

Media manipulation

If you arrived in Halifax this past weekend, the first headline that grabbed your eye was probably one of the *Chronicle Herald* or *Daily News* screamers about the young woman found murdered at Ashburn Golf Course in Dartmouth. If you read at least two or three paragraphs of the accompanying stories, you found out that her head was smashed by two rocks found bloody at the scene, that she had friends in Fairview, that she travelled in shady, underworld circles, and that she was found "half-naked" near the second tee.

For anyone who has spent the past few months in Halifax, the connections were instant and electric. Three teenage women killed violently since February, numerous reported sexual assaults over the course of the summer. Although the media can't help quoting the 'experts' who say the incidents are almost certainly not part of a 'violent crime wave' or the work of a 'serial' or 'copycat' attacker (thus recalling the jargonistic vocabulary of the Mickey Spillane novels and private-eye TV shows which dominate our collective pop culture), they also can't resist reciting the litany of violent assaults which have been splashed over the local front pages and airwaves in recent months, thus suggesting that there is a 'pattern' to it all.

Disapproving editorials about sensationalist violence and how it desensitizes us and are cliché. It has also been pointed out many times over that the media just uses it to sell papers and to attract listeners and viewers. It is also worth noting, if only just as a reminder, how easy it is to brush off violence as something that emanates from some dark, teeming, but (thankfully) well-contained corner of society that only occasionally bubbles over into the lives of 'the rest of us'.

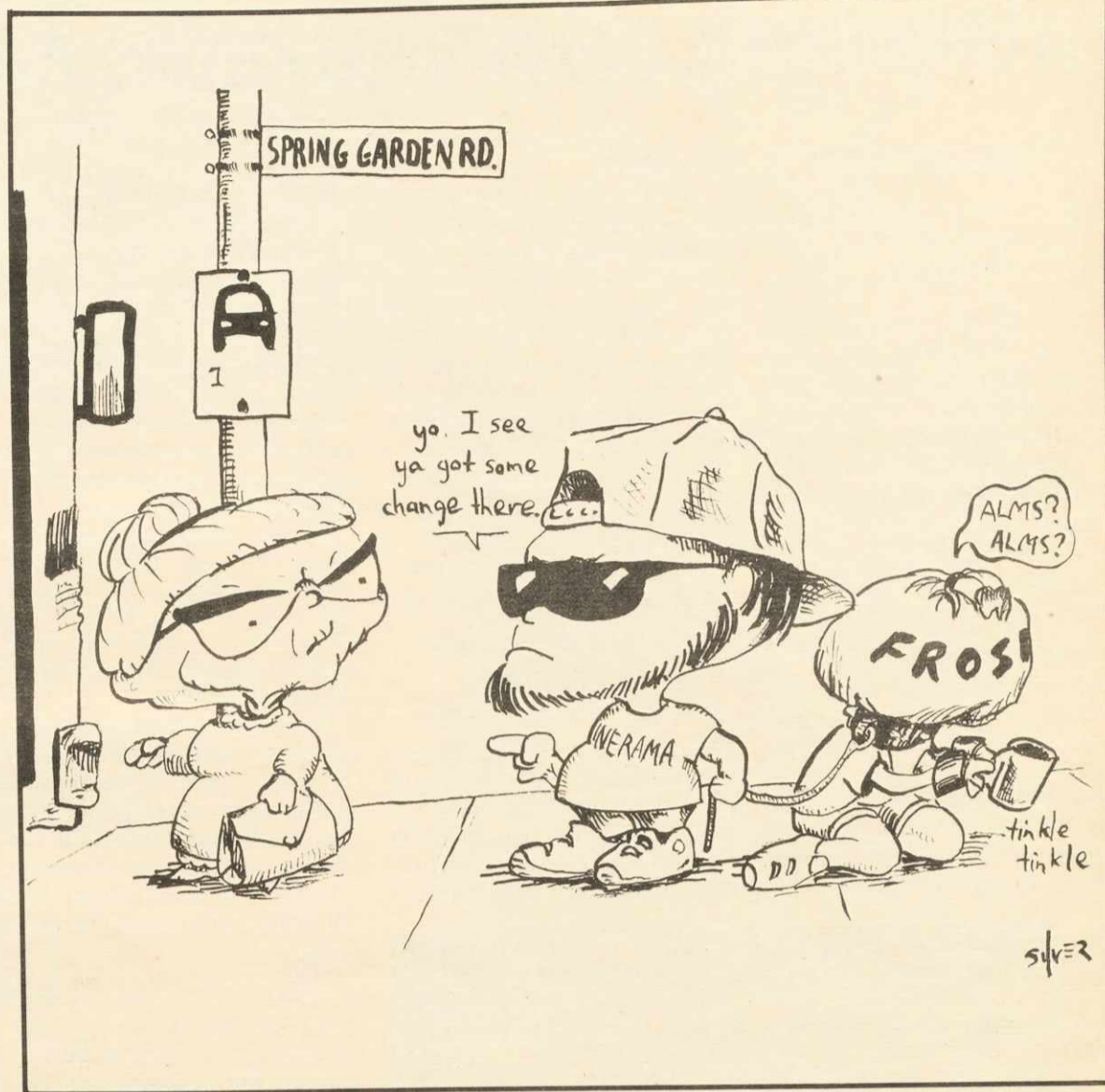
Because there is a 'pattern' to it, of course. But the media seldom depicts it accurately. I suspect that as soon as it was revealed that the woman consorted in Fairview, many readers nodded knowingly, as the stereotypical image of the Halifax suburb as a hotbed of vice kicked in. As well, the poorly substantiated insinuations about her links with impolite society no doubt confirmed many people's suspicions that no matter what a 'nice girl' initial reports made her out to be, there must be an underworld connection.

The point is that the role of the media should be to break down such dangerous clichés. But most of the time it doesn't bother. Violence is not ghettoized in our society; it brings pain to the lives of all of us, whether we live in South End or North End Halifax. And it is not strangers in dark alleys, generally, who commit acts of violence. To forget that is to adopt the easiest excuse for not doing anything about it.

Conventional portrayals of violence lock our minds into patterns which make us vulnerable to its seductive selling power, and the media thus becomes an accessory to profiteering on fear. One blatant manifestation of this greeted hundreds of Dalhousie students as they passed through the lobby of the Students Union Building this week. An entrepreneur had self-defense sprays and personal alarms for sale at a table, and attempted to grab customers with a display of headlines announcing rapes, assaults and murders. Among them, as a thoughtful passerby pointed out to me, was a *Gazette* story on sexual assaults on campus.

As a consumer of the media or a representative of it, it is difficult to avoid being manipulated by stereotyped depictions of violence. The tendency is strong to toss it aside as something that is shocking, and dismaying, but comes from outside our personal spheres. To persist in this is to fail to do justice to the tragedy that beset the young woman on the golf course.

Ryan Stanley



LETTERS

The Dalhousie *Gazette* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday noon before publication. Letters may be submitted on MacIntosh or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

Input sought on CFS

To the editor:

I am writing as the Vice-President External of the Dalhousie Student Union. Part of my position includes being the CFS liaison for all Dalhousie students. I would like to address some of the concerns raised by Rod MacLeod (*Gazette*, September 9).

The relationship of Dalhousie Student Union to CFS can be compared to, on a smaller scale, a society's link to the DSU, or on a larger scale, to Canada's involvement with the UN. If you have a particular issue that you feel needs to be addressed by a policy then you promote that policy. As Dalhousie's link I try and do that. It is only with students' input that this can be accomplished. I welcome Mr. MacLeod's opinion. However, I have never been approached by him with questions or concerns. Dalhousie may see policies at CFS that are not reflective; however, it is up to me and other students who attend CFS to propose other, more representative policies.

I believe strongly in the value of having a national student voice. Otherwise, Dalhousie would be a mere whisper in Ottawa. Monthly, I receive accounts of meetings that the CFS National Chairperson, Carl Gilles, has with government types, press releases from CFS plus press coverage reports. Anyone is welcome to access these through me.

CFS's financial situation is obviously something that needs to be addressed. I work hard to ensure CFS's financial ac-

countability in both CFS and CFS Services (the branch that includes Travel CUTS, SWAP, ISIC Cards and Student Savers). I need student input in order to do this.

As far as Mr. MacLeod's concerns about the type of policies CFS holds, I would reply that Dalhousie students, as members of the world population, are interested in international affairs. Am I right or wrong? I need you to tell me.

CFS's membership, despite some schools' membership reversals, is at an all-time high in terms of absolute numbers, 450,000 students across the nation. I believe the Dalhousie Student Union can be a 'mover and a shaker', at CFS and see our concerns reflected. I'm in Room 220 in the SUB waiting for your concerns.

Lisa Lachance
VP External
Dalhousie Student Union

A partisan issue

To the editor:

For your readers' benefit I would like to quote *Youth In Action*, the PC youth post-secondary strategy for 1992-93.

"We must take over the intellectual debate on campus from the organised student Left. We must demand a 'fair hearing' of our views first, then we will attempt to control the debate, setting the agenda and creating issues that benefit our party."

If you thought Rod L. MacLeod was looking out for your interests when he wrote his letter "CFS not representative"

(*Gazette*, Sept. 9), then your students' union is not the only party duping you.

It's important that your readers understand the reasons for Mr. MacLeod's letter, so they can make an informed decision for themselves. One member of the PC youth executive told me last year that he was "sick and tired of student groups opposing the policies my party has worked to implement."

Regardless of where you stand on the NAFTA debate you have to agree that it's important to know both sides of the issue. The Tory government isn't going to spend their money to educate the public on the negative aspects of the deal. Someone else has to.

The PC youth would like to get rid of student groups so that youth wings of political parties can fill the vacuum. Aside from being an obvious power-grab this is a serious conflict of interest. No aspiring young politician is going to openly challenge her party before she's even elected.

It's true that the federal government removed the GST on tuition fees and the three per cent surcharge on student loans. Of course it's true, they're the only ones with the power to do that. But let's not forget that it was the same government that implemented those ill-conceived policies. They were repealed only because of public outcry (from CFS, from SUNS, and probably from the PC youth too).

My point is that, in order to make an informed decision you first have to be informed. This is only one person's opinion but, for all their in-fighting and bureaucratic inefficiencies, CFS sometimes helps to keep me informed. I, for one, am opposed to stifling the debate.

Jerry West
former student

the Gazette

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