



Hollaback Goes Global

Here's what to do when a perv hits a nerve

IT STARTS WITH A KISSY NOISE, or a low whistle you hear faintly as you walk down the street... then the catcalls begin.

"Hey baby!" "Can I get some of that over here?" And the ever so classy, "Mmmmm... nice ass!"

In the past, you might have just walked faster, hoping it wouldn't escalate. But thanks to Hollaback—founded in New York in 2005 by activist Emily May—street harassers can't get away scot-free with such behavior. Instead, women can "out" their harassers with cell-phone photos and blog posts for all to see.

Since *Ms.* first covered the movement in 2006, it has gone national and global, with Hollaback websites spreading to more than 30 cities, including Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Washington, D.C., and London. The key demographic of

the anti-harassment campaign is girls and younger women, who are the easiest to target and distress.

"The stories the younger girls post are what kill me the most," says May. "I read email submissions from girls who are 12, 13, 14, who have been groped, assaulted, masturbated on."

One of Hollaback NYC's biggest victories was partnering with New Yorkers for Safe Transit to get the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority to hang anti-harassment advertisements in subway trains and include anti-harassment language in MTA pamphlets handed out in schools. Next up: a Hollaback iPhone application, launched in June, that allows users to not just upload a description of the incident and photos of the harasser but to mark the user's location on an online map. That gives Hollaback useful data on where street

◀ If you can't slap 'em, snap 'em! Emily May started Hollaback NYC five years ago to make the streets safe for women.

harassment occurs most frequently. May plans to turn this data into an annual "State of the Streets" report to raise awareness.

"Street harassment is quickly becoming something you can take to your policymaker, something you can vocalize about, something you can fight against," she says. "And hopefully, we can start to change the public consciousness and get legislation passed to educate the public, especially young boys."

Holly Kearl, author of the forthcoming *Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women* (Praeger) and founder of www.stopstreetharassment.com, feels there's no reason the U.S. cannot go a step further and enact anti-street-harassment laws. She cites precedents in Egypt, where legislation criminalizing street harassment is pending.

Legislating against street harassment is problematic, however, since the streets aren't a controlled environment like a workplace or classroom, says Pasadena, Calif. attorney Jason Oliver, who specializes in harassment suits. "Any attempt to regulate catcalling would be subject to constitutional challenges; the right to free speech and the right to be free from harassment would conflict."

Attorney Meredith Karasch agrees that street harassment is of a different legal nature than workplace harassment. "It could face difficulty in the courts, since one could say street harassment is easier to get away from than workplace harassment," she says.

But Kearl is optimistic: "There are fines for littering and not picking up after your dog, and I'm sure a lot of women see street harassment as more harmful to them than trash and poop. I think anything is possible if women fight for it."

—ANITA LITTLE