

## Take Back the Night

Good evening, and thank you for being here. As many of you know, we are gathering together tonight in protest of recent incidents of sexual violation of women which have occurred here on DU's campus. We are also here tonight to protest the violence against women that occurs every day, all over our country and our world. We are here to take a stand. We are here to Take Back the Night - to reclaim our right to be present in this world, on our own terms, without fear.

By being here tonight, we are becoming part of an ongoing history of activism for women's safety. The first Take Back the Night March occurred about 20 years ago. Since then, hundreds of Take Back the Night Marches have been held in cities and on college campuses all over the country and internationally. By taking a stand tonight, we are contributing to a political movement demanding safety for women.

Part of Taking Back the Night is breaking the silence about violence against women. The statistics paint a clear and frightening picture. For example, a survey conducted by the National Victim Center found that each hour an average of 78 rapes of adult women occurred in the U.S. during 1990. Furthermore, other research has shown that about 20% of all women (one in five) are sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. Most attacks (about 80%) are by assailants who are at least acquainted with their victims. Here at DU, about one out of every ten clients served by the Counseling Center so far this year are women who have been sexually abused; and we know that this is only a small portion of the abuse survivors on this campus.

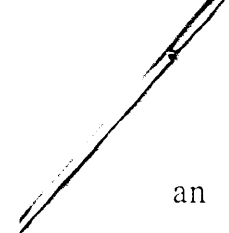
Speaking out and raising awareness about violence against women is also important because it contributes to a healing environment for survivors of abuse. It helps to break through the sense of isolation that many survivors experience. Survivors of abuse often suffer in silence because of shame, self-blaming, or uncertainty about their experience. We, survivors, need to share with each other our stories of victimization in order to offer and receive support, connection and validation. For those here tonight who are survivors of physical and/or sexual abuse, I urge you to speak about your experiences and to begin the healing process. If you are feeling especially courageous, I welcome you to share your experience during the Speak Out time after our march. But if you are not comfortable speaking publicly, I encourage you to speak privately with someone - anyone who you feel comfortable with, maybe a friend, a romantic partner, a family member, or a counselor (Counselors from DU's Counseling Center are here tonight wearing red arm bands. We are here to offer support as needed during this event). Please know that we are all here tonight in a show of support for you, the survivor. We despise what happened to you, we know you did not cause it, and we are here to support you as you reclaim your right to be in this world on your own terms.

The second part to Taking Back the Night is to speak out and raise awareness about women's power. We hear so much about women being victimized, but rarely do we hear of women successfully defending themselves. The truth is that we women defend ourselves from victimization every day in many ways. We are protecting ourselves, whether it is by trusting our intuition and leaving a potentially dangerous

situation, by using our voices to deter a possible assailant, by out-running a pursuing attacker, or by physically fighting back when accosted. The sad reality is that we rarely hear each other's stories of successful self-protection. The news-media contributes to our sense of vulnerability by focusing on stories of completed rapes, with special emphasis given to the most gory and horrific stories available. This sense of vulnerability and helplessness may prevent women from fighting back when attacked. What the media has failed to share with us is the multitude of inspirational stories about women who fought back and came out as victors over their assailants.

Fortunately, there is now consistent research evidence documenting that women can and do defend themselves from being physically and sexually assaulted. Although pound for pound the average woman may be physically weaker than the average man, every male assailant's body has areas of weakness just as every female body has areas of strength. Some of the vulnerable areas of a male assailant's body include his eyes, groin, feet, nose, and adam's apple. And we can use our strong legs and hips, and a quick palm heel or sharp fingernails to create an opening to run or to continue fighting until we have disabled our assailant.

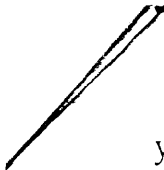
There are also many things that we commonly do before we ever get to the point of having to fight back physically. We are alert and aware of our surroundings. This enables us to assess the situation and act quickly. Another preventative action that we can take is to make noise. We can invoke our powerful voices to say "NO" and to clearly communicate our demands "Don't come any closer." We can also use a noise maker, such as



an alarm or whistle. Tonight the Student Senate and DU Security are introducing the Whistle-Stop program for the DU community. Will Connors from the Student Senate will tell us more about the program in a moment and you will be able to receive your whistle tonight. Since most assailants want to avoid attracting outside attention, making noise is often a successful prevention strategy. And for assailants who choose to disregard the noise we make, we can fight back using our bodies as well as a myriad of other creative self-defense resources, including mace, pepper spray, pens, high heels, keys, kubatons, and other weapons.

So, in being here tonight we are celebrating women's power. We are raising awareness and acknowledging that women are capable of defending themselves in many attack situations. We are breaking through the myth that women are weak and frail creatures. We are encouraging women to use their awareness, intuition, and voices to avoid being attacked; and we are encouraging women to consider the option of fighting back if attacked by using their good judgement, creativity and physical power.

Those of you here tonight who have confronted potential assailants by using preventative and/or defensive approaches (and I know you are out there), I strongly urge you to share your experiences during the Speak Out time after the march. We need to hear your stories to counterbalance the barrage of horror stories we hear everyday from the media. We need to be reminded as often as possible that women are able to use their physical and intellectual power to fight back. Especially those of you who didn't use fancy physical techniques learned in a self-defense class, we need to hear



your stories of creative prevention and self-defense. This will empower the rest of us to use a variety of resources in protecting ourselves from violation of body and spirit.

Finally, in being here tonight we are celebrating the joint efforts of women and men working towards ending violence against women. The issue of violence against women does not break down along gender lines; it is not a struggle of women against men. The battle is between respectful, responsible citizens and those who choose to violate human dignity. We are here tonight, women and men, to take a stand against violence in our streets and violence in our homes. We stand together tonight focused on violence against women, but we are also protesting violence toward children and men in our community and our world.

In closing, thank you so much for being here to Take Back the Night. The strength of our numbers, our voices and our whistles will enable us to wake up the DU community. Marching together tonight, we are joining the fight to end violence against women. And we are marching towards a world where it is the assailants, rather than us, who are behind barred windows and locked doors, and where self-defense classes are obsolete, and where all responsible, respectful people can live freely in this world without fear. Thank you for being here to march towards a future of peace and respect for human dignity.