

It's Time To Stop Being Surprised By The Existence Of Violent Women – Here's Why



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Why do we find it harder to accept women's violence? Why do we fixate on it longer and more intensely than male violence? I believe that violent women are important. I also believe that the *visibility* of violent women is important. And this is why.

We're only okay with them as a sexy aesthetic, not in real life

Pop culture is accustomed to seeing violent, sexualised women on our screens. We like our Tarantino-esque, half-naked, dripping-in-blood women with banging bodies. I think of Rihanna's BBHMM music video and how I squealed in sheer delight at its depiction of an unapologetically violent woman. But it's a curated spectacle, not real. In the last few days it's become clear to me that this is how we prefer our violent women: fictionalised. As a society, we're a whole lot less comfortable with them as realities.

Violent women exist in contexts. Violent women, in the world, are anything but glamorised, and their violence does not exist in a silo, or as part of an aesthetic. When women are violent for a cause (whatever the cause), it is treated with disproportionate disdain compared to men. Violence in men is normalised. Brutal women, severe women, abused women, marginalised women, militant women, revolutionary women get a much harder time than men – from their contemporaries, from the media, and from the [justice system](#). Why?

In reality, women are expected to handle hardship with grace

Women are not only expected, but also taught to handle adversity in a dignified way. Handle it with grace. Remain poised. Violence – not only physical violence, but general aggression in our speech, demeanor and appearance – has always been something we've been told to tone down. It's seen as neurotic, hysterical, a passing viciousness, emotional. It's rarely seen as rooted in validity.

I'd like to argue that it's necessary and inevitable to change this norm if we are to grow. While it can be destructive to live and exist in anger, we have to allow for its manifestation and we have to allow for its passing.

When we handle things with grace, we police our behaviour, we police our energy, and this will not diffuse our anger. The landscapes of anger, violence and pain will continue to live on inside us – as they have for centuries particularly in women – because we are not allowed to be demonstrative about our more severe selves. There may be lessons in our 'neuroses', particularly in the ones we so diligently ignore. What could we have learnt from the selves we've denied?

People are porous, and women are people

Collectively, we endure abuse, trauma and traumatic histories, structural oppression, the burden of emotional and domestic labour neatly placed on our shoulders. What did we think would happen with that energy, with that unfairness? Eventually somewhere, the graceful postures would have to drop, the resilience would have to slip, or take on a new form.

Why is it that we expect the poison to always stop at us, be absorbed by us and end there? People are porous. Does it not make sense that the violence that is constantly flung at women might come right through us, and back at you? It makes sense that we have our own violence too.

It's shocking when women commit the same [acts of violence](#) that are routine for men, but why is it somehow worse when we do it? It's judged more harshly because it's rarer and less visible. And yet we have so much more to be angry about, to be violent about.

Keep your double standards away from our legacies

As for the women who use militant language, radicalised women, women who have spoken in violent ways, women who've done violent things, women who were revolutionaries, women who fought for their own lives and the lives of others, women who've endured abuse and oppression, both structural and unique. Women who were systemically undermined, abused and tortured. Women like [Ellen Pakkies](#), [Cyntoia Brown](#) and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Leave them alone.

Keep your double standards away from their lives, and their legacies. And if you're not a woman of colour who has endured violence, have the self-awareness to keep their names out of your mouth, to not speak ill of what you do not and cannot understand. Be thankful that you've never had to fight their fights, confront what they confronted.

Note: this post is an op-ed that aims to critically engage with how violent women and the violence of women is portrayed and talked about.

Marie Claire does not condone acts of violence.

TAGS:

MILITANCY VIOLENCE VIOLENT WOMEN WINNIE MADIKIZELA-MANDELA
