The Simple Hell People Give Other People

If Harper Lee had limited her portrayal of prejudice and discrimination merely to the trial of Tom Robinson, a victim of the most virulent form of racial prejudice, ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** would probably be little more than a historical footnote. Wisely, though, Lee manages to tie racial prejudice to the many other forms of prejudice we all face every day of our life.

Remarkably, the novel begins by focusing not on the racial prejudice that dominates much of the story but, instead, on the kind of insidious prejudice endured by those who dare to be different in a small-town neighbourhood. While Scout's early description of Boo seems comical on its face, it takes on very different connotations when we realize that this prejudice reinforces the harsh punishment inflicted on Arthur "Boo" Radley by his domineering father:

> Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions.

Obviously Scout and her older brother Jem, because they are young, are not immune to the kind of ridiculous prejudice that follows those who, for one reason or another, are different from those around them. Jem describes Boo as dining "on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that's why his hands were blood-stained—if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off."

While this kind of prejudice may be more predominant in small town neighbourhoods it is also displayed in our own neighbourhoods toward those who are "different." Thanks to revelations like Miss Maudie's comment that if Boo was not crazy "… he should be by now. The things that happen to people behind closed doors, what secrets---" the reader slowly realizes that Boo has been the victim of child abuse, or at least child neglect.

Because of her prejudice, though, Scout is unable to recognize that Boo expresses his fondness for her and Jem by leaving them gifts:

> Jem let me do the honours: I pulled out two small images carved in soap. One was the figure of a boy, the other wore a crude dress. Before I remembered that there was no such thing as hoodooing, I shrieked and threw them down. Jem snatched them up. "What's the matter with you?" he yelled. He rubbed the figures free of red dust. "These are good," he said. "I've never seen any these good." He held them down to me. They were almost perfect miniatures of two children. The boy had on shorts, and a shock of soapy hair fell to his eyebrows. I looked up at Jem. A point of straight brown hair kicked downwards from his part. I had never noticed it before. Jem looked from the girl-doll to me. The girl-doll wore bangs. So did I. "These are us," he said. "Who did 'em, you reckon?" "Who do we know around here who whittles?" he asked.

and later, when Boo covers her with a blanket during the fire, this simple act of kindness nearly causes Scout to faint

> "Thank who?" I asked. "Boo Radley. You were so busy looking at the fire you didn't know it when he put the blanket around you."
> My stomach turned to water and I nearly threw up when Jem held out the blanket and crept toward me.

It is not only those who are stereotyped who are victims of prejudice; the very ones who are prejudiced also suffer not only because they cannot see the truth but because they are denied the possibility of benefiting from the relationship.

Scout realizes throughout the novel that she, too, is the victim of another form of prejudice, though she is not sophisticated enough at first to realize it is discrimination:

> Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea set, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father's lonely life.

Scout suffers because she is a “tomboy” and does not fit others’ stereotypes of what little Southern girls should act like. However, she does realize the prejudice against women when she goes to Calpurnia’s church and hears the minister’s sermon:

> Again, as I had often met in my own church, I was confronted with the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen.

It seems remarkable that such sexism can pervade the very churches where women seem to be the staunchest supporters. After all, it’s not pure coincidence that every small town seems to need both a church and a bar, now is it?

Of course, the reason these forms of prejudice are often overlooked in this novel is that the racism that dooms Tom Robinson when he tries to help Mayella Ewell is much more dramatic. Though racial discrimination seems most virulent at the Ewell’s level, all levels of Southern society seem infected with this disease. Even Atticus' immediate family is prejudiced:

> Grandma [aunt Alexandra] says it's bad enough he lets you all run wild, but now he's turned out a nigger-lover we'll never be able to walk the streets of Maycomb agin. He's ruinin' the family, that's what he's doin.

Even educated people, or at least people who should be educated, like Scout’s teacher, are prejudiced and totally unaware of it. There is irony, but it is a dark irony when Miss Gates discusses Hitler:

> Then Miss gates said, "That's the difference between America and Germany. We are a democracy and Germany is a dictatorship," she said. "Over here we don't believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced. Pre-judice," she enunciated carefully. "There are no better people in the world than the Jews, and why Hitler doesn't think so is a mystery to me."

Adolphus Raymond, the white aristocrat who pretends to be drunk so that people will overlook the fact that he is living with a black woman, summarizes the effects this prejudice has on the black people of the South:

> Cry about the simple hell people give other people-- without even thinking. Cry about the hell white people give coloured folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too.

For many readers, the most shocking moment in the book comes when they realize that for the townspeople of Maycomb Tom Robinson’s greatest crime, even worse than being caught in the room with a white woman, may well be that he felt sorry for Mayella Ewell:

> "Yes suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em--"
> "You felt sad for her, you felt sorry for her?" Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling.
>
> The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortable in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer. Mr. Gilmer paused a long time to let it sink in.

In Maycomb a black was not allowed to ever feel sorry for a white person because that would suggest that somehow he felt superior to a white.

Atticus Finch seems one of a relatively few white people who are able to see the injustice done to blacks and to realize that there will one day be a terrible price to pay for this injustice:

> As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it – whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash."
>
> Atticus was speaking so quietly his last word crashed on our ears. I looked up, and his face was vehement. "There's nothing more sickening to me than a low-grade white man who'll take advantage of a Negro's ignorance. Don't fool yourselves-it's all adding up and one of these days we're going to pay the bill for it. I hope it's not in your children's time.

If Harper Lee had focused just on Tom Robinson's trial, some readers could simply argue that such discrimination is merely a historical phenomena, that rehashing history unnecessarily stirs up emotions best forgotten.

By combining all of these kinds of discrimination, though, Harper Lee explores the very roots of stereotyping and the discrimination that inevitably results from such stereotyping. No one can deny that such discrimination continues and that we are the poorer because of it.

It is only constant vigilance and, most of all, empathy for our fellow man that can ever overcome this natural, but unfortunate, tendency to misjudge the “other,” those who are different than we are.

Walk a Mile in My Shoes

To Kill a Mockingbird provides a remarkable description of a self-defeating culture frozen in its own stereotypes and prejudice. Maycomb was a “tired old town” precisely because it was dominated by stereotypes and prejudice formed in its early slavery days. Unfortunately, it’s easier to see the reality of such a world than it is to see a way out of it.

The real question is what is needed to break out of this self-defeating vision of the world? What could enable people to deal with others realistically and effectively? There obviously aren’t any easy answers to the question, or the problem would have been solved long ago. However, Atticus’ advice to Scout:

> "First of all," he said, "if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view--"
> "Sir?" "--- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

offers a realistic way to begin solving the problem. If we can truly see things the way other people see things, we will at least begin to understand them, even if we don’t agree with them.

To Kill a Mockingbird follows Atticus’ success in instilling this quality in Jem and Scout. Since the story is told from Scout’s viewpoint, we see the development most clearly in her. After Jem returns to the Radley house to retrieve his pants and finds them awaiting him neatly folded, Scout thinks:

> Jem stayed moody and silent for a week. As Atticus had once advised me to do, I tried to climb into Jem’s skin and walk around in it: if I had gone alone to the Radley Place at two in the morning, my funeral would have been held the next afternoon. So I left Jem alone and tried not to bother him.

Although she isn’t truly able to see what happened from Jem’s viewpoint, she does make the effort to do so, and just that effort helps her to cope with the problem.

In one of the crucial scenes in the story when Atticus is defending Tom Robinson who is locked in the jail from the lynch mob, it is Scout’s comments that save the night, as Atticus later explains:

> That proves something—that a gang of wild animals can be stopped, simply because they’re still human. Hmp, maybe we need a police force of children…you children last night made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute. That was enough.

By reminding Walter Cunningham that she knows his son and that Mr. Cunningham had been helped by Atticus, Scout managed to break up a lynch mob, something that no amount of threats had been able to do.

One of the most telling scenes in Tom Robinson’s trial comes when he admits that he felt empathy for Mayella because she tried to escape the poverty of the family:

> "Yes suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em--"
> "You felt sad for her, you felt sorry for her?" Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling. The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortable in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer. Mr. Gilmer paused a long time to let it sink in.

Ironically, it is this very empathy for another human being that most seems to offend the townspeople, for they see it as “pity,” which is often taken as a way of “looking down” on another. Although it may offend the townspeople, readers see it as a clear indication that he is not guilty, that he is being betrayed by Mayella because she is afraid of her father and her own mistake in going against the customs of Maycomb.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of the power of empathy comes when Atticus refuses to retaliate when Bob Ewell spits in his face:

> Jem see if you can stand in Bob Ewell's shoes a minute. I destroyed his last shred of credibility at that trial, if he had any to begin with. The man had to have some kind of comeback, his kind always does. So if spitting in my face and threatening me saved Mayella Ewell one extra beating, that's something I'll gladly take. He had to take it out on somebody and I'd rather it be me than that houseful of children out there. You understand?

Personally, I'll be damned if I would put up with this from anyone, but I can still admire Atticus' self-restraint and wisdom.

Jem, being the oldest of the two children seems to empathize with others before Scout does. He begins to understand why Boo avoids people after enduring the injustice of Tom Robinson's trial:

> "... If there's just one kind of folks, why can't they get along with each other? If they're all alike, why do they go out of their way to despise each other? Scout, I think I'm beginning to understand something. I think I'm beginning to understand why Boo Radley's stayed shut up in the house all this time... it's because he wants to stay inside."

Later, when Scout is about to crush a "rolly-poly," Jem shows that his empathy goes beyond Tom Robinson, beyond even humans, when he tells Scout not to crush the insects "because they don't bother you."

Even before Arthur Radley saves Jem and Scout, Scout is beginning to feel guilty about the way the children treated Boo Radley in past summers:

> I sometimes felt a twinge of remorse, when passing by the old place, at ever having taken part in what must have been sheer torment to Arthur Radley—what reasonable recluse wants children peeping in through his shutters, delivering greetings at the end of a fishing pole, wandering in his collards at night.

Immediately after her rescue she seems to be empathizing with Boo without even thinking about it:

Feeling slightly unreal, I led him to the chair farthest from Atticus and Mr. Tate. It was in a deep shadow. Boo would feel more comfortable in the dark.

And at the end of the story when she walks Boo back to his house, she comments:

> Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.

With this insight Scout, too, finally "comes of age," gains the critical insight of human nature that Atticus has been trying to teach her throughout the story. On the way home she thinks to herself, "I thought Jem and I would get grown but there wasn't much else for us to learn."

If we could get more people to empathize with their fellow man, we might have a chance of beginning to solve the problems that face the world. We could eliminate hate groups that would turn us against each other. We might even begin to see the world in a different light. We might find that we have more in common with other nations and other people than we think we do. We might even see that their problems are our problems.

As ex-English teacher, let me suggest one possible way of encouraging empathy in people is to get them to read more books, books that get inside the head of a greater variety of people. If books allow us to do anything, they allow us to see the world from someone else's viewpoint. It's no wonder so many groups are afraid of books; books threaten their narrow view of the world by exposing readers to the views of others.

As a blogger I might even suggest that the internet offers the same kind of opportunities, perhaps even greater opportunities because it is easy to see the world through the eyes of real people, not just characters in a book. The net is a truly world-wide phenomena.

It's a Sin to Kill a Mockingbird

One of the main goals of stereotyping, and prejudice, seems to be to turn other people into outsiders, at best, objects, at worst: those people aren't human; they don't have feelings like we do. If we can convince ourselves, or others, of this, then we can use these "others" as we want without feeling guilt.

For this reason, empathy seems to lie at the very heart of conscience. We worry about what happens to others to the extent that we are able to identify with them. Once we identify with other people and feel the way they feel, it's impossible to treat them differently than we would want to be treated.

At its simplest level, empathy shows us it is wrong to hurt someone who is trying to help us, trying to make our lives better. Atticus strives to teach that to Jem and Scout throughout the novel, beginning with this advice when they receive guns at Christmas:

> Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."
>
> That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it.
>
> "Your father's right," she said. "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

While I personally wouldn't want my children shooting any living thing, it would be hard to find anyone who would disagree with Atticus' idea. Mockingbirds don't do any harm; all they do is sing beautiful songs that make our lives richer. Few would disagree that it is a "sin" to kill one.
It doesn't take much to extend this idea to the concept that it is a sin to hurt someone who is doing something to help us. After all, if we are helping someone we would certainly expect them to help us, too, or, at the very least, expect them to like us.

If we accept this proposition, the greatest sin in the story was obviously the conviction and killing of Tom Robinson. All Tom Robinson was guilty of was making the mistake of feeling sorry for a white girl and trying to make her life a little easier. Despite the jury's miscarriage of justice, in their heart of hearts the people of Maycomb must have known that it was a sin to sentence Tom Robinson to death:

> Mr. Underwood didn't talk about miscarriages of justice, he was writing so children could understand. Mr. Underwood simply figured it was a sin to kill cripples, be they stand, sitting, or escaping. He likened Tom's death to the senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children, and Maycomb thought he was trying to write an editorial poetical enough to be reprinted in The Montgomery Advertiser.

The trial is so blatantly unjust that the three children in the story are devastated by the decision. Dill immediately breaks down into tears. Jem becomes angry, sullen, and wants to be left alone, finally realizing how Arthur Radley must feel. Scout searches desperately for some rationale for the decision, but she too realizes in the end what an injustice has been done.

It's not really until the end of the novel that Scout is really able to apply this sense of sin to life itself. Only after Boo saves the children does Scout fully understand why it's a sin to hurt someone who is dong nothing but good. Sheriff Tate tries to convince Atticus that it would be wrong to put Arthur Radley on trial for killing Bob Ewell even though he knows he would never be convicted:

> "To my way of thinkin', Mr. Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great service an' draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight-to me, that's a sin. It's a sin and I'm not about to have it on my head. If it was any other man it'd be different. But not this man, Mr. Finch."

Atticus obviously agrees with Sheriff Tate but doesn't want his children to think that he doesn't live his life by his conscience, that he tells his children one thing but does something different when it's convenient. After Scout's reply:

> "Scout," he said, "Mr. Ewell fell on his knife. Can you possibly understand?" Atticus looked like he needed cheering up. I ran to him and hugged him and kissed him with all my might.
> "Yes, sir, I understand," I reassured him.
> "Mr Tate was right."
> Atticus disengaged himself and looked at me. "What do you mean?"
> "Well, it'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?"

We realize that she has, indeed, grown up and has developed a conscience. She understands the true meaning of justice because she has empathy for Boo as she has shown by seating him in the dark and, later, by walking him home.

If a child is capable of this much insight, why were so many adults incapable of it?

The Courage to Live Your Conscience

Sometimes just having a conscience isn't enough. Sometimes you have to do more than merely feel bad because you know something is wrong. Sometimes you actually have to stand up for what you believe in or, as Mark Twain notes in Huckelberry Finn, "… it don't make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him anyway."

Of course, Scout spends most of the novel just developing a conscience. It's only at the end when she feels bad that she hadn't ever returned the small gifts that Arthur Radley had left for her and Jem that she is actually able to feel badly about her actions.

In this sense, Atticus is very different than anyone else in the novel. He has the courage to live up to his convictions and refuses to give in to public will and go along with the majority:

> "...This case, Tom Robinson's case, is something that goes to the essence of a man's conscience -- Scout, I couldn't go to church and worship God if I didn't try to help that man."
> "Atticus, you must be wrong...."
> "How's that?"
> "Well, most folks seem to think they're right and you're wrong..."
> "They're certainly entitled to think that, and they're entitled to full respect for their opinions," said Atticus, "but before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience."

Sounding an awful lot like Thoreau in "Civil Disobedience" or Mark Twain in Huckleberry Finn, Atticus puts personal conscience over majority rule. Clearly without such a belief society would never change, because the majority of the people generally believe what society tells them is right. The only way to break out of that mold is for the individual to trust his own beliefs and insights.

If you don't want your conscience eating away at you and undermining your moral authority, you have to live by its dictates:

> "If you shouldn't be defedin' him, then why are you doin' it?"
> "For a number of reasons," said Atticus. "The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again."

In the end, our moral authority comes not only from our conscience but from our actions. If we believe something but don't stand up for it, then we are no better than those who hold mistaken beliefs, or those who Joseph Heller indicts when he says, "When I look up, I see people cashing in. I don't see heaven or saints or angels. I see people cashing in on every decent moral impulse and every human tragedy."

Considering who he is and what he believes, Atticus could not be a lawyer unless he believed in the justice system as he states in his closing summary in Tom Robinson's trial:

> "I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and in the jury system--that is no ideal to me, it is a living, working reality. Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on this jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family..."

The irony, of course, is that he knows very well this is not going to happen. He's already told Scout that he is not going to win this case. Paradoxically, he must believe it in order to

continue practicing law; yet he knows it is not true precisely because he does practice law, the ultimate Catch-22 for someone with integrity who wants to pursue a legal career.

To take a case like Tom Robinson's and prosecute it as an honourable man requires a special kind of courage, the kind of courage that Atticus tries to teach his children when he sends them to read to Mrs. Dubose:

> "...I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won, all ninety-eight pounds of her. According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew."

This is precisely the same kind of courage that Atticus demonstrates in defending Tom Robinson. He says as much when he tells Scout:

> "Atticus, are we going to win it?"
> "No, honey."
> "Then, why-"
> "Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win," Atticus said.

If we all gave up trying to change the world when we knew we were going to lose the battle, we would still be in the dark ages where we stoned people to death for cheating on their husband or where we let people abuse their children because it is "none of our business" and parents "have the right to raise their children anyway they want." [Oops, my bad, that is the kind of world we still live in, isn't it?]

Thank goodness there are people out there who do have the courage to speak out against injustice, even if that injustice is cloaked in the power of giant corporations or the power of the government.

Atticus may put his faith in the courts, but I, like Harper Lee, prefer to put my faith in the First Amendment. As long as we have the ability to challenge the government and those running it, we have the chance to change it. Most of us are going to lose our battles, but in the long run those who justly challenge the system seem to prevail.

At its best, democracy provides the means to change those things that are unjust – it just doesn't seem like it at times.

Women, Writing and Feminism: To Kill a Mockingbird

by Nicola Heaps

To Kill a Mockingbird was published in 1960 and is Nelle Harper Lee's only novel to date. She continued working on the manuscript for three years after it was initially rejected by her publishers who saw it as a string of short stories rather than a novel. Although To Kill a Mockingbird is a novel widely studied in schools, and one which has been made into a film, very little is written about it or its author. It seems to be considered as a novel for young adults despite the fact that beneath the humour of the childish vision, lies a critique of society dealing with class, sex and race.

Clearly, racial prejudice is the dominant theme of the novel but the role of women and especially Harper Lee's perception of white middle class women is an interesting area and one which I should like to address.

In chapter 24, Scout declares, "I wondered at the world of women." This comment comes after the trial and unfair conviction of Tom Robinson, when the rich white ladies of Maycomb are having a charity meeting during which actual Christian charity is badly lacking. The ladies are groomed for the occasion in a strictly specific way that both impresses and terrifies the young Scout. As they cruelly discuss their ungrateful poor, black servants, who apparently have the audacity to mourn Tom's fate, they nibble daintily and talk of sending funds abroad when the needy such as the Ewells and the Robinsons, are on their very doorstep. The hypocrisy of such stereotyped women is clearly portrayed together with their constructed feminine airs of grace, charity and beauty.

Aunt Alexandra is the epitome of these hypocritical ladies and in chapter 13, Scout describes her as "One of the last of her kind. She had river boat, boarding school manners, let any moral come along and she would uphold it; she was born in the objective case; she was an incurable gossip."

The hypocrisy of the so-called privileged white Christian woman is exposed through the eyes of the child narrator, Scout. In chapter 24, she explains why she prefers men.

Although often we see how men who dominate and oppress women, in To Kill a Mockingbird, we are presented with the idea of women as oppressing and policing each other, just as with the women at the beginning of Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. These women do have patriarchal values and they believe unquestioningly in them and enforce them through their morals and prejudices of class and race.

Helen Robinson and Mayella Ewell are each victims of these oppressive women. Helen Robinson is strangely excluded and condemned because her husband is supposed to have raped a white woman. As a result nobody will employ her and it is only through the charity of her fellow poor black neighbours that she and her children can survive. The white women prefer to send their charity to black people abroad. At the tea party, Mrs Merriweather seems to blame Helen as she declares that she is willing to forgive her in true Christian spirit. But what is Helen supposed to

have done? The crime in Mrs Merriweather's eyes is that she is black and has caused a fuss in society instead of playing the silent servant role.

Mayella Ewell is not condemned by these women but instead ignored. She is given no help or education but lives on the margins of society; she cannot be employed because she is white but she cannot be educated because she is poor. As a result, Mayella leads a lonely life; white people are too good to be her friends, black people considered beneath her. Unless she follows the tragic example of Mr Link Deas who has to pretend that he is drunk in order to live with black people so that he can win sympathy rather than condemnation.

Throughout the novel, we see white women as the gossiping ruling group who determine who is or is not acceptable in society. Harper Lee is quite damning in her presentation of these women but nevertheless makes a good example of how women are not always oppressed victims in society but can have power and use in a way which is detrimental both to other women and other social groups.

To Kill a Mockingbird explains its message through its title. Atticus Finch says that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird because they do nothing wrong and have only innocent intentions. Though Tom Robinson is the chief candidate for this metaphor of a mockingbird, other people, such as Boo Radley, Helen and Mayella also fit the description and in some cases, it is the middle-class, white women who fire the gun.