

The Social Breakdown SOC 110 – Violence Nature vs Nurture

ELLEN: Hello and welcome to The Social Breakdown, the podcast where we break down our complex world one topic at a time using our sociological imagination. We are your hosts,

PENN: Penn

OMAR: Omar

ELLEN: And I am Ellen, and today's topic is violence. So, we're talking about violence today.

We've been talking recently about the criminal justice system, resistance, they're all kind of related to violence. So, the first thing we want to talk about is what is violence. Elizabeth Stanko in 2001 came up with a definition that tends to be cited quite often in sociology, which is that violence is quote, any form of behavior by any individual that intentionally threatens to or does cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm to others or themselves. So, it's important to note that along with this definition that sociology sees violence as not only an individually perpetrated thing, like it's not just between one person and another person or one person and a group of people, but it can also happen in the collective. So, one of the things we're going to bring into the discussion later on in the episode is mob violence, which is something that Penn written quite a bit about.

PENN: Hey, 291 pages.

ELLEN: Exactly. 291 pages of mob violence.

OMAR: That's dedication.

ELLEN: Yeah, another really good example of this, it would be like genocide is a very good example of collective violence. So, this brings us to the idea that violence as everything that we talk about runs on a spectrum. And this spectrum on

one end, very visible violence to on the other end, almost invisible violence. So, we'll start with visible, very visible violence would be kind of the interpersonal violence that we previously discussed. So that would be something like bullying, intimate partner violence, mass shootings. So, this is where you see bruises and blood and bodies. And this is a very kind of visual violence that we see quite a bit of in media and the news and TV and movies, etc.

OMAR: And then there's also another more pervasive form of violence, which is symbolic violence. And an author or sociologist that we talked about previously is Pierre Bourdieu distinction in 1979. He quotes symbolic violence as "it is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity, which can be unconscious." And this is also indicative of systems of domination. We have a social agreement of other types of violence. So, this an example of this would be the agreement between men and women that women are the weaker sex or unreliable, or the idea held by people of all classes, the lower classes are dumb, lazy and deserve to be poor. And then the reverse upper class is highly intelligent, go getters, they want to be upwardly mobile, etc., etc. And this is symbolic violence, because this agreement doesn't need to or social contract doesn't need to be exercised in bloody form, or through physical force.

ELLEN: Yeah, so on the spectrum of visible to invisible, symbolic violence would lie more on the invisible end of this.

PENN: One more thing about symbolic violence was that we did discuss this concept a couple episodes ago, I think when we're talking about cultural appropriation as a form of symbolic violence. It's basically violence that's not on the body, but on your identity and culture. And ideas and ideas, your psyche.

OMAR: And ideas

PENN: And ideas

ELLEN: Your psyche

PENN: Yes, yeah, that stuff that you can't see.

OMAR: And it's violent, because there are always going to be consequences for whoever is situated in this form of symbolic violence. So, with the example with women, oftentimes they are locked out of social institutions, obviously, it could be in the form of stereotypes, but then there are consequences for when we believe that women are the weaker sex and men are dominant, that also ties right back into rape culture. And these a lot of these physical forms of violence hinges on symbolic forms of violence that happen, usually before physical violence occurs.

ELLEN: Yeah, I mean, as you're saying that Omar, what popped up was like how Mike Pence, our vice president refuses to have meetings with women if they're just alone. And if he's just alone, because he says he'll only...

PENN: Meet with his wife

ELLEN: Yeah, he only meets in private with his wife. So those who agree with his idea would be participating in symbolic violence, because that idea is one that a limits women from attaining higher positions in government, because they wouldn't be able to do their job properly, because they could not take private meetings with the vice president or with somebody in power. And B, it publicly advocates this idea that, oh, women are these Eve-like characters who are there to prey upon unsuspecting men.

OMAR: That's a good example.

PENN: So, the next thing we want to talk about is structural violence. So, moving from the more individual aspect of violence, very physical face to face to symbolic violence, a very not that's the invisible forms of violence. There's also structural violence. Johan Guldung wrote in 1969, a piece called violence, peace and peace research. And he says, a structural violence is a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. So that we're talking about structural violence is

institutional violence, right? This is violence at the systemic level, not at the individual level. An obvious example of this would be genocide, the systematic oppression and mass murder of a particular group of people, less obvious would be denying people groups of people medical care with the knowledge that they could die, right? So just abandoning people no matter what the leprosy colony that was on Molokai here in Hawaii was a good example of that, because they were just basically shipped off to this particular island, so that it couldn't spread leprosy, but that they wouldn't receive medical care.

ELLEN: Yeah, it's a very interesting place to go to. It's called Kalaupapa. And it's one of the few existing leper colonies. So, it's still a leper colony. Yeah, I think there's about six or seven lepers that are there and you can go I went with my partner and we took like a mule ride down because you go down the switchbacks. It's on the other side of this ridge on Molokai Island. So, they were totally quarantined and cut off from society and didn't have a lot of medical care or resources and they just kind of had to fend for themselves. And this was like hundreds of adults and children who were sent this leprosy colony. It's an interesting story.

OMAR:

No, yeah, it really is. And it's really sad. Being barred from medical services, or the medical institution in general, has a long history in the United States. And that is a very serious form of structural violence for sure.

PENN:

Yeah. So, Donald Black, who's a very big criminologist sociologist, he has a lot of interesting ideas. If you go and look at his stuff, he's written his most famous book, probably *The Behavior of Law*. He also wrote *Moral Times*, but he was very interested in structures. And one of his things was that there are no violent people, there are just violent structures, just that the structure that people are embedded in are actually violence. So, here's a quote from one of his writings on the geometry of terrorism. He says that "violence might appear to be an unpredictable outburst or unexplainable explosion, but it arises with geometrical precision. It is unpredictable and unexplainable only if we seek its origins in the characteristics of individuals, such as their beliefs or frustrations, or in the characteristics of

societies, communities, or other collectivities, such as their cultural values or level of inequality.” Right. So, he's saying we shouldn't look at the individual or even at the community level to find reasons to explain violence. He says that “violent individuals and violent collectivities do not exist. No individual or collectivity is violent in all settings at all times. And neither individualistic nor collectivistic theories predict and explain precisely when and how violence occurs. Just because an individual is violent once doesn't mean they'll be violent again.” Right. And just because a person is violent doesn't mean they're violent all the time. Yeah. And so, because of that unpredictable nature of violence, we shouldn't look towards individuals and look at their motives or their beliefs or their emotionality or their morality, we should be looking at the environment that they're embedded in. So, this is a very sociological perspective on violence, where we look at this great broader social context. And it's kind of hard to wrap your mind around when you ignore it. And I think you lose a lot ignoring the individual for sure. But yeah, this was his thing that the structures that we're in are violent.

ELLEN: Yeah, I think that that segues really well into another very well-known sociologist named Randall Collins, who he does a lot on violence. And also, he's an emotions guy. But he came out with a book called *Violence, A Micro Sociological Theory*. And in it, his big thing is that if you were to look at everyday life, in reality, we all work really hard at avoiding violent situations. And we all advocate for nonviolent ways of dealing with situations. So, violence in general is a very rare phenomenon to run into or to be exposed to.

PENN: Right, this goes back to our thing on myth busting criminology, the week before is that we are living in safer times, which means that outbursts of violence are actually becoming more rare, they're being reported more because of mass media. So, it seems like there's more violence, but actually, in everyday life, there's less and less violence. And when you think about the individual, like everyday experience, to encounter constant, constant violence is actually very rare, unless you're living in that kind of environment where violence is, is breeding.

ELLEN: Yeah, yeah, which we have, we have a few environments here in the States, that definitely breed violence. If you were to look at the south side of Chicago, the amount of gun violence happening there, it's an epidemic for sure.

OMAR: Right. And that's a good example of, you don't have to necessarily look inside someone's brain to figure out why violence is occurring, we can easily point to a lot of the structural context that those individuals in those communities are surrounded in that would lead someone to acts of violence for a variety of reasons.

PENN: Okay, so in line with violence being rare, we can ask, why is violence rare? And Colin's answer to that is that violence is not easy. It's actually very hard. Because most people, if even if they're in a very tense and fearful situation, they have to overcome a lot of emotional and morality and thinking and just like themselves in order to proceed into acts of violence. So, here's a quote from Colin's book. He says that "violence is a set of pathways around confrontational tension and fear. Despite their bluster, and even in situations of apparently uncontrollable anger, people are tense and often fearful in the immediate threat of violence, including their own violence. This is the emotional dynamic that determines what they will do if fighting actually breaks out." So, violence is very tied to emotions?

ELLEN: Right, violence usually happens because some type of emotion in the tense and fearful situation has triggered the violent reaction. And that trigger can cause a person to cross that emotional threshold become violent, but that usually doesn't happen for everyone. I mean, just think about how many times, how angry you get. I mean, I get super like crazy road rage.

ELLEN: Had just got angry that repairman came to fix her gutter.

PENN: Oh, yeah.

ELLEN: In the middle of this recording.

PENN: Yeah. Also, he was doing a personal call while I was trying to talk to him and I was not having it. But I also get crazy road rage. Like if you're in a car with me, I swear a lot. If people caught in front of me, I like can cannot but I've never like in response gone and like ram someone in the back of their car, you know, or if like, I'm on the streets and I'm a pedestrian and a car cuts me off. How many times

have I thought about kicking that car or spitting at the car? Whatever. But I don't like I don't cross that, like even that little threshold to like, physically react, you know, to someone being, you know, a bad driver.

ELLEN: It's interesting, even when you think about like, when you if you were to defend yourself from a violent situation. So, when I first went off to college, I went to Seattle, I was in the University of Washington. And I would go on like runs because I was, I gained the freshman 25 because I'm an overachiever. I go on runs, but I'd usually go at nighttime, because that's when I had time to go. And around the university, it was a little bit, there's some sketchy areas.

PENN: UW is actually not the nicest. I mean, like, there's some sketchy, shady areas.

ELLEN: There's some sketchy areas

PENN:
In all parts of it.

ELLEN: So, I would go running and then I just always felt a little bit too sketched out. Right. So, on Christmas break, I got home and I was talking to my dad and I said, hey, dad, I want to go buy a pocketknife just to carry around when I'm running.

Right. So, I can defend myself.

PENN: Right.

ELLEN: And he looked at me and he was like, really? Are you really going to stab somebody? And he's like, that's what they like. He's like, think about it. I like are you really going to get to a point even if somebody is like has accosted you as saying like, maybe has touched you in a way? Are you really gonna pull out like a four-inch pocketknife and stab that person?

Like, is that in you to do it? And so, he's like, think about it. And then if you say yes to it, we'll go get you a knife. And so, I thought about it. And I was like, no, I can't like that's that. Yeah, that's not something that I would be able to do. So, we ended up getting pepper spray, which I've never used.

PENN: Oh, that's what I was just about to suggest. Yeah. But having it is a nice Yeah, it's just for your own mental well-being. Right. So that you don't cross that threshold.

OMAR: Both of you kind of touched on both really important things. The difference between I guess, maybe verbal or soft or symbolic violence in the form of I'm going to curse in the car and be very agitated at this person. But then when you crosses over into physical violence, there's a lot more hesitation, or at least you don't know if you could bring yourself to do that. But then also, I think we were we tend to be really hesitant when we know we're dealing with strangers or people in public. But when you think about maybe like parenting, a lot of parents would use symbolic or physical violence very quickly to

PENN: And, people expect that you do. Yeah, like, oh, you should have spanked that kid.

OMAR: Right, right. yes, exactly.

PENN: Like I'm so proud. I spanked my child. He turned out great.

OMAR: Yeah.

PENN: Like what? Why is violence against children the only sanctioned violence in America? Yeah, or the world?

ELLEN: Well, okay, Omar, I have a question for you. Because Penn and I, Penn, obviously is more of a verbally violent person. I'm more of a pepper spray type of person. What about but we're both women, right? And we, I I've never found myself yet in a situation where I thought that I was really at in physical harm, or that when I get into confrontations with other people, they don't think of using

violence as a way to deal with that situation, probably because I am a girl, right? So, what about you as a man? Have you seen any difference there from what Penn and I described?

OMAR: I definitely think we live in a society in which women are more fearful of certain types of violence. And that's not saying that's like an over exaggeration or paranoia. Let's give you a perfect example. My girlfriend and I were walking back to our apartment one time at night walking our dog. And this guy was running, running, just running outside. It was at night.

And she turned to me and said, oh, so lucky that he could do that. And I was like, what do you mean? And she said, well, it's not like he has to worry about being raped or something like that. And I was like, yeah, no, you're, you're, you're, you're definitely right. If that were me, like I that wouldn't have been a thought to cross my mind.

PENN: Yeah, a guy would never think that.

OMAR: And then the reverse, I think is, um, men tend to think that well, it's, it's definitely learned that aggression and violence is a good way to achieve something or end or settle a dispute. But just because violence could be effective doesn't mean I think is a viable solution at all. Because you're at that point, you're playing on someone's fear, and you're exercising your intimidation and power over them. I don't know if being violent is necessarily explaining why you're doing something wrong. Like I've gotten beat plenty of times when I was a kid. But that just allowed me to, to associate if I do something wrong, I'm going to get hit. And I want to avoid being hit. I don't know if that really taught me why whatever act I was doing was wrong in and of itself.

ELLEN: Okay, it didn't teach you the moral lessons of it. Yeah, just taught you like the kind of reasoning aspect of like, I don't like x, therefore, I will not do y to get x.

PENN: Yeah, it's pain avoidance.

OMAR: Yeah, it's gonna be yeah, like exactly pain avoidance.

PENN: You don't wanna be in pain, so, why would you do something to put you in a situation? That's interesting.

OMAR: Then, then I quickly realized, oh, well, my parents aren't going to kill me. So, it doesn't really matter.

PENN: That's the thing, like, even if there's violence that occurs, there's still like another threshold after you cross the threshold, you actually go into violence that kills or violence that severely harms. That's a whole nother level of, of violence. So, Collins definitely agrees with Black when they say that people aren't violent, but there are violent situations that people react to. Obviously, there's been a lot of critiques to this, because a lot of researchers, including in sociology have talked about the biological propensity for violence. And this goes into the whole like nature versus nurture debate, right? Is violence inherent? Or is it a learned behavior?

ELLEN: Yeah. So, this is, I think, a really interesting debate and one that I don't really, I don't have myself a definite answer to because I jumped from nature or nurture or a little bit of both.

PENN: I mean, I think it's both. It's always both in the end.

ELLEN: Yeah. But what I thought of with this one is like, initially, I was like, no, we are not naturally violent creatures. Because if you live in your kind of day-to-day life, like I don't have these violent tendencies that come out every single day at all. Right. So just my own personal experience. But then I was I was reading a little bit more about the critiques of Collins.

And one of the things that popped up was the idea of fight or flight response, that that's something that we have inherent within us, right? When we encounter some type of dangerous situation, our initial bodily response is either to put our fists up and fight, or to also ball up our fists, but start running right afterwards.

OMAR: Right, right.

ELLEN: But it's an instinct.

PENN: Yeah

ELLEN: Because we're, we're still animals.

PENN: Yeah. So that instinct makes me think, okay, then maybe violence would be a natural response. The flip side of that argument is that violence is a learned or socialized response.

I remember my dad telling my brother one time, who was getting picked on by the boys in our neighborhood, next time, Nick comes over here, and says something mean to you, I want you to just sock him in the face, right? And he was like this little seven-year-old boy. And my brother is like okay I'll do it.

OMAR: I had a very similar situation

PENN: And then my brother did sock Nick in the face, and it solved the problem. So, it's like, there are these like parenting strategies,

ELLEN: It's almost a bad, that's kind of a bad lesson to learn though, right, as a kid

PENN: Yeah, but I mean, it also teaches you. Yeah, violence is definitely not a good lesson to teach a kid. But it also teaches a kid like, you need to know when to tell somebody to stop. And you need to be very clear about that. And if they don't,

ELLEN: And that kid should learn to yeah, bullying kid should be like, oh, if I push him too far, they are gonna smack me back.

OMAR: Yeah, Yup

PENN: Yeah. So, this is my I don't know, I want to hear what you guys say about this.

Is it a natural thing? fight or flight response? Or is violence a learned or socialized behavior, or both or both?

ELLEN: So, when we talk about violence being inherent, I think there's kind of two aspects of it is that is violent inherent in us as a species. And then as violent in us, like genetic, like our genetic makeup. So, I think there was a while back where they thought that they found the violent gene. Have you guys heard of that? Yeah, it was like the gene that tells us if you're like going to be a psychopathic killer or something. I don't know if that was actually real.
I have to look that up.

PENN: But well, they do have they have shown on like, they've done brain scans of people who have been proven to be psychopaths or sociopaths, and their amygdalas don't function the same way a non-psychopathic person functions. So, like, the notion of like guilt or being able to empathize, they cannot do psychopaths cannot do because of this brain malfunction is what they would call it.

ELLEN: So, they, they lack that emotional threshold to stop them from being violent.

PENN: Yeah, or the things that like guilt, they don't have guilt. So, guilt is a big thing that prevents us from doing

OMAR: Did they, did they find if that was genetic or just developmental?

PENN: Oh, I don't know.

ELLEN: Good question.

PENN: I don't know if it was a genetic thing. All of that. There's a really great book called, well, there I love reading about psychopaths. So, there's one by John Ronson, which is called The Psychopath Test. That's just kind of a pop culture.

OMAR: Yeah, that's a good book.

PENN: There's another one by a guy named Fallon, James Fallon, not the night show host.

OMAR: Right

ELLEN: Oh okay

PENN: But he's a neuroscientist.

ELLEN: At night he masquerades as a neuroscientist.

PENN: But he came out with a book called Psychopath. And he he's a neuroscientist. So, he was doing brain scans of psychopaths. And he figured out that like there is an obvious difference between the way psychopaths amygdala functions versus a non-psychopath's amygdala functions. And then he went and he was like scanning just kind of his family members. And so, he scanned his own and he realized from his scans that he was a psychopath just based off of these scans. Well, then he started like talking to people and asking them like, do you really think this is a thing? Or did it? Is it just a fluke? And they're just like, no, you do really exhibit the behavioral characteristics of a psychopath. He's very self-centered

ELLEN: Actually, we've been discussing this for years and we're just waiting for you to kill somebody.

PENN: It's a pretty interesting. That's interesting.

ELLEN: See, so, my thing about violence and genetics is the idea that I think this you can see this a lot when you try to adopt children. Are you getting the genes of some crazy rapist or killer or just someone who's super violent, but you don't know where these genes are from. And so, you shouldn't go and adopt like that's the kind of stuff that my mom tells me that you don't know whose genes you're gonna get and that you're not going to be able to fight those fight those genes, even if you're a very loving parent.

PENN: So, it has a lot of stuff about this idea that nurture cannot override nature.

ELLEN: Right, right. And I so I don't want to say that. I don't want to say that ever, because I don't believe that, you know, and as sociologists, I can't believe that nurture can't be nature.

Again, we're not talking about one or the other. I do think it's just both.

OMAR: Yeah, I agree, too. And I think that I like this question, the nature and nurture debate question, but I don't think it's a good sociological question. Only because I don't think the question is, is it nature or nurture that maybe causes violence? I think it's more everyone has the capacity to defend themselves, which more than likely is going to be some type of physical force that you're going to need to use. Let's say like some animals attacking you, you need to like kick it off of you. That's a form of violence that you're going to need to exhibit to allow this to stop happening. Or you're struggling against someone who's trying to choke you. So, I don't know if that's the right question. I think more so like the type of violence, though, that we find ourselves situated in really is then becomes a sociological question. For example, like no one would think defending themselves and holding a gun is a good way to do that. If no one had a gun to start with, and that was created through human creation. A thousand years ago, no one would have had the idea of like, I'm gonna go grab a gun because I need to defend myself. So, I think the idea of violence and what's going to push you to think that violence is a solution is really context specific, because there are more or less violent cultures, communities, individuals. I really do think a lot of violence is context specific and this whole idea of learned behavior. And then when the certain lessons that you're going to take throughout life is going to translate into some other form of violence. So, like we were talking earlier about the kid who's being told, you know, go smack that kid in the face if you're getting harassed on the street or whatever. I've been told those very same lessons. But I was also the person in high school who got student of the month a couple of times because I was breaking up fights. I use violence as a last resort. I've been in plenty of fights in my life. I was never like the person I'm going to fight you. This is how we're going to handle this. But some people definitely do. Some people definitely don't think it's a problem to smack their dog if their dog is doing something they want to do.

One other example of it being context specific that I forget. I don't remember the name of the author. I'll have to look this up. But she did a really good book on corporal punishment on your child when you hit them between black families and

white families and black families overwhelmingly use corporal punishment than white families. And a lot of the reasoning is from that is because we would especially the belt or some type of weapon is very reminiscent of slavery because you that's how maintaining order was facilitated. I'm going to use physical violence and a lot of corporal punishment in general tends to be in more low-income families than high income families. And that's across the board for white people too. So yeah, there's too much of the learning and context for me to really situate myself in either nature or nurture because then there are some people who are just like you're saying out with brain scans and all those other kind of things, psychopaths, sociopaths, that developmentally might have a propensity to be more violent. But it's always an interesting situation when nature and nurture clash.

PENN: Oh, yeah. So, I have a question for you guys. And in when we talk about the environment or the context that lead to violence, do you think that violence in the media like in TV shows and movies and you know, all these like action movies were lots of explosion, lots of deaths.

Do you think the environment we're creating in the media is leading to more violent behaviors? And this is a huge debate, especially in video games and violent video games are leading to violent behavior. And it's often used as a as explanation or even excuse for why mass shooting happens, for example, like, oh, he was like a super video gamer. And therefore, that's why he was led into violence.

OMAR: I think that explanation, the video gamer thing is really a crock of shit. And I think that's a crock of shit, because that sounds very reminiscent of the argument that like, hip hop music is why black people are violent or a misogynist or whatever.

ELLEN: Or like the Columbine shooters, they said, oh, they listened to Marilyn Manson. And that's why they shot up the school, which is right.

OMAR: Yeah, no, no, that's not the case at all.

PENN: But they actually didn't they say something similar to like JFK's killer that he read? On Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest

ELLEN: Catcher in the Rye

PENN: Oh, Catcher in the Rye.

OMAR: Oh, yeah, I think that's just way too narrow. And it just totally diverts the attention away from how our society might have contributed to why this person maybe committed some type of violence. But I definitely think the media, I wouldn't say the media forces us to be more violent. But I do think the media and what we see allows us to accept a lot of violence.

PENN: I think it normalizes.

OMAR: Yeah, it normalizes, for sure. A lot of types of violence that we should take more seriously and think that it's acceptable, or well, that's just what happens in the United States. I don't think I don't think we're scared enough, or worried or concerned enough when we do see terrible acts of violence on the news, because unfortunately, that'll be hot for the week. And then there'll be some other nonsense in the news the next week.

PENN: Right. And it becomes a spectacle.

ELLEN: Yeah. And that's my big beef with the movie and TV industry here in the States is that why is it okay to show these explicit acts of violence to the adult population and to the youth of our country? But how come I can't see like a very peaceful, full-frontal vagina?

You know, like, how come I can't see some penis? Like, why is it not okay to see a naked person? You can't see their skin, but you can see their gut. Exactly. Like, why can't I see what it looks like on the outside when it's intact, but I can see when that body's been totally eviscerated and blown up. And you know, it's just like, such a weird paradox that we live in.

OMAR: Yeah, it's very bizarre. And like, in Europe, it's the reverse.

ELLEN: Yeah, absolutely.

OMAR: If you talk to men about, let's say, female menstruation, the idea of a bleeding vagina really makes people upset.

PENN: And most people don't actually understand what menstruation is.

OMAR: We really need to have a topic on that. Because like, that really, that really fucking frustrates me.

PENN: I read like a thing about menstruation, like common questions that women get. And one of them is, I can hold my pee, can't you hold the bladder?

OMAR: Oh my god, they're so swanky. Jesus.

PENN: No, it's not the same goddamn thing.

OMAR: Oh my god.

PENN: And fuck you for asking that.

OMAR: Or like, men really have a problem when women breastfeed. It's like an obscene thing to observe.

PENN: When it's like the, that's like one of the most natural things that any animal does. Any animal.

OMAR: But then again, there's that symbolic violence, right? We can control what women do. We have no problem with selling nude magazines or objectify women for the things that they wear and appreciate it. But if it's, I want to breastfeed, oh my god, hide that nipple.

ELLEN: Yeah, it's like if you're using, if you're using that body in a way that we as a male dominated society don't approve of, well, then that is just obscene. That is

disgusting. We don't want to see a full bush. It should be, you know, like, it can only look like this, your pubic hair.

PENN: We can see censored.

ELLEN: Yeah. Right.

PENN: So, I want to point that back for the listener that when we try to oppress women's bodies, that's a form of symbolic violence.

OMAR: Yes.

PENN: So that's still violence. Okay. I know it sounds like we're going a little off topic, but actually this is still a form of violence.

OMAR: Yes. Reproductive politics is violence.

ELLEN: Yeah. If we go back to the very start of the episode, when I told you guys the definition of violence, it says one of the things that Elizabeth Stinko says is that it threatens or it does cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm to others or themselves. So, this is definitely sexual and psychological when we're talking about the way women's bodies are treated or what kind of standards we're allowed to show on movies or TV.

OMAR: Also, I don't think we have a full understanding of what violence really does look like, because everything these symbolic forms of violence that we were describing in this episode, other people largely wouldn't even assume that that's a violent act, right? Violence is just me punching you in the face or me ending your life. And that's a lot of the type of violence that we would see on the news, someone's life being ended. But we could say medical mistakes is a form of violence, or sexual assault is a form of violence.

PENN: Or invading your privacy.

OMAR: Yeah, right. Invading someone's privacy is a form of violence. So yeah, I think the media definitely plays a role in shaping our views of violence and what's accepted and not.

PENN: Okay, so in relation to violence in the media, I think one type of violence that's often covered in the violence that groups of people engage in, I think, especially at sporting events, that's usually a popular example. What comes to mind is a 2011 Vancouver Stanley Cup riot that occurred and the whole city was basically overrun by this mob after their national team lost. And it's easy for us to think when we see violence as a crowd, to say that those people are being totally irrational, like that they're acting out and they're acting like hooligans and they're running around smashing windows and burning cars, that crowd violence especially is an is irrational, and it's purely emotional. So, this has a lot to do with my research area, because I this is what I wrote my dissertation on is mob violence. And the thesis that I went with was that actually violence is not irrational, because emotions are irrational. And I think it's easy for people to put emotionality and rationality in opposition to each other. But actually, emotion comes from a place of rationality. Emotion is part of your cognition. And it's part of your morality. And it's part of how you decide how to do things. So, emotions are not irrational. And therefore, violence, which comes from a place of emotion is not irrational also. And this makes more sense when you think about Collins main thesis that there are no violent people, but just violent situations that people react to. Right. So based on Collins, when we think about mob violence, again, not every single individual is violent at all time, nor is each individual equally violent, at all times, usually violence, especially in a crowd or mob is carried out by a few extreme individuals. But it ends up being a representation of the entire movement that they're participating in. So, you know, in in a mob of 200 people running around the city, maybe actually only 10% of those people physically committed acts of violence, like physically smashed windows and stole property and burned cars, but that's seen as a representation of the whole movement.

ELLEN: Yeah, we see this every day in the news when politicians talking about Muslims, right? Yeah, Muslims are seen as this violent group, when in reality, it's a very, very, very, very small percentage of Muslims who are actually terrorists who are carrying out acts of violence, but the entire religion is seen as a violent religion.

PENN: That's right. That's a great parallel.

OMAR: Yeah, then violence then becomes a media tool to create divisions between the type of people who don't commit violence and the type of people who do.

ELLEN: Yeah, in this case, it'd be Muslims versus Christians,

PENN: Right

OMAR: Or Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter. As if Blue Lives Matter don't kill a lot of people. But that's besides the point.

PENN: Right, so there's a lot of like generalizations and stereotypes that go into how we see violence. And again, violence isn't easy. Like even if you're in a crowd of people, and there's like a couple people being doing violent stuff, you're not gonna be like, oh, yeah, let me just do that, too. You know that you have to still cross that whatever emotional morale threshold that you have to actually commit acts of violence, right? People aren't just cows where they're like, oh, the whole people, everyone's going, I'm just gonna go with them. And then I'm just gonna start, you know, running amok. And that's not how violence works, right? So, Collins writes that crowd violence is almost always carried out by a small proportion of persons at the front, throwing stones, taunting the enemy, burning or smashing enemy property. The behavior of most people in riots show tension and fear manifested in great caution, and frequently in running towards safety at signs of counterattack from the other side, say like if the police comes and breaks it up, the elite, quote, unquote, "of crowd fighters, those at the front, also generally show some manifestations of fear or at least high degrees of tension." So usually in a violent collective situation, there's the people who are extremely violent, and they're going to be at the forefront, too, because they're the noisiest and the loudest, loudest ones, and they're making the most noise to him, or they're making the most damage. So, in a violent situation, the whole crowd isn't actively involved in violence, only a few individuals are. This is not to say that the crowd is not implicit to violence. So, this is kind of the more symbolic aspect of violence, because in a

crowd, where there are a few extremists who are violent, and you can look at lynchings, right, in American history as an example of like the crowd that surrounds lynching. So, it's one that I was teaching my students the other day. And I probably traumatized them a little, but is this lynching of the 17 year old boy, he was mentally ill, they believe that he killed the wife of his master, basically, he was tried, he was sentenced to death, and his death was being thrown out of the courthouse, like down the stairs, and a mob of 15,000 people surrounding his body as they burned him, like they were like, lower him into this fire, and then they would bring him back up so that he would suffer. And when he tried to climb up the rope to escape, you know, they cut his fingers off.

ELLEN: Oh my gosh.

PENN: And they cut his testicles off. And you know, they like slowly did like maimed him and then while lowering him in and out of the fire until he finally died. So, in that crazy act of 15,000 people, there was maybe like 20 men who were actively cutting this kid's fingers off and doing all these horrible things. Right. And the rest of the crowd who are watching, they're not engaging in violence. But they're also implicit to it.

ELLEN: They also didn't stop them.

PENN: Yeah, they're watching it. And they provide what Colin says is basically emotion, immediate emotional support, right, those who are less emotionally energized, less confident, unable to take initiative, give a sense to the leading edge that others will back them up, giving a weight in numbers that will help overall the enemy once the momentum is flowing. So even just by giving violence attention, you become implicit to violence.

OMAR: Oh, yeah. You can think about bar fights all the time. So, gassing them up or like.

PENN: Yeah, you provide the emotional support for violence and you provide what is called the sweat Turner and Killian to criminologists called the illusion of unanimity is defined as when the silence of dissenters may provide a form of

passive support for the emergent Norman contribute to the illusion of unanimity. So simply the existence of the crowd, whether or not it's actively supporting the violence can provide the illusion of support. So, there's the those in the crowd who are egging people on and then there are those who are just there and providing that illusion in numbers.

ELLEN: That's really interesting.

PENN: When you try to break down the dynamics of crowd violence, there are all these different levels of violence and different levels of engagement with violence. Collins talks about another way we can understand mob violence is this concept of forward panic. So, this concept relates to again, Collins thesis about the role of tension and fear that induce violence situations that people will react to. Forward panic is tension and fear in a conflict situation, tension that is prolonged and built up. It has dramatic shape of increasing tension striving toward a climax waiting to be fully active. Then when opportunity comes, it's an emotional rush. So, an example of what Collins calls forward panic is like this group of soldiers going through Vietnam, in enemy territory, is that for days and weeks, they're in this highly tense, unnatural situation where they're waiting to be attacked or waiting to step on a bomb. They're in this horrible situation. And then finally, when there's some trigger, this group of soldiers, this is a historical example, but the group of soldier was triggered, but that they engage in violence because of this forward panic was that it released all the tension in the situation. And they just had to, they had this huge emotional rush, and they decimated this whole village that they were coming by. Because they had been in this situation of fear for so long that they're like, oh my god, we just need to let it out. And they rioted within this village. So that still seems like they were a crazy mob of soldiers. But what Collins says is that there is still a threshold of violence because a, for example, even in that emotional rush, you know, riding in this village, so they still respected the hierarchy of the army. For example, they never went and hurt their commanding officer who they never went beyond the boundaries of the village, you know, they didn't continue in their in their riot, and went and decimated like four more villages after that, it was still like within this boundary. So, there was still some level of rationality there, even though it seems like they were acting irrationally.

ELLEN: Yeah

OMAR: I like, I like this because the idea of emotional being rational and tension, because unless you are and I don't like to use this word, but I just think as an example, everyone's gonna I'm talking about, you would be kind of crazy if someone slaps you in the face and you start smiling. I don't think then that reaction is therefore irrational. And the idea of tension, people, you know, cause self-harm, so like cutting themselves a lot of this like psychological tension that's built up, that can be like a form of release. Or if you're really, really mad, and you like walking around, and you just go punch a wall, and that actual release of tension can make your emotions subside of all that anger build up. Do I think it's smart to punch a wall? No, but I don't think it's irrational that someone did that. That seems like a very rational way to release this tension that you might need to have some type of physical release to let it out. Same sex, sex works the very same way.

PENN: Yeah, like I always when I'm angry, I just cry. And I'll cry so much. And it seems like I'm just being like, crazy person, like uncontrollably bawling. But I feel so much better afterwards. And I realized I just needed to get that out.

OMAR: Exactly. Same, same. You're not alone there.

PENN: So, it's like we were all so even though it seems irrational, and emotions seem irrational, right? Again, that's a great point that actually, it makes sense that we do it. Yeah, they serve a purpose.

ELLEN: Okay, that sounds signals the end of this week's show. Per usual, we're going to end with some quick breaks. These are random topics, possibly current and newsworthy that I will throw at Penn and Omar, who must then do a personal breakdown of the topic in five words or less. It's very sociological. I'm going to start with Penn. I know you're a big Pokemoner.

PENN: I went last night. And I'm going tonight.

ELLEN: Okay. What do you think about Honolulu passing a city ordinance that allows police to ticket people for distracted walking?

PENN: Yeah, it's illegal now to cross the street while looking on your phone. It actually just came into effect yesterday. So, we're recording this a little earlier than we're releasing. But on the 26th, it became effective. And I actually, when I was going around Pokemoning, we were very aware of that. We're like, okay, put the phones down. My personal breakdown is it's good. I like it. Yeah, that's, that's my breakdown. As a driver, I hate it when people cross when just staring at their phones. Because when people just cross the street without acknowledging the driver, or just like, hey, I'm aware that I'm in this danger, possibly dangerous situation. Yeah, it really annoys me when they're just staring at their phones. And I want to run them over.

OMAR: See, I agree with you, Penn I totally agree with you. Like I get infuriated. But I would much rather the rule be if I hit you, it's not my fault.

ELLEN: Because like, Darwin's survival of the fittest.

OMAR: Unless a cop is going to be standing there to prevent that person from actually walking across the street distracted. The law might, you know, it'll definitely make more people a lot more conscious, but there are still going to be people who are going to do it. But I'd rather the penalty not be my fault. But I guess maybe now because there's this law, I could be like, well, they were texting and walking. And if they can prove that, then I wouldn't be in trouble.

ELLEN: So, you could be like, you're doing a citizen's arrest with your car. I had to disabled them.

PENN: We were talking last night that the punishment shouldn't be like a \$35 fine. It should be that the police comes and throws your phone on the floor.

OMAR: Ooo I like that, I like that

ELLEN: Okay, so Omar, your quick break is Thanksgiving.

OMAR: We should be ashamed. And no, too many words. We need to fix that.

ELLEN: We need to fix that. In what way would you like it to be fixed?

OMAR: Christopher Columbus never made to the United States. So, I don't even forget the genocide, the rape, the racism. Forget all of that.

PENN: Forget the syphilis.

OMAR: Yeah, forget all that for just a second. He didn't even make it to the United States. So why are we picking that person? That's one thing. Now add all that other stuff. I don't understand why. I don't understand why we are celebrating that. There was nothing peaceful about that at all. Now, I'm going to level with America for a second and say, let's say these Europeans came to the United States. Then there's these Native Americans that go, oh, look at these people. Let's sit down. Let's greet them. Hello, we're gonna have a meal. And the Europeans go, oh, this is great. And then so they have this meal. But then after the meal, there was a bunch of bloodshed and terror. So, like there was no, this was not peaceful ever.

PENN: There was no thanks being given.

OMAR: Yeah, no. And I find it that a lot of there are definitely a lot of people in the United States today who wouldn't feel really happy on that day. So, I think it's kind of like a slap in the face. How do we how do we have that? And then say that we're taking care of Native Americans? Like you just Yeah, it's just ridiculous.

PENN: On that note, Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

ELLEN: Yeah, Happy Thanksgiving.

OMAR: It should be the day of mourning. And celebrate life, not America.

ELLEN: Alrighty, thanks for listening to The Social Breakdown. We really appreciate it. If you're interested in violence, or would like to get a little bit more information on the works that we cited today, you can check out our website, thesocialbreakdown.com. That's thesocialbreakdown.com. We list all of our articles, scholars and books discussed in today's episode, as well as provide links to other relevant materials. You can also find us on Facebook or the Twitter. And you can send us your questions there. Our tag is @socbreakdown. That's @SOCbreakdown. And you can also subscribe to our podcast on iTunes, Stitcher or wherever you find your podcast. So be sure to tune in next week. Until then, stay social.

PENN: Think social

OMAR: And go read some books.