Attacks threaten sense of community

Column by Rebecca Kaplan

Monday night, Oct. 30, I get a call from a friend. A who is upset. And a little scared.

There's another bloody poster in the Incomplete Corridor: "SILENCE = death; quiet = silence, therefore shut up. Hamit." My friend and I decide that it would be a HAMIT t-shirt in the halls? Who are these people who refuse to stand up for their issues, or just want to make fun of us? What would it mean to have a sense of community? Do we have to be afraid, or hide it? How many people think that it is fair game to anonymously threaten a racial or religious group? Do the perpetrators of these acts actually believe that no one knows or cares about it? I came to MIT believing that the motto of MIT's pride is in its diversity. With its mix of students from many different backgrounds, I assumed that bigotry would be less of an issue at MIT as a result. It's often said that "if you're quiet about it, no one will give you trouble." This statement is used to justify harassment. After all, we are "flaunting ourselves." But I assume that my identity is not necessarily to be protected. How many people actually think about the countless posters that depict images of heterosexual men? Why do living group party posters depict members of the opposite sex together? Is it necessary to flaunt this sexuality? What about ads on billboards, television and newspapers that tell you that you can attract the perfect heterosexual mate, if only you purchase their product? What about laws in some states that forbid high school materials from even mentioning homosexuality? How many people come to MIT under the impression that they have never met a gay or lesbian person? Probably many. One of the main reasons that a gay voice is necessary is that it allows people with homophobic attitudes to maintain their beliefs, and to justify to themselves acts of persecution. These acts further instill fear and prevent people from coming out. The group who put up this poster billed themselves as HAMIT (hettes at MIT). This is not an official MIT group. In the past, when discussing events like BGLAD (bisexual, gay and lesbian awareness days) with people, I have often heard comments like "It's not fair, why is there a HAMIT?" My response: those of you who feel heterosexuals are oppressed, or should have their own groups, why haven't you founded a HAMIT? All you need to do is find out the necessary associations of Student Activities funds. Then you could apply for Financial Board funding for posters and events. However, you would also be constrained by the same regulations under which all groups must operate. Students do not hide behind anonymity must work. Like regulations about what can be said on posters, and accountability.

In Massachusetts, the Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights Bill passed the Senate education vote on Monday. This means that the bill will probably be signed by Gov. Michael Dukakis within about 10 days. This bill will prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in areas of employment, housing, credit and the provision of services. Through legislation such as this, human rights can be furthered and part of the vicious cycle of fear can be broken. The American Psychological Association filed a brief in support of gay rights legislation. The APA believes that the topic of discrimination and human and civil rights against lesbi- ans and gay men should not be controversial. As citizens of this country and as human be-ings, lesbian and gay individuals deserve all of the same privileges enjoyed by other Amer- icans. MIT policy also addresses issues related to the poster attack. The relevant section of MIT policy reads: "Harassment of any kind is unacceptable at MIT and is in conflict with the policies and interests of the Institute. ... Harassment is de-