

# #YesAllWomen

By Phil Plait

*The following article is a discussion about violence, violence against women, and the oppression women face every day. Have a care if these topics disturb you. Note too: I am a cisgender male, and the hashtags I discuss below deal with the issues in binary men/women terms, so I do as well. Trans and other folks may well have very different feelings about these issues, and I welcome their input.*

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. I won't recount the details here; they can be found easily enough. I also won't speculate on the controversies involving his mental health, or about the NRA, or the police involvement in this. I want to focus on a narrower point here, and that has to do with men and women, and their attitudes toward each other.



**Taryn O'Neill**  
@tarynoneill

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My husband didn't 'get it' until he spent half an hour on the feed. Then he looked ashen. "I had no idea".

[#YesAllWomen](#)

4:33 AM - 26 May 2014

260 RETWEETS 324 FAVORITES

The murderer was active on men's rights fora, where women are highly objectified, to say the very least. They are seen as nonhuman by many such groups, and at the very least lesser than men—sometimes nothing more than targets or things to acquire. What these men write puts them, to me, in the same category as White Power movements, or any other horribly bigoted group that “others” anyone else. While it may not be possible to blame the men's rights groups for what happened, from the reports we've seen they certainly provided an atmosphere of support.


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Of course, these loathsome people represent a very small percentage of men out there. 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.

Why is it not helpful to say “not all men are like that”? For lots of reasons. 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; they’re busy thinking of ways to defend themselves. I watched this happen on Twitter, over and again.



**Karin Robinson**  
@karinjr

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No, [#NotAllMen](#) are violent against women, but [#YesAllWomen](#) have to navigate a world where those who are look the same as those who aren't.

9:17 PM - 25 May 2014

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**3,292** RETWEETS **2,875** FAVORITES

Third, the people saying it aren’t furthering the conversation, they’re sidetracking it. *The discussion isn’t about the men who **aren’t** a problem.* (Though, I’ll note, it can be. I’ll get back to that.) Instead of being defensive and distracting from the topic at hand, try staying quiet for a while and actually listening to what the thousands upon thousands of women discussing this are saying.



**Wagnerok!**  
@wagnerfilm

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"UNFAIR! NOT ALL MEN!" Imagine a bowl of M&Ms. 10% of them are poisoned. Go ahead. Eat a handful. Not all M&Ms are poison. [#YesAllWomen](#)

5:38 PM - 26 May 2014

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**2,594** RETWEETS **2,447** FAVORITES

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.

Before what I'm saying starts edging into mansplaining, let me note that also 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.



**Ruth Marie Sylte**  
@rmsylte

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If you're getting tired of my RTing [#YesAllWomen](#), imagine how exhausted I am dealing with sexism and misogyny. Every. Single. Day.

9:17 PM - 26 May 2014

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**1,984** RETWEETS **2,303** FAVORITES

Reading them was jarring, unsettling. I have many friends who are vocal feminists, and it's all too easy to see what they deal with for the crime of Being a Woman on the Internet. But this hashtag did more than deal with the rape threats, the predators, the violence.

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.

Those tweets say it far better than I ever could, for many reasons. The most important is because I'm a man, so *I haven't lived through what they have*. 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.

This is not a failing, or an admission of weakness. It's a simple truth. 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. As someone raised Jewish, I may have more of an understanding for what an oppressed people have withstood in general, but I've never really been oppressed myself. That puts me in a position of—yes—privilege.

All that means is that I can only speak from my own point of view, and try to understand others as best I can. When it comes to sexism, to my shame, that took me a long, long time to figure out. I had to have my head handed to me many times in

many embarrassing situations to see how I was participating in that culture, that everyday sexism. It was like air, all around me, so pervasive that I didn't see it, even when I was in it and a part of it.

**Neil Gaiman**

@neilhimsself

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The [#yesallwomen](#) hashtag is filled with hard, true, sad and angry things. I can empathise & try to understand & know I never entirely will.

5:42 PM - 25 May 2014

6,255 RETWEETS 8,807 FAVORITES

What made that harder was coming to an understanding that I will never truly understand what women go through. I can't. 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.

Over the weekend, I retweeted a few of the [#YesAllWomen](#) tweets I thought were most important, or most powerful, and saw that again and again they were misunderstood. In almost all the cases I saw, the men commenting were *reacting* to it, being defensive about the hashtag instead of listening to what was being said.

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.

**Aimee Mann**

@aimeemann

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The cops who asked me "Well, what were you wearing?" when I reported an attack and attempted rape.

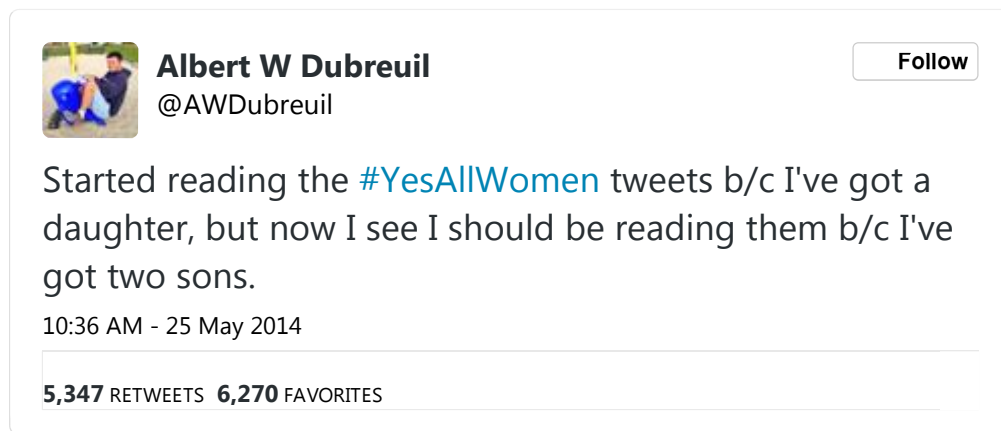
[#YesAllWomen](#)

8:47 AM - 26 May 2014

1,986 RETWEETS 2,820 FAVORITES

Part of this problem is the mislaying of blame, and the misdirection of what to do. When it comes to legal action, to the enforcement of rules, to societal pressure, it all comes down on the women and not the men.

Which leads me to the best tweet using this hashtag that a man put up.



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.

And one final word on this. As a man, having written this post I expect there will be comments insulting me, comments questioning my manhood (whatever twisted definition those people have of such a thing, if it even exists), and so on.

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, and that we should be listening to them instead of telling them how to feel. 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.

*My thanks to **Surly Amy** for a helpful suggestion she made to me about this article.*

*(**Update:** I neglected to add a couple of links; please read **Chuck Wendig's thoughts on this topic**, as well as my friend **John Scalzi's**. You should follow **John on Twitter**, too; he's an unusually lucid thinker on difficult topics.)*

**Read the rest of Slate's coverage of the UC-Santa Barbara shooting.**

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BEHIND THE SCENES

APRIL 8 2015 3:02 PM

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A closer look.

Leon Neyfakh

**The North Charleston Shooting Illustrates How Broken Taillight Policing Can Lead to Tragedy**

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**Why Did the North Charleston Cop Handcuff Walter Scott After He Shot Him?**

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**Rand Paul Thinks He Can Solve All of America's Problems. He Should Just Focus on This One.**

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**Rand Paul's Campaign Strategy Is to Out-Obama Obama**

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**Republicans Aren't Nearly As**

APRIL 8 2015 2:41 PM

## If You Didn't Catch Our *Mad Men* Premiere Party

A podcast from our live event, exclusively for **Slate Plus** members.

*Julia Turner, John Swansburg, June Thomas, and Wesley Morris*

**What Was the Best *Mad Men* Zinger This Week? Vote Now.**

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**What Do Customs Brokers Do? Working Podcast: Episode 4 Transcript.**

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**Criminal Justice Reporter Leon Neyfakh Rounds Up His Favorite *Slate* Pieces This Week**

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ARTS

BROW BEAT

## Libertarian As Rand Paul Supporters Wish They Were

### BUSINESS

#### MONEYBOX

APRIL 8 2015 5:49 PM

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Alison Griswold

**Worried Your Country Doesn't Have Enough Babies? Make It Easier for Women to Work.**

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**Is Coca-Cola Going Flat?**

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**The "Netflix for Books" Has Started Selling Books You Might Actually Want to Read**

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**Young Adults Are Getting More Suburban. So Why Does Your City Seem Full of Twentysomethings?**

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**Southwest Airlines Has Figured Out How to Make Your Flight Even More Fun: Book Readings at 35,000 Feet!**

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Sharan Shetty

**The Trailer for Sundance Winner *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* Will Tug at Your Heartstrings**

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**Watch Kendrick Lamar Help a Bewildered Kid Spell "Negus" at a Spelling Bee**

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**Finally, a Summer Movie Season for Women**

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**James Corden Performed *Grease* in the Middle of a Los Angeles Street**

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**How *Black-ish* Earned the Right to Call Itself *Black-ish***

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### Even Apple is Getting Over the Insane Lines for New Apple Products

LIFE

OUTWARD

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### Republican Legislator Cuts Off 10-Year-Old Testifying Against Anti-Gay Adoption Bill

Mark Joseph Stern

### I Don't Want to Be Perceived as Gay. Does That Make Me Homophobic? (Video.)

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### What Was On a 1920s Membership Application for the KKK?

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### A Two-Sided Word Puzzle on London Streets Takes on Stereotypes of Homelessness

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### Watch Jon Stewart Eviscerate Indiana's "Religious Liberty"

FUTURE TENSE

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### FCC Fines AT&T \$25 Million Over Brutal Breach Affecting 280,000 Customers

Lily Hay Newman

### Netizen Report: Turkey's President Fights to Control the Conversation, Online and in Print

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### Before You Give Away Your Genetic Info, Ask: What's in It for Me?

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### A Candle That Charges Your Phone, and Other Great Projects From a U.S.-Mexico Competition

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### A Popular Encryption App Has a Huge Security Hole—and It's Not the Only App You Should Be Nervous About

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## Debate. (Video.)

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## DOUBLE X

### THE XX FACTOR

APRIL 8 2015 2:39 PM

## **To Keep Women Safe, North Carolina GOP Tries to Stop Med Students From Learning How to Provide Safe Abortions**

*Amanda Marcotte*

### **Anti-Choicers Say Women Who Want Abortions Are Like Children Near a Hot Stove**

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### **Women Read More Books, but Men Get to Write More Book Reviews**

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### **Kansas Legislature Bans Spending Welfare Money on Cruises**

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### **Despite Damning Report, *Rolling***

APRIL 8 2015 12:34 PM

## **Has Environmental Journalism Failed?**

Five lessons from Gallup's latest survey.

*Krista Langlois*

### **California's Anti-Vaccine Movement: Politics, Wealth, and Paranoia**

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### **The Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive" Helped Me Save My First Life as a Doctor**

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### **Incredible Undulating Clouds over South Carolina (Video)**

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### **Why America Needs STEM Literacy**

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## SPORTS

SPORTS NUT

## **Stone Will Continue "To Do What We've Always Done." Are They Serious?**

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## **Somehow, Indiana Managed to Convict a Woman of Both "Feticide" and Child Neglect**

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## **Women Sue the Pentagon Over Military Sexual Abuse**

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## **MTV's True Life Shows Slut-Shaming in Action, and It's Nauseating**

APRIL 6 2015 9:59 AM

## **Glass Hole**

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*Erik Malinowski*

## **Seven Players and a Coach Explain What It's Like to Beat Duke in the NCAA Tournament**

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## **The Body Language of March Sadness**

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