

Visualizing Street Harassment: Mapping the “10 Hours of Walking” Street Harassment Meme

Rebecca Hayes,
Michigan State
University

“Visualizing Street Harassment” is a digital map project prompted by the question of how and where activists have repurposed the format and characteristics of the YouTube video “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman” to build public conversations about street harassment and to critique the public rhetoric surrounding it. The project was developed and funded through a Cultural Heritage Informatics Graduate Fellowship at Michigan State University and presented as a digital poster at the Conference on Community Writing in October 2015.

2014 was “the year street harassment became a national conversation” (Butler). From the Twitter hashtags #yououksis to #dudesgreetingdudes, the topic of street harassment pulsed through every kind of social media. The YouTube video, “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman,” produced by Rob Bliss Creative for Hollaback, a U.S.-based anti-street harassment nonprofit organization, played a key role in amplifying the street harassment conversation in the public sphere. Bliss and his colleagues created “10 Hours



of *Walking...*” by hidden camera recording a woman, 24-year-old actress Shoshana Roberts, walking in NYC for ten hours and editing the footage down to a two-minute video. The video opens with a black screen and text, “Ten hours of silent walking through all areas of Manhattan, wearing jeans and a crewneck t-shirt.” The subtitles in the video convey the words spoken to Roberts, for example, “Hey beautiful,” as well as describe actions, “(same guy-has been walking silently alongside her for the past two minutes).” The video closes with a black screen and white text “100+ instance of verbal street harassment took place within 10 hours, involving people of all backgrounds. This doesn’t include the countless winks, whistles, etc” and a call to donate to Hollaback.”

When the video was released on YouTube on October 28, 2014, it went viral. In its first day online, it had over 10 million views and, in its first month, over 37 million views, and, nearly 140,000 comments on YouTube. There are hundreds of copycat videos, video responses, blogs, tweets, and born-digital media articles that share, mimic, support, mock, critique, and lambast the video, its makers, its funders, its research methods, its subjects, its politics, its ideologies, its agenda. Critiques leveraged against the video point to racist, classist, and sexist frameworks and editing practices that produced a skewed, limited reality of both the targets and perpetrators of street harassment.

As I watched the video go viral, I became especially interested in one type of response: videos that employ the original video’s approach of filming someone walking in public places for extended periods

of times to problematize the narrative of the original video and its frameworks based in mainstream, non-profit, white, feminist anti-street harassment activism. These videos range from “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman in a Hijab” to “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Man” to “10 Hours of Walking in Mumbai as a Woman” and over 30 more.

Through my digital project, “Visualizing Street Harassment: Mapping the ‘10 Hours of Walking’ Street Harassment Meme,” I have begun curating, mapping, and describing the videos that use the “10 Hours of Walking...” approach. “Visualizing Street Harassment” is motivated by the question: how and where have activists repurposed the characteristics of “10 Hours of Walking...” to critique and build public conversations on street harassment? I’m particularly interested in the ways the video creators’ adapt the “10 Hours of Walking...” meme to draw attention to the complexity of interactions between movement in public spaces and seemingly visible identity markers such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality.



Two examples, both posted on November 6, 2014 are “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman in a Hijab” and “10 Hours of Walking in LA as a Black Man.” Karim Metwaly of “Are We Famous Now” released the latter video on YouTube. Metwaly introduces the video, saying it portrays his friend walking for five hours in casual clothing and five hours in hijab, “to see how they compare and the responses

she gets.” The video concludes with text: “What do you think? You be the judge?”, encouraging viewers to consider the role of clothing, traditional or otherwise, in incidents of gendered street harassment. Critiques of this video argue it perpetuates victim blaming by suggesting that if women covered their bodies, they wouldn’t be harassed.

Another video released on November 6 was Insane Genius TV’s staged parody, “10 Hours of Walking in LA as a Black Man.” The video opens with the text: “10 hours of silent walking through all areas of Downtown LA wearing jeans and a crewneck t-shirt and.....being BLACK.” The final scene portrays him being shot by a police officer, intending to call upon public knowledge of recent incidents of police violence against men of color. The video concludes with the text: “Rest in Peace Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown.”

According to Bliss, Roberts, and Emily May, the executive director of Hollaback, the purpose of “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman” was to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of street harassment and to show it is not related to dress. Roberts intentionally dressed in casual clothing, jeans and a t-shirt, to debunk the victim-blaming arguments that street harassment is connected to a women’s choice of attire. While it’s important to acknowledge the frequency of street harassment as part of the spectrum of gendered violence and to educate against victim-blaming, the response videos add an additional layer to the street harassment conversation by moving it beyond awareness and individual responsibility. When examined individually and in relationship to each other, the videos began to situate street harassment in conversation with other instances of violence and the systemic issues surrounding gendered and racialized violence.

In their article, “Service Learning as Social Justice Activism: Students Help a Campus Shift to Bystander Awareness” in this issue of *Reflections*, Erin Tunney and Irene Lietz write that they “determined that [their] intervention [into campus gender violence] should challenge the perception that victims are exclusively responsible for their own safety” and thus moved to a campus wide service-learning program on bystander awareness in order to decrease gendered violence. From their work, I wondered: how would the

street harassment instances in these videos have looked or proceeded differently, if there had been bystander intervention? I also begin to consider the pedagogical possibilities for “Visualizing Street Harassment” and other public rhetoric projects on gendered violence. As a set of public rhetoric artifacts, students could compare and analyze videos as an entry point into discussions of the complexities surrounding violence, identity, and their systemic nature. As a multimodal project, students could themselves replicate the video’s format for issues and identities relevant to their local campuses and contexts.

You can find “Visualizing Street Harassment: Mapping the ‘10 Hours of Walking’ Street Harassment Meme” at: <http://visualizingstreetharassment.matrix.msu.edu/>

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Rebecca Hayes is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric and Writing at Michigan State University, where she also works as an editorial assistant for a creative nonfiction journal and is pursuing certificates in Museum Studies and Community Engagement. Her research, teaching, and engagement interests include queer and cultural rhetorics, public humanities, community-engaged rhetoric, writing, and literary arts, and public and social memory. Her dissertation examines the public memory practices of a local lesbian community.