ance needs met by local authority services, the government has re-affirmed the dominance of professional choice over the ability of disabled people to choose how their needs should be met. While the rhetoric is about 'empowering' people, the one mechanism (direct payments) which brings this about, has no real place in the community care reforms. For many disabled people in the 1990s, community care will be about fitting in to available services, having no choice over who gives support and feeling too disempowered to complain.

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Book Reviews

Women Viewing Violence

Philip Schlesinger, R. Emerson Dobash, Russell P. Dobash and C. Kay Weaver
BFI Publishing, London, 1992.

This is an empirical study of women's interpretations of television portrayals of violence against women. Completed in just one year it is an impressive achievement. It brings together media studies of audiences, and the sociological literature on violence against women that have hitherto largely developed in relative ignorance of each other.

Group discussions were conducted with 91 women in a total of 14 groups. The women watched a number of television representations in which there were scenes of violence against women. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The authors emphasise the advantages of such approaches over the contemporary tendency to concentrate solely on qualitative methods. Feminist media studies have largely concentrated on studying women's media, women's presence in mass media institutions (particularly in positions of power), or on analysing the use made of such media by women as consumers. These are all important topics but it is important to remember, as the authors point out, that 'the construction of the gender identities of women via the media needs to be understood in a context much broader than that of "women's media" alone' (p7).

Theoretical orientations

In a break with some recent cultural studies research, the authors emphasise that the ability of each of us to interpret what we see on television is bounded by social, political, economic and cultural constraints. Arguing that the debate about the 'effects' of televised violence is unresolved, they say that they have chosen to 'pose the question differently'. Their key question is 'what do women *make* of the violence that they see in the media?' (emphasis in original) and this allows them to find out how 'the impact of televised violence upon women's conceptions of themselves – their gender identities – might be variously described' (p3).

Methods

Following a pilot study the authors selected three television programmes and a film to screen for their discussion groups. The programmes were

chosen to reflect a range of genres, including a factual programme (*Crimewatch*), a soap opera (*Eastenders*), a single play (*Breaking Ranks*) and a full length feature film (*The Accused*). These were screened to a range of audience groups – most importantly these included groups of women who had experience of male violence. But, the authors say, 'experience of violence may not be the only, or possibly the most significant, factor affecting readings' (p16). Therefore groups thought to be 'theoretically relevant' (p170) were systematically selected to reflect ethnicity (Afro-Caribbean Asian and white groups), nationality (Scottish and English groups) and class (middle and working class women). Curiously, though, no lesbian groups were assembled.

The programmes were chosen on the basis that, amongst other things, they represented a range of genres, bore significant relation to actual acts of violence, portrayed a variety of such acts, with a variety of female character types as victims of violence. This latter criterion offered the possibility of a range of interpretations of the reasons why women are subjected to violence.

In pilot studies several other films were assessed for inclusion but rejected. These included 'slasher' horror movies such a *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th*, which were rejected as they were not taken seriously by pilot groups. David Lynch's cult film *Blue Velvet* was also considered for inclusion but rejected for ethical reasons. Its glamorisation of violence against women was considered 'far too disturbing' (p20). One result of this selection process was that the programmes chosen were all 'relatively sympathetic' (p171).

Results

The groups of women sat through a gruelling whole day schedule of screenings followed in each case by questionnaires and discussion. Their responses are presented systematically with routine comparisons between quantitative questionnaire data and the qualitative data from the group discussions. This is a welcome antidote to the seemingly random presentation of data in some contemporary studies. It is also a useful counterpoint to the use of positivistic opinion surveys which cannot account for the subtleties and apparent contradictions in people's ideas. For example, many of the women with experience of violence were greatly upset or 'offended' by the representations of violence against women but nevertheless thought that sympathetic portrayals might be used to promote awareness.

There were apparently few observable differences in interpretation between Scottish and English groups, but the same was not true when ethnic and class dimensions were examined. In the play *Closing Ranks*, the central male character is a police officer who beats up demonstrators on the job and metes out sexual violence to his wife when off duty. Middle class women found the portrayal of the police much less believable than did the working class women in the study. Ethnicity seemed to be a stronger differentiating factor in this study. Some of the English and Scottish Afro-Caribbean women were critical of the portrayal of violence against Carmel, the black social worker in the *Eastenders* episode screened in the study, on the grounds that it had racist elements. Some were also likely to feel alienated from representations which dealt solely with white culture. On the other hand some of the Asian women viewed *The Accused* 'almost anthropologically' (p164) seeing the white women in the film as being beyond the cultural controls operating in Asian culture, which were defined as protecting women from male violence.

The most obvious factor influencing interpretations of television was the question of experience of violence. Women with such experience were 'most sensitive to televised violence, more subtle and complex in their readings, more concerned about possible effects and more demanding in their expectations of (TV) producers' (p165).

An important issue here is, 'are the women likely to feel more vulnerable, less safe, or less valued members of our society if as a category, they are with some frequency depicted as those who are subjected to abuse?'. If so, then 'the portrayal of violence against women may be seen as negative' (p170). This is a question that would certainly repay future research and it is to be hoped that the authors will go on to consider the extent to which films such as *Blue Velvet*, which appear to condone violence against women do make women feel less safe (without necessarily requiring women to watch such films). This could then be compared with some of the data from this study on the extent to which it is felt that 'broadly sympathetic' portrayals have an educative effect.

A related set of questions are raised by the discussion of victim blaming ideologies. Victim blaming ideas are said by the authors to be 'popular and deeply rooted (p93); and part of 'common sense'. Women with experience of violence were more likely to have 'been forced through bitter experience into reflecting upon the validity of such popular beliefs'. Women without that experience were more likely to blame the victim in at least some elements of their accounts. The key role of experience in prompting women to change their ideas is a very important finding of this research. The obvious corollary of this is the question of the construction of 'common sense' ideas about women's culpability for male violence. Do the media, for example, have a role in helping to construct and reproduce such ideas or do they simply reflect them? Further research in this area ought to prove fruitful.

Television and violence against women

Contemporary debates about the role of television in portraying violence are illuminated when the group discussions touch on the question of censorship. In cultural studies there is a tendency to look for and celebrate the 'resistance' of marginalised groups to dominant messages. In this view, the

'active' audience can find pleasure in television representations which are more conventionally defined as 'negative images'. However, amongst the women in this study the 'pleasure, escape or fantasy' elements of the programmes were not stressed. Rather, the women were much more concerned with the 'relevance and social importance' (p169) of television portrayals.

The research also brings out some of the complexity of the participants views on censorship. This is particularly the case with discussions around *The Accused*. For many of the women there were mixed feelings about the film's value. These related partly to their perceptions of the reasons that the film was made (ie to make money), bbut aallso to questions about its perceived impact. Although worries about the film were widely expressed, *The Accused* was seen as in some ways a progressive film. Only six women thought that it should not have been made. Eighty-two per cent of those who had experienced violence and 75 per cent of those who had not felt *The Accused* had an educational value; a reaction the authors attribute to the films 'triumph over adversity' ending.

Interestingly the debate over whether films like *The Accused* should be shown did not just revolve around the often repeated dualism of Censorship vs. Free speech. The debate was much more sensitive, raising the question of contexts of viewing.

One participant, a women with experience of violence, working as a rape counsellor, expressed her ambivalence as follows:

> 'I'm looking at if from two points of view. I'm looking at it (as) a good training film for my recruits, to get them used to certain things that they're going to come across. But to put (it) on general release and to have people sitting in their homes or in cinemas watching it and getting some form of enjoyment, I think is wrong'.

The concern here was with how *The Accused* might be open to *mis*interpretation. This is an important point, which could perhaps have been developed further. If *The Accused* is open to misinterpretation, then there is quite a high degree of agreement about the correct interpretation. If such broadly sympathetic representations are in a minority, then the worries about the majority of representations of male violence against women concern their correct interpretation by men. To put it crudely those representations tend to justify and condone violence against women.

Cultural criticism of representations of violence against women is important even when those representations are trying to provide a critique of dominant ideas (as in the case of some of the programmes used in this study). But mass media such as television, cinema and the press do continue to sell glamorised images of violence against women as a commodity. Such representations are quite different to the programmes included in this study.

This is an important study, which raises a number of issues missing from the contemporary literature on the impact of the media. It should also contribute to the literature in Criminology and Women's Studies. But

perhaps its most important audience is amongst broadcasting professionals and regulators. It ought to make television producers and executives think again about the damage that can be done by screening glamorised or voyeuristic images of male violence against women.

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Researching Health Care: Designs, Dilemmas, Disciplines

In the last few years an explosion of activity termed health services research (HSR) has occurred in various parts of the Anglophone world. In the United States where concern about health care costs is most salient and justified, the degree of expectancy of benefits to be gained by HSR is the greatest. It has become almost an article of faith in the United States that HSR will eventually eliminate waste, control costs and maximise appropriate health care for all. In the United Kingdom, despite long-standing distrust of the relevance of knowledge and expertise into policy-making, something of the same enthusiasm has now been generated that HSR can solve the many problems of the NHS. The ideology of HSR is much more compatible with the therapeutic scepticism traditional in British medicine. Curiously the suspension of belief in the effectiveness of health care is harder to promote in the 'can-do' technologically oriented culture of American medicine and society more generally. However while the United States is throwing millions of dollars at HSR to facilitate results, it is increasingly likely that the newly created NHS Research and development strategy will be based on a meagre budget.

This volume is one of many to appear in recent years designed to provide a methodological framework for evaluating health care. Health services research is an unavoidably inter-disciplinary subject and this edited collection goes further than many in obtaining contributions from clinicians, epidemiologists, sociologists, economists and policy-makers. The editors and several of the other contributors are from Australia. They have obtained contributions from other countries, particularly Canada and the United Kingdom. The main message of the volume is that HSR require a plurality of methods. Although the randomised controlled trial can be the most powerful and precise method of addressing questions, the contributors repeatedly emphasise the merits of other methods, particularly quantitative quasi-experimental and survey-based data and various forms of qualitative methods.

Contributors appear to have been encouraged to discuss the distinctive features of their work in terms of methodological issues rather than substantive results. All of the authors are experienced researchers and achieve this remit with varying degrees of success. Thus a cardiologist, Michael