



"Did you just say my bum does look big in this?"

"Cheer up, love... it might never happen!"

Wolf-whistling – does it make you mad or make your day? Two writers tell *Cosmo* what they think



"It makes me cringe – and I'm a man!"

says writer **Tim Bradley**

"Men have come a long way since the ape days. We've invented the wheel, the phone and the offside rule. But what we haven't invented is a new, civilised way of showing our appreciation for the opposite sex. If a

gorgeous girl walks past a pub at closing time, centuries of evolution go out the window and the smartest thing anyone can think of to say is, 'Oi darlin', I'd love a bit of you!' Honestly, chimpanzees could do better.

"But then I've never seen the point of wolf-whistling and I don't think I ever will. My friends say it's just a way of showing appreciation and giving the lucky lady a confidence boost, but I know that's not all there is to it. After all, most women would rather get a nice smile (or, in the right

circumstances, a drink). My girlfriend says it makes her feel nervous, uncomfortable and sometimes a little unsafe. No, wolf-whistling isn't about impressing women – it's about impressing other men.

"There's an element of bravado to it, showing off in front of friends and trying to get attention. If we shout something obscene at a girl, it makes us and our drunk mates laugh. We're trying to mark our territory in some Neanderthal way, despite the fact that we'd only have a chance with our female targets if they took leave of their senses.

"Because men aren't stupid. We know there's not a chance in hell that the stunning Cameron Diaz-alike who's just sashayed past is going to turn round and say, 'Yeah OK, let's get it on.' No one I've ever known has pulled a girl by shouting out at her – and if your best chat-up line is, 'Get your tits out', yelled at full volume from behind a cement mixer, then perhaps it's best you don't reproduce at all.

"But just as unnerving is the way men dissect women among themselves. Many >

a time I've listened to a friend focus on one particular woman and then spend the entire night telling me in great detail what he'd like to do to her. All I can do is nod, when what I really want to do is scream, 'I don't want to know! I don't care!' On occasion I've said, 'That's interesting. Shall I go and tell her?' just to watch their reactions, but most of the time I'm too chicken to object.

"I wish I could, though – it's very off-putting when you actually like someone. You're sitting there, plucking up the courage to ask for her number while your friends are busy sexually dissecting her with lines like, 'Not much up top but a great arse.'

"I guess it's all part of being a man and proving it to other men; I don't think there's an equivalent for females. I can't imagine a woman being out with her friends, pausing outside a shoe shop and shouting, 'Phwoar, look at the heels on that!' And even if they wolf-whistled at men, it wouldn't have the same intimidating tone. Because it often is intimidating, even if men don't mean it to be. Take the other night, for example – I watched a girl walk up the road at closing time and a swaying bloke shouted, 'Eight out of 10!' at her. Is that a compliment? (Surely she'd have to know his scoring system.) Did she spend the rest of the journey wondering why she wasn't a 10? Or did she speed up, grip her mobile phone in her pocket and hope she'd get home safely? I know which one's more likely.

"But the fact is that us men are pathetically instinctive and simple creatures, and I doubt the 'eight out of 10' guy even considered her thoughts. Maybe it's time to reconsider whether we should still be wolf-whistling and catcalling. It hasn't got us a single shag in hundreds of years and I can't see women changing their minds now..."



"Bring it on!"

says writer
Lauren Henderson

"I didn't always love being wolf-whistled. As someone who sprouted 34Ds overnight at the age of 16, I'd heard it all, from, 'Yer don't get many of them to the pound!' to the highly original, 'Cor, look at the tits on that!' God, I hated builders when I was younger.

"In my early twenties, I lived in a flat with construction going on next door and the builders made my life so miserable I'd make

a big detour from the station, adding an extra 10 minutes to my journey to work just to avoid them. Until one morning, one of them saw me and yelled, 'Oi love, give us a smile!' I mumbled that I didn't feel like it. He narrowed his eyes and hissed, 'Miserable c**t!' To this day, I'm proud I found the wit to retort, 'I've got one mate, but you are one!' He shut up after that, but I still got scared whenever I had to walk past that construction site.

"When I was 25 and moved to Italy for work, I half expected things to be worse. But in my first month there, I was waiting to fill up my car at a petrol station and noticed a truck driver staring at me. I was dreading walking past for fear of what he might say, but I put my chin in the air and summoned my courage; as I passed by, he shyly said, 'Signorina?' I just wanted to say that you're really pretty."

"I went bright red. So did he. I carried on walking but was in a daze. How different it was here! Of course, men did look me up and down, but from my Italian friends I learnt that it was OK for me to look at them and call out, 'Ciao bello!' and it was normal for them to say 'Ciao bella!' to me – unlike in England, where you had to avoid a man's eyes or he'd come over and bother you. During the time I was in Italy, I had just one lewd comment about my breasts – the man who did it was drunk and my friends immediately shouted him down. When I was all dressed up, I'd walk down the street feeling like Sophia Loren

in a '50s movie, swinging a handbag as men turned to stare appreciatively.

"Times changed and I moved to New York. There, builders hung off scaffolding to yell stuff like, 'Baby, you're breaking my heart!' Italy had made my feminism less knee-jerk and I could tell that these men were just

telling to pay me a compliment. So I smiled at them and said thank you. They loved it.

And – as with the truck driver – I felt pretty.

"And then last year I returned to the UK.

Things have changed a lot since I was 16.

Codes of conduct are plastered up outside building sites, with numbers to ring if anyone's offensive – but oddly enough, I don't hear anything offensive anymore. Instead of lewdness, I've had winks and whistles. And I'm not embarrassed to say I've enjoyed them, particularly when I'm all glammed up for the evening. It's lovely when you make

an effort and men actually notice.

"And as various friends of mine have pointed out, the influx of sexy young Poles to the UK has made for a substantial increase in the attractiveness of builders – and we all like to look at hot builders, don't we? Why don't we take a leaf out of the Italians' book and look at the men as much as they look at us? Take a Diet Coke break, whistle at them and even yell, 'Hey gorgeous!' if they're really working it. In my experience of wolf-whistling at builders, they love it. After all, if they're making us feel attractive, shouldn't we have the good manners to return the compliment?"

SEXIST OR SEXY?

How do you react to catcalling men? Tell us what you think by writing to us at [cosmo](mailto:cosmo@mail@natmags.co.uk).
mail@natmags.co.uk



HOW TO HANDLE IT IF YOU HATE IT

Feeling uncomfortable? Clinical psychologist Dr Abigail San says handle it with confidence...

"Behaviour gets reinforced by tension, so continue walking and don't change pace or facial expression. Pretend you aren't affected by it because a reaction will positively reinforce their behaviour and they'll do it again.

"Most importantly, although women believe that being catcalled at says something about them, it

actually says something about the men who are doing it, so don't take measures to avoid the situation, like changing the way you dress or walking a different route to work.

"That said, never put yourself at risk. If you feel seriously threatened, alert your local police station without letting the perpetrator know." ©