



KATIE MONROE: WOMEN BIKE PHL

My name is Katie Monroe. I run a program at the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia called Women Bike PHL, with the goal of getting more women riding bikes in our city. Harassment comes up constantly in my work. I'm a firm believer that active transportation -- biking and walking -- is something we should all do more of. It's the most efficient and useful way to incorporate physical activity into our daily lives, it keeps us connected with our communities, it's environmentally friendly.... But the streets and sidewalks where Philadelphians can bike and walk are not equally welcoming to all.

A few Thursdays ago, my bike had a flat tire. Normally I ride to work, but I had to walk instead. I remember thinking when I left my house -- maybe I shouldn't have worn this skirt, these boots. Maybe I should have dressed down. I hate that I have to think that way, it feels like I'm blaming myself for something that's not my fault. Sure enough, during my commute several men I passed on the sidewalk looked me up and down, disgustingly obviously, and one muttered a comment about my body as we passed on the sidewalk. I ignored him, too scared to tell him off without any bystanders around, and ended up feeling frustrated that he "got away with it."

When I'm riding, I feel safer from this kind of harassment. Men don't have the chance to say things under their breath to me that I'll actually hear when I'm pedaling down the street, and if they do decide to yell something at me, I feel much less vulnerable knowing I can just bike away. Sometimes I even feel safe enough to yell back at them, which I never do when I'm on foot. Fast forward to the end of the day -- my flat tire was fixed and I was riding home, down 15th street at around 9pm. I was relieved to be back on my bike instead of walking, especially at night. That man who passed me on my morning commute was still lingering in my head after a 12 hour workday. Suddenly, some guy in an SUV pulls up alongside me and starts yelling at me to "get in the bike lane" (which is actually just a shared-use lane on 15th street -- I was legally allowed to be in the lane where I was riding). I was so exhausted and overwhelmed and frightened that I can't even remember what I said back. I know it wasn't aggressive though -- I know better than to pick a fight in that situation, because the bicyclist will always lose in a standoff with an SUV. He continued to yell at me, threatening to run me off the road, so eventually I just got off the road and walked my bike on the sidewalk instead. He screamed at me, calling me a rude combination of the f word and the c word, before speeding off. And then I cried the rest of my walk home, too freaked out to get back on my bike despite not wanting to be walking alone at night either.

What's the moral of this story? As a woman who bikes and walks around this city for transportation, I experience some form of harassment -- whether it's because of my gender or my bicycle or both -- nearly every day. On some days, and this particular Thursday was one of them, it feels like there's no escape -- on the streets or the sidewalk, I will be made to feel unsafe, objectified, scared, disgusting, small. Just because I have a female body and I choose to leave my house.

I asked some of the women bicyclists I know to share their harassment stories. One woman was biking over the South Street bridge and had a car full of white college-age men pull an illegal u-turn to follow her, calling out comments about wanting to have sex with her and ultimately chasing her in their car for blocks until she managed to bike the wrong way down a one-way street to get away from them. Many women reported hearing the comments "can I get a ride" and "I wish I were that bike seat" from men when they're biking (I know I have!). One woman said groups of men often call out "Can I get a ride, baby" even when she is toting her *children* on her



bicycle with her. One woman said she seems to get harassed more than her male friends, and wondered if it was because she wasn't riding fast enough. Another woman recently heard a "huge smooching sound" come from a cab at 3rd and Dickinson when she was riding, but ultimately said that biking is a "huge resource for her" to feel safer from harassment around the city, compared to other forms of transportation. Several women admitted to sometimes feeling compelled to ride on the sidewalk, or more often, run red lights, despite knowing that it is illegal, to escape unwanted interactions when they're stopped on their bikes. We need more active transportation for everyone in Philadelphia -- but it's hard to convince women to bike and walk more when our streets and sidewalks can feel so threatening.

Attachment/addendum with complete list of stories I received: (for minutes, but will not be read at hearing)

Ema Yamamoto: I was biking from West Philadelphia to Center City last spring to have supper with a friend. While I was crossing the South Street Bridge, a car full of college age White men saw me. I assume they were frat guys at Penn, but I didn't ask them. They were going the opposite direction, saw me and pulled an illegal u-turn on the South Street Bridge. They pulled up next to me at the red light and began to say really terrible things: how they wanted to have sex with me, etc. etc. I did not engage. I have found that usually men will get bored if you don't talk back. The light turned green and the car full of men followed me. They continued to yell at me. I ran a red light to get away from them and they ran the red light as well. They were chasing me. I pulled some incredibly dangerous and illegal turns to weave through traffic so that I could lose them, which I did, thank goodness.

Kate Kern Mundie: I did not think this type of thing was really affecting me anymore. (I used to get it a lot when I was in my 20s) But I have had some really aggressive interactions lately with men calling me the c and b words. It seems that my guy friends don't get the same treatment on the road that I do. I kept thinking it was that I don't ride well enough/fast enough.

Michelle Lee: Bikes & bike lanes are actually a huge resource for me in terms of feeling comfortable and avoiding street harassment around the city ... A few instances of mild harassment (including a huge smooching sound from a cab yesterday at 3rd & Dickinson) that are annoying but don't seem dangerous enough to change my travel. I'm more concerned about physical safety. After the shooting near 8th & Moore last month, I've been wary about riding through that area in the dark, especially if in business clothes/heels. A couple weeks ago I had to ride to 30th Street Station before dawn and asked my husband to come with me. It was the right choice at the time but felt totally disempowering.

Godis Shani Asantewaa Strothers: Sometimes I ride too slowly to ride in the bike lane so I ride ON THE SIDEWALK, on underutilized small streets, etc. to avoid any sort of harassment from vehicles coming up behind me. I avoid fast roads where drivers can get away with crap by being anonymous & quick.



Lisa Jan Wielunski: 99.9% of the time I relish the smiles and interactions that happen when I'm riding down the street. But stop lights can be wearying places. I don't like rolling through a red, but sometimes people take this as an opportunity to start a conversation about my love life, or how dangerous it is for me to be riding through the city at night. ...If only some folks realized that the only people who make me feel unsafe are those who try to inflict their own fears on me, or who make assumptions about my soul.

Erin McLeary: I get a fair amount of "friendly" harassment while on my bike--comments on my body, "is that bicycle built for 2" sort of stuff. Always when stopped at traffic lights..... the number one reason I will jump a light is to end an unwanted interaction. I wish that in discussions about traffic law enforcement there was more sensitivity to why women in particular will choose to "run" a light/stop sign.

Jeannette Brugger: Most comments are *meant* to be friendly but are still obnoxious, like "take me home with you" or "damn, you make biking look good." I can usually come up with something snide to say with a smile. Only a few times in 10 years have I been yelled at as a stupid b*tch and told if I didn't move over, they'd run me over, usually by people speeding down Bainbridge or Kelly Dr at the 25th Street intersection.

Marni Duffy: Closer to sexual harassment is the line I get, often with all three of my kids on board, "Can I get a ride?", sometimes, "Can I get a ride, baby?" ... always from men, 95% of the time from groups of 2 or more men, usually men sitting on stoops in the middle of the day. Thankfully, the neighborhood where that happens is not on my daily route any more.

Myra Clemens: On two different occasions I had young female drivers try to run me off the road. One woman actually swerved and hit me with her mirror. Then yelled at me "Bitch get out of the street!"

Megan Rosenbach: I won't recount all of the harassment I have received while riding a bicycle in this city (some of it sexual harassment and some biking harassment), but here is the most offensive one: I was riding down Spring Garden and at a stop light a man rolled down his window and said, "I wish I were that bike seat". (gross!). Thankfully it was day time on a busy street, but if it were night time on a neighborhood street I may have panicked.

Kathy Hurchla: I have heard both "can I get a ride" and "wish I were that seat" - sad how common these phrases are.

Karina Puttieva: Before I got injured and had to start taking the bus to work every day, I use to walk everywhere. As much as I hate the bus because it is a cesspool of smells, germs, and airborne diseases, I noticed that I am much less wary these mornings. As a pedestrian, I would get harassed and cat called on the street at least 3 days out of the 5 day work week. One time I got cat called 3 times by 3 different men during the first 3 blocks I walked from work towards my house. That's about a 6 minute span. It was the trifecta on a bad day. At the last catcall I actually walked up to the guy in his truck and yelled "You're harassing me!" in his face. He only smiled, which made me so angry I started to cry. Recently, a man on a motorbike made kissing noises at me while I was at the bus stop and he was at a red light. I was alone, but I managed to



look him square in the face, and loudly and seriously told him to "Stop doing that. That's harassment." He didn't say anything but he did turn to look forward instead of continuing to look at me. It was a small victory but an important one. I had him trapped just as he had trapped me and made him rethink his gaze.