

Violence Against Women

This column by Michael Valpy originally appeared in The Globe and Mail on August 19, 1991.

My 18-year-old daughter on occasion drives home alone late at night from parties. For that reason, she has asked that a cellular telephone be placed in the car. It will be done.

This summer at our farmhouse she was assigned the refurbished back bedroom. Built as the quarters for the hired hand, it has its own staircase to the ground floor, meaning someone could gain access to the bedroom without passing through the main upstairs area.

My daughter asked that a lock be put on the door at the foot of her stairway. It was done. What strikes me is that it was her *immediate* assessment of what needed to be done after I, the male, said the room was finished.

I try to do this but I cannot, as a male, adequately imagine putting daily constraints on my activity in order to protect myself from being sexually harassed, assaulted, abducted or murdered.

I do not worry-not once in a year, let alone once in a day-about being physically threatened in familiar and ostensibly safe surroundings by someone enormously stronger than I am, having my clothes torn off and having something unspeakable done to my inner and most private self. My daughter is not neurotic, alarmist or easily spooked. Police and thousands of citizens in the Toronto-area community of Burlington have been searching for

clues to what happened to 18-year old Nina DeVilliers, who disappeared while jogging in the environs of the family's community recreation club.

Three nights after the conversation about a car telephone for my daughter, a young woman driver reported to Toronto police that three knife-armed men sexually attacked her when she stopped at a stop sign.

Several weeks before the disappearance of Ms. DeVilliers, the dismembered body of Burlington teen-ager Leslie Mahaffey was recovered, encased in concrete, from a lake.

In January, 29-year-old Dr. Carolyn Warrick was beaten to death virtually within view of the security camera in her Toronto condominium building.

Last Easter, university student Lynda Shaw, 21, was stabbed and her body burnt after she inexplicably stopped her car on Southern Ontario's Highway 401, the busiest expressway in Canada.

Across Ontario, police currently are looking for 15 women who have vanished without reason in the past few years.

I cannot tolerate living in a community which my almost-grown child is afraid to inhabit alone.

As a parent and adult community member, I must assume responsibility for this. It does not matter whether it is something new we have arrived at or whether it has

always been with us.

No one can be satisfied with an answer that males throughout nature are aggressive to females. No one can be satisfied with exculpatory explanations that male sexual aggression is linked to social stress and dysfunctional community life.

No one can accept the answer that this violence to women results, at least in part, from women assuming more visible, more equal and, hence, less protected social roles.

We are an evolving animal.

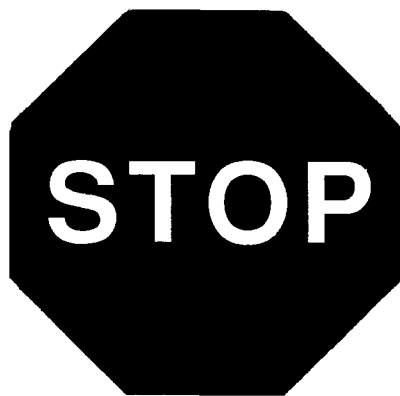
University of Toronto social historian Edward Shorter, in his book *The Making of the Modern Family*, notes that less than 200 years ago custom did not permit middle-class and peasant European women to join their husbands and sons at the dinner table or enjoy the same quality diet.

Dr. Shorter has theorized that one major reason why women of earlier days did not participate in public life was that they were constitutionally too weak-from poor diet and the resulting ailments of continuous childbirth.

That is passing into history. Sexual aggression is not.

The most successful human society will attach the most inviolate taboo imaginable to violence against women-using whatever resources are needed and beginning with massive public education. This is awful, what is happening now.

Must



The following response to Mr. Valpy's column appeared in The Globe and Mail on August 24, 1991.

Violence against women

From Michael Valpy's column: "The most successful human society will attach the most inviolate taboo imaginable to violence against women—using whatever resources are needed and beginning with massive public education. This is awful, what is happening now" (August 19).

Yes, yes. But I'm skeptical of these "massive public education" programs; they usually amount to well-intentioned but unconcerted, unimaginative and ultimately ineffective tut-tutting.

What is happening now is awful—the harassment, assault, rape and murder of our mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and nieces. Any public education campaign to attach an inviolate taboo to violence against women must be aimed at, and capture the attention of, men.

News of the discovery of another violated woman's dead body came during a baseball game between the Toronto Blue Jays and Detroit Tigers. During the game, there were advertised messages from professional athletes appealing to viewers to

help stamp out ilietis and colitis. It has been an effective campaign against what has been a cruel, crippling but previously unglamorous and unappreciated disease.

How effective it might be if a highly visible spokesman of this highly masculine elite were to speak out on violence against women. They have mothers and daughters and sisters and aunts and nieces—and news of another violated, dead woman surely devastates them as much as the rest of us.

Why can't some good, well-heeled public relations or advertising firm donate their imagination and talent to an effective campaign against this heinous social disease? And why won't more men sign up?

Mr. Valpy's column is a start.

— Martin O'Malley, Aurora, Ont.

Alas, this reactionary gem was published in the same paper on September 5, in response to another column by Michael Valpy. Plus ça change...

It was just a joke

I don't remember whether Michael Valpy has had a vacation from serious column-

writing yet this summer. He certainly needs one.

Mr. Valpy and fellow aircraft passenger James Guild of the Nova Scotia nurses union both object to a (very old) joke they heard on an Air Canada flight (Nothing Funny in Comic's Humour, Aug. 20). The joke is about a man married three times: his first wife died from eating poisoned mushrooms, and his second wife from a fractured skull — she refused to eat the mushrooms. Mr. Valpy implies in his column that this sort of humour is inappropriate in a society in which violence against women is commonplace.

This is utterly irresponsible on his part. An important point needs to be made: to tell a joke is not necessarily to support or believe in the content of the joke. I have heard some very fine jokes about Newfoundlanders, librarians, and imperfect men (I am all three of these), but I never consider whether I agree with the "facts" before I laugh.

Humour is a completely amoral activity. A person who tells a joke is not presenting an mini-discourse on his most cherished beliefs, all couched in funniness so as to be more palatable. The purpose of humour is to provoke laughter, not to set you prattling about how acceptable it is.

— Wayne Jones, Ottawa