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The Effect of Rape Stories on Survivors: Listening to Other Voices

by Kevin Stoner, Journalism, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Introduction

With a reported rate four times that of West Germany and 13 times that of the United Kingdom (Gelman, 1990), rape in the United States is clearly a societal problem of immense proportion and impact. By even the most conservative estimates, more than 82,000 women report being raped each year. Using other figures, the number might increase tenfold, with at least one rape occurring every minute. Yet the role newspapers play in this social dynamic is far from clear. Academic research on agenda-setting and crime has produced mixed results, and the professional and legal debates have taken on the aura of a medieval joust in which each side of the "Use her name, Don't use her name" debate trots out their rape survivor/champion to do battle on behalf of the respective newspaper's or lawyer's position.

It is the purpose of this study to systematically examine the effect of rape stories on survivors, with a goal of using the insight of this particular group to help develop models for reporting, which might then be incorporated into the daily news routine of newspapers.

Literature Review

Crime Coverage

As in any social issue, the media play a role in the presentation of the phenomenon and hence in the public discourse about the issue (Tuchman, 1978; McCombs, 1972; Graber, 1988). Research regarding crime and the media is neither new nor uncommon (Davis, 1952; Einsiedel, 1984; Sheley, 1981; Wolf, 1987; and Graber, 1980). However, research regarding rape and the media is somewhat scarce and has tended to focus in two areas: content analysis of news stories (Heath, 1981; Protess, 1984) and anecdotal debate in the trade magazines over naming the rape survivor (Clay, 1983; "Victims Names...", 1983; "High Court Backs...", 1975; "First Amendment Upheld...", 1989; "Tell Us...", 1990). While concern for the rape survivor is implicit in the academic research and explicit in the professional debate, research focusing on the topic of that concern is lacking. Content analysis by Heath (1981) is useful in detailing the parameters of media concern and the quasi-experimental design of Protess (1984) raised unnerving points about agenda setting, but neither addresses the impact on those most personally affected by the crime. Anecdotal debates in the lay press and the trades, while useful in raising journalistic consciousness, provide only personal anecdotes to support arguments for and against including personal details in rape stories ("Rape Victim Steps Forward...", 1990; "Tell Us...", 1990).

Crime News and Media Distortion

In an attempt to systematize the research in this area, it is useful to begin with a discussion of distortion. Two clear patterns emerge from the literature: 1) Portrayal of crime bears little resemblance to official records; 2) Public perceptions of crime and of those involved in crimes, are much closer to those of the media than to official reports. Beginning with Davis (1952), evidence has continued to mount that media presentation of certain types of crime has little correlation with official crime statistics, and perhaps more disturbingly, public perception seems more in line with media presentation than official reports. Jones (1976) found newspapers in St. Louis gives crimes against persons 35 times the attention crimes against property received and that murder received 90 times the coverage of more mundane criminal activity. Graber (1980) found much the same thing when she examined Chicago newspapers, discovering...
that murder made up one percent of recorded crimes but accounted for 30 percent of crime stories published. More recently, findings by Sheley (1981) indicated that while rape constituted 0.6 percent of the crimes reported, it constituted six percent of the coverage in a New Orleans newspaper. Fedler (1982) found similar conditions in Orlando, FL newspapers, and Autunes (1977) reported consistent findings in Houston, TX. Of particular concern is media reinforcement of myths or stereotypes regarding relative danger to the community and perceptions of victims and suspects (Demers, 1983). In some cases, media portrayal seemed to fit official statements. Sheley found the common offender for robbery, rape and homicide as portrayed by the media to be a young, black male. This portrayal squared with police figures. But while Fedler (1982) found no evidence of racial bias in crime reporting, Fishman (1985) found direct evidence of sex-based bias in crime stories. In short, the literature is supportive of Sheley's contention: "...It seems that images of crimes which reach the public through the print media are grossly distorted." (1981: 493).

Rape and Media Distortion

Perhaps nowhere, with the possible exception of homicide, is a crime so distorted by media portrayal as is rape. Heath (1981) found media distortion in frequency of rape as opposed to homicide, attempted rapes as opposed to completed rapes, age of survivor, time of day of attack and number of details. Further, the study found an almost complete lack of what Lemert (1983) called "mobilizing information," which would have helped put the crime in a social perspective. Disconcertingly, Heath points out newspapers' preference for what might be called the "model" rape, in which a stranger attacks an adult woman who is subsequently seriously physically injured in the attack. Though each of these stereotypes has been found to be unsupported in repeated studies (Winkel, 1984; Becker, 1983; Kanin, 1984; Russell, 1982; Galvin, 1985; Ledray, 1986), they are propagated in the media. Disturbingly, the type of rape found to have been deemed newsworthy is extremely close to a rape paradigm that supports prevailing public attitudes toward the crime (Williams, 1984). Further, Lizotte (1985) worries that survivors, fearing they will not be believed because their attack does not fit societal stereotypes, do not report the attack, leading to a minimalization of public awareness of rape as a serious social problem. If this is true, then Protess' findings that though the agenda-setting effect of rape stories on the general public to be negligible, there is a much stronger affect on policy makers and on newspapers, become very important. Victimology literature is clear that survivors report rapes which follow the ideal model in which the survivor is injured, attacked by a stranger and a weapon is used. Lizotte said (1985:185), "Factors that make a strong case for prosecution are more powerful predictors of reporting rape that reporting assault."

Professional Debate

The evidence of media perpetuation of incorrect stereotype and outright myth is compounded by the media debate that generally revolves around decisions as to what information to include in a story. There are those who suggest names of survivors should not be included in stories, and that to do so subjects the survivor to additional pain, but who think additional mobilizing information should be included (Heath, 1981). Such persons are opposed by those who cite the public's right to know (Clay, 1983) and the need to demythologize the crime (Tell Us..., 1990). Victimology literature indirectly addresses this line of thinking, stating repeatedly that rape is unique among crimes and cannot be considered in the same light as, say, robbery (Kanin, 1984; Williams; 1884; Russell, 1982). In general, newspapers seem to tacitly accept the position as evidenced by a general reluctance to divulge the name or address of rape survivors, with Wolf (1987), finding 90 percent of her respondents following this policy.

Impact of Rape on the Survivor

Though the media effect of rape stories on survivors is largely anecdotal, with the exception of Halleck (1965) who found fear of newspaper publicity one of
the reason survivors give for not reporting the crime, the effect of the attack on the survivor is well documented and can shed light on journalistic practice. Foremost among the survivor’s concerns are reassertion of control and privacy. Overwhelmingly, survivors report intense feelings of fear and shock (Katz, 1979). Further, the aftereffects might be best described as falling into a pattern of perceived helplessness, i.e., fear of men, feeling unsafe in the home, fear of everyone, fear of sleeping in the dark and need to express anger (Ledray, 1986). The prescription is consistent: Allow the survivor to control the environment to every degree possible, particularly in regard to decisions regarding the rape. This need to control seems to be an all-important ingredient in the healing process (Dowdeswell, 1986) and so has particular meaning for the press. Counseling literature is consistent in its advice to those who come into contact with the rape survivor: Allow the person to make as many decisions as possible, particularly with regard to the survivor’s own actions (McEvoy, 1987). Any action, however well-meaning, that takes away the survivor’s ability to make decisions and control is regarded as a negative. Equally crucial in an understanding of the rape is a cognizance of the emotional turmoil regarding the actual attack. As Ledray and Katz point out, feelings of inferiority, stupidity, carelessness and partial responsibility for the attack are common. This is interesting because according to Lizotte (1985), the less the attack fits the rape "model," the more responsibility the survivor often feels and the less apt she is to prosecute. Society, too, has a preference for the model rape, finding it more credible than the date or acquaintance rape (Williams, 1984; Bridges, 1989). Heath has clearly demonstrated newspapers’ preference for this type of story. This type of "secondary victimization" has great pertinence for the media and spawns the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses

The literature review suggests that media accounts of rape contain multiple distortions of the rape phenomena and that survivors would be aware of the distortions based on personal experience. Therefore, the following hypotheses are offered:

1 - Survivors will make a statistically significant distinction between the believability of general news stories and that of rape stories.

2 - Survivors will assert the privacy rights of the survivor over the right of the public to know of an occurrence.

3 - Survivors will not support the inclusion of details of the attack in the story.

4 - Survivors will support the inclusion of mobilizing information in the story.

5 - Those survivors whose assault was reported in a newspaper will have a different view of acceptable media coverage than those whose attack was not reported.

6 - Those survivors who reported their assault to the police will have a different view of acceptable media coverage than those whose attack was not reported.

Methodology

Survey Tool

Data were gathered from surveys presented to rape survivors from several locations in Ohio during 1990 and 1991. This was accomplished with the aid of numerous rape-crisis counselors in the area. The underreporting of rape was brought home in this study and is evidenced in the difficulty of obtaining a large n for the survey. The research tool examined the survivors’ attitudes toward the media in general and stories about sexual assault in particular. It included questions regarding what details should be included in rape stories, specifically, whether the survivor or the attacker should be identified and described, whether information regarding helping services should be included and questions regarding survivor perceptions about the purpose of rape stories. The research tool also asked demographic questions.
Results

Demographics

The mean age of respondents was 29, and 88 percent of the respondents were under the age of 40. More than 92 percent of the respondents were female. The mean level of education was slightly less than a baccalaureate degree, and 54.55 percent of the respondents were either in college or had an undergraduate degree. Slightly more than 25 percent had at least a college degree. The mean assault date was 1980, with a range from 1953 to 1991. More than 31 percent of the assaults occurred after 1988. Seventy-two percent of the respondents were assaulted by an acquaintance. Slightly more than 31 percent reported the assault to the police and slightly more than 18 percent saw the assault reported in a newspaper. Slightly more than one-quarter (27.27 percent) of the respondents reported being physically assaulted in addition to the sexual assault.

Hypotheses

In general, respondents did not distinguish between the overall fairness of news stories and of stories about sexual assault. See Chart 1.

CHART 1 - Survivor Attitudes Toward Media

However, while survivors overall indicated they believed what they read in the newspaper, they were much more ambivalent about whether stories in general or stories about sexual assault were fair. Survivors agreed stories about rape were necessary, but gave newspapers only an average grade when asked if papers do a good job of covering sexual assault. Respondents gave similar average marks when asked if rape stories were free of unnecessary details and sensationalism.

Respondents did not feel stories about rape were any less fair than stories in general, but they evidenced significant concerns about the effect of such stories. Though they felt strongly that such stories were necessary, and had a relatively high mean when asked if every rape should be reported, the overall sense of the data was that such stories are a mixed blessing. Respondents indicated a belief the media includes details of rape in order to sell newspapers and that the more violent the rape, the more apt a newspaper is to print an account. Further, they agreed with a statement suggesting that many rapes reported to the police are not reported in newspapers. Clearly, though survivors believed the public had a right to know a rape had occurred, this right could be overridden if the story invaded the privacy of the survivor.

Particularly, they reported perceptions that fear of publicity kept survivors from reporting rapes to the police, that both the public and the media blame survivors and that stories traumatize the survivor and add to the survivor’s burden by adding to fears that others will be able to identify her or him. Given these data, Hypothesis One is not supported, but data suggest survivors are skeptical of both media motives for reporting on rape and of the effect of those stories.

With regard to Hypotheses Two, the data clearly show survivors feel the privacy of the survivor is paramount to the public’s right to know an attack has occurred.
In indirect questioning, this desire to protect the survivor is even more apparent. Survivors strongly disagreed with the sentiment that the stigma of rape would be erased only when the crime was reported like any other, including identifying the crime victim. Chart 2 shows survivors' perceptions of the effects of rape stories.

**CHART 2**
Survivor Perceptions of Rape Story Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity of agreement</th>
<th>1=Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2=Story Necessary</th>
<th>3=Detail Necessary</th>
<th>4=Not Reported</th>
<th>5=Survivor Privacy</th>
<th>6=Public Blames</th>
<th>7=Media Blames</th>
<th>8=Fear of Publicity</th>
<th>9=Stories Hurt</th>
<th>10=Reports Burden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.329</td>
<td>5.481</td>
<td>5.688</td>
<td>5.936</td>
<td>5.653</td>
<td>6.169</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.629</td>
<td>3.974</td>
<td>3.688</td>
<td>4.936</td>
<td>4.653</td>
<td>5.169</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.974</td>
<td>1.671</td>
<td>1.962</td>
<td>2.473</td>
<td>2.473</td>
<td>2.882</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.725</td>
<td>1.974</td>
<td>1.671</td>
<td>1.962</td>
<td>2.473</td>
<td>2.882</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When respondents were asked what sorts of details should be included in the story, they were clear in eliminating almost all details relating to the identity, age, occupation, address or physical appearance of the survivor. (See Chart 3). Further, respondents indicated stories should not contain information regarding actions such as screaming or other forms of resistance offered by the survivor during the attack. In cases where the survivor knew the attacker, respondents indicated stories should contain the context in which the survivor knew the attacker or the context (such as a date) in which the attack occurred. Survivors strongly disagreed with the notion that fairness dictated the identifying of a survivor if the suspect were named in the story.

**CHART 3 - Extent of Detail Regarding Survivor**

**CHART 4**
Extent of Attack Details Focusing on Survivor
Conversely, respondents supported the inclusion of certain details regarding the attacker. (See Chart 5.) Specifically, such details regarding the attacker as race, physical description, the wearing of a mask or other disguise, how access was gained, whether a weapon was used, what sort of weapon, what sort of physical violence was employed and whether there were witnesses present were deemed appropriate. Response to using a suspect's name was less certain, though survivors were more willing to see the name appear after a suspect's arrest.

**CHART 5 - Extent of Detail Regarding Attacker**

Respondents gave inconsistent responses as to what details of the attack should be reported, but in general supported details not focusing on assaults on the survivor, such as time of day and how the attacker gained access to his victim. Survivors were much less supportive of details such as acts of oral or anal intercourse and instances of repeated rape. Reporting the presence of witnesses and the role of witnesses was supported, as were mentions of gang rape and whether the survivor was kidnapped. Respondents supported to a lesser degree tactics the assault victim used to ensure survival.

**CHART 6 - Extent of Details of Actual Assault**

Information not focusing on the survivor or on intimate details of the assault is supported by the respondents. Inclusion of information relating to the attacker, with the possible exception of using a suspect's name, was supported. The above findings are interesting in light of the fairly strong agreement with the statement, "A story containing specific details of the attack will have more of an effect on readers that a story without details." Hypothesis Three is partially supported.

As hypothesized, in contrast to information about the survivor or the attack, the inclusion of information providing telephone numbers of rape hotlines, statistics on the incidence of rape in the community, tips on avoiding rape situations and/or recognizing potential danger signs was strongly supported by the respondents. (See Chart 7.)
This response is consistent with survivors' high level of agreement with statements indicating the most important reason for running a story was to warn others, and, to a lesser extent, agreement that stories about rape make the public more cautious. Hypothesis Four is supported.

Respondents whose rapes had appeared in newspapers did evidence a different view of acceptable inclusion of detail from those whose attacks did not appear. In general, those whose stories had appeared were less supportive of the inclusion of details surrounding the assault, some details regarding the survivor, such as occupation and age, and of details of the actual assault.

Interestingly, those whose stories had appeared were more in agreement that the crucial function of the story was to warn others, but were at the same time less certain that such stories actually made the public more cautious. Further, they were more apt to agree that reporting a single rape did little to protect the public. Hypothesis Five is partially supported.

The situation of reporting or not reporting the assault to the police proved to be an excellent discriminant variable. Like the issue of the rape appearing in the paper, the decision to report the rape seems to have a significant effect on survivor perceptions of acceptable news coverage.

In general, those who reported the attack to the police accepted fewer details of the rape, such as injuries to either attacker or survivor, intimate details of the attack or details surrounding the attack than did those who did not report their attack. Interestingly, those who reported their rapes were more likely to feel survivors are traumatized by news reports of rape and that present story style hurts survivors. Hypothesis Six is not supported.

Conclusions

Analysis and Recommendations for Future Research

The data seem to fall into three general categories: reporting on the crime, the survivor and the attacker. The message from respondents is clear: Stories placing a high emphasis on the event and those involved are inappropriate. Equally clear is that such stories cause survivors to feel further abused and might well prevent survivors from reporting an attack. It is accurate to say survivors support the inclusion of details they believe would make the public believe a rape had occurred, and do not wish to see details which cast doubt on their position. To that end, they are more supportive of details that support the crime having occurred - such as whether the survivor was kidnapped or a weapon was used - and are less willing to see information such as degree of resistance or whether the survivor screamed. Given the literature regarding the mythology of rape and "secondary victimization," this is not surprising.

The respondents are telling journalists there is little to be gained and much hurt to be caused by reporting details about the survivor or about intimate details of
the attack itself. Data support the inclusion of information that would tend to portray a more accurate picture of the assault and which would put the assault in a larger social context. In fact, the appeal for context runs throughout the data. The support for mobilizing information - which would presumably be made room for by eliminating details of the attack - is overwhelming. This is not inconsistent given the respondents' belief that the first purpose of the story is to warn others. How, they seem to be asking, is this accomplished by including demographic details about someone who has already been raped? Support for the inclusion of details about the attacker seems reasonable as most seem to be designed to provide a description of the person that might lead to his arrest. Though the "why" is not clear, respondents did evidence ambivalence about identifying a suspect before he was arrested.

The implication of these perceptions is profound, as it calls for nothing short of a major revision in the manner in which rape stories are written. Clearly, the standard story - with its focus on details that have high sensory facticity, hence meet journalists' criteria for truth - would be radically altered. If implemented, the suggestions from survivors would result in a story far different from what journalists call "breaking news" or "hard news" (Tuchman, 1979). And by suggesting such major changes, survivors force reporters to respond to the much larger question, "What is your purpose in reporting this?"

Endnotes

1Because of the presumed vast underreporting of rape (Brownmiller, 1975), estimates police are informed of only 10 percent of rapes, and even more optimistic writers such as Ledray, 1986, concede at least 60 percent remain unreported), precise figures regarding the crime are difficult to obtain. Russell (1982) found in her study that only 8 percent of survivors reported the crime, and extrapolated rape occurrence at 2, 688 per 100, 000 females. This figure is seven times the FBI's estimate contained in the National Crime Survey. The figure cited in the text was taken from the number of rape offenses reported nationwide to police and reported by Galvin, 1985.

2Protess (1984), found little evidence of rape reporting altering the public agenda, but found significant effects on policy makers and on the media itself. In terms of reporting, repeated studies (Davis, 1952; Attunes, 1977; Fishman, 1978; Sheley, 1981; and Fedler, 1982) have shown a discontinuity between official crime reports and media presentation.

3See for example the dissent of Supreme Court Justice Byron R. White in the case of Florida Star v. B.J.F., in which he opined the victim's rape at knife point "marked only the beginning of her ordeal. A week later, while her assailant was still at large, an account of this assault identifying by name B.J.F. as the victim ... B.J.F. received harassing phone calls, required mental health counseling, was forced to move from her home, and was even threatened with being raped again." (Garneau, 1989). For an opposite opinion, the reader is referred to Geneva Overholser, editor of The Des Moines Register, who is quoted as saying, "As long as rape is deemed unspeakable -- and is therefore not fully and honestly spoken of -- public outrage will be muted as well." ("Tell Us . . .", 1990:100).

4For example, the Heath study found the media focus on rapes in which the attacker is a stranger, the survivor an adult, in which a weapon is used, the survivor is hospitalized, the crime occurs as night in the survivor's home. In each case, the attributes did not mirror surveys of victimization. In the Williams study, she calls public attitudes toward rape a "secondary victimization" of the survivor in which survivors of "non-credible" rapes are subjected to intense doubt both from society and medical personnel.

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Editor's note: Kevin Stoner, an Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism, received partial funding for this research from the Center for Women's Studies and from a Miller Grant from the School of Journalism.

On the Cover

Jessica Depp is a printmaker who resides in Cinicinnati, OH. She was asked to create a cover dealing with sexual assault and a survivor's recovery process. Ms. Depp writes of her work: "I tried to approach this project from the standpoint that a person recovering from a traumatic situation will inevitably have to release the negative emotions and responses encountered in the trauma in order to move forward."
Willa Young, New Coordinator of the Rape Education and Prevention Program

by Jill Hornick, Center for Women’s Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus, Oh.

The Ohio State University Rape Education and Prevention Program (REPP) is experiencing a renewed growth period under the guidance of its new Coordinator, Willa Young. Willa’s experience in the battered women’s movement includes work in a battered women’s shelter in Erie, PA and developing and teaching a course at OSU for four years on violence against women. She also worked within the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Student Services office during its initial year on campus before starting her new position as Program Coordinator for REPP.

Two of the most important benefits to being coordinator of REPP, according to Willa, are the ability to work hands-on with students and the possibility of setting policies that have a positive effect on women at OSU, both now and in the future.

Plans underway for REPP include establishing a university protocol for dealing with a sexual assault survivor. Another project is the recording of specialized programs that REPP offers on rape education for women of color and women of varying sexual orientations for use as curriculum guides, as well as the institutionalization of these programs. Other projects include rewriting the curriculum of the "Men Can Stop Rape" program and training men for peer education through the program. Moreover, Willa hopes to train new facilitators for all areas of REPP programming in order to reach a newer and more diverse audience. As coordinator, Willa would like to see as much information as possible made available to students, especially first-quarter students, and more direct student involvement and attention around the issue of rape.

Editor’s note: For information about the programs and services available through the Rape Education and Prevention Program, contact Willa Young at 292-0479 or stop by the office at 408 Ohio Union, 1739 North High St.

A Local Response to Lesbian Battering

By Lisa Beran and Sandy Allen, CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence, Columbus, Oh.

According to the FBI, a woman is battered every eighteen seconds in the U.S. One out of four women can expect to be battered in her lifetime. Domestic violence is a frightening reality for millions of
women—regardless of age, race, religion, class, or sexual orientation. Until recently the problem of battering within lesbian relationships has not been adequately addressed by either the academic or activist arm of the women's movement. With the advent in 1986 of the book *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, the issue was finally acknowledged and is now beginning to be addressed.

Although it may be difficult initially to understand why lesbian battering occurs, if we examine the dynamics of violence within our society it becomes evident why battering invades the relationships of lesbians. All of us, whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual grow up in a culture where violence is accepted—especially violence against women. Lesbians who batter do so for many of the same reasons that heterosexual men do.

Like male batterers, lesbians who batter seek to achieve, maintain and demonstrate power over their partners in order to maximize the ready accomplishment of their own needs and desires. Lesbians batter their lovers because violence is often an effective method to gain power and control over intimates (Hart, 20).

As we begin to examine and address this topic, it is important to develop resources to educate and empower all of us. In Columbus, there is a resource in CHOICES, the center and shelter for victims of domestic violence. CHOICES is committed to developing, expanding and offering services that are sensitive and encompassing to the needs of various communities, including the African American, Hispanic, Asian, Lesbian, Deaf, and Rural populations. After five years of seeking funding, CHOICES was recently awarded an outreach grant to develop specific protocols for each of these target groups. Because these communities are increasingly becoming involved in working with the issue of domestic violence, CHOICES is utilizing this new grant to work in response to and along with the various communities' specific needs.

In addition to the community outreach programs, CHOICES works internally to develop and enhance staff awareness and center services to meet the needs of the hundreds of lesbian women and gay men who utilize CHOICES' services. An annual in-service is devoted to the specific issues related to lesbian and gay battering.

As an organization, CHOICES is committed to employing a heterogeneous population in order to address the diverse needs of the populations served. Lesbian and bisexual women in various stages of being "out" are on the staff and several professional staff members openly identify as lesbian. This leads to increased awareness and sensitivity in the entire staff in general and specifically in the design of the organization's protocols and practices.

In general, the experience of violence is the same for all women, regardless of their sexual orientation or racial heritage. The effects of violence can be more extreme and have different facets for specific groups, but all battered people think that in some way the battering is their fault. One of CHOICES' main goals is to work to debunk this myth. They typical cycle of violence that occurs is very similar for all groups, as are the characteristics of the batterer and the battered, despite possible gender differences. Because education about the falsity of the many stereotypes surrounding domestic violence can directly serve to empower women to feel they have some control and choices in their lives, CHOICES places the emphasis of their services on doing just this.

CHOICES is also making a concerted effort to recruit volunteers from the various targeted groups. In the gay and lesbian community, CHOICES is working with the Stonewall Union Community Center to set
up peer support groups. The groups, facilitated by members of the lesbian and gay communities, will work to serve the needs of lesbians and gay men who experience violence within their relationships.

Here at CHOICES we realize that the issue of violence within lesbian and gay relationships has been a problem long denied and/or ignored in society at large and within the lesbian and gay communities. The shelter movement itself has often overlooked or subsumed lesbian battering into the general category of woman battering. Due to these facts and to a strict adherence to the philosophy that everyone has a right to a violence free existence, CHOICES is committed to developing strategies and methodologies to insure that their services meet the needs of all women with special regard to differences based upon sexual orientation, race, class, physical abilities and others.

The mission of CHOICES is to respond to requests for assistance in situations where domestic violence exists and to educate in order to prevent the perpetuation of domestic violence in women’s lives and in society at large. If you would like to be part of CHOICES’ concerted effort to develop culturally specific programs, please contact Program Director Sandy Allen and become involved in turning theory into practice and making a concrete difference in the lives of all women. The telephone number for CHOICES is 224-HOME (4663).

Bibliography


Radical Activism on Campus

by Melissa Romig, Journalism Student, Ohio State University, Columbus, Oh.

We seem to be hearing a lot these days about how students of the 1990’s just don’t have the political awareness that graced the students of the 60’s. When was the last time you heard about Ohio State being shut down for riots? When was the last time you even heard a student say she voted? In the 1960’s, it was trendy to be politically active; today it’s trendy to go to the mall.

But the Association of Women Students (AWS), a politically active group fighting for women’s issues on OSU’s campus, recently showed that the political fires still burn in the hearts of today’s students. The women in the organization took part in a national Day of Action to spur Congress into passing the Violence Against Women Act.

The legislation, sponsored by Senator Joseph Biden in the United States Senate and Representative Barbara Boxer in the House of Representatives, would help make campuses safer for women because it includes funding for rape facilities and calls for campuses to keep centralized records of sexual assaults. These are some of the reasons AWS decided to do a support action.

"Violence against women is one of the most outraging, bull-shit experiences that we all have to go
through," said Anastasia Chermer, a senior majoring in Women's Studies and a member of AWS. The legislation that has been introduced has brought the issue to national attention, Chermer said, but some women still weren't aware of it. That is what AWS wanted to change.

The group uses direct action tactics, or "shock tactics" if you prefer, to get its point across. During last quarter's action to support this legislation, a roving band of AWS members performed guerrilla theater on the Oval, in the Ohio Union, and at the corner of 15th Avenue and N. High St. In the performances, a man would accost one of the women and verbally assault her, yelling profanities and threats. The woman would yell at him to leave her alone. They would scuffle, and he would knock her to the ground, where he would pin her down and slap her. Suddenly, women would materialize to tear the man away, chanting, "Women's rights are under attack, what do we do! Act up! Fight back!" Then a speaker would inform the gathering crowd about the legislation, and urge people to call their representatives in the Capitol. The group also passed out fliers with information about the bill and Congressional phone numbers.

"Being attacked by a man, even though it was scripted and we'd practiced it several times, it still gets your adrenaline going," Woods said. She said she felt empowered by the action, and other members of the group agreed.

"It made me feel really good that people in AWS could take this so seriously," Chermer said. "The first time I saw Rebecca and Greg [Rossetti] rehearse it, I thought, 'Wow, that's really strong.'"

After the first performance, a group of women in the audience cheered as the man was dragged away, said Steffy Goldberg, a junior majoring in Women's Studies and co-president of AWS. At another site, a man tried to intervene in the middle of the performance.

Obviously, guerrilla theater tactics are a bit out of the mainstream political movement, but AWS members view these tactics as useful and effective.

"We were out there. We got to do something physical. We went beyond typical political activities," said Women's Studies senior Jill Hornick. "This is visible, and it gets a reaction right away. It's immediate gratification."

"Guerrilla theater is especially apropos to this action because the thing itself, violence against women, is very shocking," said Beth Belinky, a senior majoring in Women's Studies. "You have to use shocking tactics to bring attention to it."

"It's more effective because it's more confrontational," Chermer said. "This makes people think they had to get involved, that there was some sort of threat, instead of just, 'Oh, here come those crazy women with women's symbols.'"

Rob Nosse, director of the Ohio Student Association, and one of the three men who took part in the action, said fringe tactics are effective, but can be tricky. "It's OK to shock people as long as you don't shock them into not doing anything about it. Whenever you do something like this you've got to offer people..."
something to do about it," such as passing out the Congressional phone numbers and addresses.

Unfortunately, no matter what tactics you use, there will always be some people that just can’t comprehend the message you are sending out. "When we did this, people were instantly like, ‘Holy shit, what’s going on?’ But they didn’t get that we were trying to do an action about violence against women," Chermer said.

"After we did the action in the [Ohio] Union, there were these three guys who yelled, ‘Why don’t you protest something worthwhile,'" Woods said. "Some of us went over to him and, for about an hour, we discussed rape and violence against women, but they were very resistant to our message. Even after an hour, they still didn’t get it."

And perhaps the only thing worse than an audience that doesn’t understand is an audience that doesn’t care. That can be the scourge of even the best activist. "When people go by and they don’t even pay attention, that’s bad," Hornick said. "Having someone ignore you is worse than having them argue with you."

"I felt like I was empowered. I felt like everybody in the group was empowered," Goldberg said. "But there was only one guy who stopped [to help the woman during the performance], and there were about 20 other people walking by and not thinking about what they were seeing. That really flipped me out."

But overall, members said they were pleased with the day of action. Nationally, over 100 colleges and universities took part in the activism, according to Selena Dong, legislative director of the United States Student Association. In the future, AWS plans to keep up a letter-writing campaign and conduct a teach-in about the legislation, Chermer said. And every member of the group agreed that direct contact activism would also be a part of the agenda.

"A lot of people who didn’t know about the Violence Against Women Act certainly knew about it when we were done," Belinky said. She gave credit for that to the guerrilla theater.

"AWS tends to be at their most pure when we’re able to make people stop in their tracks and think about things," Goldberg said. And that’s something that this group is not about to stop.

Editor’s note: If you would like more information about the Association of Women Students, drop by their office in Room 323 Ohio Union, 1739 North High St. The phone number is 292-2582.

Dr. Mari Nelson would like to express her sincere and heartfelt thanks to the many people in the Women’s Studies community who responded with support during her recent loss of her family.
Indoors

by Amy Black

Can I tame the spindles of this chair which grow to wild oaks as I rest? Can I tame the basement banister which splits as I climb and falls to span a raging spring stream? Clusters of damp moss pad high spots along the embankment, their swollen filaments dripping like tiny plump antennae. I find the same green beneath the skin of a cucumber. Its peels grow to tendrils in the sink, a patch of fiddlehead fern. They smell sweet, curled up like baby fingers; green as the chin of a grasshopper. They host a stand of trillium at their edge. Dark, cool white, the shell of an egg, the porcelain in the bathroom. The upper staircase is a pine grove. Hushed and dark. There is a light up top. It’s a narrow secret housing Christmas. Can I help it that this house is a forest? Can I tame its sweet, wayward growth?

Amy Black is a graduate student in the M.A. program at the Center for Women’s Studies. She writes: “I spent this past summer leading trips for girls in Maine. I loved watching the foliage change as we ascended mountains. This is my way of transforming the constant **indoors** environment of graduate school into something livable—January 1992.”

Recent Work by Elizabeth Murray

Reviewed by Connie Richards, Center for Women’s Studies, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Big, bold and brash, the three dimensional work of Elizabeth Murray makes an immediate impression on the viewer. The works are quite large, the colors bright, sometimes garish. The figures seem simple, and have been called cartoonlike. But pause to read the titles, look again at the details of these paintings, think about the interplay between the words of the title and what is going on visually. Murray’s work is less than obvious, although she gives the viewer plenty of hints about the complex possibilities of meaning.

Murray takes an object from her everyday life and paints her feelings about it, all of her associations surrounding it, what it means in her life, and how it fits into the world. She comments on the act of living in the world in general, but she also pushes the world of art. Her canvasses, stretched across three dimensional, often curved wooden frames, show us how they were put together. We can see the frame
beneath the canvas, the paint splatters on the frame. The works are so large and heavy that some of the larger ones are in two pieces. Rather than disguising the logistics of making these pieces, she makes them obvious, incorporating the fragmentation of the individual piece into what she is saying with her art. Most of the pieces have a central vortex which pulls us into the physical layers of the piece and into its layers of meaning. This recent work challenges the rectilinear forms of the canvas and straddles the categories of abstraction and representation.

*Stay Awake* is a coffee cup. The predominate color is bright red which may be Murray's comment on the affects and the necessity of caffeine in our lives. We can identify the handle of the cup, the shape which could hold the liquid, but there is something not quite "normal" about this cup. There is a hole in the side which either lets the coffee pour out or pulls us, as viewers, into the cup. We can peer into the top of the cup, across the broad rim. But, again, something seems amiss. There is a very obvious crack in the side. Perhaps we are seeing the efficacy and futility of the drug to keep us/her awake.

This interplay of multiple meanings is a thread which runs through much of Murray's work. A piece which she called a "beer glass" is entitled *Labyrinth*, obviously much more than a vessel for holding a liquid, or is it? There is the look of a vase about this piece, a wide opening at the top, narrowing to the bottom. But the bottom is also open and the figure begins to look more like a uterus. Crawling in and out of the openings are snakes. A square hole is cut in the side and coiled inside it (and inside the vessel) is another snakelike creature. The outer surface seems covered with these wriggling creatures which could be snakes or could be representations of sperm. The colors used in this piece are more somber than many of the others; an ominous yellow-green tints the outer surface of this vessel. This piece is massive and apparently required that it be executed in two pieces. The vessel is split in two by a jagged line which disrupts the fluidity of this vessel, splits the central vortex, and subverts the almost perfect roundness of the bottom opening. By highlighting this crack with darker paint, Murray calls attention to the fragility of the vessel/womb, and the tenacity with which it holds together.

The tension between strength and vulnerability can be seen also in *Joanne in the Canyons*, the closest thing to a narrative piece in this collection. Based on a climbing trip that Murray and her friend Joanne took in the canyons of the West, this piece is executed in bold, electric colors. A bright red sun shines over the central figure, Joanne, whose body is orange outlined in yellow, her feet, green. The arms of this bold figure reach out to the viewer, her legs are set wide, her feet planted in a bold stance. This abstract orange woman stands out in bright contrast to the dark blue sky/background. The central vortex is circular, exposing the layers of canvas and pulling the viewer/artist into the center of the woman figure. We see Joanne's strength and the artist's (or viewer's) relationship to her, the layers of canvas mirroring layers of friendship. The figure straddles a miniaturized city, perhaps New York city where the real Joanne lives. This bright red city is dwarfed by the central figure, but jutting up out of the city is a disproportionately tall phallic-looking building, thrusting itself into the very center of the protagonist. The strong Joanne is also vulnerable.

The themes of a woman's tenuous position in the world and the woman artist's position in the world of art thread their way through much of the rest of the work in this collection. The animated table and chair of *The Hunger Artist* seem to struggle with the process of creating female kind of art in a world which wants to constrain the category of woman's art. *The Web* shows a central figure/spider surrounded by a web of her/its own creation. Is she trapped or is she in control, creating the world as she wants to see it, or both? Other pieces deal with different aspects of the contemporary world, but always as it relates to the woman/artist Elizabeth Murray.

This collection, an investigation of Murray's work since 1987 was on view at the Wexner Center for the Arts until February 23, 1992.
The Dream of Activist Art

by Kathleen Green, Modern Studies Program, Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI

Paper Tiger Television’s (PTTV) Dream House at the Wexner Center is an overwhelming testimony to the pervasive conservatism of mass media. The installation mimics the constant onslaught of images and sounds to which we are subject in (dare I say it?) postmodern culture, thus making it extremely difficult to process in just one visit, as I attempted to do. At the same time, however, the installation is an uplifting exhibition of how a small group with a grassroots approach can challenge the huge media conglomerates, how Paper Tiger Television, by rereading the politically suspect mass media, can historicize, deconstruct, and remythologize the figures on which they report.

The installation consists of a fabricated house that mixes tacky suburban styles across time, much like Tim Burton does in Edward Scissorhands. Here one can eat store bought cookies and watch Columbus’ own ACTV or select from the daily viewing schedule of PTTV episodes. (Each set is equipped with a remote control that the PTTV activists are very anxious for visitors to use. One man even shoved it into my hand, unaware, I suppose, that I had, indeed, already selected the program I was watching.) Outside the house, one can relax on lawn furniture in the hilariously fake backyard and watch a slide show of political graffiti art.

Outside the dream house proper, a huge selection of single copies of alternative publications are available. A display of pictures of the workers documents the fun of making PTTV, while opposite that is a timeline that documents the history of television and its corporate takeover in the U.S. Another wall is covered with a recent issue of the Columbus Dispatch; guests are invited to write graffiti on this, though surprisingly little was written. The most evocative comments were those dedicated to the plight of the Photography and Cinema Department at OSU. Finally, a large wall exhibits a few of the PTTV credit rolls; nearby a video shows how to make these simple and cheap essentials.

One of the tenets of PTTV is that television is important and powerful, and, while they do their share to advocate for other alternative media, they understand taking over the television medium to be one of the more empowering and effective political moves today. As artist and critic Lucy Lippard writes, “The power of art is subversive rather than authoritarian, lying in its connection of the ability to make with the ability to see—and then in its power to make others see that they too can make something of what they see...and so on” (1984, 345). PTTV follows her definition of activist art precisely.

For example, in one episode of PTTV I saw, “John Walden on Tiananmen Square.” John Walden, sporting a fuzzy bunny suit, reads Ted Koppel’s presentation of the Tiananmen student activists. Walden shows how Chai Ling’s work is romanticized and how her political speeches are presented as visuals with voice-overs by other people. In a move typical of the treatment of women activists, the show argues, Chai Ling is associated with the emotional force of the movement but is not recognized for the strategist and leader that she is. This show is typical of the deconstructive readings Paper Tiger does of mass media reports, though it doesn’t represent the wide selection of issues they cover and formats they use on PTTV.

PTTV began in 1981 in Manhattan and has since spread to art world venues. They fully endorse the copying and broadcasting of their episodes by other public access channels nationally. The product of Paper Tiger Television’s residency at the Wexner Center, Dream House, is funded by the Wexner Center Foundation. ROAR! The Paper Tiger Guide
to Video Activism, which includes short essays and a practical handbook for doing radical Public Access T.V., is on sale at the Wexner Center Bookstore for $12.

Editor's note: Judith Mayne, Professor of French and Women's Studies and Tei Street, graduate student in Women's Studies, are featured in a segment called "Judith Mayne Reads Soap Operas."

Bibliography


Women's Studies International: Nairobi and Beyond


Reviewed by Barbara Mennel, Center for Women's Studies, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Women's Studies International: Nairobi and Beyond gives an overview of different programs, centers and organizations for Women's Studies worldwide. It is divided into chapters on: Theory and Learning, Teaching and Strategies for Change, Policy, Institutionalization, Research on Women: New Models and Priorities, Program Descriptions, and Research and Teaching about Women: A Resource List.

The articles themselves are clearly structured and obviously intended as practical resources. The first five chapters discuss different topics surrounding the institutionalization of women's studies, research on women, activism and women in development.

The selected program descriptions include Centers for Women's Studies in nine different countries. Each description entails the history, teaching, and research activities of that program. Selected courses and reading lists are included, which are interesting to compare and serve as a source of motivation and information.

The resource list of centers, institutes, groups, and organizations of diverse strategies include as many as the author could identify. Not all centers and organizations of each country are listed nor are all countries represented. Some of the listings of the institution are accompanied by a short description of history, current research emphasis, publications, courses, resources and contact persons. As it not only includes institutionalized Women's Studies programs, one can also find voluntary organizations as for example "Women for Women" in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This organization conducts seminars and research on Bangladesh women and publishes a quarterly newsletter.
The Center for Women’s Studies at Ohio State is featured as the model program from the United States. Faculty, courses, reading lists, publications, structure, and diversity are all described in Women’s Studies International.

Overall this book is a good reference and introduction to Women’s Studies around the world.

Announcements

Women in Sport: Transforming the Metaphor will take place April 24 and 25, 1992 at the Ohio State University. Conference registration is only $20.00 for the two-day conference and includes meals. A limited number of graduate student travel awards are available. For more information contact: Nancy Wardwell, 252 Larkins Hall, 337 W. 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210 or call (614)292-0847.

Contributions wanted. Contributions are wanted for a book entitled Growing Old Gracefully, an anthology of writings by women who are aging with joy, hope, friendships, renewed interests, and personal fulfillment. Topics might include: autobiography, intimacy/sexuality, body image, friendship, family, new images, and "it’s my turn now." Please send prose, poetry, and/or artwork by May 15, 1992 to: The Book Group, c/o Maxine White, 714 Fairmount, Santa Cruz, CA 95062.

Columbus Take Back the Night March will be held on May 16, 1992. The annual rally, march and women’s dance will be held at Goodale Park in the Short North area of Columbus, OH. For more information or to volunteer call (614)299-2277 or TTY (614)237-9450.

Wexner Center for the Arts will feature the following films by women directors: April 3 and 4 at 7:00 and 9:00 pm nightly they will show Jan Oxenburg’s Thank you and Goodnight! and Jane Campion’s A Girl’s Own Story. On April 16 at 7:00 and 9:00 pm, Monika Treut’s My Father is Coming will be shown. On April 30 at 7:30 pm East German visiting artist Sibylle Schnemann’s feature Locked up in Time will play. For more information contact the Wexner Center for the Arts at (614)3535.

Do You Want to be Published?

Feminisms welcomes submissions of articles, essays, reviews, artwork and graphics (black and white), information about upcoming events, community news, and cartoons of interest to feminists. Please submit your work to: Sue Green, Editor, Feminisms, Center for Women’s Studies, 286 University Hall, 230 N. Oval Mall, Columbus, OH 43210. We reserve full editorial rights.
Announcements

The Center for Women's Studies has moved! On December 30, 1991, the Center for Women's Studies at Ohio State moved to **286 University Hall, 230 N. Oval Mall, Columbus, OH 43210**. The telephone number remains (614)292-1021.

**National Organization for Women** has announced the organization of an Ohio State University campus chapter. OSU NOW will focus on a woman's right to choose, ending sexual harassment, eliminating racism, support for lesbian and gay rights, women's health programs, the election of more women to political office and ending discrimination. For information about this new campus chapter of NOW, call 299-4340 or 476-5442. All OSU students (women and men) are invited to join; support of NOW's goals is the only membership requirement.

**Women of All Red Nations** will hold a one-day conference on Genocide in Chicago on March 14, 1992. The conference will be held at Truman College, 1145 W. Wilson, Chicago, IL. For more information call (312)493-2791.

**Tell It: African Women Writing** is the name of a new annual publication which seeks to publish poetry, short stories and essays with an African outlook from women writers who reside in Africa or are studying abroad. Deadline for the first issue is June 1, 1992. Poems are limited to a maximum of 5-10 poems per entry. Stories and essays will be limited to 2000 words. Please send only unpublished manuscripts in English. The editors are accepting original drawings as well as written materials. Authors will be notified by mid-July whether their articles will be published. Send manuscripts or drawings with a few sentences about yourself to: Wairimu Wanjohi, Editor, **Tell It: African Women Writing**, P.O. Box 981, Stillwater, OK 74076.

I'm Every Woman, a celebration of womanhood to commemorate Women's History Month is intended to support and promote the creative expression and appreciation of womanhood through the telling of narratives and performance art. The event will be in Stecker Lounge, 3rd Floor, Ohio Union, 1739 N. High St. on the Ohio State University campus. Come prepared to share your thoughts and feelings for one to three minutes. For more information, contact Women's Student Services at 292-8473.

**Reassessing the Grounds for Our Struggle: Connecting Women's Lives in Theory, Practice and Performance** is a conference being sponsored by the Women's Studies Program at Bowling Green State University, April 24 and 25, 1992. Conference activities include presentations by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Marnia Lazreg and a performance by Vinie Burrows. This program is made possible, in part, by a grant from the Ohio Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities. For registration information, contact Arlene Spoores, Women's Studies Program, Bowling Green State University, 246 Shatzel Hall, Bowling Green, OH 43403, (419)372-7133.

**Flight of the Mind Summer Writing Workshops for Women** announces two-week-long writing workshops for women, summer 1992. Workshop leaders for the first week will be Jewelle Gomez (short fiction), Naomi Shihab Nye (poetry), Evelyn White (When the Rainbow is Enuf/Writing Across Race), Andrea Carlisle (Transformation: From Autobiography to Short Story), and Judith Barrington (Landscape and Memory). The second week: Ursula K. Le Guin (short fiction), Michelle Clift (Memory, History and the Imagination), Barbara Wilson (Investigating the Mystery), Beth Brant (Narratives and the Oral Tradition), and Judith Barrington (The Music of Poetry). For a brochure, details on how to apply, costs and scholarship info send a first class stamp (no envelope) to **Flight of the Mind, 622 SE 29th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214**.