

REVIEWS

WITHOUT CONSENT

A Television Documentary produced by David Goldie for ABC Television.

David Goldie's two-part documentary *Without Consent* raises a mixed response. My first reaction on seeing the women victims of rape speaking out about their experiences is positively hopeful. 'What happened' is so rarely explained in a context that accepts the victim's word as the truth. The opportunity *Without Consent* provided for women to speak is in sharp contrast to almost every other place women speak — at the police station, at court, in the community at large. In each of those forums the victim is met with suspicion and often disbelief. She is invariably tested about what she says happened and about her credibility.

The documentary also showed that the effect of allowing the women to speak is that they speak not just for themselves. The true impact, long term, on their lives necessarily includes the impact that their experience had on their family and friends and the community. David Goldie is sensitive to this. He supports the broader view of the impact of rape by interviewing family and friends, connecting the victim with the community, and overcoming the stigma of the isolated victim. The support of these people in turn overcomes the myths about the victim who is so often branded as having 'brought it all on herself' or 'asked for it'.

The straightforward approach of revelation works for the women who appear empowered by speaking out and providing confirmation that women can survive.

These positive responses to *Without Consent* become mixed, however, with negatives, creating a confusion the audience cannot be expected to unravel unassisted.

The usefulness of revelation as a mechanism of change is frustrated when it is applied to agents that will not change. Simple disclosure, if it

ever was enough, is here again not enough to cause changes in the behaviour of violent men concerning rape and assault against women and children. By permitting the rapists to speak, Goldie allows the rapists equal rights to legitimise their view of the world. For this reason the rapists should not have been permitted to speak as they did.

As the rapists explain their 'surge of power' experience through the act of rape, the documentary presents to the audience an ambiguous moral context. It condones the view that while there is the potential to rape, women will be raped. This terrorises women without in any way resolving the problem.

Goldie compounded his error by failing to censure the rapists. The message that rape is prohibited behaviour attracting punishment and deprivation of the offender's liberty was seriously compromised.

What is the message then? That men have to make a choice about who they want to be: rapists or non-rapists? But choice should not come into it. The message should have been loud and clear just like the old adage: *even if men cannot control their erection they can control what they do with it.*

The documentary needed to provide incentives to men to change their view of women and what they do to women violently. By being not only heard but heard without any confrontation, the rapists became part of the ongoing forces against the possibility of change.

In the vacuum left by this failure, the sensational portrayal of the offences and offenders was used to hold the attention of the audience. Goldie himself identified this when he said:

The problem I've had all the time is that the story is sensational . . . It's a very fine, delicate line that you can so easily cross. All the time I had to keep asking myself if I had gone too far.¹

This question should not have been necessary if the woman-centred analysis from the victim interviews was continued.

It is unfair of David Goldie to foist information on an audience which is not useful to them but which is very useful to potential rapists and assaulters. There is no lack of forensic investigation into rapists and what they think that could have been used in the documentary. Psychologists, doctors, counsellors and lawyers are readily available to give information and explanations to an inquiring public, together with the appropriate censure of the behaviour.

By the end of the documentary it became clear where the problem of David Goldie's production started — with the title. *Without Consent* itself is for some an ambiguous comment on rape — as it does not show rape as a punishable offence.

These mixed messages severely reduce the value of the documentary. I was left carrying terrifying images without any encouragement that potential rapists are being deterred.

ANNE THACKER

Anne Thacker is a Melbourne barrister.

Reference

1. 'Two Faces of Rape' by John Mangan, *Age Green Guide*, 10.9.92, p.1.

POLICE SHOOTINGS IN VICTORIA

by the Families of Mark Militano, Graeme Jensen and Jedd Houghton and the Flemington/Kensington Community Legal Centre; Fitzroy Legal Service, 1992; 116 pp., \$10 plus \$2.00 postag .

There is enormous personal pain for the relatives of any person who dies in unnatural circumstances. But that pain must be magnified exponentially when a loved one is shot dead by police and then, when no longer able to defend the allegations, is accused of various criminal acts and associations. When, in addition, a seemingly interminable