

Edited by
JANE CAFARELLA

Men on the march

COMPUTER company executive Stephen Foley has never marched before, not against Vietnam ("too young"), not for or against any cause.

But on Saturday he and at least 150 other men — he hopes up to 2000 — will set off from the steps of State Parliament on a swing through city streets, the first male march against rape in Australia, possibly the first in the world, he says.

Women are almost under siege from attackers on the streets of Melbourne after dark. Hardly a day passes without a vicious assault by a rapist; women are being abducted, and the cloak of civilisation was ripped away recently when a youth sexually assaulted an eight-year-old girl in daylight on a busy street corner in Mentone and escaped.

Reported rapes in Victoria increased by 23 per cent between 1987 and 1988. Rape cases, per 100,000 head of population, have more than trebled since 1960. Families in the suburbs have begun to keep their doors locked throughout the day, a practice that once would have been considered fanciful in comfortable old Melbourne.

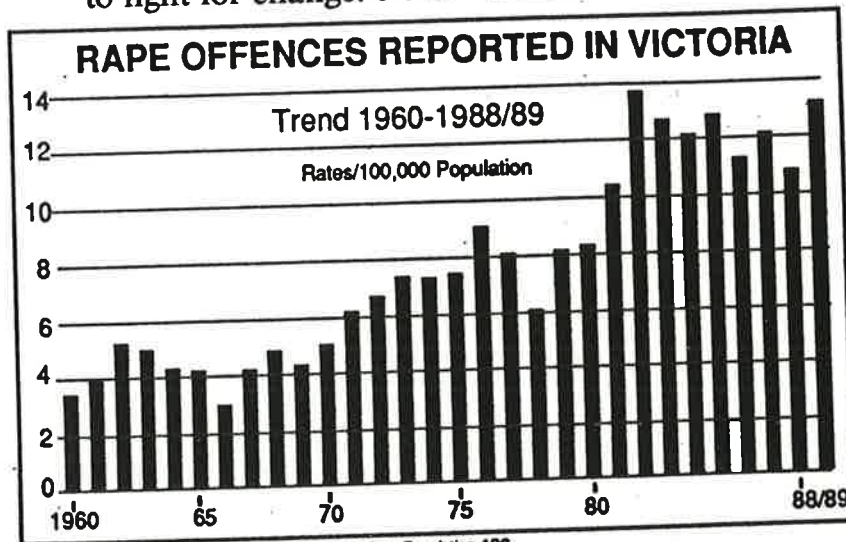
Mr Foley believes that all men are to blame for rape in that they have accepted a climate of domination of women and that rape will not end until men recognise their responsibility. The man who laughs at a rape joke, or merely remains silent, the man who badgers a woman to accept his sexual advances, helps to create a rape climate, he says.

Not the violence on TV? Not the pornographic magazines? Not the usually cited causes? No, says the earnest, chiselled-faced man sitting in the living room of his Edwardian house in Kensington, those are merely the symptoms, and when men transform the way they regard women, the symptoms will disappear. TV violence and pornographic magazines no longer will rate.

So the march. He accepts the possibility of strong antagonism. "It is a very confronting situation. It is all about power and the way men control women and children." Already some of the posters that his group is putting up in inner suburbs have been defaced and one man even attempted to take the group to court on the ground that the posters were offensive.

Mr Foley, 32, who has a company selling lap-top computers, and who lives with women's studies lecturer Deborah Tyler, decided about a year ago to form the group Men Against Sexual Assault after brooding on the fact that several of the couple's women friends had revealed they were sexually assaulted when young. "The fact is that one in four Australian women are sexually assaulted before they reach 18," he says. He knows one woman who, from the

As sexual assaults on women become more prevalent, one group of men is taking to the streets to fight for change. JOHN KIELY reports.



Source: Offences reported-statistical review (Vic Police), Population-ABS

age of five until eight, dreaded being sent to stay with her grandparents, because in the middle of the night, the grandfather would come to her bed to assault her. Her relationships with men were crippled.

Men Against Sexual Assault is a collective of about 50 men. A friend of Mr Foley, Sue Evans, a worker at a sexual assault clinic, helped him to set up the group, but has now withdrawn. She, and the group, believe that the issue is one for men to face, Mr Foley says.

In the modern style, there is no hierarchy of office-bearers in MASA. One section deals with publicity, another with activities. An allied collective, Men Against Patriarchy, is visiting schools, trying to inculcate in boys a more caring attitude towards girls.

Should women stay off the streets at night and dress carefully, as police and others now repeatedly recommend, or should they try to reassert themselves by jogging and walking everywhere as feminist Dr Jocelyne Scutt suggests?

Mr Foley agonises over the question. "It's a real slight on our society to say to women that they should wear certain clothes and keep to well-lit streets to survive. Men should be asking why it is that women need to do this. It's our problem. Women shouldn't have to obey such rules, but it makes sense at the moment. What we need are men swarming into the streets intent on making them safe for women."

The aim of the march, he says, is to make a public declaration that all men are responsible for the rape climate and that there are men who will act to end it. Men whom the group has approached

are somewhat shocked, he says, that such a march should be considered necessary, but women's organisations have been most supportive.

Marching is all very well, but what else can men do? They should, Mr Foley says, speak out of their anger about rape, talk to other men about it, interrupt rape jokes, challenge images of violence against women in advertising and pornography, resist peer pressure to accept sexist behavior, and resolve that although in most cases they are physically stronger than women, they will not try to use that power to control them. Rape will not end, he says, until men see women as equals. Fathers need to show their sons, by example, that women are equals.

Most men, he believes, go close to rape at some stage. Had he done so, himself? A long exhalation. "Not in a gross sense, but perhaps in a sense of looking at a woman and seeing her as an object, disregarding her person. Even that thought can be the catalyst for the next step." A "soft" rape then? "Perhaps in an on-going relationship I have wanted sex on a particular night and known that my partner hasn't. I don't feel guilty about that, but I have become much more aware of it."

Should a man ask a partner just once and if the answer is no, leave it at that? "It's a very individual thing. A man will know when he has crossed the line. To me, if a woman says no, it would seem to be a fair enough indication. You should not pursue a woman until you force her into bed."

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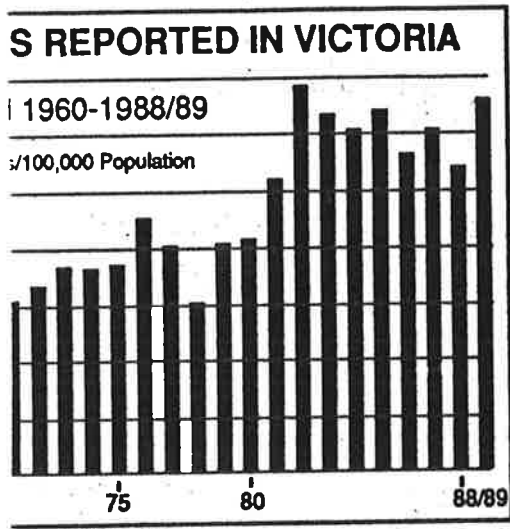
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The march against rape

Picture: JASON CHILDS

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coarse and socially inept? He rejects the
 idea. "Rape among the middle class is
 merely more sophisticated," he says. "If
 you back a woman into a corner, buy
 her lots of drinks and put her in a situa-
 tion where she cannot escape, that is a
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 "In our business circles, in sporting
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see where men have taken control. We (MASA) want to challenge the stereotype that boys are brought up to be successful, they don't cry, they don't show their feelings, they are to be powerful." Men have to learn that they cannot have empathy with women and at the same time control them. Men try to outdo other men all the time, he says, creating great stress.

They rarely reveal themselves to each other. They needed to establish networks in the way women did, to help each other and to work together.

"Women are far more independent now than 20 years ago, and, in a sense men have lost their role in life. The man was the provider and the woman the nurturer. Now in nine out of 10 relationships, the woman is also the provider.

"Men need to go through their own movement and use their own male networks to support each other, instead of leaning on women and controlling them."

Susan Brownmiller in 'Against Our Will' said Freud's claim that women were masochistic by nature, craved the lust of pain and desired to be raped, seemed to be expressed in the streets by the expression: "All women like it really." Does Stephen Foley believe most Australian men actually accept that? No, at a deep level, they do not, he says; but in pub conversation, trying to outdo each other, they pretend to each other that women want it; it is perhaps a way of legitimising their power.

MASA, like Wendy Harmer, has targeted the wolf whistle as derogatory to women. Could it not be interpreted as a signal of admiration from young men to an attractive woman? "The men whistling are seeing the woman as an object to throw remarks at, not as a woman. All the women I know say they find it offensive."

Brothels, he says, have done nothing to alleviate the problem of rape, because rape is about control, not sex.

Most rape, he adds, takes place not on the streets of Australia, but in the bedrooms — having sex with a wife or woman friend when she does not wish to be raped, he says. What is happening on the streets is just the grosser tip of the iceberg.

"We are not trying to make all men feel guilty. We just want them to take responsibility for what are violations and start to change. Because of the way men are brought up, they are victims, too."

Ms Brownmiller argued that even those men who were not rapists benefited from it, for it put women in need of their protection. Most men have wives and daughters whom they presumably do not want to see in thrall. It will be interesting to see how many are prepared to march down Bourke Street.

In the hallway of the Kensington house, Stephen Foley has a butterfly-light watercolor of a young woman, dressed in white, with bonnet and parasol, looking across a summer lake on which ride two white swans. While absurdly perfect in its serenity, it speaks of a world of tenderness and reverence that Mr Foley hopes all men will some day discover.

MEN SEXUALLY ASSAULT ONE IN FOUR WOMEN

MARCH WITH OTHER MEN AGAINST
SEXUAL ASSAULT OF WOMEN

NATIONAL MARCH FOR MEN, SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 1ST
11.00 am Parliament Steps (Spring, Street) Marching through city
The conservatory at the Fitzroy Gardens

The Men Against Sexual Assault poster: some have been defaced and one man attempted to take the grip to court on the ground that the poster was offensive.

TEST FOR MEN

In a leaflet, 'Rape, Men's Responsibility', the MASA group put these questions to men...

- Have I ever used physical force to have sex?
- Have I ever used intimidation to have sex?
- Have I ever taken advantage of someone sexually (when they were drunk or unaware)?
- Have I not listened to a woman saying 'no' and badgered her to say 'yes' to my sexual advances?
- Have I been physically sexual with someone (pinching, touching) in an unexpected or unwelcome way?
- Have I condoned rape by telling or laughing at rape jokes?
- Have I condoned rape by seeking it as entertainment in movies or TV?
- Have I talked, thought or fantasised about rape as a sexual act rather than an act of violence?
- Have I encouraged men in any of the above (by laughing or remaining silent)?

Saturday's march will start from the steps of Parliament House at 11am, pass through the city and finish at the conservatory in the Fitzroy Gardens. Further information, phone 608 854.

— how to make a social statement

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