

COLUMN

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IN THE PINK

GAY BASHING

by James Gill

The "take Back the Night" March is a demonstration which takes place in cities all across the country to focus public attention on the growing crisis of sexual assault. The first time I heard about it I was upset, not because of its intent, which is crucial, but because I was excluded as a man. The march has allowed men and children to participate only on the sidelines, and in silence.

I have since reassessed my vexation. It was not because I am a man that I was upset, but because I am a gay man. It is true that while sexual assault is a social issue we must all face, women are the vast majority of its victims. It makes sense to me that the victims must have their voice. The problem is that I was being denied my voice as a victim of nighttime violence.

I am referring to the problem of gay bashing. This is a social evil which we have been all too content to keep quiet about.

There is a question which the community at large must ask itself. We are all appalled at violence

directed against women. We would never tolerate racist, anti-semitic, or ethnic violence. However, gay bashing is a secret that society is willing to keep hidden. What does the silence mean? It surely is not the silence that comes from ignorance, for, although there are few reports of gay bashing, it is not an unknown phenomenon. Nor can it be said to be the silence that comes from indecision. Most people would probably respond that silence comes from a perception that, "It is not a problem here." That can be taken two ways, though, either that it does not happen in this area, or that these incidents are acceptable. Both of these interpretations are wrong and while I do not attribute the latter opinion to everyone, people must be aware of the of the message that silence can convey.

Gay bashing is a problem which exists everywhere. In March of this year a gay man named Joe Rose was brutally murdered in Montreal in an incident of gay bashing. But we need not go so far afield as that. There was significant media coverage of an incident last year in Saint John, however, what

the media have not reported is what goes on every week in communities just like Fredericton.

The gay and lesbian community has expressed outrage over the apparent unwillingness of the police to deal with the heinous murder of Joe Rose. We must ask ourselves what responsibility we bear. I am not talking of direct responsibility by actually participating, but rather the responsibility of members of society when an innocent person dies. Pro-life demonstrators protest abortion as the taking of an innocent life. Will they do the same for us?

The gay and lesbian community has a burden to uphold as well. I have often maintained that our ability to hide is our greatest weakness. Too often in cases of homophobic violence the victim is unwilling to go to the police- partly out of a sense of futility- but also because that requires the victim to come out of the closet. The lesbian and gay community must address the problem of providing adequate social support for the victims of gay bashing who report the incidents. As well, all gay men and lesbians must take responsibility to

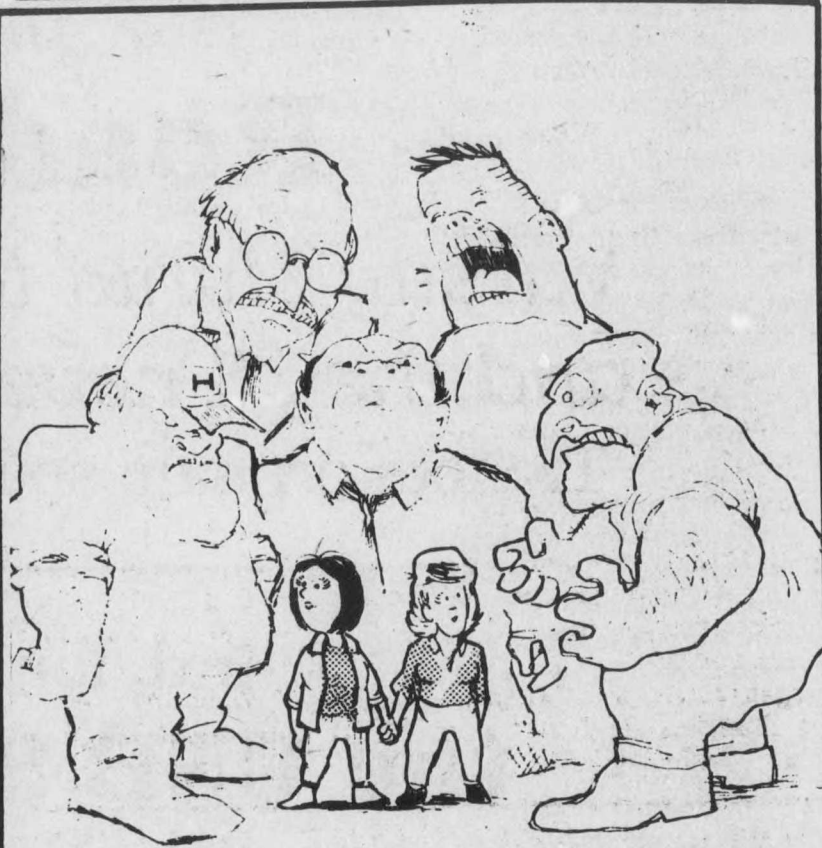
report these incidents when they happen. It is vital that society is made aware of the arbitrary violence that is directed against us.

When I was attacked I did not speak up. I was afraid. However, when the time comes to "Take Back the Night" I will be doing my part. I hope that I will not be alone.

This is the first series of articles on gay and lesbian issues, and lesbian and gay

perspectives on social issues. If you have any comments or ideas for future articles, please contact me through the Brunswickan, or through the Student Union. JCG.

First GALA Meeting: Sunday, September 17, at 7:30 p.m. in the Tartan Room, Alumni Memorial Building.



"WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO JUDGE?"

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