

# Domestic Violence Awareness — Newsworthy or Not?

by Patricia Castillo, Cathy Marston, and Mary Lou Mendoza



**D**omestic violence stories led the news this October: Ray Rice's expulsion from the NFL for punching his then-fiancée unconscious; and Vikings' player Adrian Peterson's arrest for beating his child with a switch. The latter includes Peterson's admission that he was a childhood survivor of battering.

With these national news-pegs, the city's events for Domestic Violence Awareness Month should've garnered extensive coverage. Yet, no media outlet we read, watched, or listened to covered the October 11th *P.E.A.C.E. in the Plaza* event in Main Plaza. The *San Antonio Express-News*, instead, ran wild art with a headline of a DV event in Boerne that showed a man dressed in drag; and did so inside the Metro section. There was not a single word about the speakers, poets, nonprofits, activists, free vegan food, and crafts for children available at *P.E.A.C.E. in the Plaza*, sponsored by the *P.E.A.C.E. (Putting an End to Abuse Through Community Efforts) Initiative*.

When we approached the *SA Express-News* in October on this topic, editorial page editor, Bruce Davidson, said he did not want the media angle and that it was too long. He said he would like a domestic-violence column, but not for the Sunday Opinion section. We met the word count in November; and Davidson published that

column on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. However, Mary Lou Mendoza's byline and bio were removed. She believes that Davidson chose to remove her byline because she refused to meet with the E-N Editorial Board regarding her fourth run for the Edgewood ISD school board — which the *Express-News* did not endorse.

**Battering is one of the biggest social problems we face as a society. The statistics are staggering and show that the U.S. has one of the highest rates in the world, clearly meeting the journalistic "news values" of prominence, conflict, and human interest:**

FBI statistics show that every day in this country, men kill 4 women who are their significant others or family members. This statistic is so high that the FBI coined a term for this phenomenon: femicide. Statistics also show that men batter a woman every 12 seconds in this country.

The **Texas Council on Family Violence**, in its report, *Honoring Texas Victims: Family Violence Fatalities 2012*, found that 74% of intimate-partner femicides took place in the home. TCFV believes, "[E]ach intimate partner homicide is **knowable, predictable, and preventable**." TCFV also found that perpetrators killed, in addition to their target, another 15 friends and/or family members in 2012. This included 5 children. These statistics bring home another news value: proximity.

An atrocity unique to Texas is that 20% of the time on domestic-violence calls, the police arrest the battered woman instead of the male batterer — while this happens only 3% of the time in other states. According to the International Centre for Prison Studies, nearly a third of all female prisoners worldwide are incarcerated in the U.S. There are 201,200 women in U.S. prisons: 78% of whom are battering survivors, according to the U.S. Dept. of Justice and International C.U.R.E. (Citizens United to Reform Errants).

**Project A.D.V.A.N.C.E.** (Addressing Violence & Abuse through Networking, Client Education & Empowerment) in San Antonio has classes for first-time, domestic-violence offenders. Sixty-seven percent of those are women who lawfully defended themselves. Texas recognizes the

self-defense waiver (A.K.A. "Stand Your Ground" law) codified in the Texas Penal Code, Subchapter C, Sect. 9.31 (entitled: "Self-Defense"). Texas also codified a Defense of a Third Party Waiver. Of those wrongfully-arrested battered-women documented by *Free Battered Texas Women*, 74% defended themselves; 16% defended a third party (children or grandchildren); and 10% did both. Self-defense waivers have been the subject of scrutiny in the U.S. following the killings of multiple, unarmed, African-American males by nonblack males. Proper enforcement of these waivers is essential for the protection of all citizens: self-defense is a right; battering and/or bigotry-based killing is a crime.

*Ms. reporter, Stephanie Hallett*, writes that men in police departments are 4 times more likely than men in other professions to have active or recent family-violence charges. *Texas Monthly* gave Lloyd Oliver, a candidate in the Democratic primary for Harris County D.A., a *Bum Steer Award* this year for bragging that, if elected, he would de-emphasize prosecutions involving spousal abuse, because: "Family violence is so overrated." This heinous man only took up a small sidebar in their magazine. It's time for media to fully cover such misogynist attitudes and misconduct.

Researcher Ann Jones bluntly remarks: "[I]n the scales of American justice, men weigh more than women. Assaulting a man is a serious crime, but assaulting a woman or even killing her — well, that's not so bad." She adds: "One 1991 study found that among assaultive men arrested, prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced, less than 1% (.9%) served any jail time."

Hillary Clinton once said, "Violence against women is not culture; it's not custom. It's criminal." We urge San Antonio, Texas and all of our media to speak out against male battering of women and children and encourage all groups to weave a web of safety by making their events (in October and otherwise) about ending battering and all forms of "domestic violence" ♦



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