BATTERED (M)OTHERS SYNDROME: MOTHERS WHO KILL THEIR BATTERERS AND THE CHILDREN WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN WOMEN’S STUDIES IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE TEXAS WOMAN’S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY
RACHAEL ANN FEDERICO, B.A.

DENTON, TEXAS
MAY 2010
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Rachael Ann Federico entitled “Battered (M)others Syndrome: Mothers Who Kill Their Batterers and the Children Who Are Left Behind.” I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Women’s Studies.

Dr. Linda Marshall, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Department Chair

Accepted:

Dean of the Graduate School
DEDICATION

To Stephanie S.,
I thank you for your courage and for your friendship.

And, to all incarcerated battered women and your children,
I humbly offer this work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was fortunate to have the help of several individuals throughout my writing and research process. Particularly, I would like to thank Texas Woman’s University professors Dr. Linda Marshall and Dr. Mark Kessler for willing to be a part of my thesis advising team, and for their invaluable feedback on the drafts of this text. I am also indebted to Dr. Claire Sahlin, director of the Women’s Studies department at Texas Woman’s University, for her encouragement with this project, and her keen MLA citation assistance. Dr. Peter Heinegg of Union College also offered not only some advantageous editing advice, but an incredible vote of confidence.

I also received invaluable contact information, resources, and encouragement from folks who lead very busy lives attempting to materially protect women’s lives. To these ends, I would like to acknowledge the assistance and support of Donna Bloom, Toby Myers, Debby Tucker, and Mark Sandel.

Finally, I would like to thank the innumerable individuals who not only listened patiently to my involvement with these themes, but also helped me through the law school application process. Balancing research for my thesis and fretting over law school materials was difficult to negotiate, and I could not have navigated this time alone.
ABSTRACT
RACHAEL ANN FEDERICO

BATTERED (M)OTHERS SYNDROME: MOTHERS WHO KILL THEIR BATTERERS AND THE CHILDREN WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND

MAY 2010

I examine the intersection of identities of women who kill their batterers in self-defense, as both mothers and as victims. Many scholars discuss women’s use of lethal force as a result of battering; however, many of these women’s narratives strongly suggest that they acted not solely for protection of their own lives, but for their children. My research interrogates the significance of intersecting identities, and what happens to women and their children during periods of incarceration subsequent to a murder conviction in these cases. I will discuss why the legal system fails to account for women’s use of lethal force as self-defense, given its male-oriented historical framework that excludes a consideration of a battered mother’s identity. Finally, I argue that the relationship between children and their mothers is perilously fragmented, creating compounded traumatic experiences. Children exposed to abuse become silent witnesses, vastly untreated by scholarship in this area of study.
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