

# EDITORIAL

Guest Editorial

## Dating abuse: The ball is in men's court

by Michael Kaufman

When I was in Grade six, and we were all trying to figure out the basics of sex, a friend explained the difference between "fucking" and "raping". In the latter, he said, you tie the girl to a tree. I laughed at the time, as if it were all a joke.

A year or two later, when all the guys were preoccupied with getting to "first base"—that is, a serious kiss—another friend told me about erogenous zones. The back of a girl's neck, for example, was like an Aladdin's lamp to conjure up a girl's desire. If rubbed enough the girl would melt under your fingers. I wore out many a neck in the months that followed.

The two stories shock me now: one is simply hideous while the other is simply silly. Both stories, though, have much in common. These tidbits of advice shared the assumption that sex was something boys, or men, got. We might get it by force or we might get it by smooth moves, but in the end, the issue was about our pleasure and our desire.

The one thing that was incomprehensible to me in Grade Six was that males could force themselves on females by something less than bondage to a tree. After all, the girls we knew at the time were not only taller than us, they certainly were not going to be pushed around. Little did I know that within a few years a certain male prerogative would begin to assert itself. We would have power, power to get what we wanted by persuasion ("I love you more than life itself" or perhaps the more pedestrian "aw come on, it'll be fun"), hard luck stories ("I'll die of blue balls if we don't"), manipulation ("what the hell,

let's just have one more drink"), or for some guys, if all else failed, sheer physical force.

Such things poison relationships between women and men. Even if you're the gentlest guy in the world, the woman you're interested in probably has some experiences of coercion, manipulation, sexist put-downs, or assault. What's happened to her will effect any relationship she enters into.

What's more, sex becomes a game, a contest of wills. Rather than communicating our feelings and desires, and knowing we'll be respected for what we want or don't want, both men and women circle around, hint, and try to guess what the other person is thinking.

The greatest harm of all is done to women. Study after study in the United States and Canada suggest that between 20 and 30 percent of university-aged women are survivors of sexual assault. Many others feel the potential of assault and join the fifty percent of Canadian women who are fearful to walk to the corner store at night (although an even greater danger is from someone they know.)

Perhaps what is most surprising about all this is that it hurts men too. Men who harass or coerce or rape don't do so because men are naturally bad or predatory beasts. It's because of the ways that we have learned to be men. We've learned that to be real men means to assert our power and control, although not usually through physical force. It also means shutting down our capacity to feel what others feel, an indispensable quality if you're interested in meeting your own needs without regard for others.

And so let's not waste energy debating

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statistics. (Whether it's ten percent or thirty percent of women who have been sexually assaulted, we've got a terrible problem on our hands.) Let's not waste energy countering that women are not always angels. (Of course they're not, but men are not regularly beaten or raped by women.) Let's not waste time with needless charges about "male bashers" or "they're saying we're all guilty until we prove ourselves innocent". (No one says all men are rapists or batterers.)

The ball is in men's court. We can protest and counter-charge 'til we're blue in the face, but that won't make the problem go away.

Better that we rise to the occasion and listen carefully to the voices of women, voices that have been buried for far too long. Better we urge our student councils and administrations to adopt clear codes of conduct about sexual harassment and dating behavior. Better that we encourage educational programs on our campuses. Better that we look at ways that our own attitudes and behavior might contribute to the problem, whether we know it or not. And better that we learn to challenge the men around us to change and to do it now.

Michael Kaufman is National Director of the White Ribbon Campaign.

## An apology

by Allan Carter

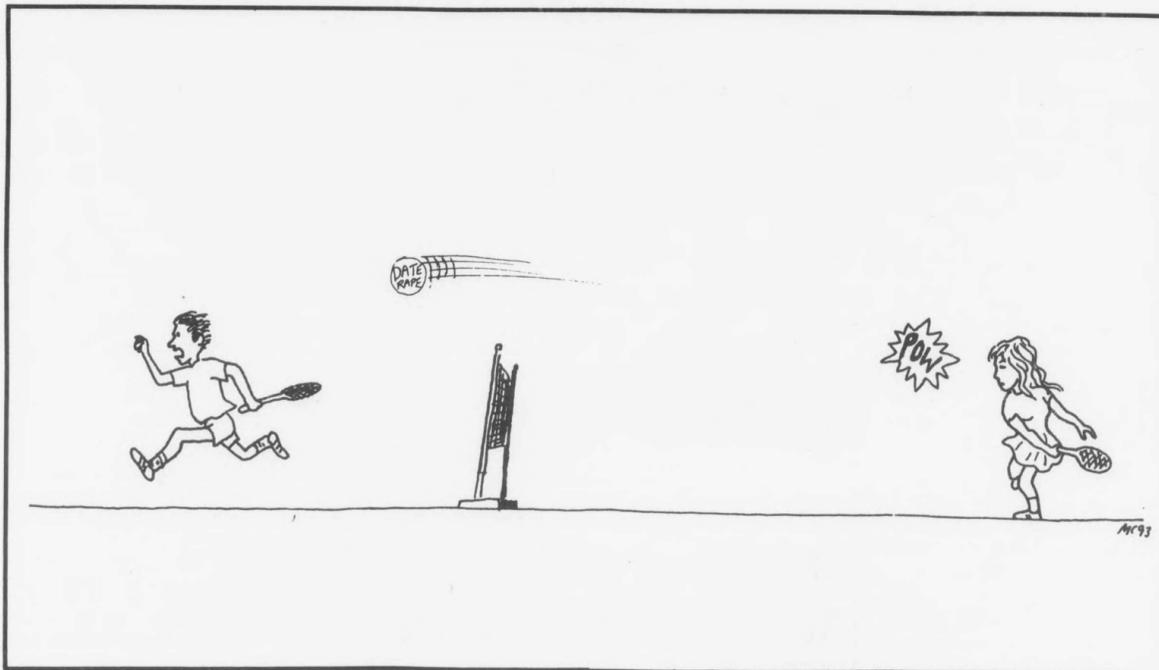
In last week's issue we unwisely allowed a response in Viewpoint to be printed which is both clearly sexist and racist. In retrospect, it is quite clear that the response should not have been printed and I wish to assure particularly those who have expressed their dissatisfaction with the statement (see blood and thunder) and everyone else that our intent cer-

tainly was not to cast aspersions on Persian people, especially women.

The two letters in our Blood and Thunder section are both well-meaning and prompt responses to the Viewpoint statement. The Brunswickan appreciates that you took the time to formally voice your concern. In doing so, you have certainly sensitized the Brunswickan staff and other readers to the fact that there is a broad spectrum of people who are

genuinely and justifiably affected by offensive statements and actions which other people, sadly, sometimes simply take for granted and accept.

The two letters have brought to light that fact and it is clear that the viewpoint statement in question was clearly against our policy and we sincerely apologize for the oversight and we will remain vigilant in attempting to ensure that such statements will not occur again.



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The Brunswickan, while being an open forum for the viewpoints and opinions of all UNB students, may refuse any submission that is judged to be racist, sexist, libellous, or containing attacks of a strictly personal nature. The Brunswickan reserves the right to edit for brevity. Letters generally shouldn't exceed 300 words in length and must contain your signature, student number and phone number, or it will not be printed.

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