

No More *Black and Blue*

Women Against Violence Against Women and the Warner Communications Boycott, 1976–1979

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In the mid-1970s, Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), the first national feminist organization to protest mediated sexual violence against women, pressured the music industry to cease using images of violence against women in its advertising. This article presents a case study of WAVAW's national boycott of Warner Communications, Inc. and documents the activists' successful consumer campaign. The study reveals that media violence was central to feminist organizing efforts, and that WAVAW and related organizations helped establish a climate of concern about violence that motivated scientific research on the relationship between exposure to media violence and subsequent aggression.

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From high above the storied Sunset Strip on a glorious June day, a bound and bruised woman on a billboard gazed down at the citizens of Los Angeles. She was the centerpiece of a new advertising campaign for the Rolling Stones's 1976 album *Black and Blue*, part of a national promotion by Atlantic Records that featured print ads, radio spots, and in-store displays. At 14 by 48 feet, she dominated the busy skyline, and traffic snarled up and down the boulevard as drivers slowed to get a better look. The woman wore a lacy white bodice, strategically ripped to display her breasts. Her hands were tied with ropes, immobilized above her head, and her bruised legs were spread apart. She straddled an image of the Stones, with her pubic bone positioned just above Mick Jagger's head. Her eyes were half closed and her mouth hung open in an expression of pure sexual arousal, as if the rough physical treatment had awakened her desires and now she wanted more. Her enjoyment was captured in the ad copy: "I'm *Black and Blue* from the Rolling Stones and I Love It!"

This billboard caught the attention of a community of women in Southern California who were becoming concerned about the social effects of mass media images that linked female sexuality with violence. Just a few months earlier, several dozen feminists had banded together to form a new group called Women Against

Violence Against Women (WAVAW) to protest the Los Angeles debut of *Snuff*, a horror film that claimed to feature the actual on-camera murder of a woman in the midst of a sexual encounter. Members of WAVAW argued that movies like *Snuff* and advertising campaigns like *Black and Blue* glorified the mythic connection between sex and violence, reinforcing the dangerous idea that women like it when things get a little rough and that physical abuse can bring out repressed female sexuality. The *Black and Blue* campaign celebrated that familiar story and members of WAVAW feared that the association with the glamorous Rolling Stones might encourage violence against women. When they saw the *Black and Blue* billboard perched above Sunset, they decided to take action.

Representatives of the fledgling media reform group contacted Atlantic Records, the Rolling Stones' record label, and demanded the removal of the billboard and the cancellation of the advertising campaign. When Atlantic refused to comply, WAVAW announced that a news conference would be held the following day beneath the billboard on Sunset Boulevard. The organization issued a news release that explained how the campaign made women feel: "We carry in ourselves a deep fear of rape. When we would drive down the Sunset Strip and see the myth about our lust for sexual abuse advertised, our fear and outrage was deepened," the group warned. "We are not *Black and Blue* and we do not love it when we are" (WAVAW, 1976a). Just 15 hours after WAVAW issued this statement, and before the scheduled news conference, the billboard was removed. In the interim, someone had spray-painted a new message across its bottom right-hand corner: "This is a crime against women!"

Building on the accomplishments of the feminist anti-rape and anti-battering movements in uncovering the problem of male violence, a number of grassroots feminist groups in the mid-1970s identified a connection between media images of sexual violence and actual violence against women. Although WAVAW was subsequently joined by sister organizations such as Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM—San Francisco) and Women Against Pornography (WAP—New York), WAVAW was the first national feminist organization to focus exclusively on the problem of media violence, especially the sexual violence against women present in mainstream advertising. To bring attention to this issue, WAVAW activists initiated a national boycott of Warner Communications, Inc. (WCI), the parent company of Atlantic Records, which had produced *Black and Blue*. The boycott was intended to force the music industry to assume corporate responsibility for the images of women that it produced and promoted and to eradicate the dangerous and gratuitous images of violence against women that were commonplace in music industry advertising and promotions.

WAVAW played a significant role in bringing national attention to the relationship between media violence and subsequent acts of violence against women, but the group's major campaign—its innovative and successful boycott of the music industry's most powerful corporation—has never been documented. In keeping with principles of feminist scholarship, which recognizes the paucity of adequate historical

accounts of the organizations that women have established, this article seeks to restore WAVAW's history through a case study of the organization's 3-year boycott of WCI. The case study reveals the in-depth operation of an effective women's organization, an academic practice that sociologist Shulamit Reinharz (1992) has described as "necessary both as models for future generations and as the raw data of future secondary analyses, comparative research, and cross-cultural studies" (p. 166). Furthermore, the article connects WAVAW's efforts to a growing climate of concern about violence against women, which ultimately supported the development of a body of social scientific research about media exposure and subsequent aggression. This goal is also consistent with the chosen methodology, as case studies are particularly valuable for analyzing the significance of a particular event or phenomenon in the unfolding of future events (Reinharz, 1992).

The data for the case study were collected through extensive archival research. The author reconstructed the evolution of the boycott by studying the unpublished manuscript collection of the Boston chapter of WAVAW, the national newsletters produced by the Los Angeles chapter, and the internal memos generated by the Los Angeles chapter for national chapter distribution. The papers of Boston WAVAW are housed in the Archives and Special Collections Department of Northeastern University Libraries, and the collection contains work diaries, press releases, internal memos, and other organizational records that were consulted for this project.¹ Published newspaper and magazine accounts of WAVAW's campaign against Warner also provided important detail. Finally, the secondary literature about the feminist anti-violence movement and the trajectory of the larger women's movement were critical in establishing the framework for WAVAW activism.

The Beginning: An Epidemic of Male Violence

Members of WAVAW were steeped in the social and cultural climate of the second wave of American feminism and, specifically, the work of the women's liberation movement in the early 1970s with regard to male violence against women. Heightened awareness of the prevalence of rape and battering emerged from the radical feminist branch of women's liberation in the early 1970s, as women who participated in consciousness-raising groups shared experiences of sexual assault (Matthews, 1994; Schechter, 1982).

As part of the effort to understand and address these problems, feminists created a body of theoretic work in the 1970s that argued that men used violence—especially rape and the threat of rape—as a political tool to oppress women (Barry, 1979; Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Mehrhof & Kearon, 1973; Russell, 1975). Griffin (1971) argued that rape was "a male protection racket" that some men carried out on behalf of all men in support of the patriarchal order (p. 30). Indeed, the threat of rape was so frightening that many women adapted their routines to try to

stay safe, remaining at home at night, keeping off the streets, and avoiding public transportation, bars, and movie theaters. Feminists realized that women did not enjoy the freedom of mobility that men took for granted. In this light, rape and other forms of violence served the interests of all men—whether or not they themselves approved or participated—by constraining women’s activities and perpetuating the need for male protection.

Feminist ideas about the function of rape as a means of social control were introduced to a national audience in 1975 with the publication of Susan Brownmiller’s landmark book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. This bestseller was regarded in its time as a definitive (White) feminist statement on male violence, commanding the front page of *The New York Times Book Review* on October 12, 1975. Brownmiller (1975) theorized rape as the quintessential act that linked men and women through time, and across race, class, and culture. She argued that once men discovered that they *could* rape women, by dint of greater strength and “anatomical fiat” (p. 16), they passed this knowledge down so that every succeeding generation could use both the act of rape and the threat of rape to control women.

During this period, Brownmiller and other theorists of rape also broke new ground in the study of male violence by calling attention to the role of the mass media in perpetuating violent behavior. Many suspected that the mass media were responsible for sustaining and spreading the rape culture, modeling male violence for each new generation of boys. In a widely reprinted 1976 essay for the feminist journal *Quest*, two members of the Feminist Alliance Against Rape pointed out that the media routinely depicted violence against women. “The media do not merely show occasional images of violence and domination, but inundate and overwhelm us with these images,” they wrote. “Women are constantly massacred and brutalized in every conceivable fashion in the media” (Friedman & Yankowski, 1976, p. 25).

By the mid-1970s, feminists were paying close attention to the depiction of male violence in the entertainment media, as they strongly suspected that men might learn about violence through these channels. Medea and Thompson (1974) argued that the stereotypical gender roles portrayed by the media taught men that they had the right to possess and control women and taught women to accept their fate as helpless victims. “As long as we accept the stereotypes that are presented to us in everything from pulp detective stories to Oscar-winning films—that women are naturally passive, childlike, and vulnerable, and that men are naturally aggressive, brutal, and uncontrollable—the rape situation will not change,” they wrote (p. 7). Brownmiller (1975) made similar connections. She identified the mass media as powerful agents that might offer “impressionable, adolescent males” the “ideology and psychologic encouragement” needed to commit rape (p. 391). In *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller made a formal connection between mass media images and rape, a connection that many women active in the feminist anti-violence movements had already begun to piece together.

By the mid-1970s, the coercive and violent aspects of male sexuality had become a central issue within American feminism, and many women were concerned about

what they perceived as the culturally sanctioned male right to abuse women. This focus on male violence was an extraordinary new development in the years immediately preceding *Black and Blue*; two major anthologies of women's liberation writings published in 1970, *Sisterhood is Powerful* and *Voices from Women's Liberation*, had contained no articles on rape, battering, or violence in general. Between 1971 and 1975, the issue of male violence catapulted to center stage of the women's movement and made significant inroads into mainstream consciousness. When *Black and Blue* depicted a bound and battered woman who professed to "love" such physical abuse, a community of women sensitized to the violence problem leaped into action. "We are especially concerned about this issue because of the increasing rate of rape, and because of the horrifying information that has begun to come out about battering," WAVAW members said with regard to *Black and Blue*. "We cannot allow this kind of behavior to be trivialized, glorified, sensationalized or romanticized in mass media" (WAVAW, 1977). *Black and Blue* contradicted these women's lived experiences and made light of the serious social problem of male violence.

Fighting Black and Blue

In response to pressure from WAVAW, Atlantic Records scaled back the *Black and Blue* advertising campaign but did not eliminate it. The company cancelled a series of radio spots that began with the sound of a whip cracking and a woman's voice cooing, "Ooooh, beat me, beat me, make me '*Black and Blue*'...I love it" (WAVAW, 1977). However, the trussed and bruised woman continued to appear in print ads in national magazines and neither Atlantic representatives nor the Rolling Stones themselves seemed to fathom the depth of WAVAW's rage. Bob Greenberg, the West Coast general manager for Atlantic Records, gave a half-hearted statement to *Rolling Stone* magazine, which was one of many national publications that had carried the *Black and Blue* ad: "It was not the intention of Atlantic, Mick, or the Rolling Stones to offend anyone" ("Hot Stuff," 1976). Members of the band were simply amused by the feminist response to *Black and Blue*. Keith Richards recalled the events in a 1979 interview in *Creem*, a rock music magazine: "I thought it was quite funny," he said. "Goddamn it, a large percentage of American women wouldn't be half as liberated if it wasn't for the Rolling Stones in the first place.... They'd still be believing in dating, rings, and wondering whether it was right to be kissed on the first date or not" (quoted in Appleford, 1997, p. 150). Atlantic Records executives refused to scrap the campaign.

These indifferent responses infuriated members of WAVAW. They did not share Richards' interpretation of *Black and Blue* as liberation writ large but saw instead the glorification of violence against women. "We believe that this image validates the physical mistreatment of women," the group said of *Black and Blue*, "and we abhor the depiction of a bound and beaten woman to enhance record sales" (WAVAW,

1976a). It was evident from the WAVAW interpretation of the advertising campaign that many of the group's members had strong ties to the anti-rape and battered women's movements.

In the wake of the conflict, members of the Los Angeles WAVAW organization began visiting record stores to learn more about how music industry advertising linked violence and sexuality. They thought they had seen the worst in *Black and Blue* but soon found numerous images of women tied up, gagged, and assaulted. The cover for the 1972 Ohio Players album, *Pleasure*, featured an emaciated woman with a shaved head. Her hands were criss-crossed above her head and chained. To the WAVAW women, she looked like the victim of a concentration camp or a lynching, but the album's title suggested that she enjoyed this type of treatment (WAVAW, 1977). The cover for the 1976 Montrose album, *Jump on It*, displayed a close-up photograph of a woman's pubic area. She was wearing bright red bikini underwear; the color suggested that her vagina was a target. WAVAW members interpreted the album's title as supporting the idea that it was socially acceptable to "jump" an unsuspecting woman and commit sexual assault. This image, like *Black and Blue*, was read as an invitation to rape (WAVAW, 1977).

The 1977 Eric Gale album, *Ginseng Woman*, also featured cover art where female sexuality and violence commingled. A naked woman was shown lying face down on the ground with her robe crumpled at her side and her feet bound with an electrical cord. WAVAW members also objected to the 1977 Kiss album, *Love Gun*, as sex and violence were juxtaposed in the album title. The advertising campaign for this album also reinforced dangerous gender stereotypes, as it depicted women as subordinate sexual objects crawling at the feet of the male band members. WAVAW insisted that these kinds of images contributed to the sexist ideology of women's inferiority and encouraged rape. WAVAW recognized an industry-wide problem and noted that many of the abusive albums carried the Warner label, or that of one of Warner's subsidiary music companies.

Launching the Warner Boycott

In the fall of 1976, WAVAW began planning a campaign to force the music industry to curb its use of images of violence against women. Record companies were certainly not the sole offenders among the entertainment media, but they became a strategic target for WAVAW efforts. Record companies comprised a high-profile and powerful sector of the entertainment industry, and many musical artists exploited images of violence against women in their advertising and promotional materials. A few major corporations dominated the music business, which made it easy to identify a major target for a consumer campaign. Warner, the parent company of the Warner/Reprise, Elektra/Asylum/Nonesuch, and Atlantic/Atco labels, led the industry in terms of sales and prestige.² The Rolling Stones recorded on a Warner label, thus making Warner—in WAVAW's eyes—ultimately responsible for *Black and Blue*.

In November 1976, WAVAW, in conjunction with the California state chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), sent letters to the chairmen of Warner,

Elektra, and Atlantic (WEA) that demanded a policy statement against the use of violence against women in album advertising. Next, they insisted that the companies cancel any upcoming ads or promotional materials that featured such violence. Finally, WAVAW asked WEA to recall all albums in retail stores whose covers, like *Jump on It* or *Pleasure*, depicted violence against women (“WEA Boycott,” 1977). WAVAW requested that each company respond by December 6. The WAVAW letters were ignored.

On December 10, 1976, leaders of WAVAW and California NOW held a news conference at Tower Records on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. The feminists assembled at noon with signs, leaflets, and poster-sized photographs displaying WEA’s most flagrant record covers. Julia London, the national coordinator for WAVAW and a veteran of civil rights and New Left organizing, read a statement that connected music industry advertising with violence against women. “WEA’s album covers and/or promotion copy have included portrayals of women as willing victims of battering, as implied targets of gang rape, as victims of abduction and targets of abuse, and as being sexually attractive as victims,” she said. “This advertising is being used at a time when rape is increasing and when a conservative estimate puts the number of battered women in the United States at *one million*” (WAVAW, 1976b). Faced with mounting evidence of Atlantic’s callous disregard, WAVAW called for a consumer boycott of the three Warner record companies until WCI issued a corporate policy forbidding the use of images of violence against women on album covers and in all related advertising material. London, who had worked with Cesar Chavez on the grape boycott initiated by the United Farm Workers in the late 1960s, knew firsthand that consumer pressure, direct action, and appeals for social responsibility were powerful tools that could generate significant public support.³ She believed that WAVAW could adopt these tactics and use them to force the recording industry to curb its portrayal of violence against women.

News coverage of the press conference and the boycott was minimal, as was typical for feminist actions at this time (Bradley, 2003; Brownmiller, 1999), but a few influential trade publications, including the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Billboard*, did report the story. *Billboard* published a major story about the *Black and Blue* controversy and quoted Julia London and members of California NOW extensively. “We are constantly seeing women being abused, raped, and gang-rape implied by use of suggestive poses, whips, and chains. Very rarely is a woman portrayed as a human being,” London told the reporter. Sue Ann Dewing, chair of the Rape and Criminal Justice Task Force of California NOW, also offered a statement. “We want women to become aware and see what an album represents. We are raising the consciousness as to the whole concept of sexual violence as acceptable advertising and society’s condonement of this behavior” (quoted in Harrison, 1976). Joining the boycott, the group explained, meant refusing to lend financial support to an industry that knowingly perpetuated lies about women. “We are...encouraging people to realize that as consumers, we have the right to make an economic vote in regards to the policies of industry,” WAVAW wrote. “We urge people to vote no on the use of degrading and abusive depictions of women” (WAVAW, n.d.–a).

Once the boycott was announced, WCI representatives contacted WAVAW. On December 28, 1976, Bob Merlis, Warner's national publicity director, met with London and other WAVAW representatives. Warner executives from sales and promotion, artist development, merchandising, advertising, artist relations, and the art department also attended. The Warner team maintained that all WEA performers had contractual control over their album covers and promotional materials, and as such, Warner was obligated to go along with whatever creative elements the artist specified. "We're legally bound to go with what the artist wants," Merlis told a reporter from *The New York Times*. "We have no power," (quoted in Brozan, 1977, p. 26). According to *Record World*, a trade paper for the music industry, the Warner department heads urged WAVAW to bring their complaints directly to the recording artists.

London and the other WAVAW members were infuriated. The very suggestion that Warner, Elektra, and Atlantic had "no power" over the albums that they produced and sold was insulting. "It seems to us that Warner's rhetoric throughout the meeting," said London, "was a shabby attempt to evade completely the issue of corporate responsibility" (WAVAW, n.d.-b). Another attendee described the meeting as "farical" to the *Billboard* reporter (quoted in Harrison, 1977). The activists came away from the meeting determined to step up pressure through the consumer boycott.

Following the WEA meeting, London flew to New York City to promote the WAVAW cause among East Coast feminists. Gloria Steinem and Susan Brownmiller invited London to discuss the expansion of the boycott with a group of influential New York feminists and to share the WAVAW slide show with the community at large. London presented the slide show, which consisted of dozens of images of album covers, billboards, and magazine advertisements that featured violence against women, to a group of women at Brownmiller's apartment on December 30. The star power of the hosts ensured that the meeting earned a feature story in *The New York Times*. Word-of-mouth and the *Times* article produced a standing-room only crowd at the Women's Coffeehouse on Seventh Avenue for a slide show on January 2, 1977. Six radio stations broadcast interviews with London, reaching dozens of national outlets. WAVAW's boycott was attracting attention across the nation, hailed by many as a modern-day David and Goliath effort: a grassroots feminist organization taking a stand against a powerful media corporation. Leveraging this new visibility, WAVAW sent letters to 16 major record companies, warning that the boycott would ultimately be directed against them as well unless they ceased using images of violence against women.

The Boycott Heats Up

London's trip to New York City sparked a wave of news coverage that caught the attention of some high-level Warner executives. On January 15, 1977, *Billboard* reported that the WAVAW effort was gaining strength and momentum and noted that WAVAW intended to expand the boycott nationally, which it characterized as a serious

“problem for labels” (Harrison, 1977). Shortly after London’s return from New York City, Joe Smith, the chairman of the board of Elektra/Asylum, contacted WAVAW to arrange a meeting. Smith’s label concentrated primarily on writer–artist California rock, including such artists as Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon, and Jackson Browne, who were popular with female listeners. WAVAW’s influence was particularly strong in California, and the boycott was more likely to dampen sales of Elektra/Asylum artists than those of rock groups like Led Zeppelin, Queen, and the Rolling Stones, who recorded on other Warner labels. The boycott posed a more realistic threat to Elektra/Asylum than it did to the other Warner music companies.

In February 1977, WAVAW representatives met with Smith. He confirmed what WAVAW had long suspected: Record companies could exert their influence over album covers and advertising images if they wished to do so. In many instances, the music companies did cede control to recording artists, as Warner’s publicity director had argued, but Smith explained that this was a voluntary decision. Record companies could oversee the content of album graphics and other forms of advertising and promotion without losing their artists (“E/A Supports Women’s Goals,” 1977). Smith refuted what Warner executives had told WAVAW about record companies having “no power” over content.

Following the meeting, Smith issued a public statement promising that Elektra/Asylum would no longer use images of physical and sexual violence against women to promote its albums. Smith promised that E/A “would exert its influence in efforts to discourage illustrations showing women as objects of sexual or other violence,” even in those instances when artists already held contractual control. “We don’t want to put out a product that offends anyone,” he told *Variety*. “And it’s not only a matter of sales; it’s a question of morality and ethics as well” (“Elektra/Asylum Pledges Respect,” 1977, p. 1). Smith extended one final olive branch to WAVAW. He promised to speak to Mo Ostin, president of Warner Bros. Records, and Ahmet Ertegun, chairman of the board of Atlantic Records, to urge them to meet with WAVAW. In the months that followed, however, neither Ostin nor Ertegun contacted the organization.

WAVAW decided to increase the pressure by showing Ostin and Ertegun the extent of WAVAW’s public support. The organization initiated a major letter-writing campaign directed at the two “intractable companies” (London, Belknap, & Grey, 1977) during May 1977. WAVAW’s goal for the May campaign was to generate a minimum of 1,000 letters to Ostin and 1,000 letters to Ertegun to be received by June 1. The letters would ideally come from all over the United States and from men and women of diverse backgrounds. “It is necessary that WEA be confronted with evidence of the scope of public concern around this issue—both the geographic and the social scope,” London advised chapter members (London et al., 1977). In fact, WAVAW consciously targeted its May education efforts to civic, religious, and professional groups—rather than feminist groups—to assure the widest possible range of letters. Contacts inside the recording industry had informed WAVAW leaders that

WEA was afraid that the boycott would spread beyond the feminist community to other groups, such as the conservative Christian organizations, Citizens for Decency and Morality in Media. WAVAW hoped that a flood of letters from people affiliated with groups as varied as the Boy Scouts and the American Medical Association would show WEA that their fears were real (“WEA Boycott,” 1977).

As part of the May campaign, WAVAW presented the slide show to a wide range of community groups and solicited letters from each viewer. During the show, a WAVAW speaker would offer a critical analysis of each slide and explain how images of violence contributed to the problems of real-world violence against women and sexism. At the end of the slide show, the WAVAW representative would turn off the projector and ask the audience members to write letters to Ostin and Ertegun on the spot. “While people are writing,” the WAVAW slide show script prompted, “ask them to imagine being Mo Ostin or Ahmet Ertegun and receiving 1,000 letters. The presence of 1,000 letters...all hand written! They cannot be ignored” (WAVAW, 1977).

According to WAVAW records, the May letter-writing campaign was a great success; more than 1,000 letters poured into Warner and Atlantic. The companies were so swamped by consumer complaints that they had to resort to sending out form letters that addressed concerns about images of violence against women.

In July 1977, members of Los Angeles WAVAW received copies of the Atlantic Records form letter, which bore Ertegun’s signature. The letter did not address WAVAW’s demands for a corporate policy against the use of images of violence against women, and stated only: “Atlantic Records has never had an album cover that depicted violence against women.” The only exception, Ertegun wrote, was the “alleged portrayal” of violence in the advertisements for *Black and Blue*. And, in that instance, Ertegun wrote, “I ordered the campaign terminated and all advertising and billboards were immediately withdrawn” (quoted in “Atlantic Issues Misleading Letter,” 1977, p. 1). As WAVAW pointed out in its national newsletter, Ertegun had removed the Sunset Boulevard billboard and cancelled a series of radio advertisements, but the *Black and Blue* in-store displays and magazine ads remained. WAVAW was disappointed by Ertegun’s response and baffled by his implication that Atlantic Records had been unjustly singled out and punished for a practice that it “never” followed.

Increasing the Pressure on Warner

Despite the success of the May letter-writing campaign, WCI made no formal overture to WAVAW to end the boycott. WAVAW leaders acknowledged that their efforts were having limited economic impact on WEA, but they believed that the record companies would tire of the negative publicity. “Its impact on the level of public consciousness and embarrassment for WEA has already more than begun to take effect; and as the campaign spreads throughout the country, that impact will become many times greater,” London assured members (London et al., 1977).

On August 30, 1977, members of Los Angeles WAVAW together with Los Angeles-area feminist artists presented a street theater performance and press event titled “Record Companies Drag Their Feet.” This event clearly expressed the powerful emotions of anguish and fury that emerged when women were confronted by *Black and Blue* and that motivated WAVAW’s campaign against WCI. Three women cast as male record executives dressed up as roosters, wearing brightly painted rooster headpieces and men’s business suits. The three “roosters” drove up and down Sunset Boulevard in a flashy gold convertible, allowing plenty of time for photographers and camera crews to capture their images. Finally, they got out of the car and entered a mock record company office, which the artists had constructed under a billboard advertising the rock group Kiss and their album, *Love Gun*. The “office” featured a large executive desk covered with money. Inside, the “roosters” were strutting around with their chests stuck out, imitating arrogant male record executives. Women entered the office and tried to communicate with the roosters, but the roosters ignored them. The women held up signs as a last resort:

I Wish the Media Wouldn’t Insult, Demean, Dehumanize Me By Their Images.
 I Don’t Want To Be Treated Like A Piece of Meat.
 I Wish I Could Walk Home Alone At Night: Love Is Not Violence.

Other women pointed to a “counter-billboard” meant to oppose the one for *Love Gun*. This counter-billboard featured rape statistics culled from the federal Crime Index. Finally, the roosters spilled a bucket of red paint over the money on the desk, symbolizing the “blood money” that the companies earned from selling images of violence against women (Labowitz & Lacy, 1978). The performance ended when 20 women draped the office set with a banner that read, “Don’t Support Violence—Boycott!” (Lacy & Labowitz, 2003). All of the major Los Angeles-area television stations covered the event.

During the course of the next several months, WAVAW members poured their efforts into writing letters, deluging Warner with telephone complaints, presenting the slide show, and publicizing the boycott. On May 2, 1978, six members of WAVAW picketed the WCI annual shareholders’ meeting at Rockefeller Center in New York City. The women distributed 1,500 leaflets to passersby that described WCI’s exploitation of women and the company’s intransigence in dealing with the issue. On one side of the leaflet, WAVAW reproduced violent album cover art from Atlantic Records, including *Black and Blue*, and on the other they printed Ahmet Ertegun’s form letter response to inquiries about his company’s use of images of violence against women (“WAVAW Confronts WCI Shareholders,” 1978, p. 1).

Meanwhile, a member of the New York chapter of WAVAW was able to attend the WCI shareholders’ meeting. As the owner of one share of WCI stock, she had the right to address the audience.⁴ She spoke passionately to 700 shareholders, reviewing the WAVAW–Warner conflict and denouncing Warner’s board of directors for failing

to establish a policy against the use of violence against women in its advertising and promotional materials. Steven J. Ross, president of WCI, offered the standard corporate line, insisting that contracts ceded creative control to the recording artists.

Audience members applauded the WAVAW speaker, but the financial data contained in the WCI annual report made it clear that the boycott was not hurting Warner's bottom line. The company credited continued growth in Warner's two largest divisions, recorded music and filmed entertainment, for its strong financial performance ("Best-Ever WCI Quarter," 1978, p. 4). WAVAW had to hope that the stigma of negative publicity would persuade Warner to meet the organization's demands.

An End in Sight

As the two and a half-year dispute dragged on, WCI began to grow increasingly uneasy about the public relations impact of the WAVAW boycott. The boycott was not adversely affecting Warner's earnings, but it was damaging to Warner's public image, and the WAVAW activists posed a constant, unpredictable threat. Warner also had to deal with periodic press coverage of the boycott and WAVAW's media actions and street performances, which cast the company in an unfavorable light. WAVAW was also generating thousands of letters of complaint to WCI, Warner Bros., and Atlantic Records through the slide show. Each letter had to be answered, draining staff time, energy, and morale.

In spring 1979, members of WAVAW presented the slide show at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Medicine. As was their custom, the WAVAW representatives asked audience members to write letters on the spot to the WEA music companies requesting a policy governing the use of images of violence against women. Instead of the usual form letter response, one physician in the audience received a personal letter from David Horowitz, one of Warner's highest-ranking executives. Horowitz's letter stated that the company had already instituted such a policy. "As a matter of Corporate policy, Warner Communications is opposed to the depiction of violence, against women or men, on album covers, in promotional material or otherwise," he wrote. "This policy has been communicated to each of our record companies, which have been enforcing it to the fullest possible extent" (Horowitz, 1979). The letter assured that all album cover art and related promotional materials were subject to careful review by Warner executives to determine that the materials conformed to Warner's corporate policy. The baffled physician sent a copy of the letter to the WAVAW office.

The Horowitz letter stunned WAVAW leaders, who had received no such communication and were unaware that a policy had gone into effect. Julia London sent a letter to Horowitz insisting that WCI communicate the newly articulated corporate policy against violence to all the WAVAW chapters. Furthermore, she argued, a decision of such magnitude deserved a public announcement, as "an important example

of an industry leader taking this step” (London, 1979a). The Warner policy change was a triumphant result of years of struggle, and London told Horowitz that WAVAW would not end the boycott until WCI formally introduced the policy at a joint news conference. WAVAW imposed several other conditions. First, the new advertising policy was to be circulated to all staff members at WEA music companies. Second, WAVAW expected Warner to distribute a press release to all entertainment trade and national news services as well as to the feminist press. Finally, Horowitz would have to arrange for WEA art department personnel to meet with WAVAW representatives to facilitate better mutual understanding of the new policy.

In return, WAVAW agreed to a condition set by Warner: WAVAW would not display any WEA record album covers or advertising material as examples of abusive images at the news conference. Some WAVAW members objected, arguing that Warner expected the organization to sweep years of violent and exploitative treatment of women under the rug. However, several WAVAW leaders argued that the organization ought to treat WCI as a new ally, as this strategy might influence other record companies to create similar policies against the use of violence against women. “There is no point in grinding WCI badness into the ground when what they have done now is very commendable and puts WAVAW in a much stronger position to deal with other companies,” one WAVAW leader wrote (Howarth, n.d.). Instead of revisiting Warner’s mistakes, she urged the organization to turn its attention to other record companies.

After 3 years of national protesting, presenting community slide shows, letter writing, attending shareholders’ meetings, and boycotting, WAVAW achieved victory. On November 8, 1979, WAVAW and WCI made joint statements to the press at dual news conferences in New York and Los Angeles announcing that an agreement had been reached. Warner announced its new policy opposing the use of violent images. “The WCI group opposes the depiction of violence against women or men on album covers and in related promotional material,” Horowitz read from a stiffly worded statement. “The WCI group opposes the exploitation of violence, sexual or otherwise, in any form” (quoted in Harrison, 1979, p. 3). WAVAW commended the company for its leadership on the issue. “We do look forward to increased receptivity from other companies as a result of the step taken by the WCI record group, one of the most important leaders in the industry,” advised London (Howarth, n.d.).

In a memorandum to all the WAVAW members that outlined the terms of the agreement, London could barely contain her joy. A grassroots community of women who mobilized in response to an epidemic of male violence had compelled a major media conglomerate to assume corporate responsibility for the images of women that it used to sell products. “All in all, WAVAW has achieved an important precedent, a first, something to build on and use. We’re on our way!!” she wrote. “Three cheers (or more!) to us all who have focused on this and to all our friends inside and outside the movement who have boycotted, talked to store owners, written letters, picketed and organized, and who have supported WAVAW during these last 3 years!” (London, 1979b).

Assessing the WAVAW Contribution

The Warner boycott and the campaign to achieve a corporate policy against violence represented the apex of national WAVAW activity and the organization's most influential period. The Los Angeles office made efforts post-Warner to pressure other record companies to issue similar policies, but most WAVAW chapters turned to local projects once the national boycott ended. The Warner corporate policy remained on the books, but in the absence of WAVAW's constant monitoring, the music industry had little incentive to police its artists and advertising. Violence against women was evident in industry product by the early 1980s, particularly within the lyrics, videos, and promotional materials associated with heavy metal and rap music artists.

WAVAW could not permanently eradicate violence against women in the music industry, but the organization's groundbreaking work in calling attention to the relationship between mediated portrayals of violence and physical acts of violence has had important and lasting consequences. Through the Warner boycott, WAVAW members brought national attention to the feminist claim that mediated images of violence against women taught successive generations of men a sexist ideology that encouraged violence. This was a radical insight at a time when dominant scientific studies, such as the 1971 report of the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, concluded that no relationship existed between media exposure and antisocial behavior. WAVAW refuted such claims, arguing that a relationship did exist between consumption of mediated sexually explicit images, particularly violent images and images that presented women as subordinate to men and acts of sexual violence. WAVAW was one of the first feminist groups to articulate for a national audience the idea that the presentation of women as victims of aggression, as in *Black and Blue*, reinforced gender stereotypes that encouraged sexual violence. The organization's boycott of WCI created widespread awareness of the feminist point of view and helped produce a climate of public concern about the social effects of media violence.

WAVAW's efforts, joined with those of other feminist anti-media violence groups, and feminist authors writing about violence in the mid-1970s, helped to stimulate the growth of a vast body of media effects research from the late 1970s forward in psychology, sociology, communication, and a variety of other social-science-based disciplines. New feminist claims about violence caught the attention of researchers nationwide, some of whom personally sought out feminist activists in the late 1970s for guidance in planning new research studies, such as the psychologists Neil Malamuth of the University of California–Los Angeles and Edward Donnerstein, then of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In 1979, for example, Malamuth and Donnerstein met with Susan Brownmiller and representatives of WAVAW's sister organization, Women Against Pornography, to explicate the feminist "hypothesis," as Donnerstein described it, regarding the relationship between sexually violent media and attitudes toward rape (Brownmiller, 1999, p. 306).

The feminist influence on scientific consciousness was evident as researchers began to formally test the proposed connection between violence in the media and real-world violence against women that WAVAW and other feminist organizations had advanced (e.g., Baron & Bell, 1977; Donnerstein, 1980; Donnerstein & Barrett, 1978; Donnerstein & Hallam, 1978; Malamuth, 1983; Malamuth & Check, 1981). Malamuth and Check (1981) credited the feminist authors Brownmiller (1975) and Kathy Barry (1979) and national feminist anti-violence organizations for directing research attention to “the possible antisocial effects of mass media violent sexuality” (p. 437). The design of their 1981 study revealed the influence of WAVAW and other feminist anti-violence groups, as it directly tested their contention that mass media exposure that portrayed violence against women favorably, such as *Black and Blue*, contributed to greater acceptance of both sexual and nonsexual violence against women. Malamuth and Check (1981) concluded that future research ought to continue investigating feminist claims about violence and “should examine the possibility suggested by feminists that messages of female subordination communicated by different sources may have summative effects in promoting a sexist ideology” (p. 445). A generation of social science studies investigating the relationship between exposure to violent media and subsequent violent behavior has roots in the anti-violence campaigns led by feminist groups, including WAVAW.

The climate of concern about violence against women initiated by WAVAW and others also supported a range of academic investigations about the portrayal of women in advertising. In fighting *Black and Blue* and other abusive advertising campaigns, organizations like WAVAW and its Northern California sister group, WAVPM, broke new ground by arguing that advertising ought to be regarded as a cultural product that defined and constructed gender relations, and that reified female subordination and male violence. The serious attention paid to advertising by feminist activists paved the way for critical scholars (e.g., Goffman, 1979; Williamson, 1978) and social scientists (e.g., Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Sullivan & O'Connor, 1988) to study the gender stereotypes present in advertising and to argue that women are typically presented as submissive and in need of male protection.

Many social scientific studies today confirm the existence of some type of relationship between the consumption of sexualized media violence and a number of variables related to sexual aggression against women (Allen, D'Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995; Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995). These analyses demonstrate that exposure to sexually violent media images is associated with increased rape-myth acceptance, increased aggression in laboratory experiments, and sexual callousness, or a disregard and contempt for a woman's right to refuse a sexual encounter (Gunter, 2002; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988; Malamuth & Check, 1985; Zillman & Weaver, 1989). Researchers have also concluded that viewing media portrayals of sexual violence initiates a process of target desensitization, which leaves viewers less able to empathize with victims of domestic abuse and rape (Linz, Donnerstein, & Adams, 1989; Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984). Just 2 years after

WAVAW ended its national boycott of WCI, two prominent media violence researchers concluded that exposure to mass media that portrays violence against women as having positive consequences, such as the extreme sexual excitement displayed in *Black and Blue*, increases males' acceptance of interpersonal violence against women (Malamuth & Check, 1981). These were not prevailing beliefs in the scientific community when WAVAW and related organizations began their work, and in fact, they ran counter to widespread ideas about the socially positive aspects of sexually explicit media content. Much of what we know today about the behavioral effects of sexual violence in the media has roots in the campaigns conducted by WAVAW and other feminist groups, whose members believed instinctively that sexualized media violence against women contributed to everyday acts of domestic abuse and rape.

Notes

1. One of the primary WAVAW manuscript collections is housed in the Department of Archives and Special Collections of the Northeastern University Libraries in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection includes papers and records pertaining to the Boston chapter and the national Los Angeles chapter. It includes a complete WAVAW slide show, the presentation that chapter members showed to audiences nationwide, and the national slide show script. The WAVAW newsletters produced and distributed by the groups are available at the State Historical Society of the University of Wisconsin–Madison as well as at a number of libraries nationwide. Most issues of the newsletter are also available in the manuscript collection housed at the Archives and Special Collections Department of the University Libraries at Northeastern University.

2. Just a few months earlier, Warner had announced the best second quarter in the company's history, with the records and music division producing 54% of corporate income and 50% of sales. Each of the Warner record companies registered increases in sales, posting \$15.84 million in profits, up 71% from the previous year (Fraiman, 1976). See also White and Sippel (1977), which describes Warner/Elektra/Atlantic's overall performance in 1976.

3. Indeed, Julia London was a seasoned activist with experience in both the women's liberation and New Left movements. She had worked as an organizer in the late 1960s for the United Farm Workers, the agricultural labor union led by Cesar Chavez. When Chavez called for a public boycott of table grapes to support workers' efforts to secure a fair union contract from California's giant agribusiness farms, London witnessed the power of consumer action firsthand. As union volunteers pressed community and religious organizations to support and publicize the boycott, millions of Americans stopped buying grapes. By 1970, the UFW had organized 50,000 agricultural workers and had forced the grape growers to accept union contracts.

4. In 1983, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) approved new regulations designed to limit activist shareholders' abilities to raise social issues at corporate annual meetings. The bulk of the regulations dealt with shareholders' right to propose resolutions affecting company business, such as resolutions regarding corporate activities in South Africa, the building of nuclear power plants, the sale of infant formula to Third World countries, and the production of napalm. The Commission decided to require that those proposing resolutions hold at least \$1,000 worth of a company's stock for a minimum of 1 year (longer than the life span of many activist groups) and to require that a losing resolution obtain at least 5% of the vote for it to qualify for resubmission the following year. In addition, the rules would allow a company to omit from the proxy material a proposal if it dealt with substantially the same subject matter as a proposal in the previous year. The regulations were regarded as a major blow by activists who used the public corporate forums, as WAVAW did, to apply pressure to companies to exercise social responsibility (see Hershey, 1983).

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