



Jeremy Corbyn and the women-only train paradox

We don't support any single political party. In fact, none come close to meeting our standards on policies to end violence against women and girls. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats decimated women's services, made it more difficult to access child maintenance, and removed many safety nets to ending poverty. Current Conservative policies engage in flagrant victim blaming of people who have very limited choices within a white supremacist capitalist-patriarchy. Labour has made it clear that they supported many of these so-called austerity measures, which many economists point out are more likely to harm the economy than save a single penny. Obviously, we're more concerned about people than the economy, which tends to put us at odds with most parties.

We have been following the labour leadership contest with interest, but, as we're not members of the labour party, our opinions on who should be elected are irrelevant.

What has interested us is the gendered reaction to [Jeremy Corbyn's suggestion](#) to hold a public consultation on the possibility of women-only carriages in trains to deal with street harassment. To be clear, and a number of media outlets have flagrantly misrepresented the issue, Corbyn has not made the proposal, rather his suggestion to hold the consultation was in response to women raising the issue with him.

In our, admittedly unscientific, [poll of twitter](#) this morning many women said they felt the theory was wrong as it held women accountable for the criminal behaviour of men. Many of these same women also said they would use women-only carriages if they existed because of their experiences of harassment and assault on trains.

Trawling through various twitter timelines we came across three common responses from men: #notallmen, women are over-reacting to men just being friendly, and jokes. Because nothing says hilarity like women being groped, assaulted, harassed and raped on public transport.

#Notallmen is an utterly tedious response to media coverage of male violence. Despite the fact that 1 in 3 women experience male violence during their lifetime, the refrain #notallmen is constant. Yes, [not all men are violent](#) but it's not just 3 men in the UK committing 80 000 rapes every single year.

Domestic and sexual violence and abuse (DSVA) continues because men do not challenge other men when they minimise the impact of DSVA. It happens because we live in a culture where jokes about VAWG are common and the torture and murder of women constitute mainstream entertainment from television programs like Law & Order SVU to games like Grand Theft Auto. It happens because men believe [they are entitled to women's time](#). Street harassment continues because we tell men they aren't responsible for their actions.

The "women are over-reacting" mantra is utterly tedious. Being trapped on a train with a man who hasn't bothered to bring a book and thinks the woman stuck next to him is responsible for his entertainment is a constant. Women, who may be working, reading, sleeping or just not



interested, are forced to negotiate their space knowing that the man sitting beside them might be the one who calls them a frigid bitch if they don't want to chat. Or, the one who punches her in the face. The demands to be entertained speak to male entitlement to women's time and is, well, tedious. Being bothered may be more common than being groped, pushed against, or flashed but it is still a barrier to women's safe access to public spaces.

The "over-reacting" refrain is applied to women have been sexually assaulted and raped. Their experiences are minimised and those around express concern for the rapists' life being 'ruined'. Consequences to the victim are, clearly, negligible.

We don't support women-only train carriages because it fails to deal with the [root causes](#) of harassment: [male entitlement to women's time and sexual access to women's bodies](#). The resemblance to [police 'safety' campaigns](#) is clear: institutionalised victim blaming. Women-only carriages on trains would have the same result: women would be [at fault](#) for being in the 'wrong' carriage; [for not being more 'careful'](#); for being in a public space.

Women only carriages puts the onus on women to change their behaviour rather than insisting that men stop harassing women or that perpetrators be held criminally liable for their behaviour.

We do welcome Corbyn's suggestion of a consultation because it makes the serious issue of endemic harassment of women in public spaces a political issue. Organisations like [The Everyday Sexism Project](#), [Hollaback](#) and [Stop Street Harassment](#) have been evidencing the reality for years. We know its a problem and it is time the government stepped up to end the pervasive nature of street harassment with legislation, enforcement of said legislation, and [mandatory sex and healthy relationships](#) taught in school to [challenge male entitlement](#).

[Women-only carriages are not the answer but they are a good place to start the debate.](#)