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Why #YesAllWomen took off on Twitter

Join the conversation

By **Emanuella Grinberg**, CNN

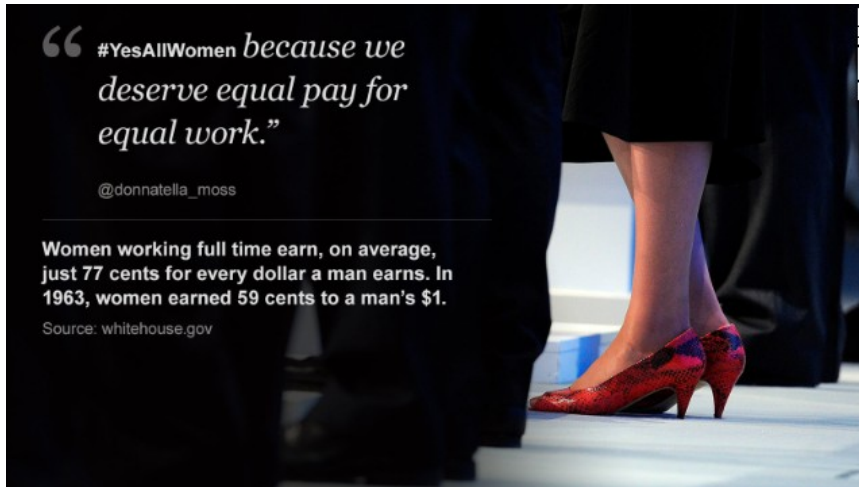
updated 4:10 PM EDT, Tue May 27, 2014



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#YesAllWomen tweets tell a sad story



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Elliot Rodger's misogynistic rants inspired #YesAllWomen Twitter conversation

#YesAllWomen has been trending since Saturday after killing spree in California

People tweet #YesAllWomen to share examples of gender-based harassment

Participants: Campaign drew in outsiders instead of preaching to feminist choir

(CNN) -- No, not all men channel frustration over romantic rejection into a killing spree. But yes, all women experience harassment, discrimination or worse at some point in their lives.

That's the message at the core of an ongoing Twitter conversation that emerged after a [rampage last week](#) that left six students from the University of California, Santa Barbara, dead and wounded 13 others.

Elliot Rodger, who apparently shot and killed himself, left behind a robust digital footprint detailing his plan to "destroy everything I cannot have," blaming the "cruelness of women" for leading to his "day of retribution."

His comments inspired Twitter users to tweet the hashtag [#YesAllWomen](#): They shared examples of what "women must fear" even if "not all men" engage in those behaviors, according to the person believed to have created the hashtag Saturday. The person did not respond to CNN's request for comment.

[#notallmen](#) practice violence against women but [#YesAllWomen](#) live with the threat of male violence. Every. Single. Day. All over the world.

— Soraya Chemaly (@schemaly) May 24, 2014

The hashtag -- a response to the "not all men" defense sometimes used to deflect feminist arguments -- spread quickly on Twitter, zeroing in on the subtle and explicit signals that a woman's worth is based on her availability to men.

By Tuesday morning, #YesAllWomen had been tweeted more than 1

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million times.

Because I now wear shorts under dresses in crowded bars after being groped and even penetrated by unseen hands.
#YesAllWomen

— Laura (@LauraLikesWine) May 25, 2014

Because calling me "Darlin' " in our first business meeting is "okay" because you're from the South. #YesAllWomen

— Amber Naslund (@AmberCadabra) May 25, 2014

#YesAllWomen b/c not returning someone's feelings, or as society calls it putting them in the "friend zone", should not make me feel guilty

— Business Sam (@Sam_Slagle) May 25, 2014

Expanding the conversation

#YesAllWomen is the latest Twitter hashtag to draw attention to violence against women in a global conversation that has spread from social media to college campuses and into the White House.

While most feminist-driven Twitter campaigns preach to the choir, #YesAllWomen has succeeded in drawing the mainstream -- including men -- into the conversation, feminist writer and political analyst Zerlina Maxwell said. More unique is the conversation's focus on misogyny and its negative impact on women and men, Maxwell said, pointing to tweets from men as evidence.

Don't hate the #yesallwomen hashtag. Hate that it has to even exist. Hate the injustice of gender inequality. Hate violence against women.

— Eugene Cho (@EugeneCho) May 26, 2014

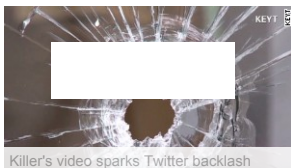
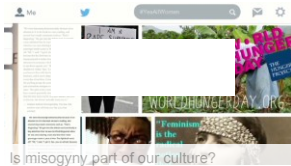
There was backlash to the hashtag's sentiment, too. Some challenged the idea that misogyny was behind Rodger's killing spree, while others argued against the broader idea that most women face gender-based harassment.

But those tweeting #YesAllWomen interpreted backlash as evidence to prove their points.

Sigh. Because I'm still having to use the block button for hateful messages. #YesAllWomen

— Amber Naslund (@AmberCadabra) May 26, 2014

#YesAllWomen's forebears include #everydaysexism, which evolved from the website Everyday Sexism. In 2011, the site launched as a place for people to share stories of gender-based harassment. Today, #everydaysexism exists as a continuous feed of examples of street harassment, and as an occasional rallying cry around petitions. It has been tweeted more than 520,000 times in the past year, according to social Web search engine Topsy.



Earlier this year, Maxwell started #rapecultureiswhen in response to a Time.com op-ed calling for an end to "rape culture hysteria." The hashtag highlighted examples of victim blaming and was tweeted more than 67,000 times.

With more than 1.2 million tweets so far, #YesAllWomen has far outpaced both hashtags, according to Topsy. It has drawn comments from celebrities such as Kerry Washington, Neil Gaiman and Patton Oswalt.

Celebrity boost aside, #YesAllWomen's universal appeal springs from "bottom-up" personal stories instead of a single omniscient voice in an op-ed, Maxwell said.

"It's not somebody on high saying this is a problem in society and everyone should fix it," she said. "It's people talking about real experiences, and each experience is validated by the next."

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