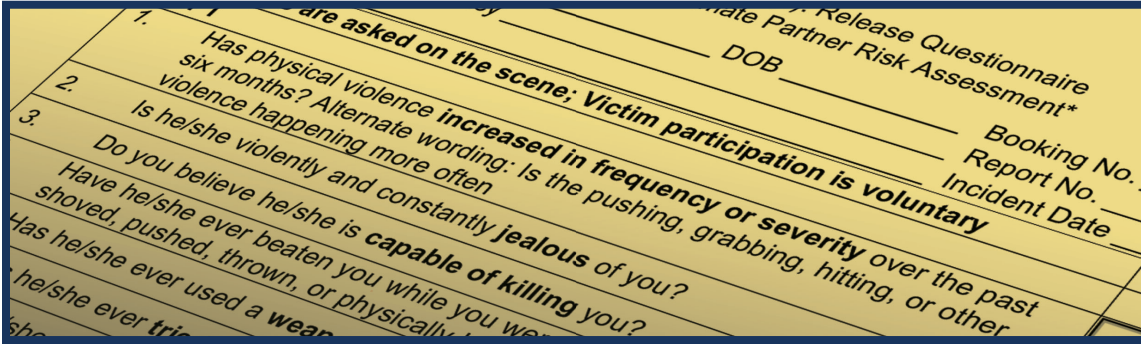




The Friendship Center

NEWSLETTER / SPRING 2024



The Myth of Mutual Domestic Violence

PAGE 4

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Help us improve our services

PAGE 5

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friendship Fridays,
Greater Helena Gives,
Just for the Helena of It, Local Rodeos,
& more

PAGE 6

SPRING GIVING:

Your gifts to TFC support vital services

PAGE 7

MISSOULA
by Jon Krakauer

Recommended Reading

PAGE 7

WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITY TO

PREVENT RE-ASSAULT

Our understanding as a society of intimate partner assault and sexual violence has come a long way in recent decades. One of the most profound shifts in the way we approach these forms of violence in the U.S. occurred when the landmark *Violence Against Women Act* was passed in 1994. Beyond calling for intervention and prevention of domestic violence, the legislation appropriated funding for programs addressing it at the state and local level. It also tasked the CDC with administering violence prevention efforts—**positioning intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking as not just crimes, but serious public health issues.**

The significance of seeing interpersonal violence as public health and safety concerns cannot be overstated. By approaching these crimes less like random instances of private violence, we remind

each other that perpetrators are among those we know and trust and—because many of them are serial offenders—the harm they do is rarely isolated to a lone survivor. When we discuss these violent crimes in the context of public health, we also empower communities to see them as preventable. However, their sheer prevalence presents persistent challenges for criminal justice personnel as well as agencies like The Friendship Center who work with survivors.

As recently as 10 years ago, an article in the *American Journal of Public Health* estimated that 12-14 million individuals were victims of rape or sexual violence in the U.S. annually. For comparison, the article’s authors highlight that figure as about 2.5 times the annual incidence of cardiovascular disease, cancer diagnosis, diabetes diagnosis, and contraction of HIV/AIDS combined. They also make the point that

Continued on next page

WE ARE THE ONLY DVSA AGENCY IN LEWIS AND CLARK, BROADWATER, & JEFFERSON COUNTIES.



Our mission is to be a safe haven for those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking and to empower our community to flourish in relationships free from violence.

Open to the Public: Monday – Friday 9AM – 4PM | Location: 1430 Sanders, Helena, MT 59601
24-Hour Hotline: 406-442-6800 | Email: officem@thefriendshipcenter.org | web: www.thefriendshipcenter.org



Continued from page 1

though the economic impact of rape and attempted rape was higher than it was for any of those diseases, public funding to research and address sexual violence remained many times lower.¹

The general saturation of violence in the U.S. is staggering—any health factor so widespread has a variety of causes. It did not reach epidemic levels overnight, so it's not going to be eliminated quickly, nor by any single agency acting alone. We know, for example, that most sexual assault cases won't go through the justice system since more than 60% are never reported to law enforcement. Stalking and intimate partner violence are similarly underreported—underscoring a need to consider the role of every system, not just law enforcement, in supporting survivors and preventing violence. The good news is that communities are getting better at working together, and there are promising tools that can help prevent the worst outcome of intimate partner violence: fatality.

Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell is a trailblazer credited for what's known as the Danger Assessment—a tool developed in 1985 to help determine someone's risk of being killed by their intimate partner (a metric we often refer to as **lethality**). Before Campbell's Danger Assessment, evidence-based lists of warning signs for domestic violence lethality were sorely lacking. As a result, many professionals who interacted with homicide victims likely missed telltale indicators that they were at extreme risk of being killed before they could help with services or safety planning. Put simply, risk assessments can save lives—especially when the various systems that respond to domestic violence cases can put them into action. The Friendship Center is excited to be part of a multi-disciplinary group of professionals that will be implementing one such assessment tool in our community this month.

A NEW RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR OUR COMMUNITY

This April, our team will be joining staff from several local agencies, including law enforcement, county and city attorney's offices, the Office of Public Defenders, Child and Family Services, the Child Advocacy Center, Pre-trial Services, judges, Department of Corrections, and others to learn how to use a lethality risk assessment tool that's currently used statewide in Arizona. Known as the **Arizona Intimate Partner Risk Assessment Instrument System—or APRAIS**—the tool measures a perpetrator's likelihood to commit a severe re-assault within seven months that would result in serious injury or death to their victim. APRAIS builds on Dr. Campbell's groundbreaking Danger Assessment with questions that reflect current data and can help assess risk for victims of any gender. This update is notable: While the dynamics of an abusive relationship are fairly consistent and predictable regardless of a victim's gender identity and sexual orientation, Campbell's Danger Assessment was based specifically on data for femicide victims.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT COMMUNITIES ARE GETTING BETTER AT WORKING TOGETHER, AND THERE ARE PROMISING TOOLS THAT CAN HELP PREVENT THE WORST OUTCOME OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: FATALITY.

Although Arizona's application of APRAIS has been tailored to meet state-specific logistical and legal considerations, it's intended to be adapted to suit broad community efforts to respond to intimate partner violence. In Helena, local law enforcement is already trained to use a voluntary lethality risk assessment when they respond to reports of domestic violence. When victims show a high risk, officers call our 24/7 crisis line from the scene, giving the victim an option to speak directly with an advocate about our services and any immediate safety concerns they might have. Research has proven that this timely connection with an advocate can decrease the frequency and severity of violence in the months following the in-

¹ Waechter R, Ma V. Sexual Violence in America: Public Funding and Social Priority. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2015 Dec;105(12):2430-7. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302860. Epub 2015 Oct 15. PMID: 26469639; PMCID: PMC4638240.

cident. It also increases the likelihood that a survivor will access services—so we know the value of risk assessments in supporting a survivor’s safety. What sets APRAIS apart is that it expands a community’s use of lethality assessment results from the immediate response to violent crimes to their prosecution.

How does it work? Prosecutors and judges are given the results of the assessment that indicate whether a victim falls into one of two risk categories:

- **High Risk:** Victims that answer “yes” to at least four of seven first-tier questions have a 10.5 times higher risk of re-assault than those with fewer risk factors. An estimated 15% of victims in this category will experience re-assault within seven months.
- **Elevated Risk:** Victims that answer “yes” to two or three of the first-tier questions have a six times higher risk of re-assault than those with fewer risk factors. An estimated 9% of victims in this category will experience re-assault within seven months.


In Arizona, a state law enacted in 2015 requires that judges consider the results of a risk or lethality assessment in a domestic violence charge presented to the court. Many states have laws allowing or requiring courts to use various pre-trial risk assessment tools in determining release conditions for certain crimes, but Arizona is one of the only states to have a statute requiring courts to review assessment results specific to domestic violence charges. While there’s no such law requiring Montana courts to consider risk assessment results, prosecutors can consider a victim’s APRAIS risk category when advocating for conditions of a perpetrator’s release like bail amounts, restricting contact with the victim, and prohibiting firearm possession. Judges can consider the risk categories as well for setting bonds or determining whether to hold a suspect in custody until formal charges can be filed.

WHY A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH MATTERS

In Arizona’s case, APRAIS was born from a recognition that domestic violence cases are complex. Many entities interact with a survivor following a reported incident or assault, and many of those agencies were using their own risk assessment tools. Whether the results of those assessments were consistent or evidence-based mattered little when a different agency or official would review them. Judges in particular expressed frustration with not knowing how to weigh information from risk assessments when setting bail. As part of the APRAIS training, legal and criminal justice personnel learn about the empirical basis of the questions used to determine somebody’s risk.

In addition to aiding decision-making in the criminal justice process, assessment tools like APRAIS can be immensely helpful in empowering survivors to understand their risks and take safety precautions. They can also be eye-opening for the public, helping us all better recognize the high-risk signs of abuse that may be affecting us or somebody we know.

RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS LIKE APRAIS CAN EMPOWER US ALL TO UNDERSTAND WHAT SURVIVORS FACE AND OFFER SUPPORT BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE.

Part of the reason risk assessment tools like Dr. Campbell’s 1985 Danger Assessment were so revolutionary is that they were at the forefront of detecting warning signs for the worst possible effects of domestic violence. Those risks are better known now in the systems that work most closely with survivors, but some factors can manifest before a survivor ever interacts with an advocate or the criminal justice system. It’s devastating when we hear that lethality factors were present in a relationship after a homicide has already occurred. Risk assessment tools like APRAIS can empower us all to understand what survivors face and offer support before it’s too late. In that spirit, we encourage anyone interested in learning about the risk factors for severe re-assault to learn more about the APRAIS risk assessment. Visit socialwork.asu.edu/family-violence-center/aprais to access the ASU Family Violence Center’s page on the APRAIS program. 



THE MYTH OF MUTUAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*Jaime Gabrielli,
Direct Services Advocate (she/her)*

THE TRUTH ABOUT domestic violence is often hidden beneath distorted perceptions that assign responsibility for the abuse to the victim. This is especially true when survivors actively resist or fight back. The term **mutual abuse** is sometimes used when both people appear to simultaneously be abusers and victims. In truth, domestic abuse is never present between equals because it stems from one partner's need to own and control the other by any means necessary. The ingrained pattern of dominance and inherent imbalance of power makes mutual abuse virtually impossible.

Sadly, mutual abuse is sometimes depicted as reality in the media and within the court system, causing more fallout and confusion for victims. At times, the perception of co-abuse impacts the way cases are handled at the investigative level, prevents prosecution, and clouds civil proceedings. **While experts in the field of domestic violence agree there is no such thing as mutual abuse, it's woven into many of the stories we hear.**

REACTIVE DEFENSE

When victims fight back, they are not instigating abuse. While some of their behaviors might seem aggressive, they are frantic attempts to defend themselves and gain personal freedom. The person trying to resist abuse is not acquiring power or control over their partner, but attempting to diffuse, escape, and survive. The correct term for victims' innate response to being harmed is **reactive defense** or self-defense. It's important to understand that many responses to trauma are automatic. Self-protection is a hard-wired reaction to the overwhelming terror and brutality of

being threatened and attacked. A survival response is not a choice and does not put the victim on par with their abuser or make them the abusive partner.

CONTROL OVER REALITY

Advocates often speak with survivors who fear they are also abusive. Victims are conditioned to see themselves as the problem because of persistent blame-shifting and minimization by their partners. Abusers manipulate and gaslight their partner into thinking they are equally to blame for the violence. These strategies are effective as victims commonly blame themselves and take responsibility for the way they have been mistreated. **Abusive people are relentless in their efforts to push others to their breaking point**, hoping they will react intensely or forcefully. When they do, abusers use their reaction to gain the upper hand and avoid accountability. This exploitation of reality helps ensure the survivor will be too afraid to reach out for help because they fear they might be arrested or disbelieved.

MANIPULATING THE SYSTEM

During an abusive relationship and when survivors try to leave, their abusive partner will predictably use past reactive behavior against them to reestablish dominance and control. In child custody court battles, for example, abusers highlight these incidents to make a judge question the victim's stability as a parent or claim they are abusive. This tactic is used by perpetrators to defend themselves against valid claims of domestic violence, possibly even defeating criminal charges and requests for protective orders. Accepting their justifications only strengthens the abuser's power, and ensures victims remain disempowered and invalidated, even after the relationship ends.

CONFUSION FOR RESPONDERS

The covert nature of domestic violence can lead responders to mistakenly believe there is mutual abuse, or the victim is the abusive party. Fully understanding the experiences and stories of two people in conflict can be tricky and confusing, especially when relevant information is obscured. This is especially true when there is a long history of abuse, and the victim's internal defense mechanisms and trauma responses are triggered. Living with constant abuse over time can lead to shattered self-esteem, low self-worth, acute distress, and PTSD. Trauma victims often experience emotional dysregulation, wavering between angry outbursts, crying, placating, frustration, confusion, and complete disconnection. In contrast, abusers remain in control of their emotions, making them appear cool and calm compared to their partner's frantic and confused state. Responders, and even family and friends, are sometimes more inclined to believe the victim is "out of control" and trust the perpetrator's account based on their contrasting presentations after a violent incident.

IDENTIFYING THE PREDOMINANT AGGRESSOR

In Montana, law enforcement officials are educated about the dynamics of domestic violence and trained to identify the predominant aggressor in related crimes. If it appears the parties were involved in mutual violence, officers use a primary aggressor assessment to avoid arresting the wrong person and dual arrests. This investigative process allows police to gain a more accurate picture by shifting their focus to power dynamics, behavioral indications of trauma, and attempts at manipulation by the perpetrator.

Correctly identifying the perpetrator in domestic violence crimes involves but is not limited to the following considerations, regardless of who was the first aggressor:

- Prior history of violence
- Relative severity of the injuries
- Whether an act of violence occurred in self-defense
- Relative size and apparent strength of each person
- Apparent lack of fear between partners or family members
- Statements made by witnesses

SELF-DEFENSE AND SITUATIONAL VIOLENCE ARE NOT DOMESTIC ABUSE

Everyone has the right to defend their emotional and physical safety. Buying into claims of mutual abuse places unwarranted blame on survivors and excuses perpetrators. Misidentifying domestic violence as mutual abuse increases the self-blame, fear, confusion, and isolation victims are already experiencing. It's also important to keep in mind that people in any relationship can exhibit unhealthy behaviors. Individuals sometimes engage in situational violence, which is fundamentally different than intimate partner violence. Unlike domestic violence, situational violence does not correspond to a rooted imbalance of power or ongoing pattern of coercive behavior.

If you or someone you love is experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking, The Friendship Center has advocates available 24/7 to assist you. Learn more at thefriendshipcenter.org. 

HELP US IMPROVE OUR SERVICES!

THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER HAS EVOLVED AND GROWN TO MEET OUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS FOR OVER 50 YEARS. We wouldn't be here without the support of you—our stakeholders. This month, we're asking you to help us improve our services and identify where our community needs more support. Whether you're a partner agency we work with, a former or current client, a passionate supporter, or a member of our community who shares our vision for eliminating violence, we want to hear from you!

Visit thefriendshipcenter.org/communitysurvey to share your thoughts. The survey is open through April 30 and takes about 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for helping us improve, expand, and adapt to serve our community! 



UPCOMING EVENTS

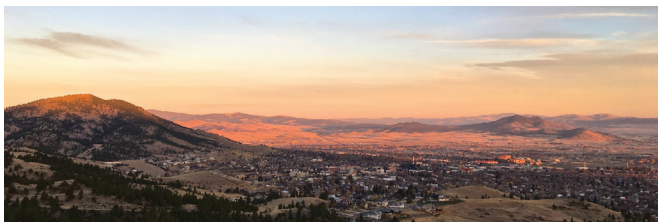
Visit thefriendshipcenter.org/events to learn more about all the upcoming events below!



Friendship Fridays | May 10 & June 14, 12 PM

Join us for one of our spring Friendship Fridays to learn about our vital services for survivors and education efforts in our tri-county area. Capacity is limited to 12 and lunch is provided, so be sure to RSVP online.

AROUND THE COMMUNITY



Greater Helena Gives | May 1 – 2

This 24-hour event organized by Helena Area Community Foundation is fueled by our community's generosity and passion for the vital work of Greater Helena nonprofits. All gifts to TFC during Greater Helena Gives count toward our spring fundraising goal!



Last Day of Just for the Helena of It Spring Pricing | June 30

If you're planning to run or walk the 5k, 10k, or half-marathon races taking place October 20, **register by June 30 before rates increase!** Organized by our friends at Treasure State Runners, all profits from this year's event benefit both The Friendship Center and Girls Thrive.

East Helena Rodeo | July 12 – 14

Come out for East Helena's Rodeo weekend this July! Proceeds from 21-and-over wristband sales benefit The Friendship Center thanks to our pals at Eagles 4040 in East Helena.



Last Chance Stampede Rodeo Purple Night | July 26

Organized by Lewis & Clark County Sheriff's Office through the nationwide Man Up Crusade program

Come out to this year's Last Chance Stampede in Helena to show your support for ending domestic violence in our communities and enter to win raffle prizes with 50% of proceeds benefiting The Friendship Center.

Broadwater County Rodeo Purple Night | August 2

Organized by Broadwater County Sheriff's Office through the nationwide Man Up Crusade program

Come out to this year's Broadwater Rodeo in Townsend to show your support for ending domestic violence in our communities and enter to win raffle prizes with all proceeds benefiting The Friendship Center.





MAKE A SPRING GIFT TO THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER

Did you know that about half of our annual support for general operations comes from the generosity of individuals and businesses like you?

Your gifts support vital services for survivors in our tri-county area as well as our efforts to prevent violence through community-wide education. Every donation makes a difference, enabling our clients to take control of their lives and empowering our community to thrive in healthy relationships.

Now through June, we're inviting you to help power the radical, hope-begetting work we do alongside survivors with a spring gift to The Friendship Center.

You can use the envelope enclosed to make your gift by mail or visit thefriendshipcenter.org/donate to give online. All spring donations made online or by mail, and all funds raised for TFC through Greater Helena Gives this May 1-2 help toward our \$50,000 spring goal! 🙌

READING RECOMMENDATION /

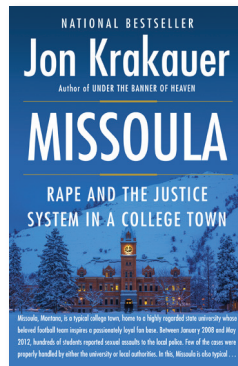
A THROWBACK FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

We hope you enjoy this preview of our spring reading recommendation. Visit thefriendshipcenter.org/tfcreads-spring24 to read our full recommendation for Jon Krakauer's *Missoula*.

WHY DO SO MANY RAPES GO UNREPORTED?

Of those that are reported, why are so few prosecuted? How common is acquaintance assault, and why is it so difficult to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against people they know? What constitutes justice for survivors?

These questions are as relevant today as they were when Jon Krakauer's *Missoula* was published this month nine years ago. Examining several cases of acquaintance rape at the University of Montana between 2010 and 2012, Krakauer confronts some of the prevailing misconceptions about sexual assault that led to several cases in Missoula being minimized, if not outright mishandled. It's sobering to admit, but it's a book that could've been written yesterday and about any number of communities.



One of the most important takeaways is that willful denial of the seriousness and prevalence of sexual assault serves no one, least of all survivors. The tiresome refrain of “that doesn’t happen here” (something we hear in our own community) is statistically improbable. What’s more, it can put people in harm’s way—a point best illustrated by some of the more chilling studies Krakauer cites in *Missoula* about college rapes in particular. In a 2011 issue of the periodical *Sexual Assault Report*, clinical psychologist David Lisak shared research finding that **90% of college rapes are committed by serial offenders, some of whom admitted to committing as many as six rapes.**

What would it take to forestall would-be serial offenders after the first time? It's a weighty question with many answers, but an important place to start is believing survivors—especially survivors on college campuses—when they disclose that they've experienced sexual violence. 🙌



to support ending domestic and sexual violence in our community

Visit thefriendshipcenter.org to give online

Join the Empowerment Club by making a **RECURRING GIFT**

Make a **PLANNED GIFT** to invest in a future free from violence

If you are 70.5 years or older, talk to your financial adviser to donate your **REQUIRED MINIMUM DISTRIBUTION**

Give through **SECGC to #3707** if you're a Montana state employee

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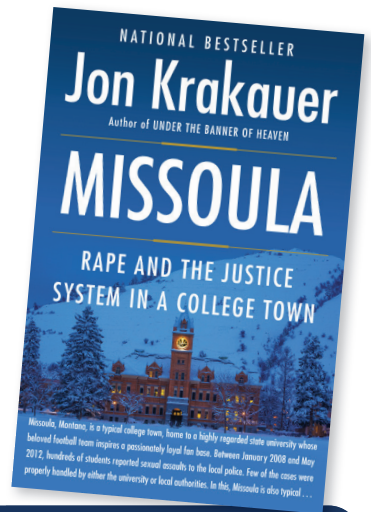
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A THROWBACK FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

NINE YEARS AFTER its publication, and almost 15 years since the cases it chronicles, Jon Krakauer's *Missoula* underscores how much is at stake when we maintain a culture that discourages disclosure and prosecution of violent crimes like sexual assault on college campuses.

Read an excerpt from our spring reading recommendation inside and visit thefriendshipcenter.org/tfcreads-spring24 for our full recommendation!



If you want to get your own copy of *Missoula*, you can support our local bookstore here in Helena by ordering your paperback or Libro.fm audiobook through Montana Book Company! Visit mtbookco.com to search titles and order online. If you're reading for a book club, email montanabookco@gmail.com to get 10% off your purchase.

Missoula contains quotes from police reports, news stories, interviews, and court proceedings detailing real sexual assault cases. These include descriptions of the crimes as well as dismissive and disparaging comments directed at many of the victims. While it's important to learn what survivors go through and where systems often fail to support them, we encourage everyone to read with care.