

Submission No. 79

(Youth Violence)

A.O.C.

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Inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians

4/26/2010

Alex

Dear Standing Committee on Family, Community Housing & Youth,

Youth violence is a social phenomenon. A social phenomenon that, thankfully, I don't know a lot about. I am not an 'expert' in violence, nor am I particularly interested in it, but I know it goes on. I know it goes on because a couple of years ago I was hit in the face by a young stranger while I was standing on a street in Kings Cross waiting for a taxi. I heard a kind of rattling noise, blacked out and fell to the ground. Luckily, I didn't have to go to hospital. I didn't see the man who hit me, so I have no idea what made him do it, but of course I am curious.

I wonder whether it's worth having an inquiry into violence at all. Will it be an inquiry, or will it be a festival of talking about violence? I don't pay much tax at the moment, but at some point I will, and I wonder if my money might be better spent on other things. It all depends on whether you in the committee will listen to people, and consider what they say. And it depends on whether people will tell you what they honestly think. That is what an inquiry is about, right?

When I read the "terms of reference", I start to think that you won't really be listening to people at all. If you're looking for, among other things, the links between "alcohol abuse and violence," then I think you're looking for something that is staring you in the face. You might as well be looking at a truck bearing down on you, and trying to determine exactly what kind of truck it is, or even more tangentially, how it works, when the best thing to do would be to get out of the way, and then later consider why you were standing on that road in the first place.

I think alcohol has taken the place of far too many things that young people are missing out on. Through the relentless barrage of marketing we subject them to every day, we rob them of their self-expression. Through our reinforcement of narcissistic competitiveness, we rob them of their respect for other people. We inflate their ego and their expectations by not telling them when they have failed. We tacitly teach them that it's not okay to fail, that if they fail they are doomed to continued failure. We teach them that they need success, and conflate success with survival, when in our society at least they are two vastly different things. At the same time, we worship the idea of youth, and denigrate the idea of growing up as an unfortunate but inevitable process, encouraging young people to stay young, and dumb.

Considering all of this it seems a little silly to attempt a forensic investigation into why kids drink and act violently. Could it be that the violence we see today is not the result of a neat confluence of factors, but rather the result of erosion? Could it be that when you take away self-expression, human decency, self-esteem, everything that is necessary for people in a decent and civil society, then drinking excessively is all that seems available to them? Could drinking be a symptom of many other problems with young people, that we're not even beginning to take seriously enough?

We act as though finding the cause of violence is some kind of unanswerable, intractable mystery of the ages. We act as though violence is perpetrated only by unsavoury, debased, already fatally-flawed members of society. We act as though if we could only find *the truth* about violence, then all of our questions would be answered, and all of our problems solved. We also ignore all we have learned about violence. We continue to examine the problem of violence as though we are seeing it for the first time. As though it were a new phenomenon, as though today is separate from yesterday. We tread naively over old ground. If we think we are the first, or the only society

experiencing the problem of violence, then we will not get very far toward understanding it. Instead we will be reinventing the wheel, except that ours will be a wheel that is wobbly and unreliable.

When people aren't behaving how you would like them to in a society you have two main choices: you can a) further erode civil liberties, and conduct 'awareness' campaigns, as though young people are infants, who go about their lives completely 'unaware' of what they are doing; Or b) encourage education, which will inevitably lead people away from violence and stupidity. I believe option a) is more politically expedient and widely practiced whereas option b) is the only way we can actually change behaviour.

I don't understand those who deny that violence is a problem, or that alcohol abuse does not significantly add to violence. I ask these people to walk around the Sydney CBD, or any busy street on a Friday night, and see the drunk kids, see the police, see the ambulances. See the kid at the end of the night lying on the pavement, surrounded by paramedics. I have seen these things with my own eyes regularly, and I don't like what I see. I hear the denialism of the new 'flat earth society', the Australian Hotels Association, and other lobby groups, and I don't like that either. They do not speak for me, and they do not represent me. I don't see whose interests they look after, aside from their own.

Some level of violence is inevitable in a free society, yet I don't want any more violence in my society, much as I don't want to be murdered, or robbed, or abused. I respectfully ask the committee to consider not what violence is, but what it takes the place of.

Sincerely,
Alex

Yes yes yes, there it was. Youth must go, ah yes. But youth is only being in a way like it might be an animal. No, it is not just like being an animal so much as being like one of these malenky toys you viddy being sold in the streets, like little chellovecks made out of tin and with a spring inside and then a winding handle on the outside and you wind it up grrr grrr grrr and off it itties, like walking, O my brothers. But it itties in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing. Being young is like being like one of these malenky machines.
- Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange