

Men Explain Things to Me

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*For the grandmothers, the levelers, the dreamers, the men who get it,
the young women who keep going, the older ones who opened the way,
the conversations that don't end, and a world that will let Ella Nachinowitz
(born January 2014) bloom to her fullest*

Men Explain Things to Me

2008

still don't know why Sallie and I bothered to go to that party in the forest slope above Aspen. The people were all older than us and dull in a distinguished way, old enough that we, at forty-ish, passed as the occasion's young ladies.

The house was great—if you like Ralph Lauren—style chalets—a rugged luxury cabin at 9,000 feet complete with elk antlers, lots of kilims, and a wood-burning stove. We were preparing to leave, when our host said, "No, stay a little longer so I can talk to you." He was an imposing man who'd made a lot of money.

He kept us waiting while the other guests drifted out into the summer night, and then sat us down at his authentically grainy wood table and said to me, "So? I hear you've written a couple of books."

I replied, "Several, actually."

He said, in the way you encourage your friend's seven-year-old to describe flute practice, "And what are they about?"

They were actually about quite a few different things, the six or seven out by then, but I began to speak only of the most recent on that summer day in 2003, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*, my book on the annihilation of time and space and the industrialization of everyday life.

He cut me off soon after I mentioned Muybridge: "And have you heard about the *very important* Muybridge book that came out this year?"

So caught up was I in my assigned role as ingénue that I was perfectly willing to entertain the possibility that another book on the same subject had come out simultaneously and I'd somehow missed it. He was already telling me about the very important book—with that smug look I know so well in a man holding forth, eyes fixed on the fuzzy far horizon of his own authority.

Here, let me just say that my life is well sprinkled with lovely men, with a long succession of editors who have, since I was young, listened to and encouraged and published me,

with my infinitely generous younger brother, with splendid friends of whom it could be said—like the Clerk in *The Canterbury Tales* I still remember from Mr. Pelen's class on Chaucer—"gladly would he learn and gladly teach." Still, there are these other men, too. So, Mr. Very Important was going on smugly about this book I should have known when Sallie interrupted

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him, to say, "That's her book." Or tried to interrupt him anyway.

But he just continued on his way. She had to say, "That's her book" three or four times before he finally took it in. And then, as if in a nineteenth-century novel, he went ashen. That I was indeed the author of the very important book it turned out he hadn't read, just read about in the *New York Times Book Review* a

few months earlier, so confused the neat categories into which his world was sorted that he was stunned speechless—for a moment, before he began holding forth again. Being women, we were politely out of earshot before we started laughing, and we've never really stopped.

I like incidents of that sort, when forces that are usually so sneaky and hard to point out slither out of the grass and are as obvious as, say, an anaconda that's eaten a cow or an elephant turd on the carpet.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF SILENCINGS

Yes, people of both genders pop up at events to hold forth on irrelevant things and conspiracy theories, but the out-and-out confrontational confidence of the totally ignorant is, in my experience, gendered. Men explain things to me, and other women, whether or not they know what they're talking about. Some men.

Every woman knows what I'm talking about. It's the presumption that makes it hard, at times, for any woman in any field; that keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare; that crushes young women into silence by indicating, the way harassment on the street does, that this is not their world. It trains us in self-doubt and self-limitation

just as it exercises men's unsupported overconfidence.

I wouldn't be surprised if part of the trajectory of American politics since 2001 was shaped by, say, the inability to hear Coleen Rowley, the FBI woman who issued those early warnings about al-Qaeda, and it was certainly shaped by a Bush administration to which you couldn't tell anything, including that Iraq had no links to al-Qaeda and no WMDs, or that the war was not going to be a "cakewalk." (Even male experts couldn't penetrate the fortress of its smugness.)

Arrogance might have had something to do with the war, but this syndrome is a war that nearly every woman faces every day, a war within herself too, a belief in her superfluity, an invitation to silence, one from which a fairly nice career as a writer (with a lot of research and facts correctly deployed) has not entirely freed me. After all, there was a moment there when I was willing to let Mr. Important and his overweening confidence bowl over my more shaky certainty.

Don't forget that I've had a lot more confirmation of my right to think and speak than most women, and I've learned that a certain amount of self-doubt is a good tool for correcting, understanding, listening, and progressing—though too much is paralyzing and total self-confidence produces arrogant idiots. There's a happy medium between these poles to which the genders have been pushed, a warm equatorial belt of give and take where we should all meet.

More extreme versions of our situation exist in, for example, those Middle Eastern countries where women's testimony has no legal standing: so that a woman can't testify that she was raped without a male witness to counter the male rapist. Which there rarely is.

Credibility is a basic survival tool. When I was very young and just beginning to get what feminism was about and why it was necessary, I had a boyfriend whose uncle was a nuclear physicist. One Christmas, he was telling—as though it were a light and amusing subject—how a neighbor's wife in his suburban bomb-making community had come running out of her house naked in the middle of the night screaming that her husband was trying to kill her. How, I asked, did you know that he wasn't trying to kill her? He explained, patiently, that they were respectable middle-class people. Therefore, her-husband-trying-to-kill-her was simply not a credible explanation for her fleeing the house yelling that her husband was trying to kill her. That she was crazy, on the other hand....

Even getting a restraining order—a fairly new legal tool—requires acquiring the credibility to convince the courts that some guy is a menace and then getting the cops to enforce it. Restraining orders often don't work anyway. Violence is one way to silence people, to deny their voice and their credibility, to assert your right to control over their right to exist. About three women a day are murdered by spouses or ex-spouses in

this country. It's one of the main causes of death for pregnant women in the United States. At the heart of the struggle of feminism to give rape, date rape, marital rape, domestic violence, and workplace sexual harassment legal standing as crimes has been the necessity of making women credible and audible.

I tend to believe that women acquired the status of human beings when these kinds of acts started to be taken seriously, when the big things that stop us and kill us were addressed legally from the mid-1970s on; well after, that is, my birth. And for anyone about to argue that workplace sexual intimidation isn't a life-or-death issue, remember that Marine Lance Corporal Maria Lauterbach, age twenty, was apparently killed by her higher-ranking colleague one winter's night while she was waiting to testify that he raped her. The burned remains of her pregnant body were found in the fire pit in his backyard.

Being told that, categorically, he knows what he's talking about and she doesn't, however minor a part of any given conversation, perpetuates the ugliness of this world and holds back its light. After my book *Wanderlust* came out in 2000, I found myself better able to resist being bullied out of my own perceptions and interpretations. On two occasions around that time, I objected to the behavior of a man, only to be told that the incidents hadn't happened at all as I said, that I was subjective, delusional, overwrought, dishonest—in a nutshell, female.

Most of my life, I would have doubted myself and backed down. Having public standing as a writer of history helped me stand my ground, but few women get that boost, and billions of women must be out there on this seven-billion-person planet being told that they are not reliable witnesses to their own lives.

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that the truth is not their property, now or ever. This goes way beyond Men Explaining Things, but it's part of the same archipelago of arrogance.

Men explain things to me, still. And no man has ever apologized for explaining, wrongly, things that I know and they don't. Not yet, but according to the actuarial tables, I may have another forty-something years to live, more or less, so it could happen. Though I'm not holding my breath.

WOMEN FIGHTING ON TWO FRONTS

A few years after the idiot in Aspen, I was in Berlin giving a talk when the Marxist writer Tariq Ali invited me out to a dinner that included a male writer and translator and three women a little younger than me who would remain deferential and mostly silent throughout the dinner. Tariq was great. Perhaps the translator was peeved that I insisted on playing a modest role in the conversation, but when I said something about how Women Strike for Peace, the extraordinary, little-known anti-nuclear and antiwar group founded in 1961, helped bring down the communist-hunting House Committee on Un-American Activities, HUAC, Mr. Very Important II sneered at me. HUAC, he insisted, didn't exist by the early 1960s and, anyway, no women's group played such a role in HUAC's downfall. His scorn was so withering, his confidence so aggressive, that arguing with him seemed a scary exercise in futility and an invitation to more insult.

I think I was at nine books at that point, including one that drew from primary documents about and interviews with a key member of Women Strike for Peace. But explaining men still assume I am, in some sort of obscene impregnation metaphor, an empty vessel to be filled with their wisdom and knowledge. A Freudian would claim to know what they have and I lack, but intelligence is not situated in the crotch—even

if you can write one of Virginia Woolf's long mellifluous musical sentences about the subtle subjugation of women in the snow with your willie. Back in my hotel room, I searched online a bit and found that Eric Bentley in his definitive history of the House Committee on Un-American Activities credits Women Strike for Peace with "striking the crucial blow in the fall of HUAC's Bastille." In the early 1960s.

So I opened an essay (on Jane Jacobs, Betty Friedan, and Rachel Carson) for the *Nation* with this interchange, in part as a shout-out to one of the more unpleasant men who have explained things to me: Dude, if you're reading this, you're a carbuncle on the face of humanity and an obstacle to civilization. Feel the shame.

The battle with *Men Who Explain Things* has trampled down many women—of my generation, of the up-and-coming generation we need so badly, here and in Pakistan and Bolivia and Java, not to speak of the countless women who came before me and were not allowed into the laboratory, or the library, or the conversation, or the revolution, or even the category called human.

After all, Women Strike for Peace was founded by women who were tired of making the coffee and doing the typing and not having any voice or decision-making role in the anticlear movement of the 1950s. Most women fight wars on two fronts, one for whatever the putative topic is and one simply

for the right to speak, to have ideas, to be acknowledged to be in possession of facts and truths, to have value, to be a human being. Things have gotten better, but this war won't end in my lifetime. I'm still fighting it, for myself certainly, but also for all those younger women who have something to say, in the hope that they will get to say it.

POSTSCRIPT

One evening over dinner in March 2008, I began to joke, as I often had before, about writing an essay called "Men Explain Things to Me." Every writer has a stable of ideas that never make it to the racetrack, and I'd been trotting this pony out recreationally once in a while. My houseguest, the brilliant theorist and activist Marina Strin, insisted that I had to write it down because people like her younger sister Sam needed to read it. Young women, she said, needed to know that being belittled wasn't the result of their own secret failings; it was the boring old gender wars, and it happened to most of us who were female at some point or other.

I wrote it in one sitting early the next morning. When something assembles itself that fast, it's clear it's been composing itself somewhere in the unknowable back of the mind for a long time. It wanted to be written; it was restless for the racetrack; it galloped along once I sat down at the computer. Since Marina slept in later than me in those days, I served it for breakfast and later that day sent it to Tom Engelhardt at TomDispatch, who published it online soon after. It spread quickly, as essays put up at Tom's site do, and has never stopped going around, being reposted and shared and commented upon. It's circulated like nothing else I've done.

It struck a chord. And a nerve.

Some men explained why men explaining things to women wasn't really a gendered phenomenon. Usually, women then pointed out that, in insisting on their right to dismiss the experiences women say they have, men succeeded in explaining in just the way I said they sometimes do. (For the record, I do believe that women have explained things in patronizing ways, to men among others. But that's not indicative of the massive power differential that takes far more sinister forms as well or of the broad pattern of how gender works in our society.)

Other men got it and were cool. This was, after all, written in the era when male feminists had become a more meaningful presence, and feminism was funnier than ever. Not everyone knew they were funny, however. At TomDispatch in 2008, I got an email from an older man in Indianapolis, who wrote in to tell me that he had "never personally or professionally short-changed a woman" and went on to berate me for not hanging out with "more regular guys or at least do a little homework first." He then gave me some advice about how to run my life and commented on my "feelings of inferiority." He thought that being patronized was an experience a woman chooses to have, or could choose not to have—and so the fault was all mine.

A website named "Academic Men Explain Things to Me" arose, and hundreds of university women shared their stories of being patronized, belittled, talked over, and more. The term

"mansplaining" was coined soon after the piece appeared, and I was sometimes credited with it. In fact, I had nothing to do with its actual creation, though my essay, along with all the men who embodied the idea, apparently inspired it. (I have doubts about the word and don't use it myself much; it seems to me to go a little heavy on the idea that men are inherently flawed this way, rather than that some men explain things they shouldn't and don't hear things they should. If it's not clear enough in the piece, I love it when people explain things to me they know and I'm interested in but don't yet know; it's when they explain things to me I know and they don't that the conversation goes wrong.) By 2012, the term "mansplained"—one of the *New York Times*'s words of the year for 2010—was being used in mainstream political journalism.

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Alas, this was because it dovetailed pretty well with the times. TomDispatch reposted "Men Explain Things" in August 2012, and fortuitously, more or less simultaneously, Representative Todd Akin (R-Missouri) made his infamous statement that we don't need abortion for women who are raped, because "if it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut the whole thing down." That electoral season was peppered by the crazy pro-rape, anti-fact statements of male conservatives. And salied with feminists pointing out why feminism is necessary and why these guys are scary. It was nice to be one of the voices in that conversation; the piece had a big revival.

Chords, nerves: the thing is still circulating as I write. The point of the essay was never to suggest that I think I am notably oppressed. It was to take these conversations as the narrow end of the wedge that opens up space for men and closes it off for women, space to speak, to be heard, to have rights, to participate, to be respected, to be a full and free human being. This is one way that, in polite discourse, power is expressed—the same power that in impolite discourse and in physical acts of intimidation and violence, and very often in how the world is organized—silences and erases and annihilates women, as equals, as participants, as human beings with rights, and far too often as living beings.

The battle for women to be treated like human beings with rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of involvement in cultural

and political arenas continues, and it is sometimes a pretty grim battle. I surprised myself when I wrote the essay, which began with an amusing incident and ended with rape and murder. That made clear to me the continuum that stretches from minor social misery to violent silencing and violent death (and I think we would understand misogyny and violence against women even better if we looked at the abuse of power as a whole rather than treating domestic violence separately from rape and murder and harassment and intimidation, online and at home and in the workplace and in the streets; seen together, the pattern is clear).

Having the right to show up and speak are basic to survival, to dignity, and to liberty. I'm grateful that, after an early life of being silenced, sometimes violently, I grew up to have a voice, circumstances that will always bind me to the rights of the voiceless.



CHAPTER 2

The Longest War

2013

Here in the United States, where there is a reported rape every 6.2 minutes, and one in five women will be raped in her lifetime, the rape and gruesome murder of a young woman on a bus in New Delhi on December 16, 2012, was treated as an exceptional incident. The story of the sexual assault of an unconscious teenager by members of the Steubenville High School football team in Ohio was still unfolding, and gang rapes aren't that unusual here either. Take your pick: some of the twenty men who gang-raped an eleven-

year-old in Cleveland, Texas, were sentenced shortly beforehand, while the instigator of the gang rape of a sixteen-year-old in Richmond, California, was sentenced in that fall of 2012 too, and four men who gang-raped a fifteen-year-old near New Orleans were sentenced that April, though the six men who gang-raped a fourteen-year-old in Chicago that year were still at large. Not that I went out looking for incidents: they're everywhere in the news, though no one adds them up and indicates that there might actually be a pattern.

There is, however, a pattern of violence against women that's broad and deep and horrific and incessantly overlooked. Occasionally, a case involving a celebrity or lurid details in a particular case get a lot of attention in the media, but such cases are treated as anomalies, while the abundance of incidental news items about violence against women in this country, in other countries, on every continent including Antarctica, constitute a kind of background wallpaper for the news.

If you'd rather talk about bus rapes than gang rapes, there was the rape of a developmentally disabled woman on a Los Angeles bus that November and the kidnapping of an autistic sixteen-year-old on the regional transit train system in Oakland, California—she was raped repeatedly by her abductor over two days this winter—and a gang rape of multiple women on a bus in Mexico City recently, too. While I was writing this, I read that another female bus rider was kidnapped in India

and gang-raped all night by the bus driver and five of his friends who must have thought what happened in New Delhi was awesome.

We have an abundance of rape and violence against women in this country and on this Earth, though it's almost never

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treated as a civil rights or human rights issue, or a crisis, or even a pattern. Violence doesn't have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality, but it does have a gender.

Here I want to say one thing: though virtually all the perpetrators of such crimes are men, that doesn't mean all men are violent. Most are not. In addition, men obviously also suffer violence, largely at the hands of other men, and every violent death, every assault is terrible. Women can and do engage in intimate partner violence, but recent studies state that these acts don't often result in significant injury, let alone death; on the other hand, men murdered by their partners are often killed in self-defense, and intimate violence sends a lot of

women to the hospital and the grave. But the subject here is the pandemic of violence by men against women, both intimate violence and stranger violence.

WHAT WE DON'T TALK ABOUT WHEN WE DON'T TALK ABOUT GENDER

There's so much of it. We could talk about the assault and rape of a seventy-three-year-old in Manhattan's Central Park in September 2012, or the recent rape of a four-year-old and an eighty-three-year-old in Louisiana, or the New York City policeman who was arrested in October of 2012 for what appeared to be serious plans to kidnap, rape, cook, and eat a woman, any woman, because the hate wasn't personal (although maybe it was for the San Diego man who actually killed and cooked his wife in November and the man from New Orleans who killed, dismembered, and cooked his girlfriend in 2005).

Those are all exceptional crimes, but we could also talk about quotidian assaults, because though a rape is reported only every 6.2 minutes in this country, the estimated total is perhaps five times as high. Which means that there may be very nearly a rape a minute in the United States. It all adds up to tens of millions of rape victims. A significant portion of the women you know are survivors.

We could talk about high-school- and college-athlete rapes, or campus rapes, to which university authorities have been appallingly uninterested in responding in many cases, including that high school in Steubenville, Notre Dame University, Amherst College, and many others. We could talk about the escalating pandemic of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment in the US military, where Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta estimated that there were nineteen thousand sexual assaults on fellow soldiers in 2010 alone and that the great majority of assailants got away with it, though four-star general Jeffrey Sinclair was indicted in September for "a slew of sex crimes against women."

Never mind workplace violence, let's go home. So many men murder their partners and former partners that we have well over a thousand homicides of that kind a year—meaning that every three years the death toll tops 9/11's casualties, though no one declares a war on this particular kind of terror. (Another way to put it: the more than 11,766 corpses from domestic-violence homicides between 9/11 and 2012 exceed the number of deaths of victims on that day and all American soldiers killed in the "war on terror.") If we talked about crimes like these and why they are so common, we'd have to talk about what kinds of profound change this society, or this nation, or nearly every nation needs. If we talked about it, we'd be talking about masculinity, or male roles, or maybe patriarchy, and we don't talk much about that.

Instead, we hear that American men commit murder-suicides—at the rate of about twelve a week—because the economy is bad, though they also do it when the economy is good; or that those men in India murdered the bus rider because the poor re-

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sent the rich, while other rapes in India are explained by how the rich exploit the poor; and then there are those ever-popular explanations: mental problems and intoxicants—and for jocks, head injuries. The latest spin is that lead exposure was responsible for a lot of our violence, except that both genders are exposed and one commits most of the violence. The pandemic of violence

always gets explained as anything but gender, anything but what would seem to be the broadest explanatory pattern of all.

Someone wrote a piece about how white men seem to be the ones who commit mass murders in the United States and the (mostly hostile) commenters only seemed to notice the white part. It's rare that anyone says what this medical study does, even if in the driest way possible: "Being male has been identified as a risk factor for violent criminal behavior in several studies, as have exposure to tobacco smoke before birth, having antisocial parents, and belonging to a poor family."

It's not that I want to pick on men. I just think that if we noticed that women are, on the whole, radically less violent, we might be able to theorize where violence comes from and what we can do about it a lot more productively. Clearly the ready availability of guns is a huge problem for the United States, but despite this availability to everyone, murder is still a crime committed by men 90 percent of the time.

The pattern is plain as day. We could talk about this as a global problem, looking at the epidemic of assault, harassment, and rape of women in Cairo's Tahrir Square that has taken away the freedom they celebrated during the Arab Spring—and led some men there to form defense teams to help counter it—or the persecution of women in public and private in India from "Eye-teasing" to bride-burning, or "honor killings" in South Asia and the Middle East, or the way that South Africa has be-

come a global rape capital, with an estimated six hundred thousand rapes last year, or how rape has been used as a tactic and "weapon" of war in Mali, Sudan, and the Congo, as it was in the former Yugoslavia, or the pervasiveness of rape and harassment in Mexico and the femicide in Juarez, or the denial of basic rights for women in Saudi Arabia and the myriad sexual assaults on immigrant domestic workers there, or the way that the Dominique Strauss-Kahn case in the United States revealed what impunity he and others had in France, and it's only for lack of space I'm leaving out Britain and Canada and Italy (with its ex-prime minister known for his orgies with the underaged), Argentina and Australia and so many other countries.

WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO KILL YOU?

But maybe you're tired of statistics, so let's just talk about a single incident that happened in my city while I was researching this essay in January 2013, one of many local incidents that made the local papers that month in which men assaulted women:

A woman was stabbed after she rebuffed a man's sexual advances while she walked in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood late Monday night, a police spokesman said today. The 33-year-old victim was walking down the street when a stranger approached her and propositioned her, po-

lice spokesman Officer Albie Esparza said. When she rejected him, the man became very upset and slashed the victim in the face and stabbed her in the arm, Esparza said.

The man, in other words, framed the situation as one in which his chosen victim had no rights and liberties, while he had the right to control and punish her. This should remind us that violence is first of all authoritarian. It begins with this premise: I have the right to control you.

Murder is the extreme version of that authoritarianism, where the murderer asserts he has the right to decide whether you live or die, the ultimate means of controlling someone. This may be true even if you are obedient, because the desire to control comes out of a rage that obedience can't assuage. Whatever fears, whatever sense of vulnerability may underlie such behavior, it also comes out of entitlement, the entitlement to inflict suffering and even death on other people. It breeds misery in the perpetrator and the victims.

As for that incident in my city, similar things happen all the time. Many versions of it happened to me when I was younger, sometimes involving death threats and often involving torrents of obscenities: a man approaches a woman with both desire and the furious expectation that the desire will likely be rebuffed. The fury and desire come in a package, all twisted together into something that always threatens to turn *eros* into *thantos*, love into death, sometimes literally.

It's a system of control. It's why so many intimate-partner murders are of women who dared to break up with those partners. As a result, it imprisons a lot of women, and though you could say that the Tenderloin attacker on January 7, or a brutal would-be-rapist near my own neighborhood on January 5, or another rapist here on January 12, or the San Franciscan who on January 6 set his girlfriend on fire for refusing to do his laundry, or the guy who was just sentenced to 370 years for some particularly violent rapes in San Francisco in late 2011, were marginal characters, rich, famous, and privileged guys do it, too.

The Japanese vice-consul in San Francisco was charged with twelve felony counts of spousal abuse and assault with a deadly weapon in September 2012, the same month that, in the same town, the ex-girlfriend of Mason Mayer (brother of Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer) testified in court: "He ripped out my earrings, tore my eyelashes off, while spitting in my face and telling me how unlovable I am . . . I was on the ground in the fetal position, and when I tried to move, he squeezed both knees tighter into my sides to restrain me and slapped me." According to *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Vivian Ho, she also testified that "Mayer slammed her head onto the floor repeatedly and pulled out clumps of her hair, telling her that the only way she was leaving the apartment alive was if he drove her to the Golden Gate Bridge 'where you can jump off or I will push you off.'" Mason Mayer got probation.

The summer before, an estranged husband violated his wife's restraining order against him, shooting her—and killing or wounding six other women—at her workplace in suburban Milwaukee, but since there were only four corpses the crime was largely overlooked in the media in a year with so many more spectacular mass murders in this country (and we still haven't really talked about the fact that, of sixty-two mass shootings in the United States in three decades, only one was by a woman, because when you say *lone gunman*, everyone talks about loners and guns but not about men—and by the way, nearly two-thirds of all women killed by guns are killed by their partner or ex-partner).

What's love got to do with it, asked Tina Turner, whose ex-husband Ike once said, "Yeah I hit her, but I didn't hit her more than the average guy beats his wife." A woman is beaten every nine seconds in this country. Just to be clear: not nine minutes, but nine seconds. It's the number-one cause of injury to American women; of the two million injured annually, more than half a million of those injuries require medical attention while about 145,000 require overnight hospitalizations, according to the Center for Disease Control, and you don't want to know about the dentistry needed afterwards. Spouses are also the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the United States.

"Women worldwide ages 15 through 44 are more likely to die or be maimed because of male violence than because of

cancer, malaria, war and traffic accidents combined," writes Nicholas D. Kristof, one of the few prominent figures to address the issue regularly.

THE CHASM BETWEEN OUR WORLDS

Rape and other acts of violence, up to and including murder, as well as threats of violence, constitute the barrage some men lay down as they attempt to control some women, and fear of that violence limits most women in ways they've gotten so used to they hardly notice—and we hardly address. There are exceptions: last summer someone wrote to me to describe a college class in which the students were asked what they do to stay safe from rape. The young women described the intricate ways they stayed alert, limited their access to the world, took precautions, and essentially thought about rape all the time (while the young men in the class, he added, gaped in astonishment). The chasm between their worlds had briefly and suddenly become visible.

Mostly, however, we don't talk about it—though a graphic has been circulating on the Internet called *Ten Top Tips to End Rape*, the kind of thing young women get often enough, but this one had a subversive twist. It offered advice like this: "Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone 'by accident' you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can call for

help." While funny, the piece points out something terrible: the usual guidelines in such situations put the full burden of prevention on potential victims, treating the violence as a given. There's no good reason (and many bad reasons) colleges spend more time telling women how to survive predators than telling the other half of their students not to be predators.

Threats of sexual assault now seem to take place online regularly. In late 2011, British columnist Laurie Penny wrote,

An opinion, it seems, is the short skirt of the Internet. Having one and flaunting it is somehow asking an amorphous mass of almost-entirely male keyboard-bashers to tell you how they'd like to rape, kill, and urinate on you. This week, after a particularly ugly slew of threats, I decided to make just a few of those messages public on Twitter, and the response I received was overwhelming. Many could not believe the hate I received, and many more began to share their own stories of harassment, intimidation, and abuse.

Women in the online gaming community have been harassed, threatened, and driven out. Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic who documented such incidents, received support for her work, but also, in the words of a journalist, "another wave of really aggressive, you know, violent personal threats, her accounts attempted to be hacked. And one man in Ontario took the step of making an online video game where you could punch Anita's image on the screen. And if you

punched it multiple times, bruises and cuts would appear on her image." The difference between these online gamers and the Taliban men who, last October, tried to murder fourteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai for speaking out about the right of Pakistani women to education is one of degree. Both are trying to silence and punish women for claiming voice, power, and the right to participate. Welcome to Manistan.

THE PARTY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF RAPISTS

It's not just public, or private, or online either. It's also embedded in our political system, and our legal system, which before feminists fought for us didn't recognize most domestic violence, or sexual harassment and stalking, or date rape, or acquaintance rape, or marital rape, and in cases of rape still often tries the victim rather than the rapist, as though only perfect maidens could be assaulted—or believed.

As we learned in the 2012 election campaign, it's also embedded in the minds and mouths of our politicians. Remember that spate of crazy pro-rape things Republican men said last summer and fall, starting with Todd Akin's notorious claim that a woman has ways of preventing pregnancy in cases of rape, a statement he made in order to deny women control over their

own bodies (in the form of access to abortion after rape). After that, of course, Senate candidate Richard Mourdock claimed that rape pregnancies were "a gift from God," and soon after another Republican politician piped up to defend Akin's comment.

Happily the five publicly pro-rape Republicans in the 2012 campaign all lost their election bids. (Stephen Colbert tried to warn them that women had gotten the vote in 1920.) But it's not just a matter of the garbage they say (and the price they now pay). Congressional Republicans refused to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act because they objected to the protection it gave immigrants, transgender women, and Native American women. (Speaking of epidemics, one of three Native American women will be raped, and on the reservations 88 percent of those rapes are by non-Native men who know tribal governments can't prosecute them. So much for rape as a crime of passion—these are crimes of calculation and opportunism.)

And they're out to gut reproductive rights—birth control as well as abortion, as they've pretty effectively done in many states over the last dozen years. What's meant by "reproductive rights," of course, is the right of women to control their own bodies. Didn't I mention earlier that violence against women is a control issue?

And though rapes are often investigated lackadaisically—there is a backlog of about four hundred thousand untested rape kits in this country—rapists who impregnate their victims

have parental rights in thirty-one states. Oh, and former vice-presidential candidate and current congressman Paul Ryan (R-Manistan) is reintroducing a bill that would give states the right to ban abortions and might even conceivably allow a rapist to sue his victim for having one.

ALL THE THINGS THAT AREN'T TO BLAME

Of course, women are capable of all sorts of major unpleasantness, and there are violent crimes by women, but the so-called war of the sexes is extraordinarily lopsided when it comes to actual violence. Unlike the last (male) head of the International Monetary Fund, the current (female) head is not going to assault an employee at a luxury hotel; top-ranking female officers in the US military, unlike their male counterparts, are not accused of any sexual assaults; and young female athletes, unlike those male football players in Steubenville, aren't likely to urinate on unconscious boys, let alone violate them and boast about it in YouTube videos and Twitter feeds.

No female bus riders in India have ganged up to sexually assault a man so badly he dies of his injuries, nor are marauding packs of women terrorizing men in Cairo's Tahrir Square, and there's just no maternal equivalent to the 11 percent of rapes that are by fathers or stepfathers. Of the people in

prison in the United States, 93.5 percent are not women, and though quite a lot of the prisoners should not be there in the first place, maybe some of them should because of violence, until we think of a better way to deal with it, and them.

No major female pop star has blown the head off a young man she took home with her, as did Phil Spector. (He is now part of that 93.5 percent for the shotgun slaying of Lana Clarkson, apparently for refusing his advances.) No female action-movie star has been charged with domestic violence, because Angelina Jolie just isn't doing what Mel Gibson and Steve McQueen did, and there aren't any celebrated female movie directors who gave a thirteen-year-old drugs before sexually assaulting that child, while she kept saying "no," as did Roman Polanski.

IN MEMORY OF JYOTI SINGH

What's the matter with manhood? There's something about how masculinity is imagined, about what's praised and encouraged, about the way violence is passed on to boys that needs to be addressed. There are lovely and wonderful men out there, and one of the things that's encouraging in this round of the war against women is how many men I've seen who get it, who think it's their issue too, who stand up for us and with us in everyday life, online and in the marches from New Delhi to San Francisco this winter.

Increasingly men are becoming good allies—and there always have been some. Kindness and gentleness never had a gender, and neither did empathy. Domestic violence statistics are down significantly from earlier decades (even though they're still shockingly high), and a lot of men are at work crafting new ideas and ideals about masculinity and power.

Gay men have redefined and occasionally undermined conventional masculinity—publicly, for many decades—and often been great allies for women. Women's liberation has often been portrayed as a movement intent on encroaching upon or taking power and privilege away from men, as though in some dismal zero-sum game, only one gender at a time could be free and powerful. But we are free together or slaves together. Surely the mindset of those who think they need to win, to dominate, to punish, to reign supreme must be terrible and far from free, and giving up this unachievable pursuit would be liberatory.

There are other things I'd rather write about, but this affects everything else. The lives of half of humanity are still dogged by, drained by, and sometimes ended by this pervasive variety of violence. Think of how much more time and energy we would have to focus on other things that matter if we weren't so busy surviving. Look at it this way: one of the best journalists I know is afraid to walk home at night in our neighborhood. Should she stop working late? How many women

have had to stop doing their work, or been stopped from doing it, for similar reasons? It's clear now that monumental

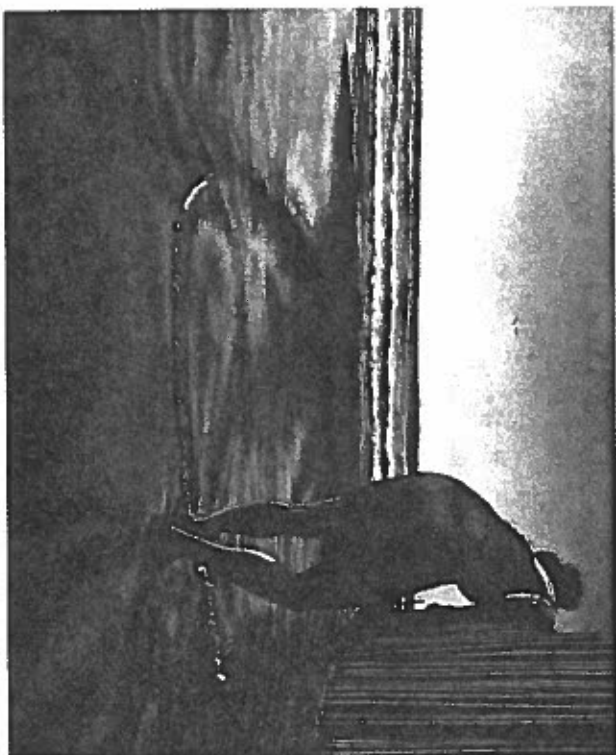
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harrassment online keeps many women from speaking up and writing altogether.

One of the most exciting new political movements on Earth is the Native Canadian indigenous rights movement, with feminist and environmental overtones, called Idle No More. On December 27, shortly after the movement took off, a Native woman was kidnaped, raped, beaten, and left for dead in Thunder Bay, Ontario, by men whose remarks framed the crime as retaliation against Idle No More. Afterward, she walked four hours through the bitter cold and survived to tell her tale. Her assailants, who have threatened to do it again, are still at large.

The New Delhi rape and murder of Jyoti Singh, the twenty-three-year-old who was studying physiotherapy so that she could better herself while helping others, and the assault on her male companion (who survived) seem to have triggered the reaction that we have needed for one hundred, or one thousand, or five thousand years. May she be to women—and men—worldwide what Emmett Till, murdered by white supremacists in 1955, was to African Americans and the then-nascent US civil rights movement.

We have far more than eighty-seven thousand rapes in this country every year, but each of them is invariably portrayed as an isolated incident. We have dots so close they're splatters melting into a stain, but hardly anyone connects them, or names that stain. In India they did. They said that this is a civil rights issue, it's a human rights issue, it's everyone's problem, it's not isolated, and it's never going to be acceptable again. It has to change. It's your job to change it, and mine, and ours.



CHAPTER 3