

IT TAKES A COMPLICIT VILLAGE:

The Cultural Sanctioning of Domestic Violence

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In the United States, it is estimated that someone is abused by an intimate partner every twenty minutes, amounting to approximately ten million people per year.¹ One in four women and one in nine men report having been subjected to severe physical or sexual violence or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.² And every day, three women are murdered at the hands of a current or former partner.³ If we are to wrap our heads around these gruesome statistics, and how they could possibly be true in the neighborhoods and cities we live in, we must first examine our societal and individual complicity in the abuse and mistreatment of women. Like racism and classism, both violence and sexism are systemic, pervading every level of our lives, from the personal to the political.⁴ If it seems unlikely that you, or those you know, could be complicit in such brutality, consider the ways members of our society have turned a blind eye, when to stand against an atrocity would cause alienation. This country was founded over the bodies of mass genocide with the near annihilation of Native tribes and their cultures, along with the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans. These were the brutal pathways taken to landownership, profitable commerce, and control, and most colonists looked away from the crimes against humanity in order to create the new life they had come for. Currently, in this country, men are encouraged and incentivized daily to use violence as a means of control. This is fueled by media, socialization at home, work, and school, and the fear rhetoric of the rightwing Republican agenda and weapons manufacturers, whose financial objectives hinder our ability to uphold federal safety laws and exacerbate violence in and out of the home. Domestic violence is

¹ Kaitlin Sidorsky and Wendy J. Schiller, *Inequality Across State Lines: How Policy Makers Have Failed Domestic Violence Victims in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 13.

² "Statistics," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*, Accessed December 14, 2023, <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>.

³ Kamala Lopez, "Domestic Violence," *Equal Means Equal*, Accessed December 3, 2023, <https://equalmeansequal.com/domestic-violence/>.

⁴ Shout out: Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political," *CarolHanisch.org*, First published February 1969, Re-pub January 2006, <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.

the brutal legacy of long-standing patriarchal sex inequality and, to break its harmful patterns, society must reject misogynist hegemony, replace media that is violent toward women, and rethink our mandates and beliefs.

Historically, a woman's value has been placed below that of a man's, legally, socially, and economically. Abigail Adams is often quoted from her 1776 letter to John Adams, as independence from Britain was nigh and the founders were preparing a new code of laws for their newly won, free country. She asked him to "remember the ladies" in these new laws, to "not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands," and to "remember all Men would be tyrants if they could." But even as John Adams quipped back in reply, calling her "saucy", her plea was ignored. The first laws concerning American women were holdovers from an English common law known as coverture. A female person was "covered" by her father's legal identity from birth and then her husband's once they were married. The couple became one legal entity, whereupon she gave her surname up for his, along with her ability to do business on her own, collect her own wages, rights to her own children, and all rights to her body, including an absolute right to all sex-related activity. A man could legally rape his wife, as marriage implied consent. It also meant that he could legally beat her.⁵

But men's control over and violence toward women did not end in the home, it was also ingrained in the societal structure of the new country. After women had performed their essential roles in the Revolutionary War, they gained a sense of ownership and empowerment in the fight for "liberty and politics as a birthright."⁶ But they were carefully herded back into their homes with the notion of Republican Motherhood, where their main duty was to raise virtuous

⁵ Catherine Allgore, "Coverture - the Word You Probably Don't Know but Should," *National Women's History Museum*, September 4, 2014, www.womenshistory.org/articles/coverture-word-you-probably-dont-know-should.

⁶ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 45-50.

republican sons as future voters.⁷ More recent scholars have dubbed this the *Cult of True Womanhood*,⁸ for its insistence that the ideal woman was to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic, and for the fact that it changed the face of what women were allowed to do and where they could do it in a most insidious manner.⁹ Not to mention, the extremely valuable work of raising citizens has never been a paid position, and has always been taken for granted that women would just do it, from their submissive role in the patriarchy. This of course assumes we are talking about white middle-class women, for if you were not white and of some means, then you would be working outside of the home by necessity, and your “worth” was further devalued by cultural standards of class hierarchy. This devaluing also permeated the workplace, and during the industrial revolution, many textile factory workers were women, often immigrants. The men in the factories used violence in the form of sexual harassment and assault to keep women under their control and ensure that the higher paying positions stayed with the men.¹⁰

These cultural relegations informed the decisions of politicians, and it was decades before any meaningful laws protecting women against domestic violence (DV), or sexual harassment, in or out of the home, were passed. Although many states outlawed “wife beating” as early as the 1870’s, divorce was rarely sought or granted. Women often had nowhere to go nor any resources to care for their children without their husbands, keeping countless women and children in

⁷ Emily Teipe, *Loyalists, Patriots and Revolutionary Mothers* (Fullerton College: Globalyceum, week 2-2), https://www.globalyceum.com/student/student_course_page/7764.

⁸ Joan Hoff, “The Negative Impact of the American Revolution on White Women,” essay, in *Major Problems in American Women’s History: Documents and Essays*, ed. Sharon Block, Mary Beth Norton, and Ruth M Alexander (Stamford, CT: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2014).

⁹ Eva Mo, “L5b: Separate Spheres Ideology, Ramped Up,” (lecture, Modesto Junior College, Modesto, CA, Week Three-1). Mo quotes 1966 essay by Barbara Welter.

¹⁰ Daniel E. Bender, “Women Workers and Sexual Harassment in the Garment Industry,” essay, in *Major Problems in American Women’s History: Documents and Essays*, ed. Sharon Block, Mary Beth Norton, and Ruth M Alexander (Stamford, CT: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2014).

violent homes.¹¹ It wasn't until the late 1970's and through the 1980's, two-hundred years after Abigail Adams' letter, that shelters for survivors of DV began to open across the country. States began to pass their own DV laws, and in 1984 the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act was passed by the federal government to assist states in giving shelter and other supportive services for survivors of family violence.¹² But not until the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994 did states have some teeth to hold abusers accountable for what was finally considered a federal crime. The VAWA provides funding not only to assist survivors of DV and prevention of DV, but also for law enforcement to better investigate, increase arrests for, and prosecute DV crimes. Two years later, the Lautenberg Amendment was the next major boon for preventing DV homicide, "prohibit[ing] persons convicted of a crime involving domestic violence from owning or possessing firearms."¹³ The VAWA with the Lautenberg firearm provision was renewed with bi-partisan support in 2000, 2005, and 2013, but did not make it pass the Senate in 2019 due to gun rights advocates opposition to a proposal that would expand the Lautenberg Amendment to include dating partners.¹⁴ The so called "boyfriend loophole" allowed dating partners to possess firearms even while under protective orders for DV incidents. Half of women killed by male intimate partners are killed by dating partners."¹⁵ The increasingly divisive political atmosphere over Second Amendment rights, paralyzed VAWA renewal in the Senate until 2022, and it only passed then because the controversial boyfriend loophole was dropped. However, after a brutal DV shooting in Uvalde, Texas in May 2022,

¹¹ Kaitlin Sidorsky and Wendy J. Schiller, *Inequality Across State Lines: How Policy Makers Have Failed Domestic Violence Victims in the United States*, 30-33.

¹² Sidorsky and Schiller, 34-36.

¹³ Sidorsky and Schiller, 41.

¹⁴ Sidorsky and Schiller, 52.

¹⁵ "Domestic Violence and Firearms," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*, 2022, https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/guns_and_dv_2022.pdf.

Congress enacted the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, including a provision to finally close the boyfriend loophole, once again vastly increasing potential protections against DV.

The VAWA and related laws have been a giant leap in the right direction, but women are still struggling to gain equal protections under the law. After the landmark case *Reed v. Reed* (1971), where the Supreme Court struck down an Idaho law as unconstitutional based on its sexist nature, it was generally believed that the Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution protected women as equal citizens. But the current political climate repeatedly tells us otherwise. The fact that the Equal Rights Amendment has been voted on and ratified but has still not been written into its rightful place in our constitution is a real kick in the teeth. Some argue that it is not necessary, that women are protected well enough by the Fourteenth, however, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia believed:

Certainly the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn't. Nobody ever thought that that's what it meant. Nobody ever voted for that. If the current society wants to outlaw discrimination by sex, hey we have things called legislatures, and they enact things called laws.¹⁶

In 2011, when he made this remark, it was considered to be fringy, and out of step with the Court's majority.¹⁷ But changes in the Supreme Court over the last decade have given the Conservative Right the majority, and we can see the evidence of women's inequality in decisions like *Dobbs v. Jackson* (2021) which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and women's fundamental right to personal healthcare in the form of abortions. Women's liberties are under attack on every level, from the highest court in the land to unequal protections from abuse in their own homes.

¹⁶ Lenora M. Lapidus, "The Constitution Protects Women Despite Justice Scalia's Views," *American Civil Liberties Union*, January 6, 2011, <https://www.aclu.org/news/smart-justice/constitution-protects-women-despite-justice-scalias-views>.

¹⁷ Lenora M. Lapidus, "The Constitution Protects Women Despite Justice Scalia's Views."

Specific to DV, there are four main layers of inequality to be considered when looking at the ways in which women are not protected equally under the law; depending on who she is and where she lives, a woman can have a far greater likelihood of abuse and death by DV.¹⁸ The first layer is the difference in security between males and females, women are two and a half times more likely to be the victim of physical violence, sexual violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.¹⁹ The second layer depends on what state she lives in, due to the variance in state laws and the states' willingness to uphold VAWA. For example, despite having only half the population, South Carolina had nearly twice as many deaths from DV in 2016 than did North Carolina.²⁰ The third layer is within jurisdictions and depends on the actions of law enforcement and members of the judicial branch. For example, in Georgia, judges may use their own discretion whether to remove firearms from domestic abusers, rather than follow the federal mandate, and in all jurisdictions, there are different levels of training and sensitivity of law enforcement who respond to DV incidents.²¹ And finally, the fourth layer of inequality depends on race and ethnicity. A woman of color is more likely to be a victim of physical violence in her lifetime, to the tune of 51.7 percent of Native American women and 41.2 percent of Black women, as opposed to 30.5 percent of White women.²² This layering of inequality builds on itself, indicating that in the United States, current DV laws and policies protect some women far more than others.

The legal definition of DV varies from state to state, and sometimes between jurisdictions, often lacking federally recognized criminal behaviors and causing a huge variance

¹⁸ Sidorsky and Schiller, 3-6.

¹⁹ "Statistics," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*.

²⁰ Sidorsky and Schiller, 3-6.

²¹ Sidorsky and Schiller, 3-6.

²² Sidorsky and Schiller, 3-6.

in outcomes of DV crimes. The *Power and Control Wheel*²³, created by the National Domestic Violence Hotline, shows the levels of abuse considered to be DV, as agreed upon by advocacy groups and researchers.²⁴ The outer ring indicates the more obvious crimes of sexual abuse and violence, while the inner sections of the wheel describe the subtle, continual tactics abusers use to keep survivors in the relationship. These inner sections are: intimidation (such as smashing things or inciting fear), emotional abuse (including insults and mind games), isolation (including controlling what she does, where she goes, who she sees, etc.), minimizing, denying, and blaming (making light of abuse, shifting blame), using children (for guilt or harassment), using male privilege (treating her like a servant, being the one to define relationship roles), economic abuse (restricting access to a job or family income), and coercion and threats (including threatening to commit suicide if she leaves).²⁵ Many of the things on this wheel would be difficult to prosecute alone, but the federal government has a relatively comprehensive definition of DV that looks for “any pattern of coercive behavior”:

The Violence Against Women Act defines domestic violence as felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence (including threats or attempts) committed by a current or former spouse of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim/survivor who is protected from that person’s acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies. It should be understood that domestic violence/dating violence applies to any pattern of coercive behavior that is used by one person to gain power and control over a current or former intimate partner or dating partner. This pattern of behavior may include physical or sexual violence, emotional and psychological intimidation, threats, verbal abuse, stalking, isolation, and economic control.²⁶

²³ “Power and Control,” *National Domestic Violence Hotline*, Accessed December 14, 2023, <https://www.thehotline.org/identify-abuse/power-and-control/>.

²⁴ Sidorsky and Schiller, 9-10.

²⁵ “Power and Control,” *National Domestic Violence Hotline*.

²⁶ “Glossary: Domestic Violence,” *VAWAMEI*, 2023, <https://www.vawamei.org/tools-resources/glossary/#:~:text=Domestic%20Violence%3A%20The%20Violence%20Against,is%20cohabitating%20with%20or%20has.>

However, in a state-by-state comparison using four of the DV statutes defined by Congress, including stalking, terroristic and/or threatening language or treatment, false imprisonment, and extension of DV to dating partners, only three states have adopted all four of these behaviors into their definitions of DV: Missouri, Nevada and New Jersey.²⁷ Further, only eighteen states consider stalking a DV offense, twenty-five states include terroristic threats and threatening language or behavior, ten states include false imprisonment, and thirty-seven include dating partners.²⁸ With the comparison of just these four statutes, it is easy to see how women in different states could have a completely different experience when attempting to free herself from an abusive partner. One glaring example is Arizona, which has not adopted any of the federal provisions related to these four behaviors and consequently is one of the states with the highest levels of intimate partner homicide over the last several decades.²⁹

Further analysis on the inconsistency of state laws points to three central factors: conservative ideology surrounding gun rights, increases in gun violence over time, and action taken by the federal government.³⁰ Georgia and Montana are both states with conservative politics which have refused to enact DV firearm laws, despite the fact that in Montana from 2000 through 2018, 72 percent of the state's DV homicides were committed with a firearm, and in Georgia, it was 59 percent between 2005 and 2018. Georgia came close once, by adding an amendment to a registry of protective orders law, that would have restricted those under a DV protective order from having a license to carry a pistol or revolver. Oddly, the original law was renewed with near unanimous support, but without any trace or mention of the firearm provision,

²⁷ Sidorsky and Schiller, 22; 62-66.

²⁸ Sidorsky and Schiller, 64-66.

²⁹ Sidorsky and Schiller, 15-17; 66.

³⁰ Sidorsky and Schiller, 67.

and no DV firearm laws have been introduced since.³¹ On the other hand, Pennsylvania, despite its conservative ideology and support for the Second Amendment, was prompted to enact stricter DV firearm laws by a severe increase in DV rates in a single year; out of the 110 people that died due to DV in 2004, 71 were killed by firearms.³² State Assemblyperson Katie True, who had sponsored the bill and had a favorable stance toward both the National Rifle Association and women's issues, said, "We are not trying to take away anyone's rights...If someone is doing something with a gun to threaten someone, they don't deserve a gun,"³³ thus, distinguishing women's safety and gun rights as the two separate issues they are. Some states, such as Alaska and Minnesota, have been more heavily influenced by the federal enactment of VAWA and its subsequent renewals, showing some sort of revision of their state laws coinciding with federal changes.³⁴ These various examples deepen the assertion that American women face unequal protections across state lines from each other.

I'd like to shine a spotlight on my home state of California and county of Tuolumne for a moment, because I have a special interest in the state that touts itself as a leader for women's freedoms and equality, and, as good as it is to be a Californian, there are some things we could be doing much better. Currently California does not classify DV as a violent crime, allowing those convicted to easily shave time off their sentences for early release.³⁵ Additionally, DV involving firearms saw an 80 percent increase from 2019 through 2021, (during the Covid-19 pandemic), 2021 having the highest numbers since 1995.³⁶ Despite California laws which ban convicted

³¹ Sidorsky and Schiller, 75-78.

³² Sidorsky and Schiller, 82.

³³ Sidorsky and Schiller, 83.

³⁴ Sidorsky and Schiller, 87-93.

³⁵ Emily Hoeven, "Will the Orange County mass shooting finally convince California Democrats that domestic violence is a violent crime?," *San Francisco Chronicle: Web Edition Articles (CA)*, August 24, 2023, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/article/orange-county-mass-shooting-violent-crime-18328919.php>.

³⁶ California Department of Justice, *Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) Report*, August 2023, <https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/OGVP-Data-Report-2022.pdf>.

abusers and those with DV related restraining orders from possessing firearms, the state often struggles to enforce these laws, reducing their efficacy.³⁷ In Tuolumne County, Jessi Abbott, Direct Services Coordinator for the Center for Non Violent Community (CNVC) in Sonoma, California gave some inciteful information on what policies are particularly helpful, or not, from the perspective of a DV shelter. In my interview with Ms. Abbott, I learned that CNVC is funded entirely by federal, state, and county grants that are allotted through the California Office of Emergency Services and that 40 percent of the budget comes from the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), which has major cuts planned for this coming fiscal year. This will negatively affect the way they are able to provide essential assistance. CNVC does get some smaller community partner grants and fundraising monies, but the bulk of their impressive operation is reliant on federal grants. CNVC offers comprehensive care in our community in the areas of DV, sexual assault, and human trafficking. They have a shelter for immediate need and safety, long term, anonymously located safe housing, community groups with weekly meetings for long term support and rebuilding lives, community outreach programs for education in schools and even training for the police department. They continue this good work after having downsized to almost half of their pre-pandemic staff, due to COVID-19 budget cuts. When I asked what policies most notably work to bolster the efficacy of CNVC, Ms. Abbott replied that as of July first of this year, the California Family Law section 6307 was enacted full time, allowing domestic violence protective orders to be filed online. She says this has made a huge difference for survivors because part of what can keep survivors from filing protective orders is the fear of sitting across from their abusers in the courtroom while a judge decides if they should be kept safe from that person or not. "It's the worst thing in the world to have to sit with somebody in

³⁷ Emily Hoeven, "Will the Orange County mass shooting finally convince California Democrats that domestic violence is a violent crime?"

court and have them have to sit and look at the person who hurt them.”³⁸ This is most often a re-traumatizing event and the change to online filing has alleviated additional trauma for victims on a regular basis. Pertaining to potential new policies that could help the CNVC fulfill their functions around DV, her biggest wish was for the state to enact requirements for mandatory training and education (similar to OSHA and sexual harassment requirements), in businesses and agencies, especially including landlords and rental agencies, on the subjects of DV, sexual assault and trauma, and how to support survivors with empathy. Another helpful shift in state policy would be allowing Medi-Cal health insurance to be applicable from county to county, anywhere in the state. Currently, if a survivor must be re-located to another county while fleeing an abuser, or say to get help with drug abuse, they must re-apply for Medi-Cal in the new county. This creates a myriad of problems for people, including being denied for essential services at times, often due to lack of a physical address. Locally, the two biggest barriers for survivors in our community are lack of housing resources and the lack of substance abuse resources. Tuolumne County does not have a live-in substance abuse program that takes Medi-Cal. The closest one is in Modesto, an hour’s drive away and across a county line. So, if a survivor can stay clean by themselves while the waitlist shrinks, still the only way to be accepted is if you have Medi-Cal in Stanislaus County. Notably, the intersectionality of DV and drug or alcohol abuse is significant, and understandably so when considering the following statement shared with Ms. Abbott by a survivor: “I use because they’re nice to me when they’re high and it hurts less when they hit me.”³⁹ Indeed. California, we beseech you, continue to be a leader in women’s rights and

³⁸ Jessi Abbott, (Direct Services Coordinator for the Center for Non Violent Community, Sonora, California), in discussion with the author, October 24, 2023.

³⁹ Jessi Abbott, (Direct Services Coordinator for the Center for Non Violent Community, Sonora, California), in discussion with the author, October 24, 2023.

equality, go beyond what current politics and culture dictate, and make ultra-accessible safety, sobriety, and security the new norm for California women and children.

Although women are the majority of persons harmed by our society's culture of violence, the psychological and physical ramifications extend to violence against men, especially young men and boys. Men also experience intimate partner violence, sexual violence and stalking, most first-time victimizations occurring before the age 25, and many before 18.⁴⁰ One in fifteen children are exposed to DV, 90 percent of whom are eyewitnesses.⁴¹ As children, "boys are at significantly greater risk of physical assault by an adult caretaker than are girls," of having something thrown at them that could hurt, being pushed, grabbed, shoved, slapped or hit, kicked, bit, beat up, or threatened with a knife.⁴² In our culture men and boys are expected to "take it like a man," creating a skewed version of what it means to be a man. And this is borne out in crime perpetrator statistics. Men are far more likely to be the perpetrators of violent acts, making up nearly 80 percent of arrests for violent crimes and 88 percent for murder and non-negligent manslaughter.⁴³ Early experiences are part of our socialization, the make-up of how we relate to society and people who have been hurt or neglected will carry that forward into their adult lives. A recent prime example of the harm done to men by our socio-cultural structure and its possible consequences are highlighted in two news stories published within days of each other. The first told of Marine ground troops who continuously shot cannon blasts in a 2016-17 U.S. offensive against the Islamic State, each blast releasing "a shock wave that shot through the crew

⁴⁰ "Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and Stalking among Men," Last updated June 1, 2020, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/men-ipvsvandstalking.html>.

⁴¹ "Statistics," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*.

⁴² Patricia Godeke Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, "Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women," November 2000, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/21948>, p 37.

⁴³ "Crime in the United States," *Federal Bureau of Investigations*, 2019, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/table-42/table-42.xls>.

members' bodies...and the most delicate organ of all, the brain.”⁴⁴ They returned home with hallucinations, depression, nausea, balance problems and more. When they complained of medical issues to their doctors, many were given drugs that had little useful effect, some had their symptoms dismissed, and others were “punished for misconduct and forced out of the military...[cutting] them off from the veterans' health care benefits that they...desperately need.”⁴⁵ It was more than a year before the U.S. Marine Corps did a silent study⁴⁶ that revealed that the soldiers had traumatic brain injuries from the blasts, yet no apology or formal acknowledgement was given.⁴⁷ Be strong, violent, do as you're told, don't whine when you're hurt. “Some are now homeless. A striking number eventually died by suicide, or tried to.”⁴⁸ When men's humanity and need for care are dismissed, where does all that human hurt, anger, and aggression go? The second article was a follow-up piece on the recent mass shooting in Lewiston, Maine that stated, “Documents released by police show that family and army officials were deeply alarmed by the shooter's deteriorating mental health months before he carried out that state's worst mass shooting.”⁴⁹ And there it is. In a country where the government doesn't admit to or clean up its own mistakes until it becomes a PR problem, where most people have insufficient access to medical and mental health care, where the freedom to carry large capacity weapons of mass destruction is more important to some than the safety of their neighbors and

⁴⁴ Dave Philipps, “A Secret War, Strange New Wounds, and Silence From the Pentagon,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/05/us/us-army-marines-artillery-isis-pentagon.html>.

⁴⁵ Dave Philipps, “A Secret War.”

⁴⁶ The case study of medical files was done without the soldiers' knowledge or participation. (Philipps, “A Secret War.”)

⁴⁷ Philipps, “A Secret War.”

⁴⁸ Philipps, “A Secret War.”

⁴⁹ Kevin Miller, “Lewiston gunman's mental health was deteriorating prior to shooting, documents show,” *NPR.org*, October 31, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/31/1209763180/lewiston-gunmans-mental-health-was-deteriorating-prior-to-shooting-documents-sho>.

families, where small, sweet boys are encouraged to be strong and hard above all else, we have a perfect storm of ultra-violent men.

The phrase “violence against women” is used ubiquitously to describe what many consider to be a women’s issue, but violent perpetrators are overwhelmingly men, and we need to be calling it what it is: a men’s issue. The way we talk and think about a thing is what it becomes for us in our minds. When we say, “violence against women,” we are painting a mental picture that leaves the male aggressor out of the equation and not holding him responsible for his actions, in effect, placing the blame on the victim.⁵⁰ An example of this paradox is when we ask the question of a DV survivor, “why does she stay with him?” Why are we not asking of the abuser, “why does he beat her?”⁵¹ Let’s take rape, for another example: many people think of rape as a women’s issue but over 99 percent of rape is perpetrated by men, regardless of whether the victims are female or male.⁵² This narrative must be changed across all platforms, so that violent men will be forced to take responsibility for their actions. And we, as members of communities and society at large, need to hold them to that responsibility, *especially* other men. Children and adults alike need to *see* suitable male role models, in their everyday lives, holding loving and firm boundaries against violent acts of all kinds, whether it be locker room talk, social media comments, fistfights, or rape. And responsible discourse and engagement must include challenging the media culture that indoctrinates individuals into society with a misogynistic lens.

Mainstream media in music, sports, news, movies, commercials, and the internet normalizes men’s violence against women, oversexualizes and de-values girls, and teaches boys

⁵⁰ Jackson Katz, *The Macho paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and What All Men Can Do About It*, Naperville, IL, Sourcebooks, Inc., 2006, 5.

⁵¹ Jackson Katz, *The Macho paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and What All Men Can Do About It*, Read by Adam Lofbomm, (Old Saybrook, CT, Tantor Audio. 2019 edition), Audible, 4:04-4:05.

⁵² Jackson Katz, *The Macho paradox*, 2006, 5.

a dangerously aggressive form of masculinity. Style magazine reports that rapper Eminem is worth \$250 million dollars. “He has a Sirius XM channel called Shade 45, earned millions at the box office for his film 8 Mile, and published his memoir *The Way I Am*. The 51-year-old also opened a restaurant called Mom’s Spaghetti and is now a character on the popular video game Fortnite.”⁵³ These are the successes and rewards our society gives to the same man who hurls misogyny like javelins in his music, including in a song named *Kim* about killing his wife, (whose real name is Kim), for cheating on him. The following is an excerpt:

Sit down, bitch If you move again I'll beat the shit out of you
 [Eminem (Kim):] (Okay)
 Don't make me wake this baby She don't need to see what I'm about to do
 Quit crying, bitch, why do you always make me shout at you? How could you Just leave me and
 love him out the blue? Oh, what's the matter Kim? Am I too loud for you? Too bad, bitch, you're
 gonna finally hear me out this time At first, I'm like all right You wanna throw me out? That's
 fine! But not for him to take my place, are you out your mind? This couch, this TV, this whole
 house is mine! How could you let him sleep in our bed? Look at, Kim Look at your husband now!
 (No!) I said look at him! He ain't so hot now is he? Little punk!
 (Why are you doing this?) Shut the fuck up!
 (You're drunk! You're never gonna get away with this!) You think I give a fuck!
 Come on we're going for a ride, bitch (No!) Sit up front
 (Well, I can't just leave Hailie alone. What if she wakes up?)
 We'll be right back
 Well, I will, you'll be in the trunk⁵⁴

It says more about our culture than it does about Eminem that he has sold over 220 million records spewing his hateful and gruesome lyrics and is one of the bestselling recording artists of all time. When sports giant Kobe Bryant was accused of rape by a 19-year-old woman, he received boos and a chilly reception from audiences when on the road, but back home in LA, his fans cheered him with a standing ovation as he entered the Lakers’ home court. The “fans who stood and cheered inevitably conveyed something beyond support for the beleaguered Bryant.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Lynn Farah, “10 of the richest hip-hop artists in 2023 – net worths, ranked: Pharrell Williams, Diddy, Jay-Z, Drake, Kanye West and Eminem are making millions beyond the recording studio, but who tops the list?,” *Style Magazine* online, December 14, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/entertainment/article/3244948/10-richest-hip-hop-artists-2023-net-worths-ranked-pharrell-williams-diddy-jay-z-drake-kanye-west-and>.

⁵⁴ Eminem, “Kim,” Aftermath/Interscope, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, 2000.

⁵⁵ Jackson Katz, *The Macho paradox*, 2006, 153-57.

It was a clear message to men that it is ok for them to rape and commit violence against women, and to women that their voices are meaningless, their bodies do not belong to themselves, and their lack of safety and value is socially acceptable and to be expected. These are not the values we talk about out loud, but they are the ones we are living and setting precedent by.

Media directed toward children is often gendering, if not downright sexualizing, setting troublesome standards for how to be in the world. Television commercials are awash with pink ponies, dolls and “pretty” make-up for girls, and tough wrestlers, monster cars, and action toys like swords directed at boys. In any big box store you can find the hard evidence of this gender priming, with toys for boys encouraging a love for cars, trucks, mechanical knowledge, being scary, hard, impenetrable, fighting, saving the day; whereas the toys for girls encourage homemaking, having babies, being soft, taking care of animals, shopping, cooking, putting on makeup and looking pretty.⁵⁶ Adding to this,



Two of the same toys, seen in Wal-Mart, one aimed at girls and the other at boys. Photo by author.

television shows and movies can mislead children to accept violence in intimate relationships. On the surface, Belle, from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, is portrayed as a strong, powerful woman because of her love for books instead of settling for the “provincial life” of marriage, babies, and drudgery. But when viewed through the lens of DV awareness, Belle ends up marrying a batterer.⁵⁷ Dr. Carolyn Newberger, Psychology, Harvard Medical School describes the relationship between the Beast and Belle:

He screams at her, he imprisons her, he throws her father out the door and rips her family away from her. His behavior is without question, frankly and horrifically abusive. And yet the whole thrust of the story is that she returns to him, that she socializes him, that she excuses him, that she reinterprets his rage and his abuse as temper, that she reinterprets his personality as tender and vulnerable, and then that she falls in love with him. And this is a movie that is saying to our

⁵⁶ Christina Nava, “The Toy Isle”, October 28, 2023, unpublished paper for Sociology-1-4134, Columbia Community College.

⁵⁷ Miguel Picker and Chyng Feng Su, dirs., *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power*, 2001; Northampton: MA, Media Education Foundation, Kanopy, 18:57-22:33.

children, ‘overlook the abuse, overlook the violence, there is a tender prince lurking within and it’s your job to kiss that prince and bring it out...or to kiss that beast, and bring the prince out.’ That’s a dangerous message.”⁵⁸

Melina, age nine, gives her thoughts, “If Belle was my friend and I’d seen her go through this whole thing, I’d probably just say ‘keep on being nice and sweet like you are, and that would probably change him.’ And in the movie, it does.”⁵⁹

In addition, the internet has become a regular source of entertainment for most of us, from Facebook to YouTube to TikTok, where face to face communication rules are often tossed aside, but most injurious is the profusion of online pornography. The internet has opened a portal for anyone to put anything up in cyberspace, including increasingly degrading and misogynistic pornography. I remember the magazines with the full paper covers over them that were on the top shelf or hidden behind the counter at the liquor store when I was a kid, and my experiences when running across a centerfold or two were quite enlightening, but I do not remember it ever being frightening. Now, as the mother of teenagers, a daughter and a son, I know that they are getting a much broader, scarier, and sadder education about sex, that is totally skewed from humane and loving interaction. These days, normal, everyday people have free access to porn about “cum guzzling sluts,” gangbangs, and barely-legals, and that is just the mild stuff. If we stop for just a minute, and actually consider every one of those scenarios from the woman’s or child’s point of view, this gives us a very disturbing picture of yet another act of men’s violence that we blithely accept as a part of our culture. And this is teaching our boys and girls how to relate with one another in a way that is brutal and unfeeling.

⁵⁸ Miguel Picker and Chyng Feng Su, dirs., *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*, 18:57-22:33.

⁵⁹ Miguel Picker and Chyng Feng Su, dirs., *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*, 22:00-22:33.

Now add to this the time spent on videogames, which for teens ages thirteen to eighteen is an average of 96 minutes per day,⁶⁰ but for heavy gamers, it's much more. Eight out of the top ten most played video games in the world are based on player versus player violence.⁶¹ Many of them include highly sexualized imagery of female characters, especially the second most played game, *League of Legends*.⁶² Often, these games have extremely realistic and bloody graphics of players murdering other humans with all manner of firearms, including various handguns, sniper rifles, and automatic rifles. There has been much discourse about whether playing video games causes people to commit crimes, and there has been no evidence of that to speak of. Abstractions on screen they may be, but this additional layer of routine interaction that includes brutal and bloody murder, for the purpose of fun, with scantily clad women around for good measure, can lead to desensitization,⁶³ and the normalization of horrific atrocities and use of firearms for dominance in daily life.

In real-life, gun violence is ever increasing, and gun rights interests do not want to see an increase in public safety firearm legislation for fear it will infringe upon profits, regardless of the very real evidence that these laws are needed to save lives. Every month an average of 70 women are murdered by firearm in a DV incident, and two-thirds of all women killed by a intimate partner are killed by gun.⁶⁴ The risk of DV homicide increases by 1000 percent when an abusive partner has access to firearms.⁶⁵ Outside the focus of DV, there is a direct correlation between the

⁶⁰ "Video Games," *Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab*, Last modified January 19, 2022, [https://digitalwellnesslab.org/parents/video-games/#:~:text=Twens%20\(ages%20to%2012,27%20minutes%20playing%20mobile%20games.](https://digitalwellnesslab.org/parents/video-games/#:~:text=Twens%20(ages%20to%2012,27%20minutes%20playing%20mobile%20games.)

⁶¹ "The 10 Most Popular Games in 2023," *Plarium*, October 27, 2023, <https://plarium.com/en/blog/popular-games/>.

⁶² "The 10 Most Popular Games in 2023," *Plarium*.

⁶³ "Video Games," *Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab*.

⁶⁴ "Issues: Domestic Violence," *Everytown for Gun Safety*, Accessed December 18, 2023, <https://www.everytown.org/issues/domestic-violence/>.

⁶⁵ "Domestic Violence and Firearms," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*, 2022, https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/guns_and_dv_2022.pdf.

increase in the number of guns owned in the United States and the number of gun deaths. From 2005 to 2020, gun sales nearly tripled, from 7.8 million to 21.8 million.⁶⁶ And although firearm sales eased a bit during the pandemic, “more Americans died from gun violence in 2020 and 2021 than in any prior year on record; gun-related homicides and suicides totaled 48,830 in 2021;” the number of children shot nearly doubled.⁶⁷ Yet the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) continue to spend millions lobbying in Washington to stymie any law or bill that would put a dent in gun industry profits.⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ For example, the vast majority of NRA members support mandatory background checks, yet since most of the NRA’s annual donations come from its corporate partners, twelve of whom manufacture assault weapons, the NRA’s lobbyists continue to fight against background checks and other restrictions.⁷⁰ The NSSF is a business trade organization that represents gunmakers, and other firearms firms and “functions as the gun industry’s voice, with a singular focus on expanding the market for all types of firearms, including assault weapons and short-barreled rifles.”⁷¹ The scope of their power is vast: during the Trump presidency, they successfully lobbied “to move regulation of gun exports from the state department to the commerce department,” to increase profits for gun exporters.⁷² These organizations are serious

⁶⁶ Daniel De Visé, “Americans Bought Almost 60 million Guns During the Pandemic,” *The Hill* online, April 21, 2023, <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/3960527-americans-bought-almost-60-million-guns-during-the-pandemic/>.

⁶⁷ Daniel De Visé, “Americans Bought Almost 60 million Guns During the Pandemic.”

⁶⁸ Allan Jay, “The NRA Is Lobbying and the Gun Companies Are Paying the Bills,” *Finances Online*, Last modified November 13, 2023, <https://financesonline.com/the-nra-is-lobbying-and-the-gun-companies-are-paying-the-bills/>.

⁶⁹ Peter Stone, “‘Even More Insidious Than the NRA’: US Gun Lobby Group Gains in Power,” *The Guardian*, August 1, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/aug/01/gun-lobby-nra-national-shooting-sports-foundation>.

⁷⁰ Allan Jay, “The NRA Is Lobbying and the Gun Companies Are Paying the Bills.”

⁷¹ Peter Stone, “‘Even More Insidious Than the NRA’: US Gun Lobby Group Gains in Power.”

⁷² Peter Stone, “‘Even More Insidious Than the NRA’: US Gun Lobby Group Gains in Power.”

about protecting the profits of their major contributors and it is difficult for voters to compete with that kind of power when trying to get politicians to enact gun safety laws.

From the outside, it seems as if the Republican ideology around the Second Amendment is the main reason that conservative politicians stymie protective firearm legislation, but a peek at which politicians accept lobbying money from NSSF,⁷³ and the bills they vote down adds a layer of financial motivation as well. The lone Democrat that received funds from NSSF, Jared Golden (D-ME) voted against H.R. 8 and H.R. 1446, both bills that intended to enhance background check laws to ensure guns don't end up in the wrong hands, especially domestic abusers.⁷⁴ Subsequently, Congressman Golden received ten thousand dollars from the NSSF in the 2022 campaign cycle.⁷⁵ In the same campaign cycle, eight other candidates, all republicans, received between nine and ten thousand dollars apiece and a thirty thousand dollar payment went to GOPAC, the general Republican super-PAC. Simply put, any gun control law puts a damper on gun industry profits, so the politicians that tout DV firearm laws as "gun control" issues rather than the "public safety" issues that they are, have their priorities on backward.

In the current political climate, it feels like a reach to hope that the next VAWA reauthorization will include stricter provisions or that states themselves will adopt stricter DV firearm laws, but there are things the Federal Government could be doing to keep women safer. As mentioned earlier, women from state to state have wildly different levels of protection against DV related crimes, especially gun related crimes because states have wildly different laws and are mostly not enforcing VAWA regulations. Congress and the White House could be putting

⁷³ "National Shooting Sports Foundation," *Open Secrets*, Accessed December 18, 2023,

<https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/national-shooting-sports-foundation/summary?id=D000054336>.

⁷⁴ Jared Golden, "Golden Statement on Votes Against House Firearm Legislation," March 11, 2021, press release, <https://golden.house.gov/media/press-releases/golden-statement-votes-against-house-firearm-legislation>.

⁷⁵ "National Shooting Sports Foundation," *Open Secrets*.

pressure on states to uphold current federal regulations by withholding grant funds, but so far, have not.⁷⁶ There are two sides to that, of course, some states seem more likely to let the grant funds go and shut down services for DV survivors than they are to change their gun laws, but there are other Federal funds that could be used as leverage. In addition to Congress, we keep hoping the Supreme Court will do its part to keep us safer. The recent *United States v. Rahimi* case is a prime example of the division along the lines of party politics that this country is experiencing currently. Zackey Rahimi was subject to a protective order due to a DV incident against his girlfriend. When police searched his home during an investigation for other crimes he was suspected of, (included several alleged assaults with a deadly weapon), they found firearms and ammunition in his home, which constituted a federal crime, due to the VAWA and the boyfriend clause. However, after the June 2022 *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* case, where the Supreme Court struck down New York's concealed carry law and reinterpreted the historical understanding of the Second Amendment, Mr. Rahimi's lawyer appealed to the Fifth Circuit Court. The appeal was granted on the basis that the VAWA provision barring domestic abusers from having guns is a violation of Mr. Rahimi's Second Amendment rights.⁷⁷ The Biden administration asked the Supreme Court to review the case, which it did on November 7, 2023. As of this writing, the Court has not released its decision, but it is generally assumed (and hoped) that the decision will favor upholding the VAWA provisions for domestic abusers.⁷⁸ Any other outcome would be catastrophic for the progress made toward protecting women against men's violence and the gun industry's bottom line.

⁷⁶ Sidorsky and Schiller, 180.

⁷⁷ Roque Planas, "This Man Is a Suspect in Multiple Shootings. His Case May Decide the Future of Gun Rights.," *Huff Post online*, July 5, 2023, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/supreme-court-gun-rights-case-zackey-rahimi_n_64a551a0e4b0035bc5c9fe71.

⁷⁸ Adam Liptak, "Supreme Court Seems Likely to Uphold Law Disarming Domestic Abusers," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/07/us/politics/supreme-court-gun-rights-domestic-violence.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

Via the research cited throughout this paper, and a lifetime of passion for the subject, I offer a few ideas that I think could help the United States break the bonds of patriarchal sexism, concurrently alleviating DV suffering, starting at the level of government and working our way back. Honored justices of the Supreme Court, please decide well in *U.S. v. Rahimi*; uphold the VAWA regulations that keep our women and children safer and set new precedent for those trying to trample citizen's rights to public safety with a foundationalist understanding of constitutional law that dates back nearly a century and a half and has no relevance in today's society. Congress and Mr. President, please apply financial pressure to states to uphold the federal VAWA regulations that are so badly needed for women from state to state to be on more equal footing with one another. After all, we are one country, and our federal laws are meant to apply to all of us. Just going to put this right here: GUN LAWS SAVE LIVES. Britain and Australia are shining examples of countries who have dramatically decreased gun deaths with legislation. Britain boasts one of the lowest gun death rates of developed countries after banning semiautomatic weapons in 1986 and most handguns in 1996, and Australia has had only one, that's right ONE mass shooting in the more than twenty-six years since enacting the National Firearms Agreement (NFA) in 1996 along with a massive buyback policy that destroyed nearly a million personal guns.⁷⁹ Additionally, and more to the point for this essay, "there was an absolute reduction in female firearm homicide victimization" as a result of the NFA, and a strong decline in gun suicides as well.⁸⁰ So let's do it! It is definitely time that we have a different Supreme Court ruling on what kind of campaign finance is constitutional. I find it handy that the

⁷⁹ Max Fisher, "Other Countries Had Mass Shootings. Then They Changed Their Gun Laws.," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/world/europe/gun-laws-australia-britain.html>.

⁸⁰ Rajeev Ramchand and Jessica Saunders, "The Effects of the 1996 National Firearms Agreement in Australia on Suicide, Homicide, and Mass Shootings," *Rand Corporation*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/essays/1996-national-firearms-agreement.html>.

Constitution, Article IV, Section 4 reads: “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, and shall protect each of them against Invasion; and on Application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature cannot be convened) against domestic Violence.” Hmm, so we can all vote (see Amendments Fourteen and Nineteen about how that should be equal between citizens), and the government is obliged to protect us against domestic violence. Seems like campaign financing by gun companies who are largely responsible for the rates of DV in this country is unconstitutional indeed. We would be far better off charging corporations for their fair share of taxes and using the funds to offer universal healthcare. Yet another hot topic, but a solution that would alleviate many of the problems that DV survivors have getting care for themselves and their children, while subsequently staying safe and away from their abusers. Whether that be in a different city, county, or state, they must know that they can have their medical needs taken care of, or they will be that much less likely to leave their abusive homes.

Furthermore, let us rethink the way we use media and whether we want such violent and debasing influences present in our everyday lives. Look, I am a musician and a songwriter, music and movies are expressive art, and I do not support regulating them down to the teeth...But...I do hold each of us responsible for what we support. Where we put our money and time is another form of placing our votes on what is appropriate for us socially. How about we don't cheer sports players and coaches when they are abusers? How about we insist they attend programs and get the therapeutic support they need to become the heroes we really want to cheer. Good example, Colin Kaepernick with his *Know Your Rights* youth programs vs. Kobe Bryant with his apparent need for control over women. How about, if we feel like we can relate to the rapey and hateful lyrics that Eminem spouts, we take a good hard look at why that is, and what personal changes

we ourselves may need to make toward a healthier attitude toward women, relationships, and self-esteem. And finally, let us be highly aware of what we put in our children's minds. From television commercials, to toys, to movies and games. Let's create the world we want them to live in, rather than show them the one we screwed up that they will need to fix.

Regarding education: the more we know, the more we can do. The education system in the United States needs a re-vamp toward fiscal equality, and a prioritization of social and communication skills based in kindness and self-respect, from early childhood to higher education. In a recent interview, retired Marriage and Family Therapist Mark Gee relayed that in his experience, most people he saw in his family counseling practice that had relationships bordering on DV had a major lack of communication skills. So many people are not being taught kindness and compassion, or having it modeled for them. And, according to Mr. Gee, bad communication can make for big reactions. Further, as mentioned before, the ability to understand the special needs of DV survivors (and all trauma survivors, for that matter), should be added to every level of education. Raising awareness raises compassion for trauma sufferers and the ability to recognize trauma and act appropriately are the most important skills we can promote to prevent suicide, mass shootings, self-harm, acting out, harming of family members, ad infinitum. Hurt people hurt people. Trauma informed response should be a state mandated training for teachers, businesspeople, and government offices. Programs like *The Offramp Project* provide training and resources for this kind of work.⁸¹ We must know *how* if we are to heal each other and prevent more trauma.

Dear men, good, kind, egalitarian men, we need you, please come forth. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle seemed to have limited and not so great choices of men. Gaston, the burly, self-

⁸¹ The Offramp Project for violence prevention. <https://off-ramp.org/>

absorbed, male chauvinist, or the Beast, who may have had a loving prince inside but was aggressively abusive on the outside. Why did Belle not have any other choices? Where was the intelligent communicator, the handsome professor with a giant library? The bigger question here is *where* can our youth see representation of male advocates in equality? Men, look for ways you can speak up in your daily lives. Can you let your buddies know that you are not going to be a part of sexist conversations? Can you reach out to your kids, or kids in your community that need a positive role model? Can you hold a standard of respect on your sports teams, insisting on respectful behavior toward women? Can you support your girlfriend, wife, boyfriend, or brother after a traumatic experience without trying to be the fixer, and just centering the person who is hurt and focusing on their needs? If so, you are one of the good men. And we need you, more than ever, to stand for non-violence in community, in society. For ideas and inspiration, watch *Breaking Our Silence*, a short documentary about men from Gloucester, Massachusetts who march for women’s safety,⁸² and watch *Tough Guise 2*,⁸³ a wonderfully honest look at and challenge to stereotypes about manhood. Check out Tony Porter’s website, *A Call to Men*,⁸⁴ and read about his work promoting healthy manhood in the next generations. Watch these movies, read the books and literature, show up. I cannot overstate... WE NEED YOU.

And we are back where we started, where we have always needed to be. Let us recognize, honor, and sanctify women’s value. This is a tricky one, because it requires that we become aware of our thoughts as we move throughout our days, notice when we are playing a stereotype-loop in our heads, and commit to changing the narrative. It starts inside of every person. Yes, we

⁸² *Breaking Our Silence: Gloucester Men Speak Out Against Domestic Abuse*, directed by Henry Firrini, (2002; Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation), Kanopy.

⁸³ *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood, and American Culture*, Jackson Katz, (2013; Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation), <https://www.toughguise2.org/>.

⁸⁴ “A Call to Men: The Next Generation of Manhood,” Accessed October 31, 2023. <https://www.acalltomen.org/>.

can point to all the things I have pointed at thus far, but ultimately, we the people is made up of you and me. First, we need to re-think the ways we view those who are most impacted by white patriarchy and specifically DV: Black and Indigenous women. When we have a plan that raises up our most vulnerable, that plan raises us all up. Another issue that Ms. Abbott from CNVC in Tuolumne County raised was the stigma of DV and how using the terms domestic violence and sexual assault limits the success of their community engagement campaigns. According to Ms. Abbott, people tend to think “it’s only a woman”, because women have been so devalued in our society, and that “this is a family problem, this is not my problem.”⁸⁵ Therefore, to combat biases and change the narrative during Domestic Violence Awareness month, the purple ribbons CNVC posted all over town read, “End Family Violence.” Similarly, the campaign slogan for the upcoming Sexual Assault Awareness month will be, “We Believe You.” Because, if there is any message that should be shouted over and over again, it is that WOMEN ARE VALUABLE. Women are worth believing and protecting. Women are the ones who push the babies out. They are to be honored, cherished, and supported. In the aftermath of *Dobbs v. Jackson*, one of the little mentioned effects of the abortion bans that spread like a disease across so many states, is that visiting the gynecologist was sometimes the only place that women in controlling or abusive relationships could turn to when they needed help getting out or making an exit plan. Thanks to the new restrictions, OBGYN’s are leaving states in droves because they are unable to practice medicine without fear of legal repercussions. Not only does this put a multitude of citizens at a health disadvantage, but also takes a lifeline to safety away from abused women and children.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Jessi Abbott, (Direct Services Coordinator for the Center for Non Violent Community, Sonora, California), in discussion with the author, October 24, 2023.

⁸⁶ Jennifer Gerson and Shefali Luthra, “How Abortion Bans Are Undercutting Efforts to Prevent Domestic Violence,” *The 19th*, November 19, 2023, <https://19thnews.org/2023/11/abortion-bans-hindering-domestic-violence-screenings-prevention/>.

Abortion has become more than a question of choice, it is a question of agency. There are valid points on both sides of the issue, but the only outcome that matters is that the state does not ever take away a woman's agency over her own body. Ever. Women do not belong to the state. Without women, the state would not exist. I love to look to Iceland for this one, and their National Women's Day Off.⁸⁷ When women stop working, society stops functioning.

No one is untouched by domestic violence. In a recent Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Meeting, when discussing the upcoming "Paint the Town Purple" event for Domestic Violence Awareness month, Jessi Abbot of the CNVC asked all of the people in the room, supervisors and citizens alike, to raise their hands if they had ever known someone affected or had been affected themselves by DV. "Every single person in the room raised their hand."⁸⁸ When I was talking to my grandmother about my research, she opened up to me about her own terrible experiences as a young wife and mother, with a husband that would beat her and worse. Because of the lack of support and laws in the 1950's and 1960's, it took her fifteen years to get herself and her kids away with an official divorce. The generational trauma is real, and many puzzle pieces snapped into place for me when she entrusted me with her story.⁸⁹ But this violence was not just handed down through my family and yours, it has been handed down for centuries. Throughout our history, the United States has continuously devalued women and their contributions to society. The Equal Rights Amendment is frozen in time as if it wasn't a century's worth of hard work by courageous women to get it considered, let alone voted on and ratified. Consistent with this, our government refuses to join the United Nations treaty to end violence for

⁸⁷ "1975 Icelandic Women's Strike," *Wikipedia*, last modified November 23, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_Icelandic_women%27s_strike.

⁸⁸ Jessi Abbott, (Direct Services Coordinator for the Center for Non Violent Community, Sonora, California), in discussion with the author, October 24, 2023.

⁸⁹ With loving permission. Thank you.

women and girls called the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Seriously, the U.S. is in the shit group of only seven countries out of 193, “including Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Nauru, Palau and Tonga—that have not yet ratified CEDAW.”⁹⁰ Is it any wonder then that the protection from domestic violence for women was nearly impossible to get and still varies from state to state? And is it any wonder that many men feel justified in their violence against women? Yes, we are complicit. Every day we all add something to the whole. Our country is supposed to be a mirror of its citizens, not the other way around. So, let’s get out our picks and shovels and return patriarchy to the soil, where it can finally sink into the loving mother earth with relief, and break down to become food for worms and brighter flowers.

Oh yeah, and please vote.

⁹⁰ “The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) ...because Women’s Rights are Human Rights,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, March 2010, https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/legal-documents/CEDAW_factsheet_20100429.pdf.

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