

Naming Men as Men: A Critical Response

In considering 'authoritarianism', it is necessary to discuss the emotive issue of violence between men and women. My goal is to highlight changes that have taken place in violence discourses over the last 10 years to highlight inconsistencies that have been uncovered in the academic literature. This discussion is necessary to evaluate Collinson and Hearn's claim (2001:153) that men's power is maintained through "dominant sexuality, violence and potential violence".

Hoff-Sommers (1995) argues that there has been gross over-reporting of violence, and a lack of rigour in both journalistic and academic claims. When enquiry is limited to 175 academic studies involving self and cross-reports of *both* sexes, findings show that men are slightly less violent than women in sexual relationships (Fiebert, 2005). Other reviews support this and note that men are marginally more likely to be perpetrators and victims in all types of relationships (Hyde, 2005). This picture, of both women and men behaving more aggressively towards *men* is consistent with Hyde's "gender similarities hypothesis" (Hyde, 2005). Three-quarters of psychological and personality 'differences' were found to be small or close to zero, and almost all others were 'moderate' (a ratio of approximately 1.5:1 in favour of one or other sex).

Kimmel (2001) attempts to debunk findings regarding violence by pointing out a 9:1 ratio in favour of men's responsibility for serious violence, but Farrell counters this by showing that men are also *victims* by a ratio of 9:1 in homicides where the killer is unknown (Farrell, 2000:151). This undermines Kimmel's claim that men target women with violence. Men are also the principle victims of both violent crime (by a ratio of 3:1) and spousal homicide (by a ratio of 4:1) when contract-killing is included within the scope of analysis (see Mercy and Saltzman, 1989; Farrell, 1994, 2000). The homicide statistics collected by the FBI show that women are victims of direct attacks more frequently than men (60:40), but that men are victims of 'multiple offender killings' (i.e. a woman persuading a boyfriend or contract killer to murder their former lover) by a ratio of 4:1. Most 'male violence' therefore, is *for* rather than against women. This raises the possibility that women play an active role in directing 'male violence'.

Studies of interpersonal relationships that poll both sexes, therefore, do not support Collinson and Hearn's thesis. As a result, Kimmel (2001) claims both that two-gender studies cannot be trusted because men lie more than women and also that men's violence is more serious for

women than the reverse. Some of the studies he attempts to discredit, however, specifically test his claims. Research based on self-reports find greater levels of physical harm to women (see Goldberg & Tomlanovich, 1984; Carlson, 1987; Cascardi et al., 1992). Later studies control for bias by checking the treatment required after injury. These find that women compensate for men's physical strength by using knives or other instruments.

Men have been found to sustain injuries at all levels of seriousness as often as women (Hoff, 1999; Headley et al., 1999; Capaldi & Owen, 2001) while hiding the true cause by claiming 'sports injuries' (Farrell, 2000). Capaldi and Owen found - contrary to expectations - that 13% of men and 9% of women were physically injured. Headley (1999) found that 1.8% (men) and 1.2% (women) reported injuries needing first aid and that 1.5% (men) and 1.1% (women) needed treatment by a doctor or nurse.

The perspective that both sexes are more aggressive towards men is consistent with demographic studies. Men are likely to die sooner in all age groups when subject to cultural influences and the demands of sexual relationships. By comparing death rates in cloistered populations of nuns and monks with the general population, Luy (2003) showed that 5.8 years of the 6-year difference in German life expectancy is due to cultural, not biological or genetic, differences. The Office of National Statistics (UK, 2001-2003) shows increases from around 20% greater likelihood of death at age 0-1 to a 160% greater likelihood by the age 20-24 (Office of National Statistics, 2005). Thereafter the difference declines back to around 20% by the age of 85+. In "cloistered" populations, however, women have only a 0.2 year life-expectancy advantage over men (see Luy, 2003). The cultural explanations lie in studies that show growing intolerance *towards* boys/men from birth onwards (see Smith et al., 1980; AAUW, 1990; Farrell, 1994, 2001; Carey & Lopreato, 1995; Hoff-Sommers, 1995, 2000).

Of particular concern is the way data was suppressed from the widely publicised self-esteem study commissioned by the American Association for University Women (AAUW, 1990). This shows that over 90% of *both* boys and girls felt that *boys* were more frequently and harshly disciplined, and that both boys and girls felt girls were better liked by teachers. For a discussion of the omissions and misreporting, see Hoff-Sommers (1995, 2000).

Out of these studies, it emerges that the more there are known risks beforehand, the more likely men are to be held responsible for (or forced into) the perpetration of violence. In two-thirds of homicides, arguments spontaneously escalate into a killing (Maxfield, 1989). In these cases, men and women were found to enact violence equally while men were about 25%

more likely to be prosecuted as the killer (Mercy & Saltzman, 1989, Wilson and Daley, 1992). This pattern, however, is not always confirmed and sometimes women are prosecuted and men are victims more often (see Rosenfeld, 1997). As planning increases, men both perpetrate and are victims more often. In planned homicides involving men and women, men are victims four times more often (Mercy & Saltzman, 1989). In homicides where the killer successfully conceals their involvement, men are nine-times more likely to be victims (Farrell, 2000). In formalised and legally sanctioned homicide (e.g. the Iraq war) men are forty times more likely to be killed than women in the US forces (Farrell, 2005), while over 100 British men died ‘in action’ before Sarah-Jayne Mulvihill became the first woman (Hastings, 2006).

Given available evidence and vivid depictions of the social process compelling men, and only men, to become killers during wartime, a more robust theoretical position is that despite men’s similarity to women, the riskier a situation the more men are expected (and forced) to take responsibility for actions to address those risks (see Ashworth, 1968; Hyde, 2005; Elton, 2006). *The Monocled Mutineer* (Allison & Fairley, 1986) provides a historical account of the impacts on male soldiers who have to shoot their colleagues for ‘desertion’ or ‘cowardice’. In Ben Elton’s historical novel *The First Casualty*, conscientious objector Douglas Kingsley is sent to prison for opposition to World War I. His wife abandons him and leaves a white feather on his bed. Later, young women give men feathers when they attend anti-war rallies. In prison, Douglas Kingsley is beaten and left for dead by both inmates and prison staff. Women, therefore, punish men socially and sexually for perceived cowardice (while avoiding the same responsibilities). Men punish other men socially and physically for the same. Nobody expects, let alone punishes, women for non-violence. In a society that punishes men (and only men) for *non*-violence, is it any surprise that men perpetrate more violence than women? Nor it is clear that men’s violence ‘oppresses’ women more than it protects them. Men’s propensity to violence, therefore, is driven mostly by a desire to act *for* rather than against women as well as to avoid social exclusion and punishment. Moreover, this behaviour is frequently rooted in the desire of potential (or actual) sexual couples acting in defence of their own relationships, or men (as a group) defending women in the community (as a group). In these circumstances, men are expected and forced to perform violent acts regardless of their individual wishes. So, while men perform more violent acts than women, the rationale and interpretation of those acts, as well as the social structures that bring them about, are radically different from those suggested by Collinson and Hearn (2001).

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