

violence: the peaceful man

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rambo's roots

For most of us, violence is something we happily leave behind in the school playground. We've had enough dead legs to know that fighting doesn't pay, and while Chinese burns may be one way of getting our rubber back from a classmate, we've probably realized it's not an appropriate negotiating technique for the boardroom. Nevertheless, there are still many men who continue to punch, kick and fight their way through adult life, whether it's the odd ruck on the football terraces or the systematic beating of partners or children.

So what is it that encourages some men to continue to use physical force? In many cases, it's simply the fact that violence begets violence. If we come from a background in which hitting people was an everyday occurrence, we may well continue to see it as a legitimate way of getting our needs met. Men who were frequently hit as boys often pass this on to others as part of a cycle of violence – when they feel hurt, they want to hurt back. But that's only part of the story, because violence is a predominantly male phenomenon. Over 90 per

cent of offenders found guilty of 'crimes against the person' are male. Virtually all rapists are men, and men constitute the overwhelming majority of military personnel in Britain (the only group in society trained and encouraged to act violently). So to really understand why men are violent, we need to look at what's influenced us as we've grown up.

Inflicting violence on others can certainly make a man feel manly. After all, Rambo's not a real man because of his dress sense. Like so many tough guys, he comes close to the pinnacle of real man-ness because of the immense power he wields through his physical might. It does indeed seem as if violence is one of the most effective ways of asserting control. Mr Jones can sleep with our wife, supervise us at work, even beat us at Mortal Kombat, but if we've got his head in a real (rather than a virtual) arm-lock, then we're the one on top.

So overpowering someone through violence can make us feel good about ourselves – it's what the inner Arnie's all about. Can you remember the last time you beat someone up (if you ever have)? Even if it was at school, you can probably recall some of the feelings that went with victory. Guilt and shame, perhaps, for doing something 'naughty', but also an overwhelming feeling of pride. A sense that you'd stood up like a man, proved your self-worth and exerted your superiority over another male. And if we feel good about beating someone else up, we could be tempted to try to recreate that feeling again and again.

Most men don't, of course, but those who feel particularly insecure about their masculinity may be more inclined to turn

to violence as a way of boosting their sense of self-esteem. If we feel we're a failure at work, if we're skint, if others are pushing us around, violence may seem a means of gaining some dignity and respect. For men who feel powerless or that their authority is being challenged, violence might seem like the only possible way of getting what they want. When words fail – and they can all too easily fail for men – aggression may seem the most appropriate alternative.

Winning a fight may make us feel better, but can you remember the last time you lost one? When the school bully knelt on your shoulders and spat in your face? Or when you were mugged walking down the street? Experiences of defeat can frequently leave lasting scars, although usually more of the psychological than physiological variety. To be physically overpowered by another person in such a direct way is seriously humiliating, a definite negation of our manhood. All our control is gone. As the phlegm fell from the bully's mouth, we were powerless to stop it. We were at his mercy.

Because it's so painful to be defeated, even walking away from fights can lead to feelings of shame. If someone in a bar behaves threateningly, it can bring up two very contradictory feelings. On the one hand, we might want to avoid getting hurt in a pointless fight, but on the other hand, we might not want to feel the embarrassment of being pushed around by some drunken job. Not surprisingly, then, some men take what at the time seems the least painful option – they respond with violence when provoked. They may end up in the local hospital, but at least their masculinity is still intact. Such an

attitude of honour before death may seem noble, but it's also responsible for the injury, or much worse, of millions of men, – from the boxing ring to the battlefield.

The feelings violence arouses are often intensified when conflict occurs in the presence of others. Being beaten up might feel bad, but if it's in front of someone else – particularly a woman – it can leave us feeling completely humiliated and disempowered. As men, we've probably come to the conclusion that we won't be loved if we can't stand up for ourselves. Being roughed up in the school playground usually earned us the contempt of the class. And from countless Hollywood movies, we've learnt that beautiful women always go for the toughest guys. The man who's beaten to the floor may have his forehead wiped by the movie's sex bomb, but it's soon evident that she doesn't really respect him any more.

In fact, the entertainment industry has probably had a major influence on male attitudes. When we watch Bruce Lee kung fu-ing his way through Shanghai, we may not try to copy his behaviour down our local high street, but it does give us a sense that violence is something exciting, manly and acceptable. To be fair, few Hollywood heroes are actually advocates of random, senseless violence. But what they do suggest is that violence is about the only reliable means of defending ourselves, our loved ones, our community and our honour. The image of man as protector is pervasive on both the silver screen and television – from *Batman to Death Wish to The A-Team*. When things get tough for Bruce Willis in his *Die Hard* movies, you won't find him in a group therapy session

with the baddies. He's far too busy climbing lift shafts, defusing bombs and running barefoot across acres of broken glass.

When young boys play games like Cowboys and Indians, it can reinforce the idea that fighting is exciting and acceptable. Warfare and death are turned into dramatic interludes which make the rest of life look dull. The latest generation of computerized games continue to perpetuate the idea that the best fun you can have is to kill people. And, as we get older, news reporting of war takes the place of Space Invader machines – we can sit back and enjoy watching rockets darting through the Iraqi night sky and down Saddam Hussein's bunker. When war is so technical and distant, we might be forgiven for forgetting that over 60 million men in military service (and over 140 million people in all) are believed to have died in warfare over the last 500 years (according to the Lentz Peace Research Laboratory).

In fact, the idea that war – in reality, state-sanctioned violence – is a valid option for resolving international disputes is often reinforced by governments and the media. When Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982 and Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, there seemed no serious alternative to force. This has the effect of legitimizing the role of violence in society generally. After all, if governments believe that when you can't get what you want by talking, you can then justifiably lash out with everything you've got, they can't easily expect their citizens not to apply the same principles to their own lives.

124 Finally, men can often mete out – or, at least, accept

– violence because of the way in which our feelings have been repressed, in particular our ability to empathize with others. All this distances us from others and makes it harder to see them as people just like us. In fact, in our minds, we often turn them into objects, making it easier for us to treat them badly. It's not surprising that, in war, soldiers are encouraged to objectify the enemy – calling them 'the Hun', 'Gooks' or 'Argies' – so as to make them seem less human and therefore easier to kill.

running scared

Despite all this, most of us are not advocates of violence. At the same time, however, the threat of violence can still have a direct impact on us. Suppose, for instance, you're driving down the road when the driver in front brakes, gets out of their car and starts walking towards you with a menacing look. What would you do if (a) they were a 65-year-old man, (b) a middle-aged woman, or (c) a 6-foot skinhead? The chances are you'd be a lot more likely to hit the accelerator with the skinhead closing in on you. The capacity for someone to inflict violence on us – along with shame and humiliation – can have a big influence on the way we respond to them. Although we may not be aware of it, often the first thing we do when we meet another man is to size up his physical strength, and if we feel that he could overpower us, we may treat him with a lot more respect and caution. Just remember the reverence with which the school bully was treated.

Of course, the way we respond to other men's capacity for 125

violence will very much depend on our own. If we're used to fighting and feel very confident about our physical strength, we're not likely to see other men as so much of a threat. On the other hand, if we've never won a fight and feel as if virtually all men could beat us to a pulp – as many of us do – then it's likely to leave a sense of insecurity and fear around other men. We may feel scared to get into serious arguments or to say 'no' to men who are a lot bigger than us. It can make us feel nervous when sitting in rough bars or when we walk down dark roads late at night. What can make these feelings worse is that it's often difficult for men to talk about their fear of violence with others; so we don't realize that many other men probably feel just as we do.

It could be worth reflecting on how our relationships with other men might be different if we didn't see them as potential adversaries. If we weren't constantly sizing them up, checking out who might be about to explode, who could beat us and who we might stand a better chance against, then not only might we feel a lot more relaxed, but we also might be more open to developing a wider range of friendships. We'd look a lot less threatening ourselves too – we often keep our face and body tight and drawn to hide our fear as well as to deter – making it more likely that other men (and women) would be interested in getting to know us.

Although we may feel scared of other men, it can be a very different matter entirely when it comes to women. Few of us feel physically threatened by women, and though we may not
 126 want to admit it, this can have an important effect on the way

we relate to them. We may feel less obliged to take what they say seriously, or to do the things they ask, because we believe they're less able to enforce their demands through violence. If every woman had muscles the size of the Incredible Hulk's, or a Kalashnikov under her arm, imagine how differently we might behave.

bringing it home

For Geoffrey, a 35-year-old marketing manager, it first started during an argument about a problem they were having with some builders:

Jane was having a go at me because I'd not done something I said I would. I got so angry, I grabbed her by the arms and shook her hard enough to cause some bruises. I didn't know what else to do; I'd run out of ideas and lost the vocabulary to end the argument in any other way.

This wasn't the last time Geoffrey was violent to Jane:

I'd been having problems at work which were affecting my self-confidence and ability to cope. I tried to shrug it off but, deep-down, I felt deflated and worthless. I felt I'd been unfairly criticized at work and the last person I wanted to be criticized by was Jane. That's when the violence would happen. It could be completely innocuous

things that would trigger it. She would say something like 'Why haven't you done this?' or 'Why can't you remember where anything is?' and I would start seething. I thought it was so unfair. I just wanted her to shut up. I normally shook her, although I also pushed her on to the bed. Once I slapped her very hard across the face.

Geoffrey's behaviour might sound extreme, but imagine yourself coming home from a tough day at the office to discover that your flat is still a tip – your partner promised she'd clean it up, but instead she's lying in bed watching *Neighbours*. You ask her if she's made any supper and discover that she's about to go out for the evening with an old flame. What would you do in such a situation? Forget about things and make your own supper? Wander off in a sulk? Tell her how angry and irritated you are? Or would you feel like hitting her? Do you actually go the whole hog and start to push, slap, punch, kick or even attack her with objects?

The violent option is not as rare as you might think. According to The North London Domestic Violence Survey of almost 600 women, almost one-third said that they'd suffered violence from their partner – and that excludes rape and 'less severe' violence such as grabbing, pushing or shaking. The same survey asked over 400 men about their behaviour. One-fifth said that they'd hit their partner and one half believed that they might if, for example, she was unfaithful or arrived home late at night without prior warning. A government review of a large number of studies concluded that 'domestic

violence constitutes a pervasive problem' and that women are on the receiving end in the overwhelming majority of cases. Domestic violence is also known to occur in some gay relationships.

Assaults tend to happen when a man feels angry or frustrated. It may be, for instance, that his partner's spent money on things he doesn't approve of, or else he may feel that she's putting him down and undermining his self-confidence. Often, however, the man's frustration will have little to do with his partner. A late train, a losing streak on the horses, a dressing down from his boss – almost any negative experience could leave him in such a state of frustration or anger that his partner's cold supper becomes the final trigger for a violent outburst.

When men assault their partners, they often feel like they've 'blown a gasket' and 'lost control'; that it's an involuntary, spontaneous act. However, the fact that many perpetrators of domestic violence don't lash out at men in the same way suggests that they see women as easier targets. For a start, their partner is less likely to hit back and, if she does, it's unlikely to hurt as much as being thumped by another man. With so much indifference to the problem of domestic violence by the police and judiciary (although this is slowly changing), men may also feel that they can get away with hitting their partner without any serious fear of legal retribution.

What's more, if domestic violence was simply a product of frustration, we'd all be doing it. The fact that most of us don't hit our partner when we get angry suggests that men who do

often have an underlying belief that violence against women is legitimate. It may be, for instance, that their father attacked their mother and, consequently, they see domestic violence as an almost normal part of family life. It may also be that they hold very traditional views of the gender roles and feel that it's justifiable for a man to assert his authority in a relationship, through violence if necessary.

Domestic violence is often used by men as a 'control mechanism'. Through assaulting their partners – or just by the threat of it – they can ensure that she does what they want. So the dinner's ready on time, the flat's clean and she never goes out with anyone she's not 'supposed' to. Men may also turn to violence when they feel incapable of asking for what they want in any other way. In fact, many men actually feel quite powerless in the relationship and violence is a desperate, last-ditch attempt by them to try to exert some measure of control.

Although men may feel their violence is justified at the time, many perpetrators of domestic violence feel guilty or remorseful after their attack. They may realize that what they've done is wrong, or else be scared that their partners will now leave them. Flowers, chocolates, apologies and assurances of no more violence often follow. In some cases, this can persuade the woman that the violence will not recur; in others, the partner will have little alternative but to stay in the home as children or lack of money prevent her from leaving. Men may also deny the extent of their violence after the event – both to themselves, their partners and others – in an attempt to minimize their feelings of guilt and to deny responsibility for

what happened. Domestic violence seldom occurs just once in a relationship – unless the woman leaves straight away. (This rarely happens; in fact, it's thought that women are assaulted an average of 35 times before they do leave.)

Obviously enough, domestic violence can be extremely damaging. As well as suffering severe physical injuries and possibly even death, victims of domestic violence can feel humiliated, frightened, degraded, powerless, self-blaming, trapped, intimidated and depressed. Perpetrators of domestic violence, too, rarely achieve much in the long run. Sooner or later they're likely to lose their partner, along with any children they may have had together. What's more, the courts are at last beginning to hand out increasingly severe sentences to men who assault their wives or lovers.

A number of programmes have been set up to help men deal with the problems of domestic violence. Normally men can refer themselves, though in some cases they can only participate through a court order. A man joining a programme will probably begin with several sessions of one-to-one counselling, in which he'll be pushed to acknowledge the full extent of his violence rather than keeping it a silent secret. He may also be encouraged to explore the roots of his violence, whether feelings of inadequacy, sexist attitudes or an abusive past. After the one-to-one sessions, he may join a weekly group where he'll be taught anger-management techniques. The group may also have a peer regulatory function – men report back on their behaviour during the week and are challenged by the other men if they have assaulted their

partners. Programmes normally run for about six months.

Organizers of programmes for violent men claim that they are successful for most men who complete them. However, it's also argued that such courses are a soft option, can leave violent men in the home to continue attacking their partners, and that it would be better to have a stronger response by the criminal justice system. It's also been said that programmes for violent men divert much-needed funding from women's refuges. Despite their drawbacks, however, these programmes do seem to offer some hope of a solution to this deep-seated problem.

Clive, a 39-year-old solicitor, certainly believes a programme has helped him. After his wife Deborah left him because of his violence, he realized that he had to sort himself out. It was difficult at first to admit that what he'd done was wrong, but he found that once he was able to do that the floodgates then opened. He started off with a few one-to-one sessions, which he feels were very important because they helped him to learn to be more open. After that he joined a small support group:

One very important part of the process for me was the 'personal contract', which I wrote down in the early stages. It contained my objectives and I had to keep referring back to these. Throughout the programme, I also kept an 'anger diary' in which I had to be honest and fair with myself about my feelings and behaviour. Part of the therapy was coming to terms with what I'd done and admitting all the

details rather than minimizing it. I did find it painful to talk about the past and I wanted to draw a veil over it, but I knew it was important to remember what I did. I've learned to stop the anger or to walk away if I feel it. I've questioned a lot of the attitudes and motives which were in-built. I've realized that women aren't sex objects, there to do what I want. I see women more as people. I also feel that I'm a much better person now.

on the other foot

Recently, there's been increasing media coverage of domestic violence incidents by women against men – the so-called 'battered husband' phenomenon. Some research has suggested that it's just as common as male violence against women – one American study found that wives committed an average of 10.3 acts of violence against their husbands each year, while husbands averaged 8.8 acts against their wives. This research is atypical, however, and not widely accepted.

There may still be some men who are genuine victims of domestic violence. These men can face particular problems: first, of being believed by anyone; and secondly, of feeling pretty ashamed and embarrassed about their dilemma. Contacting the police may therefore seem out of the question and there are very few agencies which can help, although victim support services may be able to offer some assistance.

While few of us are regular victims of female violence, there may well have been times when we've been hit by a woman in

the midst of an argument. When this happens, we can feel tempted to hit her back. However, without wanting to suggest that we should simply let her continue being violent, there are a couple of issues to think about before retaliating. In general, men can hit harder than women, so a punch thrown in anger may be a lot harder than we think. And, what's more, a woman's punches may be able to hurt us, but it's very unlikely that she's going to be able to use her physical force to coerce us into doing something we don't want to do.

a clip round the ear

How would you feel, wandering through your local supermarket, if you saw one person whacking another person around the head, screaming abuse at them and threatening further violence if they didn't shut up? You'd probably think the attacker was a headcase; you might tell the shop manager and, if you were feeling brave, you might even intervene. So why is it that when the person being hit is a child, many of us hardly take our eyes from the supermarket shelves and carry on filling our trolley regardless? Hitting children just seems to be the norm. In one American survey, 86 per cent of respondents thought that young people needed strong, physical discipline; 70 per cent thought it normal, necessary and good to slap a 12-year-old.

Violence towards children may have many of the same roots as violence towards women. We see it as acceptable, we 134 don't really respect the victims' rights, and we're not afraid

of them hitting us back. Many adults also see violence against children as an effective means of teaching them the difference between right and wrong. There's no evidence that this works, however. If our dad smacked us for trying to strangle the cat, it may well have stopped us – but only when he was around.

Besides being physically dangerous, if we hit children it can leave them with lasting psychological scars. They can feel bitter towards us as well as the world in general, or feel afraid of other men. Given the fact that boys tend to be struck more often and harder than girls, this may partly explain why men are more violent than women. Being hit as a child can teach us that it's legitimate for big people to hit little people, so perpetuating the cycle of violence into another generation. A report by The Commission on Children and Violence, published in 1995, argued that 'non-violence should be consistently preferred and promoted' and 'all discipline should be positive and children should be taught pro-social values and behaviour including non-violent conflict resolution.'

unilateral disarmament

Dealing with our violence against other men, women or children isn't easy. Even if professional help is sought, it still requires great commitment to break through old patterns of behaviour. However, if we are determined to end our violence, there are several positive steps we can take for ourselves.

- **Keep an 'anger diary':** every day, write down details of any situation in which you felt angry or felt you could become angry. Describe what sparked off your anger and assess how strong the feeling was on a scale of 1–100. Write down what you did – for example, you may have hit someone or smashed something. Finally, note down any thoughts about how you could have handled the situation without violence. The idea behind the diary is that you'll be able to better understand the causes of your anger and the kind of situations in which you become angry. You'll also be able to identify alternative courses of action and monitor your progress.
- **Take 'time outs':** this involves deciding to take a fixed period of time (usually 60 minutes) away from your partner or child when you recognize that you're becoming angry. Tell them about your decision beforehand and, when a situation arises, tell them that you are going to take a time out. Then leave the house – perhaps go for a walk – and return at the agreed time. When you return, try to work out the problem calmly. If you get angry again, agree to leave it to one side until another time.
- **Follow the '6-feet rule':** in a situation where you feel you're going to become violent, make the decision not to go nearer than 6 feet from the other person. At this distance, you can't hit them.
- **Avoid situations in which you know you're likely to get angry or violent:** this may mean cutting down on your

- drinking or maybe not going to football matches on a Saturday afternoon.
- **Avoid depersonalizing:** notice how you think about people when you get angry with them. You may, for example, think of your partner as 'a bitch' or your child as 'a little sod'. When you're angry, it could help if you continue to call them by their real name – the more human they seem, the less likely you are to be violent.
- **Be assertive:** learn to ask for what you want directly rather than having to demand it through violence. Talk as openly as you can about how you feel. At the same time, be ready to listen to the needs and feelings of others. Be prepared to negotiate – you may well be able to get some, perhaps even most, of your needs met without violence.

sexual abuse

When we think of the word 'rape' it often conjures up images of a sex-starved stranger in a dirty raincoat attacking a defenceless woman in a dark alley. The reality, however, is usually very different. For a start, most rapists are known to their victims and may even be their fathers, brothers, husbands or 'friends'. A Granada television *World in Action* programme in 1991 surveyed over 1,000 women and, disturbingly, found that one in four had been raped, one in seven by their husbands.

Although rape has many complex causes, it's rarely caused

by male sexual frustration. Men who rape often have long-term partners who they regularly sleep with. Besides which, a man who was simply desperate for sex could go to a prostitute. Rapists generally use sexual assault as a way of dealing with their anger with women: they want to humiliate or degrade them or to 'teach them a lesson'. They may have a deep-seated hatred or fear of women, or see women as the root of their problems and so use rape as a form of revenge. Rape is rarely a spontaneous act; it's usually well planned and thought out. Rapists often succeed in humiliating their victims: they can be severely traumatized – as well as physically injured – and left with long-term psychological problems. It's also been said that, even though not all men rape, rape benefits all men by keeping women in a state of fear.

'Date rape' or rape in marriage can occur when men don't take women's refusals of sex seriously. They may believe that if she says 'no' she really means 'yes', and that once a woman has shown any degree of sexual interest men have the right to do what they want. Rapists may also believe myths such as 'Women who wear short skirts are asking for it', or 'Women secretly enjoy having sex forced on them.' In other words, some rapists may see their behaviour as a perfectly normal part of their sexuality and not necessarily abusive at all.

For example, a man who goes out on a date with a woman and pays the bill may expect sex in return. If it's denied, he may become aggressive, verbally or physically. Sometimes he'll succeed in scaring the woman sufficiently to force her to have sex without actual violence having taken place. He may then

interpret her behaviour as freely given consent. Sometimes, he may wrestle the woman to the ground; if she stops struggling out of fear or because she feels she's less likely to be hurt than if she resists, then again, the man may assume she's consenting.

In the last ten years, it's also become clear that the sexual abuse of children is a major social problem. One study of over 1,200 16–21-year-olds by North London University found that 59 per cent of the women, and 27 per cent of the men, had been sexually abused at least once before they were 18. (If 'less serious' forms of abuse – such as 'flashing' – are excluded, the prevalence figures are one in five for women and one in fourteen for men.) Abusers are often men who were themselves abused as boys. When a boy is abused his sense of his own masculinity is undermined and this can lead to the development of an insecure male identity which lacks the confidence to develop normal sexual relationships. Men may also see children as willing sexual partners with adult sexual preferences. Sometimes abusers convince themselves that they are actually doing the child a favour by introducing them to sex in what they falsely believe is a caring way.

Until recently, men convicted of sexual abuse offences were usually just locked up without any attempt being made to alter their thoughts and behaviour. However, the government has introduced a treatment programme for prisoners and a few similar projects are available in the community for convicted offenders, the best known of which was the pioneering Gracewell Clinic in Birmingham. Until it closed in 1993, the

Gracewell programme focused on getting men to admit the extent of their sexual abuse, develop an ability to empathize with the victims of their abuse, and change their fantasies. Gracewell claimed that, since it opened in 1988, none of its clients had been convicted of a further offence.

Men who have not yet actually abused but who are concerned about the possibility – perhaps because they regularly have rape fantasies, find themselves becoming sexually aroused by children, or seek out ‘hard-core’ pornography depicting sexual abuse – should consider contacting a counsellor or therapist. Discussing the desire to abuse may well not only prevent it from happening but also help to improve their self-esteem and the quality of their relationships with others.

While only a minority of us will ever use physical force or threats to compel a woman to have sex with us, the issues brought up by rape are still relevant to us all. To what extent, for instance, are we prepared to coerce a woman into making love? Would we just ‘touch her up’ to try to get her turned on or would we go further through the use of guilt, emotional blackmail or intimidation? The line between encouragement and force is often a thin one. Moreover, we have to ask ourselves whether part of us believes in the myths about women and rape. If so, is it possible that these assumptions affect the way we behave sexually with women? And how would we respond to a woman, perhaps a partner, who had been raped? Would part of us hold her responsible? Would we believe that she wouldn’t have gone to that part of town, worn that dress or
140 accepted that lift if she hadn’t really been ‘asking for it’?

sexual abuse of men

Most of us imagine that rape only happens to women. However, men do get raped too, and not just in prisons...it could happen to any of us, no matter how masculine or heterosexual we may believe we are. In the United States, for example, where many states have rape laws which apply to both men and women, 5–10 per cent of reported rape victims are male. While it’s often imagined that most perpetrators of male rape are gay men, in fact most are straight and, in many cases, it’s the victims who are gay. Male rape is perpetrated for much the same reasons as female rape: it’s a way of expressing power and control over the victim; it usually has little to do with sex.

Men who are raped can experience psychological traumas as severe as those affecting women. Being raped can undermine a man’s sense of his masculinity – after all, men are supposed to be able to defend themselves and penetrate others rather than be penetrated. Rape can also lead straight men to question their heterosexuality. They may believe that they somehow invited the attack or that they secretly enjoyed it. (When a man is raped, the stimulation of his prostate may give him an erection and possibly even lead to ejaculation.) Male victims of rape may also feel reluctant to go to the police for fear of humiliation, even though some police forces are now beginning to set up special services.

The psychological effects of abuse on boys can be just as devastating as the rape of adult men, if not more so. Adult ‘survivors’ may experience deep feelings of shame or guilt, 141

a need to be constantly in control, a fear of intimacy, compulsive sexual behaviour, feelings of asexuality, isolation, and an inability to say 'no'. Sometimes, they can feel very detached from the world so that nothing actually feels real. In some cases, the experience of being abused is linked to the abuse of others. Fortunately, men (and women) who have been abused, either as children or adults, can now get support from an increasing number of organizations. These can provide telephone and one-to-one counselling and they can organize support groups for men who have been sexually abused. Part of the philosophy of these organizations is that men should try not to see themselves as helpless victims but as people with the resources to cope and recover from their abuse.

Harvey, a 42-year-old teacher, is one man who has survived a long history of sexual abuse:

I was first abused when I was seven by a friend of the family. I felt I was getting no love and affection at home and he would let me sit on his knee, buy me sweets and give me pocket money. One evening, outside the back door, he put his hand down my trousers and started touching me. I didn't know what was going on but I didn't want it to stop because I needed his affection.

Harvey's father died when he was 11 and his mother married the man who had abused him:

By this time I was having oral sex. He coerced me with excuses like 'I just love you and if you loved me you'd do this for me.' Then he started buggering me, usually on a Sunday morning when my mother was downstairs cooking lunch. This continued until I was 15.

The abuse had a devastating effect:

I felt different, dirty and had a constant feeling of shame. I felt confused about my sexuality. I started behaving self-destructively, ending up in a Spanish prison for smuggling cocaine. My marriage broke up because I found sex difficult to deal with – I used to cut out emotionally and I felt like an abuser in bed. I went on to use a lot of drugs and had constant suicidal fantasies. I didn't begin to recover until I contacted a survivor's organization and started counselling. I developed new ways of looking after myself and I'm at last learning to feel comfortable about my sexuality.

the noble warrior

While most of us recoil from the idea of cruel, random or purposeless violence, we probably still believe that violence can be legitimate. We may think violence is justified in self-defence – when an individual or a country is attacked – or perhaps to put right a greater wrong, such as for one country to depose a brutal dictator in another. We may well warm to

the ideal of the 'noble warrior', the just man who fights only when provoked, who never glories in death and who grieves for those he kills.

The problem with any justification of violence, however plausible, is that it's always open to wide interpretation. It's not difficult for anybody to find an apparently good excuse to act aggressively. But there's no need to get drawn into a discussion of the acceptability or morality of violence to realize that there's one powerful alternative – non-violent resistance. The Indian independence leader, Mahatma Gandhi, was one of the foremost exponents of this type of action. Whatever the provocation from the British rulers of India, Gandhi's followers would never raise their fists, let alone take up arms. In one famous incident in 1930, 2,500 Indians marched in protest to a government salt works, 150 miles north of Bombay. As they approached the site, the police attacked with clubs. The marchers offered no resistance besides continuing to move forwards. The salt works were defended, over 300 protesters were injured, and two were killed, but the action inspired many others to support Indian independence and severely damaged the credibility of the British Government around the world.

As Gandhi demonstrated, non-violent resistance is not the same as cowardice. It's not about giving up and running away. Rather, it's about standing your ground and staring your opponent in the eye. It's about attempting to reach the adult human being in him rather than the frustrated and enraged 'little boy' who is temporarily in control. It's about trying to

communicate rather than fight. In fact, it's very much a positive assertion of needs and rights. It requires great courage and determination and, of course, carries with it the risk of physical injury. But such action can work – ultimately, Gandhi was successful; India became an independent nation.

Of course, if you're attacked by a 15-stone Nazi and his Rottweiler, you don't have to pretend you're Gandhi. You could try to persuade him not to hit you but no-one would blame you if you decided to run away or, if you knew how, flatten him with a well-aimed karate chop. The point is that there are a range of options, there's not just the violent one. The real man allows himself only a limited choice (we all know what the inner Arnie wants us to do – convert the Nazi into 'dead meat') – but the complete man knows he has several alternatives.

We all know what the real man's like when it comes to violence: he's tough, fearless and decisive as well as fair, just and merciful. Of course, in reality, most violent men fall far short of the ideal of the 'noble warrior'. Their violence is essentially a means of being in control – who you can beat up you can dominate, whether it's another country, another man, a woman, a child or even a dog. But while not all men perpetrate violence, almost all men are affected by it. It influences how we hold our bodies, how we perceive other men, how we talk to them and how we measure our own self-worth. We all live with the knowledge (and, for many of us, the fear) that at some point we'll have to fight to prove

ourselves. Men who are violent can take steps to change, however — there are now effective anger-management techniques any man can learn. Instead of trying to get what we want through aggression, we can take steps to become more assertive — in other words, to ask and negotiate rather than just take. This requires improving our communication and relationship skills. The complete man realizes that his value as a human being is not determined by the size of his fists or his ability to injure or kill. He knows that a growing sense of personal empowerment will enable him to become a truly assertive yet also peaceful man.

bodies: the healthy man

body beautiful

It's a hot summer Sunday. You've been working like a lunatic all week and today you've decided you're going to take a well-deserved break — down to the seaside for a spot of sunbathing. It sounds like a great idea but, when you finally arrive on the beach and start unbuttoning your shirt, you're not so sure. Do you really want to parade your pale chest and beer gut in front of the other beach-goers? Seeing a couple of attractive young women nearby heightens your anxiety. And when you notice a group of bronzed, muscular volleyball players you can't take it any more. Ashamed of your puny stature, you scuttle off into the darkness of the amusement arcades. It may be noisy, aggressive and expensive, but at least no-one's going to see your flab.

If that's a story you can relate to, then you're not alone. Since the days when Charles Atlas's 7-stone weakling got sand kicked in his face, those of us who don't have a build like a bronzed Adonis can feel ashamed and embarrassed about the way we look. Real men have a stomach as defined as a