

Hollaback!: Ways to Bridge the Gender Digital Divide from a Human Rights Perspective

I. The meaning of the digital divide/extent of the problem

1. Please identify the main obstacles and barriers faced by women and girls to access digital technologies and participate in digital life. Please elaborate on the nature of these obstacles and how they manifest themselves in practice (e.g. political, economic, social and legal factors, cultural and religious norms, education and literacy gaps, online violence, bullying and harassment, infrastructural constraints, security, affordability, lack of relevant content).

Although millions of women and girls have internet access across a variety of platforms, their participation is often hindered, if not discouraged, by the frequency of online harassment and cyberbullying. Online harassment includes a wide range of targeted behaviors including: threats, continued hateful messages, doxxing, DDoS attacks, swatting, defamation, and more. Online harassment can target (or come from) a group or individual and often has the *expressed purpose* of having the individual or group leave the internet, take down their content, or to dissuade them from pursuing online or tech-based careers. Young women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals experience particularly severe forms of online harassment, including stalking, sexual harassment, and even physical threats.¹ Victims of online harassment are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide. Heightened threats of online harassment impede the ability of women and girls to effectively participate in civic discourse online. By extension, this suggests that the voices of women and girls are not as welcomed or valued online, despite the potential for the internet to empower marginalized voices.

Online harassment creates a hostile environment, limiting free speech and the equal expression of ideas. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 40% of people have been harassed online and 73% of people witnessed someone else being harassed online. Among people between the ages of 18 and 29, this figure jumps up to 92%. Individuals are witnessing and experiencing online harassment at a tremendous rate. However, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color are disproportionately impacted, often with harassment that specifically targets their identities. A 2014 study by Rad Campaign, Lincoln Park Strategies, and Craigconnects found that 44% of people surveyed reported experiencing sexual harassment, 23% reported experiencing racial harassment, and 14% reported experiencing homophobic harassment - with many individuals experiencing multiple forms of harassment targeting their identities.

In addition to professional and economic effects, online harassment leads to lasting trauma. According to the 2014 study referenced above by Rad Campaign, Lincoln Park Strategies, and Craigconnects, when asked about the effects of online harassment, 38% of individuals felt it hurt their self-esteem, 20% were scared it would have professional implications for their career. And 20% reported that they were scared for their lives. These effects are only heightened when harassment targets marginalized groups: a national study of middle and high school students found that 45% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who experienced

¹ <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>

online harassment felt depressed and more than 25% wrestled with suicidal thoughts.

Women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color are stepping back from online spaces, and in extreme cases leaving the internet as a direct result of online harassment. This is creating a significant gap in the representation of crucial voices online. We believe that HeartMob can intervene, creating direct bystander action to support individuals experiencing online harassment and ensure equal rights to expression online.

2. *Does your company/organization consider the impact of its digital products, services, strategies and policies on women and girls?*

Hollaback! developed HeartMob with the intent of tackling online harassment through a tech-based bystander intervention platform. Since online harassment most frequently targets women, girls, and non-gender conforming individuals, HeartMob was created in consultation with this audience. HeartMob supports victims of online harassment with the ultimate goal of reducing their trauma and providing real-time resources for support.

3. *Please indicate if your company/organization collects sex and gender disaggregated data regarding access, use and impact of digital technologies. Is this data openly published and accessible (in accordance with responsible data practices)? If possible, please provide such statistics.*

Hollaback! measures our results by the reduction of trauma for individuals experiencing online harassment. This is accomplished by qualitative interviews with users of the HeartMob platform, analysis of the platform's analytics, and ongoing survey feedback from our public networks. We measure user's depiction of their experience prior to and after using the platform, along with their perceptions of safety. Users of the platform overwhelmingly report an increased feeling of safety and support online, along with a reduction in trauma and fear after using the platform. Hollaback! tracks how individuals use the platform, what types of harassment are the most common, and what interventions are the most impactful. We can also track how harassment differs based on user identity, including data disaggregated data on gender identities, highlighting the importance for increased interventions and research on the harassment of marginalized groups online.

This data is currently being researched and will be publically available in the following months. In Summer 2016, HeartMob's research team, led by Jill Dimond, who holds a PhD in Human Centered Computing, received IRB approval for their research on HeartMob through the University of Michigan. The IRB determined that the proposed research conforms with applicable guidelines, State and federal regulations, and the University of Michigan's Federal wide Assurance (FWA) with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

4. *Please indicate if your company/organization has set measurable targets for gender equality in access and use of digital technologies and describe those targets and their effect.*

Hollaback!'s HeartMob platform has outlined the following measurable goals for gender equality online:

- Raise public awareness and understanding of online harassment and its effects on internet accessibility, civic engagement, and online freedoms.
- Reduce the trauma of online harassment for victims by creating a story sharing platform for victims to advocate for support and document the harassment they've received.
- Educate bystanders on how to recognize and respond to online harassment through bystander intervention best practices and the creation of extensive resources and guides.
- Through bystander intervention, create a free and accessible internet, where individuals feel that they can create content without fear of repression, threats, or doxxing.

5. *How does your company/organization address the needs of diverse members of the female population in terms of accessing and participating in digital technologies, including women and girls belonging to ethnic or linguistic minorities, those living in extreme poverty or of low caste, those living in rural or marginalized urban areas, women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, transgender and intersex persons, elderly women etc.? What can companies/organizations do to ensure access to alternative communications mechanisms for those unable or unwilling to participate in digital technologies?*

Online harassment limits the ability for women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals to utilize digital technologies or hold economically viable careers online. To respond to this crisis, social media companies can work to ensure that they have advanced reporting mechanisms for users experiencing harassment on their site, including partnerships with nonprofits and third party reporting, to provide legal and safety resources for online harassment. In addition, by developing effective support systems (incorporating best practices on bystander intervention, including documentation, delegation and reporting, direct intervention, supportive messages, and more) online to prevent and respond to doxxing, DDoS attacks, and more, we can work to ensure that marginalized people have safe and equal access to online spaces.

II. Human Rights implications of the gender digital divide for women and girls

6. *What is your company/organization doing to ensure that its interventions to bridge the gender digital divide, are based upon, and fully consistent with international human rights, including gender equality? Does it conduct impact assessments and/or consult with civil society, affected communities, and human rights experts? (You may wish to consider some key principles required to adopt a human rights-based approach viz.: accountability, equality and non-*

discrimination, participation, transparency, empowerment, sustainability, etc.).²

HeartMob bridges the gender digital divide through a framework of empowerment. HeartMob seeks to empower victims of online harassment by creating a safe community in which victims can report incidents of online harassment. Since women, girls, and gender nonconforming individuals are more likely to be harassed online, HeartMob focuses on these target audiences to ensure that their needs are being met in real-time. HeartMob enables the reduction of trauma by providing a tech-based platform that allows bystanders to offer support to individuals who have experienced harassment and work to develop public awareness of the issue. Bystanders and users are given an arsenal of tools to bolster their online communities against harassment, including guides from HeartMob on reporting to platforms, protecting your online accounts, engaging in compassionate communications, state by state legal resources, and more.

Hollaback! is collaborating alongside the Online Harassment Task Force, an online group of over 80 leaders in the field of online harassment, managed by Hollaback!, to develop best practices and resources on online harassment. Together, the Task Force utilized human centered design practices to iterate the HeartMob platform during its pilot phase. Since launch, we have invested heavily in additional user testing, including empathy audits, usability studies, and focus groups with leaders in the field, impacted populations, and users of the platform to ensure that HeartMob remains responsive and cutting edge. We've recently partnered with the Mozilla Foundation and the Kairos fellowship to develop a resource toolkit for organizations whose staff are affected by online harassment, and have collaborated with Take Back the Tech on a digital rights safety guide.

Additionally, HeartMob utilizes collected data to inform our research, which influences our recommendations to institutions. data collected on online harassment to work with institutions to improve civic cohesion. Using this data, HeartMob can develop community models that build practices for healthy discussion in online communities. Heartmob promote these practices on a larger, more high profile scale by working with companies. For example, we consulted with BuzzFeed on how to reduce trauma and improve employee retention for staff who experience online harassment as a result of their work. By simultaneously working with individuals and systems, HeartMob is uniquely equipped to empower victims of online harassment. HeartMob has worked with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit, and Youtube to create [Social Media Safety Guides](#) for those experiencing online harassment on each of these platforms. Bystander support and community awareness facilitate the persistence of women, girls, and non gender conforming individuals in public spaces such as the internet. We're working in a nascent field to create online safety for historically marginalized voices and bridge

² Other human rights considerations that could/should be taken into consideration include freedoms of expression, association, religion or belief, freedom from violence, right to education, life, health, identity, an adequate standard of living, to participate in government and in cultural life, promotion of gender equality and rights of non-discrimination, rights of indigenous peoples, minority rights, rights of migrant workers, right to enjoy the benefits of scientific advancement, etc.

the gender divide. With your support, we believe HeartMob can utilize a human-rights based approach to end harassment while creating immediate positive impacts for survivors.

7. How does your company/organization encourage the development and use of digital technologies as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls? How does it support the creation of online content, applications and services that reflect women's needs and/or promote their rights? Does it support women's rights organizations, women's human rights defenders and women environmental activists to use these technologies (for example to access critical information, build knowledge, express thoughts and beliefs, form networks and communities and mobilise for change)? Please provide any relevant examples.

Hollaback! utilizes digital technologies to raise awareness of street and online harassment, train local leaders around the world, and provide real time support to victims of harassment through HeartMob. Since 2005, we have collected over 11,000 stories of harassment in public spaces, mapping them online and using that data to advocate for change.

Studies show that over 85% of women in the United States have been verbally harassed, threatened, groped, or witness to public exposure before the age of 17, and many are seeking a way to heal from it, share their stories, and lead their community against it. By creating our online story sharing platform and app, Hollaback! provides women and girls an unique platform to share their stories, support one another, access resources, and build knowledge. The street harassment data that we've collected highlights the need for community-based interventions to street harassment. With each story, we work to elevate the issue, and provide empowering resources into the hands of every story-sharer. Every single person who shares their story is invited to participate in our free community organizer training, utilizing digital technologies to build partnerships, engage in ongoing learning, and develop localized leadership.

Hollaback! has run our community organizer training program for young women and girls since 2010. The training program is designed with the goal of transforming individual's experience of harassment into a driver to create community-led change. We recognized key gaps in traditional leadership training, and sought to provide women and girls the tools they needed to heal, excel, and lead, with particular attention to tech training. The training culminates in the launch of a digital "site," a localized online story-sharing platform providing immediate support to community members experiencing harassment. In addition, each person who goes through the training is onboarded in the Hollaback! network, accessing ongoing online training and opportunities for cross-national collaboration. We're not just training future leaders of the street harassment movement; we're training future leaders of the world, individuals who have taken an experience of isolation and, with training and support, challenged the dominant narrative encouraging them to stay silent. We've had our community organizers create curriculum for educators, speak at TED talks, hold nation-wide campaigns, and run for office. It starts with

sharing your story, and it grows with Hollaback!

While Hollaback! began our work in street harassment, with HeartMob, we've expanded our scope to recognize the impacts of online harassment on the rights to mobility, freedom of expression, and access to public space. Online harassment (including rape/death threats, doxxing, and defamation) causes emotional trauma and contributes to unequal spaces online, disproportionately targeting women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Although victims might try to escape harassment by leaving the internet, they still experience lasting trauma: a national study of middle and high school students found that 45% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who experienced online harassment felt depressed and more than 25% wrestled with suicidal thoughts. With the HeartMob platform, Hollaback! seeks to achieve an internet where individuals feel safe and supported in sharing their ideas without fear of harassment. To maintain the integrity of the internet and ensure safety, this issue of online harassment (threats, defamation, doxxing, and cyberbullying) must be addressed and victims must have avenues to seek support.

In addition to developing HeartMob, Hollaback! has also partnered and collaborated with several organizations specializing in the empowerment of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals. During the creation of the HeartMob platform, we also launched and continue to oversee and manage an extensive network of over 80 organizational leaders in the field of online harassment through a shared listserv. By uniting several organizations in the name of amplifying marginalized voices online, Hollaback! has pioneered the movement against online harassment to empower women.

8. *Does your company/organization take into account the gender and ICT targets contained in the UN Sustainable Development Goals?³ Please elaborate.*

Online and in person gender-based harassment directly inhibits the achievement of gender equality and quality education. When considering gender discrimination, accessibility to public spaces, including the internet, is vital. The continued practice of online harassment, targeting women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals, establishes a norm of discrimination. Furthermore, if minorities are marginalized online, their ability to access the unique educational resources provided by the internet is inhibited.

The following Gender and ICT targets are built into Hollaback!'s organizational goals:

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education**

4.a. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

³ For example, Goal 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women; Goal 9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

- Hollaback!'s Bystander Training Program and Education Curriculum are both examples of ways to upgrade education facilities that are non-violent and non-discriminatory. Harassment is at the core of unsafe learning environments, and prevents women and LGBTQ+ people from accessing education equally. Further, many women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals face harassment to and from school, limiting their access to education and infringing on their ability to concentrate while in class.
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality**
 - 5.1. *End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere*
 - 5.2. *Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation*
 - Equal access to public space is a gender discrimination issue. Women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals face violence in public space, from harassment and discrimination to an escalation to physical violence. Street harassment can include verbal and physical harassment, and non-physical contact including stalking, public masturbation, or flashing. We receive stories on our site and apps from girls as young as seven afraid to walk to school for fear of street harassment and its escalation. Without free and equal access to public spaces, women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals are unable to earn a livelihood, engage in public and civic life, and access services. We advocate for community based solutions to street harassment and elevate individual's stories to a legislative level.
 - Online harassment takes place in both the private and public spheres. With the internet, everything is both publicly accessible but also very individualized, particularly harassment. We've seen that harassment disproportionately targets women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals, along with women of color and LGBTQ+ individuals. Many of the tactics of online harassment have the expressed purpose of having women leave the internet - or remove their content from online spaces. With HeartMob, bystanders provide real-time solutions to mitigate trauma, document harassment, and ensure that individuals experiencing harassment have a support system.
 - 5.6.b. *Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.*
 - Both HeartMob and Hollaback!'s story-sharing platform promote the empowerment of women in technology by increasing their access to it, minimizing the harm associated with it, and allowing women to access technology in ways that are personalized and used for their own empowerment.
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

- Harassment to and from work can limit women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individual's safety in public spaces, leading to many adjusting their route to work, changing jobs, incurring additional costs by avoiding public transportation, or having trouble concentrating at work. By restricting their access to public space, harassment affects their ability to earn a living, engage in civic discourse, and run for office. By advocating for community-based change, providing a platform to document harassment, and training community members in bystander intervention, Hollaback! works to reduce trauma and provide resources for individuals experiencing harassment.
- With online harassment, as more and more jobs move online (and social media networking sites like LinkedIn), the ability to access decent work and excel in your field requires an online presence. In addition, with the increase in tech-based jobs, many jobs require familiarity with and access to the internet: a right denied many. When women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals are targeted by online harassment, many leave the internet or stop producing content. This has significant impacts on their earning potential and right to engage in decent work in a growing field. With HeartMob, we're mobilizing community members to provide immediate support to individuals who experience online harassment, reducing their trauma and ensuring that they are able to continue producing content online.
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**
11.7. By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
 - Harassment is an issue that denies women, girls, trans*, gender nonconforming individuals, and people with disabilities access to safe public spaces. There are high incidences of harassment, assault, and discrimination on public transportation, limiting access to public spaces and denying the right to safety in our cities. Hollaback! advocates for the right to equal access to public spaces, equipping local leaders with the skills to advocate for safer cities, providing the tools for community members to safely and effectively intervene when they witness harassment through bystander intervention, and creating accessible platforms to document harassment.

9. *Are you aware of any laws, policies or practices to address technology-related or technology-mediated violence against women and girls (e.g. cyber bullying, hate speech, stalking, sexual harassment, trafficking, manipulation of personal information and images)? Has your company/organization taken any specific actions to protect against, and respond to*

violence experienced by women and girls via technology platforms (e.g. policies, monitoring of content, providing mechanisms for reporting and redress)?

In the United States, there are few laws in place to address cyberbullying. On a state level, New York has expanded the Dignity Act to include best practices for public schools responding to the proliferation of online harassment. However this policy fails to establish any form of institutionalized support for the victims of cyberbullying, such as sensitivity training or counseling. On a local level, some cities, such as Seattle and St. Paul, have implemented Sick and Safe Leave Policies. These policies qualify an employee for paid leave for the purposes of personal safety, such as the result of stalking, mental health, and harassment. Hollaback! is currently pursuing legislative initiatives that would apply Sick and Safe Leave Policy to New York City through work with City Council Members, since New York City currently only mandates paid sick leave and not paid sick and safe leave. Also, on a local level, Hollaback! is pursuing streamlined procedures for the New York Police Department to report instances of online harassment through work with New York City Council. Effective practices to address the online harassment of women and girls would recognize the increased likelihood of experiencing online harassment for WOC, GNC, and LGBTQ+ community and develop a streamlined protocol of support for victims of online harassment.

10. Does your company/organization facilitate access to remedy in accordance with human rights principles and standards, where human rights harms may be caused or contributed to by connectivity initiatives (e.g. where an individual is threatened by internet-based content, or by illegitimate surveillance, limitations on freedoms of expressions, and other rights)?

HeartMob advocates for a free and open internet, where the expression of ideas is not determined by the status quo. We believe that, for the internet to truly be an open space, the issue of online harassment must be recognized as a barrier to the right to freedom of speech. We work to remedy this barrier by providing immediate support to victims of online harassment and advocating against emerging online harassment tactics.

Recently, with the increasing scope and impact of populist tactics online, we're facing increasing mobilization and emboldenment from "alt-right" news and online groups. That includes targeted misinformation campaigns against grassroots organizations and their national platforms, active DDoS attacks, and open calls for doxxing. For example, Breitbart news recently published a piece claiming that online harassment and hate speech don't exist - and that all incidences of hate speech in the media have been fabricated to push a "left wing agenda." This piece was widely shared, often with the impetus to continue the attempted closure of civil society organizations and groups working to ensure an open internet. While the goal of these alt-right tactics is often to silence dissent and maintain existing inequalities, it also has long lasting

impacts on civic engagement and participation, as misinformation campaigns often increase the harassment aimed at organizations, require significant staff communications time to counter, and fatigue activists and individuals on the ground looking to make a difference.

As a civil society organization, we rely on an accessible and open internet to increase awareness of our work and freely disseminate ideas. Without an open internet, we could not connect with our communities or engage with partner organizations, limiting the impact and scope of our work.

11. Has your company/organization considered how Big Data, the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Ambient Intelligence may impact on the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective? Do you see a risk that women and girls may be discriminated against, or excluded by these technologies? Or are they likely to create new opportunities to promote gender equality and empowerment? How can companies/organizations influence design and standards to ensure these technologies are inclusive?

We believe that Big Data has the potential to shed light on the impacts of harassment globally, but are cautious that many gender identities and/or experiences of harassment will be underrepresented due to a lack of reporting, over-representation of dominant groups, or active repression of women, girls, trans*, and gender nonconforming individuals online. Moving forward, we believe that further research is needed to determine the impacts of online harassment on marginalized peoples - along with best practices for intervention.

III. Possible solutions for bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective

12. Is your company/organization taking measures to expand equal access and enhance the participation of women and girls in digital technologies as users, content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders? Please elaborate on any initiatives, programs, or other interventions you may be leading or supporting (including to address underlying causes of the gender digital divide).

In 2014, we took on a leadership role in the online harassment movement by founding, leading and managing an extensive Online Harassment Task Force advisory board, including over 80 leaders in the field. During the development of HeartMob, the Online Harassment Task Force served as experts on what victims of online harassment face, and what interventions would help them feel safer and supported online. These suggested interventions formed the core of the HeartMob prototype. In December 2014, we held the first summit on online harassment in NYC. During the summit, we used human centered design principles to test the HeartMob prototype

with key journalists and organizational leaders from the Online Harassment Task Force. We continue to lead this engaged network, working together to collaborate on initiatives, brainstorm on improvements to legislative advocacy, and support one another's work.

The HeartMob platform was developed to expand equal access and enhance the participation of women and girls in digital technologies - including as users, content creators, employees of online companies, and innovators in digital technology fields. The platform fights fire with water by harnessing the power of community accountability to provide support and resources in the face of harassing and discriminatory actions online. It's the first of its kind, an innovative tech platform providing direct and real-time support to victims of online harassment.

Hollaback! also runs a site leader program, developing an international network of women and girls to fight street harassment. The site leader program engages women and girls to facilitate discussions about gender-based violence, including online harassment and street harassment. By creating communities of women and girls encouraging each other to feel supported and active online, Hollaback! enhances the role of women and girls in a digital age.

13. Does your company/organization engage in public advocacy or participate in the Internet Governance Forum to promote gender responsive policies on digital technologies? Do you support processes and mechanisms that enable the full, active, and equal participation of women and girls in decision-making about how the internet is shaped and governed?

HeartMob engages in public advocacy to fight for the rights of women and girls online. We support processes and mechanism that enable the full, active, and equal participation of women and girls in shaping how they use the internet, and how they access support. To that end, we have:

- Established partnerships with groups facing online harassment, such as reproductive justice workers & journalist organizations, and partnerships with tech companies,
- Created an extensive social media safety guide through partnerships with Google, Facebook, Reddit, and Youtube. We are also on Twitter's Trust and Safety task force.
- Developed a legal resource guide to online harassment in partnership with DLA-Piper, [*Online Harassment: A Comparative Policy Analysis for Hollaback!*](#), which details how governments across the US, Australia, Canada, and the UK, are attempting to prevent online harassment from a legal framework.
- Introduced a detailed legislative agenda to New York City Council to work towards preventing online harassment, including:
 - Trying to expand police trainings to understand social media and the existence of online harassment
 - Introduce Paid Sick and Safe Leave, including online harassment

14. *How can the industry and tech community be productively engaged in bridging the gender digital divide and improving the lived experience of women and girls online? What should be the responsibilities of different stakeholders to make digital inclusion a reality and ensure meaningful digital opportunities for all?*

The industry and tech communities can bridge the gender digital divide by working to:

- Ensure best practices for the safety of all internet users, particularly women and girls.
- Enforce norms of zero-tolerance online harassment policy for through community accountability and support networks.
- Shift the narrative away from targeting abusers towards supporting and empowering victims.
- Increase accessibility to resources for those experiencing online harassment, such as reports of local laws on online harassment, platforms for online support, and bystander intervention guides, and single-reporting.

Together, nonprofits like Hollaback! can work alongside industry and tech leaders to ensure a holistic, multi-level approach to safely and effectively responding to online harassment. The next great idea can only emerge when every community member has the opportunity to speak: online harassment denies many this opportunity. With adequate support systems, reporting mechanisms, and increased data, we can ensure that marginalized people are able to access online jobs, create content, connect with community members, and engage in educational opportunities without fear of harassment and discrimination.