

Often we rationalize this sort of behavior by dismissing it as "all in good fun." But what we cannot do is dismiss the disturbing message that underlies this so-called humour — that women are still an acceptable target for violence in our society.

The reality is that women's lives are threatened daily by behavior that is informed by statements like "Rape girls." Moreover, the quality of education we receive is profoundly compromised by the misogynist attitudes and incidents that surround us.

Let's compare professor A to professor B:

Prof A makes it very clear that critical questions and comments will be met with tolerance. Prof A does not allow one student's voice to dominate another's during discussion. When you ask if you can write your term paper from an alternative point of view, say, from a feminist perspective, Prof A is open to

the idea and encourages you to present a sound argument.

When you challenge Prof B's point of view, Prof B becomes defensive or impatient. When one student gets up and presents an incredibly threatening and sexist comment, Prof B does nothing to expose its implications. When you ask if you can write your paper using a feminist critique of the material, Prof B asks you to opt for a theoretical perspective that is more "academic", more "traditional", or more "relevant."

Clearly, Prof B's attitude does not create an open classroom climate.

If a student feels uncomfortable with her classroom environment, she will be less likely to openly undertake a critical analysis of the material. She will be discouraged from presenting her ideas to Prof B in an assignment, for fear of a low grade, or during class discussion, for fear of reprisal. And she certainly won't feel as though the curriculum is addressing her needs.

People find it easier to learn in an environment that is tolerant. For women,

this means that our unique perspectives must be encouraged, and that our diverse realities must be included. Presently, they are not.

But let's not end on such a disempowering note.

In order for universities to defuse the effect that misogyny has on a woman's education, formalized measures can and must be taken:

- Incidents like "shoot the bitch" must be taken seriously, and not with the traditional, *oh well boys will be boys* attitude;
- hiring practices must include an equal opportunity mandate, in order to ensure that the faculty is representative of the community (read: begin hiring more women);
- the entire curriculum must be representative and inclusionary, that is, mainstream courses must also address alternative points of view.

But the onus for change should not be born solely by university administrations — both the provincial and federal governments must commit themselves to the fight against male violence against women, and similar initiatives at both the regional and national levels must also be carried out.

And as for women, what can we do? Well, we can start by being vocal — making sure our voices are heard — in the classroom, in our homes and at work.

We can make it clear that ketchup and pudding-stained undies are not acceptable forms of humour, that no means exactly that — *no* — and that an english paper that exposes the biases of Mailer is a legitimate exercise in academia.

While we're at it, we can join the women's centre, mourn the Montreal Massacre on December 6, report any unwanted verbal or physical abuse that we experience, and support bands like Two Nice Girls with our presence.

Most important, we can support each other in our struggle for equality and empowerment.

Remembering the Montreal Massacre

Two years ago fourteen women were shot down in a brutal act of hatred.

The incident stands as one of the most shocking portrayals of misogyny we have seen in recent history.

Much of mainstream media at the time chose to focus on the incident as an isolated event, as the act of a crazy man or as an aberration.

But for many the killings were a grotesque characterization of an endemic problem: the violence directed at women by men who feel their privileged place in society is being threatened.

December 6 has been officially declared Women's Remembrance day by the university. It is a time to remember the fourteen women in Montreal and the countless other women and children who have been survivors and victims of violence.

Because first we remember then we fight for change.

The following is a collection of comments by York students on their understanding of Montreal Massacre.

Compiled by Lilac Cane

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER WERE YOU WHERE WHEN YOU HEARD ABOUT THE SHOOTINGS HOW DID YOU FEEL/REACT?

MICHAEL:

"Regina, Saskatchewan. I was studying at Bible College at the time. I don't recall having been immensely affected by it at first, but I remember this girl in our school who was from Quebec. She knew one of the killed women, and she was hysterical. Then, when it hit me, I was sickened, disgusted."

LYNN:

"I was at a Gay and Lesbian meeting downtown. Then someone came in who had just heard about it—either from the radio or on television—and announced the news to the group. At first all I felt was shock. Then, it gradually became personalized for me. It was as if all the intellectual issues that we'd studied in class were suddenly being brought to light. That, outside of the classroom, sexist and misogynist attitudes were very real."

DAN:

"I remember what happened almost

immediately after. In the York community, there was a severe backlash directed at women involved in the Women's Centre. Because women were being vocal in showing their outrage at such a crime, the Centre got a lot of threatening phone calls, that someone would blow up the office or go out and rape women..."

JENNIFER:

"I was at home when the shootings started, the television was on in the other room. I remember being drawn to the television and sitting watching the whole thing unfold. I was completely shocked. It's the only time I've ever cried watching the news."

STEPHE:

"I remember how quickly everyone was to dismiss this as the act of a crazy man. And to almost brush it off. But it didn't sit right with me it was too simplistic of an explanation."

Q. DID THIS EVENT CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN ANY WAY?

BRIAN:

"I thought about the whole notion of revenge. I felt for the victimized. Like if I was a parent of one of the young

women who died, I would have wanted some kind of retribution too, had the killer lived. But I've always been against capital punishment; it doesn't solve anything. Also, this crime had far greater dimensions than society gave it attention. I realized how everything is interconnected, that this was not just a case of a crazy man blowing up random people, that this had become a symbol for a lot of what society still hasn't fully come to terms with."

ELISSA:

"I see now that what happened in Montreal was not just a singular event. Now, this has become a part of my knowledge and memories; I link it with so many other related problems in women's issues. And I guess that's why women have identified it as symbolic. This memorial that we're observing, although centred on the Montreal Massacre, is actually MORE than just a remembrance of the fourteen. It's also for every single woman who has experienced violence in our world."

DARREN:

"I don't think it had a profound effect on me. We have to see this as an isolated incident, terrible nonetheless, but I don't feel it's necessary to have an annual vigil about it. People should remember it, not forget it ever happened, keep talking about it, but it isn't necessary to close offices, to hold week-long services, vigils on this day every year. This sort of treatment, this elevation of a single incident of crime to the symbolic, is just asking for further backlash."

Q. DID THIS CHANGE YOUR CONCEPT OF SEXISM? ARE YOU MORE AWARE OF SEXISM THAN BEFORE?

STEPHE:

When the massacre happened all I remember was this crazy man and it didn't seem to me any different from the coverage of other mass murders. I thought it was on the same kind of level. It's only now, two years later, that I am able to see it on a different level — as reflective of sexism and the utter danger of it.

MICHAEL:

"Well, I've always been aware of the problem of sexism, even before this

happened. It's an issue that I've worked at, not to believe the stereotypes, the myths and the abuse of power that men have."

FILOMENA:

"This was a sexist act, I realized, and I thought that we had overcome this issue in our society. Obviously not. And people have rationalized that the killer was insane. Maybe he was. But all crimes are indicative of society; if this could happen, it suggests that maybe our society as a whole is still a little insane too."

BRIAN:

"I am definitely more aware of it. Something else struck me about the whole thing. People believe that since Marc Lepin killed himself afterwards, that he was psychotic, an aberration, an exception to the rule. But I wonder that if he would have been alive today, a criminal in an institution, if he would have been viewed as just a male who chose to use women as a scapegoat for all his frustrations and shortcomings."

DARREN:

"What I became interested in was why the killer did what he did: what sorts of misconceptions and problems did he have that would make him do such a thing. I think men also have to work at resolving their own violent inner conflicts."

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER ANY OF THE NAMES OF THE WOMEN KILLED?

MICHAEL:

"No. It bothers me that I can remember the killer's name but not the women. This doesn't mean I don't care or that I'm not affected by it. This has become a symbol, and there's nothing wrong with that, but people shouldn't understand this as THE single misogynist event in Canadian History."

BRIAN:

"No I don't. No women's names, no."

DOUG:

"No."

LYNN:

"Well, I remember the first names of some of them: Genevieve, Natalie and Michele."