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Chapter 11

Males, Masculinity, and Physical and Sexual Violence against Females

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Male perpetration of physical and sexual abuse against women and girls is undeniably a global phenomenon because male violence is inflicted on women and girls in virtually all cultures. Internationally, male physical and sexual violence against women and girls appears in a remarkable variety of forms, "from sordid to sanitized, from secretive to sacred, in bedrooms and battlegrounds, censured as well as supported by courts, clergy, and communities throughout the world" (Fontes & McCloskey, 2011, p. 151). Unfortunately, because this type of male violence is so familiar and commonplace, the everyday male actions of emotionally abusing, slapping, beating, and sexually assaulting women and girls around the world have become almost invisible as a daily part of the social background (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Thus, when I began to contemplate "Who are these violent perpetrators?" while gathering information for this contribution, I realized that the problem is so widespread and so much a part of the global social fabric that determining predator characteristics could best be answered with one word: *males*.

I truly considered stopping right there. The answer seems so self-evident, the amassed evidence so overwhelming, that at first I believed I had nothing more to add. Then I began to think about how the global and privileged invisibility of males and their masculinity is the source of the problem, and how this keeps all of us from effectively intervening to stop their violence against women and girls (as well as boys and other men). Perhaps I did have something to add; a focus on males might assist in removing the social veil and lead us to both local and global solutions.

Before proceeding, I would like to address three common responses to the simple and accurate statement that males and their masculinities are the problem. First, acknowledging "what is" (that the problem is a male one) in no way implies human males are genetically or biologically determined to be violent, and by implication that all males are predators. This essentialist argument has been raised and debunked by better minds than I (e.g., Gurven & Hill, 2009; Hill 2010), although the disturbing evolutionary-testosterone argument for male violence and rape is far from dead in the 21st century (Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Goetz, 2009; Liddle, Shackelford, & Weekes-Shackelford, 2012; McKibbin, Shackelford, Goetz, & Starratt, 2008; Miner, Shackelford, Block, & Starratt, 2012). In any case, I want to be clear that biological determinism is not the issue.

Second, the common response that "females do it too" in no way invalidates the fact that the overwhelming majority of public and private violence is perpetrated by males. In fact, this latter argument implies there is something inherently *social* that supports such violence but does so differentially for males and females and in fact suppresses female violence:

[R]esearch on the history of . . . women's crimes is a valuable resource . . . as a way to understand the relationship between women's violence and women's lives. Whenever a woman commits murder, particularly if she is accused of murdering a family member, people immediately ask, "How could she do that?" Given the enormous costs of being born female, that may well be the wrong question . . . the real question is why so few women resort to violence in the face of such horrendous victimization—even to save their lives . . . [this] provides evidence that women's crimes parallel their assigned role in the rest of society. (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004, pp. 97–98)

In other words, there is something within our worldwide social organization that supports male violence and suppresses female violence (Chopra, 2003; Meneley, 2000; Posel, 2005; Sitaker, 2009). This "something" is known as *patriarchal hierarchy* in which males are elevated over females throughout all known social spheres across the globe, from family structure to religion to economics to politics (Adeleye & Chizwuzie, 2007; Agathangelou & Ling, 2004; Cossins, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 1981;