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Why is violence against women so endemic?

David Leser

I don't know where you were last week when you learnt about the "top bloke" who had just killed his two little boys (and himself) by driving off a jetty in Port Lincoln, South Australia.



The bodies of Damien Little and his two children were discovered in the wreckage. Photo: Port Lincoln Times

I was with my younger daughter and she was weeping as she read the story. "How could any father do that?" she asked.

Perhaps you wept too, or shuddered with a mixture of disgust and fury, or were simply left frozen by the senselessness of yet another example of destructive male force.

Here's what that story did to me. Firstly, it made me reflect back to Father's Day 2005 when Robert Farquharson murdered his three children by steering his car into a dam near Melbourne. Then it made me return to that roasting January morning on the West Gate Bridge in 2009 when Arthur Freeman dropped his little girl, Darcey, over the edge on her first day to school. He even turned his hazard lights on before he hauled her from the front seat.

From those accursed places – jetty, dam, bridge - my mind then cut a circuitous path to that farm in Lockhart, NSW, where, in 2014, Geoff Hunt killed his wife and three children (before later killing himself) because he believed "it would spare them future pain."

Suddenly my mind was leaping across national borders. I was remembering the documentary *India's Daughter* about Jyoti Singh, the 23 year-old physiotherapy

student, who died in 2012, two weeks after being gang raped, tortured and mutilated by six men in a New Delhi neighbourhood.

I was back inside Antony Beevor's *Berlin*, reading the horrifying detail of gang rape of girls and old women by Red Army soldiers in East Prussia during the summer of 1944.

I was leaping forward a generation to Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, where she wrote that "most men hate women at least some of the time." I'd rejected that notion at the time because there were too many good men I knew who didn't feel that way. But how else to understand male violence against women and children, a crime that former US President Jimmy Carter describes as "the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violation on earth".

We tell ourselves it is worse elsewhere – that female genital mutilation in Africa, sex trafficking in Asia, acid burning in Pakistan, widow burning in India, mob attacks in Algeria, female infanticide in China, honour killings throughout South Asia and Middle East, that all these atrocities constitute far worse depredations against women than anything we see in so-called "civilised" society.

Except why do American colleges now report that nearly 30 per cent of female college seniors experience unwanted sexual contact? Why, across the 28 member states of the European Union, do one-third of women encounter physical and/or sexual violence from the age of 15?

Why is domestic violence the leading cause of death for women under the age of 45 in Australia, one woman killed on average every week? How is it that one in four children are exposed to domestic violence and that "familicide", the murder-suicide of children and a parent in the context of custody or access disputes, is so common?

Is it because – and here's something to chew over guys – a brutal misogyny actually permeates every culture and society in the world? That burning witches during medieval time and ditching witches (or calling a female journalist a "mad witch") in modern times, are simply opposite points on the same spectrum? A form of misogyny as old as Genesis: Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

Many years ago I spoke to Peter O'Connor, a Jungian therapist and best-selling author about the rage and sorrow of men. He talked about men being at the mercy of their logic and reason; how they operated almost always in the external world where occupation remained the cornerstone of their identity. Men were compelled to know, to be right, to be in control, especially of their emotions.

Women, on the other hand, were generally more at home with their intuitive, feeling sides; with life's ambiguities and uncertainties.

That's why so many men felt threatened by women. Women symbolised a world over which men had little control, so that in a crisis, they couldn't rely upon their powers of reasoning and logic to provide answers. The enemy, as they say, was within.

This is where I ended up in my free-associated state after reading about those two dead sons and their father in Port Lincoln. Inside the collective head of Everyman.

"If you won't submit to my rule, I will burn, behead, rape, enslave, garotte or disfigure you. Or I will hurl your children and mine into the abyss so that you never see them again.

"Now let's see who has the power."

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MensLine 1300 789 978; Kids Helpline 1800 551 800; National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service 1800 737 732; Men's Referral Service 1300 766 491