

Home study reports are not always gender neutral
by Lloyd Robertson

Here is a question for all of you philosophers.

If a man is alone in a forest and he says something, and there is no woman around to hear him, IS HE STILL WRONG?

In my last column I said that men are more likely to be charged for their violence than women. When women are charged for their violent behavior they have an additional defence: the man was responsible anyway. I also said that the "abuse card" has become almost a standard ploy in child custody cases. The woman says the man was abusive and so should get custody.

A recent Ontario court case involving the custody of two girls illustrates the issues. When a court ordered home study resulted in a recommendation favorable to the man a more feminist psychologist was hired to offer a different view.

The first psychological report was prepared by Dr. Robert Geffner of the Child Custody Institute. He conducted clinical interviews and testing with each parent and the children involved. He also observed the children with each parent and interviewed extended family members.

Dr. Geffner's report states that he found no signs that the father, a Mr. Jones, suffered from psychopathology. On the other hand, Mrs. Jones' scores suggested that she was "an individual with underlying hostility and resentment as well as some paranoid features that indicate a lack of trust".

Dr. Geffner observed that the girls were at ease with their father and missed him very much. He observed that Mrs. Jones was attempting to alienate her oldest child from her father. Dr. Geffner also expressed concerns about Mrs. Jones' lifestyle.

Issues of family violence were raised. Dr. Geffner noted that no charges had been laid and that, in fact, police reports said the violence was mutual with both parents acting aggressively.

It was recommended that the father have custody of the children. Mrs. Jones hired another psychologist, Dr. Peter Jaffe of the University of Western Ontario.

Dr. Jaffe did not interview either Mr. Jones or the girls. He interviewed Mrs. Jones three times but did not administer a personality test on her. He acknowledged that ethically he could not make a recommendation with respect to custody because he had not assessed all parties; none-the-less, he said he could offer "a more balanced perspective for the court".

Dr. Jaffe accused Dr. Geffner of overlooking "Mr. Jones' controlling and abusive behavior that frightens the girls and offers them a poor role model". He accused the police of having "misperceptions about the nature of the violence". He said the youngest daughter had nightmares and anxiety attacks while the oldest daughter was "fearful". He concluded that, in cases such as

this, it is important that care and custody of children be kept with the mother with restricted and supervised access until "the father takes full responsibility for the violence".

Most readers will recall that there have been a series of Canadian men, wrongfully convicted of murder, who were denied parole because they had not confessed to their "crime". Dr. Jaffe is suggesting that fathers should have "restricted and supervised" access of their children until they confess to their "crime" where they have been accused by their former spouses. There is no need to interview the man or even the children to establish the truth of the allegations. Police should be taught to make "better" reports.

It was with this agenda in mind that Dr. Jaffe was brought to Prince Albert this last year. The feminist group that brought him suggested, incredibly, that "men who are abusive are more likely to apply for and get custody than non-abusive men". There you have it, if a man disagrees with a woman on custody he is not only wrong, he is probably abusive as well.

There was no federal money available to bring Dr. Geffner to Saskatchewan.