

Direct Action, Education, Consciousness-Raising, Activism and the Internet: Methods for Combating Street Harassment

History: Street harassment dates to a time when women were men's property. If a woman was in public without the accompaniment of a man, she ran the risk of being treated as "available" by the men around her. In discussing the experience of women in public between 1750 and 1850 in the U.S., particularly while traveling, historian Patricia Cline Cohen wrote that, "men who saw women alone exhibiting freedom of manners, sociability, and splendid dress marked them as disreputable women and treated them accordingly. A woman who wanted to appear reputable, therefore, had to constrain her actions, draw her cloak close, maintain reserve, and accept male escortage wherever possible."¹ This mindset continues to varying degrees in the public sphere today and some men view a woman alone in public, particularly if she is dressed attractively, as fair game for their comments. However, even women who adhere to advice like staying in at night, only going in certain public spaces, and dressing conservatively are not free from men's advances and comments. The best way to prevent harassment, besides staying home, seems to be, as it was in the 1700 and 1800s, to go in public with a man. When asked why he harassed women, one man interviewed in the documentary "War Zone" about street harassment by filmmaker Maggie Hadleigh-West responded that he did so because if a woman was not visibly with a man, he presumed she was single and so available for his attentions.²

¹ Patricia Cline Cohen, "Safety and Danger: Women on American Public Transport, 1750-1850," in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*. Edited by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 121.

² Maggie Hadleigh-West, "War Zone," Film Fatale, Inc., 1998... Viewed during the Street Harassment Summit in New York City on May 5, 2007.