

# Hollaback!

Social movement dedicated to end street harassment

WOMEN RECLAIM  
THE STREET

Inter University Centre Dubrovnik  
*Course: Social Work and Spirituality, 2013*

Barbara Perasović Cigrovski  
PhD student at the University Centre for Social work,  
Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb

# Introduction



## My perspective:

- Hollaback activist from 2011
- PhD student from 2011/2012

## References:

- Literature on social movement
- Literature on gender based violence
- PhD dissertation (Jill Dimond, 2012): “Feminist HCI for real: designing technology in support of a social movement”

# Contents



1. About street harassment

2. About Hollaback!

- a) History and development
- b) Organizational model
- c) Activities

3. Hollaback's model as a tool of empowerment

- a) Storytelling as a tool of empowerment
- b) Empowerment of volunteers

nt dedicated to end stre

# ABOUT STREET HARASSMENT

# Definition



## Harassment of women and LGBTIQ people taking place in public spaces:

### Harassment:

- Broad range of unwanted behaviours (verbal harassment, masturbation at public places, groping, following, threat of physical violence)
- Point of view of the victim, not the harasser

### Form of gender based violence:

- Harassed are mainly women or LGBTIQ persons, harassers are mainly men
- Intersectional (activists); feminist issue (activists and scholars)

### Public spaces:

- Streets, parks, public transport
- Harassment at school/work – better legally protected, more researched

# Incidence, consequences



## Incidence:

- 80 – 100% of women in most studies worldwide
- Online survey by Hollaback Croatia (women, N=446):
  - Some form of verbal encounter: 70 – 90%
  - Public masturbation, groping or being followed: 41 – 55%
  - Physical attack: 32%
  - One in two women will experience some form of street harassment by the age of 18

## Consequences:

1. Individual consequences
  - Negative emotions (fear, annoyance/anger, humiliation), fear of rape, triggering previous trauma
  - Self – objectification
  - Restriction of movement in public space
2. Consequences for gender and society
  - Discrimination of women: objectification; reinforcement of division of public/private sphere and hierarchy of sexes; “gateway crime”

# ABOUT HOLLABACK!

DEVELOPMENT, HISTORY, MAIN ACTIVITIES

# History



## 2005 – 2009

- Recognition of the issue of street harassment by 5 friends, inspired by a video portraying an incident of harassment in New York subway
- New York based blog
- Emily May – one of the founders and today's leader

## 2009 - present:

- Development of the organizational model and building of a movement
  - Registering as NGO in New York = motherhood
  - Since 2011, launch of 5-10 sites every three months

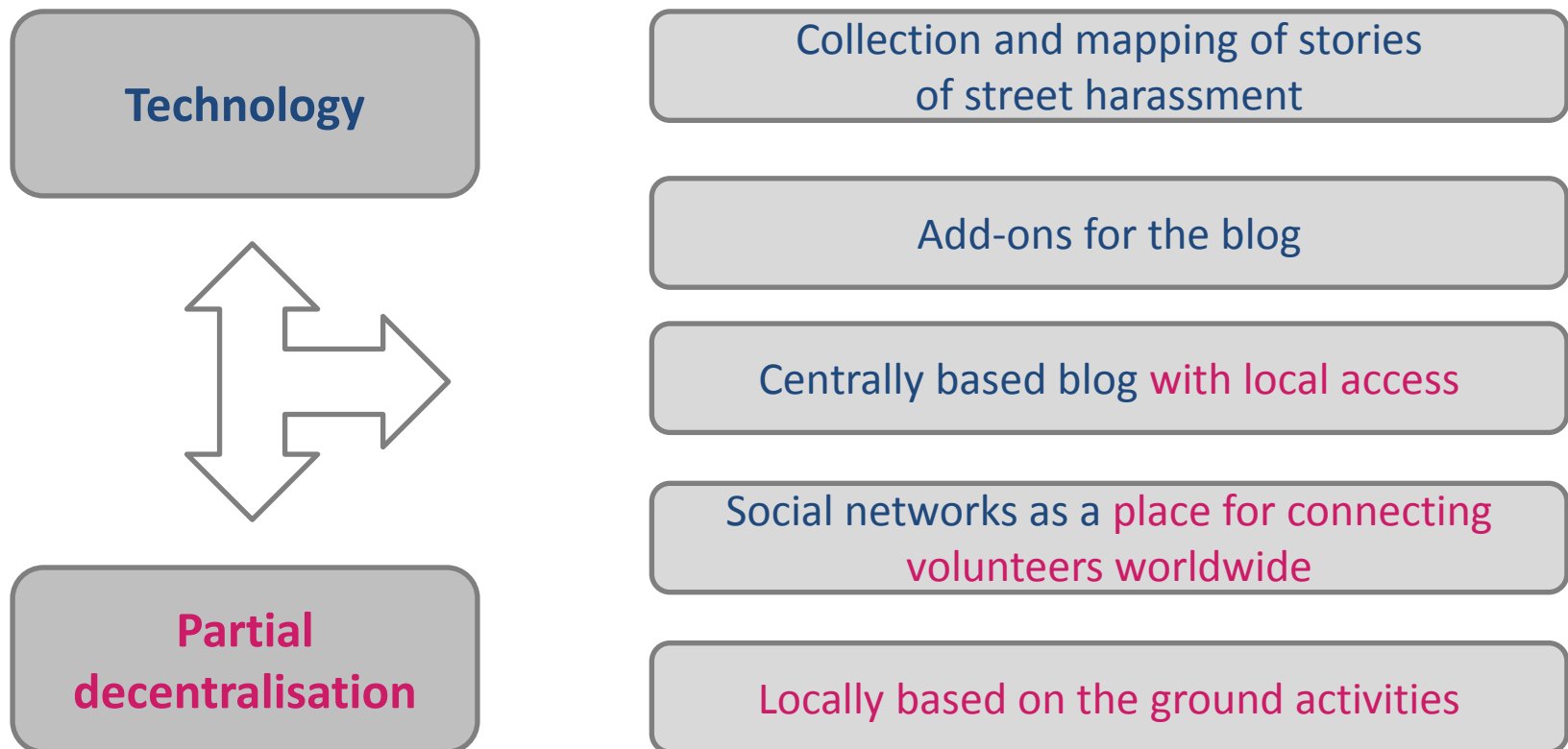
## Impact:

- Over 750 press hits, 25 000 Facebook fans and 8 000 Twitter followers
- Today present in **62 cities, 25 countries and 12 different languages**

# Organizational model



Division of labour in Hollaback – partial decentralisation - is reinforced by its digital tools;  
At the same time, key activities of the movement are enabled via digital tools.



# Stories and blog

**hollaback!**

**hollaback!**

**HALIFAX**  
HAS THE POWER TO **END STREET HARASSMENT**

[HOME](#) [ABOUT »](#) [I'VE GOT YOUR BACK »](#) [RESOURCES](#) [SHARE YOUR STORY »](#) [FAQS](#)

Search here... **SEARCH**

Groping, Hollaback! Story, Verbal

## Jessica's story: "These men were significantly older then I"

I've got a couple. They bother me mostly because I was a young teenager at the time, and these men were significantly older then I.

One day when I was walking up to the corner store. I was about 13 or 14 at the time and he was about 20. He was in his car. He yelled out "you look damn good, but you'd look a lot better if you were in my car". 5 minutes later a even older man got out of his car and just said "hello". Then the 2 men met in the parking lot and started discussing how hot I was. Things like this continued to happen frequently. I started to wear a sweater while doing my paper route. After a while I started giving them the finger... which made some very angry. They would skid and turn around in there car yelling. Eventually I just started ignoring them completely.

There was also the time when I was about 15 or so. I just left a high school dance, it was about 10 pm and a bunch of guys started cat calling at me across the street. At that time my friends and I got into a taxi and I went home. I was crying the entire way home in the cab because a week never went by without being treated like an object.

I was also molested as a young girl and couldn't take the frustration anymore. I thought I deserved to be treated like an intelligent human being. I am not bothered by cat calls as much anymore because I choose to ignore them, but there are far too many boys and men that think this kind of behaviour is okay and it's not. It's annoying, frustrating, and upsetting. It make me angry and makes me feel like crap.

**I've got your back! 11+**

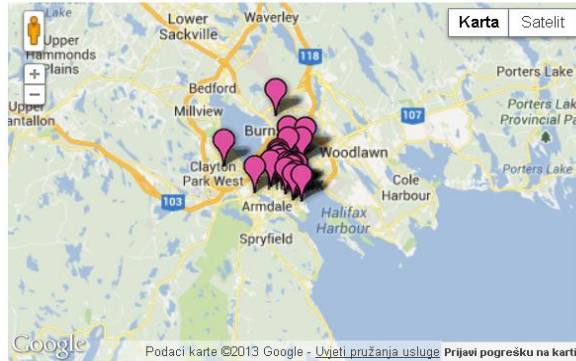
Published on May 8, 2013 at 9:20 am in Groping, Hollaback! Story, Verbal.

no comments

Hollaback! Story, Verbal

## Nifasa's story: "This is not a new experience for me in Halifax"

I was walking to a friends place and some young males in a grey car yelled "Fat Bitch"



Collection and mapping of stories  
of street harassment (No=4500, Jan 2012)

Add-ons for the blog

Centrally based blog with local access

# Activities

## Internet based activities

- Collection & mapping of stories
- Blog
- Social networks



## On the ground activities

- Campaigns
- Street art
- Education
- Collaboration with other similar organizations

# Social movement defined



**Social movement:** “Collective challenges by people **with common purposes and solidarity** in sustained interactions with elites, opponents, and authorities” (Tarrow, 2011)

**Contentious collective action:** “Actions used by people who lack regular access to representative institutions, **who act in the name of new or unaccepted claims**” (Tarrow, 2011)

HOLLABACK'S MODEL  
AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT

# Storytelling as tool of empowerment (I)



**Key question:** What is the role of storytelling in a social movement organization?

## **Framing processes:**

- Among key concepts in studies of social movements
- Cognitive concept – frames are “schema of interpretation”
- Interactive – individual frames become linked with collective understandings
- Action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings - inspire and legitimate the activities of social movement organizations

**Methodology:** Interviews with people who submitted a story to Hollaback, N=13

# Storytelling as tool of empowerment (II)



## Posting and reading stories...

... changed the way contributors thought and felt about their experience

- Validation of the experience vs. previous trivialization and feeling alone
- Reclaiming power that was lost when they were harassed
- Shifting the blame

... helped them to view their experience as part of a collective phenomenon and as part of a community

- Feeling part of a group
- Feeling that now others can benefit from their stories

...enabled them to problematize their experiences and connect it to other issues, e.g. the right to be in a public space or the position of women in the society

- "Before reading those stories, and posting, I accepted it as the norm to get harassed all the time. But it's not something that I really thought about as a serious problem. But now, I think it definitely portrays how people think about women..."

# Empowerment of volunteers (I)



**Key question(s):** Can Hollaback's decentralised model, and digital activism in particular, attract and empower activists worldwide?

- Activism as hobby activity vs. full time identity / specialized profession
- Activism for historically marginalized people who might not have access to it

## **Methodology:**

- Semi structured interviews with 13 site leaders
- Case studies of three sites
- Observation, researcher participation

# Empowerment of volunteers (II)



## Enabling digital activism...

...may help deconstruct the identity of the professional activist and attract new activists who have never engaged with activism before:

“And, why I started one? It was one of these ideas when you say, wow that’s it. Because I have a full time job, that doesn’t have a lot to do with activism, in the business sector. And this is something I can do relatively easily in my free time.”

...may help historically marginalized people to engage with social causes they might not otherwise have access to:

Site leaders’ statistics:

- 75% are under 30,
- 50% are under 25,
- 44% are LGBTQ and
- 26% are people of colour.

# Instead of a conclusion...



## *Critics / cons*

## *Responses to critics / pros*

“Revolution will not be tweeted” (Gladwell, 2010.)

Solidarity and sense of belonging established through common purpose and social networks

Support cannot be given virally  
“Invisible friend” (Site leader, Buenos Aires)

Training for finding and sustaining local volunteers in order to gain offline support

Autonomy vs. mothership

Main role of the board is to advise and help with fundraising, not dictating what local branches should do

Colonialism  
Image of North Western/Corporate feminism

Mothership responsive to local culture  
Partnering with other, local organizations

Local engagement – more work than anticipated

Deconstructing the professional activist

Attracting only volunteers with resources  
(knowledge of English, access to PC)

Empowering local activist’ through education and support

Is story sharing enough?

**MAKING STREET HARASSMENT A GLOBAL ISSUE**  
**BY MULTIPLYING VOICES**

THANK

YOU!



MY

BODY

IS

NOT

A PUBLIC

SPACE