

The experiences of women of color and transgender people of color are frequently excluded from advocacy against police brutality, which focuses primarily on the experiences and needs of black men, and advocacy against gender-based violence, which focuses primarily on the experiences and needs of white women. In using a holistic definition of street harassment that incorporates factors like real or perceived racial, ethnic, and/or religious identity, Collective Action for Safe Spaces (CASS) aims to elevate the voices and needs of women of color and transgender people of color in its work to address street harassment. By centering the most marginalized identities in our community, we are making public spaces safe for *everyone*.

1 State actors are perpetrators of gender-based violence.

The issue of state actors — specifically law enforcement actors — as perpetrators of sexual violence has been on national agendas since as early as 2007. In a yearlong 2015 investigation, the Associated Press (AP) uncovered about 1,000 officers who lost their badges in a six-year period for acts including rape, sodomy, and propositioning community members. Furthermore, according to an unofficial study by the National Police Misconduct Reporting Project at the Cato Institute, sexual assault is the second most common form of police brutality after excessive use of force.

These data are unquestionably an undercount. The AP study, for one, represents only those officers whose licenses were revoked, and not all states take such action. For instance, California and New York — both states home to several of the nation's largest law enforcement agencies — offered no records because they have no statewide system to decertify officers for such misconduct. Furthermore, it is well known that sexual assault is underreported, and this phenomenon is only exacerbated when perpetrators are state actors. The lack of reporting, particularly when state actors are the perpetrators, can be attributed to their power, authority, and potential for inflicting further violence/trauma, such as arrest and incarceration, deportation, and retaliation.

2 Police violence is disproportionately experienced by marginalized populations.

According to RAINN, police officers tend to victimize those who are vulnerable and less likely to be perceived as credible; examples include sex workers, those perceived as sex workers, or those using controlled substances. Additional research shows that law enforcement agents also frequently target other marginalized communities such as people with disabilities, those living with mental illness, people with unstable housing, and undocumented immigrants.

A 2013 study by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs showed:

- Transgender women of color made up 67% of victims of fatal hate violence in 2013.
- Transgender women were 1.8 times more likely to experience sexual violence when compared with other survivors and also more likely to experience police violence, discrimination, harassment, threats, and intimidation.
- Transgender people were 3.7 times more likely to experience police violence compared to cisgender survivors.
- Transgender people of color were 7 times more likely to experience physical violence when interacting with the police compared to cisgender survivors and victims.
- Transgender people of color were 6 times more likely to experience physical violence from the police compared to White cisgender survivors and victims.

And according to a 2007 report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, “rape and sexual abuse by police [in the United States] are primarily reported by women of color.”

These statistics demonstrate that, while women and transgender people of color disproportionately face sexual and gender-based violence, an emphasis on law enforcement-based solutions is a strategy that excludes those most severely impacted.

3 The intersection of state violence and gender-based violence fits squarely within the purview of CASS’s mission.

In 2016, CASS’s strategic plan set out to elevate the voices and needs of our city’s most marginalized communities in our mission to address public sexual harassment and assault and work toward a vision of making public spaces safe for everyone. Built into this plan, there was a commitment to address this issue with an understanding of how layers of oppression may cause different people to experience harassment differently and therefore may require different solutions for different communities.

At its core, CASS is dedicated to challenging the foundational narratives and power imbalances that enable the unequal treatment of people in public spaces; and to building spaces that treat all individuals with dignity and respect.

We envision a community in which people of

all backgrounds, identities and experiences can feel safe occupying public spaces. The evidence in this fact sheet, and the ever growing list of anecdotal events, make it clear that this vision is incomplete without examining state violence. Addressing the role of law enforcement and other state agents in perpetrating violence against women of color, transgender people and other underserved communities must be part of our work toward the safety of all.

“Indeed, until the role of law enforcement agents in perpetrating and facilitating violence against women of color and their communities is examined and addressed, we cannot claim to be working toward the safety of all women.” - Andrea Richie

Resources:

- Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color by Andrea Richie
- Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color and Trans People of Color by INCITE!
- Hate Violence Against Transgender Communities
- INCITE: Rape, Sexual Assault, and Sexual Harassment
- INCITE: Policing Sex Work
- Police Departments Ignore Rampant Sexual Assault by Officers
- When Movements Backfire: Online Harassment & Violence Against Women

State Violence Against Women of Color: DC, 2016

On March 23, 2016, a DC Public Library police officer harassed a Muslim woman and threatened her with handcuffs when she refused to remove her hijab. CASS organized against Islamophobia, in partnership with local government leaders, and continues to work with DC Public Library to hold a listening session for Muslim communities.



On October 18, 2016, a Metro Transit Police officer arrested and assaulted a young black woman when she would not throw away a bag of potato chips and a lollipop. CASS leveraged its partnership with WMATA to ensure that anti-harassment training is applied to stop harassment against women and transgender people of color.