

## Book Reviews

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Totten, M. (2001). Guys, Gangs, and Girlfriend Abuse. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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Mark Totten's book, Guys, Gangs, and Girlfriend Abuse, is an in-depth analysis of marginalized male youths' involvement in girlfriend abuse from the perspective of abusive males. Totten's calculated analysis of the phenomenon is conducted through a study that focusses on abusive male youths' struggle to make sense of their actions within the issue of abuse. Throughout the study, Totten purposefully explores physical, sexual, and emotional violence of male participants through the lens of various sociological perspectives, with a significant emphasis on familial and gender ideologies. Furthermore, Totten's study reflects the role of abuse in racial and sexual minority groups that the male youth participants adhere to within their daily lives at home and on the streets. Through the lens of familial and gender ideologies, Totten effectively explores the effect of this perspective on male youth behaviour throughout his book. By categorizing abuse as the physical, sexual, and emotional violence male youths participate in, Totten attempts to pinpoint why and how these behaviours occur. Moreover, Totten's research on the broad definition of abuse is strongly rooted in each chapter of the book.

Totten explains that defining abuse within his study can be a difficult process and there are various limitations involved. For instance, the definitions of physical and sexual abuse used for the study are within the boundaries of the Canadian Criminal Code; whereas, emotional abuse is limited to the degree of severity (p. 18). Nevertheless, he

clearly defines what constitutes each act of abuse within a set of criterion for his study. Through this categorization, Totten has the flexibility of comparing the degree of abuse that each participant is: severe, minor, or non-abuser. Furthermore, the ability to determine the severity of abuse that each participant potentially generates allows Totten to regulate whether participants are at risk for suicide, as well as the risk of their girlfriends' safety.

As Totten's study unfolds, it becomes evident that the idea of abuse is complex and involves more than outlining criteria of what each type of abuse is. Furthermore, Totten's research reflects the unsettling results that his participants display not one or two, but all three types of abuse. These outcomes can be seen throughout the book. Totten presents the results of his study in extracts of interviews with the participants. Through this method, he is able to effectively demonstrate his data in an efficient and organized manner. Furthermore, this technique allows Totten to explain the various aspects of ideologies and theory involved in the participants' answers. For instance, in an interview with a male youth named Dillon, Totten provides an excerpt of his discussion:

...When girls used to stay at home to do the cooking and shit, they never took a man's job away. Now those little cunts think they've got balls. They think they can take all our jobs at the same time they tell us "Don't lay a hand on me. I'll have you up on assault charges" or they'll cry "rape." Who the fuck do those little cunts think they are? It's not fair. That's why I hate those little bitches. Equal rights has sweet fuck all to do with it. They just want us guys to look like a piece of shit... (p. 89)

From this excerpt, Totten is able to explain Dillon's hatred of his mother, the patriarchal ideas this participant has, as well as various reasons for why Dillon has this perspective while maintaining clarity and organization of his analysis.

In the interview process of Totten's study, his analysis of each participant and their role in the issue of abuse uncovers many themes. For instance, in the excerpt with Dillon, there are several themes that are similar to other participants. The idea of patriarchy, sexual division of labour, masculine identity, and what makes up an "ideal man" are present in Dillon's ideas, all of which fall under familial and gender ideologies. As well, Totten explains how Dillon's answer reflected a comparison of a job to a penis. Totten explains that the idea that men were the only individuals that should work from home is a form of gender ideology and that Dillon's responses when interviewed reflected this perspective. Totten also theorized that Dillon's hatred of women first began from a hatred of his mother, demonstrating a connection to the familial ideology.

Totten also successfully compares participants that responded differently on issues of abuse to the majority of males in the study. For instance, Paul, a gay seventeen year old, is mentioned several times throughout the book as a comparison to other individuals. Paul's responses to ideas of abuse and his role within the issue was not to deny that he was abusive to his girlfriends, sexually and emotionally; rather, he admitted his actions and provided valuable reasoning for why he acted in the manner that he did (p.140). Totten equated this to the fact that Paul was one of the few participants that was working, and that he had grown up in a middle-class family (p. 121). Totten explained at the beginning of the book that his he assumed social class would impact girlfriend abuse as well as the idea that "youth from lower-income families might be more physically, abusive, whereas youth from more affluent families might be more likely to use emotional control" (p. 47). Therefore, Totten's comparison of Paul as a middle-class

male compared to the majority of participants within the study demonstrates the accuracy of Totten's prediction.

It is evident that each excerpt of an interview Totten included within the book demonstrates some form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse ideals that the marginalized male youth of the study held. By emphasizing these three aspects, readers can gain the sense that violence among these individuals is an all-encompassing force within their lives. When analysing the data of his study, Totten explains that in the context of familial and gender ideologies, many of the participants perceived abusive behaviour as a legitimate way to stay in gender prescribed roles– a patriarchal ideal– as well as a way to prove their masculinity (p.180). The perceptions of 'the ideal man' as well as masculine identity that marginalized male youth of the study believe to be true are evident in their responses of abusing their girlfriends to gain approval of those around them. Furthermore, the interviews with the male participants reveal the role that peer relations have in male youth.

Amongst the examination of familial and gender ideologies, Totten explores the role that peers have within the lives of marginalized male youth. His findings indicate that many individuals view gang members and their peers as "families they never had" (p.149). Many of the individuals in the study described their gangs as nuclear families that accepted their identity, status, and behaviour. Furthermore, gang members of the participants encouraged the act of abusing their girlfriends. (p. 149). One participant explained that "there's a ton of pressure, like 'Did you fuck her yet? Did you get banged? What did you do with her, what did you do?'" (p.161). Totten explains that socialization into gangs include familial values and patriarchal ideals that support abusive behaviour

and is a common theme amongst participants in the study (p.157). Therefore, it is evident that each aspect of abuse within male youths' lives relate to the familial and gender ideologies, as Totten effectively demonstrates throughout.

Overall, the book contains a vast amount of information on abusive behaviour, the effects of abusive behaviour, the role of male youth in abusive behaviour, and the impact of the many complex factors within each participant's life. Complete with numerous examples, graphs, explanations, and evidence, this book provides a powerful insight into the mind of an abusive male youth. Understanding the multifaceted subject of abuse is not an easy task, yet throughout Totten's book, the information present addresses many aspects of the topic at hand. Totten explains at the beginning of his book the difficulty in defining what exactly abuse is; however, by the end of his book, the reader is left with the understanding of how and why an individual may act in an abusive manner. Furthermore, while Totten's book is limited to the boundaries of his study, Totten's method of conveying his ideas need no improvement.

Totten's goal when writing this book was to find a way to prevent girlfriend abuse. The analysis of these behaviours, while effectively providing insight into sociological processes and theories that can account for the behaviours of the participants, demonstrate the accomplishments this book has achieved. I believe this is an excellent tool for understanding girlfriend abuse, as well as male youth and their role in gangs, and would be a beneficial read to any individual— parent, teacher, law enforcer, health professional, social worker, and so on. Furthermore, I believe this book would benefit the disciplines of sociology, women's studies, child and youth care, education, law, psychology, social work, and police studies, among others. I personally found Guys,

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Gangs, and Girlfriend Abuse informative, engaging, and highly insightful. I would strongly recommend this book to any person interested in the topic of abuse and its complex effects in individuals' lives.