

Whose Violence?

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I read the other day that "Violence in our society continues to be a problem." One, duh. Two, no wonder. I mean, we haven't even got it named right yet.

'Violence in our society.' It sounds so--inclusive. So gender-inclusive. But about 85% of all the violent crime is committed by men. The gangs are made up of men, the bar brawls are fought by men, the corner stores are held up by men, the rapists are men, the muggers are men, the drive-by shooters are men. This is sex-specific. The problem is male violence.

So it does no good to look at 'society', to look at our schools, our workplaces, our televisions. We need to look at our boys. We need to look at how we raise them--to become men. Because our girls don't grow up to commit assault and homicide on a regular basis.

For starters, let's admit that we stunt their emotional growth. From day one, we encourage outright denial: big boys don't cry. They don't cuddle and hug either. So hurt, pain, love, and affection are--not cards in the deck they're playing with.

And then there's the development of empathy. A grade eleven male student once told me that I'd wrecked hunting for him, because I'd described in some detail the awful last few hours of a wolf that'd been shot. The boy said he'd never thought about it before. Seventeen years old, carrying a loaded gun, and he's never thought about it. I guess Bambi's become a chick flick, has it? Then again, it's no wonder--you can't imagine in another what you can't even see in yourself.

Now as any reflective human being will know, hurt and anger reside pretty close to each other. So if you're blind to the hurt, all you'll recognize is the anger. And anger seems to need explosive expression--if not verbal, then physical. Which brings us to communication skills. As any teacher will tell you, boys lag behind girls in language skills. Why is this? Even if it is innate (a boys-are-better-at-spatial-tasks-girls-are-better-at-verbal-tasks thing), well, that's just a reason for doing more, not less, with boys and communication skills. Because if they can't talk about, they will fight about it.

And let's look at nature. I mean, what if male violence isn't the result of a double standard in nurture? What if it's the testosterone? Or the Y chromosome itself? Well, then, maybe it's the men we should be over-tranquillizing. If we can manipulate estrogen levels, surely we can control testosterone levels.

Of course, you're horrified at the thought of such chemical castration. Well, hell, I'm horrified! We have an epidemic of violence that's clearly sex-linked and everyone seems to be busy oohing and aahing at the emperor's new clothes. The truth is masculinity kills.