

Town Crier VI: Catcalling is not a compliment

By Meredith Metsker | Posted: Wednesday, August 5, 2015 12:00 am



"Hey, bitch! Bitch!"

My pulse quickened as I walked faster. I tried to put some distance between me and three nearby men, one of whom was yelling expletives at me. I was walking on a track around dusk and there was only one other person on the track, and he was all the way on the other side. The yelling got louder as I continued to ignore the men.

I had avoided eye contact with the catcalling men so as not to escalate the situation, but I sneaked a furtive glance over my shoulder to see what they were doing. Were they following me? No. They had moved on, laughing as if they hadn't just scared me.

I exhaled in relief and finished my lap feeling grateful for the chain link fence that separated the track from the sidewalk. I made sure the men weren't nearby before I left.

A few months later, I was walking in downtown Seattle when two men stopped and looked me up and down.

"Yeah, girl, you walk them legs," I heard one say. His friend mumbled something I couldn't hear, and the first guy said, "Nah, man, I want to follow that." He gestured to me. I hurried away.

These are two of many examples of catcalling I could bring up. I could mention the times I've been yelled at by guys driving by. "Hey girl, nice ass!"

I've said it before, but I'm going to say it now in print: Catcalling is not a compliment. It's scary. Please don't do it. If you see someone doing it, say something. Speak up for your girlfriends, your wives, your sisters, your mothers, your daughters. A man who catcalls won't listen to a woman if she asks him to stop. He'll likely get angry or insist he's just giving her a compliment. "Sheesh, can't a guy compliment a girl anymore?"

Yes, of course he can. But there's a major difference between a compliment and a catcall. It's all about tone, body language and the context of the situation.

For example, a couple months ago, I was at Rosauers of Moscow buying groceries. A young man around my age walked up in line behind me and said, "I like your skirt." I smiled and thanked him. And that was that. He was courteous, and his tone was kind. We were in a grocery store in the middle of the day. I didn't feel threatened.

When I'm catcalled, I feel threatened. A strange man is yelling crude, sexual things at me or calling me an offensive name. It's usually dark or there aren't many people around, which leaves me in a vulnerable position. His tone is aggressive and often becomes even more so if I ignore him. And I ignore him because if I respond, I don't know what he'll do. Would he back down? Or would he decide to teach me a lesson? As much as it angers me, it's safer to walk away.

As for men who drive around in cars with their friends yelling at women, I wonder what they're trying to prove. Has catcalling ever gotten them positive attention from a woman? I suspect not.

Respectable men don't "compliment" a woman in that manner. Luckily, there are a lot of respectable men in the Moscow-Pullman area. I've been catcalled a few times around here, but it's nothing compared to places like New York City. It's a daily occurrence for women there.

Not all men catcall, but almost all women have experienced catcalling in some form. It's important we acknowledge it and do what we can to stop it.

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