

NOTICE

jim o
An individual act, yes, but also a social and political act. An individual expressing of anger and hatred, but also part of a collective, culturally sanctioned misogyny. An act of terrorism in the true sense of the word - an act striking fear into the hearts of women 'out of their place, 'feminists', and indeed all women. An act of terrorism going beyond this to touch and intimidate all those who fight for social change.

georgina m-d
Family, friends and strangers mourned, marched, kept vigils and talked. They had to. Psychiatrists, psychologists and others set up emergency services for the desperate, attempting to cope with the pain. Montreal was truly a city in mourning, despairing at such savagery. Women throughout the city reiterated their constant fears of discrimination in the workplace and in educational institutions, of violence in their families, strangers, of walking after dark, and now fear of being women, anywhere.

georgina m-d
Some feminists predicted that, in the final analysis, such acts of violence were inevitable - the ultimate outcome of the extreme. But there is no question that this was an antifeminist act: the killer said so, both verbally and in writing. And all the dead are women! Perhaps now the issue of violence against women will no longer be seen as a women's problem. Are educational institutions cognizant of the prejudice and sexism within their walls? If so, how is it being dealt with?

maureen l
If there is anything positive to be learned from tragic events, it is that through them we are forced to come to grips with some of the black holes in our reality. The tragic deaths of 14 young women at Ecole Polytechnique was no exception. It forced a lot of us, some still with considerable resistance, to face the reality of violence against women in our society.

British Columbia's minister responsible for women, claims that 'there is too much extremism in the women's movement', and when Senator Lowell Murray argues that the National Action Committee on the Status of Women has been 'hijacked by extremists', the message being delivered is that feminists have gone too far and become unreasonable and unrepresentative. After Montreal, such comments are even more provocative, sinister, and unforgivable than they would have been in the past.

jim s
I was able to alter my Introductory Sociology mid-year examination by adding an optional essay question on the Massacre. We had talked quite a bit about gender, sexuality and class as empowering/disenpowering processes. I asked people to think about the Massacre as the 'highest form of patriarchal capitalism'. The students' responses were incisive and thoughtful despite the difficult question and setting.

jim o
What happened in Montreal is horrifying. But it is part of a widespread pattern of misogyny, violence against women, and hostility to those struggling to improve conditions for women. When the REAL Women argue in their newsletter that Marc Lépine may have killed 14 women in Montreal because his child was aborted by a feminist, the message is that Lépine's actions are at least understandable, if not justifiable. The message is that the actions of feminists bring down the wrath of people like Lépine on women. When Carol Gran, British Columbia's minister responsible for women, claims that 'there is too much extremism in the women's movement', and when Senator Lowell Murray argues that the National Action Committee on the Status of Women has been 'hijacked by extremists', the message being delivered is that feminists have gone too far and become unreasonable and unrepresentative. After Montreal, such comments are even more provocative, sinister, and unforgivable than they would have been in the past.

maureen l
What was the crime of these women? They were sitting in a particular classroom on a particular day and they were WOMEN

peter s
December 12, 1989
The Editor
Dear Sir,
The recent murder of 14 young women in Montreal, so tragic and shocking to most Canadians, has also highlighted the general problem of personal safety for women. In this context, I have been distressed to hear so many people, and including educators and the Minister of Justice, explain away these deaths as an act of madness. We tend to describe that as mad people who behave in ways that are incomprehensible to us and consider them as abnormal individuals. To define the killer as mad lets the problem be considered as one of individual personality. This is too easy for everyone, especially for men...

maureen l
As recovered from the initial horror, a frightening thought crept into our consciousness. We can't protect ourselves from this kind of act. Setting up sophisticated security systems, taking a course in self-defense, carrying a weapon - none of these are sufficient. The only way is to start asking hard questions: What are the attitudes in our society that spawn this kind of action? We must start asking today: What is there in my life - in the way I treat women, bring up my children, teach my students, make my living, the kind of recreation I engage in - that supports and gives approval to violence against women?
In January, we collectively discussed the events; I learned more about how deeply sexist residence life is on campus. Many more women are reporting assaults and harassment at Acadia; many more women are turning out for Women's Centre events.

peter s
...As a sociologist, I am unwilling to jump to the conclusion that things I cannot understand immediately have no logic, that they are irrational or mad. In this case, we should acknowledge that people are not born with radical attitudes against women or feminists; they are acquired through experience. Suggestions that Marc Lépine grew up in a violent environment where he saw his father beat his mother as well as himself hint at how he learned to resort to violence when frustrated. As to his hatred of feminism, i.e. of women determined to achieve equality with men, that is more easily understandable because it is normal - normal in the sense that too many men (and some women) resent the challenge of feminism.

georgina m-d
According to his constructed profile, the killer was an abused child from a broken home, with few friends, alienated on every plane of life. No one throughout his life notice any danger signals. No one stopped him from buying a semi-automatic rifle.
Social agencies that attempt to deal with family violence, child abuse, and marriage breakdown cannot adequately monitor the effects of these on a child. Is it ever possible to anticipate the point at which a person's sense of alienation and failure will trigger an insane act? Will the petition of over half a million names, organized by engineering students and teachers at the Ecole Polytechnique finally effect tougher gun control legislation in this country?

georgina m-d
On the day of the common funeral for 9 of the slain women, thousands of mourners filled the area outside the Cathedral. The street was lined with hearses. As the row of coffins appeared, one woman gave a howl of despair. She captured our common sorrow

barb m
The Massacre and my car accident of the same day remain entwined in my memory. Both taught me about life's fragility and the importance of struggle. I now know that I will never hide from the violators of women. I will fight to survive.

barbara n
Six months later, we have a Memorial Scholarship for Women in Engineering at Memorial University. Funds for the scholarship are coming from the Engineering organizations on campus and from the women's community. I hear it was opposed by many engineering faculty and there was also some opposition from women in engineering. Already 'under the spotlight', some had reservations about an initiative that would make them even more visible and, I presume, vulnerable. My grief and anger have subsided. I find myself analytically assessing the Massacre and its treatment, hear myself saying a major weakness in the postmortem was the failure to subject the university to more scrutiny. How does it, as a social institution, contribute to or at least condone violence against women? A scholarship isn't enough. At another level, however, as I go through the tunnels on my way to class, sit working alone in my office at night, and send my daughters off to school in the morning, I know I am more conscious of my fear and anger than I was a year ago.

jim o
The Montreal Massacre has altered the climate in which other people struggle to make a better world. A letter in Saskatchewan advocating killing Indians instead of big game is chilling at any time. After the Montreal Massacre it made Chief Henry Daniels of Sturgeon Lake think of Marc Lépine.

maureen l
We must all do something - women and men. We don't need more locks. We need more keys to open doors in our institutions, in our governments, in our homes, so that we can challenge sexism, racism, bigotry, all kinds of intolerance. What can I do???

jim o
We can try to understand why Lépine did what he did; we can look at what happened in Montreal and question how effectively the authorities responded to the tragedy; but in the final analysis what we all must do is work to improve women's conditions by changing the structures, institutions and attitudes which maintain oppression.

jim s
I did not feel the violation of myself as deeply as many women and some men did. It was as if I was expecting a tragedy. I worry about that.

peter s
... Too many men look on women as objects to be possessed, especially sexually. Just consider how ingrained these attitudes are in our culture, for example in popular songs of the 'you're mine' ilk. Such attitudes must be taught everywhere because they are offensive in themselves, because they contribute to the battering of many thousands of women, and because they occasionally lead to the mass violence through which we have all recently suffered. Let us deceive ourselves that the problem is one of individual madness.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Sinclair
Professor of Sociology

barbara n
My mind goes back to December 6th, to the women in engineering at the Polytechnique. I wonder why we remember the students and forget his first victim, a clerical worker; I wonder if the 'survivors' are indeed getting the support they need to survive; and I know that survival for all of us means remembering, mourning, and struggling for change.

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