

While many people in society and on campus are increasingly "aware of rape," they might be uninformed about many issues surrounding rape and sexual assault and their effects

On victims. The phenomena of victim self-blame, rape trauma syndrome, long-term physical and psychological effects and an increasing backlash against the seriousness and violence of rape remain foreign or overlooked entities to many people.

In the mid-1980s acquaintance rape arose as an issue in society that required the public's concern. Shortly after, there was a backlash that portrayed the problem as exaggerated or unimportant.

Acquaintance rape remains an important issue, but misconceptions surrounding the crime abound. Judith Scott, UNC's sexual harassment officer, said due to various programs and information about date rape, reports have increased in the last nine years but the backlash remains.

"The backlash is a denial of a serious problem," Scott said. "With (acquaintance rape's) rise, a backlash has risen that views the problem as imagined and exaggerated and not as prevalent and damaging as popularly believed."

Some byproducts of the backlash include a feeling of shame and self-blame on the part of the victim along with various long-term psychological effects.

Erica Wise, director of Student Psychological Services, said, "There is more of a tendency to blame rape victims than with other violent crimes."

The self-blame placed on women following a rape could be partly historical in origin, Wise said. "There are places in the world where women are damaged

and it is seen as less valuable or important," she said. "A subtle influence exists in this country on the mindset with which we view women."

Sabrina Garcia, crisis counselor for the Chapel Hill Police Department, said victimization was not gender related.

"We have old belief systems in regards to society's perception of gender and victims," she said. "We still look at the victim's gender and categorize by that distinction as innocent or guilty."

"Males are more resistant in reporting rape than women because of the stigma involved."

However, misconceptions still remain in the public's perception of rape.

Wise said: "The biggest misconception about rape is that it's committed by a stranger behind a bush on a dark night. Everyone thinks that it couldn't be by someone you know."

Students, with their new assertions of independence at college, may tend to minimize the dangers around them, she said.

"As young adults develop mentally they tend to feel safer testing their own abilities away from their family and tend to go against the idea of being careful and cautious," Wise said. "We hope that they make good choices and find a balance or middle ground between freedom and choices to be as safe as possible."

By JOHN ADCOCK
EDITORIAL WRITER



Helping rape victims to recover by looking past blame, societal myths

Rape is a crime that will probably affect you, or somebody you are close to, while you are in college. A study conducted by the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication found that one in three women on campus will be the victim of an actual or attempted sexual assault before she graduates. Shockingly, 87 percent of the victims will know their assailants.

Rape is considered a taboo subject, and people do not like to address the

issues involved because of rape's personal nature. But while rape is a highly personal event, it is also a crime, and this silence only protects the assailant, not the friends and family of rape survivors who deal every day with this traumatic event.

Rape is the only crime where blame and guilt are major issues. When someone is robbed, no one asks, "Well, what

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did you do to provoke the robber?" With rape, on the other hand, people are quick to ask, "Why were you in his room?" "Why did you drink so much?" No one asks to be raped, and rape is not a result of one's behavior or style of dress. Poor judgment is not a rapeable offense, and no one asks for or enjoys a violent, traumatic attack that puts the victim at risk of pregnancy, injury disease or death.

Rape is not a sexual act, but an act of aggression, conquest and violence — in short, of power over another person. It affects both women and men, and the Orange County Rape Crisis Center has dealt with victims from age 1 to age 92.

While working at the rape crisis center as a crisis intervention volunteer, I have seen firsthand how damaging rape, the aftermath of self-blame and messages of blame from others can be to the victim. Not laying blame is not enough to help rape survivors put the pieces back together. In order to fully support a victim of rape, it is also important to understand what rape victims experience following the trauma.

Rape victims suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, and more specifically a disorder called rape trauma syndrome. Studies show that all rape victims, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the rape, suffer from rape trauma syndrome to some degree. RTS can be divided into two phases: the acute crisis phase and the reorganization phase.

After a person is raped, he or she experiences a wide range of emotions. The acute phase is characterized by disorganized thinking because the victim is in a state of shock. The person can deal with the trauma either by expressed or controlled reactions. An expressed reaction — including emotions such as anger, fear and anxiety — is what most people envision as the typical response to rape. A controlled reaction occurs when victims mask or hide their feelings about the assault. It is important to remember

that one's external composure does not give an accurate picture of how well one is dealing with a situation, especially when still in shock. People who respond in this way are no less traumatized by the event; they simply deal with the shock in a different manner. In the acute crisis phase, the victim may experience a wide array of emotions: fear, denial, self-blame, guilt, mood swings, shame and revenge. The person may also express irritability, fear and caution when dealing with other people.

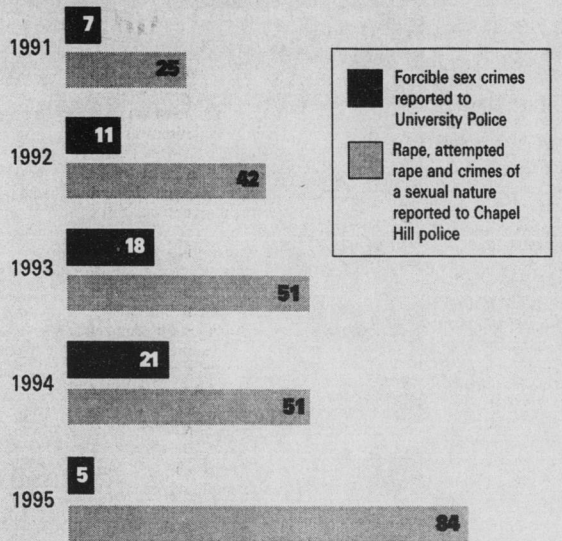
The long-term reaction, or the reorganization phase, occurs when the victim attempts to piece his or her life back together following the rape. This phase can go on for a time period of a few months or many years. During reorganization, the victim must try to make sense of what has happened. The victim may have flashbacks of the attack, experience nightmares or develop phobias in response to the attack. Paranoia and fears are normal responses during this period. The victims' sexual lifestyle also may be affected, as well as their comfort with others' physical touch, even in nonsexual settings, such as hugging. The victim may experience contradictory feelings as well, such as guilt, fear and anger all at once. Many victims may adopt uncharacteristic personality shifts. These shifts can include a wide range of behaviors, such as a shift in sexual attitudes and promiscuity, change of dress, even a change of jobs or colleges.

Long-term phase recovery is not a linear path, and victims may regress quite rapidly in how well they are able to deal with the trauma, seeming fine one day and unable to bear anything the next. These shifts are a normal part of the recovery process. The victims' healing process continues long after the period immediately following the rape.

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Sexual assault, rape on the rise

Despite a backlash dismissing rape's effects and seriousness, reports of sexual harassment and attempted rape to Chapel Hill and University police has increased in the last few years.



SOURCE: UNIVERSITY POLICE, CHAPEL HILL POLICE

DTH/MARK WEISSMAN

RAPE AWARENESS:

DEBUNKING POPULAR MYTHS

UNC gives rape victims many options

Students reporting incidents of sexual assault often feel isolated, powerless, devalued, victimized, confused and betrayed. Those same students frequently experience anxiety attacks, depression, sleep disorders, lack of energy, mood swings, loss of concentration, headaches, stomach aches and irritability. The University has long recognized that students experience these feelings and has taken steps to provide campus resources to help these students. Among those resources are the University Counseling Center, Student Psychological Services, Student Health Gynecological Clinic, Student Health Education, University Police and the Office of the Dean of Students, which includes the harassment and assault prevention coordinator and the Student Judicial System. The University's first formal sexual assault response plan was activated in August 1990.

Under Chancellor Paul Hardin's administration, a task force developed a response plan for sexual assault during the 1989-90 academic year. The response plan, titled "The University Response Plan for Incidents of Sexual Assault Involving UNC-CH Students," established a cooperative course of action which includes six University agencies: Office of the Dean of Students, Student Judicial System, Department of University Housing, academic affairs, Department of Athletics and Student Health Service. Each "agency" has developed its own protocols and procedures pursuant to the University's response plan. These protocols and procedures vary in length and breadth.

During the fall semester of 1992, the University furthered its commitment to assisting students in this area by creating an assistant dean of students position responsible for coordinating harassment and assault prevention programs and response. In December 1995, I began working in this office as assistant dean of students and the harassment and assault prevention coordinator. In this role, my primary responsibilities include development, implementation and administrative coordination of harassment and assault-related educational programming

and response procedures. The educational programs include topics such as gender communication and relations, relationship violence, date and acquaintance rape and responding to sexual assault. I am also responsible for coordinating the University's Sexual Assault Response Plan manual.

When a student reports a sexual assault to me the protocol for the harassment and assault prevention coordinator is activated. I advise the victim of any rights and review options both within and outside the University system. When I talk with students who are reporting a sexual assault, the student understands that everything we discuss is confidential. I will not contact a referral resource on behalf of the student without consent. The student victim's empowerment is

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crucial to this system of responding. According to the philosophy statement of the response plan, "The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recognizes the importance of assisting a student who is a victim of sexual assault in regaining a sense of personal control over her life and the decisions she makes."

By giving students information about available options, that student may be better able to make an informed decision and may better see how to regain control of the situation.

It is important to emphasize that where the victim and alleged assailant are both students, the victim may choose to file charges for sexual assault through the Student Judicial System, the criminal court system, both systems or neither system. Many people often confuse these options and think the student victim must choose one system over the other. That is far from the truth.

Although we have procedures detailing how to respond to these incidents, procedures alone cannot contemplate how and whether students will report incidents to any of the agencies. We know that victims are dealing with a multitude of problems — emotional, physical and social. The emotional problems are associated with the internal conflict caused by the assault, physical problems are associated with any injuries sustained during the assault and social problems are associated with perceived notions of how others will view the situation. Because we know from our experiences that not all sexual assaults are reported, either formally or informally, we do provide a supportive, confidential environment for discussing concerns.

Michelle Cofield is assistant dean of students and the University's harassment and assault prevention coordinator.

Men more than beasts, can help prevent rape

During the summer I came across a unique advertising campaign at one northern college: a rape awareness group installed drain covers that read, "You hold the power to prevent rape in your hand," in every urinal on campus.

(Just mull that one over for a second or so.)

As Rape Awareness Week begins today, I wonder if our campus' annual campaign is targeting the wrong audience.

Instead of making women be on the defensive, how about focusing on getting men off the offensive?

Personally, I get sick and tired of having my heart race every time I wander through the shadowy parts of campus late at night.

I'm tired of hearing admonitions to guard my drink against "roofies," the new date-rape drug sweeping the nation's college campuses.

I'm exhausted by the rationalizations of women trying to convince themselves that, really, just because they did not consent to sexual intercourse does not mean that — shudder to think of it — rape occurred.

But more than anything else, I'm just plain worn out with all the lip service given to women taking control of this issue when the other half of the problem goes untended.

What's the other half? It's cool to get laid.

Society values people, males especially, who can get a piece of the action. And the way in which you get the piece doesn't matter very much.

So many sexual assaults get named something else because of this Machiavellian assumption: a drunken hook-up, a mistake, getting lucky or nothing more

than a blank spot in last night's adventures.

And maybe that's partly because the victims of these assaults do not blame their acquaintances, friends and lovers and name it a crime — rather than a mistake.

But there's also some sort of notion floating around that men have these powerful, testosterone-loaded drives that cannot be controlled by mind or matter, much less by a mere woman.

That once aroused, a man reverts to a beastlike state where he must be satisfied — or else.

I've heard stories about men who were so "overcome" by women's presences — who said they just got so wound up — that their good intentions wound up crumpled by the used condom on the bedroom floor.

A friend of mine recently lost her virginity to a man who knew he shouldn't do what he did while she was trashed.

But he just couldn't help himself, he said.

Granted, I'm not a man, but that has to be the worst excuse I've ever heard for taking advantage of someone.

I'm not asserting that all heterosexual sex somehow perpetuates violence against women.

But I do think that a casual treatment of sex and sexual partners can lead to abusive situations.

Women can lock the chastity belt and throw away the key, but unless the other half of the sexual equation — their partners — help out, all the prevention in the world won't amount to anything more than a few less recriminations on the part of victims.

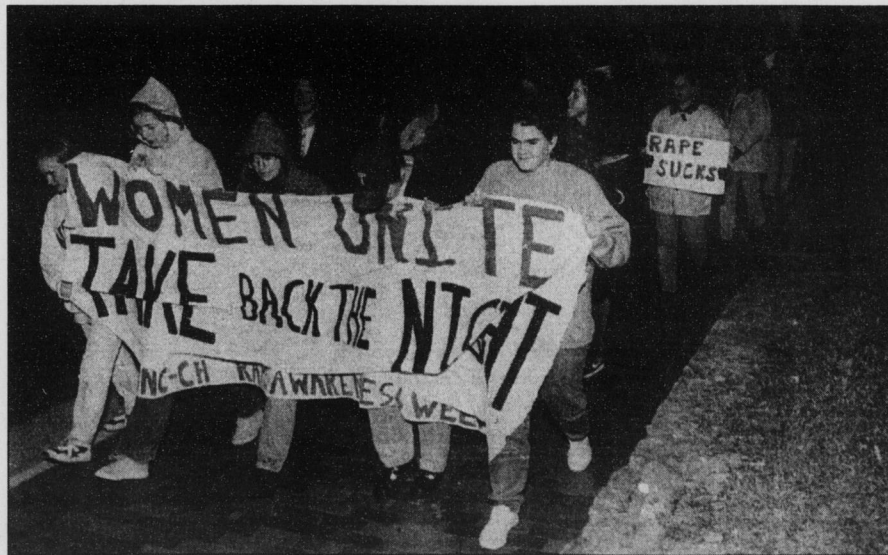
Rape Awareness Week, while serving a useful purpose in getting the word out about the prevalence of rape, can be even more effective.

It should also be a means of redefining the word rape and the power that all men hold in their hands every day to prevent it.

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Supporters process in the 1994 Take Back the Night march. The annual event, which takes place during Rape Awareness Week, is meant to show that students can feel safe walking on the dark campus.

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