

Violence Against Women on the Rise

by April Edmondson

"Between seventy-five and ninety percent of campus women have experienced at least one incident with campus men that made them feel insulted or degraded. When one university held an anti-pornography march, for instance, the women marching were taunted with cries of 'gang rape, gang rape' and 'I'll take that one,'" states Bernice R. Sandler of the Association of American Colleges in Washington, D.C.

As physical violence continues to increase so does cultural violence against women. It [cultural violence] can be seen in rock music videos, comic books, men's magazines, television and films, jokes, and on computers. It seems that violence against women, despite decades of campaigns against any form of violence, has continued to rise and has reached an all time high.

Jennie Balise, of the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women says, "We're seeing a culture in which it has become a little more okay to hate women."

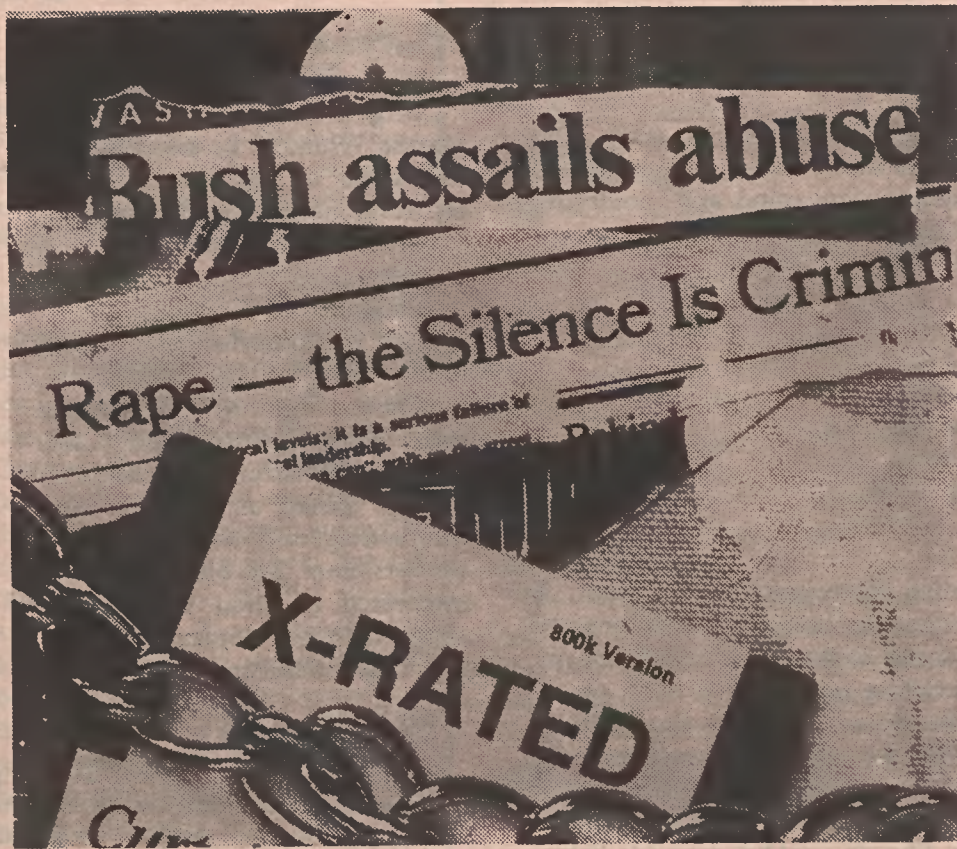
"I've been doing this kind of work for fifteen years, and it feels more dangerous out there to me now," says Nancy Biele, past president of the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, in Minneapolis.

1989 brought an array of horrifying stories to the nation's attention. However, it wasn't the facts of these stories that made them so difficult to interpret instead, as reported in "A Shocking Report On Sexual Rage" in the October, 1989 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal*, it was the fact that so many similar cases had previously been confronted:

*A teenage girl was kidnapped from a Los Angeles bus station and repeatedly raped over a several day period. She managed to escape, flag down a car, and ask the men in it for help. Unfortunately, they also raped her.

*The notorious gang rape and near-fatal attack on a Wall Street investment banker while she was jogging in the early evening. The savage attack induced brain damage, and the Yale graduate has had to relearn such elementary tasks as reading and math skills.

*A mentally impaired girl was raped by five teenage boys while eight others watched. The girl was



allegedly raped with a miniature baseball bat and a broomstick. The youth had known most of her attackers since childhood.

*A respected judge in Grand Rapids, Michigan was killed by her estranged husband, who was a police officer. He was convicted of manslaughter. A male juror said, "Everybody felt that he was provoked by his wife to do this."

*Bonnie, a twenty-eight year old Iowa student who was raped by the relative of a friend recalls, "He started to come on to me, and when I refused, he pulled a knife and made me strip. When I went to the hospital to report it the doctor was so rough I felt I'd been raped a second time."

Terrifying crimes such as these have lead even President Bush to declare, "We must halt this war against women." According to federal statistics, a woman is beaten every fifteen seconds, and five women are murdered every fifteen seconds by their abusers. The FBI reports that a woman is raped every six minutes, and one in ten will be raped in her lifetime. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General, says, "Battery is the single most significant cause of injury to women in this country."

Perhaps most disturbing is the rise of sexual violence and hostility among the youth in our society. According to Mary Beth Roden, a counselor from the rape treatment

center in Santa Monica, California, "A few years ago, we'd show high school students a taped interview with a rape victim, and kids would be saying, 'Wow, that was terrible.' Now many of them are less shocked. I don't know any other word to use but *desensitization*."

According to a survey of 6,159 students from thirty-two campuses across the country conducted by Mary Koss, Ph. D., a professor in the psychiatric department at the University of Arizona, one in twelve men admitted to having forced, or tried to force, a woman to have intercourse. It was also revealed that almost fifty-four percent of the women surveyed had been sexually victimized in some manner, while fifteen percent had been raped. Of that fifteen percent who had been raped almost ninety percent knew their assailant. Forty-seven percent of the rapes occurred on either first dates, casual dates, or romantic acquaintances.

In a survey conducted in 1985 by Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs, they found that of 325 college students, forty percent of the women and thirty percent of the men inflicted or received some form of violence in their relationship. In another study done by McKinney in 1986, thirty percent of women were the victims of date violence. While both sexes encounter violence and physical abuse, the majority of that abuse, including sexual assault, is inflicted upon women.

The need for power is certainly a factor in sexual violence, which may be a result of the challenges to the traditional male power that have been posed by the women's movement. According to Bernice Sandler and Jean O'Gorman Hughes, "Lashing out at these and other women by harassing them is a way to alleviate their [men's] discomfort." While many men have been deeply affected by the "traditional roles" of the sexes, it is the women who have physically and emotionally suffered from this.

The social upheaval created by the women's movement has deeply shaken many men, according to J. William Gibson, Ph. D., an assistant professor of sociology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Gibson says, "From the mid-sixties through the late seventies, many traditional social relationships for men were significantly altered. A lot of the culture that has emerged in the eighties, such as the increased popularity of movies and novels that present men as warriors, has been a symbolic attempt to restore a more traditional world."

The aggression against women is clear and devastating. Life will never be the same for the millions of women who have been sexually assaulted. These victims of assault are more likely to suffer from depression, alcohol and drug dependency, and anxiety. Diana Russell, Ph. D., professor of sociology at Mills College, in Oakland, California says, "This isn't a problem that can be fixed with a little psychotherapy and a few more prisons. The real issue is the way men are brought up to view women and to see manhood."

The remaining dilemma is to stop sexual aggression towards women. Elizabeth Holtzman, district attorney for the borough of Brooklyn in New York City believes that laws must be made more effective and counseling and training programs established within the criminal justice system. She says, "Speaking out against violence in media and particularly violence against women is crucial. I also think we need to address issues of discrimination against women, so we can strengthen the notion of the full humanity of women."

As Nancy Biele says, "If we can stop at a generational level and teach boys and girls differently, we can break through this. A world that is truly equal would be a world without sexual violence."