

Violence, Our Responses to Violence & Breaking the Cycle of Violence

Agree or disagree, or are you somewhere in between?

There are many forms of violence.

Violence is complex, and not only expressed as direct violence (eg, fists, knives, guns) but can also be structural (eg, laws specifically excluding certain groups) and cultural (eg, traditions and habits perpetuated by the dominant mainstream culture, perhaps the determinant of another (marginal) group).

Violence is the inevitable solution.

A prevailing cultural attitude we have been taught since childhood and continue to encounter every day in our lives is about myths of what and who constitutes the powerful, and the powerless, and the necessity of violence. In other words, a prevailing cultural attitude is the age-old battle of good versus evil, or what critical theologian Walter Wink calls 'the myth of redemptive violence'.

Cultural violence dehumanises other cultures or groups.

Cultural violence includes aspects, of a culture expressed through its beliefs, values, attitudes and ways of being that give legitimacy to violence and make violence seem like an acceptable means of responding to a conflict. It often supports or promotes a sense of superiority over, and dehumanisation of other cultures or groups.

Our violent scripts

The cycle of violence is perpetuated by the violent scripts used by individuals and society. Generally we respond to any life situation (including conflict) by drawing on learned patterns, habits and myths we've learned.

Samples of these scripts

The three most common scripts for dealing with violence are accommodate it, avoid it, respond to violence with violence. Accommodating violence is an approach that sees no other option than passivity and silence. It ignores or pretends the violent situation is not happening. Avoiding it means standing on the sidelines and not getting involved or to deputise someone else (the police, military) to deal with the problem.

The two hands of nonviolence

Nonviolent actions, empathy and creativity are ways of breaking this cycle of violent, of exploring and learning new patterns and scripts. When we respond to violence with nonviolence we are extending one hand forward with a powerful and loud *'No! That behaviour must stop! I refuse to honour the role you are choosing to play. Your behaviour is unacceptable. With this hand I will interfere using creativity and love the wrong you are doing.'* Simultaneously the other hand reaches out with love, empathy and connection to say *'I won't cast you out of the human race, I have faith that you can make a better choice than you are making now, when you are ready, I'll be here. Like it or not, we are part of one and another and need each other.'*

Discussion points drawn from Pace e Bene's book Engaged: Exploring nonviolent living