

My name is Shoshana Roberts. Many know my face, but few know my name. To millions I am just “that woman in the New York catcall video.” In fact, I'm a 25 -year-old actress living in Queens, New York. To help pay my bills I babysit and take care of pets. I have a good life. I have many interests other than acting, such as hiking and camping, fitness, and dancing. I graduated from college and recently became engaged to a wonderful man I met several years ago after I babysat for his cousin. We are now planning our wedding and our life together.

I want to help others—friends, family and strangers. That is why it is difficult for me to understand negativity in the world. I helped a stranger the other day when he was lying on the ground near the subway tracks. I bought a dog toy for a neighbor’s puppy across the hall and I regularly bring small gifts for the children I babysit. I encounter so many different types of people in this great city I call home. Most New Yorkers treat me, and other women, with respect and kindness. Sadly, that is not true for some men on the streets of New York who humiliate me and others.

With “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman” I hoped to use my theatre training to speak up on a topic I am passionate about. I answered an ad on Craigslist and agreed to participate in the creation of a public service announcement regarding sexual harassment in the streets. I worked on the project with Mr. Rob Bliss. He had an interesting idea--to have a modestly dressed woman walk in the streets of New York and film the reactions of passersby. I asked him if I could be paid for my time and efforts and he told me that "nobody is being paid." Mr. Bliss and I collaborated in the creation of a two minute video based upon his simple idea. I decided what to wear, how to walk and we jointly decided where to walk. I tried as an actress to walk “normally,” and not to invite catcalling or abuse. The video "went viral." This was an unknown phenomenon just a few years ago and one for which I was not prepared. Suddenly I was sought out for interviews, but also criticized and even threatened by those who found the video unfair to men.

While I was getting death and rape threats, others profited from advertising revenues, licensing fees and donations. Mr. Bliss was working all along with a charity which was identified later as Hollaback!. I continue to believe Hollaback! is on an important mission. However, I did not know they would use my image and performance to solicit large donations on the Internet. I thought this was to be a public service announcement. I did not know Hollaback! was paying Mr. Bliss and had an arrangement with him as to the use of my performance. I did not know Mr. Bliss had a partnership agreement with YouTube which placed advertising on my performance and shared the revenues with him. I did not sign any agreement of any kind with anyone. Mr. Bliss’s representations were false and his intentions dishonorable. He had little concern about sexual harassment of women.

I later approached Mr. Bliss and the charity regarding compensation for my work. Mr. Bliss told me I was entitled to nothing. Hollaback! did not offer to share their revenues, but they did send me a check for \$200 which they told me would be taken out of the money they were paying to Mr. Bliss.

Later, I was shocked to learn that Mr. Bliss apparently licensed the video through an advertising agency to TGI Friday's. In doing so, he sold the rights to all of the images in the video, including mine. Again, I was not paid anything for this use of my performance and would never have agreed to be associated with an advertisement for fast food that belittled women. To this day, that ad is available on the Internet and Mr. Bliss continues to use my image on his website and elsewhere to promote his business.

A few weeks ago, my attorney filed a lawsuit on my behalf. I was praised by some but, as expected, attacked by others. Let me be very clear. I am pursuing this case for two independent reasons. First, I believe in the cause. Sexual harassment anywhere--be it in the street or in the workplace-- is endemic in this country and must end. Secondly, the rights of all actors and other creative artists are increasingly threatened by those who profit commercially from their content without paying for it. I brought this case because it is the right thing to do. I will donate a percentage of any monies I receive from the lawsuit to a charity. I would like to thank my family, my friends, and strangers for their words of encouragement and support.

SHOSHANA B. ROBERTS