

BACHELORETTES > BOY BANDS > BEYONCÉ > PLUS: RIOT GRRRL REVISITED

FEMINIST RESPONSE TO POP CULTURE

bitch

MICRO / MACRO

SUMMER 2013

NO. 59 | USA \$5.95 | CANADA \$7.50



0 74470 94671 7

PHONE IT IN: A NEW APP TALKS BACK

When I was a 20-year-old college student, I commuted by bus for 80 minutes each way to my summer internship. Several mornings that summer, a middle-aged man boarded the bus at the stop after mine and sat by me for more than an hour. He routinely “fell asleep” and let his head slide onto my breasts. I thought it was accidental until he kept choosing to sit next to me and kept “falling asleep” the same way.

I never once confronted him. I didn’t know what to say.

I would turn away from him and squeeze myself as close to the window as I could when it happened. I was relieved when my internship ended.

Sexual harassment is pervasive in our lives—in school hallways and on buses, in nightclubs and at the office—and it can be hard to know what to do about it. Thankfully, there are a growing number of tools to help us out, including Circle of 6 and BSafe, which let you alert people about where you are going or if you need help, or the Hollaback! app,

which lets you report harassment incidents. The latest is the free smartphone app Not Your Baby, which generates a list of ways that someone can react to sexual harassment.

The app allows you to select where you are (for example: school, work, home), and who is harassing you (such as a stranger, classmate, or boss). Then it will suggest possible responses designed just for that situation.

When I selected “public transit” and “stranger,” it generated phrases like, “Have some

respect” and “You need to leave me alone now,” and also suggested shouting, “Pervert!” Another suggestion was, “Find a bus driver, transit official, or police officer and ask for help.”

The recommendations are generated from a database that includes the input of 238 survey respondents, as well as the ideas of hundreds of people who have submitted them since the app was released in September 2012.

If the suggestions that the app generates do not fit your situation or your personality,

you can press a refresh button to read more suggestions. Even if you don't find one that is perfect, reading the suggestions may help you come up with your own variation, and then you can submit it to be included in the suggestions for other users.

If my situation on the bus happened now, I could see myself elbowing him and saying, "Don't touch me," in a loud voice, or I might pointedly look at him and say, "This seat is taken," if he tried to sit next to me.

The app also provides ideas about how to help a family member or friend who has been harassed, lists frequently asked questions about sexual harassment, and offers numerous other resources.

Not Your Baby was produced by METRAC, a Canadian nonprofit that works to prevent violence against women and youth. Communications specialist Andrea Gunraj said they designed the app because people they work with "wanted more resources to address 'everyday harassment'

on the street, at work, at school, and among family and friends."

Since the app's launch, the number of downloads has exceeded METRAC's expectations. Because of its popularity, they've recently released a version for Android, with two new "location" options users can choose from: "online" and "faith community."

Antiharassment activists also find the app useful. Jess Prominski, the director of Holaback! in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, says she promotes

the Not Your Baby app to her network because it "recognizes the different techniques people have for resisting and responding to harassment in public spaces."

Since there is no "best" or "right" way to deal with harassers, joining these discussions, having easy access to lists of suggestions, and hearing people's stories are vital ways for us to each decide what reactions and responses feel most comfortable and empowering for us. —*Holly Kent*