

**Reading:** “#YesAllWomen” Phil Plait, *slate.com*

On Friday, May 23, 2014, a man killed six people (and possibly himself). The manifesto he left behind stated he did it because women wouldn't sleep with him...Over the weekend, as the discussion across Twitter turned to these horrible events, a lot of men started tweeting this, saying, “Not all men are like that.” It's not an unexpected response. However, it's also not a helpful one.

...For one, women know this. They already know not every man is a rapist, or a murderer, or violent. They don't need you to tell them...Second, it's defensive. When people are defensive, they aren't listening to the other person...Third, ...The discussion isn't about the men who **aren't** a problem...Fourth—and this is important, so listen carefully—when a woman is walking down the street, or on a blind date, or, yes, **in an elevator alone**, she doesn't know which group you're in. You might be the potential best guy ever in the history of history, but there's no way for her to know that. A fraction of men out there are most definitely not in that group. Which are you? Inside your head you know, but outside your head it's impossible to. This is the reality women deal with all the time.

...Over the weekend, the hashtag **#YesAllWomen** started. It was a place for women to counter the #NotAllMen distraction, and to state clearly and concisely what they actually and for real have to deal with. All the time.

Reading them was jarring, unsettling...It was the everyday sexism, the everyday misogyny, which struck home. The leering, the catcalls, the groping, the societal othering, the miasma of all this that women bear the brunt of every damn day.

...I can't possibly understand it at the level they do, no matter how deeply disturbed I am by the situation and how sympathetic I may be to what they've gone through...I'm a white, middle-class male, so I can understand intellectually what black people have undergone, or what women have dealt with, or what Japanese-Americans suffered in America in World War II.

...So I listen to what women say about it, try to understand as best I can, and try to modify my own behavior as needed to make things better. I've done a lot of modifying over the years. And there's still a long way to go.

Earlier, I mentioned that the conversation is about the men who are the problem, not the ones who aren't.

Well, at this point, a conversation needs to be had about them, too. Even though we may not be the direct problem, we still participate in the cultural problem. If we're quiet, we're part of the problem. If we don't listen, if we don't help, if we let things slide for whatever reason, then we're part of the problem, too.

We men need to do better. That is exactly right. We need to change the way we talk to boys in our culture as well as change the way we treat women.

...As a man, having written this post I expect there will be comments insulting me, ...but you know what there won't be? People threatening to stalk me and rape me and kill me for

*having the audacity to say that women are people...Yet that is precisely what every woman on the Internet would face if she were to write this. And that is, sadly, why we so very much need the #YesAllWomen hashtag.*

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In 1957, Minnijean Brown Trickey was one of the Little Rock Nine, the black students that were sent to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. 8 years later, 3 UU ministers would travel to Selma, Alabama to join Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other clergy to protest Bloody Sunday. The evening before the march, those three clergy would be brutally beaten and one, James Reeb, would die from his injuries. In 2011, one of the ministers who survived the attack in Selma, Clark Olsen, would sit next to Minnijean at a conference. A close family friend, he recently told me that he marveled at *her* courage, continued activism, and humor after the trials she has endured.

Minnijean describes that day in 1957.

*"There was a mob... the first day it was pretty shocking to get there and find out that the Guard were stopping us from going into school. We were sandwiched between the Arkansas National Guard and the mob, so it was quite brutal. I remember shaking... And people were screaming obscenities...I was totally shocked. I had been a girl of the U.S. who had done all the anthems, songs and pledges, and then I hit that mess...in a segregated society you're safe, because you don't do what you're not supposed to do. You didn't do stuff that was against the law, and everything was against the law – buses, trying on clothes, water fountains, restaurants, hotels, swimming pools. So you stayed in your place... We were told we had to leave for our own safety.*

*We were taken out secretly through the basement...So we sat at home for almost 3 weeks, waiting...By the time we started the first full day at school, we were... ready, and we were protected by the 101st Airborne...but they couldn't go into the classrooms. I remember walking into the classroom on day one and all these boys had their feet across the aisles. ...They couldn't protect us in the bathroom, so you'd get pushed around in the girls' restroom, in gym – everyone has an incident with hot water in showers and glass on the floor during physical education. So the nine of us just figured, "This will be rough, let's just go with it."*

"Just go with it." For decades, that has been the mantra of women who have been treated unfairly or abused emotionally or physically at home, in an educational, or in the workplace, or all of the above. While all of these offenses continue, by all accounts, 2014 was a good year for women and girls in a number of arenas. We might choose any year and find hundreds of individual achievements granted in favor of women's rights and equality; but many feminists thought 2014 was significant. Positive advancements occurred in pay equity, the glass ceiling, women's contraception, and in violence against women. We'll look at just a few.

Gloria Cecelia Ray was another of the little rock nine and while she did her part to eventually secure the Civil Rights Act, her mother suffered workplace discrimination just as soon as Gloria entered Little rock's Central High School. Her father, the son of a former slave, was retired, but Gloria's mother was a Sociologist working for the State of Arkansas. Her mother was fired when she refused to remove Gloria from the High School and they

eventually moved out of state where the Little Rock Nine were not so well known to find work.

That kind of blatant workplace discrimination is uncommon today, but decades later; women still find the workplace an uneven playing field. Sex discrimination includes sexual harassment and refers to discrimination based on sex including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, and benefits. How often does it happen? One in five women report being sexually harassed at work sometime in their careers. After 30 years in the workplace myself, I have been sexually harassed by supervisors at 2 separate jobs. In terms of discrimination based on gender, when a lawsuit was filed against Wal-Mart, it was disclosed that managers said, and I quote, men "*are working as the heads of their households, while women are just working for the sake of working.*" In actuality, 40 percent of American households have women as the sole or primary breadwinner.

The recent hack of Sony Pictures gave the public a look at what they pay over 6000 employees, exposing wide gender gaps in salaries, especially at the top. While women on average still make 77-78% that of a man in the same job, African American women make 64% on the dollar and for Latinas it is even lower.

But, 2014 brought good news. The state of Massachusetts and three municipalities passed paid sick days legislation, and Oregon voters passed an Equal Rights for Women amendment. A raised minimum wage passed in four red states: Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota; which is especially important to women as they make up about two-thirds of all minimum wage earners. Furthermore, in April, President Obama signed two equal pay executive orders regarding federal contractors and pay equity. This year, a Paycheck Fairness Act to combat wage discrimination for women and LGBTQ folks is up for debate in the Senate. We'll have to see how far that gets.

Related to employment, but not exclusive to it, lets consider the Glass Ceiling in 2014. Filmmaker Jennifer Lee used to be pretty popular. Now, she mainly apologizes for directing the movie *Frozen*, which is a story about two fantasy princesses and gave us the hit song, "*Let it Go.*"

I say to her, don't apologize, celebrate. It broke box office records and provided millions of revenue in merchandise and has ben called, "*a game changer for the male-dominated film industry.*" Another hopeful sign, Pope Francis praised American nuns for their dedication to social justice issues including those of a feminist ilk, a big score for them. The 12-year-old girl, who played in the Little League Championship and graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, was a first. There were many other female firsts including the first woman to chair the Federal Reserve Board, Janet Yellen; the youngest person, also a girl, Malala, to receive the Nobel Peace Prize; We saw the first female regular season assistant coach in the NBA, and our first woman U.S. postmaster general; the highest achievement in mathematics in the world went to an Iranian woman; and the Navy named its first female four-star officer. All in all, not too shabby.

There was some bad news, the 114<sup>th</sup> congress still doesn't reach 20% female representation and women remain underrepresented in the workforce in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, the Media, upper management, and Fortune 500 companies. One reporter lamented, "*Thank goodness for female firsts (and hallelujah for the day when they're no longer notable).*" As I look at our own college students here, I would not be surprised if they are the ones to shatter the ceiling once and for all.

Personally, I happen to believe the U.S. Supreme Court made some bad decisions in 2014; especially about women's contraception. In the oft-cited Hobby Lobby case, it was ruled that an employer could weigh in on whether employees had access to certain types of health coverage, in that case, contraception, which is hard to swallow when 99 percent of sexually active women have used contraception at one time. At least Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, aka the "Notorious RBG," wrote a scathing dissent and she shows no signs of slowing down. A recent study shows that the US abortion rates have dropped to its lowest point since it was legalized in all 50 states; most likely due to minority women's access to contraception, including no co-pays for contraception with the new Affordable Care Act. The number of HIV infections for black women has also plummeted due to prevention education. 2014 also marked an announcement by the American Academy of Pediatrics that long-acting reversible contraceptives such as IUDs were best in preventing unwanted teen pregnancy, NOT ABSTINENCE EDUCATION. All very encouraging facts and when you consider that having control over our bodies also helps women control their families and careers. These are important strides that we should never take for granted. This leads us to our final topic, violence against women.

We lost a great lady in 2014, Maya Angelo, another fighter for civil rights, among her many other titles in her 86 years. In 1988, she spoke at a conference in Texas called, "Facing Evil." In her speech and on many other occasions, Maya would tell this story,

*"When I was seven and a half, I was raped. I won't say severely raped; all rape is severe. The rapist was a person very well known to my family. I was hospitalized. The rapist was let out of jail and was found dead that night, and the police suggested that the rapist had been kicked to death.*

*I was seven and a half. I thought that I had caused the man's death, because I had spoken his name. That was my seven-and-a-half-year-old logic. So I stopped talking, for five years. Now, to show you again how out of evil there can come good, in those five years I read every book in the black school library. I read all the books I could get from the white school library. I memorized...Paul Laurence Dunbar... and Langston Hughes. I memorized Shakespeare, Edgar Allen Poe, all the poetry-- never having heard it, I memorized it. I had Longfellow,... I had Balzac, Rudyard Kipling-...When I decided to speak, I had a lot to say, and many ways in which to say what I had to say.*

*...So out of this evil, which was a dire kind of evil, because rape on the body of a young person more often than not introduces cynicism, and there is nothing quite so tragic as a young cynic, because it means the person has gone from knowing nothing to believing nothing. In my case I was saved in that muteness, you see, in the sordida, I was saved. And I was able to draw from human thought, human disappointments and triumphs, enough to triumph myself...As soon as we are reminded of our actions, more often than not we spend incredible energy trying to forget what we've just been reminded of..."*

In many cases, those of us who have suffered physical or sexual abuse do everything we can to forget. But in 2014, many brave women stepped forward. Over 90 colleges are under investigation and the NFL is finally dealing with its players who are involved in domestic violence. Growing numbers of women are coming forward to accuse a well-known comedian of assault. The military is admitting to the prevalence of sexual violence in their ranks and putting systems into place to root it out and a federal spending bill contains millions of dollars for testing rape kits. Movements like "Notalone.gov" and "It's On Us" were both very positive steps on this front as well.

Maya Angelou said,

*"We need the courage to create ourselves daily, to be bodacious enough to create ourselves daily-- as Christians, as Jews, as Muslims, as thinking, caring, laughing, loving human beings. I think that the courage to confront evil and turn it by dint of will into something applicable to the development of our evolution, individually and collectively, is exciting, honorable."*

Minnijean was an honorable teenager, even though she was eventually expelled from Little Rock Central after being set up by a group of white girls, but she says, *"That's what we had to do. We figured out really quickly that this experience was not just about us, it was for everyone."*

She continues her activism for all. On the day she sat next to the UU minister who was also part of the movement so many years before, they were speaking to a 100 teens that were on a Civil Rights tour in Georgia. One teen told Minnijean that back then they had an inspiring leader in Martin Luther King, but today's youth just don't have someone like that. Minnejean told him, *"No, Martin went where people asked him to come, he followed us. You are the leaders now."*

2014 taught us one thing. Its what the Little Rock Nine and Maya Angelou did and all those who have had the courage to confront evil. Stand up and say, "No more." If we sit in silence, the only possible result is that we suffer in silence. May it be so.