

Ontario Provincial Police Report, 1979

Gilleen Chase

The facts upon which this article is based were taken from an interview with Gilleen Chase, Co-ordinator of Public Education at the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre.

In January of this year, the Ontario Provincial Police released its report on rape and sexual assault, a report which clearly implies that the victim is responsible for the 'sexual' crimes committed against her. Using words such as 'indiscriminate', 'lacking discretion', and 'promiscuous', the statisticians and researchers involved demonstrate a bias in their reporting which is neither responsible nor appropriate in a scholarly report. Furthermore, if one examines the statistics upon which these interpretations are based, there is no concrete evidence to substantiate the conclusions such language explicitly reinforces.

The report constitutes a survey of sexual offenses reported during the six month period from April until September 1978. It states—accurately—that a majority of female victims are within the age group from eleven to nineteen. This is generally true because rape requires a vulnerable victim whose naïveté or innocence may be used against her. The report also states, quite accurately, that many young victims are sexually abused by acquaintances or relatives rather than by strangers. In fact, wherever the report simply documents the facts of who gets raped and where, its statements are straightforward and accurate.

Where the bias and inaccuracy of the report become glaring is in its analysis of the *causes* of sexual crimes. In dealing with victims sixteen years of age and older, the group most often assaulted by strangers, the report clearly suggests that the victims provoke the crime:

the victims tend to be involved with hitch-hiking, abuse of alcohol and/or drugs . . . with the exception of twenty-nine percent of the rape offenses, the victims showed a great lack of discretion and . . . promiscuity.

In arriving at these percentages, the researchers who prepared the report classified rape into six categories based on the circumstances in which the rape occurred: those which took place in the home environment; on a social occasion; when the victim accepted a ride; when the victim was hitch-hiking; when the victim was a runaway; and, finally, those which were 'unprovoked'. In other words, the report defines the first five categories as victim provoked rape involving great indiscretion and promiscuity.

It is disturbing to note that when Toronto *Star* columnist Michele Landsberg interviewed Staff Superintendent Neil Chaddock (who heads the OPP research branch that prepared the report) he had the following explanation for the report's use of the word 'promiscuous':

according to Webster's Dictionary, that word promiscuous means indiscriminate. That's all we're saying—that these girls were indiscriminate. . . . Indiscriminate means indiscreet . . . taking a ride from a stranger is indiscriminate.¹

If one accepts such semantic imprecision, one could justly label the researchers who wrote the report 'promiscuous' for their astonishingly irresponsible indiscretion in using loaded language to define seventy-one percent of the rape victims they studied. The word 'promiscuous', unlike the words 'indiscriminate' and 'indiscreet', refers *specifically* to sexual behaviour. It describes someone who explicitly

invites sexual involvement.

Semantic imprecision aside, the charge that the victims provoked their assailant needs to be examined. Taking Chad-dock's example of the hitch-hiker, one can dismiss this charge fairly quickly. The OPP report is a rural study covering a period of the year during which young victims tend to be out of school. Transportation in rural Ontario is often inadequate, expensive or inaccessible to the teenager, so that young people tend to hitch-hike as a means of getting about. Entering a car with a stranger may provide him with the *opportunity* for sexual assault. However, this is not equivalent to saying that the victim provoked or encouraged violent assault by getting into the car—unless one endorses the popular myth that males are not responsible for rape and are not in control of their own 'biological urges'. Biological urges have nothing to do with rape. All serious scholarly investigations of rape support this truth. What is involved is the desire to dominate and degrade the victim; to take away her right to choose whether or not to engage in intercourse.

The report also points an accusing finger at victims who were 'abusing' alcohol or drugs at the time of the assault. The term 'abuse' in police business can refer to people who drink underage as well as people who are inebriated. The use of this term without clarification is therefore misrepresentative because readers of the report would tend to assume the victims were so inebriated as to be incapable of exercising good judgment. Victimizing a drunken teenager or adult does not excuse a rapist in any case. Again, the victim may well have provided the opportunity for rape; certainly she did not provide the motive.

With regard to alcohol and drug (ab)use, the report also demonstrates a bias against the female victim of rape. The report states that male victims of sexual assault are 'befriended by the accused persons who make drugs and alcohol readily available to them.' The implication is that no male freely consents to intercourse with another male unless his judgment is deliberately impaired by the assailant by means of drugs or alcohol. Because the report makes no similar comment on alcohol or drug consumption by female victims, one must infer that females either consent more freely than males to intercourse (because they do not need to be plied with stimulants) or that they 'promiscuously' take stimulants and provoke the rapist.

Whatever the intention of the OPP researchers' sloppy use of language and unobjective conclusions about motive, the report fosters three serious misassumptions.

First, it suggests that nice girls do not get raped, or, if they do, they were asking for it. This, in turn, perpetuates the traditional guilt feelings our culture has imposed on the rape victim such that she either does not report the rape or suffers emotional trauma as author of her own violation, in effect accepting the rape as a punishment for not being sufficiently cautious, prudent or well-behaved. Failing to report the rape allows rapists to continue in their terrorizing of women. Laying a burden of guilt on the victim allows society and the rapist to continue to place responsibility on women to prevent rape.

Secondly, the report tacitly absolves the rapist of sole responsibility for his crime. It is frightening to speculate on the con-

sequences of a potential or undetected rapist's reading of this report. He might quite logically assume he need accept no blame or responsibility for his actions if the opportunity for rape presents itself. Equally, he might assume that given the police's disposition to discredit the victim, he can gamble that even if caught and prosecuted, his chances of being convicted are slim.

Finally, the report deflects public attention from the fact that rape is on the increase and that no woman is free from the potential threat of being raped. By implying that the victim is to blame, the report encourages us to complacently assume that the rising statistics of reported rape have nothing to do with us—rape cannot happen to ourselves, our friends or our families.

In October of 1977 the headline of the Toronto *Star* read 'Rapes up 36%, Chief warns women to be more cautious'. Well, yes and no. If women spent all of their energies avoiding situations where they provide rapists with the opportunity for rape, they would have to stay off the streets, never answer their doors, never accept rides home from business meetings, never have a drink in public, never stop to give directions when asked, never, in short, trust any male. The sad fact is that approximately sixty percent of rapes involve an offender who is known to the victim—he is a relative, a former boyfriend, or an acquaintance among the victim's circle of friends. Any woman reading this article can probably recall at least one occasion in the last month where she has accepted an offer of a drive from an acquaintance or where she could have been followed from a bar after having revealed the fact she was alone.

Rapists want privacy and power. Women can govern their movements to some extent to decrease the opportunities which grant these two conditions to a potential rapist. They can be assertive, can be skilled in the arts of self defence, and be aware of what it means to be a woman in this society so that they are not innocently trusting or blind to possible dangers. However, to be one hundred percent preoccupied with the prevention of rape requires one hundred percent paranoia. At some point we must balance our freedom of movement against the fact that in this society all women are potential victims.

Two kinds of awareness are required of women. First they must overcome the conditioning that urges them to be pleasing, to give double messages when saying no to sex, to be helpless and ignorant in the practice of self defence. Secondly, they must prepare themselves for the possibility of rape and know what to do and what to expect.

Every woman should know where her nearest rape crisis centre is. Most centres will not try to tell you what to do if raped; they will tell you what you can expect if you report the circumstances of your particular rape. In some cities, the police force has special rape squads which are generally supportive and objective; in others, you will come up against attitudes similar to those articulated in the OPP report. In general, certain circumstances will be to your advantage: if you are married, the victim of a stranger rape, or subject to the threat of a weapon or aggravated violence, your chances of seeing your case go to court and of getting a conviction increase. On the other hand, if you were hitch-hiking, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, a resident of a housing project, a lower class victim of an upper class male, hostile to the police, or silent for too long after the rape occurred, it is likely your charge of rape will be determined 'unfounded' and never even proceed to court. Naturally, these are generalizations. On occasion, rape charges which have been brought by prostitutes, hitch-hikers or women victimized by former boyfriends, have proceeded to the courts, despite the tendency of the police to judge such cases 'unfounded'.

Women should also know about the way a court proceeds. If a case has been ruled 'unfounded' it is very difficult to proceed. Sometimes the police are showing personal bias. More often,

aware of the evidentiary requirements of prosecution, they are simply anticipating which cases will be thrown out of court in the preliminary hearings.

In court, although federal law has recently disallowed questioning about the victim's past sexual history, the defense attorney can still ask for a private meeting with the judge and argue the relevance of such testimony. The ruling on this matter is up to the discretion of the presiding judge, and it is still possible that the rape victim will feel she is on trial rather than the accused. One can take for granted that a good defense attorney will try any trick to have his client acquitted; and often these tricks will be traumatic to the victim.

Finally, women can lobby to defend their rights and interests by supporting legislation which will change the definition of rape from a sexual crime to a form of assault. As long as rape is considered to be a sexually motivated crime, the onus will be on the victim to prove she did not provoke the assault. While rape remains in the part of the criminal code having to do with crimes against morality, the victim will be forced to defend her character and integrity. Our police are bound by the current 'moral' interpretations of the law in as much as they reflect the prevalent attitudes and prejudices of society at large. A change in the law can only help victims who take their cases to the courts.

Massive changes in attitudes will be necessary before the incidence of rape decreases. All of us can begin to make war on these attitudes by speaking up the next time we hear prejudices reminiscent of the attitudes reflected in the OPP report on sexual crimes. Argue passionately the next time you hear variants on the themes that nice girls don't get raped; that women who hitch-hike are asking to be raped; that most victims simply changed their minds about their behaviour the next morning; that the charge of rape is often an act of revenge. Perhaps the most telling statistic to throw back in the face of such uninformed bias is that of all the rape charges laid, only two to four percent are determined to be false charges laid out of spite or entrapment—a percentage no different from the ratio of false charges laid in other crimes such as theft or assault.

When we say 'no', we mean 'no'. That is the bottom line. No one has the right to read between the lines in what we say and what we do. No one has the right to convince himself that I'm really suggesting a 'yes'. There is *no* excuse for the rapist. And a society which expends as much energy as the OPP report to excuse him is accessory to the crime. It is not a victim lacking in discrimination who provokes rapists. It is anyone who defends or excuses them who cannot discriminate right from wrong. It is that person who provokes the crime. As women, we must pass this verdict loudly and clearly until the rapist and the society which encourages him are called to account for their crimes.

1 The Toronto *Star*, January 13, 1979, p. A1.

Sexual Abuse of Children—how prevalent is it? How would you, as a parent or a concerned professional, deal with such an event? Copies of this handbook are available at \$1.50 per booklet. Send in payment by cheque or money order to:

Toronto Rape Crisis Centre
P.O. Box 6597
Station "A"
Toronto, Ontario M5W 1X4

requesting 'The Sexual Assault of Children'.

A statistical analysis of sexual assault victims who consulted the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre is available for \$2.00. The figures upon which the booklet is based are for the period between January-December 1978. Ask for 'Facts In Figures' and send your payment to the above address.