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**The 'Bitch Tape':
How Male Batterers Find The Woman in the State**

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Women’s experiences have been the nucleus of domestic violence literature, discourse, and policy, and have shaped the therapeutic and/or punitive measures that are characteristic of domestic violence prevention – measures that research has shown are largely ineffective in curbing violence. Consequently, we still know relatively little about why men batter, and how they make sense of the negative “batterer” credential that corresponds with their offense. The few studies that explore batterer behavior are primarily psychological, reducing their violence to individual pathology that can be “treated” in therapy. Accordingly, non-psychological studies are characterized by evaluations of the utility, effectiveness, and/or therapeutic techniques of Batterer Intervention Programs, thus missing the *sociological* roots of batterer behavior. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 15 male batterers, my research shows that these men make sense of the offenses of which they have been accused in different ways, both with regard to the role they attribute to the state in their felt disempowerment and emasculation, and the role they attribute to their female victims. These different meanings are attributable to a number of factors – factors I argue must be addressed to the extent that they are linked to recidivistic risks of battering. The analysis presented in this paper therefore provides a foundation for creating more effective social remedies for battering behavior, and it provides an opportunity to reconsider gender-based theories of interpersonal violence more generally.

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Introduction

In February 2009, singers Chris Brown and Rihanna dominated media headlines after he assaulted her prior to the Grammy Awards. Upon his arrest, Brown was demonized in the media, conveyed a great lack of remorse, and even tried to assert himself as a victim who witnessed his own mother's abuse at the hands of his stepfather. Brown increasingly became angry at the public for being angry at him. Soon thereafter, TMZ released a photo of the horrific facial injuries Rihanna sustained from the assault. This photo further exacerbated the public's disgust with Brown because its severity confirmed and played upon the social imagination of what 'real' or 'legitimate' domestic violence looks like. It left no gray area in the way that *only* a black eye or extreme emotional abuse is typically regarded. The politics of victimhood – both Brown's and Rihanna's – that emerged in this incident emphasized the clear victim-perpetrator dichotomy that is salient in domestic violence discourse. It highlighted what many feminists have already known and long organized against, women's vulnerability in a patriarchal society. But it also emphasized the deafening silence that continues to pervade domestic violence debates – male vulnerability in a patriarchal society. It is through this latter lens that I approach the study of male batterers.

The assertion of male vulnerability in a patriarchal society can be difficult to hear, especially in the context of a domestic violence dispute where a man is the clear abuser. Indeed, this pervasive victim-perpetrator dichotomy disallows us from regarding batterers as simultaneously culpable *and* vulnerable. Perpetrator *and* victim. Existing domestic violence discourse and policy (Lemon 2005) situates the violence of individual men against individual women within a larger structure of patriarchy. Because it is women's voices that patriarchy silences in the private sphere, it is "women's experiences" around which feminists have anchored efforts to successfully bring domestic violence into social recognition (Gordon 1988; Mahoney 1992; Miller 2008; Potter 2008; Richie 1996). As a

result, scholars and activists have overlooked the possibility of theorizing gender-based violence through a more comprehensive lens (Bumiller 2010). Why should we?

In February 2013, exactly four years after the now infamous assault, Chris Brown and Rihanna arrived at the Grammy Awards together, as cameras captured numerous images of a couple seemingly in the deepest throes of mutual adoration. The story of the couple's journey from 2009 to 2013 is in no way exceptional. Their relationship is what domestic violence looks like. I therefore argue that in order to make sense of domestic violence, scholarship can no longer remain conceptually shackled by the victim-perpetrator dichotomy wherein we privilege the experiences of female victims and ignore the experiences of male batterers. There exists an important and growing body of work on women's experiences with domestic violence. What is needed is balance – a more rigorous understanding of how batterers understand themselves and their experiences vis-à-vis domestic violence. To be clear, the point is not to take their words as an objective “truth,” but to understand what is true for *them*. Furthermore, the point is not to pass blame, downplay, justify, or ally with their acts of violence. It is simply to situate batterer violence and the way male batterers make sense of that violence within a broader social context – a project that can only be rigorously achieved by abandoning the notion that “victim” and “perpetrator” are mutually exclusive categories.

In this study, I offer two fundamental reasons for disrupting the current gap that pervades domestic violence research. First, despite legislative victories and social shifts in gender ideology, there is no evidence that domestic violence has subsided. Second, who the state deems to be a “batterer,” who warrants punishment, and which punishments are appropriate are deeply shaped by race (Crenshaw 1993; Richie 1996) and class. Disguising itself as a neutral arbitrator, the state advances white male hegemony (Brown 1992; Connell 1995; Stoler 2002; Goldberg 2002; Omi and Winant 1994) and shapes the politics of relational masculinity (Schneider 1991; Siegel 1996) that are

enacted when the state engages with potential batterers. Protection of women from public male hegemony and violence is the rationale for male domination in the “private sphere” (Brown 1992; Logan 2003; Schneider 1991; Siegel 1996). State intervention in domestic violence is thus an encroachment on this premise. By usurping the role of protector, the state highlights the failure of men to isolate their female partners from the public realm and limits their ability to make claims to male domination in the private realm. In this way, batterers fall into a liminal space in which I argue domestic violence is reproduced – they are considered violent offenders and victimizers by the state, yet they may understand *themselves* as victims who are disempowered, silenced, and emasculated (Merry 2003) by the very state that aims to “treat” their behavior.

I argue that what is therefore needed is a systematic study of how men’s violence toward women is experienced, adjudicated, and socially regarded, from the perspective of male batterers. Based on interviews with 15 men who have “graduated” from batterer intervention programs (BIPs), and thus experienced state visibility as batterers, my research asks: *How do men who batter women make sense of their interactions with the state that disciplines them, especially given the racialized and classed outcomes of who the state deems batterers?* I argue that the answers to this question, combined with a critique of our current limited theorizing of patriarchy, will lay a foundation for developing a more comprehensive social theory that regards “domestic violence as a social, political, and legal phenomenon” (Bumiller 2010, 174) that does not neatly fit within a victim-perpetrator dichotomy, wherein we privilege the experiences of female victims and ignore the experiences of male batterers.

In what follows, I summarize and critique the ways in which scholars have used patriarchy to understand domestic violence, in order to demonstrate the importance of also theorizing the effects of patriarchy on men. After explaining my research methods, I will make a case for de-neutralizing the role of the state in domestic violence ideology and advocate for Wendy Brown’s theory of a masculinist state as a useful way to explain the present case. I will then show that batterers

experience a double victimization resulting from what they perceive to be a womanist state bias that empowers individual women at the expense of men. I turn to masculinity scholars to unpack this felt double victimization. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of both the conceptual and the political implications of this study.

Literature Review

Within the (pro-matrimonial) heteronormative framework¹ that has shaped existing domestic violence scholarship, the everyday practices of domestic violence are sociologically understudied, tending to focus almost exclusively on women's experiences (Gelles 1976; Gordon 1988; Haney 2010; Miller 2008; Potter 2008; Richie 1996; Walker 1977). Public policy is no different (Dragiewicz 2011; Lemon 2005; Mahoney 1992). Both scholars and activists theorize domestic violence through a lens of patriarchy. Allen Johnson (1997) explains that, "A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being *male dominated*, *male identified*, and *male centered* [sic]. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women" (5). Accordingly, scholars situate domestic violence within a patriarchal frame wherein the performance (West and Zimmerman 1987) of hegemonic masculinity structures gender practice in order to guarantee the dominance of men and the subordination of women (Connell 1995).

¹ What we now call "domestic violence" came into social recognition as "wife-beating" – a husband on wife phenomenon – and beyond rhetorical engineering, little has been done to conceptualize it differently. Gender-neutral language such as "family violence" and "intimate partner abuse" has been used to name policies and theories that claim to account for wives who batter husbands and battery in same-sex relationships (Dragiewicz 2011; Durfee 2011). But these are largely rhetorical shifts that are, for the most part, not realized in victim advocacy policies and programs – as evidenced by the recent hesitancy in reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act. Victims from same-sex couples, and even heterosexual domestic partnerships where couples are unmarried, have additional legal burdens of proving domestic violence based on highly subjective notions of what constitutes a domestic "relationship" as opposed to a room-mate situation. State funding for domestic violence is geared toward social services for *women's* protection, such as shelters and legal aid, and does not allow refuge or legal aid tailored to battered heterosexual men (Dragiewicz 2011), gay men, lesbians, or trans individuals. Indeed the only federal law pertaining to domestic violence is still called the Violence Against *Women's* Act. My point in focusing my analysis on men's violence toward their female partners is therefore not to exclude or ignore the realities of non-heteronormative relationships. My goal is to focus on "domestic violence" as it has been realized as a social issue – one that has been and remains ideologically associated with male violence toward their female partners.

Accordingly, when male dominance is manifested through physical attacks on a woman's body, it is in many ways normalized as one possibility out of many that can emerge because of the *privacy* afforded to men to rule their castles as they see fit. Therefore, the "basis of wife-beating is male dominance" (Gordon 1988, 251).

This conceptualization of patriarchy, inherent in which is the male privilege of domestic privacy, is largely ahistorical, privileging the experiences of white, middle-class women. It emerged in the mid-1980s, which was a historical moment where work and family arrangements were no longer representative of even that population (indeed, a growing number of white, middle-class women worked outside the home) and have never been representative of women from different racial ethnic and/or class groups. Nonetheless, it prevails today as the dominant model for understanding domestic violence. More recent scholarship adds nuance to conceptualizing patriarchy by considering the lived experience of poor women (Crenshaw 1993; Haney 2010; West and Fenstermaker 1995) and/or Latinas and black women (Crenshaw 1993; Miller 2008; Potter 2008; Richie 1996; West and Fenstermaker 1995). What continues to be overlooked in domestic violence research, however, is how patriarchy affects men.

What little research there is on male batterers tends to focus solely on batterer intervention programs (BIPs) and is primarily concerned with critiquing or advocating for various therapeutic curricula (Hendricks et al. 2006; Labriola et al. 2008; Lehmann and Simmons 2009; Miller 2010; Schrock and Padavic 2007). BIPs are state-sanctioned programs that some batterers (depending on their criminal history) are mandated to attend in lieu of sentencing. In California, batterers must attend assigned BIPs once a week for a minimum of 52 weeks. A judge may require more weeks depending on progress reports from BIP leaders. BIP research consistently concludes that these programs are ineffective in reducing recidivism (Hendricks et al. 2006; Labriola et al. 2008). There are a small number of non-BIP centered studies that use batterer narratives to better understand the

interpersonal aspects of men's relationships with their female partners (Cavanagh et al. 2001; Durfee 2011). However, these studies do not focus on how men situate their violence within a macro-social context.

While existing research on BIPs and batterer narratives is beneficial, it is important to realize two crucial limits of these studies. First, situating male batterer narratives in the context of a batterer intervention program obscures the breadth of social influences on male batterer behavior, and focuses on male batterers as asocial actors. Indeed, once we come to understand someone's behavior as intrinsic to their individual make-up, analysis of other factors appears superfluous. These studies isolate male experiences within a frame of pathology and seek to understand those experiences solely in terms of micro-interactions with their female partners. Second, these studies also ignore that by the time a batterer has entered a BIP, he has already been through many stages of a carceral process that stigmatizes him (to say nothing of those stigmas that may already be mapped onto him) and that makes it difficult to understand him as anything but a villain. Instead of acknowledging and interrogating it, many studies take this process of signification for granted and proceed in their analysis, essentially naturalizing and reifying those negative associations in the knowledge production process.

Existing domestic violence research therefore delimits the capacity of patriarchy to serve as a useful framework. If domestic violence continues to thrive because of patriarchy, we should turn our attention to how larger systems of male domination affect not only women, but also men. Domestic violence pioneers such as Linda Gordon agree that "defining wife-beating as a social problem, not merely a phenomenon of particular violent individuals or relationships, was one of the great achievements of feminism" (Gordon 1988, 251). Existing research that is centered on individualized portrayals of a male batterer pathology is therefore antithetical to the larger framework of patriarchy Gordon describes. If domestic violence is a social issue as feminist activists

and scholars have argued, then I suggest we remain consistent in how we treat it as such. Micro-social and psychological analysis is valuable. But to gain a more complete picture, we should also situate batterer behavior within the social institutions that normalize male domination over women – indeed, with a framework of patriarchy. As Allan Johnson aptly notes, “male dominance does not mean that all men are powerful. Most men in patriarchies are not powerful individuals, and spend their days doing what other men tell them to do whether they want to or not” (Johnson 1997, 6). Johnson’s point is crucial because it helps to explain why those who the state charges as wife-beaters are mostly lower-income men and men of color, a fact that existing domestic violence research conspicuously ignores. In the context of domestic violence, how then does patriarchy affect male batterers? How do they make sense of their structural interactions as they move through social space with a “batterer” label?

Research Method

Molly Dragiewicz (2011) has stated that “attention to batterer narratives reveals points of overlap between what is ostensibly deviant behavior and the hegemonic norms sustaining it” (62), which is precisely what I hoped to uncover in this project. Over the course of six months, I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 batterers, via snowball sampling, who were living in the Bay Area, California during their domestic violence experience with state agencies. The primary criterion I used when selecting my sample was that each man was no longer under state visibility as a batterer; in other words, he was considered “fixed” by the state due to having completed the state’s required batterer intervention program. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to three hours. Twelve interviews were in person, while three were over the phone with men who no longer lived in the Bay Area. Ten of the men identified as black, and 5 identified as white. There are a couple of Spanish-only BIPs within the Bay Area, which likely reduces the number of Latinos in English language BIPs.

Interviewees put me in touch with other men from their former BIPs. This may explain why there were no Latinos in my sample. All men came from working-class or poor beginnings, with three who described themselves as ascending to middle-class status as adults. All participants were in their late 40s to early 50s. I believe this is due to generational effects of who men forged relationships with beyond their BIP. It may also have to do with the fact that younger men are largely incarcerated for drug-related crime first and foremost. All of the men I interviewed who had criminal records mentioned that their contact with the criminal justice system was for drug-related offenses or street crime and that they were not charged with domestic violence offenses until they were older, even though they assaulted their female partners when they were younger.

Some men had been arrested for domestic violence. Some were arrested for other crimes originally and subsequently arrested on domestic violence related parole violations. One participant was never arrested and voluntarily joined a BIP. Eight men had criminal records prior to their domestic violence arrest. Nine participants had attended more than one BIP, either due to noncompliance or improper fit, and had to restart their 52-week clock each time.

In-person interview participants saw that I am a black female. Of the three phone interviews, one participant did not know I was black until midway through the interview when he was surprised by my use of “we” when referring to black people; one participant simply asked if I was black toward the beginning of the interview; and the last phone participant clearly knew that I was black based on language he used throughout the interview. Obviously, participants’ interpretations of my identity uniquely affected their narratives, as it would for their interpretations of any interviewer’s identity. However, as a woman interviewing men about an issue so intimately connected to their sense of manhood, I was especially attentive to gendered power dynamics throughout each interview.

In their article, “The Masculine Self as Problem and Resource in Interview Studies of Men”

(2001), Michael Schwalbe and Michelle Wolkomir, both of whom have interviewed male batterers, state the following:

An interview situation is both an opportunity for signifying masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened. It is an opportunity to signify masculinity inasmuch as men can portray themselves as powerful, in control, autonomous, and rational. It is a threat inasmuch as an interviewer controls the interaction, asks questions that put these elements of manly self-portrayal into doubt, and does not simply affirm a man's masculinity displays (91).

In order to capitalize on the opportunity of and mitigate the threat of gender dynamics, I structured my interviews around open-ended questions. In fact, the only formal question I asked was the first question, which was some version of, "Please tell me the story of your personal experience with domestic violence," and from there I allowed the men to guide the pace of the interview and the kinds of information they shared. This worked to play down my potential as a threat, and allowed space for men to assert their masculinity. An unexpected positive consequence of this open structure is that these interviews were apparently what participants considered their first opportunities to talk about their experiences to a genuinely interested ear, which is why the average interview lasted over two hours. Fourteen of fifteen men thanked me for giving them a forum in which to share their voices and all of them thanked me for doing research that focuses on their experiences.

Within this open format where batterers could choose the elements of the experiences they wanted to focus on, all of them focused on their childhood, the moment of violence with their female partners that got them arrested, and/or past moments of violence where applicable. In each of these accounts, their references to state actors were largely tangential. Therefore, when I did ask questions, it was usually to guide their narratives in the direction of discussing the state, or pushing them to consider the state's role in their experience. My tone was affirming and even deferential at times. However, I was careful never to approve of or endorse the violence they shared with me. When I elucidate my findings below, I intentionally choose dialog over isolated anecdotes, where

appropriate, so the reader will get a sense of how, in my role as interviewer, I attempted to push their thinking without overtly disagreeing with, criticizing, or condemning what they have shared with me.

Forestalling the “Wife-Beater” Stigma

Batterers are stigmatized by society as monsters who are fundamentally violent and incapable of remorse. Contrary to this totalizing perception, the tone assumed by each interviewee was a mercurial potpourri of guilt, anger, remorse, betrayal, levity, sadness, blame, and contrition. All of them struggled with drug or alcohol addiction during the course of their abusive behavior. And all of them witnessed violence in varying degrees as children. Mark, for example, explained that:

My father, who I learned much of my behavior from, I figure, was not a violent man, but he was a verbal man. He could make someone feel really bad with his words. I think I learned that kind of intimidation process from him. Then somewhere in there, I made it OK to become physical with that. I don't know where that came from.

Most of the other participants recalled much more overtly violent childhoods. The following account from Timothy, for example, was very typical:

Yeah, I think I've seen some bad times, some bad days me and my mother had . . . Back then, spousal abuse wasn't even on the map. But still . . . I knew it was happening to my mother. Me and my brothers in the bed trying to go to sleep, and this man is going to rough my mother up, and if I knew she had a gun around the house, I would probably be the first one to go and grab it. Go in there and just blow his head off. I'd have been locked up.

As little boys, men watched their mothers physically abused and felt powerless to aid their mothers. Then and now, it is clear that the feeling of powerlessness in protecting their mothers haunts them and, as I will show below, parallels their feelings of impotence regarding the state's intervention into their homes as well. Lewis, in a statement that was laced with deep introspection and sadness explains, “As a child, I felt bad. I hated my dad because of what he had done hitting on my mom. I remember that. I hated him. (long pause) But some of the very things that we hate we find ourselves doing.” At moments participants expressed remorse for their acts – some perhaps sincerely, others perhaps walking the party line that they learned in their Batterer Intervention

Programs. Most men admitted to being at fault in certain instances but still felt wronged in how they were treated by the state, often because they felt the woman should also have been arrested or held accountable for her violence toward him.

And typical of many “deviants,” men revealed extreme tension and ambiguity with regard to their own self-concepts (Snow and Anderson 1987). As Shadd Maruna (2001) explains, “central to the redemption script used by desisting interviewees is the notion of a ‘core self’ or ‘real me’ that is explicitly distinct from the party responsible for committing the bulk of crimes in the narrator’s past” (131). My participants were no exception to this splitting of the self, vacillating between the kind of men they were raised to be, the kind of men they really were, the kind of man a wife-beater is, and how that fits with certain actions they have committed and feel they still might commit. In the end, all participants admitted to physically assaulting their female partners. Some explained that it was an accident, others that it was intentional, “but . . .” In the midst of all of the rationalizations, logics, and ways of knowing articulated in these interviews, the one consistency was what one participant referred to as “the bitch tape.”

Domestic Violence and the State

Jared: Most of the guys came in with a bitch tape. “That bitch,” “that bitch,” “that bitch,” and we had to hear that.

Margo: Were you one of those guys when you first went?

Jared: Oh yeah, I had a bitch tape for sure. That's all you have. “That bitch,” “that bitch,” “that bitch.” “She did this,” “she did that,” “she did this,” “she did that.” That's all you have.

Jared was a former salesman who was never arrested for domestic violence and voluntarily enrolled himself in a BIP after physically assaulting his wife. He was therefore one of the few men who was eager to change his behavior and believed in the therapeutic process, so much so that he has recently become a licensed marriage and family therapist and is attempting to lead his own state

certified BIP. What he refers to as the “bitch tape” is the narrative that most men, himself included, carry with them throughout their interaction with state agencies. “That bitch,” is the beginning of their answers to questions ranging from “why are you here?” (‘here’ representing in court, jail, the probation office, to their seat in the BIP classroom) to “why did you hit her?” While, at first glance, Jared’s comments appear to be a familiar and expected batterer narrative of passing blame or living in denial, I will show that the discursive silence that lives behind the Bitch Tape narrative is what batterers perceive as the *state’s*² complicity in unfairly providing women with agency against their male partners.

In the current study, participants consistently referenced their interactions with the police, judges, prosecutors, district attorneys, probation, jail/prison, and the batterer intervention program. Although they mentioned these separately and regularly, none of them understood these agencies as working together in conflicting and compatible ways toward a universal “state” agenda. However, the closest they came to an entity with a universal agenda was what they often described as “the system.” What I therefore tried to understand is how they made sense of this system? Who was a part of it? And what universal end did it serve?

The answer to these questions is encapsulated by Lewis as follows, “[State agents] just look at him and see, ‘Bad man. He wasn't no good,’ but they don't know what draw him to that point. They don't know about the system – with the courts, with the cops, with their ex. They don't know about that a lot of times.” Notice how in his breakdown of what he calls “the system,” Lewis understands the courts, cops, and women to be one unit that has coalesced to stigmatize and punish male batterers. His statement also highlights a crucial point: wife-beating is not a crime until the state recognizes it as such; accordingly, men are not “batterers” until the state names them as such.

² I am not in favor of a totalizing notion of “the state,” a point I will elaborate below. In this study, the elements of the state that emerged as central to shaping batterer perceptions were the police, courts, probation, and batterer intervention programs. Therefore, when I refer to the “state” in this paper, it is specifically in reference to the collection of those particular agencies.

Any comprehensive theory of domestic violence must anchor itself around “the state,” for two primary reasons. First, since the late 1970s, anti-violence activists and scholars have turned the problem of what-to-do about male batterers over to the state. While these activists turned their attention toward the immediate safety of women, the responsibility for male batterers has resided solely with the state (Binder and Meeker 1993; Sherman and Berk 1984). A project that focuses on male “batterers” should therefore also focus on the state, which is responsible for naming men as batterers and for developing the technologies of power used when punishing batterers.

Second, the patriarchal domination of men over women relies on a “public” vs. “private” dichotomy, inherent in which is an assumed neutral state (Suk 2009). I argue that this is a false dichotomy, since what many have theorized as “private,” and thus distinct from the state, has in fact been constituted by the state. Indeed, marking the boundaries of privacy and domesticity have been fundamental to modern state formation (Goldberg 2002; Stoler 2002) and instrumental to establishing and maintaining gender, race, and class differences in how “privacy” is operationalized. Central to this dichotomy is a politics of protection³ (Brown 1992), where women must choose between the protection of individual men from harsh civic and state violence, or the protection of a patriarchal state from individual male violence. The private sphere is therefore distinct from the public sphere precisely because it is a realm in which civic and state power cannot penetrate. Patriarchy has come to mean male domination of women in both of these spheres. But domestic violence means male domination in the “private” sphere, hence *domestic* violence, as a uniquely gendered form of invisible oppression, distinct from civic, understood as male-on-male, socially recognized violence. Privacy has become the lynchpin of what separates domestic violence from other kinds of violence. In recent years, for example, many organizations have preferred the term

³ Wendy Brown (1992) beautifully illustrates this politics of protection in the following passage: “Whether one is dealing with the state, the Mafia, parents, pimps, police, or husbands, the heavy, dual price of institutionalized protection is always a measure of dependence and agreement to abide by the protector’s rules” (8).

“Intimate Partner Violence,” in which the notion of the intimate as a sacred and private space remains.

The problem with the public versus private dichotomy is two-fold. First, it is not universally applicable, likely because it is based on the situated knowledge of white middle-class women, for whom privacy has a distinct character. Second, and most importantly, it is a false dichotomy, in that the “private sphere” is not an asocial, ahistorical fact. The rules, norms, and practices that shape what is perceived to be private have been socially and historically contested throughout the continued (re)formation of the modern state. Since the colonial project, we have seen the policing of white female and dark male bodies, as well as the sexual availability of dark female bodies, as fundamental to the formation of a hegemonic modern state (Goldberg 2002; Omi and Winant 1994; Stoler 2002). The boundaries of privacy have thus been, and continue to be, in service of the propertied, white paterfamilias (Goldberg 2002; Logan 2003; Schneider 1991; Siegel 1996; Stoler 2002); and, privacy is operationalized on other bodies in terms of their relationship to him and to the hegemonic state that supports his interests. The state has therefore been instrumental in circumscribing the limits of power for different bodies within what is therefore not really a “private” sphere at all.⁴ And even though some men and women may feel that they experience a line between public and private, that line is absolutely blurred for men and women on the margins of society, who also happen to be the men who overwhelmingly come into state visibility as male batterers.

Conceptualizing the State

So far, I have shown how a critical theory of domestic violence must interrogate the role of the state, which is a shift from existing research that largely regards the state as a neutral arbitrator.

In this section, I will advocate for a theory of the state that will prove useful for the present study, as

⁴ Despite this point, I will continue to refer to this issue as “domestic violence” since that is the primary name through which it has thus far been conceptualized academically and through which it is recognized as a social issue.

well as future empirical studies of domestic violence. Feminist scholars have contributed important work that theorizes the gendered nature of the state (Connell 1995; MacKinnon 1982; Messerschmidt 1993). They argue that the “state embodies gender relations of power: both decision-making and enforcement of such ideas are substantially in the hands of men” (Messerschmidt 1993, 155). However, theorizing the state as a monolithic entity proves too reductive for empirical work. After all, the state is comprised of a number of agencies that sometimes support each other and at other times contradict each other. In the present study, for example, male batterers came into contact with the police, prosecutors, judges, public defenders, prison, jail, probation, and batterer intervention programs – *all* of which fall under the umbrella of the “state.”

In answer to top-down, Marxist theories of state, Michel Foucault (1977) highlighted the diffuseness and pervasiveness of different technologies of power. Using Foucault’s framework, Wendy Brown has asserted that the “abstractness, the ostensible neutrality, and lack of a body and face” in the state disguises its “contemporary institutionalized processes of male domination” (Brown 1992, 11). She therefore set out to find “the man” in the state by focusing on institutional origins, and successfully discovered that despite the distraction of its multiple technologies of power, the neo-liberal state is still masculinist, without overtly or even intentionally supporting the interest of men. Brown also acknowledges that the man in the state is decidedly white and privileged. Her theory is thus also fitting because it makes space for theorizing the experiences of marginalized masculinities.

During their interactions with different agencies of state power, lower income men and/or men of color have become adept at finding the man in the state. For example, Jimmy, a white, working-class participant, had been incarcerated previously for street violence – in other words, violence with other men. This included bar fights and drug related assaults. His behavior even

landed him in prison. When Jimmy talked about the state with regard to those convictions, he explained:

I was telling my friend yesterday, “You know what the United States of America has turned into? You know what Oakland turned into? It's a big prison ground. We're in the yard.” Like, this [gesturing to indicate the Peet's Coffee we're sitting in] is being in prison. We're in the yard. We can't go where we want. We can't do what we – we got the police all around us. You know, we're living in a police state. My friends can't even stand out here. They've got stay-away orders. [because of gang injunctions]

The location of this interview was a Peet's Coffee, where we were surrounded by individuals working on laptops or reading books, and professionals sipping lattes – clearly a space of the educated and entitled. Jimmy arrived at the interview riding a loud chopper (motorcycle) that momentarily caught everyone's attention when he arrived. He was a large man, a carpenter, dressed in his work clothes, which were stained with paint. It was therefore salient that he compared Peet's Coffee, a quintessentially innocuous setting for some people, to a prison yard for other people – people like him. Jimmy also highlighted that most of his experience had been with black males, and he felt that their encounters with the criminal justice system was even worse for them. When he refers to “my friends” above, it is black men that he is referring to, who are legally restricted from certain spaces within the city. Other participants, both white and black, echoed the notion that race led to even harsher treatment by state authorities. Lewis, for example, said, “I think the system is racist. To be honest.”

Popular culture has been rife with this notion of black males being victims of “the man.”⁵ In 1988, a Los Angeles based rap group named N.W.A. became famous for the controversial song, “Fuck Da Police,” which expressed anger over the predatory relationship between police officers and poor men of color. A year later, Public Enemy released “Fight the Power,” which called on

⁵ It is noteworthy, however, that their version of “the man” is distinct from Wendy Brown's conception of the masculinist state in that they recognize the racist and classist motivations of “the man,” but completely fail to realize how *gender* oppression is also salient in the man's politics. While Brown finds “the man” through a gendered lens, gender largely remains invisible when men of color find “the man.”

black Americans to rise up against a system of pervasive racialized state oppression. In 1993, KRS-One released “Sound of Da Police” which suggested a common etymology between “officer” and “overseer.” Police officers were thus the new overseers for a new state that continued to treat blacks as slaves. Even though police harassment has been an everyday experience for many men of color (regardless of class), there have been some incidents that have achieved national headlines, largely due to technology, such as the Rodney King beating in 1992, the Amadou Diallo murder in 1999, and the Oscar Grant murder in 2010. Therefore, even as the state becomes diffuse and disguises its function to uphold hegemonic male domination, many black and Latino men come from a cultural milieu that recognizes “the man” in the state and what he is about. Brown writes, “Ceasing to be primarily a domain of masculinist powers and an instrument of male privilege and hegemony, albeit continuing to function in these ways, the state increasingly takes over and transforms the project of male dominance. However, as it moves in this direction, the state's masculinism becomes more diffuse and subtle even as it becomes more potent and pervasive in women's lives” (1992, 29), and indeed, in the lives of men of color as well as lower-income men.

As Brown argues, “state powers are no more gender-neutral than they are neutral with regard to class and race” (1992, 9). It is thus important to emphasize the *class* element of my argument. Indeed, in the age of mass incarceration “inmates are *first and foremost poor people* [sic]” (Wacquant 2010), and have been throughout the penal history of the U.S. It was not until the post-Civil Rights era that black male incarceration began its climb toward the unprecedented numbers we see today. Thus, both class and race are central factors in determining who benefits from elite white male hegemony. Other axes of difference also apply; the point however is not to make an exhaustive list, but rather to emphasize that through Brown’s frame, we can place the elite white male hegemon at the center of analysis and mark as Other those whose social position diverges from that center – in this case, lower-income men and/or men of color.

Double Victimization

Due to their classed and/or racialized backgrounds, men in this study already possessed an antagonistic relationship with a state they perceived as predatory. When domestic violence becomes the central focus, there is no reason to suspect that felt victimization by the state is diminished. The key difference is that whereas before men perceived a man in the state – a state whose technologies of power were in service of elite male interests – in the case of domestic violence they perceived a state whose technologies of power were in service of *women's* interests. They felt that this womanist⁶ agenda operating within the state works to victimize men and gives power to individual women to aid in that victimization. What they experienced was therefore a felt double victimization. For example, Andre explains:

If you've got women, they know that once their man goes to jail all they have to do is pick up the phone. They try to use the police to control them, or the courts to control that man. A lot will manipulate because they have probation and all that. A lot of women, they use that. That's a form of abuse. See? That's another form of abuse. The man is now being abused by the system, by the cops. You know? And she's like, "Yeah, I can abuse him anytime. Get smart with me. I'll call the cops and send you to jail. I'll call them to come get you and they'll take you up out of here."

Andre speaks in a very direct language of victimization in that he uses "abuse" to describe how women, the system, and cops treat batterers. In the passage below, Lenox explains that the system is so womanist that police officers will side with a woman even when there is clear physical evidence that a man is the victim and that his health may be in jeopardy. He says:

If you call the police, they're going to take the wrong side, anyway. They don't think a woman could whoop a man. You know what I'm saying? That's the first thing out of their head. You tell them,

⁶ "Womanism" is a term coined by Alice Walker, and has since been adopted by other female scholars of color (Boisnier 2003; Collins 2001). It is used to capture the breadth of experiences of *all* women, which is distinct from the white middle-class exclusionist politics of "feminism." Originally it was meant to be synonymous with "black feminist." Therefore, even though it is now meant to represent all women, its etymology still emphasizes women of color and lower income women, in a way that "feminist" does not. "Womanist" is thus fitting here because it is appropriately descriptive in the domestic violence context where many of the women whose male partners are recognized as batterers are women from the margins of society and formerly excluded from the foundations of "feminism." Additionally, "feminism" is a common and loaded term, with different meanings and interpretations, and available for use in many colloquial forms, such as "feminazi." I therefore opted to *not* use "feminist" in this context because none of my participants actually used the word "feminist" or any of its derivatives and I did not want to leave the impression that they did.

“Oh, she hit me.” [If] she done picked up something and cracked him upside the head and he's bleeding like a pig over here they might say, “Yeah.” But if me and her are just arguing, nine times out of ten I'm going to be the one going to jail.

Each of the statements from Andre and Lenox are not just about their individual or personal experiences with women. Instead, this is how they have made sense of systemic treatment of domestic violence. It is true that participants felt victimized by individual women, but that is only because of a larger system that has adopted what they perceived as a womanist agenda and therefore made it possible for individual women to victimize them.

Timothy, for example, was incensed by a couple of Asian women who noticed him hit his wife in public and alerted the police. He blamed his entire arrest, incarceration, and subsequent mandated participation in a batterer intervention program on those Asian women whom he felt “shoulda minded their business.” Regardless of how hard I pushed him to also find blame with the police and judge that he described as ignoring him and treating him harshly, he was unable to do so, calling his male public defender, the “public vagender” – a play on vagina – to emphasize how the state has become feminized, deferring to female needs. A portion of our conversation went as follows:

Margo: What about the police and the courts? Do you think you were treated fairly by them? I understand the Asian ladies may have called attention to what you did, but it was the police who arrested you.

Timothy: Well, I'll remain open with that question. The law is going to do what the law is going to. It was more or less out of my reach to correct the judge or correct the police or the way I was treated. People are going to be people. Judges are going to be judges. Police is going to be police.

Margo: What about the Asian ladies? Do you think they were just people being people too?

Timothy: Yeah, yeah. My wife's a woman, so I don't have anything against them. I don't have anything against anybody. I did what I had to do. I completed the classes and paid what I had to pay and this and that and that and this. It's all behind me now.

In Timothy's last remark, it is as if he sees the logic in what I am saying, but he cannot (will not) internalize it. So he dismisses the whole issue and defaults to not being upset with anyone, which was hardly sincere as evidenced by his revitalization of blame toward the Asian women later on in

the interview. So even though the Asian women appear to be the source of Timothy's angst – the subjects of his Bitch Tape – what exists behind his angst is a state that has empowered women at his expense. When Lewis vented about how women are now able to treat men – “You know, they give her all that power!” – his issue is with “her” but also the “they” that is the keeper of “power” to begin with, the “they” that represents the diffuse technologies of womanist state power.

Recognizing that there is a perceived alliance between women and the state, how does this double victimization function as a lens through which batterers process their experiences? There are two related ways to answer this question. On the one hand, we can understand participants as being invested in the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 1995), which means they prefer to support the gendered status quo in which they maintain dominance over women, even if it means being subordinate to a masculine hegemonic state. But when women are imbued with power, *that* is the part that is out of place for them. On the other hand, this double victimization lays the groundwork for justifying any attempts at restitution of the masculinity they felt was wrongly stripped from them. Retaliation against state agents is an impossible project, and would only highlight the full extent of their emasculation, as the state is a force against which they are powerless, indeed impotent, to face. Retaliation against *women*, however, is realistic and attainable, and is therefore the option that allows them to retain some sense of masculine power, which is why, as Jared explains, the “bitch tape” is ultimately “all you have.” I will elaborate both of these points in the following two sections.

The ‘Patriarchal Dividend’

Raewynn Connell (1995) has described the “patriarchal dividend” as “the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (79). Therefore, even though not all men benefit equally from patriarchy “every man’s standing in relation to women is enhanced by the male monopoly over authority in patriarchal societies” (Johnson 1997, 6). In this section, I argue that

investment in the patriarchal dividend explains one way that double victimization functions as a mechanism for batterers to understand their experience. But since existing uses of patriarchy in domestic violence literature collapse all men together, I will first briefly explain how masculinity scholars have theorized variation in performances of masculinity.

Connell (1995) was perhaps the first scholar to theorize what she called marginalized masculinities – those masculinities that intersect with racial, ethnic, and class-based axes of inequality. Masculinity scholars have since noted that differences in masculine performances are often realized along axes of race and/or class (Messerschmidt 1997; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; West and Fenstermaker 1995), to include masculine performances of domestic violence (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). While all men may stand to gain from domination of women, not all men are equally vested with power to do so. Different groups of men must therefore develop different strategies for asserting a masculine self against other men, and also against women.

I asked participants if their BIPs addressed gender socialization and the extent to which those conversations deconstructed their conceptions of gender roles. Across the board, participants tended to recognize that they were socialized to feel entitled to dominate women. Mark, for example, reflected on growing up on John Wayne as the ideal embodiment of masculinity and expressed his frustration at how difficult it is for him to break that socialization by proclaiming, “fuck John Wayne.” The subordination and devaluing of women was so deep-seated for some participants that they could not quite shift their thinking in a direction of gender equality. Timothy illustrates this in the passage below where he is responding to my question about gender roles:

Oh, you mean as far as like how far a woman should go and how far a man should go with things? Like a woman is just not a woman that stays at home with the kids. You know? And a man is not the one that has to work and bring home the bacon. You both have to maneuver. You understand? You know, some guys have women spoiled. You know? I guess it's to your favor. But after so long I guess a man will get tired of that if a woman stays at home all the time and watch soap operas and stuff and he works for 12 or 14 hours a day. After a while I think a man would get tired of that, especially if a man held his place on that for 12 or 14 hours a day working and his woman is always at home whether they got kids or not and she nags at him because he went out and had a couple of

beers. When he comes home and gives her a kiss, she says that he's been drinking. Then that will rile him up and that's where it might start.

In the first few sentences, we see that Timothy understands the deconstruction of traditional gender roles – most likely because those roles have never really applied to most working class families. But then he uses that deconstruction against women who do stay at home doing what he understands as watching soap operas, while a man works all day. And her assumed laziness and lack of acknowledgement of his hard work can potentially be the cause of his anger. So Timothy has essentially used the lessons of deconstructing gender roles and twisted them into serving the exact opposite function they were intended to serve. This inability to “see” women is even more problematic (and ironic) because over half of the participants, Timothy included, were actually dependent on their female partners financially. Due to their movement in and out of prison for most of their adult lives, being able to maintain steady employment proved difficult for them, which is a common problem for lower-income men of color (Pager 2003; Western 2006). Therefore, the fact that Timothy would explain gender roles the way he did above, when in fact, his own reality is quite the opposite of what he has described, further illustrates how invisible women are for him as social and political subjects.

We can therefore understand batterers as being invested in the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 1995), which means they will support the gendered status quo in which they maintain dominance over women, even if it means being subordinate to other men, or to elite male power. Consistently, participants expressed a desire for a previous gendered status quo where individual women lacked power, and where the state did not serve womanist interests. Three of the black participants, for example, felt strongly that the OJ Simpson trial was the moment that the status quo shifted, and lamented the disrespect of the sanctity of a “man’s home.” In other words, the “macho alliance,” as one of the BIP leaders called it, has been broken. According to Andre, “Because a lot of situations in the household the cops shouldn't even come because it ain't none of their business.”

Jimmy, who generally appeared to accept much more responsibility for his actions than Andre, revealed a similar longing for the old status quo. He explained:

Because my parents stayed together through thick and thin, and they never did that to each other. And then when she did that to me [reported me], it just fucking blew my mind. That wasn't what I was used to, or even being around. Where I came from, what happened in the house stayed in the house, and you had each other's back and that unconditional type of love. And so it was hard to deal with. But I finally got through it.

Andre's statement reveals that his partner is the one who victimized him – “did that to me” – by calling the police and not honoring the gendered status quo. He admitted more than once to understanding how she was afraid of him and how he “terrorized” her. Yet, he understood the proper way to deal with that fear in a language of “unconditional type of love,” which meant not calling the police to protect herself from him. That was the point at which he understood her to now be victimizing him.

Men in marginalized positions are thus willing to close ranks with the men who oppress them, in order to maintain control over the one thing they perceive themselves as rightly having control over – women. Allan Johnson (1997) beautifully illustrates this dynamic below:

Since patriarchy identifies power with men, the vast majority of men who aren't powerful but are instead dominated by other men can still feel some connection with the *idea* of male dominance and with men who *are* [sic] powerful. It is far easier, for example, for an unemployed working-class man to identify with male leaders and their displays of patriarchal masculine toughness than it is for women of any class . . . In this way, male identification gives even the most lowly placed man a cultural basis for feeling some sense of superiority over the otherwise most highly placed woman (which is why a construction worker can feel within his rights as a man when he sexually harasses a well-dressed professional woman who happens to walk by) (9).

Indeed, participants' own accounts of their upbringing and cultural milieus suggest that women were largely devalued and invisible as legitimate social actors. Lenox, for example recalls the wisdom handed down to him from an older gentleman in his life, Lenox's girlfriend's mother's boyfriend.

Lenox: I remember this guy used to be over there that her mom knew. He'd just come to our house. We'd be drinking, and we were kind of using drugs at that time too. He used to say “you got to kick that ass every six months.”

Margo: Wow. Really?

Lenox: Yeah, yeah. I remember him saying that. He said, "Yeah." I said, "You got to hear shit?" He said, "Hey man, you've just got to kick that ass every six months." Her mom thought it was funny. That was the thing, we thought it was like a joke. I didn't realize the seriousness in it. You know?

The fact that even his girlfriend's mother found it funny shows how pervasive and internalized the subordination of women is within Lenox's community. Traditional uses of patriarchy assume that men use power to dominate. But as Lenox's example suggests, domination of women takes a different form for men who do not have access to legitimate power. For them, it is not about using power to retain power, but rather using power to compensate for lack of access to legitimate authority that is, using power to compensate for powerlessness.

West and Fenstermaker (1995) explain that, "Depending on how race, gender, and class are accomplished, what looks to be the same activity may have different meanings for those who engaged in it" (32). Participants are therefore caught between confused systems of knowledge about how to be men in relationships with women. In many ways, they are not necessarily deviants, but rather hyper-conformists to a system where masculinity is performed through control and power over women and other men, but that rewards *some* men for that performance and punishes others.

In this section, I have explained how investment in a patriarchal dividend that promises the domination of all women by all men is why respondents are invested in a Bitch Tape through which they express their felt double victimization by a state that gives power to women. But what happens when the promise is not realized and men are not able to successfully cash in on their investment? In other words, what is at stake when men are unable to legitimately signify a masculine self? The answer to that question is what I suggest as the second way in which double victimization functions as a mechanism for batterers to understand their experience.

(Re)Producing Violence

We have to consider what is at stake if batterers acknowledge “the man” in cases of domestic violence – it means bearing witness to their own castration by the state, which they are indeed impotent to resist. Women, are therefore, the only remaining “victimizers” against which men can retaliate and thus protect their masculinity.

Given their interaction with the police, it is easy to see how participants understand their treatment by the police as victimization. Based on all of their accounts, the police make it very clear that they are the winners in the game of masculinity. But that corporeal emasculation often plays out in front of the women – on behalf of women. The men are thus villainized and silenced while the police emerge as knights in shining armor. The powerlessness that comes from that spectacle is salient in Lewis’s statement:

I didn't have no rights. Don't have no rights. When you call for domestic violence and they see that man and that woman there, what they do is they go over there and they cater to that woman. And the man, he try to explain something, they tell him to shut up. That's the kind of things I have been through. “Shut up!” Next thing you know they go talk to her, pull her to the side. They see what happened. They take her word for everything. All she got to do is say that you hit her or that you threatened her and you will go to jail. That's all they got to say. They'll throw you in cuffs, they'll put you in the car before they even find out the situation.

Lewis’ anger and bitterness in this passage is focused on women, when the source of his harsh treatment and loss of dignity is very directly the police. But what would it mean for him to realize that? What would it mean for him to stare the source of his victimization square in the face? I argue that it would mean realizing his inability to do *anything* about the powerlessness that is so palatable in his words.

Ultimately, this is an issue of power – who has it and who does not. According to Andre, “I think the way the situation is handled with domestic violence . . . they look at the *man* [sic] as really the one that's inferior.” Andre’s statement reveals that throughout this process, participants are made to feel “inferior.” They feel that their masculinity – and thus entitlement to power – has been

taken away. One BIP leader described it as “cutting off their balls.” Men often feel this struggle of power against state forces and therefore establish oppositional ways of coping, to retain some sense of masculinity against an entity they are ultimately powerless to defeat. This is why we see such acting out in pop culture and as explained in numerous studies (Maruna 2001; Rios 2009; Rios 2011). The difference with domestic violence is the added effect of power being transferred to *women*, which is too much of a blow to their masculine sensibilities. Blaming women allows batterers to ignore their emasculation, which is why the bitch tape is all they have, short of acknowledging the brutal erasure of their masculinity.

Therefore, *the emasculation that occurs when the state “fixes” men is what continues to facilitate violence*⁷ – state violence toward batterers, and batterer violence toward women. In her study of class effects on interpersonal power, Karen Pyke (1996) explains that, “In the absence of legitimated hierarchical advantages, lower-class husbands are more likely to produce hypermasculinity by relying on blatant, brutal, and relentless power strategies in their marriages, including spousal abuse. In doing so, they compensate for their demeaned status, pump up their sense of self-worth and control, and simulate the uncontested privileges of higher-class men” (545). What Pyke ignores, however, is how the state functions to uphold the gendered status quo and shapes access to legitimated hierarchical advantages. If we inject “the state” into her comment, we find that the emasculation men experience at the hand of the state ultimately facilitates more violence. The loss of this patriarchal advantage is therefore also complicit in the very violence the state is allegedly protecting against. The hierarchal advantages of masculinity that the state (re)produces, (re)produces the violence it allegedly aims to curb. For example:

Lewis: I think a lot of crime . . . a lot of homicide, or attempted homicide, or stuff like that has happened. I'm not saying it should have. But I think a lot of them have because the way the cops handled domestic violence situations.

⁷ Here I mean violence in the broadest sense of the word, namely psychological, emotional, but certainly physical in some instances as well.

Margo: Oh, like what do you mean?

Lewis: Because lot of cops, when they come there, a lot of them come, slamming me, choking. Do all that kind of stuff. Because I had all that done to me.

Margo: How does that affect domestic violence situations?

Lewis: Well it makes me more like, if you know the cops are coming, or the cops make me more of an aggressor. So I'm going to jail anyway. Because I didn't feel like that before. I'm going to jail anyway. So I might as well . . . you know . . . make it count. Because the way the situation is handled.

In other words, Lewis is directly blaming the police for leading men to beat their wives. He rationalizes that if he is going to be so brutally dehumanized by the police for a crime he feels he is unjustly charged with, he might as well “make it count” by actually beating his wife, and in a perverse way, therefore salvage a little dignity. Since normative constructions of masculinity define violence as a legitimate response to humiliation (Kimmel and Mahler 2003), it should come as no surprise that the state structures gender practice to promote hypermasculinity (Harris 2000; Rios 2011) in some men, then punishes them for it, leaving the domination of women as their only remaining tool through which to feel like a man.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to focus on the experiences of male batterers and how they make sense of their interactions with the state, with the hope that their narratives can guide us toward a more comprehensive theory of domestic violence. To that end, here is what we can put together. Despite the state’s function as a site for mobilization by special interests and social action, the state has an institutionalized masculinism that works to protect the gendered status quo – that is also racialized and classed, which marginalized masculinities have been keen to recognize. The problem is that when women enter the story, as in cases of domestic violence, men are no longer able to “see” their oppression by a masculinist state. Instead, they perceive women to be holding

power over them, individually and systemically, in a way that is demoralizing and emasculating. The sometimes tragic consequence is that male batterers may then attempt to achieve successful performances of masculinity by further oppressing women, in a society where the normative rules of masculine authority allow for – indeed depend upon – the domination of women.

These findings, coupled with existing theories of masculinity, suggest that understanding male violence toward women requires attention to masculinist domination of other men. Doing so opens up new areas of inquiry with regard to domestic violence that *de-neutralize* the state, such as: the extent to which domestic violence initiatives are carried out by a state that is not invested in the feminist objectives of the domestic violence movement (Bumiller 2010; Logan 2003; Siegel 1996); how the state positions itself vis-à-vis male batterers; and attention to how and why domestic violence came into state recognition as a social issue – all of which are empirical questions subject to future research.

This study also holds implications for policy. The men in this study have been subjected to all of our existing social processes geared toward male batterers, and have thus “graduated” as cured men. But of course, we know that the success rate of these programs is low, and we see from these men’s stories that there is much ambivalence in how they understand their own actions, how they feel they have been treated, and how amenable they are to future violence. Batterer intervention program scholarship is oriented toward determining *why* BIPs do not seem to work, with the goal of improving therapeutic methods. The current project suggests that we will not understand or curb batterer behavior unless we also consider the range of social factors that exist within a larger system that batterers feel castrates them on behalf of women. Scholarship confirms that batterers are not incorrect in this perception (Comfort 2008; Goffman 2009). By taking their narratives seriously, we can look for realistic and meaningful ways to reintroduce dignity and humanity into rehabilitation and make great strides in reducing male violence toward their female partners.

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