

Book Review: *The Macho Paradox*

By Jackson Katz (*Sourcebooks, 2006*)

REVIEWED BY STEVEN R. TRACY

Violence against women is an ugly reality in our fallen world. And the more one studies this subject and the more one listens to women, the uglier it gets. This makes *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help* a particularly welcome addition to the literature on male violence against women. Jackson Katz, a well respected “anti-sexist male activist” and national leader in gender violence prevention, tackles this subject with candor, yet hope. His thesis is clear and well supported throughout the book: “If we are going to bring down dramatically the rates of violence against women . . . we will need a far-reaching cultural revolution. At its heart, this revolution must be about changing the sexist social norms in male culture” (8). Katz furthermore argues that such a culture revolution will require the participation of a lot more men at all levels of influence. His approach to the subject is quite balanced and solution oriented. He does not focus on hardened rapists and batterers, but appeals to the large number of “good guys” he believes can and should be part of the solution when they are given the proper education and motivation. Katz also evidences authenticity. The writing style of *The Macho Paradox* demonstrates the very qualities that Katz argues reflect healthy masculinity: a willingness to listen to and learn from women, letting go of the need to control, the courage to look inward and admit one’s failures, and willingness to get involved and be part of the solution.

Katz’s cultural analysis is powerfully and painfully astute. He analyzes popular culture to show that we really do have a “rape culture.” Chapter nine, entitled “it takes a village to rape a woman,” is worth the price of the book. His chapter on pornography and prostitution is also painfully insightful in showing how deeply misogynistic our culture is and how this contributes to gender violence. Some of Katz’s greatest contributions lie in his careful analysis of language. By deconstructing common media descriptions of violence, Katz shows that our language evidences our unwillingness to embrace the truth that most violence against women is perpetrated by men. In other words, we are “stuck in gender neutral,” yet violence against women is not gender neutral. Evangelical gender hierarchists have been quite reluctant to acknowledge a connection between patriarchy and gender violence, or even to acknowledge the prevalence of male violence against women. Hence, Katz’s cultural analysis of sexism and male-perpetrated violence against women has particular usefulness for evangelicals.

The Macho Paradox also has unique value in engaging the evangelical man in the fight against violence against women due to Katz’s arguments, credentials, and experience. Many conservative evangelicals are now decrying the “feminization” of the church (see Brandon O’Brien’s brilliant article, “A Jesus for Real Men,” *Christianity Today*, April 2008), making it even more difficult to engage some Christian men in what they perceive to be

an unmanly “woman’s issue.” Katz is a former all-star football player who has conducted violence prevention trainings with professional and college athletes and U.S. Marines for more than a decade. He is also well trained in women’s issues and abuse (he was the first man to receive a minor in women’s studies from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst). So Katz is particularly well suited to argue, as he does in *The Macho Paradox*, that violence against women is a men’s issue and one in which men must be involved. Closely related to this point, *The Macho Paradox* is helpful in challenging common conservative dismissals of legitimate feminist concerns. Katz brilliantly deconstructs the glib assertion that women who focus on violence against women are “male bashers.” He shows that the true “bashers” are the men who commit violence against women and that one does not have to hate men to hold abusive men accountable for their violence.

Those looking for an explanation of the mindset of abusers will be disappointed. Katz’s focus is on the “good guys” (typical, non-sociopathic men), not on characteristics of abusers. (Those wanting the latter should see Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*.) While *The Macho Paradox* is generally very well referenced, occasionally one wishes for more primary source documentation of key assertions. A notable example of this is Katz’s unsupported assertion that 99 percent of rapists are men. (While men certainly commit the vast majority of rapes, females commit a surprising percentage of sexual abuse of minors, probably 10 to 20 percent.) Gender hierarchicalists may well be put off by Katz’s unabashed feminism and his frequent use of feminist sources, although gender traditionalists are most often in need of valid feminist insights. Finally, most evangelicals will find Katz’s explanations of the cultural basis for violence against women to be brilliantly insightful, yet inadequate. His model ultimately begs the question, for it does not explain why the overwhelming majority of cultures throughout human history are sexist and promote violence against women. Only a robust theology of human depravity can explain this unbroken chain of gender oppression and violence (cf. Gen 3:16).

Katz is surely correct in asserting that violence against women is one of “the great ongoing tragedies of our time.” Thankfully, by writing *The Macho Paradox*, he has given us valuable insights into the problem and workable steps toward a solution. All evangelicals would greatly benefit from this book.

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