

Interview of the month

Gina Martin
Writer • Campaigner • Blogger



SheCanHeCan: Upskirting, a term used to describe the act of taking a sexually intrusive photographs up someone's skirt without their permission is now illegal in England and Wales and punishable by up to two years in prison. Can you tell our readers what motivated your campaign to make this act a punishable crime?

Gina Martin: I was up skirted in 2017 and even when I gave the phone, photo and the man to the police they told me there wasn't nothing they could do as upskirting wasn't a specific offence. After they closed my case I was in disbelief and I decided, for the first time, I wasn't going to brush off sexual harassment as normal.

What do you think the fact that upskirting wasn't previously a criminal offence tells us about how women and girls are considered in British society?

I think it shows, pretty obviously that our institutions can be out of touch with modern technology and what is happening to women. This is understandable when we are dealing with institutions that are made up of people from the same gender or socio-economic background - in this case a lot of our industries are made of mostly men, so women's issues aren't necessarily as front-of-mind.

"Our society is absolutely obsessed with gender instead of the content of people's character."

With reports listing over 70 victims of upskirting in the past two years, including girls as young as 10 also being identified as victims, what will this law change give to British society?

This law will set a precedent that this is not okay. It will also give victims anonymity which will ensure more reports. It will also put serious offenders on the sexual offenders register. But this law change wasn't just about the legislation. It was also about creating a conversation that raises huge awareness of an issue, and we did just that.

You have over 20,000 followers on Instagram. The pressure to conform to certain gendered stereotypes is an ongoing issue for young people and is something that is, in part, difficult to escape. However, how do you think social media platforms can be used for good?

I strongly believe in people being whatever gender they feel. I don't believe in having to conform to a specific gender, but I can see where the pressure comes from. Our society is absolutely obsessed with gender instead of the content of people's character. Sex and gender are different. Gender is a set of restrictions or rules we've put on people and we need to allow people to discover and live their truth, free from the confines of gender.

Social media puts everything in sharp perspective, it invites comparison and criticism and it can be so so toxic. I'm determined to add value to people's lives who follow me. I'm determined to be exactly who I am online and to use my space to bring awareness to bigger issues, platform other people and talk about respect, kindness and above all, tolerance. Social media has a huge potential to be used for good, but more of us need to lead by example.

You've successfully changed the law in 18 months, created a positive platform for yourself and activism work and your name is recognised internationally. What's next for Gina Martin that can we look forward to?

Ahhh, crazy to read those words! I'm working on something very exciting that is going to make people feel empowered, realise their potential and give them practical knowledge in forcing change. My work as an activist is never done, neither is my work as a writer, but I plan to commit my life to forcing positive change and showing others how to do it to.

1-O'Malley, K (January 2019) 'Upskirting: what is it and why has it taken so long to be made illegal?' <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/women/upskirting-explained-law-rules-criminal-offence-photos-skirt-consent-women-gina-martin-a8401011.html>

2-It has been illegal in Scotland since 2010.

3- McGoogan, C (January 2019) 'Gina Martin: 'How I got the law changed and made upskirting illegal' [Accessed 28/01/19] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/gina-martin-got-law-changed-made-upskirting-illegal/>

4-Turner, C (March 2018) 'Schoolgirls are forced to wear shorts under their skirts to stop boys from 'upskirting', teachers' leader warns' [Accessed 28/01/19] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/03/28/schoolgirls-forced-wear-shorts-skirts-stop-boys-upskirting-teachers>



About Gina Martin

The writer and activist Gina Martin, writes for publications such as Grazia, Glamour magazine, the Telegraph, and Refinery29 on women's rights, sustainability and lifestyle content. After falling victim to non-consensual upskirt images in 2017, Gina launched a nationwide campaign to make upskirting illegal, lobbied the Government for 18 months and successfully changed the law in 2019. She speaks at Government events, panels and workshops as well as in schools and for charities such as Girlguiding. Gina was named 'One To Watch for 2018' by Cosmopolitan Magazine, one of PORTER's Incredible Women of the Year 2018 and The Independent's Women of the Year, 2018.

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