


On #YesAllWomen, One Year Later

By **Kaye M.** on May 26, 2015 in **FEMINISM**

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#YESALLWOMEN

On the night of May 25, 2014, I curled up in bed and waited to die.

My Twitter mentions were bursting with reasons why I should. I was a man-hater. I was a rabid feminist. I was capitalizing on a tragedy. I was a terrorist in sheep's clothing. I was a hypocrite. There were many that had creatively utilized a 140-character limit to fantasize about particularly creative ends for me.

What I'd asked for.

What I deserved to have done to me.

What they wanted to do to me.

I was a Muslim woman who had dared to start a viral hashtag that laid out the fears women faced – while men shamed and accused them of generalizing against an entire gender for the sins of a perceived few.

I was the creator of #YesAllWomen, and in that moment, I had no idea what the morning would bring me.

And I wasn't sure if I wanted to wake up and see.

"#YesAllWomen is trending. Thank you so much, everyone. Your feelings are valid. Our feelings are valid."

@gildedspine, May 24, 2014 – 2:58 P.M.

On the afternoon of May twenty-fourth, a young man named Eliot Rodger armed his male entitlement with a weapon and left several innocents to await identification in body bags.

On the same afternoon, a serial rapist was let out on parole – against the advice of his own psychiatrists, in the face of united protests and fears and dread – into a small Californian town. One of the women interviewed in response was herself a rape survivor. She was shuddering. She was crying.

When I read her words, I cried, too.

And I was angry.

I know the realities of the world I live in. As a Muslim woman, as a woman of color – as a woman in general. Our bodies are hated – even as they are coveted and leered after and broken by greedy, grasping, unworthy hands. We are told to dress up, dress down, we deserve it, we should smile, that was a compliment, don't frown at me, don't block me, *are you listening to me?*

Eliot Rodger hated rejection. He gave a voice, a face, to hundreds of thousands of men online who keep searches open with certain trigger words prepared – “Islamophobia, feminist, woman, girl” – so they can toss lit grenades into the inboxes and Twitter mentions of women who openly use their voices to discuss the truths those men would rather not hear. He was a folk hero to the inhabitants of the mythical friend zone. They praised his name, even as women in my feed and offline grieved over another death, another bereaved family, another senseless loss – another reason for women everywhere to hold their keys tightly in their fists, knuckle mace or worry about walking home late at night.

There are trolls under the bridge the world over – and there’s no sound they hate more than the sound of a woman’s feet skipping right over the limiting walls they’ve tried to impose on her and the pools of self-hatred they’ve tried to drown her in.

“It appears that #YesAllWomen was started by @gildedspine. Learn more about how it started with this post...”

@KerryWashington, May 24, 2014

On the same afternoon Eliot Rodger prepared to take his last ride, I was seated cross-legged in the women’s section of a local masjid.

I was idly balancing my laptop on my knees, in an odd imitation of the little girls devoutly grasping their Qur’ans and reciting their lessons, overlapping one another. I was browsing my Twitter feed, which had grown larger and richer over the past few months – along with my discovery and awareness of online spaces as a place to find my people, like-minded women and activists, and enjoying outspoken discussions on life and discrimination and diversity and everything in between.

I was favoriting every tweet I could find that stood in defiance to the growing wave of male denial – “Not All Men.”

“Not all men hurt women like Eliot.”

“Not all men go that far.”

“Not all men can be patient with your uptight rejection, though.”

“Not all men can sit tight and smile while you go for the beta males.”

I was sick to my stomach. I was still angry.

But I wasn’t alone. I was never alone. I was not the only one who felt this way.

And I knew that, if we had a shared space, just the way #AliceinArabia, #NotYourStockMuslim, and #WeNeedDiverseBooks had taught me – our own space to breathe, to vent, to empathize – we could raise our voices together and counter the waves that tried to drown them. One hashtag – several hashtags – and the raised voices behind it had changed the world. It was one small step, but it had touched on a hunger within me that I hadn’t known existed.

As a Muslim woman, and a woman of color, I was constantly bruised by the targeted javelins of stereotypes and casual hatred. Here, in this online space, I was able to connect with voices that felt the same frustrations, that shared my need to challenge the narrative and add our own, that were able to topple yet another obstacle to our daily lives and our individuality.

My voice had power and potential. It could be raised. It could be heard.

As soon as I was home, on a steady Wi-Fi signal and with my nerves still jangling with the need to do something, say

something, I opened up a new dialogue box.

And I tweeted three friends.

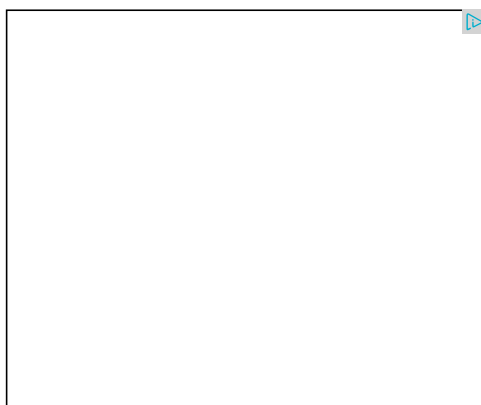
Life as I knew it split into two paths: the one where I did send that tweet, and the one where I closed my traitorous mouth and didn't.

Within two hours, #YesAllWomen was trending nationally. I had been mentioned by username and promoted by actress Kerry Washington. It had begun.

"When @gildedspine started #yesallwomen, it proved all that was great and wonderful in social media. And after? Well."

@kellybarnhill, August 13, 2014 – 7:28 A.M.

The night of the twenty-sixth, I was having an anxiety attack. I couldn't eat. Every breath seemed like a shallow blade sliding between my ribs. I wrapped my arms around my stomach like a weak rivet, a last, desperate attempt to preserve a porcelain plate – and I fired off DMs to my friend Nicole Brinkley as she and I attempted to eradicate any evidence of my real name and existence online.



Hours later, I would officially lock my account, and attempt to step back from a creation that had burst out of my control. I would leave the safe space I had tried to create for several months. I would be condemned by women who felt that I wasn't brave enough, that I hadn't spoken enough, that I had denied them further use of my voice when they needed it for announcing marches and conferences (events where the women who had needed that space the most would not be invited or considered). I was learning just what it meant to be Internet famous. And I didn't know how much more I could take of it.

I told my mother that evening, and her instant concern – for me, for our family, for our health and safety in the face of this unknown, sudden storm – made me feel worse. I had been selfish, to speak up without thinking of the consequences, even surrounded by brave feminists from marginalized backgrounds who bore such attacks and assaults every single day.

I hadn't thought of my family. I hadn't thought of what would happen if this continued on, and on, for several days.

Which it did.

"The hashtag I created has not been a safe place for my voice since the first twenty-four hours since I tossed it out.

#YesAllWomen”

@gildedspine, August 12, 2014 – 4:43 P.M.

On the evening of May twenty-fourth, I did not take #YesAllWomen trending as my accomplishment.

But I was proud. I was proud of being a conduit for raised voices. I was proud for being one of them, for being able to grieve and be angry and be strong and speak about my fears and face them. I would be accused, over the next few weeks, of planting a seed of division by speaking particularly on the fears and isolation of women of color – by making it known that I was a woman of color.

I would see firsthand the division and inequalities of mainstream feminism: of how we speak against our being consumed – and yet, if we are marginalized, are expected to turn over our voices and our projects to the “cause”, to be presented as the successful rescue cases of American feminism and not as individual activists in our own right. How we can unite for a few hours in the name of women’s rights, and then fall to piece mere hours later when some of us speak about experiences that others cannot claim as their own.

It is a scenario that continues to be repeated, and one that predates #YesAllWomen:

A woman of color creates a trending hashtag.

A woman of color is then bullied, harassed and threatened for all sides for creating said trending hashtag. (And, as always, it should be noted that a woman of color online is privy to abuse from both men and women.)

A woman of color must watch as her work is co-opted, misinterpreted, used for profit, and ultimately attributed to others.



It’s a daily problem. It’s a problem that no one wants to admit to – because that would mean that they’d lose their place in the line to scavenge, consume and appropriate. #YesAllWomen was a particularly tempting fruit, because it invited all voices, and made the mistake of assuming that the inclusion of all would mean the exclusion of none. It was ripe for the taking, and for the lines of prejudice and saviorism to be drawn.

I was locked down, and out, two days after #YesAllWomen first started trending. I watched from a distance as #YesAllWhiteWomen trended for a day, as women of color vented about their constant online abuse, of being used and abused and heckled by men and women alike and then isolated from a hashtag that was meant to speak for all women.

I would speak out, months after #YesAllWomen had finally stopped trending and was being hauled over the coals by trolls and TERFs, to condemn an account masquerading as me and culling money from stolen tweets and “official T-shirts”, to deny claims being made in my name and taking advantage of my need for privacy and safety in the name of monetary gain

and attention.

Not everything about #YesAllWomen makes me proud. I am particularly bitter, and disappointed, that it did not live up to its name and its promise. As a marginalized woman, even I could not provide a safe space for more than a few hours for others like me.

But for those few hours, I loved what it was and could be.

On the evening of May twenty-fourth, I learned that you didn't have to be a troll to harm.

A male reporter from the Wall Street Journal reached out to me – “Age/Location/Real Name?” Even after I declined with a short, polite explanation about how the space in my mentions were shrinking, that kind, heartfelt thanks were overpowered by suggestions on how I should kill myself, he pressured me to reveal that information. Another male reporter found my personal blog and followed it, just to see what I was “up to.” After an hour of begging him to stop invading my personal space, I ended up blocking him.

I learned that fame, perceived from the outside, can change recognized names and friends into strangers. An author I knew and mutually followed deemed me a man hater and claimed that she always knew I had the potential to be one.

“She’s just so angry, you know?” she tweeted.

A day or so later, when #YesAllWomen was still trending, she was drawn into a conversation in which two friends were trying to offer me comfort. She now considered #YesAllWomen an “important movement” and urged me not to lock down for the sake of the other women speaking. I unfollowed her.

A good friend sent me a direct message before I would lock down, surprised because she’d been offline and hadn’t realized exactly what was happening. She wanted me to claim the hashtag under my real name and take credit before someone else did.

I explained to her that I’d closed my laptop because of nausea and worry, only to then open my phone’s browser two minutes later for the sake of compulsion – garnering only more nausea and worry. Concerned, she tweeted a general request to leave me alone. The very first response, seconds after the tweet was published, was a rape threat.

She helped me tidy up my personal details as best as she could on her end.

On a night a few months ago, I was asked for advice on how to survive your hashtag accidentally trending.

I do not pride myself on being strong. I remember nights when I stared in the mirror, opened my lips – and pinched them shut. I remember nights of self-condemnation, of depressive spirals downward, of fingering my own dark eyelids and drawn cheeks and wondering if I was a coward to have helped so many speak out, only to spend days afterward attempting to dismantle my own creation. I remember breaking down in tears over an e-mail from an author and mentor who told me she didn’t want to see me back online until it was safe for me, who told me that she loved me and believed in me and that I was doing the right thing.

You do dwell on that a lot, after the death threats start pouring in. Was it the right thing to do, to give voice to an open, constant wound? Was it the right thing to set your boundaries, to shrink away from interviews and lock down your own account?

I regret the death threats. I regret the media attention. I regret the pain and the tears, and the hatred I held for myself for so many months afterward. But I do not regret giving women a place to speak and be heard and acknowledged on a worldwide scale.

As a woman I terrify merely by existing, and by learning to take pride in my existence. There are those who want to suppress my existence, and my voice, and what I do to amplify the voices of others. That is sad, but their prerogative. I will focus on my own choices.

I am not the best person to give advice on how to survive. One step at a time. Perhaps it is surviving when you can make yourself eat a plate of rice without vomiting it back up. Perhaps it is surviving when you can go to a conference days later and not cringe when you are identified by your Twitter username, when you can manage to hug a friend and not break down when she asks you how you feel today.

Sometimes I think back on the girl who curled up and gripped her sheets in her tight fists, who squeezed her eyes shut and let the tears curve down her cheeks. I want to stroke her hair and kiss her brow. I want to tell her that I know, I know, it will get better.

We are here. We are speaking.

I am here. This is my mouth. This is my voice.

You cannot silence me.

Tags: #yesallwomen harassment hashtags kaye m.

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Kaye M. is an English major and MLIS hopeful, and a former member of the We Need Diverse Books campaign team. When she is not advocating diversity and feminism online, she is hard at work on adding her voice to the growing list of authors within the

Muslim YA canon and obsessing over tea, magical girls, Studio Ghibli, and lip colors.



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logicbutton · 28 weeks ago

+135

Just commenting to say that I'm proud of you and was really glad to see this - it's so important for people, *especially* those of us who are white and/or male and claim to be allies, to read and understand.

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hussified · 28 weeks ago

+105

You are fucking amazing.

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[1 reply](#) · active 28 weeks ago

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Cupcake Queen · 28 weeks ago

+19

Yes, she is. :)

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canadienne · 28 weeks ago

+53

You are a force and a storm and a brilliant, beautiful light.

Thank you for giving us a voice and a safe space for as long as you could.

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ArsenioB_Ham · 28 weeks ago

+66

Thank you for what you did and thank you even more for sharing this follow-up. To me, the fact that you can write so honestly about not feeling strong demonstrates your strength. Wishing you every good thing for the future, especially a sense of safety and peace.

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dakimel · 28 weeks ago

+59

I am so moved by your writing. Thank you. Your voice is important, and strong, and accessible.

I hate that the hashtag that gave me such an effective way to explain the inevitability of unwanted attention/attacks/danger for our gender rebounded in such an ugly and threatening way on you. Your actions to protect yourself were smart and necessary, and because of them we will all be graced by your voice for years to come, I hope.

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Brooks · 27 weeks ago

+4

Yes, this. So very much this. Except that for me (male) it was not so much an effective way to explain, as an effective way to help me understand.

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Emily · 28 weeks ago

+18

Dang. Thanks for writing about this, & so eloquently too.

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TimTamGirl · 28 weeks ago

+36

You are a badass lady. Thank you for the risks you took, and continue to take. If I were a stonemason, I would carve the following into perfect smooth stones that each of us could carry in our pockets forever:

As a woman I terrify merely by existing, and by learning to take pride in my existence. There are those who want to suppress my existence, and my voice, and what I do to amplify the voices of others. That is sad, but their prerogative. I will focus on my own choices.

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RuncibleSpoon · 28 weeks ago

+5

seriously, those sentences are amazing.

thank you, Kaye, for this thoughtful essay and for your strength

[Reply](#)[Report](#)**Halloween Jack** · 28 weeks ago

+9

Thank you.

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Taiga · 28 weeks ago

+19

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Both for creating #YesAllWomen (I ended having to block a couple of people myself over that!) and for We Need Diverse Books, which I hadn't heard of and am now going to look up.

[Reply](#)[1 reply](#) · active 28 weeks ago[Report](#)**ramentic** · 28 weeks ago

+16

Thank you! <3 I was a member of #WeNeedDiverseBooks. The creator is the lovely Ellen Oh, YA author and all around extraordinary person.

[Reply](#)[Report](#)**yeah_elle** · 28 weeks ago

+8

thank you for sharing this!

[Reply](#)[Report](#)**shelly** · 28 weeks ago

+6

Thank you.

[Reply](#)[Report](#)**gregm91436** · 28 weeks ago

+15

Thank you both for creating the hashtag (I followed the tumblr obsessively) and for writing this. I'm so sorry you had to go through that. It's bizarre-slash-horrifying how men could be so threatened by a simple, truthful hashtag.

[Reply](#)[Report](#)**cleo** · 28 weeks ago

+9

Thank you - parts of this was hard to read, it must have been much harder to live through and to write about. Thank you for sharing this.

[Reply](#)[Report](#)**kellybarnhill** · 28 weeks ago

+8

I am sending you all the love in my heart and all the love in the world. I am SO PROUD of you - as much now as I was last year. This conversation continues to be important.

My best to you, precious, and to your dear family. Keep being amazing. <3 <3 <3

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Pseudomona · 28 weeks ago

+6

Thank you for everything. Your strength is an inspiration.

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Household_Opera · 28 weeks ago

+4

Thank you so much for all of this.

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Dani@RefractedLight · 28 weeks ago

+6

Thank you so much for lending your gorgeous voice to something that desperately needs a voice and for shining a light on the realities of women. You, Kaye, are amazing and so very brave and my heart just breaks for you (and for all women) over the backlash you've received because of speaking truth. *hugs*

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Unreadaethel · 28 weeks ago

+6

You're amazing. You're amazing when you feel strong, and you're still amazing when you feel small and scared and overwhelmed. I'm sorry people have been so shitty to you because of it.

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Iris · 28 weeks ago

+14

I had no idea there was so much negativity surrounding #yesallwomen. I only ever knew it as something inspiring and comforting. I had no idea.

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Colin · 28 weeks ago

+6

Thank you for your courage.

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Deoridhe · 28 weeks ago

+8

Thank you for making #yesallwomen. Thank you for being so honest about the effect of being that truthful. Thank you for wanting to create a space where we can all be safe and free. I'm so sorry it caused you so much suffering, and I wish so much I could comfort you. I hope you can be in the world as you want to be for the rest of your life because you're wonderful.

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 **nicole_44** · 28 weeks ago

+2

Thank you.

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 **selma** · 28 weeks ago

+11

... I had been selfish, to speak up without thinking of the consequences...

Oof. Gut punch right there. Why should expressing a feeling or opinion 'selfish'. One should not have to consider the likelihood of rape/death threats before saying something.

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 **AARDVARK** · 28 weeks ago

+6

You're amazing. Thank you for creating this hashtag. I'm sorry you had to suffer for it, though.

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 **Gabi** · 28 weeks ago

+5

You are brave. You are strong. Thank you.

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 **kcm** · 28 weeks ago

+4

I was living in IV and going to school at UCSB during the time of this tragedy. (It actually occurred the evening of the 23rd, not the afternoon of the 24th like your article states.) I just wanted to thank you for starting the hash tag. It encouraged so many important conversations and did not at all come off as capitalizing on a tragedy.

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[1 reply](#) · active 28 weeks ago

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 **ramentic** · 28 weeks ago

+4

Thank you. I'm glad to hear that, for someone in the area, it didn't seem like it was capitalizing. As far as I am aware, the news started seriously making its way into Twitter in the morning and early afternoon of the 24th, hence the reference.

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 **brigidkeely** · 28 weeks ago

+3

It's already been a year? Wow. Thank you for all the conversations you've started & nurtured. I'm sorry you're being punished for speaking up, claiming your space & voice. That's awful. I'm very glad you're still here.

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 **Nalaya** · 27 weeks ago

+1

The push back we experience from men is to make us stop. Stopping is the last thing that should be done. You are amazing and potent and they need you to shut up. . . glad to hear you don't know what that means because you have many who would walk with you on this path with torch in hand.

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gnureads · 27 weeks ago

+1

Salaam, sis. You don't need my approval or anyone else's, but I'm proud of you anyways.

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riannarose · 27 weeks ago

+1

#YesAllWomen gave me strength when I felt alone. Even in your "downward spiral," and your fear, you are still inspiring. People always want to drown out and eradicated the people who can change the world. Chin up. #female #power #love

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drewmicalguest · 27 weeks ago

+2

Well done. This is a great "follow-up" to a story that the news ran with then dropped. I am sorry for the stress all of this caused you and your family, but you did well. Very well. Its easy to label something as courage from the outside looking in. Not so easy to feel proud or courageous while you are in it. But know that this was courageous of you.

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Sara · 18 weeks ago

0

Thank you so much for sharing this.

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Hilary · 18 weeks ago

0

Thank you so much for writing this piece. I can't imagine the fear that you must have experienced. I'm so grateful for your voice in the online space and for starting #yesallwomen.

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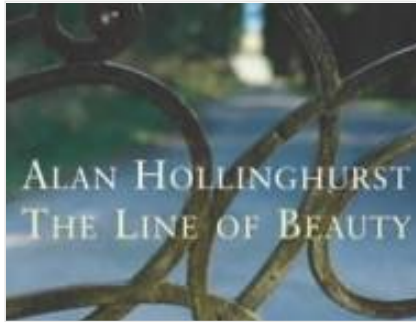
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