

Communications

- Chapter Overview
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CHAPTER TWO

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two begins our discussion of Communications. Our first contributor, Grace Poore, invites us to reimagine media as a member of the community, rather than detached observer. She asserts, “media should want to be advocates against domestic violence and want to help move bystanders to action” and, in examining what this means, expands and recreates all our roles, i.e., survivors and activists as creators of media, and media as community-based advocates. Our second contributor, Priyanka Sinha, documents this very process put to practice and in doing so, uncovers a wealth of complex and profound questions about “capacity, organizational identities, options and analysis” she and other activists were compelled to articulate and ponder.

Reader's Guide

Media and Bystander Responsibility

*By Grace Poore
Shakti Productions*

Note to the Reader:

The following questions were designed to encourage advocates to think critically about the role played by the media in their work to end domestic violence. As you read this article, you may want to think about and answer some or all of these questions.

- What are prevailing media images about victims and survivors of domestic violence? How have these images changed from 10 years ago? 20 years ago?
- What is your idea of accurate media representation of domestic violence? Does this idea apply to victims, survivors and perpetrators from different communities?
- What qualities do you look for in good media coverage or reporting on a domestic violence case? If possible, list these qualities in order of importance.
- Media has been more willing to print or air retractions or corrections when mistakes are brought to their attention. What are other more useful ways that media can make amends and how does this differ for a small town, rural, large city or state news organization?
- How has your program negotiated a relationship with local media-what steps did this require? How successful were your efforts? Conversely, if you have an antagonistic relationship with media, what were the hard lessons learned and how could there be less antagonism on both sides?
- What is the difference between being objective and being neutral? Provide some examples relevant to your work that illustrate the difference between objectivity and neutrality.
- Do you have different expectations and standards of media responsibility for print, broadcast and electronic media? Explain them.
- Name differences in the ways male and female reporters in your area cover domestic violence. To what do you attribute these differences? Do these differences cut across race, class and ethnicity, and other factors?
- In what ways could media hold perpetrators of domestic violence accountable? Now name some ways in which media lets perpetrators of domestic violence off the hook.
- Name 5 things in a media report that influenced your opinion about an issue that you were not familiar with. Why did these 5 factors influence you? How did they influence you? When were you conscious and aware of their impact on you? Apply these questions to a story you might write about a domestic violence case.

Media and Bystander Responsibility

*By Grace Poore
Shakti Productions*

I began research for this article on the premise that members of media are part of the communities on which they report. In this capacity, they have a responsibility to use their connection to one of the most influential institutions in this country to activate greater community intervention and prevention of domestic violence. To do this with integrity, I felt they had to challenge or at least question advertisements or entertainment programming that demeaned women, passed off homophobic remarks or actions as humor, perpetuated myths about domestic violence, and endorsed bullying or coercive displays of "jealous love." In addition, instead of detached coverage of domestic violence, I expected members of the media to hold their news organizations accountable when they practiced irresponsible journalism, for example:

**... members of media
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- careless reporting involving erroneous quotes by survivors of domestic violence and their advocates,
- sensationalizing and packaging a story and a victim at the expense of her dignity and integrity,
- omitting details that seem irrelevant to a reporter or editor and consequently distorting realities faced by the battered partner,
- interviewing the wrong people (batterer's family and friends), who create a favorable impression of the perpetrator, while not interviewing people known to the battered partner,
- providing news coverage that implies or overtly blames the victim for staying in the abusive relationship,
- treating the case as an isolated incident of violence instead of connecting it to a long history of violence in the relationship or to the prevalence of domestic violence in the community.

My premise is not far-fetched. The last decade shows that many news organizations and entertainment media have changed how they treat domestic violence. We see evidence of this in news as well as some entertainment media, e.g., in safety planning segments on television and radio talk shows focusing on domestic violence, public service announcements following made-for-TV movies about violence in intimate relationships, contact information for local and national hotlines in television, magazine or newspaper special reports, and survivor stories accompanied by suggestions for people needing assistance. These changes are a direct result of nearly 20 years of national, state and local advocacy to bring home the reality that domestic violence is widely prevalent.

It should be standard practice by now for newspapers, journals and televisions to include lists of resources in situations of public danger. Domestic violence reporting is no exception.

Yet the media have not gone far enough. As important as it is for news organizations to provide contact and resource information, it is a minimal step. The media are not doing anyone a favor by giving this information. It is their civic duty to keep the public informed about their options given the dangers of domestic violence, as, more than likely, many people who are reading or watching the news are also experiencing domestic violence or know someone who is a victim or survivor. A comparison can be made to providing telephone numbers regarding product recall when the Food and Drug Administration declares a warning. It should be standard practice by now for newspapers, journals and televisions to include lists of resources in situations of public danger. Domestic violence reporting is no exception.

On the other hand, irresponsible journalism continues to compromise the relationships that survivors of domestic

violence, their families and advocates have with media, as illustrated by this Pennsylvania case:

Immediately after the murder of my daughter, the news article in the Sunday paper had no mention of domestic violence. They blamed it on a bad relationship. To make it worse, when I opened the paper, they had put a picture of the person who killed her in the "In Memoriam" section with a poem. I wrote a letter to the editor with my phone number. They never published my letter but they called me and said that they did not realize he was the person who killed my daughter. So there was no apology, no acknowledgment of their insensitivity, or how they failed to humanize my daughter. There was no picture of her, they did not talk about the person she was, the family she had, about the single she cut at 20, and how well she did in school. TV news reporters also honed in on the bad relationship. They talked to her neighbors and the police. They never asked us, her family or her best friends, what we knew about the relationship. Even if it was a month down the road, they could have asked what was going on in this relationship. The initiative should have come from the media because they were the ones covering it.

– Pauletta Vaughn (2007), Survivor and Activist to end violence against women

By incorrectly naming what had happened and making Vaughn's daughter, Aubria, a victim of a bad relationship instead of long term abuse, the media ended up revictimizing her and mistreating the survivors of her murder, her family, giving them ample reason to distrust media.

Imagine what victims and survivors of domestic violence and their families could experience if all media (mainstream, alternative, large and small) saw newsgathering as an opportunity to help shape bystander responsibility. In Aubria's case, neighbors knew what was happening. As one neighbor said on television, "It was the usual Friday night stuff" (Vaughn, 2007). What if we got to hear reporters asking neighbors, "What did you do when you heard them arguing?" "Was it just plain arguing or was it more serious?" "Could you have done anything to help the victim?" "Why didn't you get involved?" "Why do you think you didn't sense anything was wrong?" These questions are not meant to point fingers. Rather, if neighbors who are usually passive onlookers are going to be asked their opinions, then why not use their passive bystander as a teaching moment about how to prevent or intervene instead of treating the domestic violence tragedy as an anomaly?

Imagine what victims and survivors of domestic violence and their families could experience if all media (mainstream, alternative, large and small) saw newsgathering as an opportunity to help shape bystander responsibility.

Who Is a Bystander?

In the famous 1964 case of bystander apathy, Catherine Genovese was stabbed to death. She was a bar manager returning home in the early hours of the morning when the attacker surprised her. The first person who heard her cries for help raised the window of the apartment and yelled out at the unseen assailant, "Let the girl alone." Subsequently the attacker drove off but he returned to find Catherine trying to get into her building and stabbed her again. During the 30-minute period between when she was first stabbed and when she finally died, 38 people saw or heard what was happening and did nothing. No one called the police. No one stepped out to assist Catherine. No one stepped in to confront the killer. And when one person eventually called the police, it was too late. The middle-class, white neighborhood in Queens where this situation unfolded was made up of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, and included many European immigrants. When the press asked the 38 people why they did nothing, their responses ranged from: "I didn't realize how serious it was" to "I thought it was a private matter," to "I don't know." But mostly people said, "I didn't know what to do."¹

In 1968, the phenomenon of bystander apathy was first raised by social psychologists, John Darley and Bibb Latane who conducted a study to see how strangers in a room would respond to a person in crisis. They found that in a crisis, most people assume someone else will do something or someone else is more qualified or better equipped to intervene. Many will also wait to see how others respond before they take action. Some are uncertain that their help is wanted and prefer avoiding the embarrassment of their assistance being rejected. Subsequently, the term bystander came to be associated with passive onlooker, a person who chooses not to be involved in a situation of injustice because of apathy or indifference (Latane & Darley, 1970).

¹ From various media reports on the case.

Activating Bystander Potential

In 2005, Victoria Banyard, Elizabeth Plante and Mary Moynihan conducted a different study and concluded that bystander response is less about apathy and more about preparedness. Participants in their study showed greater willingness to take action if they had been made aware of how harmful and undeserved violence is, if they had been taught to recognize signs of violence, and, most importantly, if they had been trained on how to make interventions. These pre-existing factors helped generate bystander confidence because they understood what was happening, who the victim was, and felt greater certainty about what steps to take and that their intervention would be helpful to the victim (Banyard, Plante & Moynihan, 2005).

Although Banyard, Plante and Moynihan's study looked at responses to acquaintance rape on campus, their findings and analysis are useful for battered women's advocates because it offers the hopeful message **that bystanders represent an unharnessed potential waiting to be galvanized.**

This model for working with bystanders can change the relationships between outreach educators and their constituencies because it changes the approach to bystanding. The goal now becomes making intervention more accessible so that people will be less afraid to try to it.

Media's Potential

Media could change the dialogue from focusing on the victim's responsibility to the community's responsibility. For instance, a reporter could say, what can I, as a member of community and not just as a reporter, do to learn about this issue. He could go to the domestic violence organization and get information, get their perspective. But members of the media don't think this is their role and they don't recognize that they have a role. They see it as the domestic violence agency's role to do this work, to convince the press that there's a domestic violence angle, or educate the public.

– Cheryl O'Donnell (2007), former Director of Communications, National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)

Battered women's advocates already work on raising public awareness and providing information that bystanders can use. The media can serve as a mechanism to help people internalize this information. People can learn how to do effective intervention if they are

regularly exposed to examples of successful interventions and preventions, e.g., through news coverage, movies, telenovelas, and survivor narratives they can integrate into their consciousness.

For instance, when an abusive partner kills his current or estranged wife or girlfriend and the children, newspaper and television news reporters repeat the mistake that police invariably make by attributing such killings to a domestic

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“dispute.” As Survivor and Activist Pauletta Vaughn points out, “A domestic dispute is a disagreement. Anyone can have one. It’s normal. There’s no abuse there. But domestic violence, that’s different.” Reporters can avoid such mistakes by reframing their approach to domestic violence coverage, which helps reframe the questions, which leads to different story angles. Again, reporters like to gather soundbites and quotes from neighbors, whose responses to multiple family killings tend to be, “I had no idea there were problems,” “What would lead him to do something like this?” “They seemed like a normal family,” or “They didn’t seem to get along so I didn’t make anything of it when I heard some loud pops from over there.” As pointed out in an earlier example, these types of responses are opportunities for reporters to turn the mirror back on society instead of on the victims.

Objectivity vs. Advocacy

Thus far, I have assumed that media should want to be advocates against domestic violence and want to help move bystanders to action. But three of the five media people I spoke with chafed at the notion of being advocates because they believe it compromises their objectivity and integrity as journalists.

I used to think that objectivity was another term for remaining neutral, which is not true. One can be objective and take sides, even the wrong side. For instance, a reporter can gather anecdotes from survivors of domestic violence and statistics from a local domestic violence program showing that domestic violence in that community reflects the national trend, i.e., that men are more likely to perpetrate domestic violence than women and are more likely to feel entitled to using domination and coercive tactics to control their partners even to the extent of committing acts of cruelty. True objectivity would mean that the findings by the reporter are presented in a way that helps the public understand that men are by and large the perpetrators of domestic violence, even against partners who have left them. But news organizations make decisions that are not solely guided by the cardinal rules of journalism – accuracy, timeliness, relevance, and urgency. Personal values, beliefs and experiences also influence decisions. All journalists bring the familiar and the feared to their news gathering and reporting.

This combination of influences affects the tone and slant of a story; where the story is placed in a newspaper or newscast; how much space, time or prominence it is given compared to other stories; how the issue is framed; who is presented sympathetically or unsympathetically. A headline with a particular bias can change the way the public responds to a survivor’s account of what happened, just as repeated use of certain images or a replay of a soundbite can affect the public’s views on a case, even if these are presented out of context.

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Perhaps the anxiety being expressed by the reporters I spoke to is more about compromising the ideal of objectivity rather than objectivity itself, because without this ideal there would be no aspiration to maintain a balanced view:

Sure, my job is to be fair and balanced but we're not computers, we're products of our backgrounds. We all have opinions. So we need to admit that right off. The best way to inform readers is to be compassionate and to be fair and balanced, truthful and honest. But everyone knows domestic violence is wrong. It's against the law. Control and power and intimidation hurt people. Is there a good side to murder? No. So there's no good side to domestic violence. Not every story has two sides. Maybe there's two sides to a particular case because someone can claim to be the victim of domestic violence and is actually the perpetrator but there aren't two sides to the issue. That's where reporters are wrong when they say I've got to keep an open mind about everything.

– Terry McCon (2007), Wala Wala Bulletin²

At the end of the day, media advocacy can take an unapologetic and consistent stand against violence in the way stories on domestic violence are investigated, filed, edited, framed,

headlined, and followed up – not just for special Domestic Violence Awareness Month features, but as a general principle. With local media in particular, this kind of coverage signals the honorable use of media's position to pro-actively shift the public from being news consumers to concerned, enervated citizens.

When news organizations work in partnership with advocates of women who are facing domestic violence, they send a message to current and potential victims, current and potential batterers, and every potential interventionist in the public as well as within that news organization that domestic violence is not tolerated.

Their partiality conveys that as members of the

community they report on, they very much care about sustaining the health and safety of people. As noted by Judy Yupcavage (2007), PCADV's Director of Communications, "Media is the most powerful force in the country to shift and re-shift attitudes. They do great investigative pieces on corporate corruption. They can clearly make or break someone's political power. So why can't they do the same with domestic violence?"

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² Newspaper that serves small city of 30,000 people.

Where the Chips Fall

Many battered women's organizations lack the infrastructure that media has to reach the public, for instance, on campaigns against domestic violence and Domestic Violence Awareness Month events. Certain domestic violence cases also need press publicity to raise public outcry on behalf of victims and survivors. With media as ally, intervention and prevention work can go further.

On the other hand, media is not an easy or natural ally for those who have experienced domestic violence or their advocates. Many forms of media and some news organizations, including some who feature stories on domestic violence, profit from condoning the subjugation of women. And in small cities, news organizations tend to be influenced by the views that local authorities have on domestic violence, which may reinforce negative stereotypes about battered women and myths about domestic violence. Unfortunately, even alternative media outlets such as progressive journals and news magazines, independent television and radio stations are often silent on violence against women (unless it happens in other countries). Many of these media have played an intermediary role between the public and policymakers, sometimes influencing policy on issues such as global warming and garment-making sweatshops, but adopt a different attitude when it involves violence against women. A quick glance at progressive publications will also show how infrequently and marginally the issue is covered. One reason is that alternative media is reflective of its primarily liberal and progressive constituency, which has frequently taken the position that violence against women is a divisive issue in progressive left politics. I recall the July 2004 Boston Social Forum³ where the two male coordinators refused to include violence against women on the agenda. Consequently, there were no keynote speakers, panelists or mention of this issue even by women speakers. A circle of women "elders" who were convened by local activists to witness a tribunal of survivor testimonies had to fight to get on stage to present a statement on the very last day at the very end of the closing plenary when most attendees had left. In response to a complaint by tribunal organizers, one of the Forum coordinators said that the issue was divisive.

Another compelling reason for media anxiety is the pressure to capitalize on the "media moment." Television, in particular (from talk shows to special reports), relies on advocates to supply the "right" survivor, as defined by the production values of a show or editor. While the promise of public attention to domestic violence can be attractive, these "media moments" come at a price, often subverting a survivor's needs, as well as an advocate's intent. This approach tends to deprive survivors of their authority and the opportunity to participate in a process where they can feel empowered to claim their voice as subjects in their own stories and not what gets packaged as media-worthy. This is especially true for victims and survivors from traditionally silenced communities. When the subject of domestic violence is also circumscribed by race, culture, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc., media often frame the content as if the individual represents whole aspects of a particular culture. While a survivor's intent may be to give voice to personal experience, there is an expectation that she will act as spokesperson for her community. This

³ The Boston Social Forum is part of a movement of progressive and radical community-based groups and individual activists who come together around the world at local, national (for instance, U.S. Social Forum), regional and international (World Social Forum) levels to confront the injustices of poverty, war, environmental exploitation, colonialism, racism, etc. Violence against women and the rights of gay and transgender communities was part of the World Social Forum in Mumbai, India. Each Forum agenda is shaped by the geopolitics of the region and the activism of the host country.

expectation is an unfair burden that exposes survivors to criticism from their home communities, and forces a choice between foregoing the media moment and doing what media expects of its subjects.

Often media's drive to generate stories clashes with what advocates of domestic violence victims/survivors see as their imperative (protect the women). Both sides agree that domestic violence must be addressed but they often do not agree on how to put a public face on the issue. The following two comments capture this tension:

Advocates need to understand media's goals and how media works. Media can't parrot the rhetoric of domestic violence advocates. We need to talk to victims. The public wants to hear from victims. But advocates are afraid that victims will be identified. If advocates don't find victims for us then the story won't be told. We can't just generate stories from press releases. The reading audience needs personal stories. Unless advocates want to write their own stories, and print their own stories and distribute their own stories, they need to understand that if they want more awareness about issues, they need to cooperate with media.

– Terry McCon (2007), *Wala Wala Bulletin*

We've made it clear that no victims would be named. We have a strong policy on this. But there's a culture of fear around domestic violence and people working in it are steeped in that fear. I wanted to spend a night in a shelter and I could not. I wanted to show how frightening it must be for a person to go to the shelter. The police and judges were very cooperative but the battered women's program was not. [Battered women's] advocates are not used to being questioned, they're afraid. Everything they say is weighted and measured and according to policy. If they want to empower women they should give battered women the choice of whether they want to talk to us, instead of making them afraid.

– Sheila Hagar (2007), *Wala Wala Bulletin*

These concerns raise the question about advocate ability and preparedness to deal with media. Cheryl O' Donnell (2007) suggests that many battered women's advocates have not tended to engage with the media as anti-violence advocates. "They take robotic steps, fax a press release, make a phone call and that's it. What's needed is a conversation with the reporter, sit down with them, ask them what they need rather than saying, 'Here's what we do. What story are you going to write?'"

The counter argument raised is, "What if there are no reporters to cultivate, editors worth befriending, or news organization willing to respond to requests for better coverage of domestic violence?" In this case, advocates could do their own coverage, i.e., write the news story, provide the headline, and find survivor quotes. When advocates take a more hands-on approach, they shape how the media frame stories on domestic violence and they influence how the public interprets the story. The key is writing stories that media can use, observing different deadlines for different media, and doing the critical follow-up with the right person so that the stories get the right kind of attention.

Another way to “be your own media” is by using some of the technological innovations of the late 20th century that media lawyer and author Scott Gant (2007) says has “dramatically changed the shape of journalism.” He advocates that “blogs have given people a voice to communicate their ideas to the world, and the Internet has given people more to talk about, more to know, more opportunities to question and be more critical ... of traditional media.” While Gant’s comments refer to the need for a different kind of journalism in the post September 11 climate of information surveillance and free speech repression, they are relevant to battered women’s advocates. Now there are opportunities to use new methods of communication in radical ways for movement work, such as digital storytelling, blogging, podcasting, streaming video and audio, MySpace, YouTube, even using telephone text messaging for campaigns. These new media technologies are said to be democratizing the process of information sharing and providing ways to hold media more accountable.

No doubt, many battered women’s programs are under-resourced and advocate access to new media technologies is limited. This can change with greater access for all advocates. But to push for access, advocates must want the new media technologies. To draw an analogy, in the 1980’s most battered women’s programs in small towns and cities, including small programs in large cities, had no VCRs or a budget to purchase videotapes on domestic violence. If there were operating budgets for shelters, they prioritized beds; videos were considered a luxury item. Now most of them have VCRs while larger and better-resourced programs have switched to DVD players. If new media technologies are to become a vehicle for grassroots community-based organizations to do better outreach about domestic violence prevention, then advocates need to budget for them, funders need persuading to recognize the value of using these technologies, and staff need training. I can envision a scenario where advocates using the new media technologies exemplify for traditional and mainstream media how to do thoughtful, nuanced, sensitive, and in-depth coverage that has a positive impact on those most affected by domestic violence.

Looking to new media technologies, however, does not suggest ignoring the need for working with traditional media, since they reach the mass base of people that many advocates consider their constituency.

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Suggestions for Improvements

The Berkeley Media Studies Group (2001) released a handbook, *Reporting On Violence: New Ideas for Television, Print and Web*, which suggests five approaches for good coverage on domestic violence:

1. Violence against women needs “thematic,” not “episodic” treatment, where thematic reporting looks at issues or patterns of events rather than focusing on a particular episode or incident of violence. Thematic reporting is “substantially more helpful to readers as a resource to making sense of events.”
2. Media should avoid focusing overly on the “unusual,” i.e., the domestic violence related homicides, murder-suicides and multiple family killings, as this kind of coverage presents a false picture. Domestic violence related killings occur less often than other types of violent crime. What the media should be informing the public about is the “magnitude of domestic violence in many American cities [where] police make more arrests and answer more 911 calls about domestic violence than any other kind of violent offense.”
3. News organizations should avoid their preference for reporting on crime in a way that scares readers and viewers, “leaving them feeling helpless about reducing violence in their communities.” Instead of regularly and prominently featuring the comments of law enforcement and prosecutors, media need to also present the views of public health experts and domestic violence experts, including battered women’s advocates, who can provide violence prevention data, examples of successful interventions and findings from domestic violence prevention research that readers and viewers can use to expand their understanding and inform responses to the violence.
4. Media should broaden their view on domestic violence reporting by helping viewers and readers see how this violence intersects with other equally vital community issues such as health costs of domestic violence, guns and domestic violence, and how domestic violence impacts a community emotionally and economically.
5. Although fewer news organizations say that domestic violence will stop if only women will leave, many still allude to the idea that victims share in the responsibility for what their abusive partners do.

Additionally, media coordinators at domestic violence organizations suggest industry-wide media training in domestic violence coverage, which they consider an urgent need for new reporters. Some battered women’s advocates are already conducting domestic violence sensitivity training for students in journalism schools. Another suggestion is better assigning of domestic violence stories. As Judy Yupcavage (2007) observes, “Often the editors assign cub or new reporters to crime reporting. They would never do this for a health and science or the business news sections. But new reporters with no experience do police beats and they are simply not aware of domestic violence issues.”

Two more suggestions are:

1. More, better, and consistent training for advocates at state and local levels on how to improve their media advocacy and media outreach. "When HIV/AIDS advocates saw how much stigma is attached to HIV/AIDS, they wanted to change the dialogue. They did outreach to the media so that media could report accurately about the crisis. What about the crisis of domestic violence and sexual violence? Advocates in the domestic violence movement have not done the same kind of outreach," says O'Donnell (2007). She also notes, "Media is changing and advocates need to understand how the changes affect their work. For instance, beats have disappeared. Before, you could contact the reporter who covered certain issues. Now we have general reporters covering everything. So continuity is affected. Relationships are different. One phone call without follow up or a press release without follow up won't bring reporters to your event."
2. Capacity-strengthening for programs that lack staff time for media work, particularly in smaller programs that juggle crisis work with media work. There is no time to craft news stories when there are other priorities, and no time to email a reporter when the computer is a cheap, slow machine. NNEDV helps draft media messages about local domestic violence incidents and provides programs with local media contacts. Not only does this ease the burden on under-staffed and over-worked advocates but, as O'Donnell (2007) explains, "We try to help advocates think strategically about how best to use the media for their work even when they distrust media and have had negative media experiences."

Other ideas from advocates who have worked with media successfully include:

- identifying non-visual media such as community radio stations, where survivor stories can be presented differently;
- in communities where telenovelas are popular, working with a writer or offering to be the producer's story consultant for a story on domestic violence that compellingly challenges stereotypes and reflects different truths from those usually depicted;
- viral marketing which involves using free web-based email to send out information that keeps multiplying as readers pass it on, a useful option for galvanizing fast community responses to a situation, such as gathering people for a demonstration at the courthouse or flooding local and state authorities with telephone calls and faxes about a domestic violence case.

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Conclusion

The need to be cautious of media and the practicality of being available to media do not cancel each other out. As with most other institutions, the relationship with media requires

As with most other institutions, the relationship with media requires constructive engagement. Advocates know how to do this; they already navigate relationships with other institutions, striving to change how these institutions interact with and treat victims and survivors of domestic violence, e.g., law enforcement, courts, state legislatures, medical establishment, the Church, even the Army.

constructive engagement. Advocates know how to do this; they already navigate relationships with other institutions, striving to change how these institutions interact with and treat victims and survivors of domestic violence, e.g., law enforcement, courts, state legislatures, medical establishment, the Church, even the Army. But most advocates do not relate to media as an institution. Consequently, they negate the chance to influence media.

Even as we ask news organizations to find a balance between objectivity and advocacy and demand greater accountability to survivors and advocates, advocates who have avoided the challenge of dealing with media must reassess and reframe their relationship with media, using what this institution offers while working to change their institutional practices. Perhaps, in the process, bad media coverage is countered with more good media coverage. And, perhaps, bystanders can learn how to change outcomes.

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Reader's Guide

"Airing the Dirty Laundry" – Intersections of Gender-Based Oppression, Racial Discrimination and Public Perception

*By Priyanka Sinha
Raksha, Inc.*

Note to the Reader:

After reading "Airing the Dirty Laundry: Intersections of Gender-Based Oppression, Racial Discrimination and Public Perception," readers will:

- Begin to understand the potential of media in grassroots organizing under an anti-oppression analysis to shift messaging from one that perpetuates oppression to one that is liberatory in nature.
- Gain some perspective on the role of "community" and the opportunities for creative and sustainable responses to survivors of violence.

Warm-up:

In the first paragraph, the author poses several critical questions to the reader. Before delving into the reading, spend a few minutes thinking carefully about those questions.

Follow-up questions:

- The author uses the term "community violence" to support the notion that violence against women is a community issue. In which ways is violence against women perpetuated by social norms and community attitudes? Conversely, how can the term "community violence" assume a transformative process?
- What are some of the strategies suggested by the author to local anti-violence advocates for promoting political education and building strong anti-oppression messaging? Can you identify any other strategies that may have worked successfully in your community?

“Airing the Dirty Laundry” – Intersections of Gender-Based Oppression, Racial Discrimination and Public Perception

By Priyanka Sinha

Raksha, Inc.

In our current social climate, how do we navigate media attention that does not reflect the true experiences of women and children affected by violence? How does one respond to mainstream coverage of “marginal” communities showcasing “quirky” cultural norms that serve to only highlight some cultural difference or practice that either demonizes or eroticizes the targeted community further? How is accountability around gender oppression sacrificed to racial discrimination, and how does it affect marginalized women of color as they struggle to bring their whole selves to the table in their demands for community and system’s accountability? How does public perception and state intervention create a double bind for women at the intersections of oppression?

Although not a how-to article, the perspective here seeks to understand the potential of media in grassroots organizing under an anti-oppression analysis to shift messaging from one that perpetuates oppression to one that is liberatory in nature. I seek to represent the experiences of some anti-violence activists simultaneously addressing racial targeting and community violence with complex public perceptions, organizational responses, and media roles. Ultimately, I hope this writing will provide some perspective on the role of “community” and the opportunities for creative and sustainable responses to survivors of violence.

Messaging: Defining the Terms

I am using the term “community violence” to stake claim to the notion that violence against women is a community issue. It is one that is enforced by social norms, patriarchal belief systems, the privatization of violence within the patriarchal family model, and further maintained by community denial, avoidance, victim blaming, and/or shaming. This term also assumes a transformative process when the abuse against a victim is addressed communally in a manner that supports the survivor’s resilience and safety. Community violence is often also used to define the violence against one’s own community members based on class, race, ableism, and any other marker that identifies the victim (and therefore the community) as “other.” Being female and/or visibly transgender are categories vulnerable to scrutiny, invasion, and public and private violations.

For a long while now women of color activists and advocates have been concerned by the one-dimensional approach domestic and sexual violence intervention systems set up, that only addresses the gender of the victim rather than approaching the intersecting issues of race and class as barriers, as well as unique opportunities in intervention strategies, for women on the margins.

By “intersecting oppressions” I mean the ways in which a woman is oppressed based on her holding multiple identities that make her “other” or of lower social standing within society’s hierarchy. For a long while now women of color activists and advocates have been concerned by the one-dimensional approach domestic and sexual violence intervention systems set up, that only addresses the gender of the victim rather than approaching the intersecting issues of race and class as barriers, as well as unique opportunities in intervention strategies, for women on the margins.

Racial Targeting and Violence Against Women

The clamor around “illegal immigration” continues to feed the monolithic messages often reflected in media. This reflection is reminiscent of the ways in which white feminists frame violence against women, best described in the work of bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margins to the Center*. Published in 1984, it still speaks to the one-dimensional approach many feminists and, for that matter, many reporters, documenters, observers, and “subjects” who are commenting on the condition of the “other” or the “object” tend to have: Privileged feminists have largely been unable to “speak to, with, and for diverse groups of women because they either do not understand the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression or refuse to take this inter-relatedness seriously...they reflect the dominant tendency in the western patriarchal minds to mystify women’s reality by insisting that gender is the sole determinant of woman’s fate.”

In the case of the South Asian community, a community that has grown to almost 2.5 million in the United States who can trace their ancestry to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, the public perceptions are very complex. Advocates have to navigate the mainstream racist notion that there is something inherently

Race and culture, then, play a significant role in how immigrant women defend themselves, are oppressed, or find safety.

different in South Asian communities, including assumptions that the women are more subservient and will not speak out. None of this takes into consideration the dynamics of immigrant status, the higher risks faced in stepping forward, the leveraging of community networks rather than the criminal legal system to obtain safety, etc. Race and culture, then, play a significant role in how immigrant women defend themselves, are oppressed, or find safety.

The South Asian community is a community circumscribed by several forms of oppression and privilege at the same time. U.S. immigration quotas and other restrictions created classes of people based on skills and professional background. As far back as the 1800s

South Asians have worked as farmers and, most recently, since the '60s, as technology professionals and academicians. The view of women is one that is also informed and perpetuated by the United States' racial and gendered construction of immigration rules. During the 19th century, for example, men came in under short-term labor contracts while many of the Asian women who came into the country came under servile conditions or sexual slavery (Prasad, 2000).

The past decade has seen a considerable shift in demographics as South Asian laborers have migrated to work in factories, hotels, and small convenience stores. Mainstream news on the community has showcased the growing trend of well-established, professional South Asians with a strong base of success and ambition. Touted as a model minority, many in the South Asian community feel powerful and aligned with the goals of the meritocracy that the United States promises. The myth, as applied to South Asians, maintains that South Asians are both inherently successful and pliant. Besides setting community members up to fail, the harsher reality is that this myth pits us against those "other people of color who can't make it," i.e., African Americans. Mass mainstream media has done little to challenge misconceptions regarding the role of women, the function of religion, and the "good family values" associated with the hardworking South Asian elite.

In 1996, galvanized by an increasingly intolerant political climate, two bills were passed by Congress and President Clinton, the Illegal Immigration Reform and the Immigrant Responsibility Act. These laws made whole classes of people detainable and deportable. Permanent residents with any contact with the criminal justice system, people fleeing persecution from other countries, undocumented workers earning less than minimum wage, and immigrants detained on secret evidence all became targets of the government, and at risk of permanent exile from the United States. In preparation for deportation, immigrants were herded off by Homeland Security (formerly INS) into county jails and prisons around the country indefinitely. According to the Detention Watch Network (2007), a national coalition working to educate public and policy makers about the U.S. immigration system, there have been 1.6 million immigrants deported since 1994. The 1996 laws also provided a strong feeding ground for what was to follow after 9/11, most notably, special registration for those who were from predominantly Muslim countries and the mass detention and deportation of thousands of individuals. To complicate matters, the war strategy and media coverage continue to associate Islam with violence against women and the war in the Middle East as the war to liberate Muslim women.

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The Double Bind

For those in the margins also victimized by domestic and sexual violence, it's a double bind. In the recent Georgia case of Genarlow Wilson, convicted of aggravated child molestation for engaging in oral sex with a 15-year-old, the immediate community actions pointing out racial targeting and calling for his release based on his "good citizenship" galvanized strong media attention. An African American anti-violence activist sent out a message over several listservs and wrote,

I am forced to pick sides in my heart...yes, this is a civil rights issue and the more epidemic human rights issue of hyper masculinity in boys which has led to a gender tolerance for covert and overt sexual violence against women and girls... So what is the message to the young women from Wilson's night of a casual "mistake"? What must she feel when reverends and representatives come out to make their syncopated speeches of injustice on his behalf? Where were they for her? Where are they now for millions of girls who "consent" to degradation in the name of acceptance?

This is a common condition for many in our communities. On the issue of domestic violence, it is a long journey for media outlets and immigration systems to name the act as one of domestic and sexual violence, although much has changed in the past decade with larger state coalitions making it a firm practice to have a quick press response to domestic violence with strategic public relations protocols that allow for less victim blaming and

obfuscation on the issue of accountability. Still, many Latina and South Asian advocates in Georgia give voice to the disturbing trend where the relief Violence Against Women Act provides turns into a nightmare when victims of violence are granted their time in court and are immediately met with immigration officers and redirected through the deportation system.

With the current immigration debate, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the growing criminalization of undocumented and documented immigrants, media attention and messaging has never been more

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complicated and troubling. The importance of moving through the double bind that often leaves so many survivors of family and community violence in a position where they have to choose between community allegiance, family connections, or their own physical safety, is a responsibility that those who interface with media and the criminal legal system must navigate with utmost sensitivity. It is as important to break the silence around violence in the community as it is to challenge the institutionalized racism and classism within intervention systems. As anti-violence activists, we have to say, "Yes, we have violence in the South Asian community. Like any other community, mainstream or not, family violence exists. The tools that those who offend have available to them are different in our communities and range from a misapplication of religious beliefs to the use of non-

citizenship status to keep women in the cycle of violence.” In the case of messages related to the impact of racial targeting on survivors of violence, it is just as important to communicate that the criminal legal system is not only lazy about enforcing Title IV, which requires court interpretation in domestic violence hearings, but also that there are entrenched barriers to truly representing the needs of non-English speaking victims of violence, which include institutionalized xenophobia.

When Raksha staff cried foul about the ramifications of anti-immigrant policies, including an English-only bill here in Georgia, media attention felt like an attempt to ascertain that we as a community-based organization were still fulfilling our duties as mandated reporters, even as we were communicating that community members would not come forward and report abuse in this climate of fear. In my work with media and other service-based organizations I soon realized that the precarious intersection on which we stood held significant power as well as public, media, and state scrutiny. I recall a conversation with an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reporter that felt suspiciously like an inquisition on whether we as service providers were protecting our community’s “dirty laundry” for fear that state interventions would be quick, merciless, and biased. On another occasion, I spoke with a Latina advocate to see whether her program had youth services for a victim of sexual violence. Her first response was to make sure that I knew they reported child sexual abuse, even though that was not my initial question. Although seemingly innocuous, I understood that there was an undercurrent of tension related to the grip of the criminal legal system on all of us who live and work within the margins. Oftentimes it felt disappointing to know that there was no space to ask questions about what would make it easier for community members to come forward in an anti-immigrant environment, what types of inter-organizational solidarity, political analysis, and trust-building were needed to create less isolation, more power, and integrated responses.

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Racial Justice Campaign Against Operation Meth

In the case of the Operation Meth Merchant, a sting operation in North Georgia that was orchestrated by the Drug Enforcement Agency and the U.S. District Attorney’s Office as an effort to address the use of methamphetamine (“meth”), the split along the intersections of citizenship, race, class, and gender became very clear. In the summer of 2005, a dozen mostly white, English-speaking informants convicted of possessing, producing, and selling meth were promised money and/or reductions in their prison sentences if they assisted with successful prosecutions of store clerks from whom they bought the household ingredients to create meth. The informants used slang terms such as “make a cook” to “communicate” their intentions to make meth. These tactics saw to it that 44 of 49 people indicted were

South Asian. Later, under oath and with signed affidavits, the informants admitted that they were advised by local law enforcement to use slang, knowing well that the lack of English proficiency would lead to store clerks selling the products unknowingly.

As a small group embedded in community, we recognized that the family members being arrested, both men and women, fell under the category of dispensability. In cases where the men were immediately put under detention and deportation proceedings, their wives worked more than 15 hours a day and took care of their families while shouldering the burdens of an increasingly invasive criminal legal system. It also became very clear to us as advocates and activists in the courts that the intersections of race, class, and gender issues would make it practically impossible for any of the women and children in need of counseling and/or intervention services related to domestic or sexual violence to report abuse. At this point, the very basic need of food and shelter under immense financial and legal burdens along with the additional trauma of impending detention and deportation, took precedence over addressing family violence, increased conflict, and stress.

The two main goals of the Racial Justice Campaign, built ground-up from community response to more than a hundred local and national allies, were to end the unlawful scapegoating and prosecutions of South Asians in these cases and to build alliances with other communities of color.

The two main goals of the Racial Justice Campaign, built ground-up from community response to more than a hundred local and national allies, were to end the unlawful scapegoating and prosecutions of South Asians in these cases and to build alliances with other communities of color. The latter goal, through the experience of the South Asian community as one of the recent targets of the so-called “War on Drugs,” addressed the wider implications of this policy as a successful strategy designed to expand the reach of the prison systems

into poor communities and communities of color. This was a complicated task, given that under the myth of the model minority we were already set up within a “good immigrant/bad immigrant” dichotomy. Playing the tune that these South Asians worked hard and were good people only exacerbated the myth that divided communities of color. Press coverage developed by the Racial Justice Campaign usually involved turning the attention to issues of criminal legal accountability and talking points that focused on the impact of the sting operation on the families, as well as the absurdly racially-motivated tactics used by local enforcement. The case grew even more complicated as families pled guilty in a complex cost-benefit analysis to minimize the impact of the indictment (e.g., a guilty plea in exchange for house arrest rather than prosecution and likely incarceration). This tactic was orchestrated by misinformed lawyers, who did not take into account that minor legal infractions would lead to detention and deportation for immigrants.

This messaging tactic – focusing on the complexities of intersecting oppression and the realities of institutionalized racism – was not successful with local mainstream media, since they were looking for the human angle, the “suffering, good immigrant” stories. The local media content usually focused on “personalities,” e.g., justice-seeking young legal professional working on a very contentious and charged issue, rather than the context and analysis of the issue. Whereas media can focus on a “personality” or alleged “facts” of an incident, its failure to capture the context and racial implications continues to perpetuate

fear, a one-dimensional analysis, and attention to sensationalism. Progressive media outlets such as *Frontlines*, a South Asian English-language e-news outlet, and local community-based media, however, picked up the story in collaboration with Campaign organizers. *Frontlines* carried more of the complex story, covering the history of the war on drugs and the criminalization of people of color, especially African-Americans, and the expansion of the prison systems. Although not the sensational attention-grabber, these types of coverage did justice by contextualizing the story.

This situation posed several challenges regarding messaging, public perception, and organizational capacity. Raksha's initiative as an anti-violence intervention and advocacy group in raising concerns about this sting operation led to positive as well as negative reactions and proved to be the beginning of a multifaceted "messaging war." The Campaign's press strategy ranged from calling on the Drug Enforcement Agency to "air their dirty laundry" to coordinating a press conference where a Campaign created character in costume called "Methi" (a leafy vegetable endemic to India and a term that exacerbated the implications of language difference in these cases) spoke as the "Official Government Scapegoat in the War on Drugs." There was enough momentum on the ground to support strong messaging with community-based journalists and local as well as national media. But when the Campaign was able to get the U.S. District Attorney General's attention on this issue, local media news clips showing Campaign highlights along with the plight of the defendants would be followed by a written rebuttal from the DA's office, maintaining the legitimacy of the sting operation and the absence of racial profiling. What was most disconcerting for South Asian activists was the face-to-face meeting with the District Attorney General wherein he continued to condone the actions of local law enforcement as well as his belief that the operation had actually curbed meth use and production. When made aware of the sting operation's impact on families, he called these very families we serve "collateral damage."

As a local organization serving the South Asian community and in collaboration with other organizations as well as mainstream agencies, Raksha was in a position to provide leadership on publicity and messaging regarding the Operation Meth Merchant. Since 1996 Raksha, through word of mouth, relationships with local community leaders and media outlets has managed to get information out about Raksha services as well as build educational opportunities within community settings. The resistance throughout to Raksha's messaging has been based on the notion that there must be enough "good information" about the community out there to balance information that reflects negatively on the community. The editor of one of the leading local news outlets wrote that it was as important to improve the image of the community through cultural preservation and information as it is to talk about the "unpopular issues" such as domestic violence, child sexual abuse, etc.

Many activists and advocates working in small organizations play the role of gatekeeper, bridge, and messenger – an experience that can be overwhelming. This is made more burdensome by the climate of fear and paralysis imposed by constant surveillance and scrutiny of the South Asian, Muslim, and Middle Eastern communities under the War on Terror. And between the War on Terror and the new use of the War on Drugs, targeted families are more vulnerable to becoming "collateral damage." Media omission as well as over-repetition of sensational news exacerbates particularly difficult effects of the criminal legal system – silence, paralysis, and isolation. Lawyers tell victims not to speak and families not to say very much about a case in criminal proceedings, hence the lack of a sense of

community or an increased sense of isolation and invisibility. In a situation where one or two family members are intersecting with the criminal legal system, where one is seeking VAWA relief and another is a defendant in criminal proceedings under these “Wars,” interventions are very isolating. The general values of the criminal legal system are retribution and punishment with very strong “teeth” (enforcement, resources, institutional value, etc) as defined by the State response. Entrenched in these institutions, family members find it hard to talk to each other or connect with members in the community, compounding the shame, silence, and stigma many survivors of violence have learned to bear from their childhood. These “intervention silos” separate families from their communities, a painful process for many whose very social identity rests on their relationships with others in community. On the flip side of this isolated approach, however, is the well-established power of organizing in social justice movements to challenge tyranny or injustice.

Beyond Sound Bytes: Possibilities for Change

Organizing as a tool in the Racial Justice Campaign was to literally shift the balance of power.

Organizing as a tool in the Racial Justice Campaign was to literally shift the balance of power. Even though this campaign built a well-publicized momentum, the criminal legal system in Georgia has considerable power and could carry out the prosecutions with impunity. The additional challenge of organizing amongst a population that was continuously losing members to deportation or to the

fear of deportation reduced the power of the Campaign. As we think about supporting survivors in these contexts, an integrated community response is needed. The outcome of a community organizing model based on the leadership of survivors and their families would reflect the “needs” on the ground, outside a “service-based” response. It would be a community-based initiative that calls on the skills and resources within the family and their intimate network and has a different point of entry from that of criminal legal and social service approaches. Needs assessments would be participatory in nature and would take into consideration key leverages and/or resiliencies within the family, key goals would be to shift power within a community setting and provide relationships for survivors and their allies to speak the truth, opportunities would open up for families to meet with others who are affected in the same way, etc. Media strategies could then be linked to the realities on the ground and reflect the full experiences and voices of women. The possibility for creating true systemic change, building community assets rather than continuing the over-reliance on the criminal legal system and traditional media outlets, and ultimately to end the war on women becomes a possibility.

The hard questions to ask are related to capacity, organizational identity, options, and analysis: Do we have enough power, capacity, leadership, and participation? What is our relationship to the criminal legal system and to media? Did we grow from a criminal legal response or from a community-based response? What is our socio-political analysis related to violence against women and children? How are we communicating this to our community, to State representatives, and to mainstream organizations? At what point of the experience of community violence are we entering as activists and organizers? Who are the allies that will fill in the gaps? Do these allies reflect a larger socio-political analysis that can end violence against women and children? Ultimately, I have found

myself asking the questions related to fear. What are we willing to risk? If we can take calculated risks, how can we protect ourselves without calling on the same criminal legal tactics that separate our families and communities in the first place? These have been guiding questions that have brought more questions related to the work needed on the ground.

Oftentimes as advocates, organizers, and anti-violence activists we are so committed to doing the work that we may have trouble bringing people along with us using accessible and relevant messaging. How can we communicate the intersections without promoting common stereotypes about our community? Much of this involves political education. Fractioning in our grassroots strategies is often due to the difficulty in making the

connections between policies, institutional practices, organizational decision-making processes and violence against women. Although many argue that political education is only useful when the “gatekeepers” are willing to actively analyze their own internalization of institutional oppression, give up inappropriate abuse of power, and take action to create cultural change, it is still the beginning of creating change. In fact, leveraging relationships with media leads or creating strong enough relationships to get journalists, students of journalism, and other “information gatekeepers” through these educational processes can be meaningful.

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Most of Raksha’s media relationships within community have helped us get information about sexual and domestic violence in a way that is more reflective of the issues that affect our community. In the world of “ethnic media” the opportunities to get information on the impact of violence in women’s life can be successful. And yet, community-based media cannot take on the charged issues of racial targeting without compromising their status as “ambassadors,” as links to mainstream communities. Despite the ways in which reporters’ hands are often tied in the media room, however, there are opportunities to also develop relationships with media allies to publicize the experiences of community. For instance, a survivor’s letter to her parents published in a Georgia-based “lifestyle” magazine called Rivaaj released in many Southeast US states, reflected the intersections between domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and a culture of “elder worship” making it relevant to our community and the women we work with. Open editorials and other creative essays can showcase more of the complexity that survivors of violence experience. In fact, currently blogs such as “Sepia Mutiny” have become far more persuasive news outlets for progressive and anti-violence activists as well as racial justice organizers on the issues that affect community.

Open editorials and other creative essays can showcase more of the complexity that survivors of violence experience.

Another of the strategies for local anti-violence advocates to build strong anti-oppression messaging has been to ally with organizations and networks that provide education, opportunities for dialogue, and “alignment” in terms of progressive political analysis.

Another of the strategies for local anti-violence advocates to build strong anti-oppression messaging has been to ally with organizations and networks that provide education, opportunities for dialogue, and “alignment” in terms of progressive political analysis. This was helpful in creating a deeper understanding for activists fighting gender-based oppression; especially as the community reaction to those doing so can be paternalistic and minimizing, as well as fearful. Collaborative partners can help represent a progressive and well-rounded understanding of the impact of racism, sexism, and classism in ending violence against women. Many media justice projects and grassroots community groups such as SPIN Project¹, a social justice media consulting group for activists, or Third World Majority², a woman of color media justice center, work to take back the old media vanguard of sensational one-dimensionality to tell the complicated stories of individuals living at the intersections of oppressions, in ways that have strategic impact.

Ultimately, successful opportunities mean leveraging organizational experiences and history to push for community change. Media advocacy is only as powerful as the “messengers” and the consistency and application of the message they communicate. Do these messages reflect the realities of communities served while strengthening the organization’s strategic direction? This is a worthwhile question to answer. In fact, it is a worthwhile exercise for any organization to go through, however small and limited the resources. At most, it will help set up the organization as a powerful advocate with a consistent and dependable framework that truly reflects the lives of women and

their families. At the least, women, children, communities, and organizations will know where they stand and can realistically build what they need to weather our current socio-

¹ Strategic Press Information Network (SPIN) Project
149 Natoma Street, Third Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone (415) 227-4200
Web <http://www.spinproject.org/>

² Third World Majority
369 15th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
Telephone (510) 465-6941
Web <http://www.cultureisaweapon.org/>

political storm and to work towards long-term, sustainable change. Tram Nguyen (2007), Executive Director of ColorLines, wrote "At the end of the day, we will not create change by watering down the broadest message to appeal to the broadest majority. Most of the time, change comes not because the majority of the people want it, but because those who are oppressed organize for their liberation and in doing so arouse the conscience of the whole society." The rest will follow.

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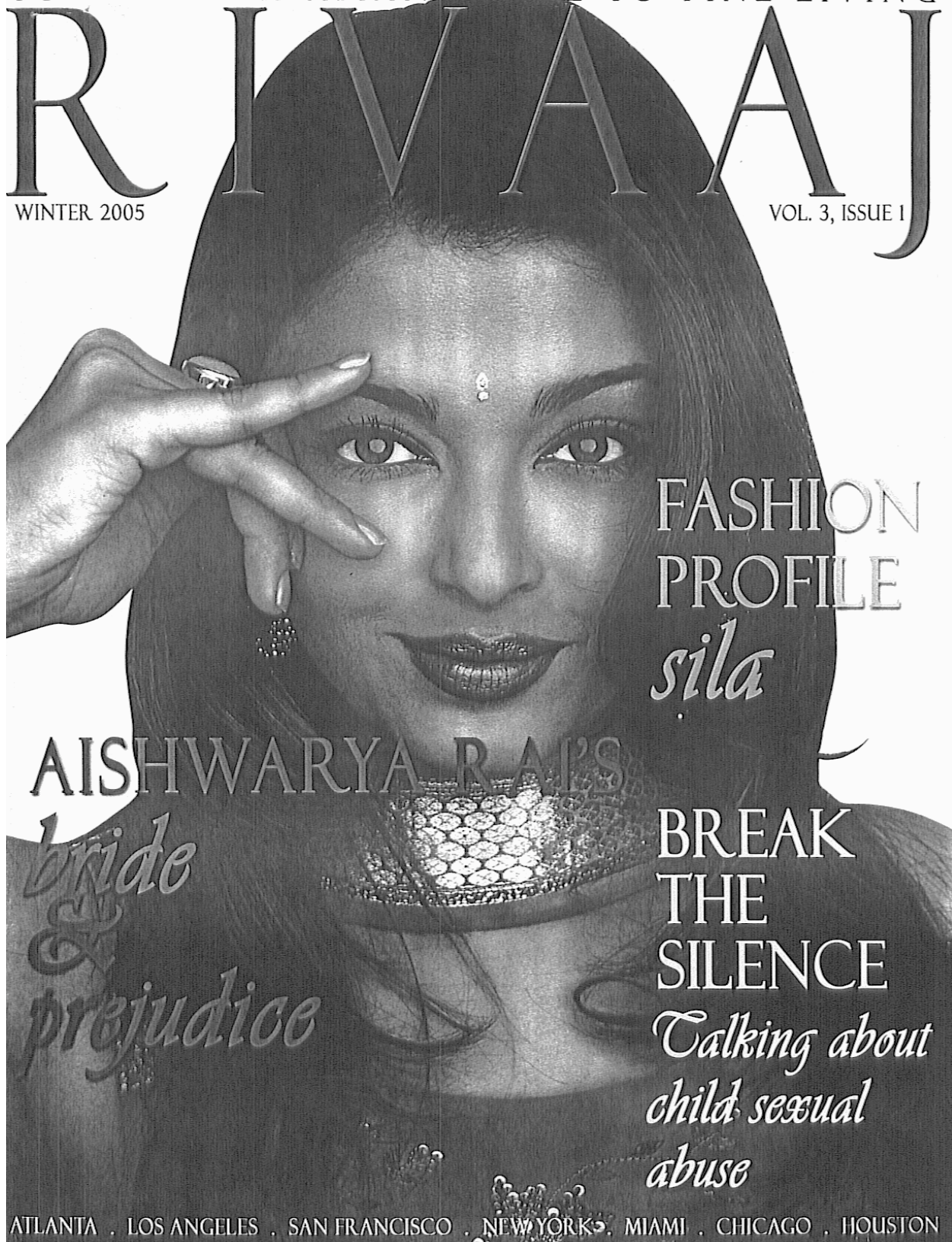
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YOUR SOUTH ASIAN GUIDE TO FINE LIVING

RIVAJ

WINTER 2005

VOL. 3, ISSUE 1



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AISHWARYA RAI'S

*bride
&
prejudice*

BREAK
THE
SILENCE

*Talking about
child sexual
abuse*

ATLANTA . LOS ANGELES . SAN FRANCISCO . NEW YORK . MIAMI . CHICAGO . HOUSTON

It is easy to think that child sexual abuse (CSA) is not prevalent in our communities or that it only happens in those uneducated poor families. As a general rule, we must first accept that it is unwise to stereotype the demographics of the individuals involved in child sexual abuse, whether it is the characteristics of victims and perpetrators or their family dynamics. We also need to be aware of the varied social and cultural challenges and barriers that contribute to, perpetuate, and foster the silent epidemic of child sexual abuse. Challenges include silencing, shaming, and stigmatizing the child while also protecting the abuser, who is often times a family member or friend.

Break the Silence: Speak the Truth! Talking about Child Sexual Abuse

By Sharanika Sadequee

We also need to educate ourselves on the issue so that we can better work to eliminate sexual violence and better serve our children and the community. We know that 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys are sexually abused across all race, religion, class, culture, and creed at any given time before the age of 18. We also know that child sexual abuse has a lifetime of health and emotional implications on the victims and their families. And, we know that the first step in working to end the crisis of sexual abuse of children requires acknowledgement of its prevalence and breaking the silence around it.

In hopes of shedding light on the complex dynamic issues involved in addressing child sexual abuse, I want to share with you a letter I addressed to my parents.

Dear Amma and Abba,

Growing up, you have raised me with strict guidelines in which I was to obey, one of which was to listen to and respect my elders and display this respect through good behavior. I am now in my mid twenties, and feel that I want to inform you that over the past decade I learned that, in fact, I did not and do not have to always listen to my elders and I certainly do not have to listen to authority figures when they violate my body and my rights as a human being by molesting me time and time again.

You never knew about my abuse because I never spoke of it. No one did, no one spoke of such violence when everyone was too busy not talking about the times when Abba beat up Amma. I never told anyone because I did not know how to tell anyone, how to talk to anyone, or that I had the option of talking with someone about experiences that brought me such immense shame.

I am eight and he is my elder, I must not betray his trust, he must care for me, he is not hurting me, after all, he is my religious teacher.

Abba and Amma, I do not blame you for my abuse. Of course, the religious tutor is the main perpetrator. However, I blame the culture of silence and shame in which I was raised, a culture that taught me to obey my elders, never talk back to my elders, and never question what my elders teach me . . . which ultimately silenced me and perpetuated my abuse. I did not feel I could freely talk about my experience until I learned about the Breaking the Silence project.

In Breaking the Silence project, my years of silence have been transformed into my life's mission – a mission to end family violence, to break the silence of child sexual abuse and domestic violence. I am fortunate that I have found a place where I have met many others who have similar experiences; it is a space where we speak out against the violence. It is a space where community members come together to learn and talk about child sexual abuse and how to protect children from sexual abuse by family members, friends, acquaintances. Nonetheless, many survivors have not found the space in which they feel safe to share this part of their lives. We all contribute to child sexual abuse as long as we fail to teach our children about healthy sexuality, silence children from talking about it, and worse yet, when we deny its existence and prevalence.

I feel that what you have taught me through out life has brought me thus far where I have grown up into a woman who feels delighted to be a part of this world. I know and feel that you have raised me with healthy intentions and the best way you knew how. Because of my reverence and admiration for you as my parents, I am thankful that I can share with you my experience. I thank you for taking the time to read this letter. But keep in mind that though the experiences of my life have brought me to a healthy forgiving place, that there remain survivors who have not yet been able to confront their families and their pain.

With all my Love and Respect,

*Allah-Hafez,
Your Daughter*

To prevent the problem of silence perpetuating sexual abuse from spilling over into our future generations; we must come up with solutions that stop the cycle of abuse and keep the issue in the forefront of our daily lives. Please, let us come together to end child sexual abuse and create a healthier community for both adults and children.

For opportunities to address child sexual abuse, Raksha is hosting a chai house, a community forum, addressing the problem, where we will screen “The Children We Sacrifice” by Grace Poore. Raksha also will host a symposium in March to focus on adult responsibility in ending child sexual abuse within the South Asian community. Let us relieve the burden from children and take responsibility as adults to support and talk to children about child sexual abuse and healthy sexuality. Let us begin by organizing a community based approach to child sexual abuse by engaging in Breaking the Silence Project.

The Breaking the Silence Project (BSP) is a collaborative movement that aims at mobilizing South Asians through leadership development to break the silence around child sexual abuse and sexual violence. BSP is propelled by a team of survivors of child sexual abuse and allies dedicated to creating a safe and positive environment where survivors are protected and allies have the opportunity to engage in empowering dialogues and strategies to prevent child sexual abuse. The BSP space strives to support individual strength and healing by lifting the curtains of social and systemic barriers to speak out against sexual violence, build a culture of perpetrator accountability, and foster adult responsibility in the protection of children. We break the silence wisely, honestly, and in connection with each other and our own deepest commitment to the well-being of our families in the spirit of justice, compassion, responsibility, and transformation.

For more information on child sexual abuse, visit: www.preventchildabuse.org or 1-800-CHILDREN, www.shaktiproductions.org, www.generationfive.org, and www.raksha.org. You also may contact Raksha at 404.876.0670 for more information or call the Raksha helpline at 404.842.0725.

Discussion of Terms

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This section of the manual is the record of a number of advocates' discussions of terms commonly used in media advocacy and communications. The terms and the meanings given here are not meant to be definitive; rather, they are meant as a tool to help us talk about the work that we do as we continue to focus, refine and energize our efforts.

- **Frame:** In news and other mediated information, framing is a way of setting up a story in order to convey a particular meaning. The frame determines a story's boundaries, including what is left in or out-as such, frames convey what is relevant, which can substantially limit deep understanding of an issue.
- **Media:** The various means of mass communication thought of as a whole. In common usage, media refers to television, radio, magazines, newspapers, internet, etc., and also includes people involved in the production process, such as reporters. Other means of communicating ideas-building materials, paintings, sculpture, dance-can also be considered media.
- **Media Advocacy:** The "strategic use of mass media to support community organizing to advance a social or policy initiative," (Wallack & Dorfman, 1996). Because media advocacy originates with local initiatives, with a goal of targeting the broad, social environment, it is often used to advance social change initiatives. Example: A community coalition with the goal of improving court response to domestic violence charges organizes a protest that gets local and regional coverage in various outlets, signifying to policy makers that there is sufficient local interest to warrant change.
- **Media Content:** Messages that are produced by the few for the many and delivered to large audiences simultaneously.
- **Media Literacy:** The ability to read, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of media forms (television, print, radio, computers, etc.).
- **Public Communication Campaign:** A strategic effort to generate specific outcomes in a large number of individuals and in a specified period of time. Public communication campaigns use media, messaging, and an organized set of communication activities in an attempt to modify human behavior. There are two main types of campaigns:
 1. Individual behavior change campaigns encourage individuals to change behaviors that contribute to social problems, such as drug abuse, or promote behaviors that have a potential benefit, such as breast cancer screening.
 2. Public will campaigns attempt to mobilize public action for policy change, such as disability rights activism that culminated in the Americans With Disabilities Act.

(See also the descriptions of *Media Advocacy*, *Social Marketing*, *And Strategic Communication Plan*)

- **Public Relations (PR):** Communications used primarily to manage information about an organization. PR is generally understood to be a way to maintain and improve an organization's public image in the eyes of its key stakeholders, but recent interpretations also include an aspect of relationship management (Phillips 2006). Although it is often used and implemented as interchangeable with media advocacy, public relations differs in its primary purpose, which is to improve the public image of an organization. Example: A tobacco company advertises charitable donations as a way to improve its public image.
- **Public Service Announcement:** Voice or video recorded announcements that inform the public about safety and health information, community services or public affairs. Produced and programmed much like commercials, but usually not produced for profit.
- **Social Marketing:** The strategic application of marketing principles to influence human behavior. Although the phrase "social marketing" is frequently used interchangeably with "media advocacy," they are two different strategies. The objective of social marketing is to influence an individual's behavior, while the objective of media advocacy is to challenge and ultimately change social norms. Example: Unified campaigns that tell us "wearing seatbelts saves lives".
- **Strategic Communication Plan:** A document that is developed and written by members of an organization, either collectively or by an appointed work group or task force. Ideally, the plan integrates all communications related to an organization's programming, education and advocacy efforts. Developing and adopting a communications plan acknowledges the value of communication and represents recognition that all organizing efforts have a communications component. Public education, community organizing, research, advocacy, direct services and fundraising contain elements of communication, and can benefit from a long-term, pro-active strategy (The SPIN Project, 2005).

Makani Themba-Nixon, for The Praxis Project, says this about strategic planning: a strategy is an overall plan that takes into account how you want the terrain (discourse, power balance, etc.) to change – and the images, data or evidence, personalities, ideas, stories and values that you can leverage to make that change occur... "You start with where you really want to go and plot the ride along the way" (The Praxis Project 2005).

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