

Silence is not always golden

Becky Dunlap, MSW
Victim Services Specialist
Crisis Connection, Inc.

"Why do you think the millions of rapes and batteries that are committed by American men upon American women and children every single year aren't the lead story on the news every night? Do you think the high rate of men's violence against women and children is simply an unpleasant fact of American life? Is it so thoroughly taken for granted that males are perpetrators of violence and females and children their appropriate victims that we need not discuss the matter further?" Jackson Katz

So began Jackson Katz, the nationally acclaimed author of *The Macho Paradox*, *Beyond Beats & Rhymes* and *MVP Strategies*, to name a few, at a local seminar sponsored by Crisis Connection one year ago this month.

Since that day I've thought a lot about his questions. Sadly, I think he was right; men's violence against women, children *and other men* has apparently become an unfortunate fact of American life.

I started noticing some things after I heard Katz speak.

For example, I noticed that night after night, on the local news, the first one to seven (I've been counting) stories are about men's violence against others, yet never, *not even one time*, have I heard the news reader make the obvious connection: it's *men's* violence, not generic people's violence, but *men's* violence against all others.

I've noticed that the media reports school shootings as if they occur in a vacuum, not once making the, once again, obvious connection that all of these shooters are males.

I've noticed that when someone dares to even *attempt* to open a dialogue about men's violence against women and children, they are promptly challenged with the same worn-out, hostile and defensive question, "What about women's violence?"

What about it?

If the only interpersonal violence our country had to deal with were the violent acts perpetrated by females upon all others, we'd be closing prisons and juvenile facilities by the dozens; consolidating courts; laying off probation officers, law enforcement personnel and deputy prosecutors; investing billions more in our schools and infrastructure and lowering *all taxes for everyone*. That wouldn't be a dialogue, it would be a celebration.

Why would anyone choose to waste their time discussing the exception rather than the rule?

The United States already incarcerates more males (1 in 54 over age 18 according to the recently published *Pew Center on the States Report*) than *any other nation in the world*.

How many more prisons must we finance to incarcerate even more men because of the *choices* they have made?

Yes, I said choices.

Choices because I don't believe males are genetically programmed to be cruel and violent. I believe that violence is a learned behavior. Little boys are groomed by abusive fathers whose example speaks loudly and clearly: when you intimidate someone long enough, they will eventually give up and you'll get your way.

Choices because I believe we permit, by our silence, men to choose violence and then we excuse their ruinous choice. We excuse their choice with statements like: "He was drunk.. stressed... exhausted...depressed...disgusted...fed up," *you fill in the blank*, but

understand that by whatever excuse you decide to accept, it's still deliberate violence...by *his choice* and with *your permission*.

Choices because I believe that we find it easier to shake our heads and lament, "Well, what can *we* do about *people like that*."

Choices because I believe that what is learned can be unlearned and that men are capable of change.

Choices because I believe that if men were being terrorized in even *half the numbers* that women and children are, *every single day*, we'd be hearing plenty: the roar of outrage *and* demand for immediate and decisive action would be deafening.

Choices because I believe that we, as a nation, are more concerned about our pot holes than we are about the hundreds of thousands of women and children who are brutalized every year by our sons, brothers, uncles, cousins, neighbors and buddies.

Choices because I believe that a brutal man will be dealt with more harshly if he kicked the barn cat than if he blackened his wife's eye: domestic battery is a class A misdemeanor, animal cruelty a class D felony.

My grandma used to wag her finger and warn me that I would reap what I sowed when I didn't complete a chore to her satisfaction and she of course was right, but in the case of brutal men the results will be the opposite. *We will reap what he has sown*.

Consider the following:

•According to the *Centers for Disease Control* and the *Family Violence Prevention Fund*, a single incident of domestic violence costs \$2,303.30 for medical and mental health care and lost productivity *only*. They did not factor in the cost, to all of us, of law enforcement, court appointed representation (his attorney, as is his right at our expense), courts, jail, probation officers, devastated children and destroyed families.

•A single incident of sexual assault costs \$3,296.60 and a single incident of stalking costs \$1,229.40. In 2007, Crisis Connection (we serve Crawford, Dubois, Orange, Perry and Spencer *only*) worked with 594 victims of domestic violence, 155 rape victims and 419 stalking victims for a total cost of \$3,329,207.80 in medical and mental health care and lost productivity...*only*.

•Children who live in a home with a violent father have much higher than average rates of: depression, anger, aggression, school failure, lying, nightmares, bedwetting, early and unhealthy intimate relationships, teen pregnancy, bullying, drug and alcohol use, risk-taking behaviors, suicide, exhaustion, poor personal hygiene, and self-mutilation than children who live in a home with a nonviolent father.

•These same children are physically abused by their father from 50-70% more often than children with a nonviolent father *and* are sexually abused by their father 20-40% more frequently than their peers living with a nonviolent father.

•80% of the little boys who grow up in a home with a violent father will become violent men. They learn what they have seen and heard: *Does father really know best?*

We're paying big time for these men's choices.

After digesting the preceding, silence hardly seems an appropriate response or in our own best interest.

At the *very least*, all of these men should be court ordered to a minimum of 52 weeks of the Crisis Connection Men's Batterers' Intervention Program. Not 12 weeks or 18 or even 24, but a solid year...*no exceptions*. What took a lifetime to learn will not be turned around in a few weeks.

These men *should* be allowed an opportunity to make meaningful and lasting changes in their lives for all of our sakes. But, *please* don't buy the argument that these classes

place an undue financial hardship on these men. At \$20 per class, these classes cost less than ½ of what a carton of cigarettes costs and about the same as a case of beer...these men can afford whatever they decide is important. *This is important.*

I challenge you to break *your silence* and speak up.

To speak up at your job, at church, at the bowling alley and the club or bar.

To speak up with relatives, friends, co-workers and casual acquaintances.

To speak up with the sheriff, the police chief, the prosecutor and the judge.

Slaps on the wrist aren't working and frankly few of us can afford another prison so maybe, *just maybe*, it's time to take re-educating violent men *very seriously*.

I challenge you to break *your silence* and speak up unless you don't mind paying your *fair share* to continue to finance violent men's choices.

I do mind. I mind very much.

Sometimes we need to speak our minds, even if our voices shake.