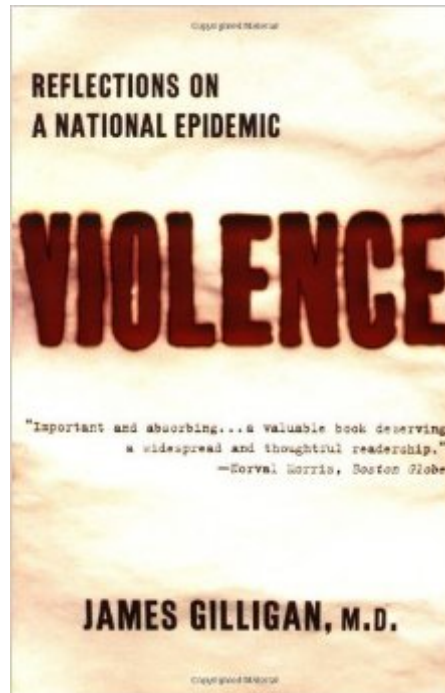


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# Violence: Reflections On A National Epidemic



## Synopsis

Drawing on firsthand experience as a prison psychiatrist, his own family history, and literature, Gilligan unveils the motives of men who commit horrifying crimes, men who will not only kill others but destroy themselves rather than suffer a loss of self-respect. With devastating clarity, Gilligan traces the role that shame plays in the etiology of murder and explains why our present penal system only exacerbates it. Brilliantly argued, harrowing in its portraits of the walking dead, *Violence* should be read by anyone concerned with this national epidemic and its widespread consequences."Extraordinary. Gilligan's recommendations concerning what does work to prevent violence...are extremely convincing...A wise and careful, enormously instructive book."--Owen Renik, M.D., editor, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I lived with violence (or to be more accurate, the constant threat of...) and in an attempt to understand it, I bought James Gilligan's book after I heard him on the radio. Unfortunately the damaged young man named Dennis X described almost perfectly the person who inhabited my apartment space. The author's insight into the twisted logic of violence mirrored my own personal observations. His perspective immediately helped me to set aside emotion and confusion, to communicate and handle my situation better and ultimately plot my successful escape! Useful for any of us who have to navigate amongst angry and potentially violent people in an urban setting.

[Please use the following review in place of my previous review, which I have found contains a few

typos.]The most hopeful insight Gilligan offers about violence is: A person's tortuous, shameful sense of self prompts the act of murder to "symbolically" silence the ridicule one has endured. Does this sound remarkably similar to those humiliated young teenagers who feel compelled to avenge their pain with murderous revenge against their taunting classmates? Gilligan's book offers a sign of hope, for if we are able to significantly prevent violence, it will come from focusing on the underlying "incapacitating feelings" we humans experience when we are repeatedly emotionally wounded. In my new book on education strategies for prevention of violence, I address our cultural reluctance to educate children (and their parents) about the critical importance of understanding their inner reaction to being emotionally wounded. Gilligan, in his own way, seems to be advocating that violent consequences follow blaming others for what WE feel, and then symbolically attempting to punish them (with murder) for our sense of shame. We need more parents, teachers and emotional educators who can demonstrate a healthy and honest way of dealing with emotional wounds other than shaming ourselves or blaming others. It is not rocket science to LEARN how to deal with painful feelings. It is just that we have a deeply embedded cultural tendency to ignore and let our pain build up within us until it erupts into what Gilligan calls the "ritual" of murder. I would venture that few, if any, persons who commit violence were ever taught how to name, own and honor their hurt feelings as a normal -- not shameful -- part of their human vulnerability.

This book is probably one of the most important books written on the subject of violence in America. I would couple it with Steven Stosny's *Treating Attachment Abuse: A Compassionate Approach* as creating a solution to the problem of violence. If you are interested in the solution and not in perpetuating the problem, read these books.

As a scholar who has spent the last 3 years trying to understand what drives men (and now boys) to the extremes that we have witnessed at the Dunblane (Scotland) Elementary School - 19 dead, (March, 1996), the Port Arthur (Tasmania) Historic Site - 35 dead (April 1996), on through a litany of American towns right up to the Columbine High School in Littleton, CO in April 99, I have found the greatest insight into these actions in Gilligan's book. He asserts that at the root of the worst violence, indeed all violence, is shame. I concur. This book must be required for parents, teachers, psychologists, anyone concerned with the roots of violence. Guns provide the means (the British and Australians were wise enough to legislate gun controls after their respective disasters), shame is the driving force behind each of the cases of horror we witness all too frequently!

This book is eye opening. It reveals with powerful and blunt force how much the events of a criminals childhood effects who he/she is when he grows up. There are things in this book that will leave you wanting to put the book down because of their graphic nature. The things the criminals/victims have endured will make you so angry and sad at the same time that you will be inspired to make a difference in the lives of those who have become the dangerous people they were taught to be by their role models and the people they trusted to give them the guidance they needed to grow into normal adults. Read this book if you are ready to take in the truth and be enlightened to a gruesome reality, violence is largely the result of the violence we are subject to. Maybe it's time for us to stop blaming violent people for being violent and create programs and environments that CHANGE it!

I teach classes on the sociology of violence and have recently started assigning this book. Although Gilligan is a psychiatrist and not a sociologist, he offers a sociological understanding of the problem of violence. His arguments are convincing, and his writing is accessible to college students. I disagree with the previous reviewer that the book is poorly edited and poorly written. Gilligan is an excellent writer. His book targets a general readership, but he does not insult an academic audience. I would have liked more than a few pages on what we can do about the problems he outlines. But the book is a great starting point. I consider it a "must-read" for anyone studying the problem of violence.

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