

Rohypnol—How the Hype

BY TAMARA GORIN

Cet article rend compte des recherches sur les drogues associées au viol, issues du Centre canadien sur le viol. Dans la première partie l'auteure examine le contexte social, politique et légal des drogues utilisées dans le but de violer les femmes et elle élabore une théorie à partir d'expériences accumulées chez des femmes violées et l'implication des drogues dans leur vie. Dans la deuxième partie c'est l'histoire plus personnelle de l'auteure qui examine un récent article d'Andrea Dworkin qui fut elle-même victime d'un viol alors qu'elle était droguée. Elle relate l'impact politique et personnel de son travail avec Andrea dans les mois qui ont suivi le viol suivi de son cheminement à travers les débats publics sur la validité de son histoire.

Part One

In 1999, the North Vancouver RCMP seized a large quantity of Rohypnol. After days of dire warnings in the local press, with police reminding women of the ways to protect themselves against date rape drugs, police spokespeople finally made an admission that almost all of the drugs seized were bound for the street, which is why they had made the bust in the first place.

The street names for Rohypnol include roofies, Rocies, R2, and Forget Pill.

Rohypnol, after emerging in the early 1990s, quickly became associated with night clubs, parties, and raves. It is a cheap, plentiful, and highly addictive street drug, now widely utilized by heroin and cocaine users as a secondary drug.

The recent reformulation of the

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drug makes it salty and it does not dissolve completely. Older versions of the drug are still circulating, which are odourless, colourless, and tasteless. The drug works almost immediately, peaking at about two hours and lasting eight to 36 hours after ingestion. The effects, which become more pronounced when the drug is combined with alcohol or other drugs, include slurred speech, difficulty walking, nausea, extremely low blood pressure, difficulty breathing, dizziness, amnesia. Even so, Rohypnol metabolizes quickly and is often not traceable after only 24 hours.

Rohypnol is used to commit rape.

But Rohypnol is only the latest drug men use to commit rape. Attention focuses on Rohypnol, but men who rape continue to use alcohol, prescription medication, marijuana, and cocaine. Women are bombarded with warnings to modify their behaviour to keep themselves safe from Rohypnol, yet the number of women calling us to report the use of drugs or

alcohol as a factor in the violence done to them remains constant at about one quarter of the 1,400 calls we receive each year.

Rev up the search engine and type "Rohypnol." The search results provide hundreds of sites, largely created by local police, sheriff's offices, community groups and the American Drug Enforcement Agency. These anti-drug campaigners have a significant impact on the legislative changes in the U.S., and increasingly the rest of the world. Their strategy is to highlight Rohypnol's potential to be used against a person to commit violent crime, and secondarily in its use as a street drug.

Countries and international agencies classify drugs according to medicinal purpose and their potential for illegal abuse. "Schedules" define the legalities of drugs and describe the responses that the country or agency must take to monitor their use. The American government is currently reviewing recommendations for the removal of Rohypnol from Schedule IV to the more limiting Schedule I in the *Federal Controlled Substances Act* because of its high potential for abuse. If moved there, it would join the likes of marijuana, LSD, and heroin. *The Drug Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996* provides for up to 20 year sentences where the defendant is convicted of possessing a controlled substance with the intent to commit a violent crime, and sentences of three years for simple possession of Rohypnol.

Not so much from public pressure but from the neo-liberal love affair with murky reproductions of American law, Canadian MPs voted in 1998

Tricks Women

A Rape Crisis Centre View

in favour of tougher restrictions on Rohypnol. Prior to this, changes were made to the *Controlled Drug and Substances Act* in 1997, though Rohypnol is not moved from Schedule IV. Possession is liable for imprisonment of six months or a \$1,000 fine for a first offence and imprisonment of one year and a \$2,000 fine for a second offence. Trafficking and administering of noxious substances are indictable offences bringing three and fourteen-year maximum sentences respectively. There are no convictions for administering Rohypnol in Canada.

An internet search of Canadian government sites, including the Department of Justice, reveals the British Columbia Ministry of Women's Equality is still the only site with any reference to Rohypnol. These pages have not been updated in two years, leaving one with the feeling that the Ministry was acting out of the hype of the moment, with no real plan for ongoing analysis or recommendations. The site provides the standard information. There are some notable points though. They acknowledge Rohypnol is not the only drug used in sexual assault, and take feminists seriously by warning that "promoting awareness also run(s) the risk of potentially promoting the behaviour it criticises." In other words information distributed should not tell people, in this case men considering rape, how to commit the act the information is supposed to prevent. By stating "although there are reports about Rohypnol in the media, there is no *official* evidence of the drug in B.C.," [emphasis theirs] they admit the response reiterated most often by police.

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The RCMP forensic labs in British Columbia have still not had a positive testing for Rohypnol in any of the rape kit samples sent in for evaluation, and the national lab can report less than ten across the country. Most samples are taken long after the drug metabolises in women's bodies. Often, the samples are not screened for other drugs. Local police and RCMP tell women that without this evidence it is impossible to investigate. As with sexual assault cases generally, the onus is on women to prove they were raped before the police proceed with charges, regardless of the law.

"Date rape" describes rapes that occur usually towards the end of a date, frequently in one of their cars, or in women's homes. Also included are rapes by casual acquaintances, men met at bars, parties, and other social events. The use of alcohol and/or drugs by one or both people is often a factor. Instructional information such as posters, resource guides and campus handbooks tend

to emphasise date rape. Police, educational institutions, and social service agencies create campaigns almost exclusively directed at women. These materials largely stress what *women* should do to avoid being raped.

Lists of "*do's and don'ts*" reinforce the myth that if women restrict their behaviour they will cease to be targets for rape. The language used makes women, not men, the active participants in rape: "Limit your use of alcohol and drugs," "Walk confidently," "Set clear boundaries about what you are prepared to participate in sexually." Add Rohypnol to the list. Now women must not only limit their alcohol intake, they must never leave their glass of cola unattended. They should mix their own drinks, and where they can't it is preferable to watch the bartender, wait staff, or date pour. Directives to avoid rape do little more than place the responsibility for preventing rape on women while letting men off the hook.

Despite years of feminist work to refute rape myths, misogyny informs most public and private discussions about rape. Accordingly, a woman will question herself about the details of the attack down to the minute points. She is vigilant to have an explanation for her own behaviour because anyone she tells inevitably questions her. If she also experiences memory loss, no matter the cause, her judgements are considered suspect. Even before the potential of providing the burden of proof in a legal case, she must provide it in the court of public opinion.

Women are questioned about their behaviour precisely so that judgements can be made about which class of women they are: good or bad,

madonna or whore, true victim or deserving participant. *Was she merely at the wrong place at the wrong time or did she ask for it?* The continued insistence on maintaining standards that reflect only oppositional possibilities of behaviour for women to follow refuses to admit the complexities of women's lives and the complexities of rape. It also admits a steadfast refusal to hold men who rape to the same standards as women.

In a society which holds rape victims under a scrutiny almost no other crime victim endures (besides perhaps battered women and incest survivors) Rohypnol provides some measure of vindication. Unlike other drugs which some women choose to ingest, men give Rohypnol to women without their knowledge, slipping it into their drinks behind their backs. The rapist's sleight of hand puts responsibility squarely in his hands, where it should be anyway.

Whether or not a man uses Rohypnol or another drug to incapacitate the woman he intends to rape, the man who rapes is the one responsible. Holding fast to this idea, women break free of misogynist myths about rape, and the possibility of a response beyond the individual woman emerges. It becomes possible to move the spotlight off of women's behaviour and to focus on men instead. It becomes possible to move the spotlight off of Rohypnol and to focus on rape instead.

Part Two

Andrea Dworkin was raped.

Correction: A man or two men raped Andrea Dworkin. They used a drug to do it.

She told us at a fundraiser we brought her across the continent for. Barely ten feet away from me, after an intimate dinner with 100 of our closest allies present, she said, "This is a work of fiction." But by the wrenching in my gut, the pain ringing my ears and constricting my throat, I knew.

It is true.

I am slightly drunk, so I cry. Tears stream down my face, my best friend holds my hand but she does not know where this sorrow is coming from. I have not done my job. Andrea is mourning the waste of her life's work that this single act against her brings. I am mourning the time I wasted not getting the work done. I did not hear her until

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now. What kind of rape crisis worker am I?

And then, I am mad at her
Andrea, don't tell them rapists using drugs to rape is new. Don't say that. It is not new. They have done it forever. Used drugs and alcohol and ether and anaesthetic and hypnosis. You know this Andrea. I am really angry because she keeps saying it is new. I think: no one listens to the likes of me, she's Andrea Dworkin for krist's sake. I told her about my work and the San Francisco women's work. I told her the rape crisis centres say it's not new. But she still said it. Over and over. Because it happened to her. I told her it wasn't new, and she has a responsibility as a writer, as Andrea Dworkin, to tell the truth beyond herself, gawd-dammit.

She said she was tired and broken by the rape, hope was hard in coming. She couldn't face women like me, young and working hard to pick up the pieces, to stop the men who rape and batter and kill. She said it was hard to resist anymore.

Then, the following evening, at Take Back the Night, she said it was every single woman's obligation to fight, to resist. She told 1500 women to take a stand beyond that night, to get in between the rapist, the john, the pimp, the batterer. She meant it too. She was reinforcing our speaker's calls to action and she raised her voice up and demanded we do it.

We all worked hard that weekend—about 50 feminist anti-violence workers from all over B.C. with Andrea Dworkin and Sheila Jeffries. Feminists in B.C. do not often get a chance to meet, our coalitions are less and less politicized, and we are therefore more and more isolated from each other's work. We told each other what men and the state were doing to women. We came up with an extensive list of demands to take back with us to our hometowns to work on. We learned from and criticized Andrea's and Sheila's work.

Andrea and I did not get another chance to talk. We have not since.

I picked Andrea up at the airport, she was not well, but we worked the awkwardness of strangers meeting and her reputation preceding her. We drove through the city to her hotel. We chatted. Feminist chat, anti-violence worker chat. *Not "howse the weather in these parts?" but "howse the rape in this parts?"*

She asked me about date rape drugs. What did I think? I told her. I wrote an article. The cops are assholes. The women are being tricked. The rapists are getting away with it. Hoffman-La Roche is benevolent and changed the chemical composition, shouldn't we all be so grateful? Thank you so much. I said Hoffman-La Roche also makes Valium and Halcion and Xanax, which have been used by rapists forever, by doctors to keep us numb forever, but they aren't changing the chemical composition of those legal, state-sanctioned drugs, are they? I said the women I am working with who were raped by men using Rohypnol. They are are fighting mad,

insisting with the police, because this is the control they can exert now. They know they were raped, even without the memory.

At the hotel, we had lunch. We talked about Edward Said. I was very excited about this, talking about Edward Said with Andrea Dworkin. She also talked about "President Rape" (Bill Clinton) and the attack on her for taking a stand and then the subsequent attack on the other women who didn't or did, but to us, were wrong. I was glad to be a Canadian feminist at that point, and we laughed about this. She drank bottled water. She travels. I would too if I travelled. Saves the intestinal tract. Now I think: I would too if I were recently raped.

Andrea Dworkin was in my car. We talked about rape, she asked me about date rape pills. I said, "I was raped and I remember, but I didn't at first because I was asleep." I looked her in the face over lunch and talked and theorized and I did not know. How could I not know? Why didn't she tell me?

I was a stranger, another woman who has used her words for sustenance and guidance. I tried to let her know that I could see her, the woman. But if I were her, I'd be "shields up" too. How many women's faces must she look at and see the hopeful, "see, we are like each other," but mostly, "see, I am like you." We don't intentionally objectify our leaders, those of us who still read and listen to Andrea Dworkin especially. But obviously we do. She expected this from me. And I probably did, even though I did not want to.

I told her I was raped not so she could take care of me, but to place myself beside the women who call the rape crisis centre. We are each other. But I can see how one more woman telling her this fact added to her burden, might have added to her isolation. I forget. I work in a collective of women; I have access to as many as 30 women at a time. She works at home, out of hotel rooms,

at conference centres. She has few to call on.

In June of this year, the *New Statesman* published her article, "The Day I was Drugged and Raped." Reprints spread through the internet feminist circles and the print "intellectual dailies and weeklies" quickly.

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On the feminist listservs and the web sites which I frequently visit in the course of my work, women were expressing rage, hurt, and deep sorrow in that first week. By the next, women were writing earnest letters to the editor and opinion pieces, sometimes to stem the tide of anti-Andrea propaganda, sometimes in response to it.

Women were forced to respond to the sexist pundit's questions. Was she raped? Did it happen?

The women in our collective had heard the earlier, rawer and, if possible, more searing version just nine short months before. She told us the first public account.

Those of us, who are intimate with rape, who know as much about rape as the men who rape will allow us to know, had to be quick. In those two weeks it seemed the whole question of women's credibility about rape was up for grabs again. While still trying to deal with our own emotional responses to the news, we had

to stand up not only for Andrea, but also for every raped woman before and after her.

How do you say you believe women but also weave into the mix the complexities and contradictions of women's lives? This is dangerous territory for feminists, to be thought over and struggled with. Any slip, no matter how small, is used against us and subsequently every other woman. Whole sentences must be used.

The exact moment I described in my article and Andrea described in hers was happening. Rape victims, no matter who we are and what happened to us, must shut up or provide the facts that prove it. Whether or not we go to court. Most women are tested in the private sphere. Andrea was tested in the public one. Her refusal to use the police because of what she knows about rape, a decision that most women who are raped make, was held up as the most important reason not to believe her.

The rape Andrea described was, while horrifying and mind numbing, rather ordinary. Thousands of women report this kind of rape, drug-aided or not, to rape crisis centres. But many people used the facts she chose to report against her, accusing her of sensationalizing to make her point.

Maybe Andrea and I know more about rape than we should. What for us is simply every day reality, the complete and unassailable truth of too many women's lives, is for most people too much to hear. A woman telling what happened to her in her own words, instead of through a journalistic lens or cinematic drama, is too much.

I wonder: if she told her story to a journalist instead of writing it herself, would the unleashed fury be tamed? If her presented victimhood, rage, and despair was tempered by the "objective" voice of a third party, would the naysayers relent, leave her at least a little room for grace?

Why is what happens to women more credible when someone else

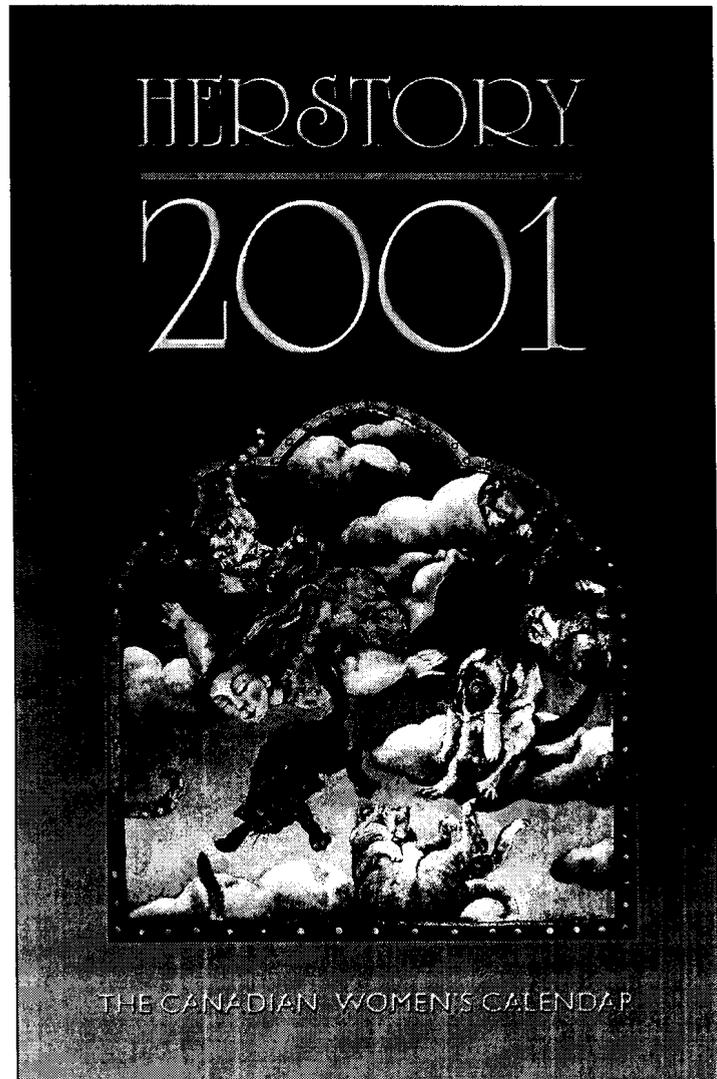
tells it? The therapist, the doctor, the journalist reports "rape happened" and suddenly, every one nods and says, oh yes, it did. A woman, *whose body it happened to, who was the only other person in the room besides the rapist* reports "rape happened" and she is subjected to an interrogation of her motives, her sanity, her behaviour.

Andrea Dworkin is a writer. It is her job to tell what happens to women. And she is a feminist. She holds "the personal is political" as a deeply held belief. It is her obligation to tell her woman's life. Women activists and writers do not have any choice but to do so or we betray every other woman. It is not necessary to embody every rape victim, as one of my co-workers said to Andrea after her speech in September. I would add: we have our own lives to tell.

A shorter version of part one of this article originally appeared in Kinesis, October 1998 and can currently be found on the web at www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/issues/rohypnol.html

Tamara Gorin is a long-term collective member of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter. She chooses anti-violence work as the site of her resistance to patriarchy so that she will not be tricked into thinking everything is gonna be okay. She is working class, a radical lesbian, white and a mother to a ten-year-old boy child. Inviting Sheila Jeffries and Andrea Dworkin to Vancouver last year, considering the current political climate in Vancouver and Canada generally, is an act of bravery she is proud of herself and her collective for insisting upon.

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**TO END POVERTY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
WE DEMAND THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:**

34. Integrate a gender-equality analysis into all programs, policies and funding concerning Aboriginal peoples, and provide adequate resources to autonomous Aboriginal women's organizations to assist in its development.

35. Amend the Indian Act to restore women's traditional rights to pass on Aboriginal heritage.

36. Provide adequate funds to Aboriginal women's groups to develop transition houses and other services in Aboriginal communities, on and off reserves.

37. Fully implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that include comprehensive recommendations on women's equality.

38. Ensure the amendment of all federal statutes and policies that continue to discriminate against lesbians, and bring lesbians into full legal and substantive equality.

39. Undertake a three year public awareness campaign with the aim of eliminating discrimination against lesbians and facilitating the ongoing task of promoting respect, dignity and equality.

40. Amend the Immigration Act to allow for lesbian spouses to be recognized as "family class" immigrants, taking into consideration the persistent inequalities that lesbians face around the world and include sexual orientation as a ground for claiming refugee status.

41. Promote and defend the rights of lesbians to be protected under the following international agreements: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

42. Fund an independent national meeting where lesbians can discuss and prioritize areas for legislative and public policy reform, and consult with lesbian communities on future policy changes.

43. Allocate sufficient on-going resources to independent and feminist women-controlled groups, such as rape crisis centres, transition houses and women's centres committed to ending violence against women. This federal intervention must begin with an immediate infusion of \$50 million this year.

44. Create a "special access to justice" fund so that women may be informed and represented in all legal proceedings. Special funding must be earmarked for translation, sign language and cultural interpretation services.

45. Engage in family law reform that acknowledges the prevalence of wife assault, child sexual abuse, and patriarchal gender dynamics, and that does not force women to submit to "shared parenting" plans, joint custody and man-datory mediation upon divorce.

46. Develop a special plan to identify racist bias in all aspects of the criminal law system and propose ways to effectively eliminate racism from judicial practice, in collaboration with the provinces and in consultation with affected communities.

47. Engage in an egalitarian reform of the Criminal Code, the criminal trial process and sentencing policies that takes into account and tries to eliminate the his-toric sexist, racist and classist biases of Canadian criminal law.

In particular:

- prohibit the use of the defence of provocation in all crimes of violence against women;
- improve the provisions on self-defense to ensure a fairer treatment of women who defend themselves in crimes of violence against women;
- ensure fair and equal treatment of all offenders and victims, taking into account their individual and collective disadvantages and privileges;
- ensure that the criminal law does not reinforce and perpetuate existing relations of domination and subordination;
- eliminate all homophobic bias and ensure the full recognition of the dignity and worth of the lives of women and girls with a disability.

48. Fund consultations prior to all legislative reform of relevance to women's security and equality rights. These consultations must be in national scope, inclusive and developed in collaboration with federal, provincial and territorial women's equality-seeking organizations.

49. End all trafficking in women and protect the human rights of all the women involved in the sex trade.