

Doctors get the treatment

It's not just in the homes, workplaces and in the streets of North America that women are being raped, harassed and sexually assaulted.

The acts of violence and hatred against women are being conducted routinely in physicians' examining rooms, in dentists' chairs, on therapists' couches, in professors' offices; indeed, even in librarians' alcoves.

The need to dominate and degrade is still present but the mode is more subtle than a knife at the throat. The motive is the same; the method is professional coercion.

It's in the isolation of their offices that a large number of professional men, armed with a sanctioned, guarded body of information, manipulate, coerce and abuse women. Ignorance of just what is "proper procedure," combined with the intimidation of status, reputation and authority often leaves a woman stunned and confused by the encounter.

At the same time, she is often fearful that her experience will be considered to be "only the imaginings of a doctor-crazed woman." Often it is an act of courage for women to talk about the event to anyone, let alone taking the risk of reporting to the police or involving themselves in more direct action.

"While alone with his patient in the gynecological clinic in Roosevelt Hospital, New York, in the course of performing an internal examination, Dr. Robinson committed an act of sexual intercourse with the complainant against her will and consent."

"She was told by Dr. Hammond to undress, had her breasts felt and then was told to masturbate or a second injection (to bring on a later period) would not work."

"As a Yale University junior, she was offered an A in a course if she yielded to the professor's sexual demands."

There's a growing awareness of the dimensions of this abuse, and already the fight-back is beginning in earnest. First have come the legal offenses; courts in New York, California, Toronto, Dallas, Chicago, Vancouver and elsewhere are hearing the anger of women assaulted by men in positions of trust.

Tactics are starting now to take a new, more militant turn: physicians and psychiatrists in Toronto and other cities have arrived for work to find their names and their crimes against women emblazoned against their office windows in red paint. And boycotts have proved effective in raising the consciousness of women about this abuse and educating the public in general, as well as in neutralizing the individual perpetrator.

Most recently, groups of women have started taking collective action against such abuse. In Vancouver, for instance, more than a dozen women—all previously strangers to each other—were brought together through their

local Rape Relief organization to put together and carry through a plan to effectively neutralize a marauding optician, who had molested each of them individually. (See accompanying article.)

"When one woman called us and told us that she and four of her friends had been assaulted by this man, we knew there were probably many more," said a Rape Relief worker.

"We simply facilitated the process of women taking back the control that he took from them."

"The first time he said to me, 'Do anything you want here in this office. If you want to act out a fantasy, you can act it out. Some women like to take their clothes off.'"

"Her husband accompanied her on the visit to the dentist, pretended to leave by slamming a door and, after a 10 minute wait, entered the treatment room to find his wife sedated and Dr. Cohen fondling her breast."

"He was always after me to lay on the couch and I didn't want to. When I finally did, he would lay down next to me."

Excerpt from "Rape," a poem by Marge Piercy.

There is no difference between being raped and being run over by a truck except that afterward men ask if you enjoyed it.

There is no difference between being raped and going head first through a windshield not of cars but half the human race.

(The following account is by a woman who was involved in the collective action against the Vancouver, B.C. optician who molested at least 42 of his women patients. (See accompanying story). The account demonstrates how people with a common problem can find each other in a large city, raise their own consciousness about the roots of the problem and then take collective action for relief.)

I was thoroughly confused and uncomfortable after my first visit to the optician. I just couldn't shake the feeling that something abnormal had happened.

I'd gone for my first fitting for contact lenses early in the morning, and there was no one else around. The optician acted in a very friendly way toward me, asking me personal questions about my use of birth control pills,

which I knew had some effect on wearing lenses.

Then he went on to ask me about my personal relationships, and he suggested I looked tired. He started massaging my shoulders to "relax" me, and when he put the lenses in my eye he leaned very close to me, then dropped one down the front of my sweater.

He stuck his hand inside my sweater and started groping for the lens. I didn't know what to do—I felt both frightened and embarrassed, plus I was scared I might not be able to find the lens on my own.

ALLEGED RAPE

Afterwards, I decided that I wouldn't go back there alone, and I felt pretty bad about it. Then I read an article in the daily paper about a local optician allegedly raping one woman and sexually

molesting several others during contact lens fittings. The article contained an appeal from Vancouver Rape Relief for information on incidents involving this optician.

I could hardly believe it was the same man, so I decided to call Rape Relief. We established that it was indeed him, and they suggested that I come to a meeting at the Rape Relief office.

EMBARRASSED

On the night of the meeting I remember feeling scared, thinking that somehow the optician would find out. When I got there, I realized that the nine other women must be feeling the same way.

They were apprehensive and pretty isolated from each other, sitting there with their coats on, saying nothing. One woman had her dog with her, and later she told me she never went anywhere alone

since her encounter with the optician.

A woman from Rape Relief started things off by saying it was important that we didn't criticize or judge each other. She said the main thing was to believe each other, because "out there" they didn't believe us. I thought about this and remembered how, after the incident, I hadn't wanted to tell anyone for fear they might think I was making a big deal out of nothing.

At first it was awkward at the meeting, and I think we all felt pretty nervous, so it was good when one woman admitted to being frightened about the whole business. Each woman told her story and they were all similar in a way. Like me, they thought they had probably encouraged the assault.

One woman blamed it on

Hartogs for malpractice. Julie Roy and Lucy Freeman co-authored *The Betrayal*, which has since become a TV movie, documenting Roy's experience as a patient coerced into sexual activity under the guise of therapy. The case set a precedent, and has made it possible for other women in similar circumstances to speak out.

PROFESSIONAL STATUS

In 1978 alone, Dr. Lornie Leonard of Florida has been charged with professional neglect, sexual assault and battery in a \$9 million suit; a prominent N.Y. psychiatrist is facing a million dollar suit; and Dr. William Wilhoit, former president of the Florida Mental Health Association faced four charges of administering an incapacitating gas and rape.

At the present time half a dozen New York psychiatrists are under investigation by the Board for Professional Medical Conduct resulting from similar complaints.

In some states, the Board of Medical Examiners have been pressured to revoke the license of offending members of the profession, as in the case of a New Jersey pediatrician charged with sexually abusing several teen-age patients. And one woman has recently won the right to sue Yale University "for not taking steps to prevent alleged sexual harassment of female students."

(*Breaking The Hold*, a pamphlet on anti-rape organizing and self-defense, by Diana Smith and Veronica Woolcott, available for \$1 from Vancouver Rape Relief, 45 Kingsway, Vancouver, B.C.)

(Quotes in this article are from newspaper articles and from *Women and Madness*, by Phyllis Chesler, 1972, publ. by Avon Books, Chicago \$2.25.)

(For continuing coverage on women's fight-back against sexual assault, check *Big Mama Rag*, 1724 Gaylord, Denver, Colo. 80236. Subscription \$6 per year.)

Women abused join together

the jumpstart she was wearing because she felt it was too tight-fitting and, in fact, she'd never worn it again. Also, some of us felt confused: the optician had touched us without our permission, but was it really that serious?

GROUP CONFRONTATION

Gradually, through our discussions, we began to feel more clearly that he had abused our trust—that he'd abused his status as a professional to ask us personal questions and force sexual intimacies on us.

As we became more angry we decided that the most important thing was to stop him from doing this to other women. A couple of the women suggested picketing his office and handing out leaflets explaining what had

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