

Book review

The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help

REVIEWED BY ANTONIA QUADARA

The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help. Jackson Katz. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks. 2006.

In this book, American lecturer and social commentator Jackson Katz, wants to turn the issue of violence against women on its head. It is not, he declares, a women's issue. It is, rather, a men's issue. If men comprise about 99% of perpetrators of domestic violence, sexual assault, serial killings and abductions, then the time has come to have a "national conversation about the male causes of this violence" (p. 6). Jackson's focus is not on offenders, and offender treatment programs, but on the general population of men, including those who see themselves as a "good guy", to make a commitment to preventing violence against women—in the locker room, in pubs and bars, at the office.

There are two overarching tasks to this book. One task is to disrupt commonly shared perceptions about sexual violence that depoliticise it and remove it from issues of power and gender. These include the notion that violence against women is perpetrated by crazed predators leaping out from bushes, and that talking about and organising around violence against women is really a form of male-bashing. The second task is about making connections between broader social and cultural practices that enable and maintain violence against women to be a feature of our society. Katz suggests that the mores of male peer culture, the music of rappers such as Eminem, and the pervasive effects of pornography all provide common languages and alibis that excuse and normalise men's violence against women.

In elaborating on these tasks, the book moves through several distinct phases: personalising men's violence against women by appealing to them as fathers, brothers, sons, lovers and husbands; critiquing the gender-neutral languages—in news, research, and organisations—that describes men's violence against women; making connections between the consumption of "cultural products" such as hip-hop music, stripping, pornography and violence against women; and developing ways of educating and responding to young men in developing awareness of and responsibility for the perpetuation of violence against women. These last chapters are probably the most useful and productive ones in the book. It can be at other times difficult, often reading as a litany of woman-hating scenarios and sexual victimisations. Whether this speaks to men in a productive way about violence against women is unclear.

The book offers some important insights and strategies for having conversations with men about men's violence. One of these is the reminder that acknowledging male violence is not about making men feel guilty. Another is about finding ways of clarifying empirical and statistical data, which consistently shows that the majority of perpetrators of violent interpersonal crime are men. Katz observes that many men, take the statistical picture personally. Instead of hearing 99% of rapists are men, Katz writes that his audiences hear 99% of men are rapists. Attending to this "statistical dyslexia" (p. 79) is an important part of having meaningful discussions about violence against women. Katz's task in this book, however, is not to make men feel guilty, but to galvanise men into productive responses to the endemic nature of violence against women, "if the goal is to inspire more men to engage in transformative action we need to do more than simply tell them to stop behaving badly" (p. 25).

While violence against women—its extent and its impact—is no longer a taboo topic, Katz argues that in our conversations about the problem of violence against women little is said about the problem of men's violence (p. 22). *The macho paradox* seeks to reconnect violence against women to issues of masculinity, power and the cultural validation men's violence, and to do this in a way that speaks directly to the everyday man.

Further reading: www.themachoparadox.com

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