



Mad Blood Stirring: The Inner Lives of Violent Men

Daemon Fairless

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With a rare clarity and fearless honesty, journalist Daemon Fairless tackles the horrors and compulsions of male violence from the perspective of someone who struggles with violent impulses himself, creating a non-fiction masterpiece with the narrative power of novels such as *Fight Club* and *A History of Violence*.

A man, no matter how civilized, is still an animal--and sometimes a dangerous one. Men are responsible for the lion's share of assault, rape, murder and warfare. Conventional wisdom chalks this up to socialization, that men are taught to be violent. And they are. But there's more to it. Violence is a dangerous desire--a set of powerful and inherent emotions we are loath to own up to. And so there remains a hidden geography to male violence--an inner ecosystem of rage, dominance, blood-lust, insecurity and bravado--yet to be mapped. *Mad Blood Stirring* is journalist Daemon Fairless's riveting first-person travelogue through this territory as he seeks to understand the inner lives of violent men and, ultimately, himself.

Mad Blood Stirring: The Inner Lives of Violent Men Details

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From Reader Review Mad Blood Stirring: The Inner Lives of Violent Men for online ebook

Louise says

This reads more like a memoir, a cathartic rumination by the author to try to make sense of and to understand his own violent tendencies.

Krista says

Benvolio. I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire:
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And, if we meet, we shall not 'scape a brawl;
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring.

~ *Romeo and Juliet*

Mad Blood Stirring didn't turn out to be the book I was expecting – in a surprisingly satisfying way. Subtitled “The Inner Lives of Violent Men”, and written by a journalist with a Master's Degree in neuroscience, I thought this would be a mix of hard science and philosophy (in the vein of Steven Pinker or James Gleick). But right from the book's Introduction, author Daemon Fairless proves himself a captivating storyteller, and by focussing on the stories of real people – those he interviews and himself – he is able to illustrate male violence without getting bogged down in studies and stats (although plenty of science is cited here as well). Fairless may have gone looking for explanations for his own violent impulses, and he may have written a memoir here more than anything else, but I found it all fascinating and relatable and a worthwhile read.

Yes, I have White Hat Syndrome. Yes, I want to make the world a better place by confronting – no, let's be honest – by vanquishing the people I find threatening, domineering, manipulative and sadistic. But that white hat sits atop an angry head. And beneath that anger is a twitchy and hyper-vigilant person who is overattuned to threatening sounds in the underbrush.

Right from the Introduction, Fairless explains that he's the kind of man who is always spoiling for a fight – intervening with belligerent customers in stores, chasing down purse-snatchers, responding to cries in the night. He's a big man, and over the years, he has trained with weights and martial arts – when Fairless walks into a room sizing up the other men, imagining who he could take down in a fight, this seems to go beyond the average fantasy; he's *hoping* someone gets in his face. Fairless also explains that his parents were hippies – he was raised with limited television and no toy guns; he was awash in feminist and pacifist theory; he marched and rallied and considers himself a “post-patriarchal man”. And yet, the fighting; the genuine *bloodlust*. In seeking explanations for his own darkest urges, Fairless shares stories that illustrate the whole

range of violent behaviour.

People who live in violent places, particularly kids raised in violent subcultures, have higher levels of chronic anger. They tend to view relationships in a hostile, mistrustful way. They perceive the world and the people in it as dangerous and threatening. And if they also happen to be carrying one of the environmentally sensitive genes, fear and anger are amplified – all the more so if they're carrying more than one of these alleles.

In each section in *Mad Blood Stirring*, Fairless tells a big story about a sanctioned form of male violence and contrasts it with both the criminal extremes and his own personal urges. In the first, Fairless tells the story of a MMA fighter – his training, his history, his experiences – and adds smaller stories here and there from the male culture of honour – from schoolyard bullies to frontier justice – and begins to share his own history; from his childhood as both the bullied and the bully, to his own fight training. As the book progresses, the sections deal with increasingly violent activities: contrasting an inner city high school football team with the kind of petty criminal their coach hopes to prevent his players from becoming; a willing participant in BDSM activity is contrasted against a serial rapist; the story of a cruelly manipulative parent is set off against a psychopathic serial killer; the tribalism of sports fans is compared to warmongers and the higher purpose of a professional soldier. Throughout, Fairless adds stories from his own life and cites fascinating stats (75% of men have had specific homicidal fantasies? Up to 50% of men would commit rape if they knew they'd get away with it? Chimps routinely organise war raids against neighbouring troops?), and it all works together to shine a light on what seems natural and ubiquitous; the constant suppression of male violence that allows for human civilisation.

Now, having said that, I have no idea if most men actually walk around with Fairless' constant fantasies of violence and sex – the women he sees are all evaluated for their own uses – but his openness and relatable voice made this a fascinating examination of his own experience. More a memoir than I had been expecting, it was the personal focus of *Mad Blood Stirring* that I most engaged with.

Elizabeth Chadsey says

Very interesting (and also hella Canadian - From Ottawa, living in Toronto!) this was a good blend of gender study/personal memoir on the topic of male violence, aggression, and fighting. The author talks a lot about his own experiences growing up and through stages of outlets and outbursts. He also meets and writes about the relevant experiences of friends and criminals. I'd have liked to read more about incarcerated criminals/extreme cases and less about boxing and hockey, but that's a personal preference, the latter are still relevant examples of male violence and honestly, not what one might think of immediately when the topic is mentioned. It is good to realize those more mundane, socially acceptable examples are still violence. This is worth reading.

Kevin says

Apparently this is going to be part of my spring round-up on "Canadian books about why men are the way they are." Having just finished *Mad Blood Stirring: The Inner Lives of Violent Men* and with *Why Young*

Men: Rage, Race and the Crisis of Identity and Boys: What It Means to Become a Man on the horizon, it's going to be a testosterone-filled few months.

This one, by Daemon Fairless, is split into five chapters based around big events in the author's life. He then weaves lessons (mostly about when he got really angry with someone) in between paragraphs of these larger stories to end with... the same thing every time? The gist of each chapter is this:

Men are naturally predisposed to be angry.

Here's something that I looked into about men being violent because of their anger.

I used to yell at a lot of people in public. I am an angry man too, but not as angry as some men.

Here is the lesson I learned.

Too bad not all men will learn these lessons like I have.

Spoiler: (view spoiler) Surprise surprise.

I don't know, the whole thing seemed to start as an investigation into what the book's subtitle states, but by the end it just felt like a bloated diatribe that let the author get out some of his anger through writing about it. Some of the stories he delves into are interesting, but it is ultimately diluted as he sticks his own holier-than-thou persona into each chapter. Way too earnest.

Nikmaack says

A nice mix of personal memoir, first person journalism, and a kind of self help anger management. It goes to heavy places: rapists, psychopaths, pedophiles, and fans of soccer. A bit saccharin in places, but never dull. Extremely readable. Many of the ideas prompted me to talk about the book with friends -- a sure sign of a good book.

If you're trying to understand male aggression, this book will give you some insights for sure. Enjoyable, if (like me) you enjoy reading about the dark.

Danielle Tremblay says

Thanks to GoodReads' giveaways and the publisher for this book I got in exchange for an honest review.

This is an amazing and very convincing book written by Mr. Fairless. He did a thorough scientific research on his subject, that's obvious. And he also provided concrete evidence of what he was saying by describing events in his own life, but also by interviewing other violent people.

Moreover, if some may find this book difficult to read because it alternates between sciences and life stories, that made it more digestible to me, who is a neophyte in the different biological, psychological, historical and social aspects of violence in all its forms, shapes and angles.

Mr. Fairless is far from deserving his last name. ;) He is a man who knows how to balance things between nature and nurture, and objectively recognize his own wrongs.

I could have quoted dozens of dead-on statements from this book, let me quote just this one:
"My point is that BDSM is a culture that has been invented to negotiate a common and potentially dangerous desire. BDSM is not the desire; it is a set of controls we have invented to mitigate the danger imposed by the desire."

Anyway, violence is something we must not sweep under the rug. And I'm sure that any of you will learn something valuable about it from this book. I recommend « Mad Blood Stirring » to everyone who seeks to understand human condition and nature, and especially to those who live with sometimes violent people, regardless of their genders.

Stephanie says

Incredibly well written.
Stays with you long after the last page.

Thank you for choosing me to receive a free copy via GoodReads giveaways.

Janice says

Daemon Fairless is a man who seeks to understand the inherent inner violence present in many men. He uses his journalistic perspective and academic skills to explore the genetic, biological, emotional and socialization components which foster aggression and the need to physically dominate. This may sound like a boring academic treatise but it is instead quite fascinating. He discusses academic research but combines this with case studies and personal exploration of his own struggles with physical aggression. All in all, this is a very interesting and well-written book. I recommend it.

My thanks to NetGalley for providing me with an eARC in exchange for my honest review.

Trevor Pearson says

Received a copy of Mad Blood Stirring by Daemon Fairless through the GoodReads giveaway program in exchange for an honest review

Mad Blood Stirring by Daemon Fairless is about what on the surface looks like your everyday people, what makes them different is they are people who let their emotions take hold and their overwhelming urges drive them to commit violent and heinous acts. The author covers the prominent nature vs. nurture debate, family upbringing, abuse, bullying, and the risk factors that manifest later into depression, substance abuse and even suicide. But this is not the purpose for the book because many people have lived through much more traumatic events and have not resorted to violence to solve their problems. The primary questions the at

times violent author himself raises is what differentiates his own thirst to protect his family and the indefensible from those that cause people to kill in the name of satisfaction or relief? What emotions come before the violent act? What is the thought process that causes serial sex offenders to rape, ex-cons to stay in that never-ending cycle of violence, local toughs trying to prove themselves at every turn, and killers actually committing the greatest crime against humanity? Mad Blood Stirring addresses and does its best to answer these hard questions but in the end, the interested spectators are still left where we started; and that is we may have a better understanding but we'll never really know.

"There is an aspect of rage that is analogous to lust. Rage begets rage. It spawns itself. It builds up like clouds looming on the horizon. It causes a discomfort that is not entirely unpleasant, that is pendulous and heavy and can take the place of an emptiness if you are feeling empty. When you are full this way, it is pleasant to think about satisfying that rage. The more you think about it, the more it grows. The more it grows, the stronger the desire to think about it. It is an itch at first, then a tingle, then a pulsation, then a throbbing."

For a nonfiction book I found Mad Blood Stirring to be very effective in how it utilized hard-hitting primary research through interviews as well as more scientific and poignant secondary research in partnership with that of personal revelations and detailed introspection. There is a lot of honesty and emotion found in the more personal but also an understanding and compulsion to let the reader know what makes violent men do what they do. I find much of the nonfiction I read to be too academic filled with data, jargon, and other information not meant for people without special knowledge or experience. This concept never made much sense to me because if it's a loved subject that demanded much time away from friends and family as well as the expected energy drained from the writing process why not make it accommodating for as large an audience as possible and reap more rewards? The author achieved this with personal anecdotes, tangible emotion in conjunction with suitable research and interesting reporting. The author is a self-described violent man that goes through the normal wave of emotion, adrenaline, restraint and ultimate call to action when he feels a wrong needs to be righted. He's violent but only in the name of a loved one's safety, civic duty, justice and keeping the streets clean. His desire for thrill and adrenaline far outweighed logic and potential for danger when it came to violence. He presents his unorthodox childhood as a way to make a case for his violent tendency's but he also doesn't place blame and really just wants a resolution.

"Along with this conscious consideration of detail, there's something else: a building surge on the horizon, moving towards me quickly, an impending wave, a deep, seductive swell. He's a piece of trash. There's a lapping coolness between my temples. People all around me are scared, nervous. They feel threatened. Not me. It's different in me, it's a growing itch, a form of lust. A predatory hard-on. I want him on his knees. Subjugated. Scared. I'm out of my seat. I'm standing beside him."

It's also an enlightening experience when you learn a little more about yourself in the process of reading and that someone else shares some of the same experiences. For instance I finally found a name for the scary images I see in between the states of wakefulness and sleep. Ever since I was a young child I had these visions of geometrical shapes, vivid game show type scenarios, and scary faces that I have never experienced in my awake state of consciousness. As I got older they maintained there presence but as I would work on different projects or needed some creative thinking I turned the table on its face and used it to my advantage.

While I was channeling unnatural negative images from my subconscious I was also coming up with creative ideas that I never could have imagined and would prove to be beneficial when counting sheep or multiplication tables didn't work. I also have had moments of sleep paralysis caused by lucid dreams, refocusing eyes, and the way a light shone in the bedroom. If any have done that Jesus optical illusion where you look at an image for a number of seconds and close your eyes and you see Jesus, well it's the same idea but it ain't no Jesus I'm seeing. The cure all (knock on wood) has been to strictly sleep on the right side, we'll see how long that lasts before a paralyzed scream resembling that of a turkey gobble comes reverberating through the hallway. By no means am I tortured soul, in fact my fears are rational and I enjoy horror movies but these episodes were very curious. The author also suffers from pre-sleep hallucinations called hypnagogia and I appreciate the help in diagnosis, Web MD need not apply.

No surprise but men are the biggest culprit when it comes endangering themselves as well as others, especially younger men. Each man is different, you have to dig deep within the male psyche, which can be a dangerous proposition in it self to find where violence derives from. This intoxicating world more often than not favours the larger and more aggressive young male and is a determining factor when distinguishing an alpha. This status of dominance and drive to make another man break is what turns men to violence and when you consider the ignorance, testosterone and brashness it makes for a harmful mix. As a child, around ten or eleven years of age my violent thoughts came from protecting my family. My father worked nights and wouldn't come home until two in the morning and I wouldn't feel safe until he got home. I had a plan of attack if there was a disturbance that centred around a massive basketball trophy I had, but there were contingencies. Unlike the author I don't go around scouting adversaries, nor when I fight do I look to gouge eyes, I always assumed there was an honour amongst men when in a simple street fight, not with the author, he fights dirty.

*“The killer makes you feel precisely the other way. You know he’s a real person. It’s clear he’s a flesh-and-blood *Homo sapiens*. But listening to him talk about his emotions and the emotions of others, or reading aloud his lessons in emotional well-being and self-esteem, you have the distinct feeling he is reciting sophisticated command functions from a file named something like c://emotions/human/emulator.”*

Overall I enjoyed my time with this book, it offered great insight from interesting sources, conversation topics with family and friends as well as introspection into my own experience with violence. For most habitual offenders there seems to be a neurological disconnection and the author used this book as a means for displaying his findings while searching for the black box in the recesses of the brain. The book can be graphic and is not for the feint of heart, but if you're interested in this topic or gaining a better understanding of what makes people commit violent acts I suggest grabbing yourself a copy and strapping yourself in because it will be a bumpy ride. Recommended.

“It occurred to me that when we are younger, we believe we are the projectile, the thing that is intended to reach its mark. We aim at a distant target only to realize later, mid-flight, that we’re not the projectile at all. We’re the catapult. We are catapults flinging catapults forever into the future.”

Angelina Rose says

This was a hard book for me to read, in some ways. A lot of triggers for me as I read it. But it was worth it. A stunningly well written look at things from a different viewpoint than I would normally hold. Very intriguing book!!!

Tobin Elliott says

This book didn't turn out to be what I was expecting, exactly. I think I was expecting a much more seriously textbook style narrative on violent men.

Instead, I got a thoughtful, insightful look into the various worlds of violence, and also a partial memoir on the author looking deeply at his own—and his family's—violent tendencies.

I come from a violent family. I've been witness to my father pushing my mother down a hill and breaking her leg. I've come home to my stepfather eating a dinner he cooked over my mother's prone body, still unconscious on the kitchen floor. I've had to get my mother out of her own house because her third husband was rigging various parts of the home to kill her. And it's not just the men in my mother's life. My brother is also a violent man, having beaten at least a couple of the women in his life. From a young age, I was told that I had to learn to fight, or I'd never be a man.

I've been in a couple of violent altercations in my life, but I've never started one.

But I'm fascinated, and always looking to understand the violent nature that is presumably ingrained somewhere deep in my genetic makeup.

This book is a terrifying look into that violent nature through several lenses. It's short on answers and long on questions, but still, it's a book that will stay with me—and make me question my own thought processes, as well as those of my family—for a long time to come.

Highly recommended.

Nathan Maharaj says

As singular and messy as a sidewalk scuffle. I loved it but I can't explain it.

Kevin M says

I had a hard time deciding on 4 or 3 stars for this book, but I feel ultimately that while there is much said that is worth reading and talking about, some issues of style and focus hold it back.

This is not a light book, and rightly so, it's pretty heavy subject matter. Trying to get at the root causes and motivations behind male violence was never going to be easy-going. Mr. Fairless does an excellent job of presenting his own anecdotal experiences of the urge of violence alongside the science of violence and aggression. Rather than some hand-waving and moralizing this is a frank stare into why men fight, rape, kill, and scrap, and it rings true (at least to me, and I wager most men) about the pleasure and anticipation we may be hard-wired to feel at the prospect of fighting for what we see as just or fair. Biology isn't the whipping boy in this story however, nature and nurture both are called to account, and their interactions considered.

Where this book lost me however, is the level of personal detail. It is at its best and most interesting when considering the subjects of his interviews and forays into succinct descriptions of the academic analyses. But these are chopped up throughout the book by what feel like digressions into the writer's motivations for writing, and experiences with violence in his own life. I feel this is not a direct analytical essay on the topic, but strays into memoir. There is also much jumping around between interviewees within chapters that I think could have been better streamlined.

Ultimately, there is a line I keep coming back to where Fairless says, "...I didn't even set out to write much about myself. I envisioned a dispassionate, research-heavy book about the objective realities of male violence"(pg. 259-60). I can't help but feel like that's the book I want to read.

Still, I would recommend a read of all but the last chapter perhaps. These are issues we shouldn't shy away from, and Mr. Fairless explores them thoroughly.

Daniella Armstrong says

Review to come

Melissa T says

I won a copy of this book via Goodreads Giveaways

This packs a pretty hefty punch. It's well thought out, and very well researched. It gives multiple perspectives on the reasons for male violence, told through a series of anecdotes, obtained by the author via interviews with a variety of men.

The writing style is one of the things I enjoyed most about reading this. Given the subject matter, there was the expectation that it would be dry, and difficult to get through. I was pleasantly surprised that it was quite the opposite. The tone and style of writing are realistic, which makes it much more digestible. I have an Associate's Degree in Psychology and a Bachelor's in Sociology, so none of the concepts are foreign to me, but I liked the fact that the author didn't try to dumb things down, so to speak. I find that when authors try to make the subject matter more palatable by breaking it down it makes a book difficult to engage with.

Fairless wrote with the assumption that the reader would already be aware of the concepts. And even for people who have no experience with these concepts, it's written in such a way that they can still appreciate the points of view.

I fall into the same camp as the author, being that I believe that neither nature, nor nurture is solely responsible for human behavior, that it falls somewhere in the middle. Human behavior is way too complex to be that black and white. His own upbringing was a juxtaposition of peace and chaos.

It was interesting to read how the author was so unsettled within himself, always looking, always searching for something. I've had that feeling, though not in the same manifestation. And certainly not with the degree of bloodlust (mine is zero) that the author has. I'm actually quite surprised Fairless never got into more trouble with some of the stunts he pulled. It seems he had a bit of a hero complex. I got the feeling that he softened up a bit after the birth of his daughter, but even then there were a few questionable scenarios.

The variety of backgrounds of the different men he interviewed covered a wide range of behaviors, and tendencies.

As much research, and studying as I've done, some of these scenarios that these men talked about were just too much at times, and I did have to put the book down now and again.

There is violence everywhere in our culture. Some people experience it firsthand, with abuse. Others learn certain aspects of it via social conditioning. "Be a man, toughen up, etc." Girls are taught that teasing, and hitting are signs that a boy likes them. Sexual violence, and volatile behaviors are normalized in mainstream media.

But, just because these things are prevalent in our culture doesn't mean that all men are violent. For some men, violent tendencies are hardwired. And I would imagine that some aspects of their upbringing probably contribute to their behaviors as adults. But, just because someone grows up in an abusive home doesn't mean that they will become abusive. Just because they watch violence in movies or on tv doesn't mean that they will be violent. And besides, some people with seemingly normal, sweet demeanors can be capable of behavior we wouldn't even begin to fathom they'd be capable of.

So, it's all a mixture. A blend of environment and biology. I learned some interesting facts that humans are not the only species who rape, though motivation for forced sex within the animal kingdom is slightly different in some ways. Rape in human culture is usually about power and dominance. And this is the same in the animal kingdom, but for many animals it's about the further propagation of the species as well.

Another interesting exploration was the outlets for male violence. The author used physical training, weights, martial arts, running. He even considered becoming a police officer at one point. (which for me furthered the idea of the hero complex.)

Some of the men he interviewed were UFC fighters. Others had been violent in the past, and were now trying to redeem themselves by helping kids in the neighborhoods they came from. He discussed the research on violence after sporting events, and the mob mentality those events can bring about. As well as the demographic aspects of war, and how particularly violent periods in certain countries history may be a result of the natural control of the youth bulge.

I could continue on, but I won't. I will say that this book would make excellent reading for a college course on men, masculinity and society, or the sociology of gender.
