Learning Network
Thirty Years after the Montréal Massacre
Issue 29, December 2019

We remember the women killed in the Montréal Massacre and work to end gender-based violence.

On December 6th, 1989 at Université de Montréal's École Polytechnique, a man murdered 14 women. Upon entering an engineering classroom, he asked the men in attendance to leave the room and then started firing upon the women. After, he roamed the corridors of the university, searching for more women to kill before ending his own life. In a letter, he stated his frustration at "feminists" who took opportunities from men and he shared further names of women he planned to kill.

In our 2014 publication, we commemorated the young women who were killed on December 6th because they were women, and documented the achievements and missed opportunities in the prevention of gender-based violence in the years since the Massacre. On this 30th anniversary, we highlight how misogyny was one of the factors fueling the fatal violence against 14 young female students that day.

The root causes of femicide continue to exist today and, unfortunately, the Montréal Massacre is not an isolated event. For instance, on April 23, 2018 a man used a van to attack pedestrians on the streets of Toronto, ultimately murdering 10 people. Similar to the Montréal Massacre, the attacker's expressed motive was his hatred of women. Even more troubling was this man's connection to an entire movement that promotes misogyny and violence against women.

These attacks, and others like them, are political acts that use terroristic violence to enforce rigid gender roles and the subordinate status of women. To end violence and ensure that justice is served, we need to acknowledge the hard evidence that femicide continues to occur in Canada.

Dedication

This Issue is in honour of the women killed in the Montréal Massacre: Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz. And to all women and girls that have experienced and too often, died due to gender-based violence.

Valuing Advocacy

This Issue is informed by past and present efforts to end gender-based violence. Through the public education, lobbying, and dedication of activists, we now publicly recognize the role of misogyny in the Massacre. Activists work continually for change enabling advances on issues of gender-based violence and gender equity and there is still more work to do. We must continue to challenge misogyny, especially as it persists at the intersection of different oppressions (e.g. colonialism, ableism, racism).

Misogyny Continues to Exist in Canada

Misogyny is typically understood as an attitude of individuals, especially those who are stigmatized as "abnormal" or "crazy" (or other similarly ableist language). However, misogyny is not only the property of certain individuals; it is a phenomenon produced out of our social and political environment.

Misogyny represents the hatred of women and a desire for their subordination. It occurs in a variety of ways including the use of power to exclude, silence, and otherwise harm women in efforts to secure male dominance.

The Montréal Massacre was a lethal manifestation of misogyny. Such mass violence has been promoted today in movements like the incel ("involuntary celibate") movement, a group the Toronto van attacker belonged to. To some in the incel movement, the shooter in the Montréal Massacre is a hero.

In addition to embodying a violent hatred for women, both attackers shared a narrow and oppressive set of beliefs about how gender should be expressed and practiced that is also present in our society more broadly. These beliefs view women as tools to serve male interests and as more sensitive and emotional than rational. In comparison, men are seen as strong, rational, aggressive, and dominant. The "overexpression of male stereotypes" can include "callous attitudes towards women, the valorization of violence as an expression of manliness, and danger-seeking behaviours."[1] Misogyny and fixed, narrow gender norms are beliefs that are learned by individuals, at times through exposure to the continuum of violence during their life, and actively reinforced in our society.

Challenging Misogyny & Stereotypical Gender Norms

We need to encourage healthy masculinities; challenge how fixed, narrow definitions of gender are presented and reinforced in our society; and work towards ending gender-based violence.

Learn more: White Ribbon's *Boys Don't Cry* campaign draws attention to the impact of rigid gender stereotypes on boys throughout their life course and calls for healthier models of masculinity.

Defining Misogyny & Some of Its Forms

Misogyny is "primarily a property of social environments in which women are liable to encounter hostility due to the enforcement and policing of patriarchal norms and expectations – often, though not exclusively, insofar as they violate patriarchal law and order. Misogyny hence functions to enforce and police women's subordination and to upload male dominance, against the backdrop of other intersecting systems of oppression and vulnerability, dominance and disadvantage, as well as disparate material resources, enabling and constraining social structures, institutions, bureaucratic mechanisms, and so on."[2]

It is important to recognize that people will have different experiences of misogyny based on intersecting oppressions they may experience. Recognizing how misogyny takes shape in various forms can provide a deeper and broader awareness of how it operates in people's everyday lives. For example:

Misogynoir: Coined by Moya Bailey, this term describes "the particular amalgamation of anti-Black racism and misogyny in popular media and culture that targets Black trans and cis women. Representational images contribute to negative societal perceptions about Black women, which

can precipitate racist gendered violence that harms health and can even result in death."[3]

Learn more: View Yamikani Msosa's webinar *Roots and Resistance: Sexual Violence and Anti-Black Racism.*

Transmisogyny: "Negative attitudes, expressed through cultural hate, individual and state violence, and discrimination directed toward trans women and trans and gender nonconforming people on the feminine end of the gender spectrum."[4]

Learn more: Access the *Trans Inclusion Matters* Campaign and related resources by The 519.

Femicide is Rooted in Misogyny

Femicide is the intentional killing of women and girls because they are women and girls. **Learn more:** Click here for our Issue on Femicide that discusses the root causes of femicide.

While gender-neutral terms like "killed" or "murdered" captures the action that resulted in death, the word femicide captures how particular murders of women and girls are rooted in gender inequality, sexism, misogyny, power imbalances, and institutionalized discrimination.

It is estimated that 148 women's and girls' lives were ended by violence in 2018.[5]

31 of these women and girls were killed through non-intimate femicide—8 of them during the van attack in Toronto on April 23, 2018.[6]

Learn more: Find out about femicide in Canada through the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability website and resources.

Media Coverage of Femicide

Coverage of the Montréal Massacre focused on the individual shooter as a "madman"; however, far less attention was dedicated to examining his misogynistic motivations, the society that produced and reinforced them, and the voices of numerous advocates that recognized it as an act of femicide rooted in misogyny. Reflecting on how she covered the Montréal Massacre twenty-five years later, reporter Shelley Page shares how "I sanitized the event of its feminist anger and then infantilized and diminished the victims, turning them from elite engineering students who'd fought for a place among men into teddy-bear loving daughters, sisters and girlfriends."[7] The deaths of young women took the focus in media reports, but missing was a more critical analysis of what led to those deaths. To this day there is a resistance to calling these acts femicide and examining the social environment that produced them. OAITH's analysis illustrates the continued use of problematic representations of femicide in the media:

Media representations of 47 Ontario Femicides 2017-2018: Analysis of 131 local, national and TV news sources

Positive Frames

- Victim Humanized: 39%

- Picture of Victim: 46%
- Gendered Social Problem: 8%
- Labelled as Femicide: 7%

Negatives Frames

- Victim Blaming: 7%
- Individualized: 51%
- Voice of Authority: 60%
- VAW History Undocumented: 79%

Positive media frames represent femicide as a gendered social problem and humanize femicide victims.

Negative media frames represent femicide as an individual, random event with no context of gendered violence. With negative frames, traditional voices of authority (e.g. law enforcement, government) are cited over the voices of friends, family, and violence against women experts.

Media coverage is also biased by other forms of discrimination and oppression. For instance, while Indigenous women, girls, and 2-Spirit individuals face disproportionate rates of femicide as a result of ongoing colonialism, the media often portray their deaths through negative frames and racist stereotypes. **Learn more:** Read "Deeper Dive: Media and Representation" in *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.*

We need to #callitfemicide and media need to engage in an intersectional and anti-oppression analysis of femicide.

Misogyny Builds & Fortifies Male-Dominated Spaces

Based on rigid, stereotypical gender norms, there are certain spaces that come to be coded as "male." Men are assumed to be entitled to spaces that value "rationality" and "strength" and therefore, they gain privileged access to those spaces. Examples include the military, high-paying professional sports, construction, computer science, and engineering.[8] In comparison, women are portrayed as incapable of understanding or succeeding in these areas and they often face a "chilly climate" when entering these spaces.[9] When women are present in stereotypically male-dominated environments, they are viewed to be transgressing gender norms. In response, some men may be invested in maintaining their space which can lead to the aggressive policing of gender norms. In its extreme form, this policing can manifest in violence such as sexual assault or femicide.[10]

For instance, consider fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). While notable advancements have been achieved, there is more work to be done in some areas:

- While women make up 44% of first-year STEM students aged 19 and under in Canadian universities, women only make up 19% of first-year engineering students.[11]
- Among engineers in Canada, 13.1% are women.[12]
- Among Canadian engineering faculty, 14% are women.[13]

Continued advances will require intentional efforts to further break down rigid gender norms that privilege one gender over others.

Learn more: [View this video of Nobel Prize Winner Donna Strickland, McMaster Engineering alumna.](#)

Dr. Strickland is only the third woman in 117 years to win a Nobel Prize for physics. She says "we need to celebrate women physicists because we're out there. Hopefully, in time, it will start to move forward at a faster rate."[14]

Numerous institutional and non-profit efforts in Canada, and beyond, have been working to address fixed, narrow gender norms so as to change the culture and create safe and encouraging environments:

[TechGirls Canada](#)

A not-for-profit organization committed to conducting research and co-designing solutions that address barriers for diversity and equity in science and technology sectors by championing LGBTTQ+, immigrant, refugee, and Indigenous women, women of all colours and all abilities.

[Engendering Success in STEM](#)

A research partnership with the shared goal to foster women's inclusion and success in STEM.

Misogynistic Beliefs & Sexual Assault

The Montréal Massacre is part of a continuum of gender-based violence rooted in misogyny. Misogyny and stereotypic gender norms create the breeding ground for violence, its normalization, and its effects on individuals and communities (e.g. fear, silence, harm).

Consider sexual assault: The presence and persistence of misogyny is reflected in rape myths consisting of "stereotypical or false beliefs about sexual violence."[15] They include that men cannot control their lust, that the women "asked for it", that women cannot say no, and that women often lie about sexual assault.

A review found that between 25% and 35% of respondents (both male and female) accept the majority of rape myths.[16]

Rape myths contribute to sexual violence:

There were approximately 636,000 incidents of sexual assault reported by Canadians in 2014. The vast majority (87%) were against women.[17]

Self-reported rates of sexual assault have been stable in Canada from 1999 to 2014.[18]

Based on intersecting forms of oppression, some women are more likely to be targeted for sexual assault:

Indigenous women reported rates of sexual assault more than 3 times that of non-Indigenous women.[19]

Women living with disabilities are about 2 times more likely than other women to be sexually assaulted.[20]

Misogynistic rape myths pose a barrier to seeking justice for sexual assault as they impact how systems (e.g. education, police, military, court, workplace) respond to sexual violence. For example, the "Unfounded" investigation by Robyn Doolittle shows how rape myths are present in police departments in Canada and contribute to the dismissal of sexual assault claims as baseless.[21]

The need to name and analyze gender-based violence continues.

Prevention

The rates of gender-based violence point to the urgent need for public education initiatives such as:

Draw the Line

An interactive campaign that aims to engage Ontarians in a dialogue about sexual violence by challenging common myths about sexual violence and equipping bystanders with information on how to intervene safely and effectively.

Neighbours, Friends and Families

A public education campaign to raise awareness of the signs of woman abuse. It has been adapted to be culturally appropriate for:

- Immigrant & Refugee Communities
- Indigenous Communities
- Francophone Communities

Challenging Misogyny & Preventing Gender-Based Violence

We hope this Issue illustrates the need for deeper reflection on how misogyny continues to underlay gendered oppression and violence, and that it compels all of us to challenge misogyny.

Ongoing Actions to Make a Difference
For You

- Remember the women effected by gender-based violence by more than just their names. Find out about the women who died by femicide in the Massacre through the words of their family and friends.
- Share information about the Montréal Massacre and daily manifestations of violence in Canada.
- Take responsibility for learning more about gender-based violence. Our Online Ontario Resource Library shares online trainings, text resources, and websites for further learning opportunities.
- Support the efforts of Canadian organizations working to end violence.
- Challenge misogyny and stereotypical gender norms.

For Media

- Report on femicide using intersectional and anti-oppression frames that name gender-based violence and femicide in Canada. *Use the Right Words: Media Reporting on Sexual Violence in Canada* by Femifesto and Collaborators is a helpful guide.
- Answer the calls to action for the media put forth by the Truth & Reconciliation Commission.

For Education Institutions

- Engage in efforts to end violence on campus and support individuals with lived experience of violence. *Courage to Act: Developing a National Framework to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions* by Farrah Khan, CJ Rowe, and Robyn Bidgood offers recommendations on how to do so.
- Create environments that counter the existence of gendered stereotypes and "chilly climates" for women and girls.

By acknowledging and confronting gender inequity, we can help prevent femicide and other forms of gender-based violence. Our next Issue will share current evidence about gender equity in Canada.

Learn more:

While our focus in this Issue is on the Montréal Massacre, it is important to note that gender-based violence occurs every day in Canada. For more information on the continuum of gender-based violence, see the resources available on our website: www.vawlearningnetwork.ca

For full reference list, visit:

www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-29/issue-29.html

Please evaluate this Issue!

Let us know what you think. Your input is important to us. Please complete this brief survey on your thoughts of this Issue: https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_54k8v5sOSsSY993

Suggested citation:

Lalonde, D., Baker, L., & Nonomura, R. (2019). Thirty Years after the Montréal Massacre. *Learning Network Issue 29.* London, Ontario: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. ISBN # 978-1-988412-36-8

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