

Shapely Prose

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Guest Blogger Starling: Schrödinger's Rapist: or a guy's guide to approaching strange women without being maced

Posted on October 8, 2009 by Sweet Machine

1,216

Phaedra Starling is the pen name of a romance novelist and licensed private investigator living in small New York City apartment with two large dogs. She practices Brazilian jiu-jitsu and makes world-class apricot muffins.

Gentlemen. Thank you for reading.

Let me start out by assuring you that I understand you are a good sort of person. You are kind to children and animals. You respect the elderly. You donate to charity. You tell jokes without laughing at your own punchlines. You respect women. You like women. In fact, you would really like to have a mutually respectful and loving sexual relationship with a woman. Unfortunately, you don't yet know that woman—she isn't working with you, nor have you been introduced through mutual friends or drawn to the same activities. So you must look further afield to encounter her.

So far, so good. Miss LonelyHearts, your humble instructor, approves. Human connection, love, romance: there is nothing wrong with these yearnings.

Now, you want to become acquainted with a woman you see in public. The first thing you need to understand is that women are dealing with a set of challenges and concerns that are strange to you, a man. To begin with, we would rather not be killed or otherwise violently assaulted.

"But wait! I don't want that, either!"

Well, no. But do you think about it all the time? Is preventing violent assault or murder part of your daily routine, rather than merely something you do when you venture into war zones?

Because, for women, it is. When I go on a date, I always leave the man's full name and contact

missing. My best friend will call or e-mail me the next morning, and I must answer that call or e-mail before noon-ish, or she begins to worry. If she doesn't hear from me by three or so, she'll call the police. My activities after dark are curtailed. Unless I am in a densely-occupied, well-lit space, I won't go out alone. Even then, I prefer to have a friend or two, or my dogs, with me. Do you follow rules like these?

So when you, a stranger, approach me, I have to ask myself: Will this man rape me?

Do you think I'm overreacting? One in every six American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime. I bet you don't think you know any rapists, but consider the sheer number of rapes that must occur. These rapes are not all committed by Phillip Garrido, Brian David Mitchell, or other members of the Brotherhood of Scary Hair and Homemade Religion. While you may assume that none of the men you know are rapists, I can assure you that at least one is. Consider: if every rapist commits an average of ten rapes (a horrifying number, isn't it?) then the concentration of rapists in the population is still a little over *one in sixty*. That means four in my graduating class in high school. One among my coworkers. One in the subway car at rush hour. Eleven who work out at my gym. How do I know that you, the nice guy who wants nothing more than companionship and True Love, are not this rapist?

I don't.

When you approach me in public, you are Schrödinger's Rapist. You may or may not be a man who would commit rape. I won't know for sure unless you start sexually assaulting me. I can't see inside your head, and I don't know your intentions. If you expect me to trust you—to accept you at face value as a nice sort of guy—you are not only failing to respect my reasonable caution, you are being cavalier about my personal safety.

Fortunately, you're a good guy. We've already established that. Now that you're aware that there's a problem, you are going to go out of your way to fix it, and to make the women with whom you interact feel as safe as possible.

To begin with, you must accept that **I set my own risk tolerance**. When you approach me, I will begin to evaluate the possibility you will do me harm. That possibility is never 0%. For some women, particularly women who have been victims of violent assaults, any level of risk is unacceptable. Those women do not want to be approached, no matter how nice you are or how much you'd like to date them. Okay? That's their right. Don't get pissy about it. Women are under no obligation to hear the sales pitch before deciding they are not in the market to buy.

The second important point: **you must be aware of what signals you are sending by your appearance and the environment**. We are going to be paying close attention to your appearance and behavior and matching those signs to our idea of a threat.

This means that some men should never approach strange women in public. Specifically, if you have truly unusual standards of personal cleanliness, if you are the prophet of your own religion, or if you have tattoos of gang symbols or Technicolor cockroaches all over your face and neck, you are just never going to get a good response approaching a woman cold. That doesn't mean you're doomed to a life of solitude, but I suggest you start with internet dating, where you can put your unusual traits out there and find a woman who will appreciate them.

Are you wearing a tee-shirt making a rape joke? NOT A GOOD CHOICE—not in general, and definitely not when approaching a strange woman.

ought not approach a woman and try to strike up a conversation. The same applies if you are alone with a woman in most public places. If the public place is a closed area (a subway car, an elevator, a bus), even a crowded one, you may not realize that the woman's ability to flee in case of threat is limited. Ask yourself, "If I were dangerous, would this woman be safe in this space with me?" If the answer is no, then it isn't appropriate to approach her.

On the other hand, if you are both at church accompanied by your mothers, who are lifelong best friends, the woman is as close as it comes to safe. That is to say, still not 100% safe. But the odds are pretty good.

The third point: Women are communicating all the time. **Learn to understand and respect women's communication to you.**

You want to say *Hi* to the cute girl on the subway. How will she react? Fortunately, I can tell you with some certainty, because she's already sending messages to you. Looking out the window, reading a book, working on a computer, arms folded across chest, body away from you = do not disturb. So, y'know, *don't disturb her*. Really. Even to say that you like her hair, shoes, or book. A compliment is not always a reason for women to smile and say thank you. You are a threat, remember? You are Schrödinger's Rapist. Don't assume that whatever you have to say will win her over with charm or flattery. Believe what she's signaling, and back off.

If you speak, and she responds in a monosyllabic way without looking at you, she's saying, "I don't want to be rude, but please leave me alone." You don't know why. It could be "Please leave me alone because I am trying to memorize *Beowulf*." It could be "Please leave me alone because you are a scary, scary man with breath like a water buffalo." It could be "Please leave me alone because I am planning my assassination of a major geopolitical figure and I will have to kill you if you are able to recognize me and blow my cover."

On the other hand, if she is turned towards you, making eye contact, and she responds in a friendly and talkative manner when you speak to her, you are getting a green light. You can continue the conversation until you start getting signals to back off.

The fourth point: **If you fail to respect what women say, you label yourself a problem.**

There's a man with whom I went out on a single date—afternoon coffee, for one hour by the clock—on July 25th. In the two days after the date, he sent me about fifteen e-mails, scolding me for non-responsiveness. I e-mailed him back, saying, "Look, this is a disproportionate response to a single date. You are making me uncomfortable. Do not contact me again." It is now October 7th. Does he still e-mail?

Yeah. He does. About every two weeks.

This man scores higher on the threat level scale than Man with the Cockroach Tattoos. (Who, after all, is guilty of nothing more than terrifying bad taste.) You see, Mr. E-mail has made it clear that he ignores what I say when he wants something from me. Now, I don't know if he is an actual rapist, and I sincerely hope he's not. But he is certainly Schrödinger's Rapist, and this particular Schrödinger's Rapist has a probability ratio greater than one in sixty. Because a man who ignores a woman's NO in a non-sexual setting is more likely to ignore NO in a sexual setting, as well.

So if you speak to a woman who is otherwise occupied, you're sending a subtle message. It is that your desire to interact trumps her right to be left alone. If you pursue a conversation when she's tried to cut it off, you send a message. It is that your desire to speak trumps her right to be left alone. *And each of those messages indicates that you believe your desires are a legitimate reason*

For women, who are watching you very closely to determine how much of a threat you are, this is an important piece of data.

The fifth and last point: **Don't rape.** Nor should you commit these similar but less severe offenses: don't assault. Don't grope. Don't constrain. Don't brandish. Don't expose yourself. Don't threaten with physical violence. Don't threaten with sexual violence.

Shouldn't this go without saying? Of course it should. Sadly, that's not the world I live in. You may be beginning to realize that it's not the world you live in, either.

Miss LonelyHearts wishes you happiness and success in your search for romantic companionship.

COMMENTS ON THIS POST ARE NOW CLOSED.

POSTED IN [FEMINISM](#), [GUEST BLOGGERS](#)

1,216 thoughts on “Guest Blogger Starling: Schrödinger's Rapist: or a guy's guide to approaching strange women without being maced”

1. [Tapetum](#)

[OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:10 AM](#)

This? Is perfect.

Is it really that hard for guys to pay attention to the actual fears and feelings of the women they're trying to approach? The results seem to say yes.

2. [Shiyiya](#)

[OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:11 AM](#)

Awesome, awesome post. Props. Bookmarked so I can reference it if/when I choose to use the term Schrödinger's Rapist!

3. [hsofia](#)

[OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:12 AM](#)

I'm sending this to some young men I know.

4. [Gail](#)

[OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:14 AM](#)

Beautifully done. Well thought out, perfectly worded, easily understood.

5. [Lucy](#)

[OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:15 AM](#)

Excellently put. I'm also saving this one to distribute to some men I know. I dare men to read this in full and still insist that women are being unreasonable for not wanting to talk to complete strangers or men they got a bad vibe from.

even though it bored me to freaking tears in high school, just in case I'm on public transportation and not studying.

6. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:45 AM

Consider: if every rapist commits an average of ten rapes (a horrifying number, isn't it?) then the concentration of rapists in the population is still a little over one in sixty.

You know, it never occurred to me before now, but I've never seen that "one in six" (or however many) statistic turned around that way, and I think that's probably the other side of the "how not to get raped" coin. Or... I guess... the same side, but a different part of the etching. I don't know, metaphor, not my strong suit.

MY POINT IS:

When we talk about rape as something that happens to 1 in 6 women, it is something that happens to women. Oh no, women! You have a problem! A women's problem! That has to do with women! What are women going to do to solve this problem?

Perhaps if we rephrased that as "one in sixty (or however many) men will commit rape in his lifetime," the problem might start to look a little different to certain people.

7. *lucizoe*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:46 AM

I would like to hand this out on the train. Awesome post.

8. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:53 AM

Liza-the-second: I know. Isn't that horrifying? It's not even taking into consideration the possibility that some of those one-in-six have been raped more than once. And the one-rapist-to-ten-rapes number is pulled out of thin air. We just don't know. Because we don't catch these creeps. We don't put them in jail. Either there is a staggering number of rapists, or rapists are routinely getting away with numerous felonies. Either possibility is horrifying.

That, or P. Garrido/B.D. Mitchell et al have some special Santa Claus power that enables them to be in a thousand places at once. Maybe tied to the Homemade Religion? I don't know.

9. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:58 AM

...oh that's cool, Starling, I wasn't planning to ever sleep again anyway.

o.o

In seriousness, though, thank you again for making that point. I can't believe I never thought about it that way, when it seems so stunningly obvious now. And wow, it kind of makes sex offender registries look like a joke, huh? OMG! There might be a RAPIST in your neighborhood! Well... yeah... if there's more than a handful of people in your neighborhood, there almost *certainly* is.

10. *dreamingcrow*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:01 AM

Wow. Thanks for this! It's clear, concise, and not likely to raise hackles.

11. *RH*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:09 AM

"The fourth point: If you fail to respect what women say, you label yourself a problem."

This is KEY. I have so many stories about men who don't respect what I say (mostly 'no') in small ways that are later problems. Most recently, a guy who worked at a pizza place I went to to get some dinner before work refused my multiple no's when he asked me to pick the music to play, and ended up being a problem. As soon as the other patron in the small eat-in area left, he came up to me and wouldn't leave me alone, asking me where I worked, where I lived, what I liked to do – all as I was trying to read a book and eat in peace. He even offered me wine, which is creepy because the place does not serve wine on the menu. That little thing – not paying attention to 'no', even when it comes to little things, like picking the music – sets off so many alarm bells in women's minds.

12. *Shulamit*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:23 AM

This is fucking perfect. Thank you.

13. *bellacoker*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:27 AM

Starling: Thank you, this is very good and well done.

Statistic-wise, I did some research, which I'm good at and some math, which I'm not great at.

RAAIN published the 1/6 women is a victim of rape or sexual assault statistic. The census estimates the female population of the US in 2008 was 154 million. Which mean 25.5 million women will be raped or assaulted. The male population is almost 150 million.

If we assume, for simplicity, that every sexual assault is reported and, for worst-case-scenario numbers, that every rapist will only rape 1 woman and then stop, then one out of every 5.83 men is a rapist.

That doesn't take into account gray rape or men who "convince" their partners to have sex they do not want.

So, stop living in fear, ladies, everything is peachy here.

14. *Taylor*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:29 AM

This is probably the best thing I've read all day. Thank you for writing this. I've already sent it along to some people who could use it.

15. *eloriane*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:14 AM

Fantastic. I wish I could give it to every dude in the universe.

As a paranoid lesbian even the most casual of come-ons is seriously distressing and seriously futile, but I never have the guts to tell guys to leave me alone, because I doubt they'd understand, and until now "making them understand" meant "telling them I am a lesbian made paranoid by a history of assault" i.e., "making myself ludicrously vulnerable to Dude Who Is Creeping Me Out."

all who engage in dudely privilege! Maybe as a counterpart to that awkward day in elementary school when they take the girls aside to warn them that their periods are coming (The redcoats are coming! The redcoats are coming!). The boys at my school never seemed to get taught anything exciting on that day, and usually played card games instead. This would be far more useful.

16. *Elle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:22 AM

I don't usually comment, but I just wanted to say to this post: Yes. Just yes. It's hard to articulate things like this but you nailed it. Fo' realz.

17. *CassandraSays*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:25 AM

The funny thing here is I'm a lot less cautious than that in some senses – I'll walk to Walgreens alone at 4 AM, I leave my door unlocked sometimes if I'm just running out for a few minutes, I walk around at night with headphones on, I hang out in sketchy rock clubs and have been known to drink and do drugs with men covered in tattoos – but the minute I see a man ignore one of those "back off" signals? Red alert. From now on I will make sure never to be alone with that man. Not only will I not date him, I will not be his friend, and I will discourage any woman I know from hanging out with him. He has identified himself as The Enemy.

And I'm pretty damn fearless, as these things go. But this stuff, the responding to unspoken signals, isn't just fear – it's common sense.

Seriously guys, you know how you tend to insist that women can't tell if your intentions are bad? Um, yeah, actually, we often can, because we have no choice. We HAVE to be able to read your intentions.

18. *The Bald Soprano*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:22 AM

I may print out copies of this to hand out to strange guys who try to talk to me (in place of that monosyllabic response, just hand this out without looking and go back to reading).

19. *Annie Mcfly*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:27 AM

Ok, that's it, I'm making a few thousand copies of this in flier form, and I will give it out to every single man I meet.

20. *Godless Heathen*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:55 AM

It could be "Please leave me alone because I am planning my assassination of a major geopolitical figure and I will have to kill you if you are able to recognize me and blow my cover."

Oh great, give away all the secrets!

How I wish I could have handed this out to some of the guys on the bus back in the day. I had to change buses for a month to get away from this one guy who would get off at my stop and follow me. Hey, maybe he was just looking to cheat on his wife and I wasn't giving him a fair shake and thus hurt a poor widdle adulterer's feelings. Maybe he was the sugar daddy of my dreams and I ruined my one chance to live a life of luxury. Certainly he was creepier than all get out though, and I was tired of having to look over my shoulder for him! Thirty days of going home later than usual was better than living in fear.

21. [lightcastle](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:05 AM

Well, this kicks the shit out of the Schrodinger's Rapist post *I* was thinking of writing.

Part of me still wants to use Schrodinger's Douchebag as the more general case, but I'm not sure if that isn't just me self-editing to the inevitable "But "rape" is such a scary word!" reaction. (As well as the "If women were just more confident/knew self defense/carried a gun then they would feel safe and this wouldn't be necessary" reaction.)

But yes, this needs to be spread far and wide as excellent reading.

Bellacoker, I am pretty sure good evidence exists that most rapists rape more than once, so I don't know if the calculation you did is helpful. I like the "1 in 60" because it shows that even with generous assumptions, the number is still frightening.

22. [Frankincensy](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:15 AM

Thank you so much for this post.

23. [Ger](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:09 AM

This is brilliant! Would it be ok to reproduce this? I would love for it to be printed in my college newspapers

24. [Catatonic Kid](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:37 AM

Brilliance. Sheer brilliance. Thank you.

25. [Linda](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:38 AM

Actually, if I saw a guy wearing a "rape is funny" t-shirt, I would just assume he is probably a jerkoff such as appear in many internet threads. Most serial rapists would work hard not to arouse suspicion that way. But otherwise, there's a lot of truth there.

Of course, you might just reject a guy because you aren't interested, and that's o.k., too.

26. [Josh](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:02 AM

Forget about handing this out to *only* a few people. This needs to be taught in schools. I wish this becomes widespread, it would save so much to have that happen.

I say this, as a guy who not only unwittingly emits the creepy vibe sometimes, but has also been a victim: wake up and pay attention to this. Please.

27. [CassandraSays](#)OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:19 AM

There should really be a special by-law that says women are allowed to kick anyone wearing a rape-is-funny tshirt in the balls. We could maybe sell it as pre-emptive self-defence?

The most offensive tee I ever saw IRL was one with IT'S NOT GOING TO SUCK ITSELF and an arrow pointing down. Looking the dude up and down, smirking, and going "with your striking good looks and charming personality it's going to have to, isn't it?" was one of my proudest moments.

28. *snarkysmachine*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:28 AM

This was fantastic, though I'm not sure moms being life long friends means a man is less likely to do me harm as evident from friends who were assaulted by close family friends. I think the point is women should be in tune to their risk tolerance and that "gift o' fear" and let that dictate their responses rather than falling into assumptions like "stranger in the alley = bad" / "mama's friend so-and-so's son at family picnic=good"

I tend to take these things on a case by case basis. YMMY

29. *Starling*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:51 AM

lightcastle: There's always room for more! I see what you're saying about the terminology, and Schrödinger's Rapist felt a little more edgy than I was completely comfortable with, at first—you know, mouth running ahead of brain. But the really problematic thing with strangers is that you DON'T know if they intend criminal assault, right up until you find yourself getting hurt and that information is too late to benefit you. Whereas there is no similar opaque box problem with the douchebag. Sometimes, as in the case of the guy CassandraSays ran into, there's no element of uncertainty at all.

Linda: I have this horrible feeling that, given the large number of rapists that must exist to correlate with the large number of rape victims, many rapists aren't what you would think of as serial rapists trying to hide their criminal intent. I have a terrible feeling that many, many rapists are men who would NEVER haul a strange woman into the woods, but who think that if they shelled out the big bucks for dinner and a show, someone owes them. Or that women who are too drunk to resist are awesome good fun. Or that once she's come home with him, well, that's one big yes, amirite?

So the guy who's wearing the tee-shirts making light of roofies, or suggesting that gang rape in a New Hampshire pool hall is super-fun . . . yeah, he's a jerkoff. But he may also be dangerous because he's endorsing certain beliefs about men being entitled to women's bodies under some circumstances, and how women really want it to be that way.

snarkysmachine: Hoo boy yup. Scary men don't exist out in the wild without friends or family—they have both! Who are often victims! But if you're talking men finding places to introduce themselves to women where the women are likely to be comfortable, having both mommies present usually ensures good behavior during the introductions.

[There is the whole other potential problem of mommies who would like you two to get married and produce adorable offspring, but that seemed off-topic.]

30. *Elizabeth*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:54 AM

I'm printing this out and leaving stacks everywhere.

31. *Katrina*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:55 AM

Whilst there is some great general advice in the post, something about it bothers me and I am not quite able to pin down exactly what it is. It seems incredibly patronising to both men and women, somehow. Especially the idea of handing it out to someone.

Plus, the only thing I can see it achieving is showing the bad men how to appear not creepy without actually changing anything about how they really view women and their interactions with them. It might enable them to convince the woman long enough to get

There will be decent guys who might just be a bit socially awkward and not read the situation properly, or simply just not realise what they are doing, and they might benefit from this. I imagine those are the ones this article targets, but I believe the men falling in that category to be very small in number. The really decent guys are the ones already not doing any of this crap.

I'll have to think about it some more and hopefully come up with some more coherent thoughts. Something just doesn't sit right with me on this.

32. *Joe Snuffy*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:58 AM

You forgot the important statistic though: Three quarters of rape are by men already known to the women. Being a stranger isn't the big problem.

33. *Aurora Erratic*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:59 AM

Wow. This is exactly what I have been wanting to say, or wanting someone to say; I just didn't have the right words.

34. *Myytinmurtaja*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:17 PM

Excellent post!

35. *Tara*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:22 PM

Thank you for this post, Starling! I immediately thought of so many situations in the past where something a guy did just struck me as ooky and I couldn't articulate why—now I can!! And living in a rural Southern town where many of the people in positions of power think that 1955 was a GREAT year and we should arrest social progress right there, there have certainly been many of those ooky situations! Few things make my blood boil quite like having a bunch of strange men address me at work as "Sweetheart" or "Darlin" and sitting there mentally weighing the benefit of saying, "It's Tara" vs. the inevitable raining down of criticism for being "impolite."

Sorry, got all ranty on ya. Starling, you rock!

36. *Jota*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:36 PM

Katrina: I'm not sure that it helps the socially awkward guys, necessarily. As a socially awkward guy, I feel like it means I probably just shouldn't even try, because not only am I going to sound and feel like an idiot, I'm also going to make her feel like someone was trying to rape her.

(In fact, reading this, it sounded like a checklist for [this comic](#).)

37. *Lampdevil*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:48 PM

This is fantastic. Absolutely fantastic.

And even if it's only truly helpful to that (theoretically) small segment of awkward good-hearted dudes, that's still a Good Thing. Maybe it's not going to revolutionize the world, but it presents something important in a clear, easy to digest fashion. If it gets the

point across to someone, then I'm willing to throw a party and bake two whole cakes for it.

@Lucy: OT, I hear that there have been new translations of Beowulf released in recent years. Much less dry, much more poetic. Look into that for your Awesome Bus Reading!

38. *KellyK*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:52 PM

The most offensive tee I ever saw IRL was one with IT'S NOT GOING TO SUCK ITSELF and an arrow pointing down. Looking the dude up and down, smirking, and going "with your striking good looks and charming personality it's going to have to, isn't it?" was one of my proudest moments.

As well it should be, CassandraSays. You rock, a lot. I'm putting that reply in my mental "Staircase Wit" file where it will await the opportunity to be used.

39. *KellyK*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:57 PM

Starling, you also rock. I really like this because I see it getting the message across to guys who are "low-grade creepy." That is, they'd probably never intentionally hurt someone, but they ignore or don't register certain social cues, and then get all hurt and confused when a woman is justifiably creeped out by their standing too close or an uninvited hand on her shoulder or a conversation that she can't seem to escape from.

Not to give those guys a total free pass, because it takes at least little bit of jerkiness to ignore the discomfort you're causing someone, but I think targeting it with the base assumption that a guy's intentions are good was the way to go. You answered the really common "But...I'm a good guy!!" with "Okay. Here's how you can prove it."

40. *Maya*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:58 PM

"schrodinger's rapist" is in my vocabulary now. *nod*

41. *Kristin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:59 PM

Holy shit. I am sending this to every man I know. This exposes their male privilege in a way I could never explain. Wow.

42. *DeepStar*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 12:59 PM

This post is simply fantastic. I am going to link to it wherever and whenever possible!

43. *Jessikanesis*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:08 PM

I also love this, and am sending the link to ALL my friends, men and women alike!

44. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:16 PM

Starling: Yeah, I do see your point, and I do think it was the right word choice in the end. It definitely did give me pause, though.

Interestingly, I've been getting more and more comments from men about how these threads prove that if women just talked back and were confident more, instead of being "polite", the problem would go away. Oh, and they should learn self defense.

45. April DOCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:17 PM

In a bit of encouraging and related news from BoingBoing.net: "Go Senator Al! Al Franken successfully introduced legislation that denies federal contracts to companies that have policies — anywhere in the world — that punish employees for complaining about rape or discrimination on the job." Some guys understand. Huzzah.

When riding on buses I really wish people would just stop assuming that if someone (me) is reading a book then that someone (me) must be SO ABJECTLY BORED that they MUST want to listen to some stranger verbally jack-off to their life story in my ear. Seriously. I'm READING. Happily. Leave. Me. Alone. I don't care if you'd be my bestest bestest bud if I just gave a flying fart but I DON'T. The worst part is that hunched up defensive preparation for that inevitable "Hey you bitch I'm talking to you" crap that always follows. *sigh*

46. Sarah TXOCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:20 PM

Katrina – I think the "HowTo" tone is supposed to be a little ironic. This piece isn't really targeted at genuinely nice guys who want to meet women "in the wild". It's targeted at those clueless guys (and women) who *still* don't understand what was problematic about the xkcd post. Although they may never approach someone on a subway car, *they don't see why we get so defensive about it*. It's a black-comedy set-up to present the seemingly-simple idea that someone who ignores a social cue to back off is sending the message that he/she will ignore *other* cues to get what they want. And that is what a rapist does.

47. IrishUpOCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:22 PM

Excellent post, Starling!

Because it's come up, there is a prof at UMASS Boston named David Lisak who does research into the "undetected rapist". Estimates are that 15% of rapes even get reported, of those, about 50-70% are prosecuted, and jail convictions occur in only 10% of prosecuted rapes. So only about 1-4% of rapists are actually in jail. Obviously, most rapists are OUT THERE. Which goes to show it's not just Teh Wimmenez Vapors.

Anyway, Dr. Lisak conducted research aimed at characterizing the undetected rapist. Briefly, he used a survey that just described behaviors without labeling them. About 120 men self-reported behaviors that would classify as rape. Of these, nearly 2/3rds were serial rapists (76/120), and accounted for an average of 14 victims apiece. So Starling, your guess was right in the damn ball-park.

I'm linking to one of his reports, as it shows very clearly that Starling has done an outstanding job of delineating WHY boundary violations, even seemingly minor ones, are in fact actually good indicators that you are not dealing with a nice guy, but a NG(TM). From the linked report, undetected rapists:

- are extremely adept at identifying "likely" victims, and testing prospective victims' boundaries;
- plan and premeditate their attacks, using sophisticated strategies to groom their victims for attack, and to isolate them physically;
- use "instrumental" not gratuitous violence; they exhibit strong impulse control and use only as much violence as is needed to terrify and coerce their victims into submission;
- use psychological weapons – power, control, manipulation, and threats – backed

up by physical force, and almost never resort to weapons such as knives or guns;

- use alcohol deliberately to render victims more vulnerable to attack, or completely unconscious.

So you see, Katrina, there is no way that this post will “help” the men who actually present the most danger to us, because they are already good at what they do. Starlings post was aimed at Nice Guy For Reals. If Nice Guys for reals start to respect women's boundaries on a regular basis, it provides LESS cover for NG(TM)s, not more. It makes use MORE safe, not LESS. Oh, and it puts men and women on a more equal footing overall, since our communication becomes just as valid as men's.

48. *IrishUp*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:22 PM

Crap! Forgot the link!

http://www2.binghamton.edu/counseling/documents/RAPE_FACT_SHEET1.pdf

49. *jennyknopinski*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:27 PM

This is one of those things where you read it, and it seems so obvious, but no one has ever put it in such an illuminating way before. Thank you! I had an experience just the other day that was exactly what you are describing. If someone can't show me respect in the first few seconds of our interaction, why do they think I would want to date them? I wrote about it here: <http://wp.me/pF0jQ-2f>

50. *JenniChicago*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:29 PM

Thanks, Starling, for the post, and for bringing the term Schrödinger's Rapist to the world. (Wish we didn't need it.)

51. *Meems*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:32 PM

This is fantastic.

...and I'm a bit like CassandraSays (walking around alone at night, etc.)

52. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:45 PM

“Starling, you also rock. I really like this because I see it getting the message across to guys who are “low-grade creepy.” That is, they'd probably never intentionally hurt someone, but they ignore or don't register certain social cues, and then get all hurt and confused when a woman is justifiably creeped out by their standing too close or an uninvited hand on her shoulder or a conversation that she can't seem to escape from.”

This seems to be conflating two things: people who are socially awkward/inability to discern social cues such in the case of Asperger's and “low grade creepy” I guess I'm not sure what is meant by this. Could you clarify because some of the behaviors you stated sound a lot like folks I know who are on the spectrum and equating their “lack” in social skills with creepiness or rape culture in general feels pretty fucked up to me.

53. *Sarah F*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:51 PM

Thanks for this. I've known a lot of women who either do not have these built in fears or ignore them for whatever reason. When comparing my cautiousness to them I wondered if

I was not the norm.

54. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:52 PM

If you expect me to trust you — to accept you at face value as a nice sort of guy — you are not only failing to respect my reasonable caution, you are being cavalier about my personal safety.

Exactly that.

Actually, if I saw a guy wearing a "rape is funny" t-shirt, I would just assume he is probably a jerkoff such as appear in many internet threads. Most serial rapists would work hard not to arouse suspicion that way.

I wrote pretty much exactly what Starling said in response to this, before I read her comment. The kind of person who thinks their right to wear a rape jokes tshirt trumps any woman's right to feel safe around them is pretty much exactly the kind of person who might well be a serial rapist, but would never in a million years realise or acknowledge it, because the bitches wanted it really and he's entitled to some pussy once in a while, and it sure as hell doesn't count as rape!

Interestingly, I've been getting more and more comments from men about how these threads prove that if women just talked back and were confident more, instead of being "polite", the problem would go away. Oh, and they should learn self defense.

So, they acknowledge the reality that a strange man in a public space may want to do a woman serious harm ("learn self defense"), but they still can't see why a lot of the time in that situation, a woman chooses to be polite rather than confrontational to someone who is probably bigger, stronger (and more pissed off at being rejected) than themselves? I call bullshit. (And that's without even getting in to the socialisation women receive to be polite and kind and take care of everyone, all the time, forever.)

Oh, and it puts men and women on a more equal footing overall, since our communication becomes just as valid as men's.

Which, even if it weren't in a rape / assault context, would be worth pursuing.

55. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:53 PM

Also! Forgot to say. Starling, this post is FANTASTIC. Thank you.

56. *jennyknopinski*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:58 PM

Caitlin, not to mention that women who do "talk back" often get verbally berated. Sometimes even if you shut a guy down politely he will get angry and defensive and call you a lesbian bitch or something. People who encourage women to just tell these guys to get lost don't realize that could put the woman in an even more uncomfortable or dangerous situation.

57. *Just Some Trans Guy*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 1:59 PM

This is a really great post. Also, regarding creepy Mr. Email, I actually wouldn't assume that he wouldn't / won't escalate. That's some seriously scary disregarding of boundaries, and it's something that would make advice columnist Carolyn Hax immediately recommend Gavin deBecker's "The Gift of Fear." Quite appropriately so.

I do have a minor nitpick, though:

"Well, no. But do you think about it all the time? Is preventing violent assault or murder part of your daily routine, rather than merely something you do when you venture into war zones? "

Actually ... yeah, I do; and yes, it is. Especially at night and if I'm walking alone, I am very aware of how vulnerable I am as someone who is both non-gender-conforming and queer. I have been verbally and violently attacked for this, and I have been sexually assaulted for this. Intersectionality applies to men as well as to women and, of course, to people who identify outside the binary.

It's possible that this comment wanders into "What about the menz?!" territory, but since I wasn't sure, I thought I'd post to see if perhaps I should have just stopped after the first paragraph. Feel free to delete, mods, if I've gone astray.

58. JenniferP

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:01 PM

This is a beautiful post, especially the part about body language and respecting the signals.

59. snarkysmachine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:07 PM

"Caitlin, not to mention that women who do "talk back" often get verbally berated. Sometimes even if you shut a guy down politely he will get angry and defensive and call you a lesbian bitch or something. People who encourage women to just tell these guys to get lost don't realize that could put the woman in an even more uncomfortable or dangerous situation"

I think it depends on the woman. I do not feel uncomfortable telling some dude to back the fuck up off me. I'm not a big person. I'm 5'0 and not especially intimidating. But I do believe my body is mine and I get to choose who has access to it. I also don't give a shit about being polite. My mama didn't really socialize me that way so a lot of this is kind of foreign to me.

That said, I realize it's not true for everyone woman and everyone has feel empowered to speak up based on their own comfortable level.

Eh, so I guess we're not unpacking the "low grade creepy / socially awkward" conflation today. Cool.

60. Starling

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:10 PM

Just Some Trans Guy: You're right, and it's worth noting that hypervigilance is something I first recognized consciously in cops, not in women. There's an awareness of surroundings, a tendency to look for exits, and a general level of watchfulness that the rest of the world doesn't have. I was hanging out with a friend late one night, and he mentioned, "This is an awfully vulnerable spot. If someone came up to the car window, I wouldn't be able to see him until he was RIGHT HERE. If he had a gun, then I'd be dead." And I looked at him and thought, "Paranoid much, are you?"

Of course, the next week, that particular friend was stabbed while at work by a drunk guy who pulled a knife. So, no, not paranoid. Just living his job, all the time.

genders, trans people: all are legitimately conditioned to be very aware of surroundings in order to protect themselves. But saying, "Dude, the guy's jumpy because he's a Vietnam vet" makes sense to people. Sometimes, saying, "Dude, the woman's a little nervous because she doesn't know you" just gets, "BUT I'M A GOOD GUY!"

61. *Lori*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:11 PM

I have to admit I'm troubled by the idea that somehow every man should be viewed as a potential rapist. Yes, using common sense makes sense. But, to me, assuming that a guy who says hi to you on a bus may want to rape you is taking that a step too far, and isn't much different from the parents who refuse to allow their 11-year-old to walk two blocks to the bus stop lest they be kidnapped by one of the child molesters hiding in the bushes. Child sexual abuse happens. It's wrong, it's tragic, and it should be dealt with so it becomes less common. But, viewing every adult or situation with suspicion is not the best way to go about that, and I think viewing every man or social interaction with a man you don't know as a potential rape threat is also not particularly productive.

For me, I refuse to live my life in fear. I also refuse to let the fact that some men are rapists keep me from engaging in a friendly way in everyday social interactions with men, even if those interactions aren't always the ones I'd most want to be having. Do I take reasonable precautions? Of course. If I get a genuinely creepy vibe off somebody, or I suspect I'm being followed, I take action. But, I just don't get scared (or annoyed, or put out) because a guy on a bus or at a coffee shop or in the library starts talking to me. Because odds are they are NOT a rapist, odds are I'm in a situation where they could not do me any physical harm without causing a scene even if they wanted to, and I just won't view others through the lens of fear.

I mean, yeah, it's annoying when you are trying to listen to your iPod and somebody starts talking to you on a bus, whether it's a man or woman. But, honestly, I feel like I see a little bit of trying to justify that annoyance at having your sense of personal isolation/space invaded by treating it as a genuine threat, when in most cases it isn't. I don't know, I feel like part of the price we pay for living in a society—like paying taxes—is having to at times endure social interactions we would rather not be engaged in. It means sometimes listening to the woman sitting next to you in the waiting room tell you about her daughter's wedding or the guy sitting next to you on the plane tell you about his job even though you'd really rather not have to deal with either of them. We are not guaranteed the right, when we go out in public, to not have any social interactions we don't want to have. We do have the right to not be harassed, of course. But, a guy (or women, or child) saying hello and trying to strike up a non-sexual conversation isn't engaging in harassment, even if he is annoying. Some people just don't have the same set of social skills that we might expect, and in general they mean no harm, and really in a public place they could do very little harm even if they did intend it, so I don't really see why they need to be treated as a potential rapist rather than as a human being who might just want some human connection of some kind in a culture that seems to be sorely lacking in opportunities for it.

I just see so many people complain about having to deal with other people, and honestly I think it's something we just need to suck it up and accept as part of life. Some people can't stand ever having a child make noise around them. Some people (and I admit to being one of them, although I try to just get over it and deal) can't stand having to sit next to somebody on a bus who doesn't have the same hygiene habits we expect, or having a fat person near them on a plane. Some people don't like men talking to them. And while people will have reasons of varying degrees of validity for those feelings, I'm not sure we can expect the world to cater to any of them, unless we go off to live in isolation

somewhere, or that we should expect the world to cater to them. I may want to knit and listen to my iPod on the plane, but that doesn't mean that I have some inalienable right to do so without anybody interrupting me, or that somebody is committing a grave wrong if they dare try to engage me in conversation.

I live in an area with a really high rate of property crime. And yet I'm not going to approach every male between maybe 15-30 (those most likely to commit the crimes) as if they may or may not be a purse-snatcher. I'm just not. I will not live my life in fear like that. I won't demean the vast majority of men between 15-30 living here who aren't thieves by doing that. That is, for me, no way to live. And it saddens me enormously that so many women seem to view every single man they don't know as a potential rapist, just like it saddens me how many parents raise their children to view every adult they don't know as a potential child molester. We do need to be aware and alert, but I also think we shouldn't let that awareness turn into a paranoia that causes us to deny the fact that most people—male or female—are basically good people who have desires and intentions not much different from our own.

62. Laura M

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:12 PM

So if you speak to a woman who is otherwise occupied, you're sending a subtle message. It is that your desire to interact trumps her right to be left alone. If you pursue a conversation when she's tried to cut it off, you send a message. It is that your desire to speak trumps her right to be left alone. And each of those messages indicates that you believe your desires are a legitimate reason to override her rights.

Repeated for so much emphasis. I get this all the damn time. "I just wanted to give you a compliment!" No, asshole, you wanted me to talk to you. If all you wanted was to give me a compliment, you wouldn't have kept talking after I nodded and turned away again.

63. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:12 PM

It's possible that this comment wanders into "What about the menz?!" territory, but since I wasn't sure, I thought I'd post to see if perhaps I should have just stopped after the first paragraph.

No, I wouldn't say it's in "what about the menz" territory, but it's close to another type of derail (not that I think you're derailing!) where people argue that because they lack one form of privilege, the ones they have are irrelevant. I don't think that's what you're doing, but it's in that species. Your male privilege lets you walk alone unmolested; your queerness makes it dangerous again. That doesn't negate the general point about male privilege, it just means that that particular part isn't about you because you're in another oppressed class.

Of course, I think (though I don't know from experience) that male privilege is complicated in general for trans men — it's something men will still bestow on you just for being a fellow man, assuming they find you adequately male-presenting, but it's not something you've always had and never questioned. And the queer oppression and male privilege are, in that case, bound up very closely to the point where you probably rarely experience uncomplicated male privilege. But again, that just means this post is not about you.

64. Fantine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:12 PM

snarkysmachine: A stranger who doesn't register your social cues because he has

because he wants in your pants. If it's a stranger, you have no way of knowing he has Asperger's. He's just a stranger who isn't paying attention to the fact that you don't want to talk to him (or sit near him or give him your phone number). It is unfortunate that certain behaviors of people with autism spectrum disorders can come across as "low grade creepy" when it's not their fault, but it is the truth.

65. Gina

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:12 PM

Great post! As someone who may find herself "dating" sometime in the future, I am a little freaked out now, though.

This line: "Is preventing violent assault or murder part of your daily routine, rather than merely something you do when you venture into war zones?" reminded me of a poster I saw a couple weeks ago in the women's restroom at a Marine base. I found it online here:

<http://www.sapr.mil/Images/posters/marines/marines1B.pdf>

Had sorta mixed feelings about it, but I think the part that bothered me the most may have been that the space for including the local victim advocate's contact info had apparently never been filled out.

66. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:14 PM

Lori, I feel like you're being a little disingenuous here. Do you really read Starling's post and get the impression that she's talking about kindly strangers who want to have a friendly, non-fraught conversation with people who are clearly interested in having a friendly, non-fraught conversation?

67. jennyknopinski

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:15 PM

Snarkysmachine, I think the problem is that when you are approached by a stranger, you have no way to know whether that person is a rapist, a clueless doofus, a person with a mental illness or disability, or someone having an off day. The only information you have to go on is that current interaction and the person's ability and willingness to read my cues and respect my wishes. I do feel for anyone with a condition that makes social interaction awkward and difficult, but if I'm faced with someone who is making me uncomfortable, I am going to have the same reaction no matter what is motivating their behavior.

68. snarkysmachine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:18 PM

"snarkysmachine: A stranger who doesn't register your social cues because he has Asperger's can be just as creepy as the stranger who deliberately ignores your social cues because he wants in your pants. If it's a stranger, you have no way of knowing he has Asperger's. He's just a stranger who isn't paying attention to the fact that you don't want to talk to him (or sit near him or give him your phone number). It is unfortunate that certain behaviors of people with autism spectrum disorders can come across as "low grade creepy" when it's not their fault, but it is the truth"

Hmm, okay. Just checking. So we are just being fucked up. Cool. I'll be sure to pass that along.

69. B.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:22 PM

"Is preventing violent assault or murder part of your daily routine, rather than merely

something you do when you venture into war zones? Because, for women, it is."

Thank you. This is something most men don't understand.

70. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:23 PM

Thanks for your post. I completely agree with your points in bold — a 100% (especially about reading signals and respecting them). But somehow, as a woman, I do not have this attitude of constantly (or even often) evaluating risk and thinking about the potential to be assaulted or worse. I wonder if I am unusual in this way, but that part of the post — which seems to be the main part and the title — somehow didn't ring true to my own experience as a woman (although I cannot argue with the statistical arguments, which are amazing and strong).

I don't like being talked to by strangers, but it has little to do with the risk factor — I also don't enjoy old ladies chatting with me (and they do it more often than strange men, maybe it's the vibe I'm sending out..)

Am I naive? clueless? lucky? (well, lucky for sure that sexual assault is not something I think about often).

71. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:24 PM

snarkysmachine: I'll play.

I think that it's okay to say that This Action Makes Me Uncomfortable, even if the cause of the action is a problem like Asperger's. There are a variety of possible reasons that a guy might do something that makes me uncomfortable, and most of those reasons are actually benign. Still, the possibility of a non-benign reason, combined with other risk factors, may hit a level of discomfort. Everyone's level of discomfort is different, and some people do have a no-tolerance level.

That doesn't negate the difficulty of navigating these waters when you have a condition like Asperger's. It does mean, though, that you have to understand that if your actions are causing fear, your intent just plain doesn't matter, because a stranger cannot be expected to read your intent. She just reacts to the actions.

72. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:26 PM

B. wrote her comment at the same time that I did — the part she quoted, and said men don't understand, is exactly the part I don't feel either. So I guess I disagree with the assertion that "for women, it is". Though based on the responses here, and on the amazing statistics, sounds like for most women, it is (or maybe, "for women, it should be" ?)

73. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:26 PM

snarkysmachine: Yeah, it is fucked up. Word. That's the bottom line in rape culture. We all suffer.

74. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:27 PM

"I do feel for anyone with a condition that makes social interaction awkward and difficult, but if I'm faced with someone who is making me uncomfortable, I am going have the same reaction no matter what is motivating their behavior."

ableist, classist and homophobic behavior. It's a real slippery slope.

I think there are ways to talk about how women negotiate their safety in spaces without using coded language that seems to suggest that it's about everything but safety.

75. *Fantine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:29 PM

"Hmm, okay. Just checking. So we are just being fucked up. Cool. I'll be sure to pass that along."

Wait. What?

76. *Fantine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:32 PM

Never mind. Starling covered it.

77. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:32 PM

I think what I said was pretty clear, Fantine. Respectful disagreement is allowed, correct? :)

78. *jennyknopinski*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:33 PM

Ok, Snarkysmachine, if I am on a bus and someone approaches me, strikes up a conversation, invades my personal space, and ignores my cues that this social interaction is unwanted, what should I do? Should I ask that person if he has Aspergers? If the answer is yes, what impact should that have on my reaction?

79. *Fantine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:35 PM

Respectful disagreement is certainly allowed. Saying that we're being fucked up without further explanation—is that respectful? However, I believe I see your point. It is absolutely unfair that a socially awkward person's behavior toward a stranger may appear threatening or creepy to someone who doesn't know them. Does that mean I'm going to stop looking out for myself when a stranger doesn't respect my boundaries? Absolutely not.

80. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:36 PM

Child sexual abuse happens. It's wrong, it's tragic, and it should be dealt with so it becomes less common.

Lori ... I was sexually abused as a child, and it didn't just 'happen.' Rather, men chose to do it, and then did it.

81. *LilahMorgan*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:37 PM

I think there are ways to talk about how women negotiate their safety in spaces without using coded language that seems to suggest that it's about everything but safety.

I do think there are some interesting intersectional issues here. This is one of them, and the class and race dimensions are another one. As someone who is white and grew up middle class, there is no question that I was trained to be more fearful for my safety around men of color and men who got IDed as lower class, and I think this affects my perceptions to this day, though I try to work past it. For instance, I'm invariably more cautious or on alert on

public transportation than I am in, for instance, an airport, even though I think I've had more awkward and uncomfortable interactions with men on airplanes than on public transportation.

I don't think there's an easy answer, but I do think that it's something to remember when talking about this – that one of the things that often gets factored into assessments of "creepy" or not is the perceived race and class of the person in question.

82. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:39 PM

Lori, having to sit next to a fat person on a plane != a man approaching woman in space where she doesn't feel safe and attempting to engage her attention.

One may make your flight more physically uncomfortable. Even emotionally uncomfortable, if you strongly dislike fat people, or you're claustrophobic and you feel more enclosed/pressured. I suppose, in a worst case scenario, you might experience some anxiety while wondering if they'll eat your baby donuts.

The other may make you afraid for your safety, infringe on your sense of autonomy, and/or continue to have long-term effects. (When I'm made anxious by a creepy guy on public transit, I continue to look for him for a while after, with some anxiety each time I go to a bus stop, until I haven't seen him for awhile and feel "safe" again. Having a creepy guy in your apartment building can be worse.)

This is not something we should have to deal with. This is not just about me wanting a little peace on the public transit. It's all very well to say that we shouldn't assume every dude might be a rapist, except, as Starling eloquently pointed out, this is a guy who is now displaying behavior that matches the attitudes of a potential rapist. So to use your purse snatching analogy, this is a person who not only fits the typical profile of the criminal you're concerned with, he has just glanced around casually to make sure no one's watching, lowered his baseball cap, and is now walking purposefully toward you, eyes on your purse.

83. *aliciamaud74*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:43 PM

@Josh: Forget about handing this out to only a few people. This needs to be taught in schools.

Done. I do a unit with my high school seniors on gender issues (making more transparent the stuff I infuse into the other stuff we do in English all year), and will definitely be linking to this on our class website and discussing it in our class.

My 17 year old students are generally (initially) alarmingly resistant to discussions of feminism—they're scared to alienate each other and ill informed about the term. But, a few years ago I decided to start our unit with some basic questions about gender: do you think you should feel safe in your workplace? do you think men and women should have equal access to education? The last question I include on the survey, adapted from Jean Kilbourne's *Can't Buy Me Love*, is "You've parked your car in a far off lot at the mall. You're now leaving, and it's late. List the steps you take as you walk to your car to keep yourself safe." In each of the 10-12 groups of students I've taught since, the girls scribble furiously for several minutes, while the boys say things like, "Wait, is this a dangerous neighborhood?" or "Wait, I don't understand the question" or "What do you mean, 'safe'?" When the girls share what they have written (ways to carry keys, avoiding parking

near vans people can hide in and grab you, not walking past bushes, dialing nine-one on their phone and keeping it in their hand in case they need to dial that last one, carrying piping hot coffee they could hurl at someone in a pinch, singing loudly so people don't walk near them), the boys are inevitably shocked, and say things like "I have never even HEARD of that!" It's VERY illuminating for students, and often the first time they have ever considered how different the worlds in which we live actually are.

Thanks for adding another level to our discussion, Phaedra Starling!!!

84. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:43 PM

"Respectful disagreement is certainly allowed. Saying that we're being fucked up without further explanation—is that respectful? However, I believe I see your point. It is absolutely unfair that a socially awkward person's behavior toward a stranger may appear threatening or creepy to someone who doesn't know them. Does that mean I'm going to stop looking out for myself when a stranger doesn't respect my boundaries? Absolutely not."

See Lilah Morgan's comment. Often these conversations have a weird tinge of class, race, ability and gender identity discrimination. People feel comfortable having certain prejudices which are not allowed to be questioned because it's about THEIR SAFETY.

While I think it's important we should ALL do whatever we need to do to ensure our safety, let's not kid ourselves that at times some of our perceptions of fear have some problematic origins that need to be unpacked.

85. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:45 PM

Lori, if I truly thought that every person who approached me was intent on doing me harm, the NYC metro area would have a huge increase in the report of dislocated shoulders.

For all those who don't live in fear, or don't think you do, I beg to differ. Do you lock your doors at night? Do you lock your car? Are there things you sensibly won't do, but your brother or husband or son wouldn't be concerned about doing? You may call these reasonable precautions, not "fear." But we're talking about the same thing. We acknowledge that threats exist, and we take reasonable precautions.

It is not disrespectful to men to say that some men are a danger to us, and (no offense guys!) we can't always tell who is and who isn't by looking at them. When men's actions edge towards threatening, or even towards being disrespectful of personal space and normal social expectations, we do react, and we have the right to react.

If you were walking home in the dark, and a large man followed about five steps behind you for block after block after block, would this make you afraid? Would you be concerned? But you have no evidence that the man following you has bad intentions. He could just be a good guy who is going in the same direction you are. He could be trying to return the umbrella you dropped. He could want to compliment your coat. Hell, he could just be oblivious for any of a number of different reasons. Does this mean you have no right to be afraid? No.

And this is a completely different scenario than walking home and seeing a black man and being afraid because, you know, black! people! OMG! There's a huge difference between reacting to a real threat (even an inadvertent one) and reacting to a threat *that exists only

86. Caitlin

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:46 PM

Re: Shrodinger's Rapist. In the xkcd post, Bagelsan said

*Yeah, maybe *this* guy was joking but sometimes the guy *isn't* and how do you know? Joking or serious they sound exactly the same — because they, like Schrodinger's douchebag, haven't picked a state of joking or serious until they see how the people around them respond.*

I think that's the also really interesting other facet of this. Starling's post looks at Shrodinger's Rapist from our point of view — that we can't tell which way it's going to go until it does, and then it's too late. Bagelsan's was looking at the fact that the man *himself* may not know yet which way he's going to go in a situation, and will act according to how other people respond. If the woman is sufficiently pleasant and accommodating to his continuous intrusion, maybe he'll just harrass her a bit and go on his way. Or maybe he'll think "she wants me" and rape her. If the woman refuses to play along, maybe he'll be intimidated and leave it, or maybe he'll hurt the uppity bitch to show her what's what, especially if a carriage full of people are ignoring (=condoning) their whole interaction, so he must be right to treat the uppity bitch this way.

A man who would never conciously think of himself as a rapist could approach a woman on public transport "just to talk to her" and have any, all, or none of these motivations in his head, and how it proceeds from there is a random product of her reaction, onlookers' (usually lack of) reaction and the situation. The terrifying thing is that there is no way of knowing what will provoke this particular "perfectly reasonable guy" into the "attacker/rapist" state, and there is no way for us to win.

I feel like I'm not communicating this well, but it's a really interesting aspect of the interaction.

Child sexual abuse happens. It's wrong, it's tragic, and it should be dealt with so it becomes less common. But, viewing every adult or situation with suspicion is not the best way to go about that, and I think viewing every man or social interaction with a man you don't know as a potential rape threat is also not particularly productive.

This would be a great point were it not for the fact that the vast majority of child sexual abuse, like the vast majority of rape, is carried out by someone who knows the victim (and usually by someone who prompts the response "[X] is a good person, they couldn't possibly have raped a woman/molested a child!"). You are proving the exact point you think you are refuting.

Yup, jennykopinski. It's almost like women might know more about what happens to them than men do, so men shuould sit down and shut up. How I long for that day.

So we are just being fucked up

Absolutely, snarkysmachine. Asserting that a woman's right to determine her own personal boundaries and ride on public transport in safety is more important than someone else's right (no matter who they are) to force unwanted attention on her is completely fucked up. I'm glad you caught us on this one. Next time a strange man approaches me on public transport and ignores all the cues I am giving out that I don't want to talk to him, I will absolutely pause to ask "Wait, could it be that this guy is non-neurotypical and therefore can't help missing these cues? I guess I'd better engage in a conversation I DON'T

FUCKING WANT TO ENGAGE IN for the next ten minutes until I can tell for sure."

Because I have no right to refuse time and attention to any man, lest it hurt their poor feelings, and it is absolutely up to me to caters to his wants and needs. I feel like there's a whole comments thread about this somewhere.

87. Ruth

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:48 PM

There is a difference between a behavior and a characteristic.

It is unfortunate that some very kind people who have a certain characteristic (such as Asperger's), might present a certain behavior(s), due to that condition, that could be easily misinterpreted as threatening.

But responding in a guarded or self-protective manner to aggressive behavior is not racist.

88. Rantonimo

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:49 PM

You know, if you replace "man" with "young black male", and "rapist" with "mugger", and substitute the appropriate statistics, you've got yourself an argument you'd see on Stormfront. Is it OK for me to go with "Schrodinger's mugger" and assume that any young black guy I see on the subway is a mugger until I know otherwise? Because assuming that any man could be a rapist is about the same mentality.

89. LilahMorgan

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:51 PM

*And this is a completely different scenario than walking home and seeing a black man and being afraid because, you know, black! people! OMG! There's a huge difference between reacting to a real threat (even an inadvertent one) and reacting to a threat *that exists only in your imagination because you are a bigot.**

Wait a minute, here; I'm not disagreeing with your general point, but I think this vastly oversimplifies things. It's not a matter of either (a) only being nervous when someone is pacing right behind you for several blocks (and yeah, someone who matches their pace to mine IS one of the things that will get me nervous no matter WHO is doing it), or (b) being a straight up bigot who runs and screams when they see a POC. We all perceive a lot of things every time we go out, and it filters into our brain and then sometimes down into our actions, not even necessarily at a conscious level. And most men of color, I think, will talk about women clutching their purses closely when they walk past them or locking their car doors at intersections and the like, things I think white men get much less of. It doesn't mean that women are being irrational by being on guard; it means that the prejudices that affect other aspects of our life and thoughts also come out to play in our perceptions of risk, too.

90. snarkysmachine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:52 PM

"Absolutely, snarkysmachine. Asserting that a woman's right to determine her own personal boundaries and ride on public transport in safety is more important than someone else's right (no matter who they are) to force unwanted attention on her is completely fucked up. I'm glad you caught us on this one. Next time a strange man approaches me on public transport and ignores all the cues I am giving out that I don't want to talk to him, I will absolutely pause to ask "Wait, could it be that this guy is non-neurotypical and therefore can't help missing these cues? I guess I'd better engage in a conversation I DON'T

Because I have no right to refuse time and attention to any man, lest it hurt their poor feelings, and it is absolutely up to me to caters to his wants and needs. I feel like there's a whole comments thread about this somewhere."

Um, what? I just asked to clarify what "creepy" meant, as it appears it was being conflated with some behaviors attributed to folks on the spectrum. It did seem fucked up. I'm not exactly sure how this request takes a quantum leap to me now believing folks don't have a right to make choices about their safety. I think I've said that over and over again.

Also, you all can lose the patronizing tone. This isn't my first ride at the rodeo.

91. [lightcastle](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:52 PM

Caitlin:

So, they acknowledge the reality that a strange man in a public space may want to do a woman serious harm ("learn self defense"), but they still can't see why a lot of the time in that situation, a woman choses to be polite rather than confrontational to someone who is probably bigger, stronger (and more pissed off at being rejected) than themselves? I call bullshit. (And that's without even getting in to the socialisation women receive to be polite and kind and take care of everyone, all the time, forever.)

Well, in one case (mentioned on the earlier thread), the comment was that while feminists think women are in danger and can be met by violence if they tell someone to back off, in fact this never happens except in cases where the person was obviously disturbed. As proof, he points to the fact that in the other thread, people were proud of the times they told the guy to back off and he did.

The other case is a self-defense teacher. Since so much of self-defense is mental and feeling confident, women need to be confident and stop feeling like victims. Then they wouldn't be afraid when nice men come to talk to them.

In a way, it's Lori's argument of "I refuse to live my life in fear". See, not talking to men shows you have a victim mentality – or something.

sigh

92. [JennyRose](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:54 PM

I think it is pretty unlikely that a man will get a date as a result of talking to a strange woman on public transportation or such a setting. So why do they even do it? My guess is that is a combination of privilege and cluelessness.

I also think women need to stand up to these clods when possible. These guys have no qualms about violating a woman's boundaries and are probably not even aware of or disregard go away signals such as reading a book. When I was a teenager riding a train on the outside seat, an average looking man pressed his dick right against my upper arm. It took me a few moments to even realize what was happening. I was scared, then angry. Much to my amazement I yelled at him to stop it. He shifted away. I was still enraged so I yelled again for him to move. At that point the train stopped and he literally ran out the exit saying "You're crazy lady." I still get mad thinking about it.

Maybe I am a fool, but I am fairly confident and don't really feel threatened in such public situations. I once lived in a very bad neighborhood and the skills I learned there are still important to me. Women do need to be careful but we cannot live in such fear that we fail

to assert ourselves when it is safe to do so. Yes men and male privilege are responsible for the rape culture but we as women need to stand up for ourselves whenever possible.

Rapists are predators and they look for easy prey. I know this because I was raped by a person I thought was my friend. I was an easy victim looking back, he knew I was sad and lonely, acted like a friend and offered me alcohol. Then he raped me. I am sure he thought it was sex. He only became violent when I woke up and fought back. At the point of violence I just accepted it and waited for it to end. You can bet I will help my daughter avoid such traps. I will make sure she has enough self esteem so that she never needs such a friend and when it is appropriate; tell her how a predator operates.

In a way, the doofs on the public bus tend to make me more angry than frightened.

93. *TLP*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:56 PM

"I just wanted to give you a compliment!" No, asshole, you wanted me to talk to you. If all you wanted was to give me a compliment, you wouldn't have kept talking after I nodded and turned away again.

Yes, Laura M.! Exactly!

94. *Just Some Trans Guy*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 2:56 PM

Starling,

Thanks so much for the reply! It was just a tiny thing, but it was nagging at the back of my mind. Had my fingers crossed that I wouldn't be That Dude Who Derails. Also ...

"But saying, 'Dude, the guy's jumpy because he's a Vietnam vet' makes sense to people. Sometimes, saying, 'Dude, the woman's a little nervous because she doesn't know you' just gets, 'BUT I'M A GOOD GUY!'"

That is so, so true. And so frustrating.

Unrelatedly, I really do think the onus is on men to not be creepy vs. on women to not be afraid of potentially creepy men. And it's imminently doable. I knew a guy in college who realized that women were going to be afraid of him when alone at night, because, hi, rape culture. So he tried to mitigate that as best he could—not walking too close to women if he passed them on the street, not staring or really even looking at them, etc., basic stuff like that.

And he never felt it was a great burden to do and he never took it personally. He's the kind of guy I've tried to be since coming out as trans.

95. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:00 PM

About generally awkward people – just being awkward doesn't let you off the hook for poor behavior. If someone's is attempting to interact to get a certain result, and their behavior consistently returns another, perhaps opposite, result, it is their obligation to change that behavior. Period.

Sure, that person might never achieve suavity and debonairness, but we should all strive for general non-creepiness at whatever level is attainable.

language at all, they come across as privileged and rude and shitty. There is no need to speak a second language with native fluency, but making the attempt signals that you can see the world from a perspective outside of your head and that you are less of a douche for it.

96. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:01 PM

STARLING THIS IS SO FANTASTIC!

I have to admit I'm troubled by the idea that somehow every man should be viewed as a potential rapist.

But every man **IS** a potential rapist... as well as a potential non-rapist, as well as a lot of other things, some of them good. However: lots of women have indeed gotten raped by lots of men, and this has been true for a really really really long time. So yes, in that sense, men qua men are potential rapists vis-a-vis women. And women didn't cook up this problem. Please don't suggest that the truly unfortunate thing about the scenario is that it hurts some men's feelings, or makes them have to try a little harder to gain trust.

Because if the men are so sad about it they can start using their male privilege to challenge the horrid definition of masculinity in the dominant culture. Oh, except — THE GUYS WHO ACTUALLY DO THAT tend to have a clue about why women are hesitant to trust them and don't hold it against them or whine about how it's so haaaaaard to feel like you're seen as a potential rapist. (Hint: it's even worse to be raped!)

Yes, using common sense makes sense. But, to me, assuming that a guy who says hi to you on a bus may want to rape you is taking that a step too far, and isn't much different from the parents who refuse to allow their 11-year-old to walk two blocks to the bus stop lest they be kidnapped by one of the child molesters hiding in the bushes.

Slight derail: You know, I used to like Lenore Skenazy, the "Free-Range Parenting" lady who's gotten such publicity saying that child abduction risk perception is way overblown. I thought, "At last, someone telling parents that there's not nearly so much to be afraid of as they've been told." Having read her blog for a while, I've changed my mind. She now strikes me as yet ANOTHER person who has gotten one good idea about parenting that might help some parents in a particular situation... and used it as a reason to snicker with her friends and point at "those other mothers" who don't do things to her specifications. Oddly enough, this does NOT, actually, help the feeling that many parents have that they're being watched and judged at all times and so had better be hyper-vigilant about NOT SCREWING UP!! Which I **thought** was what Skenazy meant to call attention to in the first place, but I guess not. So, yeah...if you see a parent who is more worried about child abduction than you are, and so won't let her or his kid do some things, consider that maybe their hypervigilance makes sense to them, in their circumstances. You don't know but that they might have had a scare or a tragedy. Do you suspect abuse? If not, please please please cut them some slack.

97. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:04 PM

Lori, this post is not an instruction manual to women on why they should regard every man as a rapist; it's a rejoinder to the scads of men who think women owe them conversation just by being in public.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:04 PM

"Bagelsan's was looking at the fact that the man himself may not know yet which way he's going to go in a situation, and will act according to how other people respond."

And **that** is exactly why I feel weird about phrases like "he'd never really hurt anyone" or "he's harmless." I mean, how the fuck do you know that? There is a good chance that some male in my extended family raped someone at some point. I don't know of any incidents, but let's face facts, right? The odds are pretty good. I find this a horrifying thing to contemplate, because as far as I know, my male relatives are good guys. In fact, I can add all my male friends and acquaintances, who, as far as I know, have never raped anyone. Let's add all the men on the bus, too.

I'm up to hundreds of men now, and the likelihood that none of them are rapists is rapidly approaching zero. So while right now I could say in all honesty that none of the men I know are rapists, I'm wrong. And not just a little.

99. *jessi*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:05 PM

"This would be a great point were it not for the fact that the vast majority of child sexual abuse, like the vast majority of rape, is carried out by someone who knows the victim (and usually by someone who prompts the response "[X] is a good person, they couldn't possibly have raped a woman/molested a child!"). You are proving the exact point you think you are refuting."

I don't think she is. Because the majority of child sexual abuse/rape is carried out by someone who knows the victim, what good does the fear of strangers do you?

"For all those who don't live in fear, or don't think you do, I beg to differ. Do you lock your doors at night? Do you lock your car?"

No, I don't. I go running alone in the woods and if I'm in the mood, I go for a walk alone at night. Because all of these situations are no more likely to end in me being assaulted than being with an old friend alone in his apartment or visiting my grandfather.

100. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:06 PM

LilahMorgan, yes, it totally does oversimplify, and the fact is that we—as human beings in a culture with a lot of nasty biases—DO make **unfair** evaluations based on race or class or a host of other problems. Sometimes these evaluations are lumped right on top of legitimate evaluations of threat based on location or behavior. Trying to drain out that swamp of social preconditioning is hard and painful, no question. But that's not what we're talking about here.

I am not arguing that men should stop being black, or stop being lower-class, or even stop being different (although I do think that the cockroach tats went a little too far. Dude.) I'm arguing that women have a legitimate right to worry about their personal safety, and that there are actions men can take to make themselves seem less threatening. These actions are rooted in a respect for a woman's autonomy and wishes.

What I'm going for is a bit of consciousness-raising for guys who don't see a woman's world as inherently a little more dangerous. I don't object to raising consciousness of other problems. But I don't think that other problems—bigotry, racism, classism—are made worse by calling attention to this specific women's issue, either.

101. *martini*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:06 PM

Ruth, great point about behaviour vs. characteristics.

102. *A Sarah*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:07 PM

You know, if you replace "man" with "young black male", and "rapist" with "mugger", and substitute the appropriate statistics, you've got yourself an argument you'd see on Stormfront. Is it OK for me to go with "Schrödinger's mugger" and assume that any young black guy I see on the subway is a mugger until I know otherwise? Because assuming that any man could be a rapist is about the same mentality.

Right, and if you hang a "Whites Only" sign outside of your house instead of a "This house protected by ADT Security" you're a racist. Therefore nobody should hang signs outside of their homes, but rather everyone should just open the door to whomever regardless of how they feel about it.

Rantonimo, seems to me you've been a shit-stirrer before. I'm off to check, but consider yourself provisionally on bannination warning.

103. *alibelle*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:11 PM

I love the comment about the 17 year old boys not understanding about the steps girls take to protect themselves in dark parking lots. I was at a graduation after party in a park at night. 2 of the people in our group wandered off and we couldn't find them. Eventually we ended up sitting in my car hoping they would come back to where they knew we would be, before it had gone on too long and we had to call the cops or something. We were nervously discussing things our mothers tell us to keep us safe. One girl said her mom tells her not to wear her hair in a ponytail when she runs or she'll get raped. All the girls nod and laugh, and talk about how it sucks because who likes to have their hair down when running? The boys were baffled, we finally explained that hair in a ponytail could act as a handle to pull us back with.

This is a great post, it's beautiful and I'm getting annoyed with the people calling this living in fear. I don't live in fear. I was planning a camping trip with my friends once, all female, all 18 grown feminist women. I get a text from one saying that her mother won't let us go without a boy because we'll end up getting raped. I carefully explained that I was bringing a baseball bat and other defensive tools, we'd have a fire, a knife, and our brains. We didn't end up going, but I wasn't the one living in fear there.

Snarkysmachine, I'm not sure what you're going for, what do you want? If you want the baggage unpacked fucking unpack it yourself. Explain it to us, and explain how we should tell the difference between creepy guy on the bus and autistic guy on the bus. I have friends with autism and other difficulties, I watch out for how they act in public, and I accept their behavior towards me because I know it's not violent or dangerous. I don't think we have to on the bus or train though and sense these are the areas Starling is addressing I see no reason to bring up others. Besides, Sweet Machine has addressed this in regard to her brother in the xkcd post, take a look.

Also, Lori, we actually do have an unalienable right to not interact with other people if we don't want to. Life, liberty and property, I think it can fit into one or all of those.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:11 PM

Um, what? I just asked to clarify what "creepy" meant, as it appears it was being conflated with some behaviors attributed to folks on the spectrum. It did seem fucked up. I'm not exactly sure how this request takes a quantum leap to me now believing folks don't have a right to make choices about their safety. I think I've said that over and over again.

snarkysmachine, I think I took some of my frustration from the other thread out on you, which wasn't a fair thing to do. I appreciate that for people with Asperger's or who have other issues with reading social cues, it's hard to get the messages people are trying to send, and they can come off as "creepy" without intending to do so. The point I am making is that there is no difference, as first glance, between a strange man on public transport who doesn't understand the cues that I don't want to talk to him, and a man who *chooses* to ignore them because as a woman I don't have the right to refuse to talk to him.

It is not up to me to take the time to determine which is which before I decide whether I want to continue talking to him. Assessing this discussion as "fucked up" denies the rights of women to determine whatever boundaries they feel they need to determine their personal safety, which clearly isn't what you're about, so I think we're just coming at this from a different perspective.

I'm not saying no socially awkward (for whatever reason) man should ever talk to any woman ever. I'm talking about a very specific situation: unknown man talking to woman on public transport and continuing interaction regardless of whether she wants to interact with him. If a man can't understand (because of Asperger's or for any other reason) why that might be problematic, or how to tell whether it's okay to keep talking to her — well, hey, here's a whole post about that. The resources are there, if men choose to use them. It isn't up to me to cater to them if they don't, no matter who they are.

105. *Gail*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:11 PM

Lori:

For me it isn't so much about fearing every stranger as it is my right to be left alone. Yes yes YES I do have that right and I think it's sad that you don't think that you do.

Freedom of speech goes both ways. I have the right to say whatever I want and other people have the right to not listen to me. They can turn off whatever media I've engaged to get my message across; turn off the tv, radio, shut the book, click off the blog, walk away with fingers in ears going, "la la la la la!!"

My body, INCLUDING MY EARS, is my property and you do not have the right to access it any time you want just because you feel like it. I'm not saying I refuse to ever listen to some pathetic lady yammer about her daughter's stupid wedding, or engage a guy or several guys in harmless banter, I do that all the time. What I am saying is if I feel like shutting the conversation down because I don't want to talk then it is definitely my freakin right to do so dammit.

As far as little kids yelling? No I don't like it and it makes me cringe, but that's what little kids do. That's also why God gave me fingers I can stick in my ears.

106. *Shiyiya*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:18 PM

Urrrrrrrgh. Anita's comment just reminded me that I have an uncle who (statutory? I've never really been told the details, just that I should avoid being alone with him) raped a

fifteen year old girl and was never charged. I really don't like remembering I'm related to that.

More on-topic, the self-aggrandizing bullshit people spout about "choosing not to live their lives in fear" is really, really irritating. I didn't spend every city bus ride I took to community college terrified of every male on the bus, but I was very aware of where they were in relation to me and got trapped into several conversations with no out (come to think of it, the guy who told me I danced pretty because I was apparently absently moving my head to mentally singing is the kind of drive-by compliment that might have escalated if I had tried to brush him off instead of being as incredibly polite as I've been taught and continued the conversation.)

Argh, I keep knocking myself offtopic. Hope that made some kind of sense. I'm bad about tangents.

The thing about the seventeen year olds and the parking lot is really interesting! I'll shup now.

Am I the only one who read snarkysmachine's "fucked up" comment as he was going to tell his friends that oh he and they are just fucked up and hopeless and it being a really passive-aggressive comment?

Time to hit post and hope again I didn't stick my foot in my mouth. Sorry in advance if I did.

107. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:22 PM

You know, if you replace "man" with "young black male", and "rapist" with "mugger", and substitute the appropriate statistics, you've got yourself an argument you'd see on Stormfront. Is it OK for me to go with "Schrodinger's mugger" and assume that any young black guy I see on the subway is a mugger until I know otherwise? Because assuming that any man could be a rapist is about the same mentality.

This is why it's important to talk about privilege and intersectionality, and why I'm glad that snarkysmachine has pushed us to talk more precisely about it. White people have a lot of societal reinforcement for their "black people are threatening and violent" prejudices: rates of imprisonment, media coverage of crime, and centuries of racism reinforce the lie that — despite the fact that they are privileged in every aspect of society vis a vis POC — white people are in danger from black people. Institutionalized racism reinforces the idea that "every black man is a potential mugger," and it also ensures that if a white person really **is** attacked by a black person, the full force of the law will be used to follow up on that crime.

By contrast, women do NOT have privilege vis a vis men, and attacks on women by men are NOT prosecuted with the full force of the law. This is especially true if the attack victim is a WOC. This means that women must be extra vigilant about their safety around men, because both women and men know that many, many men *can and do* get away with it. Women know that and may view perfectly nice men — like the ones addressed by this post! — as dangerous; that's disappointing for those men. Men know that and may choose to rape women whom they perceive as vulnerable; that's a bit more than disappointing for those women.

108. Just Some Trans Guy

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:24 PM

Also, sorry, Fillyjonk, I missed your reply:

"No, I wouldn't say it's in 'what about the menz' territory, but it's close to another type of derail (not that I think you're derailing!) where people argue that because they lack one form of privilege, the ones they have are irrelevant."

No, male privilege, I haz it. My trans status complicates it, possibly, but in no way negates it. Just to be very clear about that.

109. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:25 PM

Shiyiya, I agree about "choosing not to live in fear." What we actually do is usually skate at the edge of our tolerance for risk, which varies widely from person to person. Generally speaking, the fewer really scary experiences we've had, the higher our tolerance for risk. But that doesn't mean that people who have a very low tolerance for risk have "chosen" to live in fear. They have been *made afraid* by people who have done bad things to them. That's not a choice, that's the opposite of a choice. And it's really NOT something to condemn the victim for.

110. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:28 PM

Okay, so I'm noticing people I respect are being nicer than I was to Lori and rantonimo, whom I snarked at. I'm considering that this might indicate I'm just in a pissy mood and may regret having snarked later.

::goes off to consider::

111. *infamousqbert*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:36 PM

makes me wish i knew more straight, single men, to send this to.

112. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:36 PM

Regarding the point of replacing shrodinger's rapist with shrodinger's mugger for young black men: sweet machine's response makes perfect sense, pointing the big difference between the scenarios, where in one the "targeted" group are men (the "privileged"), while in the other it is people of color (the "under privileged"). I agree with that. However, it is still a confusing question (to me) — is it common sense / understandable sensitivity to view young black men as potential muggers, or is it really just bigotry and reacting to a danger in your bigotted mind? Isn't the danger real in the statistical sense? It seems like sterling and others view the "shrodinger rapist" analogy as completely fine and sensible, while the "shrodinger mugger" as obviously morally wrong and bigotted. Is it really this simple (on both questions)?

Personally, I do not think of poc as potential muggers (or at least I consciously try to overcome my bias and predisposition as a white person in this society), but I also really do not usually think of men as potential rapist (except in really creepy situation, like being followed in a dark alley — it certainly does not cross my mind on a daily basis).

Perhaps the answer is that even though thinking of a young black man as a shrodinger mugger is understandable, it should be fought and resisted, *because* of the societal situation and state of bigotry. What do you think?

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:40 PM

This is fabulous. Thanks so much for posting it.

I like running in the park when it's dark outside. It's cooler, it's quiet, I have it to myself, and generally I am much more afraid of the coyotes I've occasionally seen there than that there is a scary man hiding in the bushes who might hurt me. I've seen the stats, and technically I'm much more at risk staying home in my living room, so I go out for a run. So in that sense I "refuse to live my life in fear." (I also am blisteringly trusting of strangers in many many ways and it's usually rewarding but sometimes it gets me screwed—this is a temperament/personality difference more than a difference in reasoning, I think.) But. I am hyper-conscious of my surroundings. I run with something in my fist. I prevent myself from daydreaming and keep my attention focused and present. It's probably not something a man in that situation would do.

It hurts to think that 1/10 of the men I know are undetected rapists, according to that link that was posted. I would so love to believe that *my* male friends are special exceptions to this general rule.

114. *mcm*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:44 PM

Ok, I feel like a dummy being the first one to ask this after over 100 comments but can someone explain "Schrodinger's Rapist" as a concept.

Note that I did read the wiki article on Schrodinger and the one on his cat experiment and I am still having trouble understanding why that term is being used in this context. The whole quantum mechanics thing...*woosh*, right over my head.

Love the discussion. I learn so much here.

115. *Ruth*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:45 PM

@martini: Thanks!

@nicegirlphd: I think it's behavior vs. characteristics, again. We should not assume that someone is a mugger because of their characteristics (race or other).

But it makes sense be on guard against being mugged, raped, etc., based on someone's threatening/suspicious behavior.

116. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:47 PM

nicegirlphd, I am really not sure what you're asking. Are you asking about crime statistics? Because Professor Google can help you with that. If you're asking about whether it's just *true* that young black men are scary, well, that's not a question you want to be asking here.

Can someone who hasn't taken crazy sudafed this morning explain Schrodinger's cat to mcm?

117. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:50 PM

Ruth, I agree with you (and indeed in my first comment I said I completely agree with all the bold-face stuff in Sterling's post). No doubt regarding response to behavior. And even without any provocative behavior, there is every right for a woman (or anyone) to not

engage in conversation with someone else, even if the someone else is interested.

But Sterling (and others here, such as a sarah) also make the point that just the fact of being a man, given the unfortunate situation in society, makes him already a potential rapist (and many other things). This is the point I both agree with, to some extent, but also struggle with, from a moral standpoint.

118. *infamousqbert*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:51 PM

mcm: Schrodinger's Cat is a very famous philosophical problem. it hinges on the idea that, by observing a phenomenon, we affect it. So, in this situation, a given man is neither "a rapist" nor "not a rapist" until we have interacted with him and found out by his raping or not raping.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schr%C3%B6dinger%27s_cat

119. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:52 PM

The cat has the potential to be both alive and dead depending on unknown factors.

The stranger has the potential to be both a rapist and not a rapist depending on unknown factors.

120. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:53 PM

Actually, if I saw a guy wearing a "rape is funny" t-shirt, I would just assume he is probably a jerkoff such as appear in many internet threads. Most serial rapists would work hard not to arouse suspicion that way.

I respectfully disagree. Sure, a premeditated serial rapist probably **would** work hard not to arouse suspicion.

But I don't think the vast majority of rapists are premeditated serial rapists.

I think the vast majority of rapists are ordinary guys — sometimes jerkoffs in internet threads, sometimes not — who have yawning chasms where their understanding of consent should be, and who feel entitled to "apply a little pressure" or "just thirty more seconds I'm almost there" or "could tell she was into it". Ordinary guys. Which makes it more terrifying.

I have a terrible feeling that many, many rapists are men who would NEVER haul a strange woman into the woods, but who think that if they shelled out the big bucks for dinner and a show, someone owes them. Or that women who are too drunk to resist are awesome good fun. Or that once she's come home with him, well, that's one big yes, amirite?

Oops. She said it first and better.

121. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:53 PM

Oops, I forgot the part about how you don't know for sure the cat is alive or dead until you open the box. And you don't know for sure that the guy is a rapist until it's too late and you're already in danger.

122. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:53 PM

mcm: The gist of Schrodinger's cat is that you don't know whether the cat will be alive or dead until you open the box, so it's in a state of being both at once. Schrodinger's rapist is any man who starts an unwanted conversation like people have discussed – if you ask him to stop, he could back off politely, or he could flip out and try to set you on fire and follow you home, and you don't know which one it will be. Super condensed version help explain it better?

123. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:54 PM

Since someone brought up this comment, I'm going to quote what I said about my brother in another recent thread:

I fully understand that people who are not neurotypical may not know or may not be able to attend to typical social cues. My brother, who is cognitively disabled, is one of these people; he often overshares with casual acquaintances or wants to hug people he doesn't know very well. I absolutely despise it when people say mean things or stare at him in public; however, if he went to hug someone and they said "Don't touch me" or something much harsher that meant the same thing, I would fully understand. And you know what? So would my brother, if I explained to him afterwards why that person might have reacted that way. He would be really sorry that he had acted inappropriately, because he is a genuinely nice man who respects other people deeply even though he does not always act socially appropriately.

124. *Shiyiya*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:54 PM

Inafter a few other people there. Oh well

125. *Starling*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:55 PM

My dad is a physicist, and he routinely explains things like dating to me by starting out, "If the number of men you meet is x , then $f(x)$ is" Sorry!

Essentially the point is that the cat in the box is either alive or dead. We don't know, because it's in the box. We can calculate the probability, but until the box is opened, the cat exists in a state of uncertainty. Dead? Alive? Somewhere between the two? Auughh! The quantum mechanics implication here is a little mind-boggling, but the metaphorical implication is that there is a certain percentage of rapists in the general population of men. Upon meeting a man, we have no information about him other than the general stats. We collect more information as we go, but that information does not erase the uncertainty. It just changes the odds. The only way we know for sure—the only way the box can be opened, as it were—is if the man proves himself a rapist by committing a rape, either against us or against someone else.

This is obviously true about murders and all the rest, as well, but the percentage of murderers is much lower, and there isn't the same social expectation that one will prevent one's own murder like one is supposed to prevent one's own rape. Although, since the vast majority of murders among women are tied to sexual partners or sexual assault, that's an interesting disconnect.

126. *Shoshie*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:56 PM

therefore we shouldn't talk to people or make eye contact or smile oh God where is the social interaction what is the world coming to?! But I think this post explained in plain language what most women intuit because of rape culture. You may not think that you're assessing the possibility of an attacker when in public, but I would be very surprised if you weren't a bit more cautious at night, or if waiting for the bus alone with a stranger. Those are situations where you're more likely to encounter a rapist, so it's right to be more on guard.

When I encounter a person, especially a man, who violates my person space and social cues, I am also experiencing a situation where there's higher probably that the person is someone who will attack me. That's raising the risk too high for my personal comfort and safety and, statistically, I have a valid reason to feel that way. I don't owe anyone social interaction. Whereas, if I'm sitting on a plane and someone doesn't like fatz, well, that's tough noogies because I paid for my seat and I AM owed that passage on that plane.

Snarkysmachine- I've tried to find a less assholeish way of saying this, but to be honest, it's not my job to be concerned with WHY someone in public is being creepy. Maybe they have Asperger's. Maybe they weren't allowed to play with other kids as a child. Maybe they're supergeeks who lack social skills. Those are unfortunate situations, but, to be honest, not my responsibility to explore why someone's being creepy on the bus. I try not to be rude as a general rule, but I have no obligation to make conversation while in public. I certainly have no obligation to make conversation while in public while the other party is making my uncomfortable. I don't think that's fucked up, I think that's common sense.

127. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:58 PM

I'm glad we're discussing intersectionality on this, because which man I subconsciously perceive as a threat versus which man I perceive as an unwanted privileged intrusion who may *turn out* to be a threat is definitely influenced by race and class in ways I wish it weren't, and am trying to change. I'm not going to deny that, and it's something I'm working on unpacking. However, it still doesn't mean I have an obligation to talk to any man for any reason, which is what we're talking about here, and Sweet Machine's point about where the dynamics of privilege lie in each situation is well made.

A Sarah, I don't know about Rantonimo, but I haven't addressed Lori's comments much because they come from the same place as her comments on [this thread](#) and she didn't listen then. So it is not lack of snark because I don't have a problem with the notion that we should all live in a world of lovely interpersonal communication, happiness and kittens and that it is up to women make this happen by not being so crazily paranoid, but because Lori clearly doesn't see where other women are coming from on this and wants to repeatedly tell us how we could handle it better. Eh.

mcm, Schrodinger's Cat is in a box and may be alive or dead, and we have no way of knowing until we look inside the box. So up to that point both forms potentially exist — the alive cat and the dead cat — and when we look inside we collapse the potentialities into one of those states. In the same way, we cannot see Shrodinger's rapist's intentions. He may be a rapist or not a rapist and we can't know which (and as mentioned above, possibly neither can he). The only point when we find out which (=look inside in the box) is the point at which he either escalates into violence or walks away, at which point it is too late for us to do anything about it.

That's how I understand it, anyway. I am so not a philosopher or quantum physicist!

128. *lijakaca*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 3:58 PM

nicegirlphd,

I believe that your Schrodinger's rapist is much more statistically likely than Schrodinger's mugger for the average person. I think the difference is that the mugger scenario is *made to seem more likely* in the MSM and by patterns of racism in society and ourselves.

Plus, a mugger is a one-time interaction, whereas a rapist may not rape you that day when they first approach you, but the interaction might be ongoing, with many possible times that they may rape.

I don't think I'm explaining things well, I'm sorry about that.

129. *celeloriel*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:00 PM

Sure, SM, I'll take a stab at it.

mcm, 'Schrodinger's cat' refers to a hypothetical situation set up involving a cat in a box. (Feel free to make your cat macro jokes here.)

The box is closed. We know the cat's inside it. In this scenario, there are ONLY two options: the cat is alive, OR the cat is dead.

Now, the quantum mechanics (and some trippy experiments with radiation) enter the classic Schrodinger's cat idea here, but *for our purposes of analogy* that doesn't matter.

Please note: FOR OUR PURPOSES, the cat cannot be both alive-and-dead — that just doesn't make any sense outside the framework of quantum mechanics, and we won't be addressing it.

So. Moving on with the simplified analogy. Until we open the box, we do not KNOW what state the cat's in. Remember, it's either one or the other. When we open the box, we are able to determine the state of the cat.

Now, let's tie this into the "schrodinger's rapist" idea. When a man, any man, approaches a woman, he is either a rapist or not-a-rapist. UNTIL he demonstrates danger, she will not know if he intends to rape her or not. (Demonstrating danger, here, is the equivalent of opening the box in the cat experiment.)

Therefore, men who approach women uninvitedly in public spaces can be classified as Schrodinger's Rapist – which means, simply, that a woman does not know if a man is a rapist when that man approaches her without her invitation.

The post above gives some tips for men so that they may show, via social interaction, that they are in the state of not-a-rapist.

(Does this make sense?)

130. *CatsMcGee*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:01 PM

This is wonderful. Thank you for this.

131. *Alibelle*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:01 PM

Can I also point out that Schrödinger's Rapist applies to those who are not socially normal, or borderline creepy or whatever due to developmental difficulties or other mental issues? Just because someone has Asperger's doesn't mean that he won't rape you. The issues there are different, but the idea behind the post still applies.

132. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:02 PM

Just on SM's heels here, the whole question of whether it's ableist to place primary value on your safety even knowing that some people who are awkward will be mentally disabled or have had hard childhoods has been ably covered by several hundred comments in yesterday's thread. Caitlin was particularly funny. It's worth reading.

Nicegirlphd, it's not really sounding to me like you got the full thrust of SM's point? This isn't like Schrödinger's Mugger, it's like Schrödinger's Racist. POCs are absolutely justified in assuming that any white person they come in contact with has the potential to dehumanize them and there's nothing they can do about it. The *very structure of society* is what makes it rational to imagine that the members of the privileged class that you, as a member of an oppressed class, come in contact with may treat you like a member of an oppressed class. That's sort of what privilege and oppression *mean*. That's why the assumption that white people may behave in a privileged, racist, or ignorant way is fundamentally rational, and the assumption that black people will knife you is not. I think the false equivalency between rape and mugging comes from missing the fact that Schrödinger's Rapist, with a P, is not as much about the violence as about the context of that violence — that you owe a man attention, favors, or access simply by virtue of being a woman.

133. *celeloriel*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:03 PM

oh, damn, lots of other people commented while I was being explain-ful. sorry for the repeat.

134. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:05 PM

sweet machine, here's my question — why is "are men really scary" ok to ask here, while "are young black men really scary" not ok?

(it seems to me the first question is asked in the post and discussion, and the second question you say in your response I do not want to be asking here).

Both questions have to do with characteristics (not behavior) of the individual. And both have some basis in statistics.

I understand why the latter question is not ok, but ambivalent about why the first **is** ok. You already gave an answer (in the first case the end of the sentence is "to women" and in the second case it is "to whites" — very very different). I see that, and it does answer my question somewhat, but does not feel fully satisfactory to me — I am still a bit uneasy with the setup of Schrödinger's rapist in the post, for this reason. I'd be very interested in your (personally, and collectively) opinion.

135. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:08 PM

Nicegirlphd: Reframe in the context of privilege (already).

Are oppressors really scary to the oppressed?

Are the oppressed really scary to the oppressors?

Does that make the different meanings of "scary" more clear?

136. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:08 PM

Ooh, or what FJ said.

137. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:10 PM

You know, if you replace "man" with "young black male", and "rapist" with "mugger", and substitute the appropriate statistics, you've got yourself an argument you'd see on Stormfront. Is it OK for me to go with "Schrodinger's mugger" and assume that any young black guy I see on the subway is a mugger until I know otherwise? Because assuming that any man could be a rapist is about the same mentality.

Nope.

See those numbers Starling put in her post? They're not just there for decoration. The facts bear out that many, many men are rapists and they rape many, many women.

Whereas the facts do not bear out that white people are more at risk from black people: the facts are that violent crime is overwhelmingly INTRAracial.

138. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:12 PM

fillyjonk: yes. The difference is clear. And still it's not enough to make me feel comfortable with viewing a man as an oppressor just by virtue of being a man (but of course it's much more understandable than viewing a poc as an oppressor!). I am much more comfortable with the characteristic vs behavior framing.

On the other hand, this (and the bold stuff in the post) completely resonated with me: "[the assumption] that you owe a man attention, favors, or access simply by virtue of being a woman" — yes, that's exactly the problem, and that's the reason that I still like the original post despite my being a bit uncomfortable.

139. *Alibelle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:13 PM

I think what you're asking nicegirlphd is why is it not sexist to assume that all men will rape you? I get your point except that we aren't assuming that all men will actually rape us. We're assuming that there is the potential for that. You can also assume there is the potential that a black man will mug you, because there is, but you need to see that a white man might mug you too, there is the potential for that as well. This post is largely about cues that make the potential to do so turn into good odds it will happen. If I see a black man walking it is unreasonable to think the chances are good he will mug me, if I see a black man in a ski mask with a gun it is reasonable. The same with any race or gender here of course. If I just see a man in broad daylight I do not assume he will rape me, he might, I won't know until he does. However if I see a man in the dark in an alley I will assume he might rape me even though I don't know, can't know until he actually does rape me.

I hope I haven't put my foot in my mouth too much here. Please call me on it if you feel I have.

140. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:14 PM

And still it's not enough to make me feel comfortable with viewing a man as an oppressor just by

That's not really up to you, though. It's already true. It's been true. It's what male privilege and patriarchy and institutionalized sexism and misogyny are about — whether or not an individual man is himself an antisexist or a nice guy is irrelevant to that calculation. If you want to ignore it, that's fine, that's your choice, but you absolutely cannot pretend it's something we made up and expect to be part of the conversation here.

141. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:14 PM

A Sarah, I don't know about Rantonimo

Well, I looked up hir comments and I both was and was not thinking of the same person. The comment that had stuck with me was the “*the problem is not that good food is too pricey but that bad food is too cheap. I don't see a feasible way to make good food cost less, but if we make bad food cost more, it at least becomes a level playing field.*” one a while back, which made many people pretty pissed-off. But since then zie has had genuine comments, and also, everyone has an off day, and I've also made comments that I regretted, and also I was away from the blog for a while because of starting the new job so I didn't have the context, etc. etc.

Anyway, Rantonimo, I thought you were someone whose contributions amounted to “let's make bad food cost more” and “this is the same as being afraid of black people because they're black,” so that's where the bannination warning was coming from. Sorry, it was an honest misunderstanding, and I see now that's not the case.

142. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:17 PM

Alibelle's points are also good, in the sense that this post is clearly about men who want attention from you and are unwilling to abide by your boundaries. That's not nearly as simple as saying “you think all men are rapists!” Male privilege and lack of regard for your wishes are essentially weapons they are flashing at you.

143. *the fat nutritionist*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:18 PM

This is so wonderful. Especially:

It is that your desire to interact trumps her right to be left alone.

I'd also like to point out that, when I told people that I was nervous about every interaction I have with a strange man because I am trying to judge my probability of being *raped and dismembered*, people were just SHOCKED.

And I was shocked that they were shocked. Past experience is a hell of a drug.

144. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:19 PM

You forgot the important statistic though: Three quarters of rape are by men already known to the women. Being a stranger isn't the big problem.

OK, but how do we define “already known to the woman”? Wouldn't “that who bothers me on the bus every week” qualify? “That neighbor I've never had a conversation with” certainly seems to, as does “that guy who was at the party I was at” and “that manager at the restaurant I frequent”, so I think this post is spot on.

Once someone forces a certain number of painfully creepy and awkward conversations on you, they're *known to you*.

145. Koral Ozgul

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:19 PM

A great article. I'd really wish to translate it into my mother language and post somewhere with high visit rates. But...

PROBLEM 1: I don't think that many guys would read it up to the end (including those "good" guys).

PROBLEM 2: Those who would care to read this up to the end (as I did) with a frank attitude and effort to really understand and show empathy, would most probably be already knowing and respecting all these!

So, there may be negligible few people left who would sincerely read and yet haven't realized these yet before reading it.

146. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:21 PM

You forgot the important statistic though: Three quarters of rape are by men already known to the women. Being a stranger isn't the big problem.

Also, no post can be every post. We're right now talking about the other third. (And FYI, the fact that friends, partners, and family members are frequently the instigators of sexual assault? That doesn't exactly support the notion that we should all be more trusting of the poor men.)

147. snarkysmachine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:22 PM

"Can I also point out that Schrodinger's Rapist applies to those who are not socially normal, or borderline creepy or whatever due to developmental difficulties or other mental issues? Just because someone has Asperger's doesn't mean that he won't rape you. The issues there are different, but the idea behind the post still applies."

please point out where I stated this. i was not liking where the conversation was going in terms of "Creepy" because often times it ends up justifying some pretty problematic conversation, particularly in terms of race. And of course, it looks like a few folks were going in that direction, albeit in coded language. I am super uncomfy with conversations like these because those who ask others to question their language, check their privilege and unpacked their assumptions are shouted down because they are threatening someone's safety or idea of safety.

Instead of trying to beat me over the head with some tangent, why not look at the way we talk about threat and how that is tied to things like race, class, gender, ability status, sexual identity, gender identity recognizing that there are some societally sanctioned tropes that might play into how we define "risk". For example, it's pretty well established that behaviors of males of color (particularly black and latino) are often interpreted as "threatening" in a way that similar behaviors by white males would not.

I don't have the luxury from separating out my safety concerns with how the structure of privilege and oppression impact those I might fear. It's complicated for me and I don't always get it right. Still, it's very important to me to unpack my reasons for why I have reactions in certain situations where I feel unsafe, though naturally, getting myself SAFE is

I guess I am trying to find a balance between working "The gift of fear" and not using it as scapegoat for all my fucked up views on other people.

148. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:23 PM

And still it's not enough to make me feel comfortable with viewing a man as an oppressor just by virtue of being a man

That's not really up to you, though. It's already true. It's been true. If you want to ignore it, that's fine, that's your choice, but you absolutely cannot pretend it's something we made up and expect to be part of the conversation here.

hmm, interesting — this is getting to the heart of the matter (the matter likely being my not understanding basic feminism 101, I admit). Of course you did not invent oppression of women by men (and I am trying to get over the resentment of you dismissing me as a troll who pretends this – maybe written comments do not convey my tone well, and I am not a native English speaker so maybe I give this impression). Anyway, going back to the point: Men oppress women, sure. And **every** individual man has male-privilege, yes. But does this mean you can (should?) view an individual man as an oppressor? Is it true that every man **is** an oppressor already, like you say? I will think about that (truly).

149. *Murasaki*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:25 PM

Totally inadvertently followed you here from XX, Starling. :)

I can't seem to follow the advice of a very wise ex who very firmly, after sitting quite patiently through an infuriated rant of mine, advised, "Becky, NEVER read the comments." As such, it's extreme boredom or passion and little in between that leads me to comment myself, and why I lurk in many more places than I comment. This is purely the Internet, mind you- I'm quite happy to engage in passionate debate in the flesh.

I've been wrestling, since the xkcd-related article (I'm neither particularly passionate about the comic, which I've read maybe a dozen times in the past several years, usually because of a 'thoughtful' link from someone saying 'OMG this is totally you!'), about whether or not to speak up, because it, and subsequent ones since, have left a particular kind of feeling in my stomach- a barbed, crawly one, as though you'd swallowed a thumb tack in order to gain membership in the Cool Playground Girls, and were getting this growing sense of urgency and panic, half real and half illusion but all visceral, that you'd made a terrible, terrible, irreversible mistake.

I reserved comment because it was very clear that it would have been grossly unpopular, possibly very ill-received no matter how respectfully worded, possibly get me screamed at, and ultimately lead nowhere. I then had to wrestle with the feeling that followed: I WAS AFRAID OF OTHER WOMEN PUNISHING ME FOR DISAGREEING WITH THEM. Ironically, what I'd wrestled with putting forward was that I didn't share the same kind of fear, and felt like the definitions it was being dressed up in seemed wrong somehow.

I should point out that my fear of posting wasn't a disproportionate fear. I was afraid of angry response that would simply discourage me from posting again- not that someone was going to come firebomb my house. I was afraid of being called a bad feminist, of being insensitive to victims of trauma, of being insufficiently / incorrectly educated, etc. Possibly even in all caps. It would sting a little bit, and the last few days have been shitty enough

that in spiritual economics, I didn't feel like risking a little sting in my already depleted soul-exchequer.

I'm not going to flash my life-experience badge to credential my feelings, because Lori and Katrina have shown more courage than I and expressed essentially my sentiments. I dealt with my life traumas by forever assessing threat, looking for cover when loud things happened, mentally gauging everyone. I got called "paranoid" a lot and put a lot of friendships through the wringer.

Coming out the other side of 30, though, I've found that over the course of reluctant adulthood, it was the things I did to build my own confidence and personal power that calmed that. There were a lot of things in life I never wanted to give up completely, didn't want to sacrifice for not much in return. I love talking to strangers. Some of the most enlightening (platonic- really! honestly!) moments in my life have come from those dreaded conversations in the subway, at the bus stop, in the airport. I've learned to say "no" every single time I want to, and to know that I have the skills and wisdom to have a better-than-average chance of backing that "no" up if it isn't respected- which, 99% of the time, it is.

A Sarah said it well that "every man is a potential rapist... as well as a potential non-rapist, as well as a lot of other things, some of them good," but I think I'd take it in a different direction than her. I sincerely hope that I'm never hurt again, and that all the other women in my life have the same safety. Oh, god, where was I going with this again? As Starling said, everyone's risk calculus is their own. I've chosen, for myself, to keep taking the chance, because there's a lot of good stuff I want to be available for, and that I've discovered you can survive a lot of things you thought you couldn't beforehand.

This will raise some hackles, but this discussion has gotten me thinking a little bit about "female privilege" in this context. I've never been searched at an airport. When I've forgotten my employee ID, I've been waved through security areas where my male colleagues have been detained or denied entry. When other people's children smile, wave, or try to play with me in public, their parent permits me to interact with them, often at length, without being terrified, suspicious of my enjoyment of their child, or doing that mental calculus of what atrocities I might be capable of (I say this having looked into the faces of parents, victims, and perpetrators of said atrocities).

Furthermore, when I walk down the street, even at night, I can smile and say "hello" to strangers. (I often do. I enjoy the hell out of it.) I can tell another woman I love her shoes, or that I read that book, and while it may be clear she doesn't want to chat further, I know she's very likely not assessing whether I'm going to sexually assault her (or do anything else along the spectrum of unwanted outcomes).

Here I am sleeping with the enemy: I feel bad for the men in my life, the many good, honorable, strong, and kind men, that would love the people in the world to feel safe around them, to allow them the unreserved permission to be friendly and interested and engaging that I enjoy. I feel privileged that nobody would ever suspect me of doing things that have been done to me. My heart hurts when I think of how much smaller everyone's world- men's and women's- seems to have become in my short lifetime.

150. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:26 PM

the matter likely being my not understanding basic feminism 101, I admit

Yeah, this is definitely 101 stuff... let me ask you, nicely, to step away from the conversation until you do some basic reading on male privilege, since this isn't really a 101 space (and we've done a lot of basic education in the last couple threads, so since you seem willing to educate yourself I hope you don't mind getting the Smart Kid Treatment, where you're asked to go do your own research while we take care of disciplining the troublemakers).

151. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:28 PM

Fair enough – thanks for being nice! :)

152. *Alibelle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:28 PM

Snarkysmachine, I understand what you're saying, now. Earlier you weren't saying that though, you weren't saying what everyone assumed you meant either, but it was unclear. You came to the conversation angry and people get defensive. What you said in the last post was an extremely valid point, it however was not what you originally stated. There are dozens of issues lying beneath the surface, when you make a statement that could include many people are going to go for the most obvious one. Sorry if you feel like the people here were cruel, but I wasn't clear with what you were saying and I don't think anyone else really was at first either.

153. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:29 PM

I guess I am trying to find a balance between working "The gift of fear" and not using it as scapegoat for all my fucked up views on other people.

I think this is really important. I just read that book recently, and one of the things that really struck me (and made me angry) was about how all the false fears that are instilled in us culturally — through racism, ableism, and so on — actually distract us from *real* threats (like the "perfectly friendly" guy who is getting way too pushy on the bus, or what have you). It's very difficult to discern what makes someone seem "creepy" to us, and you're right that that reaction is not free from oppressive systems of belief and behavior. I really appreciate your comment.

154. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:29 PM

Still, it's very important to me to unpack my reasons for why I have reactions in certain situations where I feel unsafe, though naturally, getting myself SAFE is a priority and processing comes later.

Yeah, this is an important point — I think people, including me, were reading your earlier comments as eliding that second point (which is the point of the post, and the point of the many-hundreds-of-comments thread in the XKCD post that dealt with some of what you're bringing up). I'm glad you've been clear that you're asking to look at the intersectional import of this *while still understanding that safety can be paramount*. That wasn't clear and in the previous thread we definitely had people arguing seriously that because some men are developmentally / socially disabled and / or had difficult childhoods, it was unfair for personal safety to be our primary concern.

155. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:31 PM

It's complicated for me and I don't always get it right. Still, it's very important to me to unpack my reasons for why I have reactions in certain situations where I feel unsafe, though naturally, getting myself SAFE is a priority and processing comes later.

:nods: I've been thinking about this too. How do you hold both "Women in public are under no obligation to talk to strange men when they don't want to," and "Sometimes the specific reason a woman has to NOT want to talk to a strange man is, or is mixed in with, racism; and it's not good to be racist, and they should expect to get those assumptions critiqued by antiracists"? I think you just say both. At least that's the best I can come up with.

156. snarkysmachine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:32 PM

"Anyway, going back to the point: Men oppress women, sure. And *every* individual man has male-privilege, yes. But does this mean you can (should?) view an individual man as an oppressor? Is it true that every man *is* an oppressor already, like you say? I will think about that (truly)."

Yeah. Oppressor sounds all fanciful like a dungeon and a leather hood. Mostly it means who has the societally sanctioned power and the privilege to wield it unchecked. Men have this power over women. But yeah, it seems if your understanding of 101 is limited, there is probably a bit of catch up you'll need to do in order to get the gist of the post, which is firmly rooted in this perspective.

157. Anita

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:34 PM

nicegirlphd, I apologize if this is too 101 / pedantic – I just wanted to check something out with how you're using "oppressor".

I wonder if one of things that might help is clarifying how "oppressor" can be used. It can be used in an active sense, as in "The dictator oppressed the people," where the oppressor takes an active role.

With male privilege, there's additional entanglements because an individual with privilege exerts power even when he doesn't think about it, or mean to, or want to. It's one reason privilege is a helpful concept / term, because it doesn't require active agency on the part of the privileged.

So your question "are all men oppressors" reads to me like you're asking if all men want to oppress women, or if all men consciously do things to oppress women, which is a different question as to whether male privilege, which all men possess, oppresses women.

158. Starling

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:34 PM

Hey, being angry at Crappy Stuff is fine—let's not be dissing snarkysmachine for it. :-)

159. LilahMorgan

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:34 PM

*I think this is really important. I just read that book recently, and one of the things that really struck me (and made me angry) was about how all the false fears that are instilled in us culturally — through racism, ableism, and so on — actually distract us from *real* threats*

This often bothers me in discussions of women's risks (not here; in non-feminist spaces, primarily). And I think those false fears are oppressive in two directions, too – they're directed in racist, ablist, classist ways, and they're also meant to limit what women do, by teaching them at that it's not safe to strike out in certain ways, or express themselves in certain ways. Whereas women are perhaps most at risks when they're in culturally approved situations (at home with their family and partners, on that date with that "cute"

160. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:35 PM

This will raise some hackles, but this discussion has gotten me thinking a little bit about "female privilege" in this context.

This "privilege" of being considered undangerous is simply the byproduct of having less power in society.

My heart hurts when I think of how much smaller everyone's world- men's and women's- seems to have become in my short lifetime.

I really don't know what you mean by this.

161. Gail

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:35 PM

Okay, how about this...

It's not so much about men okay? We talk about men because it's usually men who do not recognize that they simply do not have the right to intrude on a woman just because they feel like it. Forget all that. Forget that anybody even mentioned men at all.

Let's talk about strength. Strength as a weapon. Not everyone is going to pick up a gun and use it. Not everyone is going to choose to use their strength as a weapon. A gun is a potential weapon. Strength is a potential weapon. I am strong. The person (woman or man) who is attempting to interact with me is without a doubt stronger than I am. I do not want to interact, but I have no choice but to take into account that this person is stronger than I am. Can I safely disengage? Can I safely confront them with their unwanted behavior? For my own safety I have to observe them for clues. If those clues alarm me, whether that was the intention or not, I must take them seriously. At that point the hurt feelings of the person holding the bigger weapon is at the very bottom of my list of concerns.

162. snarkysmachine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:35 PM

"Snarkysmachine, I understand what you're saying, now. Earlier you weren't saying that though, you weren't saying what everyone assumed you meant either, but it was unclear. You came to the conversation angry and people get defensive"

With all due respect, I was not angry, so please don't project that onto me. :)

163. the fat nutritionist

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:36 PM

*I just read that book recently, and one of the things that really struck me (and made me angry) was about how all the false fears that are instilled in us culturally — through racism, ableism, and so on — actually distract us from *real* threats (like the "perfectly friendly" guy who is getting way too pushy on the bus, or what have you). It's very difficult to discern what makes someone seem "creepy" to us, and you're right that that reaction is not free from oppressive systems of belief and behavior.*

I recently read the book too, and had similar feelings.

Also, to whether it's worth the effort to examine if your "creepy" meter is set off by some ingrained prejudice: yes, yes, and yes.

164. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:37 PM

Yeah, anger is just fine here, thank you very much — but also, a lot of times people read comments that make them feel *personally* defensive as being much “angrier” than they are (see, for example, my xkcd post).

165. SugarLeigh

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:38 PM

breaks anti-social lurking streak to jump in

I’ve not read the comments yet. I just want to say I am in awe of this piece. Absolutely brilliant. Thank you for an important part of an important dialogue that I hope continues until resolution (so... until like the year 3013?).

166. Alibelle

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:38 PM

With all due respect, using the words “fucked up,” implies anger. Tone is important on the internet, I don’t know what your face looks like, or your tone of voice. You made it much easier for me to project that onto you by using those words.

167. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:38 PM

Oppressor sounds all fanciful like a dungeon and a leather hood.

Hee.

Gail, I like that analogy, assuming we throw metaphorical strength (privilege and social position) into the mix. It also helps tease out the fears that are rational (men are going to be literally stronger in most cases, and have the weapon of privilege, whether or not they’re planning to use it) vs. ones that are rooted in prejudice (black men are not going to be literally stronger than white men, and are unprivileged in significant ways, not least the fact that others will also be suspicious of them for racist reasons).

168. mcm

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:39 PM

Thanks for all of the explanations. It makes more sense now!

169. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:40 PM

With all due respect, using the words “fucked up,” implies anger.

Yeah, I don’t know — we encourage cussing here. Saying “we’re being fucked up” and then going on to explain what you mean by that and how it’s not actually combative in the way people have been reading it... that’s fine by me. I just wish the two hadn’t come quite so far apart. :)

170. Alibelle

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:40 PM

Or I could shut up and let Sweet Machine do the talking. :) Anger is totally fine, you can be angry, I was just explaining how it made me react.

171. A Sarah

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:41 PM

47 of 345 Murasaki, I think you just ARE as afraid or as unafraid as you feel, and I wouldn’t dream of

second-guess someone else's fear or lack thereof. It's like being thirsty (to use Harriet Lerner's example about anger). You just ARE thirsty. You don't say "Wait, I already HAD water this morning. I can't possibly be thirsty!" The evidence for your being thirsty is the fact of your thirst. Likewise fear. This isn't a test! :)

But: there is evidence about how many rapes are rapes of women by men. And there's a system supporting men's oppression of women, even if some great individual men recognize it and HATE it and wish it weren't so, it's bigger than any one guy. And if that is sad, it's sad because of a system that benefits men at women's expense. That's why it's not up to women to be nicer, soothe / anticipate men's feelings for them, FEEL men's feelings for them, improve themselves so that men will be nicer to them, and generally make the problem better.

Appreciate your self-disclosure and what reads to me like honest questioning...

172. *Alibelle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:41 PM

Or not angry as well. *bashful*

173. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:42 PM

"With all due respect, using the words "fucked up," implies anger. Tone is important on the internet, I don't know what your face looks like, or your tone of voice. You made it much easier for me to project that onto you by using those words."

It's not really my responsibility to ensure that you don't perceive me as "angry" nor do I care if you did. I'm just pointing out that I wasn't. I try not to get "angry" about the interwebz anymore and I have a bit of a potty mouth, which probably makes my tone seem a bit crispy.

174. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:47 PM

Hey, thanks snarkysmachine and anita, you know what, I think it was a bit of 101 ignorance, but mostly a language issue! English is not my first (not even my second) language, and I translate oppressor differently than what it really means. Still, I'm off to educate myself as I want to understand why the original post makes me uncomfortable (and it's not that it advocates "living in fear" – it's more about it seeming to me a tiny bit "unfair" to men). By the way, thanks all for the interesting discussion (in this thread and on the blog in general).

175. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:47 PM

Also, I didn't read the comix post. I haven't really liked that comix (my partner does) and often links them to me and I go, "wait, what." because there are elements of it that eek me out and I probably should read that blog post because I have some suspicions, based on the conversations happening here it would. I don't always read every post here and I realize it's probably an vital part of participating in this community, if only to know where folks are coming from.

176. *PurpleGirl*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:48 PM

Everything I was going to say has pretty much been covered already; but the tee shirt thing reminded me of something I saw at work. There was this guy, sort of average, I think he maybe was bald with a beard; he was having dinner in small town USA with his

grandmother. The shirt he was wearing was for some death metal band, had some goofy macabre logo on the front; and it said in big letters on the back "It'll hurt if you don't swallow BITCH".

I was absolutely speechless. And even in a crowded restaurant, with friends, coworkers, managers, and customers around, I felt slightly unsafe.

177. kb

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:49 PM

. I don't know, I feel like part of the price we pay for living in a society—like paying taxes—is having to at times endure social interactions we would rather not be engaged in.

why? this post is about schrodinger's rapist, which is a legit concern. but does that have to be the only reason I don't want to talk to a guy on the bus? Other people have hinted at this, but my issue is that it doesn't matter. I don't have to worry about being raped to not want to talk

nicegirlphd-what? I don't even understand your last comment. it's not about treating all men as oppressors so much as choosing which we're going to interact with—a right they already have. also, see comments about numbers.

178. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:50 PM

I don't always read every post here and I realize it's probably an vital part of participating in this community, if only to know where folks are coming from.

It's not always, but with these two posts we've been having a lot of the same conversations over again. In this case, as it turned out, you weren't trying to have the conversation some people thought you were trying to have — you were trying to have a much more nuanced one that we *didn't* just hash out. Although reading the previous comments thread might have clued you in as to why we were leaping to the conclusion that you were saying it was unfair for women to be suspicious in order to protect themselves.

179. Matt

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:50 PM

Ok... Im a little confused by a couple of things; please dont take anything I have to say as a potential attack, as Im purely speaking out of curiosity and confusion...

Im a guy, and a gay one.

I'll get that out first; a great deal of my confusion here clearly comes from the fact that I just dont think of the women in my life or around me as potential sexual partners, and certainly not sexual "objects"; the thought's just not there.

Out of that the idea of a "rape culture" bothers me; yeah, my first kneejerk is to angrily dismiss, and say "but men arent like that", and the immediate following response in my mind is that my own line of thinking is a strawman argument; just because the men I know (myself included) are not like that doesnt mean that they're even a part of that world. My confusion/curiosity is piqued though and so I have to ask... do women as a whole tend to feel that way about men?

I can freely understand the thoughts of rape culture in places where its truly culturally ingrained; if one were to look at places like Cite au Soleil outside Port au Prince Haiti, where chances are every woman in the slum has been raped by one of the many roving rape gangs who use it as a form of social control and subjugation, I can understand immediately because of the very widespread nature of the problem; but I have to ask if it is

like that here for women who live in the areas Im most accustomed to?

Honestly, if there's a woman on the train who for lack of better words is just wearing a fierce pair of shoes, Im more than likely going to tell her so (of course depending on circumstances; if her headphones are in her ears, Im going to assume she wouldn't even hear me so Im just going to leave her alone). Then again, I personally assume that Im going to come across as non-threatening-male as Im not exactly the straightest appearing branch on the tree; again though it leaves me at a loss to understand the thought processes as its a world I generally don't have access to.

Is it pretty much across the board that women in general just see men in general as potential threats?

180. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:50 PM

snarkysmachine, it's not so much that we expect everyone to read every post as that that particular post got into very detailed discussions on this topic (and is where Starling coined the term Schrödinger's Rapist) and generated 600+ comments. It's very much in the air around here this week.

181. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:50 PM

How come all my sentences are so fucking long and cumbersome today?

182. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:52 PM

it's more about it seeming to me a tiny bit "unfair" to men)

Having met so, so many women who were raped by their husbands or best friends, I really wonder if it's possible to be unfair to men as a group. Thirty years ago I would have thought differently. Sigh.

183. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:53 PM

(smile) Long maybe, cumbersome? Not at all.

184. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:53 PM

I feel bad for the men in my life, the many good, honorable, strong, and kind men, that would love the people in the world to feel safe around them, to allow them the unreserved permission to be friendly and interested and engaging that I enjoy.

Okay. I feel sorry for the good, honourable, strong and kind women who've been harrassed, attacked, raped and/or murdered, so the feelings of the men in your life are considerably down my priority list on this issue. Plus, if the men in your life are as you say they are, why would they be forcing interaction with unfamiliar women on public transport who clearly don't want to talk to them?

You weren't talking about that situation? Strange, because we were. The fact that you know some nice men who can't play with kittens in the street or whatever doesn't really have anything to do with what we're discussing here.

185. *snarkysmachine*

50 of 345 OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:54 PM

What actually brought me to this post was an experience I had last night at the grocery store. A dude was trying to get cozy, despite me sending plenty of signals that didn't want to be arse. We're talking curlers, housecoat with a puffy vest over it and my "keep away" (fake wedding/engagement band) but he was a total zombie playa; he just wouldn't stay down.

There was a second of feeling that female guilt about not being "nice" before I railed into him with all manner of "mutherfucker don't be mutherfucking blah blah blah" and when it was over and he slunk away I still had that feeling of overreacting.

Gah. So this post was totally comforting and because I'm me, I couldn't just sit with my warm fuzzies, I had to start thinking about my own shit and how much of it when into my reaction.

186. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:56 PM

Matt the friendly gay guy, with all due respect, you need to do some feminism 101 and this is not the blog for it. There's a lot of material about rape culture out there; please read some.

I can freely understand the thoughts of rape culture in places where its truly culturally ingrained

Which is why you should pay close attention to the statistics Starling brings up in the post.

187. fillyjonk

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:56 PM

he was a total zombie playa; he just wouldn't stay down.

And now I'm particularly glad that you weren't trying to say this was Unfair to Menz, because maybe I love you.

I had to start thinking about my own shit and how much of it when into my reaction.

Which is awesome and very much encouraged. I think we're just bruised after all the "but what if that man was THE ONE and now your CHILDREN will NEVER BE BORN, you SEXIST BITCH!" conversations.

188. Gail

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:56 PM

Caitlin: Just, YES.

189. Starling

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:57 PM

Murasaki: Hey! Cool! Hi! Sit down! Have a drink!

I see what you're saying. Default should be that everyone gets to live like women *in the way we aren't perceived as a threat*. The people who have pissed in that pond, though, are not the women who are now legitimately cautious. They're the men who have done bad stuff. Rape culture: sucks for everyone, not just for women.

It's not actually always a privilege to be considered weak and harmless. It may get you past airport security, at least when it's not your week to be felt up, but it also means that the scary people who want to harass and oppress someone chose to do it to you, because you are less likely to fight. This is true verbally (because women have to be nice, or are expected to be nice) and physically. The reality—that I personally can kick the crap out of a solid 80%

of men—does not change the perception, which is that bullies can get away with crap when I'm present.

It means that the skinny little man who lives next door came out of his building and started screaming "Fuck you bitch!" at me at 6:30 one Saturday morning. Did I have the ability to break both his arms and choke him senseless? Sure thing. Without breaking a sweat. But, you know, I really couldn't do that. The cops would have been profoundly unhappy.

Had he believed I might have done so, he wouldn't have harassed me, though.

One of the reasons I wrote this post is that I have five brothers and two brothers-in-law, and a father who has never once in his life met anyone he wasn't delighted to talk to. They learn—they have learned—that there are obscure and arcane rules for interacting with women. I'd like them to see that the rules aren't that messy, really. They make sense, once you step back and let your perspective shift.

I once carried a badge in my job. It was a scary federal badge. When I pulled it out, I freaked people out, and it was the least powerful and most vulnerable sections of the population who were most alarmed. When I became aware of this, I made real efforts to make myself as non-threatening as possible, explaining what I was doing, being respectful of people's boundaries, and generally not EVER doing the law enforcement headfuck thing. The more aware I was to the power differential, the more effective I got at doing my job, which relied on the goodwill and assistance of the people I spoke to. Understanding that my position of power made some people uncomfortable was the key to a successful interaction. It didn't make interaction impossible, it made it much easier.

So what I hope is that discussions like this can make interaction easier and more productive for men and women both, instead of entangling the really good guys in the bullshit misery that has been perpetuated by too many jerks to name.

190. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:57 PM

We are not guaranteed the right, when we go out in public, to not have any social interactions we don't want to have.

See, I actually agree with this in a sense — because there are some people who think that they shouldn't have to look at fat people in public, or be in a public place where there are any children making children noises. And some people have white-supremacist goggles on and don't know it, as has already been pointed out. But that's exactly why we need to check assumptions and look for privilege.

Want to say more but have to go deal with a kid...

191. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 4:58 PM

"I think we're just bruised after all the "but what if that man was THE ONE and now your CHILDREN will NEVER BE BORN, you SEXIST BITCH!" conversations."

Understood. I just perused a few choice comments. Hot buttered scary!

192. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:00 PM

I just had the disturbing realization that because of my personal experience I tend to trust men I actually know *less*. I've had nice conversations with random dudes on the bus....

Why am I realizing all of these creepy squicky things today? Sorry for the bit of OT mememe but urrrrrrk.

Ohcrapnopleasebraindonotstartwiththeflashbacks.

193. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:01 PM

I still had that feeling of overreacting.

But is that because we're trained to "be nice" or at least "not be difficult" all the time? I mean, maybe you did look like a crazy lady, and maybe you saved your own life. You can never tell.

194. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:02 PM

Matt: One woman in six. If that number doesn't feel like rape culture to you, what exactly are the goalposts?

And I'm glad you're here, because you're the man I want to speak to. See, I don't know you're gay, that you have no possible sexual interest in me, that you are emphatically not a rapist ever. I don't know because I don't yet know you. But you can show that you're unlikely to be running around over my boundaries and hurting me by respecting my boundaries in our interactions, beginning with the first hello. Yes, this is how very many women feel. It doesn't mean that you can't talk to them, just that you have to be aware that you do not have a big old neon sign on your hat that says "HARMLESS GOOD GUY WILL NOT RAPE YOU."

Not that such a sign would be reassuring IRL. But you see what I'm saying.

195. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:02 PM

"but what if that man was THE ONE and now your CHILDREN will NEVER BE BORN. you SEXIST BITCH!"

Wait, did we all get transported to Wonder Woman's island?

196. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:02 PM

Hot buttered scary!

You are on my Awesome List for the day.

197. *Ethyl*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:04 PM

@nicegirlphd

"The difference is clear. And still it's not enough to make me feel comfortable with viewing a man as an oppressor just by virtue of being a man..."

Ok I've been trying to respond to this for a couple of minutes and all I can say is, maybe you just need to do some 101 review.

198. *Alibelle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:05 PM

53 of 345 Snarkysmachine, I so agree with Fillyjonk! Zombie playa, for real? You sort of rock, and the

actual comment you were making was super smart too, let's be friends? Not even being sarcastic here.

199. *Murasaki*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:06 PM

"This "privilege" of being considered undangerous is simply the byproduct of having less power in society."

Point taken, Sweet Machine, but it still feels a little tautological. Since I'm part of an oppressed population, attributes that positively enhance my quality of life (disproportionately to others, even?) DON'T count as privilege? I don't know...

'My heart hurts when I think of how much smaller everyone's world- men's and women's- seems to have become in my short lifetime.'

"I really don't know what you mean by this."

I'm speaking purely perceptually here, Sweet Machine. My home culture DOES feel decidedly different- more xenophobic, more distrustful, dividing lines more stark, etc. Even when I was younger, and life was personally a lot more dangerous, the world in general seemed fairly understandable in how shitty it was- now I find myself waiting in cynical awe for how unreasonable or disproportionate one group's responses to another will be. The same old threats were probably there then and now in equal measure (this is reminding me of Suzanne Vega's "Last Year's Troubles")- it just feels, to me, like EVERYone has become so dramatically disconnected and at war with each other on an individual level.

200. *curious_sceptic*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:06 PM

Very well done. We men spend a lot of time trying to figure out what a woman is thinking. It's nice when it is explicitly laid out, and especially so when it's in an area like this where such thoughts may not naturally occur to a man. So thanks.

I am skeptical about the 1-in-6 business, though. The FBI estimates 89,000 women reported being raped in 2008 — 29 women for every 100,000 people. If half those people are women and nobody gets raped twice, that's 1-in-1724 rapes in a year. Women would have to live to be 287 years old to run a 1-in-6 chance. It's a serious problem, for sure, and you could argue that anything that helps sensitize women to the threat could help prevent rape, but I think the number is bogus and just used as a scare tactic.

201. *liz*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:11 PM

@Matt who likes nice shoes.

I can't answer for all women, but I will tell you for me the answer is yes.

I will not get on a subway car if I am the only woman on that car. I will switch cars if I am the last woman aboard. I don't give a crap if I'm the only white person on the train, but I will NOT stay aboard if I am the only woman.

202. *Matt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:13 PM

Starling: oh believe me Im horrified to hear that number; its an odd area of ignorance to have my nose rubbed in (deservedly, mind) and am currently trying to find more of a break

down of statistics; RAINN.org's stats page on the offenders though was what coupled with my curiosity (<http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-offenders>), where they state that by far the higher percentage likelihood is that a rape will be committed by a known person, not a stranger (73% of rapes by their stats, reported via the dept of justice)

a) shows Ive got quite a bit to learn, but b) makes me feel oddly out of sorts thinking that just being seen across a train or public space that the women around me are assessing my threat potential with an automatic bias towards violation or violence. While I think I can safely assume that's less directly terrifying than being raped, its still in itself a pretty horrifying thought.

203. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:13 PM

curious_sceptic, you understand that rape is a *drastically* underreported crime, don't you?

I let your comment in because of the first paragraph, but any repetition of the second paragraph — i.e., any further rape denial — will result in an instant ban.

204. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:13 PM

"It doesn't mean that you can't talk to them, just that you have to be aware that you do not have a big old neon sign on your hat that says "HARMLESS GOOD GUY WILL NOT RAPE YOU.""

Hahaha! That would be the most awesome The Onion piece. "Area man 'will not rape you, attack you, or follow you home and peer through your windows', sign says."

205. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:14 PM

This thread has suddenly brought up something I haven't thought of in a long time. 20-something years ago, I was in college and had to work late in the winter, when it gets dark by dinner. I was walking home and realized that the street was really, really empty, except for the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps. Which got faster and faster. My heart started to race and I dove into some snow-covered bushes as something brushed my coat. I looked up and the jogger turned his head and said, "Sorry." without breaking his stride. I picked myself and went home, still shaking. For that mere 30 seconds I was absolutely terrified. My only thought was, "notagainnotagainnotagain."

Funny story. Except that I have tears in my eyes thinking about it. Is this choosing to live in fear? Fuck anyone who says so. I earned my fear through bitter experience.

206. *Arwen*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:15 PM

Awesome post. I have to agree with those who've pointed out that the one-in-sixty are rapists reframe is rather stunning.

@snarkysmachine: hot buttered scary and zombie playa are now officially in my vocab.

207. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:17 PM

" My home culture DOES feel decidedly different- more xenophobic, more distrustful, dividing lines more stark, etc. "

Could that just be because you are older and more aware now? Not trying to be a smart ass, I'm serious. We often have a certain degree of blindness when we are young. As we get older and have more experience with bad situations our eyes are opened and we see things or read different things into situations. A little kid doesn't see the danger in a hot stove until his fingers get burned. People say teenagers have a sense of "that will never happen to me", but that's because usually nothing has really happened to them yet. It's not real for them yet.

What a loaded word, YET...

208. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:17 PM

Curious_skeptic and Matt, there's a nice link at the top of the comments thread provided by IrishUp. It has stats from several different studies over a couple of decades. The statistical evidence is overwhelming, and I'd like to add the anecdotal evidence that not one woman on this thread is surprised at these numbers. Which means we are rape victims and/or we know rape victims.

In my case, that's an "and."

209. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:19 PM

Murasaki, may I ask what definition of privilege you're using?

My home culture DOES feel decidedly different- more xenophobic, more distrustful, dividing lines more stark, etc. Even when I was younger, and life was personally a lot more dangerous, the world in general seemed fairly understandable in how shitty it was- now I find myself waiting in cynical awe for how unreasonable or disproportionate one group's responses to another will be.

I really don't know what to make of this. "Unreasonable" or "disproportionate"? Are you talking about the people who've been on the smooth side or the rough side of oppression? "One group's responses to another"? The history is not the same for both groups, nor the dynamics. Do you mean the less-privileged groups are overreacting? Being unreasonable and disproportionate in their demands — unlike the reasonable and prudent guardians of those old-timey homey time-honored traditional old truths from Back When People Were Nicer And Times Were Simple, like the truth that a man has a right to beat his wife or that queer people are unnatural and an abomination to the most high God? Please tell me that's not what you're saying.

210. *liz*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:19 PM

Raises hand. Date rape. Never reported because what would be the point? Also: flasher, groper, and verbally harrassed on the streets.

211. *AnthroK8*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:20 PM

Boy howdy, do I need to go educate myself on Ableism 101, is what I am saying to myself today.

I can make an observation about men who are not neurotypical / otherwise differently abled: I used to work in a maximum security prison for men. There were absolutely men there who were not neurotypical, and they were usually POCs, which reflected the offender population in that facility and disproportionately reflects the state's general population.

This suggests that all the institutional issues we know negatively affect neurotypical men of color in the criminal justice system also affect non-neurotypical men of color.

I've also been going around and around in my own head about unpacking my own privilege knapsack when it comes to assessing risk when engaging with men of color (something I do think about) and non-neurotypical men (something I really need to start thinking about).

I don't know if other people have had this impression, but thinking on it, I do feel that men who are disabled can be perceived as a special kind of risk-to-women. They aren't just mistaken for "actual creepy men," I think they're often assumed to be "likely a creepy man" because of their characteristics. (Any one of a number of SVU episodes comes to mind, when looking for a media representation. And that character from Of Mice and Men... Lenny?)

Aaaand, in addition to questioning my interpersonal interactions, I'm thinking I need better context for getting what's going on social-system-wise and institutional-structure-wise. Which is why I'd better get cracking on Ableism 101.

Thanks, SM and snarkymachine for that.

Also, Starling, this is a hilarious and insightful post. Thanks so much for writing it.

212. [snarkymachine](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:21 PM

"Snarkymachine, I so agree with Fillyjonk! Zombie playa, for real? You sort of rock, and the actual comment you were making was super smart too, let's be friends? Not even being sarcastic here."

Chicken Fried Done. Can you tell where my head is? My partner is coming home tomorrow and will cook many foods with butter and batter and my mouth is already watering!

"I am skeptical about the 1-in-6 business, though. The FBI estimates 89,000 women reported being raped in 2008 — 29 women for every 100,000 people. If half those people are women and nobody gets raped twice, that's 1-in-1724 rapes in a year. Women would have to live to be 287 years old to run a 1-in-6 chance. It's a serious problem, for sure, and you could argue that anything that helps sensitize women to the threat could help prevent rape, but I think the number is bogus and just used as a scare tactic"

You forgot to factor in all the women (leaving aside that men are assaulted too) who fail to report their assault, the hell survivors go through reporting and the fear of having to face their attacker if the case should go to trial.

I do bedside advocacy at the ER for sexual assault victims for both cisgendered and Transgendered women and I am on call two nights a month and in the three years that I have volunteered in this position I am still waiting for the night where I sit up playing scrabble instead of rushing to the ER to lay the smack down on pushy social workers, brisk clinical staff and holding hands of a woman viewed as stat some folks can't quite conceptualize.

213. [Ethyl](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:22 PM

Annnnd it took me so long to think about my reply that it's already been addressed. Carry on. Sorry!

214. *Caitlin*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:24 PM*The FBI estimates 89,000 women reported being raped in 2008 — 29 women for every 100,000 people.*

Yeah, curious_skeptic, it's the "reported" part of that sentence that's your problem. But please continue disregarding the words of women and ignoring already-linked evidence that contradicts your personal perception that not that women women are raped *really* so we're all just overreacting. You're in no way part of the problem.

Also, what Starling said. No woman here has expressed surprise at that number. There's something for you to think about.

215. *Lu*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:24 PM

I just wanted to say, snarkysmachine, my experience of your posts today has been very interesting. At first, even though we all swear here and get angry, I somehow found myself put off by the way you expressed yourself (but stay with me here) and saw myself disagreeing. Then I actually troubled my little princess self to think about what you were saying, and when I actually entertained the points you raised, I was grateful you had done so. Your further clarifications about where you were coming from were most welcome and enlightening, and then you proceeded to ice the cake with your leap up to even more vivid and idiosyncratic language. Me like!

The experience reminded me to not be such a hothead when it comes to language that might hit me wrong for whatever personal reason, and remember that there is a person behind it and to wait and find out more.

@Murasaki, I'm conscious of what I call my "white-girl privilege" (being seen as not a threat gets you the use of bathrooms in stores where you are not a customer, for example), but nonthreatening is always in the eye of the beholder. To many, I'm about as bland and cuddly as it gets, but I've been pulled out of airline security lines for baggage inspection and I've had little kids shy away from me when I've made neutral, friendly, closed-ended (non-response-expecting) remarks. I have to respect that other people may have their reasons for these reactions.

216. *sarah*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:28 PM

Yes. This. Yes. Thank you.

217. *kristinc*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:29 PM

See, I don't know you're gay, that you have no possible sexual interest in me, that you are emphatically not a rapist ever. I don't know because I don't yet know you. But you can show that you're unlikely to be running around over my boundaries and hurting me by respecting my boundaries in our interactions, beginning with the first hello.

Yeah. Like, Matt, in your shoes example. It doesn't mean that a crowd of women is going to hunt you down and bludgeon you for complimenting someone's shoes, but it DOES mean that when you honestly intend only to compliment the shoes you can improve your chances of it being received as such. For example, by smiling and saying "Fierce shoes!" as you swing out of the car at your stop, so the woman doesn't feel like the burden of responding with nice conversation is on her. Or just by waiting till she happens to look at

you and then saying "Fierce shoes!" and not saying a word more unless *she* engages *you* in conversation about aren't they great and she found them on sale and you know where the *best* place to find fantastic shoes is?

What I'm saying is, you can telegraph that your intentions are benign by paying attention to her cues, and letting those cues, rather than your desire to be heard about the shoes, lead you.

218. [*snarkysmachine*](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:31 PM

Thanks, Lu and everyone else. thanks for letting me clarify. I realize I was operating on the assumption that people can read minds. Twitter has me thinking I have to do everything in 140 characters or less!

219. [*KellyK*](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:34 PM

This seems to be conflating two things: people who are socially awkward/inability to discern social cues such in the case of Asperger's and "low grade creepy" I guess I'm not sure what is meant by this. Could you clarify because some of the behaviors you stated sound a lot like folks I know who are on the spectrum and equating their "lack" in social skills with creepiness or rape culture in general feels pretty fucked up to me.

This has already been discussed a good bit, but since it was my comment that set it off, I should explain myself.

I'm sorry...I wasn't trying to be insulting or to draw any sweeping connections between social awkwardness and rape culture.

Maybe it's more helpful to explain what I mean by "low-grade creepy" by putting it totally in terms of actions and my feelings about them. A guy stands too close, hugs or touches without any indication that I'm okay with that, keeps talking when I'm making excuses as to why I want to get out of the conversation, etc. Those actions creep me out.

From where I stand in that situation, I can't tell if it's a social awkwardness thing or a rape culture thing or any number of other things. I don't know if the guy's missing my body language or other cues or if he's too self-centered to care, or if it's a bit of both.

If he's missing the cues, I don't know why that is. (It could be anything from Aspergers to not talking to girls much to the cues not being as obvious as I think they are to him having a particularly non-observant day because he didn't get his morning coffee.)

Similarly, if he's ignoring them, I don't know if it's specifically a sexist thing or if he has no regard for other men's boundaries either. I also don't know if he's a jerk continually or if he's just being jerky today.

When I referred to "low-grade creepy," I meant a combination of those behaviors that raise my hackles with other behaviors that suggest that the guy in question is a decent human being and the absence of behavior I'd class as *very* creepy (following someone or yelling at them, threats of violence, all the stalking and harassing behaviors mentioned on this thread). Basically, in that situation, I feel threatened, but not physically threatened (though this may be in part because I've never been assaulted in any way). There's a violation of boundaries and a creepy sensation, but I don't actually think I'm in physical danger from the person.

I didn't mean any insult to anyone with Aspergers or anyone else who has difficulty with social cues. I should probably not have referred to "guys who are low-grade creepy" but to specific *behaviors* as creepy. I think I can reasonably stand by calling those behaviors creepy because, to me, they *feel* creepy. They may be perfectly innocent and well-intentioned, but they raise my hackles.

220. *iheartchocolat*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:36 PM

"When riding on buses I really wish people would just stop assuming that if someone (me) is reading a book then that someone (me) must be SO ABJECTLY BORED that they MUST want to listen to some stranger verbally jack-off to their life story in my ear. Seriously. I'm READING. Happily. Leave. Me. Alone."

This happens to me all the time, and not in public spaces either. I was on vacation at the beach, and reading...they don't call them beach books for nothing...and the family I was vacationing with couldn't for the life of them understand READING a book means READING a book..not I'm bored, talk to me! One guy actually said, oh must be a good book, aka. "you're not talking to me, so that book must really have your attention." It took all I had not to say, no it's actually a pretty bad book, but I like to read, and I just don't really want to talk to you! Wish I'd said it now. HS 20/20.

221. *AnthroK8*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:37 PM

zombieplaya, hot buttered scary, and chicken fried done= superior.

And now I also wish to eat things that have been dipped in batter and fried and then slathered in butter.

Maybe a batterfried babyflavored donut?

222. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:38 PM

*not that many women, I meant

223. *Arwen*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:39 PM

My own Schroedinger's Rapists are more keenly felt with folks I know. (I lived in such urban density for so long I've not had a lot of "alone with stranger" experiences.) But I've had a bunch of experiences like the "first time that the guy comes over for coffee with a mutual female friend but then the female friend cancels and the guy shows up anyway". That visit will scare me the whole time. Or ending up alone in a room at a party with a guy who's standing between me and the door. Ditto ending up alone in the house with male relatives in the extended family with whom I've not been alone before. (Even the feminist ones.) Those are all really high stress for me.

Thinking about it, my own thoughts of Schroedinger's changed a bit since having kids and passing into plus sizes. I read "Fat is a Feminist Issue" when I was a very young person – maybe 12. I don't remember much from it, and I'm sure I've gotten this wrong: but my take away was this – 'women get fat because it makes them feel secure against rape.' I was angry at that for so long, because it made my inbetweenie fat something that with sufficient therapy I could change, you know? Fat was somehow in my head and in society, and not of my body.

fight. I couldn't imagine anyone getting very far with my mom – we're fat, but we're healthy, active, strong. So it gets back to the "that person is stronger than me" thing. So based on the suggestion I took from Fat is a Feminist issue, I've decided it'd be harder to push me around. Now, of course I would much prefer that the men in my life are not rapists; but due to a possibly misread suggestion of a theory, I've decided that if they were, I'd fight and leave them injured. Part of it is feeling of strength and size; the other part is some kind of permission, like that book gave me a Fat Superhero archetype. Yep. Kickin' ass and takin' names.

224. *The Other Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:43 PM

Wow, I'm far less cautious than the author. I've been with my partner for a long time so I don't go on dates but I do meet strange men for hobbies or professional reasons and I don't always display the information in a prominent place. Maybe I should make more of an effort to do that.

This article makes some valid points but it's very focused on dealing with strangers. It's also worth talking about the fact that most rapes are committed by someone already known to the victim.

225. *amy*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:43 PM

I'm new here, so I hope I don't do a 101 fail. I've been thinking about this since the initial discussion of the comic, and something is bugging me. Here's the situation: I have moderate social anxiety; it's bad enough that I identify myself as a disabled person. It has hindered progress in my career, and is probably the main cause of my being single for several years now. I really enjoy talking to people and meeting new people, but it's nearly impossible for me to make the first move of introducing myself. I have a terrible time making eye contact with people I don't know. In public places, I sit in a closed-up posture, look down or out a window, and sometimes read a book. All my signals say: leave me alone! But much of the time I actually long to talk to other people, of all genders and ages. All it takes to start a conversation is for someone to ask me some simple, impersonal question, like something about the weather; I respond enthusiastically if I want to talk to the person. If I don't want to talk, I give a monosyllabic response.

But the rules being presented here are so strict. A nice person is supposed to read other people's body language and not say one word to someone who is closed off or looks busy. If everyone followed that rule, I would be even more socially isolated than I already am. Now, I understand that this is my disability and I'm the one who should fix things. I have worked really hard in therapy to get better at opening up to people. I tried medication, but couldn't stand the side effects. Am I just out of luck here? Couldn't the rule be: if you see someone who looks like they probably don't want to talk, it's okay to ask one pleasant, impersonal question and then stop talking to the person if they don't respond positively?

Many of the comments on this post and the previous one seemed to imply that if a normal person wanted to talk, he/she would indicate that clearly in body language, etc. I feel left out of this description; I think it privileges the non-disabled.

226. *Just Some Trans Guy*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:48 PM

snarkysmachine,

scapegoat for all my fucked up views on other people."

Me, too. I do an internal double-take when my warning alarms go off and I'm not sure if it's legit fear or bigotry. Often that's worked well for me—I can usually distinguish between "that group of rough-looking guys isn't even looking at me, they're talking and laughing amongst themselves" and "that dude is giving us way too many glances, and I don't like the look on his face while he's doing it."

227. *Matt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:52 PM

Kristinc: that I agree with 100%; also with there being no agenda involved, or the need to say anything more, or even the need to say -anything- if it seems she'd just not want to be approached. (yes, even if they're limited manolos.) I think the only time I myself have acted against that was to say something nice to a woman who was in tears (again on a train; what is it with trains?) in the hopes of at least showing kindness to someone who was visibly suffering; I'd hate to think that would have been perceived as a come on or a manipulation but I can see how that would be possible. (In that instance, she said thank you and the conversation was over; which was fine... it didnt need anything more.)

I guess my thoughts are that its just tough to be a guy in a scenario where I'm automatically put on the defensive by people who think I'm automatically putting -them- on the defensive by my simply being present. Or Sweet Machine's statement that power and threat are automatically linked, and to show non-threatening-status one must show a lack of power or strength. I can see how either extreme of behaviour is by itself extremely clear, but it makes us guys ask where the line actually falls between being an outwardly strong male and being seen as a threat, or the boundary line between a positive and a negative male quality; makes me agree with others above who've expressed desires that this could be freely taught, but I'd wish to see it coupled with a what-should-be-common-sense approach of how to safely interact -before- it needs to become a matter of what-not-to-do.

228. *kua*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:55 PM

1. Arguing that most rapists are acquainted with their victims doesn't help our hypothetical man on the train, because he isn't trying to rape me on the train, he's trying to get acquainted. The threat isn't just him following me home, it's also convincing me to meet him for coffee a few times before he follows me home.

2. "men are threats" vs "black men are threats." We fall back on whichever power structures support our relative privilege (hello, kyriarchy!). This means that men who face racist/ableist/cisist/classist/etc discrimination are tempted to assert the one form of power they have: male privilege. I think this might explain why the majority of men hassling me are from a less-privileged class or race. Unfortunately, that reinforces my prejudices and privilege in those hierarchies. As a white/educated/cis/temporarily able woman, I tend to rely on my privilege in those power structures. So it isn't that I think black men (just using the example because it came up before) are bigger threats, but they're more likely to assert their male privilege openly (since they lack other ways to assert privilege) and I'm more likely to respond with white privilege.

Is this right? No. Do my ideas of right and wrong get back-burnered when I feel threatened? Yes. Does that ultimately help stabilize the kyriarchy and prevent meaningful social change? 'Fraid so. I work hard to overcome my privilege when I am the authority figure, but I really don't know how to do that on the bus. Suggestions welcomed...

229. *occhiblu*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:56 PM

For me, what's getting left out here is this: In most cases, a man who approaches a woman he doesn't know and compliments her or tries to start a conversation (as opposed to just seeking information, like asking for directions) is trying, in some way, to pick her up, otherwise he wouldn't be talking to her.

If she finds him creepy, *for whatever reason*, then she's not going to want to date him. Even if some other woman wouldn't find his behavior creepy, even if there's a good reason that he's behaving the way he is, even if she's just creeped out because he's black and she's racist. This particular woman does not like this particular man, which means that they probably shouldn't date, because they're failing to click at a fundamental level.

So you could even just add that it's simply *practical* for guys to back off when women are giving the "you're creepy, go away" signals, because even if the guy is not being objectively creepy, that particular woman is still not going to date him. And pretending that if she just *x, y, or z'ed* then she'd totally understand what a nice guy he really is, is working under the assumption that men are allowed to be individuals with individual personalities and women are some homogeneous, interchangeable group who should all react the exact same way to everything.

230. *Q*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:57 PM

Brilliant piece. Although, sadly, I must take issue with the 'one in six' women statistic...most sources I've read put the number at more like one in three:

<http://www.oneinthreewomen.com/campaign.php>

231. *Caitlin*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 5:59 PM

Yeah, but Matt, what if you just didn't approach women on public transport who made it clear that they didn't want to talk to you, and then the problem is solved? This isn't abstract theory, it's quite a simple concept.

I guess my thoughts are that its just tough to be a guy in a scenario where I'm automatically put on the defensive by people who think I'm automatically putting -them- on the defensive by my simply being present.

And it's tough to be the woman who, in an alternative scenario where the man is someone *who looks a lot like you*, she might actually be about to be assaulted or raped. So I'm sure you'll see why my sympathy and focus are not on you in this situation.

it makes us guys ask where the line actually falls between being an outwardly strong male and being seen as a threat, or the boundary line between a positive and a negative male quality

Good. I'm really, sincerely glad you're asking yourself those questions. They are great questions to be asking, and there's a lot to learn here if you're willing to sit down and listen.

232. *April*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:06 PM

This is such good conversation here that I hate missing out on it but have been just reading quietly because my nerves have gone raw from all the rape talk recently. It's firing off all kinds of triggers in my head.

Plus, every time I think I have a point to make about something, it's said by someone else, usually much more brilliantly than I could anyway.

I did want to join in long enough to say thank you for this post though. It's certainly helped me have a better idea to understand how I feel when I am approached by a strange man and will hopefully help me better frame that to the men in my life who I know are not the rapist and are genuinely confused when they bring up to me how difficult it is to approach a woman.

233. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:06 PM

"Unfortunately, that reinforces my prejudices and privilege in those hierarchies. As a white/educated/cis/temporarily able woman, I tend to rely on my privilege in those power structures. So it isn't that I think black men (just using the example because it came up before) are bigger threats, but they're more likely to assert their male privilege openly (since they lack other ways to assert privilege) and I'm more likely to respond with white privilege."

This is an interesting point. One of my safety concerns often has to do with how much privilege a person has in relation to me. Meaning, I think about the way a person's privilege and my lack (in some areas) might contribute to my ability to bring charges against someone if they would do me harm and what are the consequences for them (doing me harm) vs. me (reporting them). In my experience I felt one of the reasons I was easy to "street harass" is because my cultural group (chubby, black chicks) is routinely devalued and othered as women. Therefore assaults, particularly cross-racial aren't generally viewed from a neutral perspective and even if a perp isn't conscious in his trading in cultural memes about woc's sexuality, it's still a dynamic that comes into play.

Partly, this stems from the volunteer work I do where I encounter women of varying levels of privilege being attacked by primarily exceedingly privileged men (I live in the least racially diverse state in the country, oh wait, I think Maine one it this year. okay 2nd least. I'm a raisin in the oatmeal.). Anyway, one of the reasons I created this "job" is because of hearing stories of women feeling victimized again when they were seeking help and they weren't the "right" kind of woman. (insert all the privilege bingo squares) And it did seem to me their concerns weren't always handled with as much nuanced care as other folks.

Again, a really interesting perspective.

234. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:12 PM

Ger-sorry, I just barely saw your post way up top. Yeah, no prob, but e-mail me first. It's *firstname dot lastname at gmail dot com*.

235. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:16 PM

kua – Thank you.

236. *Tom*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:16 PM

What do you do to meet men? Your view on us honestly offends me. If you look at every man who comes into your life as a possible threat, unless, of course, you do meet him in church with your mother, what kind of men do you meet?

sinister aspects, but if every guy is walking on eggshells to introduce himself, doesn't that turn into a boring cycle?

Meeting someone is one of the best parts of a relationship, and can be memorable and exciting. If I had to approach women, and men for that matter, scared out of my mind of being maced, I don't think I would want to meet people at all.

I know this world/country is slowly falling to shit, trust me, my ex got raped, but it was a family member, in her home. Don't hold our penises against us for being in public and thinking you look nice.

Sorry ahead of time, and I might get maced if I run into some paranoid, but I'm keeping the adventure in my life.

237. Arwen

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:19 PM

In most cases, a man who approaches a woman he doesn't know and compliments her or tries to start a conversation (as opposed to just seeking information, like asking for directions) is trying, in some way, to pick her up, otherwise he wouldn't be talking to her.

This hasn't been my experience; especially now with kids. When I was younger I had a higher hit on/attempted pick up rate; but it's been a long time since I got hit on in public. I wonder if there are regional differences in public socialization, as well as differences in things like weight and age?

Many men in my area, for example, will be extra-solicitous to elderly women – they may be reminded of their mothers or be polishing their boy scout merit badges helping the women across the street; or maybe they're trying to defraud them of their retirement savings. (I'm not saying it's all fuzzy Vaseline lens, here.) And I've had people tell me all sorts of stories on the bus: I think I look enough like "a mom" – or maybe a bartender – that talk to me about what's going on for them.

And since being a mom, I have men and women talk to me all the time about their kids. Some of the talk is distinctly gendered and misogynistic: I've passed from virgin/whore to good/bad mother, and this re-contextualization has changed what I cope with in terms of stereotype or misogyny.

238. A Sarah

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:20 PM

^

Whoops, got interrupted... Heh. Yeah, kua, thank you. That connection – about resorting to the form of privilege we have, and how that plays out in our subway scenarios – was not 100% clear to me before until you laid it out so plainly.

239. Arwen

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:21 PM

– Oh, and hey: elderly women in my community also have to worry about rape, just less about the casual pickup by everyone with a penis.

240. abyss2hope

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:29 PM

Thank you for this post. Some of the commenters seem to be missing a key point of this post which is many men who view themselves as safe feel they have the right to ignore women's personal boundaries and/or their safety concerns. And when these men's self-perceived right is denied they often blame the women whose boundaries they ignored

rather than taking responsibility for their own actions.

It is vital that we address the behavior of men who believe that what they want is more important than what women do not want simply because their motives are positive. Highlighting that this attitude from non-rapist men mirrors the attitudes of rapist men should be a wake up call to men who don't want to hurt women and who don't believe women's feelings are less important than their own.

The only real solution to men violating women's boundaries is for men to stop doing this. When individual women successfully deflect boundary violations or successfully project attitudes which deter unwanted behavior that does nothing to solve the underlying behavior problem.

The criticism that this post only addresses strangers when most rapists are known to their victim ignores the fact that once a man introduces himself he isn't likely to be classified as a stranger if he commits rape unless he attacks her immediately.

241. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:30 PM

So it isn't that I think black men (just using the example because it came up before) are bigger threats, but they're more likely to assert their male privilege openly (since they lack other ways to assert privilege) and I'm more likely to respond with white privilege.

Interesting point, although my experience (yeah, more anecdotal) points to the opposite. I'm white, and almost all the men who've assaulted or harassed me have been white. I believe this is white privilege in action (mine, specifically), in that men in racial minorities might not have felt secure enough to victimize a white woman. That sounds really weird, but I can't think of another way to put it. People intent on harm typically choose the safest available target and in most places I've lived, a white woman is not as safe a target as a WOC who will likely have less legal and societal recourse.

Obviously, the solution is not to change society so that men of all races can happily join together and harass any woman they want. I'm just talking about a couple layers of power and privilege here.

242. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:52 PM

Meeting someone is one of the best parts of a relationship, and can be memorable and exciting. If I had to approach women, and men for that matter, scared out of my mind of being maced, I don't think I would want to meet people at all.

That is what this guide is for. Listen to yourself! You are saying that if you had to fear for your physical safety every time you approached a woman, you wouldn't want to do that. This post is saying that many women fear for their own physical safety at certain times when a man approaches them. Why is your lack of safety automatically a tragedy that should be fixed, but women's lack of safety is just part of the game?

Don't hold our penises against us for being in public and thinking you look nice.

Go ahead and THINK we look nice all you want. We do that too! This post is about what happens when you decide it's a good idea to talk to that nice-looking woman.

243. *Tricia*

66 of 345 OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:52 PM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

The criticism that this post only addresses strangers when most rapists are known to their victim ignores the fact that once a man introduces himself he isn't likely to be classified as a stranger if he commits rape unless he attacks her immediately.

Thanks, abyss2hope. I've been wrestling with how to say that very thing.

Also, strictly-defined rape may be perpetuated more by "known" men, but commentators are also covering a wide range of sexual assault and harassment situations most of which are more often committed by strangers. I think the stories on these recent threads prove that point quite well.

244. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:53 PM

I'm keeping the adventure in my life.

And, apparently, the fear and misery in the lives of women.

245. *Larry*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:55 PM

Firstly, awesome article. Any chance for improved understanding is a great thing.....

But so: Just from using first names... It appears that only one in 20 responders to this article are men. & How many of the rapists are going to read/heed something that you hand them on a bus?

246. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:57 PM

Many of the comments on this post and the previous one seemed to imply that if a normal person wanted to talk, he/she would indicate that clearly in body language, etc. I feel left out of this description; I think it privileges the non-disabled.

Amy, I feel for you, and you're right that ableism plays into the emphasis on body language here. We've discussed this in comments above and on the recent thread called "Would it kill you to be civil," if you'd like to read more of what's been said. These rules are strict, but no one's enforcing them; there are going to be exceptions, like you, who may not be sending out the body language signal "Feel free to talk to me" even when you would like to. But there's no way for a stranger to know that in advance, is there? That's part of the problem we're dealing with — none of us know each other's motivations in advance. Men think about this a lot from their own point of view, but many of them haven't considered that from a woman's POV, and they need to know.

I honestly don't know what the answer is for you. I don't think you're doomed to isolation at all. But I also think that being approached on the train is not the only way to meet people, you know?

I don't think I'm expressing myself very well, so I hope someone else addresses your comment too.

247. *Tricia*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 6:59 PM

...and in relation to what abyss2hope said. (I hope this makes sense.) That is a key feature of rape culture — the assumption that women are always "default" sexually available. So once a guy makes "friendly" contact, a woman's chances of getting anyone to take her complaint seriously goes way, way down.

248. *liz*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:00 PM

Matt, the answer is NO. If someone is reading, or looking otherwise occupied, or looking out the window, it means s/he doesn't want to talk to you. And if it's a woman, she'll have some part of her mind thinking that she hopes everyone will just leave her the heck alone and not be all, "Hey pretty lady!" at her.

No, you don't get one sentence. You just don't.

I say this somewhat hypocritically since I've been doing political canvassing pretty continuously for the last two years, but when there's a "No Soliciting" sign on the door, I respect it and don't canvass that house. A book is a "No Soliciting" sign. A concerted effort to NOT make eye contact is a "No Soliciting" sign. Respect it.

249. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:00 PM

Larry, we're kinda hoping the whole "publishing this on the internet" thing will take care of that problem. This is a feminist blog where the majority of commenters are women (partly because we talk about feminist issues, and partly because men often don't play by the rules), but we've been known to be read by, you know, lurkers and outsiders.

250. *Katy*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:01 PM

Really hope I'm not repeating too much of the awesome comments above, but I wanted to get this in...

@Matt – Did you ever sit through those "how to prevent sexual assault" classes at a college orientation? They're always about all women being potential rape victims, i.e., "women: don't drink too much, don't walk home alone, don't do x, y, and z..(subtext: b/c then because you could be raped)" So it's not too far of a logical leap (for me at least) to start viewing all men as potential attackers. If we're all possible victims and we all have to think about being possible victims allthetime, then who are the possible assailants?

Also, big thanks for this piece. It's awesome. And it brings to light the tiny, constant, almost unconscious checklist women go through to determine danger. I was discussing this with my bf recently and how we both do it when we walk through our downtown neighborhood at night. It was enlightening for him, b/c as he put it, the only thing he needs to check is to see if he's bigger than the other person. If he is, no big worries.

251. *Splotchy*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:01 PM

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

(a guy)

252. *dreamingcrow*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:03 PM

Sorry ahead of time, and I might get maced if I run into some paranoid, but I'm keeping the adventure in my life.

Wow, Tom. Thank you for warning me about your inability to respect my boundaries ahead of time. That saves me a lot of work and worry.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:05 PM

A book is a "No Soliciting" sign. A concerted effort to NOT make eye contact is a "No Soliciting" sign.

Let's say I'm sitting opposite you on the train, and I'm wearing some fierce shoes, as I often am. I see you glancing at them and I'm thinking "I bet that guy likes my shoes" and you're not staring at my face or doing anything that sets off alarm bells — you're just looking at my shoes. Next time our eyes meet, I will probably smile at you. Because I have read the situation. When I smile at you? *Then* you say "Fierce shoes!" And I will say "Thanks! They look like Fluevogs but they're really knockoffs" and maybe we'll talk shoes for a while or maybe we won't. OTOH, if I'm reading a book intently or clearly not meeting your eyes, ever, then it is NOT a good idea to say anything, and you will just have to twitter "Girl on train wearing amazing shoes and reading Foucault—grad student or pretentious fashionista?" and be done with it.

Or, as someone mentioned upthread, you say it when you're leaving — it's your stop, and you say, "Sorry to interrupt you, I know you're reading, but I just love your shoes! Take care!" Then maybe the woman is flattered or maybe she's pissed that you interrupted her Foucault, but either way, you're not a threat to her, because you're leaving.

254. *IrishUp*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:07 PM

For those who are pointing out that rapists are known to their attackers, this is very true, AND it includes first dates, people known from commutes, internet acquaintances, freinds-of-friends, classmates, dorm-mates, fellow apartment dwellers, etc. In other words, people known to us by casual contact. Known to the victim no more means "my BF for 40yrs" than stranger means "guy hiding behind the bushes".

And I think the larger point is this, that in a kyriarchy, most situations are set up so that someone's rights and wishes are necessarily subordinate to whomever they are interacting with who is on a higher rung. This (largely unquestioned) privilege conferred to the latter allows abuses and attacks to happen to the former in a way that is then very hard for the victim(s) to prosecute or redress. Changing our structures in such a way as to give equal agency and validity to the communications of everyone in a given situation removes much of the camouflage that predators of any stripe (violent racists, rapists, homophobes, pedophiles what-have-you) use to isolate and victimize others.

255. *Ethyl*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:08 PM

@Tom:

"Your view on us honestly offends me. "

WHEW, I was really wondering what YOU were thinking TOM. I am SO GLAD you came in here to tell us!

256. *Caitlin*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:11 PM

Tom, I don't give a shit about whether "our view of you" offends you, because you are exactly the person we are talking about. You seem to genuinely think your right to talk to any woman at any time is more important than her right to refuse to talk to you. And any woman who does refuse must be some paranoid crazy bitch because you were just being *nice* and trying to *meet people*! You've taken nothing from all this except how *mean* we all are, and a renewed commitment to not caring whether women feel safe in public spaces.

Fuck you.

Why is your lack of safety automatically a tragedy that should be fixed, but women's lack of safety is just part of the game?

Aye. Exactly that.

257. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:13 PM

FYI for regular Shapelings: I'm letting more newbies through the queue than usual today because, let's face it, this post is addressed to them. As usual, anything truly foul is being deleted on sight. But please do not in anyway tone down your usual awesomeness because of this.

258. *Ethyl*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:14 PM

Oh but Caitlin, he's just trying to explain to us silly ladybrains about how SAD and DESOLATE and ISOLATED our lives are because we do not know the magic and wonder that is TOM. I weep for our collective humanity for not knowing the NICENESS of TOM.

Sorry, sorry. I'll try to be more productive when the stabby pain goes away.

259. *Faith*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:17 PM

I consider myself fairly street smart. I also am a survivor of multiple assaults as a child/adolescent. Getting on an elevator with a man/men immediately puts me on guard, I am, without even thinking about it, ready to fight back. Now that it is getting dark earlier, I find myself feeling stressed out more often (walking in twilight, marketing, etc.).

I am also queer. I don't know whether you are or not. So, unless you are kiki-ing with your boyfriend, I'm going to be wary of you too. I am not going to smile or make eye contact, not because I'm a bitch, but because I am concerned for my safety and I don't know what you are capable of.

260. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:21 PM

OH MY GOD!

TOM IS OFFENDED!

TAKE DOWN THE BLOG IMMEDIATELY!

TOM MUST BE MADE TO FEEL OKAY! GOD, HOW COULD WE HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT SOMETHING OTHER THAN MAKING TOM FEEL OKAY?

(Now, women out in public, on the other hand? They can rot in hell. Nobody should worry overmuch about making THEM feel okay. Where's their fucking spirit of adventure?)

261. *jennyknopinski*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:24 PM

Tom, I'm so happy that you have an adventurous life. I am totally willing to sacrifice my feelings of personal autonomy and safety in order to provide you with that life. You're welcome!

They are merely saying that you should heed someone's verbal and non-verbal signals that they do not want to talk to you. It's pretty simple if you don't have a major entitlement complex when it comes to access to women.

262. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:24 PM

Ethyl, HOW DO I LIVE WITHOUT HIM? I WANT TO KNOW. HOW DO I BREATHE WITHO- oh wait that's a song. Never mind.

Sorry, sorry. I'll try to be more productive when the stabby pain goes away.

Please don't. The mockery does the most to keep me sane.

Coolio, SM. I've reached the stage where it's just funny. Jellied eels!

263. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:26 PM

Larry, this post isn't addressed to rapists. It's addressed to genuinely nice guys who don't want to creep women out. I would hope that goodwill would carry them to the end.

If men who rape are genuinely curious as to what they can do, thankfully that article is much shorter. Here you go, so you can copy it onto a small card.

A rapist's guide to not raping:
Don't rape.

264. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:28 PM

@Faith. Oh I won't get into an elevator when it's just me and some dude I don't know. I often had this issue when I worked at hospital. I would always wait for another one or take the stairs. Sometimes because my "this ain't kosher" meter was blaring other times I just didn't want to get stuck in elevator with some douchechow who wouldn't shut up and like enjoy the silence.

Even if it's not a matter of safety, there is this societal agreement that women are available for conversation, sexual favors to whatever johnny no sense that comes a long, and it always feels unnatural for me to be crispy, because I realize I'm fighting against societal training, but I make myself do it because I don't mind offending someone who didn't have the right to my attention in the first place.

Again this is still a struggle because I'm always seeing situations in a bunch of ways, but that's just how its gotta be.

265. *jennyknopinski*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:29 PM

Anita, maybe that card can be handed out at college orientations along with the rape whistles?

266. *Ethyl*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:31 PM

Caitlin, how could you mock someone as nice as TOM? Maybe if you were nicer you wouldn't scare such awesome guys as TOM away? Maybe TOM would have totes been an ally except for your horrible no good very bad TONE. Didja ever think about that? Huh?

71 of 345 And maybe if you weren't such "a paranoid" you could have had the impossibly good luck 8:40 am

to meet someone just like TOM and your life would even now be complete in a way most of us will never know. Sadly, your horrible horrible tone just make that level of happiness impossible.

Tom, you are too late for jellied eels. Here, we have only pie. Get used to it.

267. *OlderThanDirt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:33 PM

How many of the rapists are going to read/heed something that you hand them on a bus? says Larry.

42.8%. What's your point?

We're not trying to get the rapists to read it, we're 1) trying to explain our lives to men who're pissed at us for trying to avoid rapists/assaulters/screamers/firestarters and 2) maybe clue in some of the nice guys on what's happening in our lives.

I want men to stop telling me that avoiding assault is in my power and that I am wrong when I try to avoid assault. I want *those* men to read Starling's post.

This isn't just to you, Larry but over and over and over we hear good men saying, "I had no idea." Well, now an absolutely excellent discussion is going on right here on the internet. And if a woman gives a man a copy of this post or a link, it probably means that she's hoping he's not a rapist. And if that woman is someone he claims to love, he needs to recognize that she's doing it with her heart in her mouth, praying that he's going to read it and think and hold her and be supportive. And that he's not going to tell her that she's hurt him and dissed him and made him feel bad so she should just stop saying this shit because it's mean and it's not even true because he'd never hurt anyone.

And maybe this post could get a few non-rapist men to stop using the same language and excuses and attitudes as rapist men, and, as more than one person has said, that would be very useful.

268. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:34 PM

"johnny no sense" = A+++

And god help me, any day that someone brings out the jellied eels is a good day for me. JupiterPluvius, where are you in our time of need?

269. *KellyK*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:34 PM

Shorter Tom:

Okay, so I just skimmed this post and its comments because there was way too much lady-talk for me to pay attention to. But I saw that you might react to me as a threat. How can you be so MEAN and UNFAIR when I'm a GOOD GUY who would never ever hurt a woman or violate her boundaries. And I TOTALLY wouldn't ignore what she was saying or half-listen and turn what she actually said into what I wanted to hear.

270. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:35 PM

It's for the "nice" guys that shoot up gyms and hurt people because they can't deal with rejection.

271. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:35 PM

Non-raping men are also highly encourage to read this post for examples of what they can do to be good to women: <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/stuff-what-boys-can-do/>

272. *littlem*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:46 PM

@alibelle –

"I hope I haven't put my foot in my mouth too much here. Please call me on it if you feel I have."

You have.

It started in one of your previous comments to snarkysmachine here:

"If you want the baggage unpacked fucking unpack it yourself. Explain it to us"

In a somewhat blunt nutshell, I don't believe you're entitled to have snarkysmachine — or anyone else, for that matter — explain the issues to you.

Please educate yourself:

<http://delicious.com/katenepveu/race+rhetoric>

I do also believe part of the problem is that the entire gender has yet to settle on a universal definition of "creepy" or "aggressive" behavior. I do think, however, that it's important to reiterate — as several here have kind of talked around, but I'm not sure anyone has yet said directly — that race and class memberships can inform how those definitions are created.

These comments also seem to inform the issue:

And it's tough to be the woman who, in an alternative scenario where the man is someone who looks a lot like you, she might actually be about to be assaulted or raped. " – Caitlin

"One of my safety concerns often has to do with how much privilege a person has in relation to me. Meaning, I think about the way a person's privilege and my lack (in some areas) might contribute to my ability to bring charges against someone if they would do me harm and what are the consequences for them (doing me harm) vs. me (reporting them)." – snarkysmachine

I also don't believe consideration of how those definitions are created takes away, at all, from Starling's original points.

[I'm in the midst of a busy few days and am not likely to comment further on this issue, so please don't consider yourself snubbed if you ask me a direct question but don't receive a response.]

Thank you for your post, Starling.

273. *DRST*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:49 PM

Tom What do you do to meet men? Your view on us honestly offends me. If you look at every man who comes into your life as a possible threat, unless, of course, you do meet him in church with your mother, what kind of men do you meet?

1) You're assuming all of us want to meet men. Lesbians don't exist in your world, apparently?

2) If my choices are offending you or saving a woman's life, I'll take door number 2, thanks. I don't really give a shit if you're offended. I'm offended that globally 1 out of 4 women is

raped, so your poor widdle feelings don't really appear on my radar.

3) Women get raped in churches, by men they know, and by pastors or priests. So no, just meeting a guy in a church doesn't mean I trust him.

4) *I understand the respect men must give to women given the state of the world and its more sinister aspects* You really, really don't if you can read this thread and the comments here and say what you said. I'd venture to say you don't actually get what's being talked about at all, given that to you it's a choice between "giving women respect" and you being bored.

5. *If I had to approach women, and men for that matter, scared out of my mind of being maced, I dont think I would want to meet people at all.* And yet you think this post and the attitude towards men is offensive? Even stating flat out that if you had to live with healthy trepidation of every stranger of another gender who approached too closely it would make you miserable, your response to that is that women are being too mean and judgmental to men? You couldn't get 4 if you married 2 and 2 together, could you?

Your adventure in life? Ignores my inherent right to life and self-preservation, not to mention being peacefully unharassed in public spaces. Your adventures, approaching women who aren't interested in talking to you, could be hurting women who've already been assaulted once, because you're triggering them. If you don't believe me, read the comments again and note the women here who are triggered just by reading words on a page.

Fuck your adventure. I want my safety and sanity more.

Also knowing one woman who has told you she was raped (which does not mean there are not several other women you know who have not told you their stories) doesn't make you an expert or give you the right to dismiss the reality of thousands upon thousands of other womens' experiences. Especially when plenty of them are here on this page for you to read and absorb instead of attacking them for hurting your feelings.

DRST

274. *littlem*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:49 PM

@KellyK – the irony, it is stunning.

275. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:51 PM

Tom: "[if] every guy is walking on eggshells to introduce himself, doesnt that turn into a boring cycle?"

Yes, indeed. Often I find myself wearied by voluntary conversation and social interaction. Many are the bus rides where I slump listlessly against the window with my NPR and chemistry models, my fascinating novel or my own business, longing for some stranger to intrude on my personal space, ignore my wishes, demand my attention, assure me that meeting someone is the most exciting part of a relationship, and then look deep into my rock-solid malevolent glare and say to me, "Trust me, my ex got raped, but it was a family member, in her home. Don't hold our penises against us."

At which point I might be tempted instead to kick your penis against you (I assume you only have one), and I assume from your adventurous spirit, you'd be all gung-ho for the experience. Or we could skip straight to the macing step.

276. *celeloriel*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:53 PM

Anita, you rock.

277. *volcanista*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:55 PM

Yes, Matt, it's like that for most of us. Rape culture is real and it is all around you. You don't notice it. That's the whole privilege thing.

I love talking to strangers.

This keeps catching me up, in the comment it came from and also in Lori's comments (repeatedly). I honestly just don't see why that's relevant. I mean, okay, you like to do that, and maybe you like to be polite to strangers and accomodating when they're being imposing. So what? What does that have to do with the fact that other women protect their space more closely? Are you saying everyone else is doing it wrong? Because, I mean, no, obviously no, if you've read any of the other comments on these threads. You like it your way but it's not universal and it doesn't have anything to do with whether or not most women feel the need to be more cautious than you. Are you just so deeply, condescendingly sad for all these threatened women and victimized men? In that case, I mean, PLEASE, get over yourselves.

278. *kristinc*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:57 PM

Larry, this post isn't addressed to rapists. It's addressed to genuinely nice guys who don't want to creep women out.

A group which you disqualified yourself from, by the way, Larry, when you threw a tantrum about how it makes your life less fun to think about maybe not creeping us out. So, yeah.

279. *James*OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 7:59 PM

As a male who has been assaulted by other men, I found this post fascinating on multiple levels. I completely agree that people have a right to be left alone: especially when they are in a situation in which they cannot easily escape (such as a crowded bus, elevator, etc.) I am deeply sympathetic to women who are scared as they walk alone to their car on the far side of a dark mall parking lot. I think a lot of the problems well-meaning men encounter is a basic lack of socialization and an unthinking lack of understanding of what it means to feel threatened.

However, I just want to point out that this post is being read by a lot of people like me who have not had Feminism/Abelism 101 and who had to google the word "Kyriarchy". Speaking from that perspective, it seems that the regular commenters here may be taking the position of theoretical physicists: why should you dumb down your conversation for the sake of the uneducated? I appreciate that position, but I think that fair is fair: we excoriate scientists who adopt un-falsifiable theories and try to build a small club of people who all agree with them. Some of the ban threats by a sarah and Sweet Machine seem dangerously close (to this outsider) of bordering on groupthink. A reference was made to men not playing by the rules on this blog. I hope that does not translate to: men tend to inject more skepticism into a conversation.

and the comments. I have a really hard time believing that 1 in 6 men is a rapist. However, I had a really hard time believing that an electron can be in a superposition, too. In the latter case, we knew how to falsify the claim, and did thousands of experiments to that end. In the former, if the response to any skeptical question is "rape is under-reported", how do we attempt to falsify that claim (for the ends of proving it true)? I know that I am an outsider here, but I really think a link or even a suggested Google query would help: why do we have confidence that 1 in 6 men is a rapist, if we are not allowed to use FBI statistics?

280. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:02 PM

For men who feel the situation described in this post is unfair since you are nothing like the men who do rape, rather than calling women paranoid, contact your state sexual assault coalition and tell them you want to get actively involved in primary prevention.

The root source of your problem isn't women who don't trust that you aren't a rapist, it is the number of men who are willing to commit rape at some point in their lives.

If we work together and stop or significantly reduce the number of attempted sexual assaults then women who meet you on public transit will be less likely to need to assess the probability that you might abuse or assault them.

281. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:03 PM

Actually, I think Larry just left an observation about how few male names he saw in the comments. And a compliment on the good article. Did I miss something?

282. *Mark Atwood*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:03 PM

A lot of these comments have degenerated into "there is no valid reason for a man to start an unsolicited conversation with a woman on the bus".

That sort of attitude, well, we are reaping what we sow.

Something I love about being at Burning Man, and at other burner events, is that that social norm is almost completely inverted. When you get on an art car, or stand in a line, or sit and meditate on a piece of art, and a stranger is there next to you, striking up a random conversation or giving a random complement, or handing out a random gift, is extremely common, expected, supported, and welcome.

Which society is the more healthy one?

283. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:05 PM

ARGH! You're right. It was Tom who threw the douchebagorama.

Sincere apologies, Larry.

284. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:08 PM

"2) If my choices are offending you or saving a woman's life, I'll take door number 2, thanks. I don't really give a shit if you're offended. I'm offended that globally 1 out of 4 women is raped, so your poor widdle feelings don't really appear on my radar."

285. *purpleshoes*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:12 PM

Starling way back at the front, there have been studies at college campuses of self-reporting perpetrators of a long list of disturbing things that fall under the heading of "rape".

Self-reporting rates of ever having physically forced a woman into a sex act are about 6% among caucasian men ages 18-25. So one in twenty is about right for that population.

286. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:15 PM

Some of the ban threats by a sarah and Sweet Machine seem dangerously close (to this outsider) of bordering on groupthink

James, please read this post, particularly the following paragraph:

We think about our responses, and we own them. But they're not up for negotiation. We only get bitchy after we've perceived a consistent pattern of disrespect for the comments policy and/or the spirit of the blog. If you don't perceive the same pattern, then one of two things is happening: you haven't read all the same comments we have, or you have different standards than we do. Either way, it's our call, and arguing with us about those calls is far more likely to get you on the shit list than change our minds.

This is a high-traffic blog, and you have no idea what kind of vitriol never sees the light of day. We're ban-happy here and not ashamed of it.

To address your other concern, this is really not a Feminism 101 space, despite the fact that this post is aimed at a 101 level. It arose from another post that was decidedly not 101-level, but which prompted a lot of self-identified male commenters to come in and tell us how paranoid women were for not trusting men and how sad it made the poor men who might miss out on True Love because of that. This post is directed at those men; that doesn't mean the comments are, and that doesn't mean we're ready to relax our notoriously (and belovedly) draconian moderation style to cater to 101-ers. There really is a lot of material out there for men who are new to feminism and who want to think about it more. Professor Google is here to help you.

287. *Ethyl*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:17 PM

@James:

"I know that I am an outsider here, but I really think a link or even a suggested Google query would help..."

Maybe you could try here:

<http://imgtfy.com/>

There's lots of good 101 links in the comments above. You could try there. Or you know, try doing your own research. As has been stated previously by the people who are in charge, this isn't a 101-level place.

288. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:18 PM

@ James:

The statistic in the article and comments is an estimate that 1 in 6 women has been or will be raped. Starling estimates that maybe 1 in 60 men rapes (she lays her assumptions out exceedingly well).

The FBI thing has been covered already – basically, read the fine print about what the statistic is, and it will help you understand. (Hint: # estimated REPORTED rapes reported is probably a drastically different figure than # of ACTUAL rapes.)

I think if you've missed these things in the post/comments, there's probably other stuff you missed or misread too, so you might want to do some closer reading.

289. Ethyl

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:19 PM

@SweetMachine:

Jinx!

290. Alibelle

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:21 PM

Um, littlem, did you read all the comments? I told her to unpack it herself because she was asking us to unpack it, not because I didn't understand. I was saying that if there was an issue she had she should explain it to us. Then she did explain it to us, and I agreed with it, and we made up. It's chicken fried done in fact and I have a slight girl crush on snarkysmachine now. And I don't like how you decided to edit my comments together. I don't think you addressed anything I said at all really, and I feel annoyed, honestly.

Tom, did we even suggest mace at all? Or attacking men? Because I don't remember anyone advocating violence against men in this discussion. Anyway I prefer pepperspray, I like the kick that it gives my baby donuts.

291. OlderThanDirt

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:22 PM

I think a lot of the problems well-meaning men encounter is a basic lack of socialization and an unthinking lack of understanding of what it means to feel threatened.

And the solution to this problem is not to come here and suggest we've got a groupthink issue. I'm sorry you don't like the stats. I'm sorry that our life experience leads us to believe that rape is a huge problem.

Next time I hear the word "groupthink" attached to women speaking of their common experiences I'm going to flip the fuck out. And do you know why "men inject more skepticism" when women speak about their lives? It's because they don't believe us. And if there are a lot of other women who agree with me, I guess that's groupthink too.

292. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:23 PM

I know that I am an outsider here, but I really think a link or even a suggested Google query would help: why do we have confidence that 1 in 6 men is a rapist, if we are not allowed to use FBI statistics?

Here's a starting place, and (as I said) Professor Google can take you from there. According to the US Department of Justice, 60% of rapes/sexual assaults are never reported to the police in the first place. 60%. Think about that. Over half the people who are raped do not even even seek justice. Most of these people are women. Most rapists are walking free right now. Rapists do not look different from other men. I know you say you have a hard time believing that 1 in 6 men is a rapist. Do you have a hard time believing that 1 in 6 women has been assaulted? And if not, who do you think is doing the assaulting?

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:25 PM

I just backtracked through the various posts that initiated this.

When I first saw the xkcd strip a week or two ago it did register as basically a male nerd fantasy. I had thought about drawing an extra panel on the strip which showed the woman imagining the entirety of the original strip — basically showing the girl imagining the nerd imagining him as a desirable to the woman (essentially showing the mind of the strip's creator).

Jesus, it sounds so convoluted and confusing, but I assure it would have been funny. Trust me on this.

294. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:25 PM

Okay, Alibelle, I think it's time to drop it. You said people should call you out if you put your foot in your mouth; littlem did just that. You don't have to agree with her, but it's time to disengage.

295. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:26 PM

Tom, did we even suggest mace at all?

The title does, even though the real-world scenario is more like "how to talk to women without getting them to act a tiny bit bitchy toward you."

296. *Alibelle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:27 PM

Sorry.

297. *JennyRose*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:28 PM

Tom – The chances of a woman you talk to on a short train or bus ride going out with you is next to nil. The chances of her not wanting her boundaries violated is extremely high.

Do that many men get dates on the subway?

298. *Charles*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:28 PM

Let me please say that, as a man, I am sorry and shamed that you have to publish this list of things not to do. These things fall into the category of common decency and should be obvious to anyone, as they are to me and, I am sure, to many other men.

I think any woman is wise to feel threatened by any strange man who attempts to talk to her. There is an old custom called "introductions," which has worked well for years. My advice to young men is to wait for an introduction, without it STFU. If that woman wants to talk to you, she will.

I am 72 years old and have never met a woman by approaching her as a stranger. Yet, amazingly, I have led a very happy life, lots of good, some not so good, and one fantastic, relations with women, and have been happily married for 30 years to Ms. Fantastic.

299. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:28 PM

79 of 345 And, in the comment queue, a prime fucking example of why we moderate like the Unruly 78:40 am

Way to live in a world of fear. Here's hoping you get raped..

Gotta love troll logic.

1. You're too fearful!
2. I hope you are raped!
3. ???
4. Profit!

300. volcanista

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:31 PM

Although some of the comments were a while ago, a few people in this thread have said or implied that people are raped because they act weak or like victims. This really isn't true. You can be targeted because you look like a victim or an easy mark, or you can be targeted because you stand up for yourself and need to be put in your place. or anything in between, or a dozen other unrelated reasons. If you've been assaulted or harrassed, it's not because you did something wrong. That really can't be said enough.

amy, I think that's a reasonable concern, but I don't think there's any way around it when the setting is a public place where people don't have anything in common (other than taking the bus). I think that the way that you can have a better chance of being approached, when you can't send the social signals to that effect, is to look for it in other settings. Maybe through activities where it's safer to be approached, and that also don't trigger your anxiety if you do them?

Matt, I don't think that asking someone "Are you okay?" falls into the categories being discussed here! Asking a person in obvious distress if they are all right is not the same as imposing on a stranger and expecting them to carry on a conversation with you. If you saw a woman crying on the train, I think it's good to ask her if everything is all right. (And if she doesn't want to be helped and says so, then you should respect that.) Same goes for seeing injured people, or witnessing assaults or abuse or harrassment — hell yes, step in in those cases, please.

Uh, Tom... you can meet people who are work colleagues, friends of friends from school or work, people who do the same activities I do, neighbors, friends and work colleagues of family? Also, the internet? I have a harder time making new friends than most people I know, and yet I manage without talking to strangers in public. Bothering me on the train isn't necessary for your social life.

301. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:32 PM

Do that many men get dates on the subway?

No kidding! I know exactly one couple who met on public transportation, and they are lesbians who realized they were on their way to the same concert (i.e., a shared activity *outside* the bus). Who are these people walking down the aisle with the dude who said "Nice hair" on the subway?

302. Anita

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:34 PM

SM, have I told you how much I love the Unruly Bitches' Moderation Policy?

303. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:36 PM

However, I just want to point out that this post is being read by a lot of people like me who have not had Feminism/Abelism 101 and who had to google the word "Kyriarchy".

So you are ignorant on the subject matter, and still feel entitled to lecture us about our own lives. I only wish this was the first, or even the 10th time that's happened today.

A reference was made to men not playing by the rules on this blog. I hope that does not translate to: men tend to inject more skepticism into a conversation.

Ahahaha. Because men are SMARTER than us! And better critical thinkers! And what better place to assert that bullshit than on this blog, which is DEVOTED to critical thinking about the society we live in! How dare the bloggers assert their own rules on their own blog and expect everyone who visits — YES EVEN THE MEN!!!!1 — to obey them. Madness! Groupthink! BURN THE WITCHES!

Some of the ban threats by a sarah and Sweet Machine seem dangerously close (to this outsider) of bordering on groupthink.

No, they border dangerously close to women doing whatever the fuck they want, which you clearly can't handle.

I know that I am an outsider here, but I really think a link or even a suggested Google query would help: why do we have confidence that 1 in 6 men is a rapist, if we are not allowed to use FBI statistics?

You're a fucking idiot. There are links to that information in the goddamn post, which has ALSO been pointed out several times in comments.

I have a really hard time believing that 1 in 6 men is a rapist.

I have a hard time believing you're for real. Fuck off.

304. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:36 PM

I think troll logic needs a little more explication to be perceived in its true glory.

1. You're so hysterical. Why do you think every man wants to rape you?
2. I hope you get raped!
3. ...
4. I'm right!

305. *Matt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:39 PM

Liz: Im on the same page with you on that one; I tried to be pretty clear in stating "If she has headphones on, Im not going to bother her", same holds true for a book magazine, or any item that has her attention... not my place, not the time to bother her, and no, Im not going to flag her attention down to have her take out her headphones or worse... its her time and she's spending it as she wills. That's totally cool, and its an understood fact that its not my time to bother her.

single sentence or anything like it; I know how pissed I'd be if someone screwed up my commute by being a jerk, and I offer the same courtesy. Not sure where the idea I'd be the insistent party came from; KristinC mentioned one of my thoughts very elegantly in saying if the comment/compliment were passed in a way that there was NO burden of response that that would be a kindly way of presenting a compliment, as it absolves either party of any notion of continued conversation or feelings of obligation/privilege.

I got that part. :)

306. *Alice*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:39 PM

LOTS of great points, and what a wonderful post. I've known way too many guys who just don't get why they don't get the benefit of the doubt when meeting strangers – this really sums it up well.

Tom, what you said reminded me of an obnoxious law school professor who wanted to 'get the discussion going' on rape. In a nutshell, he kept saying 'but if men stop at an initial no, there won't be any seduction!' He was largely right – there would be a lot less ham-handed seduction if all 'no's were heeded.

But there would also be a lot more unthreatened women and a lot more interactions that could keep growing at a slower pace, nurtured by mutual respect. If respecting people's boundaries is 'walking on eggshells' for you, then I'd say you need to get used to it, and get some soft-soled shoes.

Amy, your point is an interesting one to me – I think that a number of people who live with disabilities would be excluded from these general rules (eye contact as a precursor to conversation can't work if you're blind), and I'll admit that I'm not coming up with any panaceas. I can't in good conscience sign on to your proposal of welcoming 'one pleasant, impersonal question' when it's directed towards someone who doesn't look like they want to talk; that just opens the floodgates for the vast majority of us who actually *don't* want to talk. However, I figure you can chat with the gregarious waiters and baristas, while I'll continue to give monosyllabic answers to them most of the time. :)

307. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:40 PM

1. *You're so hysterical. Why do you think every man wants to rape you?*

2. *I hope you get raped!*

3. ...

4. *I'm right!*

5. That should show you to keep your mouths shut, bitches!

308. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:41 PM

@James – "I referenced falsifiability because I am concerned about the rape statistics quoted in the post and the comments. I have a really hard time believing that 1 in 6 men is a rapist."

From the body of this post the statistic given was: "One in every six American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime." This statistic comes from RAINN which was derived from data in: National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey. 1998.

The only claim in the post about the possible number of rapists is: "Consider: if every rapist commits an average of ten rapes (a horrifying number, isn't it?) then the concentration of rapists in the population is still a little over one in sixty."

In the comments someone wrote about a worst case possibility which as that phrasing implied was purely speculative.

In surveys of men to see how many acknowledge committing acts which meet the legal definition of one or more sex crimes, researchers in multiple studies got positive responses from the rate of 4.8% to 14.9%. These references came from a rape fact sheet by U of Mass Boston prof David Lisak.

Please note that all of these are higher than 1 in 60 estimate from the body of this post which would be 1.6% but is lower than 1 in 6 which would be 16.6%.

309. *Piffle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:43 PM

You know, I think this topic and the previous one are helping me understand why I've always found "Pretty Woman" such an offensive song. I never really articulated why; but it just sums so much of the assumption that women are available. "Every Move You Make" (I may have the title wrong, it's by the Police) also has always bothered me as stalkerish, and I got that from the first time I heard it; I'm actually less bothered by it since I was told the idea was to disclose stalkerishness by the art, though lots of people think it's romantic, romance wasn't the intent of the artist.

310. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:43 PM

abyss2hope, silly, girls can't do math!

311. *Piffle*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:45 PM

Also, lots of warm fuzzies for Charles. He's a truly nice person.

312. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:47 PM

In a nutshell, he kept saying 'but if men stop at an initial no, there won't be any seduction!'

"My definition of romance is heavily informed by patriarchy and rape culture! Without patriarchy and rape culture, therefore, how would we ever have romance?"

It's like saying "but if women didn't diet, nobody would be beautiful, because only very thin women are considered attractive." AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT, HUH?

313. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:47 PM

Tom, babe, I wrote this post, and let me tell you: I've dated guys I met at the park, on the street, and in the subway. I am not ruining your dating life. I am telling you HOW TO GO ABOUT APPROACHING ME at the park, on the street or in the subway so I look at you and think, "Cool, let's meet for coffee" instead of "Damnation, another bottle of Mace wasted, and it's only Wednesday."

Capisce? Clearly not. Read it again.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:48 PM

Charles, thank you thank you thank you thank you. I've mostly disengaged from this because of other demands on me today, but I was shutting this browser tab and saw your comment. Thank you thank you thank you. I can now leave feeling sort of good, instead of "OH MY GOD, the world is INSANE and I'd better hunker down with the other awesome Shapelings who have a clue."

Also — snarkysmachine: dang, nice blog!

315. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:48 PM

These things fall into the category of common decency and should be obvious to anyone, as they are to me and, I am sure, to many other men.

It is somewhat freaking me out that so many men are coming here to assert their right to infringe on a woman's space *in the name of civility*. Thank you for showing them how it's done.

316. *Arwen*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:49 PM

For a bunch of reasons, I think the "reading body language" bit can be a bit tricky to prescribe – body language is interpretative and cultural both. Eye contact, breath contact, and space all seem relatively contextual, and interpretations are often based in self and experience. For example, someone's body language here (reading) is not how I consistently signal leave me alone (I'm sometimes happy to discuss books with people on buses) – and so the conditioning over the whole society won't be precise.

Damn, if I'm reading, oh say Fat-o-Sphere? I'm practically begging someone to talk to me about it, yeah? But if I and others are "positively" conditioning someone (that interrupting a reader will get your ear talked off on the subject – which may be at least attention) leaves those who read and are signaling "go away" in the category of "bitch", and rape culture is preserved. This is not good.

I am really good at standing up to those who hassle the woman – or anyone else – who states something. I will verbally beat down anyone who says "c'mon, why so uptight?" or "c'mon, smile", or "whatever, bitch", to the woman whose no is disrespected.

I think rape culture will be defeated with posts like this one, which I lay out the calculations of a woman on a train really well. I think rape culture will be defeated by people listening to and actively supporting the respect of boundaries, and also by people actively laying down boundaries, especially where it feels like a transgression to do so.

(Enough of that still doesn't solve rape, but it helps solve rape *culture*.)

My problem with body language as the focus, is that, unless it's extreme and frightening to the more vulnerable – shoving, flipping the bird, etc. – is that it's not clear when the language isn't consistently agreed upon, and it's also a skill on some level – one that some shy people struggle with, and the charismatic are able to use for ever more subtle communications.

But go away, or no thanks, or go fuck yourself – well, those do have consistent public meaning.

including body language, earphones, books, a dog, whatever it takes.

317. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:50 PM

It is somewhat freaking me out that so many men are coming here to assert their right to infringe on a woman's space in the name of civility.

Civility is where women are considerate and accommodating to men and men do whatever the fuck they want.

318. *lapidary*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:54 PM

Well, I'm one of the people who has gone on dates I met on public transit. My personal record was coming home from a failed subway date (no boundaries—kept pressuring me to go into his home on date 1!!) and getting asked on another on that same trip. Went out with the guy a time or two, he made an incredibly racist remark about “Guidos” (in Brooklyn), and I decided I needed a better vetting process than “rides public transit.”

I fully agree with the post—I'm not saying this to disagree, just that I kept seeing plaintive questions of “who goes out with these guys anyways?” and was chuckling to myself when I realized it was me.

NYC was my first shot at living in a big city, from a town where you see someone you know almost every time you leave the house, and there were many things I learned about invasions of space and discouraging contact in my year there.

319. *Matt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:55 PM

I gotta giggle for a second.... personally, Ive never thought of a woman being an “unruly bitch” as a bad thing. ;) love it.

I forgot to log who mentioned it, but someone asked me about college rape prevention classes; all I can really say in response is to reiterate the wish that us as guys would get some sort of positive classes in how to approach, talk to, and effectively communicate cross-gender. (or frankly even same-gender... neither are exactly ingrained in the populace and they should be). I do see the need for this kind of post; Im not refuting that in the least, and even though Ive had questions, I do agree with it even if I do see myself as outside its core issue (as I explained above, Im gay; Im not copping out of the topic by seeing myself outside of it, Im just the last person who would ever see a woman as a sexual object or try to use sex to force a point with her)

From this side Im wondering how difficult it would be to set up something like a “how to talk to a woman safely and respectfully 101” kind of class or workshop; I think it'd be hypocritical in a way to have it taught by men as we can never as men experience the nuances of what you ladies do; and I can agree that even for those of us who dont put it to conscious use that male privilege exists and would undermine the idea... any thoughts?

320. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 8:55 PM

Crap. Tom, I'm sorry. I just realized that if you are the man with the cockroach tattoos, I did in fact tell you never to talk to women in public. So, yeah, my bad. But I'll spring for a match.com membership to make up for it, kays?

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:02 PM

Man, there are some amazing comments on this post. Thanks so much for the great discussion, (almost) everyone.

James, I highly recommend doing some 101 reading. There are some 101-level posts on this blog (look in the "101" category in categories) and there is always the feminism 101 blog. I know that doing this takes a little more effort than simply reading a post and commenting on it, but it is worth it. Believe me, there are very few useful points that can be made on a topic like this without prior education, and the regulars here have heard them all.

That said, I also had trouble imagining 1 in 6 men as a rapist. I mean, if you just count the men in my family, there's likely to be an average of 6 or 7 rapists at any given large family gathering. That's scary! And I have a really nice, close knit family. They're good people! Maybe *my* family is the exception; maybe there is no one in my entire bloodline who's ever done ANYTHING bad. I doubt it. But I also imagine that there are actually fewer rapists in a given population than 1 in 6, because from my research and personal experience, I've noticed that few rapists are one-time offenders.

Oh and this is completely irrelevant and I apologise in advance for the derail, but I just wanted to mention that last night a woman named Kate Harding made a reservation at the restaurant where I work. I really, really wanted to ask if it was THE Kate Harding, but I figured it was pretty far fetched that THE Kate Harding would be visiting Deadmonton. So there ya go, you have a name twin who seems to be a very nice lady.

322. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:03 PM

The stat is that one in six women is raped, not that one in six men is a rapist.

323. *Arwen*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:04 PM

@Sniper – I think Charles was saying that not speaking to strangers who are women is common decency, not that women speaking to strange men is common decency.

He appears to be an older man; indeed, there are in many cultures the gendered expectation that men don't talk to women they don't know, and I believe Charles is claiming experience of such a culture, and is suggesting that's part of his confusion as to the thread. Because women shouldn't talk to men they don't know.

Am I missing what you're saying?

324. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:04 PM

From this side Im wondering how difficult it would be to set up something like a "how to talk to a woman safely and respectfully 101" kind of class or workshop;

Matt, are you familiar with the group Men Can Stop Rape? They have programs on college campuses... but being by men for men I'm not sure what the programs entail. I'm a FB fan of them and they seem to do good work.

Okay, for real, I'm getting back to work now.

325. *Annie Mcfly*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:06 PM

86 of 345 Also, I second the thanks to Charles. I wish more men were gentlemen like you! 11/12/2015 8:40 am

326. *Annie Mcfly*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:07 PM

Sniper: yes, I was just responding to James saying that he can't believe that 1 in 6 men is a rapist.

327. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:07 PM

Uh. Wow. First, this really is a great post. I keep trying to read to the end, then hit refresh, and I'm just never going to catch up. I do agree that Starling's article would be good for pretty much everyone to read.

There was so much I wanted to comment on through all of this thread, but I'm basically too depressed now that I've gotten to the end.

As a man, I feel a deep sense of sorrow that this is part of your daily experience of the world. I'm not going to bother disputing facts, as the greater point to me is that your experience is real, and hence the facts are less relevant (if it's 1 in 6 or 1 in 20, would it really change your experience?).

I'm a very big, tattooed, possibly scary looking guy. I think I've known all this at least subconsciously (when I'm walking down the sidewalk at night and it's just me and a woman in front of me, if she starts to seem nervous, I'll cross the street. And so on). I'll carry this knowledge with me from now on, and teach it to my sons.

I'm having some trouble reconciling all of this with my experience however (my shit, I know and accept, just saying). Mostly because this doesn't seem to be the experience of the woman in my life. I don't say that as a judgment of them, or of any of you. So my internal question becomes a desire to talk with them about the topics raised here. Would you want the men you know to discuss this with you?

I want to ask how do we change this, but I guess a better question is do you feel it's even changeable?

328. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:11 PM

Charles, you are lovely. Thank you very much.

Anita, your post to Tom was glorious. Well played.

329. *Grace*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:11 PM

I just want to say thank you for this post, and the previous one about the comic. The first post resulted in a wonderful, in-depth, 3 hour (!) conversation between myself and my husband. It's amazing because I had never realized just how pervasive male privilege can be. My husband, who is a sensitive, kind person with sisters and many female friends and is as liberal as they come, had NO IDEA that I've ever in my life had to worry or think about rape. It had never occurred to him. My husband is a guy that never would have approached a strange woman on a bus, but thanks to these posts he is now much more aware of rape culture and male privilege, and that's a wonderful thing :)

I wish I had this post printed up to give to the guy who tried to talk me up from his car, driving along side me while I was on my bike (which resulted in me nearly crashing into another car making a left-hand turn at an intersection). Does anyone really think this would result in a date? Come on people.

330. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:21 PM

I think Charles was saying that not speaking to strangers who are women is common decency, not that women speaking to strange men is common decency.

Arwen, you've misread my comment, which obviously wasn't clear enough. I was thanking Charles for not being one of the jerks who think it's okay to accost women in public, because he clearly said it's not okay to accost women in public.

331. Arwen

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:23 PM

@Sniper – Oh! Okay. Sorry, I was confused!

332. infamousqbert

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:24 PM

Tom, you are too late for jellied eels. Here, we have only pie. Get used to it.

i'm SO glad that this has left the shakesville sphere and entered into the wider web. :)

333. Arwen

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:25 PM

(Yes, I misread "show them how it's done" as show them how disrespecting women is done. *g*)

334. John

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:27 PM

I think this article oversimplifies the very complicated subject of rape.

I also don't think it's appropriate using rape as the implied consequence of making mistakes while talking to women. I would like to know how many rapes are the consequence of the (fairly specific) social situation you're giving tips on. As it is now, this article seems to imply that 1 in 6 women are going to be approached and raped by a stranger in public. Surely that's not the case.

What am I supposed to take from this article? Be very careful about how you talk to women in public, because they're going to jump to the conclusion that you're a rapist? I appreciate that this article means well, and I think it gives an excellent insight into the process of gaining trust, but being told I have to work my way up from the level of a rapist is discouraging.

This article is clearly more tailored to women than men. Either that, or it's simply missed the mark.

335. Sniper

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:28 PM

Yes, I misread "show them how it's done" as show them how disrespecting women is done

Oh, crap no. I was thinking maybe Charles could hold a class on Anti-douchery. They're always looking at community colleges.

336. bubbah gurl

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:28 PM

regardless of the statistics about how many women will be raped (men get raped (by men), too—so that could lead to another interesting blog)..and that something like the average rape victim is raped 3 times a year (see NCVS site)... i guess it boils down to that really scary things happen to people. SOMETimes it seems like it happens because of WHO we are. In the case of rape, it seems to be about the fact that we are women.

Child abuse is pretty common, too. A lot of times, the brutality is happening behind closed doors. Should we assume that all parents are potential abusers? That we should feel

uncertain about letting them take their kids inside their house? Should we spy on them to make sure they are not abusing their kids?

One could take the reasoning and apply it to soooo many situations.

I liked the posting. It was funny and helpful to men I think. But I am left feeling like it somehow perpetuates a culture of fear, isolation, and distance between people. It is great if a man is sensitive to the experiences and fears of women. I assume that women will be sensitive to his when he insists on a signed consent form before you have sex and a video recording of you just before the act in order to ensure that you are not intoxicated. Because it is a real possibility that he may be falsely accused of rape and his life will be ruined. Doesn't happen a lot, but it HAS happened. So, it only takes once to ruin his life forever. He should assume that every woman is a personality disordered liar who wants to totally screw him over.

337. *blu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:33 PM

(not so) funnily enough, about that 1 in 6 stat (which btw refers to the survivors, not the men) – I was thinking, out of the 6 men I know in my family, 1 is in fact a molester. I'm the only one who knows it, and it's killing me since in every other respect he's a good man, at times a fucking awesome one – but yeah, sometimes they really are our fathers and brothers and uncles.

Now that's anecdotal, so it's worth about as much as the thoroughly-masticated gum on my left shoe – but seriously guys, please don't just assume you'd never actually know a rapist because all the dudes you know are like, cool and decent and stuff, and that all these rapists are just lurking somewhere in our statistically-falsified imaginations. And like, read units and stuff.

338. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:34 PM

Dearest, most loveable Tom.

Clearly, the author made a mistake by making this post about what women think, want and feel. Who cares about that, right. And she may say that she wants people like you to understand women like her, but that's just stupid because everybody knows that women are all crazy and can never be understood because their brains don't work rationally like the men do, amiright?

Well ok, let's put the text into terms that are not about weird women's thoughts.

Let's make it about dogs. You like dogs, right?

We'll just assume you do. So, let's say you are walking around, and suddenly there is this dog. You think it looks like a great dog. You want to play fetch with this dog, and pet it, and maybe even take it home with you. What do you do?

Do you simply walk to the dog, put it on a leash and take it home? No. It might belong to somebody else.

Do you just sit down and pet it? No. Maybe the dog bites. Maybe this dog had a bad owner, and dogs like that don't like being petted by strangers. Maybe it's a shy dog, and your looming over it will scare it. You like dogs, you don't want to scare them! Maybe the dog thinks you are intruding into its territory and it will get aggressive, trying to protect its space.

what experiences it has had in the past, or how it will see your actions.

So you do the sensible thing. After looking around for the owner of the dog, who can tell you if it likes strangers or not, you might squat down, so as not to tower over the dog threateningly. But you only do this if the dog does not look like it is already scared. Or angry. Or feeling threatened. You're a smart guy, you can read it's body language, right? And you will act accordingly. After all, you like dogs. You don't want this dog to not like you. So you make sure to take your clues from the dog.

So since always thinking about why women are doing the weird things they are doing is asking too much, just remember: Take your clues from them. And also, women do not have the option to bite you like a dog can. So maybe give them a little extra room?

339. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:41 PM

He should assume that every woman is a personality disordered liar who wants to totally screw him over.

Oh for fuck's sake, get real. This bullshit is tired and has no place here and you have just won the title of My First Ban of the Day (Visible to Commenters, that is).

340. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:42 PM

What am I supposed to take from this article? Be very careful about how you talk to women in public, because they're going to jump to the conclusion that you're a rapist?

Gosh, yeah, it must be awfully oppressive to read an article that says you should be careful how you talk to women in public. It's almost as though we expect you to care about their feelings or something.

I appreciate that this article means well, and I think it gives an excellent insight into the process of gaining trust, but being told I have to work my way up from the level of a rapist is discouraging.

Is it really. Gosh, I feel for you. Here's an idea: talk to your fellow men about *not being rapists*. That would be an awesome way to help women stop having to worry that they're in danger of sexual assault.

And while you're taking on the difficult job of working against rape culture — which, be warned, people will drop by and tell you that you're being hysterical and paranoid and making things up, so enjoy that part — you could try *not assaulting women verbally*. Don't get in their space when they don't want you there. Don't act like your right to not be "discouraged" trumps her right to be safe. OH WOW SOMEONE SHOULD WRITE A POST ABOUT THAT.

341. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:42 PM

@A Sarah: thank you, muchly. Park up a comfy chair and watch me obsess about pens!

This thought occurred to me. Over the course of the last month or so, most of the per/blogs I've read have had at least ONE post per week about some zombie playa who was trying to breach some chick's personal bubble. And we probably could spend all day for a good ten billion years recounting every single time a person didn't quite understand the concept of "get the fuck away from me, mutherfucker."

Fuck, I don't even know how I feel about marriage, but I totally slapped on a "keep away" (fake wedding/engagement band) as some kind of talisman, which is often NOT a deterrent to unwanted advances.

It seems like the male trolls are getting bogged down on whether or not these advances or empty clue bongs are in themselves indicative of potential rapes, which of course they might be. As though the fact the advances are UNWANTED isn't enough reason to learn new mate seeking behaviors, which I wholeheartedly believe it is.

Of course it's not "normal" for women go through life hyper vigilant, but it's also a little bonkers for men to assume that everyone person of a gender you're attracted is required to give an audience for your traveling playa roadshow.

To a lesser degree I find myself doing battle on dating website forums on this issue as it relates to not getting responses from women and getting all "nice guy" about it. Over and over I hear the same refrain, "If a person is raised with manners, they would respond to my messages even if they don't want me." And over and over I say, "Nobody is obligated to give you an exit interviews as to why they don't want to fuck you." and really, if we can't get folks to understand that women don't owe them a frigging "thanks, but no thanks" email (for one, it doesn't stop there and if you're lucky the call you a 'bitch' and go on their way, at worse they stalk you all over the internets) it's probably unlikely they are going to get any of the concepts discussed here.

342. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:45 PM

On another note:

Since we are dealing with principles of physics, here is another one that is commonly accepted and that can be applied to this issue as well:

There is no such thing as a positive proof of a theory. Only the negative proof can be absolute.

So, men who want us to realize that they are Nice Guys For Real: please remember, there is no such thing as a positive proof that you are a nice guy. Or that you would never harm a woman, sexually or otherwise. The longer we know you, the more data we collect that you are genuinely a good guy, the better we will feel. But there will never be the one action that proves once and for all that you are a good guy and will not harm us. There will never be absolute certainty. Not to the point where it can't be refuted. Because no matter how much we want to believe it, you can always still prove us wrong.

That's what happens in the vast majority of rape cases. The guy gave the women some data that pointed towards him being a good guy. And then he proved her wrong. And this proving her wrong is the only proof that can not be refuted. Once he has raped her, he has once and for all shown that he is not a good guy and that he can not be trusted to keep from harming women.

Whether women feel like it or not, the facts make it pretty clear that they are not safe.

The best thing you can do to make people believe in your scientific theory: Provide as much corresponding data as possible.

The best thing you can do to make people believe in you as a truly good guy who does not harm women: Act like a good guy. And don't harm women.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:45 PM

Men who are made uncomfortable by this article, please read [this one](#) as a followup. Here, I will even make it shorter for you by quoting the money part:

You, dear male reader, are totally not one of those men. I know this, and I appreciate it. I really do. But here's where all this victimy girl shit concerns you:

- every time you don't tell your buddies it's not okay to talk shit about women, even if it's kinda funny;
- every time you roll your eyes and think "PMS!" instead of listening to why a woman's upset;
- every time you call Ann Coulter a tranny cunt instead of a halfwit demagogue;
- every time you say any woman—Coulter, Michelle Malkin, Phyllis Schlafly, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, any of us—"deserves whatever she gets" for being so detestable, instead of acknowledging there are things that no human being deserves and only women get;
- every time you joke about how you'll never let your daughter out of the house or anywhere near a man, 'cause ha ha, that'll solve everything;
- every time you say, "I don't understand why thousands of women are insisting this is some kind of woman thing";
- every time you tell a woman you love she's being crazy/hysterical/irrational, when you know deep down you haven't heard a word she's said in the past 15 minutes, and all you're really thinking about is how seeing her yell and/or cry is incredibly unsettling to you, and you just want that shit to stop;
- every time you dismiss a woman as "playing the victim," even if you're right about that particular woman...

You are missing an opportunity to help stop the bad guys.

You're missing an opportunity to stop the real misogynists, the fucking sickos, the ones who really, truly hate women just for being women. The ones whose ranks you do not belong to and never would. The ones who might hurt women you love in the future, or might have already.

'Cause the thing is, you and the guys you hang out with may not really mean anything by it when you talk about crazy bitches and dumb sluts and heh-heh-I'd-hit-that and you just can't reason with them and you can't live with 'em can't shoot 'em and she's obviously only dressed like that because she wants to get laid and if they can't stand the heat they should get out of the kitchen and if they can't play by the rules they don't belong here and if they can't take a little teasing they should quit and heh heh they're only good for fucking and cleaning and they're not fit to be leaders and they're too emotional to run a business and they just want to get their hands on our money and if they'd just stop overreacting and telling themselves they're victims they'd realize they actually have all the power in this society and white men aren't even allowed to do anything anymore and and and...

I get that you don't really mean that shit. I get that you're just talking out your ass.

But please listen, and please trust me on this one: you have probably, at some point in your life, engaged in that kind of talk with a man who really, truly hates women—to the extent of having beaten and/or raped at least one. And you probably didn't know which one he was.

And that guy? Thought you were on his side.

344. bellacoker

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:45 PM

100%. 100% of rapes are the result of men meeting women and then proceeding in a manner contrary to Starling's advice.

The article does not say or imply that all rapes are stranger rape, but how do you imagine people proceed from stranger to not stranger? Magic?

345. Arwen

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:46 PM

g.

You know I am interested in the intersection of what this means overall, though. Charles does sound to me from a more segregated culture – and it wasn't the culture we're in now, but it's not one I'd want to return to.

I suppose that's why the "respect women's individual voices" rather than "note they're women and avoid" is my preferred solution. Of course, of course, I do not think women here are *saying* that – for example, Sweet Machine very well laid out her rules for engagement, and in her anecdote there are clear signs and she is an entity. for

But I personally am wary about overmuch othering women, especially in public, and especially with variable rules in body language. Where "she asked for it" suddenly raises its head: am I, who laughs and talks, asking for it because I am not giving fuck off signals? I know we here don't conflate consent to conversation with consent to sex....

Until our voices are better respected, I understand why assuming no to those with lowered eyes makes sense – I've been a victim of violence, and have been stalked, etc., and have had rape culture show up in my relationships – but I'm also somewhat wary of saying "women are intimidated and we should treat them carefully / differently". *Anyone* giving a bright no should be treated with respect – even the talkers like me.

Of course allies need to be especially careful to support voices otherwise ignored – especially younger women, who are preyed on by every jagoff with something to prove.

Still, I get weaker / gentler sex horrors.

In some ways, lots of those old patriarchal constraints were about controlling women, but they were also protective within a very narrow band – of course, with women as chattel, this was all framed within protection of property rackets – but not talking to women was a big part of that. Fuck yes, I want the grad student who has an opinion about Foucault to accost me on the bus if he would a guy in the same situation.

I'm hearing a lot of buses without any stranger talk – this is why I wonder if bus chat is regional. There are little pockets of conversation break out on buses here.

The tiresome ones are sports related. *g*

346. Anita

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:52 PM

Aww, Caitlin, thank you.

I do want to say that I feel a little bad for the man with the cockroach tattoos. Were they playful tattoos? I would totally not mind talking to you on a day I feel like conversation!

I often find that men's body language can be helpful, too. I think there might be a 102 post in not creeping out women who might be interested. That is, there are tattooed men that I

don't find nearly as threatening as some clean cut business types. I don't know what this is – perhaps they are doing some sort of eye contact thing I'm interpreting as a friendly signal, plus not engaging until I make the first smile / move / comment? Maybe they're triggering my queerdar or other codes that make me think we have something in common? I'm not sure. On the other hand, I find football-player shaped men almost always threatening, no matter what their body language, sexual orientation, or distance from me. So I'm guessing it's a combo of body language and internalized "threat types".

@Nathan – Sure! I'd love to have my male relatives / friends coming to me, but generally not as a "now, teach me about rape" kind of way. A lot of us do a lot of 101-type educating, and starting from scratch every time gets old. Personally, I'd welcome it if he did some reading on his own first, and/or came to me and expressed a willingness to listen when/if I felt comfortable doing so, and/or came with specific open-ended requests.

But that's me, and this is a really individual thing, so you may need to play it by ear. I often need to work up to talking to women, and much more men, about my experiences with harassment and assault, and my trauma is relatively mild. (One of my neighbors grabbed and kissed me and tried to hold me down when I was fifteen, and I had a stalker in college, and a few very scary incidents, and a lot of minor ones that were still scary.)

347. Ruth

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:53 PM

Wow.

I've read a lot of the comments on this post, but not yet all. (But I WILL read them ALL, because I VALUE this safe forum for discussion (<3, etc.), and since I haven't yet said this, Starling, WOW, and SM and FJ (and if KH has commented and I haven't read yet, sorry), so insightful!, and of course, snarkymachine, you rock, and who in their right mind WOULDN'T want to be your friend, and so many wise and awesome people here, that I finally have that woman discussion forum I've been LONGING FOR AND LACKING.

So many great comments, so little time to give them the weight and appreciation they deserve.

So, let me just get to the point and say:

I personally, have NEVER had a woman INTERRUPT me, on public transport, when I was reading, or what have you, with more than a, "Excuse me, do you have the time?" AND THEN (and this is important) after RECEIVING answer, silence, OR, (alternate scenario) "I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I couldn't help but notice you were reading..."

So, just saying, the BEHAVIOR of women IN MY EXPERIENCE has been NON-THREATENING.

So, bottom line, to ME this is still about BEHAVIOR and not CHARACTERISTIC.

For me personally, if a woman were taller than me by a foot, and seemed stronger than me, and ignored all my cues that I didn't want to engage, and she threatened me, and, and, and...

I would be just as scared if it were a man.

But it's never happened.

348. *Echo*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:55 PM

Nothing useful to say, just that this post is soo awesome. And not just as an educational tool for men, but as a guide to me, and presumably plenty of other women, on how to set and maintain boundaries in public places.

349. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:55 PM

Anita—actually, it was the most striking set of tattoos I've ever seen in my life. Dozens and dozens of two-inch cockroaches in very realistic colors scurrying (in a very realistic pattern) towards the man's shirt from his head and neck and arms. As if someone had just turned on a light in the kitchen. It was an incredible visual effect.

It also made me wonder whether he had taken a vow of lifelong celibacy or something and gotten the tattoo as a way to enforce it. Because it produced precisely the same reaction as seeing a bunch of huge cockroaches crawling into someone's shirt might be expected to produce. Yikeeeeees.

350. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:56 PM

OMG. I cannot believe the men who come here and say that because they're made uncomfortable by this article and the comments—which were written by women to address and share the problem of how they are made uncomfortable by male strangers—that THAT is the problem. And they proceed to lecture on how the women are wrong, and doing it wrong, and so forth.

Filly and SM, I offer you a virtual doughnut of the sweetest, spiciest, and most baby-flavored kind.

351. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 9:59 PM

I understand womens' point of view on this issue. But, if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men? Men are afraid of rejection, but we're definitely not afraid of being raped or killed by you. We definitely do think about killing or being killed on a daily basis (as crimes against men usually end in death, walking away from a rape or a sexual assault would be a nice change of pace), usually while protecting a woman or family. So, why not stop with all of the rule sets and approach us instead?

Also, some other guy brought up an excellent point: 3/4 of rapes are committed by someone familiar to the victim. That means that that stranger that's coming onto you is far safer than your childhood best friend.

352. *Anita*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:02 PM

Starling – Oh. When you said Technicolor, I was imagining small (inch-long?) rainbow-colored cockroaches, maybe from ear to collarbone. It sounded kind of whimsical and fun, although I could imagine why others might not find an ultramarine cockroach kind of interesting. I also wouldn't mind sort of a traditional entomology-type illustration thing (in sepia?).

The scurrying mass is less awesome, and indeed, my willingness to converse would decline dramatically.

353. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:05 PM

Anita—in a weird way, it was amazing. Whoever did it was a master tattoo artist. But, y'know, yikes. And, as I recall, there were little reddish trails of fluid left behind by the roaches. I don't know, maybe he dated only entomologists.

354. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:05 PM

Good point, Lauren.

I liked the posting. It was funny and helpful to men I think. But I am left feeling like it somehow perpetuates a culture of fear, isolation, and distance between people.

No, that would be the men attacking and raping women. You absolutely do not get to blame us.

Because it is a real possibility that he may be falsely accused of rape and his life will be ruined. Doesn't happen a lot, but it HAS happened.

Whereas rape DOES happen a lot, and does ruin lives, but it is apparently excessive to talk about it like the people doing the raping are somehow to blame.

I assume that women will be sensitive to his when he insists on a signed consent form before you have sex and a video recording of you just before the act in order to ensure that you are not intoxicated.

A culture of consent? OH HOW I DREAM OF THE DAY. I feel like someone wrote a book about that.

Fuck, I don't even know how I feel about marriage, but I totally slapped on a "keep away" (fakey wedding/engagement band) as some kind of talisman, which is often NOT a deterrent to unwanted advances.

snarkysmachine, I told people I was married while travelling because I wasn't on my home turf, and it seemed easier to try to deter as many advances as possible rather than trying to negotiate my way through other cultures' different social rules. My travelling companion (female) couldn't understand this, at all. She thought it was crazy and paranoid and really rude. Because it...might stop a man I don't want to talk to from hitting on me? In a country where I don't know my way around, have no friends and don't speak the language? She seriously got angry every time I did it. I still don't understand.

As though the fact the advances are UNWANTED isn't enough reason to learn new mate seeking behaviors, which I wholeheartedly believe it is.

Yup.

Anita, Starling, I don't find tattoos intimidating at all *unless they are meant to be intimidating tattoos*. (My mind immediately jumps to swastikas, gang signs and the sectarian shit that pervades Northern Ireland and Glasgow. Put those tattoos on yourself and I will be nowhere near you, ever.) One of my girlfriends is covered and the other's getting her first big piece soon, so tattoos aren't an issue for me. I'm actually far more likely to be cautious of the businessmen types, because I see enough of them in my day job to know that they are often the ones who think they are lord of all they survey, and that is what is scary to me.

bellacoker, this is absolutely not the point of what we're discussing, but men rape men, women rape men, and women rape women. It's a small percentage and it IS NOT what we're talking about here, but let's not leave out the fact that it happens.

Aww, Ruth, I recognise that happiness of "At last! My people!" I had the same thing. :D

I cannot believe the men who come here and say that because they're made uncomfortable by this article and the comments—which were written by women to address and share the problem of how they are made uncomfortable by male strangers—that THAT is the problem.

THE WOMEN ARE TALKING, LU. AND THEY WON'T STOP.

355. *Charlotte*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:07 PM

I have nothing else to add but applause. This is so useful and brilliant.

356. *Matt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:13 PM

Lu: not all of us would dare lecture; personally, Im finding it fascinating and pretty helpful; there are a great many perspectives on here and ideas I had never even taken the moment to think about... Im pretty thankful to have stumbled on this via a friend's reposting of it on facebook.

Of course it makes me uncomfortable; it also makes me want to change the aspects of myself that cause discomfort... and I think that's the point of the whole thing.

357. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:15 PM

Of course it makes me uncomfortable; it also makes me want to change the aspects of myself that cause discomfort... and I think that's the point of the whole thing.

Well played, Matt. Seriously. Well played.

358. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:15 PM

Caitlin:

Point taken.

revised –

100%. 100% of rapes are the result of people meeting other people and proceeding contrary to Starling's advice.

359. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:17 PM

Matt, I appreciate that you're different, but why do I have to acknowledge it? Did I say ALL?

And I'd like to add that I almost stopped myself from posting this, because that's the kind of caretaking of other peoples' feelings that women are expected to do. No, this is not the time or place to expect it.

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:18 PM

@bubbah girl – “I liked the posting. It was funny and helpful to men I think. But I am left feeling like it somehow perpetuates a culture of fear, isolation, and distance between people.”

Talking about the reality of sexual violence and the impact it has on many women is not what perpetuates a culture of fear, isolation and distance between people. The reality of sexual violence does this and not just the violence itself but the way victims are frequently blamed afterwards if they are believed. “You met him on the bus? What did you expect?”

361. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:23 PM

But, if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men?

Women not approaching you or your buddies != women not approaching men, period.

(as crimes against men usually end in death, walking away from a rape or a sexual assault would be a nice change of pace)

You have got to be fucking kidding me. You did not just say that.

3/4 of rapes are committed by someone familiar to the victim. That means that that stranger that's coming onto you is far safer than your childhood best friend.

No, it does not, because you have missed the whole fucking point of the Schrodinger analogy.

Dingo, your comment is one of the ones I let through so that the good-hearted men who are reading will see why their “but I’m a nice guy” arguments are just not enough for us to trust them.

362. JenK

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:24 PM

Re: saying you're married when you're not: this also becomes useful when you're polyamorous.

To me, multiple partners means I have *less* time to get involved with someone new. I'd also want my current partners to get to know and approve anyone new.

But to hopeful guys who are chatting me up it means that I'm *more* available because, hey, if I'm not monogamous then I must be willing to sleep with anyone! Including them! Right now! Plus I'm fat and therefore desperate for sex! Now! Right?

...yeah.

363. Matt

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:24 PM

Nah... I wasn't expecting or asking for handholding; and I was surprised actually at my own reaction to the first part of your comment “men who come here and say that because they're made uncomfortable by this article and the comments—which were written by women to address and share the problem of how they are made uncomfortable by male strangers—that THAT is the problem.” and had to agree with you; I think even the fact that I was bothered by the article speaks a whole lot... my response to you was less about waving my hand and saying whatever excuse I could than it was that I'm still kinda

This kind of topic and the comments that go with it ARE what women think and what women have to say; and generally (at least in what I get to see on a regular basis) there aren't enough people knocking this into the heads of the guys around 'em. We guys don't get this frequently enough I guess.

364. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:25 PM

as crimes against men usually end in death, walking away from a rape or a sexual assault would be a nice change of pace), usually while protecting a woman or family

Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit, bullshit.

365. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:26 PM

Matt, you know what, I thought it over and I apologize. I was exasperated and you weren't my real target. And I respect you for taking it in stride.

366. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:26 PM

Ah, sorry, Sweet Machine. I see you already covered Dingo's idiotic, self-serving comment, and with more than one word.

367. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:28 PM

Of course it makes me uncomfortable; it also makes me want to change the aspects of myself that cause discomfort... and I think that's the point of the whole thing.

Matt, I really appreciate you saying this, because it's a very clear articulation of what checking your privilege can feel like.

368. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:29 PM

Oh, Sniper, one word was one more than it deserved, but I let it through because it was illustrative of a theme in many comments I've deleted today.

369. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:31 PM

I understand womens' point of view on this issue.

No you don't.

We definitely do think about killing or being killed on a daily basis (as crimes against men usually end in death, walking away from a rape or a sexual assault would be a nice change of pace)

Crimes against men committed overwhelmingly by whom, Dingo? Go on, go on, guess? Did you say men? Did you? Do you see how using that to blame women for protecting themselves against men's violence is completely ridiculous? Well done, you win a SHUT THE FUCK UP.

So, why not stop with all of the rule sets and approach us instead?

Dingo, I am coming nowhere fucking near you, because people as unwilling as you to respect the wishes of women send off "keep away" vibes from a mile away. It's hilarious

that you're generalising women's reluctance to be anywhere near your creepy-ass self as some kind of failure on their part. Good judgement, is what it is. You have no idea how much women approach men, because they don't want to approach you.

370. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:34 PM

Also, Re: saying you're married when you're not: this also becomes useful when you're polyamorous.

Amen. The guy who feels entitled enough to intrude on my clearly-uninterested personal space and ask "Do you have a boyfriend?" is not going to respond to "No, two girlfriends" in any way that is going to enable me to get my space back.

371. *farfalla*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:45 PM

usually while protecting a woman or family

Oh I see! So it's women's fault that women get raped (she was dressed like a slut and asking for it), it's women's fault that men are aggressive on public transit (you just need to take control and tell them to fuck off), it's women's fault that we live in a sterile culture where no one knows anyone anymore and we're all so isolated and lonely (you're killing random interactions between strangers), and now it's ALSO women's fault that MEN kill other MEN.* God. How do we live with ourselves?

(*Obviously, women also kill, but I'll assume that in most of the scenarios being imagined by Dingo, this isn't the case.)

372. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:45 PM

:: Seriously platonic crushing on Charles and Nathan ::

373. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:50 PM

Something I love about being at Burning Man, and at other burner events, is that that social norm is almost completely inverted.

No, it's not.

There's a social convention which was mentioned either in this thread or the one on the comic – 'the roof is the introduction.' This is what you've experienced at shared events. It does not typically apply, however, to the street, or to public transportation, which for social purposes should be considered an extension of the open street. The exceptions are rare events such as earthquakes, where the shared event and the potential for need for aid override normal social distance.

374. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:54 PM

@Dingo – "I understand womens' point of view on this issue. But, if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men?"

One of the problems with this as a solution to the issues raised in this post is that some rapists view this as blanket consent and from paying attention to rape cases too many non-rapists seem to agree that women who initiate contact cannot be believed if they report having been raped or that the rapist shouldn't be convicted because he might have

misunderstood her lack of consent in light of the fact that she's the one who initiated contact.

These issues are why I am actively involved in my state's (MN) SV primary prevention efforts.

375. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:56 PM

What am I supposed to take from this article? Be very careful about how you talk to women in public, because they're going to jump to the conclusion that you're a rapist?

Why yes. Yes, as you have guessed with lightning-swift perspicacity, this post was ALL ABOUT YOU and the risks YOU face.

Except, oh wait, it's fucking not. You fail, please take some time to review the material before attempting once more to pass the final test.

3/4 of rapes are committed by someone familiar to the victim.

Once you've harassed someone a few times, believe me, you're familiar to them. Men who hit on women in public places are attempting to become familiar to them.

376. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:57 PM

Are any of you familiar with the advice people give lawyers and men who are thinking about proposing marriage that says: Don't ask a question that you don't already know the answer to.

That phrase has been running through my head since the beginning of the Would it Kill You to Be Civil thread.

377. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 10:57 PM

Which society is the more healthy one?

Oh! Oh! I know this one! A society where 1 in 6 women isn't raped in her lifetime. Ask me another!

(And please try to be *more* of a sanctimonious git. I can see why you would think worrying about trivial issues like routine harassment, rape and murder is a waste of time. Teach me how to be more like you.)

378. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:03 PM

Also, A lot of these comments have degenerated into "there is no valid reason for a man to start an unsolicited conversation with a woman on the bus".

No, they're stating that there is no reason for a man to assume he has the right to start an unsolicited conversation with a woman on the bus, or to continue it if she doesn't want to talk to him. I'm sorry if that hurts your precious fee fees, but since it's true you might just have to deal with it.

379. *Another Matt*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:07 PM

Hey... I am in agreement. The thing is, I have male privilege, and I haven't grown up

thinking about these things. So I'm probably not going to be quite as sensitive to cues as women tend to be. For instance, I quite possibly wouldn't notice if I was blocking a woman's exit from a room.

Let me be very clear: I am truly sorry about this. I try to be aware, but sometimes I fail. I do not expect you to mind-read my intentions, and what I want most of all is for you to feel safe. If that means I get my feelings hurt a little bit by a brush-off, so be it. That's the very small price I pay for you feeling (and being) safe, and I pay it gladly. Seriously, do what you need to do, and don't feel bad about it. It's not your fault, so it's not your guilt.

Apologies if that comes across as patronising patriarchal bullshit ;-). Jus' sayin'.

380. *Poetry*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:10 PM

This is so true. Every time a strange man talks to me in a public place, I calculate the probability that he is some kind of creeper, revising the calculation every few seconds. Which is not to say that my suspicions can't be dispelled. I've met strange men in public places who I thought were creepy at first, but showed through non-threatening body language, large personal space, and respectful attitude that they were not dangerous.

381. *KC*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:12 PM

I've been working so hard to keep my head from exploding on this one. I'm trying to take cues from the many smart women here who keep it together better than I can.

This reminds me of an old bit by Elayne Boosler: she would talk about the way men would harrass women on the street and from their cars. Then she would point out that women never do that and she would say "Do you know why women don't tell men to get in our cars? Because men would GET IN OUR CARS."

I guess I'm thinking of that because what (many of) the male commenters don't seem to understand is that we are not looking for a better hook-up, we are actually willing to pass on this one. Comments like "why don't more women approach men" and so so many others along the "but what should I do? How can I show the laddees that i'm the man of their dreams if I can't drive that point home with a sledgehammer" (can't go back to re-read, head threatens to explode) miss the point entirely that women may not send signals, they may not approach you, they may shut down your initial attempt at conversation and that is OK. She is not killing love, or seduction, or your future happiness (and her own!). She's willing to let this one go. Her book is more important, her solitude, her music, her mental preparation for the big meeting or her menta relaxation at the end of the day. You do not need to force her to see you so that your destiny may be fulfilled. She is prepared to miss this one chance. Any attempt to force the issue is disrespectful, threatening, and unwelcome. STFU.

OK – not sure why I had to throw that in there, obviously this has been covered already. This is a terrific conversation and I admire the energy of all of you participating.

382. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:25 PM

"She's willing to let this one go. Her book is more important, her solitude, her music, her mental preparation for the big meeting or her menta relaxation at the end of the day. You do not need to force her to see you so that your destiny may be fulfilled. She is prepared to miss this one chance. Any attempt to force the issue is disrespectful, threatening, and

:: WILDLY APPLAUDING, CHEERING, AND DOING THE SHIMY-SHAKE HAPPY DANCE ::

383. *Fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:26 PM

Matt wins prizes. Seriously. This stuff is much easier if you've had some practice, and he is coming to it pretty cold, and doing amazing.

Ok, so while I was sitting on the Metro this evening hoping that the woman with the amazing boots would make eye contact with me so I could comment on her amazing boots, I of course thought about this thread and had the opportunity to do some analysis.

Things this woman already knew: that her boots were fucking hot.
Things she did not already know: that *I thought* her boots were hot.

Seriously, the only way in which that conversation would enrich that woman is by letting her know my opinion on her boots. Now, this is not necessarily a bad thing! I often like to hear that people like my shoes, it's a nice commentary on my taste. But why would I feel that she somehow *owed it to me* to hear my opinion? Why would I feel it was my right to insert myself into her consciousness?

384. *John*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:27 PM

Don't get in their space when they don't want you there. Don't act like your right to not be "discouraged" trumps her right to be safe.

The article begins with a thank you that I'm reading. If I'm in a place I'm not supposed to be, then I am mistaken and apologize.

I'm sorry if you feel I'm trying to detract from women's safety. This is not my intention. I simply want to point out that, if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls, then men are going to stop talking to girls. I would be terrified of talking to many of the women in these comments.

100%. 100% of rapes are the result of men meeting women and then proceeding in a manner contrary to Starling's advice.

I would say that's demonstrably not true, as rape happens for many reasons in many different social situations. In fact, this advice wouldn't have helped a single rape victim I know. Like I said, I feel this article oversimplifies rape.

This is why the article makes me uncomfortable-because it gives tips on avoiding social awkwardness, not rape. Even if a man follows all this advice, it doesn't mean they're trustworthy. It just means women trust them more.

What about date rape? What about child molestation? Those are a significant percentage of the 1 in 6 statistic, yet aren't addressed here. This article only deals with strangers meeting in public. What are the odds that in his lifetime a man is going to rape a woman he's never met before in a public place? That's the statistic I feel is applicable here.

385. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:27 PM

Apologies if that comes across as patronising patriarchal bullshit ;-). Jus' sayin'.

Another Matt, I'm not giving you a cookie or anything, but I really appreciate your comment after the day we've had here. Thanks.

386. *aleks*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:27 PM

As a guy with poor interpersonal skills, thank you. That all seems very obvious, but should probably be kept in the front of my mind.

387. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:29 PM

I would be terrified of talking to many of the women in these comments.

BOO!

Fucking hell!

388. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:31 PM

What about date rape? What about child molestation? Those are a significant percentage of the 1 in 6 statistic, yet aren't addressed here. This article only deals with strangers meeting in public.

That is because that is the topic of this article.

But since you're so eager for tips, John, here are some sexual assault prevention tips guaranteed to work.

389. *Becky*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:34 PM

I simply want to point out that, if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls, then men are going to stop talking to girls.

The use of "men" and "girls" here is pretty fucking telling. Also? Why do you think we give a fuck? I would be perfectly happy if I were never approached by a strange man in public again. I am married, but if I were not I would be perfectly happy to meet men online, at work, and through friends. I don't understand why: "Well this is going to stop me from talking to strange women in public at all!" is supposed to be some kind of threat.

In fact, this advice wouldn't have helped a single rape victim I know. Like I said, I feel this article oversimplifies rape.

This is not a "how not to get yourself raped" article. We have enough of those already. Nor is it a "how not to rape" article because as many people have already pointed out, that one would be very short: "Don't fucking rape." This is an article for non-rapist men who are interested in approaching women without making them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. I'm not sure how that could be more obvious, but there you are.

390. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:34 PM

I simply want to point out that, if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls, then men are going to stop talking to girls.

trouble yourself to find out before prematurely lamenting the loss of all social opportunity.

Also, "men" and "girls"? Really? Try this: "If being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to boys, then women are going to stop talking to boys."

391. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:35 PM

I simply want to point out that, if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls, then men are going to stop talking to girls.

Also: listen to yourself. "Girls"?

392. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:35 PM

"prematurely," obviously. I think I just invented a new ancient Greek word.

393. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:36 PM

I know the internet is full of idiots, but I'm absolutely floored by the number of damned fools coming in here and talking about the fear and anxiety poor men might experience if women aren't nice to them at all times; as if this somehow outweighs a woman's actual, legitimate fear of being raped/beaten/kidnapped/harassed/otherwise assaulted. I feel like going into a full Wrath-of-Khan bellow.

DOOOOUUUUCCCHHHHEBAAAAAAAAG!!!!

394. *Becky*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:37 PM

Also, seeing men quote the "75% of rapes are by someone you know" statistic as an argument is making me want to scream. For **years** feminists have been pushing that statistic in an effort to get men to take acquaintance rapes seriously. To see those same men turn around and throw that statistic back at us on the occasions we actually are talking about strangers is unbelievably frustrating and enraging.

Also, also: great article Starling, and SM and FJ thank you so much for your efforts in moderating this thread, it's raising my blood pressure as it is but I can only imagine how much worse it is for you to read *all* the comments and moderate them, I really appreciate it.

395. *Ted*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:38 PM

Thank you so much Starling! This is beautifully put — clear, concise, helpful. I wish I had had something this clear and articulate when I first began to become aware of these issues. And for that matter it's good to read now to keep conscious and aware of how differently our actions are perceived than they may be intended. And I think the concept "Schrodinger's Rapist" is very useful to encapsulate the impact of having to move through the world continually responding to such a high-threat environment day-in and day-out.

396. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:38 PM

Thanks, Becky. Since I've apparently got the flu, raising my blood pressure is probably making me feel better overall. ;-)

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:39 PM

Also,

I would be terrified of talking to many of the women in these comments.

Good! Maybe now that you've discovered the ability to project possible consequences to your behavior, you can apply those in an empathetic manner to imagine that the women (oops, sorry, girls) might be projecting their own set of possible consequences onto your behavior.

398. *Starling*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:40 PM

John, reading is good. I do thank you for reading. I promise you that you aren't being labeled a rapist when you do dumb stuff. Hell, we women sometimes feel uncomfortable labeling people who *commit rape* as rapists. (Coughpolanskicough.)

But we're talking about something very specific here. You would like to approach a woman and get to know her better. She doesn't know you at all. Her decision—whether to take a risk, which I've pegged at around 1 in 60, although stats make it slightly higher—will depend on whether you are able to get past an initial barrier of wariness that is based on the fact that RAPE IS VERY COMMON IN THIS CULTURE. Much more common than murder, for example.

You see, the woman you're approaching isn't just trying to avoid having you haul her off by her hair to your lair in the depth of the opera (or wherever.) She also wants to know that, at the end of date two, you're not going to push her past her comfort level. At the end of date three, you're not going to ignore her when she says, "This is going too fast for me." The first indicators are coming from what you do, right here, right now. So date rape and stranger rape and acquaintance rape are all applicable to this discussion.

The whole point is to give you, a guy who doesn't generally think about vulnerability to rape, *tools and insight* that allow you to more successfully approach and make meaningful connections with those strangers who are women, and possibly wary. 'Kay? I am all about people making connections and being nice and falling in love and chatting amicably about books and everything in between.

399. *Ruth*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:42 PM

@caitlin: Thanks.

This forum is so refreshing. I just don't get it that it's so hard for so people to get it.

Once, I had a man threaten me with a gun (he SAID he had a gun, I DON'T know if he actually had a gun).

He was driving in a car, and it was daylight, and this was downtown Denver (safe-ish, for a city), and tons of people were around.

He asked me for directions, and I said something really provocational (if that's a word), like, "I'm sorry sir, I don't know how to get there," and kept walking.

And he's starts screaming, "You fucking snotty bitch, I have a gun!"

And I yelled back. I don't know why, that was just my gut response.

And I ran to a parking lot and started ducking behind cars, in case he REALLY DID have a gun (which I kind of doubted, after the fact, cuz it seems like a crazy fucker like that woulda used a gun if he had one).

And all kinds of people were walking up and down the street and said and did nothing.

It was surreal.

It happened around 15 years ago.

Until reading this post, and reflecting, I had totally blocked it out.

Too much cognitive dissonance. It was so insane.

So, why is it so fucking hard for people to accept that women have legit reasons to be afraid (most surprisingly, some women)?

Why, why, why, why, why, why, why?

OK, enough for now.

Could youse guys do an xtra fluffy Fri. fluff tomorrow, PUH-LEASE!?!?

400. *Puffalo*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:42 PM

"if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls, then men are going to stop talking to girls."

Oh, if only.

Also, if the mistake you're talking about is acting like a rapist, then doesn't being labeled a rapist make sense? Or, since it's what were actually talking about, being labeled a potential rapist?

401. *John*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:44 PM

I apologize if I appeared to be hostile. I can only assume it came off as such, as hostility is all I'm receiving. So fuck it.

I only wished to point out, as politely as I could, that this is a poorly written list of inane social tips thinly veiling a cliché rape culture message.

Don't rape? Thanks. The strict laws and social condemnation weren't enough to keep me in my place, but this stupid little article has completely changed my mind. Thank god you wrote it. There is no other more constructive way to approach gender politics. I need shitty pick up tips.

402. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:45 PM

Fuck off, John.

403. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:45 PM

The article begins with a thank you that I'm reading.

about not making them uncomfortable for reading. Are you sure she's talking to you?

404. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:46 PM

John's head appears to be made entirely of Portland cement.

405. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:47 PM

Bye bye, John.

406. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:47 PM

Also, I love that he thinks this article is about "shitty pickup tips," like it's written by Mystery or something.

407. *Lu*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:48 PM

Well put, fillyjonk.

408. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:48 PM

I have saved John the trouble of garnering any more "hostility."

It's cute, though, how the reason he doesn't rape women is that it's *illegal* and *frowned upon*.

409. *snarkysmachine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:48 PM

"This is why the article makes me uncomfortable-because it gives tips on avoiding social awkwardness, not rape. Even if a man follows all this advice, it doesn't mean they're trustworthy. It just means women trust them more."

Not necessarily. See the other component of this "nice" thing women are taught is to be very adept actors. Women often give the "appearance" trusting people they do NOT FUCKING TRUST. I can think of several men I KNOW PERSONALLY off the top of my head I do not trust. Are they all cruising around in a rapemobile. I don't know. But I do know it makes no fucking sense to say, "hello, before we go into this strategic meeting. let me start by saying I don't trust your oily smile or shifty stare for one moment. Okay, let's tackle these figures shall we?" Instead it's far more useful to be aware of my space when I'm around them, set, clear direct boundaries and pretty much hope for the best.

He might think I "trust" him, when really I'm merely managing him for the time we are in each other's company until I can get the fuck away.

410. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:49 PM

The strict laws and social condemnation weren't enough to keep me in my place, but this stupid little article has completely changed my mind.

What a catch you are!

411. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:50 PM

What a catch you are!

Watch out, you might make him stop talking to girls! That would be a tragedy of epic proportions!

Also, I meant to say this to a previous commenter who's also deeply worried about what our social lives might be without him:

if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men?

We don't want to.

Stick that in your pipe and smoke it. With your burned lips.

412. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:53 PM

John, the response to you has been hostile because you're coming off as an asshat. You might want to work on that.

413. *Becky*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:53 PM

John, this post wasn't intended to be the definitive post on gender politics! It was intended to be a guide on how to approach women without making them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. If you want a more general post on gender politics, try one of the many, many other posts on this blog, or one of the many, many posts on one of the many, many feminist blogs out there. Coming onto one post and complaining that it doesn't discuss what you want it to discuss is really fucking ignorant and rude.

414. *Ailbhe*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:54 PM

[This comment is totally All About Me, so I want to add: great post, thank you.]

To everyone who says "I refuse to live in fear": Go fuck yourself. I personally refused to be raped, the first few times. Guess what? Refusal doesn't work.

Really, it reminds me of people who say "I'd never allow my kids to..." People do shit they aren't allowed to do all the time. Allowing has fuck all to do with it. I personally would like the option of not being afraid of strange men insisting on interacting with me when I'm in a vulnerable position, but it doesn't seem even a little realistic.

(Also, I adore all you Shapelings' comments, especially Anita's guide to not raping people).

@volcanista: *You can be targeted because you look like a victim or an easy mark, or you can be targeted because you stand up for yourself and need to be put in your place. or anything in between, or a dozen other unrelated reasons. If you've been assaulted or harrassed, it's not because you did something wrong. That really can't be said enough. Oh holy shit, I think you've changed my life. I have *always* blamed myself for the times I "was a victim" and let it happen, and *never* for the times I fought back and it happened anyway. And that's full of shit. Thank you. I need to be sick now.*

415. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:55 PM

The strict laws and social condemnation weren't enough to keep me in my place, but this stupid little article has completely changed my mind.

rapist almost every time ("She must have done something to deserve it"), which is totally enough to stop men raping women, as we can see by the fact that no women are raped. No, wait. Wait. There's something wrong here.

I would be terrified of talking to many of the women in these comments.

Ahahahahaha. MY WORK HERE IS DONE.

416. *Gail*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:56 PM

HEY! YOU! Yeah you! Listen up for a sec Trolly McNoclue. You wanna find your soulmate on the fucking subway? FINE. But let me tell you buddy, you interrupt a woman (get that?? A WOMAN) who is clearly into or doing something else and her first thought on seeing your fabulous manly magnificence is NOT going to be, "Oooooohhh looky looky!! There be my soul mate!!" It's going to be, "why is this asshole bugging me when I am clearly occupied?????" Not a good start to that dream relationship dipshit.

One of you brilliant uber nice guys would be afraid to talk to me? GOOD!!! Be afraid douchebag, be very afraid!

417. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:56 PM

John:

"Even if a man follows all this advice, it doesn't mean they're trustworthy. It just means women trust them more."

I don't understand this statement. Isn't women trusting a man more evidence that they have become more trustworthy? Also, if you don't count the African-American votes, Obama wouldn't be President. Do you see the point I'm trying to make? Women get to decide, in this instance, our votes are the only ones that matter.

418. *Ailbhe*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:57 PM

Also, I heart aleks, whoever he is.

419. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:58 PM

No no no, bellacoker, don't be silly: only men get to decide who is the Platonic Ideal of Trustworthiness. We can't leave something that important to girls!

420. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 8, 2009 AT 11:59 PM

Also, I heart aleks, whoever he is.

Agreed! I hope Frosty from the other thread, with her socially impaired weapons-obsessed friend, sees aleks' classy response to this article.

421. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:00 AM

I do rather like the notion that I might be considered terrifying. Alas, I doubt it. Though my husband did tell me not long ago that I was about as scary as an éclair, which I suppose could count for something in so fatphobic a culture.

422. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:01 AM

Oops, it took me longer to type than it took John to get banned.

So sad. . . :(

423. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:01 AM

See, if I had but known, I can come up with much better shitty pickup tips. Sorry, John! But here's a free one, on your way out, that encapsulates this entire discussion and would immensely improve your chances of good interactions with women: Stop being an asshole.

You're welcome.

424. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:01 AM

Eucritta: Hee hee, good one! :-)

425. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:02 AM

aleks and Another Matt are certainly a refreshing change.

*I have *always* blamed myself for the times I "was a victim" and let it happen, and *never* for the times I fought back and it happened anyway. And that's full of shit.*

Oh god, Ailbhe, it's never your fault. When you're placed in a horrific situation all you can do is try to get yourself out the other end. There is no "better way" to handle those situations because they should NEVER HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU. Ever.

426. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:04 AM

When you're placed in a horrific situation all you can do is try to get yourself out the other end.

THIS. Repeated for emphasis. No blame, no shame.

427. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:05 AM

Sweet Machine: And they have been doing such a lovely job at it, why would anyone want to change the status quo?

428. *Ailbhe*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:05 AM

Caitlin: It's one of those rules that's easy to apply to other people, but oddly difficult to oneself. But I don't think "what I did made no difference" ever really struck me before in quite this way. There's no reason it **should** have made a difference.

Oh – interestingly (to me) I'm mentally tacking on "I'm lucky to be alive" there and actually, no, and also the "I should really just be grateful I wasn't killed" is just-er-no too. The urge to minimise is bizarre.

429. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:08 AM

I simply want to point out that, if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls

You are insane if you think you're going to get away with this utter and pure refined bullshit here. Men never ever ever get labeled rapists for talking to women. MEN GET LABELED RAPISTS FOR RAPING WOMEN. Don't like that? Stop the men in your life from raping or excusing rape.

then men are going to stop talking to girls.

Fine. See ya. Buh bye.

430. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:09 AM

I love this article. I love this discussion. I am slightly disheartened that I have had to explain to a couple of *women* that this line of thought is not unfair or from Mars, but never mind that.

I also want to pipe in a point that is actually not mine but my husband's, but he would never bother to post it because he's a Luddite. His response to my "read this!!" was that not only does this article not go too far, it doesn't go far *enough.*

"Because it's not just that she has the right not to talk to you because she's afraid you might rape her. She has the right not to talk to you. Period. You do NOT have the right to talk to her. She does not owe you a conversation just because she stepped out in public."

431. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:09 AM

Dear John:

I am so very fucking sorry that we did not surround you with adulation and proper concern when you made (remade, actually) the point "that, if being labeled a rapist is the consequence of making a mistake while talking to girls, then men are going to stop talking to girls."

Clearly, this is a primary concern for us, as is demonstrable by the near complete lack of concern from women about this pressing issue.

The fact that it's "the strict laws and social condemnation" that you cite as preventing you from raping, and not the fact that it's wrong, evil, destructive, bad, and wrong*, demonstrate clearly one reason that our main concern is about protecting ourselves from men who would rape if they had the chance, and not about your hurt feelings.

The clear implication here is that if you didn't have the laws and condemnation, you would rape. As we know, the laws are super-awesome, and arrest and conviction rates are sky-high, and men who rape actually experience social condemnation, and those who are raped are believed and comforted to the full extent of the law and society.

Oh, except that that's fantasy land, and you are officially a terrifying human being.

* Please consult the thesaurus yourself, as I am sort of stumped for words here. I mean, SERIOUSLY.

432. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:09 AM

Question: You and I are on the bus/train/sidewalk. Don't know each other. I'm just some random guy. Another guy starts hitting on you/talking you up/whatever. You are

obviously uncomfortable. Do I say something to him? I don't want to offend you by somehow suggesting that you can't handle it. I'm honestly not even coming from that place. On the other hand, I simply think part of the problem is that people keep quiet when they shouldn't. Do I address him or you? By that, I mean do I point out what he's doing isn't appreciated, or do check with you about the situation?

I realize that all situations are unique, but I'm looking for some general guidelines here. My typical experience is I ask the woman "You OK?", and get the "yesfineit'snoprobblem" quick response. What I now understand is she has gone from having one confirmed creep to deal with to now a confirmed creep and a possible creep (me). Not what I was going for, but I get it.

I'm happy to step in. I'm happy to help. What's the protocol?

433. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:15 AM

"It's one of those rules that's easy to apply to other people, but oddly difficult to oneself"

I totally get that concept Ailbhe. It's easy for me to view other people's experiences with horror and then turn around and minimize my own. I don't even bother waiting for someone to tell me it was my fault or it wasn't that big a deal, I do that all by myself.

It's not your fault. You did nothing wrong. I believe that with all my heart.

It's not my fault. I did nothing wrong. I still can't quite believe that.

434. *sharah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:15 AM

Absolutely fantastic, fantastic post!

435. *Just Some Trans Guy*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:17 AM

kristinc,

"Men never ever ever get labeled rapists for talking to women. MEN GET LABELED RAPISTS FOR RAPING WOMEN. "

Actually, it's even more than that—men who rape women rarely get labeled rapists. Which is depressing but true. And makes all these b.s. "Oh woe, I am so afraid of being labeled a rapist for even looking in a woman's direction!" arguments leave an extra bitter flavor in my mouth.

436. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:18 AM

Crud, late again. I must work on my typing skills.

437. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:20 AM

That's a very good question, Nathan. You're right that stepping in can slide quickly into "hey baby, is this guy bothering you?" territory. I'm formulating ideas, but meanwhile I'm going to see if I can smoke out our resident etiquette columnist, who might know the answer.

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:22 AM

Actually, it's even more than that—men who rape women rarely get labeled rapists.

True, true.

I'm happy to step in. I'm happy to help. What's the protocol?

I think this was touched on in the XKCD thread, but personally what I would most appreciate is the male ally saying something like “Dude. C'mon” in a tone that says *you are being inexpressibly socially clueless*. As if said dude had put his elbow in the butter dish. It's lowkey, it's non-white-knighty, and it doesn't put me in the position of engaging with an extra guy when I'm already harried.

439. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:23 AM

Big heart to Nathan. Let me throw you over to Harriet Jacobs' thread, Stuff What Boys Can Do. (Sorry, html skills suck.) <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/stuff-what-boys-can-do/>

440. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:23 AM

Thanks @fillyjonk

441. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:25 AM

@kristinc I really like that. Great idea, and my new response.

442. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:26 AM

Nathan, I think that you are honestly wonderful. Thank you so much for trying to understand. You other guys too, you know who you are. I'm going to have to take a trip upthread and make a list.

As to your question, personally I don't know how I would react. I haven't really had that happen before. If I'm feeling cornered there's no telling what kind of fear dynamic I'm processing. I could weep with relief and be eternally in your debt. I might fall back on my good-girl programming and try to brush it off with the yesfineit'snoprobblem knee jerk response. I might be in the mood to say, “yeah fuck off hero! I don't need you!” Which would be really shitty of me, but cornered animals bite.

I would hope I would take your gesture in the spirit in which it was offered. I would hope that I would thank you over and over and stick close by you for the rest of the trip. I think that's what I would probably do, but I can't say for sure.

For all the guys who would try to do this for me, I'd like to say thank you right now in case I'm too afraid to later.

443. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:26 AM

Nathan:

That is a thoughtful question because there is a fine line between assistance and paternalism. I think the answer is be there, be aware, pay attention, let your attention be obvious. If it becomes clear that the lady in question has repeatedly said No, and the guy is escalating the interaction, and you feel safe doing so, step up and say something like: She said no

An answer like that reinforces that her wishes should be listened to without making it about you. Then, unless she continues the interaction with you, back off again.

This was linked above, but it's relevant: <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/stuff-what-boys-can-do/>

444. *Loaf*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:27 AM

A rousing Amen to this and (most) of the comments. This clarified for me my own attempts to explain the same issue to people I know.

If I could count the number of times someone has told me I didn't need to worry about unwanted male attention and/or being raped because I'm fat, well, the number would be high, but not as high as the number of times I've been on the receiving end of unwanted ANYTHING from a guy I didn't know and didn't want to know.

A lot of times I have friends, even women, tell me that it's "just because I'm a lesbian" that I'm "paranoid" (i.e. cautious) about men, and from now on I can just point them to this post. No. It's not a lesbian paranoia thing. It's a fact thing, a statistics thing.

So yeah, thanks again to all you brilliant thinkers.

445. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:29 AM

Starling: link jinx!

446. *Piffle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:34 AM

Gah. My memory is like a sieve. I think there's a project on the streetharassment site where you can upload pictures of harassers. I know there is a harassment map where you can point out where you got harassed so that people can get numbers for how much harassment goes on. It would be awesome if there were, and there might be, a database of pictures of people (male or female) who harassed others at particular places so that they could be identified.

To the douchhound who would be terrified to talk to any of the women here, please be aware that every woman you are attracted to on public transit or the street is indeed one of the commenters here.

For Nathan, please go to this link posted earlier in the thread, it's both heartening and a good example of how to help women in trouble: <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/stuff-what-boys-can-do/> This will give you better feedback than I can on how to help.

For the anecdota about rapists etc. I know of at least one molester (now dead of old age) in my family. I also know two men that most people would never pick as a rapist. It's really pretty common.

Women who cry rape falsely are a big problem for everyone. That doesn't mean however that women should not be careful around men. That stranger rape is less common than acquaintance rape, doesn't mean it doesn't happen. That murder is less common than rape, doesn't mean that it doesn't happen. (There are several examples drawn from the news of women murdered for not responding, or not responding positively, to random men who approached them on the streetharassment blog. That's in the last couple of years, and in the

447. [stopstreetharassment](#)OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:34 AM

Thank you for articulating this so beautifully. I'm linking to it on the homepage of my Stop Street Harassment website, under the subheading "How to Talk to Women in Public."

448. *DRD1812*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:39 AM

You know, I think this topic and the previous one are helping me understand why I've always found "Pretty Woman" such an offensive song. I never really articulated why; but it just sums so much of the assumption that women are available.

Piffle, this surprised me, because I'd always seen Pretty Woman (the song, not the horrible movie) as a great model for how you should treat someone. The singer never actually speaks to the woman, it's all internal dialogue. When she passes by and doesn't initiate, he shrugs and keeps going, heads home... I always read the song as she came back and spoke to him *because* he wasn't pushy.

Totally with you on Every Move You Make. Creepy as hell.

449. [Sweet Machine](#)OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:45 AM

Sting has commented on the misreading of "Every Breath You Take." From the Wikipedia article: *Sting later said he was disconcerted by how many people think the song is more positive than it is. He insists it's about unrequited love (the song was written at the time he and his then wife divorced), about the obsession with the lost lover, the jealousy and surveillance that followed. "One couple told me 'Oh we love that song; it was the main song played at our wedding!' I thought, Well, good luck." [cite this quote] When asked why he appears angry in the music video Sting told BBC Radio 2, "I think the song is very, very sinister and ugly and people have misinterpreted it as being a gentle, little love song."*[4]

450. *Matt*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:48 AM

Thanks, Fillyjonk. ;)

"Things this woman already knew: that her boots were fucking hot.
Things she did not already know: that I thought her boots were hot."

That's what I was thinking about in the first place but couldn't put my finger on it... it reminded me of the "my short skirt is not an invitation" monologue Eve Ensler wrote (my ex's mom does a V-Day staging up in Camden, Maine every year for valentine's day)

I -do- very clearly understand that a hot pair of shoes is certainly a part of a woman's right to wear whatever the heck she feels good in or feels good about; not my place to ever put insistence in there, but (and totally not to make it sound like I'm fixating on shoes... just got stuck in that as an example) a little positive feedback can be nice (I love it when someone says something about my tie if I'm wearing one; that kind of thing) In the same vein, though, I'll admit that I might pull out a "gayer" word than I might normally think of... I'm not going to say anything like "Oh my gods those are sexy shoes.." or anything that I know would instantly sound pretty creepy; even as a guy I'm a little weirded out in a bar if someone just says "nice ass" to me as it doesn't imply a good choice or being fashion forward, it's usually just smarmy... hence I'll pull out something like "fierce pumps!" or the like as it feels like it automatically points to effeminate-ish gay guy.

where's the line between tough guy and object of fear? "Sensitive" men seem to come in and out of vogue, alternating with the tough guy / greaser / slightly thuggish public image of masculinity, at least in cultural visibility and popular media, which would give young men at least the idea that that's something worthy of emulation or somehow what's desired (that quality being somewhere in between I guess what would be seen as "rugged" but at the same time that same threatening quality we discussed before, only with luck without the skeezy creepiness)

Rhetorically speaking would it be a smarter overall idea for guys like that to let the women around them initiate contact/conversation? Is there an actual truth to what we guys get through media representation that most women would appreciate a NON-CREEPY hello or socially-appropriately-timed greeting from a man like that, or is that just popular media still running on a marlboro man imagery myth?

451. *Piffle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:50 AM

Oh, and if we actually managed to protect women from rape, if no one ever raped again; I predict that women would be much friendlier to random strangers. I predict this because I do know one male who is invariably treated with friendship and kindness even when approaching women in public places, my five year old son. I think this is because he is so evidently not a danger to anyone.

452. *Raijin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:53 AM

First-time reader, male, and I just wanted to stop by to say two things:

1) This was excellent. We should be printing out stacks of these in booklet form and handing them out everywhere.

2) I apologize on behalf of the stupid men who stopped by to derail the conversation and stupidly flaunt their stupid privilege issues, and who are too stupid to know why they should be apologizing themselves.

453. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:01 AM

Thank you for the responses and the reading material.

Gail – Thank you for your kind words. I understand how we just don't know where we are going to be coming from when things like this happen. I think I would be quite understanding of all the responses you list.

bellacoker – You hit on something that I've tried to do in the past, but didn't mention. Simply exert my physical presense. Nothing verbal, just make it known I'm there and very aware of the situation. I like the idea of not making sure to not make it about me as well. Thank you.

I feel a greater clarity for what to do the next time the situation arises. The sum of what I'm taking away from this is "be an ally".

454. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:05 AM

Nathan, I'd combine bellacoker and kristinc's thoughts and go with something like "Dude, c'mon. She said no/She's not interested" in the tone kristinc suggested.

The crucial thing to realise — and this isn't aimed at you (because you do actually seem to get it) but at other guys who might be reading this and thinking about these questions — is that doing the decent thing in that situation *does not then entitle *you* to her time or attention*. Step in and do what's right, then RESPECT HER SPACE, because that's what this is *about*. Don't take her out of one unwanted situation where she has to entertain a man into another one, with a helping dose of guilt about being "mean" to someone who helped her out. That would not be cool.

455. *the fat nutritionist*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:13 AM

...being told I have to work my way up from the level of a rapist is discouraging.

I was really blown away by this remark.

I'm sorry my (totally valid) fear of being raped makes the world such a discouraging place for you.

You could interpret this as being my fault, because I'm some kind of hysterical, paranoid psycho who has overreacted to being sexually harassed and/or threatened and/or assaulted, mostly by strangers in public places, since the age of 12...

...or you could walk away with the message that misogyny and violence against women hurts everybody. Maybe not to the same degree, but, yes, one of the consequences of living in a world in which women are disproportionately victimized is that *men lose a little bit of our trust*.

Sorry to be the one to break it to you, but that's how the cookie crumbles. And I'd take *being mistrusted by strangers over being fearful of strangers* anyday.

Close your eyes, and try to put yourself in our shoes, if you can, for just a second.

Maybe, just maybe, when you open your eyes, you'll find we're all on the same side.

I know this has been linked before, but it merits another go: <http://shakespearessister.blogspot.com/2009/08/terrible-bargain-we-have-regretfully.html>

456. *Laura*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:17 AM

I almost don't want to comment, since it feels like I am interrupting some awesome "dialogue" with John, but I have now read EVERY SINGLE COMMENT (except the ones that went up since my last refresh) and there's something I feel got missed up at the top re: the race issue.

The biggest difference I see between the "any man might be a rapist" and "any black man might be a mugger" memes is that BLACK MEN ALREADY KNOW THAT PEOPLE THINK THEY MIGHT HURT THEM. Nobody has ever had to write a blog post saying "Hey, young black guys, I know it's potentially offensive and hurtful that I cross the street when I see you walking towards me in a group with your friends, but given XXX statistics you have to understand that I'm concerned about my personal safety ..."

I'm not saying that someone who wrote that hypothetical blog post would be justified. But I **am** saying that it's never had to be written because DUDE THEY KNOW. They know they're going to be targeted for DWB. They know not to get "uppity" with the cops (and they know that to avoid seeming "uppity" they're expected to be totally submissive and

polite and non-threatening) because otherwise they end up in jail, or worse. They know if they walk up quickly behind a young white woman late at night on a deserted street that she's going to be freaked the fuck out. They're not told it's fair, but they know what's up.

Has any mother ever sat down her little white boy and said "now Johnny, I know you're a good boy, but the girls on the subway don't know that. *I* know you're not going to hurt them. But you're going to be seen as a potential threat. Here are the ways that you should act around women so that you don't inadvertently appear to be a rapist." My guess is ... no. And I think that's a really important distinction.

457. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:25 AM

Raijin:

Thank you for your impulse to apologize for the dooods on this thread who are making asses of themselves, but it's really not necessary. They are stupid individuals and not a reflection on you.

Please remember this the next time you meet a woman who is making an ass of herself, she is not a representative of her entire sex either.

:D,
Bella

458. *Piffle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:25 AM

Actually, I'm having some of those discussions about not scaring girls with my eleven year old son; just today, sparked by these discussions here.

459. *rainne*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:27 AM

I don't believe the '1 in 6 women have been raped' statistic either. It doesn't at all align with my experience, what my friends have told me or the sense I get from the way men and women act in public towards each other. It's just common sense that it isn't true. No amount of links (all of which are at least partially speculative because of the "underreporting" issue, and because people define rape differently and then there's the whole "grey rape" thing) are going to convince me, sorry.

Personally I'm convinced it's more like 1 in 3, if I'm being optimistic. 1 in 2 on a bad day.

Nathan, I am just one woman, but I'd be perfectly happy with a 'you OK' if you don't expect anything further than a 'yesfinenoproblem' from me. Because your 'You OK?', although addressed to me, sends a signal to Other Dude that he's being policed and you are not on his side. I'm assuming that's usually enough to get Other Dude to back down if he's inclined to do so. I've seen interactions like that where the simple 'You OK?' is enough to get Other Dude to transfer his hostility to you, sadly, but frankly that's still better from my point of view.

If you talked directly to him without checking in on me first, I'd be all 'thanks for trying, but hello, grownup autonomous woman here BACK OFF'.

So I think your protocol is right on.

You're a guy. Checking in like that decreases your creep factor. BUT it doesn't mean I have to chat to you instead, or give you anything except 'finethanksbye'. Your intervention has made me safer by signalling to Other Guy to back off. It's made me walk away from the day feeling slightly more encouraged about humankind. So thank you for doing it. But it doesn't entitle you to anything. As soon as you start expecting it to, your creep factor goes back up.

That was a long answer, sorry. Short version: I wish more guys would check in like that in those circumstances, kudos.

460. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:28 AM

Holy crap, so much to respond to, and there will no doubt be a ton more by the time I finish. I made a list of quotes, didn't write down names, sorry about that.

It doesn't mean that a crowd of women is going to hunt you down and bludgeon you for complimenting someone's shoes, but it DOES mean that when you honestly intend only to compliment the shoes you can improve your chances of it being received as such.

THIS THIS THIS. I think so many of the guys reacting defensively are missing the point that a woman's regarding you as Schrodinger's Rapist does not mean she's going to scream or mace you or call 911. It means she's going to be vigilant, self-protective, maybe even defensive — in ways that you may or may not even be aware of. And she will let down her guard only when and if she's damn well ready, because she feels you've earned her trust. (ETA: I originally wrote that backwards. Long week.)

If you are interested in actually being a trustworthy person, you will respect that and honor her boundaries — even if it means you don't have a conversation and this stranger never learns how nice and awesome you are, and you don't get together and have 100 pretty babies.

This has already been discussed, but... well, everything has, and fuck it, I'm talking anyway. To the representatives of Dude Nation, if it helps, remind yourself that this is not just a man/woman thing. It is an "assessing the threat of a more privileged person" thing. I, for instance, am Schrodinger's White Supremacist to every POC I meet, Schrodinger's Homophobe to every gay person, etc. (If you're white and straight, so are you! Welcome to the club!) Now, because I'm a woman, I'm statistically much less likely to get violent — but enough white, straight women are hateful assholes that I can't fault anyone who does not share my various layers of privilege for assuming that said layers might, in fact, make me an asshole!

What's a gal to do, when people are just assuming willy-nilly that she *might* be an asshole because of her skin color or her wedding ring and references to her husband or whatever? It's easy: **Don't be an asshole!** And if you do happen to do something that suggests the asshole interpretation is the correct one, you might apologize for it — but if the person is not having it, then the thing to do is *walk away*. Accept that someone you will probably never see again has gotten the mistaken impression that you are an asshole, and move on with your life. Because trying to convince someone that you are not an asshole? Is a real good way to look like an asshole.

Nobody owes you their trust. And people who belong to oppressed groups have a damned good reason to be wary of people who don't belong to the corresponding privileged ones — which means yes, those of us who have the privilege will sometimes have to prove

ourselves. Is it unfair? Well, shit yes, *systematic oppression* is unfair in many ways, most of them far more damaging than that one. But the thing is, if you're *not* an asshole, it's usually not all that hard to demonstrate that you're not an asshole and get past the initial suspicion (which is not to say earn someone's trust, necessarily), at least far enough to have a conversation. There are loads of social situations in which this is not only possible but actually quite easy! If, however, the other person shuts down the conversation? You don't get to keep on with your efforts to get past the suspicion (or the other person's desire not to talk, which may or may not be the same thing), because that in itself is *asshole behavior*.

A reference was made to men not playing by the rules on this blog. I hope that does not translate to: men tend to inject more skepticism into a conversation.

LOLOLOLOLOL. That's all.

Something I love about being at Burning Man, and at other burner events, is that that social norm is almost completely inverted. When you get on an art car, or stand in a line, or sit and meditate on a piece of art, and a stranger is there next to you, striking up a random conversation or giving a random complement, or handing out a random gift, is extremely common, expected, supported, and welcome.

Which society is the more healthy one?

The main points of why this reasoning is flawed have already been covered, but let me add this: Burning Man and public transit are not two different societies. They're *different situations* within the same society. The same society has different rules for different social environments. Go figure!

I'm having some trouble reconciling all of this with my experience however (my shit, I know and accept, just saying). Mostly because this doesn't seem to be the experience of the woman in my life. I don't say that as a judgment of them, or of any of you. So my internal question becomes a desire to talk with them about the topics raised here. Would you want the men you know to discuss this with you?

I'm glad you ended with that question, because frankly, there might very well be a big difference between "this doesn't seem to be the experience of the women in my life," and "this is not the experience of the women in my life." I was raped when I was 17 — it's been long enough now that a lot of my newer friends might not even know that (unless they read this blog pretty closely), because I am past the phase where I constantly wanted to Talk About It, and it just doesn't always come up. And honestly, that goes double for male friends — conversations about rape tend to come up organically far more often with women, in my experience. It's not that I don't trust those men or wouldn't feel comfortable discussing it with them, it's that it's a heavy conversation I don't usually set out to have anymore, and when chatting with men, queer and straight, I rarely find myself stumbling into it. Sometimes, with women, I do.

So for me, if a male friend said, "Hey, I read this post that got me wondering if my female friends have a lot more experience with rape than I realize," I would be more than happy to talk about it — but I probably wouldn't bring it up myself. And obvs, some women aren't happy to talk about it, or ready to talk about it, so I'm not sure if I can offer any blanket advice there that won't run the risk of hurting someone. I think what it comes down to is, use your best judgment about how well you know the friend and how you phrase the question — and then follow her lead in terms of pursuing it. If she clearly wants a change of subject, go with that. Fast.

being told I have to work my way up from the level of a rapist is discouraging.

It sucks, doesn't it? I sure wish there weren't millions of racist white assholes and gay-bashing straight assholes and ableist TAB assholes and transphobic cis assholes, etc., out there turning me into Schrödinger's Threat to various populations, too! My only consolation is crying into my *multiple layers of systematic privilege*.

No wait, there's one more consolation: The useful information that not acting like an asshole will usually help me work my way up. I find that encouraging as well.

OK, I had more, but it's time for dinner.

461. *Matt*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:30 AM

Laura: I kinda wish our mothers WOULD take us aside and say that very thing; that's the very point I was thinking about up above when I mentioned that we (men) really don't get much in the way of being taught about healthy relationships, inter-gender respect, and boundaries. Someone made a point of a gender split in their class, where all of the young women astounded the young men with their points about safety... but if we had some sort of advice freely given or taught, preferentially before we even really have a chance to have feelings of awakening into a sexual identity; well, it would potentially truncate the disasters in relationships and even curtail the kneejerk "why don't you go get raped" reactions we've seen peeking out as the moderators show pieces of what they're not letting through

462. *the fat nutritionist*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:31 AM

I wish more guys would check in like that in those circumstances, kudos.

Seriously, if this had ever happened to me, even ONCE, in all the times I have been bullied by a strange dude in public, I probably would have jumped in the air and clicked my fucking heels for joy.

It's funny that this is the first time I've ever stopped to think — wait. Why *hasn't* that ever happened? And I don't want to think too much about the answer, frankly, because it's depressing as shit.

463. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:31 AM

"Has any mother ever sat down her little white boy and said "now Johnny, I know you're a good boy, but the girls on the subway don't know that."

Those exact words to my son? No. But we have had these kinds of conversations. My son is 17, but even as a baby he was taller, bigger, stronger than his peers. I have always tried to make him see the other person's point of view, I had to. I have always tried to make him recognize the danger of his own strength, I had to. He's the sweetest boy in the world (and that's not mama-talk, you can ask anyone who knows him) but he could very easily hurt someone without meaning to. He could easily intimidate those who don't know him. I make sure he realizes that.

464. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:31 AM

Laura: point taken. My fifteen-year-old son has now read the article.

465. MartinbOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:31 AM

Just a quick follow up on snarkysmachine's unpacking of the Asperger's thing:

Most Aspies (and for boring genetic reasons, it is mostly men) do have a reduced ability to understand non-verbal behaviour and use it to ascertain the state of another's mind. So just because – to your way of thinking – you are *sending* some very clear (non-verbal) cues does not mean that failure to comply with them implies unwillingness to comply. To put in terms of Communication 101 – Aspies have an elevated high noise level that interferes with their ability to successfully decode your (clearly sent) signal.

However, they are *extremely good* at understanding and following defined rulesets, particularly when they're explained in a way that can be logically traced from first principles.

So, if I may (and tell me if I may not!) summarise the article's advice to its intended audience as the following logical trace:

- 1) Many women's experience is that rape and rapists are common
- 2) As a simple and effective method of reducing exposure to the risk of rape, women will avoid situations and people that appear risky, with a high presumption of risk – fairly likely to be higher than your presumption, but different for each individual.
- 3) On meeting a woman, that you are not actually a risk is only obvious to you.
- 4) Women will use your behaviour as a way of continually (re)evaluating the risk you pose.
- 5) The most powerful risk indicator is your compliance with their self-defined boundaries (and this is true whether or not those boundaries make sense to you, or are the ones you would set or are even entirely artificial and for the purposes of evaluating your compliance in low threat situations in advance of higher threat ones)
- 6) Those boundaries will be signalled to you; because you may not be that good at understanding them for what they are intended to convey, here's a cut-out-and-keep guide. With some general advice on making it clear that you pose a (relatively) low level of risk.

then this is *extremely* helpful and useful to both me (pretty low level Aspie; although not single I do quite enjoy having conversations with strangers) and my 8yo son (much stronger Aspie traits, who I have to continually coach on understanding others' behaviour).

(apologies for Project Manager-y use of Risk terminology – it's my day job)

To several people who reasonably asked in various wordings "How would I know if he has Asperger's?" (or less reasonably asserted that they didn't care – inability to understand non-verbal signals being just as 'creepy' / culpable as unwillingness to follow them) the answer is simple: don't rely on non-verbal cues – deploy a polite (but direct; hints are not much better than non-verbal to Aspies) verbal cue before escalating to the "Back the FUCK off". This will help you discern the "Can'ts but will if intention is understood" from the "Won'ts"

(Oh, and I very much like the 'the roof is the introduction; public transport doesn't count' convention. I hadn't heard it before, but it's another good coaching point for my son!)

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:33 AM

Caitlin, no offence taken. I'm in agreement with you. What I take away from this is that part of being an ally is to at no point make this about me. During any potential conflict, I can make my comments directly to the person not getting it, and don't need to interact with the woman (or man for that matter), unless they choose to interact with me. Which is another point. To me, I'm not going to use this just interacting in this situation with woman, but with anybody. If someone is harassing someone else, this seems to me to be the way to deal with it. Due to this thread, I just have a (possibly) greater understanding of some of the dynamics going on.

467. Martinb

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:35 AM

Has any mother ever sat down her little white boy and said "now Johnny, I know you're a good boy, but the girls on the subway don't know that. *I* know you're not going to hurt them. But you're going to be seen as a potential threat. Here are the ways that you should act around women so that you don't inadvertently appear to be a rapist."

Yes. My wife has. And I have.

That our son is Aspie means we're probably having those conversations more often and earlier than would otherwise be the case (and not (yet) specifically mentioning sexual violence), but I'm pretty sure that most of our friends have similar ones with their sons.

468. MamaD

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:36 AM

@SM—re: *Every Breath You Take*—I can't believe anyone would think that was some nice love song! My husband and I used to call it "The Stalker Song."

469. Sarah

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:38 AM

Nathan — what everyone else said, but also if you're for whatever reason not comfortable with actually calling the jerk out on his behavior, one thing that could work well is to find some way to grab his attention about something, anything for a 15-second conversation, allowing the woman to make a discreet and much-appreciated exit from the immediate area.

470. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:39 AM

bellacoker — *You hit on something that I've tried to do in the past, but didn't mention. Simply exert my physical presense. Nothing verbal, just make it known I'm there and very aware of the situation*

Oh yes, I was going to say that, too — just make it clear that you're watching and you care. I've done that myself — making eye contact with the woman and nodding or something, so she knows I think she's handling it fine, but I've got her back (and a phone ready to dial 911) if it escalates. I have no idea if that's been helpful to the women in question, but I know it's something I'd appreciate. And if it DOES escalate, and you can clearly see that the woman is saying "back off" and the dude's not listening, then hell yeah, step in there! At that point, I think it's safe to assume she *can't* necessarily handle it alone — not because she's incompetent, but because Potentially Dangerous Asshole is not taking no for an answer. I would LOVE it if some other guy went, "Dude, come on, she told you to step off" at that point in such a conversation with a douchebag.

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:39 AM

It's funny that this is the first time I've ever stopped to think — wait. Why hasn't that ever happened?

Yeah, I was trying to remember if it's ever happened to me, the guy checking in thing, and the only example I came up with I made an oblique reference to above:

I was on a late night train, New Years Eve, going home with my boyfriend. I was around 17. And a drunk belligerent guy started hassling me – nice lips, bet they'd feel great wrapped around my cock: this was well beyond 'socailly clueless' into foul harassment stuff. And he went on and on, and this is in a crowd of people watching this horrible interaction and saying nothing but being amused.

And the second my boyfriend said Hey, guy, back off, not cool, the harasser turned his attention to him, hostility flaring, and challenged him to a fight.

Clearly the entire thing was designed to goad my boyfriend. I was the mechanism by which Asshole was demonstrating his intentions, that's all. The cheerleader, if you will, between the horses. He was attacking my boy, really. And my boy took too long to speak up in my defense precisely because he knew that and was afraid of the confrontation. If he hadn't spoken up at all, who knows where it would have gone?

472. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:45 AM

Matt: In addition to not being told this explicitly, think of all of the ways you were "shown" that the opposite was true.

473. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:48 AM

rainne, thank you for your response. I think you get the drift of where I was coming from. I wanted the woman and him to both know I was there and ready to be active in the situation (in hopfully a positive way). Yes, it was partly my intention to refocus his attention. It's better from my point of veiw as well. Am I correct in assuming that the "dude, she said no", while not directed at you, would still not raise your eire?

And yes, I get you don't owe me anything. Not a look, not a thank you. And I wholeheartly agree with that. If I step in, it's my choice.

474. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:49 AM

I've been following the comments to this post since I commented last night (when there were, uh, FIVE comments... don't know how I didn't see this coming). I'm not caught up yet, but I want to say two things:

1. You people are awesome. I mean, not ALL of you. But you know who you are. Thanks for saying all the things that I want to say so my head doesn't explode.

2. I love how, once again, we have Trolly McDerailer come in and say, "Blahblah groupthink! Blahblah dissent = bannination! Blahblah hivemind!" in the SAME THREAD where we have people (snarkysmachine et al.) starting out with a pretty vehement disagreement, and coming up friends. Seriously. Awesome.

3. Caitlin, I think I might be developing a blogcrush on you. You keep making me laugh

125 of 345 and say "YEAH THAT" and kind of being generally awesome. You rock.

11/12/2015 8:40 am

475. *tin foil hattie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:51 AM

Beautiful. Brings to mind Ntozake Shange's haunting poem:

With No Immediate Cause

every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a
woman is raped / every ten minutes
a lil girl is molested
yet i rode the subway today
i sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days / 30 years ago
he might have sodomized his
daughter but i sat there
cuz the young men on the train
might beat some young women
later in the day or tomorrow
i might not shut my door fast
every 3 minutes it happens
some woman's innocence
rushes to her cheeks / pours from her mouth
like the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn
apart / their mouths
menses red & split / every
three minutes a shoulder
is jammed through plaster and the oven door /
chairs push thru the rib cage / hot water or
boiling sperm decorate her body
i rode the subway today
& bought a paper from a
man who might
have held his old lady onto
a hot pressing iron / i don't know
maybe he catches lil girls in the
park & rips open their behinds
with steel rods / i can't decide
what he might have done i only
know every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes every 10 minutes / so
i bought the paper
looking for the announcement
the discovery / of the dismembered
woman's body / the
victims have not all been
identified / today they are
naked and dead / refuse to
testify / one girl out of 10's not
coherent / i took the coffee

& spit it up / i found an
 announcement / not the woman's
 bloated body in the river / floating
 not the child bleeding in the
 59th street corridor / not the baby
 broken on the floor /
 there is some concern
 that alleged battered women
 might start to murder their
 husbands & lovers "with no
 immediate cause"

i spit up i vomit i am screaming
 we all have immediate cause
 every 3 minutes
 every 5 minutes
 every 10 minutes
 every day
 women's bodies are found
 in alleys & bedrooms / at the top of the stairs
 before i ride the subway / buy a paper / drink
 coffee / i must know /
 have you hurt a woman today
 did you beat a woman today
 throw a child across a room
 are the lil girl's panties
 in yr pocket

did you hurt a woman today
 i have to ask these obscene questions
 the authorities require me to
 establish
 immediate cause
 every three minutes
 every five minutes
 every ten minutes
 every day.

476. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:54 AM

Sweet Machine,

It's interesting that Sting has set the record straight on that. I always thought that song was about a *deceased* lover, i.e. "ever since the day when you went away" was about his life after her death. If it's about a living-but-estranged lover (which I guess it must be) then yes, creepy.

477. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:57 AM

@Ailbhe:

Oh – interestingly (to me) I'm mentally tacking on "I'm lucky to be alive" there and actually, no, and also the "I should really just be grateful I wasn't killed" is just-er-no too. The urge to minimise is bizarre.

Oddly enough, you know how this one clicked for me? Not after I was raped, not after I found my way to feminism, not after all the "it is never the victim's fault" education—it was after I was robbed, and it was told to me by a cop.

Weird, I know! But someone broke into my house and stole a bunch of my stuff, and I was kind of self-blamey, because I'd left the front window unlocked, and well that was just stupid of me, and I was lucky I *only* lost a bunch of my things (and my sense of security, thanks). And he looked at me and said, "You weren't lucky, you were robbed. You left the window unlocked. You didn't ask anybody to come in and steal your things. It's not *only* a crime if you take every precaution to prevent it."

He was, in many many ways, awesome, and never once did I feel uncomfortable, in my freshly-broken-into house, alone, with a single, armed male LEO.

478. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:00 AM

Recent deleted dude comment: *It's not the same level of trauma, but far more than 1 in 6 men will be dehumanized and humiliated (usually publicly) or have the shit beat out of them by other men in their lifetime. We deal with it. You do, too. It's a damned shame that we're all so divided by fear and atomized by Modernity (including feminism) but it's the wasteland we've inherited.*

Sexism hurts men MORE, bitches!

479. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:05 AM

Sexism hurts men MORE, bitches!

And so does feminism, apparently! How about that.

480. *Meowser*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:06 AM

About the Asperger's: As a card-carrying member of Club 299 (Late-DXed Aspie Division), it's not that we aren't capable of picking up social clues. It's that we don't always know what we're supposed to do by osmosis, or at least how to fake it by osmosis (which I often think is more the point with NT behavior; a lot of NTs don't know what they're "supposed" to do either, but they know how to fake it better).

Certainly if someone spells out to me exactly what's going on, my reaction's going to be "ohhh, thanks for telling me, sorry, I didn't know." Personally I think an aspie guy is more likely to have a reaction like that to something like, "I'd really like to read my book, if you don't mind," than your basic NT d00d who still has his eyes on you as the belt notch and won't take that extremely broad hint. NT d00ds are a lot more likely to be concerned about "scoring" to show off for other men (even imaginary men!) than autistic guys are, probably because they know that NT d00ds are never going to read them as entirely "normal."

Love this post, Starling. Thank you.

481. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:07 AM

Pre-modern people totally bonded over their non-atomized relationship with fear and early death! They totally got together over mead and celebrated how likely they were to suffer horribly, and created an atmosphere of mutual respect that was only slightly marred by the intermittent raping! Which totally didn't damage the unity between the genders (two only), because women weren't so whiny about their trauma!

482. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:07 AM

Sexism hurts men MORE, bitches!

I felt like somebody punched me and I could do nothing but laugh hysterically instead of cry.

OMG... Giggle-fit!

Should I have said HER-sterically? He was being kind of HIM-sterical. I wanna keep being all... What was it? Atomized by something something?

483. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:09 AM

Wait, so now men have to think about not beating each other senseless or humiliating each other AND not raping or harrassing women? All these rules!

484. *Martinb*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:16 AM

Slightly clearer explanation as I think Meowser and I are saying the same thing: Us Aspies aren't very good at spotting and correctly interpreting social clues that haven't been explained / can't be inferred from obvious logic.

So if I know what clues to be expecting (and knowing the reason behind them helps a lot too), it's all easy.

485. *nationalblah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:17 AM

This hypothesis needs data to back it up, but is it possible that most rapists don't conform to preconceived notions of what is a rapist – meaning the real rapists are not the “sketchy” guys, but the friendly, “cute” guys who appear fine? I say this because almost all people (men and women) have fairly nuanced abilities to assess social situations. These help us make good decisions. But all people also harbor lots of irrational biases that impede our abilities to make accurate judgments. Has anyone done research to find out if men most women judge to be sketchy are more likely to rape then other men? It'd be interesting research to try to find common characteristics among rapists. (Sadly, there probably aren't any.)

At the same time, it is quite logical that men who do not respect boundaries and social norms for how to act in public, will also not respect private boundaries in a relationship.

The larger message should be that even if a man's public actions do not arise from an intent to rape, if they are sketchy / frightening / uncomfortable / annoying, they should not have to be tolerated. Just because you aren't a rapist doesn't give you the right to be an asshole.

486. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:19 AM

Nathan,

Recently riding the bus there was a man making a total fool of himself annoying a woman. She was very very obviously annoyed, and as I mentioned above I'm not good at picking up social cues so if I could see it he really should have been able to. She was trying to read her book and he kept asking her questions about it. So I started telling him about the book I

was reading. He kept trying to brush me off and go back to her, but I acted like I thought we were having a nice group discussion on literature, since what other people were reading obviously fascinated him, with no ulterior motives on his part (chatting up the woman) or mine (interrupting). Eventually she got off and I stopped bothering him. I don't honestly know what she thought of it, maybe she thought I was just another clown joining the circus, but my intention was to take some pressure off of her and it seemed to work.

487. *Derek*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:19 AM

Starling – thank you for a very interesting article addressing an issue I've been exposed to and thought about before but haven't considered in quite so stark terms. I appreciate the argument that you are making.

What led me to read the entire subsequent comment section (or tried to) was a concern with the presentation of your statistics. My apologies if someone has already addressed this, although I could not find it.

I followed some of the links to the originating research and as far as I can tell, the point that incidents of sexual assault and rape being both much higher than people often assume and also largely unreported is quite valid. What did not quite follow from the research quoted, unless I'm misreading something, was equating sexual assault with rape.

In the article the quoted statistic is that 1 in 6 women are sexually assaulted in their lives. This leads to a conclusion about the occurrence of rapists among men. While rape and sexual assault are both awful things that should never happen, they are not equivalent and I'm concerned that the imagery conjured by the term rape is a way of inflating a statistic about sexual assault that should be a sufficient point in itself.

Following the studies and research, a rough look suggests that studies about only rape / attempted-rape have significantly lower (although still alarming) numbers than those that include sexual assault.

Perhaps I simply have more ease picturing one in six men having groped a woman or exposed themselves than having to picture one in six men as having raped a woman. Perhaps I need to overcome that difficulty. But I suspect that it may also be useful to be careful with the terminology being used in such a charged topic. Or I'm missing something about the research or article above. Apologies if I have.

488. *Demosthenes XXI*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:20 AM

Starling....

The general idea of your article is textual gold. You are clearly and concisely detailing what a guy should try to look at and for if he decides to approach a woman that he has not been introduced to and also detailing what said guy needs to know as to cut his losses and LHtFA (Leave Her the Fuck Alone).

(BTW; LHtFA is not an insult; it is a rule of conduct and a measure of safety for men. If a woman clearly states that she does not want to be bothered, you initiate a full-stop and you leave her vicinity at once if possible; if not, then do so ASAP. In today's legal climate, a man can't even play with what might happen, so it's best to just get clear away from a woman who is not interested in your attention or contact and eliminate any and all doubt that you would be perceived to be a problem.)

Starling, your rules of conduct/engagement make perfect sense.

Allow me to repeat this for all of the ladies on this page, who may question what I wrote above.

Understanding the above-written rules of conduct/engagement for approaching a woman who you have not been introduced to previously, makes perfect sense, especially for a man who wishes to make a good first impression on said woman; assuming that the woman in question is remotely interested in you at the time of first contact.

I met my wife using the common sense observations that you detailed in your essay, Starling. So I can say with all confidence that what you wrote is "the gospel."

With that being said, before I can recommend your essay to other fellows, we do need to discuss the one fallacy in your essay; the assumption that a given man is a rapist until proven otherwise. In fact, this is pretty much where your essay falls apart. Unless your statement of wanting men to read this was sarcastic, you risk alienating your target audience with this fallacy.

I'm sure that a lot of women are going to say (in fact, many already have):

"That fact is a harsh truth; deal with it, fella."

This is leading into the same logic that is used to circumstantially incriminate ethnic peoples in American society. All African Americans are muggers until they prove otherwise. All Arab men are terrorists until they prove otherwise. While Shiyiya did a good job of condensing your viewpoint, it doesn't change the idea.

As an African American male, I have to now deal with two negative stereotypes (racial and gender) that I inherited through no fault of my own or any of my peers or progenitors. Oh, I forgot; three stereotypes. According to the racial stereotype I inherited, we are damned twice over as "potential rapists" because we are African American men and there's nothing we want more than to "rape some poor, defenseless, white woman." Do you know how many African American people have been killed because of the kind of logic you are applying here, Starling?

Let me remind you all of something. Nearly all rapists by nature suffer from some degree of sociopath disorder. A rapist is a person who feels (in various degrees) that their desires/feelings are the only ones that matter in their world. Their victims suffering does not register as the suffering of a "real person." In fact, regardless of gender, they do not consider their victims as "real people" at all; they are just "something placed on the earth for their personal use."

With that being said, if a guy comes up to a woman out of the blue and tries to strike up a conversation and the woman clearly indicates that she is not interested, and said guy continues, then by all means she should do whatever it takes to reestablish her zone of comfort/safety. Because if he breaks more than two of your rules of engagement, you have a right for worry, and if he breaks all of the (except for the tattoo one...that's more than a bit superficial), he probably is going to be trouble.

And do you know what? A genuine, dyed-in-the-wool rapist already has a plan that incorporates all of your rules because all he wants is to gain your trust enough so he can stay close to you and wait until he gets his opportunity to strike. According to FBI profilers, Ted Bundy was able to snare more than 30 women without raising any red flags until it was

Nobody (who is reasonable) is saying that women out alone in public do not have any grounds for caution or worry. I would rather my wife (or any woman for that matter) err on the side of caution, than be caught unawares by some monster.

But you know something, Starling? (And this is also for the rest of the good women who are reading my post.) Your "theorem" is bordering on discrimination and is engendering a very dangerous trend of thinking that is only going to destroy any attempt to eliminate rape culture by alienating the men you need to help achieve your goal.

For this dialog to be truly successful, you can't discount the feelings and observations of the "other side," or else you risk your own feelings and observations being discarded by the people you are trying to reach.

489. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:21 AM
aleks:

That was totally funny and really clever of you. I love it!

490. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:23 AM

Thanks Gail. Full disclosure, as a recently young man I've certainly been the one who needed to be subtly smacked with the "Dude, she doesn't want to talk to you" sign at times too.

491. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:23 AM

aleks – Hahaha. That is awesome.

492. *Gail*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:26 AM

We all do doofy things aleks, the important thing is to learn from it. You now recognize that what you did wasn't cool and not only are you not doing that anymore you're actually trying to help in similar situations.

ding You leveled. (recovering WoW junkie)

493. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:30 AM

@Ailbhe – "The urge to minimise is bizarre."

As a fellow rape survivor I don't believe it is bizarre at all and this urge doesn't come primarily from inside those who are raped. We are repeatedly told to minimize being the victims of sexual violence by the way so many people talk about sexual violence.

If we report we face blame and possible false accusations that we have made a false accusation and are making it tough for "real" rape victims. We are told that our word alone means nothing and should not result in a conviction. If we don't report people will say we helped our rapist through our silence and are partly responsible for any subsequent sexual assaults he (or less often she) commits.

This widespread minimization is what several men who have commented here have effectively demanded and it is what at least one woman commenter effectively demanded as well.

Sexual violence is endemic and yet people tell those who think about it in their interactions with the group who commits the most sexual assaults that they are paranoid. As a gay minister in a non-gay friendly denomination (at that time at least) once said, "Is it still paranoia if someone really is out to get you?"

494. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:33 AM

Hehehe I've never played WoW because if I'm paying monthly for a game I know I'll play it all the time. Medieval 2: Total War is the poison of choice that's currently keeping me from my homework, although I'm dying in anticipation of Starcraft II. Damn I miss Kerrigan.

495. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:34 AM

Ummm, the above was a response to Gail, I realize it looks like I posted some random nonsense to the wrong blog, oh, oh.

496. *bellatrys*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:36 AM

Just Some Trans Guy:

I'm not the mods, of course, but my perspective on this would be not that you're derailing in this case (altho' your sensitivity to the possibility that you were committing the classic "what about teh menz?" is commendable) but rather that, by being gender-non-conforming, you de facto **are** part of "our" group (where I deliberately put "our" in quotes to acknowledge the non-binary realities of gender/sexuality) because in the eyes of the sorts of Manly Men who regard female agency as a silly thing to be disregarded at best and something negative to be destroyed at worst, males who **don't** present as "straight" have become dangerously contaminated with the Feminine Essence in their minds. Worse than merely **being** women (who after all can't help it, poor things!) you guys [sic] commit Gender Treason, and thereby make a mockery of the whole Grand Scheme of Things with your subversive ambiguities, possibly being even more dangerous than we mere Uppity Ones...

I am flippant, because I always am, but I don't kid, really – what I mean is, you come by your "feminine" fear of Reg'lar Guys honorably, the same way we do, and for the same reasons (because they ARE out to get you!) , plus some extra ones which are illuminating of the whole interconnected misogyny-homophobia complex.

–Starling, this whole post rocks, I just had to lay a "no way in HELL I'd be interested in dating you (even if I were physically interested in you) after you failed to listen to my "not interesteds" six times running AFTER lying to me about wanting to hire me as a freelancer to get my phone number!" smackdown on a PUA-type. I am (now) one of the bolder ones, though not as bold as CassandraSays, the tattoo'd guys don't bother me having been an art-student-proto-Goth back when – but the smooth/smarmy preppy boyz scare the shit out of me, because the entitlement reeks off them stronger than the Axe and I know just how bad they can be (even short of Bundy).

Ironically, the “Be afraid-correction, TERRIFIED – of every man who comes near you at all ever because all men only want ONE THING FROM GIRLS and you can’t tell which ones are rapists!” is what my conservative antifeminist father drilled into his daughters as soon as we hit puberty...then he turned around and berated us for “dressing like dykes” and “being scared of men” afterwards, and tried to find other rationalizations for our man-hating feminism. No, Dad, it was mostly you: we had to figure out which sorts of guys were safe and which were dangerous in spite of your “helpful” safety advice!

497. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:47 AM

Nathan, I think the general thing to do in this situation is body language / eye contact: look directly at the offending man so it's clear you are noticing, and your look says 'what the hell are you doing?', and maybe also an exchange of looks with the harassed woman, with this kind of rolling of the eyes about the harasser (don't know how to explain it in words, but maybe you get what I'm saying). This will allow the woman to give you a signal (with eyes/body language) if she wants more help or wants you to step in more verbally, but if it were me (as the woman) I wouldn't — I would just be happy you are there. And this is sending a message to the man that what he is doing is not acceptable and not cool, and he may be peer pressured to stop.

It won't work for all situations (some guys don't look around for social cues, like some types of crazy guys in the subway), but I think there are many situations that this would work.

498. *Sunil*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:47 AM

I'm male and though it made me sad to read this, I understood and appreciated every word. Great article.

499. *Thorn*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:50 AM

Dingo sez: *I understand womens' point of view on this issue. But, if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men? Men are afraid of rejection, but we're definitely not afraid of being raped or killed by you.*

Y'know what? I'll play along, just for a minute. WHY?

1. Because inverting who-approaches-who does not make you STOP being Shrodinger's Rapist. You are equally unknown to me regardless of who makes the initial contact.

2. Because my approaching you does not actually make me less vulnerable throughout the course of whatever interaction follows. In fact, it makes me MORE vulnerable. The simple act of a woman approaching a man, to many people (like, the kind who wind up on juries) can easily be twisted into “she wanted it,” whether I did or not.

Also, by approaching you I am not only opening a conversational door, but thanks to all the other patriarchal bits of social conditioning we have BOTH been saturated with, I have actually made it MORE difficult for me to close that door, should I later decide I wish to.

But, y'know, thank you for your genius idea on how to fix everything in one fell swoop anyway. Us silly wimmenz and our lady-brains sure never would have come up with that doozy.

I only wished to point out, as politely as I could, that this is a poorly written list of inane social tips thinly veiling a cliché rape culture message.

Wow, thank you, John! Regardless of the fact that there are hundreds of posts from women here, pretty much all saying "OMG, this is amazing. Every man needs to read this because it's so true" (and I am yet another), of course WE'RE all wrong and YOU'RE right. Because you're the MAN and we all know that MEN are 1) always right, and 2) always have the final word, even about living life as a woman. Glad to know that you're more of an expert on the female experience than any of us. I'm sure we're all so, so sorry that we hurt your precious little feelings.

501. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:53 AM

It's a damned shame that we're all so divided by fear and atomized by Modernity

I first read this as 'anatomized by Modernity,' which is fairly gruesome, but then realized – oh, my, *atomizers*! He's talking about perfume! And, you know, I would definitely try a scent named 'Modernity.' It sounds wonderfully Deco.

502. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:58 AM

If a woman approached me, *then* decided I was a sketch artist and started making her lack of interest known, I'd be pretty confused about what had just happened and probably think "What the hell did you start talking to me for?" since I wouldn't know what I'd done to trigger her alarm. Being me, I'd take it stoically and only cry on the inside, but if I were the shouty or worse type this situation would be at least as irritating or worse for her as if I had approached her and she let me know she didn't appreciate my attention. So no, while women making the first move more would be *awesome*, it wouldn't help at all with the problem under discussion.

503. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:00 AM

Wow, note to women who date men: do not ever, ever go on a date with a guy named Carl Novak. Just fucking trust me on this one.

longs to take off mod hat

504. *Neats*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:00 AM

It is an "assessing the threat of a more privileged person" thing. I, for instance, am Schrodinger's White Supremacist to every POC I meet, Schrodinger's Homophobe to every gay person, etc. (If you're white and straight, so are you! Welcome to the club!)

This! This is something that actually came up in the same segment with Chris Rock where he talked about Polanski; at one point, he said something about how he's always surprised when white people are nice to him. At first the comment stung a little, and I thought, "Hey, I'm nice! Just because I'm white doesn't mean I'm automatically a racist." It took a moment for me to realize, oh, hey, privilege.

505. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:01 AM

And that was a response to Thorn. Sorry, the blog I'm used to shows whom you're replying to.

506. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:05 AM

Demosthenes XXI, we've had some discussion about race, class, and stereotyping up above; did you see it?

Let me remind you all of something. Nearly all rapists by nature suffer from some degree of sociopath disorder. A rapist is a person who feels (in various degrees) that their desires/feelings are the only ones that matter in their world. Their victims suffering does not register as the suffering of a "real person." In fact, regardless of gender, they do not consider their victims as "real people" at all; they are just "something placed on the earth for their personal use."

This, however, is just false. Our culture is so saturated with sexism that it is not a stretch for a man to think that women are not "real people" — that is, in fact, what patriarchy is all about. So no, rapists are not sociopaths; they are men who *know they can get away with it*.

507. rainne

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:06 AM

Nathan, either action (addressing me or addressing Other Dude) is so far above the standard I have been used to expecting from male witnesses to harassment that either would be just peachy with me. Also, this may be the first time I have been asked 'but what can I do to help' in a sincere and non-rhetorical ('yeah, society sucks, what do you expect me to do about it, huh?') way.

508. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:11 AM

Also, a general announcement: since this thread has over 500 comments (and our last one on harassment has over 600), **we are no longer going to approve newbie comments that question the existence of rape culture, argue against the rape statistics cited, or tell women to stop living in fear.** Men who would like to participate in this conversation: you have to meet us more than halfway here. If you can't do that, the internet is a big place: link away and discuss this somewhere else.

509. aleks

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:12 AM

Neats, here's that clip (Rock on Leno about Polanski) <http://videos.nymag.com/video/Chris-Rock-Rips-Into-Roman-Pola>

510. Julie

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:17 AM

Okay. I've let this reading error slide at least half a dozen times now, and I can't stand no more. (I'm a Virgo: bite me.)

Nowhere in the article does it say that men are automatically rapists. Pay attention, gentlemen! Assuming you have not committed rape, SHE NEVER CALLED YOU A RAPIST.

What she is saying is that, from a stranger's point of view, you are neither a rapist NOR a non-rapist. That's where the whole Schrödinger thing came in, see – we don't KNOW.

Now, since we're talking about risk assessment, let's follow the consequences of being wrong in either direction. If I treat you like a potential rapist even though you are a non-rapist, then one of two things happen:

end; or

2: I miss the chance to make friends with a non-rapist.

2 might be said to be regrettable, sure. But let's compare the possible consequences if you are a rapist whom I treat like a non-rapist:

1: You decide for some reason not to rape me (right now), and I walk away; or

2: You rape me, and perhaps other nasty things as well.

Kind of a no-brainer. I realize that as a POC that sounds dangerously like upholding a blind prejudice based on bullshit, but previous comments have explained why this is not so.

(BTW, there was recently a book published about sociopaths that suggests that they make up 10% of the population, so again, caution would appear to be warranted.)

511. *nicegirlphd*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:21 AM

Laura, thanks for this:

BLACK MEN ALREADY KNOW THAT PEOPLE THINK THEY MIGHT HURT THEM.

That's a very good point.

And I'm certainly going to sit my boys down and talk to them about this when they are a little older (they are only 1 and 4 now)

512. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:21 AM

Demosthenes XXI:

I'm mostly done, so please forgive me for not addressing the substance of you post. I just wanted to say, your continual repetition of Starling's name was very creepy to me.

513. *volcanista*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:22 AM

Derek, while a man who sexually assaults but does not rape a woman is, I agree, not a rapist, he is still someone I desperately want to avoid having any contact with. Sexual assault that isn't rape is nonetheless deeply traumatizing. I feel like you're being pedantic, and in this case that comes across as really trivializing of horrible things.

tinfoil hattie, that poem is amazingly powerful, but good god, so upsetting and triggering for me. After reading it and sitting here crying, I had to go self-medicate with some wine. but still, thanks for posting it. hard but I needed to read it after all of this this week.

514. *Rose*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:23 AM

This has been, by far, the greatest thing to happen this week. Thank you so much. I would love to point out the best part of this, but as far as I'm concerned, it is perfect. I, also, will be handing this out on the subway, as well as forwarding it to my University's Women's and Gender Studies department.

Thank you.

515. *Thorn*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:23 AM

[TRIGGER WARNING]

@ John (the banned): **100%. 100% of rapes are the result of men meeting women and then proceeding in a manner contrary to Starling's advice.**

I would say that's demonstrably not true, as rape happens for many reasons in many different social situations.

What about date rape? What about child molestation? Those are a significant percentage of the 1 in 6 statistic, yet aren't addressed here. This article only deals with strangers meeting in public. What are the odds that in his lifetime a man is going to rape a woman he's never met before in a public place? That's the statistic I feel is applicable here.

I'm going to go out on a veeeeerrrrryyy shaky limb and assume you're trying to ask a real-live honest question here.

All of the situations in which a woman you know has been raped, some one (generally a man, but since you bring up molestation and I unfortunately know a couple of women whose childhood sexual abusers were also women, I will go with the neutral) first MET her, and later – whether minutes or hours or dates or years – disregarded her clear signals that she was not appreciating the attention she was receiving.

If you think Starling was writing about some kind of situation where a strange man approaches a woman on a train and, right there in plain daylight, attempts to assault her? You're wrong.

Starling was writing about the same sort of situations you describe. Some guy says hello to me on a bus. He may just be saying 'hello' and may very well want to invite me for a cup of coffee sometime, and his intentions may be perfectly innocent. However, he may ALSO be saying hello to me as part of his plan to start a conversation, continue it when I get off the bus, and then walk with me until we get close enough to my home so that he can FORCE HIS WAY IN AND ASSAULT ME!!!

And both of those guys? They look the same. They start with the same line, "Hey, what book are you reading?" or "What are you listening to on your iPod?" They may BOTH show the same unwillingness to leave me the hell alone when I politely try to brush them off.

Look, pal. I don't have a crystal ball to see the future with. I don't have some cool-ass Jedi powers to read your mind. I don't get some constantly updated list from Feminist Hivemind Central telling me which guys are rapists and which aren't.

That rapist over there? He's wearing the same windbreaker you are, and the same sneakers, and he's got the same haircut you do. If you want me to believe you're nothing like him, in the face of all that? Then you're going to have to do something to show it.

Because see, if I don't trust you and you aren't a rapist, then the worst that happens is I don't get to go on a date with a guy who maybe likes me, but not enough to make a little extra effort to show he respects my completely rational need for safety.

But what if I do trust you, and you ARE a rapist? I think you're smart enough to figure out the answer to that on your own.

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:28 AM

I feel like you're being pedantic, and in this case that comes across as really trivializing of horrible things.

Totally agreed, and it also misses the point of the post, which is that we don't know who will hurt us and in what ways.

517. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:29 AM

RE: Volcanista,

At Feministing they say "TRIGGER WARNING" above posts that might evoke that reaction. Might that be a convention worth adopting? I don't know enough to have an opinion but it might be worth considering.

518. *hsofia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:30 AM

I have to say that I have never consciously thought, "This man is going to rape me," so for me, refusing to talk to someone because I know he is trying to get my number or sell me something or whatever has to do with my RIGHT not to continue a conversation I don't want to continue.

It seems like in our society, people can understand the concept of not being SPAMMED, receiving junk mail, or having solicitors knocking on your door to ask you for stuff, panhandlers asking for money, and any other number of interactions.

Why can't they comprehend a woman not wanting to talk to a friendly guy?!

519. *Neats*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:31 AM

NT d00ds are a lot more likely to be concerned about "scoring" to show off for other men (even imaginary men!) than autistic guys are, probably because they know that NT d00ds are never going to read them as entirely "normal."

This is why I tend to feel much *less* threatened if a non neurotypical guy talks to me on the bus. I can usually tell pretty quickly if the person talking to me is on the autism spectrum or otherwise not neurotypical (apparently most people can't tell?), so it doesn't come across as creepy to me if he doesn't catch on that I don't feel like talking.

520. *genderbitch*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:32 AM

Frankly, I'm sort of amazed that anyone automatically trusts anyone.

I did threat assessment on everyone I met, guy, girl, white, poc, TAB, PWD, poor, rich, cis, trans etc. And then, when I started transition, that instinct to do threat assessment saved my life and well being a few times and I learned that certain specific groups of people were waaaaay more dangerous to me than others.

And the times I auto trusted people, were usually the times I got hurt, badly. Including one particular time that culminated in a year's worth of domestic violence finished off with sexual assault.

Tough lessons learned, I do not ever autotrust guys of any stripe nor cis women (and even

trust and I regard any attempt to talk me out of it (when someone decides to center their feelings above my safety) as abundant proof that they aren't as nice as they think they are.

Seriously a brill post. Ought to be required reading.

I also linked this post at my own (<http://genderbitch.wordpress.com/2009/10/08/expectation-of-trust/>) for further reading. Trackback didn't go through so I just wanted to let you know. XD

521. CC

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:33 AM

thank you for writing this, it was a thoughtful reminder that i don't have to feel bad about my paranoia of the "scary guy" on the subway...i don't have to sympathize, all i have to do is protect myself; the statistics and built-in visual cues only reiterate that fact.

522. *volcanista*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:33 AM

Sure, aleks, but frankly practically every comment on these threads deserves a trigger warning, and I knew that and was reading anyway. I'm not easily triggered, so I take some chances. And while this has been upsetting yesterday and today I also am really glad the discussion is happening, if that makes sense. There are not many groups of people I'd feel safer with discussing this stuff.

523. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:35 AM

Addendum to general announcement above: **We will also not publish comments by men about how you can't get dates.** For fuck's sake.

524. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:36 AM

Our long-suffering moderators deserve two-weeks of fluff for the last two days!!!

525. *Robert*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:38 AM

Agree mostly. I haven't read all the comments but the article doesn't mention one *large* group of men in the descriptions you give. The ones who believe they can "sell" themselves, against any opposition, if they can just get the conversation going. A lot of "Salesmen" get training in different ways of "never taking no for an answer". Besides the ones that just do it on their own.

I don't believe all of them are the type(s) you describe though there *is* going to be overlap. The ones who "never take no for an answer" verbally are on a slippery psychological slope.

526. *volcanista*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:39 AM

For fuck's sake is right. Hell, this week and my reaction to it have convinced me to finally really stop dating for a while, for real. Take that, assholes.

527. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:55 AM

aleks, great way of dealing with that guy. You have my admiration.

528. *abyss2hope*

140 of 345 OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:55 AM

Derek, you asked about the statistical difference between rape and sexual assault.

On the offender studies looking at rape only we have: 6%, 6.1%, 10%, 6%, 4.8%, and 5% which gives an average of 6.3% of men (just over 1 out of 16) surveyed who admitted to committing acts which meet the definition of rape.

Ignoring all sexual assaults other than completed rapes doesn't paint a safe picture for women when they are dealing with random strangers.

529. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:55 AM

#hsafia *Why can't they comprehend a woman not wanting to talk to a friendly guy?!*

Speaking only from personal experience, I think it has to do with seeing people hit it off brilliantly and thinking "Hey, I could do that too, maybe with this woman sitting right here!" Plus, your female friends tell you girls are attracted to confidence, right? Jasmine told Aladdin to go jump off a balcony and but he persisted and they turned out alright, right? Now, having grown up a bit and learned from past disasters, I understand that this woman sitting next to me is not like any other woman, I am not like any other guy, and this situation is not like any other situation, so the fact that my tall handsome charming friend Jason met his girlfriend of four years and counting by randomly complimenting her skirt AT THIS VERY COFFEE SHOP doesn't obligate this scenario to develop or this woman to respond in the same way to me now. But, although I consider myself to be both intelligent and full to brimming with the noblest intentions, young men like young women are bombarded with all kinds of contradictory and unrealistic advice and expectations and some of us take awhile to disregard the crap (and obviously some of us never do).

I'm tired and I don't know if any of that was coherent. I want to be crystal clear that this has no relevance at all to violence, aggression, or stalking behavior, only to failure to take the initial hint that she doesn't want to talk to you. I also intend it as an endorsement of, not riposte to, Starling's guide on how not to accidentally be a dick.

530. *rhiaia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:03 AM

It's been ages since I posted here (although I lurk constantly), but I just need to chime in on a couple of things.

- 1: Thank you for a brilliant post;
- 2: Thank you for a wonderful comment thread;
- 3: Thank you for your moderating efforts.

Seriously, would it be helpful to turn the modding into a game, like collect the most absurd ones and post them?

I love these kinds of threads, because they're not only amusing but emotionally buttressing—some troll shows up to say stupid shit we've all probably thought at some point, lots and lots of brilliant Shapelings squish it, I feel a bit more reassured about myself (repeat x times, where x = many, many individual keyboards).

Also: OMG, how did I not know about Fluevogs? ::: runs off to engage in furious coveting
:::

531. *James*

141 of 345 OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:08 AM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

Sweet Machine: thanks for taking the time to address my questions. I can imagine the number of attacks you get, and moderating them makes sense. The link to Feminism 101 is helpful. You probably feel that most men like me who commented are just trying to raise your blood pressure: but speaking for myself, the way I learn things is to ask skeptical questions. I realize that it is not your, or Caitlin's, or anybody else's responsibility to educate me, but your reply was helpful to me, and I hope others who read the comments. If nothing else, my awareness has been raised. So thanks: really.

abyss2hope: thanks for setting me straight. The claim was: 1 in 6 women has been sexually assaulted, and while reading the comments I confused it with 1 in 6 men is a rapist. I respect and appreciate your straight-forward tone. And yes, girls (women) can do math quite well.

Ethyl: your suggestion that I just google the claim that 1 in 6 women has been sexually assaulted (a claim which I am otherwise inclined to believe by the way) in no way helps answer my question, any more than would a physicist telling a freshman to just google the claim that we live in a multiverse. There is a lot of unfalsifiable junk physics proffered by Professor Google. I was hoping you, or somebody else, would address my concern: if I tried to publish a physics paper in which I claimed that the number of photons in my graph is actually higher because my instrument "under-reported" them, I would not get far.

532. Havoc

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:08 AM

Guys can be CREEPY AS HECK on the bus (or train). I don't want to talk to them. I don't want to interact with them. But it's hard to balance my need for burying my nose in a book to indicate "do not talk to me" with my need to keep an eye on my environment, in case someone who looks perhaps not too safe steps onto the bus from either the front or the rear door. I always sit with my back to the window so that I can see. Or in case the creepy guy who won't stop staring at my breasts gets off at the same stop as me and follows me. (This has happened! More than once!)

Oftentimes, I will use my carefully-cultivated glare, which reads as 'fuck off and die.' I spent years in grade school and junior high being sexually harassed. Trust me, I've perfected this glare.

Unfortunately, the fuck off and die glare isn't a good strategy to employ when on public transit alone in the middle of the night. That's when I get the "why do you have to be such a bitch?" questions, and when the men start getting threatening. That's when I sit by the driver so as not to feel threatened, because, at the very least, the driver is usually concerned about his or her safety on the route too, and there's a security camera aimed right at the driver.

Security cameras on public transit: Never not awesome, people.

That's also when I start lying. Men strike up conversations with me, because I'm pretty, because I'm alone, because I'm a woman and therefore available. Because I *must* want their attention, if they've deigned to force it on me. "What's your name?" They ask me that a lot. "It's Liz," I tell them.

My name isn't anything close to a variation on Elizabeth, of course.

"What're you doing out so late, Liz?" They ask me that too, and I know the answer in their mental script is supposed to be completely innocent, but it's supposed to make me sound fuckable too. Because they want me to be available. Not to mention fuckable. If they're on

the bus and talking to me, they're hitting on me. If they don't know me and they're hitting on me, presumably, they're aiming for sex. Especially if it's late at night, because why would a woman be on the bus by herself late at night if she's not looking to hook up? I usually demur with an answer about how I've been out with my friends, and now I'm going back to my parents' house. Or I have school or work early in the morning, and I have to sleep.

Unfortunately, mentioning sleep means that these types of men think of a bed, and when these types of men think of pretty girls alone on the subway who want to go to sleep in a BED, they're not thinking that I really want to sleep. They're thinking that's Sekrit Girl Code for fucking. Because, of course, doctors recommend eight hours of sleep a day – and sex with the skeezy guy on the bus who thinks that because you're out alone, you want to fuck him.

Sometimes they ask me about my make-up. Sometimes they ask me about my book. Sometimes they ask me about my friends. Or where I work! And what I do! Not to mention where I live! Or my hobbies and habits. They ask me where I go for coffee in the morning. Or sometimes they offer to take me home. My house or theirs. They even offer to pay for my bus ticket. Because I'm a good girl, you see, not a prostitute (and there is *nothing wrong* with choosing sex work, seriously), so they think they can get off cheap by offering to pay for my bus ticket.

After all, I'm a good girl, but I can't be that good. I'm on the bus. Late at night. I mentioned sleeping. Which equals bed. Which equals sex.

I'm supposed to be flattered by this attention, you see. They want to *get to know me*. They want to find out if we *share a common interest*. Also, they want to find out my personal habits and my daily routine and meet my friends. Not to mention stalk me.

So I smile blandly and demur, because I know the only person I can rely on right now is myself. The adrenaline coursing through my system is enough to keep me awake. I exit the bus a stop or two before my real stop, because I don't want this guy to know where I live, or to know anywhere even *near* where I live.

I hope I can afford cab fare, and I hope that there are cabs around. If I can't afford it, and if I can't get a cab, I have to walk extra to get to my place, and hope a coffee shop is open late, and then I can walk in where there's at least a couple of employees who can call the police.

If I can afford the cab, I breathe a little sigh of relief once I get in. Then I keep my hand on my cell phone, and hold my keys ready, and I hope the cabbie isn't a rapist. (If it's during the day time, I call my mom! My mom gets lots of calls with, "Oh, hi, it's me, I'm just taking a cab to blah-blah-blah, and I had some spare time before I have to be at my appointment! Where people are expecting me! I will be home two hours from now and call to talk to Dad then! How are things going right now, though? Because I am on this cab ride, and want to have a nice chat that that will presumably keep the cabbie from deciding I'm a good target for rape and murder!" I don't really have an appointment most of the time. But it certainly is good to keep people guessing!)

I don't know who's a rapist and who's not. Cabbie. Random dude on the bus who thinks my eye make-up is pretty and I would like to introduce him to his friends. Random dude on the bus who thinks I should tell him all about my book. Random dude on the bus who asks me my name, and says he should maybe just call me pretty girl instead. Any of them could be rapists. Or, you know, just really fucked up with zero knowledge of social

Whatever! I maintain my right to lie through my fucking teeth to keep myself safe. Because if I don't know you, I feel threatened by you. (Sometimes I know you and I feel threatened by you, but that's a different set of protective mechanisms, and not what this post is about.)

I know, I do, that not all men are rapists. I know many men whom I've been with in situations where they could have tried to rape me, had they so chosen. (Some of them have chosen to joke about it. I have chosen not to hang out with those men any further. Funny, that.)

But – and this is the whole point of the initial post anyway – I just don't know the guy who strikes up a random conversation with me in public. He may feel he has the right to strike up a random conversation.

I just wish he respected my right not to engage him in conversation. Because then I wouldn't need to have protective mechanisms, or an entire persona created just to use with men who hit on me when I would clearly rather be left alone.

(I'm just waiting to see who's going to accuse me of being an evil lying bitch because I made up a persona for public transit encounters. I doubt it's going to be any of the regulars, though.)

533. DRST

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:14 AM

Demosthenes XXI-

According to FBI profilers, Ted Bundy was able to snare more than 30 women without raising any red flags until it was too late for them to escape.

Yeah, totally calling bullshit on that. I can't count the number of times a guy, stranger or within my circle of acquaintance, has raised red flags with me but I said NOT ONE THING to him. I got away as fast as I could, found girlfriends, compared notes, even quietly helped orchestrate a "we can't let him ever be alone with a woman" campaign. I never actually told the guy "You're being a creep. Stop."

Why? Because that wouldn't have been *nice*. It could've caused drama.

And I'm not supposed to do that.

Your post suggests that (pardon the phrasing) to you rapists are a very black and white issue. Rapists are always easily distinguished by their sociopathic tendencies and it's also futile for women to try to spot them because they're going to blend in anyway, so women generalizing about all men as being potential rapists is equivalent to any form of racism and just as unfair.

This entire post is about the fact that rapist isn't obvious. The only thing that tells a rapist from a non-rapist is time and behavior, neither of which are traits inherently born into anyone. The situations are not equivalent.

Kate – *Is it unfair? Well, shit yes, systematic oppression is unfair in many ways, most of them far more damaging than that one.* The heck you say.

534. *Starling*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:15 AM

Demosthenes XXI—Yes, you're right. Schrödinger's Rapist is a really loaded term. It's actually meant to be, because I think that all of us (men and women) have a vastly unrealistic idea about what a rapist is, and how often one is encountered. The idea I'm trying to lay out is that all strange guys are lumped together in the "maybe a problem" category. Not rapists, so far as I know, but not necessarily not-rapists, either. They're in the wait-and-see. I want you to know that I'm not excluding my nearest and dearest (my brothers, my dad, my closest male friends) from this label. To strangers, every one of them is *still* Schrödinger's Rapist. Still a potential threat. Even though I'd stake my life on them each being not-a-rapist, there's no way for me to convey that to every strange woman they encounter.

Now where we have a problem is when I, a white woman, look at a white man on the street and assign him threat ratio 1:60, but look at a black man, identically dressed, on the same street, and assign him a threat level of 1:30. This is bad, bigoted and wrong, and if it happens, it comes from racism.

But assigning all men a 1:60, and modifying that number as actions show him less or more trustworthy—well, I think that's okay.

Let me put it this way: you, a black man, will view the cops in a completely different way than I, a white woman, will. Your caution around law enforcement is a result of a world in which you suffer from exercises of white privilege and racism by law enforcement. Is it nice or fair or right to consider all cops racist sons-of-bitches? Of course not. But is it sensible to consider the possibility that the cop who stopped you will be one? Yeah. You never know. It's your safety that's at stake. If I'm a cop, if I carry a badge, I should approach you knowing that I have some ground to make up in trustworthiness. This doesn't mean I'm a bad cop. It means that I understand and respect that your experiences have made you cautious.

It also doesn't mean that you are the one making life hard for the cops or getting them fired or threatening them, just because they *might be* racists sons-of-bitches. Because they're the ones in power.

The same argument applies when it's women who are cautious of men. Generally speaking, we are on the low end of the power balance there, and so you're not harmed by my caution. You're just put to some trouble to dispel it.

There's some great discussion of this earlier, as well. Does this help?

535. *aleks*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:21 AM

James, I'm also skeptical about statistics, especially those regarding notoriously taboo subjects. The thing is, does it matter whether the rape victimization rate is 1/6, 1/10, or 1/4? Can we all agree that it happens A LOT, and that that's the point here? Women have to survive in a world where A LOT of women are raped, regardless of the exact number. Men have to deal with women acting in the knowledge that A LOT of women raped, regardless of the exact number. Would you or I feel much more confident jumping into a pool with only three sharks than one with four?

536. *Derek*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:21 AM

abyss2hope – thank you for confirming that I was seeing the right numbers, and also for more clearly making my point – that the numbers are alarming enough, in all respects, that hyperbole is unnecessary for the central argument.

Saying that 1 in 16 women have been raped, and that potentially 1 in 160 men is a rapist (following Starling's reasoning – not the further inflated 1 to 1 ratio you suggested) makes the same point, with more accuracy and less of the distortion that often leads to disbelief by male readers.

I won't argue that this is pedantic, but I do believe that hyperbole, intentional or not, cripples credibility and raises suspicions of bias. I don't think this was Starling's intention, so, given the size of the comment thread, I didn't feel bad about making note of this.

537. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:24 AM

And I'm certainly going to sit my boys down and talk to them about this when they are a little older (they are only 1 and 4 now)

Start now. You do it differently, of course, but the effect is the same: you model for them in age-appropriate ways that it is very important to listen and look for consent from the little girls they play with, you discuss it when someone else does not pay attention to consent. You stop what's happening and point it out when a playmate is unhappy or uncomfortable and your child isn't noticing that. You pay attention to tiny things like giving hugs that someone else may not be enthusiastically happy about. You stress repeatedly and consistently, in other words, how other people's bodies are not things they have a right to.

You're doing the right thing wanting to teach your sons this, but if you just sit them down when they're 10 or 15 without a lifetime of setting the foundation for it, it's not going to stick. And maybe you already know that and are doing all these things, it's just that it really is the little stuff and it really does start when they're babies.

I feel like you're being pedantic, and in this case that comes across as really trivializing of horrible things.

At Pandagon, they often refer to the type of guy who wants to know, very specifically, where the line is when it becomes rape. "Is this rape? What about THIS? OK, what about if she does this and I do this?" The consensus is that these guys sound like nothing more than rapists who are trying to determine exactly how much raping they can get away with, and people who get cute about the line between "sexual assault" and "rape" are horribly evocative of that same mindset to me.

538. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:26 AM

NationalBlah: "Just because you aren't a rapist doesn't give you the right to be an asshole." FTW!

Derek: The stats are hard to establish, and I am certainly open to more accurate numbers if they are available. However, you misread Abyss2Hope's comment—the 1/16 she refers to is the percentage of the male population admitting to behaviors classified as rape, not the percentage of the female population which has been raped.

539. *Mary*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:30 AM

146 of 345 Wow, it seems I'm late for the party. Starling thank you for writing this, great article, 11/12/2015 8:40 am

amazing comments. Half of the male comments made me loose faith in man kind, the other half helped me regained it and I feel that they're noteworthy solely for that fact, so Charles and Matt, thank you for being actually willing to listen, it's a refreshing change.

540. *fillyjonk*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:32 AM

Would you or I feel much more confident jumping into a pool with only three sharks than one with four?

Excellent. Excellent.

541. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:40 AM

I'll throw another "Charles, you are awesome" into the mix.

542. *Derek*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:49 AM

Starling – you're absolutely correct, my apologies to abyss2hope for misreading her comment and for misreading the table from which she drew those numbers.

For clarification, the research was referenced earlier in the thread by IrishUp (http://www2.binghamton.edu/counseling/documents/RAPE_FACT_SHEET1.pdf) and appeared to be a fairly well done literature survey of an assortment of other studies and further had numbers which seemed to match the statistics you were using.

To avoid further pedantry and since this is far from an area I know much about, I'll leave at that.

543. *Eliza B*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:51 AM

@ Demosthenes

I'd say that most rapists, in my experience, are NOT sociopaths. Or if they are, they don't seem to me, themselves, or anyone else like sociopaths. i've been sexually assaulted by three (3) members of various extended social circles. none of them seemed like they had a screw loose. they all seemed like...normal guys.

when i TOLD people what happened, the reactions were usually:

a) no! he did that? wow, that sucks. bummer! so, what are you doing saturday?
(minimizing)

b) wait but like...i don't get why you were alone in the car/apartment/etc with him though? (victim blaming)

c) are you SURE? (accusing me of "crying rape").

d) yeah, i've heard that about him (assuming i "should have known" -> victim blaming).

we live in a rape culture. it's no surprise that normal guys think that they can do this stuff to women and get away with it. because you know what? they can.

544. *Eliza B*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:55 AM

and also: when i worked as a loan officer, I used to go for coffee breaks at a starbucks near work. this one guy constantly would see me there and smile at me. once, i gave a sort of a half-smile back, after i finally started wondering if i was supposed to be knowing him from somewhere.

he came up to me and asked me for my phone number. i thanked him for the complement, but declined, saying i had a boyfriend (i didn't. but he didn't know that).

the next time i saw him there, he asked again. i said no again.

the next time i saw him there, he asked again. i said no, this time more firmly. as i was putting my coffee in the cupholder of my car i heard a tap at the window. i jumped, scared, and saw that he had FOLLOWED ME TO MY CAR and was tapping on my window to get my attention. i rolled it down a centimeter. he asked me for my phone number.

i was a lot younger then. now i would have told him to fuck off. but at the time, i was scared of Making a Scene. or Being Rude. so i said no.

i told my coworkers. know what they said? that it was romantic and i should give it to him next time i see him.

this, friends, is rape culture.

545. Valerie Keefe

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:58 AM

First of all, I couldn't agree more that a woman's risk tolerance is her own to set, and that demonstrating that you respect boundaries is a good thing, though the paradox of finding just the right level of assertiveness to be attractive to a woman without being threatening is maddening, it's also been addressed a thousand times before, by more accomplished women than myself (read Julia Serano, "Why Nice Guys Finish Last."

Ask yourself, "If I were dangerous, would this woman be safe in this space with me?"

I have to say as a test the fundamental message is that no space is acceptable space, and sort of reinforces the 'if you have tattoos only talk to me on the internet' class-privilege message that I read from the post.

The message is read by my working-class trans lesbian self to be: Well, if you can afford a space, if you can be inherently attractive as a success object, then women will not feel threatened by you. If you're working-class however, what with your thug life tattoos and bawdy t-shirts, well, you should recognize that it's far more likely that you're a rapist than some sociopathic equities trader in a two-piece suit.

Again, it's not more likely, and it's your hangup, not his, and a good person, while respecting it, can still resent it. "I'm sorry, I think you're a criminal," is, well, frankly erasing and offensive to anyone. And no, sociology does not trump someone else's fundamental right to dignity. It's no more correct to profile marginalized males as it is to profile anyone else based on readily identifiable features. Does that mean it's not going to happen? No. I'm not naive. I'm just interested to know at what interval of frequency or what level of threat profiling a person based on their socialization and appearance that they are powerless to help ceases to be an less of an affront to equality than it becomes a blow for equality.

546. aleks

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:59 AM

kristinc

and people who get cute about the line between "sexual assault" and "rape" are horribly evocative of that same mindset to me.

Ugh. I am a teacher, and it's my job to be pedantic, and if a student hands in a research paper on rape and sexual assault she/he'd better have the definitions right and solid sources for any statistics. A jury member, likewise, might someday be called to distinguish between rape and sexual assault. **But** as a man pondering proper behavior towards women, what possible difference could it make where one becomes the other? They both exist on the far side of what should be a pretty damn bright red line that under no circumstances is there ever an excuse to cross. In other words, in a real life setting, from a potential offenders POV, there should be no practical difference. You don't touch her like she doesn't want to be touched, and it's safely neither/nor.

547. *kristinc*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:15 AM

YES, aleks. YES.

548. *Katie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:16 AM

This was a wonderful article. Well written, and it gave me a lot to think about. All men should read this.

549. *vgnvx*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:20 AM

Great, great, great. Thank you.

550. *hsofia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:21 AM

Speaking only from personal experience, I think it has to do with seeing people hit it off brilliantly and thinking "Hey, I could do that too, maybe with this woman sitting right here!"

aleks, I can't speak for anyone else here, but for me the problem isn't someone (anyone) saying hello to me or smiling or whatever. I smile at people all the time on the street. Sometimes they don't smile back, or they look away. I don't DO or SAY anything about it. I move on! I don't expect anything in return!

If your friend met the love of his life by complimenting on her skirt, chances are she wasn't giving him the stink eye or trying to avoid him at the time he did it. No one is suggesting that all public interactions between human beings ought to stop. Just having some respect!

551. *hsofia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:22 AM

mmm ... lots of grammatical errors in that last comment. Apologies.

552. *kua*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:26 AM

hsofia: I love your comparison between the irritating chat-up and spam! I'm definitely adding that to my vocabulary.

Allies, instead of saying "Dude, come on," you could also go with "Dude, stop spamming her!"

553. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:28 AM

hsofia,

I didn't mean that it would happen literally like that (I made up the example although I did have a friend in mind). I was trying to explain the mindset that would lead a well-meaning

boy / man to not "comprehend a woman not wanting to talk to a friendly guy?!" Since I'm basing this on my own experiences, let's also stipulate that he's kind of socially clueless and she's being at least somewhat subtle in telling him to piss off. Now, is he doing a dork? Yes. Is he being a jerk? Probably. I was just trying to answer your question on what he might be thinking.

554. *Charles*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:34 AM

Thanks for all the nice comments.

And to Arwen: I am somewhat amused that you think I come from a segregated culture. Actually, I do. It's called the United States. I grew up on the south side of Chicago and have been riding subways for 60 years and seen what can happen. Let me put what I said slightly differently: My advice to any young woman is to not speak to a strange man – period. There is too much danger. I'm not talking about being proper or mannerly or knowing your place, I'm talking about staying alive. I have been with these people in locker rooms, work places, barracks, jails and saloons. I know how they talk, think and act. I can easily believe that one man in 6 is a rapist, as someone stated. But, I also believe that more than one man in 6 is a decent, kind and respectful person. You can find plenty of them without taking crazy chances.

555. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:36 AM

Ok, I've been thinking a ton since my last comment, and now I'm back feeling shamefaced. I was hurt and upset at first after Sweet Machine's comment/modding of my comments. I couldn't quite figure out what I had done wrong and decided not to comment again until I got it. I get it now, and my face is burning. I act so defensive and angry towards someone doing what I took as criticizing me that I came across just like those guys on the bus who get angry when you won't talk to them. I'm really sorry. I don't think I can stop myself right now from being that way, I'm still a shallow 19 year old, and will be for at least a year. So I'm going to not post unless I'm sure I'm not doing it, or until I know I can stop it from just spewing forth. If I fuck up and comment anyway, please call me on it, I don't want to be that girl, I really don't.

556. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:36 AM

It sounds like we may need to start Finally! A Sociology Stats 101 Blog soon, with helpful examples. I don't mean this to come down on any one person, but I'm startled how often men in this thread have misread the numbers to support the point they're trying to make. I suppose that shouldn't startle me more than trying to adjust every woman's experience to fit the point they're trying to make, but it really does.

Especially the dude who's very concerned about his physics paper getting through with the wrong graph. (Doesn't physics participate in peer review, or is that solely the realm of all the other sciences? I mean, it's not a perfect system, but it does *usually* catch stuff like that.)

557. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:42 AM

Charles, I admire you, and in 45 years I hope to be pretty much the man you described in your first post. But I've made tons of life-long female friends whom I spoke to or who spoke to me when we were strangers. They've enriched my life and I hope I've added to theirs. Now, I have no idea what sort of vetting process they applied to me before we

reached the point where they'd trust me in an isolated setting. I'm sure it helps that I'm a small white guy without a very imposing presence. But never talking to strangers seems like it would hugely crimp most people's lives. You can talk to someone without following them into a dark alley.

558. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:44 AM

alibelle,

19 is hard but it does end sooner or later.

559. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:46 AM

Demosthenes XXI, it's been mentioned several times before that racial stereotyping has a different context because of different intersections of privilege.

560. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:48 AM

Derek, the problem is that what feels like hyperbole to you because it seems like it can't possibly be true is backed up by multiple studies across time which look at sexual violence from a variety of angles. Before you can validly treat numbers presented here as hyperbole you need to look at the numbers different government agencies have collected rather than just assuming they are nothing more than hyperbole.

To preemptively attack what you view as hyperbole makes you look both ignorant and arrogant. This is magnified when you blame your attack on those you are attacking.

561. *Fey*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:53 AM

I think this is a good start but there is more. What I want men to know most of all is that they should not condition women to feel comfortable in dangerous situations. For example, you are a nice guy who wants to strike up an innocent conversation with a woman on a dark street. Let's say she ignores her gut feeling and you have a nice chat.

The next night she is walking and she meets another good guy. They have a nice chat and she is not harmed in anyway.

The next night she is walking and someone with nefarious speaks with her. She has been taught by the previous positive experiences to disregard her gut feeling and her vulnerable situation. Now, she is in more danger than if the two men had not spoken to her.

It is sad, and I am sorry for it, but men of good intentions CAN NOT approach women in those situations, and shame on you if you try. Imagine if men of good intention never approached women in dangerous situations then women would always know to trust their gut feelings and not talk to strangers.

562. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:58 AM

You have got to be fucking kidding me. You did not just say that.

Yeah, I did. It is something that men think about all the time. Just because it's something that you, as a woman, don't experience on a daily basis, doesn't make it any less true to a man.

Dingo, your comment is one of the ones I let through so that the good-hearted men who are reading will see why their "but I'm a nice guy" arguments are just not enough for us to trust them.

That's fine with me. Personally, I'm married and am just offering a suggestion that will keep you from being the next neighborhood cat lady.

563. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:03 AM

I really hope I'm not doing the overly defensive thing that I am so often guilty of right now when I say go burn in hell dingo, you're a fucking dick. Also, there's nothing wrong with being a cat lady.

564. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:05 AM

Dingo, we are not worried about being the neighborhood cat lady, OH THE HORROR> There are LOTS of ways to meet potential mates that aren't talking to creepy boundarycrossing guys on public transportation. And hey, guess what, NOT ALL WOMEN ARE LOOKING FOR A MAN TO SETTLE DOWN WITH, either! There are lesbians and bisexuals and asexuals and people who are already romantically involved with someone!

Thanks for being so utterly ridiculous though, I laughed out loud.

565. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:05 AM

It's okay to be defensive when someone is being objectively offensive.

566. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:06 AM

Wow, Dingo! The fact that you're married gives you an automatic pass! Because, you know, it's not as though married men ever rape anyone or beat their wives or – oh, wait.

Guess what, it's not all "neighborhood cat ladies" who think this way. I'm married too. To a man, and everything. And he's not with you on this. And I thank the gods every day that I found a man like him and not a man like you.

(Oh, wait. I found LOTS of men like you. I just didn't marry them.)

567. *Sean*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:07 AM

I just wanted to pop in after receiving the link to this article over FB. It's been a great, if frequently disheartening, read. I've reposted the link.

My only purpose in commenting is to say that some men do get it, to some degree. I stopped opening doors for women years ago, not because chivalry is dead or any of that nonsense, but because I noticed that many women did not perceive my action as I had intended and, in fact, that my gesture could be read in numerous ways, many of them unwelcome (I stopped opening doors for men mainly because they seem to read it as a power statement and go all gruff). I really do like opening doors for people, so it kinda sucks, but I've moved past that pretty easily.

I've never tried to hit on a women while on public transportation. Frankly, the thought never crossed my mind that that would be an effective way to spark a conversation that would lead to a relationship. To all the men reading: seriously? do you really think this works? really?!?!? gimme some of what you're smokin' bro, must be some good shit.

I read the aforementioned stuff-what-boys-can-do link and I don't think it goes quite far enough in some instances. For example, I firmly believe that some dudes need to get

curbies (see definition #2: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=curbie>), perhaps a few times, before they understand that *others* will threaten their physical safety if they threaten women verbally or physically. It is a useful tactic in the larger sense of creating awareness in the male populace? Probably not. But I can guarantee you that that particular guy, while he is sipping his meals out of straws for a couple months, will think carefully about his actions for some time.

To create a larger awareness requires from males the simple comment, as has been proposed above, along the lines of, "Dude, wtf? Stop being an asshat or it's curbie time!" I, like nathan, hope that doesn't come across as demeaning to women. It's really just me saying to another male, in a way he is likely to understand, that he needs to STFU.

My experience has been that men really only understand violence or the threat of violence in certain circumstances. Does that mean that women are responsible for not threatening enough violence and are somehow responsible for violence inflicted on them? No, it most certainly does not. What it means is that "nice guys" need to grow a pair, stand up, and not let this bullshit happen when they have the power to stop or mitigate it.

If I may speak for the "militant nice guy camp," I would just like to say that some of us try to regulate the douches out there whenever possible. We'll work it from our end, and hopefully ya'll will continue to do so from yours.

568. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:10 AM

I read through a few of the responses to my post, and am surprised at the vitriol directed at me. It's fine if you don't like my suggestion, but your responses have been a tad extreme. I would give you history on why I feel the way I do, and the the two rapes that I have personally stopped from happening, but it seems that everything that comes from a man on this site is open to attack. But, I'll do you a solid, ladies... next time I hear a woman crying for help, I'll ignore it. After all, I don't want to get in your personal space while pulling a rapist off of you. That would just be the same old kind of knuckle dragging misogynist that you would expect me to be anyway. Wouldn't want that.

569. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:12 AM

Dingo, do Charles and Aleks sound like women's names to you (ok Aleks could be confusing) or have you seen either of us attacked?

570. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:13 AM

alibelle permalink

I really hope I'm not doing the overly defensive thing that I am so often guilty of right now when I say go burn in hell dingo, you're a fucking dick. Also, there's nothing wrong with being a cat lady.

No, there's nothing wrong with being a cat lady. There's definitely nothing wrong with you not breeding, and I wholly support your decision.

571. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:14 AM

Well done there. Nothing tells women you were really on their side like passive aggressive implied threats.

572. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:14 AM

aleks permalink

Dingo, do Charles and Aleks sound like women's names to you (ok Aleks could be confusing) or have you seen either of us attacked?

If you're a man, you're on your own. You know that.

573. *Annie Mcfly*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:18 AM

Why is Dingo still here?

Hint: if a few angry women on the internet are enough to make you never want to help a woman who is in danger again...I have a hard time believing you're the sort of man who would help a woman who was in danger without ulterior motives. Nope, I'm pretty sure you're just a douchehound.

574. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:19 AM

Julie permalink

Well done there. Nothing tells women you were really on their side like passive aggressive implied threats.

Dear Troll: Troll troll troll troll troll. Sincerely, Troll.

I'm threatening nothing but apathy to the next violent situation involving a woman and a man that I come across (or a man and a man, or a woman and a woman). I wasn't attempting to sow discontent among the masses; I was initially making a suggestion that turned into an attack on me. If you feel that I'm trolling, fine, this will be my last response. Just note that I didn't give into the name calling and ad hominem attacks directed at me. Night.

575. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:21 AM

Dingo, I've known Feminists who hated men. These ain't them. You're just a jerk, and not a clever or interesting one.

576. *Dingo*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:23 AM

Annie Mcfly permalink

Why is Dingo still here?

Hint: if a few angry women on the internet are enough to make you never want to help a woman who is in danger again...I have a hard time believing you're the sort of man who would help a woman who was in danger without ulterior motives. Nope, I'm pretty sure you're just a douchehound.

I was a Guardian Angel (red berets, white t-shirts) back in the day. But, believe what you want to believe. I do sincerely hope that you don't get raped, though. Whether or not you think I'm a "douchehound" (I'm imagining a puppy frolicking in a puddle of vinegar and water), I seriously hope bad things don't happen to you. This is seriously my last post.

Sorry, Julie, I didn't see this response until I'd responded to you. So, good night everyone.

577. *aleks*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:27 AM

Guardian Angel + KateHarding= Man who ignores rape occurring in front of him?

I find that astonishingly hard to believe.

578. *Eucritta*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:30 AM*If you feel that I'm trolling, fine, this will be my last response.*

I'm reminded of the famous quote from Michael Curtiz:

*'You think you know fuck everything and I know fuck nothing. Well, I tell you, I know fuck all!'*579. *CassandraSays*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:39 AM

IrishUp – Thanks for the link to the Lisik study. Interestingly enough it matches my personal data set about men I've felt threatened around and men who I know for a fact have committed assault PERFECTLY. Like, on every single point. I think we should spread that link around – it would be particularly useful for young women going off to college to have, for example.

580. *thew*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:41 AM

kate harding: i just wanted to say thanks for rephrasing this in a way that removed gender identity and focused on privilege and how it can be applied to other situations of inequality. your comment made something click in my mind that wasn't clicking before.

someone else mentioned that it's about potentialities and that helped too, cause at first I felt like identities were being branded, which felt threatening, but potentialities are more open.

i'm still processing, but thank you to all the comments that continue to provide more clarification on a topic that should be simple: "don't be an asshole" but can be more challenging when training in day-to-day mindfulness "am i being an asshole now? how 'bout now? now?"

581. *Shiyiya*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:00 AM

Trolls trolling banhammers.

Seriously the most passive-aggressive asshole douche I've seen in quite a while..... Probably because our lovely bloggers/mods don't let most of the douchehounds through to mature into this STERLING example of manhood. "Boohoo, some feminists on the internet got mad at me because I was a jerk to them, so in revenge I will ALLOW WOMEN TO BE RAPED IN FRONT OF ME AND DO NOTHING, despite the hypothetical women I'm referring to NOT being the ones I'm butthurt at, and the fact that this completely invalidates any claim I have ever made to being a good person. Wait, what?! People don't believe me now that I used to belong to an organization that helped stop rape just because I said I'd never stop it now?! FEMINISTS ARE SO UNFAIR. And I have the moral high ground here, because despite how I have threatened people with no longer caring about rape, THEY CALLED ME NAMES! MOMMYYYY!!!!!"

582. Neats

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:02 AM

I am a teacher, and it's my job to be pedantic, and if a student hands in a research paper on rape and sexual assault she/he'd better have the definitions right and solid sources for any statistics. A jury member, likewise, might someday be called to distinguish between rape and sexual assault. But as a man pondering proper behavior towards women, what possible difference could it make where one becomes the other? They both exist on the far side of what should be a pretty damn bright red line that under no circumstances is there ever an excuse to cross.

One of the things that bothers me about trying to make this distinction in general, but especially in this type of discussion, is that the legal definition changes depending on where you are, and the legal definition and the commonly accepted colloquial definition often don't match up perfectly. Some things that people call rape in common speech are technically called sexual assault at trial, and some things that people commonly call sexual assault are prosecuted as rape. There are some places where rape, by anyone's definition, is prosecuted under the more general term of sexual assault, and some offenses are called rape in one place but sexual assault in another. When you're talking about these things, especially on the internet where people come from many different places, which definition do you use to draw the line?

I'm with you on that "pretty damn bright red line."

583. Max Goldberg

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:00 AM

I actually found this expecting something somewhat different, but let me preface this with some philosophy name dropping.

Freddy N. argues, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, that someone without power – or without capacity or opportunity – can't be judged as moral or immoral in any meaningful sense. Is a lamb's nonviolence good if it is simply the nature of lamb? An individual with resentment will justify their state as a good soul through their inability to do evil. They're nice, right? But in a situation where self-preservation is not an issue, or where they do hold power, their will might be might change. I bring this up because it would seem that nice guys don't even understand how capable of rape they (or we) are. Until until one has the opportunity, one doesn't usually know whether they are capable of an "evil" act, from masturbating, to not returning incorrect change, swiping a handbag, vandalizing something, slandering an enemy, embezzling, rape, and even homicide.

So, when I was in college and in a position of authority, I had to deal with a rash of sexual violence one month. Thankfully it all stopped before full-on rape, but unfortunately they were all very gray and it sparked a lot of debate and deep thought. In a creepy twist, someone else under my purview asked if he could "look at" my girlfriend, who was asleep in bed. And then I myself was hit on by a really fucking scary guy covered in scars on a train late at night, with other people around who averted their eyes and said nothing.

The whole month of shit reached an inflection when a friend ended up crashing on my bed while she recovered from too much drinking. This was a woman whom I absolutely lusted for and getting her in my bed like that was a dream come true with a little too much irony. At some point, while checking on her, I realized that I could have sex with her with no resistance.

And with that, I was seized with a schizophrenic horror at the possibility that I, a normal

no less – while at the same time suddenly gripped by a desire to do it. Seeing that kind of darkness inside yourself induces a kind of nihilistic horror that's just bad. It's almost a damning proof of the evils of men or humanity in general.

Of course it's not proof. I didn't touch her; I looked, the cat is OK. But peeping into the box, I could also have found a dead cat – and a rapist. Not an *SVU* trope, but merely a person who commits an act of sexual violence. Defining rapist as an essence trivializes the fact that a rapist is created when the thought of rape becomes intent. I had to get out of the room to calm down, but I still wondered whether I resisted because of what had happened in the weeks prior, or only because of fear for getting caught, or because of genuine respect for the woman. I hope it was the latter. On the other hand, if sexual violence hadn't been on my mind, would I even have thought about it in the first place? The only thing certain was that the old sex-positive canard that rape is really about power totally lost its credibility that night.

Well, I don't mean to come on here to point out how righteous I am, or claim to empathize with victims of sexual assault, but something in my experience merits attention in regard to the nice guy problem. Schrödinger's Rapist both does and doesn't lie within them and most don't realize this; I certainly didn't. The realization of it caused intense fear and anger in me. Some of the blowback you might be seeing is exactly that dread: an inability to come to terms with an uncomfortable realization about hidden biases. I apologize if this is all covered in the Literature, but this was an provocative post and it brought back some memories.

584. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:06 AM

Ahahaha, Dingo. Shut up.

Martinb and Nathan, yous are wonderful. Thank you.

tinfoil hattie, I'd never seen that poem before, and it is amazing.

It's not only a crime if you take every precaution to prevent it."

Amen.

So I started telling him about the book I was reading. He kept trying to brush me off and go back to her, but I acted like I thought we were having a nice group discussion on literature, since what other people were reading obviously fascinated him, with no ulterior motives on his part (chatting up the woman) or mine (interrupting).

Well played, aleks! Your other comments have also been made of win.

The men on this thread have suddenly become awesome. Which I appreciate is due partly to good modding, but whatever, because I needed some hope for humanity.

Hee, Liza-the-second! Thanks. :)

585. *Kyle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:43 AM

If I as a man was guilty of a sexual assault, would you get offended if I told you to "back off" and threatened you with a weapon (as mace, the example given in this article, is) simply because you approached me, would you get offended?

Note: this is not a hypothetical situation. I actually was the victim of a sexual assault at the hands of 5 girls when I was 17. Yes, it does happen the other way around as well, as hard as it may be to believe. I actually did not know I was a victim of sexual assault for a few years due to the fact I had been raised to think I could only be a perpetrator, never a victim. I don't mean to turn this whole debate around to a "woe is man" type of debate, but...well I'll get to that in a minute. (Although, Sweet Machine, you DID ask if we do any of that stuff, so...)

I have a feeling most people would call me paranoid. And I actually would be inclined to agree with them to a point. Not that I am stupid and ever let my guard down in public with strangers, or even people I know to an extent, and the event is still with me to some extent, but I can't let one bad experience with women make me think that every woman is going to do the same thing. I am still extremely cautious, and Lord knows my overprotective parents put the fear of everybody straight up to 90-year old grandmas in me, but I do not feel as if I am about to get robbed, raped, kidnapped, or killed simply because a stranger says something to me in public, unless they actually do SOMETHING that says "I am a criminal."

Now, as to why I bring it up this way, I just wonder what people here would really feel if they were being prejudged as potential criminals themselves. Because before you say it is extremely rare for it to happen to me, that point is moot, because it already HAS happened to me. And prejudging men as potential criminals is exactly what this article is doing, whether that was the intention or not. This is why many of the guys on here, including myself earlier on my now-deleted post (okay in retrospect it was overly emotionally charged, but isn't this whole topic?), got very defensive over it.

I have no problems with women being vigilant about their safety, in fact they should be. I feel all people should be vigilant about their personal safety. But I do not feel as if I should be expected to be seen as a criminal by default. I do not do that to other people. If they want to see me that way simply for being around them, that's their business, but as long as I am not really threatening someone I feel it is up to them to change what they're doing, not the other way around. To expect men to have to change to suit women if they're not actually DOING anything is sexist in itself.

586. *fdg*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:08 AM

I came across the link to this on a friend's blog. It's an excellent and well thought out piece, and I will not hesitate to smack both my nieces and nephews across the head with it until they understood.

Just weighing in on the rape/sexual assault thing- in my country, a lot of the statistics don't differentiate between getting groped on a train and sticking it in, and obviously there's an order of magnitude there, albeit one that follows a straight line.

Many sexual predators are nonviolent, and very, very charming. I indeed fell into one's trap myself, only to be told that since he'd a: not actually raped me and b: I'd stupidly thought of him as a friend and had confided in him as a friend and c: a pathological lying miserable worthless shitstain of a woman was also involved and I'd been stupid enough to trust her as well, then the whole thing was my fault, I was a stupid whore and that I should chalk it up to experience and move on. (Thank you Daddy and Mummy, I feel much better now, please excuse me while I go shower with a scourer.) And in the meantime, this man, forty five, a skilled and experienced sexual predator, moved onto the next naive teenage idiot to stumble across his path. As I said he never actually raped me (that I know of; that I hope)

but I've no doubt he wouldn't have hesitated if I'd had gotten drunk enough. And he was always on me to drink. Mercifully, I've never actually felt the urge to get smashed on a regular basis. So, from experience, not all predators are violent. This doesn't make them more dangerous than a nonviolent predator, it makes them worse. Because they're the ones you trust and find yourself in bad situations with. And as an added bonus, justice is so much harder to get in those situations.

So yes, this is excellent advice to all, but does not cover all possible situations. I've no doubt that often these advances are made with honest intentions by men with genuine interest (except as one commenter noted, the ones made at night and in empty areas which are almost always Dodgy Brothers Inc) but allow me to be brutal: I am not obligated to return anyone's interest, male or female. (And being sapphically inclined I've met some fucking terrifying women.) And if you're determined to force your interest onto me, then at best you are rude, and worst, down right threatening.

587. *brian*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:24 AM

I just wanted to chime in here as a straight male who totally (I believe, anyway) gets where you're coming from. I've known those kinds of guys — whether they ever actually raped anyone, I couldn't say, but it wouldn't surprise me. The world is full of swaggering clods who think they are The Shit and that women are put here for their personal pleasure. They're the same guys who, when not out preying on women, get drunk and look for somebody whose ass they think they can kick — and on too many occasions when I was younger, that ass was mine. But I'm not here to whine about that; I only bring it up to make the point that I can grasp having to be on your guard all the time — nowhere near as much as a woman must, but still, enough to seriously empathize.

Anyway, back when I was a single city-dweller, I rode the bus and train everywhere and frequently encountered attractive women on their way to work or wherever. Many times I would have liked to have initiated a conversation with them, but it just always seemed like an impossible situation. I would mentally put myself in their shoes and know that they were most likely 'hit on' a thousand times a day, and that there was no way I could avoid coming off as a complete tool or, worse, the dreaded CREEPY. Maybe I was just shy, but I just couldn't ever think of anything to say to a stranger that didn't, in my head, sound ridiculous. So I just resigned myself to meeting women in ways and places that were less likely to be so futile.

These days I live with my wonderful fiancé and her teenage daughter (who grows more stunning on a daily basis), and my once-pervasive worries of whether I would ever meet the right woman have evaporated. But they've been replaced with abject fears of what could happen to my future stepdaughter in this fucked-up world. I notice men MY age leering at her when we are out, and it scares the hell out of me. At sixteen, she is of course oblivious to danger no matter what we tell her, and we don't want to instill a paralyzing fear into her anyway. But frankly, the statistics you cite here make me want to throw up.

I'm not sure what my point is here, but all I can say is, as a man who loves the women in his life very much, it saddens and sickens me that we live in a world that is so dangerous for them. And as a member of the 'privileged' gender, I don't feel very privileged to belong to the same 'club' as these monsters. So I guess that's my point. Solidarity. As one of the 59 out of 60 who AREN'T a statistic, I am very much on your side.

588. *brian*

159 of 345 OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:30 AM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

One more thing: a few years ago I saw the film 'Irreversible' and it has haunted me ever since. It's not like I wasn't already aware of the horrors of rape, but for some reason that film really brought it home in a way I hadn't experienced before. Brilliant film, because it truly cuts to the core of the subject, without glorification or glamourization, and it has exactly the effect it aims for. Probably one of the best films I've ever seen, from an artistic perspective — but ironically, I can't really recommend it because it is so horrifyingly real. I don't know how many of your readers have ever seen the film (it's French), and like I said, I don't know if I can in good conscience tell someone to see it, but for anyone with a strong stomach who wants to seriously discuss rape culture, all I can say is that it will never leave me. Ever.

589. *Ailbhe*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:32 AM

@Sweet Machine: *we are no longer going to approve newbie comments that question the existence of rape culture, argue against the rape statistics cited, or tell women to stop living in fear.*

Thank you.

@Havoc: That was *awesome* and should be its very own post somewhere.

Also, still with the I-heart-aleks stuff.

590. *rhiain*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:36 AM

Wait wait wait, "ladies," Dingo is here to save us!

Dingo, I am under no illusions that you have actually flounced off at this point, so: if you have in fact personally prevented two women from being assaulted, then good for you. That DOESN'T actually give you the right to come in our space and be offensive, any more than it would give you the right to aggressively invade a woman's personal space on a subway or wherever. If you don't get that, I guarantee you that far, far more than two assaults have been underway in front of you that you did nothing to prevent. We don't actually owe you anything because you acted like a decent human being twice in your life; dollars to baby donuts we've all done it at least that often, more if you count "preventing" (more like: managing to avoid one particular scary situation, not actually achieving any kind of safety) *ourselves* from being attacked.

WTF is with dudes and their "I am not actually personally physically assaulting you AT THIS MOMENT, you owe me adulation!" personal boundary problems. "Geez, I was just trying to be NICE!"

Also? Saying "because of you ladies I will not help the next woman I see in trouble"? Is a threat. And a whiny, childish one at that. Flounce, flounce. Sorry you missed the jellied eels, my good sir, but here you will find only pie.

591. *aleks*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:39 AM

Neats,

The thing is, it's like the distinction between homicide and murder. If I'm on trial, the difference becomes a very big deal. If I have yet to squeeze the trigger, well I should probably avoid either/both and not worry about the division. If I don't plan on ever killing anyone, then it'd be kind of weird to, as kristinc put it "get cute" over the difference. I'll take you at your word about the complexities of the issue, but until I serve on a jury or something, I really don't need to bear the details in mind. Rape or sexual assault might be

very complicated but "neither" is pretty straight-forward.

Thank you Caitlin! I'm basically just a gremlin who likes to break things. In this case, some jerk's stupid game plan.

592. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:07 AM

I just made sure Dingo sticks to his resolve to leave the thread and cease commenting.

593. *CassandraSays*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:29 AM

Way upthread someone suggested a 102 post about how to approach women who do seem interested and willing to engage – that's a fantastic idea.

Matt's posts made me think. I'm often chatted up by gay men when I'm out and about, and have yet to feel uncomfortable in that situation. Now one could claim this is because they're gay, but the thing is, I don't necessarily know that right off the bat. So why is the response different? Well, it's simple – when they strike up a conversation they're typically not being creepy. It's not "gay" I'm responding to positively, it's "friendly and nice and trying to engage me about something I'm actually interested in rather than just talking at me". I have a friend who I got to know that way who's actually straight, but I initially thought was gay, and a friend who is gay who always gets read as straight because he kind of looks like a football player and dresses like a skater kid. In both cases they came across as friendly and nice and interesting and not creepy or threatening, so I was willing to talk to them. (And both are about a foot taller than me so it wasn't because they were physically unimposing)

I keep seeing these "omg are you saying we can never talk to women in public again?" comments from dudes and the thing is, I know some men who talk to women in public all the time and it doesn't seem to cause problems, because the way they do it is friendly and unthreatening and not creepy, and they leave people who're giving off go away signals alone. So yeah, a 102 "How to approach women you don't know without making them think you're creepy and dangerous" post would be cool, and it would be interesting to see the anecdotes that would show up in the comments.

Also RE Lori's comment way upthread, which is similar to things she was saying in the last thread...look, I am a woman who lives my life the way you're insisting all women should lest we be deemed to be "living in fear". And yet I am still able to understand why other women are much more cautious and to refrain from implying that they're cowards/making the world a less sparkly happy place. Perception of threat, boundaries, comfort with strangers, general sociability...these are individual things shaped by a huge number of factors. Other women are allowed to feel differently about what they're comfortable with, and society in general should err on the side of what the majority wants. From all the comments I'm seeing, "men in public approach women only if given clear go-ahead signals, and with caution" seems to be the general consensus. Surely it makes more sense to go with that, given that it seems to be what most women want?

Also I keep seeing implications that people are OBLIGED to be sociable in your comments, and hey, even as someone who is...no. No one is obliged to be friendly. If someone wants to never engage with strangers at all beyond what's needed to buy things in stores, gas up the car etc, that is their right.

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:33 AM

Also RE roaches running into his shirt tattoos guy...I love tattoos, if they're well executed, but that would make me think someone was a little odd. Especially the little red trails left behind, that's just sort of icky.

595. *Gillian McLean*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:13 AM

Liza-the-Second,

You are absolutely right!

596. *tinfoil hattie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:16 AM

Now, as to why I bring it up this way, I just wonder what people here would really feel if they were being prejudged as potential criminals themselves

See, I don't care if someone on a bus looks at me and thinks, "That woman could be a pickpocket. I'm going to watch my wallet." WTF do I care?

Not a rapist? Don't rape. Indignant that you're missing out on all these possibilities (to what? marry? fuck?) women? Too fucking bad. Why are you entitled to the possibilities anyway? Women are not public property.

@volcanista, I am SO SORRY about the triggering.

597. *sarni*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:17 AM

Great, awesome article. I actually do this thing when I am alone at night where I try to make myself look bigger and scarier. In my head it's like my 'puffer fish' impression.

I do know some guys who just 'get it' and do things like speed up to walk in front of a woman instead of behind a woman on a dark street, etc, or alternatively fall further behind rather than keep pace.

And to those guys who are offended that they are being treated as potential rapists:

1) welcome to the perspective of being a POC and being treated like a mugger (hey – two new perspectives in one day!).

2) it's no different to every other way you should be aware of how you come across to people around you. For example, I wouldn't go up to little kids and offer them candy.

Because that would be creepy. And I'm not offended that if I did that, the child's parents would get anxious and think I was Schrodinger's paedophile.

598. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:20 PM

Kyle, if you don't want to talk to me, that is a totally legitimate reason to break off contact, and I better respect that immediately. Now are the power dynamics different when you threaten to mace me than when I threaten to mace you? Yes. Absolutely. And there's no doubt it would freak me out. But you know what? You're not required to think of my feelings when you're worried about your safety. You tell me to back the fuck off, and I would. And I don't care if you're a rape survivor or not, because you don't need to justify your reasons for being afraid. (Certainly not at that moment, and certainly not to me.)

"I feel all people should be vigilant about their personal safety [. . .]but as long as I am not really threatening someone I feel it is up to them to change what they're doing, not the other way around."

What do the words vigilant and threatened mean to you, anyway?

Being vigilant to me means that I have to consider potential threats. You are a potential threat by virtue of presenting as male. Approaching me in a situation where I don't feel safe or when I clearly don't want to be approached is threatening behavior. People who display threatening behaviors are themselves threatening, because these behaviors don't perform themselves. As you continue this behavior, it continues to be threatening – it is, in fact, a cumulative effect. It doesn't matter that you don't mean to threaten me. You are.

So it's not up to me to "change my behavior," which I can only assume means "swallow your fear and entertain me" or "swallow your fear and let me pick you up" or "shut up and pay attention to me when I want."

599. CassandraSays

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:25 PM

Can someone explain to me any good-faith reason why anyone would feel the need to get picky about women who've been sexually assaulted compared to women who've been raped and insist that we must not conflate the two? You know, a reason other than wanting to suss out how much rapey behavior men can get away with before they get in trouble?

Dingo, any man who threatens not to help women who're being raped because some other women were mean to him on the Internet is a complete, unmitigated asshole. And also being remarkably childish. Go to hell.

Alecks, you're cool, keep up the good work.

Oh, and Valerie Keefe – You're reading it wrong. The tattoo thing was a throwaway reference to one specific guy. This is not about class profiling. Hey – I get paid to interview rock bands, so I work around alternative-looking guys from a working class background who're covered in tattoos all the time. Most of them are fine. In fact, the nicest person I've worked with in that context so far has two nearly full sleeve tattoos, and I felt completely comfortable being alone in a room with him with the door shut. The scariest predatory guy I've ever met was a rich Ivy League boy who was as preppy as can be, and he registered on my radar as DANGER, RED ALERT, CREEPY SCARY DUDE WHO WILL HURT YOU right away. I'm willing to bet most of the other people here have similar stories to tell. So really, give me a break.

600. Starling

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:37 PM

Max Goldberg: YES, thank you so much for your thoughtful comment. This is something that is far beyond the scope of the 101 post I wrote. But people who commit crimes are not innately different from people who do not commit crimes—we all have impulses that are criminal. My experience has been that the ones who have gone ahead and committed crimes do so while maintaining the personal belief that they are "good people." If I acknowledge to myself that I have done a wicked thing, I can either dredge up justifications to reassure myself that I am really a good person with this one aberrant moment, or I can acknowledge that I am, in this instance, evil, and start making things right. (I have never met or dealt with anyone who said, "Oh, guess I'm evil! Dr Evil! Bwahahaha!" I don't think people are generally wired that way.)

Accepting a person's self-assessment as a "good guy" is not only problematic because we can't be sure a person is telling the truth, but because people who have committed rape *still* think of themselves as "good guys." There are, after all, many good things they have done!

That are really good! And they have all sorts of justifications for why it wasn't rape, really. People who will commit rape in the future also think of themselves as "good guys"—because few people look into their hearts and acknowledge that we all have Schrödinger's Criminal there. The more taboo the crime, the less we are willing to admit that we possess the capacity to commit it. So while most of us are cool with being Schrödinger's Thief in this more quantum sense—we don't deny the occasional impulse to theft—very few of us would like to believe that we could be Schrödinger's Child Abuser.

Ironically, it's the willingness to acknowledge and grapple with our darker impulses that is the best defense against succumbing to them.

601. *Nia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:41 PM

Yes. Yes yes yes yes yes.

Men who are upset are being "Schrodinger's rapists" don't get one thing: Women are raised to believe that it is OUR job to prevent being raped. We get instructions, recommendations, or orders, regarding how to keep a certain level of safety. This begins when we are babies. I'm a school teacher, and I don't remember, in my own upbringing, in my teacher training, or in my work experience, many instances of teaching boys any of this:

- how women feel when they are made vulnerable (something like this blog post but in a friendlier form aimed at teens).
- how to prevent other boys committing rape or abuse,
- what to do and not to do with a girl (or *to* a girl).

I do remember some of the earliest instructions about how to be ladylike, specifically in order to protect myself from boys. I was a preteen. No one told boys that I was worth of respect, though.

602. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:41 PM

@Valerie Keefe: I'm all about tattoos in general. I'm referring to this one as a bit of a punchline because it was so unquestionably intended to provoke horror and repulsion, and it did it so well. And, having made that choice, the guy in question probably found that it provoked horror and repulsion even in girls he wanted to approach in public.

There's a rather brilliant discussion of intersecting privilege near the top of the thread—look for Snarkysmachine's comments and be patient while the rest of us go, "Huh?" until the conversation gets rolling.

603. *DRST*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:42 PM

Kyle – I'm very sorry that that happened to you. For the small fraction of rape and assault victims who are men, the experience can end up being incredibly difficult because of the lack of recognition from society that men can even be victims of a sexual assault, especially from women, because men are supposed to celebrate every sexual contact with women as a victory. Which leaves the male victim at a total loss as to how to come to grips with the feelings of violation over something the culture tells him is a "score."

Because hey, newsflash, patriarchy hurts everyone.

I just wonder what people here would really feel if they were being prejudged as potential criminals themselves

I'm being prejudged as a victim by the creeper on the subway already. Why would I worry about being labeled a criminal? If my choices are "let this guy harass me until something really awful happens" or "assault the bastard and knock him unconscious and possibly get arrested" I think I might take the second option.

(As an aside – wth is up with men and the binary choices in this thread? Anyway.)

I have no problems with women being vigilant about their safety, in fact they should be. I feel all people should be vigilant about their personal safety.

Well thank you for your permission. Of course, nobody needs your permission to make these choices; they are individual and therefore not something you can control any more than you can keep people from wearing pink with purple polka dots on Wednesdays.

But I do not feel as if I should be expected to be seen as a criminal by default. I do not do that to other people. If they want to see me that way simply for being around them, that's their business,

OK which is it? Are you giving your blessing for me to make my personal choices that will make me feel safe or not? Because you're whinging a whole hell of a lot here. The entire point of this thread is that women don't know you aren't a rapist until you don't rape them, which is something that can only be determined by time and behavior, and you *say* you're okay with women being vigilant about their safety, so which is it? Can we make decisions about not wanting to interact with you because of concern for our personal safety or not?

but as long as I am not really threatening someone I feel it is up to them to change what they're doing, not the other way around.

Define "really threatening." No, seriously. I'll wait. Because to you, a group of aggressive girls might feel threatening because of your previous experience. To someone who has been assaulted, you staring at her because you're lost in thought on the bus and a million miles away may feel threatening. Where's the line of universal "threatening"? Especially when so, so many creeps on public transit start off plying their prey with flattery and when finally told flat out to stop, they start hurling insults and cursing? One heartbeat turns from gross personal comments on my body to "fat, ugly bitch."

So? What's "really threatening"?

To expect men to have to change to suit women if they're not actually DOING anything is sexist in itself.

Passivity in the face of rape culture is doing something. You are choosing to say "Hey since I'm not the one raping women it's not my problem and asking me to consider my privileged position and try to change when I'm just sitting here not doing anything about anything is sexist!" That's making a choice to not be helpful and let the rape culture that you are soaking in continue rather than have to step outside your own experience for a second and think that maybe there's a bigger issue here than your personal feelings.

DRST

604. CassandraSays

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:52 PM

Also following on DRST's comment, can we define "not doing anything"? Because it seems

non-verbally that they don't want to talk to you is, in fact, "doing something".

605. Lucy

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 12:52 PM

When I read comments like Dingo's (who implies that because he is married, he has the power to evaluate which of us will turn into "the neighborhood cat lady" and threaten to deliberately not help a woman in a danger- nyah) and Tom's (who says that even though his ex-girlfriend was raped, which means he totally understands rape, he's not going to stop approaching women because he doesn't want to lose his "sense of adventure"), I have to wonder- are these men's wives and girlfriends and sisters and daughters aware that their husbands/boyfriends/brothers/fathers are going to explicitly designated feminist spaces on the Internet under a false handle and writing these nauseatingly sexist and hateful things?

It makes you wonder, in all that rage channeled towards anonymous women he doesn't know, what kinds of things he might like to say or do to real women in his life he thinks he cares about, but *can't*.

606. Ed

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:12 PM

You guys did something right I think, cause I did something right as a result of reading all this, I think.

I'm not the target audience; I'm married and even when I was single I never chatted up strange women (through shyness more than feminist enlightenment I'm afraid).

But this morning I happened to witness a situation where somebody privileged (white male like me) was getting in the face of somebody unprivileged, and making unreasonable demands, and the unprivileged person was asserting themselves but kind of scared, and being ignored, and though I was uncomfortable about it I brought myself into the situation and took their side, and perhaps partly because his fellow privileged white guy had turned against him, the guy backed the hell off and took off.

So you guys all put a bug in my ear, and I was willing to do the right thing though it was uncomfortable, and it seems to have helped.

That is a concrete data point that *it makes a difference to post stuff like this.*

Details unimportant (the scenario was nothing like the "stranger chatting up a woman" in the details, but it was similar in the ways noted above) but available on request if I can manage to keep up with the huge torrent of interesting dialogue here.

607. Anita

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:18 PM

Ed, you're right about how uncomfortable it is. Good for you for doing it anyway.

608. Larry

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:22 PM

I suppose making this about rape catches attention. But these ideas work in a much broader context.

A woman may choose to brush-off a man for lots of other reasons. The reason should not matter. Everyone should be free to decide who they want to let into their life and who they want to keep out.

609. *Lily*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:29 PM

this may be a repeat idea, but I'm going to say it anyway, without finishing the comments

There is a difference between assuming that every man IS a rapist, and assuming that every man COULD BE a rapist.

Knowing that a certain percentage of eggs in the store are contaminated by salmonella, I treat eggs as though any of the COULD BE dangerous to my health.

I make sure I keep them cold, and then that they are fully cooked before I eat them. And I pay attention to any sign that they might be bad, if they are cracked or discolored or smell bad, I don't use them, at all. I don't give them a second chance, either.

Just like I make sure I keep men at a safe distance, and watch for signs of being cracked or full of bad ideas.

I'm sorry if that means someone without social skills, whether by lack of socialization or genetic difference from the norm, it doesn't matter to me in a non-safe situation. Assaulting me verbally or physically on accident is still an assault.

I still eat eggs, I still make friends with men. And they both require vigilance at the right time to be an asset to my life.

610. *DW*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:41 PM

Once someone has to say "ad hominem attack" in their post, they should win a prize. Jellied eels, or pie. Their choice. If Dingo wanted us to think he was anything but a douchebag, he could have kept his big gaping mouth shut. Dude, you are JUST who this article was written for. Please, STFU.

My husband gets this. It's something we've discussed before and at length. He could not understand why I was scared to come home to our house, with woods behind it, alone at night. He could not understand why he should make sure the doors were locked at night. He could not understand why he should make sure I was in my car before he pulled away in his. Explaining all this to him made him feel awful for women everywhere because he never fully understood the threat of having the audacity of simply living as a woman. And now he does. And he does hang out with the Dingo's of this world for good reason. His friends simply aren't assholes.

I'm a survivor. I was sexually assaulted at the age of nine. I was further harassed at cat called and groped and grabbed all through high school. Every woman I know suffered that fate as well.

I can't say this enough. Fuck you, Dingo. You and your ilk are part of the problem, not the solution. Bully for you that you wore a red beret. Try looking in the mirror sometimes.

Nathan, Aleks: thank you. A million times, thank you.

611. *DW*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 1:42 PM

I meant DOESN'T hang out with the Dingo's of the world. Gah. Proofread, DW. Proofread.

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:04 PM

re: bellacoker, "That doesn't take into account gray rape or men who "convince" their partners to have sex they do not want"

I would encourage people to make the choice to not use this term "gray rape." First of all, there is no such thing as "gray rape." This term was reported by Cosmo and originated from conservative, anti-feminist Laura Sessions Stepp. Besides that, what does this term imply? That there are gray areas of rape where you can't tell if a woman consented or not? That it is always just a "he said-she said" miscommunication? That some rapes are clearly black and white, but when it comes to alcohol, or if the woman doesn't fight back then clearly it is gray rape? I completely disagree with the definition of consent and rape that this term implies. Rape is rape...with no varying shades of gray.

613. *panda*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:43 PM

I just wanted to thank you for this post. A million times, THANK YOU.

I was sexually assaulted as a child (by someone my own age), and to this day my parents and close friends do not know. I spent the majority of my adolescence actively avoiding boys.

While I was never harassed by men in the United States, it did happen to me twice while I was living in Germany. Both times it happened I was a teenager (16-17) and the men were in their thirties. The language barrier made it all the more frightening. One man followed me out from a train all the way outside of the station. He grabbed me and ran his tongue across my cheek. It was the most disgusting and humiliating experience I've ever had, and what was worse was that there were people everywhere and no one did anything to help me.

614. *SunlessNick*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:43 PM

There is a difference between assuming that every man IS a rapist, and assuming that every man COULD BE a rapist.

Even more clear: there is a difference between assuming that every (or a given) man is a rapist, and NOT assuming that every (or a given) man isn't.

615. *Matt*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 2:44 PM

So, I posted this discussion thread to my facebook last night and have gotten some terrific responses; I just asked the women around me what they thought and it's started some really interesting conversations.

But one of them said something BRILLIANT:

This smarmy, creepy guy sees this hot chick on a bus, right? looks at the book she's holding and blurts out to her "Theoretical Physics, huh? Haaawwwwwwt"

She looks him up and down.

She says "you know those little piles of ball like turds rabbits leave behind them?"

He looks puzzled and mutters something.

He looks more puzzled and clearly has no idea what's going on....

She says "Well, what about cows, and the huge steaming pies they leave behind them?"

He breaks down and says "What the hell are you talking about?!"

To which she replies "Dude, since you obviously don't know SHIT, how the fuck do you expect to talk to me about Physics?"

616. [liz](#)

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:01 PM

Ooh! Ooh! NYC Subway story!!! Pertinent!!!

I was on the subway going to work one day and [Jaye Davidson](#) got on the train, looked around, saw I was the only woman on the train (two women had just gotten off), and sat down next to me.

I was reading a book. I looked up at the window opposite, caught Jaye's eye in the reflection, nodded (Jaye nodded back), and went back to my book. We said absolutely nothing to each other. We didn't invade each others' space, and we didn't get harassed by the business men sitting farther down the car.

It was a perfect NYC moment.

And it was brought to you by Actually Respecting Boundaries Thank You Very Much.

617. [abyss2hope](#)

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:02 PM

@Max Goldberg – "The only thing certain was that the old sex-positive canard that rape is really about power totally lost its credibility that night."

I appreciate you relating your experience with the realization that you could have raped someone you wanted to have sex with, but I disagree that your experience undermines the credibility that rape is about power. What tempted you to rape might have been about sex, but crossing that line would have absolutely been about power.

The difference between your actions and the actions of men who would rape or commit a non-rape sex crime under those circumstances has nothing to do with sexual desire. Those other men don't simply have more hormones, they have more rationalizations. They might justify committing rape in the scenario you describe because they were simply overcome by sexual desire and no heterosexual man in that situation could walk away. Sure what they did was wrong, but shouldn't be treated like a real crime because they were no longer in control of their bodies.

Only you and other men have proven that claim to be a lie.

618. [Sweet Machine](#)

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:10 PM

Oh lord, I want to apologize to everyone: I thought I had banned Dingo after his first comment. Apparently I was wrong — I am truly sorry. I banned a lot of people yesterday, and he slipped through. Mea culpa.

619. [Sweet Machine](#)

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:25 PM

Ed, thank you for your comment.

620. *Neats*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:29 PM

I'll take you at your word about the complexities of the issue, but until I serve on a jury or something, I really don't need to bear the details in mind. Rape or sexual assault might be very complicated but "neither" is pretty straight-forward.

I'm pretty sure we're trying to say the same thing; you're just being more clear and concise about it than I.

621. *Ellen Guy*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:34 PM

Not that I expect anyone to read the 500-and-somethingth comment, but the estimates of the number of men who are rapists range from around 4-10% of the male population. A small number, but those 4-10% of guys really get around and commit multiple rapes, and frequently other crimes. So what does that mean? To me, it means the chances of random guy being a rapist is really high, b/c rapists get around.

622. *Ellen Guy*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 3:47 PM

PS, I got my stats from the wonderful David Lisak mentioned at the top of the thread.

623. *Kristin*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:15 PM

Ugh. I can't believe this spiraled into a WHAT ABOUT THE MENZ thread essentially.

Thanks to SM and FJ for moderating.

Here's what I wanted to share with the men on the thread who just aren't getting it:

This past weekend, I went to a wedding of a high school friend. I shared a hotel room with two other (male) high school friends. These are people I've known since before I had hips and boobs, so attraction to each other is – I thought – non-existent and not possible. It's as close as I could have to a real-life safe space where I can interact with men without being objectified.

Or so I thought.

The first night in, one of my friends got very drunk. I was helping him get to bed when he pulled me near him and stuck his hand down my pants and under my panties and grabbed my ass and hit on me. I said no and pushed his hand away and then he rolled over and went to sleep. That? Outside the boundaries established by our relationship. That? Sexual assault.

See, even the men I trust I can't trust.

Am I mad at him? Not really. I don't feel injured in any way emotionally or otherwise. I understand he was drunk (he did not remember the incident in the morning). Do I think there is a problem with our society when that is the response a drunk man has to a woman in his proximity? Yes. Do I think that there is a problem with the way he (and by extension most men) has been socialized? Clearly. Do I think he's a bad person? No. Do I think he's a potential rapist? Well...

I think this post answers that question quite definitively. No, but yes. No, but there's an

with a good person I've known almost my whole life.

But what if he gets drunk and sticks his hand down the back of some girl's pants who is drunk herself? Who can't fend him off for whatever reason? Well, that is sexual assault/rape.

I can imagine *that* happening...so...Do I think he's a potential rapist? I'm not sure anymore. I sure as shit won't be caught alone with him when we've been drinking again.

Or, consider this: Yesterday, I was walking down the street in my busy city when I crossed over to the other side. Why did the 20-something female cross the road? Not the beginning of a joke because I wasn't actually sure why I did that. I looked around and saw that on the side of the street I had just vacated, was a large group of men that I would have passed had I not crossed the street.

I crossed the street without even realizing WHY I crossed the street, because I didn't want to get harassed. It happens enough that avoiding men on the street has just become second nature to me.

When you live in a world where you have FRIENDS you can't even trust and where your subconscious is avoiding large groups of men because of a culture permissive of rape, then you live in a fucked up world.... And no amount of "But I was assaulted too!" coming from the men (although, Kyle, I'm sorry that happened to you) is going to fix the automatic power dynamic at work with men who approach strange women.

I hope that made sense.

624. *Michelle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:20 PM

LOVED this post. & it inspired some good discussion between my husband and I as well.

I have to say, Starling's comment (somewhere upthread, I just read ALL OF THE COMMENTS, I am so proud) about not being afraid of cops surprised me, though. I'm a white woman who was raised pretty middle class (although I've been in a lower income bracket since leaving home), & I have always been taught that cops are dangerous. Granted, one of my earliest memories (I think I was around 10-11) involving a cop is my mother coming home in hysterics because a cop had pulled her over when she was alone in the car, told her she'd been weaving in traffic when she hadn't, and screamed at her until she was crying. And my dad has always disliked and been suspicious of cops, which I suspect has something to do with being a skateboarder when he was younger. This is my first comment here so I seriously apologize if I'm breaking any rules or derailing, it's just something I'd been wondering about lately spurred by another blog post – someone made a comment about feeling safe around cops and that idea is so. bizarre. to me that I can hardly comprehend it. Feel safe around a cop? It's just a man (or person, the very small town I grew up in didn't have any female cops) I don't know, with a gun. Why would I feel safe?

And it was brought up upthread, but I'd rather deal with a heavily tattooed individual than someone who seems "upper class" any day. I've ran into a few creepy tattooed men, yes, but I've met far too many more rich/white/frat boy types who thought that just by merit of me being a woman (& they always commented on my multicolored hair/tattoos – not sure why? I have a few theories about tattooed women & how they get treated, but not the time or the place) I was sexually available, for them. And probably a total freak in bed/"slut" because of the aforementioned hair/tattoos, to boot.

Then again, there are so many different markers and how to read them...it's such a complicated thing that I don't even think about most of the time, I just react. Someone who comes off as a redneck, for lack of a better term, immediately puts me on edge, someone who's just scruffy does not (to the same extent). A guy with a mohawk, tattoos, and Docs, I'll probably look at the band patches on his vest before deciding anything. ;) Someone brought up being taught to be aware of "lower class" guys, and they all could both fall under that category.

Back on topic – great article, and although many people already brought it up, the assertions of "but you're saying all men are rapists!" baffle me. No, she's saying we DON'T KNOW if they are a rapist or not, until proven otherwise, and unfortunately that's something we have to be considering. The people who want to say that the statistics are hyperbole are annoying too – I can, off the very top of my head, think of 5 women I know who have been raped / sexually assaulted. And those are out of women I know and am/were relatively close with (or in the case of one, family), which is not a large number. Maybe 12 women total.

I'm done with the rambles, but thank you, Starling, for a fabulous post, & thanks for the awesome commentary by everyone else (aside from a few asshats).

625. *Kristin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:25 PM

@Lily:

There is a difference between assuming that every man IS a rapist, and assuming that every man COULD BE a rapist.

Knowing that a certain percentage of eggs in the store are contaminated by salmonella, I treat eggs as though any of the COULD BE dangerous to my health.

I make sure I keep them cold, and then that they are fully cooked before I eat them. And I pay attention to any sign that they might be bad, if they are cracked or discolored or smell bad, I don't use them, at all. I don't give them a second chance, either.

This is a good analogy and I'm stealing it the next time I try to engage a friend in this discussion and he says "BUT NOT ALL MEN ARE RAPISTS."

Most eggs aren't contaminated. But some of them are.

626. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:39 PM

Maybe this is because I have been doing far too much studying lately (law student approaching finals) but I ended up relating the whole "women's signals and how to read them" to something far less sinister.

Entering a contract. To enter a contract in Germany (and I am sure in most other countries) all parties have to consent to the terms of the contract. They have to make it very clear that they consent to all the aspects of the contract. Simply being quiet does not make for a binding contract. Consent has to be made clear, either verbally, in written form, or by acting in a way that makes it clear that the party agrees with the terms that were set. No agreement, no contract.

These are rules that we apply to all contracts. Even something as simple as buying a loaf of bread in a bakery (that is, technically, a sales-contract). Agreement (→ consent) is not to be

assumed. It has to be made obvious by the other party.

So if we do this with things as (relatively) unimportant as a sales-contract about a loaf of bread, the WHY THE HELL NOT ABOUT SOMETHING AS IMPORTANT AS OUR RIGHT TO DECIDE WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR OWN BODIES?

Why does anybody get away with arguing that not saying no equals consent? Why does anybody believe they have a right force sex, stealing a person's right to decide about their own body? When no one would argue that stealing a TV is a criminal offence, how can stealing something so much more essential not be?

Why does the guy on the train think that a woman is obligated to react positively to his advances someply because she s a woman? Why do men act as if, simply by being women, we all signed a contract that makes it our job to be sexual objects for men?

We do not accept contraacts as binding when one person was mentally unable to really enter an agreement, for example because ze was drunk or drugged. We do not hold people to agreements they made only because they were under duress by the other party. Yet there are people who have no problem assuming that a woman (or man, for that matter) who was drunk or rugged can still consent. Or that a woman who was treated by a man's behaviour, im- or explicidly, should be held to the fact that she said "yes", even though she only did it because she was under duress?

Why, why, why do we put more importance on consent when it comes to buying a loaf of bread then when it comes to our most essential rights?

Society is FUCKED. Really, really FUCKED.

627. *genderbitch*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:40 PM

It occurs to me that I could probably go a bit more in depth, having been on both sides of this. I'm a bit atypical among trans women, in that the dissonance between body structure and mind came first and the identity as a woman came long after I started transition.

So I was fairly okay with the idea of being seen as a guy and the roles and whatnot (well more that I was mildly indifferent to the roles and tried to do my own thing).

The thing is, I recall a shit ton of pressure, from all sides (even some girls) to "lose my virginity." People suggested some seriously awful stuff: Like getting a girl drunk so she'll be more likely to have sex with you (ironically, that's how I was raped, mid transition), be more aggressive and assertive and take the lead and just kinda push stuff.

Serious. Those were real suggestions from people (some girls even, fucked up, eh?) At a particular party, way pre realization and pre transition, I had just started dating a girl recently and she was drunk and mildly passed out in my lap, resting. This mostly because someone had previously been harassing her for sex and as I was awake and semi sober, I was a safer place to be. One of my friends was sitting near me and suggested I grope her in her passed out state.

And like Max mentioned, the temptation was there. Holy shit was it there especially because I was drunk, virginic and reasonably horny. I didn't do it but after I got acquainted with the 101 stuff I realized just how bad that could have been. What really scares me however, is before I got to that stuff, I can fairly guarantee that the primary thing that kept me from being that sexually aggressive douchebag was the fact that I hated my body so

much that sex wasn't a terribly appealing idea half the time.

The thought that I could so easily have been like one of the guys in these comments (or even worse the fuckstupid wire chewers who've been moderated away from these comments) is frankly shudder worthy. And I'm a nice person. So you all are not immune.

Flash forward. Not only am I a woman now, I'm also a trans woman. Which means dangerous situations won't just end in rape for me, they'll likely end in death too. After having already been sexually assaulted/raped (still struggling with the r word for that) and having been sexually harassed in person and on the phone, I really have to say that a lot of perspective (unpleasant perspective) has been gained. I seriously don't know who's safe and I've already been shown that making the wrong call about who to trust will hurt me intensely (and with what I know of statistics, would prolly leave me a very deceased statistic myself).

This sense of fear and caution is made intensely worse by the fact that I experienced life on the other side of the chasm of gender privilege and social training. That I heard the crap these guys said, even considered it myself at times. It doesn't occur to any of them that any of this is bad. It doesn't occur to them that any of this would seriously hurt someone. It's a sheer, comfortable apathy to the needs of the target, and targets we are. Not people. Targets.

These guys weren't really easily differentiated from the ones that do respect women and are nice. This kind of stuff usually wasn't said around women, it showed up in actions in dark rooms, on buses, or when everyone's a bit wasted. And even the nice people get that pressure and have not so good urges. Even nice people, the ones who think they respect women, still have ideas and views that are Not. Good. At. All in regards to women and sex.

And really, for any of the guys who say, "oh come on, that pressure isn't there." Yes, it is. That pressure to have sex w/ no thought to the person you're seeking to have sex with, that social attitude that sex was a sport and it was all about winning and scoring? That faded completely when I transitioned. No one pushed that, no one gave awful suggestions, no one thought I was weird because I wouldn't have sex with a drunk girl unless things had been worked out into fine details (safe words and constant checks for freezing up or freaking out included). Suddenly my caution, my habit of asking "this is okay? You're doing alright?" and stopping if I don't get a happy sounding "yes" with my partner are considered perfectly fine and normal. I would have gotten mocked to hell for doing that when I was seen as a guy.

Course, all of that was replaced with the social training that I'm a godawfully horrible bitch for daring to say, "hey, look, I'm not interested in you and you're kinda creeping me out a little, dude. Couldja give me some space?". Along with douchenozzles calling me on my phone, asking me to masturbate and when I hang up, trying to call me two more times. Significantly worse social position, I would say. x_X

628. *genderbitch*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:44 PM

@Lauren:

Even the contract analogy is iffy because really, there's no obligation to continue having sex if you need to stop mid run. In fact it's definitely rape if one has started to have perfectly consensual sex, suddenly needs to stop and the other person refuses to stop.

629. *AuntiMay*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:55 PM

I found this article very good.

When I am in a public space, I do not want to be approached by strange men for any reason, even if my hair were on fire. I can take care of myself, thank you very much.

If I have a reason to talk to a man, I will approach first.

Other than that, PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE!

630. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:56 PM

Sean, I let your comment through because most of what you have to say is useful and relevant, but I am really not comfortable with your advocating violence, even threats of violence, between men as a response to gender-based harassment.

631. *Lothar*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:59 PM

Lesson to fellow men: join feminist anti-rape organization, be sincere in activist intentions, and up chances for meeting women by a significant order of magnitude.

632. *Lauren*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 4:59 PM

At genderbitch:

I absolutely agree that one of the most important things people need to reralize is that everyone has the right to say no AT ANY POINT.

And that an agreement to have sex should never be seen as a binding obligation to continue having sex whe ze does not want to any more.

I am not saying that saying yes once constitutes a binding contract.

But I still think that the point I was going for – the fact that society pays a lot more attention to make sure in their rules of law that people definitely want to do something a mundane as buying bread, yet allow for all these “but that means she wanted it”-excuses when it comes to making our own choices about our bodies, that people get away with just assuming content-is true. There are some seriously screwed up value-mweighngs going on here.

633. *genderbitch*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 5:56 PM

@Lauren:

Yeah definitely. I just felt like the analogy had a problematic edge that should at least be brought up before the wire chewers jumped all over it for rape apologism ammo.

It's definitely screwed up how consent in any other area of society is treated as sacrosanct but in sex, at least for women, it's considered an implied or a non necessity.

634. *abyss2hope*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:01 PM

@genderbitch – “People suggested some seriously awful stuff: Like getting a girl drunk so she'll be more likely to have sex with you (ironically, that's how I was raped, mid

This point is critical about the pervasiveness of presenting certain types of sexual violence as not only acceptable, but as expected or the norm. It reminds me of this quote by Dr. John Briere: "Toxic decisions seem rational in toxic environments."

The bigger solution then can't be just to teach men about the appropriate ways to handle certain situations with women. Underlying toxic beliefs must be brought to the surface and challenged. Those who have internalized toxic beliefs are likely to resist or as we've seen here, attack to protect those beliefs which seem rational to them. Hating their toxic beliefs will be equated with hating them (or men).

635. *Jessikanesis*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:10 PM

Admittedly, I've only read most, not all, of the comments so far (some of you type so fast it's hard to keep up!), but I'm deeply saddened by the men who seem to assume that none of us will ever meet men, make friends, enjoy our lives or have relationships as long as we're so "paranoid."

Speaking only of my personal experience: I have gone on dates with men who were, at some point, strangers. I have great male friends (some of them big, "scary-looking," tattooed guys!) who were, at some point, strangers. Hell, I've even flirted heavily with a guy on a bus (okay, and made out with him a little, but that's me, and there's a long story behind it). Did all of this happen because I completely disregarded my need for personal boundaries? No. It happened because I interact with men when I want, in the way that makes me comfortable at the time.

When my friend and I went to a pub together one night, a group of about three or four young men came up to us and asked if they could sit at our table. We said yes. In that particular situation, we wanted to meet new people. And while we had a great time that night, talking, drinking, and listening to good local music, nothing happened that hadn't been our choice. When the gentlemen were leaving, they asked if we wanted to come with them to a party, and we declined for a couple of reasons: one being that we were tired and ready to go home, two being that we were in an unfamiliar city and outnumbered by these big guys. Driving off to an unfamiliar neighborhood to somebody's house just didn't seem like a smart idea. The guys just said that was too bad, and that it had been nice hanging with us, and we all went our separate ways.

Another night, the same friend and I would go out and NOT feel like meeting new people. If someone came up and asked to sit with us then, we would have said as much.

When I don't want to talk to strange men, I don't (assuming the strange men respect my wishes), and when I do, I do (assuming they want to talk to *me*, since I have to respect their boundaries as well).

So you see, it really is possible for men to meet women without seeming like jerks. That doesn't mean, because *you know* you're not a jerk, you automatically get to meet whatever woman you want, at any time. Please try not to lament the fact that in order to be "nice" you somehow have to be able to read women's minds, and subject yourself to their irrational whims of feeling alternately social or anti-social. Yes, women all over the world are changing their minds every day, in complete disregard for your desire that they be simple and predictable. They will continue to do so. Poor you.

When you say something like, "Why don't women take a chance on nice guys?" What you're really saying is, "Why don't women take a chance on ME?" And it's completely

transparent. We DO take a chance on nice guys, but only when we feel like it. If we don't feel like it, and you push the issue anyway, you're probably not a nice guy.

If you find yourself saying, "But if I don't talk to a woman just because she doesn't want to talk to me, then I'll NEVER be able to talk to women again!" then maybe you should start thinking about why women don't want to talk to you.

"She's a stuck up bitch" isn't an acceptable answer. We're not your self-esteem coaches. We don't even know you, and it's not our job to humor your efforts so you can feel a little better about yourself.

636. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:11 PM

@genderbitch:

Absolutely understand where you are coming from. One of the problems with analogies is that they hardly ever fit all the aspects of the things one is comparing. That's why hesitated before posting the "dog-reply" upthread. So, thanks for pointing out this very important difference. It should be self-explanatory, but then so should the fact that women don't want to be raped...

637. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:16 PM

Michelle—The comfort level with cops has to do with the fact that I worked in law enforcement for six years, and for a national private investigations company with a lot of other former law enforcement for four years after that. So no, it's just me, not a middle-class-white-women thing. Sorry not to be clearer!

638. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:24 PM

Michelle, cont: I hit post and then thought, "Ack, need to fix." My comfort level with strange cops (who are, you're right, just normal people with guns, some good, some not) has to do with the fact that as a 31 year old middle-class white woman with an assertive presence, I'm confident that one message I can send to a cop who approaches me is, "She probably has a lawyer." If I had the same experience set but were a middle-class Latina woman with an assertive presence, I would be much less comfortable around strange cops, because the cop's probable perception of my relative social power is different. Race and class and all the rest do play in—they're important—but my lack of concern comes from my experiences, not just my position of privilege.

639. *JennyRose*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:24 PM

I rode the subway this morning and the guy next to me was reading a book and listening to an ipod with ear buds. I almost giggled out loud at the thought of saying "whacha reading? or you have cute eyes." He would have thought I was crazy or a con-artist trying to distract him.

I dunno, it seemed funny to me. The thought of giggling out loud on the subway seemed funny to.

640. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:25 PM

So no, it's just me, not a middle-class-white-women thing. Sorry not to be clearer!

cops has a lot to do with cultural factors (obviously) including race, class, and gender, but also where you live and what the reputation of your cops is. I have lived in places with notoriously corrupt cops, including ones who were convicted of sexually assaulting people who called them for help, and there's no way in hell I would call them for anything but the most dire emergency because of that. I've felt differently in other places. Anyway, what I'm saying is that I think it's neither "just you" nor a "middle-class-white-women" thing but somewhere in between.

641. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:28 PM

SM—very true. There are specific jurisdictions in which I would avoid the cops like the plague, because the reputations are so bad that they're nationally known, at least in law enforcement circles.

642. *jfpbookworm*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:31 PM

We're not your self-esteem coaches. We don't even know you, and it's not our job to humor your efforts so you can feel a little better about yourself.

This.

I know that one of the reasons why my own approach to this issue is "don't start a conversation with a captive audience" (i.e., someone who can't easily disengage without potential consequence, such as a bus/train passenger), is because I assume that there's no way they could be interested in talking to me. And that's something that I should probably get over. But just it's partly rooted in personal insecurity doesn't mean it's not also a good idea, and just because I need to get over that mindset doesn't mean that I get to conscript anybody around me for impromptu therapy.

643. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:32 PM

@Lothar, your lesson to fellow men is flawed. If men bring attitudes to feminist anti-rape organizations which previously interfered with connecting to women on a meaningful level very little will change. If a man has sincere activist intentions, but holds onto problematic beliefs, attitudes and habits he may get a justifiably cool reception which he would likely dismiss as evidence that those women don't like men.

If a man joins a feminist anti-rape organization he should do so because he respects those he is helping with no strings attached and with the willingness to listen and learn even if that causes discomfort.

644. *TrackerNeil*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:44 PM

A Sarah:

"Because if the men are so sad about it they can start using their male privilege to challenge the horrid deinition of masculinity in the dominant culture."

As a gay man I don't have much of a dog in the fight, but can you explain exactly how one uses male privilege to challenge something?

645. *Michelle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:50 PM

178 of 345 No problem, Starling, it was just something I had been honestly wondering about, because 11/12/2015 8:40 am

like I said – the idea of feeling safe around the cops is a completely bizarre notion to me, something I can't even fathom. Granted, supposedly the cops here in Austin (just moved here in June) aren't bad at all, but the town I lived in for my entire life before was a small, conservative town in rural Missouri in the Bible Belt. Very racist, very sexist, etc. etc. My husband had a coworker who lived next to a cop that would regularly get drunk & beat the shit out of his wife, she'd call the cops, and they'd just drive the guy around until he sobered up, then take him back home. Like SM said, I'm sure a lot of it has to do with the area you're in. But either way, I'm not sure I'll ever actually be comfortable around cops.

Will be quiet now since it's not on topic. :)

646. *OlderThanDirt*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 6:54 PM

Slightly off-topic, yesterday I heard two news reports about Michelle Obama's family. In both, her great-great-great-great (I think that's right) grandmother bore a child to a white man while still in slavery. The first news report did not call this rape and before the NBC nightly news story came on, I said to my husband, "Betcha they don't use the word rape." Sure enough, they called it "sexual relations." But my husband turned to me and said, "So, just because she was a slave, it had to be rape?" "Yes! She had no agency. She couldn't say no! That's rape!"

I was and still am upset that this was news to him. O.K., back to the regularly scheduled discussion.

647. *jeffliveshere*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:03 PM

Whew. What a heartbreaking post and subsequent discussion. Inspiring and heartbreaking at the same time.

I just want to say to all of the men out there who are pointing out the ways in which patriarchy hurts men (I count the ways in which men are harmed by bullies, "women should approach men more often" and "I shouldn't be assumed to be a rapist" among the ways patriarchy harms men): However true all of those things may be, pointing them out isn't an appropriate response to the points made in the post, or in the discussion. Sure, let's talk about how patriarchy harms men, but not as an *answer* to how it harms women.

Part of what needs to happen is that men need to talk with other men about this stuff, including the ways in which we can not only better treat women (on transit and in general!) as people, but also the ways in which we can change social structures so that men don't have to deal with all of the ways in which patriarchy harms us.

648. *Jeanne*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:13 PM

" kristinc permalink

You forgot the important statistic though: Three quarters of rape are by men already known to the women. Being a stranger isn't the big problem.

OK, but how do we define "already known to the woman"? Wouldn't "that who bothers me on the bus every week" qualify? "That neighbor I've never had a conversation with" certainly seems to, as does "that guy who was at the party I was at" and "that manager at the restaurant I frequent", so I think this post is spot on.

I am here, still reading, after following a link from another website. Excellent article and very informative discussion! I teach Anthropology and Sociology, so this whole discussion is of great interest to me professionally AND personally as a female survivor of assaults.

Excellent point right here! Think of it from the cops-investigating-an-event point of view : her (if able to describe) statement might be "that creepy guy who always sat next to me on the bus and tried to get me to talk to him." Witnesses' statements might be "well, she always had a man with her, sitting next to her on the bus. They talked together, but she didn't always look happy." It appears that he is "known" to her ??? Could complicate matters and the statistics!

649. *Anne*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:14 PM

For curious_skeptic and James and any other person who thinks the 1 in 6 statistic is wrong because it's different than the FBI numbers:

The FBI gathers statistics for REPORTED rapes. There is a great way to gather statistics for unreported rapes called asking women. For example, I had to fill out a questionnaire that asked me if I reported it before I went in for my first appointment for therapy after I was raped. Isn't that mindblowing?

650. *Paul*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:19 PM

Starling, your points are well taken and it is a shame that in this day and age what you write is still surprising to large numbers of men. However, the situation is not solely due to a lack of information.

There are women who are of low self-esteem, or damaged, or simply young, who do respond to men in spite of discourtesy, or even because of it. And though the men in those situations leave harm in their wake, to themselves, they nod and say "yep, that must be the way to do it." I wish this were not so, but I have been the crying shoulder for enough of this kind of thing to feel it is not isolated.

So I think it is important that the message not only be: Men should act this way to improve their chances, but also: Men should act this way so that someday our sisters can emerge from the war zone and perhaps we can all of us be friends.

651. *DRST*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:30 PM

TrackerNeil – I'm not A Sarah, but my explanation is that men listen to other men in a way they do not listen to women, ever. There is a gender divide that women cannot breach. Women talk endlessly about not feeling safe, about what it's like to live in the rape culture, and if you've read the comments here, you've seen a tiny taste of what we get back from men when we talk about this – derailing, denial, corrupting the conversation and outright attacks.

Men speaking to other men do not carry that divide (and yes, this includes gay men speaking to other men, because you are still male and therefore not in the automatically Not To Be Listened To category due to your gender).

Examples of this would include modeling good behavior (respecting boundaries) to other men, speaking up when men make rape or sexual assault jokes – this is especially

important in situations where there are no women present and men feel they can "get away with" more. When another man calls that behavior out, without any pressure because women are in the room, it sends a very powerful signal from within the gender group about what is and is not acceptable. You can read the linked post of Kate's that appears several times in the thread for more examples.

DRST

652. *Mayya*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:47 PM

With more than 600 comments on this post, I can't realistically check to see if anyone has already said what I want to say, so excuse me if it's redundant.

This is an excellent post and I applaud your concisely describing the realities of danger assessment for women. Gavin DeBecker says "Men's worst fear is that women will laugh at them; women's worst fear is that men will kill them." Sadly this is not an exaggeration. I have no patience with men who complain that they are not rapists and are hurt or frustrated when a woman treats them that way. With my life at stake, I don't give a **** about your feelings; there is simply no comparison.

For myself, I decided some time ago to never give men advice about how to be less obnoxious to women, how to be a "nice guy" who can get dates, or anything else whatsoever that allows them to pass for decent human beings. Either they already ARE decent human beings and don't need instruction, or they can simply use that information to pass as one, and thus put more women in danger by camouflaging their intentions.

I don't know if your aim was to instruct men or just to describe the situation so eloquently, but I think you are inadvertently giving tips to the enemy. Do we really believe men are so dense they can't understand personal space, eye contact, gestures, body language? That with the birth of modern feminism more than 60 years ago they still somehow don't "get it"? The men who don't get it don't WANT to get it.

653. *wide-eyed innocent*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 7:48 PM

Thank you, thank you, thank you for this post. I've read all (!) the comments, too.

One thing I wanted to add: The vast majority of the discussion is based in urban American social mores. Or at least, Western (European/ American/ whatever) mores. Which is fine – that's your target audience, after all. But I wanted to add something...

In many developing and underdeveloped nations, like Morocco, where I serve in the Peace Corps, it's even harder for a guy to 'approach a strange woman without getting maced'. The women are kept so "protected" (read: oppressed) that it's virtually impossible to spark conversation in a public place.

Doesn't stop the guys from trying, though. Especially with women who are obviously not Moroccan, like me and other pale-skinned Peace Corps Volunteers. The guys have watched enough American movies and European porn to conclude that All White Girls Want It All The Time. And since the local women *never* want it – at least, can never ever admit to wanting it, which leads to a whole terrifying no-sometimes-means-yes-phenomenon – the sexually frustrated guys see in us their best chance to Get Some.

181 of 345 ...which means that sexual harassment of foreign-looking women, from catcalling and shouted comments up through broad daylight groping and fondling, is damn near ^{11/12/2015 8:40 am}

I've written about it [here](#), and discussed it extensively with other Volunteers and friends back home, but was never able to articulate before what Starling makes so clear:

If I'm projecting a don't-approach-me vibe – and I often am, here – then the very fact of your approach means that you're either oblivious to or dismissive of my desires. If you have any characteristics that thicken my leave-me-alone wall – if, for example, you smell of alcohol, or are obviously leering, or on bad days, if you're any male between 12 and 40 – then your approach sounds even more alarm bells. My goal is to Avoid Interacting With You. The fact that you've spoken to me, or touched me, or put yourself in my personal space, or whatever, means that I've already failed to achieve this goal. You've already won something; I've already lost something.

Most of my arsenal is defensive weaponry. I'm good at deflecting attention, dodging comments, avoiding eye contact. I have few offensive weapons at my disposal. (I do have a wicked elbow jab and know how to blind you with my thumb, along with other assorted self defense skills – but I also know that I'm incredibly unlikely to avail myself of these.) So I stick to passive resistance, most of the time. I pretend to ignore you. I pretend I don't speak French. I keep my eyes on the ground so I neither notice your ogling nor have to watch it ratchet up into speculation when you manage to make eye contact. Walking through the public market can feel like running a reconnaissance mission on hostile soil – the kind where my very presence, if discovered, constitutes an Act Of War. I'm hoping and praying that I can do my business and get out before anyone registers me.

"But I'm a nice guy" – maybe you are. Maybe you really do just want to practice your English. Maybe if I got to know you, we'd be pen pals for life. But I'm not looking for a pen pal right now, and the best way you can prove you're a nice guy is to respect my obvious desire to be left alone.

And here's the rub – that's exactly what the nice guys do. Respectful Moroccan men respectfully *leave*me*alone*. Nice guys don't talk to girls they don't know, in this culture. Meaning that the only guys who interact with me are the ones who have decided not to respect *either* me or that cultural more.

So yes, the sample set of my interactions skews massively towards disrespectful jerks.

I recognize the sampling bias, and therefore consciously and deliberately refuse to let myself imagine that all Moroccan men are [insert negative thing here], just because I've encountered some who are. When it's really bad, I force myself to think of Ali and Sayeed and Mohassin and Ahmed and the other handful of Moroccan men whom I trust implicitly. (And by "trust implicitly", I mean that I believe that if they found a girl drunk and half naked in their beds, they'd tuck her in and wait for morning. And maybe call a friend for her.)

So yes, of course, there are good Moroccan men and bad Moroccan men, just as there are good American men and bad American men, and good women and bad women in any culture. Peoples is peoples. I just wish I didn't have to work so hard to remember that, sometimes. And I just wanted to thank Ms. Starling for laying out in her article, so clearly and calmly, what I have never managed to make some male PCV friends understand.

654. *Sean*

182 of 345 OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:06 PM

Sweet Machine, thanks for letting me get that comment in edge-wise. If I can impose with

11/12/2015 8:40 am

one more post I would like to (hopefully) better explain what I meant.

I was a little worked up reading the comments and recalling the women I have known who have been subject to sexual assault and/or rape (that is not a plea for sympathy, I'm just explaining my state of mind when I was writing). My mentioning curbies was definitely over the top. Please forgive my fantasizing out loud about some of the men who have injured women I have known; it wasn't a productive avenue for discussion.

I didn't intend to come across as a hero-complexified, white knight and I hope it wasn't taken that way, although a re-read of my post shows it would be a reasonable interpretation. I should have taken my wife's sage advice and slept on my response. To attempt a clarification of my motives: my belief is that it's not *women* in particular who should be free of unwanted associations, it's that all *people* should have the freedom to freely associate with whom they wish. "The freedom of all is essential to my freedom," to borrow from the widely dissed Bakunin. ;-]

I don't normally start an intercession in a public place by threatening violence directly and calling people asshats. It tends to be counterproductive. ;-] In that regard I was being hyperbolic in my previous post. As a student of aikido I try to defuse confrontations verbally whenever possible, or extricate myself and others from them when they can't be talked away.

I guess I was taking the hypothetical subway scenario and running it like this through my head to a worst-case conclusion:

I am alone with a man and a woman on the subway. The man is making unwanted advances and is escalating his threatening behavior towards the woman. I could call the police, the state-authorized bringers of violence, in the hope that this would dissuade the man. Most people when faced with the threat of state-sanctioned violence would get the message and chill the fuck out. Some would turn their aggression on me, which I'm more comfortable with than having the previous dynamic between the man and woman play out further.

But in this worst-case scenario, I imagine that I'm unable to call the police, or that they won't respond quickly enough. I further imagine that the man is now becoming physically threatening. So now I'm left with what is, to me, a clear-cut decision: act to defend someone or do nothing.

Note that whether I call the police or act myself, I am threatening some form of violence, direct or mediated by the state, on this man. Even an innocuous, "Dude, leave her alone," has an implied threat behind it when spoken between males under most circumstances.

None of this is meant to advocate vigilantism, which happens after a crime has occurred (actually, that's a tad disingenuous: if a man assaulted my wife I would hunt him to the ends of the earth, and moral code be damned because I love that lady dearly). What I'm trying to express is that men, women, and even purple Martians have a responsibility to defend each other against aggression *in the moment*. Frequently that means employing the threat of force, if not the actual thing itself.

But this whole rambling post is off-topic from the story, so to try and bring it back on point: guys have now had a tutorial in how to not be creepy and in how to respect a woman's freedom to associate or not; my addendum to the story would be that guys need to adopt a "not while I'm around" attitude in order to disincentivize this sort of behavior.

There are certainly disincentives other than force or the threat of force which could be employed, and I wouldn't want to be seen to be minimizing them: calling other men on sexist or derogatory remarks in mixed or all-male settings, severing friendships with asshats, raising boys to see women for the equal partners they are, and many more. But if I exhaust my tool kit of other approaches then my options dwindle to one. I'm not unaware that this provides a case study in how men view violence as an ultimate option to be held in reserve, but I've yet to find a better way to re-wire my brain, so, as Clyde from That 70s Show says, "Where Zen ends, ass kicking begins."

Cheers, this has been a very thoughtful and well-moderated conversation and I appreciate having been allowed to take part! I will happily lurk now unless called upon. :-]

655. *SJL*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:14 PM

After reading all 650+ comments, I think all the whining guy comments can be boiled down to:

"But if I have to listen to and respect what women are telling me about that THEY want (or don't want), then I won't get to do what *I* want."

The presence of this attitude is both scary and the whole reason women are wary of men.

656. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:15 PM

Thanks for the clarification, Sean, and I'm glad you picked up on what was bothering me about your comment (the white knight aspect of it). I completely agree that men need to act in the ways you describe to disincentivize aggressive behavior from other men. I just want to make sure we don't inadvertently end up describing it as a kind of homosocial "this woman is a pawn between us two models of violent masculinity" drama, you know?

657. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:27 PM

TrackerNeil, sorry, my kids are sick and I'm intermittently offline so I'm only just seeing this new. But, yeah, DRST pretty much nailed it.

658. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:28 PM

Paul, I'm not sure what you mean by some women "respond to men in spite of discourtesy." Could you explain what you mean?

659. *TrackerNeil*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:36 PM

Thanks, DRST. I see your point, but I confess the writing that occasioned these many comments makes me think of a personal experience that is related in theme. When Mathew Shepard was murdered, back in 1998, it was easy for gay people to view all straight folks as potential murderers and gay bashers, and I am ashamed to admit that I fell prey to that as well. It took some time and some distance from the event itself for me to realize it was just not healthy for me to view all heterosexuals in such a narrow, suspicious way. (Fact is, the vast majority of heterosexuals do not intend physical harm to gay people.) I think it is similarly unhealthy for women to adopt, even mentally, the idea of "Schrödinger's Rapist."

Starling is not off-base in her observations, and she makes some powerful points, but in my view this "Schrödinger's Rapist" stuff is just a little too far.

660. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:40 PM

TrackerNeil, for god's sake, no one here thinks this is a "healthy" situation for women. We think it's profoundly unhealthy, in fact, and part of culture-wide misogyny and sexism. We just think that men should participate in making a healthier society rather than tut-tutting about how paranoid and sad our little lady lives are.

Also, the title metaphor, Schrodinger's Rapist, is not being used to dictate to women how to live their lives. It is being used to communicate to men how many women *already* live their lives.

661. *OlderThanDirt*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:40 PM

Saying all men might or might not be rapists is going too far? This is a question that women should not ask themselves when they meet men? We should just open the box and find out?

662. *Sean*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:41 PM

Sweet Machine, I totally understand because my post reeked of whtie-knightiness when I re-read it and that's something I've been examining today. It's a fine line to walk: how to stand up for others' liberties without letting the instinct to assert dominance take over? Sometimes I've even felt those two motivations running through me concurrently, which is certainly an odd mix. Must devote some cycles to processing this a bit more...

663. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:43 PM

It's a fine line to walk: how to stand up for others' liberties without letting the instinct to assert dominance take over?

Sean, this is a great way of describing the difficulty of being an ally to a socially oppressed group. It's a question we've all gotta ask ourselves in different contexts.

664. *Vehemens*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:43 PM

I'm not going to get a lot of support for this comment, so I'll begin with a disclaimer:

Rapists should be euthanized.

Disrespecting a woman is unacceptable.

This article touches on extremely important points.

However, there are other factors.

One thing to note, and this is a big pointer for other guys:

It's generally best not to try and pick up a woman on a bus or train. Aside from the aforementioned article, they are transportation methods, not dating hubs. You have somewhere to go, 9/10 times it's to or from a job or other business deal, trying to pay a bill. Subways are not vacation spots.

As men, we do need to become more perceptive of body language and take it into account.

On the other hand:

In my personal experience, I've had pleasant dates come from just saying 'Excuse me, Miss,' or an equivalent statement after first not being responded to. That is not to say that any man should be disrespectful of personal space, but I've had more instances of it just being a miscommunication instead of it being a signal not to talk to me. If it is the latter, I apologize and return to what I was doing, which is just good manners.

But it is also good manners to respond politely if greeted politely. If the man is rude, brush him off and let the red flags go up, but asking a second time to make sure a man was heard when he speaks, or desiring a direct response that is more than body language (which can be confused, and easily) is not out of line.

The statistic is troubling, and I definitely question more things about how I come across to women after reading this, but I cannot possibly agree that it's entirely the fault of one gender.

It's not a fair jump to say that a guy who makes sure you heard him is now making himself a rapist. That's my only point.

There are aspects of just polite conversation that should be observed by both parties.

665. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:46 PM

It's not a fair jump to say that a guy who makes sure you heard him is now making himself a rapist.

For what is surely the hundredth time on the thread: it's not that this guy is now definitely a rapist. It's that we don't *know*. And every time you choose your desires over a woman's expressed wishes, that gets you a point in the "More likely" column.

666. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:52 PM

Vehemens, I want to make sure I'm understanding... Are you saying you realize that on a few occasions you've said "Excuse me, Miss," and having not been sure whether you were heard, repeated the "Excuse me"?

If so, are you saying that that need not indicate a desire to get all up in someone's business / personal space?

I agree that it might NOT mean that. I won't rule out that some guy, somewhere, might feign having "not heard" as a means of disrespecting boundaries. If that's not what you're doing, and you've honestly just repeated a question to see/confirm if you were heard the first time? Then great! Truly.

(That of course doesn't mean that someone must want to talk to you.)

And really, that's all this "assumption of potential rapist" thing is about. Having to be on guard because YOU NEVER KNOW, and if something happens people will say "Why weren't you on guard because YOU NEVER KNOW!?" So, in this scenario, I might say, "Hmmm... he's talking to me. He's repeated something. What's up? Provisionally engage defense systems until I know more." That's all.

667. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:53 PM

Or just what SM said.

668. *Anita*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:54 PM

"There are aspects of just polite conversation that should be observed by both parties."

A conversation needs to be voluntary. If I'm not participating voluntarily, then we are no longer talking about a conversation. Polite conversations are, by definition, not begun arbitrarily by one party at another's expense.*

I'm glad you've had some nice dates, but I'm not sure what that has to do with the prices of tea in China.

*Except if you're a kid. Or maybe in churches, but I like to imagine church small talk is equally painful on all sides.

669. *TrackerNeil*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:56 PM

Sweet Machine said:

"TrackerNeil, for god's sake, no one here thinks this is a "healthy" situation for women. We think it's profoundly unhealthy, in fact, and part of culture-wide misogyny and sexism. We just think that men should participate in making a healthier society rather than tut-tutting about how paranoid and sad our little lady lives are."

What I said that was that such was not a healthy *view*; I did not comment on anyone's situation, nor will I. As to "tut-tutting", I agree that people should not belittle the honest viewpoints and reactions of others. However, I think that using the term "Schrödinger's Rapist" in this way is not the best way to incline men to participate in making a healthier society. Personally, I don't feel inclined to sympathy towards people who view me as a potential rapist, just as I am sure you would not feel inclined to sympathize with me if I viewed you as a potential suicide-bomber or child molester or whatever.

670. *Anita*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:56 PM

Vehemens, in other words, what I hear is:

"Disrespecting women is unacceptable, but sometimes when I do I've gotten what I wanted."

... which is a problem.

671. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:57 PM

For anyone confused by our feminist terminology, Liss at Shakesville just posted an epic description of what we mean by "rape culture":

<http://shakespearessister.blogspot.com/2009/10/rape-culture-101.html>

If you were not familiar with this term before this thread, please do not come back here until you have clicked at least half the links in Liss's post.

672. *Starling*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 8:59 PM

Oh, heavens. Are we really back to the old argument that women just need to be *more polite*? Are we all living in the same world here? Politeness is a two-way street, and it starts when the interlocutor respects "back-off" signals.

673. *SJL*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:00 PM

Vehemens, let me break it down for you so you can understand:

Any time a strange man approaches me in public I immediately begin assessing his risk potential. Every word, look and action is consciously or subconsciously appraised as a clue as to how likely this interaction is to turn inappropriate or unpleasant or downright dangerous. If the warning bells go off, or I'm just not in the mood to turn on my alarm meter, I'll disengage in whatever way seems the most effective. As Sm has repeatedly pointed out, anytime you choose your desire to interact over my desire for distance or non-interaction, or whatever, the warning bells get louder.

It's not that we're all looking around saying to ourselves, "I bet that guy is a rapist." But with every interaction, we are compelled to ask ourselves whether this guy is likely to get nasty or not. 600+ comments relating scary stories should be enough to convince you that we do this not because we're manhaters, or rude, or hellbent on the destruction of polite society, but because its necessary.

674. *abyss2hope*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:01 PM

@curious_sceptic – "I am skeptical about the 1-in-6 business, though. The FBI estimates 89,000 women reported being raped in 2008 — 29 women for every 100,000 people. If half those people are women and nobody gets raped twice, that's 1-in-1724 rapes in a year. Women would have to live to be 287 years old to run a 1-in-6 chance. It's a serious problem, for sure, and you could argue that anything that helps sensitize women to the threat could help prevent rape, but I think the number is bogus and just used as a scare tactic."

CS, I'm addressing your comment directly because it repeats a common troubling pattern. The problem with this quote and your entire premise is that your numbers are a sloppy extrapolation of numbers which don't even line up with the estimate you are trying to debunk. What was said originally is: "One in every six American women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime."

If you are trying to debunk this claim then you need to look at measurements of sexual assaults and not just rapes and you need to look at the best estimates for victimization which you cannot get from FBI reporting statistics even if you do correct your calculation to be for sexual assault. The raw data you claim to debunk came from the National Violence Against Women Survey. "Using a definition of rape that includes forced vaginal, oral and anal intercourse, the survey found that rape is a crime committed primarily against youth: 18 percent of women surveyed said they experienced a completed or attempted rape at some time in their life..." Since all those survey respondents were still alive and therefore still at some risk of sexual assault, the 1 in 6 lifetime number, if in error, is too low.

If you are refusing to accept this survey data because it comes directly from women rather than from the FBI then you are expressing bigotry.

In 2007, Utah did a crime victimization survey of women and the results they got were that 29% of the women surveyed had been sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Fewer than 12% of those crimes were reported to the police.

This is a reality not scare tactics. Also your words "sensitize women to the threat could help prevent rape" get it backwards. Sensitizing potential victims to the threat is not prevention. Sensitizing bystanders and Schodinger's rapists to the threat and widespread intolerance of

sexual assault are what has the potential for prevention.

675. *farfalla*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:01 PM

The statistic is troubling, and I definitely question more things about how I come across to women after reading this, but I cannot possibly agree that it's entirely the fault of one gender.

Wait, what? Which statistic is troubling? Because if it's the one about 1 in 6 women... um, yeah, I'm pretty uncomfortable with suggesting that rape/sexual assault is really the fault of both parties.

If the man is rude, brush him off and let the red flags go up, but asking a second time to make sure a man was heard when he speaks, or desiring a direct response that is more than body language (which can be confused, and easily) is not out of line.

And you know what? Yeah, I do think it is out of line for a guy to interrupt a woman who's reading a book on the train, for instance, and then when she glares at him/ignores him/mutters something, expect a direct and verbal "no" just to confirm. Sorry, but I don't think a guy gets to invade my personal space, and then DO IT AGAIN in case I didn't actually hear him the first time.

676. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:02 PM

Personally, I don't feel inclined to sympathy towards people who view me as a potential rapist,

Well, once you show me the magical device/method/question/what have you that distinguishes rapists from not-rapists at one glance, then I will agree with you.

Do you hear yourself? If we use your own example of the Matthew Shepard murder and gay-bashing, you are saying that instead of straight people having more sympathy for you and your fear in 1998, *you* should have had more sympathy for *them* and how awful it must have been for *them* to be viewed as potential gay-bashers. Do you really believe that is true? That *straight people* really were hurt the most by Matthew Shepard's murder?

677. *jeffliveshere*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:07 PM

@TrackerNeil:

"However, I think that using the term "Schrodinger's Rapist" in this way is not the best way to incline men to participate in making a healthier society."

I think Schrodinger's Rapist is a fantastic conceptual tool, and disagree with you on pretty much every level, TrackerNeil. One reason it's a great conceptual tool is because it beautifully captures the fact that, because of how many men rape women, and because of how many women get raped, there is a relatively high level of possibility that any given man is a rapist (relative, to, say, the possibility that he is a suicide bomber, which is why that is a false analogy). And, however high the possibility, it is (generally) *women* who get to make that risk analysis, because they are the folks who (generally) get raped. Is it terrible that you may be considered a possible rapist? Sure. But if you have a problem with that, you need to work to end violence against women, not whine that women shouldn't think of you that way. Sheesh.

678. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:07 PM

society. Personally, I don't feel inclined to sympathy towards people who view me as a potential

rapist, just as I am sure you would not feel inclined to sympathize with me if I viewed you as a potential suicide-bomber or child molester or whatever.

Yeah, ladies! Watch your tone.

How about this, TrackerNeil, since you find it so offensive to be viewed with caution. The next time those fuckers at the airport try to make you go through security see your ID, raise a fuss. Try arguing that there's no reason for them to view you as some kind of smuggler or mad bomber. See how far that takes you.

Eyeroll sprain

679. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:10 PM

TrackerNeil, do you go up and engage strange small children in conversation, then give their parents an offended look when they keep a close eye to be sure you aren't abducting them? Or would you think that parents who did not keep an eye on their kids around strangers were a little neglectful?

Same thing applies to women watching out for their own personal safety. Except that the incidence of stranger-abduction of children in the US in the last year for which I could find stats (2002) was 115 "stereotypical kidnappings" (ie, what these parents were protecting against.) Does that mean that parents in general are overreacting by keeping their kids supervised around strangers? No. But it suggests to me that perhaps women, who as a group suffer rapes at a much higher frequency than children suffer stranger-abductions, *also* have a right to be wary without provoking your ire.

680. *Jessikanesis*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:11 PM

I don't feel inclined to sympathy towards people who view me as a potential rapist.

So do you generally not feel sympathy for people who are terrified by the very real possibility of being molested (since they're, you know, taking it "too far"), or are you just mad at anyone who sees you as anything less than a great guy because it hurts *your* feelings?

Your lack of sympathy is pretty clear in your comments. If you just plain don't understand where these women are coming from, there's nothing wrong with saying that, but don't say that a woman's view of men as potential threats makes you less inclined to take their fear seriously.

...is not the best way to incline men to participate in making a healthier society

Does this mean you are now DISINCLINED to participate in making a healthier society? Really?

"Man, I was going to do my part toward equality and safety for women, but then I read this article... now I'm not sure I care."

681. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:13 PM

@ TrackerNeil:

Personally, I don't feel inclined to sympathy towards people who view me as a potential rapist, justas

I don't want your damn sympathy. I want you to not rape me (or "sexually assault" me, or harass me). I could give a shit if you like me or not, okay? I have lots of friends, and I'm not looking for new ones, but if I change my mind, I have confidence I can find them.

You are honest-to-god equating someone *viewing you with suspicion* with someone *raping me*. You are saying that the (high) possibility of the latter does not justify the consequences (? we... don't talk on the subway?) of the former.

Well, buddy, you are using some kind of interesting scales there.

682. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:15 PM

Thanks, Abyss2Hope.

If there is one thing I'd like to do with this post, it is to get a lot of people thinking, "There is no possible way those numbers are right. There is no possible way that there are that many rapists in the population." And then have them go look up the statistics, analyze the quality of the studies, and come to the horrifying, sobering realization that there are a hell of a lot more rapists around than any of us thought, and that we as a society truly suck at dealing with rapists.

683. *Kyle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:17 PM

Response to Anita after my post, although much of it could really be aimed at a lot of people, she just happened to respond directly to me and I saw it:

"Now are the power dynamics different when you threaten to mace me than when I threaten to mace you? Yes. Absolutely. And there's no doubt it would freak me out."

What makes it different? For all I know you could have a knife and will stab me with it. I hate to keep bringing up this fact but women can and do attack people, including men. I would love to not have to mention that but as long as people here continue to act as if men are threats by default and women are never threatening I feel as if somebody needs to bring it up. I can go find stories very, very easily if anyone doubts what I am saying.

"Being vigilant to me means that I have to consider potential threats. You are a potential threat by virtue of presenting as male. Approaching me in a situation where I don't feel safe or when I clearly don't want to be approached is threatening behavior. People who display threatening behaviors are themselves threatening, because these behaviors don't perform themselves. As you continue this behavior, it continues to be threatening – it is, in fact, a cumulative effect. It doesn't matter that you don't mean to threaten me. You are."

If someone doing nothing more than approaching you is threatening to you, you probably shouldn't be in that situation. Which leads me to...

"So it's not up to me to "change my behavior," which I can only assume means "swallow your fear and entertain me" or "swallow your fear and let me pick you up" or "shut up and pay attention to me when I want."

No this wasn't what I meant. I have no desire to force anyone to talk to me. What I mean is if you are so scared of men that you think they are not to ever come anywhere near you in a

If you don't want to talk to someone, that's fine. Lord knows I have ignored people in public in the past and reserve the right to do so and I don't really care if anyone minds or not because it isn't anyone's place to give me permission to do so, so I would be a hypocrite for suggesting anyone cannot do the same. But there are limits to what you can and cannot tell someone what to do. You can tell a person not to talk to you but you can't tell them to leave unless they show themselves as a serious threat, and "he's a man" will not stand up in court as a serious threat. Being physically aggressive, forcing himself into your space, that is something that is really threatening.

To really sum it up though, I do not have to prove that I am not a rapist and/or murderer to go about my daily life. That is what I am getting at. I don't ride public transportation because it doesn't exist around here but if I happen to and I just happen to be close to a woman because it's crowded and she gets uncomfortable simply because I'm breathing near her it's not my problem. Now, if I am truly doing something that makes you scared of me then I would like to know what it is so perhaps I don't do it again (unless it is something bizarre and off the wall, such as simply existing near you, in which case I will conclude you are mentally ill and are probably actually a threat to ME and I am glad to find out about it).

684. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:21 PM

To really sum it up though, I do not have to prove that I am not a rapist and/or murderer to go about my daily life. That is what I am getting at. I don't ride public transportation because it doesn't exist around here but if I happen to and I just happen to be close to a woman because it's crowded and she gets uncomfortable simply because I'm breathing near her it's not my problem.

The way you prove you are not a rapist in your daily life is not to rape people.

And the next time you ride the train and you say, "Hey, what are you reading?" or "Nice shirt" or "Do you have a boyfriend" to a woman and she tells you to piss off, don't ask yourself what's her problem or why she didn't treat you like the nice guy you are or why she was so pissed or think she has PMS or tell her she's a bitch and you wouldn't want to fuck her anyway.

IF YOU DO NONE OF THESE THINGS ALREADY, THIS POST IS NOT ADDRESSED TO YOU.

685. *Kyle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:30 PM

Response to DRST,

"Kyle – I'm very sorry that that happened to you. For the small fraction of rape and assault victims who are men, the experience can end up being incredibly difficult because of the lack of recognition from society that men can even be victims of a sexual assault, especially from women, because men are supposed to celebrate every sexual contact with women as a victory. Which leaves the male victim at a total loss as to how to come to grips with the feelings of violation over something the culture tells him is a "score."

Thanks, and I'm glad this didn't turn into a "no you did not!" kind of thing, which is what I was afraid of.

about being labeled a criminal? If my choices are "let this guy harass me until something really awful happens" or "assault the bastard and knock him unconscious and possibly get arrested" I think I might take the second option."

Well, just keep in mind one thing—this could be used against you one day too by someone who thinks YOU are the "creeper."

"Well thank you for your permission. Of course, nobody needs your permission to make these choices; they are individual and therefore not something you can control any more than you can keep people from wearing pink with purple polka dots on Wednesdays."

I don't know what it is with women thinking a man commenting on something like this must be granting "permission" because I do not care to even try to grant permission to anyone for anything unless I am involved. I ain't your boss and don't care to be.

"OK which is it? Are you giving your blessing for me to make my personal choices that will make me feel safe or not? Because you're whinging a whole hell of a lot here. The entire point of this thread is that women don't know you aren't a rapist until you don't rape them, which is something that can only be determined by time and behavior, and you *say* you're okay with women being vigilant about their safety, so which is it? Can we make decisions about not wanting to interact with you because of concern for our personal safety or not?"

Perhaps I should explain this better. You don't have to talk to anyone (as I said in my last post I sure as hell don't always) and have every right to tell them you don't want to. But you cannot assault someone without there being actual danger or threat of danger involved. Self-defense does not equal preemptive assault. To answer your question, "really threatening" is an action that shows that physical danger is imminent—and it is not simply someone talking. Going back to the last paragraph, this isn't me speaking, ask any judge about this. Now if a man says something along the lines of "don't think you can walk away from me, I'm not done with you" or anything like that you are probably within your legal rights to at least use enough force to stop him.

"To expect men to have to change to suit women if they're not actually DOING anything is sexist in itself." (Note: these are my words from earlier, the next paragraph is DRST's words).

"Passivity in the face of rape culture is doing something. You are choosing to say "Hey since I'm not the one raping women it's not my problem and asking me to consider my privileged position and try to change when I'm just sitting here not doing anything about anything is sexist!" That's making a choice to not be helpful and let the rape culture that you are soaking in continue rather than have to step outside your own experience for a second and think that maybe there's a bigger issue here than your personal feelings."

This is really what I wanted to respond to. I don't see how I'm responsible for rape or sexual assault if I'm not doing it. What am I supposed to do, go out and physically stop every assault that happens? It's impossible. If one happened to occur near me I'd do something to stop it, at the very least calling the police if I couldn't do anything. I do not condone rape. Beyond that, I am not really sure what the hell you people think I'm supposed to do.

686. Lu

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:32 PM

193 of 345 Good god, how many more men are going to post here to say, "your discomfort with man" 11/12/2015 8:40 am

makes me sad and uncomfortable and you're being mean and ruining society for me!"? You know what, dudes? This post is for men who like and respect women and want to know how NOT to make WOMEN uncomfortable. It's truth from the horse's mouth, so to speak, and you've got ample evidence that most women agree with it. If you're not that person, why don't you go away and nurse your wounds somewhere else instead of jumping in to talk about how you're suffering at the hands of the evil feminists?

687. *decco82*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:32 PM

Swetmachine

"But please listen, and please trust me on this one: you have probably, at some point in your life, engaged in that kind of talk with a man who really, truly hates women—to the extent of having beaten and/or raped at least one. And you probably didn't know which one he was.

And that guy? Thought you were on his side."

No joke, I literally flinched when I read to the end of this post. Because it's fucking true, I've been that guy. And I'm still reeling from realizing the consequences of it. Thank you for that moment of clarity.

I also loved the original post, and I'm still reading through the comment threads.

688. *S. Rune Emerson*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:33 PM

smiles This is very well written. It's unfortunate, but this is the world we live in. Rape, and other forms of abuse and violence, are very common and always have been. For years, people just turned a blind eye to it, and committed even worse social crimes by vilifying the victims of such things, saying that they were "loose women" or "asking for it."

I would say this has to stop, but I know it won't until men start listening. There are other crimes as well, of course, and our nature as men won't change just because we and others want it to, but that's not an excuse for this kind of behavior.

So, if we want to fix the problem, we all should get working on it. I am all in favor of this kind of education, because it acknowledges that women have already identified the problem and are taking steps, and men don't get to choose what those steps are until they take responsibility and make these steps unnecessary.

Bravo!

689. *Lu*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:34 PM

kyle, that was not a response to you.

690. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:36 PM

"What makes it different? For all I know you could have a knife and will stab me with it. I hate to keep bringing up this fact but women can and do attack people, including men."

The power dynamics. You've got male privilege. I don't. So a situation that is set in a context of rape culture with a male aggressor is different than one set in the same rape culture with a female aggressor.

"If someone doing nothing more than approaching you is threatening to you, you probably shouldn't be in that situation."

You know what, I'm speechless. I considered making a joke in poor taste about changing my gender presentation, but it's not like being a transman is risk free, and I identify as a woman anyway, and then I was going to snark about getting in a rocket and going to another planet, but I'm really really tired.

This is how most women live. There is no safe space. And you're absolutely right. I should not be in this situation.

Reading your post, I'm not sure if you're talking about the same kind of "approach" I am. It's not that I think you should switch to another subway car when you see me coming. Starling's original post outlined the kind of behavior I'm talking about. Men are not taught to see this behavior the same way women are, and if you're not thinking about it, the line between "sitting in an empty seat next to a woman on the bus" and "demanding her attention" may seem pretty slim.

"Now, if I am truly doing something that makes you scared of me then I would like to know what it is so perhaps I don't do it again (unless it is something bizarre and off the wall, such as simply existing near you, in which case I will conclude you are mentally ill and are probably actually a threat to ME and I am glad to find out about it)."

Excellent! There's this great post on this that I read recently about exactly the sort of thing that makes women anxious.

<http://kateharding.net/2009/10/08/guest-blogger-starling-schrodinger%E2%80%99s-rapist-or-a-guy%E2%80%99s-guide-to-approaching-strange-women-without-being-maced/>

691. *Nia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:38 PM

To anyone who thinks that "women should not be so paranoid". I have had gossip, intimate conversations, about sex, offline, with lots and lots of women. Only one said that she had never, ever been raped.

692. *Lu*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:39 PM

Anita, that was a brilliant conclusion to your comment. There's a virtual Z for Zorro on my computer screen. :)

693. *Nia*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:41 PM

And anyone who compares "being suspect of raping" with "rape" should read this:

<http://shakespearessister.blogspot.com/2008/11/mra-mirror.html>

694. *Kyle*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:44 PM

Male privilege has nothing to do with who can attack who with a knife. If you have arms that work you can stab with a knife.

695. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:48 PM

195 of 345 Kyle: I know it's a popular canard to deny that women have reason to be wary of men 11/12/2015 8:40 am

because after all, women have attacked men too. So I'd like to take you into the wonderful world of *probability*.

I'll start by talking about risks we all face together. It is *possible* that I will die in a terrorist bombing. It is also *possible* that I will die of being hit by a car as I walk across the street. The fact that these are both *possible* outcomes aside, if you look at how often each thing happens in the US and how many people are affected, you come to the conclusion that it's much more *likely* that I will die of being hit by a car.

That being the case, it is reasonable for me to look both ways carefully every single time I cross the street. It is less reasonable to suggest that we should be exactly as vigilant every time we step into a building (because it might be bombed), even if *some* caution is called for. Likewise, it is not reasonable to say that the possibility of being in a bombing means that we *shouldn't* look before crossing the street.

What does all this mean to you, the man with hurt feelings about being treated like a car? It means that when you say "women attack men," it does not change the underlying fact that a man is much, MUCH more statistically likely to attack a woman than the other way around. So we, as women, carry that as part of our awareness. We don't necessarily hold it against you as an individual (as has been pointed out over and over and OVER again, so try going back and reading everything again), but it would be dangerously naive of us not to keep the possibility in mind *every* time we are dealing with men, particularly men whose limits we don't yet know.

And in fact, any casual perusal of rape information will tell you that if anything, the slightest lapse in our attention to this fact gets turned into our implied consent. So all the cries to "lighten up" don't exactly help that, either.

696. *Anita*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:50 PM

I'm going to walk away for a little while, folks. I'm tired and grumpy, and I think I'm actually snarling at the screen. I thought I was smiling, but usually I don't show this many teeth when I smile, so I doubt any response I compose at this point would be helpful, unlike SM's rape culture 101 link, which is hugely awesome, and I think might help Kyle with some of the contexts of gendered violence.

697. *Kristin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:50 PM

Why is it that any blog post I read in any feminist space (here, Shakesville, CiF, etc.) that asks men to question their privilege gets a flood of men who say "Oh but if you expect ME to change, then you're being just as sexist."

That's not the way it works. You are the oppressors!

(Though I am thrilled that there are a lot of men on these threads "getting it" or at least making a very concerted effort to get it and I want to say that before I go on)

I am a white, cisgendered, middle class woman. I grew up incredibly privileged. I get that. I understand that PoC can justifiably see me as a potential threat. And I totally understand that all of this we're talking about here doesn't even begin to address the daily threat of DEATH transpeople have to deal with simply by walking around being themselves. I understand this and I try really hard to continue to educate myself on the issues surrounding racism and transphobia and classicism. I make mistakes. I've made classist remarks before and have been called out and while, sure, my ire goes up when someone

accuses me of something, I have worked really hard to be able to step back from the situation and say to myself "Something I am doing is offensive to this person. Why is that and how can I change that?" Sometimes I succeed and sometimes I fail... I'm not saying I'm perfect, I'm saying I am open to learning.

Kyle et. al., all we are asking is that you be the same! Jeez. This thread argues that women are justifiably wary of strange men. Even if you think that it's not justifiable, the fact that women ARE wary of strange men means that SOME MEN are doing something wrong! So it's your job – if you want to be a good and decent member of society – to learn what you can and question your own behaviors.

And yet any time anyone even DARES to suggest that the menz do something about sexism, there is a flood of men who yell about how it's not THEIR fault and why aren't you ladies nice to me and why can't I get dates because I'm really nice I swear and it's ALL YOUR FAULT you manhaters.

This got slightly off topic.

Sorry, I'm a little angry about that. Need break from internet.

698. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:50 PM

Kyle, you are shit-stirring and you are making me feel the stabby pain. Knock it off or you'll be banned.

I am really, truly, deeply sorry that those girls assaulted you, and I can see why this discussion might be especially painful or conflicting for you. But that situation, as horrific as it was, is not what we are talking about here and not who this post is directed at. No one here is going to deny that women can be abusers as well as abused. This post is addressed to men who do not understand why women are suspicious of them even though they've never assaulted anyone. The answer to this is that women do not know that any given man has never assaulted anyone, and both statistics and culture-wide misogyny tell us that we need to be on our guard.

Of course this doesn't mean that a woman with a knife is somehow not dangerous. You know this already, though, and you're trying to make this thread all about you when it really, really isn't.

699. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:52 PM

Anita, thanks for fighting the good fight with us. Go have a drink of whatever you enjoy most!

700. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:52 PM

Kyle, I think I'm seeing what you're saying. The subtitle is a joke; I have never seen any man maced for approaching a woman in public, nor have I ever done it myself. I'm not advocating or even seriously suggesting that women respond to overtures that make them uncomfortable with physical violence, nor that men have an obligation to not be men—or not be present—in a space with a woman. I am directly addressing those guys who *want* to approach a strange woman, and how they can do so without showing themselves unaware of the vulnerabilities that are a consequence of being female in this society.

in your general interactions. What you can do to help, if you'd like, is to bring the weight of social disapproval down on men who are clearly overstepping women's bounds. You can usually tell: inappropriate intrusion into personal space, a woman who is sending "Leave me alone!" body signals, including the nervous smile and the shrinking back. You can assert your male privilege by looking over and saying, "Dude, not cool. Didn't anyone ever teach you to pick up chicks?" and leaving it at that. We don't expect you to go all Superman on us; in fact, we'd prefer the situation not escalate.

You see, if we say, "Hey, back off," we're saying it to someone who has already made it clear he's willing to ignore the rest of our cues. He's probably not going to respond by clearly letting us alone. But he will often respond to general social disapproval and slink off.

701. *Jane*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:58 PM

I thought I'd respond to our new Whinging Guy (TM), but instead I will contribute to our terrible world view with some new anecdota.

In conversation with some college freshmen (or, really, freshwomen), the subject of harassment in public places came up. One student said that guys she doesn't know sometimes come up to her while she's waiting somewhere (for instance, for a bus) and ask for her cellphone number. Even in the stone age before cell phones, of course, this was not totally unheard of. So I said, Oh yeah, a friend of mine made up and memorized a number to give guys at bars—and three or four people said at once, "No! You can't do that because they totally call it right while you're standing there and wait to hear it ring!"

I said, wow, how awful. One of them said, "Oh, I just say no, fuck off." And another one said, "Dude, no! Because my friend did that and once the guy PULLED OUT HIS GUN and HELD IT TO HER HEAD until she gave him her number and he heard it ringing in her purse!"

We weren't talking about the rapist/not-rapist in the box. We didn't have to. Nor did we have to terribly unfairly and in an unjustified paranoid manner pre-judge all those kind, sweet, totally nice guys complaining about being stereotyped (and promising never to help those mean wimmens again) in the comments here. Because these young women could have played the Nice Girl and responded meekly, or could have really said "no, fuck off," but it didn't matter.

IT DID NOT MATTER. They were harassed and threatened and stalked by phone calls afterward. I kind of think they are not as into the meet-cute adventure as they might once have been.

702. *Henchminion*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:58 PM

Kyle: It's true. I, as a woman, am also Schrodinger's stabber. The crime statistics may make that a less likely scenario, but the potential exists. Thing is, that doesn't cancel out the fact that you're also Schrodinger's rapist. It would be damn rude of me to approach you in a public place and start a conversation that your body language said you clearly didn't want to have. What if my attitude was "I don't see how I'm responsible for [being a stabber] if I'm not actually doing it" and I decided that I had a right to corner you and talk your ear off if I felt like it? Because, you know, why should I have to live with the thought that people might think I could be a criminal?

703. SarahOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 9:59 PM

Well, just keep in mind one thing—this could be used against you one day too by someone who thinks YOU are the “creeper.”

If I violate someone else's boundaries so blatantly and repeatedly, then yes, as someone said upthread, I deserve a swift can of lentils to the head. I'd really hope that it wouldn't come to that even if I was drunk or something, and that a friend would have taken me aside and given me a ride home for the good of society. But if I am being that much of a physically-threatening jerk to you, please respond accordingly.

704. JulieOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:00 PM

Kyle, when did anybody ever say that they were condoning physical attacks on men who came up and said hello?

I am forced by many of the weirder comments to conclude that a lot of people only really read the article up to some trigger word or phrase that is too difficult for them to deal with, and they fall into some rote defensive response to how they *think* the rest is supposed to go without ever absorbing what was actually said.

705. abyss2hopeOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:01 PM

@Starling, you're welcome. We as a society may suck at dealing with rapists, but as a society we've been great at developing them. That's why I'm a big supporter of primary prevention.

706. StarlingOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:02 PM

All us adults are Schrödinger's Child Abductors, and we have managed to live with the fact that we don't approach strange children and offer to give them candy and/or show them a puppy, *even if* all we want to do is give them candy and show them a puppy. Because, dude.

707. Sweet MachineOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:06 PM

and we have managed to live with the fact that we don't approach strange children and offer to give them candy and/or show them a puppy, even if all we want to do is give them candy and show them a puppy.

Right?!

“But I just love kids!”

“Look at me, you can just tell I wouldn't hurt a fly! I just wanted to give this kid a lollipop.”

“Kids love me! They love my candy!”

“It's so unfair that I can't just ask kids to come to my house and play with my puppy without their parents getting all SUSPICIOUS!”

708. StarlingOCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:06 PM

199 of 345 “But how will children ever get candy or become familiar with puppies if I can't come up 5 8:40 am

and give them candy? And show them puppies? I WAS JUST BEING NICE!"

709. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:09 PM

Jane, I have seen that thing with the cell phone happen with my very eyes. A guy *pulled my friend's cell phone out of her hand and called himself with it* so he would have her number. I should mention (or rather, I shouldn't) that she had already told him she was a lesbian.

710. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:14 PM

"Those children will DIE ALONE with nothing but CATS, AND BROCCOLI!" Which, as we know, go together.

711. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:16 PM

decco82:

That was an excerpt from this blog, <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/>, which gives us that exact same blown lobe feeling with startling regularity.

712. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:21 PM

Actually, bellacoker, that was an excerpt from Kate's post, but I agree that Fugitivus is definitely a place to get your mind blown.

713. *Jane*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:22 PM

@Sweet Machine: God. Did she have to get a new phone?

What killed me about this was that my first thought was something like "Oh, I'd have known this if I had a cell" and then "Jesus, have they ALL had that happen?" And yeah, most of them had. Not the gun thing, of course—an exceptionally bald example, that one.

As a couple of other people have mentioned, MOST of the women to whom I'm close enough to have had this conversation say they have been raped. ...I haven't asked the woman who had the made-up phone number, actually, and I think my college roommate wasn't a survivor...and probably not the nuns I work with, but there's no telling. Certainly when the priest-abuse scandal became big-time news, the first reaction of the nuns I spoke to was that there was a long history of rape in convents by the priests who officiated there (ignored by the church hierarchy). I mean, at least FOUR nuns said something like this to me, as their first response.

When I feel surrounded by women who have been raped, attacked or harassed, it's really beyond me to feel all bad for the guys who feel like they're being unjustly suspected. And when Unjustly-Suspected Dude's first response to hearing the rape statistic of the day is ALWAYS some variant of "you must have that wrong," you know, my head explodes a little bit.

714. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:25 PM

My apologies, to Kate as well. I seem to be having some blog-bleed.

:)

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:27 PM

"It's so unfair that I can't just ask kids to come to my house and play with my puppy without their parents getting all SUSPICIOUS!"

Oh, you may laugh, but I have seen statements lolsobbingly close to this made *in dead earnest* in other discussions of child abuse and abduction.

"My husband teaches at a middle school and he is just SO HURT that he can't ever be alone with a female student without being suspected." "Oh yeah, well MY husband is SO OFFENDED that he can't even ask a lost child where their mommy is without somebody calling the cops on him!"

Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

716. *Julie*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:28 PM

Wow, y'all. A lot of good conversation here, and I kind of adore many of the women and *some* of the men who've commented...and on the other hand the whole thing kind of makes me want to go and hit myself in the head with a brick.

717. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:42 PM

HEY DUDES! You know what would be, at the very least, consistent? I mean, since you see it as High Tragedy that anyone assume anything about you that's unflattering or wrong?

1. Next time you see any reported rape on any newspaper's website, go to the comments. See all those people blaming her? "She should have known better than to..." blah blah?

I want you to write the following in the comments. "No, she did exactly the right thing, and she absolutely should NOT have known better. Because the MOST important thing is that the Non-Raping Male Community NEVER be wrongfully mistrusted. Women should ABSOLUTELY go around trusting men entirely, with no data. Sure, the cost of this is that a few of them get raped, but at least nobody gives me the stinkeye and hurts my feeeeeelings whoa-whoa-whoa feeeeeelings!"

2. Next time someone assumes something about you that isn't true, OR THAT THEY HAVE NO REASON TO ASSUME IS TRUE BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE THE DATA, make sure you announce LOUDLY that it's unfounded. LOUDLY AND EMPHATICALLY. The car mechanic assumes that you know more about cars than your female spouse? The realtor or tax preparer assumes you're the main wage-earner? TELL THEM THEY HAVE NO GODDAMN BUSINESS ASSUMING SUCH THINGS UNTIL THEY KNOW FOR FUCKING SURE IT'S THE CASE!

What? Oh, what's that? Men just know more about cars, you say? More men are wage-earners than women? (I don't even know if that's true, but let's say.) WELL FINE. MEN JUST RAPE MORE THAN WOMEN DO. THAT'S THE POINT.

I'm fucking sick of this shit.

718. *Sean*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:47 PM

I know I said I would politely recede into the background, but I want to provide some thoughts to the men who have defensively knee-jerked and said something along the lines of, "But I'm insulted to be viewed as a potential rapist by women I just want to get to

know." (that's my charitable interpretation, anyway)

[What follows is largely conveyed in guy-language and is directed at men. If it seems at points like I'm saying that women should do more to avoid being victimized it's not my intent at all. I'm trying to communicate in language that men will likely understand who haven't yet had the 101 course. This may create a number of new "white knights," but my feeling is that that would be a positive step along the continuum.]

Let's turn the situation around gentlemen. The scenario I propose that you consider is this: we're now talking about your female spouse, children, relatives, or friends. Would you not advise them to be mindful of their surroundings and to take reasonable precautions? To conduct themselves with a certain amount of "zenshin," the awareness of constant potential danger? Wouldn't you want them to take any steps that they could to avoid being a target?

You would? Great, because I certainly want my wife to do everything she can to remain safe. Now, understand that the woman on the subway is only doing the *same thing* when she evaluates you as a potential rapist; it's not personal and she has no doubt had the males in her life impress this message upon her. Moreover, understand that society has placed the onus of avoiding an attack on *her* and not on the aggressor to, well, *not* attack her.

Make sense? Good. Now take it a step further. Why is it that we expect women to protect themselves, but don't expect more from men in terms of not perpetrating violence against women? And yes, I know you're a great dude who would never hit a woman, molest a rodent, etc. The point is this: you complaining about having to accommodate a perfectly rational risk assessment on a woman's part is really whiny, especially when you would demand that the females in your life do exactly that kind of assessment. It's also pretty boy-like, and definitely doesn't make you any more attractive to the opposite sex, for what that's worth.

So, you have multiple reasons to get the fuck over your pride having been insulted. Don't like this status quo? You can step up and do something about it, starting by reading the links that have been posted in this thread and educating yourself. Then, shout down your buds when, after a few drinks, the sexist or outright rape jokes come out. Stand up and assert to other men that what they're doing is wrong when they press themselves on women. Refuse to place the burden on your significant other, relatives, or friends. Shoulder it, and act like a man.

@A Sarah: my wife is AC-certified, which I loudly and happily proclaim when we have car troubles. I'm proud of her accomplishments and want her to get the credit. Besides, I really know jack shit about cars...

719. Trackerneil

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:51 PM

JeffLivesHere said:

"Is it terrible that you may be considered a possible rapist? Sure. But if you have a problem with that, you need to work to end violence against women, not whine that women shouldn't think of you that way. Sheesh."

Sigh. This is why we liberals lose elections.

720. Caitlin

202 of 345

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:53 PM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

Starling, Schrodinger's Child Abductor is exactly it. Excellent.

Ed, it's good that you did what you did. I'm glad if we helped spur you to do it,

721. *Starling*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:55 PM

Trackerneil: Yeah. All that empathy, decency and idealism are ballot-box poison.

722. *jeffliveshere*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:56 PM

At the risk of troll-feeding:

@Trackerneil:

"Sigh. This is why we liberals lose elections."

Wha...? Do liberals lose elections because they try to end violence against women? My mind-reading powers don't seem to be working on you, so maybe you could throw a guy a bone regarding your point.

Also: Just FYI, "we liberals" is a misnomer, in this case, as I don't identify politically as a liberal. I'm a marxist feminist, mostly.

723. *Lu*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 10:58 PM

You know, I said here before or in the thread that started this discussion, that I have "white woman privilege," which means as I am almost universally perceived by the mainstream majority as nonthreatening, and even I have had children shy away from me if I chance to make a comment to them when their mom or dad is not within a close distance to them. (Like looking at ducks in the park or something.) So I'm Schrodinger's Child Abductor. Fine. If children and their parents want to be extra-cautious around all strangers, as a decent human being, I can live with that.

That's what letting other people establish their boundaries—and then respecting them—is all about.

724. *Sean*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:01 PM

@Trackerneil: To add to what jeffliveshere said, I'm an anarcho-taoist. You conflate me with a liberal at your own peril, as I'm not interested in winning elections so much as changing minds. ;-]

725. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:02 PM

Sean – I feel where you are coming from, and if I understand your greater point correctly, I'm with you.

From my (male) point of view, when other men protest their NOT being Schrodinger's Rapist, those are the ones I'd personally keep my eye on. It is my experience that the more someone (seemingly unsolicited) protests what they are not, it's far more likely it's what they are. I guess my point being that I get your POV of potential.

As a side note, after this discussion yesterday, I had a completely different view of the world. It really helped me, and it was just little things. I was the last one in the office last night other than our cleaning lady. She is Latina, and speaks very little English. I know I

learned here in mind, it changed our interaction. It was a little thing, but I felt I got what could be concerning her much, much more than ever before. Same with the young lady collecting shopping carts from the dark parking lot I was walking through. Little things, but I felt I was looking at the world through different eyes.

726. *littlem*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:04 PM

"...the assertions of "but you're saying all men are rapists!" baffle me. No, she's saying *we DON'T KNOW*"

It's really this simple.

727. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:06 PM

@Sean:

I appreciate what you're trying to do, and I genuinely think that your heart is in the right place.

However, I think there's a staggering amount of—let's be charitable and call it naivete—necessary in order to think that the problem with men like TrackerNeil is that they can't understand what we're saying in our lady-language, and need to have it explained to them by a guy.

These men aren't, collectively, any less intelligent than the men who Get It, nor are the bloggers and female commenters here less adept at communicating with men than you are.

The problem is that these men are so deeply invested in their privilege that when someone points out something unpleasant about its existence, they don't *want* to think about it. They *choose* to continue bleating about their poor, poor privilege and how TRAGIC it would be if they had to surrender a teeny, tiny piece of it.

OTOH, they are more likely to listen to a man than, apparently, 600 women. So I don't know, maybe I'm wrong, in which case, knock yourself out, and thanks for trying either way.

728. *littlem*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:08 PM

Actually, there's an addendum:

... and, as a result, AutoTrust is NOT WARRANTED – whether you're a Nice Guy or not.

729. *Sean*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:13 PM

@Liza-the-second: You're totally correct to call me on that, because that's what my words said in many ways. My sincere desire is only to try and bang away from every direction until some light shines through to a perhaps limited number of men. I have no idea if hearing it from their mothers, spouses, or female friends is more effective than hearing it from another man. I'd like to believe that a man would trust his mother or sister instead of some random dude on the interwebs, but...

Man that "but" really depresses me.

730. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:14 PM

Okay, Trackerneil, you're out. Thanks for playing.

731. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:16 PM

Confidential to "Steve": Evo psych isn't "science." If your comments aren't passing muster here, feel free to start your own blog and post them there.

God, it's almost like women don't automatically owe men the time to listen to them spout off whatever they happen to be thinking about. Where have I heard that before?

732. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:19 PM

Man that "but" really depresses me.

You and me both, brother.

733. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:19 PM

@Liza-the-second:

Personally, I think it's more than that. I think strong emotional reactions come from a place of recognition. I'm not saying that anyone protesting "I'm a nice guy" or "I'm not a rapist" is a rapist. But even I as a guy would asses their threat level as higher for visceral protest. I mean, if someone mistook my sexual orientation for x when it's really y (or z for that matter), do I freak out about it? No. Why would I? I don't care who you think I fancy. On the other hand, recent history has shown that certain republican legislators who rail against LGBT, well, we all know what we find out about them.

734. *Demosthenes XXI*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:30 PM

I'm combining all of my responses in one post, simply to save time. Thanks in for replying to me.

[b]Sweetmachine:[/b]

[i]This, however, is just false. Our culture is so saturated with sexism that it is not a stretch for a man to think that women are not "real people" — that is, in fact, what patriarchy is all about. So no, rapists are not sociopaths; they are men who know they can get away with it.[/i]

We are going to have to agree to disagree on that point. Anyone who feels that "rape" is something to be "gotten away with," has a criminal point of view by the virtue of looking at forced sex in that light. Shoplifting is something that a thief feels that "they can get away with." I'm not saying that there are not men with the viewpoint that "women are not real people." What I am saying is that those men who share that viewpoint are not well.

But to continue, if we follow that line of intention of your above statement, then any man can and will rape provided he has access to; a) a victim, b) opportunity, and c) an alibi. I think that we both agree that this is not the case. However, whether you meant it or not, that is what is implied. Thus, the danger in that idea. As it stands, it is just on side of safe thinking, but it can be easily toppled over into dangerous territory and it will not take

Let us acknowledge and agree upon one thing Sweet Machine; there are malicious people out there who will take any opportunity to hurt another person. Furthermore, there are malicious men (a subset of those malicious people) who will take any opportunity available to hurt/rape a woman.

Let us also agree that the right of contact belongs to the solicited. If you don't want to talk to a stranger that approaches you cold, you have the explicit right to not want that contact. In addition we all know that some men and some women have that right. I also acknowledge that women have a harder time with rebuffing unwanted contacts. (Just today, I had to tell some other guy to back off from a girl in the lobby of where I work. The poor girl was being polite and totally flustered that it went further than she wanted and the poor guy didn't have a clue that she wasn't interested. It ended a lot better than it might have.)

Staying within the realm of Starling's initial topic and regarding unsolicited or "cold" contacts with unknown males, there needs to be an established code of conduct that clearly lets a guy know when he's crossing a boundary, when it's time to LHtFA, or when to proceed further, but at the same time, lets a woman know (if she is so interested) that the guy is willing to respect the aforementioned boundaries. Those rules she listed in her post do not do a bad job of doing just that, right.

Perhaps us fellows should adopt some sort of pseudo-Victorian rules for calling upon a lady to whom we have not been yet introduced. If you are walking on the street and you see a woman who "strikes your fancy," you smile politely, and hand her your "calling card." If she gets back to you, then you know to proceed to the next step; otherwise, you trust that she'll discretely dispose of it, and you two will go your separate ways.

To further that idea, how about we just advise women and men to stop any unsolicited cross-gender contact altogether? If somebody doesn't introduce you to him or her, then you just be polite (or at least civil) and mind your own business. That way, neither gender has to worry about unfortunate consequences of contact due to total strangers.

However my overall problem with this general viewpoint is that if any and all male/female contact is based upon a context of caution or fear, then we are laying the foundation for societal disaster.

And it still won't stop the genuine rapists who either will just jump out of the proverbial alley and drag a woman into the dark, or the rapist that "you already know" from "misunderstanding that no means no."

(By the way...a good number of MRAs have a similar viewpoint to Starling. However their fear is not of rape, but of being accused of that crime, but that is a different topic...not one for this discussion.)

[b]BellaCoker:[/b]

Why does using a person's name in a discussion make them creepy? When people talk to people, you often use their name more than once in a given conversation. I was taught to do so by my parents and teachers as this is a polite way to acknowledge the person you are talking to.

What I find a little offensive is that I presented a logical argument to Starling's post (while using her name), and you decided to brand me "a creepy guy," rather than address my viewpoint. That is rather foul of you to do so, I must say.

Well, Ms. Coker I see your attempt to use feigned fear to negate the focus of my argument, and I'm asking you "what do you really fear?" I presented a non-threatening yet logically presented argument and you responded with a veiled accusation of me being a threat.

Why is that?

Throughout my entire post, I clearly stated my desire to see a clear and open dialog between women and men. The only thing that I disagreed with and questioned was the initial "Schrodinger's Rapist" trope. And I wrote my entire post in a very civil and polite manner.

So what are you really afraid of, Ms. BellaCoker?

Responses like yours are the reason that men and women are failing to have a successful dialog about mending gender differences, and gender relations would do a lot better without having to cater to your divisive kind of manipulation.

[b]Havoc:[/b]

You are not a "lying bitch" for doing what you do. You are responding to your environment in a manner that you feel affords you comfort and safety; nothing in the world is wrong with that. Respect is based upon a quid pro quo foundation and trust is earned.

Again, you do what you have to so you can make it where you live. But my question to you is how effective do you think that a simple declaration of non-interest would be instead?

"(Excuse/Forgive) me, but I'm not (in the mood/of the mind) to hold a conversation. I would like to be left alone to (fill in activity). Thank you and you have a (good day/evening,) okay?"

If a guy persists (says anything other than words to the effect of "Well, you have a nice day too and goodbye"), then he has clearly identified himself as a problem, and you are free to act accordingly. (i.e. repeat your request, move away from him, find authorities, etc...).

I'm not asking you to change what you do. I'm just asking what do you think would happen if you followed that angle.

[b]DRST:[/b]

Did you look up Bundy's record or read anything on him? I did and according to info recorded by profilers and FBI psychiatric personnel, he had several approaches he used to get inside of his victim's trust zone, including feigned automotive damage and just civil conversations. Bundy was no Albert DeSalvo (The Boston Strangler) just ringing doorbells and forcing his way into apartments; he knew how to manipulate his victims in order to get close to them.

By the way, I never said that rapists were obvious. In fact, I clearly wrote that it is better that a woman err on the side of caution in regards to communication from a unknown guy.

However, for the context of this discussion (unsolicited male initiated contact with a female recipient) I did say that rape is black and white. There are two types of men to be considered by a woman in an unsolicited contact:

- 1) Men who have benevolent motives.
- 2) Men who have malicious motives.

The men in the first group who can't get the fact that a woman is not interested in contact with them are not malicious but they are most likely socially inept. However, I acknowledge that a woman out alone is probably too frightened to even bother considering the difference between the two. Thus, expediency over safety concerns forces her to place this guy in the second category.

As for the men in the second group; they are going to do whatever is prudent (to them) to achieve their goal. Either he's going to get you or he's going to decide that you are not worth the effort and find another victim (unless he's an obsessive). Just for the record and the context of this discussion, this group is limited to opportunistic and serial rapists.

My argument again is in the potential harm that this kind of thinking can cause. There is nothing wrong with being cautious. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be left alone by total strangers. But there is a very thin line between this brand of caution and what it may lead to. I am only warning against what might go wrong with this kind of thinking.

[b]ElizaB:[/b]

Just because the guys you mentioned seemed "normal" does not mean that those guys are normal. Guys don't sit around talking and saying stuff to each other like: "Yeah, she said 'no,' but she wanted it...I knew she did."

Do you know what guys call other guys who make remarks like that?

Rapists.

I do acknowledge that there is an issue in insensitivity in regards to handling victims.

On a side note, my initial post does not take into consideration "date rape" because its nature does not apply in the context of the original article.

Eliza, regarding your unfortunate experiences and rape culture, I have a question for you. Regarding your three assault cases, did you allow yourself to be "convinced" that you were wrong about your reaction to what was done to you, or did you stand by the fact that you were victimized and sought justice/redress for the harm done you?

As for the guy who didn't quit, he was a genuine problem, and I'm sorry that you had to go through that. You said that you were afraid of "being rude" or "making a scene." Where did you get the idea that you should not have done that? Who taught you that you should remain quiet when somebody is obviously bothering you? I'm genuinely curious to find out where you got that from.

[b]Shiyiya:[/b]

We too are going to have to agree to disagree on that point. Racism and Feminism do have significant points of commonality, especially in regards to the concept of "rape culture." Because of racism, African American men have been in the category of "Schrödinger's Rapist" with White American women (due to White American men), for far longer than American men in general have been. Especially since the historical reality was that White men were regularly raping female African-descended slaves during the run of the Slavery period.

[b]Kristin:[/b]

(avoiding LOL-speak). It is about us becoming aware of what is going on in the minds of women under the conditions Starling listed in the article. By reading the comments, you discovered that quite a few men agree with the focus of the article, some totally disagree with it, and others (myself included) agree with the spirit of the article, but had some reservations about the "letter" of it.

It's fine to write things like that for yourself or your given group, but if you expect these things to be understood, you have to let the target group know what's going on. I felt that the blog mods were very fair about their moderation and allowing for intelligent dissent on this subject.

[b]Older Than Dirt:[/b]

Yay for you! Thank you for posting what you wrote! And on a similar note, African slave men were raped as well during that period of time, both by the male and female owners/overseers. And it was rape as they had no choice in the matter. If the men said 'no' to the White women owners, then they would just claim that the male slave tried it anyway and he would suffer the consequences as if he were caught doing it anyway.

[b]Starling:[/b]

Thanks for responding and I see your viewpoint. But living in that world you described, I have to force myself to deal with people as I would want to be dealt with. I've been a victim of racial profiling twice in my life and both times, I escaped by the grace of deity. I can't convey in words the sense of dread I feel every time I see a cop. But I might imagine that a rape victim (or near victim) feels that times ten when she (or he) is by a man, and men are far harder to avoid than cops.

With that being said, again I force myself not to paint all policemen with that brush of fear and hate. And let me tell you that this is not an easy thing to do. Every time I see a police car pull behind me when I drive is a descent into frustration and terror. After the second time I was arrested, I was house-bound for nearly six months. And nobody understood what I was feeling; everyone kept claiming that I was overreacting.

For the record, besides the fear of incarceration, it was also frustration because of the fact that all of my personal strength and ability meant nothing; if I employed it in my defense, it would only result in my likely death. Five years on battlefields across the world and another 12 in martial arts and it counted for nothing in that circumstance. I couldn't even employ my knowledge of the law because no matter what knowledge I had to protect me, the dirty cop who tried to get me thrown in jail had his position to negate it.

Starling, my fear is simply that the kind of consideration you are discussing in your post can easily lead into prejudicial thinking if not tempered properly with common sense and logical thought. And to reiterate, my wife and I met over a "cold contact." But she wanted to talk to me and I respected her space, so it was all good.

I'll ask you too; what do you think about my above mentioned idea about reestablishing the social practice of men (and women) using "calling cards?"

Again...you wrote one hell of an article and I applaud you. This is opening up a lot of dialog and while there are some "bad apples," most of the discussion is awesome. I am getting to see a lot of feminine viewpoints and they make some clarity about what goes on in a woman's head.

[b]In Closing:[/b]

There are reams and reams of paper that can be used up on the discussion of "Violator by way of Intention" and "Violator by way of Ignorance." What I am seeing here in this discussion is that a lot of folks are blurring the lines in regards to the context of this discussion.

Also, what I am seeing is a lot of "language getting in the way of the concept." Starling, thanks again for clearing up your viewpoint in replying to me. It made a whole lot more sense. Hopefully, you'll see what I wrote as the warning it was meant to be.

I personally enjoyed reading this post as it clued me in to a few things that I did not know and confirmed a lot that I did know.

Our feelings belong to us. If you as a woman are afraid for your personal safety, then there is little I can do about it as a man, other than help you maintain your personal space, and be ready at any given time to employ the LHtFA doctrine.

At the same time, what women can do is to not be afraid to clearly state your position, and make sure that you are clear about it. Most reasonable men will get the hint and leave you alone. Also, please do not be afraid of "making a scene." That's how people know that something is going wrong and that you may need help. Furthermore, if the guy is just "socially inept," he'll learn the lesson. It may be the hard way, but he'll be more circumspect in his dealings with women after that.

All that I ask is that despite whatever else you may believe or know about "male privilege," just please do not ignore what some men are saying. Listen to us the way you want us to listen to you.

735. *Tarquin*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:43 PM

Interesting and illuminating article. I am a man. I am not a rapist. I have never thought that a woman would automatically assume that I am a rapist. Never crossed my mind. I guess it should have, and now it will.

This post isn't saying that all men are rapists, or that all women get raped. This post is a discussion of the mindset of a woman in a new interaction. Stats and anecdotes don't mean squat to a mindset. Sadly, the commentators have deviated from the theme of this post. I was reading the posts hoping to see more "I feel the same way too" or "You're off your rocker" type comments, but alas, all I see is a long list of "Every man is a potential rapist" debate.

I, for one, appreciate this glimpse into a woman's view. Now I know that the next woman I talk to will be evaluating me not as a potential friend/lover, but as a potential rapist. Not right, not fair, but real. Is. All the logic in the world can't change it.

736. *dreamingcrow*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:45 PM

Holy hell. This thread has both re-affirmed my faith in humanity AND made me want to crawl into a corner, lock myself in the room, and NEVER COME OUT AGAIN.

I've been reading this thread since it was posted and I want to thank all of you who keep coming back here to talk about it and explain without losing your minds. I had enough trouble with the one response from someone I thought was a friend on Facebook.

737. *kristinc*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:49 PM

My god. Talk about taking over a thread! On my page, Demosthenes' comment is more than TWELVE PAGES.

He is the literary equivalent of Giant Phantom Schlöng Guy on the plane. Let's all us ladies get out of his way so he can stretch out and make himself comfy, ok?

738. *Eve*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:49 PM

Demosthenes XXI:

my overall problem with this general viewpoint is that if any and all male/female contact is based upon a context of caution or fear, then we are laying the foundation for societal disaster

You seem to be assuming that this context does not already exist. For women, it does. To wit: Rape Culture 101.

Rape culture is not something that exists solely in the minds of frightened women. It is a real world phenomenon, and one which makes even a "benevolent" or "socially inept" man capable of rape, because everything around them is telling them that their actions are okay.

Intentions don't always matter in rape culture. There are men out there who have committed rape who thought that they were simply having sex.

739. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:55 PM

Demosthenes XXI, I appreciate your response, and I'd like to point you to the link I dropped earlier about rape culture on Shakesville to expand what I mean by men "knowing they can get away with it." I don't see there being two types of men: the benevolent and the malicious. I see a continuum (not just for men, but for all people), and I think that cultural context has a lot to do with where any individual man is going to let himself be on that continuum.

740. *Anita*OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:57 PM

Demosthenes, the card thing seems to be a good faith suggestion. I think for a few very specific circumstances it might be helpful. If I was handed a card that introduced the holder as someone who was aneurotypical (or neuro atypical?), stated that he had a very hard time reading body language, but would like to talk, and if I was interested, I could approach him . . . I think I could be okay with that. Not 100%, but with the proper body language?

But for the rest of the population, what's the advantage? If I am wearing my earphones and reading a book, what's the difference between interrupting me to give me a card that says "HI! I can see you're busy, but I want to talk to you now!" and actually saying "HI! I can see [etc]!"?

It might take a little of the immediate pressure off, but that's not the point. I don't really remember any women upthread saying "Often I really want to talk when I'm interrupted, but I'm nervous and need a moment to gather myself together." That's not the crux of the problem. I mean, it's like suggesting that men just ask for a woman's number, and if she doesn't give it to them, to let it go. (I bet you can guess how that goes.) What's the

improvement in your suggestion from just leaving women alone who don't seem to want contact?

741. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:58 PM

kristinc, I deleted a comment from a dude that was over 4500 words long, which as FJ pointed out to me in email, is nearly the length of a NYT Magazine cover story.

Also, it started with the following paragraph: *And now it is I who find myself as a sheep amidst the wolves. I'm sorry, but as an intelligent, informed, grown man living in this country I find this entire blog entry to be disappointing, backward thinking, and quite frankly...absurd. While it is not my intention to insult, I can find little other way to accurately express my feelings about such ideas.*

You tell us you're going to insult us... and then you expect us to read a feature-length comment about it? No thanks.

742. *dreamingcrow*

OCTOBER 9, 2009 AT 11:59 PM

Shorter Demosthenes XXI: Never mind you ladies' real life experience and day in, day out fears, I know better than you, so sit down and listen.

I mean, really? REALLY?!?

743. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:00 AM

Tarquin—actually, we're evaluating you on all those levels. Good and bad. You are never "just a potential rapist." It's just that the possibility has to be considered in light of an approach. Do we give you our phone numbers, or do we get off the bus four stops early to make SURE you have no idea where we live? Both are possible reactions, and so is the gamut in between. Usually guys' reactions in a similar situation stop at the "Do I give out a number?" and skip the "Do I have to flee and fear stalking?"

744. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:02 AM

actually, we're evaluating you on all those levels. Good and bad.

I'm really surprised at the number of people who are missing that crucial aspect of the Schrodinger metaphor: the cat is alive OR dead (or technically, I supposed, alive AND dead).

745. *dreamingcrow*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:02 AM

Sorry, I shouldn't have grumped there, more eloquent people have it well in hand. I'm just so heartsick at all these people coming in here and telling us that we don't know how we feel and that we're just plain wrong.

746. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:04 AM

Oh, dreamingcrow, we are waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay past grumpy here. Please don't apologize. Some of us have been in jellied eels territory for days now.

747. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:05 AM

civilization realize that many of the women who smile at them, respond to their questions, and defer to their choices are doing so out of fear. The waitress who smiles at your comment about her clothes may be genuinely pleased, or she may fear that trying to assert her boundaries will result in you flipping out to her boss. The woman on the bus who answered your question may have left two stops early because of you. You'll never know.

Maybe this makes you feel bad. Good. It's nothing compared to daily calculus of fear most women carry out automatically, but since it's about you, maybe you'll actually think about it.

748. *Nathan*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:05 AM

@ Sweet Machine

This seems timely: http://warehousecomic.com/comic_460.php

749. *genderbitch*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:10 AM

@abyss2hope

It's actually far worse than you think.

You see, I (and many others) were exposed to an analysis of the toxicity of these beliefs and environment through honest and hardworking efforts by feminists and pro feminists. And the impact of that toxicity was still not apparent to me until I actually experienced it on the other side as a woman.

It just didn't strike me as that pressing of a concern. I didn't personally rape people so I was largely apathetic to the culture surrounding me. Other guys did what a lot of the guys here did and argued against it or rejected it.

Even for someone as intelligent as myself when it comes to abstract concepts, I only grasped it fully when I experienced it on the worse side.

So these guys who are resisting and attacking? Just a tiny percentage of the guys untouched by this message, because a far larger component will just shrug, go "wow that sucks but whatever" and go about their daily lives in the toxic stew of the rape culture.

It's dismaying.

750. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:10 AM

Perfect!

751. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:12 AM

I think Demosthenes XXI is trying to have a legitimate dialogue about discrimination, intersecting privilege, and trade-offs. Which is an important topic and a big question, and any reply is going to take a while to formulate. (Yeah, watch this space.)

RE the cards: In some cases, society has determined that the possibility of harm is so serious that all communication follows really strict rules (see Schrödinger's Child Abductor), which I don't think is where we want to be. After all, that's how we did things two hundred years ago in certain social strata. You just did not speak to a woman to whom

you had not been properly introduced. You just didn't. It was Not Done. And if you did it, you were going to get the cut direct, which was the gentlewoman's version of Leave Me The Fuck Alone. We're in a much less formal society, mostly a win but one with disadvantages as a result of the ambiguity of social cues.

I have to say that I wouldn't be offended or alarmed if a guy getting off the subway handed me his business card with the note, "I didn't want to break into your reading, but maybe we could do coffee sometime?" and a cell number. I don't know that it would necessarily work—depends on current boyfriend status, level of attraction, etc—but it wouldn't hit any of my "Yikes you are crowding me" buttons.

752. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:15 AM

"and we have managed to live with the fact that we don't approach strange children and offer to give them candy and/or show them a puppy, even if all we want to do is give them candy and show them a puppy.

Right?!

"But I just love kids!"

"Look at me, you can just tell I wouldn't hurt a fly! I just wanted to give this kid a lollipop."

"Kids love me! They love my candy!"

"It's so unfair that I can't just ask kids to come to my house and play with my puppy without their parents getting all SUSPICIOUS!"?

I am terribly offended by this analogy because it compares women to children.

Infantilization of women is one of many evils of the patriarchy. It assumes weakness and lack of mature agency.

Women are strong, intelligent, and independent... please don't forget that in this very intense discussion.

753. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:17 AM

Ah, the 4500-word guy has a problem with words meaning things, you guys. He just left another comment saying that he told us he wasn't going to insult us in his epic comment — when, of course, he implied the exact opposite. This is perhaps part of this whole "no means yes" problem.

754. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:19 AM

AuntiMay:

In the child molester analogy women are the children (the prize) and the gatekeeper (the parents). Hope that helps.

755. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:23 AM

It isn't comparing women to children, it's comparing behaviors, modifications of those behaviors, and the acceptance of the response to same.

756. *Anita*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:23 AM

I wonder if Schrodinger considered the zombie cat option? It is simultaneously alive, dead, and undead? If not: Nobel Prize, please.

757. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:23 AM

AuntiMay: . . . and guarding children from harm is actually assumed to be the responsibility of society, not simply the children themselves. Or even the children's parents.

While we're strong, intelligent, and independent, we also should all be considered under the protection of the social order in which we live.

758. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:25 AM

Holy shit! Zombie Cat! SCORE! I love it!

759. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:28 AM

Nathan, d'you suppose that if I asked nice, I could get that on a tee-shirt? Because that cartoon MADE MY DAY.

760. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:35 AM

"While we're strong, intelligent, and independent, we also should all be considered under the protection of the social order in which we live."

Why would we need protection if we are strong, intelligent, and independent? If the social order is supposed to provide that protection, should it not also provide protection for men, the very people whom we consider to be potential rapists?

Why do I need protection from harm? Who is supposed to protect me from harm if not me, a strong and intelligent and independent woman?

This seriously confuses me.

761. *bellacoker*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:40 AM

Demosthenes XXI:

Repeatedly using a person's name is a tactic used by salespeople, predators, and other people who want you to do what they want. It's called "forced teaming," and is used by people who seek to establish a feeling of connection beyond what actually exists.

I understand that you wanted to connect with Starling and affect her opinion, I also understand that you likely didn't adopt this tactic consciously. I was just offering my opinion on your initial post.

That being said, in your response about why I found it creepy you did it again. This time I imagine you did it in order to make me uncomfortable, who can say? But to answer your other question, if men on the internet, with no dog in this fight, who I will probably never interact with again cannot be troubled to respect my opinion on something this trivial, what could I possibly be scared of in my interactions with real men in real life which have

762. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:42 AM

Why would we need protection if we are strong, intelligent, and independent?

Because *strong, intelligent, independent women get raped anyway*. And we could use a little help in making that happen less frequently.

Seriously, that confuses you?

763. Eucritta

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:45 AM

@AuntiMay, while you don't need any protection save your own, I do – I have significant physical impairments, and am no longer able to defend myself. Ergo, it's in my best interest – and that of everyone who is not able to defend themselves – to have a functional social contract.

Then, too, what Kate said.

764. Sniper

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:48 AM

If the social order is supposed to provide that protection, should it not also provide protection for men, the very people whom we consider to be potential rapists

Society does provide protection. That's what it's for. It's not like men are arming themselves to the teeth for a hard day slogging in the data mines. Most of us drive cars with the reasonable assumption that it's not going to be a free-for-all. People send their children to schools in the belief that teachers will look after their kids rather than selling them to roaming bands of slavers.

765. Catatonic Kid

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:48 AM

it isn't about likelihood. it isn't about probability. it's about indeterminacy.

it isn't necessarily about approaching things from a perspective of fear, or lack of safety weighed up against the logic of it all or any number of other objections raised in this thread

despite the fact that they may well be valuable points, on the whole, we still can't know. we just can't therefore we approach Schrodinger's Box neither overly cautiously nor wantonly.

i mean, did you get that we don't want to destroy the illusion, either? did you get that we don't like feeling the fear and doing it anyway? but we do. every day. because we choose to live. of course we do. that isn't what this post is about.

it's about pointing out the fact (and yes it is genuinely one of those immovable points of the conditions of the present universe) that we don't know you from a bar of soap when you approach us therefore the logical thing for everyone to do is in fact to establish these strange and wondrous things called boundaries, which respect personal space etc. they may alter with interaction. they may not. that's our choice to make.

the more pressure that society applies to women to ensure that their boundaries are simultaneously rigid and fluid, just like the Schrodinger's Rapist is both alive and dead until you engage sufficiently, the more crazy-making it is for every single one of us. men

at some point we all make a decision to engage or not, and that choice can mean life or death. are you seriously telling me that you don't see how that might, just might alter the way we all approach the problem in the first place?

the problem generally isn't the man standing right in front of us, it's true. it's the fact even without his presence we wonder, truly wonder if today might be the day that we open the box and kill the cat.

we can't know. yes, some women choose to assume the cat's alive, and some women don't.

but do you see how your power of choice is different to ours in this scenario? if you begin the interaction, however innocently, you create the box. that's the thing, though. it's still your box, and we're still outside it and we just can't know.

how many times have you been afraid to even think something new or different just because it wasn't familiar? i'd be willing to bet, more than a few.

it's human nature. and sorry, asking me to help that because you're really such a darn good guy, still doesn't change that.

766. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:48 AM

AuntiMay–

The social order protects all of us. That's the bargain we make when we have a civilization. This social contract provides us with laws, national defense, social mores and all the rest. All of us should be equally protected under the law, and the US continues to move in that direction. We should also be equally protected by the social conventions under which we operate—regardless of gender, race, class or other dividing lines.

For example, if a burglar steals your television, he committed a crime. Even if your door was left unlocked, no one is going to say, "You were giving that TV away! Of course that nice person took it! No one could expect that nice person to resist taking the TV that was sitting right there in your unprotected living room! Are you going to ruin some nice person's LIFE by making a big deal over a stupid TV?"

On the other hand, if a woman is raped, you hear all these things. So what I'm talking about is a society that acknowledges that a woman's bodily autonomy is something that society values and defends, rather than something that is the woman's sole responsibility.

767. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:50 AM

And, you know, something that society values and defends more than a television set.

768. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:55 AM

AuntiMay — What you're saying sounds a lot like, "I got mine, so screw the common good." Or perhaps "I feel safe, so I guess the rest of you who were assaulted weren't protecting yourselves well enough like I was."

Please clarify.

769. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:58 AM

unsolicited or "cold" contacts with unknown males, there needs to be an established code of conduct that clearly lets a guy know when he's crossing a boundary, when it's time to LHeFA ..."

The problem I have with this is that it allows a multitude of boundary violations where the man can plead ignorance. A guy doesn't need clear negative indicators that he's crossing a boundary. What he needs are clear positive indicators from that specific woman that he is not crossing any of her boundaries. This difference is much more than semantics.

If negative indicators are required then a woman's attempt at politeness in response to an unwanted contact can easily be ignored and she can be improperly blamed for not clearly setting or enforcing her boundaries when that is not her responsibility.

If someone wants to initiate contact with another person the burden must be on that person to ensure that they are not crossing any of that other person's boundaries.

770. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:59 AM

Abyss2Hope: *big smacky kisses*

771. *genderbitch*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:16 AM

You know what sucks? My signs of nervousness and discomfort are signs guys commonly think mean interest.

Looking away, not making eye contact, biting my lip, playing with my hair are all things I do when I'm worried, nervous, scared or uncomfortable. x_x

772. *Another Matt*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:20 AM

Ah fuck, I just realised I'm still stuck in white knight mindset. And Max's comment made me realise that, yeah, in the right (wrong) circumstances I'm probably a rapist too. Fuck. And shit, they both come from exactly the same starting premise: women are things for men. Fuckfuckfuck.

Rape culture is evil, and I say that knowing that I'm feeling only the tiniest fraction of what most women experience every single fucking day, and knowing that *I* can just choose to stop thinking about it anytime I want. Gah!

Gotta think about this some more. And stop accepting all the rape-culture bullshit. Any more advice for me, while my mind is still exploding?

773. *Matt*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:24 AM

I know I ask too many questions, but....

Im at a loss to why some of the guys (and Im sure more that the mods havent let through) keep thinking women need to "be more polite"; ok, I try to be a polite guy overall, but if I lash out at someone verbally or tell someone to fuck off, Im "just having a bad day"; if a woman tells someone to fuck off, it seems she's automatically "a bitch" or a crotch level insult.

For one I wish more women wouldnt worry about politeness and would just be more direct without fear of retaliation; I see nothing wrong with a "fuck off" or a "get the fuck out of

Today on the train I did everything possible to just people watch (without staring at people, trying ont to be creepy) but just watching who had their armor up and who didnt; just watching the silent interactions between even who sat where / stood where / how positions changed for the people who were already where the new people wandered over to (the women especially, and the women with their books / ipods even more so... the way it was visibly armor was pretty stunning.)

774. Julie

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:24 AM

Another Matt:

1. Give yourself a gold star for having the realization in the first place.
2. Understand that having a gold star is not a free ticket to get laid.
3. Understand that there is NO free ticket to get laid, because
4. Women do not owe men sex, because
5. Women are, in fact, people.

That should get you well on your way. :D

775. Rana

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:31 AM

After reading this wonderful post – and long thread – I am boggled by the number of people who seem unable to grasp this one very basic concept:

Don't force people to do things they don't want to do.

I mean, really. It boils down to that: people (in this case, women) don't want to talk with you. So *leave them alone*.

(I do understand that a large point of the post is to explain why many women would not want to talk with a man they don't know – but it disturbs me that so many people seem to need a reason beyond "She doesn't want to.")

Decent people don't insist that other people do things they don't want to do – why do some people find this so hard to understand?

776. Another Matt

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:32 AM

"2. Understand that having a gold star is not a free ticket to get laid."

Yeah, that's what makes a white knight just another predator. Gratitude is not something that should be owed or demanded, and expecting booty for doing the right thing kind takes the altruism right out of it. I'm beginning to get that.

777. Kyle

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:35 AM

Julie said,

"Why is it that any blog post I read in any feminist space (here, Shakesville, CiF, etc.) that asks men to question their privilege gets a flood of men who say "Oh but if you expect ME to change, then you're being just as sexist."

If it makes you sleep better at night to tell someone you have never met that they are oppressing you simply because of their gender (hey, isn't judging solely on the basis of gender what sexism is?), go ahead, but you do NOT have the right to tell me what to do and how to act.

778. *Kyle*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:35 AM

Starling,

Thanks for your response to me. I can appreciate that better than someone accusing me of shit-stirring because I responded to someone's posts aimed at me. The subtitle is a joke and I never really thought that the author was advocating macing a guy just because he approached, but some of the comments here have indicated that could be a possibility, and my comment there was in response to that. I don't really think it's something that should be joked about in any case as it is violence, but I suppose that's the double standard of joking about violence. That's a whole 'nother topic though.

"If you're not a guy who wants to approach a strange woman in public, you're probably fine in your general interactions. What you can do to help, if you'd like, is to bring the weight of social disapproval down on men who are clearly overstepping women's bounds. You can usually tell: inappropriate intrusion into personal space, a woman who is sending "Leave me alone!" body signals, including the nervous smile and the shrinking back. You can assert your male privilege by looking over and saying, "Dude, not cool. Didn't anyone ever teach you to pick up chicks?" and leaving it at that. We don't expect you to go all Superman on us; in fact, we'd prefer the situation not escalate."

That's a good way to look at it, and I'll take that into consideration. Those are pretty good ideas.

779. *Julie*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:37 AM

Kyle:

Good thing I DIDN'T, then. Since I'm not the one who said the thing you quoted.

But hey, why bother to remember which bitch was yammering, amirite?

780. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:40 AM

Another Matt—

Most of the evil any of us do as people does come from an unconscious mindset that other people are things, that they aren't as *real* as we are. We start our lives as the center of our own little world, and some people secretly continue to believe themselves the center of the universe for their entire lives. All I can offer is the thing I do myself: when my temper starts to rise or self-justification starts to kick in, I try to immerse myself in the world of the Enemy or the Other, as if I were writing a book from his or her point of view. It is amazing what this little exercise has done for my understanding and my maturity.

So, in women's issues, think of yourself as the woman on the train with the headphones and imagine what she feels and needs and fears. You're not going to hit all the right answers, naturally, which is why this blog and other reading about feminism will help dispel blind spots, just as some study of racism will help dispel blind spots in racial matters. But being willing to understand is key. It's not simply do unto others as you would have them do unto you, not in this format. It's more analogous to getting a birthday present

for someone. Even if canned salmon is your favorite thing in the world, maybe your best friend would prefer something else on Christmas morning, you know? Trying to see from that other perspective is huge, and the more you do it, the better you'll get at it.

(Also, it will make you extremely attractive and utterly irresistible to the gender you prefer, because there is nothing more desirable than a partner with that kind of advanced human wisdom. But that's a side benefit.)

781. Thorn

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:46 AM

Kyle:

This is really what I wanted to respond to. I don't see how I'm responsible for rape or sexual assault if I'm not doing it.

Ever heard of enabling?

Like, if you shared a couple pitchers of beer with a friend, who afterward got into a car and hurt someone because he was driving drunk. No, you're not directly responsible – you're not the person who was at the wheel, you're didn't MAKE him drink so much, etc. But by knowing that your friend was planning to drive home and helping him get drunk anyway, by not doing anything to prevent him from driving home, you helped create a dangerous situation, which resulted in someone getting hurt.

What am I supposed to do, go out and physically stop every assault that happens? It's impossible. If one happened to occur near me I'd do something to stop it, at the very least calling the police if I couldn't do anything. I do not condone rape. Beyond that, I am not really sure what the hell you people think I'm supposed to do.

We ALL share a responsibility for shaping our culture. By writing this post, Starling is trying to help change the shape of our culture. By participating in this discussion, every single one of us is either trying to help nudge it into a new, better shape, or trying to keep it in the shape it's currently in.

Sure, you aren't raping anyone, and you don't actively condone rape, and if you were aware of a rape happening you would try to stop it. These are all good things. But that's not doing anything to change the culture at large. That is, honestly, pretty much a bare minimum of Decent Human Behavior.

What are you supposed to do? Well gosh, when a buddy talks about being shot down by a woman and declares he's going to just keep asking, that eventually he'll "wear her down"? Don't just sit there. Disapprove. I don't care how you do it, really, but don't leave him with the impression that you think such behavior is all right.

Really, go read Melissa from Shakesville's post about rape culture, and start paying attention. When you see these things, you have an opportunity: you can enable rape culture, or you can stand against it.

But make no mistake: by doing "nothing"? You're enabling rape culture. You don't have to actually rape someone to be a part of the problem. And as a (potential) male feminist ally? You have a unique opportunity to make a difference, because you can confront rape culture in those all-male spaces where rape culture likes to hide.

So what are you supposed to do? That's up to you. But don't think that simply "not raping" counts as "fighting rape." It doesn't.

782. Caitlin

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:47 AM

Gotta think about this some more. And stop accepting all the rape-culture bullshit. Any more advice for me, while my mind is still exploding?

KEEP. READING. Search the archives here for more posts like this ([She Didn't Fight Back Because You Told Her Not To](#) and the Fugitivus post it talks about blew *my* mind on this issue and I'm not exactly new off the turnip truck). Read the Rape Culture 101 post linked in comments here (Ctrl+F for that title). Read on from there.

What you're feeling is what happens when your ideas about the world get exploded by new information, and it is a great thing, and the best thing you can do is keep reading so you can try to make some sense of this.

For one I wish more women wouldnt worry about politeness and would just be more direct without fear of retaliation; I see nothing wrong with a "fuck off" or a "get the fuck out of my face, I -dont-want to talk to you".

Matt, you were doing so well, don't fall down now. The problem with either of those things is: with some men they may work to end the harrassment, but with some men they may DIRECTLY LEAD to the man escalating to violence, and there is never ever ever any way of telling for sure. You can make a judgement call based on where you are, how many people around and if they seem to be watching/ignoring you, what you can tell about the man based on your interaction, your own past experiences — which is where the continual risk-assessing/Schrodinger's rapist attitude discussed here comes into play — but you really can't ever know how it's going to go.

So each woman makes the best decision she can in the circumstances, whether to play along as she's been socialised to, or to be monosyllabic and hope he takes a hint, or get short with him, or just tell him to fuck off and hope that he does (instead of e.g. beating and raping her), but it IS NOT your place to say "I wish more women would [x]" or "more women would [y]" because there is no "should" for women in this situation, there is only a neverending set of circumstances we should never have to deal with at all.

783. Starling

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:50 AM

Kyle—I'm pretty sure that the terms 'oppressor' and 'rape culture' seem judgmental. But we're using them in a specific way that's common in the academic discussion of social power imbalances, not in a way that is intended to imply you are a bad person. There's a basic overview of this stuff, and the vocabulary we're using, at this link.

<http://finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com/>

The page about 'male privilege' may illuminate what we're talking about here. And looking at 'oppression' as an academic term rather than what you have in mind may also help.

I hope this will clarify what's going on without making you feel like you're being adjudged a dirtbag because you've got an XY chromosome pair. For a slightly easier-to-handle analogy than Schrödinger's Rapist, scroll up the thread a little, looking for Schrödinger's Child Abductor and see if that makes more gut-level sense to you.

784. Caitlin

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OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:53 AM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

Also,

If it makes you sleep better at night to tell someone you have never met that they are oppressing you simply because of their gender (hey, isn't judging solely on the basis of gender what sexism is?), go ahead, but you do NOT have the right to tell me what to do and how to act.

Kyle, if you're so new to this whole "women are people" thing that you don't know, understand or care about male privilege and how it works for you and against us — yes, *simply because of your gender*, because that IS how our society works — then you just don't know enough to comment here and expect us to take you seriously. It's not up to us to educate you, or to engage with comments that come from wilful ignorance (because there are more than enough links in this post to educate yourself on the matter).

Why don't you show some good faith by doing the basic research on the matter, and contribute when you're ready to offer something useful? It's really a matter of basic respect, both for this blog and the people trying to have a high level of discourse on it.

785. *Matt*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:07 AM

Caitlin: that's why I tucked in "Without fear of retaliation"; I gotta own that my gender's known for being the instigator... hence the wish was more aimed at hoping women would -be- safer, not just "feel" safer. I meant more of the wish for my side of that line (males) than yours per se. The hardest part is trying to figure out where to start or how to realistically integrate changes into my own life that'll make a difference. Workin' on it.

786. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:12 AM

Another Matt and other people who are seriously thinking and wanting more information, here's some recommended reading, some of which has been linked elsewhere in this thread. These are not all, like, SP-endorsed, but they all come from my bookmarks of "resources that made my head explode in a good way":

<http://www.amazon.com/Yes-Means-Visions-Female-Without/dp/1580052576>

<http://www.amptoons.com/blog/archives/2005/12/02/how-not-to-be-insane-when-accused-of-racism/> [this is about racism but is applicable to being a good ally for other social justice movements, too]

<http://community.feministing.com/2009/04/what-boys-can-learn-from-girls.html>

<http://www.amptoons.com/blog/archives/2005/12/02/privilege-is-driving-a-smooth-road-and-not-even-knowing-it/>

<http://cereta.livejournal.com/652008.html>

<http://www.amptoons.com/blog/archives/2007/05/23/q-since-when-is-being-criticized-like-having-your-limbs-blown-off-by-a-landmine-a-since-that-criticism-came-from-someone-with-less-privilege-than-you/>

<http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/2009/06/26/another-post-about-rape-3/>

<http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/2009/06/24/a-woman-walks-into-a-rape-uh-bar/>

<http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/stuff-what-boys-can-do/>

<http://theangryblackwoman.com/2009/10/01/the-dos-and-donts-of-being-a-good-ally/>

<http://poptext.wordpress.com/2009/10/01/polanski-rape-and-the-myth-of-not-like-us/>

<http://shakespeareessister.blogspot.com/2009/10/rape-culture-101.html>

Warning: the above are mostly not in feminism 101 terms — they're more like 202 to 505 in scope. If you want 101, there's a whole blog dedicated to it:

223 of 345 <http://finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com/>

Obviously I don't intend for you to stay up all night tonight reading and then come back with a book report tomorrow. :-) But the key for many of us when trying to think and feel our way toward understanding the effects of privilege on those without it is to *listen*. Find out more. Keep reading. Keep thinking. Keep talking — but talk with other men about the basics, and when you're talking to women, listen more than you talk.

We really want you to see where we live, metaphorically speaking. We know it's hard, but we've been waiting for you a long damn time.

787. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:15 AM

The hardest part is trying to figure out where to start or how to realistically integrate changes into my own life that'll make a difference. Workin' on it.

Yup, it is. I have the same issue everywhere I have privilege that is denied to others. It's difficult and ongoing and incredibly worth doing. It's the only decent thing *to* do.

788. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:24 AM

I've noticed that several men in the comments here have prefaced their responses to specific women by comparing those women to other women commenters (or to other women in general). If women commenters please one of these men with their responses he is nice, but if women commenters displease him he is nasty.

This is a very troubling pattern and instead of making me feel good when I am favorably compared to other women, I get a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach because along with the comparison the man has made it clear that he has made women responsible for his choices in relation to women. That shifting of a man's personal responsibility off himself is potentially dangerous enough so that I consider this a personal red flag.

789. *HiddenTohru*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:26 AM

I apologize if I'm saying something that anyone has said previously in this thread, but I only have a few more minutes of online time before I really must go do dishes (or else I will not have any dinner tonight, and that makes me tummy sad).

I had a revelation tonight, between this post and some of the other SP posts that I've caught up on today, after a week without internet.

I realized that much of the reason I don't get unwanted male attention nearly as often as most women is because of my size. Not my weight, I mean being 6' tall and big boned. If I was male, like my brothers, I would get joking questions about whether I played football or basketball in high school/college. As it is, most men find me intimidating.

And for most of my life, I've *regretted* that.

Like most women, I get slightly nervous when I'm walking alone at night, even for short distances. Not the full blown panic, but the consciousness of my surroundings and the instinctive reach for the part of my purse where I keep my pepper spray (which I have never used). But I can count on one hand the number of times a man has said anything offensive to me in public, and only one incident where I actually felt afraid and disgusted by his behavior. Most of the time I ignore men I don't like. I don't care at all if they get angry or offended.

And I used to envy all those girls who were tiny and slender, who got so much attention, who seemed to get their pick of men. I don't think I ever realized before how scary life must be for them. My goodness, I know how nervous I can get in public (although it's partly social anxiety from being introverted, I'm simply uncomfortable in public for long periods regardless of gender), and moreso when there's mitigating factors (strange men, darkness, sparse population). I would lament not getting hit on when I went to shows or parties, and lament the fact that men didn't seem to want to strike up conversations with me.

It never even occurred to me that this was a privilege that few women got. I like to think I've mostly realized most of my privilege as a white middle class cis woman (bisexual but usually assumed to be straight), but it never came into my mind until today that my size and build are good things in this one area. Not to say that all large women are immune to rape, hell no. But I never realized before how privileged I was to not feel afraid of a man who was smaller and skinnier (or at least not fatter) than me, as more than 50% of the male population are. Taller men are rare enough that I often comment on it when I see them at work (I currently work as a cashier at a grocery store, you basically see every kind of person there, since everyone has to buy groceries) and most of the time I dismiss smaller men almost immediately, unless they actually look or act obviously threatening (and some do, and I am often hyper aware of them). I have the privilege of not having to consider them. Unless they're masters of fighting, there's a good chance I could beat them at least long enough to run away, so I just don't worry. And I've realized that there was a subconscious knowledge of this in my mind, as I've often acted as the unofficial protector of my smaller female friends when we go out in public, in any situation where any of us might be harmed. I remember a particularly sticky situation when I was in high school and some 30something guy tried to hit on my then-best friend, then treated me quite meanly when I tried to tell him to back off, but eventually went away anyway. Not that I generally feel any less nervous than them, but since I'm the biggest I could probably hold off a man or two long enough for them to get away.

I don't know. This comment is probably rambly because I'm tired and thinking about doing those dishes, but it was just such a sudden revelation that I thought it was worth sharing. Becoming aware of your privilege is a good thing, right?

790. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:47 AM

the man has made it clear that he has made women responsible for his choices in relation to women. That shifting of a man's personal responsibility off himself is potentially dangerous enough so that I consider this a personal red flag.

A. men.

791. *littlem*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:59 AM

SM – You have made a h*ll of a lot of jellied eels.

I hope someone has set you aside an equivalent lot of pie.

x

@Hidden Tohru –
right. :-)

792. *Starling*

225 of 345 OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:01 AM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

Caitlin, Abyss2Hope, I have to say I'm feeling a little responsible for a lot of this. It's like I unilaterally invited my little brother's entire fraternity to Kate's party and now I'm clucking around, making nervous little hostess-y noises, saying, "Okay, hey, dude, remember what I said about pissing in the aphidistra? How it wasn't that kind of party? The (jewel-toned) powder room is down the hall . . ." Not that tons of them haven't been great, well-behaved, decent guys, but wow. The others.

793. Becca L.

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:06 AM

...wow. I know I am coming in to all of this late, and I apologize, but I was clued in about this place just today and have just been absorbing the awesome. What a group!

To the OP, much respect for a brilliant and insightful article that really should be required reading. It made me think—and not just about male privilege issues. I've discovered that I need to unpack some baggage of my own when it comes to race privilege.

The thing I discovered I was missing is something that was discussed in comments fairly early on: the reminder that women JUST PLAIN DON'T KNOW who is a potential rapist and who isn't, even sometimes when they have gotten to know a guy somewhat.

Understanding that every guy gets approached with the same caution can really hurt a guy's feelings or even make him angry IF he takes it personally. But he has to remember that the people to blame for this wariness are the predatory men women are trying to protect themselves against. No predation, no wariness. Again: nothing personal. It's just the damage to society and people that predatory men have done.

Back to my little, related "aha" moment. I've gotten angry, confused and hurt when approached with suspicion and defensiveness by a member of another race. "What," I would think, "do they assume I'm racist? But...I work hard at checking my privilege and NOT being a racist! I'm not small-hearted or cruel like that! I—"

...am completely clueless to the essential fact, apparently, that as a stranger I am "Schrödinger's Racist". People of other ethnicities and cultures from my own aren't psychic any more than women are! Nor are my efforts at being a good person going to come shining out of my ass for all to see. And there isn't a single POC out there who hasn't been burned in some way by white privilege, individual racism, racial violence or all of the above. Of course a lot of people are going to be cautious until they know me! It's not personal either. It might hurt my feelings, but in this matter, compassion obligates me to suck it up, be willing to earn trust, and save my anger for the predatory whites who have caused this damage to society and people.

Anyway, wandering back to topic, I can sympathize with guys who react to the facts of life with shock, sadness, disbelief or pain, but...the whole "it's not personal" mantra needs to be repeated here. You have to earn trust, and one of the ways you do is being understanding of caution and responsive of boundaries. Being pushy, yelling "I'm a good guy" (or "I'm not a racist!") doesn't prove the point. Actions do.

794. Zenoodle

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:14 AM

HiddenTohru — that was a really interesting comment! As a pretty teenchy person, I have often grumbled (only semi-jestingly) that I would be a lot less irritable if I was taller (also, one of my many unrealised ambitions from childhood was to 'be tall so I could reach stuff on high up shelves' — not being able to do something myself was obviously getting to me

perfectly ok not only to touch me, but also to *pick me up* and often to **swing me around as well**. Apparently I'm 'cute' because I'm short and apparently the urge to **pick me up unannounced and whirl me around, in the process touching me unbidden and usually hurting me, can be 'irresistible... usually this has been men, but one or two female friends have done this too. And they look so hurt when I yell PUT ME DOWN or GET OFF!!!! One particular instance when a male friend who is about 6'5" picked me up, swung me around, and fucking dropped me onto a concrete floor** and then got angry with me when I yelped in pain and had a go at him sticks in the mind!

It makes me angry not just because these people seem to think shortness and smallness means I'm fair game to use as some kind of fucking doll, but because it reminds me how crap I'd be in a situation where I faced physical violence. I take self defence lessons (but I'm not very good at it) but if I was attacked by someone bigger than me (as most people are) I would be at a serious disadvantage. It makes me angry that I suppose to some potential attackers, my size (about which I can do little-to-nothing) would factor into making me an easy target. So I guess in a way, your stature is a kind of a privilege (though I wondered if you get a different sort of trouble from being 'too tall' intersecting with that? — a friend of a friend is a woman of 6'2" and she gets no end of annoying and often rude comments. In many ways I would love to be some kind of super-strong Amazonian woman, but I've just realised that accepting my height is an aspect of size acceptance I had made faster progress with at an earlier age than with FA/size acceptance, and that reading FA has consolidated that... Certainly nothing much is going to make me taller, although I bet there is an internet 'solution' out there for me somewhere! :/

795. *Zenoodle*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:14 AM

WHAT IS IT WITH MY BOLDING FAIL TODAY??!!! :-(

796. *CassandraSays*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:15 AM

@Liza-the-2nd (and Sean)

See, I disagree – I think a lot of men really are just that clueless that what Sean was doing, almost babytalking to them like they just have no idea, is the right approach, because some of them really do have no idea. That's not the approach I'd take with all men, but with some, yeah, that's the way to go.

Example – Earlier this week I had to do an interview with the singer of a rock band. So I get there, get ushered onto the tour bus (this is already strike one – not happy with this situation, would prefer a more neutral setting) and get introduced to the guy I need to talk to...who is twice my size. Also, I am the only woman on this bus, in a group of about 10 men, all of whom are strangers (strike 2).

Then, singer dude decides that he wants to do the interview in the tiny little lounge at the back of the bus with just the two of us (strike 3). So he leads me back there, way away from everyone else (strike 4), and shuts the door (strike 5). And then he's all oh hey, I think it's locked and I don't know how to open it (strike 6). And did I mention that I don't know this guy and he's a foot taller than me?

Now from the point of view of a woman raised in rape culture, this is a scary situation. From the point of view of the guys, though? They don't mean me any harm, so what's the problem?

Which is why I think Sean's consciousness-raising-for-dummies approach has merit. I honestly don't think those guys meant to make me uncomfortable, they were perfectly friendly and polite – in fact I dropped my notebook while I was there and one of them even took the time to find me later to give it back, and waited till I finished my phone call to very politely catch my attention to do so. So, these are not bad guys. But it never occurred to them to think that the scenario they set up looked EXACTLY like scenarios in which a lot of women are hurt, ie. like deliberate traps. Because men are not socialised to be empathic towards women, or to consider that they might be scaring us and maybe they should try not to do that.

But you know what? I bet at least some of them, because they are decent guys, have probably warned their sisters/daughters/girlfriends not to get into situations like that because what if the guys they meet are not nice guys? I'm sure that this is the case because I've been the female friend who guys like that have fussed over and gone please be careful, some guys are assholes, protect yourself.

So yeah, Sean? Keep it up. It's a shame that the discussion needs to be dumbed down so far to reach a lot of guys, but it really does, and we have to start somewhere.

797. *Zenoodle*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:16 AM

And also the non-grammatical sentences... hope it makes some semblance of sense!

798. *bumerry*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:12 AM

The thing about refusing to live in fear bothered me too.

I recognize that I have that tendency, but I have it *because I was abused* and when the PTSD symptoms of hypervigilance and waking up screaming are in check, I go to the other extreme. One of the trauma workers I respected most referred to the dynamic thus: "Get attacked by dogs after age five, grow up and you're a dog catcher. Get attacked before five, grow up and you're a vet."

And even if that isn't in play, living in fear is a matter of degree and immediate circumstances. I don't live in fear of tripping. In fact, when I'm most distracted (at one friend's wedding and another's funeral) I'm most likely to trip. Even though I broke an arm at the wedding, I still don't live in fear of tripping, mostly.

Until the moment I notice my shoe is untied because I stepped on the tip of the lace. Given that cue and a situation where I can't just tie it (such as crossing a busy street) and must keep walking, my whole arsenal of trip avoidance behaviors emerges. Because tripping in the middle of a busy road is a real danger to my health and life.

The daily routine I have for not tripping (tying my shoes in the morning) doesn't rise to my consciousness because it is so familiar, but it is always there. I DO live in fear of tripping, of course. I just don't usually acknowledge or even notice that fear.

Similarly, I don't think about rape all the time, but in an isolated, dark area it's nice to notice that my keys are already between my fingers and my car doors were locked without thought.

799. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:35 AM

What you wrote is important and many of the comments with troubling content which were let through moderation are important because they expose troubling attitudes. I've let far worse through on my blog when they highlighted important attitudes. On a post about gaining genuine consent vs. overcoming lack of consent the trolls came out in force.

800. *HiddenTohru*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:35 AM

@Zenoodle – I used to be a bit oblivious to how I touched smaller people (I used to be a hugmonster in my elementary through beginning of high school days), but I can't remember EVER picking someone up against their wishes. o.o I think I made some people uncomfortable with my clinginess before I realized that I had reached an age (and more importantly, a size) where spontaneous hugs weren't okay. Many of my smaller female friends, when I expound on why I don't touch people unless they invite me, go "but I hug people all the time and no one objects!" ... Well, yes, because you don't descend upon them from great height. You're small enough that they won't feel threatened by you, and can push you off if you annoy them. And I certainly have had some women (speaking of my past best friend) who told me they were uncomfortable being touched by me after they learned I was bisexual. I think a lot of them assumed that since I was attracted to women, I had suddenly become a potential rapist. Nevermind that I wouldn't hurt a fly (and most of them already knew me well enough to know that), suddenly not only am I bigger than them, I'm also potentially dangerous to them. Which, as someone who totally understands where they're coming from, really fucking hurts.

Yeah, there are certainly other areas where being short is a privilege and being tall is a detriment. Dating immediately springs to mind. Ask any girl over 5'10" how many guys her height or higher she's dated sometime. Then ask the tall guys you know if they've ever dated a girl within six inches of their height. I've never had a guy anywhere in the 6'2" to 6'8" range ever express interest in me. My oldest brother (both my brothers are 6'8") just got married earlier this year to a girl who is an inch shorter than me. Granted, I'm just happy he didn't marry his first girlfriend (he was with her for six or seven years, 5'6" and severely screwed up, although the one had nothing to do with the other), but yeah.

Also, I don't tend to get comments about being Amazonian, but I think that's because I'm not a model (meaning I don't fit into the current societal ideals of beauty). I've certainly known other tall women who've gotten those comments, but I don't generally get them. I do sometimes get asked the basketball question, and of course the "wow, you're tall!!" (a: Holy crap, really? NO ONE HAS EVER POINTED THAT OUT BEFORE.)

I think an interesting point to be made here is a thought I had a few weeks ago at work, concerning an analogy for the fat/size acceptance movement. I just suddenly thought, "you know, no one has ever come up to me and said 'hey, maybe you should try not growing. Have you ever tried just hunching over a bit?' Why on earth do they want me to try not being fat, then?" Except, someone did actually tell me to stop growing once. Not directly, but my grandmother (the particularly odious one) tried to convince my parents to give me supplements as a child that would stunt my growth. She just didn't want me to be a freak (*looks down at men's size 13 feet* yeah, like there was ever any chance of that). My parents, of course, told her hell the fuck no. The real kicker? It would've made me, at most, perhaps an inch and a half shorter. Oh yes, because being 5'11" is a HUGE difference from being 6'! But anyway, I digress. The point is, being fat is roughly as genetic as being tall.

There are environmental factors that can affect both (hence why people keep saying that the American public's increasing height is because of better nutrition in childhood), but about

80-95% of it is genetic. My dad's 6'5" and my mom's 5'10, there was NO WAY I was gonna be short (or skinny).

801. *Dw3t-Hthr*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 7:22 AM

One thing that I don't think anyone's covered – and while I've read the comments there were a lot of them and I'm bad at reading on a screen – is an obvious response to the “Well, why don't you approach men more?”

The fact of the matter is I've been the initiator of all of my relationships (except the one where I was sexually assaulted, fancy that).

How, exactly, is this supposed to prevent people from invading my space on the subway again? It's not like I have a hat with a sign on it that says “Will let you know explicitly if your attraction is welcome in completely unambiguous terms, otherwise fuck off.” And if I did it wouldn't accomplish its purpose anyway. When does this magic ‘this wouldn't happen if you just asked guys out’ effect kick in already?

I'm Schroedinger's Available Gal. Or, to be fucking blunt about it, and more accurate for the circumstances involving the creepy, clueless, and/or entitled, Schroedinger's Target.

And I'm not the one with the power to collapse that waveform. My vast span of not-availability (book, wedding rings, lack of any fucking interest whatsoever, whatever else I might bring to bear) does not have any influence. The guy who wants to target a woman is the one who decides what condition I'm in when the box is opened. And if he doesn't resolve me to “target”, that's because he picked someone else, and isn't that just fantastic.

(Note to the clueless and defensive: “the guy who wants to target a woman” is the subject of that sentence. If you don't read the subordinate clause and properly apply the modifier, you will be condemned to diagram sentences as penance for your sins.)

802. *Kristin*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 7:44 AM

Kyle,

I was the bitch yammering about safe feminist spaces and BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MENZ.

Also, Demosthenes, “BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MENZ” is a concept (“lolspeak” optional), not a method of sorting out who is supposed to read the post. Educate yourself about feminism, then come back.

<http://finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com/2007/10/18/phmt-argument/>

Ugh.

803. *Catatonic Kid*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 9:16 AM

@Zenoodle – so with you. nice to know i'm not alone on annoyed at being treated like a toy just because am short but also, came to terms with that aspect of my body pretty quickly. there are ways to mitigate the easy target factor, at least — if you're shorter and/or smaller, you're usually faster/more agile. and in a tough spot, it's far easier to land a shot to the groin... i'm just saying.

what i still don't quite feel comfortable about is the thought that we, tall or short, think so much about how our bodies can be weapons or potential threats. i get why but it still seems like it might be starting from exactly the place i work hard to avoid —

having said that, my PTSD gets in the way so perhaps it's a confused little world of conflicting interests regardless.

804. Cessen

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 10:45 AM

(First, let me preface this with full-disclosure: I'm a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle-class, college-educated male. So, yeah, I'm coming from a place of a shit-ton of privilege.)

if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men?

For a lot for reasons, some of which have already been covered here (including socializing, rape culture, etc.). But also, I suspect, because fewer women objectify men than men objectify women.

If you see an attractive woman on a bus, you might think, "She's hawt, I want to talk to her and maybe get in her pants." But that's sexual objectification.

If you didn't objectify her, you might see her and think instead, "Well, she's physically attractive, but she doesn't look interested in talking to me, and obviously it's important to respect that. Plus... even if she was interested, there's little indication that she's into the same kinds of things as me, so I don't think we'd really relate well."

(Admittedly that last bit can sometimes be hard/impossible to judge based on appearance, and that gets into all kinds of issues of isms and prejudice. But for me, for example, I tend to have fairly nerdy interests, and if I see a woman all dressed up and wearing makeup, or a guy wearing a sports jersey or nice suit, I generally assume I won't have much in common with them. Maybe that's horribly wrong? Yeah, I still have issues of my own I need to sort out.)

805. Cessen

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:36 AM

(Also, it will make you extremely attractive and utterly irresistible to the gender you prefer, because there is nothing more desirable than a partner with that kind of advanced human wisdom. But that's a side benefit.)

Yeah, he'll have his pick!

These kinds of comments bother me, regardless of who they come from. But it's particularly shocking hearing it come from a feminist. Because you just offered up women as a reward (or, I guess, as a "side benefit").

Granted, you said "gender you prefer", and I'm sure you were very careful about that. But honestly, that doesn't change the meaning. If his preferred gender is female (which is statistically very likely), you still just offered up women. And even if he's homosexual, some of the other guys that read it (like me) aren't, so you've *still* just offered up women. And even if every person who reads that prefers men, then you've... offered up men?

(Secondarily, it's also demeaning to whatever person you might say it to. "It will make girls/boys like you!")

806. *Another Matt*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:54 AM

I don't want to take this off-topic, but I just came across "enthusiastic consent" and... hell yes! It seems to me that that would be a pretty darn good benchmark for *all* areas of life – sex right through to, well, bus conversations with strangers. Helpful!

807. *Caitlin*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:24 PM

Caitlin, Abyss2Hope, I have to say I'm feeling a little responsible for a lot of this.

Starling, I know you know you are in no way responsible for the behaviour and choices of asshole men. And that the fact that a simple suggestion like "Make sure the woman you want to speak to wants to speak you" makes hordes of them flood out of woodwork to denounce this crazy concept just proves how right you are, and how much it needed to be said. I just thought I'd remind you :).

You made a lot of women feel that they are not alone, gave us a resource we can offer for well-meaning men who just don't get it, and completely blew the minds of a few men in a very good way (Another Matt is bringing me particular joy at this point). This is awesome. The problem men coming in to comment on it just show much it was needed in the first place., and they were never going to get it anyway.

Also, and now I'm clucking around, making nervous little hostess-y noises, saying, "Okay, hey, dude, remember what I said about pissing in the aphidistra? How it wasn't that kind of party? The (jewel-toned) powder room is down the hall . . . " is making me lol.

808. *Caitlin*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 12:27 PM

*wants to speak to you

809. *jay*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 1:38 PM

Cassandrasays,

I left a comment here yesterday (complimenting the OP, so not sure why it's not appeared yet).

"I bet at least some of them, because they are decent guys, have probably warned their sisters/ daughters/ girlfriends not to get into situations like that because what if the guys they meet are not nice guys? I'm sure that this is the case because I've been the female friend who guys like that have fussed over and gone please be careful, some guys are assholes, protect yourself."

Yes, but there's another aspect as well (and probably even more). My sister was furious and fought for her right to be in whatever potentially scary situation she wanted to be. What you describe as the appropriate male way to think about the interview situation – considering that a woman may feel cornered and be scared – she would very likely consider this infantilizing. She would think that it's part of being equal to not be treated like someone who cannot take care of her own. Now I don't know if she would have been scared in the setup you describe, but while I don't think so, I'm fairly certain that she would have considered dealing with this kind of fear as the appropriate thing to do.

Doesn't mean that men should not think about the feelings of women they talk to, but it means that those feelings aren't as clear and one-directional as you make it seem. It's not that easy sometimes making someone not scared and not infantilized at the same time.

810. *OlderThanDirt*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:15 PM

I think one reason we're seeing trolls arrive (or not seeing, THANKS MODS!!!!) is we're breaking the social contract of talking about the agent in rape. You know, "She was raped." "xx% of y set of women will be raped." "Don't go in the alley, you'll get raped." We're supposed to talk about rape like it's something that happens to women and the women are the only ones moving around. All this man-pain from a post that says that women can't tell if a strange man is a rapist and that's all it says. We can't tell.

I'd love to see (not really) the reaction if the post just said, "Sometimes men rape women." Not all men, not all times, not exclusively, not even the fact that most rapes are man on woman. Just a statement that puts the verb with the man. I think you'd still get swamped with the 12-page screeds on why it's wrong to say that.

811. *Lauren*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:17 PM

About the whole "refusing to live in fear" – bit.

I think there some people are confusing two very different issues by referring to them using the same phrase.

One is being a woman (or, for that matter, part of any other oppressed group) and knowing how this makes you vulnerable to attack from members of the privileged group – in the case of women, this would be men. It is impossible to have that knowledge and not be influenced by it. How you deal with it, and what consequences you take away from it, is your personal decision. But you will invariably have thought about it. And if you chose to engage in so-called "risky" behaviour, than this is your right. And it certainly doesn't make it your fault if someone takes advantage of you. But if you chose to avoid so called "risky" behaviour, or take security measures that aim at making you feel less at risk, that is just as ok. It does not make you weak. It does not mean you have a "victim mentality". It means you are doing what you have to, in order to feel a little safer in your life.

Sadly, no matter where you fall in the spectrum of reasonable reactions to the danger that are facing you out there, I am sure you are well aware that there is no such thing as being completely safe when interacting with members of the privileged group. Because yes, they are all Schrödingers rapist/white supremacist/ gay basher/ transhater/ abelist. And there is no way to ever prove that they aren't.

That is one aspect of the "living in fear" debate. And I for one cannot understand how any woman would begrudge another woman(or oppressed person) for taking whatever measures she considers necessary to deal with the fact that simply by being a member of the oppressed group, she has a reason to be afraid.

The other issue where the term "not living in fear" is often brought p is when it comes to survivors dealing with the fact that they were raped/abused/bashed/assaulted. PTSD is common, and so is the wish to learn to "live a normal live again", to not let what happened dominate your everyday actions and interactions. To not let your attacker hurt you even more than he has already done. "I am not going to let you ruin my life,I am not going to live the rest of my live in fear because of you".

I think this is a very understandable need. I think that a survivor who manages to have a "normal" live again is achieving something incredible. I think that everything a survivor does to get there- be it carrying pepper spray, or taking self-defense classes, or making sure

not to go out without a trusted friend, or screaming "Fuck You" at the world in general and people who treat zir poorly in particular, is a good thing. Because it is about the survivor taking care of zir own needs. Re-establishing boundaries. Learnign to live with what happened. and when someone tells me "this happened to me, but I refuse to live in fear because of it", then it is great that this person has gotten to a point where they can say this. And I am not going to question them, because whatever helps them is a good thing. For them.

But I will not let other people's experiences dictate how I have to deal with whatever traumatic experiences I have had. No one has the right to set a time-table for when yo have to be back to "normal". Nobody has a right to assume that, just because something worked for them, it will work for you. Because every survivor is different. Because every experience of violence – rape, or bashing, or beating, or assault, or abuse; verbal or physical or both purely psychological, is different. Because survivors are not statistics, are not numbers, are not types. The are human beings. And their experiences, their ways towards being able to live with or despite of what happened, are just as individual as they are.

So, maybe there aren't two different issues after all. Maybe it really is just as easy as me respecting your choices and you respecting mine. And neither of us assuming we know better what the other needs.

(because sadly, it needs to be stated: when I say that it can be good for some women to take classes in self-defense, I am saying this because it might be something they feel is good for them. I am not and would never ever be suggesting that, if only all women knew self-defense, there would be no rape. Or if all gays knew how to fight back, there would be no bashings. Obviously, that would be complete bogus. And yes, it is also not my job to keep the men from raping me. I hope it didn't come of that way above, but thought I would say it outright in case some idiot decides that the only thing he should take away from this is "but this woman said that all you need to feel safe is a class in ass-kicking". You know someone would)

812. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:29 PM

Another Matt:

There is a book called "Yes means Yes" that deals with this very topic. I have not read it, so I am not qualified to recommend it, but the idea of Enthusiastic consent, instead of the old "no means no" is, as far as I can tell, pretty central to current feminist debates of sexuality, so you should find a lot on the topic simply by asking prof. google.

Also (((you))) for being so enthusiastic about the concept. It should be self-evident, but it sadly sin't, so knowing that htere are men out there who get it is fantastic.

813. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 2:59 PM

@Lauren, you make good points about statements which use "living in fear."

What I find interesting is how acceptable some men find it when women limit the scope of their lives (don't ride the bus alone, etc) as supposed rape prevention while they find it unacceptable that women are assessing men's individual behavior and attitudes in order to estimate the probability that he is a danger to them.

I've seen this too often from men:

234 of 345 A woman never going out alone at night: acceptable.

A woman out alone at night who refuses to talk to him because his potential as a rapist is unknown: unacceptable.

When I am assessing other people's behavior and attitudes I'm not living in fear, I'm doing a risk assessment based both on personal experience and research. Beyond a risk assessment for crime victimization, there are some attitudes which I will not volunteer to have in my life.

814. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:04 PM

@CassanraSays: I had to go back and re-read my comment because I honestly could not remember what I'd said. How's that for having the courage of your convictions, eh?

I think you and I fundamentally agree—and the difference seems to be that you're speaking in the more general sense—many men—and I'm speaking in the specific—men like... sorry, I've just gotten off a 14-hour shift and I can't remember his name. TrackerNeil? Anyway, the trollier trolls in this thread.

I'll leave it to Sean to address what his intended audience was, since I can't stand it when people announce to the world what MY intentions are :)

@Sean: I think I owe you an apology. Far be it for me to tell you not to try something because it *might not work*. WTF, self. I shouldn't have done that, and thanks for being gracious about it.

@Nathan: I'm sorry, I'm not sure what you mean here. I mean to say, I understand the words you are saying, and I think I agree with you, but I'm not sure—you seem to be replying in rebuttal to something I said? And I'm not sure what. I lost the plot a little bit there, sorry.

815. *Vehemens*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:20 PM

First thank you all for responding to me.

Secondly, Anita:

I'm saying that conversation is a two way street. Being interested in something out the window is not 100% of the time a clear signal to be left alone. Same thing with listening to an iPod (I don't generally disturb anyone who is reading, books are more in the 90% area imo)

Also, sometimes people just don't hear greetings, and greetings can be repeated. If, after the repetition, I am ignored, then I go on my merry way because even being persistent would not yield a pleasant interaction anyway.

I understand, to the best of my ability as a nice guy, male, and straight (Admitting that it is not as great as your personal experience) that there is a great and legitimate need for red flags, and that men need to be more aware of body language.

But one thing to quickly note: The intelligent author of this post is a licensed Private Investigator. On some level, through job experience or through education, you're trained in these signals. How to send them, how to see them. Your occupation, if I am guessing properly, has the reading and transmitting of body language as one of the pillars for doing

You also see more than likely the worst of society.

This is NOT an insult, I want to keep things civil and present a differing opinion. And it's not even that different.

The only thing I'd ever dream of asking for is an acknowledgement to being heard. If you don't want to give that, then it is your choice. I am not denying you, or anyone choice, in any way shape or form. It is, at most, a request that would help keep the nice guys from being in a worse situation.

Or, you could offer seminars in training us all in body language.

I take offense to being told that repeating oneself to make sure you were heard is a problem. I work as a dispatched for technicians, and two of my bosses are deaf in one ear. I have to repeat myself multiple times a day as a matter of professional course to make sure that information is transmitted properly and accurately.

Proper and Accurate communication IS one of the things that helps to prevent these situations when talking about the nice guy.

Mace the guy who disrespects you at all, and kick the rape supporting shirt wearer in the balls, I'll help.

But, even female friends of mine who've been raped and assaulted have not come out and told me that one double check to make sure you got heard is wrong or a problem. Because that's going too far, in my opinion.

Please read my whole post before commenting, as I will reiterate my first post on this blog:

This blog has increased my conciousness already, and when I'm done working my 50 hour work week, and training for another 4 hours, and helping to manage my family, and taking care of my own home, I will be clicking the provided links and researching it in greater depth to increase my conciousness of how I come across.

But if, when I say 'Make sure I was heard,' comes across as 'Disrespecting your social boundaries,' Then you have more of a problem than I do.

Sometimes, and I would argue more often than not, people get lost in their thoughts, and don't hear things, repeating oneself a single time, is not a problem. I do not touch, I do not go within 3-5 feet of the woman if space allows (If space doesn't allow, keep in mind I don't approach.) It is a verbal request to clear up mixed signals, of which there are many in the course of a day.

So, while I respect your opinion, what I say is what I mean, it is not a hidden message saying anything else.

816. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:31 PM

Vehemens, I am bemused by the idea that somebody listening to music and thus shutting themselves off from their environment is someone who would welcome conversation, especially *more* than someone reading a book o_O

(That would be the only thing about your comment that jumped out at me, because it sounds like it comes from Bizarro Universe.)

817. *Vehemens*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:35 PM

Shiyiya,

I only speak from my personal experience. I'm also young, and a lot of women in my age group where I live don't mind being talked to while they listen to music. Or else I am confusing bewitching smiles with secret hand motions to their mace at the belt.

It may not be the status quo other places, but I don't live there, so I can only write about what I've had experience with.

Anyway, I apologize if that response places the troll flag anywhere, I do need to be off now. But thank you for the response.

818. *AnnieF*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:46 PM

"bewitching smiles"? You...are kidding with this, right? Do you understand that your understanding that the smiles are "bewitching" is based in your desire that they be so? Perhaps the women that you say "don't mind" being talked to are actually just smiling nervously and hoping that the interaction ends soon so that they can listen to their music?

819. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:48 PM

Vehemens, if you read up on discussions of street harassment, you'll find that many women say they put on headphones specifically so that no one will try to talk to them. I've done it even without turning the music on, just to have an excuse "not to hear" what some guy said to me.

I appreciate that you're trying to figure out the boundaries between what's a red flag and what's just common sense, as that's what this whole post is about. But at some point you have to ask yourself, how important is it that you actually get to say what it is you wanted to say? I'll quote FJ's comment from up above:

Ok, so while I was sitting on the Metro this evening hoping that the woman with the amazing boots would make eye contact with me so I could comment on her amazing boots, I of course thought about this thread and had the opportunity to do some analysis.

Things this woman already knew: that her boots were fucking hot.
Things she did not already know: that I thought her boots were hot.

Seriously, the only way in which that conversation would enrich that woman is by letting her know my opinion on her boots. Now, this is not necessarily a bad thing! I often like to hear that people like my shoes, it's a nice commentary on my taste. But why would I feel that she somehow owed it to me to hear my opinion? Why would I feel it was my right to insert myself into her consciousness?

Even if the woman you're talking to maybe didn't hear you (or maybe was pretending not to hear you), how important is it that she does? I mean, unless you're saying "That guy's stealing your wallet" or "Your hair is on fire" or "Didn't you say this was your stop," chances are you could just let it go. That's why it's a little baffling to me that you're trying to come up with reasons to talk to women who are sending out what seem to be signals that they are not interested in talking.

820. *Vehemens*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 3:57 PM

Okay, before I really log off.

Annie: I do my best in every situation, if signals get mixed up, then I profusely apologize and leave them alone as soon as I realize this has happened. You cannot expect it to be perfect every time, and the answer is not to force social interaction to come to a standstill. I also apologize if my desire to use exaggerated adjectives puts you off, that's not my intention either.

What I am saying is there is a very early point in any situation where something clear and verbal can be stated in a diplomatic manner by both parties. If a guy shows good manners, and a woman does not wish to talk, that is entirely her choice.

However, if the situation is reversed, most women I know would expect and prefer an honest verbal response from a man they are talking to.

Clear, usually verbal, accurate communication is not a bad thing, nor is it unnecessary.

821. *Lauren*OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:03 PM

abyss2hope

Absolutely. It is sickening how many men think it is a-ok (or even their duty) for women to take protective measures that are limiting for themselves (such as only wearing certain clothes, going certain places, not going certain places, only going out at certain times/ in certain circumstances) but completely blow the gasket when women take measures of self-protection that might, in some way, limit the men's and their right to do whatever they want.

My post was directed more at members of the same oppressed group who think that they have the right and ability to tell me whether I am living with the right amount of fear and dealing with it the right way. Your's was definitely an important addition.

Men: You don't know why I act the way I do to protect myself and my right to decide who I wish to interact with, or not interact with. That does not mean you have the right/knowledge/ability/understanding to tell me whether what I am doing to protect my rights is too much/not enough/the wrong way.

Until you have been magically put into my position- and I mean exactly the same position, with all my characteristics and experiences and fears and wishes and privileges and oppressions determining the reaction to the exact same situation with the exact same people treating you the exact same way- you have no right to tell me what the "right" reaction would be. And funny thing: If it were actually possible for you to understand me and the situation I am in like that, you wouldn't feel the need to open your fucking mouth and tell me to act differently. Because you would know that as a man, you are Schrödinger's rapist, and aggression like you express by criticizing the way I keep myself safe is the last thing you should do.

Because when you are complaining about my keeping you away? You are really saying that, not only do you think that you have a right to my attention whenever you feel like demanding it, this supposed right is also much more important than my right to be left the fuck alone when I want to, for whatever reason I might have. And when you are complaining about being called Schrödinger's rapist, you are saying that your right to stay

in denial about the truths of rape, and rape-culture, and sexism and privilege, and how you are a part of it, and just the principles of fucking basic human decency that no one should need to be taught? That your right to that denial is more important than my right and the right of every other woman to NOT BE FUCKING RAPED.

ASSHOLE.

822. *Veronica*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:14 PM

Just wanted to jump in and say one, that I loved reading this post and all the comments.... and two – to all the people who've been saying "but most women are raped by people they know" – that this isn't a rape/perfect safety dichotomy. Rape culture perpetuates an entitlement that also manifests as groping, nasty comments, stalking, slut-shaming and five dozen other kinds of harassment and assault that are, often enough, perpetuated by strangers.

I get tired of hearing dialogues about women's safety and autonomy boiled down to rape only, because while I've never experienced a completed rape by a man, I have been assaulted and harassed many times by both strangers and acquaintances. The men I knew who tried to rape me? One date, two friends. But most of the men who've groped me, flashed me, called me horrible names because I didn't want to talk to them or tried to punish me in other ways were strangers – in a bar, on the street, wherever, and that is why I'm so uncomfortable when yet another male stranger sidles up to me. It's not that I think I'm about to be raped right there on the bus. It's that past experience has taught me that if I ignore him or tell him to leave, he might get ugly quick in a multitude of ways.

Which isn't to discount the horror of rape or the need for precautions. But I find this kind of ongoing hostility and assault is invisible to many men – that to them, "harassment" is a woman getting whistled at by a construction worker. They have no idea of how vile and intense it can get, or that sexual assault can be as quick and anonymous as being groped and fondled in a crowded bar.

823. *Jane*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:16 PM

@Vehemens: *But if, when I say 'Make sure I was heard,' comes across as 'Disrespecting your social boundaries,' Then you have more of a problem than I do.*

Well, yeah. I do have more of a problem than you do, because the worst-case scenario according to your own post is that you feel a bit offended and walk off.

The worst case scenario for me *begins with a man repeating what he has just said*, in fact whether I have acknowledged it or not, since he may not feel that my acknowledgement was *enough*, including that it wasn't said with a smile or wasn't said enthusiastically enough or contained only the answer to his question or a "Thanks" to his compliment or a "Yes, I am" to his observation that I am where he says I am, doing what he says I am doing.

It then can progress quickly from nagging to shouting to screaming to grabbing to shoving or hitting or maybe setting on fire or following out of the public space or meticulous descriptions of imaginary rape or real rape.

That is what this whole post has been about. Yes, it has. Yes, that is exactly the point: I have a big, urgent, potentially life-threatening problem. You have some times when you feel embarrassed or dismissed.

If you speak to me and I ignore you, that is a safety measure that I take for myself, and you don't know why I feel it is necessary, how many times a genuine harasser has actually moved on when I pretended not to hear (with a "huh, bitch," which I also pretend to be deaf to), how many times my mother or elder brother or cousins or teachers have told me to shut up, don't say anything—although the other half of the time people I know are telling me to make nice because he didn't do anything *that* wrong. Yet. If he intended to at all, which of course *I. Do. Not. Know.*

Now, it sounds like you actually repeat once and move away, therefore opening the box a crack and letting me peek in at a non-rapist, but UNTIL YOU ARE GONE a woman has no way of knowing whether you are going to let her alone. In fact, I've known harassers to come back later for more, so I don't know even when a man leaves if he'll decide later to come back, if the guy who was friendly five minutes ago has gone all the way through the train and has decided that of all the unresponsive women who didn't appreciate his nice self, I look like a good prospect for being annoyed, manipulated, or outright forced into talking to him.

That's it. We don't know. You are the only one who knows you are not an asshole when you meet a stranger in public.

824. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:17 PM

I think one reason we're seeing trolls arrive (or not seeing, THANKS MODS!!!!) is we're breaking the social contract of talking about the agent in rape.

Good point. But another reason we're seeing trolls arrive is that we got linked on at least one board where someone deliberately encouraged people to troll this thread. So really, Starling, don't feel bad!

825. RKMK

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:20 PM

bewitching smiles

I just threw up a little bit. In my mouth.

826. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:23 PM

But another reason we're seeing trolls arrive is that we got linked on at least one board where someone deliberately encouraged people to troll this thread.

Because this will clearly convince us that strange men don't wish us harm!

Good work, men!

827. OlderThanDirt

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:34 PM

Yep, we deserve trolling because we said that rapists don't wear signs. The nerve of some of these bitches!

828. OlderThanDirt

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:35 PM

Here's another thought. When lynching was popular in the U.S., white people who weren't lynchers benefited from people of color being terrified of lynching. Not that the "good"

stopped or the business taken over or whatever. But it was there, in the background, all the time. So, do non-rapists benefit from women being afraid of rapists?

I keep going off-track from Schrödinger's Rapist, but this discussion has completely taken over my brain and the idea of being actively trolled because we said that you can't tell by looking just brought this to mind.

829. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:36 PM

"It's not that easy sometimes making someone not scared and not infantilized at the same time."

This is indeed a dilemma.

I have stated before in regards to men approaching in a public space – Please leave me alone!

As for men trying to be patronizing and protecting in that very demeaning and infantilizing way – Please don't tell me what to do! (I will tell you what to do and that's usually, "go fuck yourself").

830. *Aurora Erratic*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:38 PM

"But another reason we're seeing trolls arrive is that we got linked on at least one board where someone deliberately encouraged people to troll this thread."

Yeah, but WHY did they find it threatening enough to link and encourage trolling? Because you are openly discussing the agents of rape.

I linked to you, too, BTW, but I don't think the ilk can be coming from me, as I have a readership of about 50/day. No asshats that I know of.

831. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:51 PM

I linked to you, too, BTW, but I don't think the ilk can be coming from me, as I have a readership of about 50/day. No asshats that I know of.

Naw, I'm talking about something specific I've been e-mailed about.

And yeah, of course, the larger reasons for trolling remain. I just wanted to point out that there was at least one specific call for trolls, which explains some of the worst.

832. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:58 PM

Confidential to "Some Guy": You maybe should have read the part upthread where Sweet Machine said we wouldn't be publishing any more first-time comments from dudes telling us that rape culture doesn't exist, we're being too extreme, etc. But of course, to do that, you would have to read the fucking comments, which cover every single Very Important Point you made in the comment I just spammed 90 TIMES OVER.

833. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 4:59 PM

Jesus...

to a guy on the bus who is clearly into something else? Safe bet that you wouldn't, know why? Because you don't want to fuck him. You respect his space because he is a human equal to you, but because women are less than human (simply because you want to fuck them) they are not deserving of the same rights. The guy also gets your respect because he might could whip your ass if you keep bothering him. You obviously do not have the same fear of the poor woman you have chosen to annoy. OH but I forgot, "bewitching smiles". It's so her fault. My fucking bad.

834. *AnnieF*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:03 PM

Yeah, I'm having a hard time extending the benefit of the doubt to Vehemens, because "bewitching" is really troubling. It's part of an entire complex of ideas that women have to deal with all the damn time: "I can't help it, you're just so pretty!" "She obviously asked for it, did you see how she was dress/how she acted/how enchanting she was?"

A woman with headphones on who smiles at you because you are insisting on encroaching on her space in public is not trying to "bewitch" you. Really, truly. Put your own desires and projections aside and try not to be part of the problem.

835. *AnnieF*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:04 PM

*dressed

836. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:19 PM

@Vehemens, I think part of the reaction to what you are saying is that you seem to expect women who are not interested in you to acknowledge you if they do hear you. When men talk about women's obligations in these types of situations this often comes off as controlling which research has found to be a rapist risk factor.

Then rather than respecting the opinion of a woman who tells you she doesn't want greetings to her from unknown men to be repeated and that she may use headphones and silence as a "leave me alone" signal, so that you understand that other women feel the same way, you are getting hostile.

Hostility toward women is another rapist risk factor so if you come off as both controlling and hostile toward women when you are neither you are doing yourself a disservice.

Those men like Dingo who then go on to talk about doing nothing if he sees a woman being raped or a man who says he will do nothing about pervasive sexual violence directed at girls and women because women here aren't presenting information in a way which pleases him, those men are expressing another risk factor: acceptance of violence against women.

Just something for you to think about.

837. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:22 PM

Or else I am confusing bewitching smiles with secret hand motions to their mace at the belt.

OMFG. This has already been well-covered, but let me just ask if you read the comments upthread from women saying they automatically smile when they're nervous, and how problematic that can be? One of my oldest friends does this, and I saw that very problem in action just a few years ago. A dude she had once dated (and who had stalked her

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afterwards) asked her to come back to his place after a party. Her usual nervous smile immediately hit her face — a look *anyone* should be able to distinguish from a “bewitching” smile, I might add, and that people who know her recognize as *terror*, not openness — as she turned him down. The next day, he called her a dozen times, insisting that he KNEW she was into it and just demurring for other reasons, because of how she smiled like that, even as she said no!

So, OK, having said that, maybe the terror-smile is relatively uncommon. You know what's not? The polite smile. The non-threatening smile. The “If I smile instead of scowling or telling him to fuck off, maybe he'll leave me alone and this won't escalate” smile. Sometimes also known as the “PLEASE DON'T HURT ME” smile. I just wrote upthread about how three nights ago, I gave a guy a big smile as I told him no when he approached me out of the blue and asked me to go to a different bar with him, without so much as saying hello. That smile was NOT an indication that I was OK with being approached at all, let alone like that, much less that he had any chance with me. It was an indication that *I didn't want to fight about it*, verbally or physically, which is a real fucking concern in those situations.

So just keep in mind, the smile you find “bewitching” could be any of those smiles — “I'm terrified,” “I'm irritated but being polite,” “I'm concerned that if I say what I really think, this could get ugly, and I want to defuse this situation,” “PLEASE DON'T HURT ME.” Any of those, or lots of other things that are very, very much *not invitations to keep talking*.

And before anyone fucking tells me that if a smile can mean so many confusing things, men and women will never be able to get together and the human race will die out, let me explain what an invitation to keep talking does look like — or more precisely, what it sounds like. And that is: AN INVITATION TO KEEP TALKING. Usually expressed as active engagement in conversation — much as it is among men! Go figure! It's almost like if you *listen to the woman*, you'll have no trouble cracking the code of her mysterious, exotic ladybrain!

And if what you hear when you listen is silence, THERE'S YOUR ANSWER.

838. *CJ*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:27 PM

This is one of the best essays on respect for personal boundaries that I've read in ages. It also allows men who may not understand safety issues (from a woman's point of view) to really and truly ‘get it’, possibly for the first time in their lives. I am hardly a timid gal, yet I too deal with this stuff 24/7, and so envy the freedom that guys enjoy, the basic freedom to relax in a public space without constantly remaining vigilant to potential danger.

839. *dan brodribb*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:40 PM

Kate Harding Said:

“Let me explain what an invitation to keep talking does look like — or more precisely, what it sounds like. And that is: AN INVITATION TO KEEP TALKING. Usually expressed as active engagement in conversation — much as it is among men!”

I am a man, and due to my profession, I am occasionally approached by people I don't know. In such cases, even though sometimes I DO want to keep talking, I clam up because I freeze up or I'm unsure what to say next or I because off woolgathering and am shocked at being snapped back into “social mode.”

So I often appreciate it if whoever it is keeps talking as opposed to giving up and walking away because it gives me a second to "get my conversational bearings."

I don't think I'm the only person in the world this has happened to.

That being said, I never realized how off-putting being approached badly and trying to figure out how to handle it can be until I experienced them myself. It's made me a lot more empathetic for women who have to deal with it on a regular basis.

-Dan

840. *OlderThanDirt*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:41 PM

I read a study somewhere using something like the following scenario: when someone from work asks you to join a group going out to lunch and you don't want to, but, after a pause, say something like, "That sounds great...(another pause)" Most of the people in the study could instantly identify that the person speaking doesn't really want to go to lunch. Before they state they can't or would love to, but... or whatever. Men were in this study. They could tell when the person was signaling reluctance. Honest to god, they could tell. Just like women with their woo-woo interpersonal mojo hyperskills.

I'm sorry I'm so vague about the study but I remember clearly that if the situation was co-workers at lunch instead of approaching women for dates or sex, they had no problem at all interpreting all manner of awkward smiles, pauses, etc. Odd, that.

841. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:42 PM

My best friend and I talked about this feeling guys have that they are God's gift a long time ago. We were having man troubles, our boys were little, we were guilty of spoiling them at the time, and vodka was involved. Anyway...

Little boys get the message from their moms that they are perfect and wonderful and they should get that message. We want them to have a positive self-image and they are perfect and wonderful TO THEIR MAMAS. Little girls get the same message, but because they are trained to be lil'ladies they learn that other people matter too.

When these little boys grow up and some woman tells them point blank or shows them without a doubt that they are NOT all that, the reaction is hurt feelings and honest confusion. "But my momma said I was perfect!!"

I only have one son. I am not your momma. Go to her for your affirmation. If you're all butt hurt 'cause some mean bitch turned down your offer to share your perfect self, go cry to your momma you big baby.

842. *Julie*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:47 PM

Vehemens:

Like any Nice Girl, I want to acknowledge the fact that you're trying to get it, and thank you for that. Because you see, *all* women are very strongly trained that they are supposed to be Nice Girls. Even when the most awful things are unfolding before us, we are supposed to do no worse than to politely excuse ourselves to the next room.

in public a thing like "Look, it's possible I just really don't feel like talking to you right now. Could you just leave me alone unless I indicate otherwise?"

That, in turn, is why something that to you must sound very innocuous, something like "It is, at most, a request that would help keep the nice guys from being in a worse situation," reads as so insidious to us. Yes, yes, it says, I suppose it's valid for you to think a little bit about your personal safety, as long as it doesn't stop you being *nice to me.*

Nice guys can learn to recognize that women don't OWE them a shot, even a very politely-dressed shot. (You might be shocked to learn how many "nice guys" don't get this, because women are not people to them but a reward they ought to be getting for their "niceness." Conversely, you might be surprised to find out that women don't see those as being, in truth, "nice guys," which is a big chunk of their problem in acquiring their "reward.") It is really, really not as big a sacrifice to ask of you as it is to ask women to please not worry so much about being attacked because *I* might just want a friendly chat and I deserve to have one.

843. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:51 PM

"That smile was NOT an indication that I was OK with being approached at all, let alone like that, much less that he had any chance with me. It was an indication that I didn't want to fight about it, verbally or physically, which is a real fucking concern in those situations. "

You know I read once that smiles likely developed from early people BARING THEIR TEETH. It was a way to show weapons and a way to show fear. When both people smiled at each other it was an acknowledgment that they were both armed and that they were both afraid so the footing was equal. Only later did it evolve into a pleasant greeting signal. Kind of like shaking hands, which came from people showing that they were not holding weapons.

I think that may be one reason why some women, including me, instinctively smile when nervous about someone. It's an automatic attempt to diffuse the situation, to be non-confrontational. Not because we are pleased by what's going on, but because we don't want the situation to escalate.

844. *Lucy*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 5:56 PM

Little boys get the message from their moms that they are perfect and wonderful

Oh my God, yes. I really take issue with this and the whole "my son can have any girl he wants" trope. Uh, no he can't- because no one, literally no one, is entitled to anyone they want. Not for relationships and definitely not on public transportation. It's all well-meaning, of course, but it's not such a stretch that a little boy who's told he can get any girl he wants might turn into a man who comes to expect that any woman in a public place he chooses to impose upon should be THRILLED to talk to him.

Even if he won't rape, it still doesn't bode well for how much respect and empathy one can expect from him.

845. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 6:29 PM

Another well-meant but not thought out thing far too many people tell their children: You can get anything/ be anything you want, as long as you work really hard.

Now, that one is obviously extremely problematic because it completely ignores the realities of a world that is full of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and all other kinds of nasty systems that keep far too many people from achieving things they want, no matter how hard they work (never mind that direct ableism in ignoring the fact that people might have physical or mental impairments that they can not change, no matter if they want to or not, no matter how hard they "work on it").

But aside from all those obvious flaws of the "bootstrap-myth", there is also the issue that many people take it to mean that they have the right to get whatever they want. And that they have the right to work on getting it, in whatever way they think necessary. Which makes it a-ok to keep hitting on and molesting and crowding and raping women they want, never mind what the women themselves might want.

After all, working hard to get what/where we want is something our society encourages! It's one of the most prized qualities in our society.

(Also, I just totally made myself nauseous by trying to understand the mindset of someone who considers a woman a "something" to get. Blergh.)

846. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 6:47 PM

Argh. Sometimes the whole "not my first language" thing really shows. Could someone please delete the previous (horrible sounding) "correction"-comment?

This is how the sentence was supposed to go:...to keep hitting on and crowding and molesting and raping women.

I'll walk away now until my ability to correctly express myself has recovered.

847. *Starling*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 6:50 PM

Although I don't really have any special private investigator mojo coolness to share about body language, yes. There's a huge difference between the real smile and the "rictus" smile, or polite smile, that we use in many social situations. Most photos feature the "rictus" smile unless you've made a joke and managed to get everyone really loosened up, or unless you are looking at small children or puppies or your beloved or something.

I'm pretty confident that most of us have the capacity to tell what body language is saying—the problem stems from the fact that men are told that they're supposed to go up and give it a shot anyway. I think that's probably fatiguing and potentially leads to a lot of feelings of rejection in the guy, who very likely not to get a positive response. You guys have heard of those "Leave me alone you twerp" phone numbers? The ones women can give guys who hit on them, which will then call a recording that says, "You got this number because you are a jerk and the woman you spoke to thinks so, and so does the rest of the population of the planet Earth . . ." or something of that sort? I imagine that there are plenty of guys who get that phone number and who are humiliated, horrified and really upset when they get that message.

Because they are truly just trying to make a good-faith connection, and they do not understand why they'd get a gratuitous insult instead of a "No, thank you."

I really, truly, genuinely want the guys in this category to read this essay and think, "Ohhh! Maybe I am inadvertently making the woman I approach feel like she cannot safely refuse to hand over her number. Maybe she is feeling threatened. If I don't make her feel

threatened, my success rate may go up dramatically."

This would be another bullet point for Rape Culture Hurts Everyone.

Vehemens, Dan Brodribb, what I want you to realize from this is that public places have different rules of engagement, and closed commuter spaces, among others, have the rule, "Don't strike up conversation unless you get the go-ahead." That rule does not have an exception like, "or there's a smokin' hot blonde you want to say Hi to." Following this rule is not just a matter of social courtesy but also of being respectful of others' feelings and considerate about the real concerns that confront a woman alone in public.

848. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 7:05 PM

Lauren, done! :)

849. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 7:13 PM

It's not like this "public places" rule is unknown or is a brand new thing. I've seen old movies where people were on the bus/subway/in the station. Unless the people or group were obviously together and talking animatedly, there was no social contact and everyone seemed okay with that. People staring off into the distance, reading, knitting, eyes closed, looking out the window, etc. were not bothering or being bothered and everyone seemed to accept this as normal. Am I mistaken or don't directors copy the backgrounds of real life to aid in the suspension of disbelief? Therefore, I have to assume that this social situation is known to almost everyone and men who claim ignorance of these established social signals are basically FULL OF SHIT.

850. *Anita*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 7:23 PM

(Vehemens:) "Being interested in something out the window is not 100% of the time a clear signal to be left alone. Same thing with listening to an iPod (I don't generally disturb anyone who is reading, books are more in the 90% area imo)"

So does a woman have to be 100% clear in order not to be interrupted? If you're just nearly completely certain she doesn't want to be bothered, isn't that enough? Especially in light of the fact that so many women on this thread have expressed that they don't feel comfortable giving a straightforward "I don't want to talk".

Let's say you're right, and only 9 out of 10 women don't want to be bothered when they're doing something. (I bet it's much higher than that.) You honestly think it's okay to interrupt all of them twice in search for the one that might want to talk, especially now you know that the odds are good that at least one of the women you're interrupting is a rape survivor? That just blew my mind, so let's say it again.

It is much more likely that a woman is a rape survivor than you're wrong about her body language.

I feel like the disability thing is a cover. The deaf women I've known are rarely so caught up in their own world (especially on transit) that they're oblivious to men trying to get their attention, nor are they less likely to be aware of their body language, nor are they dying for someone to talk to them (or incapable of making human connections on their own).

unaware of body language, secretly hoping or open for conversation but wrapped up in other activities, who are not put on guard by some guy repeatedly trying to get their attention. And you know what? I think the odds of that are low enough that you shouldn't base your actions on its probability.

851. *Ducky*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 7:52 PM

The whole "bewitching smile" thing reminds me of SNL when they made a joke about Toby Keith. I don't remember what the context was in, but the joke was Toby Keith's new (made-up obviously) song "Her lips said no but her eyes said yes".

I mean, is it really that hard? If the girl is barely responding or even actively says something along the lines of "I really don't want to talk right now" what else is there to question?

852. *Gail*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 8:11 PM

From inside the box I hear the cat saying, "I'm a NICE cat! Really! I promise I'm dead! Honest! I won't hurt you! C'mon, smile and open the box! I swear to you that I am dead!"

Upon opening the box I am met with very live cat who proceeds to shred my face with a torrent of sharp claws. The cat turns to me and says, "Stupid bitch. What the fuck were you thinking opening that box?"

853. *Sean*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 8:53 PM

@Liza-the-second: I had time to think about it and what I was attempting to do with my "male language" post was pretend that there's some sort of universal code that could be employed to communicate to men. If there is such a code, it's probably gone the way of the Enigma machine a long time ago. Having said that, if that approach proves effective in any way then I'll happily continue to try it. But I think (uh-oh, now I'm imputing a motive to *you* ;-)) that perhaps what made you uncomfortable was the one-size-fits-all nature of my post. At any rate, it made me uncomfortable after analysis.

I had a close male friend over to my house last night. I've known this guy for years, we went to the same college, I trusted him enough to have him as a roommate with my wife and I, and we tend to move in the same circles to this day. We're also both geeks, so all I really had to do was throw out the title of this story and then we jumped right into a discussion of some of the issues I've been wrestling with as I've been following the thread. He didn't require the 101 class, and if I'd tried my baby-talk language with him he probably would have been righteously insulted.

So my feeling is this: it is slightly dangerous to pretend that there's any one method of communication that's guaranteed to work in terms of bringing about a heightened awareness in men of the rape culture we live in. Some of them will get the message with very little explication, whereas others will require much more time and energy. Sounds obvious to me when I say it that way, but it eluded me while I was in the midst of my crap-gotta-deal-with-these-trolls-of-my-own-gender mindset. It was a knee-jerk reaction on my part to try and change male minds on the internet. I'll prove to be much more effective in communicating with my male peers, and if the statistic bears itself out then I hope to accomplish some good by doing so.

working for the price of one reader! And hopefully more to come. ;-]

854. *Sean*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 9:01 PM

Off-topic, but I wanted to add that my conversation with my Bolivian friend then spiraled off into a discussion of privilege, race, class, and many other worthwhile subjects, including an explication on his part of how he feels about the term "Latino". If this picture helps any, imagine two dudes busy drinking and throwing around literary references and philosophies into the wee hours with an occasional flash of insight to light up the night. Thanks to everyone for sparking such a meaningful conversation!

855. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 9:11 PM

Sean, I'm so pleased to hear that this sparked a great offline conversation with you. I always find that really gratifying as a blogger.

856. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 10:00 PM

In that vein:

I have had several interesting conversations with my parents about the issues presented in the posts about Polanski as well as the "guide..." post. At one point, my mom asked me if this didn't make me too afraid (I already have serious issues with social interactions that are not related to harassment.) And I could honestly tell her that, apart from taking a break when I needed to, I was also re-gaining a lot of that lost faith in humanity just seeing how many intelligent points you guys and others were making on the subject, standing up for your beliefs in such a brave, admirable way.

I have also made what my therapist called a very big step thanks to the examination of privilege and oppression here and at other intelligent blogs. You are helping me become mentally healthy (-er).

Thank you for that.

857. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:17 PM

Thanks for posting this, it and the comments were an interesting read. As a heterosexual male who was raped by two women, and now regards most women as potential rapists, I was wondering what the views of many of the readers/posters were towards my attitude and whether they felt my views towards women were unjust.

858. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:32 PM

@Sean: Okay, I've had some sleep and gone back and re-read all the relevant comments, and here's what I got :)

it is slightly dangerous to pretend that there's any one method of communication that's guaranteed to work in terms of bringing about a heightened awareness in men of the rape culture we live in.

This, I think, is more to the heart of what bothered me about what you were saying. I agree with what you're saying, but I was also hearing—and for once I want to disclaim that I really, truly believe you did not mean to say this at all—the oh-so-common "if you ladies would only X, you wouldn't have this problem!" underneath it.

Because while you, Sean, seem like a truly Nice Guy who is willing to sit down and examine your (completely understandable) knee-jerk "BUT NOT ME I AM NOT LIKE THOSE DUDES" reaction, and change your focus where appropriate, so very, very many of the people who have, in this discussion and countless others, offered similar "helpful" advice have been saying essentially that: that the problem is that women are not communicating with men effectively—not clear enough, not using a friendly enough tone, not using an unfriendly enough tone, blah, blah, blah.

And what it boils down to is kind of a cavalier, dismissive, "There you go, fixed rape for you. Problem was, you were trying to use your silly little ladybrains! Needed a man for that one." Which can be... a little frustrating.

The other, shadier side of that is that when one pretends that there is One Right Way to communicate with men, one (inadvertently or, sadly, not) implies that when a man fails to acknowledge/understand/respect a woman's attempt to communicate "no," it is because she was communicating wrong. i.e.: victim blaming. A popular sport and a vile one.

And having discussed this with you I a) certainly don't get the impression you were coming from that place (victim-blaming or Explaining) and b) kinda wish I could've been there for the late-night booze-fueled "Oh wow the world is crazy" talk with you and your friend, because you seem really cool.

(I feel like I've been rambling about this a bit, although it's no 4500-word treatise. I'm definitely a "talk-to-think" type, so thanks for indulging me there.)

859. *Cara*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:43 PM

The only thing I'd ever dream of asking for is an acknowledgement to being heard. If you don't want to give that, then it is your choice.

Dude. I know you're embarrassed because your pet pickup technique has been revealed to be irritating and frightening to women instead of oh-so-charming, as you've heretofore fancied it to be, but just accept the fact and **move on**. And, no, you aren't automatically entitled to acknowledgement. Women are not universal appliances. Get over it.

860. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:47 PM

@Stefan:

I am not going to comment on whether you viewing all women as potential rapists is just or unjust, as I don't think that's really the issue. (Nor will I get into the issue of whether this is a true parallel, because that's kind of been covered.)

What I am going to tell you is that I whole-heartedly support your RIGHT to view all women as potential rapists, if that's what it takes for you to feel safer.

861. *Julie*

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:47 PM

Stefan:

I'm very sorry that happened to you. To answer your question, if your experience means that you feel threatened by women who refuse to acknowledge your desire to be left alone in casual contact situations, then you are completely within your rights to feel that way, and to regard such women with additional caution.

Did you expect a different answer?

862. Jason

OCTOBER 10, 2009 AT 11:57 PM

Starling, thank you for this excellent post. In many ways it's extremely sad that this discussion needs to be had, but it certainly does. I try to be aware of how my privilege influences my outlook and behavior in different circumstances, and in theory at least the original post was old hat, but in practice it's still too easy to neglect practicing in my embodied life those things which I know intellectually. And many of the comments have forced me to reconsider other behaviors I may have thought of as positive (or at least neutral/benign) or perhaps not thought of at all.

To any men who doubt the 1:6 statistic, my own experience (yes, anecdotal alert) with women who have allowed me into their trust enough to talk about such things indicates that it's accurate. Furthermore, including other quantifiable forms of sexual assault/harassment would put that figure at 1:2, at a minimum. If you think of it in terms of the number of women who experience negative personal and social effects as a direct result of gender oppression, I'd be hard-pressed to think of any reason why it wouldn't be 1:1. Therefore, it should not be such a stretch to realize that virtually (if not exactly) every woman you meet has either been directly, personally affected by rape or another kind of sexual predation OR has a close relationship with someone (likely multiple persons) who have. To interact with them strictly on the terms of your own comfort and desire is not just thoughtless, it is dangerous. It is dangerous not just because you could be a rapist **as far as they know** (and to them the fact that you think you're a "nice guy" means exactly squat), but also because in doing so you perpetuate and reinforce the social conditions that make widespread violence possible.

I'm also somewhat ashamed to admit that I had never thought of rape statistics in terms of the number of men who are *actual*, as opposed to just possible rapists. I had thought to some extent about the fucked-up nature of putting nearly all the responsibility for rape prevention on women, but it is likely the case that much of my thinking about changing that overwhelming tendency had more to do with (unintentionally so, but nevertheless) white-knighting, as opposed to putting the responsibility on members of the privileged group to check their own behavior. If I, who have made some effort to be an agent of positive change, had not escaped that thought-trap, how much more so for men who have not been confronted with these realities as strongly as I have? Not wanting to toot my own horn at all, I just want to point out, for any men who may still be reading this far down the comments, that these are complex and serious issues and just because we may be more aware of the problematic social assumptions that inform our behavior that a) does not let us off the hook for the behavior and b) does not mean we can stop learning, that we somehow have become enlightened simply because we've started to see things differently.

Also, a huge thank you for all the awesome links. There are many things about which I need further education, and your suggestions will go a long way towards helping me reflect on my situation within the world and how I can be an ally and agent of positive change (and encourage other men to do so as well).

Briefly off-topic:

Sean, I am incredibly interested in your self-description as "anarcho-taoist." I don't know where you are, but if we ever end up in the same neighborhood I would love to sit down with your beverage of choice and hear more about it. I identify as an anarchist Christian, but have attractions to Taoism as well.

863. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:00 AM

Thx Liza and Julie

and no I didn't expect a different answer, I wasn't sure what to expect at all to be honest, I've had different responses from many different people, some have replied as you have and I'm thankful for that. I've also had people tell me that my view is entirely unjust and that because it only happens to very few men, it shouldn't affect my view of women like that, or how all men would like to be with two women and that it shouldn't be considered rape.

Thanks for replying the way you did though Julie and Liza

864. *Julie*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:05 AM

Stefan:

It's true that it happens much less often to men than to women, but in no way does that negate your experience or your needs in light of that experience. As long as you don't start attacking strange women as a form of proactive "defense," I think we're fine.

865. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:05 AM

Stefan:

If I am making you uncomfortable in any way please go ahead and tell me to fuck off. Don't stop for a second to worry about what my intentions are. Please do not consider whether or not I'm a nice girl and you might be hurting my feelings. If I am acting like such an asshole that I made you feel the slightest bit threatened then I beg you to please check my unwanted behavior. If I get wounded by what you say then maybe I'll think twice before I force my attention on the next person. I actually like to learn from my mistakes.

I have a tendency to be a real smart ass, but I'm being serious right now. If some other woman is doing this to you, just pretend she is me and that I've just said all of this to you.

866. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:11 AM

Thanks Julie, I definitely have no want to attack women as some form of defense, so we should be good :)

Gail – I'm not sure what you meant? As in regards to your previous posts in the thread?

867. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:17 AM

No, unless of course you didn't like my posts. :-/

I meant that if we met out in public somewhere and I made you feel uncomfortable I would want you to shut me down immediately.

868. *musicbizmuse*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:25 AM

Thank you for writing this. Until now, I have never heard someone other than myself speak against the practice of randomly hitting on strangers by making comments on their

For me, I feel not only embarrassed to receive compliments from people I don't know, but it also makes me feel dirty...because in my experience, people whose first words to you are concerned with your appearance generally have no interest in knowing *you*. It's a sign of disrespect. And generally, when you don't respond with a "thank you" or a smile to such comments, the speaker is offended and thinks you're being snobby or "bitchy." I've even been called a racist by a total stranger because I chose not to respond when he approached me on the sidewalk, gave me a once-over and told me I was "so good-looking he could eat me up." I walked right past him without so much as a nod, fixing my eyes on the pavement, and he yelled, "What's the matter? You don't want to talk to a black man? Are you a racist or something?"

There's simply no good response to that question. Not when you feel like a total stranger just undressed you in public, not when you feel that you have been called out on white privilege (whether you are exercising privilege or not) and any response will either incriminate you or encourage the random guy who wanted to "eat you up."

There is something about your entry that does bother me...and it's the fact that when people talk about rapists, they tend to talk about *male* rapists, *men* who sexually harass people. I don't know about you, but I happen to have been sexually harassed by a female, on the basis that she knew I was bisexual. She constantly made jokes about wanting to make out with me, even though she would then assure me she was straight and merely bored, so I just kept looking at her funny and shaking my head, thinking she was just immature. However, one night, we were hanging out in my dorm room listening to music and being generally kooky, when she started talking about making out again. And I told her no, as I'd told her many times before, I was not interested and I was in a committed monogamous relationship. She kept pressuring me throughout the next hour, and I began to ignore her and babble randomly about unrelated topics, thinking she was just bored as usual. But then, when I started dancing (by myself) to something playing on my computer, she got up and danced with me, then put her hands on my shoulders, then started pushing me backward toward the wall. I tripped and fell on my ass, and she pinned me to the floor, grinning and giggling and repeatedly asking me, "Well, don't you want to?"

I kept dodging her questions, paralyzed with fear—you see, I'd been in a traumatic situation five years before that happened very similarly, and I was losing my ability to think straight because of my paranoia. I kept dodging and dodging and waiting for her to get off of me while I stared at the ceiling...and then, perhaps she came to her senses, because she abruptly got up and left my dorm room, not returning that night. I couldn't talk to her for days about it because I was still trying to figure out what had happened, but I ran into her a week later and she was acting like nothing weird had ever gone on in my room. I finally had to stop her in the middle of the small talk to tell her I was not comfortable around her. She asked me why, and when I explained that what she'd done in my room had given me flashbacks to a time when I'd been molested, she looked at me weirdly, shrugged, and said, "Whatever. Okay. So are we good now?"

No, I told her, I didn't think we were. But I didn't feel like wasting my time trying to further explain to her how violated I felt. I haven't talked to her since.

These rules of which you speak—for the most part, very eloquently—are excellent. However, I think they should be directed towards anyone, male or female. No one is less or more potentially threatening simply because of their perceived gender. Sure, we can all quote statistics on male-versus-female numbers of rapists, cases, even talk about scientific studies done on levels of aggression in male and female studies, but as is the case with many issues, nothing is black and white. Men and women cannot be accurately named as "rapist"

and "raped," respectively, particularly because the situation can just as easily be reversed, or a man can rape or harass another man, or a woman can rape or harass another woman. Anyone can be at risk to be taken advantage of or disrespected, and anyone can lack consciousness in a moment long enough to take advantage of someone else or disrespect them. It's not about penetration and who has a penis; it's about consent.

869. Sean

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:48 AM

@Liza-the-second: I wanted to pick this out because my wife and I were just now having another interesting offline conversation with some married friends of ours and this conclusion was reached by a different road:

The other, shadier side of that is that when one pretends that there is One Right Way to communicate with men, one (inadvertently or, sadly, not) implies that when a man fails to acknowledge/understand/respect a woman's attempt to communicate "no," it is because she was communicating wrong. i.e.: victim blaming. A popular sport and a vile one.

This is precisely what I had in mind when writing that last post. A male friend approached it from a different direction, though, that being, "Dude, that's a pretty gross generalization to make about men, and an insulting one at that." Which basically underlines for me the dehumanization involved in this type of assumption (ie – that there is a right or wrong way to communicate with any particular gender). Any man who therefore believes that it's a woman's responsibility to communicate with him in some particular dialect is not only dangerously close to victim blaming, if not outright engaged in it, he is also denigrating his own gender as one that can be "bucketized", simplified, and stereotyped. It cuts both ways, not equally due to male privilege, but it cuts both ways all the same.

Although I've read that rape culture hurts us all, this crystallizes it for me on a level I can intuit, rather than being some intellectual concept that I just nod at. It's an angle I may play up in future conversations with my male friends. Also:

Because while you, Sean, seem like a truly Nice Guy who is willing to sit down and examine your (completely understandable) knee-jerk "BUT NOT ME I AM NOT LIKE THOSE DUDES" reaction[...]

So, a couple thoughts on this:

1. I have not yet achieved the platonic ideal of Nice Guy-ness. :-] There probably *was* a certain amount of "let me show you how it's done, ladies" in my "male language" post. Having said that, there was also a healthy dose of the activist in me that is constantly looking for the "right" way, the silver bullet, for engaging and communicating with others in order to effect change. I guess what I'm saying is that, although I appreciate affirmation when I'm heading down the right path, you were entirely correct to challenge me, and I thank you for that.

2. I came to the conversation pretty comfortable that I am not like those dudes in many ways, but I'm embarrassed and ashamed by them. So my instinct was to strike out, to fix, to try and resolve a fairly intractable problem with a fairly simple approach. It was just wishful thinking, and since entering the discussion I've had occasion to be humbled in many ways, which has me questioning how much distance truly separates me from them. It's a very healthy exercise.

And I also tend to think out loud, so I hope that ramble made some sense. Thanks for the nuanced discussion.

870. *Stefan*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:52 AM

Gotcha :)

I've definitely gone through the stage of just being super uncomfortable and not being able to do anything about it. Now I'm alot more outspoken about it if somebody makes me feel threatened. That being said, if somebody wants to compliment my hat or something, I'm usually pretty good about taking it at face value now. Lately if I'm approached and decide to show disinterest or indicate that I don't want to continue a conversation, the female involved has been respectful about it, which helps slightly mollify my perception of every woman intending me harm.

On a slightly different note, from the comments I have read from various posters, it seems like alot have had men approach them and then have had the men continue to try and interact with them after they have displayed no interest. I'm sorry to hear that, and I do hope don't think all men are going to do that, as some (myself included before what happened) may approach a woman who doesn't look busy, and will back off if she shows/or indicates she isn't interested. Not that all may do what I would do, infact a fair amount don't, but that there are many men who will respectfully back off if a woman indicates she isn't interested in pursuing a conversation.

871. *Andrea*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 12:54 AM

AMEN. Thank you so much. I hope that within my lifetime what you wrote will be common sense.

872. *Abe Frellman*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:00 AM

Brilliant! This should be added to the high school curriculum. Now.

873. *Caitlin*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:07 AM

or how all men would like to be with two women and that it shouldn't be considered rape.

Oh sweet holy fuck. I only *wish* I couldn't believe that someone would say that to you.

Rape culture: it really does hurt everyone.

874. *Stefan*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:12 AM

Caitlin – I was in pretty big shock when I heard that one too. Another person who was nearby when the conversation occurred went up and slapped the girl.

875. *alibelle*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:12 AM

Ok, this fmylife and the comments that go along with it seemed to illustrate this perfectly.

<http://www.fmylife.com/miscellaneous/5759599>

876. *Stefan*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:29 AM

Musicbizmuse – Thanks for posting

particularly because the situation can just as easily be reversed, or a man can rape or harass another man, or a woman can rape or harass another woman. Anyone can be at risk to be taken advantage of or disrespected, and anyone can lack consciousness in a moment long enough to take advantage of someone else or disrespect them. It's not about penetration and who has a penis; it's about consent."

I agree whole heartedly with the above statement

As far as random compliments, if you had done your hair a certain way, or had on a particular piece of clothing and somebody made a polite comment about how they thought it looked great on you, would you still feel dirty about it? I can understand the feeling in the situations you described, as the people were untactful and being assholes, but in a more respectful situation would you feel the same way?

877. *Sean*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:30 AM

@Jason:

I had thought to some extent about the fucked-up nature of putting nearly all the responsibility for rape prevention on women, but it is likely the case that much of my thinking about changing that overwhelming tendency had more to do with (unintentionally so, but nevertheless) white-knighting, as opposed to putting the responsibility on members of the privileged group to check their own behavior. If I, who have made some effort to be an agent of positive change, had not escaped that thought-trap, how much more so for men who have not been confronted with these realities as strongly as I have?

This is a lesson I've also internalized as a result of this discussion, and it really is a life-changer for me (and so shaming when I realized it). It speaks to the distance that we as a society must cross if we are all to truly be equal and free.

I had an oh-shit moment when I realized that I was guilty of whittie-knightiness on this thread, and that was quickly followed by this feeling of pathos that many men never get to the point where that lesson comes home to roost. And I'm still not sure how much of it my heart has really understood yet; I have in me the capacity for violence and that dark side is scary to contemplate. So, in my evaluation, even if I lay aside the risk assessment that women will reasonably perform on me, I'm still Schrödinger's Rapist, whether I like it or not.

I'm not really sure what to say after that...perhaps it's time for a beer and some navel-gazing.

Off-topic: Jason, please feel free to contact me at d-a-i-gi-d-a-n at gmail.

878. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:30 AM

alibelle,I just threw up in my mouth a little. What a bunch og assholes.

879. *Lucy*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:32 AM

Oh my God, I was so stupid to read those comments. Is reading an FML that you disagree with really justification to call a woman you don't know a "stupid bitch" and tell her to "get over" herself unless she's a "perfect 10"?

acting stupidly that their blood pressure will spike, and then there will be less of them.

880. Robert Hutchinson

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 1:57 AM

Because it can't be said enough (unless it breaks the blog software by making the page too long or something), this is an outstanding post, followed by many outstanding comments.

Starling, mods, non-trolling commenters: all awesome. (At least 200 kilohotdogs of awesome.)

881. Lali

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:01 AM

This whole article is just... well, if the stats were UK-based, I'd be printing it off and handing it out to the guys who fall into step with me and start talking in the street. And that guy who sat in the back seat of his friend's car while they gave me a lift and could not take a severe physical hint that I didn't want his arm around me. (Ending up bent pretty much double to get away was apparently not enough.) Oh, and the men who try to chat me up on late-night train journeys even after they've oh-so-subtly enquired about my relationship status and I've mentioned a girlfriend and gone back to looking out of the window. I'd send one to my first boyfriend, too.

See, I'm 5'9", and I know martial arts, and I'm pretty unafraid to stare people down, slap hands away (out in the open with space to move to – the car was... a bit confined for that), or wrestle people off me or my friends, and I like to think I'm pretty confident out and about in the streets, but I still left the address I was heading to with my best friend when I went out to join a D&D group the first time. And asked her to call me at 11 to make sure I was safely on the way home, and give me a handy excuse to duck out of staying any later. (And yes, the boys at D&D, in the nicest possible way, did suggest I could stay over, completely unprepared, and borrow their clothes, and there was plenty of room, no worries. :/ Thanks guys, not on the first game. By the way, you see that rainbow badge I'm wearing? Yes? Take a hint?)

Said best friend has since (I *think* mostly jokingly) told me off for leaving the address with her and so on, with the words, "Yeah, *thanks* for making me worry there."

Um. Yeah. Well, thanks for worrying – sorry, should I be apologising for taking steps to ensure my safety there? You're a woman my own age, you're 5'0", you pull the headphones-in-the-ears-with-no-music trick to avoid conversations with strangers, you cross the street to avoid gangs of wolf-whistlers in the dark... But you look at me funny when I give you the address of the gang of unknown young men I'm going to meet? And you tell me off for making you worry unnecessarily?

It's because of that, and other people double-taking if I comment on stuff like that (like taking a wrong turn on the way home because That Guy has been ten yards behind me for the last six streets and I'm on my own) that I keep thinking I'm paranoid.

This post, and all the comments after it, reminds me that I'm not. And it reminds me how many women I know who've been raped or abused, and how much of the stuff I've gone through *counts* as assault even though I feel ashamed to make *any* kind of deal of it because I'm *lucky* it wasn't worse and it is *nothing* in comparison to what some of my friends have gone through, and how the fact that I refuse to stop wearing that little rainbow badge is probably, on the whole, a bad idea, and I should really just keep my head down and hope nobody notices me.

Yeah, that probably all makes very little sense and bears little relevance to the topics currently being discussed, but I kind of needed to say that.

Sorry if I'm off-topic. Thanks for making me feel a little bit more on the sensible side of paranoid.

882. *Tahni*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:07 AM

This is wonderful. I shall be sharing it with as many people as I can, as the points brought up are wonderful. I recently began volunteering at a support center for survivors of sexual assault and while reading this I thought to myself "this should be on our fridge." :)

883. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:08 AM

ding – *ding* – *dingdingdingdingding*

So many men, and some women too, leveling up here. Me included. I'm just so kitten-high-on-catnip happy right now. Sure there has been some ugliness, but at least it served to further the discussion and help a lot of people look at themselves and at these situations differently. Eyes and hearts have been opened and I'm all just hippie trippin wow right now.

884. *Henchminion*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:21 AM

Wow. The phrase "Schrödinger's rapist" now has 932 hits on Google. I think I, and all the other people who have linked here, need to send our fearless moderators a couple of cases of baby doughnuts.

885. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:26 AM

Guideline for men: Do not approach a woman for any reason regardless of the "signals" you perceive that she is giving. If she wishes to communicate with you, she will approach you with directness and confidence.

Guideline for women: If you find a man interesting, approach him first with directness and confidence.

886. *CassandraSays*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:28 AM

Jay – Did I say that infantilising women was the best way to go? I don't think I did. What I was saying is that even though men may well be able to look at a situation and think "potentially scary / dangerous for women I care about" they won't necessarily extrapolate from there to women that they don't know, and that if they did they might think twice about some of the creepy-to-women things they do.

I really didn't care for the implication that any women who does feel threatened in situations that have the potential to turn bad is being a coward, by the way. That's kind of the whole point of this very long conversation, that women are forced by the way our society works to be alert to potential danger all the time. It doesn't mean that we then decide not to do the things we want to do anyway.

887. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:31 AM

That seems a bit one sided, women can tell men of their interest, but men can't do the same?

As long as it's done respectfully, and not interrupting the other person doing something else (reading/listening to music/what have you) is it really that big of a slight to approach somebody? That goes for both sexes.

The guy might not want to be approached by the woman, and could be placed in the situation that you fear a woman may be placed in. It goes both ways.

888. *Lucy*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:34 AM

Oh my God, here we go again...

889. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:35 AM

"That seems a bit one sided, women can tell men of their interest, but men can't do the same? "

Women don't rape men. If they did, then this entire blog post would not be relevant.

890. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:36 AM

"Women don't rape men. If they did, then this entire blog post would not be relevant."

Bullshit.

I was raped by two women, if you think that it doesn't happen at all, you're an ignorant bitch

891. *Julie*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:37 AM

AuntiMay:

Heeeyyy, guess what! We've already had two men tell us that it happened to them. It's much rarer, yeah, but that doesn't mean it never happens.

So tell me why it's more reasonable to tell men "never approach women, they'll always approach you" than it is to tell them "you can still approach, but back off if she's not responsive."

892. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:38 AM

"I was raped by two women, if you think that it doesn't happen at all, you're an ignorant bitch."

Welcome to banned camp.

893. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:39 AM

What? You going to try to ban me because I was raped and you don't believe me?

Get the fuck out of here

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:39 AM

RE Listening to music and being interrupted...you know, I don't mind being interrupted if someone actually needs something, or if they want me to turn down the volume, but yes in fact listening to music does mean the person is doing something and probably won't appreciate being interrupted. Personally I don't use headphones as a shield so much as I just like listening to music, so it's very much like reading a book – I am happily occupied with what I'm doing and would prefer not to be interrupted, and I expect people to respect that. If you don't, and there's not a good reason why you needed to interrupt me, I will at the very least think you're being rude.

I'm not even touching "bewitching smiles". Yeah man, women are trying to cast a spell on you – it's the "piss off and stop bothering me" spell. Sadly that one doesn't seem to work very well.

895. *Julie*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:39 AM

Oh. And also if you really mean to be overtly abrasive to everyone every time you post, and if so, why that is.

896. *Sean*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:45 AM

@Stefan: what I think your last post misses is that it's not going both ways *equally*, due to our privilege as males. I understand that your sense of entitlement has been horrifically upset, and I'm sorry for the violation which you have been subjected to. No one should have their freedom, past, present, or future, curtailed in that manner.

However, for the vast majority of men it's not a two-way street where the woman is coming at you in the same size of vehicle. She is, metaphorically speaking, driving a Prius while the men are bearing down on her in a Hummer. Although the street allows this sort of traffic, that doesn't mean she is being unreasonable when she swerves to avoid you. Am I making any sense?

897. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:48 AM

Awww man... and I was all hippie happy too. Fuck.

898. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:48 AM

"What? You going to try to ban me because I was raped and you don't believe me?

Get the fuck out of here"

You suffer terribly from male privilege.

899. *Julie*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:49 AM

Sean:

Dude, harsh. I think that a man who has been raped has had more than his "sense of entitlement" upset. If rape is horrific, it's horrific no matter who the victim is, ne c'est pas?

900. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:51 AM

260 of 345 Sean – I definitely recognize that women tend to be raped more than men, and am^{11/12/2015 8:40 am}

extremely saddened that it happens to anyone, however I meant that I think it's a little bit unreasonable to expect women to be allowed to approach men, and men not allowed to approach women at all. Each gender has the same right to approach someone of the same/or opposite gender.

Yes, she has every right to avoid/discourage an attempt to strike up a conversation, and I'd understand completely if somebody just doesn't want to talk to somebody else. However, denying the right to initially approaching respectfully seems a bit overkill.

901. *Julie*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:51 AM

AuntiMay:

No, seriously. I'd like an answer to the polite version of the question before I start asking why you're not busy under a bridge eating goats.

902. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:55 AM

AuntiMay – "You suffer terribly from male privilege."

What the fuck are you talking about?

You said men didn't get raped, and I responded that they do. After stating that as long as a man approaches and it's done respectfully, backing off if the other person isn't interested in striking up a conversation.

Throughout this back and forth you have done nothing but shown insensitivity to the fact I was indeed raped, and then proceeded to tell me I'm suffering from some sort of male privilidge?

How fucking dare you

903. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:57 AM

"No, seriously. I'd like an answer to the polite version of the question before I start asking why you're not busy under a bridge eating goats."

I don't understand your question. But I won't apologize for my point of view regarding the unpleasant way that men approach women in public. It's just another form of rape. And any time a man posts with the "men have it bad, too" reminds me of the "what about teh menz?" bullshit.

904. *RKMK*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:59 AM

#

Bullshit.

I was raped by two women, if you think that it doesn't happen at all, you're an ignorant bitch

Your charming reaction aside, I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt, Stefan, and assume you are not trolling for sympathy/kicks from the site Kate mentioned above.

However, Aunti May was speaking of statistical reality. Some men are raped by women(and many men – especially in prison – are raped by other men), but the incidence

of that happening compared to sexual assault and rape by men against women is like drops in a bucket compared to lakes and oceans.

Your own personal fear is reasonably rational, due to your personal experience, but men generally (outside of prison) do not have to navigate the threat of rape, especially by women, in their daily lives. To put it another way: people who've survived a terrorist attack have a rational basis to be traumatized and fearful of terrorism, but the statistical reality of a person in the general population dying in a terrorist attack is less likely than that of being hit by lightning. It is the exception, not the rule.

905. Lucy

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:00 AM

Sean, Julie:

Rape is horrific no matter who the victim is or who the perpetrator is. That's undisputable. But I kind of see what Sean meant in the "sense of entitlement" comment (or at least I think I do, correct me if I'm wrong, Sean). Rape has been classified for so long as a "female problem" that when a man is raped, it tacks all these "female" (culturally, heteronormatively "female") signifiers onto him. For some men, being raped is traumatic enough in and of itself. For others, however, the trauma of being raped is compounded by this identification with "female" where they previously had none.

And in still others, such as Stefan's case, the fact that he was raped by two women and had his trauma gravely misunderstood makes this experience somehow more valid and more traumatizing than any woman's rape- you know, because rape just happens to women. It just does. But a MAN being raped. That's a huge blow to the ingrained sense of privilege that men are allowed.

(Is that along the lines of what you were thinking, Sean?)

906. Jason

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:01 AM

I'm not sure I would agree that no man, at any time should ever approach a woman in whom he is interested. I do think, however, that any man considering an approach should subject himself to a **serious** gut check before doing so. I do think a man can approach a woman in a way that shows he takes seriously her agency as a person and safety – which is not to say it necessarily happens all that often. And men who do make it a practice to interact with women in a respectful fashion, as equals, are probably not the intended audience of the original post.

I also might say, though, that if a man is approaching a woman he's never before met with romantic or sexual intentions, it's highly unlikely that he intends to engage her as herself, as opposed to the object he creates and forces upon her based on his own observation and desire.

So while I wouldn't say it should **never** be done, it is probably the truth that it should be a very rare occurrence.

907. Stefan

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:01 AM

"I don't understand your question. But I won't apologize for my point of view regarding the unpleasant way that men approach women in public. "

rude, however approaching somebody in a respectful manner and then backing off if disinterest is shown shouldn't raise anybody's hackles. Sure if you look like you might be intimidating to people, you might consider internet dating or not approaching someone in such a way, but for most men, saying hello and introducing yourself could be deflected with an easy "I'm busy / not interested in continuing a conversation" instead of trying to "ban them" from approaching altogether

908. CassandraSays

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:02 AM

AuntieMay – PLEASE scroll up a bit and read Stefan's first comment, and then stop telling a rape survivor that what happened to him wasn't real and can't have happened.

909. Gail

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:02 AM

AuntiMay: Your simplistic guidelines would never work. Women who are regarding men as Schrödinger's Rapist would still be opening a box of unknown were they to approach a man. That being said, no one has said that no woman should ever approach a man.

Stefan: The point has been made on this and a couple other threads that no one is saying that men should never approach women. You know you are a good guy, the woman you approach does not know that. A woman has the right to shut a man down for whatever reason she wants to and the man should respect that.

AuntiMay: You are being a complete and total dumbass when you say that woman don't rape men. No, it definitely does not happen as often but how dare you hurt Stefan by not believing him or minimizing what he went through? The sex of the victim is irrelevant, rape is rape, and you are no better than those assholes who laugh about rape and say stupid shit like, "she was askin' for it" when you do things like this.

910. Paradox

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:04 AM

Thank you for so clearly articulating this. I know that's just one more voice added to the grateful chorus, but it's so nice to see the feeling I've been struggling with placed so gracefully into words. I am constantly approached in inappropriate ways in public, and am constantly at a loss over how to respond. I'm legitimately considering printing copies of this to hand to the men who do it.

Just, thank you.

911. Stefan

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:05 AM

Gail – "The point has been made on this and a couple other threads that no one is saying that men should never approach women. You know you are a good guy, the woman you approach does not know that. A woman has the right to shut a man down for whatever reason she wants to and the man should respect that."

Oh definitely, women have every right to shut the guy down. But AuntiMay was stating that men should NEVER approach, which seems overkill. As long as he leaves it alone after she makes it known she's not interested in pursuing a conversation, there doesn't seem to be much harm done.

912. Gail

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:06 AM

See, that's the other problem with that "men don't ever approach women" crap. It just ain't

913. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:07 AM

Men generally (outside of prison) do not have to navigate the threat of rape, especially by women, in their daily lives.

That's understandable, however my post didn't necessarily refer to the fear of rape in a woman being approached, but more in the fact that as long as whoever approaches the other person is respectful and backs off after no interest is shown, there isn't a lot of harm done.

914. *Jason*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:09 AM

But I won't apologize for my point of view regarding the unpleasant way that men approach women in public. It's just another form of rape.

No, it's not. It's an action that exists along the same continuum of actions that leads to rape, and on through to more violent crimes. The difference is subtle but vital. But you're right to insist that there is no excuse for that kind of behavior, and I would say that most approaches men make towards unknown women, in public places that are not designed for the purpose of meeting new people (and probably many if not most in places that are), fit into that category.

915. *AuntiMay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:09 AM

"AuntiMay: You are being a complete and total dumbass when you say that women don't rape men."

What about teh menz? I am so sick of that shit.

916. *Sean*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:10 AM

@Julie: You are correct. That was a poor choice of words, and I'm sorry if it offended Stefan. I wouldn't be surprised if it did.

curses his grasp of the English language for a time

@Stefan:

I meant that I think it's a little bit unreasonable to expect women to be allowed to approach men, and men not allowed to approach women at all.

If I may be so bold, you are approaching this conversation from the perspective of someone who has been brutalized. I have not. I'm entitled, powerful, and generally feel this sense of entitlement whether I think about it or not. I'm sorry if I allotted you the same motive and perspective when I made my comment. That was a real asshat gesture on my part.

What I was trying to communicate with my last post was that, although I long for a world in which there is pure equality of the kind which I believe you are expressing with the quoted statement above, it's just not the reality I know. It *is* unfair. It's unfair to the women who must constantly assess the danger that males near them might pose, and it's unfair to the men who want to openly engage in dialogue with the women they find

What we can't do, though, is pretend that reality is other than it is. Your experience cannot and should not be diminished by anything I or others might say. You are grappling with a complex issue, as am I, and your life experience makes it even more complex. I guess I'm just trying to highlight that if we abstract this conversation somewhat, it becomes apparent that women are not the equals that you or I feel they should be. The question then becomes (to me): how do we right this situation?

Perhaps I'm rambling again. If so, my apologies.

917. CassandraSays

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:11 AM

Since we seem to be back to is it ever OK for men to approach women in public or not, which I thought we'd already covered...sure, if the woman looks like she's open to being approached, ie. open body language, willing to make and maintain eye contact, a smile that isn't the nervous smile Kate was talking about. If however she looks totally closed off, is ignoring you, rebuffing attempts to make eye contact, etc? Then no, leave her alone. That was kind of the entire point of the initial post...it's how men respond to signs that we're not interested that begins to tell us whether they're trustworthy or not.

Also please don't ever pull a woman's headphones out of her ears because you want to talk to her. I've had that happen on multiple occasions and seriously, not cool.

918. Stefan

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:11 AM

"What about teh menz? I am so sick of that shit."

So men being raped don't have the same rights as women who have been raped, and it's more okay for a man to be raped?

Get out of here with that bullshit, it's utterly ridiculous

919. Stefan

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:13 AM

CassandraSays – Thank you

As long as it's done respectfully, no harm is done

920. RKMK

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:15 AM

That's understandable, however my post didn't necessarily refer to the fear of rape in a woman being approached, but more in the fact that as long as whoever approaches the other person is respectful and backs off after no interest is shown, there isn't alot of harm done.

Except for maybe the cold stone that dropped in the woman's stomach, the tingle of apprehension that skittered down her back, and the breath frozen in her lungs until the dude showed signs that he's accept her lack of interest without setting her on fire, sure – no harm, no foul.

921. RKMK

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:16 AM

(*he'd)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:16 AM

What about teh menz? I am so sick of that shit.

And you should be sick of it, but who was saying that?? I was talking about rape survivors. I was recognizing us all as humans. I wasn't drawing the line between us and them. Most of us are trying to help men and some women understand that women are just as human as men and have the same human rights as men. You sound like just because men have a different world view that they should be dragged down and belittled no matter what happens to them. How is that any different than what most of them do to us?

923. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:22 AM

Welcome to banned camp.

Yes indeed — welcome, AuntiMay! Your impersonation of a feminist caricature was delightful, but I'm bored now. Bye.

Having said that, Stefan, "ignorant bitch" was way over the line. I'm not banning you, because you got provoked by a troll, but watch it.

924. Stefan

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:25 AM

"Except for maybe the cold stone that dropped in the woman's stomach, the tingle of apprehension that skittered down her back, and the breath frozen in her lungs until the dude showed signs that he's accept her lack of interest without setting her on fire, sure – no harm, no foul."

So men should never try to approach somebody?

I can understand some women being scared of being approached, and usually that is reflected through body language, discouraging somebody to approach. If it isn't displayed and the man approaches and she is scared, that is usually indicated through body language too, which some men will pick up on.

I'm not saying that I don't sympathize with the womans perspective at all, additionally if a man never approached a woman due to assuming that every woman would be scared of a respectful approach, the general population would be alot lower. As far as I've known, from talking to alot of couples I know, a fair amount of couples meet this way.

It seems a little unrealistic to expect a man to never approach a woman in my opinion.

925. Stefan

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:27 AM

Kate Harding

Thanks for banning them, and sorry about the language, however being told that I don't deserve rights as a rape victim because I am male tends to evoke emotion in me

926. RKMK

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:34 AM

It seems a little unrealistic to expect a man to never approach a woman in my opinion.

I would respond to this, except there's a 900+ thread full of incredibly smart women detailing what is an appropriate setting or situation to approach women. Perhaps you

should read the thread in its entirety, as I feel you may have skimmed it before now.

927. *calixti*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:34 AM

I've literally read every. single. comment. on this thing. Yes, I have no life.

And Stefan, it's been said, but no one's saying a man should never approach a woman—they're saying you shouldn't approach someone *unless they show they're open to being approached*. It's pretty easy, really; when I'm on the bus late at night or early in the morning, my body language is pretty closed off, I'm aware that it's dark, and I'm probably the youngest person on the bus, quite possibly the only woman on the bus, so I stick my headphones in my ears, sit close to the driver, not look at **anyone** and wait for my stop.

Afternoon? When it's nice and bright out and there's other women around? I'll smile and leave one headphone out and make eye contact.

The former? Do not approach me, or I will regard you as dangerous. The latter? Hey, talk to me! If you notice my nifty ebook reader, go ahead and ask what it is. If you recognise it, ask what I'm reading—maybe we can geek out over Gaiman together. (General 'you,' not specific 'you.')

That goes for people of all sexes and genders.

928. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:39 AM

Calixti

I agree in entirety to your post above and it reiterates what I was trying to get across.

Included in what I deemed "approaching respectfully" was the notion that the person being approached showed body language indicating they were open to it.

"I'm aware that it's dark, and I'm probably the youngest person on the bus, quite possibly the only woman on the bus, so I stick my headphones in my ears, sit close to the driver, not look at anyone and wait for my stop."

That falls in with what I was saying about respectfully approaching. In that situation, it's indicated that you don't want to be approached, and it's well within your rights and completely understandable to assume I'm dangerous.

I'm glad we're on the same page :)

929. *Sean*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:40 AM

@Lucy: I wish I had had your clear explanation in mind when I posted my comment, but I did not. I was searching for words to describe something I find hard to describe, hard to approach mentally, and I grabbed the wrong ones. They may be right in the way that you have explained them, but what I was really thinking was more along the lines of, "My world would be turned upside down if I was raped by women. Does. Not. Compute." I had much the same reaction when I read in the NYT about men being raped by other men in the Congo. To me, "sense of entitlement," doesn't seem to describe it by a long shot. Again, Stefan, I'm sorry for my choice of words.

930. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:44 AM

267 of 345 Er, I believe AuntiMay DID say that a man should never approach a woman. Not growing 8:40 am

at those who missed it — it's a loooooong thread — but it was true that somebody said it. Somebody who said other ridiculous things and then got banned.

931. [calixti](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:47 AM

Oops, you're right A Sarah. Can I amend that to nobody who's not a relative of Trolly McTrollerson said it? ;)

932. [MezzoSherri](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:50 AM

(Stefan) if a man never approached a woman due to assuming that every woman would be scared of a respectful approach, the general population would be alot lower. As far as I've known, from talking to alot of couples I know, a fair amount of couples meet this way. It seems a little unrealistic to expect a man to never approach a woman in my opinion.

Stefan, I'd like to suggest you go back over the comments thread, because this notion has been discussed pretty thoroughly. Search on the word "roof" (as in "the roof is the introduction") and you might see some useful distinctions made about the sorts of contexts where connections are more likely to be made. With the exception of Auntie May, I haven't seen ANY women on this thread saying that men should never introduce themselves to women.

Although I'd encourage you to read a lot more of the comment thread than this, CassandraSays addressed your concern only seven posts above yours, when she wrote:

Since we seem to be back to is it ever OK for men to approach women in public or not, which I thought we'd already covered...sure, if the woman looks like she's open to being approached, ie. open body language, willing to make and maintain eye contact, a smile that isn't the nervous smile Kate was talking about. If however she looks totally closed off, is ignoring you, rebuffing attempts to make eye contact, etc? Then no, leave her alone.

As a rape survivor myself, I have real sympathy for what you have endured. However, I'm feeling some frustration about how, rather than responding to CassandraSays's insights, you just repeated this straw argument about us wanting men to never approach women.

933. [Stefan](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:53 AM

MezzoSherri

I agree with what CassandraSays said, and was reiterating myself due to the fact that RKMK seemed to imply that women never wanted men to approach in this post

" "That's understandable, however my post didn't necessarily refer to the fear of rape in a woman being approached, but more in the fact that as long as whoever approaches the other person is respectful and backs off after no interest is shown, there isn't alot of harm done."

Except for maybe the cold stone that dropped in the woman's stomach, the tingle of apprehension that skittered down her back, and the breath frozen in her lungs until the dude showed signs that he's accept her lack of interest without setting her on fire, sure – no harm, no foul."

934. [Kate Harding](#)

268 of 345 OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:55 AM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

however being told that I don't deserve rights as a rape victim because I am male tends to evoke emotion in me

I understand, but it doesn't actually excuse name-calling that's both hostile and sexist, especially in a thread like this.

And despite the fact I'm quite sure AuntiMay was fucking with us, the term "What About The Menz" exists for a reason. From the second link:

No one is saying that discussions on men and masculinities shouldn't go on. It is absolutely important to have dialogue on men's issues, including discussions on violence done towards men. The thing is, a feminist space — unless the topic is specifically men's issues — is not the place to have that discussion and neither are spaces (feminist or otherwise) in which the topic is specifically focused on women's issues.

You came in here and asked how we'd respond to you saying that you've been raped by women and are thus wary of women. People responded compassionately and encouraged you not to apologize for setting your boundaries as you see fit, which is what any decent person would say. But that is an entirely different thing from suggesting that because all genders can be raped, no gender has a good reason to be more wary than another.

This is a post about how *women* live constantly with the specter of rape. The personal experiences of men who have been raped, although horrible, do not mean that in general, women are just as dangerous as men or that men in general live with the same kind of fear, or that our culture is set up to support female violence. If I see this thread going any farther in that direction, I will not hesitate to ban more. This is a post about how *men treat women*, and thus the topic of male victims is a derail, no matter how much we may sympathize.

ETA: And yeah, I see we're also back on the derail about how men can never approach women. You need to go back and read the comments before you make any more, Stefan.

935. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 4:15 AM

You need to go back and read the comments before you make any more, Stefan.

And you need to read the link Kate just dropped. To quote further:

What it boils down to is this: Men, not women, need to be the ones creating the spaces to discuss men's issues. There are a lot of feminist allies who do this, in fact, and there also a lot of non-feminist (or anti-feminist, if you really want to go there) spaces that are welcoming to this kind of discussion. Thus, the appropriate response to a thread about women is not to post a comment on it about men, but rather to find (or make) a discussion about men.

936. *Trix*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:47 AM

Another Matt: I totally suggest you get *Yes Means Yes*, a recent feminist anthology that Kate contributed to. It really gets into the whole idea of explicit and enthusiastic consent, and even makes the useful observation that it doesn't even have to be verbal, all the time. In the sexual realm, "wanna fuck?" is never a bad question (with perhaps some alteration in actual language), and the response can be someone jumping into your lap and wriggling around with intent as well as, "Yes, please!"

Going upthread away, to that person who brought Matt Shepard into it, fuck you. Sure, gay men get bashed more than straight men to, there is no question. So you *should* be looking at straight men as Shroedinger's Basher; as a queer woman, I certainly do. But let's do another thought experiment. How many women have been assaulted by men? Many of us – there is that 1 in 6 sexual assault figure. How many gay men have had that experience? Far fewer. At least half of my female friends have been physically and /or sexually assaulted by men. A very few have been physically assaulted by same-sex (ex-)partners. But even fewer have been gay-bashed – I know of three gay-bashings personally out of the scores of queer acquaintances I have.

So if you'd like to assess your risk of being gay-bashed as low and "refuse to live your life that way" (in a state of fear), that's fine. However, my realistic chance of assault is higher than yours (hah, although that horse has bolted already – I *have* been assaulted, more than once), so I should be able to take whatever measures that I deem fit in reducing my risk profile.

No, I don't walk around in a state of fear all the time – very few women do – but virtually all of us have experienced fear in response to a situation that seemed to be unclear or getting out of hand. To imply it's stupid for us to do so is saying more about your own perceptions than ours. There is plenty of data around to suggest that *not* paying attention to those warning signs – being too nice, to polite, too obliging – is much more counter-productive than the reverse. Read *The Gift of Fear* for some useful information.

937. *Pete*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:13 AM

These sorts of posts always make me feel kind of depressed and ashamed of my Y Chromosome. I can't figure out what's wrong with men that over half the world's population has to constantly be aware of and on guard against assault, simply because of their Sex. You'd think we could have come further than this by now.

938. *Stephen*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:26 AM

I thought this was great, and told so many people about it... That every guy should read this... but then I had my girlfriend read it and she had an interesting response... She felt that it scares away the "good" guys and gives the "bad" guys ideas to hide themselves... I don't know how I feel, but I thought I'd share and open it up for conversation...

939. *Catherine*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:37 AM

Question:

If men are so fed up with women shutting them down because we feel they are Schoedinger's Rapist, why not get together and start explaining to other men Rape Is Not Acceptable? By the stats, if one in sixty is a rapist, why the hell are the other fifty-nine sitting on their thumbs? Why is it ok to the other 59 their wives daughters sisters friends live with this fear and this reality?

And yes, I am the super statistic- my sexual assault happened was an intelligent and interesting stranger and I was 10. Happily I had the courage (ok, anger) to get my ass out of there.

(Zombie Playa? it would be funny if it weren't true)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:03 AM

Catherine: peer groups tend to be self-reinforcing in their values. Or, to put it another way, there's no *obvious* misogynists or *obvious* would-be rapists in my group of friends, because my group of friends would not tolerate their presence. That's good in the individual sense, but it does have the downside of distancing us from the people who really need to know how we feel about this. Not sure how to counteract this.

Obviously public situations are entirely different, and potentially afford more opportunity to make a difference.

941. *Kezia*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:15 AM

OlderThanDirt said:

"I read a study somewhere using something like the following scenario: when someone from work asks you to join a group going out to lunch and you don't want to, but, after a pause, say something like, "That sounds great...(another pause)" Most of the people in the study could instantly identify that the person speaking doesn't really want to go to lunch. Before they state they can't or would love to, but... or whatever. Men were in this study. They could tell when the person was signaling reluctance. Honest to god, they could tell. Just like women with their woo-woo interpersonal mojo hyperskills.

I'm sorry I'm so vague about the study but I remember clearly that if the situation was co-workers at lunch instead of approaching women for dates or sex, they had no problem at all interpreting all manner of awkward smiles, pauses, etc. Odd, that."

I think you are referring to a book by Deborah Cameron called "The Myth of Mars and Venus" some excerpts of which can be found here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/oct/02/gender.familyandrelationships>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/01/gender.books>

942. *Lauren*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:05 AM

Another Matt

I get what you are saying about not knowing obvious rapists. But as we have established, you do know men. And men are Schrödinger's rapists. You don't have to be sure who is an actual rapist in order to make a difference. Making a difference is not only about confronting men who are obviously ignoring the fact that a woman doesn't want to talk to them, or who are behaving in a threatening manner, or who are actually in the act of physically harming a woman.

Stepping in is important. But it is just as important to change your every-day interaction, the way you react to rape culture. By not laughing at rape jokes- and telling people why you are not laughing. By pointing out to people that they are seeing things from a privileged perspective. By treating women as human beings and expecting others to do the same. By not spending money on movies that are obviously misogynistic. By trying to use your teaspoons to do something against rape culture.

There is a lot you can do. Most of it is really easy to do, once you are willing to accept the facts of rape-culture and male privilege and make a conscious choice to work on changing things.

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 2:17 PM

You don't have to be sure who is an actual rapist in order to make a difference. Making a difference is not only about confronting men who are obviously ignoring the fact that a woman doesn't want to talk to them, or who are behaving in a threatening manner, or who are actually in the act of physically harming a woman.

Absolutely. Someone who's not an obvious X, Y or Z might very well still have much to learn about not being part of the overall problem (since most of us do). I don't hang out with obvious bigots and jerks, either, but I do hang out with people who will talk about how heroic and inspirational people with disabilities are, for instance, or call Ann Coulter a "tranny" without thinking about why that's perceived as such an insult and whom it really hurts. People who wish for gay male friends to shop and drink Cosmos with, without stopping to think that what they're really wishing for is their own pet stereotype. People who think that if Skip Gates had been more respectful to that cop, he wouldn't have gotten himself into trouble, and that's the end of *that* discussion. People who would never dream of insulting *my* body but will still talk about how if people just took the stairs instead of the elevator, the country wouldn't be so fat. Etc.

I have *been* one of those people plenty of times, and still sometimes am. I get a little better every time a friend or reader tells me to examine my own privilege, or asks me to think about something I usually don't *have* to think about and thus don't. So I'm willing to bet that there are loads of productive conversations you could have with your friends about sexism and rape culture, even if they've already cleared the "Don't harass or rape" hurdle.

944. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 3:51 PM

Oh man, I go out, and when I get back, the comment thread has grown again. Teh internetz has taken over my life.

I'd like to add another wrinkle to what Stephan and others have brought up—the question of vigilance as a result of assault by a woman. There are unquestionably women who rape, although many fewer than men who rape. For men to cheerfully approach any woman anywhere without any caution, assuming that women are powerless and unable to hurt them, is actually kind of dumb.

In fact, any individual woman can be as dangerous as any individual man. The incidence of predator women in the population is low enough that most of us—men and women—discount women almost entirely as possible threats. People who have seen the kind of destruction ALL human beings can wreak on one another tend to be more cautious—again, cops, soldiers, victims of child abuse and survivors of war.

So, yeah, Stephan, being wary of women is sensible. You are simply attuned to the presence of a threat that most men aren't aware of. This is different from being frightened of women. It just means that you do risk assessment of people you meet instead of accepting them at face value. That's cool. The level of risk you accept is ALWAYS your own choice and something the rest of us have no business judging.

But what I'm pointing out in this post is that most women, by virtue of their experiences or the things they've been told by other women, are keenly aware that men pose a threat. So we too have a level of wariness around men that is also entirely appropriate. Our risk assessment process also includes the probable difference in physical strength between ourselves and the man who approaches, and the likelihood that the man will be a predator rather than a good person. With the addition of these two factors, strange men approaching

additional risky behavior, such as crowding or boundary-crossing, is going to trigger women's desire to get away and prevent further contact.

In essence: you're sensible, but you're unusual. Your caution comes from a rare and terrible crime committed against you. Women are also pretty sensible re: men, but our caution is much more usual, because the crimes against women are relatively common. But most men don't get it, and I would really like them to get it, because then they will get more dates. (Oh, yeah, and women will be less frequently harassed and frightened in public places.)

And, Kate, DO NOT GET ME STARTED on the Skip Gates thing. You have no idea how much righteous ire I can unleash on that subject.

945. [abyss2hope](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 4:35 PM

Stefan, when you talk about approaching women respectfully and understand that sometimes the only respectful action is not to approach a woman at all it is important to explicitly include this detail. If you don't then I and others can't tell whether you get this basic idea since too many men do not understand it or refuse to understand this.

Men can absolutely be raped by women and other men. Some women buy into the rationalizations which are most commonly used to deny male on female rape and decide that if something when done to them cannot be rape then it cannot be rape if they turn around and do it to men. The idea that girls and women are asking for it implies that boys and men can be asking for it as well. The same goes with "she didn't say no," harassment and disregarding any other personal boundary.

The difference in sexual violence perpetration and victimization by gender has a gendered impact which we shouldn't deny in the name of gender equality. When some people bring up male victimization or female perpetration they seem to be wanting to deny this gendered reality.

I agree with those who labeled AuntiMay as a troll. After reading all the comments from this person (including: "Women don't rape men. If they did, then this entire blog post would not be relevant.") I was left with the concern that this was an MRA and a man who believes that feminist women believe they can do whatever they want including having the right to rape men while feminists believe men don't have the right to do anything. AuntiMay could be a woman who gives off those vibes since attitudes are not biologically based.

One suggestion for when a woman is seeming to be open to getting to know a man is to simply say hello with no expectations of a response. There are times when I see a man who I might like talking to and I will do this. When I have no expectations it is impossible for me to be rejected since I have asked for nothing. If my hello is responded to with enthusiasm then I will proceed again with no expectations that this conversation will continue.

Other than respecting my space, my safety, my right not to engage with them and my right to disengage at any time, other people owe me nothing and vice versa.

946. [Nia](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 5:41 PM

@Matt:

There are many reasons why this happens again and again.

Everyone is socialised with the idea that women should be friendly, polite, approachable and pleasant to look at. A woman who doesn't comply to the standard is more noticeable than a man who doesn't.

A common antifeminist fallacy is that one of the problems of women who aren't fully successful is that they failed at being pleasant. Niceness is assumed to be a woman's primary "weapon" to succeed in society.

So it's not that women are very rude – it's that many men have an unrealistic expectation of politeness as compliance or pleasantness. Consider that they don't demand that politeness of men.

947. *jay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 5:45 PM

CassandraSays,

"Did I say that infantilising women was the best way to go? I don't think I did."

I didn't say you said so, I said that what you said may well lead other people, like my sister, to think along those lines.

"I really didn't care for the implication that any women who does feel threatened in situations that have the potential to turn bad is being a coward, by the way. That's kind of the whole point of this very long conversation, that women are forced by the way our society works to be alert to potential danger all the time. It doesn't mean that we then decide not to do the things we want to do anyway."

Good. The thing is, though... This is as much or more about discourse about assumed danger as it is about real danger. What you say above is equally true for men if you don't single out rape. But would you find it reasonable behaviour if a male reporter were scared interviewing Elton John in his tour bus should he close the door? Or scared about being mugged by a gangsta rapper in need of renewed street cred? I know this is about Schrödinger's rapist (genius title, btw), and I assume all this has been covered in the millions of comments above that I didn't all read (I happened to read yours and that's why I replied), and I really don't want to get off the topic. But there's also Schrödinger's mugger and Schrödinger's killer, and statistically, men are much more likely to become a victim of a violent crime than women are. Not rape, sure. But if we'd say that being scared about being mugged by a man is unreasonable in the situation you describe, why would we assume that fear of being raped by a man is reasonable?

"If you don't, and there's not a good reason why you needed to interrupt me, I will at the very least think you're being rude."

Agreed. And being rude is not likely to start a good conversation, which is, really, the point of starting it. So that probably kind of balances out. People wanting that conversation probably will have that reason, others probably are just rude.

"Also please don't ever pull a woman's headphones out of her ears because you want to talk to her. I've had that happen on multiple occasions and seriously, not cool."

Seriously? That really sounds like a bad idea. And more than just borderline creepy unless you fell asleep on a train with the plugs in and the person wanted to tell you you reached the station you wanted to get off at.

948. RKMK

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 5:50 PM

I assume all this has been covered in the millions of comments above that I didn't all read (I happened to read yours and that's why I replied), and I really don't want to get off the topic.

If you really don't want to get off topic, you would have read those millions of comments, which do indeed already cover this particular flavour of derail.

949. limesarah

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 5:56 PM

May I offer two excellent conversations I've had with men on public transit, as examples of successful negotiation of boundaries? These are both slightly different situations than your average bus ride, because it was on a long-distance train with an observation car. Since everyone had their own seat elsewhere on the train the observation and dining cars were fairly clearly more of a social space.

Conversation 1

Me: *sits, spinning yarn with tiny little porta-spindle; smiles vaguely at people nearby* [I often do this in public specifically as an introvert conversation-attracting device]

Guy who happened to be sitting next to me: *stares at spinning device in a classic mesmerized manner* "I love watching people spin; it's so fascinating. What fiber is that? It doesn't look like wool."

Me: "No, it's cotton." *explains tiny spindle's usefulness for spinning said fiber*

And we later discovered that he's a children's librarian, which is what I'm currently studying, so we talked for a good 20 minutes. My entire posture had been designed to say "Yes, I am doing something, but would probably welcome conversation", which was confirmed when I answered his question enthusiastically instead of just mumbling and turning away.

Conversation 2

Me: *sits with Hebrew textbook out, studying*

Guy passing by: "Is that Biblical or Modern Hebrew?"

Me: *looks up and smiles, but keeps book open* "Biblical"

Guy: "Oh, I just finished my doctorate in Old Testament Studies. It's a great language; good luck with it!" *walks away to elsewhere in the train*

Now, it's entirely possible that Guy #2 wasn't planning on chatting for long anyway, but I'd like to think he correctly read my signals as saying "I am not annoyed by your question, but unless you are going to help me with verb prefixes, you are likely to get beamed with a dictionary if you distract me for too long".

950. jay

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 5:57 PM

RMMK,

it's a relevant analogy. But you address a meta issue instead of the issue.

But if we'd say that being scared about being mugged by a man is unreasonable in the situation you describe, why would we assume that fear of being raped by a man is reasonable?

Yeah, first of all, read the comments, of which there are ALMOST A THOUSAND now, so you can be pretty sure that your worries about men have been discussed, because god forbid there be a thread about rape and sexual harassment that doesn't turn into a Men Have It Bad Too, Ladies discussion.

But second, mugging is an entirely different type of crime from sexual assault. Are you socialized to accept that mugging is your fault if it happens to you? Have you ever tried to convince someone that they weren't "really" mugged, or that they brought it on themselves by carrying a purse? Have you ever been in a situation with someone you know, a normal-seeming person, and they said something that made you think that they might mug you that night? Do you stand at the bus stop and have people come up to you and conspicuously eye your back pocket and say "Nice wallet, baby" and then have to get on the bus with them? Maybe they're the bus driver!

Get fucking real.

952. [Sweet Machine](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 5:58 PM

But you address a meta issue instead of the issue.

Oh for fuck's sake.

953. [limesarah](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:00 PM

But would you find it reasonable behaviour if a male reporter were scared interviewing Elton John in his tour bus should he close the door?

As has been discussed, one reason the reporter is likely to not feel scared is that if someone he was interviewing did attack him, he would not be told that he was "asking for it". With the exception of some very politically / socially powerful men, his interview subject would likely be prosecuted as far as the journalist felt like pushing it. You get into other intersections of privilege, obviously, if the journalist and subject are of different races or other demographics.

954. [Gail](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:07 PM

Jay, unless you're willing to do your fucking homework on this thread then... I mean 'da fuck dude?? Oh I get it, you're just so much smarter / better / more informed / manly-er / creative / original than the rest of us that you don't HAVE to read what's already been said. How bitchy of us to expect you to waste your manly time before you give us your manly opinion. Of course it didn't matter that us silly women took the time to keep up with this discussion, our time is naturally not as important as yours. (flutters eyelashes)

955. [limesarah](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:07 PM

Or what SM said; I've clearly got my reference hat on today...

956. [CassandraSays](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:08 PM

RKMK, Sweet Machine- Thanks, I was about to get ranty.

Jay – How many men have ever been mugged on tour buses? OK, now how many women have ever been raped on tour buses? If Elton John raped a male reporter on his tour bus would anyone say it was the reporter's fault for just being so damn sexy and wearing such short shorts?

I rest my case.

957. [Sweet Machine](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:13 PM

"Well, he had given money to homeless guys before voluntarily, so it's not really a crime that this one punched him in the face and stole his wallet."

"When men come up to you and touch your wallet and say 'I want me some of that,' they're not really going to steal it! You'd have to be paranoid to think that."

"What was he doing alone after dark anyway? Everyone knows that's just asking to be mugged. It's almost like he had a sign that said MUG ME on him."

"If this goes to trial, it's just your word against his. You say he threatened to kill you if you didn't give him your money. He says you wanted to give him your money, that you'd been hinting at it all night. Who's a jury going to believe?"

958. [RKMK](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:16 PM

RMMK[sic],

it's a relevant analogy. But you address a meta issue instead of the issue.

It's actually *not* a relevant analogy, and as I indicated, you would know this if you had *read the thread*.

And I "addressed the meta issue" (*eyeroll sprain*) because it is not my job, nor the job of any other woman in this thread, to give you special tutoring on a subject already previously discussed because you're too goddamn lazy and/or entitled to *read the goddamn thread*.

959. [Gail](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:17 PM

Thank you SM. Those comments in that context certainly shines a different light on the subject.

960. [CassandraSays](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:23 PM

I get the feeling that Jay thinks "relevant" means "things I care about". Maybe a dictionary would help?

961. [lightcastle](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:35 PM

Wow.

I was all excited about this post, but had intermittent connectivity all week and now it is legendary, all over the internet, and over 1000 comments.

Awesome. I've stolen a dozen or so quotes that I want to bring to people's attention because there has been so much goodness.

heads of some men on my lj, am almost giddily crushing on some of the guys on this thread who are getting it and struggling with it.

I also have developed a blogcrush on snarkeysmachine and reconfirmed my growing crushes on a number of the regulars here.

I really do think -as others have said- the post almost doesn't go far enough since no one owes you a conversation period. I'm going to bring that up to some of the men I think are immediately raising shields at the word "rapist". I've tried leading the horse to water, but I can't seem to make him drink.

@Sweet Machine: *"What was he doing alone after dark anyway? Everyone knows that's just asking to be mugged. It's almost like he had a sign that said MUG ME on him."*

I actually have heard this. Goth kid got beat up and mugged walking home from a club and a number of people I knew brought up that he should have known better and pretty much had a "MUG ME" sign on his back. No sympathy for him.

I was pretty shocked.

962. jay

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:38 PM

Sweet Machine,

"because god forbid there be a thread about rape and sexual harassment that doesn't turn into a Men Have It Bad Too, Ladies discussion."

Honestly, I don't really understand why you would expect that. I mean, you do single out rape from other violent crimes, theoretically, and practically, even in this reply to me, and then you wonder why discussions that are by definition blaming men for something they do to women cause reactions that are defensive along the way you describe? Really? And, well, in a way, the - excellent - original post was addressing a male concern, so I don't really understand why such reactions would surprise you.

"ALMOST A THOUSAND" comments - yeah, too much to follow up on. If you think my contribution isn't worthy of commenting on because it has been covered before etc., just say so, or don't reply. Really. You may be assuming I'm Schrödinger's troll (such an excellent title, really), but by treating me aggressively in your reply you're also causing my inner defences to go up. Not particularly helpful. I really, really, hate how it's almost impossible to get and give the benefit of the doubt in online discussions anymore, because most discussions now seem to start from a high-aggression start point and require people to slowly build the trust they need to actually communicate. Alas, they not usually have the patience to build that trust, so communication attempts often break down before actual exchange of ideas has occurred in a respectful manner, which, in turn, leads to a growing amount of echo chamber discussions, in which people are merely shouting their own points. It's a problem.

"But second, mugging is an entirely different type of crime from sexual assault."

Sure. No doubt. I didn't say that it's the same, which is why I used the term analogy. I understand that rape and sexual assault are different and unique in a lot of ways, and that women are forced to deal with this in ways men don't. But, still, in the example given by CassandraSays, why would it be reasonable to expect of the guy being interviewed to take

mugged? I don't see why the socialization of women to blame themselves for rape or common attempts to define rape away would lead to a different expectation with respect to his behaviour (an interview in the back of the bus).

The thing is, I'm really asking here, because I don't see a difference. I wouldn't be afraid to interview a gay gangsta rapper in the back of the tour bus, no fear of being raped and no fear of being mugged. I think the statistics show that men are more likely to become victim of violent crimes, except rape. So statistically, I'm probably more at risk in the situation that a woman (except for rape, again). But I'm not afraid of either, and it's not because I'm courageous, but because I just can't imagine something happening to me. Carelessness? Irrational belief in my physical ability to defend myself in such a situation, an irrational belief that is part of a gendered upbringing and thus is different for women? I don't know.

It's just that I don't think we should begin every interview with questions like "do you feel safe I won't mug you or would you like someone else to sit in" or "do you feel safe I won't rape you or would you like someone else to sit in". I don't think either would be a reasonable reaction or even demand.

Again, the differences between the kind of violence doesn't mean the appropriate social reaction has to be different. It is a valid analogy in this case (in my opinion, of course).

963. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:43 PM

Shorter Jay: Let's talk about what I want to talk about.

964. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:44 PM

But I'm not afraid of either, and it's not because I'm courageous, but because I just can't imagine something happening to me.

Right. Women can imagine being sexually assaulted in many given situations, because we live in a culture that devalues women and rape is a crime that is rarely brought to justice. I think you've answered your question already.

but by treating me aggressively in your reply you're also causing my inner defences to go up.

Boo fucking hoo. Do you understand the irony of this, as a response to this post? This post is about how women's inner defenses go up because of their continued experience of aggression by men, and you come in to say that despite the fact that you don't continually experience aggression by men you aren't afraid, and then you're complaining that we're being too aggressive in telling you that it's not relevant? Listen to yourself.

Again, the differences between the kind of violence doesn't mean the appropriate social reaction has to be different.

There are hundreds of women here telling you otherwise. Also, this completely ignores that what is considered an "appropriate social reaction" to any given situation is highly differentiated by gender.

You are giving me the stabby pain.

965. *RKMK*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:48 PM

966. *jay*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:50 PM

CassandraSays,

obviously, "relevant" means "relevant to me" in my replies. Same for everyone else.

CassandraSays, LimeSarah,

"If Elton John raped a male reporter on his tour bus would anyone say it was the reporter's fault for just being so damn sexy and wearing such short shorts?"

"As has been discussed, one reason the reporter is likely to not feel scared is that if someone he was interviewing did attack him, he would not be told that he was "asking for it". With the exception of some very politically / socially powerful men, his interview subject would likely be prosecuted as far as the journalist felt like pushing it. You get into other intersections of privilege, obviously, if the journalist and subject are of different races or other demographics."

Honestly, thanks for those replies. I'm surprised that the general notion seems to be that the main reason for women to be scared is not the general notion of violence but the way the potential violence would be treated by society – I didn't really get that when I replied to Sweet Machine above, but I think I understand that now. This does indeed make sense, and, yes, I would agree now that a lack of belief in protection by the law or lack of belief in the efficiency of law enforcement does make a difference and thus justifies additional caution.

This is a reasonable point, and one I did not sufficiently consider yet.

Thanks.

967. *CassandraSays*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:54 PM

Wow, Jay, with all that projection you're doing you should consider setting up your own movie theater.

Please note that no one suggested most of the things you're implying were suggested. Certainly not me – I went in, did my interview, was aware that the setup could potentially turned bad and alert, but said nothing about it at the time because women are good at reading body language, because we have to be, and none of the men involved were acting in a threatening way, did my job in a professional manner (I've listened to the tape, you can't tell I was in any way uncomfortable) and did in fact mention that I don't think the guys involved meant to scare me at all.

Buy hey, if your response to a conversation which starts out as "men, please try to see things from a women's point of view, because it's really quite different" is "no, why should I? your point of view is clearly unreasonable because I don't feel the same way", well, you don't seem to be interested in learning anything so what are you even doing here?

968. *alibelle*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:55 PM

Jay, until you have read all the comments we shall all assume that you have no interest in having an honest and real discussion with us. You just want your voice to be heard. That's understandable I suppose, but if you want your voice to be heard without listening to other voices start your own blog, maybe? Or this was recommended in another impossible long

thread, read all the comments up to 200 (really not that hard or time consuming and do a word search for any other points you'd like to bring up to make sure they haven't already been addressed. All your points have been addressed again and again and again in several different ways by some really smart people.

Also as far as building up trust goes, as someone who is still relatively new to commenting on here I can tell you everyone was willing to allow me to comment without getting annoyed with me as long as I was willing to do the same back. I've only ever had one problem here which was all based in how I was acting and not how other people were reacting. Think about it, everyone else is being treated nicely but you, the variable is you.

969. [Sweet Machine](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:56 PM

Buy hey, if your response to a conversation which starts out as "men, please try to see things from a women's point of view, because it's really quite different" is "no, why should I? your point of view is clearly unreasonable because I don't feel the same way", well, you don't seem to be interested in learning anything so what are you even doing here?

Right. This, for the record, is why we all did not appreciate your initial comments, Jay.

970. [Sweet Machine](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 6:58 PM

I really do love, as much as it has pained me to moderate it, how this thread has become an enactment of the problem it describes. It's very meta.

971. [CassandraSays](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:01 PM

No, if you had bothered to read the comments you'd realise that most other people, if they discuss relevant issues, mean relevant TO THE CONVERSATION OR THE SUBJECT BEING DISCUSSED. Not just to themselves.

972. [jay](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:02 PM

CassandraSays, Sweet Machine,

"Buy uy hey, if your response to a conversation which starts out as "men, please try to see things from a women's point of view, because it's really quite different" is "no, why should I? your point of view is clearly unreasonable because I don't feel the same way", well, you don't seem to be interested in learning anything so what are you even doing here?"

As much as I don't like to admit it, this is a fair enough perception.

973. [Gail](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:08 PM

Just one more man telling us all how we're doing it wrong. "Let me show you how to fix that lil'lady."

Jay, imagine if you were hosting a discussion and had 500 people walk into your front door one by one and each of them had been given a handout on the topic being discussed, including the points that had already been covered. Most of them read the handout and as they walked in were announcing their pov on the topic. Almost all of these people were original and opened new doors for you. Each of the people outside were given updates on their handouts. Now say about every 25 people or so some Wookie comes swaggering in after not reading the handout and updates and proceeds to spew the exact same point as

the other Wookies who didn't bother to read them. Their point has been covered and answered and addressed each and every time. Would you not start to yell at the Wookies to DO THEIR GODDAM HOMEWORK???????

974. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:09 PM

Sorry for yelling.

975. *Anita*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:13 PM

Jay, if you can't be arsed to read what we've said, why should we repeat ourselves and hope you'll read what we've said? Presumably, you're an adult – take responsibility for your own education.

976. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:14 PM

Also, ignoring that it's disrespectful not to read the comments, the comments are actually really fucking fun! There's sarcasm, satire, swearing, occasionally alliteration. :) There's fighting and vivid language and tons of great ideas. I love reading the comments on here, almost everywhere else it can be tiresome and I don't even bother anymore because frankly I don't have the fucking sanity watchers points to spare, but here? Aw shit man, I love it, I love the brilliant links and interesting stories that people tell. You learn shit here, you learn a lot. So if for no other reason try reading the comments for that.

977. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:15 PM

I've been reading this thread for a while now, but I'm still a couple hundred comments shy of the end, so my apologies if any of this is redundant:

Nathan, here's my thoughts on your question about how to intervene when you see a man pestering a woman:

It's all in the body language.

Where possible, you want to aim for a combination of putting yourself at least slightly between the ill-mannered lout and his target while increasing the space around the target. Increasing the space around her is the key. If you reduce it, you've become part of the threat. Everything in your body language and manner of speaking needs to indicate you're going to leave her alone as fast as you possibly can after you deal with the ill-mannered lout.

Some examples I've seen of this:

"Hey, is this guy bothering you?" combined with dropping a heavy arm across the ill-mannered lout's shoulders and grabbing his near shoulder with the other hand, and starting to pull him away from the target.

Any form of "Sorry, he's got no manners," combined with shoving yourself in front of the ill-mannered lout and starting to edge him away.

Stepping in front of the ill-mannered lout and offering a business card, while speaking respectfully and edging the ill-mannered lout away, then turning and walking the ill-mannered lout away from the target.

If you're on public transport, offer to exchange seats with the target if it will get her further away from the ill-mannered lout.

Simply standing between the target and the ill-mannered lout can work wonders. I've seen this done at a bus stop, where the gentleman appears to be studying the sky, the sidewalk, and the asphalt, but manages to keep moving every time the ill-mannered lout does and stay between the lout and the target.

kristinc's suggestion of "saying something like "Dude. C'mon" in a tone that says you are being inexpressibly socially clueless. As if said dude had put his elbow in the butter dish." is fantastic for lesser threats or as a first attempt for greater ones.

On Matt's question: "Is there an actual truth to what we guys get through media representation that most women would appreciate a NON-CREEPY hello or socially-appropriately-timed greeting from a man like that, or is that just popular media still running on a marlboro man imagery myth?"

Socially appropriately-timed and respectful is both fine and often welcome. When I'm walking down the street or in any other form of transit is not a socially-appropriate time. When I'm shopping, whether for groceries, gas, or whathaveyou, is not a socially appropriate time. When I'm reading or working on a computer or writing or any other such activity is not a socially-appropriate time. When I'm working out is not a socially appropriate time.

A socially appropriate time is when I'm at a social gathering and clearly smiling and looking to talk to people I'm not already talking to. Parties, dance clubs, and the social parts of conferences all work. Of course, in those situations, the key is that it needs to be clear from your body language that you're about to go away again immediately if I don't respond with enthusiasm.

Dingo: "I understand womens' (sic) point of view on this issue. But, if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men?" I already do approach all the men I want to. This means one about every three or four years. The rest of you just plain aren't interesting and I wish you'd all quit yammering at me 24x7. If that bugs you, be more interesting, but leave me alone.

Kyle: "I just wonder what people here would really feel if they were being prejudged as potential criminals themselves." If a woman of color prejudices me as white-bitch-who-will-cause-her-problems-until-proven-otherwise, I don't really "feel" anything, certainly not resentment, because she's behaving rationally given what our society is like.

On intersecting privilege: A non-neurotypical man once went from seeming perfectly harmless to badly injuring me in less than five seconds (and he actually believed the savage beating he dealt me was "friendly" behavior). Since then I do everything I can to stay at least ten feet away from any man who appears even possibly non-neurotypical, but I've still been targeted by some very scary harassment from such men, many times. I found out the hard way that what skills I have for predicting men's behavior from their body language simply don't apply to the non-neurotypical, and since I have no way to predict, logic dictates I don't have the skills to safely go near them. It's not fair, but neither was spending years recovering from a nasty neck injury.

WTF is up with Derek's inability to understand basic logic? Is he eight years old? Because mentally he appears to be. And does James really expect anyone to give a flying fuck whether he approved of their responses to him or not? James, honey, the theoretical

physicists gave you as much intro talk as they felt like, then went back to discussing the advanced stuff among themselves. It's childish and silly to whine that they're having a conversation you're not up to.

And I just plain burst out laughing every time some guy thinks that claiming he and his will punish women by stopping street harassment is some kind of threat. I mean, really? What are you going to threaten me with next, an end to world hunger? Free plasma screens for all? A lifetime supply of chocolate?

978. MezzoSherri

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:16 PM

We don't fucking swear here. That would be unladylike! ;)

979. RKMK

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:17 PM

alibelle, I think it's because jay is clearly here to pontificate, not listen and/or learn.

980. lightcastle

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:18 PM

As much as I don't like to admit it, this is a fair enough perception.

Well, I think jay gets some props for actually listening.

981. Sean

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:19 PM

@jay: it's possible you've already done this, but if the comments seem intimidating to wade through, you might take a gander at the links that Sweet Machine posted upthread. Reading them and taking time to consider what they're saying would better prepare you to understand some of the points being made in the current conversation. Heck, even if you don't rejoin the thread here it would be well worth your while to read them. :-]

I hope that doesn't come across as condescending on my part. I'm a frequent participant in online discussions, many of them quite lengthy, but this thread has even my head spinning after reading all the comments, so I'm trying to point out the cheat sheet that Sweet Machine has thoughtfully provided.

982. Gail

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:20 PM

Do I hear a *ding*? Did he just level?

983. CassandraSays

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:22 PM

Also, Jay, consider – women's tendency to be on the alert for potential danger all the time combined with their knowledge of how likely they are not to be believed if something bad does happen? The fact that you were not previously aware of this is an indication that the women in your life do not confide in you. Now why would they not confide in you? Well, given that your first reaction to a woman describing a situation where she was aware of potential problems is to imply that she's overreacting and patronisingly explain why you wouldn't feel cautious in that situation and therefore she's being unreasonable if she does feel cautious...this may be the reason that the women in your lives don't share these things with you.

I'm just saying.

984. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:25 PM

Can I add that given the sheer number of hours it's taking me to read this thread, I am in awe of the dedication of the moderators?

Thank you to all of you.

985. *Matt*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:25 PM

Helen Huntingdon: uh-oh... did I miss where a lifetime supply of chocolate was part of male privilege? ;-) Dangit....

Thanks for your answer. ;) Im still a newbie as far as feminist thought and work is concerned (and fascinated... pleased to say reading this article and participating in the comments has been a great experience, as has the opportunity to use this as a starting place to open up some dialogues with female friends of mine. As a gay guy its a fantastic window into a world I dont generally come up against, insofar as my /most of my male friends' speaking to women doesnt carry an agenda of trying to get laid... and this has been a great explanation of some of what I see in my daily commute. ;)

986. *Lucian*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:28 PM

Chiming in with **alibelle's** love of the comments here! I have genuinely learned more here than I learned from my Sociology lectures in my final year. Not joking. (My lecturer liked to assume that students came to lectures pre-loaded with information and psychically knew what papers he was referring to...)

I mean, there are a lot of comments. But if I can read them, I'm sure other people can. :)

So thank you, commentators. Really, lots of thank yous.

And **jay**:

"As much as I don't like to admit it, this is a fair enough perception."

I am sad that you don't like to admit that someone else's perception of an occurrence has some weight.

987. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:29 PM

@matt: uh-oh... did I miss where a lifetime supply of chocolate was part of male privilege? ;-) Dangit....

Wait! What? I missed that to. Gimme chocolate!

988. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:32 PM

Lucian: I am being generous and assuming the "as much as I don't like to admit it" is an admission of the difficulty of challenging your own POV on something. (That's often difficult for lots of us.)

989. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:40 PM

Still catching up, and good heavens there are a lot of tools on this thread. I shudder to think

Like this dood, TrackerNeil: "Personally, I don't feel inclined to sympathy towards people who view me as a potential rapist, just as I am sure you would not feel inclined to sympathize with me if I viewed you as a potential suicide-bomber or child molester or whatever."

Erm, why wouldn't you feel inclined to sympathy? You must be some kind of fucking sociopath. Seriously. If a person of color freaks out because they think I am really about to harm them because I'm pasty, it would be impossible for me not to feel sympathy. Because I'm, you know, human and not a sociopath. Unlike you.

990. *dialzero*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:41 PM

Gah, what's the permanent URL for this post? I'm trying to share it via facebook, but it doesn't work...

991. *Shiyiya*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 7:54 PM

dialzero, <http://kateharding.net/2009/10/08/guest-blogger-starling-schrodinger%e2%80%99s-rapist-or-a-guy%e2%80%99s-guide-to-approaching-strange-women-without-being-maced/>

<http://is.gd/4eeN8> is a shortened version that facebook should also parse fine that you could try

992. *CassandraSays*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:01 PM

Is anyone else noticing a persistant theme in the supposedly brilliant counter-examples these assclowns are offering in that what they're setting up as equivalent situations are totally not equivalent? I mean for the case of women fearing that strange men may be rapists, potentially, we've substituted the case of people being assumed to be suicide bombers...clearly a social group known for having the power and privilege of society behind their actions, just like men in relation to women, yes? And then for the case of small female reporter alone in room with very large male rock star we've substituted male reporter alone in room with Elton John, who is 62 years old and not exactly known for being physically imposing? And we all know how much our society and legal system loves to support gay people, yeah man, they have all the privilege.

I mean seriously, do you people hear yourselves? You may as well write THE OPPRESSED ARE OPPRESSING ME OMFG SHUT UP and just leave it at that.

993. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:04 PM

Matt, you're probably a guy I'd be happy to chat with in a socially appropriate setting. Among other things, I wouldn't be getting that sickening sense of ulterior motives under polite lies.

I've thought back over the times I've met strangers and at least considered romantic involvement. I realized they all have something in common:

I spoke to him first.

At some point, I wanted to leave a conversation / flirting session he was really into, and there was never a sign of it being a problem, but instead he gave a warm and cheerful goodbye.

At some point, he wanted to leave a conversation / flirting session I was really into, and there was never a sign of it being a problem, but instead I gave a warm and cheerful goodbye.

He didn't compliment my appearance until I had been enthusiastically flirting with him quite a lot. (I hit my lifetime weariness with men I am not close to shoving their opinions of my appearance at me when I was about 20. It's never had the power to charm since.)

994. *Lauren*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:05 PM

Dear mods:

Because it can not possibly be said enough: THANK YOU

The occasionally idiot aside (and those lead to great, intelligent answers by wonderful shapelings, so I can appreciate why they were allowed to post for a while), this has been one of the best comment threads I have ever read.

I am still very new to this blog, but one of the things I love about it is the most is that not only the posts themselves, but also the resulting discussions are so interesting, thought provoking and educational and still manage to often be fun at the same time.

I can not even imagine how hard it must have been to keep this whole discussion (almost completely) respectful, civil and enjoyable.

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU

This truly is a great discussion due to your hard work; and I, as I am sure most of us here, am incredibly grateful to you girls for working so hard to make that happen.

995. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:08 PM

lightcastle, I think the bit you're talking about was Lucian quoting Jay in order to respond, rather than Lucian's own words.

/not here

996. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:13 PM

Repeated for being made of winnitude:

Starling: "All us adults are Schrödinger's Child Abductors, and we have managed to live with the fact that we don't approach strange children and offer to give them candy and/or show them a puppy, even if all we want to do is give them candy and show them a puppy. Because, dude."

997. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:20 PM

@Caitlin. Yes, I got that. I just think I want to have a more charitable reading of Jay's words than Lucian seems to be willing to give him. I might just be in an inordinately charitable mood, though.

998. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:25 PM

Jay, the reason we all sound a little crabby is because we have collectively written the equivalent of a book about this issue in the past four days in answer to a number of questions. It's like NaNoWriMo on steroids. While saying, "Dammit, read the whole thing before commenting!" may seem like a huge amount of work, there are thoughtful, careful answers for the questions you're asking. And they're funny, creative, and occasionally, yes, alliterative. (Thanks Alibelle!)

Also, I'm running out of cool new ways to make the same analogy. Cutting and pasting previous responses is not merely bad form, but would be annoying to the moderators, who would unquestionably have won the Nobel Peace Prize if it had been awarded next week instead of this week.

999. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:26 PM

@Helen Huntingdon: That's one of the bits I am stealing to use with other people. I'm actually famous among my friends for being a child-magnet. Kids love to come up and talk to me, follow me around, what have you. It seems I am non-threatening to children.

None of that means I don't understand completely if any parent looks askance at me, because that's completely reasonable behaviour on their part.

1000. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:30 PM

lightcastle, I get the same thing. Small children will wrench themselves from their keeper's grasp to run and hug me or hand me a pebble or something. I have no idea why. Luckily their parents also think I look harmless, but still, that shock of fear when your small child suddenly runs to a stranger can't be pleasant.

Which is why my immediate response is to walk towards the parent, while smiling hugely and beckoning to the child to follow. I want the kid back within arm's reach of their parent ASAP. Only then can we all decide what we want to do next.

1001. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:32 PM

Helen Huntingdon—I sooo did not mean *you* in my last comment, sorry. You quoting me gives me fuzzy little feelings of pride in my heart. *Me* quoting me would be not super-kosher, though.

1002. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:34 PM

Oh, I've also discovered that most often the little ones will be satisfied with a sense of having completed one successful social transaction. So if the child hands me a pebble and I say thank you, or the child manages to exchange a couple of sentences with me that at least mimics conversation, I can then say a formal goodbye with exchanges of smiles and bye-bye waves without the child pursuing me further.

This also leaves the parents looking much reassured and pleased.

1003. *jay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:34 PM

Lucian,

"I am sad that you don't like to admit that someone else's perception of an occurrence has some weight."

No, I don't like to admit I was wrong.

CassandraSays,

"... this may be the reason that the women in your lives don't share these things with you. I'm just saying."

well, sorry, but I think it's a bit unfair to assume something like that about my relations to women based on three comments here. I'm the only one in my social environment whose interested in gender issues – and it's not because I don't get laid (just to preempt the standard assumption in that respect) – and I'm interested because I'm interested in social dynamics. My initial reaction here may have been informed by – an even unconcious – defensive tendency with respect to the subject at hand and the possible unconscious fear that a male point of would automatically not be given equal weight in a feminist thread. I don't know. Those who replied to me, including you, made a better argument than I did.

But this leaves me with a lot of questions regarding day-to-day conduct. I think I'm very good at attracting and making women feel safe around me. But how much should I be influenced by considerations about their possible fear of me help them deal with such fears instead of being simply insulted by this very notion? How much should *I* treat myself as Schrödinger's rapist despite knowing the state of the cat?

Say I'm giving my best friend a ride home (my best friend is female). She would be insulted and wonder if I still trust her by my suggesting possible fears around me a week after she literally told me that it feels even safe discussing her sexual problems with me? If I gave an interview to a female reporter, to which extent should her possible fears of being raped be my concern, particularly if she, like you say you did, managed to conceal her emotional state? Should I ask her if she feels safe? Would you have wanted to be asked whether you feel safe in that situation? Wouldn't that be unprofessional? You say the guys you interviweed were nice, their body language was non-threatening, and yet you felt unsafe. Because they didn't think about the possible emotional consequences of having an interview in a bus. Would you expect them to think about this?

I mean, for flirting, her feeling safe is my best interest. But for all functional interactions between men and women, how much do you think should this be consideration? I mean, as human beings, while we should consider each other's emotions, there also is a point where we have to deal with our own emotions and not make them someone else's responsibility. I mean, take last night in a club, there were two women who knew each other and were both interested in me, constantly touching me. I was a bit more interested in one than in the other, but knowing that they were friends I decided that the little more interest I had in one did not justify choosing her over her friend. But for me the option was rejecting one or both. To which extent would you say should my decision be based on other people's assumed emotions? To which extent should my possible interest in sex with one of them be a part? Because, in the end, that's the fundamental question you're asking: how much should your assumed feelings count, how much should my feelings count, when I make a decision about what to do. And vice versa. This is a fundamental question of human relations, but you raised it in a very specific (I do get that now) context, so, if you don't mind, please help me to get a clearer picture here.

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:35 PM

Starling, it's a brilliant analogy. So is the original post. Very, very useful stuff.

1005. *Jay*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:47 PM

Starling,

no worries. No one likes to repeat themselves. I'm still glad I got the replies I got because I actually had a heureka moment about 5 minutes after I replied to Sweet Machine's slightly aggressive comment.

Since you took the time to reply, I'd like to compliment you personally on the original post. It's really excellent, with a particularly clever title, that, btw, helped me to get at least partly over my usually conscious defensive reaction to the "all men are potential rapists" argument.

1006. *Helen Huntingdon*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:47 PM

OMCeilingCat, this thread is so full of morons I keep howling with laughter. I hope my neighbor lady's kids aren't napping.

Demosthenes XXI: "But my question to you is how effective do you think that a simple declaration of non-interest would be instead? '(Excuse/Forgive) me, but I'm not (in the mood/of the mind) to hold a conversation. I would like to be left alone to (fill in activity). Thank you and you have a (good day/evening,) okay?'"

ROFL. What kind of idiot seriously thinks this is a good idea? I mean, really? Because what you'd be communicating by such a response is, "Even though you have boorishly interrupted me, I will still be courteous to you." That is EXACTLY the kind of response predators horn in on — being nice even when they aren't. If you respond that way the next time a predator approaches you (and there's a neverending supply of them), you will have just acquired an insta-stalker that will stick to you like a barnacle.

Sheesh some of these doodz are stupid.

1007. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:50 PM

This is a fundamental question of human relations, but you raised it in a very specific (I do get that now) context, so, if you don't mind, please help me to get a clearer picture here.

Jay, do you really expect us to decide a "fundamental question of human relations" for you? We're having a discussion — a long, involved, complicated discussion — that has a wealth of information and opinions and suggestions for further reading. If that's not enough for you, then that's your problem. If this has opened your eyes to new considerations, awesome: now go do some thinking. We're not obligated to do it for you just because you asked.

1008. *Starling*OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:50 PM

Jay—what's key here is that we are not really talking about emotions, except to point out that all of us are entitled to pay attention when we are getting a bad feeling about something.

frightening them from the get-go. It is that you are being regarded with a legitimate caution until the woman feels she has enough provisional information to decide whether or not you're going to be a threat, now and in the future. Your best friend made this evaluation a long time ago, so of course she doesn't need to remake it every time you offer her a ride home. Wariness, not fear, you see?

Think of how you behave when you get pulled over. You maybe try not to make sudden moves towards the glove box, right? You don't get out of the car and run screaming towards the cop? You generally try to act like a non-threatening person in the understanding that cops, while not frightened of traffic stops, are wary that the people they stop may become violent?

Same idea, but women are less likely to say, "You're making me uncomfortable" than the cop is. Don't pull women you've just met into enclosed or locked spaces (tour bus). Don't crowd into her personal space. Arrange to meet women you intend to go out with in a public place, instead of insisting on going to their homes to pick them up. Simple stuff, but it all goes back to being open and transparent in your intentions, and respectful of signals you're receiving.

Re: flirting v non-flirting communications, please do show the same respect when you aren't flirting. It's easier because the stakes are lower and therefore you are less likely to crowd. Look, it may seem like you're not getting an immediate reward for being a good guy, but you do, almost imperceptibly, smooth your communications with women. You also make an incremental change for the better in inter-gender communication expectations, which is a benefit to both men and women.

1009. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:51 PM

Jay—thanks very much. It does seem to have hit some nerves.

1010. *vgnvxn*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:54 PM

Helen Huntingdon, that comment of Demosthenes XXI's made me laugh as well. "Oh, forgive me creepy man that stops his car in front of me in the middle of the night, trying to get me to let him 'give me a ride' instead of taking a cab home, i'm simply not of the mind to take a ride home with a super scary old man tonight! my heavens, i must simply decline your good offer and take my leave, because whilst speaking to you, I have let two cabs go by and may not see another. oh, i know you can hardly hear me from all the way over there and would like me to come a bit closer, but i am ever so disinterested in being kidnapped tonight. i'm a fat ugly bitch, oh well you have a pleasant evening, good morrow!"

1011. *jay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:55 PM

Sweet Machine

me: "so, if you don't mind, please help me to get a clearer picture here."

you: "We're not obligated to do it for you just because you asked."

no, you're not. Who said you were?

"Jay, do you really expect us to decide a "fundamental question of human relations" for you?"

was wrong, but I won't delegate my decision making agency.

1012. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:55 PM

I'm a bit confused about all the naysayers talking about fear, or living in fear.

What's fear got to do with it? It's not about fear, it's about basic math.

You do the research, check the studies, check the methodology, assess the numbers, and then make a rational choice. I didn't quit making nighttime roadtrips through ice storms because they scared me — they didn't. I quit doing it because I took a pause to look over the probabilities, and chose accordingly.

I don't want strange men to stop bugging me because I'm scared of them. I want them to shut the fuck up because the probability they'll add anything positive to my life, even for a few seconds, is vanishingly small. And the probability that they'll annoy me approaches 1. And the probability that they'll turn violent if they feel like it is nowhere near zero. Fear doesn't enter into it, just basic awareness of reality.

1013. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 8:56 PM

Yes, I got that.

Ah, sorry. Was just skimming by 'cause of work and I obviously misread you. Don't mind me.

1014. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:04 PM

ROFL @ kritinc's "Giant Phantom Schlong Guy". I hadn't heard that expression before for Swollen Ball Syndrome. It's a good one.

1015. *Louise Jones*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:11 PM

Thank you. This is excellent and should be required reading for all males.

1016. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:12 PM

Helen Huntingdon: Oh, I've also discovered that most often the little ones will be satisfied with a sense of having completed one successful social transaction

This! Absolutely. They need to show me something, or say something, or bring me over here where there is a toy, and then they are happy. (And yes, I try to engage the parents as quickly as possible because I'm almost always that guy with the shaved head in a black trenchcoat.)

1017. *Cara*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:15 PM

This is a fundamental question of human relations, but you raised it in a very specific (I do get that now) context, so, if you don't mind, please help me to get a clearer picture here.

Read the thread first.

1018. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:16 PM

Caitlin: No worries.

1019. *jay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:17 PM

Starling,

"Same idea, but women are less likely to say, "You're making me uncomfortable" than the cop is."

I can't really imagine a cop saying it like that, to be honest ;). But – assuming you're right that women are unlikely to express discomfort when they experience it, why would that be? And if so, why would they, at the same time, expect that their discomfort should/could be picked up by the other (in this case male) party? I remember reading a paper about a guy who did body language cluster studies of flirtatious situations in clubs in the 1980s and came up with the astounding result that only 1 in 31 men actually understood through body language what the woman was trying to tell them while all the women believed they had clearly communicated what they wanted to "say". But even if women assumed their non-verbal communication was ignored rather than not understood, what would keep them from making their discomfort explicit?

1020. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:20 PM

lightcastle: "I'm almost always that guy with the shaved head in a black trenchcoat."

Ah, that must add a new dimension to things. I hadn't thought of it this way before, but I look exactly like the kind of person Gavin de Becker tells people to train lost children to approach.

Even the local mallard families follow me around.

1021. *Alibelle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:20 PM

Jay read the god damn thread before you write anymore comments. You're covering ground that's been covered before. It's been covered! How many times can we tell you this, read the fucking comments.

1022. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:21 PM

But even if women assumed their non-verbal communication was ignored rather than not understood, what would keep them from making their discomfort explicit?

Jay: read the thread. Read the thread! Read the thread!

People have been discussing this all week and in just about every other post on our front page right now what the experience of street harassment is like. There are hundreds and hundreds of examples. You would know this if you would read the fucking thread.

Seriously, you are on the edge of being banned. You clearly have no idea how incredibly annoying and entitled your behavior is right now. You are, in fact, ignoring explicit signals given to you that you should stop talking. And you wonder why women don't trust men to listen to them when they say stop.

I am telling you to stop talking.

1023. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:24 PM

"But – assuming you're right that women are unlikely to express discomfort when they experience it, why would that be? "

Because douchebags like you respond exactly as you are responding now, by aggressively stalking us and shoving your long-winded explanations of our wrongness at us no matter how many times we say we don't like your behavior.

Duh.

1024. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:24 PM

Jay—for that one, I really am going to refer you back to the thread, and (if you really have a lot of time today) the thread on the XKCD comic a few days ago. I think that if you start reading the way that women's interactions with strange men play out, you'll understand why it's almost never that easy.

Part of the reason is that the cop is not going to say, "You make me uncomfortable." He or she is going to pull you out of your car, throw you on the ground, handcuff you and pull a gun on you, not necessarily in that order, while calling for more cops to show up and help. Women do not have this luxury—we are relatively powerless, both in a physical confrontation and, socially, when we try to get men to leave us alone.

On this thread, look for "zombie playa." That's a great place to start. And on the XKCD thread, look for Melena and the lighter story. Happy reading!

1025. *jay*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:25 PM

"Read the thread!"

Alright then. Talk to you once I'm done with that...

1026. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:44 PM

Repeated because it's a really really important red flag, but a subtle one:

abyss2hope:

"I've noticed that several men in the comments here have prefaced their responses to specific women by comparing those women to other women commenters (or to other women in general). If women commenters please one of these men with their responses he is nice, but if women commenters displease him he is nasty.

"This is a very troubling pattern and instead of making me feel good when I am favorably compared to other women, I get a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach because along with the comparison the man has made it clear that he has made women responsible for his choices in relation to women. That shifting of a man's personal responsibility off himself is potentially dangerous enough so that I consider this a personal red flag."

1027. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 9:58 PM

I do so love the doodz who think becoming an unmarried cat lady is something to avoid.

Sheesh, dudes, do the research. When other factors are controlled for, it's healthier for women to be single than married. And barring certain medical conditions, pets are good for health and long life; in recent years studies have shown this is particularly true for cats.

Oh, wait, I get it. The yahoos who think "cat lady" is an insult are just pissed the cat ladies'll outlive 'em. Hey guys — living longer is easy — the studies show that too: The mindsets that make assholes like you assholes shorten life and health. Quit being dicks and you won't have to be so jealous.

1028. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:16 PM

I do get the feeling that Jay is a nice guy who is trying to understand, but he's the same nice guy type that's barged in here over and over trying to front like he's got a PhD in this shit. He wants to have an interesting philosophical exchange and that's cool, but it's not cool to try to have that discussion here. We are NOT just having some abstract intellectual discourse on a mildly amusing subject, this is our LIVES we are talking about.

I swear, it's like being born and raised on the Moon and having someone who's never even been to the moon try to tell me about it. "But I know some Moon people, hell one of my best friends is Moonish! I've seen pictures and read the statistics you know, don't tell ME about the Moon!"

1029. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:16 PM

Vehemens: "Or else I am confusing bewitching smiles with secret hand motions to their mace at the belt."

This forever and always should be known as the Polanski argument.

It's the exact same argument, "If you look desirable to me it can only be because YOU WANT ME" that Polanski used to justify child rape.

Variations include,

"She smiled, so she must like me."

"Did you see what she was wearing?"

"That nine-year-old was no virgin, just look at her, so raping her is totally ok."

Etc.

1030. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:18 PM

I think Jay might be trying to understand, but that doesn't change the fact that he's being a complete asshole.

1031. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:18 PM

The Polanski Argument: Hmm, that strikes me more as an argument about Polanski.

May I suggest "The Polanski Justification"?

1032. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:20 PM

Or "Polanski reasoning".

I routinely use "Space shuttle reasoning" to refer to the argument that it didn't blow up the last few times, so it's totally safe.

1033. *Grafton*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:23 PM

I'm sure I'm a little late here.

I am a man with Asperger's syndrome (please to spell without the b, the guy's name means that he grew asparagus, not that he came from snake-village) and find the article helpful. Things where people state clearly what they feel and why and under what circumstances usually are.

I'm pretty sure that there's no getting away from the fact that my autism means that I am low-grade creepy. I just accept this. I wish people would not hit me because of it, and that they would accept it when I inform them that I can't help it, and not point it out more than once per person, but it hardly seems reasonable to suppose that people should ignore all creepiness because mine is not deliberate. I imagine that your amazing NT 'gut reactions' serve you a lot better if you don't overanalyze them in some effort to be fair to me. Too bad, since I have very little sex drive and am probably more afraid of you than you are of me. Or not, since I have no desire to strike up random conversations and if I want to compliment your hot boots I'll do it just as I am leaving so I can avoid having to figure out what to say next.

Many of you appear to be reaching for the Autistic Dream (life, liberty and the pursuit of being left the fuck alone) on public transport. In a perfect world people would leave you alone while you are reading, but in reality a book is a poor social barrier, and evidently some people carry them for the purpose of starting conversations. In my experience the only book that properly functions as a social barrier is The Bible. Christian book stores often sell leather bible-covers. I advise that you pick up a few of the ones that most clearly advertise the book inside as a bible, and put them over whatever you actually want to read. I hope you find this helpful.

1034. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:34 PM

Grafton: Much love for "life, liberty and the pursuit of being left the fuck alone". That's a brilliant summation of what I've wanted in life pretty much as long as I can remember.

1035. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:38 PM

I think Jay might be trying to understand, but that doesn't change the fact that he's being a complete asshole.

True that!

1036. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:46 PM

The Justification, in its pure form, is that the default state is Women Want My Attention, and they are responsible for signaling if that's not the case. Whereas I have this suspicion that gay men actually read and respond to non-verbal signals before approaching and to chat up men that they meet in public. Possibly because men are not socialized to respond

politely even to unwanted sexual overtures from other men? Completely different power and privilege dynamic. (Which I am in no wise suggesting we ought to adopt or endorse—a huge factor is the real threat of violence with which gay men live. I'm just pointing out the difference in what men accept as normal when it's directed towards a woman v. towards another man.)

Women Want My Attention is a delusional default, since just over 50% of the population is married and a significant number beyond that is partnered. So really, the default should always be Not Interested Unless Otherwise Signaling.

1037. [HiddenTohru](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:51 PM

@ Helen Huntingdon

I already do approach all the men I want to. This means one about every three or four years. The rest of you just plain aren't interesting and I wish you'd all quit yammering at me 24x7. If that bugs you, be more interesting, but leave me alone.

I love this quote. I think I'll have to save it. The whole "well women should just approach men then" argument only works when we choose the men who want us. They can't seem to fathom the fact that if we actually did this, then we'd still not be expressing interest in them. Does that make sense? I'm very tired so my brain is a bit addled. Anyway, a great comment from you. Have some internet cookies (I love baking cookies, but I'm secure enough in my feminism to accept that it doesn't make me a stereotype).

1038. [Nia](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:52 PM

@Jay:

But even if women assumed their non-verbal communication was ignored rather than not understood, what would keep them from making their discomfort explicit?

Because you're not getting it, I'm going to make a quick summary for you.

A woman who says, clearly, "leave me alone" is called a bitch. Women are accused, all the time, all our lives, of not being friendly / polite enough. Sometimes we are paralysed between the desire to get away from a situation we dislike and the desire of not being accused of Female Flaw #1: not being nice and kind.

This thread has 1035 comments and 55 mentions of the word "polite". I'm not counting synonyms. I'm not sure about this thread, but "being angry" is often used as an *accusation* against feminist bloggers.

So, I'm telling you very simply so that you can remember the rest of your life, online and off: Women are often angry, or simply not in a good mood, and we don't externalise it because we are not allowed to do so.

You don't believe it? Tell me of one woman who is unambiguously praised by the media for speaking her mind and being direct.

1039. [Helen Huntingdon](#)

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:56 PM

@Hidden Tohru:

1040. *Julie*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:56 PM

Helen:

I can personally vouch for the fact that often, rejecting a man *politely* is not enough. Not once, not twice, but on NUMEROUS occasions, I have allowed a man I wasn't interested in a short, polite conversation, ended it with a polite "no thank you, good day"...and had a stalker for MONTHS. And by "stalker" I mean people who literally followed me everywhere (including into *very small spaces*), did everything in their power to find out my phone number and address, GROPED ME, and were angry when I finally resorted to yelling, insults and even physical force after everything else failed. (Sometimes myself, sometimes by proxy.)

Because lots and lots of guys ignore social signals when they want something. Meaning, for those to whom I am a "thing" and not a person, ME. So yeah. I didn't get this "impolite" in a vacuum.

1041. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 10:59 PM

What Nia said, and more:

If I politely tell a fellow technogeek who decided to chat me up that I would like him to leave me alone, this more often than not results in weeks of creepy stalking where he bombards me relentlessly with arguments about how I'm making the wrong choice.

Can't win for trying.

1042. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:04 PM

Which reminds me, one thing that can't be repeated enough:

Why don't women approach men more? BECAUSE YOU GUYS ARE FUCKING BORING. Sheesh. All of you are real people with real lives and have some real knowledge or experience to say something interesting about. But nope, when you decide to bug me, you almost invariably trot out the same few subverbal semi-sentences that the last 500 guys did. And the more sure you are that you're being original, the more sure it is you're just repeating what other guys are saying.

That's why I said I'd probably chat with Matt. He sounds like he would actually say something I hadn't heard a few hundred times before.

1043. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:11 PM

@Helen Huntingdon: Well, I actually think men can be rockin' interesting. It's pickup lines that are Boring. As. Hell. Shockingly, I would really rather discuss the syntactic brilliance of Virgil than the super-cuteness of my shoes.

Yes, I really was picked up in a public space by a guy who approached me, complimented my nail polish, and then got into a rousing discussion of classical and Renaissance Latin poetry in reference to Vergilian styles. Obvsly doesn't work for everyone, but that's what made it so brilliant.

1044. *Gail*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:11 PM

Not to mention that a guy who is resorting to randomly accosting women in public is not exactly a prize.

1045. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:11 PM

Moderators, if you think my last comment will increase the trollage you have to wade through, please delete it and accept my apologies.

1046. *car*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:13 PM

And Grafton Gets It in just one post, whereas Jay is still trying to tread water. What's interesting to me is that you've been able to internalize the idea that people don't always understand what you mean, and that you don't always understand what they mean, so guidelines are a Good Thing, and this puts you miles ahead in understanding the point. That's exactly what this post was initially about, and the problem is that so many guys *think* they get it, so they obviously don't have to listen to the guidelines being given to them, when they really, really, really don't. If only everyone had to go through social skills training.

1047. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:14 PM

Starling, my professions have all been heavily male-dominated, so yeah, I find men interesting too, when they're acting like I'm a normal human being. It's easy to find ones who talk about what I want to talk about.

But when it comes to stranger approaches — nope. They never say anything interesting. Just the same old boring drivel. Of course I'm not going to go looking for more of that.

1048. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:21 PM

Helen—Zactly. That's why I find it so bewitching (hah, yes, totally borrowing that adjective) when the conversation turns on things that we as people find interesting, rather than the same tired Hey Baby. Because I luuuuv to be though of as a person first and an object of sexual interest second, if at all. At least until the initial assessment period is over and I feel willing to consider meeting again.

Obviously, speaking for myself. I think most women agree, but nobody made me the Goddess of Dating.

1049. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:24 PM

^_^ One of the advantages of engineering dudes is that they can do their dudely posturing for each other *and* talk about things I find cool and interesting at the same time. And the really bright ones then get so caught up in the conversation they forget to do the dudely posturing.

1050. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:29 PM

Still working my way through the whole thread:

299 of 345 Stephan: "As far as random compliments" — For myself, if they're coming from men, I'm sick of them. Really, really, really sick of them. I have been for a long time. Men are

relentless about shoving their opinions of my appearance at me. It happens all. the. time. I can't get away from it. I wish you'd all quit it.

1051. *HiddenTohru*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:34 PM

Starling, per the Rules of the Internets, you are now going to have several of us clamoring for you to be given the title of "Goddess of Dating". XD Congrats! (also, since it can't be said enough, such and awesome post of awesome, kudos to you)

1052. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:35 PM

I second the motion!

1053. *Starling*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:37 PM

No, not Goddess of Dating. Czar, maybe. I could get behind Czar.

1054. *HiddenTohru*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:43 PM

(Ugh, d's keep sneaking in somehow... I think my fingers are too tired to type properly.)

Czar of Dating... That has a nice ring to it! Anyone wanna third? X3

1055. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:49 PM

Jason: "I'm not sure I would agree that no man, at any time should ever approach a woman in whom he is interested. I do think, however, that any man considering an approach should subject himself to a serious gut check before doing so."

What he said. And further, the way I would put it is that anyone, before approaching anyone to whom they are attracted, so stop and think honestly about the answer to this question: What will they feel if the person brushes them off, perhaps even very rudely?

If the answer to that includes any resentment at all, then you're not grown-up enough yet for romantic approaches. Leave it until you are.

1056. *HiddenTohru*

OCTOBER 11, 2009 AT 11:59 PM

@ Helen

Interestingly, I had a brush with my white privilege today, which is relevant to what you're saying (I promise). As much as I try to be aware of it, since it is privilege it easily sinks back into the background. At any rate, as I've mentioned on SP before, I work at a grocery store and thus see all kinds of people, from all races and backgrounds. Today a Muslim girl came through my line. I deduced this because of her head scarf (I am an idiot and can't remember the correct term), and for a moment I had this surge of "ooooh I can totally talk to her!" because this week I just finished reading the book *Mother of the Believers*, which is a novel about the prophet's wife Aisha and her role in the birth of Islam. And then I thought to myself "wait, what? Because I read one fucking book on Islam, I get to ask this girl about her core beliefs? YOU WILL NOT DO SUCH A STUPID THING, YOU IDIOT." So I didn't say anything other than the usual "hello how are you today would you like paper or plastic".

attractive girl. You automatically assume there's something you have to say that might interest someone, and prepare to strike up a conversation with them about it. Then you should stop yourself and go "wait, why the hell do I think what I have to say is so amazing that she **MUST** hear it? Who am I to think I'm that important? Will my interaction with her add anything of value to her day?"

Maybe jerks will just brush past these thoughts as irrelevant, but I'd say it's something worth doing for any regular guy. And it isn't meant as a put down, as a "this goddess is too important for you to touch, you miserable worm" (as I can guess many geek guys would see it), but rather a "put yourself in her shoes, would you care?"

1057. *GreyLadyBast*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:00 AM

Czar of Dating... That has a nice ring to it! Anyone wanna third? X3

I'll third.

BTW, while I have read all the comments over the past several days, I haven't chimed in yet solely because I don't have anything to say that hasn't been said before. Which should be a lesson to all you dudely types who want to push your oh-so-original thought (that's been said 9000 times already) at us. There's no shame in having a nice, hot cup of Shut The Fuck Up, when you don't actually have anything new to add. There **IS** shame in being too bleeding lazy to read the comments to be sure that your thought hasn't already been said. Repeatedly.

Bast

1058. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:10 AM

Tohru, that's a great example. You hit on one of the things that can be hard for foreigners in America — people always want to talk about whatever they think makes you exotic.

I've complimented women on their headscarves before, especially after I noticed women in hijab in my neighborhood frequently stopped to ask me about whatever skirt I was wearing. At first I just figured it really was about the skirts and where to get them, but then I began to realize in some cases, they were really new here and aching for some kind of pleasant exchange with a neighbor woman. Items of dress we both wear provides something to talk about — I wear long skirts a lot, and in the winter I use giant scarves wrapped in such a way it can look like I'm in hijab. So maybe reaching out is good, but it's better to talk about something in common than an obvious difference?

1059. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:18 AM

Still reading.

jay: "obviously, "relevant" means "relevant to me" in my replies. Same for everyone else."

Oh holy shit, what a stupid asshole.

1060. *littlem*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:20 AM

"And the more sure you are that you're being original, the more sure it is you're just repeating what other guys are saying. "

Kind of like many of them have been doing on this thread.

(There's a relationship there, and it has to do with hierarchical aggression and socialization thereto, I think. I'm just not sure what it is yet.)

1061. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:31 AM

Starling: "Women Want My Attention is a delusional default" Especially in engineering school. Oh god, the flashbacks.

1062. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:36 AM

"There's no shame in having a nice, hot cup of Shut The Fuck Up, when you don't actually have anything new to add."

offers GreyLadyBast a bite of one of Tohru's cookies

1063. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:37 AM

littlem, I'd be glad to hear any further thoughts you have on the matter.

I read the whole thing!

1064. *Sean*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:41 AM

To Starling, the now-official Czar of Dating, and all the patient mods who have created and maintained the space for this conversation, I offer my thanks and a bit of Chuang Tzu that I was reminded of while reading the tail of the thread just now. I won't be offended if this gets deleted, since it's a bit off-topic on the surface. I do hope you will bear with me, though.

A frog in a well cannot be talked with about the sea; – he is confined to the limits of his hole. An insect of the summer cannot be talked with about ice; – it knows nothing beyond its own season. A scholar of limited views cannot be talked with about the Tao; – he is bound by the teaching which he has received. Now you have come forth from between your banks, and beheld the great sea. You have come to know your own ignorance and inferiority, and are in the way of being fitted to be talked with about great principles.

[Now, I just want to first explain that the "sea" in this context isn't really a feminine or masculine entity. There is no innuendo or symbolism intended (in fact, the sea in this quote is ruled over by the "Spirit-lord of the Northern Sea," a character who can safely be described as without sex or gender). I'm only mentioning this because I know that patience is thin right now for those who have followed the whole thread and I don't want to be seen to be derailing the conversation with an unnecessary and irrelevant discussion of Taosim vis-a-vis yin and yang, maleness and femaleness, etc. If the sea has any hidden meaning for me, it's "wisdom." Or perhaps it's just the sea. Depends on my mood.]

So why did I bring this up? I was the frog in the well before coming to this discussion (still am, but let's leave that aside for now ;-), and I appreciate being "brought to the edge of the sea" to talk about great principles. This has occasioned several days of reflection and healthy conversations with friends and I want to be sure to express my gratitude now before the thread dies out, even though there seems little danger of that happening any time soon. Thank you all.

I also want to say that you have forged at least one ally. Not the passive "ally" that I was before I started in on this thread, but someone who is now looking for actions to take in matters small and large to make a difference in ending rape culture. I'll find or make the time to be an agent for change in this regard.

Finally, if this comment does anything to make you feel more hopeful or positive about the struggle with which you are engaged, please do not reply to me. I don't need my ego fed. If you find grounds to criticize what I've written, please don't hesitate to do so.

Ok, 'nuff rambling. I hope that made some sense.

1065. *GreyLadyBast*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:42 AM

Thanks, Helen. *noms cookies*

1066. *HiddenTohru*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:46 AM

@ Helen – Right, and I had no right to comment on any aspect of her life, or share my views about her life with her. I mean, commenting on a magazine someone buys ("huh, hadn't seen that before, looks interesting") or asking about their pet when they buy pet food ("so what kind of dog do you have") is just something I do to pass the time when we're having to deal with each other as cashier and customer. But prying into someone's religion and culture isn't common courtesy. It's rather more like invasion. Even though I was coming at it from a "oh, someone who understands this subject and could teach me more" perspective, the chance was that she would view it the other way, and so I had no right to mention it.

Re: cookies, they're oatmeal butterscotch, if anyone's wondering. XD

1067. *Amy*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:02 AM

A thousand thank yous to the OP, to the mods, to all the people who made this thread an amazing read over the last couple days. I've never been able to fully articulate the reason I'm overly polite to the doodz who do these things, instead of speaking out explicitly, and I'm really thankful for being able to read this and say Yes, Yes, That Exactly so many times.

It's a little horrifying to think that I've never internalized the idea that no, I don't owe these guys the time of day and chit-chat; and yet I for sure internalized that I'd better put up with it with a polite smile, or else.

1068. *Eucritta*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:05 AM

... people always want to talk about whatever they think makes you exotic.

Yep. Even when you're not.

I take an interest in this issue, because people often ask me what I am, and if I happen to be wearing something that could be mistaken for exotic, like a scarf wrapped around my ears because it's cold, it's apt to be commented on as if it were some sort of tell as to what (not who, never who) I am. Sometimes, I swear, it makes me wonder if I'm really an okapi in a human suit. (FWIW, I'm tri-racial; but then, so are lots of people in the US so you'd think folks would be used to it.)

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:08 AM

@Jay – “My initial reaction here may have been informed by – an even unconscious – defensive tendency with respect to the subject at hand and the possible unconscious fear that a male point of view would automatically not be given equal weight in a feminist thread.”

Jay, please reread what you wrote carefully. There is a huge flaw in your thinking. This isn't just a feminist thread this is a thread about women's actual experiences, good, bad and horrific. Why should the male POV about women's actual experiences be given equal weight?

Some of the most problematic comments from men on this thread seem to demand that those men's POV trump the actual experiences of women. Some of the demands from men on this thread about what women should or must do differently can easily lead to immediate harm which those men would know about if they actually read the experiences of women who have commented here.

If a thread were about the experiences of bakers and you had never baked anything in your life, would you expect your POV and the POV of other non-bakers to be given equal weight to the POV of actual bakers? Would you automatically enter that thread on the defensive because the dominant POV doesn't include yours? Would you resist learning anything about the experiences of bakers because you hate to be wrong? If you had previously read something about baking which a baker contradicts would you jump in to inform that baker that what they said about their experience as a baker was wrong?

When people are telling you to read all the comments the core message you should take away is that you are showing that you have not truly listened to the experiences of women which are available to you. Telling us that you have listened to the experiences of one woman or a few women is not a valid excuse for refusing to listen to other women's experiences and insights.

1070. *Gail*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:19 AM

Sean: Respectful admiring silence for your post.

Eucritta: “because people often ask me what I am” My best friend gets asked that and when she was little it used to really bother her. One of my other friends is Tri-Racial and she gets that too, she tries to act like it doesn't bother her but I can see that it still does a little. Both these women are exquisitely beautiful and I think that is what people are reacting too, but it's still seems rude as hell to me. Nobody comes up to my obviously Celtic face and asks me what breed of white I am.

1071. *Suzanne*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:31 AM

While I don't doubt that one in six women are raped, that doesn't mean one in six is raped every year. Or does it? Did I miss it?

I was raped in my own home at gun and knife point by a stranger who broke in. It was no secret (except to my small children) but I've only heard of two other rapes among people I know myself. Those of us who have been raped need to be able to talk about it with someone as part of our recovery; but also to make others aware that it does happen to “nice girls,” middle aged women, old ladies, etc. If your psyche can stand it, go public!

1072. *Lucy*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:41 AM

In a perfect world people would leave you alone while you are reading, but in reality a book is a poor social barrier, and evidently some people carry them for the purpose of starting conversations. In my experience the only book that properly functions as a social barrier is The Bible. Christian book stores often sell leather bible-covers. I advise that you pick up a few of the ones that most clearly advertise the book inside as a bible, and put them over whatever you actually want to read. I hope you find this helpful.

Grafton- it's funny you mention this, because once on the train I found a copy of the Alcoholics Anonymous Reader, and that's what I've used for a LONG time as my subway protection. It's soft-covered like a Bible, and the words Alcoholics Anonymous are embossed on the cover with no lining, so people can't see what it actually is and will just assume it's a Bible. When I read that on public transportation, it doesn't matter how provocatively I'm dressed- NO ONE approaches me. (And consequently, I've learned a lot about alcoholism recovery.)

1073. [abyss2hope](#)

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:46 AM

@Suzanne, the 1 in 6 statistic is for sexual assault in women's lifetime, not the number who are raped each year. The estimated number of rapes/sexual assaults in 2008 in the USA was estimated at 203,830 not counting sexual assaults where the victim was also killed or where the victim was under the age of 12.

1074. [Grafton](#)

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:55 AM

Car said: "What's interesting to me is that you've been able to internalize the idea that people don't always understand what you mean, and that you don't always understand what they mean, so guidelines are a Good Thing ..."

I may misunderstand why it's interesting to you that I understand that, and I hope I'm not therefor producing some strange non-sequiter. I think that the 'theory of mind' tests imposed on autistic people produce skewed or misunderstood results, because the tests are given to children who are not offered the option of responding, "How the hell should I know what someone else thinks?" or demanding that the researchers read a Thomas Nagel essay entitled "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

I had social skills training as a kid, and training in classical manners from old-fashioned parents. Probably the latter was the more helpful.

Perhaps I only 'get it' because I know what it is to be afraid of people.

1075. [Grafton](#)

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:59 AM

Sorry, Lucy. We were writing at the same time.

I'm glad to know that the bible's amazing powers as a social barrier work for you as it does for me.

1076. [Skinner](#)

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:13 AM

So I have now read through the entire 1000+ comment thread (and worked through a bottle of vodka as a means of keeping sane through the process.) Observations:

a) In this case I am going to pull the same card I use in many, many feminist debates. Boys, back off. No uterus = no opinion in this matter. If you cannot accept that *this is our reality*

you need to go away because you are not going to have anything worth while to contribute to this debate.

b) I am a fairly friendly woman. I actually quite like it when people talk to me on public transport, or in other places where conversation between strangers is usually discouraged. This does not stop the Schrodinger's Rapist equation immediately starting up every time a man so much as makes eye contact, and I have, over years and years of experience, found that doing that is almost always justified. Either a man works his way down to an almost-zero threat level over time and I have a new friend, or he doesn't and I was considerably better off before he bulled his way into my life. Even if my life wasn't restricted by the threat of being raped, I would still run that equation, because frankly men who doesn't get themselves down to a low threat level pretty much guaranteed to be assholes even if they aren't violent. Hell, I'd advise men to run it on all men, except that men aren't intrusive on other men's personal space anything like as much as they are on women's.

1077. *Skinner*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:14 AM

Oops; just realised my last comment excluded trans women. My bad. Sorry, ladies!

1078. *car*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:15 AM

Sorry, Grafton, I just meant it was interesting that you were providing an example of one man who entirely got the point as opposed to all of the other men on this thread who didn't, not that it was somehow an oddity that you yourself understood it. I should have been more clear.

1079. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:24 AM

Starling: Women Want My Attention is exactly the delusional default.

Helen Huntingdon: Concerning compliments. In his memoirs, Casanova said something like "compliment the beautiful ones on their intellect and the intelligent ones on their beauty". While full of problematic assumptions (shocking, I know. ^_^), his point was that most women have already heard all the damn compliments that you would obviously make so if you are going to compliment them, make it about something new and interesting that isn't what they've heard a hundred times before.

1080. *Starling*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:31 AM

Re: headscarves/hijabs, I was in the subway a month or two ago and saw something unexpected. A woman sat across from me, wearing a complete burqa, including a partial veil over her face. She was reading what appeared to be a religious book in Arabic, which I assumed was the Koran, and she had her small son with her. A large man approached her, looked sorrowfully at her, and said, "Lady, I want you to know that Jesus loves you and can free you from these chains." To which she replied in perfect Brooklyn English, "Fuck off," and walked away with her kid.

It was an inspiring encapsulation of Your Opinion Was Not Solicited, So Shove It.

@Lightcastle: which reminds me of the old saw, "Women want to be loved for their minds; men for their bodies." Which is problematic, but always makes me laugh.

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:35 AM

lightcastle, yeah, exactly, but that Casanova line doesn't hold anymore because "you're pretty" and "you're smart" have been way too overworked, and are most often used in situations where they're meaningless. I mean, if I don't know you, why the hell would you think I care if you think I'm pretty or not? It makes no sense. And if I you don't know me, your opinion of my intellect is meaningless, so what are you flapping your jaw for?

I'm really tired of the guys who think they're being original when they come up with some other way to remark on my appearance and actually think they've come up with something I haven't already heard 50 times. They never do.

1082. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:36 AM

I've noticed that several men in the comments here have prefaced their responses to specific women by comparing those women to other women commenters (or to other women in general). If women commenters please one of these men with their responses he is nice, but if women commenters displease him he is nasty.

Repeating this once more, both because it's important and because it annoyed the shit out of me that Jay did just this. (I'm assuming his silence at the moment means he's finally reading the goddamned thread, which is lovely, but I'm still going to pile on.) More than once he referred to how "aggressive" Sweet Machine was, as though he couldn't possibly be expected to take HER seriously! Except, guess what, SHE'S A MOD. Who has been working her ass off keeping monster threads on contentious subjects with regular troll influxes civil over the last few days. I am always just dead fucking stunned by the gall of people who walk in here and get shirty with the mods for our tones/attitudes and immediately try to instruct us on how to run a better blog, instead of thinking, "Hmm, I seem to have pissed off one or more of my hosts here, I wonder what I DID to deserve that?"

So that's A. And B is, of course, what abyss2hope was saying and Helen was repeating: This little game of "I will respond decently to Susie, who was nice, but not to Mary, who was mean!" is such bullshit. You know, this blog has gotten over 86,000 comments since it was started 2 and a half years ago, I've read damn near every one of them, and I can count on one hand the number of times women have pulled that shit. Trying to teach women how to be more polite in their own space, when you *have not even had the decency to catch up on the conversation you just walked into*, is part and parcel of the problems we're describing here. The very same guys who will scold the fucking mods for not being sufficiently gracious will then turn around and ask why women don't just decisively shut down unwanted male attention. It's mind-boggling.

1083. Helen Huntingdon

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:36 AM

Starling, that rocks. I'm glad she had her Essential New York English down.

1084. lightcastle

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:37 AM

Starling: That subway story is lovely.

And yeah, I've heard that one too, and liked it for similar reasons.

In fact, I remember having a conversation about exactly that with a friend of mine back at the beginning of our friendship. She was complaining about how if she got one more

compliment about being hot she was going to stab someone, and wanted someone to desire her for her mind and her artistic talent. I complained that if one more person told me I was funny and charming I was going to scream and really wanted someone to insist I was hot and ask if she could jump me.

We're both so stereotypical. ^_^

1085. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:40 AM

A suggestion to those who would woo geek women: "You're smart" or variations thereon likely won't impress. I kind of figured that out already from the advanced engineering degrees. So STFU.

1086. *Lucy*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:47 AM

Starling, it's so good to know that you're in New York City too, because I seriously want to bake you some cupcakes.

Can we e-mail?

1087. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:56 AM

Helen: HA! Yeah, the smart thing has become rather drastically overplayed as well.

1088. *Sniper*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:02 AM

A suggestion to those who would woo geek women: "You're smart" or variations thereon likely won't impress.

Especially if you say it like you're really, really surprised.

1089. *twinklecup*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:06 AM

While the Aspergers people are weighing in (okay, so there was only the one, but still), I may as well contribute. I'm Aspergers and female. Like Grafton, I'm pretty terrified most of the time when I get approached in public. I think guys actually get kind of unnerved by my behavior sometimes because I'm just so obviously freaked out by them approaching me. That makes sense to me, and I actually prefer it to the alternative. Other times I do the nervous smile thing, as previously mentioned by others in this thread, and they somehow interpret it as flirtation. I've been harassed, groped, once I was even followed to my hotel room by a strange man without any kind of encouragement or conversation other than "hi," all because of my Aspergers tendency to freeze up and not know how to react to confusing or unwanted social situations. For some reason, a lot of guys seem to interpret a panicked smile, lack of eye-contact, and looking around for a way out as "oh baby, I totally want you." And a complete and total lack of response apparently means "keep going." It doesn't exactly help that I have a tendency to want to be nice, which I'm sure is partly due to societal pressures placed on all women. It isn't easy for me to tell a guy to fuck off and die when I'm busy panicking that someone's talking to me and I'm not ready to deal with that, wondering what the appropriate response is supposed to be, and worrying that I'm misinterpreting the guy's intentions and being mean and presumptuous. It REALLY doesn't help when (some) men insist on whining about how evil and rude women are if we don't immediately trust them and want to be their best friends just because they were so kind as to give us their attention.

On some level, I still blame myself for not having easier-to-read reactions to things. But on another level I can't help but wonder, why the hell does my instinctive fear of being approached by men leave me MORE open to this kind of stuff? What is wrong with society that so many men seem to interpret that kind of body language as a sign of encouragement? Is "deer-in-the-headlights" a sexy look? It honestly bothers me that more men have mistaken that for flirting than have taken it as a sign to leave me alone.

1090. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:12 AM

"I'm glad she had her Essential New York English down"

It's weird how it's assumed that she had to learn english or even New York english, because after reading the comment I came away with her being American as in born in America probably in New York.

I think a lot of people assume that anyone born in America wouldn't be in a full burqa, or would refuse to continue wearing it. It's just a pet peeve of mine, plenty of women even feminists wear them, it's part of a religion, it means something to them other than oppression. It's not just chains, anymore than a rosary is some kind of bondage.

Of course I might have read that comment wrong, I'm sorry if I have Helen, I've loved reading your comments recently.

1091. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:17 AM

Especially if you say it like you're really, really surprised.

OMG. I think I've mentioned this here before, but I once broke up with a guy in part because, after several months, he still expressed surprise whenever I said something he found particularly smart. ("God, you really *are* smart." "I mean, I knew you were smart, but... wow, you're *really* smart!") At first it was sweet, but after a few months, it was just like, WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU STILL ACTING SURPRISED? If you know me at all, you know that I'm smart! The real problem, of course, was that he'd spent his entire life being The Smartest Guy In The Room, and he was just shocked every time he was reminded he'd met someone who could actually keep up. (I'm honestly not even sure if it was especially gendered.) But after a while, it was like, Dude, yeah, we're both really fucking smart — but neither one of us is quite so *earth-shatteringly* smart that finding an equal should still feel that surprising MONTHS LATER. If you really can't wrap your big brain around the fact that I can keep up with you, you've got problems I can't fix.

1092. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:17 AM

Oh shit, major privilege fail on my part. Thank you, alibelle. My apologies to all.

1093. *homitsu*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:20 AM

It's dark now and I think I started reading the comments at lunch then in between chores the rest of the day. I couldn't stop because of peoples' eloquence, much better than the average, and the nature of the subject. I've learned a lot and I thank you all.

1094. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:24 AM

Kate that's hilarious. That's also why I keep winding up with the impression that 2/3 of the male population has traumatic brain injuries. If you can't grasp a new fact despite proof, I

start to think you should really see a doctor about that.

Of course, this is coming from someone who just managed to forget that just because I've never seen someone in a burqa doesn't change the fact that Americans can and do wear them. Oi. Want a self-serving reason to check your privilege? *Because you sound really stupid if you don't.*

1095. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:24 AM

Honestly Helen, I'm still not very good with the privilege stuff yet, I'm trying but I fuck up constantly. That is just something I've been thinking about recently.

1096. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:26 AM

alibelle, I'm grateful for you pointing it out. Doing stupid stuff is part of the human condition. Part of friendship in my book is helping save each other from our own stupidity, and you just helped me out.

1097. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:29 AM

Yay! I love making internet friends! Cookies and baby donuts all around! ;)

1098. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:31 AM

And pie!

1099. *Julie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:31 AM

Isn't it amazing how this conversation causes such an avalanche of privilege awareness in other areas? Yesterday I was at the store, and there was this contraption for pulling up pop-tops. And I was actually opening my mouth to ask if I was really supposed to be too lazy to open a pop-top when I thought, *Maybe it's for people whose hands don't WORK the way yours do, asshole*, and closed my mouth in time.

To get back to topic, I also went with my husband to the pharmacy, where three large young men were also slouching along, and very blatantly sized me up visually while I looked back at them, and very clearly considered for a moment before going about their business and leaving me alone. (I say this hoping to the gods I'm not going to get back any "All they did was look at you, aren't you being paranoid?" type comments. I'm almost 40, and lots and lots of people have looked at me in that time. There are differences one learns to notice. Husband noticed it too. And now I'm realizing that I'm feeling like I have to justify myself and that makes me a little bit ill.)

And I was with a six-foot tall male covered with muscle. If I'd been alone?

1100. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:34 AM

My aunt taught me that I should always avoid strange (as in unknown-to-me) young men socializing in groups as though they are going to burst into violence at any second. It took me a while to really understand her point.

1101. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:37 AM

paranoid. I hate when men do that, and tell women to be reasonable. It's like the fuck you say? Because I already went back and forth 16 times in my mind about whether or not I was being paranoid. And if I wasn't being paranoid and they did attack me, then you would tell me I wasn't careful enough.

Also, does anyone else have a slight slumber party feel going on right now? Lots of talk of booze, and pie, and cake. I'm really digging it. I just hope it's caramel apple pie, because I have been wanting that all week.

1102. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:38 AM

holds out the Drambuie

1103. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:39 AM

Oh and Tohru, I loooooooooooooooooooooove oatmeal butterscotch cookies. Or maybe love is the wrong word, since I cannot peacefully coexist with them in the same room.

1104. *Julie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:42 AM

Alibelle:

Caramel apple *crisp*. Oh nom. I wish my oven was working!

1105. *Starling*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:48 AM

Helen—don't feel bad. That's one reason it stuck with me, too: I'd been subconsciously assuming that the woman in the burqa was somehow silenced by cultural differences or language barriers or something. So I did a total double-take when she spoke in a way that made it clear she was Brooklyn-born and -bred.

Pet peeve, applicable to burqa woman and criticism of SP moderators: What do people think you're gonna do with their pithy criticism? Look around and say, "Whoops, your single-sentence rebuke convinced me that I have been wrong and my deep-seated personal convictions are now overturned!"? My parents have nine kids, and people *still* earnestly try to argue them out of large families, even though, hello, it's a little late for that. What are they supposed to do, expose my teenage brothers on the mountainside? (Um, wait, we already do that. It's called Going Snow Camping With Dad, Who Likes That Sort Of Thing.)

Lucy—I sent you an e-mail.

1106. *RKMK*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:50 AM

Kate Harding:

"I've noticed that several men in the comments here have prefaced their responses to specific women by comparing those women to other women commenters (or to other women in general). If women commenters please one of these men with their responses he is nice, but if women commenters displease him he is nasty."

Repeating this once more, both because it's important and because it annoyed the shit out of me that Jay did just this."

BECAUSE I WAS SO MEAN, MEAN, MEAN, MEAN! MEAN! His refusing to respond actually solidified my impression of him. Srsly. Asshat. I notice Stefan hasn't responded since we told him to read the thread either. I sense a pattern here.

Why don't women approach men more? BECAUSE YOU GUYS ARE FUCKING BORING. Sheesh.

Right, Helen? As it played out here on this thread: men aren't nearly as creative, insightful, or original as they think they are, so when they threaten NOT TO TALK TO ME ANYMORE, I'm all, "Thank God. Now I can live in peace, chat with my friends, play with my cats, read my books, and be awesome without constant pesterment."

Helen Huntingdon: *holds out the Drambuie*

Hee, I didn't realize Americans were so familiar with Drambuie. Whenever my mother orders a Rusty Nail in the States, they give her the Weird Looks.

1107. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:50 AM

"My parents have nine kids, and people still earnestly try to argue them out of large families,"

ROFL. Maybe they've been reading Douglas Adams and are expecting an accident with a contraceptive and a time machine?

1108. *RKMK*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:52 AM

Um, tagfail. *blushes*

1109. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:52 AM

Oh shit Julie, even better. Now I really want to get drunk and bake pie. Since one of those things is still illegal for me, I guess I'll have to stick with the pie. Also, baking and drinking not a good idea?

Anyway, this is a totally awesome feminist slumber party. I'll just view Dingo and the rest of the trolls like someone's older sibling interrupting our festivities. Later we can freeze their bras, and put their hands in bowls of warm water, I've always wanted to know if that works.

1110. *Stefan*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:52 AM

RKMK – I chose to not reply after Kate stated I would be banned if I kept posting along the topics I was, as it didn't fit in with what she wanted on this website.

1111. *Starling*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:53 AM

Helen–Yeah, the only real answer is, "By George! You're right! We have to downsize! Would you mind taking a few?"

1112. *Julie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:54 AM

How do I give my contact info to the cool kids without exposing myself all over teh

1113. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:59 AM

alibelle, I make a great hard cider apple cake, which I think would technically work since supposedly all the alcohol bakes out.

RKMK, I keep wondering where these guys work who can't hear facts unless they're surrounded with cotton wool. Are they kept in fluffy lavender daycares all day or something? Because in engineering, if you can't take a rigorous shredding of your ideas in the most blunt possible language, you are by definition incompetent. Are these guys this fragile on the job? How do they not expire on their fainting couches every five seconds?

1114. *CassandraSays*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:00 AM

"The whole "well women should just approach men then" argument only works when we choose the men who want us. They can't seem to fathom the fact that if we actually did this, then we'd still not be expressing interest in them. Does that make sense? "

Why yes, yes it does! Look guys, even those women who are super friendly and open in general may still not want to talk to you specifically at any given moment, and that is their right. Also, they may be open to friendly conversation but not interactions that are sexually motivated for all kinds of reasons, none of which are your business really, but which can include married, lesbian, in a relationship, you're just not my type, wow you're creeping me out, and hey I just don't feel like dating right now. So again, the take-home message here is if a woman doesn't seem to want to talk to you, accept that and move on. There is no way in which persisting is going to end well.

1115. *Starling*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:02 AM

Julie-The Ning site, maybe? I just signed in, so I don't know how it works.

Alibelle, I totes get to be the one to freeze Dingo's bra.

1116. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:03 AM

Kate Harding: Oh lord, I knew a guy like that, always expressing shock anyone – especially women – could keep up with his magnificent brain.

If there's a baking slumber party, I am willing to make my great-grandmother's awesome doughnut recipe. (The one that calls for a glass of alcohol in the ingredient listing and only has half of it poured into the batter during the instructions. Took me a while to figure out the other half a glass was "cook's perk")

I'll just view Dingo and the rest of the trolls like someone's older sibling interrupting our festivities. Later we can freeze their bras, and put their hands in bowls of warm water, I've always wanted to know if that works.

It can. (The water thing. Don't know what bra-freezing is supposed to accomplish.)

As for baking and drinking, see above story about the recipe. ^_^

1117. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:03 AM

I'll play running water sounds next to his ear.

1118. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:06 AM

It is so on!!!

1119. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:10 AM

as it didn't fit in with what she wanted on this website.

Eh, no. It wasn't appropriate to take over this thread with that discussion. That doesn't mean a discussion of male rape survivors isn't something I'd ever want on the site.

Speaking of derailing, I know we could use a little levity around here, and the thought of freezing Dingo's bra cracks me up, but honestly, gals, the slumber party/baking/drinking whatnot would be better in the recent fluff thread. This IS still a post about rape culture, and if all we've got to add to it now is goofy shit, maybe it's time to let the thread die peacefully. (Please? Please can the thread die peacefully now?)

1120. *Starling*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:15 AM

Kate Harding, translated: "None of us here in Mission Control have slept since Roman Polanski was caught. AUGHHHH PLEASE LET US GO TO BED!"

Yes, ma'am.

1121. *Spiv*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:39 AM

Whoo-wee, I'm going to try to wade in to this knowing these are not friendly waters, but hopefully this can go somewhere...

I'm an intimidating guy. I know this. To men and women. Heck if I know why; I'm not terribly tall, am plainly thin and not built or anything. Generally average looking, generally polite, extremely non confrontational. Given all that- within the first 5 seconds of being in the same room with someone (male or female) they seem to have that shift to some kind of fear/beaten dog personality without me saying a word. If, for whatever reason, I get in to a conversation with someone it's all fine (I assume they realize I'm non-threatening from my general friendliness or whatever.) No I'm not covered in tats, or have some a mohawk, or anything like that. Just a normal dude.

Anyway, given the above I don't approach women. Ever. I don't like an awkward situation any more than you do, and actively approaching someone who does not already know me will result in awkwardness. I'm a "leave me the fuck alone" by default, not by choice. Even people who do know me (or at least that I think know me) seem to occasionally get creeped out at the slightest misstep, like the whole time they were waiting for something to confirm their 'vibe.'

So how does a guy change this? Any guesses as to why I seem instantly scary? I'd like to be able to strike up a random conversation with new people every now and then without starting at "85% chance he's a serial killer*" as an initial obstacle. It's one hell of a hill to start at the bottom of.

*Or whatever it is they're thinking. I really don't know.

1122. *Matt*

314 of 345 OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:05 AM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

If the conversation's going to bed, I just want to take this moment to say thanks; this has been a fascinating read, and I have to agree with the posters who've commented on how it's made them pay more attention to the overlaps (and ... er... underlaps?) of privilege in interactions with people around them. It's definitely opened my eyes up a lot; I've been paying more attention to the veils and armor people wear or choose not to (special one that sticks in my head was a young woman on the train with her book and her ipod; the moment other people sat near her, she kinda curled into herself while lifting the book to hide more of her than it had previously done; that really drove it home for me that even though she didn't look at anyone, she clarified her "don't bother me / speak to me" message very strongly. I don't know if I would have noticed that in the same way before reading this, I probably would have thought she was just trying to get more comfortable in the seat... this really drove it home that no, that motion really was one of donning armor.

(I'm capable of patting my own head; that's not what I'm asking for... but I don't think I would have noticed things like that before reading this post and its comments and feel I owe a deep heartfelt thank you to the poster, mods, and

(ya know, right there I was going to say women who've allowed me to ask questions; and I stop and think that makes it sound like there have been women who forbade me to ask questions. Not the truth. Then I thought people who've been willing to talk to me; honestly I've enjoyed reading people who had nothing to do with my bits of conversation as well as the people who may have reacted in what I perceived at the time as a negative response. It sounds kinda hokey to me writing it but I guess what I feel I need to say is thank you for speaking honestly about viewpoints I don't ordinarily have the chance to hear or know how to ask questions about. I've gotten to have some really good conversations with close friends about their life events and ways of seeing I never knew about them. That's worth more of a thank you than I know how to type ;-)

1123. Jason

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:26 AM

@Matt- what he said.

That, and it's a real shame there aren't more spaces IRL to have this kind of discussion. I'm trying to kind of flesh out what it might look like to have some more serious anti-oppression-oriented conversations at my church, but I haven't been attending very long so I'm still trying to get the lay of the land, so to speak.

1124. J.

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:08 AM

I'm married to someone with Aspergers. And yeah, he can be socially inappropriate, but he also takes NO more seriously than any other man I've ever dated.

People can have a lot of different mental disorders that make them more or less safe to be around people, and we can't always tell by looking what is going on inside someone's head, we can only react to what they do and say.

I think this article is brilliant. I have a LOT of friends with Aspergers. And they're perfectly capable of hearing "no" and responding to it appropriately. To think less of them, that somehow women should not feel free to say "no" to someone who is being creepy, for fear that they might somehow be discriminating against someone who has a disability, is demeaning and ridiculous.

someone not respecting my boundaries, period. Even with my severely disabled child, I have to set boundaries and enforce them—she'll bite, kick and otherwise damage people who don't.

I **do** think that women can learn body language/self defense techniques that can help them better project the vibe they want to communicate, be it, "Leave me alone" or, "Don't fuck with me" or "You can start a conversation but be prepared for me to finish it." As a young college student living off campus for the first time in the '90's, I had the educational experience, rather terrifying, of being followed home from school on the bus a couple of times. When I noticed it happening, I would go to the grocery store near the bus stop instead, call a male roommate and not walk home alone. A few weeks later I went out and bought a leather jacket, CS spray and combat boots, and no longer had trouble for the rest of the winter.

When spring came, I went out without my jacket one afternoon and in a 2 block walk had 2 separate groups of young men verbally harass me for being female, young, reasonably attractive, etc... The next time I went out, I imagined putting on that jacket before I left, and I **never** had that sort of "stranger trouble" again. I wore the same attitude whether or I was wearing my jacket or not, and stopped being seen as a potential victim.

That's what I can control. I shouldn't have had to, but it did make a difference.

It was a revelation for me, being with a man who truly respected "no" and didn't push. So many "nice guys" I'd gone out with had gotten pushy when the hormones got flowing. Being with a man with true self control who truly respected me? Should not be that unique.

And that deep respect allowed mutual respect, part of the reason I married him.

This article is aimed at men. Probably not at the creepy guy who grabbed my crotch in an alley when I was 9, probably not at the creepy guy who watched me the entire way home from school and then got off the bus when I did when I was 19... but certain those boys in the car. The guy at the party who groped me and then made it out like it was my fault for being nearby when I was 20. Certainly the "nice guys" I've dated who didn't take "no" seriously, until I made it "NO, DAMMIT!" could and probably would catch a clue from this.

1125. *Nia*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 10:44 AM

@Matt: I think it's such a tragedy that spaces like this don't have more often men who say "oh, I get it now! Thanks for explaining!".

1126. *Lizzie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 12:21 PM

I think this article is excellent.

I just wanted to point out that the stat you came up with for how many men are rapists (which is more like 1/10 not 1/60 alas, see Dr Lisak link) while appalling, is very low compared to societies such as South Africa where 24% of men SELF-IDENTIFY as having raped, meaning many more probably HAVE. Rape stats go up horribly as soon as you get more conservative or warlike societies. In Liberia the lifetime chance a woman will be raped/assaulted is 90%.

I would therefore add to the list of tips in the article, under the environment section. What culture are you in? Are you in a place where a lone woman may receive social opprobrium

for talking to a man? Are you in a place where (unwitnessed) rape is not even legally a crime (Saudi Arabia)? Is premarital sex frowned on or banned? What is the prevalence of HIV? Was there a war in living memory? If yes to any of these, the number of women who have been raped may be very high, even a majority. It also means the consequences of rape for a woman (social exclusion even by family / husband, unwanted pregnancy which she cannot choose to terminate, HIV – both as stigma and as totally untreatable death sentence – being jailed or flogged, having marriage prospects destroyed), and odds of her receiving justice, are even worse. Hence, all women will be more wary.

In such circumstances the hoops a man has to jump through to prove himself non-threatening that much harder and more numerous. This won't apply to most men reading this blog but even the cultural difference between New York City subway and a bus in a little town in upstate New York, should be factored into any approach.

1127. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 1:49 PM

That's also why I keep winding up with the impression that 2/3 of the male population has traumatic brain injuries. If you can't grasp a new fact despite proof, I start to think you should really see a doctor about that.

Speaking of privilege overlaps, this really rubs me the wrong way. It's awfully close to "men are retarded," don't you think? Traumatic brain injuries are, you know, traumas, and not just a metaphor.

1128. *la soeur*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:15 PM

I'm sorry–this just struck me–i know you said the convo is winding up, but–is it just me, or is it horribly sad / ironic that we use the term "fucking" to describe the sucky (oop...there it is again) situation we're all in because of this rape culture?

1129. *la soeur*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:31 PM

And...i wanted to say, Starling, this post is excellent. It so clearly articulated things i've always been mindful of, both consciously and subconsciously. The discussion has been hugely enlightening, too, in spite of (maybe in consequence of?) the occasional dingbat comment–the moderators and participants have really come together to create an awe-inspiring compilation of insight and information.

p.s. Starling...tell your dogs i said "get fat."

1130. *A Sarah*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:37 PM

@Jason – "I'm trying to kind of flesh out what it might look like to have some more serious anti-oppression-oriented conversations at my church, but I haven't been attending very long so I'm still trying to get the lay of the land, so to speak."

Hey, just wanted to invite you to email me if you're interested in being put in touch with people who do this, or joining a (now pretty much dead, unfortunately) listserv discussing it.

1131. *Liza-the-second*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:43 PM

Not to feed the trolls, but...

I've been trying to keep up on the comments here through the weekend but a) no internet access at work and b) my brain keeps getting stuck here:

you wonder why discussions that are by definition blaming men for something they do to women cause reactions that are defensive along the way you describe

and then it gets trapped in this little loop: "Someone... said that? Did someone really say that? No way someone actually said, 'The problem is you're blaming men for something they do to women.' No, that can't be. But... look, right there! In black and white! Someone... said that! Did someone really say that?"

ad infinitum.

I got nothin' but a world full of "WOW" there.

1132. *Louise Jones*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 2:56 PM

Very interesting reading! A few random thoughts as I read the comments....

a) Why are women "nice" if they don't want the attention? Because we've been trained to be polite our whole lives. I know that in certain situations I have just frozen with panic. Hugely annoying is being at a corporate function where I am being friendly and talking to a guy because he is a client and he interprets that as I want to bang him. I've had my ass grabbed several times. I suspect many waitresses have this same problem. It's our job to be nice to you, this doesn't mean that we're interested.

b) Straight guys freaking out and feeling justified in beating up a gay man that approaches them. This has always struck me as so bizarre. Hello? Women deal with unwanted attention every day that can make them feel threatened and you don't see us taking a round out of anybody because of it.

c) What are you? My 18 year old daughter, although caucasian, is exotically beautiful. She is often asked, "What are you?" Sometimes she says "Human". Sometimes a racial slur is thrown at her. She doesn't know how to respond to that...if she says but I'm not a then is she giving the impression of condoning the comment...just not for her? She says...if I look like a minority, but I'm not, then am I acceptable? Should I have some kind of club card to wear around my neck?

d) My 14 year old daughter has been approached by males in their 20's on several occasions on public transit and in public places. From my perspective, she is clearly a young girl, nowhere close to 18, and should there be any doubt, about 10 seconds of conversation would make this clear. The last guy asked if she wanted to go get a beer....at which point, his buddy punched him in the arm and said something to him. The guy turns to her and asks her age. She says 14, buddy hauls him away. Thanks, buddy. But first guy...c'mon...are you really that dumb...and what would you have done if buddy wasn't there? And BTW, if you're over 17, thanks for the compliment on her tri-coloured hair, but she thinks you're a "creepster" and a "skeeze-ball" for saying anything more than that.

1133. *Anita*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 3:18 PM

Spiv, I mused about a 102 thread somewhere up there, where we might talk about how a genuinely nice guy might approach a woman giving the right signals. It's another really complicated risk assessment factor exercise, I'm afraid.

For one thing, it's different for different women, so you've probably got a combination of triggers going, and probably some body language stuff that is hard to unpack given how subtle it is (and, you know, because none of us have seen you in action). What sucks for you, and other genuinely nice men, is that there's not one clear signal that flashes "Not a Rapist!" Often a man is doing everything "right" that I can identify, but I get a weird feeling about him anyway; almost as often, I run into a guy showing "scary" markers (certain haircuts/tattoo patterns/clothing choices/muscles/situations) – things we're taught are dangerous – and I don't feel that at all from him.

This stuff is super subtle, so I don't really feel like giving suggestions over the net is helpful. Have you considered activities that help you be more aware of your body? (I'm thinking improv class, or something along those lines, since it combines that physical aspect with the characterization aspect.)

Kudos to you for choosing the right option, instead of just continuing to try to get women into conversation anyway.

1134. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:05 PM

@Sweet Machine,

I know, it rubs me the wrong way too when used as a metaphor.

I wasn't using it as a metaphor though. I meant literally. My father has brain damage from a traumatic brain injury. It's not generally obvious, but every now and then there's this glitch where you wonder what the heck is going on, and if you ask him, it turns out to be oh, yeah, brain damage. Ok, no sweat.

I've gone through the same conversations with relatives and friends who've had strokes or brain tumors. Or blood sugar-related disorders that have spiked momentarily. Or thyroid-related temporary memory impairment. Or social anxiety disorder in a triggering situation. Quite a huge percentage of us will go through some injury or illness in our lifetimes that causes us to be or appear impaired with regards to very simple, low-level logic.

I maybe didn't express it clearly enough, but I meant that what literally goes through my head quite a lot is, "Whoa, this guy needs a doctor. He's having repeated trouble with cognition ten-year-olds are capable of."

But then it turns out to be a privilege problem, not a medical one. Or maybe an undiagnosed medical one — I'm not a physician, so I don't know. But I wasn't using a metaphor, but speaking literally, when I said I often wind up with the impression that 2/3 of the male population has some kind of kind of cognitive impairment needing medical attention. It can be hard to tell, since as I demonstrated with my own privilege fail in this thread, unchecked privilege makes you stupid.

1135. *tinfoil hattie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:40 PM

Whew! Kudos and thanks to the author & to the mods, is all I can say. Award-winning blog post, for sure.

Award-winning comments, too, for the most part. This is the first time I've ever come away from a post discussing rape and sexual assault and felt *better* afterward. So much validation!

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:47 PM

I have been following this thread and believe that I have read every post, but am not 100% sure.

I'm not sure if anyone is still reading, but in case they are, I believe that I actually have something valuable to add from a perspective that I haven't yet seen here.

I am a woman and a police officer. I've been female for 40 years and an officer for 12. And I can tell you that those posters who have compared what women do when dealing with strange men is identical to what the police do when dealing with all strangers. It is called "threat assessment" and is completely logical.

A safety conscious police officer, when they arrive on scene, will ask and answer one question before they do anything else, "Who, of all these people I am dealing with, will try to kill me," and then proceed from there.

A safety conscious woman does exactly the same thing.

The main difference in the situation is the power dynamic. As a police officer on duty, I have many, many more options for proceeding than I do as a woman in civilian dress. I am aware of this and alter my behavior accordingly, depending on whether or not I am at work when I feel threatened.

And I dare any man to explain to me how doing something that makes me safer (threat assessment) is acceptable when I am in uniform, armed to the teeth and have numerous officers standing by if I need help but is NOT acceptable when I am wearing a dress and heels and am dependent wholly on myself for my own defense.

1137. *dreamingcrow*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 4:50 PM

I'm still coming back to read this thread every day, sometimes getting angry, but mostly fascinated.

I wanted to thank Starling and all of the Shapely Prose mods for how this post helped me, though.

This post encouraged me look up "Rape of a Child in the First Degree" in Washington State.

I know find those words strangely comforting. No, I really mean that. It's been amazingly comforting to me to admit that it was RAPE. I was not just sexually abused at age 7. I was raped. More than once.

Never mind all the furor over this link when I posted on Facebook and all the pain that caused me. It also finally caused me to face and accept this fact, which has been an amazing gift for my own peace of mind. Really.

My own personal determination is that I will not keep quiet about this. Just like mental illness, sexuality, other kinds of abuse, and all of those other things that society treats as dirty little secrets, rape and sexual assault shouldn't fester in the dark. It's not something about which we should be ashamed. Our abusers should be ashamed, not the survivors.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to find my freedom from something that has haunted me for almost three decades.

1138. [abyss2hope](#)OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:10 PM

Liza-the-second highlighted this statement from jay: "you wonder why discussions that are by definition blaming men for something they do to women cause reactions that are defensive along the way you describe"

The problem I see with this statement is that men should be blamed for what they do to women which harms women. That's called accountability. Unfortunately, there is such a cultural acceptance for putting the responsibility for what men do to women onto women that for some men the absence of this women-blaming pattern feels unjust.

1139. [Lizzie](#)OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:12 PM

Just for the record, I first met my husband through a scenario like the above. It was in the lobby of the building where I lived. He was visiting a (platonic) friend who lived in the building. I spotted her doing some photography with him in the yard then we coincided downstairs. We made eye contact, and I smiled, and he said, "Hi." And that was it.

Six weeks later (when his friend had moved, so he couldn't use her neighbor status to run into me) he saw me on a dating site my friend had put me on, and asked me out; he didn't recognise me though (he obviously has a type and I'm it). Three months' chatting went by (as I was traveling). At our first date, I did not recognise him as he'd had on a hat when I saw him before, but he recognised me. However he didn't bring it up until weeks later, after I'd invited him to my home. I remembered seeing the photography session and it all clicked. I asked him why firstly so long to mention it, and secondly why he didn't hit on me the first time he saw me, since clearly we had a 'moment'. He said, "I didn't think it was appropriate to hit on a woman in her own home. And at our first date I didn't think it was cool to tell a woman I met online that I know where she lives, as most women probably find that really scary."

In other words, EVEN WITH THE GO SIGNAL, he felt it best to leave it. And you know what, he is right; if he'd hit on me in my home I would have thought, "Well he's really cute but this is too risky," pretended I was just visiting the building, and written off the best man I've ever met. He got the girl by NOT being creepy-maybe-rapist-guy. If I believed in fate I would say that if you DO refuse to talk to the man on the bus, well, the Moirae are watching, and if he's really the father of your babies, it seems you'll find each other.

1140. [WonkyFactory](#)OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:14 PM

Actually, anonymous surveys of college males have found that about 12 percent (one in eight) admit to having committed acts that qualify as rape, and 25 percent to acts that qualify as sexual assault. So your chances of being friends with or in proximity to a rapist are much, much higher.

1141. [lightcastle](#)OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:37 PM

abyss2hope Unfortunately, there is such a cultural acceptance for putting the responsibility for what men do to women onto women that for some men the absence of this women-blaming pattern feels unjust.

Which is one of the reasons we get so many "if women were just clearer/learned self-defense/knew how to project the right body-language" suggestions, I would think.

1142. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:38 PM

But I wasn't using a metaphor, but speaking literally, when I said I often wind up with the impression that 2/3 of the male population has some kind of kind of cognitive impairment needing medical attention.

Thanks for the clarification — thing is, it would be impossible for anyone reading to know this background, so it appeared that you were speaking metaphorically. Just so you know.

1143. _bme

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:40 PM

[delurking]

This is, as has been said so many times, an amazing post. Combined with “Would It Kill You to Be Civil?” and even “Expecting Crickets”, it's been a phenomenal week at Shapely Prose, and thank you so much for the hard work, effort, etc. The moderators have been fantastic too.

When I saw Starling's comment saying she “felt a little responsible for a lot of this”, I felt like I had to chime in with my own feeling of responsibility for at least one would-be commenter who got the banhammer. Heaven only knows how bad it really was (I'm presuming typically awful as he clearly did not make it to posting), but in an email exchange with my husband, he pointing to his banning as some sort of commentary on the discrimination men face, etc. He also said that talking about “male privilege” and “white privilege” is crap, and actually sexism and racism (self-hating if you “have” said non-existent privileges, reverse -ism if you don't). Of course, he would **never** continue an interaction with a woman if she didn't express interest.

And what is perhaps most ironic about this? Said man has repeatedly ignored **my** boundaries (on the internets). I've defriended / defollowed / in some cases blocked him; I don't respond to any of his responses to me; I won't attend any event where I think he might be (he's a friend of the family, sort of, I guess?); and he seems to think every tweet I make that links to something feminist (particularly re: abortion) is ALL ABOUT HIM, and it's his “responsibility” to “mansplain” how wrong I am and what is “for reals.” My husband keeps an eye on his twitter feed in the interests of my safety and mental health. I know *I* can't read it — I have no desire to continually perpetuate my own oppression and I value my mental health, thankyouverymuch.

At the end of the day, I'm not especially afraid that he will *try something*, but that doesn't stop me from being *wary*. But it's ironic, and ridiculous, and frustrating, and yeah, a teeny bit scary, that this man I don't know very well won't leave me the fuck alone. While I'm proud of my husband for attempting to educate him, I also worry that it just encourages him further. And this feeling? That I can't win? That's part of the patriarchy. And it hurts.

1144. Helen Huntingdon

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:54 PM

Sweet Machine, thank you for the heads-up. Being surrounded by engineers who take everything literally all the time, I sometimes forget the communication rules shift in other environments.

Hamlette, thank you so much for posting. I bookmarked your comment.

1145. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 5:57 PM

And I dare any man to explain to me how doing something that makes me safer (threat assessment) is acceptable when I am in uniform, armed to the teeth and have numerous officers standing by if I need help but is NOT acceptable when I am wearing a dress and heels and am dependent wholly on myself for my own defense.

Thanks for a much-needed perspective, Hamlette.

1146. *Starling*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:10 PM

Spiv—I hear you. Best I can offer is to watch your body language carefully, and keep a reasonable distance. You may never be anything but too intimidating to approach a strange woman in a subway or another closed space, but there are a million other places in the world you can meet us, so it's not as bad as all that.

Consider that when you're seated and the woman is standing, she has an edge from the non-verbal communication POV. Be really mindful not to step too close, particularly if the woman has a wall or other obstacle to her back, and don't come between her and the door. Stay as loose as you can—people mirror each others' body language, and if you tense up, so will the other person. Open shoulders and arms are a good thing—as if you were discreetly showing that you're unarmed and not prepared to fight. Mirroring each others' speech patterns also conveys friendliness, and yawning can produce relaxation.

I learned all these tips from observing a good friend, who is 6'2", built like a tank, tattooed, and has the added disadvantage of being on the local police SWAT team. He nevertheless is magic in dealing with people, even in police garb, because he's got the ability to calm a situation down by sending out "I am your friend" vibes, even to people he's actually in the process of arresting. When he needs to get scary, he gets scary. But his default is so mellow that he has to put scary on much less than the guys he works with.

1147. *Annie Mcfly*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:11 PM

J., I'm otherwise on board with your post but this just rubs me the wrong way:

"I wore the same attitude whether or I was wearing my jacket or not, and stopped being seen as a potential victim."

No. You were lucky here. You didn't solve the problem by changing your attitude, you were LUCKY. Some creepers are scared off by a tough, assertive attitude. Others see that sort of attitude and want to squash it. Sounds like there happened to be a preponderance of the former in your area at the time.

1148. *Lizzie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:17 PM

Dingo – "I understand womens' point of view on this issue. But, if this is the case, then why don't more women approach men?"

To your first sentence, do you? Really? I bet you \$1000 that if I had a professional makeup artist make you into a woman for a week, and you had to go about your life as one all week, you would realise that this is not the case.

Secondly, the point of this article is that WOMEN DO APPROACH MEN. Replace 'approach' with 'invite' and bear with me. Nearly all positive interactions between strange men and women start with the woman. The idea that all the agency is with the man is a total myth; it is the woman, at parties, on trains, wherever. Observe human interaction and

you will see it's true; there's always the look, the beckon, something. Catcalling and formal introductions are almost the only incidence where the woman doesn't have to do anything to get the man to open his mouth. Men who don't wait for that cue are almost inevitably freaks. Watch the woman you like (ideally without leering) and see if it comes. She's alert; she's already spotted you. If she hasn't ruled you out, she'll let you know. If she has, preserve your self-esteem by telling yourself it's because she's married, and move on.

Women invite men to talk to them by smiling, by being physically open with their body language, by putting down that interesting book to make lingering eye contact. That is what this article is about; noticing these cues that women have opened the door to you, they've taken step 1. Step 2 is up to you. You are a strange man who might be an axe murderer, meaning they've already taken a risk in smiling at you. If you won't reciprocate by taking the much smaller risk that your pride will get damaged (not nearly as bad as getting axe murdered, I suggest) then it is your fault if you are lonely.

What Starling is saying is, if a woman has not taken step 1, do not leap straight to step 2. It is by looking for the cues that you realise you've already got your 'in'. You've already been not-rejected. So man up and take it from there.

1149. *Faith*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:19 PM

Hamlette. Your perspective was really eye opening for me. While I recognize what I do, I have never quite given it a name and "threat assessment" is exactly what it is.

Whether this makes men sad or feel bad about themselves or angry is not my problem. My problem is making sure the guy on the elevator isn't going to follow me into my empty office at 5:45 a.m. an hour before anyone else arrives.

1150. *Grafton*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:29 PM

Twinklecup: "why the hell does my instinctive fear of being approached by men leave me MORE open to this kind of stuff?"

I would suppose that it's because they don't care if you're open to it. What they notice is that you cannot defend yourself against it. From my social-fail point of view, the guys randomly 'flirting' bear a remarkable resemblance to the kids who used to tease me with fake friendliness (to get me in trouble with the teacher for losing it when they refused to leave me alone) and then beat me up when they found me alone.

The eye-opening thing about this article is that — a couple of weeks ago I was sitting on the train watching, with growing horror, four young men take turns to go sit next to and flirt with a young woman, while the three not taking their turn kept up a running commentary, thinking to myself, "This is really scary. Didn't she just say she didn't want this attention? Are these guys seeing some signal I have missed? How can she cope with this without coming totally unhinged? What the fuck is going on?" — the eye-opening thing is to read that it probably /was/ scary for her, and that she probably wasn't giving some secret signal for them to carry on but meant it when she asked them to stop bothering her, and that it remains totally amazing that she didn't lose it, and that holy fucking moley, Batman, I actually /did/ have a clue what was going on and it sucked as much as I thought.

Thanks, J.

comments it'll take you to a non-existent page that's got the same URL but with a typographical error in.

1151. *Gail*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 6:40 PM

This series of threads has been amazing, important and historic. (HER-storic? How about OUR-storic) People all over *da internetz* are talking about this. Whether they agree or not they are talking, and that is so crucial.

A handful of men had their eyes opened and are learning more. They want to help make a difference. That is amazing.

We've had some women begin to recognize what many forms harassment takes and that they are not alone. Some saw their polite behavior for what it was and decided it was okay to walk away, that it was okay to protect themselves, that they were NOT crazy. That alone makes it all worth it.

To the heroic moderators: Thank you will never come close to covering it, but it's all I've got. Well good vibes and much love, I've got that too.

Starling: You've helped make a positive difference in people's lives, including mine. Standing ovation for you.

1152. *jay*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:03 PM

Alright, I read it all. Took some notes, will sort through, will get back and reply to the two comments directly addressing my earlier comments.

Having read the 1000ish comments one after another, there's one meta thing that I found really striking, and it's something that makes me wonder if it wouldn't be truly worthwhile publishing this article in a more neutral space. This is a self-selected audience, and as such it is not representative of the population at large.

Most women here seem to have accepted certain feminist concepts (rape-culture, privilege, oppression) as unquestioned and unquestionable axioms of their positions and arguments, while this doesn't seem to be the case for most men commenting. Maybe that's the reason why the gist of most initial replies to comments made by what were assumed male posters was along the line of "you don't get it", "read feminism 101", "make some effort to understand", "it's not our duty to inform you".

So there's a post trying to explain dating etiquette and female emotional responses to men, they reply, and the standard reply is: "You're not familiar with our lingo and don't seem to agree with our worldview. Come back when you do." There are exceptions, and there are quite interesting exchanges of arguments above, but generally, that's the impression I got. I don't think that's helpful for the debate, but I also don't think it's actually possible to have truly unbiased discussion on a feminist blog, precisely because of concepts like privilege – because in the end invoking privilege, which I think can possibly be a useful additional way of looking at the world, but also means that a male perspective can be easily disregarded due to privilege or a male argument doesn't have to be given equal weight. And that's a problem. I understand that that's part of the "privileges" women complain about with respect to the general social discourse and there certainly is some merit to that argument.

I'll sort my notes now...

1153. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:08 PM

I don't think that's helpful for the debate, but I also don't think it's actually possible to have truly unbiased discussion on a feminist blog, precisely because of concepts like privilege

Jay, where *would* it be possible to have a "truly unbiased discussion" about sexual harassment? No one is immune from socialization about rape and gender. Or by "truly unbiased" do you mean "where men get deferred to automatically"?

I'm going to repeat something I said upthread:

To address your other concern, this is really not a Feminism 101 space, despite the fact that this post is aimed at a 101 level. It arose from another post that was decidedly not 101-level, but which prompted a lot of self-identified male commenters to come in and tell us how paranoid women were for not trusting men and how sad it made the poor men who might miss out on True Love because of that. This post is directed at those men; that doesn't mean the comments are, and that doesn't mean we're ready to relax our notoriously (and belovedly) draconian moderation style to cater to 101-ers.

I do appreciate that you have read all the comments and are taking notes and thinking about it. But if you want a discussion that plays by different rules from our own, please start it somewhere else.

1154. Helen Huntingdon

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:19 PM

ROFL.

jay, this is the unbiased discussion, where bias and preconceptions and expectations are carefully unpacked.

When you talk about "unbiased", you're actually saying you want "heavily biased in your favor". Learn to read already. We've given you the material.

1155. Grafton

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:19 PM

The idea that feminism (a movement directed towards establishing equal rights and protections for women) is 'biased' is very strange. Given standard definitions of 'equal' and 'bias' anyway.

1156. jay

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:22 PM

Sweet Machine

no, there can never be a truly unbiased discussion, not just about sexual harassment. But owning that doesn't mean taking the problem away.

"Or by "truly unbiased" do you mean "where men get deferred to automatically"?"

Yes, that's exactly what I meant. Btw, I'm always up for a sarcasm-off if you insist on one.

"But if you want a discussion that plays by different rules from our own, please start it somewhere else."

No, but as you say in the excerpt, I think the discussion had a different dynamic than the original post. That's why I suggested it would be great to publish the original post somewhere else in addition to a feminist space. I don't know, dating boards, maybe, the NYT Sunday edition, Guardian Comment is Free. It's a good and useful essay, and while part of the discussion here is also good and valuable, there's also parts that I think aren't helpful in the way the original post is.

1157. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:28 PM

Btw, I'm always up for a sarcasm-off if you insist on one.

Dude, house always wins. I am a mod, you know. I've already told you once you're giving me the stabby pain. You are still on the edge of being banned.

Insisting on an "unbiased" discussion is usually something that is a result of a privileged mindset. Everyone has a bias but you, right?

1158. *Lizzie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:32 PM

Robert – but a really good salesman knows the vast majority of sales come from word of mouth.

If you sell a customer on a product and they love it, they tell all their friends, and that's 100 people you don't have to spend money persuading to buy it. If you sell a customer on a product that they do not like, they feel swindled or dissatisfied, and they tell people. And then other people do not buy that product. Having worked in Hollywood I know that the aim of a trailer is not to get devoutly religious people in to see raunchy movies they may well hate but to get your core demographic in on the first weekend, to make it sound as great as possible TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE. They're the ones who get the next batch in.

Salesmen also know you can't sell against someone's prejudices. So if a woman is not in the market for a dickhead, then selling yourself using dickheadery is a mistake. And if she is in the market for a nice guy, and her preconception of a nice guy is one who respects her boundaries, then you have to sell to that prejudice. You don't have to like it, the same way an editor who really likes bodice ripping period dramas might be baffled on the inside when he (they're nearly all men) cuts together a trailer for an action movie that emphasizes the incredibly high number of really big explosions. He may know that the movie also contains a really strong and interesting female character and that may float his personal boat. But he knows that teenage boys want to see explosions and are most likely to buy the first batch of tickets and encourage their friends and families to get the second weekend's take. Your target audience sets the parameters of the sales pitch, not you.

You (by which I don't mean you personally, but 'man who is approaching a woman') don't have to like female caution but you can't wish it away. Because when you try to sell someone something, from a movie ticket to a date with you, you CHOOSE to elevate their opinion from totally irrelevant to your life, to something you've got to factor in. That's true no matter how irrational you find their reasoning. To sell a nice guy in the language of a dickhead is just as counter-productive and irrational as selling a period romance by the number of explosions.

A third rate salesman won't take no for an answer. But a really good one approaches his targets such that nobody ever says it in the first place.

1159. *Jay*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:33 PM

Sweet Machine

"Everyone has a bias but you, right?"

I don't quite understand... I just said there can never be an unbiased discussion... I have bias just like everyone else. But I'm trying to keep it as small as possible.

1160. *Julie*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:38 PM

Plus I love how one guy gets to decide which parts of the discussion were "helpful." Because lots of it was helpful to ME, and I bet the parts I liked and the parts he liked wouldn't match.

But who cares what I think? This article was for teh menz, it says right in the title!

I'd vike a favorite saying from a friend, "Get on the clue bus," but make sure you don't hit on anyone while you're riding.

Look, Jay. (Sooooo ironic for me that's your name. You've no idea.) This really isn't that complicated an issue, and we can take "bias" right out of it – or at least make it a lot clearer to you where it really lies.

Say it's a *guy* you're going up to on the bus. He's reading and listening to his iPod, making no obvious signals that he's looking to have a nice chat with anyone. One, does it even *occur* to you that you should strike up a conversation anyway? Two, if you try it and he brushes you off, do you push, or do you *shut up and leave him alone*?

I know there must be exceptions (waves sympathetically to Grafton) but for the most part, I'm betting that once we take "possible tourist site for my penis" out of the equation, it really doesn't look like rocket science any more.

1161. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:39 PM

Jay, either you want to join in the discussion here, or you don't. Quit arguing about the terms of the discussion; they have been covered again and again.

1162. *Starling*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:42 PM

Jay, not to get more than wildly off-topic, but did you keep up with the legal coverage about Ricci v DeStefano this summer? You may have noticed an interesting discussion of the difference between disparate treatment and disparate impact. That concept is an important one to bring to any discussion of social inequality, even one about something as simple as small talk in public. 'Privilege' and 'oppression' are academic terms used to discuss social power dynamics, but those ideas are valid and important in contexts far beyond the Woman's Studies world.

You say that discussions of women's experiences always turn into the women saying, "Hey, you're not taking into account our worldview and vocabulary." What else are you here for? When we are telling you how we think and what it means for you, it is precisely our worldview and vocabulary that are most important to the discussion.

they think. Or women should arm themselves with Mace. Or women should not be wary.) But what I'm trying to tell you is that, while the world ought to exist like that, it doesn't. I've tried to explain the reasons why. I've suggested that you may wish to change your behaviors if you would like a change in your results. But I've not said that all men should instantly comply with what I've suggested. Just that if they do so, their success in making a connection will be increased.

Lizzie's comment is really what it's all about. I'm giving you pointers to navigate the reality-based world. The world you wish existed is a little irrelevant in that discussion.

1163. *car*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:43 PM

Jay, you're claiming that the biases of women cloud the discussion... on what causes women to have biases against men and how to be sure to understand and properly deal with said biases. If you remove that from this discussion, there isn't anything left.

1164. *Sid*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 7:53 PM

Two things, oft-repeated but worth saying:

1 – Starling: AMAZING post, thoughtful responses on the thread, well-done all around.

2 – Mods: I've been reading Shapely Prose for a couple years now, and it consistently has the best, most thoughtful comment threads I have ever encountered on the webs, and that is SOLELY because you work so incredibly hard to keep them that way. Ur doin it rite. I wish I could give you the Nobel Prize in Moderation, or send you truckfuls of baby donuts and sanity watchers points. You deserve donuts and sanity. Thank you.

1165. *Hamlette*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:04 PM

Faith, thank you. I was half-asleep when I typed my post, and I'm sure that some of it, the third paragraph especially, is jumbled.

I find that, for me, giving ideas names gives them power and added legitimacy.

And you're absolutely right about bearing no responsibility for men's emotional responses to your threat assessments.

As a police officer, if I feel that a suspect is a danger, I am going to handcuff them. If I attempted to handcuff them and then stopped because I was worried about hurting their feelings, what kind of officer would that make me? A piss poor one.

Discussions about power dynamics can be very uncomfortable. But I have found that being aware of these dynamics and working with citizens as they are performing a threat assessment on me when I am Schrodinger's racist officer, instead of becoming defensive about it, can be a very rewarding experience.

1166. *iii*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:09 PM

presents moderators with individual balloon bouquets

Y'all are wonderful.

1167. *abyss2hope*

329 of 345 OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:12 PM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

Jay, you are coming across to me as extremely patronizing which indicates that while you read all the comments you didn't understand most of them.

When you wrote "I don't think that's helpful for the debate, but I also don't think it's actually possible to have truly unbiased discussion on a feminist blog ..." you miss the fact that this is not a debate.

What you would call unbiased seems to be to have your opinion about women's experiences be given equal weight as the opinion of women talking about their own experiences.

This makes as much sense as telling those opposed to genocide that they need to change what they are doing so there can be an unbiased discussion about genocide because those who don't want to do anything about genocide aren't getting treated the same as those who are discussing what to do about genocide.

The only people who are truly unbiased about genocide are completely ignorant about genocide and the reality of instances of genocide. This lack of bias is dangerous and is not something which should be exalted. However, those most likely to claim to be unbiased are likely highly biased and want to position their cold-heartedness as neutrality when it is no such thing.

1168. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:19 PM

Aw, Hamlette. I'm so glad you're out there doing it right.

/not here

1169. *jay*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:21 PM

Julie,

thanks for your reply, as I think it gets right to the two most important snippets I copied from the thread. First, even including possible interest in penis tourism, I agree that this isn't rocket science. Misunderstandings can happen, but basically, I'd agree that none of this is actually rocket science, as CassandraSays put very well –

"So again, the take-home message here is if a woman doesn't seem to want to talk to you, accept that and move on. There is no way in which persisting is going to end well."

True. There can be no good interaction if a woman doesn't feel safe. Maybe some guys may want to defend themselves in such a situation, but really, what's lost is lost and if a woman has indicated her disinterest continuing the interaction is a recipe for disaster on every level. Not rocket science. That's for your "Two". I completely agree. Completely.

But as we are having this debate there are clearly people who, at least in practice, disagree with this – and – moreover – we're not just talking about a few disturbed people but about a systemic bias causing men to behave in ways that trouble women. Why would that possibly become a socially stable outcome? That's where, I think, the "One" you're referring to and a very appropriate snippet by Kate Harding from way up the thread become relevant –

"If you are interested in actually being a trustworthy person, you will respect that and honor her boundaries — even if it means you don't have a conversation and this stranger never learns how nice and awesome you are, and you don't get together and have 100 pretty babies." (/ #comment-114535)

I think this gets right to the bottom of the entire problem, and probably explains why there is a difference — certainly in perception — for same-sex and inter-sex interactions — and the motivations for them.

I whole heartedly support Kate Harding's approach in most circumstances, particularly in situations where women have every reason to be particularly concerned and alert — say public transport — and will thus likely not be open to a nice conversation anyway (although even in this thread, there was considerable disagreement among women as to whether and how they appreciated the initiation of a conversation on public transport — so there doesn't seem to be one single rule). That said, there is a fundamental incentive problem here.

I think a lot of men will think along this line — "what's the point of her thinking I'm a trustworthy person if we don't have that conversation and there's still at least the possibility of Penis tourism and, possibly, 100 pretty babies."

If you're interested in talking to her, but you don't talk to her because of her assumed boundaries, and you don't risk to be rejected, you may feel good about yourself, being the trustworthy person that you are, but you don't get anything else for it. And, very likely, you won't even marginally change the female perception of male initiators, since you *did not have an interaction with her, she doesn't know that you pre-emptively respected her assumed boundaries and so she won't be able to go home happily and tell her friends that not all men are assholes.

But you know what? The next time she meets an asshole who doesn't do that, she will most certainly go home pissed and tell all her friends that men actually are assholes. Kate's proposition is certainly nice, but it's ultimately self-defeating from the guy's point of view.

And that's where the problem is. In a very real way, I think, for him, the more rational approach would be to politely say hello and see if he's interested, always being alert about her reactions, and withdrawing if she shows any kind of disinterest. That way, while having been interrupted, she may even get the impression that the guy was able to understand her saying no — to him. A no that was not assumed, but real.

1170. *Caitlin*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:22 PM

Also, the mods are fucking amazing, as always. Thank yous.

1171. *Demosthenes XXI*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:26 PM

@Anita:

It was just a suggestion based upon a time where there were more social regulations regarding unsolicited male/female contact.

Moreso, and regarding the "calling card," forgive me for not clearly stating that of course, the woman always had the option to not accept the fellow's card. If a woman did not want to take the card, she just says "no thank you," and goes on her way.

on. If she accepts the card, then the proverbial ball is in her court (she still has the choice to decide to contact him or not), and if she doesn't, then she's out of the picture. The only responsibility (out of a duty to social politeness, nothing more) that the woman would have in this context would be to be civil/polite in the acceptance or rejection of the soliciting man's card.

Rejection is almost always the burden of the offering party. If a woman chooses not to accept a man's calling card, that is her right and it's up to the guy "making the pitch" to deal with whatever mental histrionics he conjures up to rationalize why she didn't take the card, or why she didn't call him back after her taking his card. (Most men will just say "there's more fish in the sea" and move on without a second thought.)

Personally, if I lamented over each time I've been rejected after trying to initiate something with a woman, I'd be in the loony bin. I never got mad, I never insulted the woman; I just thought to my self "her loss," and moved on. Forgive me, but I am entitled to a moderate degree of conceit under those circumstances.... :)

Guys who don't (or won't) understand words to the effect of saying "I don't want to be bothered" are a problem. I acknowledge that and I'm sure that a lot of the guys following this thread do as well. But you say that it doesn't address leaving alone women who do not appear to not want contact.

May I counter you with this question; how can a guy know that for sure if he doesn't ask?

You mention women being "bothered" while having on headphones or reading; neither of those activities are indicative of not desiring social contact. I listen to music via headphones in public or read (usually both) nearly all of the time; that does not mean that I am adverse to social contact, nor do I feel that should be a general assumption for most people. If there is something that I am not getting, then I honestly do wish for a degree of clarification.

1172. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:29 PM

Jay, this has been said so many times but I'm going to repeat it. This is not a debate, this is not really even a hypothetical discussion. This is an article and comments about how women live their lives. You can wax philosophical about it all you want (not here though) but for us, it is reality. I wish I knew the name of the writer or the article but it's been awhile it was linked here I think, there was a great blog a man, yes a man, wrote about how not to be an asshole in feminist discussion, if anyone knows where it is or what it's called I would love you so much for telling me, I've been wanting to find it again for awhile now. Anyway, his main point is that you need to understand that in a feminist discussions about women's lives the best way to learn about them is to STFU and listen to the women. Try it.

Now, I agree this could be a great article in a non-feminist space as well. I can't speak for Starling, but I think she would be OK with you putting this on your facebook if you credit her and link to this page. There you could have an "unbiased" discussion about it solely as dating tips. That will not happen here the way you seem to think it it should, so stop suggesting it. We can also think of how this would be recieved in another forum, so we don't need you to tell us. We appreciate you reading all the comments, truly, but stop now. Please?

Grafton, I think you're kind of awesome. You, Aleks and Matt are making me really happy, it's rare that I meet feminist men or allies where I live. It's hard to remember that they exist, so thank you for reminding me.

1173. *Starling*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:31 PM

Dude. Jay. What you're saying is that you can hold off, and let her assume men are assholes as a result of a conversation with a real jerk, or you can talk, and let her assume men are assholes from a conversation with a nice guy. Ack, no.

The more men who pay attention to boundaries, the more comfortable your average woman's going to feel, and the more likely she is to be making eye contact and smiling at people she finds interesting, instead of putting on the earbuds and getting out the book and generally trying to drown out all strangers rather than attract the notice of the jerks. So you do get a payoff for good behavior.

Which should not matter, since whether or not you get a payoff, it's the way the majority of women would vastly prefer you behave, out of courtesy and respect. I hope that's its own reward.

1174. *Julie*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:33 PM

Demosthenes:

Along with a few other men, you have raised a question along the lines of "Yeah, but what if she really might be a LITTLE interested in talking to me? How can I be sure? I mean really, REALLY sure? Shouldn't I take the risk if I'm not really REALLY sure?"

You can never be 100% sure. Just like we can't. The woman you are addressing on the bus is Shroedinger's Feminist. Approach her accordingly.

1175. *Hamlette*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:37 PM

Julie! Schrodinger's Feminist is brilliant. I love that.

1176. *Sweet Machine*OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:40 PM

If you're interested in talking to her, but you don't talk to her because of her assumed boundaries, and you don't risk to be rejected, you may feel good about yourself, being the trustworthy person that you are, but you don't get anything else for it.

That's right, Jay. You don't get a cookie for treating women like they're human beings. Stop looking for one.

May I counter you with this question; how can a guy know that for sure if he doesn't ask?

Demosthenes XXI: There is actually a really, really easy answer to this. Assume she's not UNLESS she gives you specific signs (verbally or through body language) that she is.

How can this still be confusing?

Problem: Men treat all women as if they've got a neon sign that says "ON THE PROWL" on their heads, and then men are disappointed when most women brush them off.

Solution: Pretend the sign says "LEAVE ME ALONE" unless explicitly signaled otherwise.

Honest to god, this is so easy. The only way I can explain people like Jay and Demosthenes continuing to argue against this is if they really don't understand that women are autonomous individuals with their own desires.

1177. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:43 PM

alibelle, here's what you're looking for: <http://theczech.wordpress.com/2008/12/22/repost-how-not-to-be-an-asshole-a-guide-for-men/>

It was originally posted on Pandagon but got swallowed up when they switched domains. Most pertinent bit:

– You are not saying anything the women you're talking to haven't heard a thousand times before. You are not saying anything the women you're talking to haven't told themselves a thousand times before. If you would actually stop your reflexive know-it-all yammering and pay attention to what women actually SAY about the offenses they suffer on the sexual harassment – rape continuum, you will note that almost to a woman they second-guess their own gut feelings about the putative offender far beyond the point where almost any man would.

1178. alibelle

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:52 PM

Thanks, Sweet Machine!! There Jay, read that, I'm off to go bookmark it so I have it in the future, it's a fucking fantastic post.

1179. Helen Huntingdon

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:55 PM

As abyss2hope said, "you miss the fact that this is not a debate."

Jay doesn't understand basic scientific reasoning, to the point that he keeps making, over and over and over, the same argument that Indiana legislators once used when they wanted to change the value of pi just by setting a law.

1180. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 8:58 PM

If you're interested in talking to her, but you don't talk to her because of her assumed boundaries, and you don't risk to be rejected, you may feel good about yourself, being the trustworthy person that you are, but you don't get anything else for it.

Listen to yourself, Jay. That's right: You don't get anything for it, where "it" is your random attraction to a stranger. Your argument hinges on the belief that you are entitled to speak to any woman you find attractive, regardless of her body language, because there's a chance that you might "get" something for trying, and a guarantee that you will "get" nothing if you don't try. Do you not see how fucked up that is?

Also, you're skating awfully close to the line (crossed above by Dingo, TrackerNeil, and probably others) of, "There is no point in behaving well if I am not rewarded for it." Which is how very young children and sociopaths think, not grown people with any pretensions to decency.

*And, very likely, you won't even marginally change the female perception of male initiators, since you *did not have an interaction with her, she doesn't know that you pre-emptively respected her assumed boundaries and so she won't be able to go home happily and tell her friends that not all men are assholes.*

You're right! You won't get a cookie! That's why this post is not titled "How Jay can single-handedly make women feel safer and be rewarded for it." The point is, if more men in general who think *women feeling safe in public is a good thing* would respect women's body

language and boundaries, eventually, women would start to feel safer. Complaining that you don't get an immediate result and/or the credit for it is like saying hey, what's the point in voting, when my vote will certainly not be the deciding one? *It's a group effort.*

But you know what? The next time she meets an asshole who doesn't do that, she will most certainly go home pissed and tell all her friends that men actually are assholes.

Yes, because the point of this thread — and feminism, really — is that all men are assholes! I was just discussing that with my husband the other day!

Jay, listen up, I'm about to blow your mind: If any of us believed that all men are assholes, there would actually be no point in writing, much less discussing, a post saying that *we expect better of you*. That we believe it would be helpful to raise awareness among men who would like to help women feel safe in public but might not understand how their own behavior contributes to our frequent unease. If we thought men were assholes in general, all that would be a lost cause — we'd just have to arm ourselves or stay home.

Kate's proposition is certainly nice, but it's ultimately self-defeating from the guy's point of view.

Because once again, the important thing here is whether the guy gets what he wants whenever he sees a woman he's attracted to, not whether the guy contributes to a culture in which women feel just as safe going out in public as men do.

And that's where the problem is. In a very real way, I think, for him, the more rational approach would be to politely say hello and see if he's interested, always being alert about her reactions, and withdrawing if she shows any kind of disinterest. That way, while having been interrupted, she may even get the impression that the guy was able to understand her saying no — to him. A no that was not assumed, but real.

Sure, that's "the more rational approach" if what you want is A) to preserve your belief that you're entitled to female attention as you see fit, and B) get some sort of credit for behaving like a decent human being. If what you want is to help women feel safer, though, the rational approach is to *observe her body language before speaking*, and choose *not* to speak if you observe that she is closed off and clearly sending signals that she doesn't wish to be spoken to. What's rational here depends largely on your goal.

I almost said it depends entirely on your goal, but even that's not true, because there's an obvious flaw in your "rational" plan to make contact and come off looking like a sweetheart if you take no for an answer, which you fail to see even after having read over 1000 comments. To wit, that first contact with a woman who is not obviously looking for conversation is *already a violation of her boundaries*. If you politely say hello, get turned down, and back off, the good news is, you will not be seen as a potential rapist or other threat — but you will also not be seen as a knight in shining armor. You will most likely be seen as another clueless twerp who thinks a woman's mere existence in a public space entitles him to her time and attention, however brief. She won't go home and tell her friends about the nice guy who respected her "no." She probably won't think about you at all after 5 minutes. But she probably will roll her eyes and add you to the long list of men who ignored her clear body language, her headphones, her book, whatever, because he believed that if there was *any* chance he could "get something" out of talking to her, he had the right to give it a try.

For the millionth time, this doesn't mean you can never talk to a woman, or that men and women will never hook up. As people have said umpteen times, there are *plenty* of social situations where "the roof is the invitation," not to mention plenty of women (even on this

very thread!) who, when willing to talk to strangers in public, keep an open posture and deliberately *don't* close themselves off. If you're burning to give a woman a compliment and truly expect nothing in return, you can always do it as you're walking away, as many people have suggested.

But it's that "expecting nothing" part you don't seem to get. As long as you prioritize the chance that you could "get something" over the chance that you'll make a woman uncomfortable, you're part of the fucking problem. End of story.

1181. *jay*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:01 PM

Starling,

will look that case up.

"but those ideas are valid and important in contexts far beyond the Woman's Studies world."

Out of sheer personal interest, I have read some feminist philosophy, from basic Simone de Beauvoir to Judith Butler and Elisabeth Anderson. The concepts you mention are, in my opinion, valuable in some ways, but problematic in others – they become problematic, I think, when they turn into silencing devices – "you're not oppressed in my book, your opinion is not as valid as mine" – in spaces where the generally oppressed are the majority. Sometimes I wish the "tools of the trade" would also be applied in those circumstances. It's understandable that they're not, but it's still dissatisfying.

"You say that discussions of women's experiences always turn into the women saying, "Hey, you're not taking into account our worldview and vocabulary."

I said that my impression was that saying that as an initial reaction to a male commenter isn't helpful – also because they guys reading this will also be self-selecting, and probably be interested in what women say. It's not about getting cookies, it's about not getting maced for stating your own point of view or disagreeing.

"I've suggested that you may wish to change your behaviors if you would like a change in your results. But I've not said that all men should instantly comply with what I've suggested. Just that if they do so, their success in making a connection will be increased."

My results are fine, and I would like to think that that is partly a consequence of actually doing the things you mentioned. Starling, as I have said before, I think your article is excellent, and whenever I find an opportunity I will link to it.

As for the later other comment – thanks for giving me the opportunity to mention Elinor Ostrom, who, as of today, is the first female Nobel laureate in economics. Much of her work deals with precisely the kind of collective action problem we're looking at here –

"The more men who pay attention to boundaries, the more comfortable your average woman's going to feel, and the more likely she is to be making eye contact and smiling at people she finds interesting, instead of putting on the earbuds and getting out the book and generally trying to drown out all strangers rather than attract the notice of the jerks. So you do get a payoff for good behavior."

Wonderful... when is that going to happen though? Every person (today) has a period of

So here's classic public good conundrum – my behaviour is creating lots of positive external effects in the future while the payoff for myself is relatively low. This is a common problem for situations in which there is no positive stable equilibrium... there is no way for either collective party to credibly commit to a different behaviour. Because every individual has an incentive to defect. It's essentially a "prisoner's dilemma".

"Which should not matter, since whether or not you get a payoff, it's the way the majority of women would vastly prefer you behave, out of courtesy and respect. I hope that's its own reward."

That may well be so – or should be so. But here I am less optimistic than you are, apparently, because I think this is where I would quote your comment to me from above – "The world you wish existed..."

Well, let's hope together.

1182. Faith

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:04 PM

Wow Jay really wants the cookie – NOW.

Thank you Kate. You are just brilliant. You have made a wonderful space here for so many. Thank you.

1183. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:07 PM

Heh, Sweet Machine beat me to the exact same shit, and more concisely. As usual.

Demosthenes, let me quote this once more, for both truth and amusement:

You can never be 100% sure. Just like we can't. The woman you are addressing on the bus is Shroedinger's Feminist. Approach her accordingly.

I would only add that although you can't be 100% sure you haven't missed some sort of opportunity, you *can* be 100% sure that you haven't contributed to making a woman feel unsafe in public. Why the hell is that not seen as its own reward?

I promise you, guys, you will not miss out on meeting "the one" by erring on the side of caution here. You will still talk to loads and loads of women in your lives, some of whom will be both attractive and attracted to you, and will make their interest clear. You lose *nothing* by not talking to a woman when you can't quite tell if she wants to talk — and you gain the satisfaction of helping to create a culture in which women are treated with respect and can feel safe in public. Why do you keep insisting you're owed more than that?

1184. Faith

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:09 PM

Interesting also that you mention the prisoner's dilemma in which the prisoners (game players) are looking for the most positive "payoff". Interesting because the woman who is not giving signals is not playing the game and yet the Schroedinger's rapist in this scenario is. Therefore we have one player and one non-player but he thinks she's playing (or wants her to play whether she does or not). He is going to end up "losing" this "game" if only because he is not playing with a willing partner. Do you see where the prisoner's dilemma gets him?

1185. alibelle

337 of 345 OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:12 PM

11/12/2015 8:40 am

Ok, Jay, I'm going to use another approach, when you go into someone's house and you don't piss on their rug, do you expect a thank you? Should a person when not having their rug pissed on go, "Thank you so much for not peeing on my rug, that rug really ties the room together, so I didn't really want any piss on it."? Do you thank people for not peeing on your rugs?

Also, women do appreciate men who are allies, we have thanked several of the men who commented here and got it. Also there are posts like this one, <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/stuff-what-boys-can-do/> which I suggest you go read. Especially the latest entry which is about a man who gave his reward for helping catch a rapist to the rape victim. But just don't go over there and submit your heroic story of reading all the comments on a really long feminist thread.

1186. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:13 PM

they become problematic, I think, when they turn into silencing devices – “you’re not oppressed in my book, your opinion is not as valid as mine” – in spaces where the generally oppressed are the majority.

Oh, for fuck's sake. You do realize, of course, that the very few spaces on earth where an oppressed population sets the terms of the discussion exist *in response to* the larger society, wherein our oppressors routinely and, you know, *oppressively* set the terms? And that commenting at one fucking blog where your voice is not automatically valued over a woman's — when talking about women's experiences, no less — is nothing but a taste of what it feels like to *actually be a woman every day*? 'Cause if you don't, you weren't reading all that feminist theory very closely.

1187. Sarah

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:13 PM

I listen to music via headphones in public or read (usually both) nearly all of the time; that does not mean that I am adverse to social contact, nor do I feel that should be a general assumption for most people.

Have you actually read the rest of the comments? It sounds like you are not in fact alone in this behavior, but you are relatively unusual. There is also so much other body language involved that it's usually easy to tell if someone with headphones on wants to talk to you. They'll, y'know, look at you. And smile. And say hi. And other fascinating things like that.

1188. Sarah

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:21 PM

Every person (today) has a period of about 20 years of inter-gender interactions until they're off the market, one way or another.

This is relatively small fish in the face of the rest of your statement, but please remember the existence of people who would prefer same-sex interactions. Or people who are asexual. Or older people who start up relationships even though they are no longer capable and/or interested in producing offspring.

1189. Lu

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:23 PM

Every person (today) has a period of about 20 years of inter-gender interactions until they're off the market, one way or another.

1190. *jay*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:24 PM

Kate,

"Your argument hinges on the belief that you are entitled to speak to any woman you find attractive, regardless of her body language"

I explicitly said that I think your point is valid in most circumstances, and that includes body language.

"because there's a chance that you might "get" something for trying, and a guarantee that you will "get" nothing if you don't try. Do you not see how fucked up that is? ... Which is how very young children and sociopaths think, not grown people with any pretensions to decency."

Or economists. And I'm not trying to be funny.

"It's a group effort."

Exactly, and I pointed out the incentive problems for this particular case of collective action.

"If we thought men were assholes in general, all that would be a lost cause — we'd just have to arm ourselves or stay home."

When I wrote that the hypothetical woman would go home complaining that all men are assholes, I wasn't trying to suggest that you or anyone here had suggested that, I was merely capturing a common and understandable reaction to a problematic interaction. I am well aware that feminists by and large aren't manhaters, otherwise my life would be seriously in danger ;) (and here I was trying to be funny).

"For the millionth time, this doesn't mean you can never talk to a woman, or that men and women will never hook up. As people have said umpteen times, there are plenty of social situations where "the roof is the invitation," not to mention plenty of women (even on this very thread!) who, when willing to talk to strangers in public, keep an open posture and deliberately don't close themselves off. If you're burning to give a woman a compliment and truly expect nothing in return, you can always do it as you're walking away, as many people have suggested."

I agree. And I think I've said so a number of times, including in this reply. And this isn't my impression of what we're talking about here. I think we're talking about a problematic systemic condition (that you call rape-culture) in which the incentives for the initiating party are skewed towards direct reward rather than reaping discounted collective benefits of a distant future. That's the problem.

"But it's that "expecting nothing" part you don't seem to get. As long as you prioritize the chance that you could "get something" over the chance that you'll make a woman uncomfortable, you're part of the fucking problem. End of story."

Or an economist, that's why they call it the dismal science. It doesn't tell us things about ourselves that we like to hear (men/the initiating party, in this case).

And also what Sarah said. LOL.

1192. *abyss2hope*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:25 PM

Jay, there is a huge problem with your premise that if you talk to a woman when she isn't indicating she's open to talk to you then some man worse than you will talk to her and that asshole will define her perception of all men. Your premise misses the fact that a woman may have many times where she is open to talking to certain men she doesn't know and some of those men will succeed at respecting every one of that woman's boundaries.

The idea that a woman who has her boundaries respected by a man who doesn't talk to her never knows when this happens is false.

Also the man who you label as an asshole is likely using the same rationalization you are using. If he witnesses your approach and the woman's lack of positive response to you he may be viewing you as the asshole who makes men like him look bad.

1193. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:27 PM

Ok, I give up: This is one of those situations if I can't tell if a guy is being stupid on purpose or has a medical problem needing prompt help.

Jay thinks facts are things that can be changed by debating them, instead of things you report and substantiate. 10-year-olds can figure out the difference.

Jay displays sociopathic reasoning normal for toddlers, but not for anyone older.

Jay certainly hasn't grasped the first thing you're supposed to learn in high school science, which is the necessary precursor to any scientific reasoning of any kind is figuring out how to do an end run around your own confirmation bias so you can actually see the facts in front of you. Witness his inability to read stats without mangling them.

So, Jay, seriously, I can't tell. Have you been in a plane crash recently? Had a major stroke? Because you're acting like you really need a doctor ASAP

1194. *Aurora*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:28 PM

Hugs to the mods if they accept them, and thanks to all the contributors to this amazing discussion. I just read to the where the thread ended when I started, an hour ago... and really want to add my thanks.

1195. *Demosthenes XXI*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:31 PM

@DreamingCrow:

Uhhh...where did you get that? Where was that written in my post.

Yes, I'm extremely verbose...that's my blessing / curse. But where did I say that I was telling the women on this blog that I knew better than they did? By the way, I just chose not to do a bunch of individual posts in favor of answering everyone who responded to me in a single post.

Again, all that I asked was for the idea of risk assessment not veer to closely into discrimination.

I read later that you were just frustrated...I can accept that. But I'm not the enemy. I'm just asking the questions that reasonable men who want to be able to approach women, but at the same time not be offensive to those same women want to know.

Informed agreement requires clear discussion from both parties involved in a dispute.

1196. Kate Harding

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:34 PM

Exactly, and I pointed out the incentive problems for this particular case of collective action.

And I pointed out that "the incentive problem" you describe is an abhorrent bit of reasoning to grown-ups who actually prioritize women's safety and comfort over men's desire to chat them up uninvited. You can blame being an economist for your resistance to that argument, but I doubt "economist" is going to be the first word that leaps to most decent people's minds.

1197. Demosthenes XXI

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:34 PM

@Dreamingcrow:

I acknowledged that by reading the posts here that I'm understanding how many of the women are feeling. I've demonstrated that I want to learn more. Is that not enough?

If you don't meet halfway those men who are trying to understand and help solve the problem, then what is the point of us trying? Ask yourself that question and get back to me.

1198. Julie

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:36 PM

Okay, so. Economics, stats, the bottom line in the short term for men.

How about this? Men are rejected by women countless times in their lives. This is, I would imagine, painful. Sure, there are people whose personalities can handle the cold-call, hard-sell, telemarketing approach to a thing, but that's not most people. Most people would rather succeed than fail.

So how's this? If you approach a woman even though she is giving no signal that she wants to be approached, even if your chance of succeeding with her may be nonzero, it is still vanishingly small. Whereas if you approach a woman only when she IS giving a signal that she wants to be approached, your odds of success are substantially higher. Ergo your rate of successes vs. failures goes up. Your "batting average," as it were. That's your reward. You are spared numerous incidents of the sting of bitter failure.

1199. Sweet Machine

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:37 PM

Jay, I'm sick of you. Say hello to our banhammer. Please read the "How Not to Be an Asshole" link to understand why you're banned. If you care.

So, Jay, seriously, I can't tell. Have you been in a plane crash recently? Had a major stroke? Because you're acting like you really need a doctor ASAP

HH, I still find this really problematic; please stop.

1200. Helen Huntingdon

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:38 PM

"how can a guy know that for sure if he doesn't ask?"

Where are you getting the overwhelming narcissism to think it's so important that you find out?

1201. *dreamingcrow*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:39 PM

Demosthenes XXI: Your comments have repeatedly made it clear that you are not actually willing to meet us even half way, just like Jay is currently busy doing. I do not owe you my attention.

1202. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:39 PM

Demosthenes XXI, THIS IS NOT A FUCKING 101 THREAD, WE ARE NOT HERE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS!!!! There are many websites for that, look them up. Also, I feel that you are fucking lying when you say that you have read the comments because we have been over this same thing again and again and again.

This is a discussion, not a how to get more pussy website published by feminists. There have been so many fucking links provided that it is un-fucking-believable. The title of the post is not, "Call For Questions About Feminism and How to Get Laid On Trains."

1203. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:40 PM

If you don't meet halfway those men who are trying to understand and help solve the problem, then what is the point of us trying?

And the male privilege unfurls its glorious flag. "Why should I care about a world where women are more safe if you don't act super nice and deferential to me right now?" Next thing we know, you'll be like Dingo upthread, promising not to call 911 if you see us getting raped.

1204. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:40 PM

Kate: Actually, the fact he is an economist explains a lot. So long as he views the incentive in question as getting laid, and that it outweighs other aspects, he's right.

It's a nice way to justify things you want.

1205. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:41 PM

Sweet Machine, stopped and won't do it again.

Demosthenes XXI: "I've demonstrated that I want to learn more. Is that not enough?"

Of course not. And you also haven't demonstrated that you want to learn more. You have done quite a lot of demonstrating that what you want is the opposite.

1206. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:41 PM

Informed agreement requires clear discussion from both parties involved in a dispute.

LOLOLOLOLOL. Try to be clearer, ladies! The previous 1200 comments have just been too ambiguous!

Also, Demosthenes, maybe you missed where people were saying this to Jay, but let me remind you that there is actually no dispute here. You do not have the right to act like an asshole and ignore other people's social boundaries because you feel like it. No one does. This is not something about which reasonable people might disagree; this is *truth*. You can question that truth all you like (at least until you're banned for boring us), but that doesn't mean there's any actual controversy here. It just means you're being willfully obtuse.

1207. *Sweet Machine*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:41 PM

Man, economists are the new philosophers, I guess.

1208. *alibelle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:43 PM

I've thought this over, and I shouldn't have said I thought you were lying, but I think you're not reading closely enough, and would rather have us tailor make answer for you. That's no better really.

1209. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:46 PM

Well, economics involves a lot of reasoning from premises that don't actually hold in reality.

That doesn't make it worthless, since it can give you some insights into a problem, the same way modeling a horse as a massless spheroid in freshman physics isn't worthless and in fact can tell you quite a lot if you take it and run with it.

But in the end, you'll wind up with a lot of false information if you don't keep revisiting the fact that you started from false premises. A lot of people who think they are economists forget that. A lot. All over the popular press these days.

1210. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:47 PM

at least until you're banned for boring us

And yeah, upon further reflection. I've been bored for some time. And I'm done.

1211. *Sarah*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:48 PM

Demosthenes — just a tip, but in extremely long threads like this it really helps to quote at least a portion of the post you are referring to, otherwise people get frustrated and/or assume you are replying to a different comment.

Jay, and for that matter several other men who have disagreed with this post:

The post can be summarized as "We feel that men are showing us severe disrespect when they act in a particular way. If you want to show us respect — and we hope you do — here is how to do it." Now, if you don't understand terms people are using, or want clarification on a particular argument, fine. But there really is no non-jerky way to *disagree* with the idea that you should act respectfully towards people. If you feel that there are philosophical problems with this strategy because men won't leave women alone unless there is something in it for them, then for one thing this makes me want to go move to one of those Planet of the Lesbians in bad 50's sci-fi, but if you're seriously concerned, write your own post. You know the male psyche better than most of us — give your reasoning a try. But if we actually followed your advice and gave up on this post, we are left back where we

started from. You have admitted that the reasoning here is sound — if you feel it lacks persuasive force, then actually make yourself useful and suggest arguments that would be taken better.

1212. *Helen Huntingdon*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:49 PM

Something about this thread keeps calling up lines from Douglas Adams from the deeper recesses of my memory.

Such as “It doesn’t matter a pair of fetid dingo’s kidneys.”

1213. *lightcastle*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:49 PM

Helen Huntingdon: Exactly.

And Sweet Machine: I once read an article by an economist that argued that there would be less risk of STDs if people who had been low-risk or virginal just slept with more people. By making themselves more available, they dropped the overall population risk and so more people would feel safe having unprotected sex.

(At least, I think that was the argument.)

1214. *Julie*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:53 PM

Oh. I know he’s gone now (waves buh-bye to Jay) but another self-serving benefit to not approaching women who display no interest in being approached is time saved. That time can be spent looking for more approachable women. (Or, you know, reading a book or something.)

1215. *RKMK*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:54 PM

Oh, he was an economist. That actually explains a lot. I’d heard that bias-fixation and situationally-inappropriate cost-benefit analysis stuff before, and it was from a sexist asshole economist who set off increasing warning bells the longer we’d talked – institutional feminism as “biased” academia, society’s vested interest in preventing parents from ‘killing their children’ (i.e. abortion). Economics is a discipline entrenched in sexism (see: Marilyn Waring’s critiques) and seems to appeal to borderline sociopaths – there’s a reason why the first woman to get the Nobel Prize in economics succeeded just this year.

1216. *Kate Harding*

OCTOBER 12, 2009 AT 9:54 PM

All right, you know what? I’m making this official. **COMMENTS ON THIS POST ARE NOW CLOSED. ANY COMMENT AFTER THIS ONE WILL BE DELETED, AND THE USER WILL BE BANNED..** Everything that can possibly be said has been said, repeatedly.

You will notice that there is still a comments box underneath this one, which you might take as, let’s say, an *invitation* to post? A suggestion that I am interested in continuing this conversation, even though my words say otherwise? YEAHNO. I can’t turn comments off without hiding all the comments that are already here, and I don’t want to do that (though I will if people fuck with me on this). Instead, I am using my words to tell you all that I no longer wish to continue this conversation, and as the blog-owner, it is my right to set such boundaries! Go figure!

ONE WILL BE DELETED, AND THE USER WILL BE BANNED.

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