



# Addressing Sexual Harassment and Gender Bias in Weightlifting

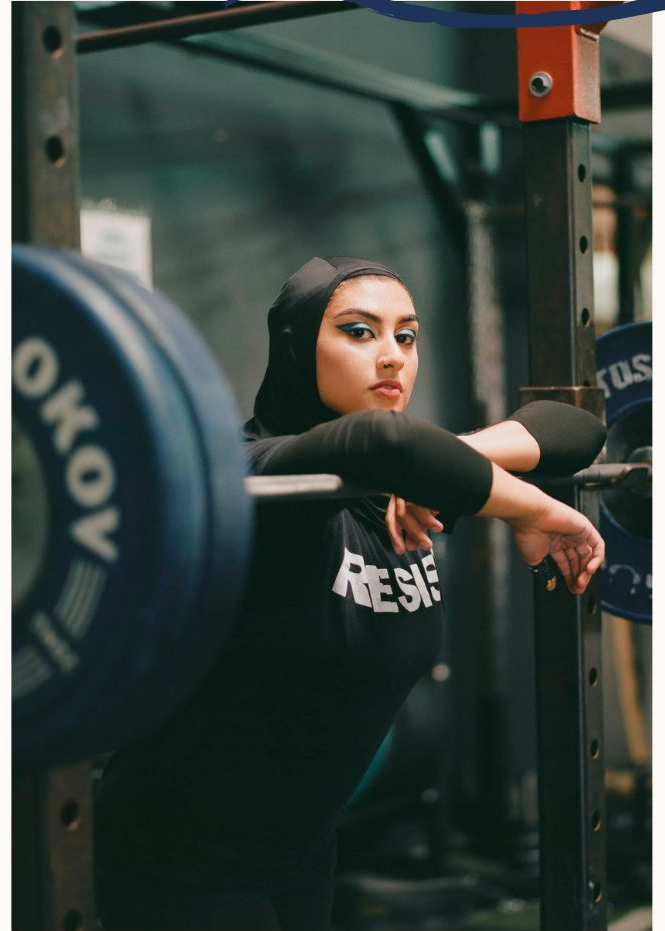
*By Haleema Bharoocha*



# About Haleema

Haleema is an olympic weightlifter, facilitator, and change maker. She facilitates equity-focused workshops to equip people with the tools to make change, on topics including bystander intervention, community safety, Islamophobia, and gender justice and has trained over 700 people. She is passionate about curating digital content and brands for social justice.

Haleema graduated from Seattle University at age 19 with a BA in Sociology where she founded the Gender Justice Center, a student-led community center. Named on She the People's list 25 Under 25: Women of Color to Watch, Haleema is building power for communities of color.





# Agenda

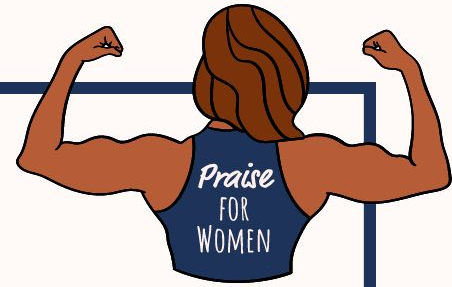
- Welcome
- Overview of Sexual Harassment and Gender Bias in Weightlifting
- How to Create Safe and Affirming Fitness Spaces
- Next Steps and How We Show Up



# Community Agreements

- Take care of yourself & **take a break** if you need to!
- Ask questions using the **chat function**
- **Use reactions** to let us know if you “like” something
- Keep in mind that we are all at **different knowledge levels**
- **Be open** to possibilities
- **Center and believe survivors!**





# PART 1

## *Understanding the Issue and Its Impact*



## Sexual Harassment Takes Many Forms



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**Cultural:** Sexualization of fitness and women's bodies. Enforcement of rape culture which normalizes rape and gender based violence through and not limited to victim blaming, minimization of sexual assault, lack of accountability for harm caused, and objectification.

**Non-Verbal:** Unwanted staring, videotaping/photographing without consent.

**Verbal:** Catcalling, comments about body, unsolicited advice, asking someone out and not accepting no for an answer, being engaged in unwanted conversation, harassment online.

**Physical:** Groping, grinding, invasion of personal space, unwanted touching, stalking, rape.

**Institutional/Policies:** Not having a safe reporting process for sexual harassment, not believing survivors/victim blaming, hiring staff who perpetuate sexual harassment.

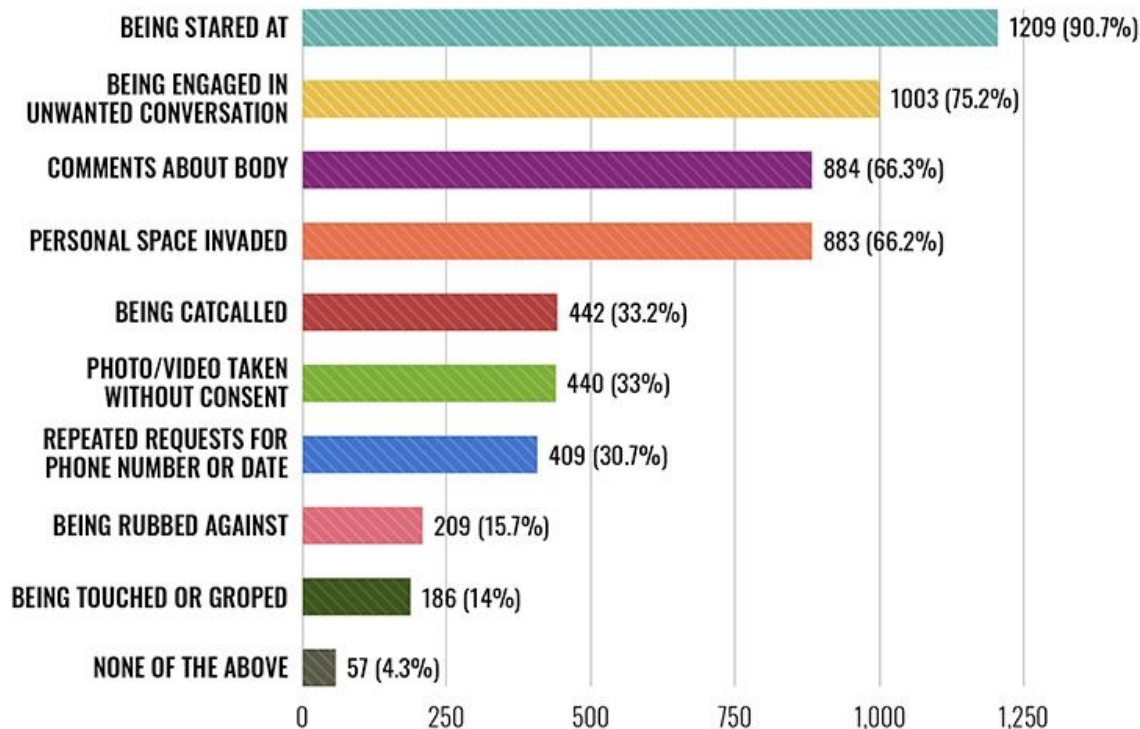
Unsafe fitness spaces are common and discourage women and girls from participating in fitness.

In fact, it can be dangerous to do so mentally and physically given the severity and daily occurrences of harassment.

This does not even include data on TGNC identified people.

## Have you experienced any of the following behaviors while at the gym? *Please check all that apply.*

1,333 responses



# *Gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms are a barrier to sports and fitness for non male identified people.*

**Gender norms:** Socialized performance enforced by society which informs how one behaves and thinks based on perceived gender identity.

**Harmful Gender Norms:** Thoughts, behaviors, and frameworks that uphold gender based violence, the gender binary, homophobia, and transphobia that are a result of colonization. These norms are embedded within culture, language, policy, and institutions and are upheld through shame, suppression, violence, and punitive repercussions. This impacts and influences all gender identities.



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75% of girls have heard disparaging statements about girls in sports.

(Source: Sported)

**WEIGHTS ARE  
FOR MEN**

**You will look like a  
man/get bulky.**

***Too aggressive***

**"WOMEN'S SPORTS IS NOT  
A VIABLE CAREER."**

**WOMEN SHOULD BE GENTLE.**

**WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?**

**YOU WILL GET HURT**



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## Impacts

- Evidence suggests that gender stereotypes contribute to young women dropping out of sport participation because women in sport are often seen as being non-feminine.
- Men who do not fulfill the 'masculine' stereotype have reported feeling intimidated and excluded from sports participation.
- More than half of gay, lesbian or bisexual sport participants conceal their sexuality from their team/club and report feeling unwelcome.
- Majority of people (of any sexuality) report frequent homophobic and discriminatory comments.

Source: SEXUALITY AND GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON SPORTS ETHICS, 2020



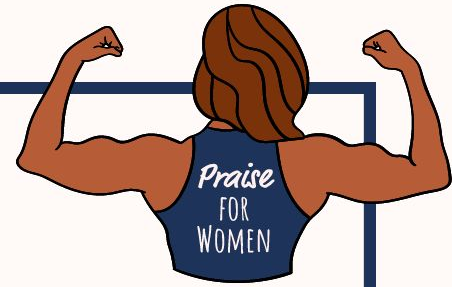
# Creating the Culture We Want

This does not have to be our reality. We can change these harmful gender norms through systemic and cultural change and encourage the next generation of girls and gender expansive youth to participate in sports.

What messages, narratives, words, and stories do you want to see shared and used that do not perpetuate gender bias?

Drop your answers here: [tiny.cc/newnorms](https://tiny.cc/newnorms)





## PART 2

# *Approaches and Actions to Address the Issue*



## Survivor Centered Approach



Centers the impacted person: their feelings, their experience, and their needs.

Those most impacted by the issue are closest to the solution. “What people know and think are intrinsically wrapped up with class position. Also, notice that the elite in any society exercises disproportionate control over what ideas are accepted as truth.” - Patricia Hills Collins

Recognizes that everyone has a range of experiences that are shaped by their identities and experiences and thus have different needs.

Allows people impacted by violence to determine what is best for them.

Acknowledges that the existing systems in place do not meet the needs of many communities and can further disempower people, and thus part of violence prevention includes systems change.

# Creating Safe and Affirming Fitness Spaces

Policies

Preventative  
Measures

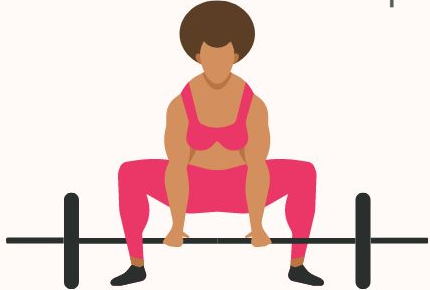
Culture  
Change

Active  
Intervention



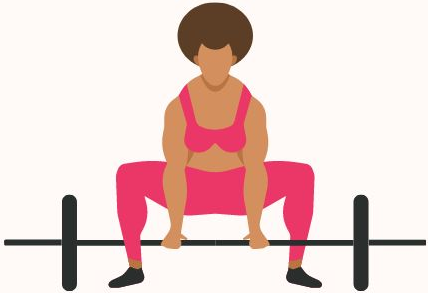
# Creating a Culture of Safety and Affirmation

- Practice active and affirmative consent among coaches and athletes especially for physical touch. All coaches and athletes should know how to ask for consent and practice it
  - Ex: Can I spot you? Can I squat behind you? Is it okay if I touch your back to adjust your form?
  - Give athletes options for spotting that they can do alone/without being touched
- Avoid using terms that associate fitness with a gender identity
  - Ex: standards for RX weights can be based on strength rather than gender
- Counter rape culture and the gender binary with clear messaging



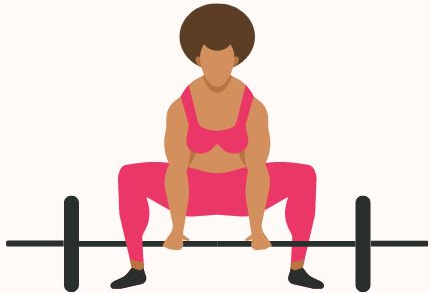
# No Tolerance Policies

- Believe survivors
- Make it clear and easy for anyone at the gym to report sexual harassment
  - Awareness on how to report
  - Include information on what the survivor can expect
  - Allow for anonymity in reporting to protect the survivor
- Ban members and fire staff who perpetuate sexual harassment and alert nearby gyms (especially if you are a chain)



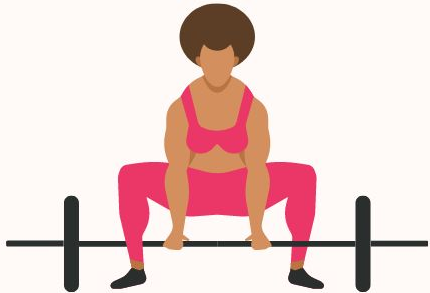
# Preventative Measures

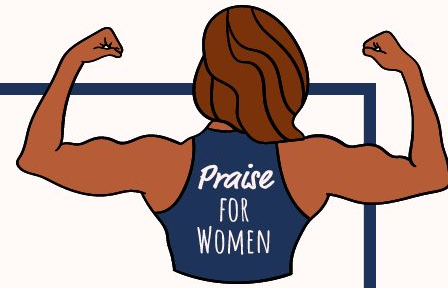
- Ensure there is good security in the space and people know they are being monitored
- Train gym staff on sexual harassment awareness and prevention
- Include a sexual harassment 101 for new members orientation
- Hire staff with a gender based violence background or certification



# Active Intervention

- Call out sexual harassment in the moment when you see it and take appropriate action
  - Ex: If you witness an athlete excessively staring at another athlete, let them know they are being watch and they must stopped.
- Use bystander intervention to intervene when you see sexual harassment





## PART 3

# *Next Steps and How We Show Up*



# Participation in Sports for Girls Has Positive Outcomes



## BETTER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

High school girls who play sports are more likely to get better grades in school and more likely to graduate than girls who do not play sports.



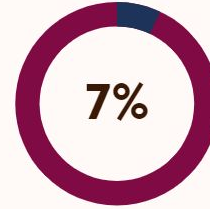
## LOWER RISK OF BREAST CANCER

As little as four hours of exercise a week may reduce a teenage girl's risk of breast cancer by up to 60%; breast cancer is a disease that afflicts one out of every eight American women.



## REDUCED MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Girls and women who play sports have higher levels of confidence and self-esteem and lower levels of depression. Girls and women who play sports have a more positive body image and experience higher psychological well-being than girls and women who do not play sports.



Girls who participate in high school sports have higher rates of labor force participation and earn 7% higher wages.



A study of 821 female senior managers and executives found that 94% played sports after primary school.

# Healing and Action

*Reflect alone and then share back:*

What is one commitment you will make to decrease and prevent sexual harrassment and gender bias in your fitness space?

What does the next step of your healing journey look like?



# Stay Connected!



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