

Man Control

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As a political event, the Million Mom March was about gun control. But as a genuine outpouring of pain and protest, it better demonstrates the need for “man control”—it was a lot like earlier demonstrations that helped give Sunday’s march its name and format.

The trend setting Million Man March of 1995 and the subsequent Promise Keepers’ Washington rally both were massive congregations of men exhorting one another to be better husbands and fathers. They were collective confessions that too many American men today are shirking responsibilities and wreaking havoc.

The marching moms were not admitting their own shortcomings and resolving to shape up themselves. They were instructing *others* to shape up—what moms were blessedly put on this earth to do.

But the “others” responsible for the evils the moms decried are overwhelmingly men. The bulk of the heartbreaking personal stories related in reports on the march involved mothers who had lost sons or husbands to gun violence committed by other men.

Most “gun violence” (along with most knife, club and hand violence) is also “man violence.”

Unfortunately, Sunday’s central call for “sensible gun control” largely obscured this real, core issue. America has not become a more violent society because it abandoned strict gun control. But it did once have stricter “man control” than it has today.

Restraining the reckless impulses of males is a central challenge for every human society. The universal need for man control has been put plainly by social scientist James Q. Wilson: “Men,” he writes,

. . . are more aggressive than women. Though child-rearing practices may intensify or moderate this difference, the difference . . . certainly rests on biological factors. In every known society, men are more likely than women to play roughly, drive recklessly, fight physically and assault ruthlessly.

Other evidence of the modern failure of man control is all around us. In a compelling cover story in this month’s *Atlantic Monthly*, “The War Against Boys,” feminism critic Christina Hoff Sommers argues persuasively that a groundless myth has been spread in recent years to the effect that girls are short-changed in school.

All the real evidence, Sommers argues, is that it is boys, as a group, who are

in crisis—academically, behaviorally, psychologically.

As a result of deliberate blindness about which gender is most troubled, Sommers says, we risk fumbling the elementary social challenge of “civilizing young males.” The “traditional approach” to that challenge, she notes, was “character education, [developing] the young man’s sense of honor” and inculcating the cult of the gentleman.”

Today, by contrast, social transformers abide “moral confusion,” while seeking to alter “masculine nature” itself. Sommers says boys are urged to somehow overcome such innate qualities as competitiveness and aggressiveness, which they can no more discard than they can sprout wings and fly—instead of being given no-nonsense direction about the difference between wholesome and destructive expressions of those qualities.

Violence is, of course, not the only sort of destruction males are especially prone to. The news about New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani also sheds light on the condition of “character” and “honor” in modern culture.

Allegedly, Giuliani has been cheating on his wife for years, finally destroying the marriage. Whether all this is true is uncertain.

But polls reporting that eight of ten New Yorkers think the whole matter utterly “irrelevant” to Giuliani’s fitness for high office is surely a sign of the times—clearer, because the situation lacks allegations of legal wrongdoing, than the message of the Clinton-Lewinsky ordeal.

If men are told by modern society that they can do whatever they please about keeping commitments to women, and can do it without any consequence to their social and professional stature—well, some things are not hard to predict. We will continue to get an epidemic of struggling single mothers and fatherless children.

Modernity’s terrible dilemma is permissive, tolerant modern society (more inclined to permanently lock up guns than criminals), might work pretty well if it weren’t for men. But men are still with us.

It’s sensible man control we need, and we don’t know how to get it back. Ω