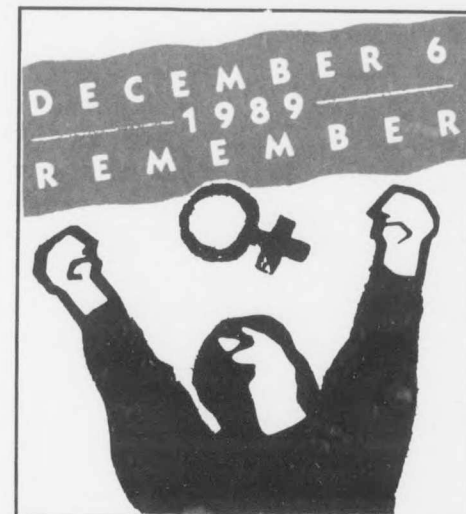


DECEMBER 6, 1989 REMEMBER

an essay by Valerie Kilfoil

MEMORIAL
STU Chapel
4:00 Friday Dec. 4



Introduction

Violence against women reached new depths on December 6, 1989. On that day, 14 women at an engineering school in Montreal, Quebec, were hunted down and shot. The Montreal Massacre was unique in that it was the first time in the recent history of mass murder that women were the specific target. This is not to suggest that females have not been victims of mass murderers. They have. However, their femaleness was not the target. Mass murderers have traditionally targeted ethnic groups - not sex.

The Montreal Massacre was also unique in another way. For the first time, society stands out that a young man named Marc Lepine walked through the engineering school separating the men from the women, shouting he hated women and feminists, and shot them. This paper will explore this aspect of blatant violence and its effect on women. This paper arose out of my own personal struggle to grapple with the Montreal Massacre.

Since the Massacre, I have wondered if I was alone in my feeling of rage, despair and fear. Eventually, I reached a point where I had to know if I was alone and over-reacting, as society seemed to be telling me I was. That result of my search for answers is this paper.

This paper is based on a belief that the Massacre is not an isolated incident and that women of all ages and backgrounds were affected whether they realized it or not. This paper is an attempt to document the reactions of women from varied backgrounds, ages and life experiences. I believe for some, the links between the Massacre and their own life experiences are very obvious and very frightening. I believe for others, the links are less obvious but just as real

The Research

My interviewees were chosen on the basis of certain characteristics that I was looking for in planning my analysis of the effects the Montreal Massacre had on women. As stated, I believe it affected all women regardless of age, experience, or background. Therefore, I sought a diverse range of women to interview. While each of the women share specific characteristics with one or more of the others, they were chosen for one main characteristic to create a cross section of women.

These women will not be identified by their real names but by names I have made up. They were chosen specifically for the following reasons:

- Nicole is a 27 year old feminist working in a non-traditional field.
- Saxon is 23 years old and the victim of a gang-rape at the age of 10.
- Jenna is 25 and is traditional in that she married her high school sweetheart and moved from her parents' house into her husband's.
- Rita is a 65 year old never married woman who has always lived at home.
- I have also found the following information to be relevant in showing and explaining the differences and commonalities in the responses of these women.
- Nicole is also a victim of a rape that happened 10 years previously, who was going through a healing process at the time of the Massacre. She graduated from law school in June of 1989 and was writing her bar admission exams in Toronto at the time of the Massacre.
- Saxon graduated from the University of Prince Edward Island with a Bachelor of Arts in June of 1989. She was teaching pre-school at the time of the Massacre.
- Jenna took a six month travel agent course in Halifax after high school. She has worked as a travel agent for the past five years. Her husband is an engineer.
- Rita retired as secretary at the age of 63. She was living with her unmarried 62 year old sister in the family home in the neighborhood they grew up in at the time of the Massacre.

The Links

"ALL THE WOMEN LIVE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF VIOLENCE..."

Despite the differences in the lives of each of the women, two central themes consistently appeared through the interviews: All the women live with the knowledge of violence and it shapes their lives both consciously and unconsciously; and secondly, society causes the violence and women are the usual victims of it.

The women had varying explanations for the central themes, but this is not surprising given the variation in their personal backgrounds, experience and age. What is significant is the common link of awareness of the violence against women and the reasons for it. The Massacre, therefore, had a common effect on the women, but to varying degrees and for varying reasons.

For Rita and Jenna, the Massacre was a shock. They both are aware of violence in society, but feel somewhat removed from it.

For 65 year old Rita, the Massacre was an extension of the gradual rise in violence she has seen.

Rita: "Years ago, you would go out at night and think nothing of it. But now I'm not as easy going out at night...I would never take a walk at night...It was a gradual coming (the rise in violence). You knew the violence was out there...this (the Massacre) was another incident, but a much more surprising or shocking one."

For Jenna, the Massacre made her ask a lot of questions about her own view of the world. "I was really shocked and I thought about it in a lot of different ways and asked myself a lot of questions from one end to the other of the spectrum...right from it just being a person killing a person, right through to the male-female thing because I think there's a lot to consider. You just can't pin it down to 'the hated women and its because of society.' I find that's just too general."

For Nicole and Saxon, the Massacre had a more dramatic effect, as it did for myself as a radical feminist. They saw the Massacre as a clear statement and confirmation of the hatred in society of women.

Saxon: "For me and people who live with a lot of fear, it (the Massacre) was the epitome of all the anger and fear that you...I have more of a feeling I could die (since the Massacre) because I could just be shot for being a woman where before I could be abused for being a woman. It's a different kind of fear. It's a fear I could simply be picked off."

Nicole: "It (the Massacre) made sense (to a feminist)...sort of like, this is what we've been saying. 'HELLO...realize...this is what we are trying to tell you. This is out there. This is what's being directed...and it's not about sex and it's not about someone dressing in a short skirt. It's about anger and out and out random violence.' As a victim and feminist, it almost said SEE - see what I've been trying to tell you."

All four women cited examples of how violence affects their lives. They all saw the Montreal Massacre as a horrible extension of this violence. They all cited fears of a male attacker always lurking in the background. They all admitted modifying their behaviour and their lifestyles because of this constant presence of violence.

However, only the feminist and the rape victim were consciously aware of the personal impact the Massacre had on their lives. For Jenna, the married woman, the Massacre made her rethink a lot of her views, but she did not take the Massacre as a personal assault on her safety. Rita depersonalized it even further, though she admitted it might have a greater impact if she had been younger and out in the workforce or attending university.

The Second Link

"THE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS"

The second common link among the four women was that violence is more prevalent in society today due to certain factors and that women bear the brunt of this violence. However, the women split into two groups on their reasons for this.

The feminist and the gang-rape victim saw women as victims of a society that fosters hatred toward women and encourages it to breed. Rita and Jenna saw a general increase in violence in society due to an overall decay in the structure and women as victims because they are the physically weaker sex.

After examining the women as a group held together by a common lifestyle dictated by an awareness of violence, it is useful to break the group down further. It is my contention that women have been affected at different levels by the Massacre. I feel that women who have been personally affected by the violence as direct victims or as feminists who are aware of the patriarchal structure and its implications for women, are more deeply affected by the Massacre than those without these characteristics. My research supports this.

The following table illustrates the reactions to the Massacre by the direct victims of violence and the non-direct victims of violence (non-direct meaning never personally experienced violence or never had a close relative experience it, that they are aware of). It also should be noted that the non-victims do not consider themselves feminists. The gang-rape victim also does not consider herself a feminist, though she says many of her friends call her a feminist.

Direct Victims	Non-Direct Victims
- not sure they have dealt with the aftermath of the Massacre	- have rationalized and accepted it
- very angry about the violence	- not angry, more accepting as part of life
- experience intense, irrational fear day or night personally	- cautious about going out at night
- took the Massacre personally	- felt it did not affect them personally
- not surprised that it happened	- shocked that it could happen
- vivid recollection of their initial reaction to the mother did to him	- no strong recollection of initial reaction
- wondered what Lepine's Massacre	
- see the Massacre as representing society's hatred toward women	

I think the common links found among the four women and the differences between the two categories listed above are the result of personal awareness and experience with violence. I submit the different experiences in relation to violence account for the different attitudes toward

it. This would account for the differences in degree in which the Montreal Massacre affected women. At this point, it is useful to take a closer look at the people who make up the two categories.

Nicole and Saxon

"...HAVE FELT THE HATRED AND RESENTMENT TOWARD WOMEN"

In examining the interviews of Nicole and Saxon, their responses, views and opinions are identical in almost every aspect. Both clearly remembered what they were doing when they heard and what their first reaction was - Nicole was horrified, Saxon was angry, but neither were surprised like Rita and Jenna were.

Both say they could easily have seen the Massacre happening on their campuses and say they have felt the hatred and resentment toward women. Both cited several specific examples. Both identified with the violence and the women who were slain. Both said they can see the Massacre happening again.

Nicole: "I knew where it (the Massacre) was coming from. I felt it at law school. It's rage against us. It's there...the Massacre sort of brought it home to me. But the backlash is...it's almost evil. It's really there in this profession (law)...I think you almost have to go through it...be in law school...and feel the anger against you. I mean it comes out in ways like sexist jokes and putting articles in the newspaper putting women down by writing women at law school aren't attractive and I wouldn't go out with them anyway. But it's deeper than that; it's real anger like 'YOU SHOULD NOT BE HERE.'"

Saxon: "It's a hatred and it grows the more they (men) get together in their little men's clubs and their shower rooms...it grows. Like, there are ones who honestly believe that together as males they can agree with one another that it's, as they would say, the isolated one or mentally diseased person that can go snap and be violent. But they're the ones encouraging each other."

Both report having lived with fear long before the Massacre, but the Massacre intensified it.

Nicole: "I don't think you ever get over that. I remember being, for a month anyway, on the subway and every time a single man who looked about the same age as Marc Lepine or was scruffy looking or whatever, I just watched that person, was nervous around them and was ready to bolt if he looked weird...and that really freaked me that I was doing that..."

...That's when I realized I'd better take Wen Do (a feminist self-defense course for women) again...There we talked a lot about the Massacre. They (the instructors) said that they just told women to kill (if in real danger)...whereas before they always said kill as a very last resort. That's how it affected them."

Saxon: "I've already lived with a lot of fear and I guess it exemplified it if anything...you know, gave more fear to fears that I already had...I've always been afraid of half the population."

Both wonder whether they have dealt with the Massacre and if it will come back haunt them. Nicole says if she had not been going through a healing process for her rape at the time of the Massacre, she would have been devastated. She says she believes the Massacre became part of her healing process, but does not know if she has dealt with it completely. A direct reaction was that she took the second level of Wen Do - a feminist self-defense course - to gain back some of the safety the Massacre took away.

Saxon says she has not dealt with her rape other than to deny it. She believes she is doing the same thing with the Massacre. She refuses to talk to men about the Massacre and rarely discusses it with females. She says to deal with the Massacre, she would have to deal with her own rape and she does not believe she can do that.

Both expressed feelings of being left out on the anniversary of the Massacre because there were no ceremonies or get-togethers that they could attend.

Both also reported that the Massacre made them more aware of their vulnerability in the workplace. Nicole said she sometimes looks around the courtroom and realizes what an easy target she is for some angry man with a gun. Saxon says she never works past 6 p.m. at her preschool because that is when the male janitor comes in. She says if the female janitor worked nights, she would feel safe working later.

The very similar effect the massacre had on these women is significant. The only difference in their responses was it gave them each a new, but different insight to the fear and violence they had been living with.

For Nicole, who was going through a healing process at the time, it made her realize she had to get strong again and fight for women. For Saxon, who has not dealt with her rape, the Massacre was more damaging. It added a new dimension to her fear when she realized she could actually die just for being a woman.

The effects of the Montreal Massacre on Nicole and Saxon as feminists, university students, victims, professionals and as women are deep, obvious and dramatic. The Massacre represents the hatred that they have seen and experienced and the fear they live with. It confirmed their fears and added to them.

The Massacre will not fade from their memories like yesterday's headlines. It has become a part of their lives.

Rita and Jenna

"AFFECTED BY THE VIOLENCE"

For Jenna and Rita the commonalities in their feelings and comments were just as frequent, though their explanations for the reasons behind these views were slightly different. Neither said they live in fear, but they both take precautions which they calmly accept as a necessary part of being a woman in society today.

Rita says she does not feel safe walking at night and does not do it, but she does feel safe in her home and her neighborhood.

Jenna says she does feel safe at home and walking in her neighborhood at night. However, she does admit this may be due to a naive belief that it could not happen in her neighborhood. She also says she may feel less safe if she lived in a lower class area.

Both Rita and Jenna do take precautions like parking in well-lit areas and not being out alone at night. However, they view these behaviours as "common sense" and accept it as just the way things are today.

Rita: "I can remember when I was about 10 there was a storekeeper a block away from where we lived at that time and he was shot. The whole city was in mourning and really shocked and that's all you heard for two or three days, even the kids...right on up. But today you pick up a paper... 'Oh, someone shot'...it means nothing."

Jenna: "I think a little bit of common sense on how I live has a lot to do with why I can act like I'm not in fear...like last night I parked in the parking garage rather than down the street in a dark lot...so in a way I guess I am consciously aware of the fact a rape or murder could take place...an ounce of prevention I guess."

Both tended to put the blame on women before society for the violence, though both saw women as the natural victims because they are physically weaker. They did not think the violence in society was necessarily directed at women specifically, just that they made easier targets.

Rita: "Yes, I would say, in some ways women have gone too far with equality...those women (the Massacre victims) had a right to an education, it wasn't their fault, but other women have gone too far..."

Jenna: "I guess they start generalizing too much. Maybe their mother and sisters did awful things to them and on the bus a woman snubbed them, just stupid things just start adding up in someone's head whose already can't have all their screws tight anyway."

Both women felt removed from the Massacre. Rita said it did not affect her, though she did think of her nieces who have attended university and are in non-traditional jobs. Jenna also said if the Massacre had happened closer to home or if someone she knew had been involved, it would have had a greater impact on her.

Jenna also said she did spend time trying to imagine how it happened and what if it did happen here.

Overall, the two or more sheltered interviewees were less informed about the circumstances surrounding the Massacre and of patterns of violence in general. However, they do admit to being affected by the violence that the Massacre represents - Jenna more so than Rita. However I believe the age difference could explain the greater impact on Jenna than Rita.

The common links between Rita and Jenna are striking because these two women have little in common on the surface. One could assume that their sheltered upbringings - both say they never saw violence growing up - account for their similar attitudes. They also have similar levels of education, work experience and a lack of contact with victims of violence.

Conclusion

"TO SERVE AS A REMINDER"

According to my research the Montreal Massacre has not been forgotten by many women. It had an impact on all women at some level and continues to serve as a reminder of the violence aimed at women in society.

For Rita and Jenna the initial impact of the Massacre has been rationalized, accepted and life has gone on as usual - a life dictated by an awareness of the faceless violence.

For Saxon and Nicole, the Montreal Massacre has left a deeper wound that may never heal.

The Massacre represents their worst nightmare - it represents a violence and hatred that had a face and it intensified their fear of that fact.

Despite the varying degrees of impact the Massacre had on the women, the fact remains it did have an impact. For these women, the Massacre is seen as the ultimate act of violence toward women and not necessarily the last.



MEMORIAL
UNB Dineen Auditorium
2:30 Friday Dec. 4