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Death by Masculinity

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Death by Masculinity

Abstract

On Friday, May 23rd, a 22-year-old man killed four men and two women and injured 13 more people at the University of California Santa Barbara, citing women who were not “attracted” to him or “looked down on [him] as an inferior man” as the primary cause for his violent outbreak.

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, school violence, sexual violence

Disciplines

Gender and Sexuality | Peace and Conflict Studies | Sociology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

DEATH BY MASCULINITY

May 29, 2014

On Friday, May 23rd, a 22-year-old man killed four men and two women and injured 13 more people at the University of California Santa Barbara, citing women who were not [“attracted” to him or “looked down on \[him\] as an inferior man”](#) as the primary cause for his violent outbreak.



One man.

Only a few months prior, I listened while a group of male high school students made rape jokes and cat-called to a woman performing a drama about violence against women.

Yet more men.

While one wielded firearms and took the lives of six individuals, and the others merely sat in an auditorium, both situations are unsettling as they show blatant disregard for respect of women; both scenarios show that these men (even while learning about domestic and sexual assault) feel that it is their right to act in certain ways to indicate power over women. Both of these examples, in their respective extremes, show the undeniable link between expectations of masculinity and violence.

Of the [seventy mass murder shootings](#) that have occurred over the last 32 years in the United States, only one resulted from a female perpetrator. All of the others have been committed by men.

After a mass shooting occurs, conversations explode – debates about gun control, mental health, and sometimes conversations about race – but the gender of the shooter often remains a minor detail.

But with the most recent shooting in Isla Vista, the conversation has refocused on this very issue. This male shooter was a [Men's Rights Activist and a member of PUAhate](#) - a group that the Southern Poverty Law Center lists as [“hate” group](#) – and he showed his anger against women in a series of [videos posted](#) before the shooting . In this specific case, there is an explicit link between gender, misogyny, aggression, and murder. This obvious

connection has led to the rise of the [#YesAllWomen campaign](#), through which individuals who identify as women are coming forward to share experiences with sexism, harassment, violence, rape, and more – and it's incredible.

But it's also horrifying. There is a reason why when I run programs on domestic and sexual assault and I ask young men to name things they do on a daily basis to avoid rape or assault, they have no response. Yet, when they turn the question on me, I don't have to think twice before explaining why I keep my key wedged between my knuckles when I walk to my car alone at night. Or why I keep my drink with me at all times at a party to avoid being drugged. Or why when I know there's someone behind me, I am terrified to look to see who it is because my glance back might be seen as an invitation for unwanted conversation (or more).

The young men in these programs, who are collectively a group of intelligent, charming, well-meaning students who are attending programs progressive enough to allow for conversations about rape culture and domestic violence, are still victims of the expectations of masculinity that our society prizes. Even as I know that [#NotAllMen](#) are violent or actively misogynistic, it's disheartening and even scary to see these students struggle with what is "right" and what they have internalized as the correct behaviors they have to fulfill to be adequately masculine. These young men have told me countless times that they don't know how to act when women are smarter than them. One student even told me that when he "allows" his girlfriend to pay for a meal he feels emasculated. An overwhelming number of them have told me that they feel they have to make more money than their female partner because they fear ridicule from their peers. And, when I spoke to a group of students specifically about sexual assault, the conversation quickly focused on the legal ramifications of raping someone or the "blurred lines" of consent ("but what if I don't know she's drunk?"). I tried to explain to them that they should know not to rape someone not because they could go to jail for it, but because it is unethical, immoral, and inhumane to exert that type of power over someone else. But the fact that I needed to justify this point of view – that even if they're flirting with a girl or think they might get intimate, that doesn't mean that they should or can have sex – this terrifies me. These young men have undeniable power and privilege in our society. And yet what are we teaching them about their role and responsibility to it?

We have been taught to accept the gender binary and the roles that come with it. We've also been taught to revere a strict, socially-constructed definition of masculinity. Telling a man that he is acting like a woman ("stop being such a pussy", "what, are you PMSing?", "you're being such a little bitch") is considered a terrible insult; undermining a man's masculinity is the way you can hurt him most. This is abundantly evident in the UCSB shootings. The [perpetrator made clear](#) that because women were turning him down, they were emasculating him. In other words, he, as a man, deserved the love and sex of a woman, and no woman should feel able to reject his advances. This concept of shaming women for "friend-zoning" or that women feel we have to lie to men about our reasons for turning them down rather than being able to [honestly express our noninterest](#), clearly shows that our expectations of masculinity indicate that men should (and do) have the power to choose with whom they have relations. Women know that they must submit to that choice, and if they do not, they [must fear violence](#).

But while this most recent shooting allows for this conversation about gender violence to finally take place on a larger stage, it still isn't enough. This one young man who expressed his anger toward women before an appalling act of violence is not an exception to the rule; he is not the only man who chose violence as a solution to his problem. Even as misogyny is clearly inherent to this most recent shooting, made explicit by both his [videos and written manifesto](#), there are still many arguing that this can't be the case, as men were killed in the attack as well – as if "violence against women" isn't something so common that it has its own phrase, a phrase that intrinsically means "men's violence against women."

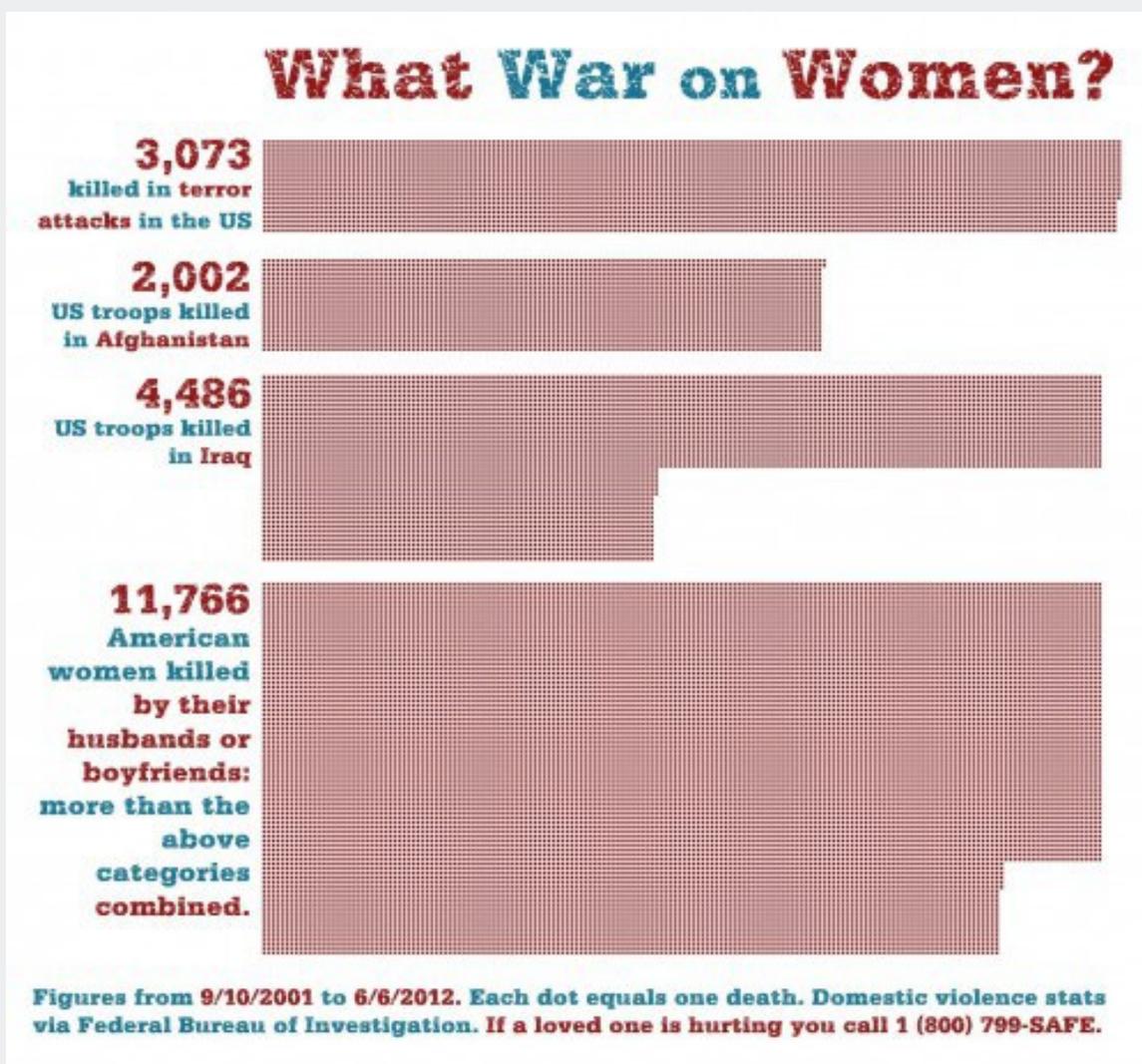
There's a reason that men are the ones who are doing the killing — the pressure of fitting the elite masculine mold, followed by the shame when one fails to do so. Men are expected to be tough and never cry, play and love

violent sports, have lots of heterosexual sex, make the decisions, make the money. When men do not live up to these [masculine expectations](#), they are told that they aren't good enough, and who wouldn't get angry about that? And we're all getting these messages from our families, our friends, politics, and yes – television, movies, and video games. We are all constantly bombarded by these problematic views of masculinity in every facet of our lives.

What if we stop telling men and boys that they should make more money than their wives, that having heterosexual sex makes them a stud, their worth is in their ability to prove that they are a “man”, and that when they fail to do so, that they're not good enough? What if we taught all men that their value was instead determined by their character, compassion, and humanity?

I'm confident that we *can* shift our framework, our language and our cultural expectations. We *must* or misogyny will continue to kill.

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