The U.S. legal system’s treatment of domestic violence has evolved a long way from the “rule of thumb.” (Early U.S. courts tended to follow the British common law, which provided that a man could chastise his wife “in moderation”—like one might a servant or child—and tolerated the custom that a man could beat his wife so long as he used a switch no thicker than his thumb.) Today, every state treats physical and sexual domestic violence as a crime, and many states have also criminalized verbal, psychological, and emotional abuse that occurs in domestic relationships. Some states recognize various domestic torts, and a few have even established special domestic violence courts. Still, numerous counterproductive myths regarding domestic violence abound, and much work needs to be done in order to create a legal regime capable of successfully combating domestic violence.

This year’s Women and the Law Conference will bring together a wide range of experts on domestic violence. Domestic violence survivors from a variety of backgrounds will share their stories, domestic attorneys, counselor mediators, and police enforcement personnel will share their experiences and frustrations with the current legal theories and options available in domestic violence cases. Domestic abuse experts will discuss the causes and effects of domestic violence as well as the most promising intervention therapies and assistance programs. Finally, scholars will discuss their plans for providing more effective legal strategies and remedies for the many victims of domestic violence and helping to end the scourge of domestic violence in this country.