amendment has actually come to be used to protect men who catcall us. There is a limit to the First Amendment but, "the fighting words statute" is not considered when it comes to catcalling, because mostly we, "do not respond violently to verbal abuse." In United States law, there is not a direct mention of catcalling, but this is not true for other countries (Chhun). Beginning as early as 2009, countries have moved towards creating laws to protect us against catcalling. The countries are Peru, Iceland, Nicaragua, France, and Argentina. (Ferreira) However, the United States has fallen behind in the movement to end harassment toward women.

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