

Street Theater in Ecuador

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In Ecuador the CEPAM decided to undertake "A Day in the Life of Alegria", a play on domestic violence. This particular play was one of four plays developed by CEPAM as part of their promotional activities with women's groups. The message of this play was that domestic violence is not an individual problem and that women with this problem can find support outside their homes.

Production

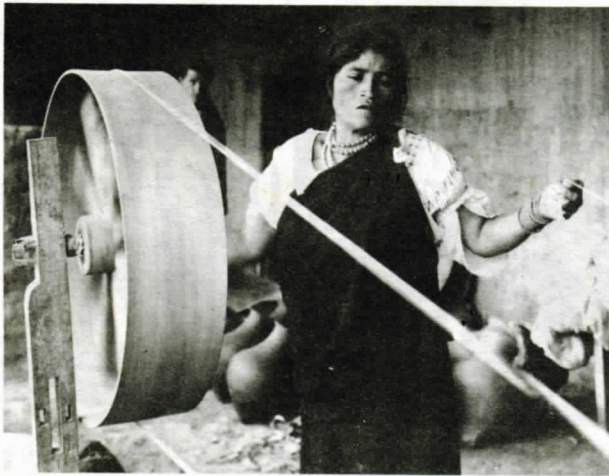
The play was produced by women from a working class barrio. These women have experience in live social dramas, therefore they could empathize with the characters. The entire cast of the play were adult women.

The impact of the play was undertaken with two groups, women belonging to organizations and women without specific organizations. After the play, the women were encouraged to participate in discussion groups.

One discovery in these groups was that women who stay at home are high consumers of the mass media. Their work day starts early and they are kept company by the radio as they conduct their daily chores. In the late afternoon they may watch a soap opera on



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television and at night they watch the news. As an exception, some women were found to read the newspaper in the morning or watch the news at midday.

Participants' responses

Varied responses came from the audiences. Many found interesting that the actresses were all adult women. This meant that adult women were still capable of learning and taking on new experiences.

One criticism was that women took on masculine roles in the play and the audience rejected the scenes that showed tenderness between two women, even if one was playing a male role. However, if men had played the male roles, the performing actresses would have problems with their husbands.

The original ending of the play was not satisfactory because it was too ambiguous. The message was that if you are battered, do not hide it, violence in the home is everyone's problem. This ending was too inconclusive. A

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scene was then added where the neighbors come to the wife's defense and the man is reprimanded by other men in the community.

The most interesting response from the participants was that many of the women from the working class neighborhoods maintained a distance in accepting or recognizing the problem of violence as their own. They claimed that they did not experience conflicts with their husbands that led to violence and that this type of behavior was not common in their class. They attributed these conflicts to the "lower classes" in this case, the indigenous women.

Another factor was that one of the groups that attended one of the presentations was a children's group. The question was what type of perceptions do people have towards theater or what do they understand theater to be?

Evaluation

The cast was evaluated and their intentions for undertaking this play were documented. Among their responses were that they sought to denounce the battering of women and wanted to represent "machismo" as a phenomena that affronts women. They strove to create scenes that would allow women to reflect on the issue and to raise their consciousness. In addition they wanted to show that the battered woman is not alone, that many women suffer from this problem.

The opinion of the women was divided as to how effective organizations were in helping women with this problem. Many felt that organizations cannot resolve all their problems and that even women who are part of women's organizations, can continue being abused by their husbands and living in violence.

Source: *Identidad Comunicativa y Propuesta Alternativa para la Mujer - Memoria de Seminario Taller, CEAAL/Red de Educacion Popular Entre Mujeres/CALANDRIA, Lima, Peru, 1993*
