



NYC Media Response Project Manual



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NYC Media Response Project Introduction

Welcome!

You are a part of a dedicated team of anti-rape activists who are making social change by addressing the way local media misrepresent and underrepresent sexual violence. It doesn't matter if you sign up to be a 'monitor' once a month or sign up to be a 'writer' twice every week: every bit counts. The NYC Media Response Project is set up to be as effective as possible as well as flexible and open to change so that we can meet the diverse needs and concerns of members and the anti-rape movement. Anti-rape activists brought us the rape crisis centers in the 1970's and the anti-rape education in the 1980's, and it will be anti-rape activists that improve the quantity and quality of media coverage of sexual violence in the year 2006 and beyond!

This guide was created to support the efforts of anti-rape activists like you. Information in this guide will help get your voice heard by the media as well as your community. There is a lot of work to be done on many fronts – but addressing local media is an important and key step in calling for an end to sexual violence. Actions like sending a letter to the editor, communicating with journalists and publishing an Op-Ed makes a difference! As a member of the NYC Media Response Project your actions will be coordinated with the efforts of other activists in order to maximize results. In addition, having the support of like-minded individuals who are also doing this difficult work is invaluable. The NYC Media Response Project also has an evaluation component that is crucial to measuring the effects of the actions taken, improving the process, justifying investment and showing evidence of success. This way you will be able to see the effects of your work being documented, aiding system changes and encouraging others to join or support the work.

The NYC Media Response Project manual is a work in progress. New statistics and information are produced all the time, objectives/goals and projects are modified and members bring new and exciting ideas to the table. In order to effectively organize against a powerful system and battle against our own sense of helplessness and isolation we must be flexible, creative and willing to draw fire.

If you ever have any questions or concerns, or ideas for the NYC Media Response Project do not hesitate to contact Emily with Take Back The News at Emily@takebackthenews.org and/or Christine with NOT IN OUR CITY at cstjohn@nycagainstrape.org



NYC Media Response Project Background & History

The NYC Media Response Project is a movement devoted to confronting the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of sexual violence in mainstream media outlets that are based in New York City. Take Back the News and NOT IN OUR CITY created the project with the goal of 1) improving both the quantity and quality of media coverage of sexual violence and 2) raising public awareness about the epidemic nature of sexual violence in order to foster greater public dialogue and ultimately greater public responsibility.

Take Back the News was founded by Emily Brandt in 2001. It began as a print project in an independent Boston-based newspaper in response to local misrepresentation of a highly publicized sexual assault. The goal was to provide victims of sexual assault a chance to tell the public what happened in their own words. The success of the first print project prompted the development of www.takebackthenews.net, so that the project could expand to communities around the country. Several communities and campuses have sponsored and continue to sponsor local Take Back the News Print Projects, which replicate the format of the original print project. Take Back the News became an official non-profit organization in the summer of 2005. During that same summer, Emily's three sisters, Maria Brandt, Laura Blasberg, and Julia Brandt, took on roles as Board Members of Take Back the News. In July of 2006, Julia Wey joined the Board of Directors. The five women continue to collaborate on all aspects of the project and on the maintenance of the new website, www.takebackthenews.org.

NOT IN OUR CITY is a community-organizing project of the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault (www.nycagainstrape.org) to prevent sexual violence through critical dialogue, advocacy and activism. The mission of the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (Alliance) is to develop and advance strategies, policies and responses that prevent sexual violence and limit its destabilizing effects on victims, families and communities. We accomplish this through: 1) research to document the extent of sexual violence in NYC and determine the effectiveness of current intervention and prevention efforts, 2) education about the devastating aftermath of sexual violence and opportunities for its prevention, and 3) advocacy for responsive policy development, practice and legislation with public officials and service providers.

The Alliance was founded in 1998 as a coordinating agency to facilitate a network of support and shared knowledge on behalf of the professionals who care for victims of sexual assault throughout New York City. The City's service providers identified the need for such an organization which, unencumbered by the mandate to provide direct

service, unites representatives of rape crisis centers, specialized law enforcement and criminal justice units, child advocacy centers and the health care community. Through its advocacy, education and research initiatives, the Alliance has also responded to newly identified needs that include broadening the base of support for sexual violence issues by reaching out to a larger community that shares the concerns about survivor response and prevention.

The Need for Change:

Amnesty International published a report (www.amnesty.org, News – November 2005) concluding that one in three people believe that women who behave flirtatiously are at least partially responsible for being raped, and a similar number think that women are partially or wholly responsible for being raped if they are drunk. Recent statistics (National Center for Policy Analysis, U.S. Dept. of Justice) estimate that only 6% of rapists will ever spend a day in jail for their crime. Rape may be the only crime where the victim is blamed and the perpetrator nearly always escapes punishment. Yet at the same time, rape is one of the most devastating crimes that can happen to a person. Cultural norms are one of the most powerful societal and community influences in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Mainstream media play a huge role in shaping negative cultural norms that contribute to an environment that tolerates sexual violence. An article produced by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center entitled “Sexual Violence and the Spectrum of Prevention” describes the following norms as ones that play a role in maintaining a rape culture: “They are norms about: 1. *women*: limited roles for and objectification and oppression of women; 2. *power*: value placed on claiming and maintaining power (manifested as power over); 3. *violence*: tolerance of aggression and attribution of blame to victims; 4. *masculinity*: traditional constructs of manhood, including domination, control and risk-taking; and 5. *privacy*: notions of individual and family privacy that foster secrecy and silence.”¹ Too often, mainstream media reinforce these norms when reporting on sexual assaults by minimizing impact, reporting on ‘titillating’ details and placing the blame on the victim.

The NYC Media Response Project believes that the roots of sexual violence are systemic and institutionalized. We believe that an end to sexual violence relies on effecting broad social change that requires concrete changes to the organizational practices of mainstream media that sustains a culture of sexism, classism, heterosexism and other oppressions. In response to the prevailing ‘rape’ myths often found in media, the NYC Media Response Project will do our best to educate media outlets and consumers that sexual assault can happen to anyone. Sexual violence is never the victim’s fault. No one deserves to be assaulted. Sexual Violence is not ‘a crime of passion’ or about the inability of perpetrators to control themselves; it is about perpetrators exerting power and control over victims. Our purpose is to create a movement of activists who will directly challenge media outlets that perpetuate myths about sexual violence and the oppressions that result in sexual violence.

¹ Cohen, Larry, Davis, Rachel, Parks, Lisa Fujie “*Sexual Violence and the Spectrum of Prevention: Towards a Community Solution*” National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2006.

Anti-rape activists are aware of the need to address the way mainstream media report sexual violence, but they often lack the structure and resources to respond effectively and create social change. Activists are often disconnected from one another and lack a coordinated strategy. In addition, activists are extremely busy and face challenges in finding time for volunteer work. The NYC Media Response Project will provide structure and a team of like-minded anti-rape activists supporting each other in this difficult work.

NYC Media Response Project Programs:

'Letter to the Editor' – The NYC Media Response Project will organize activists into effective protesters who can be mobilized as needed for ongoing activism around media reporting of sexual violence in New York City. NYC Media Response Project members will write a letter to the editor anytime there is an article that misrepresents the reality of sexual violence. For now, members have chosen to focus the letter writing campaign on *The New York Times* and the *New York Post*. By exposing irresponsible reporting via a letter to the editor, we will be raising awareness and educating media as well as consumers about sexual violence. Monitors are also encouraged to check their free neighborhood newspapers such as the Brooklyn Papers www.brooklynpapers.com (which requires letters to be mailed) and a popular blog, The Gothamist www.gothamist.com. NYC Media Response Project members have also identified Newsday as an important media outlet to monitor. Due to the general better-quality coverage by Newsday, members will monitor Newsday's positive reporting and reporting that could be improved with the hopes of producing a report for Newsday editors which we can present at a collaborative meeting. This will serve as a trial run for a media advisory board that the NYC Media Response Project will form.

The NYC Media Response Project will utilize a survey monkey to monitor *The New York Times* and the *New York Post* to see if coverage of sexual violence improves over time. In addition, the data from the survey will inform the project of the effectiveness of letter writing.

Due to the fact that the NYC Media Response Project has just begun to develop as of August 2006, we will be focusing on launching the 'Letter to the Editor' program in the upcoming months. The project has additional ideas such as, expanding the 'writer' function to include as many people as possible instead of the singular person that is currently in place, writing general opinion letters to the editors (op-eds) as well as writing letters to editors praising reporters who have done a positive or exemplary job in reporting responsibly on sexual violence. In addition, there will be strategic planning on how to effectively utilize existing blogs to further NYC Media Response Project goals. There is also ongoing discussion about publishing letters on the Take Back The News and Alliance website.

Training:

Due to scarce funding, the training aspect of the NYC Media Response Project will depend on the leadership and experience of Take Back The News and NOT IN OUR CITY. Staff from Take Back The News has extensive experience with writing and producing letters for publication (among the Board members, there are two English

teachers and an attorney) and the Organizer from NOT IN OUR CITY is knowledgeable about the dynamics of sexual violence (for two years she has provided crisis intervention and advocacy to survivors of domestic and sexual violence at the hospital emergency room, police station, Child Advocacy Center and throughout court proceedings). In addition, staff from the NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault will act as consultants for information and/or training. All members will receive a comprehensive volunteer guidebook that includes statistics, laws and other information about sexual violence. This guidebook will be updated on a regular basis to include new research and to reflect current statistics. In addition, this guidebook will include a “How to” on effective protest letter writing. Through our own outreach, we will consistently strive to inform ourselves about organizations that have similar goals, such as Women In Media & News (WIMN), and to work in tandem with them.

In addition, current members of the NYC Media Response Project are all either rape crisis advocates or anti-rape activists who have already done either advocacy or activism around the issues of sexual violence and bring their own expertise to the project. As we continue to build momentum and gain additional funding sources, Take Back The News and NOT IN OUR CITY will provide support, including hiring outside consultants if needed, for members as they continue to examine public attitudes towards and media institutional policies about sexual violence and identify additional strategies for effective change.

Evaluation:

The NYC Media Response Project will incorporate two types of evaluations: a program evaluation and a process evaluation. The following program evaluation will be conducted.

Short- term benchmarks will include the following:

- Number of mobilized members
- Number of actions taken
- Creation of survey monkey to track media response to sexual violence
- Evaluation of actions and data

Long-term benchmarks will include:

- Number of actions taken
- Number of additional people involved
- Data produced by survey monkey
- Evaluation of actions and data

A process evaluation will be conducted using the objectives developed by Take Back The News and NOT IN OUR CITY regarding the goals and objectives of the project. In addition, a sub-sample of advocates/activists will be randomly chosen to conduct a more in-depth evaluation in a focus group setting of the skills they learned six months and one-year post training. The groups will examine what skills are still being used in their organizing work, what additional skills they feel they need and what aspects of the program they found most and least useful. The comments and feedbacks from these sessions will be used to inform future trainings and work with NYC Media Response project volunteers.



NYC Media Response Project Actions!

The NYC Media Response Project has an ‘on-call’ monthly calendar where members can sign up to be a monitor, writer and/or editor. The calendar exists in order to ensure constant monitoring and timely coverage by the NYC Media Response Project of *The New York Times*, *New York Post* and *Newsday*. It also allows members to pick and choose when they can commit themselves to the project. On the first of a given month, members will be given until the 10th to submit which days they are available and which function they would like to do in the next month. A staff person from either Take Back The News or NOT IN OUR CITY will put together the calendar and forward the completed calendar to all members along with member contact information. Below is a description of the responsibilities of each function:

Monitor:

The monitor will review the reporting of sexual violence in the following newspapers: *New York Post*, *New York Times*, and *Newsday* and a community newspaper and/or blog of their choice. Each time that she/he reads a news article on sexual assault that misrepresents the crime and/or perpetuates myths about sexual violence, she/he alerts the writer via e-mail. The alert should include a link to the article, and *may* include how the article misrepresents the crime of rape. The monitor must **alert the writer by 2 pm** that day with the link to the article. If no article was found that misrepresents rape, the monitor must still **contact the writer and editor by 2 pm** to let the writer and editor know that there are no articles for that day. The monitor also completes the survey monkey/evaluation on *any* article about sexual violence and submits it to NOT IN OUR CITY within two days past the scheduled shift as well as letting the editor know if she/he has come across a published NYC Media Response Project letter. Any member can be a monitor.

Writer: (As project grows, the writer function will be covered by as many people as possible.)

Upon receiving an alert, the writer will write a letter to the editor critiquing the article in alliance with the NYC Media Response Project's goals. In event of a highly publicized incident, the writer may choose which media outlet to respond to. **Optional:** If the writer would like the editor on-call to look at what she/he has written, the writer may then forward a draft along with a specific list of items the writer wishes the editor to look at

(i.e. grammar, wording of a specific sentence, etc.) **to the editor by 7 pm** to be reviewed before publication. The editor will respond to the writer with any suggestions and/or constructive criticism **by 9 pm**. The writer will submit the letter to the journalist and editor of the article being critiqued as well as the Public Editor **by midnight**. The writer will also forward a final copy to the NYC Media Response Project editor on-call **by midnight**. Copies of all letters written by members will be kept for evaluation and funding purposes. Any member can be a writer.

Editor:

The editor will proofread the letter for spelling and grammar, as well as give constructive criticism/feedback on content in alliance with the NYC Media Response Project's goals. The editor must **return the edited letter to the writer by 9 pm**. The editor keeps a copy of the finalized letter for the NYC Media Response Project files. With the writer's permission, the editor will forward the letter to members for others to read for purposes of group cohesion and for the monitor on-call to recognize a letter written by a group member. (Any member who demonstrates excellent writing skills and critical understanding of the dynamics of sexual violence can be an editor.)

If media outlets get letters from many people raising the same issue, they will most likely publish one or two of them. So even if your letter doesn't get into print, it may help another one with a similar point of view get published. Take Back The News and NOT IN OUR CITY hopes to that the writer function of the NYC Media Response Project will expand to include multiple people on call at once. To increase the likelihood of a letter being published, it is important to submit your letter not only to the letters editor but also directly to the journalist and his or her direct editor as well as the editor of the particular section the article appeared, i.e. lifestyle, sports, etc. See below for the specific contact information about various journalists and editors. This information comes from the News Media Yellow Book – 'a who's who among reporters, writers, editors and producers in the leading national news media.' It is a book that the Alliance Communications Director has which is updated frequently. (We currently have the Summer 2006 copy.)

Example: Duff Wilson, the investigative reporter for The Sports Section of The New York Times writes an article that requires a response (think Duke Lacrosse). A member would send their letter to the Sports Editor – Thomas A. Jolly and reporter Duff Wilson as well as the Public Editor (letters@nytimes.com).



NYC Media Response Project Guidelines:

Below are guidelines on how to detect and respond to bias in media from Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR). The following is a part of their Media Activism kit that can be found www.fair.org. Material that is written in italics are accompanying notes and/or examples that are specific to sexual violence compiled by Take Back The News and NOT IN OUR CITY.

Who are the sources?

Be aware of the political perspective of the sources used in a story. Media over-rely on "official" (government, corporate and establishment think tank) sources. For instance, FAIR found that in 40 months of Nightline programming, the most frequent guests were Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig, Elliott Abrams and Jerry Falwell. Progressive and public interest voices were grossly underrepresented. To portray issues fairly and accurately, media must broaden their spectrum of sources. Otherwise, they serve merely as megaphones for those in power.

- **Count the number of corporate and government sources versus the number of progressive, public interest, female and minority voices. Demand mass media expand their roldexes; better yet, give them lists of progressive and public interest experts in the community.**

Example: In media coverage of sexual violence in the military, does an article focus on the individual incidence and/or on Department of Defense sources and leave out the staggering statistics of sexual violence in the military and/or fail to include information from such groups as The Miles Foundation which works with victims/survivors of sexual violence in the military or Center for Women Veterans.

Is there a lack of diversity?

What is the race and gender diversity at the news outlet you watch compared to the communities it serves? How many producers, editors or decision-makers at news outlets are women, people of color or openly gay or lesbian? In order to fairly represent different communities, news outlets should have members of those communities in decision-making positions. How many of the experts these news outlets cite are women and people of color? FAIR's 40-month survey of Nightline found its U.S. guests to be 92 percent

white and 89 percent male. A similar survey of PBS's NewsHour found its guest list was 90 percent white and 87 percent male.

- **Demand that the media you consume reflect the diversity of the public they serve. Call or write media outlets every time you see an all-male or all-white panel of experts discussing issues that affect women and people of color.**

In order to fairly represent the different communities in which sexual violence occurs (i.e. college-age individuals vs. individuals who are immigrants), media outlets should have members of those communities present in media coverage. Demand that media coverage reflect the diversity of communities in which sexual violence occurs and the diversity of issues that sexual violence impacts.

Example: In media coverage of an acquaintance rape between two students at the local university, there are a lack of voices and/or statistics relevant to sexual violence on college campuses or in media coverage of a sexual assault between two family members, one of whom is an immigrant, there is a lack of reporting on the additional barriers immigrants face in accessing medical care and/or the criminal justice system.

From whose point of view is the news reported?

Political coverage often focuses on how issues affect politicians or corporate executives rather than those directly affected by the issue. For example, many stories on parental notification of abortion emphasized the "tough choice" confronting male politicians while quoting no women under 18--those with the most at stake in the debate. Economics coverage usually looks at how events impact stockholders rather than workers or consumers.

- **Demand that those affected by the issue have a voice in coverage.**

Example: The victim's voice is absent from coverage, while the perpetrator's voice is present.

Are there double standards?

Do media hold some people to one standard while using a different standard for other groups? Youth of color who commit crimes are referred to as "super predators," whereas adult criminals who commit white-collar crimes are often portrayed as having been tragically led astray. Think tanks partly funded by unions are often identified as "labor-backed" while think tanks heavily funded by business interests are usually not identified as "corporate-backed."

- **Expose the double standard by coming up with a parallel example or citing similar stories that were covered differently.**

Media outlets tend to hold certain types of sexual assaults to one standard while using a different standard for other types of sexual assaults. These double standards in media coverage of sexual violence often perpetuate 'rape myths.'

Example: A report of a sexual assault that involves a stranger typically receives extensive coverage while sexual assault involving an acquaintance either receives less coverage or treats victims with disbelief furthering the myth that most rapes are 1. violent; rapes are committed with weapons and 2. committed by 'rapists hiding in the bushes or in the shadows of the parking garage as opposed to the majority of rapes being 1. 'non-violent'; i.e. using psychological coercion and 2. almost two-thirds of all rapes are committed by someone who is known to the victim.

Do stereotypes skew coverage?

Does coverage of the drug crisis focus almost exclusively on African Americans, despite the fact that the vast majority of drug users are white? Does coverage of women on welfare focus overwhelmingly on African-American women, despite the fact that the majority of welfare recipients are not black? Are lesbians portrayed as "man-hating" and gay men portrayed as "sexual predators" (even though a child is 100 times more likely to be molested by a family member than by an unrelated gay adult—Denver Post, 9/28/92)?

- **Educate journalists about misconceptions involved in stereotypes, and about how stereotypes characterize individuals unfairly.**

Stereotypes are often prevalent in media coverage of sexual violence. A sexual assault between two people of different ethnic backgrounds tend to get more coverage despite the fact that over 90% of sexual assaults occur between people of the same ethnic background. Example: Media coverage of a sexual assault focuses on the perpetrator's race when race is not mentioned in sexual assaults between two people of the same ethnic background. This unfairly characterizes men of color as sexual predators.

What are the unchallenged assumptions?

Often the most important message of a story is not explicitly stated. For instance, in coverage of women on welfare, the age at which a woman had her first child will often be reported—the implication being that the woman's sexual "promiscuity," rather than institutional economic factors, are responsible for her plight. Coverage of rape trials will often focus on a woman's sexual history as though it calls her credibility into question. After the arrest of William Kennedy Smith, a New York Times article (4/17/91) dredged up a host of irrelevant personal details about his accuser, including the facts that she had skipped classes in the 9th grade, had received several speeding tickets and—when on a date—had talked to other men.

Unchallenged assumptions are rampant in coverage of sexual assault and frequently blame the victim for the sexual assault. Example: In coverage of a sexual assault, the reporter focuses on witness' accounts of how 'drunk' the victim appeared, implying it was the victim's fault for being so drunk.

Is the language loaded?

When media adopt loaded terminology, they help shape public opinion. For instance, media often use the right-wing buzzword "racial preference" to refer to affirmative action programs. Polls show that this decision makes a huge difference in how the issue is perceived: A 1992 Louis Harris poll, for example, found that 70 percent said they favored "affirmative action" while only 46 percent favored "racial preference programs." Challenge the assumption directly. Often bringing assumptions to the surface will demonstrate their absurdity. Most reporters, for example, will not say directly that a woman deserved to be raped because of what she was wearing.

- **Demonstrate how the language chosen gives people an inaccurate impression of the issue, program or community.**

Example: Reporters will use the word 'accuser' to refer to the victim or will order words that put the blame on the victim, i.e. stating: Mary got raped instead of John raped Mary.

Is there a lack of context?

Coverage of so-called "reverse discrimination" usually fails to focus on any of the institutional factors which gives power to prejudice—such as larger issues of economic inequality and institutional racism. Coverage of hate speech against gays and lesbians often fails to mention increases in gay-bashing and how the two might be related.

- **Provide the context. Communicate to the journalist, or write a letter to the editor that includes the relevant information.**

Media coverage of sexual violence almost always fails to focus on any of the institutional factors which give power to perpetrators such as larger societal issues of gender norms and violence. Without any contextual material that points to the bigger picture, people will fail to see sexual violence as an institutional problem and epidemic.

Example: Coverage of child sexual abuse usually portrays the perpetrator as a 'lone crazy individual' and the rest of the family as clueless for not realizing what was going on and fails to mention the staggering statistics of child sexual abuse and the complicated issues of why a child would keep it a secret.

Do the headlines and stories match?

Usually headlines are not written by the reporter. Since many people just skim headlines, misleading headlines have a significant impact. A classic case: In a New York Times article on the June 1988 U.S.-Soviet summit in Moscow, Margaret Thatcher was quoted as saying of Reagan, "Poor dear, there's nothing between his ears." The Times headline: "Thatcher Salute to the Reagan Years."

- **Call or write the newspaper and point out the contradiction.**

In headlines of coverage about sexual violence, many media outlets use the headlines as a way to sensationalize the crime or to play down the severity of the crime.

Example: 'Man Has Sex with Child'

Are stories on important issues featured prominently?

Look at where stories appear. Newspaper articles on the most widely read pages (the front pages and the editorial pages) and lead stories on television and radio will have the greatest influence on public opinion.

- **When you see a story on government officials engaged in activities that violate the Constitution on page A29, call the newspaper and object. Let the paper know how important you feel an issue is and demand that important stories get prominent coverage.**

Articles about stranger rape or sexual violence where ethnic background comes into play are usually featured prominently and articles about non-stranger rape are shorter and are often 'hidden' or not reported on at all.

How to write an effective letter to the editor:

The following are tips from Jennifer L. Pozner, founder and executive director of Women In Media & News.

Be firm but polite

Make your case sans insults, rants, and vulgarity. Nothing makes it easier for editors and producers to dismiss your argument than name-calling. Good idea: "Your discussion of the rape survivor's clothing and makeup was irrelevant, irresponsible, and inappropriate. Including those details blames the victim and reinforces dangerous myths about sexual assault." Bad idea: "Your reporter is a woman-hating incarnate of Satan!"

Be realistic but optimistic

Calling for the *New York Times* to transform itself into a socialist newspaper will get you nowhere; suggesting that quotes from industry executives be balanced by input from labor and public-interest groups is more likely to be taken seriously.

Choose your battles

While we'd all like to see fewer female bods used to sell beer, asking the networks to reject such ads is a waste of time. (A letter-writing campaign to the companies that produce those ads is another matter.) However, it's worth the effort to pressure telecom

and cable giant Comcast to air the antiwar ads it censored during Bush's State of the Union speech.

Correct the record

For example, remind media outlets discussing "partial birth abortion" that this imprecise and inflammatory term doesn't refer to an actual medical procedure but is, rather, a political concept fabricated by conservative groups to decrease public support for abortion rights. Focusing on facts is more persuasive than simply expressing outrage: "Christina Hoff Sommers's quote contained the following inaccuracies" is better than "Antifeminists like Christina Hoff Sommers should not be quoted in your newspaper."

Expose biased or distorted framing

Look at whose viewpoint is shaping the story. In light of the Bush Administration's assault on affirmative action, for example, Peter Jennings asked on *World News Tonight*: "President Bush and race: Does he have a strategy to win black support?" Let ABC producers know that you'd rather they investigate the economic, academic, and political implications of the president's agenda for African-Americans than the effects of race policy on Bush's approval rating.

Keep it concise and informative

If your goal is publication on the letters page, a couple well-documented paragraphs will always be better received than an emotional three-page manifesto. Sticking to one or two main points will get a busy editor to read through to the end.

Avoid overgeneralization

Don't complain that your local paper "never" reports on women's issues or "always" ignores poor people. Even if stories on topics like workfare are infrequent or inaccurate, their very existence will serve as proof to editors that your complaint doesn't apply to their publication.

Address the appropriate person

Letters about reportorial objectivity sent to editorial columnists or opinion-page editors will be tossed in the circular file.

Proofread!

Nothing peeves an editor faster than typos or bad grammar.

Finally, give 'em credit

Positive reinforcement can be as effective as protest. Be constructive whenever possible, and commend outlets when they produce in-depth, bias-free coverage.²

² http://bitchmagazine.com/archives/04_03slash/protest.shtml



Factsheets

The following pages are factsheets compiled from the Alliance website: www.nycagainstrape.org. When addressing media, it is important to qualify your letter with statistics and to attribute them to the appropriate source, i.e. “77% of completed rapes are committed by non-strangers (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997).” Feel free to use the following pages to your advantage. The majority of the factsheets are copyrighted by the National Center for Victims of Crime.

If you are writing a letter that requires NYC specific data, you may find the following information helpful:

Sexual assault is rampant in our city. We know from statistics that 17.6% of adult women and 3% of adult men have been raped (attempted and completed) during their lifetime (NVAWS 2006). This means that in NYC alone, 1.3 million women and over 200,000 men have been raped at some point in their lives. In the last year alone in NYC, it is estimated that over 22,000 women and nearly 7,000 men were raped. These are numbers of staggering proportions. For those that have experienced rape, we know that very few will seek help. Within the last year, 1,339 adult survivors have sought counseling services at NYC's rape crisis programs (NYS DoH 2005). Furthermore, only 741 cases of rape were reported to the NYPD in 2005, representing less than 3% of the rapes that are actually occurring (CompStat 2006).

If there are any other statistics or information that you feel would be helpful, please let Take Back The News or NOT IN OUR CITY know and we will do our best to track down the appropriate text and add it to the guidebook. If you know of any sources or information that is missing or should be added, please feel free to share with the rest of the NYC Media Response Project members.