



Note: This editorial was first published in the March 2007 issue of Carpe Diem, Decatur (Georgia) High School's magazine. The lead author was Juan Cardoza-Oquendo, a 2005 graduate of the Men Stopping Violence Internship Program.

Violence Against Women Also a Man's Problem

The Majority Opinion of the Editorial Board of Carpe Diem Magazine March 2007

People still don't get it. Rape isn't some freak act of violence that happens to a few unlucky women, domestic violence isn't just an indication that a marriage has gone wrong, and sexual harassment isn't just perpetuated by mentally ill bums. This violence isn't just an individual's problem. Violence against women is a social epidemic that affects everyone – both women and men. It won't go away until we all choose to face it.

One in three women suffers physical or sexual assault by a man at some point in her life. Who's responsible? With few exceptions, usually men. Nine out of ten perpetrators of physical assault are men, and they perpetrate 95 percent of all domestic violence. About 25 percent of all men will use violence against a partner in their lifetime, and almost 100 percent of those imprisoned for rape are men. Still think violence against women is just a woman's problem?

What's stopping men from changing? Probably what society tells us a man should be. Males are taught early on not to cry and not to show weakness, especially fear. Often, men who do express their feelings are immediately labeled as "gay" or "feminine." How can men begin to address their own violence when they're taught to keep their feelings to themselves?

Before anything, men have to feel safe to examine their own behaviors. To do this, men must make true friends – not just "buddies" – with other men. They must be able to talk openly about their feelings. Men can't change by themselves; they must do so in community, holding each other accountable.

Not only must men change the way they treat each other, but they also have to change the way they talk about women. Everyone's heard the negative terms used to label women. Music, TV and magazines bombard us with them. Language inevitably influences how people think. If the words that men use to describe women are only degrading and humiliating, what's going to stop them from acting on those words? Men's relationships with women must be based on honor, respect, and equal power to make decisions.

With these steps, men can change their own behaviors. But how can they help solve the social epidemic of violence against women? Men should ally with women in the movement to attack the root causes of violence. Men can organize forums. They can join women who support laws like the 2005 Violence Against Women Act. Anyone can volunteer with organizations like the DeKalb Rape Crisis Center, Men Stopping Violence and the Women's Resource Center, all close to Decatur. Student leaders can help administrators plan assemblies which might accomplish more than a choir performance. Above all, men should listen to women. Their realities are what should inform men as they go through the process of self change. They are the ones who suffer the most from the violence.

Sending perpetrators of violence against women to jail won't solve the bigger issues. When men take the risk of engaging with each other without fear of labels, value respect in relationships with women, and organize with women to challenge institutions that perpetuate such abuse, only then will gender-based violence go away – for good.