

Domestic violence forum focuses on redefining masculinity

By Dan McDonald/Daily News staff

MetroWest Daily News

Posted Jan 22, 2009 @ 02:12 AM

FRAMINGHAM —

Evan Graber won't implore you to be a man, suck it up, or stop crying like a little girl.

In fact, he spent the better part of 90 minutes yesterday afternoon trying to break down such everyday euphemisms in an attempt to help a roomful of police and social workers dissect America's "narrow scope of masculinity."

Graber, a Worcester-based psychologist, was the featured speaker for Middlesex District Attorney Gerry Leone's domestic violence roundtable held at Keefe Tech.

The stats do not lie, said Graber, who is chairman of Males Against Violence, a group working to promote healthy models of masculinity and curb violence and prejudice.

Men are responsible for 90 percent of all violence in America, which is the most violent of industrial nations.

Men also commit 95 percent of all domestic violence.

Graber few ask why this is the case.

"Until we include a gender aspect we are omitting a huge factor," he said.

It starts in childhood, Graber said, with people speaking differently to baby boys than baby girls. Even well-intentioned kindergarten teachers will react differently to a crying girl versus a crying boy, said the father of three.

A "narrow definition of manhood" is perpetuated throughout boyhood and adolescence that makes machines, sports, the objectification of women and high-risk behavior particularly alluring to males.

"We just assume that boys will be boys," he said.

Being affectionate, Graber said, is frowned upon during the male childhood because many fathers are uncomfortable hugging their sons.

"To me that is sad. There is a homophobia attached to the Y chromosome," he said. "The one sanctioned way for human connection is wrestling."

The saturation of misogynistic advertising did not escape his scope either. He showed one print ad for a line of skateboards featuring a male - resembling the stick figure found on a men's room sign - holding a gun to the head of a stick-figure woman. The ad elicited at least one exclamation of "Oh my God!" from the crowd.

Graber also delved into media's portrayal of violence.

The coverage of the Columbine High School tragedy in the late 1990s, in which two boys killed a dozen students inside the Littleton, Colo., high school, largely omitted the fact that the gunmen were boys, Graber said.

"It's only notable when it's a girl. That's when it's a headline."

Graber said most men have have done very little to challenge the violence perpetrated by the minority of men. But all is not lost.

Taking public action - whether declining to laugh at chauvinistic jokes or publicly denouncing sexism or homophobia - could slowly change the culture of manhood, he said.

"We need to broaden our definition of masculinity."

(Dan McDonald can be reached at 508-626-4416 or dmcdonal@cnc.com.)

Copyright © 2009 [GateHouse Media, Inc.](#) Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons](#) license, *except where noted.*