

## Letter from the Director—

### our mission statement

The Westside Domestic Violence Network (WDVN), through the expertise of its diverse membership, serves as the authority on domestic violence policy, service provision, and standards in training for the Westside communities and is committed to expanding and enhancing services to victims of domestic violence by:

- Improving communication, collaboration and accountability among member agencies through regular networking meetings and resource sharing
- Improving the westside community's continuum of care through meetings where member agencies may analyze complex cases involving interagency coordination
- Supporting member agencies in their prevention and intervention efforts through the provision of training, peer consultation, and technical assistance
- Working with member agencies to develop best practice models to attain the highest possible standard in serving victims of domestic violence
- Developing projects to address emerging issues that impact victims of domestic violence

The truth is that I sat down to write this piece on Mother's Day weekend and never finished it. It was about our obsession with mothers' and women's roles; how they should be, what they should be and what they shouldn't be -- Tiger Mom, Helicopter Mom, stay-at-home mom, welfare mom and CEO mom. The article was intended to focus on the essential need to dialog about gender oppression, that gender-based issues are just as relevant today as they have ever been. The truth is, I never finished it. It had no soul. It didn't have passion or focus. I struggled to try to figure out what was getting in the way and as much as I hate to say it, I have come to understand, I'm tired.

I'm tired of having to tell my son about yet another mass shooting. I am tired of looking into his eyes and trying to figure out how to make sense of these cruel and senseless acts. I am tired of reading about gun control and signing ump-teen on-line petitions. I am tired of answering his questions of "but why, Mom?" I'm tired of the constant and daily outrage. Most of all, I'm tired of trying to convince people that issues

of gender oppression matter; that they matter to men and women, girls and boys alike. That patriarchy and privilege have never been and will continue to NOT be beneficial for society. This idea that you're supposed to have, that you get to be, that you are owed something is something painful and scary to turn towards and look in the eye. It brings with it long histories of pain and guilt. Who would want to do this? Of course this is the last thing people want to look at and talk about. It hurts my heart just to think on it.

The bare bones fact is that gender matters and gender has everything to do with our health, safety and wellness.

"It is not about guns and mental illness, its about cultural ideas about manhood and how they correlate and intersect with the availability of guns and mental illness...It screams out for a national conversation about manhood, and sex, and violence, and relationships."

Jackson Katz

So, why write this? Because, if I were really honest with myself, though I wish to hand off the task and responsibility to someone else, I realize the thing I fear more than being tired is acceptance. I found myself saying, "well, I'll have to tell my son about this before he goes to school tomorrow" with an air of normalcy and matter-of-factness that was distressing in hindsight. The work is too important to lay aside. Lives are at stake and not just in annual shootings, but in how battered women are treated in court, how children are treating each other, in whether a woman can walk to her dorm room without pause or thought, dreading that time where she has to think, "If only I hadn't ...".

## ***Letter from the Director– Continued***

Margaret Atwood's words, "Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them" feel extremely relevant to our times. Jackson Katz who has been writing about this since Columbine stated,

"Rampage shootings and school shootings are in his typical pattern, which is that men who feel like they've been either marginalized, abused, harassed or socially ostracized can develop a revenge fantasy, find firearms and then enact this script where they take control back. We talk about guns and the availability of guns and mental illness and how can we figure out how to get better mental health services. What almost nobody says in the mainstream conversation about those two factors is if it's about gun availability and mental illness, then why don't girls and women commit 50 percent of these acts? It is not about guns and mental illness, its about cultural ideas about manhood and how they correlate and intersect with the availability of guns and mental illness...It screams out for a national conversation about manhood, and sex, and violence, and relationships" (<http://www.ksby.com/news/alleged-gunman-elliott-rodger-s-life-of-rage-resentment-and-loneliness/>).

In "But What About The Men? On Masculinity and Mass Shootings" (<http://feministcurrent.com/6942/but-what-about-the-men-on-masculinity-and-mass-shootings/>), Meghan Murphy chronicles a litany of mass shootings and the theme that ties them all together is men who are scorned who are taking back what they feel is owed to them. Murphy writes, "In 31 of the school shootings that have taken place since 1999, the murderers were all men. Out of the 62 mass murders which happened over the past 30 years, only one of those shooters was a woman. The overwhelming majority of the gunmen were white."

This is how privilege works. What we know is that the human mind and body does not like dissonance. Just as the brain works to create the phantom limb syndrome to "make sense" of the loss of a limb, we seek to reconcile our internal and external states. The internal powerlessness of the individual clashes against the external messages and notions of privilege. That privilege says to that individual that you "get to" do this. You get a voice. You are owed this as a birthright. This is not to say that all men are violent or disempowered, but there is a historical context for this privilege that is the soup in which we all swim. Sitting at this very Barnes and Noble a few weeks ago, a white woman walked up to a group of African American women and intruded upon their conversation to comment on one of the woman's braids. The white woman was loud. She was annoying with her questions of "how do you get your hair to do that and how long does that take?" They politely answered her questions and waited for her to leave. This incident was beyond a kooky lady who has no social graces. This was an example of a white woman who felt she **got to** intrude. She had permission to do this and took it upon herself to do so. In January, Elliot Rodger posted, "I passed by this restaurant and I saw this black guy chilling with 4 hot white girls. He didn't even look good. Then later on in the day I was shopping at Trader Joe's and saw an Indian guy with 2 above average White Girls!!!" He addressed "full Asian" men saying, "[W]hite girls would never go for you. You're just butthurt that you were born as an asian piece of shit..." (<http://rodonline.typepad.com/rodonline/2014/05/santa-barbara-shooting-suspects-history-of-racist->

## ***Letter from the Director– Continued***

rants-and-messages.html?utm\_source=dlvr.it&utm\_medium=twitter). In this window into Rodger’s mind, we see a complex world of privilege and oppression. It is dangerous and it is painful.

We live in confusing times. We have a Black president and yet a young Black man can be killed for wearing a hoodie and seeking out some Skittles. We have Sheryl Sandberg teaching us to “Lean In”, promising us the new American Dream of empowerment if only we could grab it for ourselves, and yet we have the Steubenville rapes. As we come into the anniversary of the shootings of June 2013, we understand that as a community, we have no choice but to challenge ourselves. The shooting instigated by John Zuwahri shattered the false notion that as a Westside community that we could rest in our complacency. Who knows to what extent we failed to empower Randa Abdou in her gender oppression or in her experience as a Lebanese immigrant, post-911. What conversations did we not have about race and gender because they were too uncomfortable or because there was no forum for them?

So this leaves us at the question: “What do we do?” I can’t say it is a question easily answered, but a starting place is with ourselves. We can look in the mirror and check ourselves the same way you would check for spinach in your teeth. Carefully and close up. Take in the reality. Take a deep breath in and be brave enough to analyze our own privilege and have conversations with each other. Lots and lots of conversations that lead to internal and external change and connections with others. Scary conversations about both race and gender. Complex conversations that appreciate nuance. We must support the foundational elements of the Westside Domestic Violence Network in collaborating to create a community safety net which acknowledges that violence in the home has everything to do with everything, unemployment, school failure, mental illness, substance abuse and gang violence. We must also support the work of BRO, understanding that because the overwhelming majority of violence is instigated by men, that violence IS a man’s issue. We have to do this because if there is one reality that mass shootings brings to light it is the “It could be me or someone I love” understanding that violence affects us all.

The bare bones fact is that gender matters and gender have everything to do with our health, safety and wellness. I am tired, but I have strong and focused allies who will proceed with me because we are at an impasse which will define the future. We as a community are past the 101 course of gender and race studies. We have hit the big leagues, the graduate course of understanding ourselves, others and the world around us. It is difficult, but we must change and come to realize that we have to have scary and difficult conversations about gender, conversations that create connection and empathy. We have to. Lives depend on it, quite literally.

For more information, visit :

<http://kalw.org/post/your-call-how-can-men-oppose-misogyny>

<http://www.npr.org/2014/05/27/316452303/a-killers-manifesto-reveals-wide-reach-of-misogyny-online?sc=17&f=2>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/08/jackson-katzs-ted-talk-gender-violence-video\\_n\\_3238956.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/08/jackson-katzs-ted-talk-gender-violence-video_n_3238956.html)