

*Applying performance to transform
scripts of gender and sexuality
that enable rape*

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how performance can work as an innovative form of rape prevention. As a community artist working through the medium of performance, the issue of rape has often arisen in my work with young women. However, I have been unsure of how to deal with this potentially traumatic topic through performance. This study is an investigation into some pertinent approaches.

Drawing upon Sharon Marcus' analysis, this work considers rape as a script which positions men as perpetrators and women as victims. As a script for sexual relations, rape both scripts and is scripted by normative gender roles. This thesis asks if the rape script can be disrupted through staging different types of performances. It asks how performance can transform ideas of gender and sexuality which enable rape to occur. Nicola Gavey writes of a 'cultural scaffolding of rape', in which the hegemony of gender masks rape as an inevitable aspect of gender relations. Gavey's theory is drawn upon as a way to unpick the types of ideas which are prevalent in the script of rape, and thus those which must be thwarted in order for rape to be prevented. While conventional approaches to rape prevention focus on warning people about sexual danger, this thesis looks to Moira Carmody's notion of sexual ethics. The *Sex & Ethics* program, founded by Carmody and Karen Willis from the NSW Rape Crisis Centre, works with young people and service organisations to alter the conditions which enable rape. It does this by supporting young people to question and perform their social roles differently.

With its focus on social transformation, practices used in applied theatre are widely drawn upon throughout this examination, alongside approaches from other performances which also seek social change. When looking to the potentials of performance as a vehicle for rape prevention three main questions arise: How can performance deal with the trauma of rape? In what ways can performance undermine norms of gender and sexuality that perpetuate rape? And how can performance encourage audiences to create new social scripts? This study investigates these questions by first looking to a range of performances based on painful lived experiences, and argues that when aiming to transform pain, performance must offer opportunities for connection and compassion. The Drama for Life (DFL) applied

drama festival at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 2010 provides an opportunity to examine methods of transforming social scripts through applied theatre and performance. Some of the approaches to transformation observed at DFL are identified as pertinent to my examination into rape prevention. In considering the gender norms that underpin rape, this study goes on to examine what Rebecca Schneider calls 'explicit body performances'. Pieces from the United States by Annie Sprinkle and Karen Finley, and from the Australian artists Moira Finucane and The Kingpins are analysed. These performances reveal significant approaches for undermining normative notions of sexuality and gender which underpin the script of rape.

My own work, *Spreading the Love*, is then analysed as a final case study. I look at this performance in order to provide insight into the practicalities of planning and performing shows that attempt to prevent rape. *Spreading the Love* was performed in public spaces across Adelaide, engaging with those who passed by as participants and audiences, and encouraging them to destabilise normative notions of gender that perpetuate rape. As a community arts piece, it was produced in conjunction with the Feast Festival and local councils, and struggled to gain council support as an overt piece of rape prevention. This thesis concludes by suggesting that rape prevention is a complex and ongoing process that requires commitment and a wide variety of social responses. I suggest that performance is an ideal way to augment other forms of social education which create possibilities for different ways to perform sexuality and gender, and ultimately, end rape.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: _____

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