

Take Back the Night march confronts rape and violence

By Raegan Randolph
Staff Writer

Confronting such issues as rape, sexual assault and domestic violence members of the Middlebury College community gathered together last Friday night to participate in the Coalition for Feminist Consciousness' annual Take Back the Night March. The march was the culmination of a week of activities sponsored by the CFC to raise awareness of the violence against women and to commemorate and empower the victims of sexual and physical abuse.

Coordinator of the Coalition for Feminist Consciousness (CFC) Kate Landis '99 was pleased with the number of people who supported the march. "We had a lot of people who had never been involved in the issue before," said Landis. An estimated 60 people, one-third of whom were male, attended the event. Landis viewed the group as "a cross-section of the community."

There was an especially significant attendance this year on behalf of different campus minority and activist groups and by men, including male students, the college's Vice President Ronald Liebowitz and President John McCardell. "One thing that really struck me," said Melissa Fuller '01, "was the amount

of guys there to support the women. It shows that it's not just a woman's problem; it's something everybody needs to be aware of." Fuller was one of the several members of the women's rugby team who supported the march.

The Take Back the Night March, an event celebrated every April on college campuses and in town communities as part of Sexual Assault Awareness month, began at 8 p.m. Friday at the Chellis House and wound its way through the entire campus. The crowd processed holding candles that were difficult to keep lit with the force of the wind and shouted out affirmative statements that addressed the issues of sexual assault and violence. The crowd chanted such phrases as "good sex starts with yes" and "Middlebury College unite, take back the night." The participants tailored some of their statements to address the issue of sexual assault - specifically at Middlebury; in these chants they demanded blue safety-lights and a more effective sexual assault policy. The CFC holds these two problems as most urgent in the college community.

In 1996, Jennifer Handal '98 conducted a study of blue lights on 26 college campuses comparable to Middlebury and found that Middlebury was the only college without them. For example, Handal found that Williams College has 270 blue lights.. According to Handal, Middlebury's lack of sufficient campus lighting violates the Campus Security Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1992. But it is not the

legality of the issue that concerns the CFC as it continues to fight for blue lights. "Blue lights provide people with a sense of safety and make others feel that they need to be aware of the possibility of sexual violence on campus," said Landis. The other major concern expressed in the Take Back the Night March was Middlebury's sexual assault policy. Handal calls Middlebury's sexual assault policy "toothless."

Last year the Sexual Assault Policy Task Force and the Safety Task Force collaborated to draft an extensive sexual assault policy with a protocol for the process of reporting a sexual assault offense. The task forces submitted the policy to the College. The College adopted the policy officially but also reduced the policy to what Landis called in an Opinions article published in last week's edition of *The Campus*, "a mere half column in the handbook that nobody knows about."

According to Landis, Middlebury has not treated the sexual assault policy with the attention and seriousness it deserves in part, because the administration is ignorant of the sexual assault problems on campus. Landis also claims that the silence kept by student victims of rape and sexual assault is a result of Middlebury's lack of programs

that foster open discussion of the issue. Handal agreed with Landis on the College's neglect of the issue, "The administration doesn't realize that sexual assault is a silent epidemic." Anyone who attended Take Back the Night Week's Speak Out last Wednesday cannot deny that sexual assault, rape and violence

against women are real problems at (see Take Back, page 12) Middlebury. The Coalition for Feminist Consciousness, in sponsoring Take Back the Night Week, and continues to fight for awareness of these issues at Middlebury.

With the relative success of the Take Back the Night March, it seems as if the Middlebury community is slowly opening its eyes to the incidents of sexual assault and violence that occur in the real world everyday and, yes, even at Middlebury.

The CFC's Take Back The Night Week Chair, Shauna Hill '99, saw the march as a "positive voice for change" that energized the community and showed that sexual assault "is something a lot of people are concerned about." Speaking on behalf of the CFC, Landis remarked, "We really feel that as the years go by this issue has been more and more accepted by the greater college community, and we hope that it will continue to be accepted by more people in the future."

The CFC is currently working on forming a regular support group for survivors of violence against women and is also considering starting an escort service for week-ends with specially trained escorts. The CFC also hopes to organize more sexual assault awareness programs for the college community in the future.