

POLICE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NYC

A Community Safety Project Report

**COMMUNITIES
UNITED FOR
POLICE REFORM**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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“When you’re being harassed... it feels like your world is crumbling... You go to police because you want to feel safe, because you want to report the bad guys to the police, but what happens when the police are the bad guys? ...It has to be stopped.”

- Jessica (36, Latine, cisgender woman, Staten Island)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All New Yorkers deserve to be safe from abuse, harm and violence, including being safe from police violence. Police sexual violence is a pervasive but under recognized form of police violence that disproportionately affects marginalized communities in New York City. Police sexual violence ranges from everyday forms of sexual harassment and using the power of the badge to demand sexual favors, to various other forms of sexual assault and rape. This kind of violence has long-term, harmful effects on individuals and on communities, significantly impacting people's sense of safety and well-being, and sometimes their employment and housing. The Community Safety Project sought to capture the firsthand narratives and insights of New Yorkers who have experienced various forms of police sexual violence at the hands of the NYPD, hearing from people directly about what these experiences mean for their lives and what they think it would take for police sexual violence to stop.

We conducted a multi-method research project that included community town hall meetings, a survey administered to 3,778 New Yorkers in all five boroughs of the city, and 37 in-depth semi-structured interviews with those who have experienced police gender-based and sexual violence. We especially focused on highly policed communities in New York City, but spoke with New Yorkers from all walks of life. Many of the stories that were reported to us are harrowing accounts of violence and harm with long-lasting impacts for survivors—often demonstrating how sexual violence at the hands of law enforcement can magnify an already harmful experience. Our main findings are that:

- (1)** New Yorkers experience a wide range of police sexual violence from sexual harassment to sexual assault, at levels that are much more pervasive than commonly acknowledged.
- (2)** When reporting or considering reporting police sexual violence, New Yorkers often feel unsafe, unheard, or unbelieved, almost always choosing not to report.
- (3)** The enactment and ongoing threat of police sexual violence has long-term cumulative impacts on the well-being of individuals and communities, functioning as a source of intense fear for those targeted and their communities at large.

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These findings clearly demonstrate that police sexual violence is not contained to a few “bad apples” in the NYPD. Putting an end to police sexual violence in New York City will require thoughtful and effective solutions that address both structural and cultural problems within the NYPD, as well as investments in alternative approaches to sexual violence response and prevention. The first steps in decreasing sexual violence at the hands of the NYPD is that:

- (1)** The city must expand oversight, transparency, and accountability of the NYPD, taking active steps towards real accountability for officers who sexually harass, abuse and violate New Yorkers. Unless stopped, the culture of NYPD impunity will continue to pave the way for police sexual violence and leave survivors without real accountability for harm.
- (2)** Reduce the size, scope, and power of the NYPD—police sexual violence is part of the continuum of police violence, and one important step to addressing police violence is addressing the outsized power and authority of the NYPD.
- (3)** New York City needs to invest in non-police crisis intervention programs for sexual assault and intimate partner violence, as well as services and supports for survivors of police sexual violence.

While we have seen an increase in awareness and condemnation of police violence in the last decade, police sexual violence is still underrecognized and underreported, despite our data showing that it is quite pervasive. Furthermore, little has been done at the city level to decrease police sexual violence and ensure that New Yorkers who experience police sexual violence are heard, believed and supported. This report aims to shed light on this critical issue to propel legislators to take stronger action to protect New Yorkers.



"I was being pressured, because he [officer] would pop up to my house unexpectedly... There was plenty of phone calls and threats... I wanted to tell somebody, but I was afraid. He told me, 'I could get all your information. I'll make it hard for you.'"

- Sherray (50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

Chapter 1: Introduction

In September 2017, two undercover NYPD detectives stopped an 18-year-old young woman and her two male friends in a car in Brooklyn. After searching the vehicle and finding a small amount of marijuana, they let her two friends go and took her into their unmarked car. There, they subsequently raped her while she remained in handcuffs, threatening her with criminal charges if she did not cooperate.¹ Exactly one month later, the #MeToo movement against sexual violence erupted and spread virally, generating more than 12 million online reactions shared around the world within its first 24 hours.² In the era following both the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements, research revealed a stream of sexual violence perpetrated by law enforcement across the country, from correctional officers in prisons to Border Patrol and ICE agents enacting sexual violence in detention facilities.³ Yet, to date, little attention has been given to the sexual violence committed by officers in the context of everyday policing, outside of prisons and jails.

Police sexual violence—including physical and verbal misconduct of a sexual nature—currently constitutes the second most common police complaint reported after excessive force.⁴

Incidents of police sexual violence in New York City have been documented as far back as the late-nineteenth century.⁵ Yet, no federal agency collects data on police sexual violence,⁶ and the NYPD does not generally share internal data voluntarily.⁷ Reviewing news reports and court records, a recent study spanning 10 years reveals that police across the U.S. are caught for some form of sexual violence once every five days.⁸ Another study has found that more than 36% of officers engage in some form of sexual misconduct, with flirting on duty and sexually-motivated traffic stops reported by officers themselves as common.⁹ In addition, sexual assault rates have been found to be significantly higher for police officers than the general population;¹⁰ on-duty police officers have, in fact been found to commit sexual assaults at more than double the rate of the general population.¹¹ And from the little existing data we do have, we know that police gender-based and sexuality-based violence disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ people of color.¹²

This national data is the background against which the Community Safety Project sought to understand police sexual violence at the hands of the NYPD. We collected data from 3,778 New Yorkers, in part on their experiences of police sexual violence, including 37 in-depth interviews with New Yorkers to better understand the context, conditions, and impacts of these experiences. New Yorkers who responded

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to our survey answered several questions about police sexual violence, giving us a wide range of experiences that painted a clear picture of how New Yorkers were experiencing police sexual violence, especially in highly policed neighborhoods. We interviewed many New Yorkers who shared their stories and experiences with us, often willing to share what for many was one of the most difficult experiences of their lives.

Police sexual violence includes sexual harassment, sexual coercion or extortion, sexual assault and rape. Police sexual violence ranges from everyday sexual harassment and using the power of the badge to demand sexual favors, to various forms of sexual assault and rape.

What we have produced is our attempt to document and explain the range of police sexual violence reported via in interviews and surveys with New Yorkers across the city, and what the city needs to do to protect New Yorkers from harm. Our primary findings, detailed in the following sections, are:

1. New Yorkers experience a wide range of police sexual violence, ranging from everyday sexual harassment—including sexualized attention, harassment based on queer and transgender identities, and sexual coercion and extortion—to various forms of sexual assault, some of which are facilitated by routine policing practices.
2. When reporting or considering reporting police sexual violence New Yorkers often feel unsafe, unheard, or unbelieved. This includes experiencing police dismissal and harassment after reporting incidents of sexual violence, and choosing not to report incidents of police sexual violence because of police impunity.

3. The enactment and ongoing threat of police sexual violence has long-term cumulative impacts on the well-being of entire communities, functioning as a source of intense fear for those targeted, and all others witnessing this harm, particularly in highly policed areas.
4. Police sexual violence is a significant part of a larger continuum of police violence, requiring immediate policy change, non-police community-based response services, and improved support systems for survivors of sexual violence.

In the sections that follow, we detail these four key findings, sharing stories directly from respondents, as well as overall patterns and themes that arose from the data (supporting and additional analyses as well as demographic data can be found in our online appendix). We hope to provide a more comprehensive picture of the breadth and intensity of police sexual violence in New York City and what it means for everyday New Yorkers.

Methods

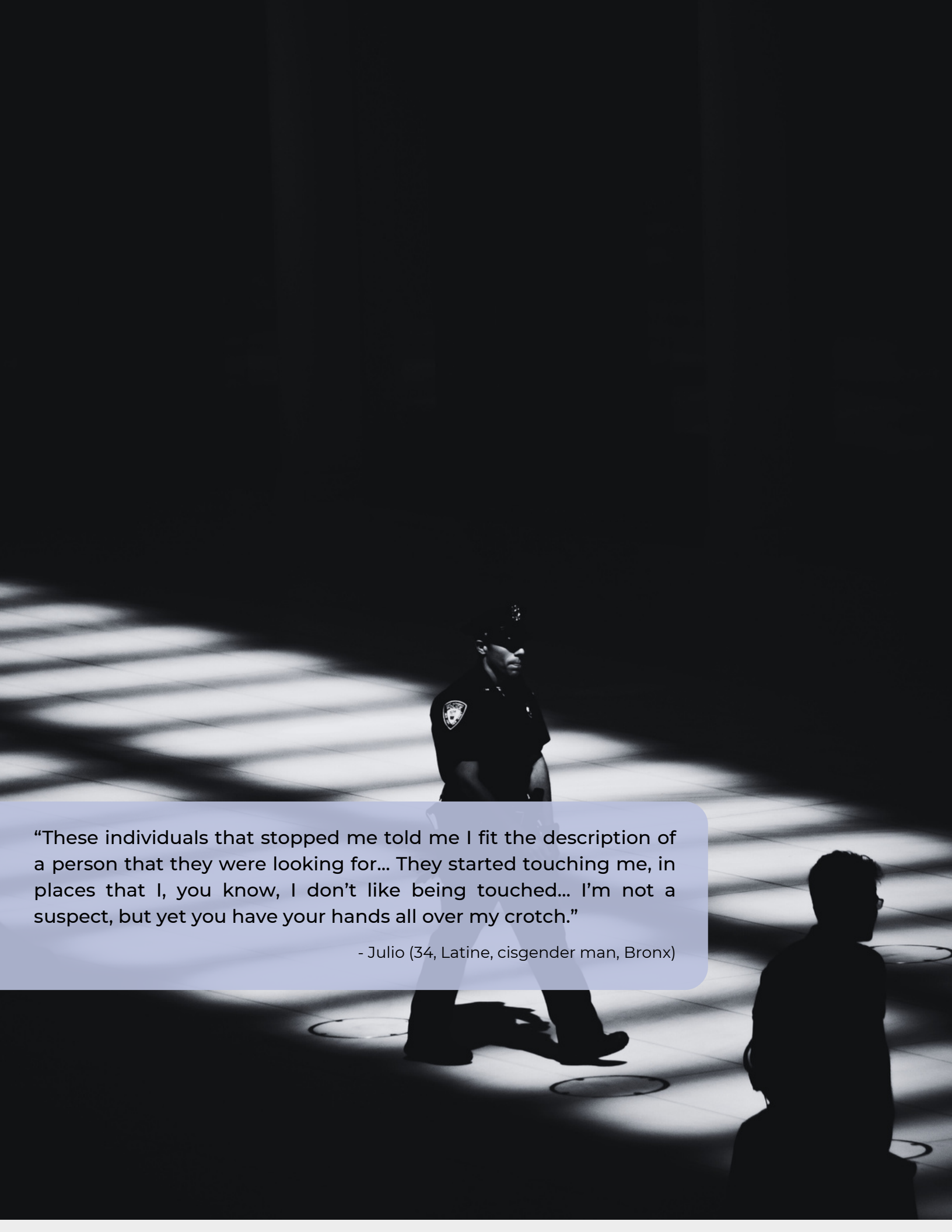
This study is part of the Community Safety Project, a collaborative research initiative between Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) and the Public Science Project (PSP). Over the course of four years, the Community Safety Project conducted a multi-method participatory action research project that, as part of a larger effort, studied police sexual violence through: (i) two virtual community town hall meetings with 60 participants in total; (ii) a survey administered to 3,778 New Yorkers both online and in person in all five boroughs of the city; and (iii) 37 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with those who have experienced police sexual violence. Representatives from CPR membership organizations conducted all aspects of the Community Safety Project — developing the methods, collecting information,

analyzing data, and communicating results – through a deeply collaborative process that drew upon the group’s substantial expertise as organizers, educators and advocates. Facilitated by CPR staff and PSP members, the Community Safety Project was primarily led by a research team of eight community-based organizations that received additional support from an advisory group consisting of nine organizations. For this report on police sexual violence, six organizations with expertise in sexual and gender-based violence worked together to analyze the data and communicate the results. All CPR organizations involved in this study have worked extensively with, and on behalf of New Yorkers in communities most impacted by policing.

A diverse sample of participants in all five boroughs were recruited through purposive, snowball, and respondent-driven sampling.¹³ **This sample includes New Yorkers who have been identified as particularly vulnerable to police sexual violence such as Black, Indigenous, cisgender and transgender women of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+, as well as people who are low-income, houseless, previously incarcerated, disabled, immigrants, perceived to be involved in the drug and sex trades, and/or those who have been previously victimized.**¹⁴ Our sample also includes those considered less vulnerable to police sexual violence, such as cisgender heterosexual men, to capture a broad range of experiences. Quantitative data provide crucial missing data on the landscape of police sexual violence, including its prevalence and scope, while qualitative data illuminate the breadth and depth of this phenomenon in New York City. Taken together, these data shed light on the cumulative nature of an issue that has historically remained hidden.

About the Community Safety Project

The Community Safety Project is a collaboration between Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) and The CUNY Graduate Center’s Public Science Project (PSP). Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) is an unprecedented campaign to end discriminatory and abusive policing practices in New York, and to build a lasting movement that promotes public safety and reduces reliance on policing. CPR runs coalitions of over 200 local, statewide and national organizations, bringing together a movement of community members, lawyers, researchers and activists to work for change. The partners in this campaign come from all 5 boroughs, from all walks of life and represent many of those most unfairly targeted by the NYPD (changethenypd.org). The Public Science Project (PSP) is a collective of City University of New York (CUNY) professors and students who believe grassroots social science — collaborative, systematic, public-facing inquiry — can play a significant role in the struggle for justice. PSP members partner with community organizations and public institutions to conduct research with the goal of supporting movements aimed at interrupting oppressive structures (publicscienceproject.org).



“These individuals that stopped me told me I fit the description of a person that they were looking for... They started touching me, in places that I, you know, I don’t like being touched... I’m not a suspect, but yet you have your hands all over my crotch.”

- Julio (34, Latine, cisgender man, Bronx)

Chapter 2: New Yorkers' Experiences with Police Sexual Violence

Police sexual violence is an underrecognized form of police violence that, to be prevented, requires a more in-depth examination. For one, police sexual violence can happen anytime and anywhere that contact with law enforcement happens, from traffic stops and street policing to youth engagement programs and public schools, to probation and parole enforcement.¹⁵ Police sexual violence has also been documented during home raids and calls for police assistance, as well as in facilities where officers are overseeing vulnerable populations, such as undocumented people and those with disabilities.¹⁶ **The New Yorkers we spoke with across all five boroughs described incidents of police sexual violence by NYPD while exiting a shopping mall, when driving their car, outside a bar, in an officer's vehicle, on public transit, at a public City Hall meeting, at their jobs, at local police stations, in their homes and on streets in their communities.**

In total, 19% (n=459) of our survey respondents reported they experienced police sexual violence in their lifetime and 12% (n=297) reported it was recently.

Acts of sexual violence enacted by those carrying a badge and a gun can look differently, happen more easily, and be experienced as more severe within the various contexts of everyday policing as compared to sexual violence more generally.

19% of survey respondents reported experiencing police sexual violence in their lifetime and **12%** reported experiencing it recently.

While the contexts are varied, our study found patterns in what police sexual violence looks like and how it is experienced. In this chapter, we detail the wide range of police sexual violence that New Yorkers reported. More specifically, we take a closer look at their experiences in the context of two broad types of police sexual violence: sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Sexual Harassment By NYPD

Sexual harassment is legally defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that can create a hostile or intimidating environment. Within the context of everyday policing, we found that respondents reported experiencing NYPD sexual harassment much more frequently than one might imagine. In fact, we learned that 18% (n=420) of the survey respondents and nearly half (49%; n=18) of those interviewed reported they experienced sexual harassment by the NYPD in their lifetime. Through these interviews and surveys, we heard New Yorkers describe three main forms of sexual harassment: (1) sexualized attention by the NYPD, (2) NYPD harassment based on queer and transgender identity, and (3) sexual coercion and extortion by NYPD.

Sexualized NYPD Attention

Sexual harassment by police involves sexualized attention that includes sexual objectification, comments or questions of a sexual nature, comments or questions

about someone's sexuality or sexual practices, and photos, videos or texts of a sexual nature.

Twelve percent (n=289) of the people we surveyed, and nearly a quarter, or nine, of the people we interviewed, reported experiencing sexualized attention from the NYPD. Four New Yorkers we interviewed experienced police sexualized attention on multiple occasions; two also experienced prolonged sexual harassment from officers for hours at a time, while another interviewee experienced an officer putting his crotch inches from her face despite her pleas for him to move.

12% of survey participants and **9** interview participants reported experiencing sexualized attention from the NYPD. Sexualized attention can involve flirting, asking for phone numbers, or catcalling.

Sexualized attention can involve flirting, asking for phone numbers, or catcalling. Those we spoke with discussed the cumulative harm of this kind of attention from police. Several interviewees described the routine practice of being stopped and questioned as an opportunity for officers to sexualize the encounter. Julia, a 26-year-old Black cisgender woman from the Bronx, described receiving sexual attention on multiple occasions, primarily as a teenager in her local train station by the same officers she would regularly see in her neighborhood. She explained:

"I've never been frisked, but they did used to check your purse. Um and I've had a lot of times where they would call me over to check my purse just to talk to me and flirt with

me. So that was really annoying especially when you're trying to get to where you're going, you know? ...I mean, all these men were probably in like their 20s or so, maybe a little older than that. And I was a kid [scoff]."

Julia
(26, Black, cisgender woman, Bronx)

This kind of interaction can also become normalized, particularly in heavily policed neighborhoods. Julia described it occurring so regularly that it was "hard to count because eventually you just get used to it."

Sexualized attention can also involve sexually inappropriate comments, such as comments about someone's body, clothing, or sexual preferences. Jessica, a 36-year-old Latine cisgender woman from Staten Island, recounted an incident of unwanted sexual attention from two officers at the bus stop in her neighborhood while with her coworker on their way to work in the morning. She explained:

"It was questions like you know, 'You two are very sexy and, you know, look at your bodies. Are you two together?' ...Questions like that and then it gets a little bit more, you know, graphic, and what are you supposed to do? ...Do you walk away from the bus stop and call 9-1-1? And you know it, it's just scary. There's even been times where I've been called a b-i-t-c-h, or you know, um, you just, just, you feel the aggression... I've been called sorts of names, you know, even s-l-u-t, uh you know, I've, I've been degraded...

...and um, there are certain, you know, officers that are more aggressive than others that don't want to take no for an answer. Um and they get a little bit more, you know, verbally abusive... Sometimes, you know, it'll keep, the aggression will keep coming until eventually, like I'm out of view."

Jessica
(36, Latine, cisgender woman, Staten Island)

Jessica discussed experiencing routine sexual harassment from officers throughout her adult years well over 20 times, all marked by feelings of extreme vulnerability and deep fear of unchecked police power. Everyday forms of sexual harassment are powerful tools of misogyny that encourage aggression toward those who challenge them.¹⁷ **As a result, sexual advances are often accompanied by fear of retaliation for rejecting them¹⁸—fear that is significantly amplified by the institutional power with which officers are legally granted to discipline and punish.**

Another form of sexualized attention involves accusations of engaging in sex work. Jennifer, a 24-year-old East Asian cisgender woman, was falsely arrested for prostitution while walking to the corner store in her neighborhood in Queens, explaining:

"They took everybody that was on the block, everyone; old grannies, it didn't matter... And mind you I am a teenager, and I, like, I had drug problems. So it was easier for them to kind of manipulate the narrative, because I could understand if I was

undressed, or I was doing something inappropriately. I could understand that, but I wasn't doing any of it. They didn't find nothing on my person. I was fully clothed. I was put together... It's very disturbing when we are looked at, where people are looked at as a piece of meat for someone with authority... They're the ones harming us, not keeping us safe."

Jennifer
(24, East Asian, cisgender woman, Queens)

During this arrest, Jennifer was then groped on her backside by the arresting officer after being handcuffed. While her charge was ultimately dismissed, she spent the entire weekend in Central Booking. Jennifer described her arrest and the related sexual violence she experienced as part of a larger tactic of community harassment. **False charges for sex-related crimes such as prostitution, especially within the context of discretionary arrests as exemplified here, provide opportunities for instances of unwanted touching, sexual extortion, and sexual assault.¹⁹**

It is essential, as we do in this section, to center cisgender and transgender women and fem-presenting New Yorkers when discussing forms of police sexual harassment like sexualized attention. However, it is notable that in our study 12% (n=116) of cisgender men surveyed also reported experiencing sexualized police attention and several of those we interviewed described sexually violating experiences with police officers that resulted from gender-based harassment. Damien, a 32-year-old Black man from Brooklyn, shared:

“I’ll say about 15 [times]. They, they, they’ve actually had, they went into my pants and grabbed mine [genitals]... I knew it was for no reason because I didn’t have anything on me... Just harassment, just targeted because I’m a young Black man.”

Damien
(32, Black, cisgender man, Brooklyn)

In these instances, sexualized attention was used to exert power and perhaps, emasculate Damien. Participants reported that forms of sexualized attention can then too easily progress to stop-and-frisks, strip searches, and cavity searches—police practices that interviewees often described as sexually violating.

NYPD Harassment Based on Queer and Transgender Identity

As the previous experiences demonstrate, sexual violence is intimately connected to both gender and sexual identity. Police harassment is also experienced differently depending on the identities you hold, and the ways that officers perceive those identities. Related to sexually inappropriate comments about someone’s sexual preferences and/or practices, police harassment based on LGBTQ+ identity is another form of sexual harassment. Harassment based on queer and transgender identity includes discriminatory behavior against those who do not conform to heterosexual norms of gender expression.

Many New Yorkers described experiences of being harassed by the NYPD based on their perceived sexual identity. Of the LGBTQ+

participants surveyed, 13% (n=73) reported they felt targeted by the NYPD because of their sexual orientation and 9% (n=49) experienced harassment based on sexual orientation, including police making insulting comments about their sexuality.

13% LGBTQ+ survey participants reported feeling targeted by the NYPD because of their sexual orientation, and **9%** experienced harassment based on sexual orientation, including police making insulting comments about their sexuality.

Pamela, a 58-year-old bisexual Black cisgender woman from Brownsville, was verbally harassed for being queer by her neighborhood police officers on four different occasions. She felt that she was targeted because of both her race and sexuality, sharing:

“If you show any gay tendencies, you know what I’m saying, or, you know they see you with another woman, they treat you a certain way... smirks and stares and, you know, it wasn’t nice... Things were said, you know, like, like, you know, ‘It’s Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve’ which really put me in shock, you know, that it was coming out of a policeman’s mouth.”

Pamela
(58, Black, cisgender woman, Brooklyn)

During each instance, Pamela explained that the officers were in pairs of two or groups of four, where this sexuality-based harassment happened collectively. She added, “They have one say something and the other one back ‘em up.” Several other interviewees spoke about experiencing

similar group forms of NYPD harassment, akin to getting bullied by a group with more social and legal power than you do, further exacerbating people's experience of powerlessness.

Many transgender and non-binary participants also experienced police harassment, including 26% (n=15) of the survey respondents who reported experiencing gender-based harassment from the NYPD, and 43% (n=26) who felt targeted by the NYPD because of their gender. Harassment based on transgender and non-binary identity ranged from officers making derogatory remarks, to not respecting requests to be frisked by someone of the same gender. This type of police harassment also included “gender checks,” where officers illegally frisk or search someone in instances where they suspect that gender expression does not match one’s sex.

Scott—a 34-year-old, queer, non-binary, transgender, Black person—described being stopped in Brooklyn and harassed by a group of officers because of both their sexuality and gender. Scott explained that three officers participated in this group-level harassment, bullying them for approximately 1.5 hours before letting them go with no official charge. They recounted:

“When I was coming out from the shopping mall, uh they started asking me many questions... ‘Why are you dressed this way? ...Are you male? Are you female?’ And then I told them I’m, I’m queer. So they started asking me uh, ‘Why are you queer?’ ...They demanded answers, the answers which I could not give. Uh so, they start telling me that I was... not abiding by the laws. Then I asked them which laws... One of

them uh, slapped me... They told me that I’m under arrest... Along the way, they are just making fun of me, teasing me. Uh suddenly the, one of them then threatened to take my shopping away.”

Scott
(34, Black, non-binary, transgender person, Brooklyn)

Scott’s experience directly highlights ways in which officers may collectively engage in both the policing and punishment of sexuality and gender expression, even when absent of sexualized attention.

Additionally, nearly a quarter of survey participants who identified as transgender and/or non-binary (24%, n=14) reported sexual attention by officers—double the rate of police sexual harassment for cisgender participants (12%, n=260).

24% of survey participants who identified as transgender and/or non-binary reported sexual attention by officers—double the rate of police sexual harassment for cisgender participants.

Our findings support previous research that reveals disproportionate rates of police sexual violence against transgender and non-binary individuals.²⁰ Transgender people across the country have reported high rates of sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual coercion and sexual extortion by police officers, particularly if they are, or are perceived to be, involved in the sex trades.²¹ NYPD in particular has a long history of violence against LGBTQ+ communities in general, with a review of recent lawsuits revealing homophobic and transphobic officer behaviors.²² Research

and data continue to support what LGBTQ+ communities have been saying for many, many years about their experiences with the NYPD.

Those we spoke with also reported sexuality-based harassment in the context of seeking help from police. Another interviewee, Rob, a 41-year-old gay multiracial (Black & white) cisgender man living in Brooklyn, called the police for help on multiple occasions after experiencing intimate partner violence. Rob explained that he felt he was denied help because of both his sexuality and his racial identity, his partner was a white man whose side the police took on several of these occasions. He recounted:

“The first time when he [his partner] stomped on my back I called. Nobody came and then eventually I got a phone call. So that happened at 2 a.m.... somebody called me back maybe about 4 a.m. asking me if everything was okay. At that point he had beaten me so bad, I just didn’t want to cause trouble. I said, “yes, it’s fine...” The first [recorded] account with David [his partner] was a was a, a strangulation, like a really [small pause] violent strangulation... He put me in hospital maybe three or four times at that point and by the end of it, and eventually I, I managed to get away and it was, and it was, you know, in the middle of the night kind of situation. And the police did *nothing, nothing*. In fact, they would, in fact they would aggravate the situation and make it worse.”

Rob
(41, Black and white, cisgender man,
Brooklyn)

Rob then went on to explain how he felt that officers not only denied him protection from extreme verbal and physical abuse in these instances, but also harassed him in the process because of his identity as a gay man, ultimately exacerbating the abuse he experienced over a period of five to six months. In one instance, officers also arrested Rob himself after he called for help. When he tried reporting this incident to the detective on his domestic violence case, Rob was met with outright disregard, explaining:

“You’re laughing in my face when I’m telling you that I’m being severely abused and punished by somebody in the street, physically and mentally... I don’t need you to call me a faggot to know that you’re calling me a faggot... I would go into the precinct, by my physical body, and they would just laugh at me as I’m filling out the documents. They arrested me to take me to the hospital to deal with my [scoff], with my injuries. But they let the person who, the person who was doing [small laugh] the injuries to me was left comfortably at home. So they, they cuffed my arms so tightly that I’ve got, I sent photographs of it to the detective... He just ignored them and he, just never answered a call or text from me ever again.”

Rob
(41, Black and white, cisgender man,
Brooklyn)

Intimate partner violence survivors should be supported and heard, not laughed at or dismissed because of their identity. Rob’s experience demonstrates an incident in which the NYPD compounded the already existing harm that Rob was experiencing.

Sexual Coercion and Extortion By the NYPD

Another form of sexual harassment involves sexual coercion and extortion. This includes any non-physical act to pressure or manipulate someone into engaging in sexual activity, including the use of threats and intimidation that can be facilitated by the power of the badge. In the context of policing, sexual coercion and extortion can look like an officer asking for sexual favors in exchange for offering something (e.g., a dropped charge), or by threatening harm (e.g., jail time) if those targeted do not comply. Five percent (n=125) of the survey respondents and three people we interviewed reported experiencing sexual coercion or extortion at the hands of the NYPD.

5% of survey respondents reported experiencing sexual coercion or extortion at the hands of the NYPD.

Sherray, a 50-year-old Black cisgender woman from Queens, discussed her experience of being sexually coerced by an officer for months after she got out of prison. She shared:

“When I came home, he lived right there in my neighborhood in Queens. Um, he started to come on to me... I went through with it [having sex] because he would, he would tell me things like, ‘Well, you know, if you ever get arrested again, I can help you’ ...And being a young mother, you know, and struggling, and going through, you know, life’s obstacles, the ups and downs, I figured, well let me go ‘head and do

it, you know? But it was like I was being pressured, because he would pop up to my house unexpectedly. Um, and this is a heavy man. Um, there was plenty of phone calls and threats. So, I went along with it for about a good four months... I wanted to tell somebody, but I was afraid. He told me, ‘I could get all your information. I’ll make it hard for you.’ It was really bad.”

Sherray
(50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

Many participants reported that one of the most harmful aspects of experiencing police sexual violence was directly related to the outsized power and absolute authority of the NYPD. **Police work fundamentally includes the use of this power to criminalize, arrest, and detain those targeted—a strong force that can be wielded if the person targeted does not cooperate with officers’ wishes in opportune moments.²³ In these instances, the line between consent and coercion can easily become blurred, particularly in moments of criminalization and/or for those with prior criminalized histories.** When faced with the power of the police badge, many participants felt especially powerless to push back or stop the violence from occurring. Instances of sexual coercion and extortion, as several interviewees’ experiences made clear, can then escalate to acts of police sexual assault.

Sexual Assault By the NYPD

Sexual assault is legally defined as non-consensual sexual contact or behavior, ranging from unwanted sexualized touching to rape. While most incidents have not received media coverage, public awareness of police sexual violence often

comes from the high-profile cases of sexual assault that have made news headlines. The rape of Abner Louima in 1997 remains one of the highest-profile cases of police brutality in NYPD history.²⁴ In more recent years, one of the most high-profile cases of police sexual violence nationally featured Daniel Holtzclaw, a police officer in Oklahoma who was convicted of the sexual assault and rape of 13 Black women and girls whom he targeted while on duty.²⁵ And just last year, the top uniformed officer in New York City, the chief of the NYPD, resigned after numerous allegations of sexual assault. This officer was appointed and repeatedly endorsed by Mayor Adams, himself a former NYPD officer who has also been accused of sexual assault during his time on the force.²⁶

Media often explain these incidents as the rare product of “a few bad apples” however, previous research reveals sexual assault by officers as a more ongoing, widespread problem, particularly in highly policed communities.²⁷

From our data alone, 100 (4%) survey participants and 5 interview participants reported experiencing sexual assault (including, but not limited to rape) by NYPD. We frequently found that participants reported that routine policing practices such as stop-and-frisk led to incidents of sexual assault (see below).

4% of survey participants reported experiencing sexual assault (including, but not limited to rape) by NYPD.

We also found that acts of sexual coercion and/or extortion by an officer could lead to instances of police sexual assault. For example, Sassy, a 25-year-old Black and

Latine cisgender woman from the Bronx, described being arrested multiple times from the age of 10, for petty offenses such as stealing food when she was hungry, by the same group of officers in her neighborhood. Then, while still a minor, at just 14 years old, Sassy experienced sexual extortion and rape by one of those officers. She recounted:

“It was just this one officer, he was like, ‘Oh, I’ve been having my eyes on you for so long, but you’re so young, but I been having my eyes on you.’ Like, and then it just got to a point that when I actually turned, like, 14, I was going to juvie, I was getting sent and he had to transfer me. And he said that they will give me a lesser time, if I just would’ve did, you know, have sex with him or something. But I told him, ‘eh it was okay, I didn’t wanna do that.’ I was still a virgin too. And I was just like, I didn’t wanna do that. And he like grabbed me, like by my head, and just forced me.”

Sassy
(25, Black and Latine, cisgender woman, Bronx)

Sassy’s story is deplorable and shocking, and no child should have to experience this; yet, like so many survivors, Sassy never felt safe reporting this assault and her story never made it into the public conversation. This is a story not just about rape, but about a law enforcement officer using both his physical power and his authority to assault a young girl who was in his custody.

When we asked respondents both in surveys and in interviews about their experiences with the NYPD, many described police interactions where they were stripped naked and searched in ways that

felt violating; touched during stop-and-frisks in ways that felt sexualized; or cavity searched, meaning they were penetrated in their anus or vagina, in ways that felt like sexual assault. In the next two sections we will share respondents' experiences of unwanted sexualized physical contact, including body cavity and strip searches, and explore how people described these experiences as well as their impact.

Unwanted Sexualized Physical Contact

Unwanted sexualized touching is a form of sexual assault that participants reported experiencing during stop-and-frisks, strip searches, and other police encounters that included groping and touching that felt sexually inappropriate and uncomfortable.²⁸ Participants differentiated between routine touching as part of a pat-down, and groping touching that felt sexualized and whose intent was to "feel a person up". Of the New Yorkers we heard from, 170 (7%) survey respondents, along with 15 interview participants, reported they were touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable. Six people we interviewed experienced this kind of sexualized touching on more than one occasion. Two of these interviewees discussed these experiences happening during routine frisks as many as an estimated 25 times, in which officers regularly touched their crotch and genitals.

7% of survey respondents and 15 interview participants reported being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

Julio, a 34-year-old bisexual Latine, cisgender man, described an incident of suddenly being stopped and frisked by male

officers in the middle of the day with many people in his Bronx community looking on. He explained experiencing this incident as a severe sexual violation, and felt targeted because of his sexual identity, recounting:

"These individuals that stopped me told me I I I fit the description of a person that they were looking for... They started touching me, in places that I, you know, I don't like being touched... I'm not a suspect, but yet you have your hands all over my crotch and, you know, my buttock... I'm explaining to him I'm very uncomfortable. And then instead of being professional, that's when it comes out, "It's not my fault, you're a fag. It's not my fault you're uncomfortable because you're a fag..." God knows I don't have nothing in these tight pants [laugh], like c'mon... They went inside my pants in the back, and felt my balls and everything back, from the back, while I'm against the wall."

Julio
(34, Latine, cisgender man, Bronx)

Julio's story demonstrates that even when NYPD officers were alerted that their touch felt sexualized instead of professional, their response was to place blame on Julio and completely dismiss his complaints. This experience in particular also reveals how different forms of police sexual violence (i.e., unwanted sexualized touching and sexuality-based harassment) can accumulate even within a single police encounter.

Other interviewees similarly spoke about unwarranted instances of stop-and-frisk that led to unwanted touching in a manner that felt sexualized. Katie, a 41-year-old

white cisgender woman from Queens, shared a 45-minute encounter where she was suddenly stopped, questioned, and frisked while waiting in her car for a mechanic to look at her vehicle. Four undercover officers jumped out of an unmarked van, dragged her out of her car, handcuffed her, accused her of buying drugs, and frisked her multiple times while searching her vehicle. She explained:

“There was like four guys and they, none of them had like, police uniforms on. They didn’t have those badges around their neck or anything. Nobody identified themselves. Like, I didn’t even realize at first that they were cops. I thought I was getting like mugged, or like, assaulted... He put his hands like, on like, between my jacket and my shirt and he was like feeling, you know, like up up and down... Then another guy came over and he was patting me down too. And he did the same thing... Both of them put their hands like under my boobs, and I wasn’t wearing a bra because it was like, um, a bodysuit... The second one put his hands like... on my hips and on my ass and like my pants didn’t have pockets or anything.”

Katie
(41, white, cisgender woman, Queens)

Katie was clear that the quality of touch that officers were using during pat-downs was sexual in nature and six months later, a similar incident of police sexual violence happened to Katie yet again in another part of Queens near her job. She was suddenly approached by three male plainclothes officers while sitting in her car playing with her dog; this time she called 911 right away

because she feared she was getting carjacked. She described it as “same thing, take me out of the car, put me in handcuffs, took me behind the car... patted me down, didn’t give me their information, didn’t take my ID, so I’m assuming they didn’t like log this, you know?”.

Katie also described this second incident where she was patted down as sexualized in nature, where officers took advantage of their positions of power. Operating undercover provides officers an additional layer of protection and anonymity from which to engage in acts of police sexual violence, and plainclothes officers have a history of engaging in serious crimes.²⁹ In 2020, NYPD’s plainclothes unit was dismantled after its tactics were declared unconstitutional; however, in 2022, these units were rebranded, reinstated, and staffed with some officers who have a history of civilian complaints against them, this without any new measures implemented for institutional change.³⁰

In addition, while those we spoke with discussed unwanted sexualized touching and other forms of police sexual violence perpetrated mostly by male officers, some participants also described harmful experiences with policewomen. Jonathan, a 22-year-old multiracial (Latine and white) cisgender man, described being sexually violated by a policewoman in his neighborhood in Queens. He explained:

“There was this woman, this policewoman and, I was just walking minding my own business and then she she came at me... All she said, she wanted me... like this, “I want you” [said seductively]... She charged at me. Pushed me against the wall.”

Jonathan
(22, Latine and white, cisgender man, Queens)

In this way, the use of violence underlying the institutional culture of policing transcends individual officer identities. Participants' experiences provide further evidence that the presence of policewomen does not prevent the occurrence of police sexual violence.

In another instance of unwanted sexualized touching, Soeurette, a 29-year-old East Asian cisgender woman from Manhattan, experienced unwanted sexualized touching by a male officer in the subway. She discussed both her distress about the incident and also how her awareness of deeply imbalanced power dynamics influenced her reaction. Soeurette explained:

"I have a sense of my constitutional rights and, like I know that... I don't need to cave into their every demand; like, that's not all legal. But... I think a lot of people will just because they're scared... You don't know what kind of mess you can get yourself into if they're pissed off or in a bad mood, or they feel like they're being disrespected."

Soeurette
(29, East Asian, cisgender woman,
Manhattan)

Sexual assault often occurs in relationships where one person has more power or authority over another person. It is never easy to refuse someone with power, which is especially true when that person can legally arrest you and is carrying a loaded weapon. Given this severe imbalance of power, previous research has found that most people will not push back against police action, making decisions that are not desired, but simply as a means to avoid further violence.³¹

Body Cavity & Strip Searches

In our survey, 138 (6%) of the respondents reported they experienced a body cavity search in their lifetime, times when a police officer penetrated their anus, vagina or mouth. This was a much higher number than we anticipated, and one that raises serious concerns, as the law sets high thresholds that law enforcement officers have to meet in order to have grounds to cavity search civilians.

6% of survey respondents reported experiencing a body cavity search.

Many of the people we spoke to experienced cavity searches as part of routine stop-and-frisks especially in highly policed communities, leading us to find that cavity searches are being performed at concerning high rates. The majority of people who experienced body cavity searches and strip searches likened them to violating sexual experiences that had traumatic impacts well beyond the police encounter. Damien, a 32-year-old Black cisgender man from Brooklyn, described his very first encounter of being suddenly stopped by police when he was in high school while walking home in his neighborhood. Two officers took him into their vehicle, where they performed a cavity search on him, penetrating his anus. He understood this experience as rape, and shared:

“Two cops they, you know, racially profile me. ‘Come here. You look like a suspect.’ So um one of them was checking me... He was basically grabbing on mine [pause], my special parts, you know, in my, my butt, and things like that. Then they, one of them even stuck like, a finger to see if I was, hiding things up there. But I’m just a 17-year-old kid.”

Damien
(32, Black, cisgender man, Brooklyn)

Damien explained that one officer performed the cavity search, with the other “watching his back to make sure nobody watched.” This story once again demonstrates how routine police activity, like a stop-and-frisk, can lead to serious violations, in this case one that is sexual in nature and with a minor.

In addition to cavity searches, in our survey, 166 (7%) respondents reported experiencing strip searches. Chris, a 30-year-old white cisgender man from Staten Island, estimated experiencing approximately 75 instances of being stopped and frisked over the span of a decade, starting from the age of 17. He characterized at least 20 of these instances as severely sexually violating, including invasive strip and cavity searches. He explained:

“When they got to make their quota, they’re they’re gonna they’re they’re gonna be fishing and looking for something, so even if you’re not doing nothing wrong, you got to live in fear if you’re gonna get pulled over ... I’ve gotten assault-sexually assaulted by them numerous times

when they stopped, touched me. They had me naked in front of my house in my underwear. They stripped me, stripped my pants, everything... They even did this thing to me, um they call, they call it—this is their terminology—credit card swipe. They take their hand and they slide it in your butt, like that. (motioning up and down) And he would, he would do it, but he wouldn’t just do the swipe. He would use his finger like that, and you know. And I had scratches back there too... They sit there and they grope, they grope you. You know? Like, like smelling my hair.”

Chris
(30, white, cisgender man, Staten Island)

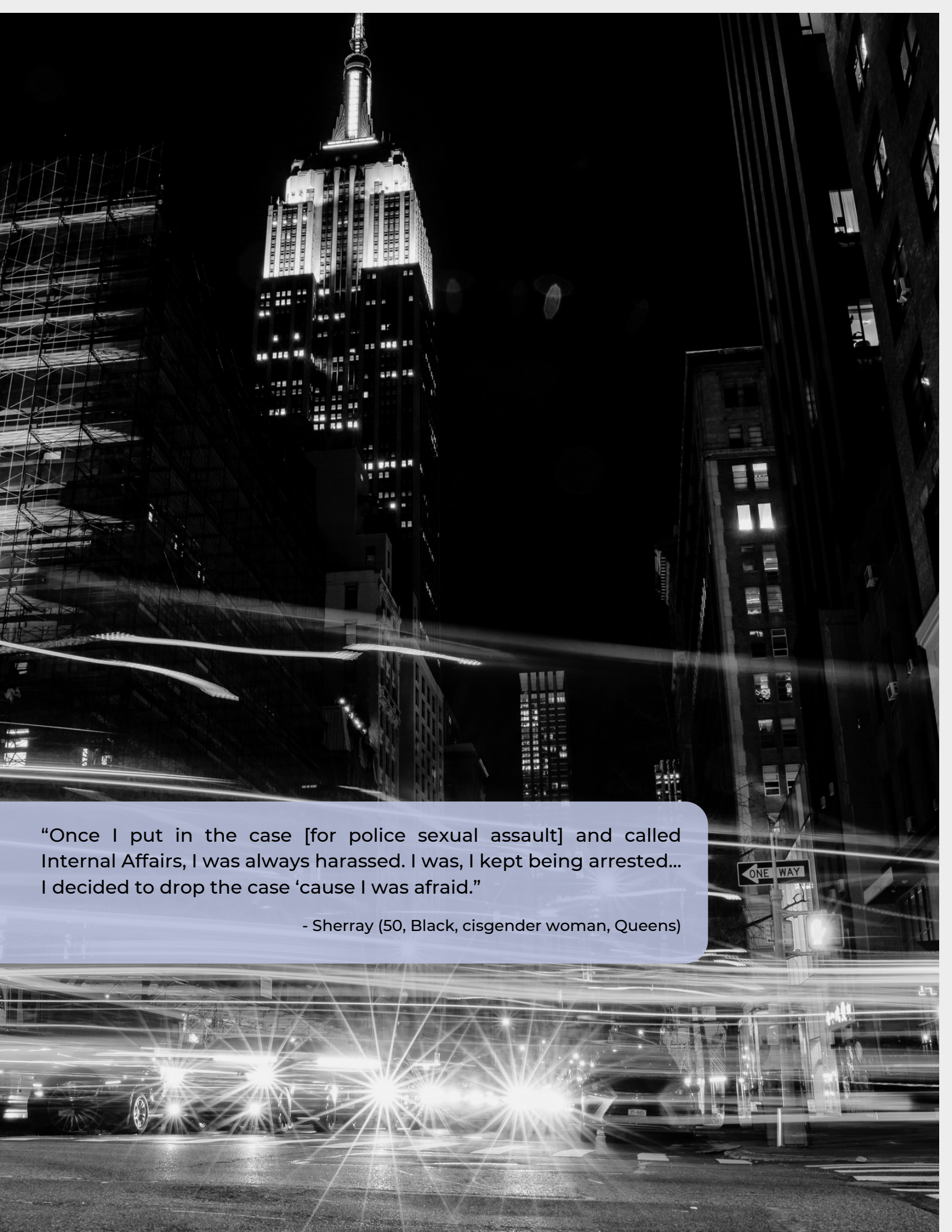
7% of survey respondents reported experiencing a strip search.

Chris described the “credit card swipe,” a police technique that was well known in his highly policed community, as one type of cavity search that his friends had similarly experienced and that he described as a way for the NYPD to harass and humiliate community members. In addition to Chris, other participants consistently likened strip searches to sexual violations, often describing these searches as having traumatic impacts on their mental well-being that lasted long after the incidents themselves.

While law enforcement has the authority to conduct these searches under certain parameters, given the frequency and the serious impacts on people who experience these searches, more needs to be done to

protect people from harm. Police officers are legally allowed to search anyone who does not verbally assert their constitutional right to refuse the search; in this case, consent is then legally assumed.³² And even when people are aware of their right to refuse a search, saying that they do not consent oftentimes does not stop the search from happening, given the unchecked power that officers can wield.

These stories of unwanted sexualized touch show a consistent pattern of sexual assault happening within the context of police interactions, at rates that are much higher than commonly acknowledged. We must do more to protect people from these harmful interactions with police, and ensure that people feel safe from police sexual violence.



“Once I put in the case [for police sexual assault] and called Internal Affairs, I was always harassed. I was, I kept being arrested... I decided to drop the case ‘cause I was afraid.”

- Sherray (50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

Chapter 3: New Yorkers' Experiences with Reporting

Those in our study who experienced police sexual violence not only described the harm of the incident itself, but also frequently reported that there was no perceived pathway to receive justice afterwards. When faced with an experience of sexual violence, calling the police is one of, if not the only, existing option for survivors. Yet, those we spoke with often described feeling helpless with NYPD being the only available option. Understandably, they did not want to turn to the very institution that had caused them harm. They spoke about fearing police retaliation for reporting, and did not trust that officers would hold other officers accountable, particularly within an institutional culture of impunity. In this chapter, we more deeply explore these concerns and the added harm they cause.

Officer Impunity & The Choice NOT to Report

In a recent study of 78,000 officers with disciplinary records from 2012 to 2023, of which the most common and harmful form of misconduct was police sexual violence, less than 1% of offending officers were fired or resigned as a result of on-duty abuse.³³ In general, officer accountability is rare, with only 1% of all investigated NYPD misconduct cases overall resulting in serious disciplinary action.³⁴ **Previous research reveals a culture of impunity created by pervasive institutional practices that conceal police sexual violence such as the blue wall of silence, transferring offending officers to new departments, and union-mandated eradication of police misconduct records.**³⁵ It is unsurprising then that those

in our study who experienced police sexual violence frequently discussed their distrust of police and a disbelief that NYPD officers would be held accountable for their sexual violence if reported. For example, Katie, a 41-year-old white cisgender woman from Queens, explained her decision, sharing:

"I don't think that, that there's any way that this, the organization that's responsible for producing people like that would ever be able to offer support, or even like, be somebody that you'd be comfortable approaching to say this happened... I don't trust you."

Katie
(41, white, cisgender woman, Queens)

Katie was not alone; 31 of the 37 interview participants we spoke with chose not to report their incidents. The vast majority felt they would not be taken seriously by officers.

The perception of the blue wall of silence operating within the NYPD was a serious deterrent to reporting. Publicly reported cases have in fact shown how this code of silence extends to other officers blatantly attempting to dissuade survivors from speaking out about and reporting experiences of police sexual violence.³⁶ Another serious deterrent, as other interviewees discussed, was the sense that they might not be seen as credible compared to an officer. With sex crimes in particular, low-income cisgender women of color and LGBTQ+ women of color are at greater risk of both initial victimization and subsequent legal dismissal.³⁷ Historically, even when officers have faced serious charges, their chances of conviction remain unlikely.³⁸

Their beliefs about the blue wall of silence and these credibility gaps are not unfounded. In fact, survivors who have attempted to file complaints about police sexual violence have too often been ignored by police departments, with police supervisors disregarding numerous complaints filed.³⁹ Those who attempt to report may be put through numerous interrogations to have their stories examined for any inconsistencies that weaken their claims. Janice, a 30-year-old Black cisgender woman from Brooklyn, filed a complaint after eight officers unlawfully barged into her apartment without a warrant when she was naked. Afterwards, she was repeatedly interrogated and asked to attend several meetings with the offending officers. Janice explained that after going to three or four meetings, she was too scared and uncomfortable to continue with the investigation and stopped going. She was not only continually questioned, but also forced to see the same officers who harassed her for 15 minutes while she was unclothed without allowing her to get dressed in her own home.

Those we spoke with also held legitimate fear of the various forms of potential retaliation they may face for coming forward—from officers doling out false charges to enacting more serious forms of sexual and/or physical violence—which makes the risk of reporting outweigh the unlikely reward. José, a 36-year-old Latine taxi driver, was racially profiled and experienced police sexual violence not far from his immediate neighborhood in the Bronx. After picking up his brother who was visiting from the Dominican Republic and had just arrived at the JFK airport, José was driving home when he and his brother were stopped by two white male officers. José described being targeted because of his race and ethnicity; he then was sexually

violated, physically abused, and called a homophobic slur before being arrested. He explained:

“So they telling us that we fit a description [laugh] of two Spanish, Latino guys that’s been, been seen, observed uh, uh dealing, uh drugs... All of a sudden he [one officer] come back, open the door, and say, “You mind stepping out the vehicle for me.” I said, “no, no I can’t.” And that’s where it started. That’s where he take his hand, he dragged me by my balls, by my *balls*, not by my arm, my neck, not even my back. He grabbed me like that with his other hand, and literally lifted me out of my driver’s seat... Long story short, they take us out, they beat us up... and the last thing I remember was uh, he had his foot on my balls as I lay on the floor.”

José

(36, Latine, cisgender man, Bronx)

José reported this incident, which he described as a severe sexual violation, and tried to start a criminal case against the offending officers. The criminal case, however, was dropped when the officers claimed José was resisting arrest. His lawyer instead advised him to file a civil lawsuit. At the time of the interview, this lawsuit—for sexual harassment and police brutality—had already been pending for almost four years. During this time, José explained that he remained fearful of various forms of retaliation. He shared:

“Maybe they deport me back to Santo Domingo. You know, I I, yes...

...of course, I think that all the time... Every time I see them, I I still get scared; maybe retail- retaliation. You know, maybe they they know me. Or maybe they looking for me... And maybe that's the friend of the white, of the white man cop, you know, and I'm just a Dominican immigrant here in in his country, you know? And, and he has [a] gun."

José
(36, Latine, cisgender man, Bronx)

José's ongoing fear of both deportation and more severe violence after reporting and starting this case was also connected to other legal and economic consequences, including paying \$10,000 in court fees at the time of his interview. These fees were compounded financial costs that came after José had already lost income due to his inability to drive his taxi and work as much after being traumatized behind the wheel during this incident.

Officer Retaliation After Reporting Police Sexual Violence

Two interviewees who filed complaints for police sexual violence did in fact experience ongoing retaliation from officers after reporting. Sherray, a 50-year-old Black cisgender woman from Queens, discussed her experience of being sexually coerced by an officer for four months, and then raped in his vehicle when he saw her on the street and she directly denied his sexual advances. She shared:

"It was a time when I went to tell him that we can no longer continue with this behavior... And then he forced himself on me. [He was] just like, 'No, you're gonna give me this because you've been giving it to me, so you just gonna accept it and shut up.'"

Sherray
(50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

After this incident, Sherray did in fact decide to report the officer, and then experienced ongoing police retaliation. Over the next few years, she experienced discretionary arrests for low-level, non-criminal offenses at least 10 other times, a form of ongoing harassment from officers in her neighborhood. She recounted:

"Every time they seen me, whether it be driving, walking, once I put in the case and called Internal Affairs, I was always harassed. I was, I kept being arrested. They would put anything in from loitering to trespassing... They was threatening me, acting like it was other people making prank phone calls, stuff like that. But I knew it was them. And then when they see us as they driving in their vehicle, we're driving, they would laugh. They would pull us over, you know, and try to say things about the case. 'Oh you still got that case open, huh?' You know, little smart things to me and my husband, but um, I I decided to drop the case 'cause I was afraid."

Sherray
(50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

Sherray's experience highlights how various forms of police retaliation not only created ongoing fear that stopped her from pursuing the case, but also included material charges that would likely undermine her perceived credibility. Research does in fact reveal a history of police officers bringing charges against those victimized to undermine complainants; historically, if those filing complaints have charges or convictions, their complaints have been found to be unsubstantiated.⁴⁰

Sherray also shared that the retaliation she faced in the form of various discretionary arrests also resulted in economic and employment consequences. She added, "It actually damaged [scoff] my record. So I haven't been able to get, you know, a good job, a job period... They look up my record and see all the arrests; they don't wanna hire me." The criminalization of survivors in this way also reveals how the state further punishes them for their resistance to sexual violence.

Another interviewee, Chris, a 30-year-old white cisgender man from Staten Island, described being sexually, verbally, and physically abused over the span of decade by a group of officers in his neighborhood. Chris also mentioned that one of the officers in this crew was Daniel Pantaleo, the officer responsible for the high-profile killing of Eric Garner. While Pantaleo was eventually fired from the police force, a grand jury and federal prosecutors never brought criminal charges against him and he was evaluated very positively by his colleagues, even though he was found to have seven misconduct complaints prior to that fatal incident.⁴¹ Chris explained that he also filed several complaints against officers for repeated incidents of sexual assault that also resulted in no officer accountability. Afterwards, Chris instead experienced ongoing retaliation from the same group of officers, including numerous unnecessary

arrests and an encounter where they tried to frame him for having drugs that he never possessed. He explained:

"It was supposed to be anonymous, you know? It wasn't anonymous, 'cause I called 311, me and my dad, and it got back, it got back to them. After that, they they just, they made my life even more a living hell. The the stops got, got more persistent. Um, they they even they even tried to plant something on me, uh, when when they were searching, but I kicked it away. I said I said, "that's not mine. I just saw you drop it..." Eric Garner got choked right here, right here. And the same cop that choked him... was in the crew, in the clique... Pantaleo. I he, he pulled me over. He he he actually hit my head getting into the car one time... The only time it slowed down with them, with me, was after Eric died. After they choked Eric, it slowed down a little bit. But then the next year, it just ramped right back up and they came back with a vengeance."

Chris
(30, white, cisgender man, Staten Island)

Chris recounted approximately 10 different discretionary arrests—for charges including disorderly conduct, loitering, and jaywalking—that resulted in being taken to a precinct and strip searched while handcuffed, sometimes left naked in front of multiple officers for as long as an hour at a time. Each time he was let go, with no real charge presented. As a result, he found himself with an accumulation of discretionary arrests for petty offenses that were then used against

him to send him to Rikers Island for 30 days. As he was being processed for Rikers, he was then strip searched again and this time patted down while he was completely naked, despite the fact that he had no felony charges. Chris's experiences in particular highlight an accumulation of non-criminal charges that falsely create a "criminal history" for those arrested, as well as vulnerability to more sexual violence at the hands of officers in jails and prisons. Overall, the costs of attempting to speak out, for the few who did, compounded the cumulative consequences that amassed from the incidents themselves.

Calling the NYPD for Help With Sexual Violence Perpetrated by Civilians

While seeking to understand experiences of sexual violence at the hands of NYPD, we also learned of other significant and related ways that police cause harm in New Yorkers' intimate and sexual lives. In particular, we spoke with those who sought police help after incidents of sexual assault at the hands of others in their communities (not NYPD). Five percent (n=128) reported that the NYPD has investigated a sexual assault case on their behalf. Of them, 64% (n=82) reported they had at least one troubling interaction with the NYPD within the context of their sexual assault case. For example, over a third (34%, n=44) reported that the NYPD blamed them for their assault, over a fifth (23%, n=30) told us the NYPD ignored their case, and 10% (n=13) said the NYPD arrested them instead. Overall, those we heard from reported that officer responses were at best unhelpful and unempathetic, and at worst blatantly disrespectful and violent.

Among the **128** survey respondents whose sexual assault cases were investigated by the NYPD, **64%** reported at least one troubling interaction with the NYPD.

Three interviewees described being dismissed and blamed when calling the NYPD for help after instances of sexual violence. Samantha, a 33-year-old Black cisgender woman from the Bronx, described being sexually harassed and followed by a male stranger for nearly 15 minutes in her neighborhood. When the man became more aggressive, she called the police for help, only to be met with two male officers interrogating and blaming her during a 20-minute interaction. She explained:

"I'm the one that called you for help and you're making it seem like I'm the one that started the issue to begin with. So it's, you know? Like you're, they're there to *help* us, not to make us feel like we're, we're to blame... The police officer made it seem like... like if I was basically giving the guy attention when I really wasn't... He asked me, "What did I say and what did I do?" ...He made me feel like I wasn't even a victim."

Samantha
(33, Black, cisgender woman, Bronx)

Another interviewee, Sam, a 57-year-old Black cisgender woman from Staten Island,

discussed being continuously harassed and threatened with sexual violence by a man who lived next door, whenever she walked in the neighborhood with her girlfriend. Recounting her negative experiences seeking help from police, Sam explained, “I see the officer afterwards and I told him about it. He was like, ‘Well, there’s really nothing that you could do’ ...It was like he didn’t really, he he didn’t really care.” The harassment from this male neighbor continued for about six months, during which Sam tried to ask police for help on numerous occasions, and was similarly dismissed by other officers. Living in fear, she and her partner were ultimately forced to move.

Even in cases where more severe acts of sexual violence have already occurred and formal police investigations have begun, survivors have still experienced inadequate and harmful police responses. LG, a 39-year-old Black cisgender woman from the Bronx, recounted two separate incidents of sexual violence where she called police for help and was met with disbelief and blame. The first incident was an attempted rape at the home of a man in her neighborhood whom she considered a friend at the time. She explained:

“They [the officers] pretty much didn’t believe me about that incident either, even though my face was swollen and scratched up. And even though I only had on a tank top because I had to run next door for them to call the police for me. You know, I had witnesses and everything. And it was just like nothing... They’ll say something like, um, ‘Oh, well you. know, it was an attempted rape, you know, so we

can’t really do anything about it. You know, it would’ve been different if it was an actual rape.’ Like, oh yeah, I’ll remember that for next time, you know? Like what the fuck. I, I guess next time I should let him rape me so y’all actually fucking do something.”

LG

(39, Black, cisgender woman, Bronx)

LG then detailed her second incident of sexual violence, which was a completed rape, and yet resulted in no better response from police. She explained:

“The person choked me out, basically left me for dead. Um, I don’t know how long I was out, but when I came to the first thing I did was call the police. Um, my face was like swollen and and scratched and, you know, my lip is swollen and everything like that. And they’re like asking me what happened and I’m trying to tell them what happened, and it’s like, kinda like they didn’t believe me... They were kind of like so cold and nonchalant. Like, just like another rape victim... Like it was your fault that you brought this guy home [starts crying].”

LG

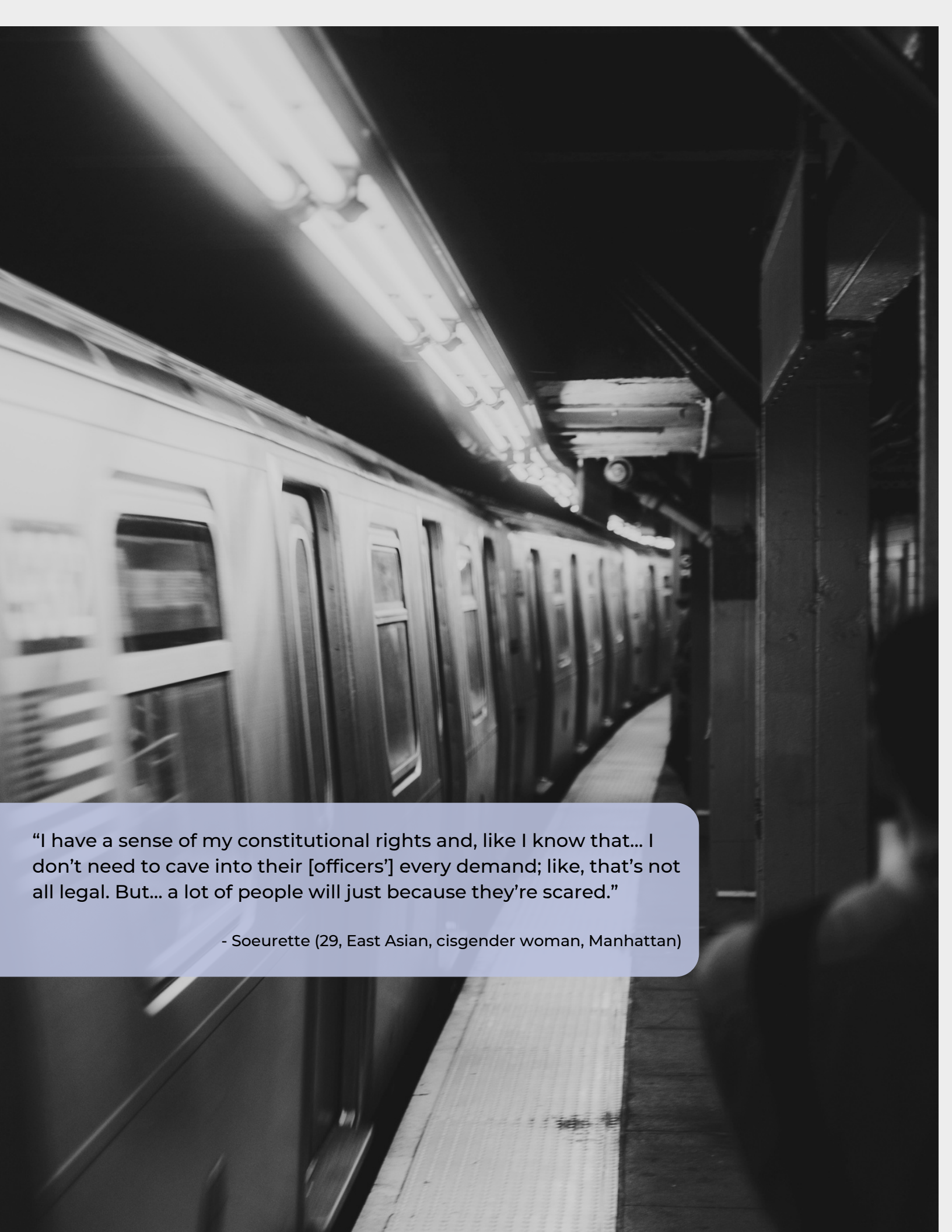
(39, Black, cisgender woman, Bronx)

Anyone who is experiencing harassment and assault deserves respect, assistance and support, especially when the violence is sexual in nature. Previous studies document police officers’ deeply inadequate responses

to sexual assault, intimate partner violence, sex trafficking cases, and incidents of gender-based violence in general.⁴² In a recent report, the U.S. Department of Justice has recognized the impact of gendered biases on police forces in both preventing investigations of sexual assault cases, and causing further harm to victims.⁴³

And despite increases in police officer training, too many of those turning to police for help in these instances continue to report negative experiences. The fact that most (64%) of our survey respondents had negative interactions with police officers in the context of reporting their sexual assault cases further demonstrates that most people are not getting the kind of help needed after being sexually victimized. The fear that officers would respond negatively to cases of sexual violence happens frequently enough to deter people from reporting in the first place. As one survey participant shared, “I was sexually assaulted by someone I knew and I didn’t call [police] because I knew there was a really good chance they wouldn’t do anything, and might blame me.”

Overall, this chapter provides evidence that the police too often cause harm in New Yorkers’ intimate and sexual lives, even when officers are not directly perpetrating sexual violence. Participants’ experiences call attention to the problem with police being the only resource available to report cases of sexual violence, and the need for other alternatives. When those experiencing sexual violence—whether at the hands of police, or at the hands of others in their communities—are further harmed when trying to report, or are so fearful of the police response to even attempt to report, they face a range of negative outcomes, with ripple effects for their immediate loved ones and the communities they are a part of.



"I have a sense of my constitutional rights and, like I know that... I don't need to cave into their [officers'] every demand; like, that's not all legal. But... a lot of people will just because they're scared."

- Soeurette (29, East Asian, cisgender woman, Manhattan)

Chapter 4: The Collective Harms of Police Sexual Violence

While NYPD has a significant presence and impact in all five boroughs, highly policed communities are impacted by police violence in ways that are distinct and that have a more significant effect on the community at large. Our study reveals that police sexual violence is happening across all five boroughs of New York City; however, studies have found that in highly policed communities there are both higher levels of police violence and higher levels of fear of this violence.⁴⁴ Our study also found evidence of this fear. As one 54-year-old, Black survey participant from Queens explained:

“Constant police presence means you live in fear of losing your life to law enforcement 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You are afraid to venture too far from home after sunset. When you hear a siren, you freeze. If you see them following you in a car, you slow down and pray they drive past you.”

- Survey participant
(54, Black, cisgender man, Queens)

This fear has deep impacts on the well-being of those in highly policed communities. Police forces have long relied on military and warfare tactics to target, control, and punish populations through various domestic wars—from the War on Poverty, War on Crime, and War on Drugs, to most recently, the War on Terror.⁴⁵ Previous research has also found sexual violence to function as a common weapon

of war, especially in places where militarized state-sponsored institutions, like the police, are most present.⁴⁶

Therefore, in this chapter, we explore the individual and collective harms specifically related to police sexual violence in *highly policed communities*. Our study found that police sexual violence is a force of intense fear. Those who directly experienced police sexual violence described it as extremely harmful, sharing a wide range of long-term consequences including a deep ongoing fear of police. Sexual violence at the hands of officers can have long-lasting and severe impacts on survivors’ health, well-being, and overall livelihood. In addition, our study found that witnessing police sexual violence contributes to a climate of collective fear, even for those who have not directly experienced it.

Long-Term Impacts of Police Sexual Violence

Nearly all those we interviewed who experienced police sexual violence shared significant and long-term psychological consequences, including various forms of ongoing mental and emotional stress.

Participants highlighted their distrust and fear of police—fear of how officers could use their weapons against them, the power officers have to request and access their personal information, and the police ability to detain, arrest and jail anyone.

Jessica, a 36-year-old Latine cisgender woman from Staten Island experienced sexual harassment from officers on over 20 different occasions. She shared the impact it had on her, explaining:

“You know, you don’t even want to engage in a fight, because you don’t know what kind of retaliation will...”

...come after that, you know? God forbid the next time you're in the street, you see the same officer, uh and then you know, you're alone and maybe they pull you into the, you know, alleyway... It just keeps me on guard every time I pass by an officer... When you're being harassed and you're going through an uncomfortable, disgusting, and just, you feel like dirty and degraded. And it's not like, it's just it's, I don't wish that on my worst enemy... It feels like your world is crumbling... Late nights up just drinking wine and sitting there crying, thinking about okay what happens if this happens again. How do I handle this? ...You go to police because you want to feel safe, because you want to report the bad guys to the police, but what happens when the police are the bad guys?"

Jessica
(36, Latine, cisgender woman,
Staten Island)

Jessica, like other participants, described feelings of extreme vulnerability connected to a lack of power to do anything both in the moment and afterwards. She also discussed an ongoing fear of police retaliation for rejecting officers' sexual advances, including more severe forms of sexual violence. Jessica experienced persistent anxiety, and worried about being sexually harassed by officers on a daily basis. Forms of anxiety, panic, and extreme worry were in fact the most common psychological responses reported by those we interviewed. The majority of those we spoke with also expressed hypervigilance, or feeling the need to continuously assess threats in their environments. Hypervigilance is also a

common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁴⁷ Other PTSD symptoms experienced include panic attacks, flashbacks, sleep disturbances (i.e., trouble sleeping and nightmares), and loss of concentration.

Other interview participants shared additional physiological responses at even just the sight of police including increased heart rate, tensing up, sweaty palms, and coldness in the body. Research suggests that these physiological responses can then contribute to a significant wearing down of the body, causing more severe physical health issues.⁴⁸ Chris, a 30-year-old white cisgender man from Staten Island, discussed police regularly sexually assaulting and arresting him, which he explained triggered his epilepsy and caused him to have repeated seizures. He shared, "Almost every time they arrested me I had a seizure. And they they would threaten me. They they would say, they would say, 'We're gonna make you stay in here an extra week if you have to go to the hospital.' Now I take epilepsy medicine; they're keeping me out. I have to take it."

Overall, consequences are intensified among those who experienced severe acts of police sexual violence. Damien, a 32-year-old Black cisgender man from Brooklyn, described the first time he was suddenly stopped, frisked, and cavity searched by police officers at 17 years old while walking home. He described this experience as "literally the most traumatizing incident that happened to me in my life." Damien further explained that, despite his attempts to avoid police as much as he could, he was stopped approximately twenty-five times after this incident, with officers frisking and searching him in sexually violating ways more than half of those times. He shared:

“It made me very scared to the point that there would be, sometimes, sometimes cops would have to be like, ‘Are you okay? You alright? Like, you shaking’ ...I’ve never been the same. I’ve never felt the same, ever since that day... Basically like now I feel like I have to look over my shoulder or, like I get nervous in big crowds and things like that. Like, I can’t be around people for too long. Honestly, I really can’t... When I got home, it’s like I literally felt like the worst person in the world. I felt ashamed. I felt like it was my fault. Like, I felt so much, there was like so many emotions I was going through... It terrorizes me every night and day... I’ve been had the um, the suicidal thoughts and everything.”

Damien
(32, Black, cisgender man, Brooklyn)

Like Damien, nearly half of those we interviewed described their experience of police sexual violence as their first encounter with police—a traumatic foundation that shaped all subsequent interactions with the NYPD. And 45% (n=14) of interview participants who experienced police sexual violence also went on to experience subsequent incidents of police sexual violence.

45% of interview participants who experienced police sexual violence also went on to experience subsequent incidents of it.

Nearly three-fourths of interview participants also discussed going out of their way to avoid any kind of interaction

with officers, resulting in them having less access to public spaces in and around their communities. They discussed not going out at night, staying off certain blocks, changing routes when walking to avoid officers and precincts, and a general fear of being outside. As Damien added, “I’m so afraid, just like I don’t go nowhere. Like, I don’t go outside, only I, for me it’s work, back in the house, work, back in the house... I’m afraid to go places.” Seven interviewees avoided leaving their homes entirely after incidents. Another two interviewees actually moved because of police sexual violence; Sherray moved after being raped on two different occasions by officers who knew where she lived, and Sam moved after experiencing months-long sexual harassment from a neighbor and receiving no help from police.

Those we spoke with described other consequences of police sexual violence that included diminished trust of others, decreased self-worth, and strained relationships. Scott, a 34-year-old Black participant from Brooklyn shared, “I can say that for the first like two weeks, uh, it really affected my relationships with my friends, family, because I didn’t want to talk much. I was, I just wanted to sit alone, uh thinking about my life... People thought maybe I just decided maybe to cut them off but it was not like that.”

These psychological and social effects also extended to other behavioral and material consequences. Participants discussed making choices to stay safe around police including changing the way they walk, dress, and speak, and described self-surveillance as an everyday part of navigating public space. They also reported various educational consequences such as diminished educational goals and difficulty functioning in school with officers present. As Chris, a 30-year-old white cisgender man from Staten Island shared, “I got my GED because I, I didn’t go to school. I missed too many classes... I was afraid to, I...

...was afraid to, to go, to the school from my house. I would see them [police] parked across the street.”

Avoidance of police extended to participants feeling like they could not call the police for help when needed. Rather than seeing police as a source of safety, interviewees spoke about officers escalating situations, and provoking and intimidating community members. Experiences of police sexual violence resulted in a deeper loss of trust in one’s overall sense of safety and in the institution of policing in general. As a result, those we spoke with described feeling like they had no protection from future danger. Sherray, a 50-year-old Black woman from Queens who experienced multiple incidents of police sexual assault shared:

“Dealing with the police, I do not, do not, ever want to do it, and it’s sad. Because I could be in a bad situation where I’m getting hurt, I will not call for help, because I’ve been taken advantage of.”

Sherray
(50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

Sherray explained that she was triggered by the mere sight of police, recounting one time where she was terrified upon seeing officers arrive alongside the ambulance when she called for medical assistance. For most of those we spoke with, the lack of available options for protection unconnected to police left them feeling extremely vulnerable to future harm at the hands of both officers and others in their communities.

Climate of Community Fear

Our citywide survey revealed that 17% (n=339) of survey participants living in

heavily policed neighborhoods reported witnessing police sexual violence, including NYPD officers touching someone in a sexually inappropriate way, sexually assaulting someone, or making insulting comments about someone’s gender or sexuality. Significantly, over a third (36%, n=722) of the survey respondents in these neighborhoods worried about being sexually assaulted by officers. Those who directly experienced sexual violence by NYPD in their lifetime were twice as likely (57%, n=157) to report worrying about sexual assault, and yet, over a quarter of those who did not directly experience sexual violence still reported worrying (28%, n=346). In this way, the mere threat of police sexual violence served as a source of fear for many.

Those we interviewed discussed the omnipresence of officers in highly policed communities and the related feeling that there was always a threat of police sexual violence. As Sassy, a 25-year-old Black and Latine cisgender woman shared:

“They are everywhere. I walk into the shelters and I see them... Me and my wife, we’re just waiting for the train. And this officer’s just mean mugging us, the whole time.”

Sassy
(25, Black and Latine, cisgender woman, Bronx)

Jessica, a 36-year-old Latine cisgender woman from Staten Island who experienced multiple instances of police sexual harassment in different boroughs across the city, added, “I wish it never happened at all, but I would say it happens very often... You think that you could feel protected and you wouldn’t be harassed by people... But yeah, unfortunately it could happen in the train station, uh, you know, when you just pass by a security guard or a police officer on the street... It could happen anywhere.”

Several interview participants also discussed experiencing police sexual violence in front of others, creating a public spectacle and contributing to public humiliation amid a climate of community fear. Chris, a 30-year-old white cisgender man from Staten Island, shared, “He’s looking up my butt with a flashlight. And then he’s telling me spread and bend over more, bend over more. And this is out in the street, in public! Yeah other people are looking.” Another participant, Julio, a 34-year-old bisexual Latine cisgender man from the Bronx, experienced an incident of being stopped and frisked in a way that felt sexually inappropriate, before being called a homophobic slur in front of a group of his neighbors. He explained:

“It’s broad daylight, I mean, there’s so many others around... Maybe they’re just doing that to show off, like to show others around that they’re in power, and I can do this to you too... *That’s* the crazy part about it. That there was a whole bunch of people around and people still felt like they couldn’t do nothing about it.”

Julio
(34, Latine, cisgender man, Bronx)

The powerlessness felt during these interactions, particularly when enacted in front of others, contributes to creating fear not only for those targeted, but also for all those looking on.

Similarly, those we interviewed also spoke about the impacts of witnessing police sexual violence happening to others. Mike, a 22-year-old Black cisgender man living in a shelter on the Lower East Side, described witnessing an incident of police sexual violence just a few days prior to our interview. He shared:

“I was standing with my friend at the end of the corner. So um, we were, we watched as four police cars, and each with two officers, hopped out and they were taller than the guy. I kid you not, the guy um, they stripped him, basically strip searched him in public, on the sidewalk... we’re yelling like, ‘Yo, that’s illegal. You can’t do that.’ Like this guy is, he’s naked. I shouldn’t have, I shouldn’t have to see his genitals... Personally I’m outside all day every day. So I see a lot of shit that cops do today, even, some sexual, but either way they all get treated the same and it’s fucked up... They [officers] want you to be [scared]. If you’re not scared of them, then it’s like they’re not doing their job right. And it’s supposed to be the opposite.”

Mike
(22, Black, cisgender man, Manhattan)

In addition to directly witnessing police sexual violence, participants spoke about indirectly witnessing and hearing about incidents happening to others in their communities, as well as from high-profile media cases. Mary Jane, a 26-year-old Latine cisgender woman from the Bronx who was falsely accused of prostitution, shared:

“I remember seeing on the news about like a cop just forcing himself onto women, like, you know, forcing them to give them, you know, oral sex. And that *terrified* me. That made me terrified... That’s traumatic because, it’s it’s different because...

...it's it's different because you expect the authority to uphold, you know, their integrity, or morals."

Mary Jane
(26, Latine, cisgender woman, Bronx)

Another interview participant, LG, a 39-year-old Black cisgender woman from the Bronx, discussed learning that one of her closest friends in high school, who later went on to become an officer, participated in a gang rape with another officer. After seeing him on the news, she recounted:

"I was like, oh my god... Him and his partner, um, something with a drunk lady, and they they followed her home and then they both raped her. It's crazy, like wow... It's not really about the sex. It's about the control and the power. Like it's, I guess especially these cops, like they really got some kind of, some kind of power trip or something like that, 'cause it's like, first I'm a cop, I can do what I want. And then I can, you know, take this, take something from this woman 'cause I want to, you know? It's just sick, especially to know that, you, you did this with somebody else. Like, you did this with another cop that was supposed to be here to serve and protect."

LG
(39, Black, cisgender woman, Bronx)

Most of those we spoke with resisted the urge to stereotype all officers as having violent dispositions and/or negative intentions. They shared an understanding that not every officer would enact sexual violence; however, the unpredictability of

which officers they would interact with and how those interactions would unravel served as its own source of terror. As Scott, a 34-year-old Black participant from Brooklyn commented, "I just end up avoiding all of them, fearing them, all of them."

It is noteworthy to mention that Scott's experience of sexuality-based and gender-based harassment from officers was their first and only encounter with police. Similarly, participants may have experienced an incident of police sexual violence just once; yet, the potential threat of it happening again served as an ongoing source of fear. And this fear extended to ongoing worry that others would also experience sexual violence at the hands of NYPD. Overall, 40% (n=806) of survey respondents living in heavily policed neighborhoods worried about friends or family being sexually assaulted by officers. Those who directly experienced sexual violence by the NYPD were nearly twice as likely (59%, n=164) to worry about friends and family as compared to those who did not directly experience police sexual violence (31%, n=386).

40% of survey respondents in heavily policed neighborhoods worried about friends or family being sexually assaulted by officers.

Taken together, those we spoke with described a collective fear in highly policed communities that stems from not only police sexual violence directly experienced, but also the vicarious trauma of directly and indirectly witnessing police violence happening to others. Sherray, a 50-year-old Black cisgender woman from a heavily policed neighborhood in Queens, shared the deep fear of police that her loved ones also experienced:

"If I see a police officer, even my kids, they run. They are scared. Um, if I say to my daughter—and and I never said to her the police are bad or anything—if I say to her, 'there go a cop,' do you know, she cries and she's disabled, you know. I mean she is so afraid of them. Her and my son, my grandson, they are afraid of them. You cannot say I'm gonna, you know, let's call the cops. Like there was an incident where the drug dealers was, um, out there arguing and fighting, and I was just trying to get by one day and they was all screaming, 'go the other way' to me and the kids and stuff. And when the cops came, my kids ran so fast, they ran into the building. They wasn't scared of the, the guys with the guns and the drug dealers that's on my block, they were more afraid of the cops! And they shouldn't be. My kids are supposed to run to them for safety. They left me and ran into my home, my building. That's that's that's unacceptable. That has to be changed, has to be changed."

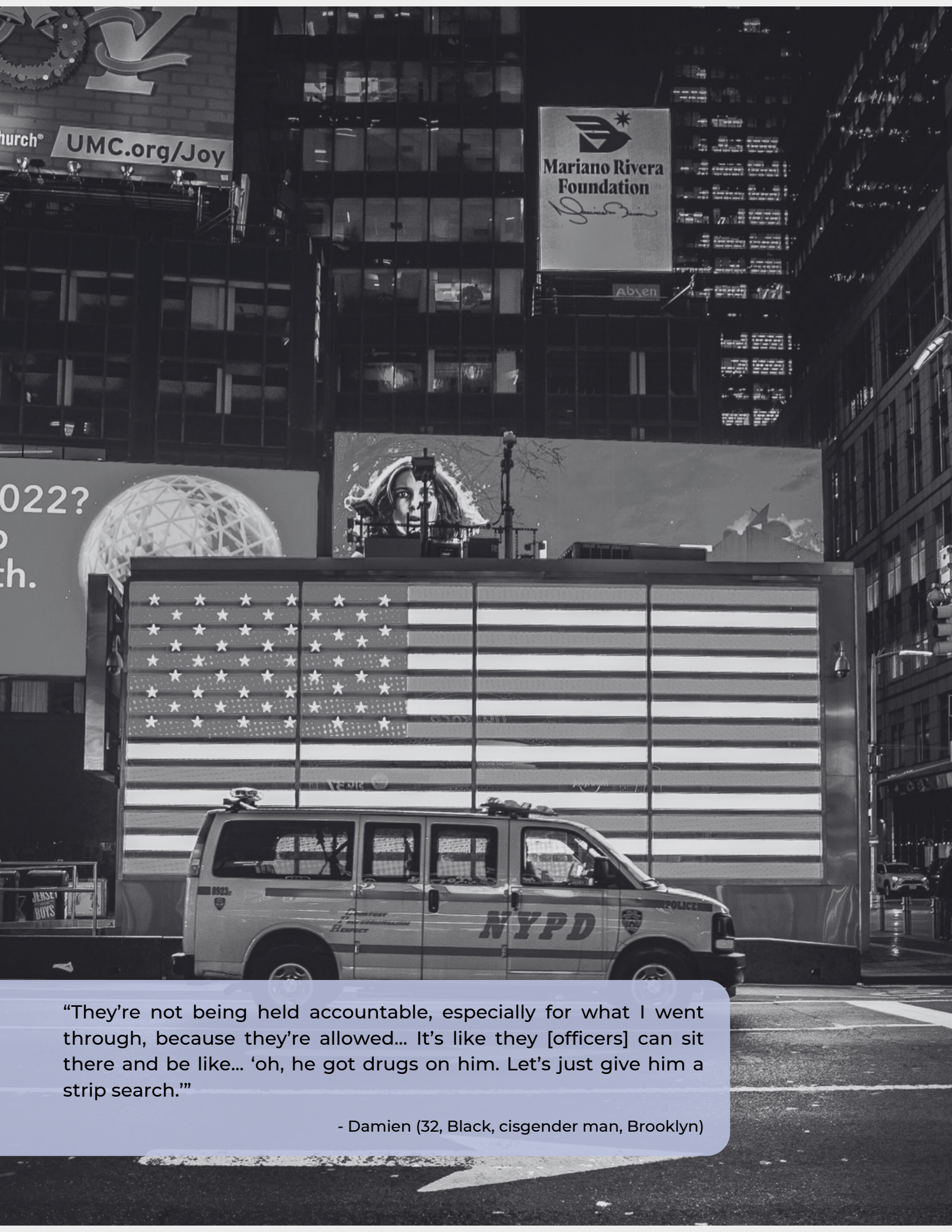
Sherray
(50, Black, cisgender woman, Queens)

Like Sherray, others we spoke with described a general fear of police resulting from experiencing and witnessing various forms of police violence. While this report specifically focuses on police sexual violence, it is important to note that this harm often occurs within the context of other forms of police violence, harassment, and abuse, especially in communities with high levels of police presence, and where law enforcement shapes large portions of daily life. Data reveal that police sexual violence is often connected to other forms

of police violence. For example, 85% (n=312) of survey participants and 9 interviewees living in heavily policed neighborhoods who experienced police sexual violence also experienced non-sexual physical violence at the hands of NYPD officers.

85% of survey participants and **9** interviewees living in heavily policed neighborhoods who experienced police sexual violence also experienced non-sexual physical violence at the hands of NYPD officers.

Mainstream media representations often sensationalize the most shocking cases of police sexual violence, positioning them as isolated acts by "bad apple" officers. In contrast, participants' experiences reveal that a wide and connected spectrum of sexualized violence occurs within everyday, encounters of policing, with the most extreme forms connected to less extreme forms of police violence at large. As such police sexual violence should be understood as a significant part of a larger continuum of police violence. Police sexual violence, in tandem with other forms of police harm, strengthens an overall climate of community fear, especially in highly policed communities where NYPD's presence is ongoing. Those who experience police sexual violence directly bear the brunt of this fear, along with a range of other psychological, physical, social, behavioral, and financial consequences. However, we also learned that police sexual violence can serve as a significant source of fear for those in highly policed communities who have not directly experienced it. Directly and indirectly witnessing acts of police sexual violence is a significant form of harm in itself. Overall, participants reported that the ongoing threat of police sexual violence in general made them fearful for their safety and the safety of their entire communities.



"They're not being held accountable, especially for what I went through, because they're allowed... It's like they [officers] can sit there and be like... 'oh, he got drugs on him. Let's just give him a strip search.'"

- Damien (32, Black, cisgender man, Brooklyn)

Chapter 5: Recommendations & Conclusion

Through this project we heard from almost 4,000 New Yorkers about their experiences with police sexual violence, through surveys, town halls and extensive interviews. We heard about people's difficult experiences with sexual harassment, sexual assault, coercion, extortion and rape. We found that police sexual violence is a varied, pervasive, underrecognized, and underreported form of police violence that harms individuals and has long-term negative impacts on the safety and well-being of entire communities.

New Yorkers experience a wide range of police sexual violence, ranging from everyday sexual harassment—including sexualized attention, harassment based on queer and transgender identities, and sexual coercion and extortion—to various forms of sexual assault, some of which are facilitated by routine policing practices. When reporting or considering reporting police sexual violence, New Yorkers often feel unsafe, unheard, or unbelieved including experiencing police dismissal and harassment after reporting incidents of sexual violence and choosing not to report incidents of police sexual violence because of police impunity.

Lastly, the enactment and ongoing threat of police sexual violence has long-term cumulative impacts on the well-being of entire communities, functioning as a source of intense fear for those targeted and all others witnessing this harm, particularly in highly policed areas. While police sexual violence shares many of the same characteristics as non-police sexual violence, we also repeatedly heard how New Yorkers felt that having NYPD perpetrate sexual harassment, assault, coercion, extortion and rape magnified survivors' feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness.

Nonetheless, we asked respondents who had experienced police sexual violence what justice for this harm could look like. Despite these painful experiences, survivors and community members articulated powerful visions of justice. Rather than calling for punitive retribution, most participants called for justice grounded in **repair, prevention** and **accountability**. Their visions emphasized the need for addressing these harms through independent oversight, increased transparency, and community-based safety strategies that do not rely on police.

Importantly, our findings also make clear that police sexual violence does not exist in isolation—it is part of a broader continuum of police violence. Addressing it requires systemic change aimed at reducing the overall power, scope and presence of police in New York City.

In this section, we present three key recommendations to protect New Yorkers from police sexual violence in NYC. These recommendations are grounded in the lived experiences of survivors and shaped by the expertise of community organizations who contributed to this report:

1. Expand NYPD oversight, transparency and accountability

2. Reduce the size and scope of the NYPD

3. Invest in Non-Police Crisis Intervention and Survivor Support

We discuss each of these recommendations more in-depth in the following section and concrete steps that New York City can take to make the city a safer place for all.

1. Expand NYPD Oversight, Transparency & Accountability

The city must do more to keep communities safe from police sexual violence including by increasing transparency and local oversight of the NYPD, while also holding officers/departments accountable for the violence, harm and abuse they cause.

- **Hold NYPD officers accountable for sexual violence, harm and abuse.**

Whether it be police sexual violence, or other forms of police violence, the NYPD's failure to hold officers accountable for abuse, harm, and even the death of New Yorkers leads to ongoing, unchecked police violence in communities. When both officers and community members know that there is little consequence for violence and abusive police behavior, community members' real and perceived sense of safety decreases. National statistics show that less than 1% of police officers who commit acts of sexual violence are held accountable for their actions. The city must end NYPD impunity by strengthening their ability to hold offending officers accountable for harm, in ways that clearly communicate to the public and to the police force that any kind of sexual misconduct will not be tolerated. This also includes supporting survivors to report instances of police sexual violence. While it is a positive step that police sexual misconduct is now included in the scope of abuse that the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) can investigate, it means little if the CCRB continues to close and dismiss most of its cases without completing an investigation. And even when the CCRB

does recommend disciplinary actions for substantiated misconduct, NYPD officers are rarely held accountable.⁴⁹

Policymakers need to strengthen the city's ability to hold NYPD officers accountable for harm and address patterns of misconduct that put New Yorkers at risk.

- **Demand that the NYPD comply with city and state transparency laws.**

Police sexual violence is part of police violence at large, and increased transparency about police violence will result in stronger and more effective solutions to stop it. In 2020, organizers and advocates won the repeal of 50a, the police secrecy law, making police misconduct reports available to the public. However, the NYPD's public database on officer misconduct continues to be deeply flawed, with cases of officer misconduct disappearing for weeks on the database, making it virtually impossible to accurately assess the level and scope of officer misconduct overall. The NYPD must be transparent with the public about officer misconduct cases and comply with statewide legislation.

2. Reduce the Size, Scope and Power of the NYPD

- **Reduce police practices that lead to police sexual violence and dismantle historically abusive units.** It is essential that we protect communities from police violence by reducing the policing tactics like stop-and-frisk and other broken windows policing practices that have a track record of consistently harming New Yorkers and leading to police sexual violence. In addition, we must dismantle historically abusive units such as the NYPD's VICE Enforcement Division, which investigates organized prostitution and human trafficking, disproportionately targets Black, Latine, immigrant, and transgender New Yorkers and has a notorious track record for sexual misconduct. Officers from this unit have been repeatedly accused of sexual harassment, sexual coercion, sexual extortion, and rape. Despite cosmetic reforms to this unit, the violence and abuse has persisted, abusive policing practices persist, and the unit currently has a budget of almost \$14 million dollars. Harms from the VICE unit can most recently be seen in Jackson Heights, Queens, where residents have reported experiencing an uptick in police sexual violence due to Mayor Eric Adams' Operation Restore Roosevelt (ORR) policing initiative. This initiative targets, tickets, and arrests women believed to be sex workers, disproportionately criminalizing trans women of color and putting their communities at further risk of police sexual violence. This is one of several initiatives under the Adams' administration that has increased everyday policing practices and the police sexual violence that results.

"Don't send 10 cops to the door when somebody calls them in a domestic violence situation... Maybe it's not the cops' job, but the domestic violence unit or the, the counseling services can then talk to that couple, or to whoever necessary, to really find the root of the problem. Do they need rehabilitation for drugs? Do, you know, is it an economical thing? ... Maybe community leaders can be there rather than the cops to figure out what's really going on."

Tracy
(54, white, cisgender woman, Manhattan)

"There needs to be like robust abuse prevention education based on best practices which looks like teaching kids about, about body autonomy... They have a right to define their own personal boundaries, uh and and assert themselves when when those boundaries are crossed. That they have a right to, you know, tell adults around them about when they feel unsafe and that those adults should take them seriously and trust them... That people in the community understand the nature of sexual abuse, um, the the realities of it, um the reasons why people don't don't report immediately, the methods of manipulation that abusers use, um, and most importantly, that there be a commitment, a sincere commitment to supporting those who report and a commitment to encourage the reporting of sexual abuse... Like we're not going to tolerate that, you know? ...These are the markers of how you know that your community is either safe or unsafe."

Asher
(30, white, cisgender man, Brooklyn)

3. Invest in Non-Police Crisis Intervention and Survivor Support

- **Expand non-police responses to sexual and intimate partner violence.** Survivors of sexual assault, rape, and intimate partner violence need crisis response services that prioritize their dignity, safety, and autonomy. The NYPD has repeatedly proven inadequate in responding to these incidents—often retraumatizing survivors or failing to take action altogether. In contrast, non-police strategies led by independent outreach workers, peers and community-based organizations have shown success in de-escalating conflict and preventing long-term violence. These strategies are most effective when paired with wraparound services such as health care, housing, employment, and education—all of which contribute to greater long-term stability and public safety. The city should: (1) Expand existing non-police crisis response services specifically for sexual and intimate partner violence. (2) Increase investment in trained, trauma-informed professionals who can assist survivors without causing additional harm. (3) Ensure survivors are connected to comprehensive support services, including medical care, mental health counseling, housing, and legal assistance.
- **Support survivors of police sexual violence.** Survivors of police sexual violence are too often neglected in city services. Those most impacted—including Black and Latine residents of over-policed neighborhoods, trans and non-binary New Yorkers, and unhoused individuals—frequently face barriers to accessing trauma-informed and culturally competent care. Services often

fail to meet their somatic, linguistic, and psychological needs as well as tend to the nuances of sexual violence at the hands of law enforcement. To better serve these survivors, the city must: (1) Invest in Black and Latine and other therapists of color with expertise in sexual violence. (2) Expand access to gender-affirming mental health support, especially for trans and non-binary New Yorkers of color and (3) Ensure sexual violence support services are accessible to immigrants and non-English speakers.

- **Close gaps in survivor support funding.** While recent city budgets have made some progress in mental health and social service funding, major gaps remain in order to meet the true needs of New Yorkers. To begin closing these, the city should: (1) Fully fund the Trans Equity Fund and the Gender Affirming Continuance Fund. (2) Expand housing for runaway youth and other New Yorkers vulnerable to sexual violence. (3) Continue increasing funding for survivor-centered, community-based services for those experiencing sexual violence.

Conclusion

Police sexual violence is a persistent and deeply harmful form of violence that continues to be overlooked in public discourse and policymaking. Our research makes clear that this violence is not rare, nor is it the result of isolated misconduct—it is systemic, pervasive and enabled by a lack of accountability, transparency, and meaningful police oversight. Survivors face not only the trauma of violation, but the added burden of disbelief, retaliation and institutional silence. This is especially true in highly policed communities where the density of police presence means that incidents of police sexual violence are more numerous and the long-term psychological impacts on communities can be strongly felt.

New York City has an urgent responsibility to confront this reality. Ending police sexual violence will require bold action: transforming systems of accountability, reducing the NYPD's scope and power, and investing in survivor-centered, non-police safety infrastructure. This report amplifies the voices of those directly impacted by police sexual violence and presents a clear mandate for change. The city must act—taking concrete steps to ensure safety, dignity and justice for all New Yorkers.

"I wanna see all the women of this world no longer living in fear, no longer being victimized, no longer being harassed... That would be healing enough for me, seeing other women healed. Seeing myself be healed... Not just like all of us women, which is definitely needed, but also just for the entire world; we definitely need a change, 'cause this can't go on like this."

Jessica
(36, Latine, cisgender woman, Staten Island)

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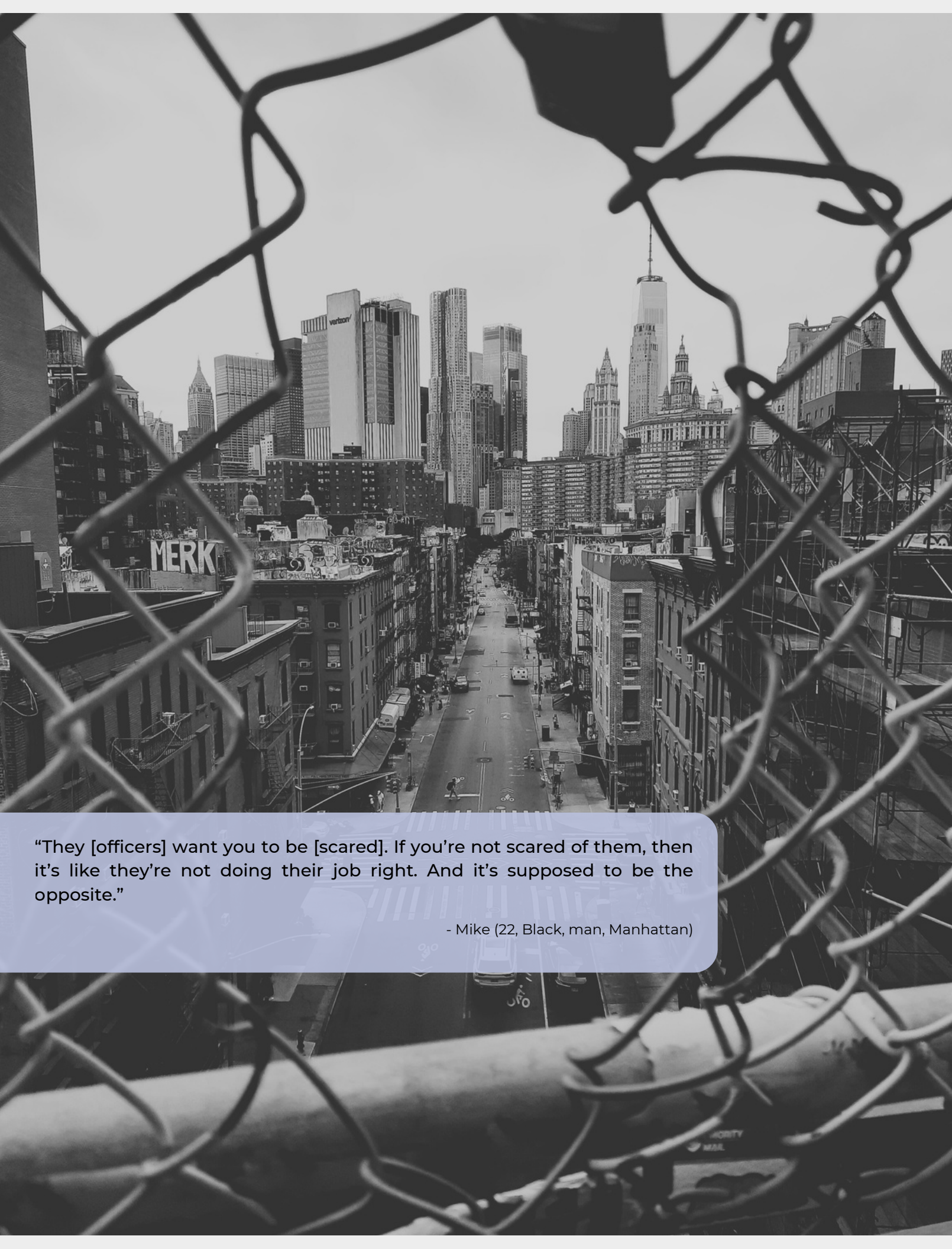
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“They [officers] want you to be [scared]. If you’re not scared of them, then it’s like they’re not doing their job right. And it’s supposed to be the opposite.”

- Mike (22, Black, man, Manhattan)