

PART IV: THE MEDIA AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There are three different types of questions to be asked about connections between the media and violence against women.

1. Do the media contribute to the incidence of violence, either directly by stimulating violent attitudes and behaviour, or indirectly by sustaining popular myths and misconceptions? Sections I and II lay out the evidence on these points and relate the problem of violence to the general representation of women in media content.
2. How can we formulate a counter-response to these media messages? What information do we need? What actions can we take? Sections III, IV and V offer some suggestions.
3. How can we use existing media channels to encourage better coverage of violence against women, in terms of context, causes and effects? The basic components of a media strategy are outlined in Section VI.

Finally, Section VII contains a listing of audio-visual resources on this subject.

I. Violence in Media Fiction

Does the fictional portrayal of violence in the media cause aggressive behaviour in people who are exposed to this type of content? For more than fifty years this has been one of the most heavily studied topics of communication research. Probably no other question of media content has been such an important political issue.

By the later 1970s the accumulated research evidence suggested that children and adults of all ages, all social class backgrounds, and all personalities can become more aggressive by exposure to large amounts of media violence. The likelihood that people will imitate aggressive behaviour which they see in the media is increased when:

1. The violent person is rewarded or not punished.
2. Violence is portrayed as justified or glorified.
3. Violence can be related to the actual problems of the audience.
4. Violent persons are portrayed as attractive individuals, with whom audience members can identify.
5. Presentations of violence highlight the clear intention to be malevolent and to injur someone.
6. The presentation seems more real than fictional or fantastic.
7. Violence communicates pleasure in the act or is calculated to please the audience.
8. Violence goes uncriticised.

A recent exhaustive review of laboratory and field research, as well as short-term and long-term correlational studies concludes that 'all four types of study coverage on one conclusion - heavy viewing of televised violence increases the likelihood of acting aggressively towards others... There is no convincing evidence that watching violence has any positive effects, such as reducing subsequent aggression (the catharsis hypothesis).'¹

Over the past decade researchers have devoted an increasing amount of attention to studies of sexual violence in media content: the use of physical force and violent imagery in a sexual context, in music and music video 'clips', horror films and videos, advertising and commercials. The results of this research can be divided into three broad categories:

1. **Measurement of attitudes towards women.** Findings consistently show that exposure to violent sexual content in the media increases men's (but not women's) acceptance of violence against women and strengthens men's belief in rape myths (for example, 'women have an unconscious wish to be raped and may then unconsciously set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked').
2. **Self-reports and observation of sexual behaviour.** Various Canadian and American studies have revealed a sizeable proportion (between 20% and 30%) of men who admit they might carry out a rape if they could be sure of not being caught. This group also exhibits greater sexual arousal if shown material in which the woman is portrayed as first resisting, and then becoming sexually aroused, in rape.
3. **Measurement of behaviour towards women.** The research shows that an acceptance of violence against women (as well as an acceptance of rape myths and an acknowledgement of some likelihood to rape) is a good predictor of aggression against women; and that men who see aggressive pornography are subsequently more aggressive towards female, but not male, targets.

The conclusion of the most comprehensive review of research evidence so far is that 'the overall pattern of the data ... strongly supports the assertion that the mass media can contribute to a cultural climate that is more accepting of aggression against women'.²

Yet the same review goes on to say that hoping for improvement by simply publicising this conclusion in a world in which 'strong economic and structural-institutional factors ... resist such changes' will bring no benefits. Certainly, the media industry almost universally continues to claim that there is no conclusive evidence of serious social harm a result of media portrayals of violence, whether in a sexual context or not. Researchers maintain, with considerable justification, that these critics are demanding the impossible. Short of successful incitement to crime, research in this field has gone as far as society might wish or expect in establishing facts and relationship.

What is actually at issue is, on the one hand, a highly lucrative industry and, on the other, dominant social values. As a parallel, think of the way in which tobacco manufacturers and advertisers have continually rejected as 'inconclusive' the research findings on the hazards of cigarette smoking. What eventually forced governments to introduce certain restrictions on tobacco sales and advertising was not the evidence of research, but the highly organised lobby of consumer and health associations which successfully mobilised public opinion around the issue of exploitation of various images in the sale of a product which damages people's health. Certainly, this lobby made use of the existing research rather than the 'indisputability' of the research findings.

One thing is clear: decisions about media content - whether taken at an institutional or a political level - are based on assumptions about the current state of social and cultural values. In all of our societies, such values incorporate certain definitions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood', of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. These are replayed to us daily by the media in the overwhelming outpouring of images in which we see ourselves as 'the gentler sex': passive, weak, needing protection, subservient, scatter-brain, dependent, comforting, nurturing, caring, beautiful; mother, wife, sex-object. And in which we see men as forceful, strong, capable, aggressive, demanding, independent, successful; tycoon, hero, playboy. It is these images - more subtly, but just as surely as representations of overt sexual violence - which feed into general definitions of sexuality, reinforcing ideologies of masculinity and femininity, demonstrating that while man is 'naturally' aggressive, woman is the 'natural' target for that aggression.

A great deal of media imagery - based on a view of the world in which women depend on men for economic, social and sexual status - perpetuates the notion of women as property, or commodities, 'available' for sexual and other use. Pornography provides the most extreme example of representations which connect sexuality, the objectification of the female body and the accentuated power of the voyeur. But the messages it contains about female passivity and availability can also be found in 'mainstream' media imagery. And the visual codes it uses - pouting female lips glistening and parted, eyes fixed invitingly on the camera, body displayed and embellished for the pleasure of the onlooker - can be seen on advertisement hoardings in city streets, in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema. The presentation of women to themselves, and to men, in this way produces a situation of immense potential tension and conflict. In media fiction at least, this is often dramatically resolved through the goddess-whore dichotomy: 'good' girls may suffer temporarily, but always get their reward (a man) in the end. In real life, the dramatic resolution is often more violent.

Clearly then, to 'take up' the issue of the media in relation to violence against women means much more than to try to establish a straightforward connection between explicit violent content and the development of aggressive attitudes and behaviour - although, as we have seen, this in itself is difficult enough. The broader task is to understand, and to demonstrate, the values underlying all sexist representations of women - whether in advertisements, sexist cartoons, fashion photography, pornography, romantic fiction, traditional stereotypes in drama and film - which depict women as responsive to men, not as responsible in their own right; which depict men as the initiators, the source of active desire. The challenge is to lay bare these values, to illustrate their role in explaining and defining actual and fictional male-female relationships, and to propose alternative values and media representations which redefine these relationships.

The advantage of this approach is that it moves the debate from the level of social engineering ('the media can/should be doing this/that'), with its overtones of censorship from which the media industry is all too easily able to retreat, to the level of political philosophy ('what kind of culture is being reflected/created by the media? what kind of values are at stake? what kind of society do we want?'). Within this strategy research evidence based on monitoring of media content is certainly necessary. But at least as important is an analysis of the political, economic and cultural factors influencing the present situation, a vision of an alternative future, and an awareness of the most important pressure points within not only media institutions themselves, but the economic and political systems of which they are a part.

II. Media Coverage of Violent Events

In theory, there are important differences between fictional portrayals and news reports of violence. In terms of **intention**, we can assume they are dissimilar. While the news report sets out to provide an accurate description and/or explanation of a violent event, fictional constructions generally have more dramatic aims: for example, to stimulate a particular audience response, or to develop the identity of a character. In terms of **appeal**, therefore, we should also be able to assume that they address different human faculties. If the news report is directed at the intellect, the fictional account is primarily intended to stimulate the senses and the emotions. This is the theory. In practice, however, there appear to be important similarities underlying both forms of presentation.

This is an area in which very little systematic research has been done. However, the criticisms which have been directed at news reports of violence can be grouped under three main headings:

1. Descriptions of the motivations of offenders.

Media reports almost always cite the reasons given by the defending counsel or the judge. Rarely is the victim's or the prosecuting counsel's reasoning reported. This means that motivations which are put forward with the specific intention of getting an acquittal or a more lenient sentence are reported as the motivations, giving these the status of legitimate and reasonable explanations of violence. Thus many reports reproduce a vision of the offender as 'driven' by 'uncontrollable' urges brought about by frustration, an excess of alcohol or drugs, sexual abstinence, the 'unreasonable' or 'provocative' behaviour of the victim. Such accounts perpetuate the belief that violence (whether in rape, battery or some other form) is an isolated, exceptional event with no relationship to other social phenomena or to the general character of male-female relationships.

2. Descriptions of the characters of offenders and victims.

These vary considerably, depending on the type of crime. For example, in cases of multiple rape, gang rape, or where the victim is very young or very old, the offender tends to be described in moral terms - as a 'beast', 'monster' or 'fiend'.

Parallel descriptions of victims stress their blamelessness - 'decent', 'helpless', 'mother' - except where the victim is a prostitute, whose 'loose morals' will be said to have put her at risk. When the attack does not easily correspond to the conventional stereotype of sexual violence as 'perversion', descriptions concentrate on the **psychological** make-up of the offender - as 'emotionally inadequate', 'frustrated', 'jealous' or 'under stress'. In these cases there is a tendency to shift the blame onto the victim, by referring to her appearance ('stunning', 'pretty', 'attractive') or her behaviour ('nagging', 'two-timing', 'frigid', 'demanding'). This pattern of descriptions has the effect of defining violence against women as **either** an act of gross deviance or a minor aberration. In both cases the responsibility of the offender is limited: he is either a 'maniac' or a 'normal, healthy male' responding to unbearable provocation.

3. Selection of cases based on **sensationalist** appeal.

Only a tiny proportion of violent attacks against women is given media coverage. Rape crisis centres and shelters for battered women complain that attempts to draw the attention of the media to the cases which they handle often draw the response that these are 'run-of-the-mill' or 'unnewsworthy'. On the other hand, in many of our countries sex is used by the media to attract an audience. This means that reports which are carried often dwell on lurid details, accompanied by titillating photographs or illustrations. A rape crisis centre is described as a 'Sex-Call Hot Line' on which women 'confess' that they have been raped. In some cases there is calculated juxtaposition of rape reports with pictures of provocatively posed pin-ups, as if to imply that women invite and enjoy sexual violence. 'Run-of-the-mill' wife-beating, if covered at all, is downplayed in the journalistic euphemism 'domestic dispute'. Sexual harassment, still a 'novelty issue' for the media, tends to be treated as a joke. 'Newsworthy' violence - usually involving old women, very young girls, gang rape, or rape by strangers - is given eye-catching coverage, often with an air of moral indignation but rarely with any analytical depth. The overall result is two contradictory media definitions of violence. In some cases ('domestic disputes', sexual harassment) it is seen as **normal** behaviour. In others ('newsworthy' accounts) it is portrayed as **abnormal**, something which has nothing to do with 'people like you and me'. Consequently the reality of women's experience of violence - its seriousness and pervasiveness - is glossed over.

Set in the overall context of portrayals of women in media fiction, news reports of violence against women illustrate various conflicts and contradictions. One is the way in which women are encouraged by a great deal of media output to dress and behave in ways which are expected to 'please' men, but are then held responsible when this results in sexual violence. Another is the implication that women will be safe from violence if they withdraw to the traditional shelter of the domestic sphere and the protection of their men, when the fact is that all forms of

violence - including rape - are at least as likely to take place in the home, among family and friends, as outside among strangers. Rather than increasing public awareness of the nature and causes of violence against women, the cumulative effect of media representations in fictional content and news coverage is thus to reinforce prevalent stereotypes, perpetuating these as sources of socialisation and social control over women.

III. Media Depiction of Violence Against Women: Some Guidelines

The following list was developed by the Women's Group of the U.K. Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom³. It encapsulates many of the above points in simple terms. You might be able to use the guidelines as the basis for a discussion session with media people. In your discussion, make the point that you are offering these as suggestions, in the interests of good journalistic practice.

Problem 1: "Sex Maniac"

- DON'T** focus on 'exceptional' cases of male violence - i.e. the more sensational ones - portraying the men as 'maniacs', 'beasts' or 'perverts' whose sexual urges are uncontrollable
- DO** make the connection between violence and sexual abuse and the relative positions of men and women in society
- DO** highlight the fact that there is no particular type of man who commits these offences - they are 'ordinary' men from all backgrounds and are most frequently known to the women

Problem 2: Titillation/Sensationalism

- DON'T** report violence, including sexual abuse, in a titillating or sensationalist manner
- DON'T** place reports of violence next to pin-ups and other items which heighten their titillating value
- DON'T** highlight and sensationalise the rape of white women by black men, using it as an excuse for racism
- DO** be aware that sensationalising violence puts other women more at risk from those stimulated by this type of presentation
- DO** report violence and rape in a factual manner, treating it with due gravity and without revealing the victim's identity in any way

Problem 3: Trivialisation

- DON'T trivialise any kind of violence against women - including sexual harassment
- DON'T make any form of violence against women the subject of a cartoon or any kind of comedy
- DO reflect the fact that violence - no matter how mild it may seem to a male media worker - is extremely distressing for the women concerned
- DO treat campaigns to counteract violence with the seriousness and respect they deserve

Problem 4: "Asking For It"

- DON'T imply that the victim of violence or sexual abuse in any way 'asked for' or deserved the offence
- DON'T include irrelevant descriptions of her clothing or her appearance, which suggest this
- DON'T publish details about the women's sexual present or past, or imply that acts of violence against prostitutes are less shocking than those against 'respectable' women
- DON'T give greater prominence and validity to the man's point of view when reporting a court case, or exonerate his actions on the grounds of the women's 'unreasonable', 'taunting' or 'immoral' behaviour
- DO always reflect the fact that NOTHING excuses male violence or sexual abuse towards women

IV. Common Questions About Violence Against Women in the Media

In any activity or campaign that you organise to highlight the problem of violence against women as presented in the media, you will be faced by scepticism about the seriousness of the issue. It is important that you try to anticipate the kinds of questions that you will be asked, so that you can have convincing answers ready, backed up by as much evidence as you can find. The following questions and answers are very loosely based on a publication⁴ by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media - a US group which has been in operation since 1976. They will not precisely correspond to your own situation and concerns, but they should illustrate in general way the opposition you are likely to meet and set you thinking about the counter-arguments you will need to prepare.

- Q: What is your basic objection to media content in which violence against women is shown?

- A: An essential ingredient of many media images of women is the 'objectification' of the woman. This is not just rhetoric. It means that women are portrayed as things, not as human beings. Consequently, we can distance ourselves from scenes of women being beaten or raped. Add to this the fact that women are shown actually enjoying this kind of treatment, even begging for it. When men come to think of women in these terms, it leads to a situation in which violence against women seems not just acceptable, but something that women actually expect from men.
- Q: What makes you think that people are bothered by these images in the way that you are?
- A: If it doesn't bother people to see women being beaten or raped or tortured then something is wrong. This is exactly the point: as we see more and more of these images of women, we accept them as normal. Psychoanalysts have pointed out that as media portrayals of rape become more common, rapists stop seeing themselves as abnormal.
- Q: But surely a lot of the images you're talking about are not in common circulation? You have to go to special bookshops and cinemas, or certain parts of town, to see them. Aren't you being puritanical in trying to prevent people having access to this kind of material, if they want to, and if it is properly controlled?
- A: You can see extreme examples of the images we are talking about on the sleeves of record-albums for sale in any department store, in fashion photographs in many widely available magazines, in advertisements on television, in the press and on street hoardings. Pornographic magazines and videos are on public display in high street shops. Even if it actually was possible to make sure that the worst of this material was only available in certain controlled settings, this is not the answer. Can you imagine what an outcry there would be if we had shops or cinemas in our towns where you went to find films, videos and magazines showing one section of the community systematically dominating another (for example, whites and blacks, Christians and Muslims)? Then why is it prudish to object to materials which show the relationship between women and men in this way?
- Q: But there isn't any proof that this kind of material really affects people, is there?
- A: There is plenty of proof. Most people don't realise that there is now a substantial body of research which shows that both children and adults behave more violently after being exposed to violent media content. Don't forget that research on this subject has been going on now for fifty years. Some of the first studies were certainly inconclusive, and many people still refer to these to try to show that there isn't a problem. But recent research has concluded that there is a definite relationship between violent content in the media and violent behaviour. Let me give you just one example. In 1972 a very big study of

television and violence - known as the Surgeon General's Report - was published in the United States. Its conclusion were inconclusive. But an equally big follow-up study - the National Institute of Mental Health Report⁶ - appeared in 1982. Its conclusion was that 'after 10 more years of research ... a casual link between televised violence and aggressive behaviour now seems obvious'. You can quote other examples, for instance the conclusions of Harold Fisbein's recent review.²

Q: But that's violence in general. Surely there's nothing to show that women are particularly at risk from aggressive behaviour as a result of violence in the media?

A: This idea - that various forms of violence in the media act as a kind of safety valve - was very influential in the 1950s and 1960s and many studies were carried out to investigate the possibility. In fact, the research did not support the catharsis hypothesis, which has now been discredited and is no longer considered a useful theory of behaviour. It was always a very dubious idea. For instance, do you think that parents who feel an urge to beat their children should be encouraged to look at scenes in which adults are shown taking pleasure in beating and torturing children, and in which some of the children are enjoying this treatment? Do you really think the widespread availability of this kind of material would be a safety valve against child abuse?

Q: But women choose to take part in these videos and films, to model for the kind of photographs you're criticising. They earn a lot of money from it. How can you say that this is exploitation of women?

A: First and foremost, we are concerned with the implications of these images for all women, not just the small number of women who are involved in their production. Secondly, many of these women are coerced in various ways into this kind of work. Some are sold by their parents. Others are kidnapped and kept in captivity, where they are broken down by violence and sometimes drugs into 'agreeing' to participate. Thirdly, only a tiny proportion of women in this business ever earns the kind of money which guarantees an adequate living. The majority work sporadically, for a very short period of time, for agents who deduct up to 50% of their earnings. The media are full of glamorous images which encourage women to think that their bodies can - indeed, should - be used to gain male approval and reward. In reality, women's 'reward' for this kind of work includes serious health risks, various kinds of humiliation, as well as subjection to physical abuse and sexual violence on the job.

Q: But aren't you jeopardising people's freedom of speech in objecting to this kind of material? Doesn't this really amount to censorship?

- A: The widespread circulation of these images is an abuse of the right to freedom of speech. Our society does not tolerate material that condones or promotes violence against children, or old people, or ethnic minorities, or particular religious groups. Why are different criteria used for material which is harmful to women? Our aim is not to limit freedom. On the contrary, we want a society in which people automatically object to any use of language or imagery which degrades women, in the knowledge that this perpetuates a system of inequality in which women can never be free from fear.

V. Taking Action to Improve Media Content

There are various actions you can take to make media people aware that you are disturbed by the way in which the media - either in fictional content or in news reports - represent the issue of violence against women.

1. **Telephone or write to the offending publications, station or channel.**

If you telephone: do it straight away. Don't harangue the person who answers the phone, but be assertive. Make sure that your complaint is written down, so that it can be passed on to the appropriate programme department.

If you write: keep the letter brief. Concentrate on the main gist of your complaint rather than giving too many details or going into your entire philosophy on sexism. Try not to use jargon. Be assertive, not abusive.

2. **Complain about offensive advertisement.**

Write to the publication, the television/radio channel, the manufacturers of the product, and if possible the advertising agency. Say that you intend to organise a boycott of the product. Encourage as many other people as possible to write and say the same thing.

If your country has a regulatory body to oversee the content of advertisements write to it too, if possible sending a copy of the advertisement or else giving full details about where you saw it. Encourage others to write too.

3. **Use any existing channels for audience/reader feedback.**

These may include letters to the editor, radio phone-in programmes, 'access' programmes (where community groups are given facilities to produce a programme), radio or television programmes which include audience feedback.

4. **Consider various kinds of direct action.**

These could include graffiti on advertisement hoardings; pickets outside shops, cinemas, television/radio stations, offices;

demonstrations and marches; public meetings; sit-ins; petitions; lobbying your local or national government representative; poster or leaflet campaigns. All these methods have been used, with varying success, by women.

5. Build up groups and networks.

Put the question of sexual violence and the media on the agenda for discussion in existing women's groups. If necessary form a group to deal specifically with this problem. Organise a series of meetings with invited speakers to talk on various aspects of the issue. Plan a media monitoring project, publish your report and hold a meeting to discuss your results. Send details of your activities to the local and national media. Issue invitations to individual media people to attend and speak at your meetings.

VI. Getting Your Message Across in the Media

Changing the way in which the media represents the issue of violence against women requires activity of different kinds. First, you must analyse and review past and current coverage. Second, you must decide in what ways this is inadequate or inaccurate. Third, you must register your dissatisfaction in some of the ways already described. Fourth, you must introduce media people to new ways of thinking about the issue, so that these can be reflected in media output. To do this successfully, you will need to develop a sustained and systematic media strategy.

1. Get to Know and Understand your Local and National Media.

To use the media to advantage, you must be familiar with them. Read, watch and listen as much as possible. Build up a file of press clippings. If available, an audio and/or video recorder will be useful: you can tape offensive sections of programmes; you can analyse whole programmes to understand media styles of presentation. Find out who is who in the organisational hierarchy: who makes the decisions about which stories will be covered for a newspaper or magazine, about what a television or radio programme will include? Keep a regularly updated file of data on media organisations and personnel. Start by buying any available media directories. Add to these, or if necessary create your own directory, by watching/listening to credits at the end of television and radio programmes, and by scanning newspaper and magazine by-lines.

2. Target Your Audience and Your Media.

Decide who you want to reach with your information, and which would be the most appropriate outlet for it. Remember that different media attract different kinds of audience. Are you most interested in reaching women, men, young people, policy makers? Audience research reports, if you can consult them, will give you information about the 'profiles' of readers, viewers, listeners for various media. But common sense will tell you a lot too. For example, magazines are usually intended for clearly

specified audiences. Day-time viewers and listeners of television and radio tend to be people who are not in paid employment (mainly women, children, the unemployed). Newspaper readers usually include more men than women; busy people (policy makers, legislators) are more likely to skim daily newspapers than to watch a lot of television. Local media - newspapers, or perhaps a radio station - may be more receptive to you than the big national papers and channels.

3. **Establish Good Media Contacts**

Don't wait for the media to contact you: this rarely happens. The onus is on you to make contacts, place stories and initiate media coverage. You will be a much stronger group if you can establish personal contacts with reporters, journalists, presenters and even programme producers. If you have information, or a 'story' which you think deserves media coverage, there is no substitute for being able to pick up the telephone and speaking to someone you already know well. For instance, in the case of news stories it is the newspaper editor and the television/radio news editor or director who finally decides whether a story will be carried, and who will cover it. But if you are promoting a story, you are likely to have more success if your first contact is with an individual reporter or journalist who has some understanding of the issue, and with whom you already have a good relationship. If convinced that your story is newsworthy, this person can try to 'sell' it to the news editor on your behalf. Although overall decisions about television and radio programmes are taken at senior management level, individual producers, directors and even presenters often have considerable autonomy to decide what will be included in a particular programme. If you can talk over your programme idea with a producer or presenter whom you know, your suggestion is more likely to be accepted.

4. **Selling Your Message**

Some of the best ideas for media coverage will occur to you be reading, watching and listening to the media, thinking about what you see and hear in relation to the issue of violence against women, and developing new points - or 'angles' - on stories which are already in the news. Remember that local slant on a national story. For instance:

A rape trial makes the national headlines. Contact the national and local media with facts, figures and information on the work of rape crisis centres in your locality.

A prostitute is found battered and murdered. Use this to bring attention to the problem of battery in general, presenting the media with statistics and background information, and publicising the work of shelters for battered women.

A police raid on the 'red light' district results in arrests. Suggest a feature or programme on the relationship between

pornography, other media images of women, and sexual violence.

Apart from stories in the news, you can capitalise on fictional content in the media:

A popular drama series features an episode in which a woman is battered by her husband. Call the presentation editor of the channel and suggest that the programme could be followed by an announcement giving the telephone number and address of the local women's shelter. Contact a journalist you know and suggest an interview with shelter workers and counsellors. A large circulation women's magazine is running a serial in which the heroine, following a quarrel with her boyfriend, walks home after dark and narrowly escapes rape by a psychopath. Call the editor and suggest a feature on the actual circumstance and incidence of rape.

You are not likely to find yourself short of ideas. Your success in getting them taken up will depend partly on how good your media contacts are, and partly on how convincing you are in your presentation.

5. Putting Your Ideas Across

Good media coverage doesn't just happen. You should be clear about exactly what information you want to convey, the points you want to stress, and the overall impression you want to give. Advance preparation and organisation of your ideas will improve your chances of getting them across to your audience. There are several basic methods you can use.

(a) The Press Release.

This should be short, sharp and to the point.

Short: a press release is an outline of facts and opinions, not an essay.

Sharp: use clear, strong every-day language. Use short sentences - one idea in each. And short paragraphs - one or two sentences only.

To the point: begin with **who, what, where** and **when** in your first short paragraph. In the following paragraphs, explain **why**. Short quotes give life to your message, but should be attributed. Avoid jargon, clichés, unexplained abbreviations, confusing or misleading statistics.

Type, double-spaced, with wide margins on one side of paper only. Edit material tightly so that, if possible, you keep to one page: never use more than two. At the beginning put the date, and a simple explanatory heading. At the end put the name and telephone number of someone who can be contacted for further information or an interview. Make sure this person has a copy of the press release. It should be in the hands of the relevant

editor or reporter at least 24 hours before any event or activity you are publicising. Keep a copy of the release, together with a record of where and when you sent it. If the story is used, check it for accuracy.

(b) The Television or Radio Interview.

You will have to put your message across very concisely. Find out in advance how long the interview is going to last. If it is to be a two minute interview, there is no point in preparing 10 minutes' worth of material. Work out the main points you want to get across in the time available. Imagine what questions you are likely to be asked, and think about how you could use these questions to make your points. Remember that radio and television are very ephemeral media: be prepared to repeat your main point several times in different ways. Try to watch or listen to tapes of your interviewer at work, and get an idea of her or his interviewing style. Watch and listen to interviews with experienced interviewers - givers, such as politicians, for ideas on technique. The following guidelines may help:

Send the interviewer some information beforehand, but be prepared for her/him to be badly briefed. If this is the case, be ready to push the interview in the right direction. Rehearse your most important points until they are on the tip of your tongue. Find a friend or colleague who can conduct a mock interview with you.

Try to relax. Wear comfortable clothes and get to the studio in plenty of time.

Don't bring along a script or a large bundle of notes. If you need cues, prepare a card or a small piece of paper with a few key words or figures on it.

Avoid 'yes' or 'no' answers. Build on your replies to make the points you want.

Be prepared for provocative questions, and don't let these make you lose your temper or get flustered. Even if you feel angry, you must stay in control so that you can make your points clearly and calmly.

Speak clearly, concisely and enthusiastically. Use short sentences and every-day language. Avoid abstractions, jargon, technical terms and anything that will make you sound pretentious. Illustrate your points with examples, anecdotes and comparisons.

(c) The Print Interview.

This may be of two types: a brief interview, perhaps by telephone, when a reporter wants a quick quote or material for a short news item: an in-depth interview, usually set up in

advance, to form the basis of an article or a news analysis feature.

Some advice about telephone interviews:

If you can avoid it, do not give off-the-cuff telephone interviews to a reporter who calls you without warning. Ask what aspect of the issue the journalist wants to discuss, in what context your comments will be used, and what the news deadline is. Then try to arrange a time for the reporter to call you back, once you have done your homework and prepared your remarks.

If there is no alternative to an instant interview', do not be pressured into making inaccurate statements. If you cannot answer a question, say so. Offer to find the necessary information and call your interviewer back as soon as possible.

Some advice about in-depth, fact-to-fact interviews:

Guard against being lulled into a friendly tete-a-tete in which you are tempted to divulge confidential information. Resist any encouragement to make personal attacks on individuals or other organisations, even if you do not agree with their ideas or approach. Be careful about how you phrase criticism: try to make it constructive. make sure your interviewer is clear about the status of any 'off-the-record' information you give.

(d) The Press Briefing or Conference.

Groups often think that these are the most efficient means of reaching the media. In fact, a successful briefing or conference takes a great deal of time and energy to organise. You may go to a lot of trouble arranging for speakers, contacting journalists, and sending out press releases, to find that only one or two reporters turn up. The experience can be depressing and defeating. It is probably best to avoid this kind of event unless you have really dramatic news to announce, or an extremely well-known speaker to answer questions. If you decide to go ahead, here are some points to bear in mind:

Arrange for a room which is large enough to hold the number of people you expect (not more than half of those invited), but not so large as to look empty.

Pick a convenient time: earlier in the day is better for most news deadlines.

Send out invitations, press releases a week in advance.

Contact key media contacts the day before, but don't please or wheedle.

Usually only one speaker should deliver statements; not more than two.

Being on time, even if attendance is sparse. Stop as soon as questions start to drag, or within 30 minutes.

Follow up. Offer interviews to those who want them. Distribute written announcements and background information to all who attend and to others who expressed interest but did not come.

6. Develop Good Public Relations

Just as you should register complaints about the media's inadequacies in presenting the issue of violence against women, you should make sure that praise is given when it is due. If you liked a particular programme, article or report, contact the person responsible. If you know the individual concerned, a quick telephone call can express immediate enthusiasm. A letter is a more permanent record of approval. These will often be pinned on the office noticeboard, and could gain your valuable support for programme suggestions which you might make in the future. Similarly, if you are invited to give an interview or take part in a discussion programme and you feel happy with the way that your contribution was handled, write a note of thanks to the reporter, producer and/or presenter. You might also suggest to your friends and colleagues that they write letters of appreciation.

And remember: whether it was good or bad, what has already appeared in the media is never the last work. Keep working at it!

VII Audio-Visual Resources on Violence Against Women⁵

This listing of audio-visual resources from Commonwealth countries is divided into two parts. The first contains material about media imagery - in particular pornographic representations of women - which contributes to the general environment in which women experience acts of violence. The second part concentrates on material which is specifically concerned with the issue of violence against women.

1. Media Representations of Women

Soho (U.K., 1980)

16 mm film, 20 min., colour, English

Made by Jan Matthew

Distributor: Cinema of Women

27 Clerkenwell Close

London EC1R 0AT

Tel: (01) 251-4978 or 251-4878

This film looks at what is hidden. 44% of the British workforce is female but women are not seen as workers, only as commodities. Shows how images of women are constructed and what effect this has on our lives.

Matching Looking (U.K., 1980)

Film, 20 min., colour, English
Made by Caroline Sheldon
Distributor: Cinema of Women (address above)

The camera watches a porn shop from and the comings and goings of customers. Women's voices talk about the use of pornography as a weapon against women. Aims to cut through women's feelings of powerlessness when confronted by degrading images. No pornographic images are included.

Reclaiming Ourselves: a Feminist Perspective on Pornography (Canada, 1979)

Slideshow, 30 min., colour, English
Made by Women Against Violence Against Women
Distributor: Women in Focus Arts and Media Centre
Suite 204-456, West Broadway
Vancouver, British Columbia V5Y 1R3
Tel: (604) 872-2250
Contact: Gillean Chase or Brenda Ingratta

Looks at the ways pornography and other sexist media portray women and the resulting messages on the nature of sexuality and power relations between women and men. Examines connections between the objectification of women in sexist advertising and films, and the glorification of rape, mutilation and murder of women for male titillation.

Not a Love Story (Canada)

16 film (also video), 68 min., colour, English
Director : Bonnie Sher Klein
Distributor: National Film Board of Canada
P-43 P O Box 6100
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5
Tel: (514) 333-3265

Examines pornography as a woman-hating ideology and not merely an industry that exploits women. It is a documentary, an expose and also a personal journey, following a Canadian strip-teaser through a process of self-examination.

A Respectable Lie (Canada, 1980)

3/4 in.video, 30 min., colour, English
Made and distributed by Women in Focus Arts and Media Centre (address above)

Examines the imagery and messages of pornography and its connections to violence. Opens with a fast montage of common sexist visual and audio images, followed by discussion about effects of pornography on women.

2. Violence Against Women.

Id Katha Mathramena? (India)
(Is This Just a Story?)

16 mm film, 23 min., b/w, Telugu and other Indian dialects
Made by Yugantar
Distributor: Yugantar
4 Jairam Avenue
Shastri Nagar, Madras 600 020

Using a fictional style the film examines the nature of marital violence and the roles women are expected to play to keep the family 'harmonious' at all costs.

Come On (Australia, 1978)

16 mm film, 8 min., b/w, English
Made by Elizabeth McRae and Joanne Horsburgh
Distributor: Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative
179 Harris Street
Pymont, New South Wales 2009
Tel: (02) 660-8999
Contact: Jennifer Scott

Tackles the issue of socially sanctioned sexual harassment and assault.

It's Just a Compliment, Luv (Australia, 1981)

Video (VHS & U-Matic), 27 min., colour, English
Made by Amanda King
Distributor: Cinema of Women (U.K.: address above)

Documentary about sexual harassment at work, as experienced by Australian women.

Violence Against Women (Australia, 1980)

16 mm film, 6 min., colour., English
Made by Red Heart Pictures
Distributor: Development Education Centre (DEC)
427 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1X7, Canada
Tel: (416) 964-6901

About domestic violence. Questions romantic notions of love and marriage.

Give us a Smile (U.K., 1983)

16 mm film (also video), 13 min., colour, English
Made by Leeds Animation Workshop - A Women's Collective
Distributor: Leeds Animation Workshop
45 Bayswater Row
Leeds 8, West Yorkshire LS8 5LF
Tel: (0532) 484997

Shows the constant harassment with which women live - from 'street humour' and stereotyped media images to physical violence; also harassment of assaulted women by the police and legal system; finally ways in which women fight back.

Marion's Story (U.K., 1976)

Film, 10 min., b/w, English
Made by Nicci Crowther
Distributor: Cinema of Women (address above)

A personal account of one woman's struggle against violence in marriage - rape, incest and battering.

The Issue is Rape (Trinidad & Tobago)

3/4 in. video, 60 min., colour, English
Made by Star Productions Ltd.
Distributor: Star Productions Ltd.
95 Par 3 Lane Fairways
Maraval, Port of Spain

Talk-show series exposing discriminatory laws, and medical and police procedures surrounding the crime of rape.

Tous les Jours ... Tous les Jours (Canada, 1982)
(Day In, Day Out)

3/4 in. video, 57 min., colour, French
Made by Johane Fournier and Nicole Giguere
Distributor: Video Femmes Quebec
10 rue McMahon, Quebec G1R 3S
Tel: (418) 692-3090
Contact: Nicole Bonenfant

Docudrama on sexual harassment, and examples of how to organise against it.

A Common Assault (Canada)

Slideshow, 35 min., colour, English
Made by Peg Campbell
Distributor: IDERA Films
2524 Cypress Street
Vancouver, British Columbia V6J 3N2
Tel: 738-8815

Portrays a situation of wife battering through various stages. Documents effects of sex-role stereotyping on children and adults. Critically examines popular myths about battered women and the men who assault them.

A Sign of Affection (Canada)

Slideshow, 25 min., b/w, English
Made by Peg Campbell
Distributor: IDERA Films (address above)

Surveys attitudes and opinions on wife battering. Examines relationship between alcohol and wife battering.

Sugar and Spice (Canada, 1983)

16 mm film, 20 min., colour, English
Made by Dan Perry
Distributor: Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre
299 Queen Street West, Unit 204 A
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1Z9
Tel: (416) 593-1808
Contact: Lori Keating

Uses firsthand accounts of rape victims to examine contributing social factors, prevalent attitudes and misconceptions about the nature of rape.

Centre le Viol: des Alternatives a Developer, des Mentalities a Changer (Canada, 1980)
(Against Rape: Alternatives to Develop, Attitudes of Change)

Video, 30 min., French
Made by Nicole Giguere
Distributor: Video Femmes Quebec (address above)

Documents different actions developed within the women's movement to combat sexual violence against women.

Chaperons Rouges (Canada, 1979)
(Little Red Riding Hoods)

Video, 43 min, b/w, French
Made by Helen Doyle and Helen Borgault
Distributor: Groupe Intervention Video (GIV)
718 Gildford
Montreal, Quebec H2J 1N6
Tel: (514) 5241-3259

Starting from an analysis of the fairy story, the video describes the meaning of rape and other forms of violence - including harassment in the street and at work - for women: fear, humiliation and frustration. Awarded second prize for short films at the 1981 International Women's Film Festival in Sceaux, France.

Can you Hear Us? (Malaysia, 1984)

Video (VHS), 60 min., English, Malay, Chinese, Hindi
Made by Asian Cultural Forum on Development
Distributor: Asian Cultural Forum on Development
P O Box 2930
Bangkok 10501, Thailand

Three Malaysian womenspeak about their daily struggles: in the family, the violence they suffer, and their work. Accompanied by an illustrated booklet including script, dialogues, questions for discussion and action, background information.

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1. See 'Socialization and Television' by Harold Fisbeing, pp.299-318 in Media, Knowledge and Power, edited by Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Peter Braham, London, Croom Helm, 1987.
 2. See Pornography and Sexual Aggression by Neil M Malamuth and Edward M Donnerstein, New York, Academic Press, 1984.
 3. See Women in Focus: Guidelines for Eliminating Media Sexism, by Julienne Dickey and CPBF Women's Group, London, CPBF, 1985.
 4. See pp. 9-15 in Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography, edited by Laura Lederer, New York, Bantam Books, 1980.
 5. Extracted from Powerful Images: A Women's Guide to Audiovisual Resources, Rome, ISIS International, 1986.