Mollie Tibbits, Ariana Grande and Serena Williams: every woman

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I’ve spent the past few weeks fuming at the world’s treatment of women. I’m mad at the people who believe women and men are equal and that there’s no problem here. Over the last few months, we’ve seen very high profile news stories of women as scapegoats. It is now our time to see these stories, hear these women and react justly.

On July 18, Iowa student Mollie Tibbits was murdered while out for a jog after she denied her attackers’ sexual advances. It’s startling to hear a female runner’s greatest fear come to life. Tibbett’s story is not unique. In the summer of 2016, the murders of three female runners over a period of nine days hit mainstream news. 43 percent of women claim they regularly experience harassment while running in public compared to 4 percent of men, as reported by a study conducted by Runner’s World. The same study found that 30 percent of female runners have been followed while on a run. Women should not have to fear leaving their house to live their lives—nobody should.

I’m a student and a female runner. I don’t remember the last time I completed a run without an unwelcomed catcall or worse, from the opposite gender. Over the summer, a man passed by me over and over again, back and forth, in his car before pulling over in front of me and asking for my number. I hear all the time, ‘you should enjoy the compliment,’ but I think women should not have to subjected to this kind of harassment. It’s terrifying. Jen Kirkman, actress and comedian, explains it best: “Compliments and murder both start with compliments.”

Looking elsewhere, it seems Ariana Grande cannot catch a break. She has been criticized heavily for expressing her sexuality in her music and dress since the beginning of her career. She’s also been incredibly outspoken against sexism aimed at herself and other women in the music and entertainment industry. On Aug. 31 of this year, Grandes’ dress for Aretha Franklin’s funeral was criticized for being too revealing and she was groped by Bishop Charles H. Ellis III on live television.

Maggie Astor, a New York Times reporter remarked on Twitter, “I think every woman can look at Ariana Grande’s face and body language and visceraally feel what she’s feeling. The tension. The nervous laughter. Not wanting to make a scene or make him angry. Every woman knows this feeling. But google her and everyone’s talking about her dress.”

She has silenced body shamers and sexism with every encounter which is why her current social media silence, following the death of her ex-boyfriend Mac Miller, is so startling. Within hours of the announcement of his death, comments on Grande’s Instagram were disabled after a flood of comments poured in blaming her for Miller’s death. It is not a woman’s job to fix someone or stay in a relationship that is not serving them. It was never Grande’s job to cure Miller of the toxicity of addiction and...
she should not be made to stay with him if that addiction or their relationship hurt her. Grande wrote in a tribute post to Miller: “I’m so sorry I couldn’t fix or take your pain away. I really wanted to.” Unfortunately, many women get caught in this expectation to take responsibility for the men around them. We can be here for you, but it is not our job to fix you. I hope for a day when women don’t internalize this responsibility.

Additionally, Serena Williams, tennis superpower and black feminist icon, has faced sexism and racism throughout her entire career. Recently, new mom Williams was banned from wearing a black, full body “catsuit” that helped the circulation in her legs following a complication after giving birth. Williams, who remarked that this uniform made her feel like a “superhero” also needed the full body suit to keep her blood properly circulating. When it was made clear that her suit would not be tolerated on the court, she switched to a tutu piece that also drew criticism. Her body, especially within the context of her race, has been a topic of scrutiny. These criticisms erupted for the first time in 2001 at a tournament in California where fans booed, calling out racial slurs to Williams and sister Venus. Even praise of Williams has traditionally been rooted in racial stereotypes, with her athletic success attributed to her African-American genetics giving her a strong physique. Her body has been masculinized and irrelevantly sexualized by reporters, officials, and other players. Williams, regarded as the most talented female tennis player to ever play, is incredible and will not let this cloud of racism and sexism stop her success.

In the span of two months Mollie Tibbits, Ariana Grande, and Serena Williams have faced the experiences women dread. These public displays of sexism and racism serve as a clear signal: we have a long way to go before there is equality in society.

I don’t know the answer here. I don’t have a thesis statement to tell you how we can move forward and grow through these issues faced by all women. I’m just angry and have a platform. My hope is that you notice these inequities played out on the main stage by Tibbits, Grande and Williams and then speak out when (and I do mean when) you see it happen to anyone else. Stay cognizant of these injustices and stand up for your fellow human beings.
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