

Movie Screening to Open Discussion on Rape

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The D.C. Rape Crisis Center (DCRCC) is sponsoring the screening of "NO!," a rape documentary compiled and produced by rape survivor Aishah Shahida Simmons, tonight at 7:30 p.m. in Cramton Auditorium.

Free of charge and open to the public, the screening is geared to the entire Howard and Washington, D.C. community to educate everyone about rape and sexual assault, provide survivors with tools for healing and allow an open forum for people to discuss the subject.

Some professors from area universities and in addition to Howard are offering extra credit to students who attend the event.

After the screening of the 94-minute feature length film, there will be a discussion between the audience, Simmons and Lori Robinson, author of "I Will Survive: The African American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse." The forum, mediated by INCITE!: Women of Color Against Violence, will allow people to discuss the film and any other aspects of sexual violence.

More than 30 volunteers from DCRCC will be in attendance to answer questions and provide survivor resources.

"NO!" is a college documentary devoid of narration that unveils the reality of rape and encourages dialogue on an issue that people tend to remain silent about.

"[Rape and sexual assault survivors] can dance about it. They have poems about it," Simmons said. Because of the difficulty that accompanies speaking up about the issue, especially for survivors, she said, "It was important to show different forms of expression."

AfroLez, Simmons' production company has a mission to use the moving image and spoken and written word to "make the invisible visible," Simmons said.

Screened in the United States as well as abroad in Spain, Hungary, Italy and South Africa, the film is intended to highlight black people's struggle with the issue of rape and sexual assault and get the entire black community involved in ending it.

"If racism ended right now, we as women would not be safe. We're over half the community, and it's important that we, as a community, take on this issue [of rape and sexual assault crimes]," Simmons said.

Robinson believes that it is important that black people take this time to openly converse about the subject because race puts stress on the situation and talk is essential to diffusing it.

She cites women's tendencies to fault themselves for assault, men's tendencies to not realize that they are committing sex crimes when they force themselves on women and society's tendencies to be unjust toward black people as problems.

"We can be anti-black man, but really if we're having open, honest dialogue then we are being pro-black people," Robinson said.

Her book is a guide to healing after rape and sexual assault as well as a spur for social change. Robinson, a sexual assault survivor, was inspired to write it when she realized that there were no books aimed toward blacks concerning the healing process of sexual assault.

DCRCC is sponsoring the event as a part of its new initiative to organize community awareness of rape and rape survivor resources. They want to attack the roots of the issue by working in the community, Howard and other area universities in particular.

Tied to Howard's campus in a variety of ways, DCRCC has student volunteers who are certified to work with the center after 65 hours of training.

Thais Brown, a DCRCC volunteer and a sophomore psychology major, is excited to see the emotional reaction of today's audience. "It's going to affect your life from what I hear," she said.

Nicole Bailey, another DCRCC volunteer and a sophomore public relations major, hopes the film will encourage people to "take a hard look and realize that [rape and sexual assault] isn't something that needs to be swept under the carpet anymore."

DCRCC is a resource for all survivors in the Washington, D.C. area. "We take anyone who comes into the center and says 'I'm a survivor,'" said Lucane LaFortune, DCRCC community organizing project coordinator.

Center employees can be reached on the 24-hour hotline at 202-303-RAPE.