

## Smiles and Domestic Violence Are Universal



The human smile is a gesture that cuts across all cultural barriers. Anthropologists report the world over that with a slight nod of the head it indicates friendliness and cheer. Domestic violence also cuts across all cultural barriers.

Statistics gathered by the YWCA estimates one in three women worldwide endure violence ranging from dowry related death in India, genital mutilation in Africa to beatings, rape and assault the world over. In 2002 in Utah 65% of the female homicides were domestic violence related. Utah was ranked as the 16th state in the nation in 2001 in the number of females murdered by males in single victim/single offender homicide.

Columnist Marilyn vos Savant was asked why women have been treated so poorly in Afghanistan. Was it because of 'woefully inadequate assertiveness?' In short her answer was men are physically stronger and if they are uncivilized they can easily subjugate women. As society changes and men are more secure in their manhood they don't need to prove themselves by overpowering females.

I think part of the problem is in the phrasing of the question. It assumes women allow it, perhaps encourage it, inviting men to hurt, maim and kill. I also think people who believe this should question if they also believe it is anyone's right to take a tv, car, or bank account. The possessions exist, are passive in their movement and are inviting because they give us comfort and prestige. Since robberies happen privately and if someone is clever enough to get away with it, whose business is it anyway?

Her answer indicates a progression from insecure uncivilized man to self-confident civilized man. To be civilized is to be mannerly and practice restraint. It cuts across nationality, income and education. Men in any end of all three groups have loved women truly and well while others have killed them. Insecurity vs security in manhood sounds plausible, yet not all insecure men hit women. Perhaps abusive men are insecure in the perception of their own manhood. That may be an explanation. And after all, we allow mistakes in three year olds who are insecure about their bladders. But we don't let three year olds continue in socially unacceptable bowel habits and the perception men can hit, maim and kill women needs to change.

I'm not sure it makes a band-aid's worth of difference why men physically overpower women. Some of them just do. Human behavior will never be legislated into perfect order or socially controlled by Miss Manners, but it is surprising how a change in public opinion can make issues jump into public awareness and we collectively change our attitude. Consider the perception of drunk drivers, what 'liberal' means, that we need a cell phone, Arnold Swarzenegger's career, that rayon is 'out' and cotton is 'in'.

Perhaps it is as simple as enjoying the feel of a well landed punch on a human unable to return it. Perhaps some men don't care about what they lose when they hit a woman. To me, one of the saddest results is the slow death of love that poisons the man and woman, children and a healthy society where people can live safely, well and productively. Copyright © 2005