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Communication, Knowledge Sharing and Danger Assessments: Key Factors in the Prevention of Domestic Violence Fatalities

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Rachel Louise Snyder, [No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us](#) (2019).

Were I to describe Rachel Louise Snyder's new book – [No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us](#) – in three words they would be: comprehensive, concrete, and captivating.

No Visible Bruises offers a truly comprehensive exploration of the problem of domestic violence and our socio-legal responses to it. The book is framed around key stories and insights from victims and perpetrators, law enforcement, and academics and advocates who have worked to reform social and legal responses to intimate partner violence. The book convincingly demonstrates the systemic nature of the problem in part because it is so comprehensive in its assessment of the issue. Snyder draws connections between the pervasive and silent character of domestic violence and the economy, education systems, social stigma, sexism and intergenerational abuse. Using specific examples like family justice centers, multidisciplinary high risk response teams, batterer intervention programs, police protocols, researchers and fatality review teams *No Visible Bruises* canvasses the past several decades of reform to socio-legal responses to domestic violence. Snyder traces the history of the movement to reform how law enforcement, social workers and courts address domestic violence and examines how these efforts take shape today.

The book challenges head on some of the more tenacious myths about domestic violence. For example, Snyder relies upon several high profile cases in which women were murdered by their husbands or partners to explain why for many women remaining in, or returning to, violent relationships is a survival mechanism. In doing so she thoroughly discredits the myth that if the violence was severe enough women would just leave. One of the key stories in the book, indeed the story that opens the book, involves the murder of Michelle Monson and her children by her husband. As Snyder aptly demonstrates, one of the most dangerous circumstances for a victim of domestic violence is when she attempts to leave. A woman's risk of being murdered by her former partner in the weeks and months following a break-up is alarmingly elevated. Perpetrators are likely to escalate their violence when victims try to leave. Victims of domestic violence, Snyder suggests, know this. Michelle Monson knew this and so, as often happens, following her attempt to leave, her report to the police and disclosure to her family, Michelle Monson recanted and returned to her abuser after he was released. Snyder writes:

Michelle did not recant because she was a coward, or because she believed she had overreacted . . . She did not recant because she was crazy . . . or because any of this was anything less than a matter of life and death. She did not recant because she had lied. She recanted to stay alive. She recanted to keep her children alive. Victims stay because they know that any sudden move will provoke the bear. (P. 53.)

One of the book's most important, and heart wrenching, contributions involves an examination of the risk assessment tools that have been developed to predict which cases of domestic violence are most likely to result in fatalities. Snyder suggests that the development of a danger assessment tool, which has been adapted for use by police, lawyers, courts, advocates and healthcare workers, is the single most important tool used in domestic violence situations today. This instrument was developed based on studies of domestic violence cases which did result in a fatality. Researchers and advocates were able to identify numerous commonalities, such as previous incidents of strangulation, threats of suicide, substance abuse or addiction, forced sex and violence during pregnancy, between the cases they studied. As Snyder explains, danger assessments ask a set of questions the answers to which predict the likelihood that a

perpetrator's violence will become lethal, triggering law enforcement, domestic violence advocates and health care professionals to take additional steps to protect victims. She suggests that this approach has saved countless lives. Snyder's discussion of this tool is heart wrenching because so many of the factors that these assessments are designed to reveal were present in the key cases featured in *No Visible Bruises*. Would Michelle Monson and others be alive today if a danger assessment had been conducted?

According to Snyder there is one further factor that is key to designing preventative responses to domestic violence fatalities: communication.

No Visible Bruises demonstrates the critical role that communication plays in making domestic violence less lethal. Snyder writes (P. 276), "[i]f I had to whittle down the changing world of domestic violence to just one idea that made all the difference, it would be communication". It is painful to read Snyder's detailed accounts of murders that might have been avoided with better communication between advocates, police and legal professionals.

No Visible Bruises is immediately engaging. It is an exceptionally well written example of literary journalism. Snyder threads the stories, insights and experiences of numerous individuals (victim/survivors, abusers, police officers, lawyers, academics, advocates and front line service providers) throughout the monograph making the issues and struggles addressed in the book vivid and real.

The book is as rigorous as it is dramatic and emotional. It reflects years of research, multiple interviews with many of her informants and countless site visits across the United States. *No Visible Bruises* captures the lived realities of women murdered by their intimate partners. Snyder demonstrates how these women could have survived with knowledge, communication between police, legal professionals and advocates, and systemized and coordinated response processes. *No Visible Bruises* is compassionate, unapologetically feminist, and insightful.

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