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Hannah Micciolo

hmicciolo@arcadia.edu

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Recommended Citation

Micciolo, Hannah, "The Rise of Femicide & Digital Activism" (2021). *Faculty Curated Undergraduate Works*. 72.

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The Rise of Femicide & Digital Activism

Hannah Micciolo

Arcadia University

FY 103: Gender Inequity & Intersectionality

Dr. Jeanne Buckley

November 18, 2021

Abstract

Women's voices are often silenced as compared to men, especially when it comes to speaking out against the injustice women have faced. In Mexico, women had been enduring femicide for decades, oftentimes being silenced and overshadowed by the government's narrative. In this new wave of activism called digital activism, people are now using social media to inform their audience about specific issues. Florence Pugh is one of these people. Pugh uses digital activism to spread awareness for Femicide in Mexico and encourage her audience to also speak up on the issue in a time where women's voices are silenced.

Keywords: Femicide, Florence Pugh, Digital Activism, powerful women

The Rise of Femicide & Digital Activism

History has shown that women's voices have continuously been silenced and ignored, all while the murdering of women continues to increase. The murders have escalated so much that the UNODC created a term for the killing of women based on their gender, what we now call femicide. With women's voices often being silenced, it is important for women who have that privilege to speak out about the violence against women.

For this research paper, I chose Florence Pugh, not only because of her amazing acting skills but also because she knows how to use her platform to talk about issues that are usually overlooked. Although Pugh is only a rising star, she has used her growing platform to inform her audience about the violence against women, specifically the femicide in Mexico. In order to inform her audience of the femicide in Mexico, she uses digital activism, the use of the internet to spread information and inform about a campaign. Pugh gives a platform to the women in Mexico whose voices have been silenced by the government and the people around them. I think it is extremely important to recognize and appreciate this new wave of activism called digital activism, that Pugh uses. By posting about the violence against women on social media, Pugh is not only informing her audience of the previously ignored truth but also encouraging her audience to do the same.

What is a Femicide?

Before I can explain why Pugh's activism is so important, I must first explain what she is spreading awareness about. The term 'femicide' was coined by Diana E.H. Russell, a feminist writer and activist, in 1976. Her original definition of femicide was an "act motivated by a patriarchal and misogynist culture" (Weil, 2016), although that definition was often rewritten. For years, the term 'femicide' went without an official definition until 2014 during The General

Assembly of the UNODC. After deliberating between 11 different definitions, the UNODC came up with its official definition of the term. According to the UNODC, femicide is the “gender-related killing of women and girls” (Weil, 2016). This includes ‘honor’ femicides, dowry marriage femicides, sex selection before birth, and other violence resulting in the death of women.

However, femicide is not as well known as other types of killings. In Shalva Weil’s “Making Femicide Visible”, Weil explains that there are 7 common ‘reasons’ people do not know about femicides. Reason three, however, seems to be the most likely reason, saying, “Femicide pertains to women, and the killing of women and girls because of their gender” (Weil, 2016). As Weil explained earlier, other gruesome and uncomfortable topics have been discussed in the sociology field, such as homicide and genocide. The only thing that those topics do not have in common with femicide is that femicide directly relates to women and girls, while those topics do not. Meaning, one of the biggest reasons femicide is not discussed in-depth as it should be is because it only directly affects women. Because of this, women’s voices on the matter are often silenced, especially the women going through femicide in their countries. The most notable example of a current femicide is the femicide going on in Mexico, which I will go into further detail about.

Silencing of Women

The femicide in Mexico is a prime example of silencing women’s voices. The femicide first began in 1993 in Ciudad Juarez, where the issue primarily still occurs. It began when a group of women had noticed that dozens of women had been murdered and dumped around the city all year long. However, the police force seemed incompetent in finding why these murders

were occurring. This resulted in women becoming activists against femicide and the government for its incompetence in putting an end to the femicide.

However, the subject remained overlooked due to the rise in drug violence. As stated in “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. border”, the government seemed to push the narrative that the murder of the women was related to drug violence and not femicide. The narrative following drug violence in Mexico had become a huge story and “Portrayals of the cartels as run by rational businessmen—circulated through the news media, scholarly accounts, the film industry, and other venues—remained largely uncontested until the mid-2000s”. Meanwhile, the women in Mexico remained fighting for their voices. Wright stated, “As the violence worsens, civil and human rights activists, many of them from antifemicide organizations, have challenged the government’s story of rational drug violence with the narrative of impunity.” However, because there was already so much press and attention on the drug violence narrative, the activists were mainly ignored. The violence against women continued for decades and is still currently a big issue, especially in Ciudad Juarez. Yet, women’s voices still continue to be silenced.

The Rise of Digital Activism

Activism, according to Merriam-Webster is the “doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue”. Usually, activism occurs in the form of protests and petitions. However, a new form of activism has now arisen called digital activism. According to “Digital activism decoded the new mechanics of change”, digital activism is “the use of digital technology in campaigning” (Joyce, 2010). This includes using the internet, mobile phones, or other offline devices to campaign for a specific cause.

The way digital activism is primarily used is through sharing posts or stories of information on social media apps for the public to see. Joyce goes on to explain that “the digital revolution has provided us with an expansive set of tools for pursuing activist campaigns” (Joyce, 2010). This allows for more visibility on the topics and informs people who may not currently be aware of a certain issue. People such as Florence Pugh have used digital activism to inform their audience about the current femicide going on in Mexico and encourage their followers to speak up on the issue as well.

Who is Florence Pugh?

Florence Pugh is an English actress, most known for her roles in the 2019 version of “Little Women” and “Midsommar”. She was born on January 3rd, 1996, in Oxford, England, where her father owned a restaurant and her mother was a dance instructor. Due to Pugh’s recurring health issues, the family moved to Spain for three years, which turned out to be Tracheomalacia, a rare condition where the cartilage in the trachea is too weak. This led to Pugh spending a majority of her time in the hospital as a child. Though Pugh states there weren’t serious lasting effects besides its effects on her voice, saying, ““It’s the reason I have a deep voice and why I sound like a goose when I laugh,”” in an interview with The Times.

As a child, Pugh also loved the arts. She used to record covers and play guitar on YouTube under the name, “Flossie Rose”. Pugh is not the only one in her family that loved the stage; both her older siblings are also actors. Her brother, Toby Sebastian played Prince Trystane Martell on "Game of Thrones" and her sister, Arabella Gibbins is both an actress and a vocal coach. Pugh followed in her siblings’ footsteps with her breakout role in “The Falling” and also played the leading role in “Lady Macbeth” in 2016. However, Pugh’s rise to fame did not come until 2019.

Pugh is often described as a versatile actress, being able to play multiple complex characters thoroughly. Greta Gerwig, an American actress and filmmaker, directed Pugh for the 2019 version of “Little Women”, where Gerwig attempted to change the narrative about Pugh’s character, Amy. When asked by the New York Times why she was so insistent on Pugh playing the role, Gerwig stated, ““I knew there was no other person who could do it but Florence. She has movie star written all over her, but she’s also a character actor, which is the best kind of movie star,””(Ugwu, 2020). A character actor is an actor who may mainly play supporting roles and is able to create abstract and eccentric characters.

Using Her Voice for Good

Pugh is not only a spectacular actress, but she is also an activist for women’s rights. While Pugh often posts resources on how to stop the violence against women, her main activism is her digital activism for femicide in Mexico. Her digital activism consists of posting information about both what femicide is and how the women in Mexico are suffering from it. Aside from posting information about femicide in Mexico, Pugh has also dedicated her time to sharing resources such as safety apps and first-hand experiences from the women in Mexico.

The reason Pugh’s activism is so important is that not only is she informing her now 5.4 million followers on Instagram about the femicide, but she is also encouraging her followers to “Make some Noise.” According to Impact Magazine, the University of Nottingham’s school newspaper, Pugh is “ one example of a celebrity advocate who raises awareness about the treatment of women in Mexico. Her story reels and posts provide valuable information to her [then] 2.2 million [followers] on the crisis but also share the words, stories, and voices of Mexican women who have suffered at the hands of their society,”(Sarama, 2021). And although

Pugh is only a growing actress, she makes sure to use her platform to stand up for what she believes, specifically helping in stopping the silencing of women going through femicide.

It is crucial for celebrities that have big platforms like Pugh's to speak out against the issues they believe in because it not only informs their large audience of that issue but also sets an example for their audience. Pugh not only uses her own voice and platform to speak up but in her posts, she also encourages her followers to continue the discussion in the comments and on their own platforms. It is especially crucial because when it comes to femicides, women's voices have been silenced time and time again. Not only is Pugh giving her platform to the women in Mexico, but she is also encouraging young girls to speak up and use their voices even if they are being silenced by their government.

In Perspective

Our class focuses on the constant discrimination of women and how women have had to overcome these discriminations and use their voices. In class, we often examine strong women and their achievements. I feel as though the femicide going on in Mexico and Florence Pugh embodies our class's beliefs of women using their voices against discrimination.

The issue in Mexico relates back to *Women in Power* by Mary Beard. In the book we read for class, women were often silenced and not allowed to speak, especially for their own beliefs. The women in Mexico have been facing mass femicide for years and yet most of the world has not heard of this tragedy. As stated in Shalva Weil's "Making Femicide Visible", one of the main reasons femicide is not widely recognized has to do with the idea that the victims are women. And even as the women attempt to speak up, they are often silenced by the men. As stated in "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. border", the government attempted to cover up the femicide going on by using the surging

amount of drug-related violence and claiming that the women's deaths were tied to drug-related issues. Because of this, the media pushed out the idea that Mexico is having a drug-related problem and not a femicide-related problem, once again silencing the voices of the women who were trying to speak up.

Florence Pugh, however, was not one of the people who sat back and believed the lies the Mexican government was telling. Although Pugh was an up-and-coming movie star, she used her new platform to speak out against the Mexican government. Pugh's actions embodied the other women's courage we had talked about in class, as she had taken a risk and used her platform to stand up for women's rights. Pugh not only spoke out against the violence of women, but she also encouraged her audience to do the same and therefore made a change for the better. I believe that both the femicide in Mexico and Florence Pugh's activism directly relate to what we have talked about in class all semester. Pugh used her voice when women were continuously being silent and therefore is a strong woman.

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