

Cat-calls are detrimental to everyone

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For every woman who is a direct target of sexism, there are others who witness the event and are also affected. The actions of one sexist man affect how female bystanders feel and behave towards men in general. Stephenie Chaudoir and Diane Quinn, from the University of Connecticut in the US, publish their work¹ on the effects of bystander sexism and group-level reactions to sexism in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Women are often bystanders to sexist remarks directed at other women. Research shows that women often experience a variety of [negative emotions](#) when they are the targets of sexism and other women who witness the derogatory remark can also be affected. Sexism also has the potential to shape how women think, feel and behave towards men in general.

Chaudoir and Quinn examined women's reactions to overhearing a catcall remark and, in particular, how observing a specific sexist incident impacts women's feelings and attitudes towards men. They asked 114 undergraduate female students to watch a video and imagine themselves as bystanders to a situation where a man made either a sexist catcall remark ("Hey Kelly, your boobs look great in that shirt!") at another woman or simply greeted her ("Hey Kelly, what's up?"). The researchers then asked the students to rate their anxiety, depression and hostility levels, their anger and fear towards men, how prejudiced they thought the comment was, their desire to move against or away from men in general, as well as how strongly they felt about their gender identity as a result of witnessing the sexist remark.

The analyses showed that women were more likely to think about themselves in terms of their gender group identity and, as a result, feel greater anger and motivation to take direct action towards men, in general, when they are bystanders to sexism. In other words, they experienced emotions and motivations in line with how the situation may help or harm women as a whole, rather than how it might affect them personally as individuals.

Chaudoir and Quinn's work highlights how men and women in general are implicated in individual instances of sexism and that sexism is bad for everyone.

They conclude: "Women are obviously implicated because they suffer direct negative consequences as targets of prejudice and, as the current work demonstrates, indirect consequences as bystanders. But sexism also harms men as well. Whenever a single man's prejudiced actions are attributed to his [gender identity](#), male perpetrators impact how [women](#) view and react to men more generally."

More information: Chaudoir SR & Quinn DM (2010). Bystander sexism in the intergroup context: the impact of cat-calls on women's reactions towards men. *Sex Roles*; [DOI:10.1007/s11199-009-9735-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9735-0)

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