

## Catcalls and street harassment are not compliments

Catcalls, sexually explicit comments, sexist remarks, homophobic slurs, groping, leering, stalking, flashing and assault are all considered forms of street harassment, according to the Stop Street Harassment Organization.



BY JULIET MAGOON  
STAFF WRITER

For most women, and some men, receiving unwanted attention from the opposite sex is just another normal part of their daily lives. Whether it is walking down the block, taking a jog around the neighborhood or going out with friends, at times it feels impossible to go a day without unwarranted once-overs or comments.

Acceptance, or overlooking, of catcalls and other forms of street harassment perpetuate male rights of instilling their opinion of female existence throughout their lives.

"It is a way men attempt to reassert the hierarchy of worth by sexually subjugating women and LGBTQ (people) for daring to exist in neutral space," said feminist writer and blogger Allison Moon in an interview with the Guilfordian.

"Catcalling is usually considered a verbal attack, one which often escalates into physical attack."

Acts of street harassment create an uncomfortable environment for women in public spaces. But how can you tell when a situation will lead to extreme risk rather than something you can brush off and walk away from?

"Allowing for it to bother you is giving them the power to control you," said senior Rebecca Bonilla. "In most cases, in the moment, I ignore (the harasser). But I do not forget to acknowledge the issue in my mind, being sure to remember that (street harassment) can lead to dangerous results."

"(Some women) may want to stick up for themselves, but I feel that by doing so, you are giving them the upper hand."

This issue is prevalent in most highly occupied public spaces in the U.S., but it is also a prominent issue here in Greensboro. I know that I myself have experienced many instances of harassment outside of campus. Whether it is blatant assault or an unnecessary comment on the street, I experience these instances almost every day.

"People act like it's an innocent thing, and it's not," said senior Chelsea Yarborough. "I was walking to CVS (when) a random man and I bumped into each other by mistake. I said, 'Excuse me,' and he said, 'wait.'"

"I ignored it and went to get my prescription. After I came out, I was walking back to campus, and he followed me down the road in his car to ask me on a date. It was scary."

Although some may say, "Wow what

a romantic gesture," instances such as these cloud whether or not one should be defensive in these situations. At any moment you could be one false move away from peril.

"Another time, I was walking near campus, and a car full of men slowed down near me and started barking at me for no reason," said Yarborough. "They eventually pulled off, but it was just weird."

It can be difficult to gauge when a situation is going to turn dangerous. Once you realize it is, and calculate a defense, it may be too late.

"I think it depends on the disposition of the person," said senior Benjamin Matlack. "Most of the time, I feel that it is taken as an insult or act of objectifying women."

Although catcalls, looks and other unnecessary attention from strangers are far more widely disputed than sought after by women, some feel flattered.

"When I know I'm looking good, I brazenly walk past a construction site, anticipating that whistle and 'Hey, mama!' catcall," said Doree Lewak, in her article "Hey, ladies — catcalls are flattering! Deal with it." "Works every time — my ego and I can't fit through the door. For me, it's nothing short of exhilarating, yielding an unmatched level of euphoria."

For this woman, catcalls and other comments from random strangers are welcomed. But there is surely a difference between a genuine compliment, a polite, "Hello, how are you?" and a blatant, or rude, remark made based off of appearance alone. However, this gender-based form of flattery only preserves male dominance and gender role stereotypes.

"The daily fact of street harassment places spatial restrictions on women's lives that change the time, frequency and length of forays into public space, leading to a gender-based

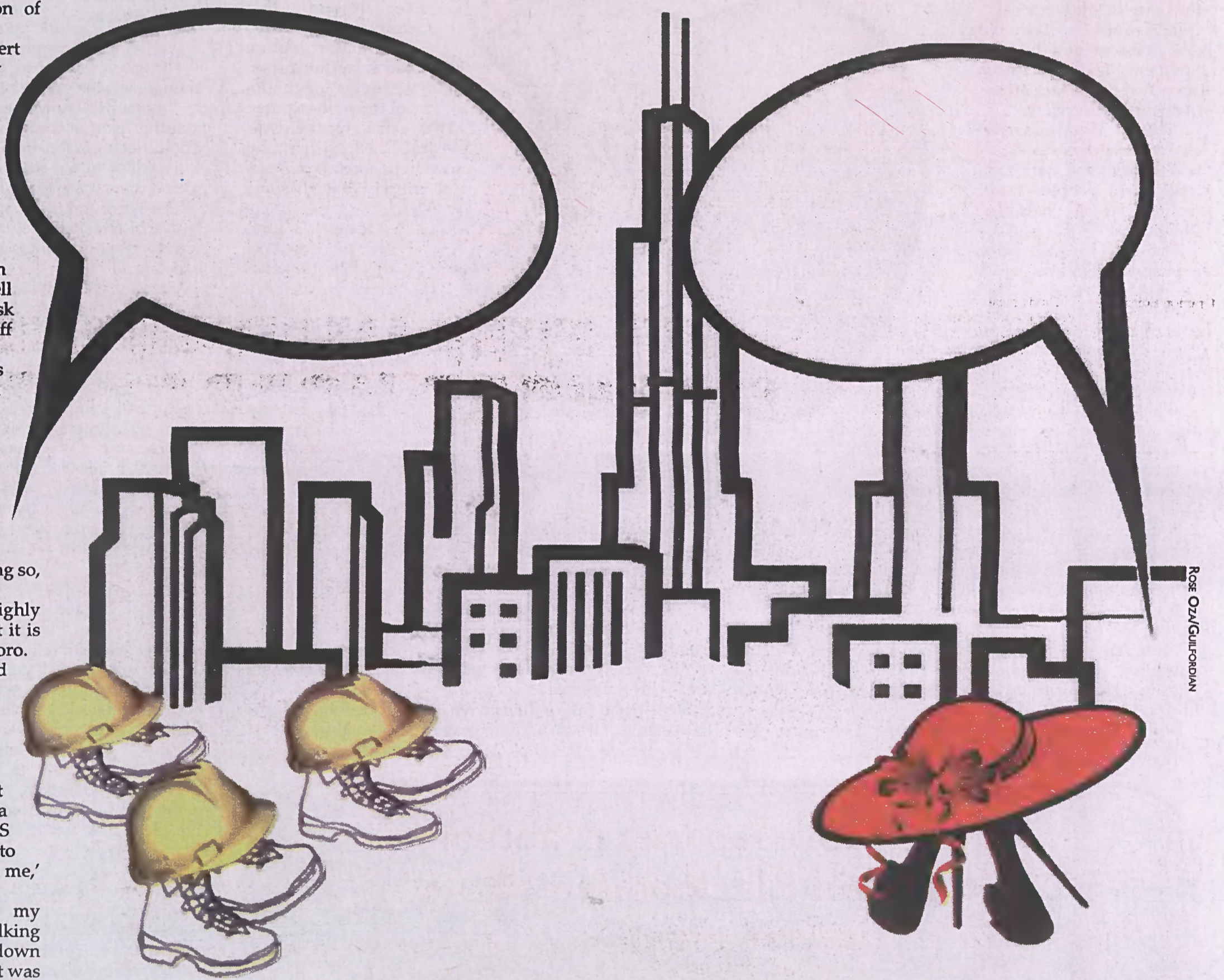
exclusion from shared space and civic life," said Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs student Jarrah O'Neill in her senior thesis.

"Too often, this barrier to gender equality is dismissed as a mundane fact of women's lives, an unfortunate reality that is both too trivial to be addressed and impossible to prevent."

Although catcalling may not be considered a severe form of harassment, it can be more damaging than you think.

"Catcalling affects everyone differently and differently based on the day," said Moon. "A person who's been harassed may just feel a twinge of pain and brush it off, or they may be deeply triggered and have to adjust their entire routine. Most people can take genuine, respectful compliments kindly."

"Ignoring or sassing aren't responses to compliments, they're responses to disrespect and abuse."



### This Week's

### STAFF EDITORIAL

## Ebola outbreak spreads more misinformation than infection

Lately, the media has been in an uproar over the spread of the Ebola virus. With as many as 2,705 confirmed deaths in Liberia as of Oct. 25, panic is high, despite assurances from the White House of the incredibly low likelihood of American infection. Public opinion seems to be confident that anyone from the Global South could be infectious. If you try to Google Ebola currently, the first thing you'll see, above the other results, is a release of information from the CDC about the disease saying, "The 2014 Ebola epidemic is the largest in history, affecting multiple countries in West Africa. The risk of an Ebola outbreak affecting

multiple people is very low."

So low, in fact, that as of Oct. 23, only nine people in the U.S. have been diagnosed with Ebola, and only one has died; the other six are reportedly recovered, while the last two are in treatment. And yet, despite these low numbers, our entire country is frantic over the idea of infection. President Obama has even been pushed to elect an official, Ron Klain, former chief of staff to Vice President Joe Biden, to be his "Ebola czar," a figurehead position to show that the White House is involved. According to statistics posted by The Telegraph, the U.S. has pledged, and actually paid, a third of funding for fighting

against Ebola among the other 11 donors tracked by the U.N. There is still more that can be done, however while the U.N. is organizing clinics and quarantine zones in Africa, countries have not delivered enough doctors to effectively staff them.

Ebola is infectious, but not highly contagious because it isn't passed through the air. To transmit the disease, one has to be exposed to contaminated body fluids or objects that have been thusly contaminated. Right-wing politicians have begun to suggest we close our borders to protect us from the outbreak or, rather, our borders. Apparently, it is the

U.S.-Mexico border that poses the threat, despite Mexico having no outbreaks so far. Closing off the Canadian border has not been discussed.

This crisis has become less about the disease and one of racial prejudice. Suggesting we close the Mexico border is not about protecting the U.S. from infection but a political attempt to take advantage of the current panic. Closing the U.S.-Mexico border would not be about protecting us from disease. That could as easily come from the north as it could the south. Instead, it would be "protecting" our country from people of color. Considering the

infections in the U.S., Ebola is not such a danger to us that such extreme measures need to be taken, but it is quickly becoming a scare tactic to be used against us. We, as a news organization, want to acknowledge these discrepancies. In the spirit of Halloween, there is something out there that should make us shiver, but it isn't this disease: it's how we treat it.

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