



Supporters take to the streets to protest against harassment

Fight Harassment By Joining Twitter's #50stories Movement

We've all heard obscene or threatening comments as we go about our day, but the call for it to stop just got louder

You'll know the feeling we're talking about because every one of us has been there. You're walking home alone and pass a group of men who make a comment or start walking with you. That trepidation, that fear, that *threat* of what could be next. Maybe it's become the norm for you, maybe you don't even notice anymore, or maybe you deliberately have your headphones in at all times, so you don't have to hear it. But last week the subject of street harassment got too loud for anyone to avoid, as Twitter was set ablaze with women around the world tweeting their experiences.

In just a few minutes, hundreds of women had used their 140 characters and the #50stories hashtag to describe encounters like: "Walking with my daughter on my way to a memorial service. Man took it personally I wasn't smiling," and "after being called an ungrateful bitch, had to explain to a harasser that I did not ask 

for his 'compliments' or attention."

The conversation was started by Holly Kearl, 30, who works on a consultancy project with the UN but has spent her free time collating accounts from victims all around the world for a book, *50 Stories About Stopping Street Harassers*.

Holly, from Reston, Virginia, who also runs Stopstreetharassment.org, a website dedicated to supporting women, told *Look* she had no idea how much #50stories would resonate when she introduced it on Twitter. "I didn't realise it would mean so much to women," says Holly. "At one point #50stories was trending worldwide. We had people tweet

“It sounds extreme to say, but it was like verbal rape”

their experiences from so many different countries too, it was incredibly powerful and devastating. When I started my blog five years ago, I would get about 10 hits a week. Now I'm getting at least 20,000 a month. Women want to talk about this subject."

Holly was inspired to start her campaign after an evening run. "Everyone has a story," she says. "I remember jogging through a housing estate. There were six men standing outside a building and one said: 'Why is she running funny?' and the other said: 'Because I'm coming in her from behind.' They all started laughing so I stopped to glare at them and then realised I was on my own. I got really panicked and ran away as quick as I could. It sounds extreme to say, but it was like verbal rape. Some people dismiss street harassment as a 'compliment' but you never see men shouting seedy 'compliments' at other men. It's about them assuming control and bullying. And it's not acceptable."

Last year a YouGov poll found at least 41% of women aged between 18 and 34 had experienced some form of unwanted attention in London alone. Holly says this is why her book and #50stories is important and why she hopes it will inspire women to stand up for themselves. "*50 Stories* includes experiences from women in 16

different countries. We have tales from the UK to Afghanistan, and from women aged 15-55," she adds. "One of the most inspiring to me is from a woman living in Wales. She was on the train coming back from a day out with her son in Cardiff. There were some football fans hassling a group of women and saying nasty things, so she asked them to leave the women alone. Then when they turned on her, shouting abusive, sexist comments at her, she pulled the emergency stop cord. The conductor refused to help and ignored her, so when she got off at her stop she stood on the train tracks until the police arrived. Instead of arresting her, they reprimanded the conductor and carried out an investigation. She'd had enough and stood up for herself – and it paid off. At the back of the book we've also included a section where we encourage women to write down three things they would like to do when faced with harassment. This means if – and when – it does happen, they'll be better prepared."

As well as the book and her online campaign, Holly and her group of volunteers are holding protests and demos to spread their message even further. She says: "We want to unite women, which is why I organise protests – to bring us together. I've started touring universities as well to promote our message, and we're in

talks to have the issue of street harassment addressed in schools. If people learn from a young age that behaving this way isn't acceptable, maybe we stand a chance of getting rid of it for good. And I won't stop until that happens. Men might have a history of shouting at us in the streets, but we can shout louder."

■ For more information, go to Stopstreetharassment.org. Buy Holly's book at Stopstreetharassment.org/our-work/book/.



Holly Kearl (far left) who started the Twitter frenzy, and a friend at a protest against street harassment

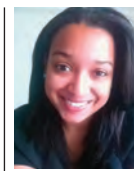
#50STORIES: WHAT WOMEN TWEETED



@jessperino
"After all the times I was stalked, and terrified over the years, they expect me to smile and look at the ground." #50stories



@HeyWhiteGirl_
"Women will walk BLOCKS out of their way to avoid groups of men on the street & they are oblivious." #50stories



@AngryWriterGirl
"I had a bottle thrown at my back by a teen for telling him to leave me alone. Ached for two days." #50stories



@fyeahmfabello
"Street harassment is NOT about sexual desire. It's about power, and it's about entitlement." #50stories



@boachiee
"When i was cat called, i told the man it made me uncomfortable. he called me a bitch... why is this normal?" #50stories



@Bestito86
"I've been followed, and some women have been physically hurt." #50stories