

## Sound of silence: race on campus not an issue

■ **OUR OPINION:** Students aren't interested in examining color lines

A surprising thing happened at the *Emerald* last week. We decided to open a forum on race relations on campus, hoping to discuss racial tension. Instead, we discovered a new minority: people who care enough to comment.

Out of an estimated student population of 16,500 (most of whom at least do the *ODE*'s crossword puzzle every day), we received only four responses. Four.

Of those four, one person said we should be looking at class discrimination rather than race and cultural prejudices. Another told us that racism at the University was status-quo and not news. We're not sure whether that means we should have asked the question sooner or not asked it at all. In either case the lack of response has left us confused.

According to three of the letters, people of color on this campus have experienced some form of racism. So, if racism does exist on this campus, are these three people the only ones experiencing it? Does silence on the part of 99.9 percent of the student and staff population indicate that unlike hundreds of colleges and universities around the country, the University does not have a race problem?

It would be remarkable if the answer were yes.

Unfortunately, we are forced to assume instead that few of us are interested in discussing the issue. It's so messy anyway. If you're white you have to worry

about saying the "wrong" thing to someone or being called a racist. If you are a person of color you may have grown tired of beating your head against a wall of ignorance. Or perhaps the two required race/gender/non-European studies classes are more than enough to satiate our interest and deplete our energy levels. It's so much easier to ignore racial division or accept it as an insurmountable problem.

Ah, yes. Apathy: The voice of our generation.

And after all, it affects so few of us here. White students have the dubious luxury of being a majority so large that they can glide through five years of liberal-arts education without even speaking with someone of another race. But whether we talk about it now is of little consequence. When we inherit the "real world" in the next decade, the issues we are willing to ignore now will be slapping us in the face.

Every major city in the United States is becoming more racially diverse. Some experts predict that within 50 years — within our lifetimes — white people will be a minority in this country. Yet, for all of our talk of the multi-colored American quilt, it's clear that much of the "color" is still bleeding along our borders.

But it can wait. There will always be time to resolve these issues. We thought now would be a great time to start a dialogue about this, but we were wrong. Please let us know what *does* interest you. We hate being out of touch with the important issues.



## Men are responsible for stopping rape

I think that by now, we all know about the epidemic proportions of violence against women. Oh, I know there are people who will argue this. Lately, for example, I've heard it tossed around that men are the victims of violent crime more often than women. I suspect, however, that there is a qualitative difference between the violence men inflict on women, and the violence men inflict on each other.

Now before some of you start hollering about domestic violence and sexual assault against men, I just want you to know that I know it happens. Men get raped and battered by women and by other men, and women sometimes get raped or battered by other women.

This kind of violence against anyone is clearly unacceptable. I don't want to classify this as strictly a straight women's problem. It's not. But 95 percent of spouse abuse, and 97 percent of sexual assault is perpetrated by men against women.

The most conservative rape estimate is that one out of every five women gets raped in her lifetime; others say it's one in four or one in three. According to the FBI, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women aged 15-44; causing more injuries than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined. A woman is beaten every 15 seconds on average, and a woman is raped every minute.

On a more personal level, I've been trying to think of women close to me who have *not* been sexually assaulted or battered. So far, I've come up with two. Statistics only go so far — when I consider how many women I know who have been hurt by men, that's what I find frightening.

It's not just physical violence against women that makes them afraid, though. It's a general atmosphere of fear that permeates our culture. Some guy making catcalls at me as I walk down the street hasn't laid a finger on me, but he has contributed to a threatening environment.

Women aren't sure what to expect from men and can't tell which men are safe and which men are dangerous. The same thing goes for lewd phone calls or sexual come-ons over the computer. How am I supposed to know if it's a guy making a childish attempt at machismo or some nut who knows where I live?

I'm not just trying to pick on men. I happen to have a number of quite charming men in my life. Men I trust. Men I think of as safe. What I do want to say, though, is that if it is men committing the bulk of rape and battery, it is men who are responsible for stopping it.

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I will continue to take measures for my own safety, but that doesn't mean I have to like it. And I will do it for my own good but not because it's my responsibility. It's not. It's men's responsibility.

It is men who rape. It is men who batter. It is men who have to stop it.

It's fairly clear to women what they should do about violence: defend themselves. For men, maybe it's not quite so clear.

First of all, realize this affects you. Violence against women affects women in your life: your mother, your sisters, your girlfriend, your daughters. It also affects how women see you. You might not be a rapist or batterer, but how does she know that?

Maybe you think she should trust you, but try to remember that many women were/will be raped or beaten by men they trusted. There is no real way for women to know you're a safe person.

Help change the atmosphere of violence that allows men to assault women, and makes women afraid. Confront other men when you see them acting violently toward women. Abusive men are more likely to listen to other men than to women.

Women have a right to walk down the street without being followed, verbally harassed or touched. Don't stare at, touch or make suggestive comments to women walking down the street. And don't follow women, especially at night or in deserted areas. Cross the street or pass women.

Don't make sexist jokes or jokes about rape or abuse of women. If your friends are making jokes like this, tell them why it's unacceptable. Violence isn't funny. Also, pay attention to the language you and your friends use to talk about women and sex. A lot of the slang used is really quite degrading to women.

Take a women's studies class to learn about how society is different for women than for men. Consider your own attitudes toward women. Listen to what women say about violence.

Not all men are violent toward women, but it is not just a "women's problem." All men are responsible for helping stop the violence.

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