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GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM HERDE

Mary Mazzio is a lawyer, rower, and filmmaker, with her documentary on the 1976 Yale women's crew protest, which brought Title IX to the forefront.

Rowers find a hero

Yale protest made splash in Title IX

By Barbara Huebner
GLOBE STAFF

It's right there in the New York Times, dated March 3, 1976: "Nineteen members of the Yale women's varsity crew stripped naked this afternoon in the office of Joni Barnett, director of physical education, to protest the lack of shower facilities at Derby, Conn. The nude women, with the words 'Title IX' emblazoned across their chests and backs in Yale-blue paint, stood at attention as Chris Ernst, a senior from Wilmette, Ill., who is captain of the [women's] crew, read a 300-word statement to Mrs. Barnett:

"The statement said, in part: 'These are the bodies Yale is exploiting. On a day like today the ice freezes on this skin. Then we sit for half an hour as the ice melts and soaks through to meet the sweat that is soaking us from the inside.'"

In an article picked up by news



Yale Women Strip To Protest a Lack Of Crew's Showers

Special to The New York Times
NEW HAVEN, March 3—Nineteen members of the Yale women's varsity crew stripped naked this afternoon in the office of Joni Barnett, director of physical education, to protest the lack of shower facilities at Derby, Conn.
The nude women, with the words "Title IX" emblazoned across their chests and backs in Yale-blue paint, stood at attention as Chris Ernst, a senior from Wilmette, Ill., who is captain of the crew, read a 300-word statement to Mrs. Barnett.
The statement said, in part: "These are the bodies Yale is exploiting. On a day like today the ice freezes on this skin. Then we sit for half an hour as the ice melts and soaks through to meet the sweat that is soaking us from the inside."
Title IX refers to a ruling by the Department of Health,

Left, a frame from Mazzio's film; right, the Times story from March 3, 1976.

outlets around the world, alumni read about Yale women getting pneumonia for lack of facilities. The phones in New Haven began ringing. The women got

showers, they got a classy new addition to the boathouse, and they won respect for female athletes everywhere.

Yet Mary C. Mazzio, herself a

rower, knew nothing about the Yale protest until housemate Ernst, an Olympian and 1986 world champion in lightweight doubles, told her the story in 1989 while they were both training at the Boston Rowing Center.

"I was blown away that I had never heard of it," said Mazzio, who went on to make the 1992 Olympic team and win the Head of the Charles that same year in the women's double. "One of the reasons I wanted to do a film is that it's in danger of being lost."

Thus was born "A Hero for Daisy," a punchy 42-minute documentary on the Yale protest that debuted last month at the Boston Film Festival and will be shown Friday at the West Newton Cinema as a prelude to this weekend's 35th Head of the Charles Regatta.

There were other reasons, too. Compliance with Title IX of the 1972 Education Act, which prohibits gender discrimination in programs receiving federal funds, remains an issue despite gains by women in the past 27 years. "Back then, the circumstances were so extreme, and now they're much more subtle," said Mazzio. "It's not like no

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Athletes find hero in Title IX fight

■ MAZZIO

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bathrooms for the women. A number of coaches we interviewed said women have a lot more today, and because of that they accept less."

Finally, there is Daisy. Although the idea for a documentary on Ernst and the protest had been simmering for several years, ever since Mazzio did a two-minute film on her for a Boston University graduate film course, it suddenly grew urgent 20 months ago when daughter Daisy was born.

"I looked around and said, who the hell is she going to be like?" said Mazzio, 38, who lives in Wellesley. "I don't want her fretting that she doesn't look like Kate Moss or Cindy Crawford. I want her to be able to exert effort, and discover her limitations, and get out there, and get sweaty, and get dirty, and know she doesn't have to look gorgeous to have value in this society."

Ernst, now a plumber in Brookline, took months of persuading.

"She doesn't see that she did anything special," said Holly Hatton, the women's crew coach at Boston University, who has known Ernst for 20 years. "I think Chris lives her life that way, that she believes this was owed to her, and this is what it took to get it. You make your statement and you move on."

Mazzio, who used a seven-month maternity leave from the law firm of Brown, Rudnick Freed, and Gesmer, where she is a partner, to write, direct, and produce the bulk



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Mary Mazzio (right) rows with friend Carey "C.B." Sands-Bohrer.

of the film, calls herself blessed that Ernst eventually agreed to indulge her.

"Chris is a woman who has had a profound effect on a number of other women," said Mazzio. "She'll never admit it, and I don't even know if she knows."

Help came from many directions. Carey "C.B." Sands-Bohrer, Ernst's rowing mate and now marketing manager at Welch's, got her employer to provide major funding. A neighbor directed Mazzio to Margie Sullivan at Arnold Communications, who lined up sound mixers and an editing house. Her sister, Theresa, acted as assistant director

and bagel fetcher; her husband, Jay Manson, watched the kids and gets credit as an executive producer. The shoestring budget, said Mazzio, makes the \$50,000 tally for "The Blair Witch Project" look extravagant.

Perhaps surprisingly, the powerful film steers clear of hostility, despite forthright on-camera interviews with team members and former Yale athletic director Carmen Cozza and rowing coach Dave Vogel. To ease fears of embarrassment, Mazzio did hours of interviews before the cameras began rolling, giving everyone a chance to rehearse and retract.

"We could have easily demonized people and made it a polarizing piece, and that's not the point and it's not helpful," said Mazzio. "I really reinforced the fact that anything they said that they were not comfortable with would not go in the film. What we tried to do is create a balanced view of what life was like there."

Hatton said she got chills watching it. "I'm very excited that my athletes will get to see it, because it will be good for them to know about the women who got them where they are today. Chris and her teammates, they made an impact all over the world. They were heroes."

To more than just Daisy. As the film took shape, said Mazzio, her thinking underwent a metamorphosis. "I ended up making a film for my son, Jamie, as well," she said of the 3-year-old who wants to be a plumber when he grows up, just like Auntie Chris. "[Now] she's inspiring men and young boys, and isn't that fantastic?"

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"A Hero for Daisy" will be shown Friday at 4:30 p.m. and 6 p.m. at the West Newton Cinema, 1296 Washington St. Tickets must be reserved in advance by calling 888-890-9227. The film will also be shown on Nov. 20 at 2 p.m. at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, with tickets available at the MFA or by calling the box office at 617-369-3770.