

THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS

By

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A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

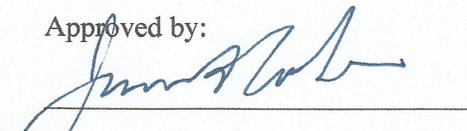
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Abstract

Ellen Pott's *The Natural Order of Things* is a critical analysis of the impact that violence has upon the overall wellbeing of women. One in four women are in an abusive relationship. Physical, mental, and emotional abuse adversely affects the mental stability of a woman. The immersive installation incorporates sculpture, video, and sound to examine the lingering tensions and feeling of confinement in abusive situations.

Abuse is commonly defined as treating someone or something with cruelty or violence, often on a regular basis. Abuse against women can include physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, verbal, or financial; it can also more broadly be seen in social, business, institutional, and religious contexts, and in the area of privilege and social status.¹ Each of these can affect women in different ways depending on her unique situation.

This paper will explore the relationship of abuse against women and the affects it has upon the mental stability of victims. The focus will be on the diminishing mental health of women who have experienced abusive relationships. The installation piece has been formulated to embody my findings. All types of abuse adversely affects the mental stability of a woman through the lingering tensions and feelings of confinement that inhibit their ability to have a sense of confidence and security.

My research resources included reading numerous books and articles on the rights and boundaries of the female body and women's mental health issues; abuse against women statistics, legislation in regards to victim's rights; and preventative practices. I also carefully investigated and selected media for the installation that would create an atmosphere to evoke feelings of anxiety, apprehension, emptiness, tension, and dysfunction.

“Violence in the name of power, conquest, dominance, and submission are the cornerstones of ancient history.”ⁱⁱ Violence persisted today and is prevalent against women. “Gender-based violence is manifested in the home and the community; it is built into gender-blind legal systems and expressed in social, economic and political practices.”ⁱⁱⁱ Religious and culturally condoned violence against women has helped perpetuate the cycle of dominance and submission. Over thirty-five percent of women around the world are or have been in abusive relationships with intimate partners.^{iv} Currently, one in four teen girls experiences sexual abuse.^v

The potentiality or actual experience of abuse prevents women from obtaining an optimal healthy life.^{vi} In addition to the physical wounds and scars, women in abusive relationship and situations can suffer from multiple mental disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and anxiety. “Women who have been physically or sexually abused have higher rates of mental ill-health.”^{vii} These mental disorders can result in substance abuse, self-harming, and suicide. “Women exposed to partner violence are twice as likely to be depressed, almost twice as likely to have alcohol use disorders.”^{viii}

“Violence related mental health problems are also poorly identified.”^{ix} The statistics on the affects of women in abusive relationships is grossly inaccurate as most women do not report or disclose their abuse. Also, the complicated and unclear legal process deters many from seeking help. “Across crime types, studies commonly report that reasons for not reporting include fear of reprisal, not viewing the incident as a serious matter, and dissatisfaction with the CLS (Criminal Legal System).”^x

Women tend to stay in abusive relationships for several reasons. A woman may fear her partner will come after her, her children, or her family. She may feel as if she deserves to be treated poorly because she grew up in an abusive environment. Her partner may have isolated her from her family, friends, and resources. Her religion might not “allow” her to get a divorce. She may feel an abusive partner is better than no one.^{xi} No matter what the reason, women in abusive relationships begin to imprison themselves and are often unable to find their way out.

Having a strong interest in the idea that women in abusive relations begin to imprison themselves, I began to explore representations of tension and confinement. As an extended media artist I decide to employ the practice of installation as a way to create an environment wherein participants/viewers could immersive themselves. “Installations provide viewers with the experience of being surrounded by art.”^{xii}

Situated in the middle of the 800 square foot gallery was an eight feet long by six feet wide by eight feet high metal prison with sporadic openings in between the poles. Thirty-five hammers were bonded, chained, and tied from the top bars. Some of the hammers had heavy thick chains that tethered them to the prison, others had rope that were broken and retied to keep them hitched to the prison, and others had wire that were either loosely or heavily wrapped to bond them to the prison. A time-lapse video of a rose blooming, dying, and finally falling away was projected onto the floor of the prison. Lying next to the rose on the floor was hammer with a severed wire.

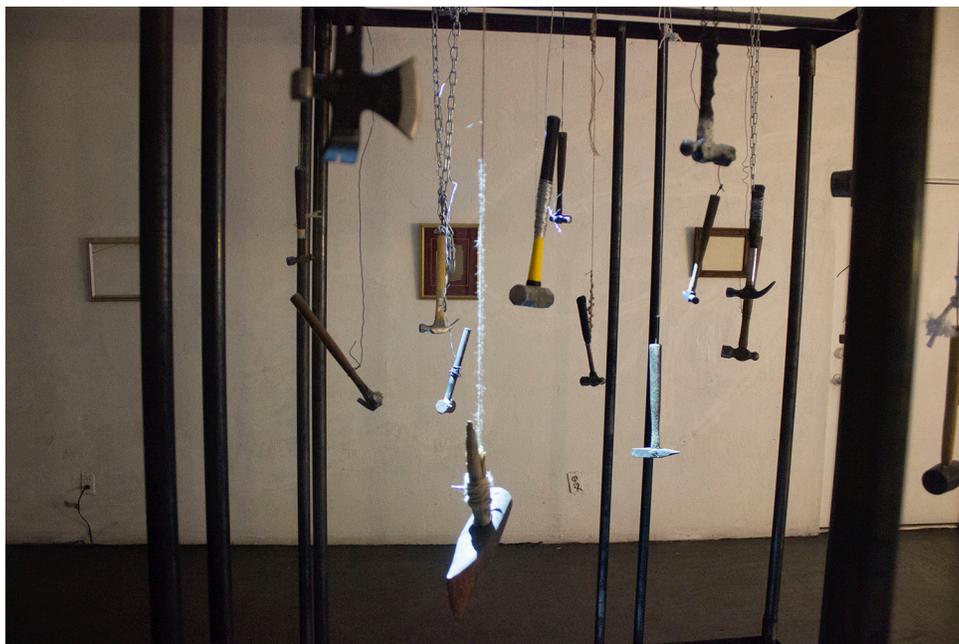
The entry of the gallery was illuminated. As you moved toward the center and rear of the room the space became darker. As one approach the sculpture the sound of a flute playing chords in F minor could be heard. The three walls on the periphery of the

gallery had empty pictures frames. The one light in the space caste a shadow of the prison on the wall.

My artwork takes a critical look at the social, political, and cultural issues that affect girls and women. I initiate and continue conversations that are taboo in society with the goal of igniting change. At the opening reception, viewers began discussing the uneasiness they felt from being in the space. The number of hammers dangling form the top of the prison and the multiple ways that I had attached intrigued many of them. Several viewers opening talked about their experiences in abusive relationships.



Ellen Pott, *The Natural Order of Things*, 2014



Ellen Pott, *The Natural Order of Things*, 2014 Detail

ⁱ "Stop Violence Against Women." - Types of Identified Woman Abuse. Accessed November 29, 2014. <http://www.domesticviolenceinfo.ca/article/types-of-abuse-149.asp>.

ⁱⁱ Debran Rowland. *The Boundaries of Her Body: The Troubling History of Women's Rights in America*. Naperville, Ill.: Sphinx Pub., 2004. p. 607.

ⁱⁱⁱ Harcourt, Wendy. *Body Politics in Development Critical Debates in Gender and Development*. London: Zed Books ;, 2009. P. 95.

^{iv} "Women's Health." WHO. September 1, 2013. Accessed November 28, 2014. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs334/en/>.

^v "Welcome to Sacasa.org." Welcome to Sacasa.org. Accessed November 28, 2014. <http://www.sacasa.org>.

^{vi} "Women's Health" WHO

^{vii} "Women's Health" WHO

^{viii} "Women's Health" WHO

^{ix} "Women's Health" WHO

^x Angela Gover, Courtney Welton-Mitchell, Joanne Belknap, and Anne DePrince. "When Abuse Happens Again: Women's Reasons for Not Reporting New Incidents of Intimate Partner Abuse to Law Enforcement." March 15, 2013. Accessed November 29, 2014. <http://mysite.du.edu/~adeprinc/goverweltonetal2013.pdf>.

^{xi} "Compelling Reasons Women Stay." Domestic Abuse Project RSS. Accessed December 1, 2014. <http://www.domesticabuseproject.com/get-educated/compelling-reasons-women-stay/>.

^{xii} Atkins, Robert. *Artspeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords*. New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1990. P 90.

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