

GENDER EQUITY FOR ALL
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CATCALLING

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CATCALLING BY MADELINE SEVERY

*catcall (v): make a whistle, shout, or comment of a sexual nature to a woman
[or feminine individual] passing by*

In the most basic sense, catcalling is sexual harrassment. Many women and feminine individuals, especially in large metropolitan areas, experience catcalling on a daily basis: In the United States, 65% of female poll respondents had experienced street harassment, with over half experiencing “extreme harassment” like touching or grabbing [1].

One recent study showed that 84% of feminine individuals had experienced catcalling by the time they were seventeen years old [2].

Catcalling is one of the most common forms of sexual harrassment, one which men are more likely to see the practice as acceptable. In a YouGov poll, 20% of male respondents believed that catcalling was a compliment [x]. What’s more, 2% of total respondents said that catcalling was “always appropriate” [1]. These statistics demonstrate why catcalling is such a widespread problem: Feminine individuals are stigmatized for being catcalled, while those who catcall are let off by societal perceptions of the practice.

FEMININE FEAR

“I ran cross country and my entire team ran in shorts and sports bras because it’s hot in Florida. Male drivers on the roads we ran on seemed to take it as an invitation to honk and yell out their windows (one man in the passenger seat had his entire upper body out of the window to yell). This happened regardless of whether my teammates were in groups or alone, if they were wearing shorts or not, or if they were freshman or seniors.”

– Madeline

Many feminine individuals, including myself, have experienced catcalling for as long as we can remember. For many, the frequency of catcalling interactions has made them fearful of walking alone or near men.

A Gallup poll from 143 countries found that 45% of women do not feel safe walking around their hometown at night, compared to just 27% of men [1]. Think about your own hometown: Would you feel safe walking alone at night? Maybe you or someone you know carries pepper spray or a whistle with them. Perhaps you only walk in groups, being careful not to walk on streets that are too dark. This is the reality for feminine individuals worldwide. Unfortunately, catcalling has grown into an egregious problem that threatens feminine individuals’ safety but is not taken seriously as an act of sexual assault.

THE DRESS CODE "SOLUTION"

My school uniform consists of a shin-length pleated skirt, tights, and a long-sleeve button down shirt and we are told we must wear it to avoid male attention. It feels like the burden of men's lack of self control is placed on our dress instead of the perpetrators themselves.

– Emunah

In many schools, dress codes are seen as a way to prevent sexual harassment like catcalling. However, dress codes stigmatize the problem of sexual assault further rather than preemptively solving it.

In the 2017–2018 school year, over half of high schools were found to have “strict” dress codes for their feminine students [3]. Often, these dress codes are stricter for feminine-presenting students, exemplifying both the ineffectiveness and misogyny associated with them. Organizations like the Ruth Project are working to dismantle sexist dress codes and instate a gender-neutral and inclusive dress code for all students.

Outside of school settings, sexual assault and catcalling against feminine individuals is often excused based on the clothing they choose to wear. From hijabs to clothes for clubbing, feminine individuals have been targeted by street harassment regardless of their outfits [4].

We all know—and it’s time for society to know, too—that it’s not the woman’s fault, it’s their catcaller. The only cause of catcalling is catcallers.

RESOURCES

Feminine individuals all over the world have been victims of catcalling. If you have experienced catcalling, know that you are not alone, and that it is not your fault. The resources below can help inspire, empower, and support you in standing up to street harassers.

[Catcalls of NYC](#)

[Stop Street Harassment](#)

[Right to Be](#)

References

[1] [Stop Street Harassment Statistics](#)

[2] [Elle Article](#) on Catcalling

[3] [AJC Article](#) on Sexist Dress Codes

[4] [Elle Article](#) on Women's Clothes While Being Catcalled