

A month of paranoia

Rape at York: myth or reality?

In a year of political activism, nothing aroused the slumber of the York campus like the month when rumours of rape and crime were rampant. Whether any fact lay beneath the rumours is another matter.

By REX BUCALI

Rape. The very word has the power to draw a myriad of responses from people of disparate walks of life. Sargeant Stanton of Metro police, when asked for statistics on reported rape victims in Toronto, asked stolidly, "Hasn't that been flogged to death?"

Later on, when discussing responses a rape victim might best employ to her advantage, he suggests that it is sometimes "best to relax and enjoy it."

For others, the word acts as a trigger for all kinds of associative images, conjuring up a mental picture of a comely woman's lonely vigil by a bus stop, a car full of drunken men screeching to a stop directly in front of her...

At York, the very physical landscape of the campus, gives rise to the possibility of rape, if not by a York student, by an intruder who thinks of the university as a haven to carry out his exploits against unsuspecting, unabashed young women.

So it is perhaps understandable that when Excalibur printed a letter from Jane Oakleaf in November, who had nearly become a victim of rape, the second incident connected with the university in a span of two months, the ensuing reaction from the campus approached mass paranoia.

Consider the following.

The Toronto Globe and Mail receives a series of telephone calls from hysterical mothers of York students, who are, understandably perhaps, fearful for their daughters' safety. The Globe and Mail dispatches one of their top reporters, Martin O'Malley to seek out the story.

A willowy nineteen-year-old student signs up in an on-campus women's self defense course, specializing in martial arts so that she will be able to effectively repel an attacker with her fists and her feet. She has heard that sex crimes on the campus are no the upswing and she wants to be prepared for



any eventuality.

A forty-two-year-old cafeteria worker rummages through her purse wondering if she has enough money to purchase a S.O.S. rape spray can she has seen displayed in the university drug store. She smiles. She has enough for two, one for her and one for her daughter.

Two girls write a letter to Excalibur explaining that they would be afraid to cross the campus alone, in the dark. There are too many open spaces, too few lights and too few security guards, and besides they have already had reminders that they are vulnerable to a sexual attack. An informal survey among girls at York reveals that many feel exactly as these two girls do.

The fear of rape on campus is an ever present danger among girls who must walk the lonely stretch of open space from Bethune-Stong to the Ross building, or from the main campus to the Graduate residences. But how valid are these fears? Women

are more apt to become the rape victims of their casual boyfriends or acquaintances after a night's partying at the Cock and Bull, than from a complete stranger.

But while most cases of rape involve acquaintances, there is very little concern over such incidences. For one thing, a rape committed by a casual friend is less likely to be violent, than one committed by a complete stranger. How precarious is a single girl's life on campus?

There has only been one recorded case of actual rape taking place on campus in the history of York.

In January of '72, an Atkinson student was driving to York for an evening class. She parked the car in the parking lot in front of her college, but she never got to it. A man, who had been following her in his own car, jumped her as she was walking toward her college and raped her in parking Lot I. The assailant was caught, arrested and sentenced to an indeterminate period of time.

This September, a York student was raped off-campus as she was walking home by way of Black Creek. While the attack took place off-campus, the incident had its effect on the mental well-being of York women.

From this incident, and from the near-incident involving Jane Oakleaf, a wave of anxiety passed through the campus between the period of late November and early December.

Claimed one English major. "I know for a fact that girls are getting raped all the time on campus." Asked if she could substantiate that claim with actual cases, she admitted that she could not, then hung on to the Jane Oakleaf matter. But Oakleaf was assaulted, not raped, and when the article was read back to her, she conceded that perhaps she had misread the article.

There is something about the nature of rape which brings out the emotion in some people. Following the rape of the Atkinson student in '72, a distraught mother, whose daughter was enrolled at York, wrote York's then-president John Yolton that "girls are raped regularly on campus". She did not leave it at that. "Even the toilet cubicles in the women's washroom are left unclean and often without toilet paper," she continued. "This situation should be remedied," she suggested and also accused Yolton of incompetence and negligence regarding crime on campus.

But stories about rape sometimes seem to materialize out of thin air. The thirteenth floor of Bethune was alleged to have been the scene of the rape of a resident student on the floor. York security was called in to investigate, and then everything was hushed up. Or so the story went.

However, Brian McDermit, the don of the floor in Bethune where the incident was to

have taken place, calls the incident a "total fallacy".

"I went around, person to person, trying to establish what in fact did happen," he explains. "When I finally talked to the three people who apparently were supposed to know everything, they knew absolutely nothing."

One of the people who were supposed to be 'in the know' was James McMurdo, who among other things, is the president of the Bethune College Council. McMurdo explained that the story was related with a rash of burglaries that had been occurring in the college that week, and that the rape story was as a result of the ensuing paranoia.

Stong college, it was whispered, also had a rapist in its confines. But that surfaced as a case of a man who paid a friendly visit to the women's showers and politely inquired of a girl if "she'd like to have her back scrubbed." What kind of man reads Playboy?

And then there are the cases that never see the light of day. The rape in the parking lot north of Founders last year, the rape outside Vanier College, the rape inside Vanier college.

"Things tend to be taken out of proportion," commented Sargeant Bill Bishop of Division 31, bringing some sobriety to the discussion. "A large number of rapes are not reported though," he admits.

How many? The Rape Crisis Centre in Toronto has things down pat. When asked for figures of reported rapes in Metro during the past two years, they replied "225 rapes and attempted rapes in 1973, 198 cases in 1974. Multiply each figure by 10 and you have the actual number of rapes that really occurred."

"Rape goes unreported if any possible repercussions could come to light," explains Bishop. "If the victim feels she will suffer more trauma through cross-questioning in court, then usually she will not press the matter. 'We're only as good as the information we have,'" says Bishop, and if they get none, they are helpless.

As for the matter of on-campus rapes, none but the possible secretive victims of rape really know for sure.

"It's hard to say if any rapes are being committed on campus," says Carol MacBride of Harbinger, "or whether they're just not being reported."

York security, however, is satisfied that the carnal crime is not being practiced at York.

"Really, for a place this big," explains George Dunn, York's chief security officer, "there's very little to worry about. 'We're very fortunate here. The crime rate for the University is an acceptable level for the number of people who live on campus and the number who frequent the campus.'"

