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## **VIOLENCE ALL MEN'S PROBLEM**

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I've always thought it wasn't my problem.

I mean, I'm not a rapist. I don't beat my wife. I'm just a regular guy. So, when talk turns to sexism, misogyny and violence against women, I furrow my brow, nod my head and show concern.

But in the back of my mind, I'm thinking, "Some guys are jerks, but I can't help it."

Jackson Katz begs to differ. As far as he's concerned, I'm part of the problem.

"We need to set the bar a little higher for what it means to be a 'good guy,' " says the California-based activist. "Just saying, 'I'm not a rapist' doesn't quite get there."

Katz is one of the continent's leading experts on violence prevention. An all-state football player who grew up in Boston, Katz has created several award-winning videos, wrote a new book due out next month (The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help) and co-founded the Mentors in Violence program -- a large-scale attempt to enlist collegiate and professional athletes in the fight against violence against women.

If that's not enough, he also appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

But according to Katz -- who is scheduled to talk about his ideas Monday at the London Convention Centre -- I'm the kind of guy who helps produce hundreds of thousands of abusive boys each year.

"Our participation in consumer culture has consequences," Katz says. "And men need to think critically about how our consumer dollars contribute to a system that reinforces sexist beliefs and attitudes."

Now, just a minute. I don't buy Hustler magazine and I don't rent pornographic videos.

Mind you, I'm not going to rush to change channels if one of those Victoria's Secret shows comes on or that Sports Illustrated swimsuit special.

And, hey -- did you catch Halle Berry in that James Bond flick on TV the other night? Wow, is she hot or . . . .

Ummm, OK.

But I'm a good dad. Why, just the other night my sons and I were watching a bit of WWE wrestling on TV and we just had to laugh when that buxom bimbo Victoria climbed into the ring and . . . Oops.

Somehow, I think this is what Katz is talking about.

Although Katz agrees today's young people are more informed about these issues than their parents were, he also argues there's more sexual violence than ever.

"There's a level of callousness and brutality that's entered the culture that was not around a generation ago," he says. "The coarsening of the mainstream media culture is implicated in some of the attitudes and behaviours we're seeing being played out by boys and men."

Katz recalls an incident during his high school days (I recall a similar one at my school) where some senior male students created huge cards depicting numbers 1 through 10, then graded female students walking past.

But now, he says, that type of degrading behaviour is a regular part of mainstream entertainment -- like Howard Stern's radio show.

Some, of course, will argue most listeners understand and appreciate the satiric nature of Stern's shows. Others will point out most young men who watch a film involving violent behaviour don't immediately go out and imitate it.

Katz says that's a simplistic argument.

"The larger effect is desensitization and normalization," he says, adding that for many young viewers the damage is already done.

"In my judgment, healthy human beings should not be able to watch, even in a fictional context, people brutalizing each other without thinking it's a problem."

In the end, he says, even "regular guys" like me have to share the blame.

"If you yourself are not abusive, but the men around you are and you don't challenge them, then your silence is complicity in their abuse," Katz says.

"I think we need a broader understanding of our responsibilities as men."

IF YOU GO

Jackson Katz will present his anti-violence forum (Tough Guise: Engaging Boys and Men in Challenging a Culture of Violence) Monday at 7 p.m. at the London Convention Centre, 300 York St. Admission is free. The event is sponsored, in part, by UWO's Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children.