

# How Many Rapists Must We Kill?

**Why does hypothetical violence against men disturb and offend more than actual violence against women?**

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Obviously, the most oppressed of any oppressed group will be its women... Obviously, since women, period, are oppressed in society, and if you've got an oppressed group, they're twice oppressed. So I should imagine that they react accordingly: as oppression makes people more militant... then twice militant, because they're twice oppressed.

— LORRAINE HANSBERRY, from "An Interview with Lorraine Hansberry by Studs Terkel," May 12, 1959

Imagine if we declared war.

Imagine if we fuck-this-shit-snapped en masse, and systematically killed men for no reason at all other than for being men. Imagine this culling starting in one country with five men a week. Then each week, this imaginary scenario would add more countries and kill more men in each of them. Fifty a week, then one hundred men, then five hundred.

Imagine an underground movement called Fuck the Patriarchy (FTP), which would claim responsibility and warn that it was putting the world on notice that it would keep killing more and more men until the patriarchy sent a representative to talk. We do not want money, it would say. We do not want a new president or prime minister to replace the current one, this imaginary claimant of responsibility would say. We do not want a few more seats in parliament. We do not want a pay raise. We do not want men to promise to do the laundry or to promise to babysit their own children. We do not want a few more crumbs. So send your representative, patriarchy, this imaginary claimant of responsibility would demand (I can imagine the infighting that would ensue).

Its ultimatum: begin dismantling patriarchy or we will continue killing more and more men every week.

How many do you think must be killed before patriarchy begins to be disbanded? One thousand? Ten thousand? One million? Is it barbaric? Is it savage? Many millions of men have been killed in wars begun by men against other men. Imagine this our declaration of war against patriarchy.

How long would it take for the world to pay attention to the killings of men? When would it become a global emergency? A month? Five months? How many men would have to be killed—for absolutely no reason whatsoever other than they were men—for the world to wonder: “What the fuck is going on? Who is behind this madness? Who do we talk to so that this savagery can stop? Who do we invade, who should we bomb? What did men ever do to deserve this barbarity?” How many men would have to be killed before the representatives of patriarchy called an emergency summit to bring to a halt the senseless murders of their own? How many men must we kill until we get patriarchy to the table?

How would men feel when they saw so many of their fellow men, murdered simply for being, like them, men? Would they change their behavior—walk together for safety, avoid certain areas of town, make sure they were not out beyond a certain time? How would boys feel, knowing that their gender made them walking targets? How would it make their parents feel? Would it change the way they raised or treated their sons? Would it change the way the boys behaved?

That is an intentionally disturbing scenario, I know. But we are long overdue a fuck-this-shit snapping. It is as if men have hoarded the operating manual for violence, and from boyhood, have been taught the language of that manual, while girls and women are kept illiterate. Violence—daily acts of violence against women simply for being women—benefits men. Patriarchy’s copyright over violence has terrorized us into fear and submission. If every act of violence against women were reported on the news, it would be recognized for the epidemic—the war—that it is. Instead, only “especially” violent attacks are reported and not even all of those, which tells you that society does not care and/or is immune to them. A daily war is carried out against women, and yet it is not called “barbaric” or “savage.” We are supposed to learn to live with it, accommodate it, never fight it.

Well, enough. Why shouldn’t we declare war?

Unless we impose on societal consciousness just how rife violence against women is and how it is ordinary men who commit it—and not psychopaths—it will continue to benefit ordinary men. Denial of that enables men to distance themselves from the violence. Whether any individual man has ever beaten up or raped a woman is beside the point, because such violence, which is enabled and protected by patriarchy, helps maintain a social construct that privileges all men. They are beneficiaries of that violence because that violence upholds patriarchy. It is the foundation of patriarchy.

Women’s violence is considered acceptable when it furthers the cause of patriarchy. The “nurturing” and “motherly” attributes that women are burdened with are essentially propaganda wrought by the patriarchy to keep things exactly as they are. When women rule in the name of patriarchy—remember British prime minister Margaret Thatcher—they are allowed to forgo “nurturing” and “motherly” reductionism and launch wars and pass into effect policy that benefits patriarchy. Countries boast when women begin serving in combat roles in their armed forces. They proudly announce when a woman makes it to a senior position, leading divisions and large numbers of troops. But the wars female combatants will fight are done so in the name of patriarchy; they promote a violence that only the patriarchal state claims a right to. It is time for women to claim that same right to launch wars—not between countries but against patriarchy.

Not only are women socialized into submission, but we are told, essentially, not to be violent even as a form of self-defense but to wait until men can stop being violent toward us. When that would happen exactly is unclear and quite unrealistic, seeing as patriarchy has been using violence to keep us in line for centuries. We are told again and again that it is in man’s nature to

be violent—surely that should disturb and make those men who refuse violence understand that patriarchal constructs of masculinity confine them too. We are told that women are weak, passive, emotional, submissive, etc. Which women are those things, and which women are excluded from those stereotypes? It matters because race, class and gender all impact the ways women’s violence is punished. We have been socialized into acquiescence ostensibly for our own good.

So, again, how many men would need to be killed in that imaginary scenario for patriarchy to take us seriously? And for how long would we have to wage battle before patriarchy begins to be dismantled?

Are my questions absurd? Yes, deliberately so. But we all must ask the absurd questions to fully take in the scale of violence that women consistently endure. How many women must be killed, raped, beaten, and emotionally abused until we do? And is self-defense the only form of violence allowed to women—if at all? These are disturbing questions I know. I stand in the disturbance and discomfort caused by the questions I’ve posted. I insist you do too, because women, girls, and nonbinary and queer people face more than disturbance and discomfort than we can imagine—they are dying, and patriarchy shows little concern.

Consider that many liberatory movements—from the anticolonial to the anti occupation—have used violence as a means to overturn systems of oppression and injustice. People have a right to resist. But which people? It is usually groups and movements led by men and including a few women whose roles are too often erased and conveniently forgotten after the revolution or liberation has succeeded, lest women remember that they, too, can use violence. We can’t have women thinking that they, too, know how to use weapons against oppressors! They might turn those weapons used against the foreign occupiers on their local patriarchal occupiers instead. And that’s how we must consider patriarchy: as a form of occupation, an oppressive force against which we have a right to use force to liberate ourselves. Is there an older form of occupation?

If violence is the language that patriarchy understands, isn’t it time more women speak it, if only for their own safety?

“Society would be better off as a whole if more women were willing to engage in justified violence against men, and fewer men were willing to engage in unjustified violence against women. To that end, women’s justified violence against men should be *encouraged, protected, and publicized*.” Those words, from the University of Miami School of Law professor Mary Anne Franks in a 2016 law review article, should be enshrined in our declaration of war against patriarchy.

In a necessarily honest and sharp appraisal of what she calls the asymmetry of violence between men and women, Franks explains, “While both men and women can, and do, use violence against each other, men’s violence against women is far more common, less justified, and more destructive than women’s violence against men.”

One of the reasons for that asymmetry is because “men do not fear retaliation for violence against women, whereas women do fear retaliation for their use of violence against men,” Franks explains.

EXACTLY THIS!

After I beat the fuck out of the man who groped me in a club in Montreal, I went home on a high. It was glorious. On Twitter, I described what happened under #IBeatMyAssaulter. My tweets were soon shared thousands of times around the world. Women sent me not just support for what I’d done but also stories of the various times they, too, had beaten their assaulter. Years of rage fueled those punches I aimed at that man’s face. Like so many women, I knew—because I had

been subjected to it for years—that men believe they can do as they like to our bodies without consequences. That was why I did not want to stop punching that man.

Each time I punched him I yelled, “Don’t you ever touch a woman like that again! Don’t you ever touch a woman!” I wanted him to know consequence. I wanted him to remember that this average-height woman, whose ass he believed he could just reach out and grab without fear of retaliation, beat the fuck out of him. I wanted him to wonder—if he ever dared again to want to grope a woman—if she too, would beat the fuck out of him. We must stop socializing women and girls not to fight back. Stop sending girls only to ballet class. Send them to class to learn to fight, too. I am not victim blaming. I am not placing the responsibility of being free from violence on women. I simply want men to know that women can dole out consequences. Patriarchy does not want us to be as fluent in violence as men are. And when we do dare to fight back, women feel patriarchy’s full and brutal punishment. And, as always, the more a woman falls between an intersection of oppressions, the worse her punishment.

The national U.S. average prison sentence of men who kill their female partners is two to six years, while women who kill their partners are sentenced on average to fifteen years, despite the fact that most women who kill their partners do so to protect themselves from violence initiated by their partners.<sup>1</sup>

“For a lot of women who do ultimately kill their abusive partners, it’s a last-gasp effort,” Robert Knechtel, chief operating officer of the Arizona-based Sojourner Center, one of the largest domestic violence shelters in the country. “Many women at the shelter don’t have the financial means to move out of the state and have an either neutral or negative relationship with the police.”<sup>2</sup> That sentiment is echoed by Rita Smith, executive director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: “When a woman or minority is claiming they are defending themselves, they don’t get the benefit of the doubt. Most battered women who kill in self-defense end up in prison. There is a well-documented bias against women [in these cases].”<sup>3</sup>

Women are the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population in the United States. According to the ACLU, as many as 90 percent of the women who are incarcerated for killing a man were battered by that same person and 79 percent of those in prison have suffered physical abuse before their arrest. Two-thirds of the women in jail are of color, and the majority of that population is also low-income, according to a 2016 Vera Institute of Justice report, *Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform*. Further, according to the report, women represented just 13 percent of the jail population between 2009 and 2011, yet they represented 67 percent of the victims of staff-on-inmate sexual victimization.<sup>4</sup>

“The legal system is designed to protect men from the superior power of the state but not to protect women or children from the superior power of men,” wrote the feminist psychiatrist Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*.

It is a never-ending vicious cycle of violence. We can’t win. So when are we going to terrify the fuck out of patriarchy and those who benefit from the rotten structures it has created?

How much longer are we going to wait?

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<sup>1</sup> Women in Prison: An Overview

<sup>2</sup> When Battered Women Are Punished with Prison

<sup>3</sup> Angela Corey’s Overzealous Prosecution of Marissa Alexander

<sup>4</sup> Overlooked: Women and Jails in an era of Reform

How many rapists must women kill before rape is erased? Imagine if fifty, one hundred, five hundred women killed their rapists. What would the world look like if women openly declared that we would kill any man who raped us? How long would it take before men stopped raping us? How many rapists would need to be killed in order for men to stop raping women? How many rapists must be killed before a man thinks twice before raping or sexually assaulting women and girls? And I am not talking here of state-imposed death penalties. I am talking about the end of rape because men are sufficiently scared of women that they would never dare to rape or try to rape them. Again, this is not victim blaming. I insist we push the conversation until we get to the part where men fear women enough that rape becomes an anomaly. I don't want the state to protect me, because as I have stated several times already, protection from the patriarchy is conditional. I want to be free of patriarchy, not at its mercy.

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Excerpted from *The Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls* by Mona Eltahawy (Beacon Press, 2019).

Content Note: this essay by queer anarchist Mona Eltahawy has some significant oversights, especially in its casual use of problematic language of “socialization,” language that has been used to deny the gendered experiences of trans women and to articulate and enact violence against trans women, as well as its lack of focus on trans survivors/sexual violence against trans and nonbinary people. These are serious flaws, and the essay must be read critically and carefully through this lens, and especially through a critical transfeminist lens. In our opinion, they do not structurally compromise the essay’s core argument, and correcting them only strengthens that core. Trans people—trans women, trans men, trans non-binary folks—all experience even higher rates of sexual violence than cis women. This happens to them *simply because they are trans*. If we carry the essay’s logic through with this in mind, then the unavoidable conclusion is that insurrectionary anti-patriarchal resistance of all forms—very much not limited to the intentionally provocative and most literal case of a survivor literally killing their rapist—can mean nothing other than *total war on transphobes*. We also believe that the the “socialization” language may be addressed by following through with the logic that if women in general can be said to have been “socialized” (briefly setting aside the criticisms we have of socialization theory as a whole) to tolerate violence from men as inevitable, trans women are “socialized” the exact same way—as the “natural targets” of violence. Likewise, trans men are not “socialized” as men or as agents of violence, but as “natural targets” of violence. Trans people, by virtue of their transgression of patriarchal coercive gender roles, are targeted for additional punishment as the river of violence flows downhill.

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