

***How Children Become Violent: Keeping Your Kids out of Gangs, Terrorist Organizations, and Cults*, by Kathryn Seifert, Ph.D. (2006), Boston MA: Acanthus Publishing.**

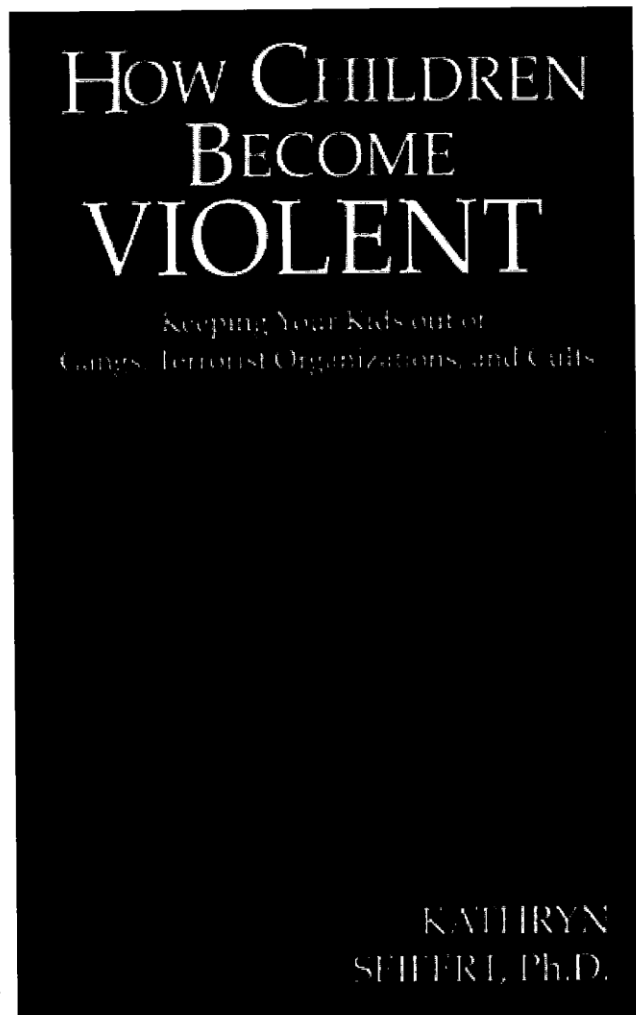
Reviewed by Peter Smith, Psy.D.

Dr. Seifert's book was "written for professionals working in the mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice/criminal justice, and research fields, as well as students studying these fields and individuals affected by violence." Dr. Seifert provides expertly written suggestions and recommendations as to how we can determine what type of child might become dangerous as an adult, tells us which tests are useful for what purpose, and takes us through to treatment, while providing enough resources for the reader to be able to understand the problem and address it more effectively. As such, this book should be required reading for anyone working with patients who have experienced disruptions of their early relationships, including but not limited to those within the public mental health and school systems, as well as within social services programs, including adoption services, foster care, and group homes.

Dr. Seifert outlines and elucidates the significant factors that contribute to the development of violence. Years of conducting research and practicing within the prison system have led her to conclude that juvenile and adult violence is rooted in early childhood trauma, neglect, and abuse. In her book, she explores in detail the way violence becomes a part of an individual's personality. She explains that "Disrupted attachment patterns (DAP) are generated when a young child's attachment process to its caregiver is severed," and she is highly successful in laying out a developmental course for the generation of violence in those who suffer from DAP. Utilizing her background in psychotherapy and research into family violence and trauma, Dr. Seifert expertly and clearly guides the reader through assessment tools, case studies and research evidence that demonstrates that sustained unmet basic needs lead to both juvenile and adult violence.

The book is an extraordinarily readable, concise, scholarly summary of the current state of research on attachment, assessment, and treatment of those who have experienced attachment disruptions. Personal stories and examples of famous people keep the reader connected to the scientific research in a way that is easily understood and serve as a practical way to see how to implement and utilize the pertinent scientific findings. Dr. Seifert notes that she developed the book over her 30 years of work with children, and her expertise shines through.

In the first section of her book, Dr. Seifert addresses how violence and disrupted attachment patterns (DAP) interact in a child's mind. She has included case studies of (in)famous serial killers and mass murderers to elaborate her point, and is able to



humanize their experience without negating the responsibility they bear for their actions. In the second section, she details the assessment processes and criteria for determining an individual's degree of DAP, case management needs, and risk for violence. There is a moderate amount of technical language in this section, making it mainly suited to the interests of mental health professionals and researchers. The lay reader can skip through this section without missing the gist of the author's discussion. With regard to the more detailed information contained within the chapter on assess-

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ment, there are numerous tables and charts, making the process of locating valuable reference material a quick and easy one. There is so much valuable information that, by the end of the section, I was running out of room to take notes of all the items I wanted to highlight. This information is scholarly, yet remains easily digestible and highly practical for clinicians who find themselves working with patients who present with histories of violence or a propensity for committing violent acts. Treatment options regarding DAP are discussed in the last section of the book. Dr. Seifert describes existing and possible treatment methods for dealing with DAP problems.

A surprising and highly beneficial aspect to the book is Dr. Seifert's willingness to incorporate her experiences in other countries (she has traveled in Brazil, the Philippines, and China) as sources for understanding how societal factors influence the violence exhibited in those countries. She expertly draws the link between the youth violence endemic in these cultures, and the pervasive poverty, child neglect, and lack of health care present in each. Conversely, she writes highly of South Africa, where trauma has been pervasive, yet a social network based on informal community support is in place to rescue potentially-violent kids.

Overall, *How Children Become Violent* is exceptionally well-written and information-dense. It is made easily accessible to the reader by the thoughtful inclusion of appropriate examples and explanations. One chapter flows into the next in a very organized fashion, so that the reader can clearly identify the problem, understand how to assess it, and finally, and most importantly, how to treat it.

I truly enjoyed reading this book simply because it was so full of valuable information directly applicable to my practice and because Dr. Seifert provides the pertinent research support for her suggestions. Further, the book is concise (250 pages) and so readable that I plan to utilize many of the resources in my practice within a residential treatment center. Even for those unfamiliar with some of the concepts and inherent complexities present in researching attachment and its connections to violence, this book is a valuable resource. ♣

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