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Whatever Happened to Catch & Release?

“You know, it’s the cycle of domestic violence, which is about the power and control of one human being over another – the verbal, the emotional, the psychological abuse, you know, the chipping away at one’s self esteem – you’re stupid, you’re ugly, you’re worthless, you’re no good... And then it escalates into the physical violence, which is the hitting, the kicking, the punching, throwing up against walls. And then of course, the honeymoon phase. And that’s the oh, baby, I’m so sorry. It’s never going to happen again.” (Brown 13)

Denise Brown was Nicole Brown’s sister (OJ Simpson’s former wife) who founded the Nicole Brown Foundation after the murder of her sister. She was a part of the interview with Robin Givens (Mike Tyson’s ex-wife) that Joy Behar, occasional Larry King Live host, held. It centered on what makes women stay in abusive relationships.

In her article, “Why Don’t You Just LEAVE Him?”, June Sheehan Berlinger, registered nurse and survivor of domestic violence, offers further insight into the merciless cycles of abuse by defining the three major phases of abusive partners. The first is known as the *tension building phase*. According to Berlinger, in this stage, the abuser will start to get irritated or upset and may begin to raise their voice, curse, criticize, and even make threats to be harmful. Most victims know exactly what is about to happen. The peacekeeping mindset sinks in and victims will do anything to de-fuse the situation, but generally this is never a success for them. Once the hostility becomes too great to handle, the abuser then shifts into the *explosion phase*. Berlinger notes that this is the shortest and scariest of the three phases and more often than not results in physical violence. The third though has proven to be the most dangerous due to women choosing to stay with their abuser. It is known as the *calm*, and this is what Denise Brown was referring to as “the honeymoon phase.” Abusers have been known to plead with their victims to stay all the while

claiming they can change and be better to them. Sadly, both the hitter and punching post usually believe these words.

Growing up, my mother, Sue Beth, and grandmother, Zorida, from my father's side of the family, raised me. Mom went through a string of boyfriends while Grandma Zo was on husband three (due to her first's violent streak and her second's untimely death). I do not really know a lot about Martin, husband one, except that Grandma's situation was becoming deadly from how badly he was hitting her. Gushing blood is all that my dad can really remember from when she and Martin were still together. The only reason I know that was because Dad felt like opening up to his four year old (me) before our family dissolved. Thinking back, that was one of the few times he ever brought his past up outside of his drug experiences. Husband three, Jose, is not exactly a wife beater, at least not with his fists, but with his control over Zo and everything she does. In an article written by April Few and Karen Rosen called "Victims of Chronic Dating Violence" the two delved into whether a woman's vulnerabilities were an influence in her decision-making process.

"Many researchers have undertaken the challenge to discover what makes some women more vulnerable to relationship abuse than others... Some scholars argue that all women are at risk of becoming involved in abusive relationships as a consequence of socializing within a patriarchal social structure... However, not all women fall victim to chronic abuse, suggesting that certain vulnerabilities must be present in the lives of those who do." (Few, Rosen 1)

After grandma's second husband died, Jorge, was she in such a desperate need for a soul mate that the first man who was nice to her (Jose) caused her to just settle? It had to have been difficult and lonely to lose a husband and still have two boys to raise. Two boys in the 70's, who had different dads and an eleven -year age difference. That right there is enough for a neighborhood to shun her. And they did. What was especially captivating about Few and Rosen's study was how they designed a Vulnerability Conceptual Model, which is what measures the two

different types of vulnerabilities. Few and Rosen were able to develop and coin the two types and they include *relational*, which is a vulnerability that stems from what the abused believes to be “normal” in relationships. Then there is *situational*, which stems from circumstantial and societal factors instead of the abused’s mindset. For example, in situational vulnerability, the abused might feel let down because they’re not in a place in life that society deems as normal. This can depend on age, social status, and so on. Studying these vulnerabilities helps to progress the understanding of what makes a woman stay with her abuser.

When he calls, which is on grounds of about just over or just at ten times a day to see what she is doing, she jumps to the phone. Yet, she will complain about how often he calls and how much it irritates her, but she still manages to reach that device before the second ring ends. She seems so miserable when she talks about him, referring to him as selfish, thoughtless, and even a pig on some occasions—which funnily enough, I have seen as a constant theme throughout entertainment like books, games, songs, movies, and even jokes, with pigs being portrayed as evil or corrupt or just all around negative—but she stays with him. I wonder if it is security she needs because she is scared to not be able to handle the costs of living on her own or if she is stuck with him because she is about 70 years old and still paying off her house? During my reading of “Victims of Chronic Dating Violence,” I noticed they define the real word that describes when a woman is unable to get out of a relationship. *Entrapped*. The sound of it makes me think of a bear trap snapping down on the leg of an animal. I can almost feel the dread that overcomes them when they realize they are going to die. To be entrapped means that since so much time and heart was put into making a relationship work, women become too attached to leave. In other cases, if she is feeling like her control over reality is losing grip, it creates this idea in her head that she is helpless and therefore needs her abuser. We would help her, Mom

and me. We would take her under our wing in a heartbeat. Is it the money? Few and Rosen spent a lot of time trying to define risk factors; a few include *individual/intrapersonal* (which is my mom), *relational* (totally me) and then there is *social/situational* (completely grandma).

Individual risk factors include depression and exposure to abuse, both of which my Mom experienced in droves. I think throughout her relationships she was always looking for someone to make her feel loved because a lot of her growing years lacked. As for the relational, these tend to draw people in from thoughts of fiery romance going on between them and their abuser as well as unconditional commitment to them. Then there is social/situational, which centers on being totally isolated or in a position where money is something no one has. Grandma is both. Jose won't even give her rides to her friend's house when they invite them both to dinners. He says so, therefore it goes. Grandma has always been poor, though, but I guess when you have two kids to consider, anything goes. He is so cheap that I doubt anything he makes goes to anything she has to pay. I remember her telling me stories about when they would go shopping, after he suggests it, and upon getting to the counter to pay he would walk away so grandma got stuck with the bill. Maybe this was another way to control her, to "make" her foot the bill? I know for a fact any dime he makes goes to scotch on the rocks or ridiculous Denver Broncos gear. One year for the Super Bowl, he spent eighty dollars on a sign to hold for the game. Really? Eighty dollars could have bought his wife something, but I guess if you want to support the good old Blue and Orange, your wife has to take a backseat. That "man" has been working, selling cars, for quite a long time now. Grandma worked in a cubicle for a little bit in her thirties, but her retirement didn't build up to anything that she could live off of. Social security is her means of survival. Which is practically nothing.

She will hide bills from him like a loan she cosigned for me to go to school. Jose supposedly has no idea about this. It is like she cannot be honest about what she does for her family in terms of helping them. Not even her son! And he grew in her. Why would Jose care about a loan I pay back every month, though? I am their only granddaughter and it isn't under his name. What is so terrible about this that absolutely must be hidden from him? Is it the opportunity to have a sense of privacy for Zo? Jose is constantly in her business to the point where he listens in on her telephone conversations. Is her secrecy what helps her stay sane and have a sense of her own identity, seeing as every decision made is usually made with his reaction in mind. He makes her plans for her on his days off. She lets him. It is like she is an agenda and his words/views/opinions is the pen that schedules in what they will do. When did it have to be like this for her when clearly she is unhappy? But if she is unhappy, what keeps her from changing it?

Although she will never admit it because she grew up in a time where the Mexican culture was very discriminated against (not that anything has changed as of now though), we are Mexican. From my understanding and experience it is very common to see male domination in traditional Mexican relationships or families.

“Culture affects the way women and men understand domestic violence and its ramifications; thus, it is important to explore how cultural nuances may influence how women and men define abusive acts in their intimate relationships and determine norms and values in relationships, in general.” (Few, Rosen 4)

In this article, Few and Rosen discovered that many surveys say ethnic women are getting abused more than other women and some of the reasons could be socioeconomic restraints, lack of resources, immigration status, and very much so, cultural values.

I have seen where women stay in the kitchen either cooking or chatting and men go where the television is or to something that is completely separated from women. Their women.

In an article (“Counseling Latina Battered Women”) by Aarti Katurirangan and Elizabeth Nutt Williams, I learned a few more terms. These new-found words describe Latina life and the basic guidelines for what a woman’s role is and what a man’s is. They are *marianismo* and *machismo*. I am sure by the spelling it is easy to see who belongs where. Let’s explore these terms, though. Marianismo is modeled after the Virgin Mary, so traditional Latina women are expected to be pure, suffer without protest, be loyal to her kin as in they always go before her, and to never disobey her husband and his authority. Machismo is bringing pride and honor to the family name and it is expected of men to not fail at this. They are the providers, the decision makers, the bread winners. While sifting through all of these characteristics that are models of what to be for others I could hear so much of my father’s family through each word. It is so crazy how much marianismo and machismo are a part of my life and I never knew until this paper. With my father and mother, for example, she went from his girlfriend to his property. In the beginning, there was love, but it was not expressed in a very romantic way or really ever at all. When he stomped his foot on the bedroom floor in their townhouse, which was the ceiling to the living room, she got up, grabbed a beer from the fridge, and brought it to him while he sat in bed. That was how obedient she was to him.

“And that’s the thing, it becomes your norm.” (Givens 9)

Today my mother would probably tell him something in the form of an obscenity. Back then, what he requested, which eventually became demanded, my mom mindlessly did. Did Dad fall into this behavior from watching his mother get stepped on by men? Berlinger describes the basic outline for an abuser’s personality; although it should not be taken completely literally for all male abusers, it was very accurate about my father. She includes the fact that, like victims, abusers can be anyone; however, their idea of self worth is muddled by low self-esteem, arrogance, and the thought of being better than all (my father is a total “know-it-all”). The abuser

was most likely raised with domestic violence, which ultimately sparked their perception of right and wrong and where domestic violence is defined between the two. Remember that Dad can only recall seeing a lot of blood when his parents were together. Berlinger continues on to illustrate who an abuser is by explaining how abusers look for people to control and eventually possess by whatever means possible. They are who is in charge and their partners will behave how they want them to. Mom never stepped out of line until she got ready to leave to Dad. Did Zo let Dad walk all over her? In the article "Taught to Hit," a man named James is being interviewed and recollecting the thought process behind seeing his mother get hit:

"When you are a kid and seeing your mom get hit doesn't surprise you or even scare you, then there is a problem and that's what happened to me," said James. "
(Johnson 1)

She let Rod rule her world. Rod was her second son and they used to get into very hideous fights. These fights were so ugly to the point that Rod himself actually hit grandma once. He made the mistake of doing it in front of my mom but never did again (in public at least) after my mom verbally beat the shit out of him. In the same article by Danza Johnson, which discussed men who were taught to hit from experience or substance abuse, I found an extremely interesting fact:

"According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, James' thought process about domestic violence is common for boys who grew up in abusive homes. Children who witness violence between their parents or caretakers are at a higher risk of transmitting violent behavior from one generation to the next, according to a study done by the NCADV. Boys who witness domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults." (Johnson 1)

That isn't a shocker. As Dad got older, did he shift into this dominant role towards Grandma to assert his independence and manhood? Which then maybe led into how he would go on to treat the women he was involved with? Mom was not his only piece of property.

What made mom do this? She is so strong and independent now. But is that because she had love beaten, literally, out of her to become resilient? I realized tonight that during those times she might have been trying to cope with her past and thus sought out only the men who made her feel worse (the individual risk factor from Few and Rosen, stemming from depression).

“Well, I was so numb.” (Givens 6)

The night before my mother left my father she bent the barrel to a gun he had pulled out on us. He was going to kill me, her, and then himself. In an article by Nancy Glass called “Patterns of Abusive Behaviors,” 40-50% of female death rates are of a result of femicide. Femicide is where a woman is killed by her partner and 70% of that time she is trying to leave. We hadn’t packed yet. However Dad had already strangled mom, sexually abused her, and was now threatening to kill her, which are all risk factors of femicide. I do believe he would have made his threat a reality had Mom not protected us. She loved him so much, and who could blame her after dedicating 12 years of her life to this man. I know it broke her in half when she finally realized that her relationship to Dad could no longer work. He shattered her though, the moment he put my life in danger. The next day we were gone and stayed gone.

Was her seven-year age difference a fuel for the fire that Dad needed to take advantage of? She was so young when they met; Mom was 15 and Dad was 22 when they started dating. Mom was practically a baby. To have someone who will take care of you and anything you want them to do without protest, is a personal slave or bitch if you will. Controlling Mom was too easy for Dad. I see these same tendencies in behavior directed towards me only not quite as extreme. For instance, the time I bought myself a car because I needed it and needed to build credit he threw a fit, a real temper tantrum. Do you know what his reasoning was behind losing his cool over his 20 year old daughter’s actions? I did not consult him about it FIRST. He is *too*

controlling. Stronger words like “deceptive” and “selfish” could be some adjectives to describe how he acted towards Mom. “Loser” might be harsh. Except Dad turned into a violent monster like his own father. Did watching his dad beat his mom somehow affect his brain to the point where at one time he thought that was okay to do? According to our friend James from Johnson’s interview, it is a little like this:

"I'd get mad and hit her, apologize, promise to never do it again and, of course, do it again," said James. "I knew it was wrong, but I also knew it was normal behavior as for what I thought normal behavior was." (Johnson 1)

One time a few years back, about five now, he had just come back into our lives and finally was on good speaking terms with my mom. It was quite the accomplishment seeing as he had just finished up his six and half year violent, stalking, harassment phase that flourished into a disappearing act. I cannot quite recall the conversation they were having, but my mom said something that did not necessarily offend my dad or make him mad in any way but he jokingly went to smack my mom and it had a little more force than what he intended. His mouth dropped once his smack/hit had planted itself on my mom’s flesh. The only thing she said to him was that he will **NOT** put his hands on her. Ever. And he didn’t from that day on and I honestly don’t think he meant to that very day. Does this mean it is not so much that he thinks that physical abuse is okay but it has somehow turned into this learned behavior like saying “please” or “thank you,” only Dad hits? I discovered there are typologies of men who abuse:

Several typologies of abusive intimate partners have been proposed over the past 25 years of scholarship in the field. Two of the best known are Amy Holtzworth-Munroe’s (Holtzworth-Munroe & Meehan, 2004; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994) and Michael Johnson’s (Johnson, 1995). Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart integrated dimensions of abuser behavior used in prior typology research to develop a typology of violent male partners with three subtypes: family only (FO), dysphoric/borderline (DB), and generally violent/antisocial (GVA). The FO men engage in the least relationship violence and the least interpersonal violence of any type. They were predicted to have little or no psychopathology. The DB men would engage in moderate to severe IPV, but not much violence outside the home. This group would have the most psychological distress often from early traumatic experiences and resulting attachment problems, and be

most likely to evidence borderline personality characteristics (i.e., emotional lability, unstable relationships, fear of rejection, jealousy). The GVA men were predicted to engage in moderate to severe levels of IPV and the highest levels of violence outside the home. They would be more likely to have characteristics of antisocial personality disorder (i.e., criminal behavior, arrests, substance abuse). Generally violent/antisocial men would resemble other antisocial aggressive groups with high levels of family of origin violence, association with deviant peers, impulsivity, and viewing violence as acceptable. This typology has been supported with subsequent research. (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000, 2003)

Michael Johnson proposed a second typology of two distinct forms of IPV: “intimate terrorism” and “situational couple violence” (Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Conceptually, the critical difference between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence is that the former is characterized by the efforts of one partner, typically the man, to systematically control the other partner, typically the woman. Intimate terrorism is characterized by more frequent and injurious physical violence that escalates over time and is almost exclusively perpetrated by men against women, with the female partner using violence only in self-defense if she uses it at all.

Situational couple violence (originally termed common couple violence), is thought to be usually less injurious and severe, with physical violence more often used by both members of the couple. Intimate terrorism is thought to be more characteristic of clinical, emergency department, criminal justice (at least in the past), and domestic violence shelter populations, whereas situational couple violence is thought to be more common at the population level. According to Johnson’s original (1995) conceptualization, intimate terrorism is a product of and contributor to male dominance and patriarchy and was originally called “patriarchal terrorism” (Glass 2).

This was not the first man Mom grew attached to that had a hard time not making her his punching bag. She was married to a different man for six years. Few and Rosen’s types of vulnerability were discussed earlier. One of them in particular (situational) stuck out to me regarding mom and when she got married. Western society usually centers on the “American

Dream,” which includes marrying young and having a family. Mom never had anyone propose to her until she was 29 and I think out of excitement and wanting so badly to be a wife, she just went with it. It is weird how little expectations from society shape your life when you let them. He was a man who she so desperately wanted to please and who is so disgusting to me, that to say his name makes me cringe. It infuriates me to think about him because he not only abused her but stole from her, stole from a church school she worked at, stole from my grandmother, from me and I was not even 12 at that point, and eventually Mom’s identity. This guy really is a piece and she stayed with him, worked to make her marriage to him survive, and all along he was sleeping around on her.

“...he had said he was going to get help... I loved him. I wanted to make it work... I wanted to do anything and everything I could for him... I was very bonded. And it’s hard to be bonded and save yourself at the same time. You just want to fix it, you know.” (Givens 7)

One of the biggest measures that I ever witnessed her take to earn his acceptance was when she converted to Mormonism to make him and his psychotic family happy. Afterwards though, the abuse really started to escalate and by that time she was so wrapped up in the religion that she refused to leave him because she said “I do” in front of her Lord. June Berlinger brought this thought process up in her article, staying because it goes against religious values:

“My well-intentioned clergyman told me that staying married was God’s plan for me and that divorce was a fate almost worse than death.” (Berlinger 38)

After Mom finalized the divorce to him, her faith became non-existent. I am not sure if it was the Zeitgeist videos I showed her or if it was his fault, but Mom no longer reads *The Book of Mormon*.

There was a period of time when Mom worked three different jobs because he couldn’t hold one down himself. She did not mind this though which used to drive me insane because it

was so obvious to me, to everyone, what a bastard he was, still is. June Berlinger interprets this type of behavior beautifully though by saying:

“She may or may not have been abused as a child. What she has in common with other victims of abuse is the mistaken belief that she can take care of, rescue, and “fix” her partner, particularly if he was abused as a child. She and her partner develop an unhealthy, dependent relationship that they call ‘love.’” (Berlinger 37)

That mindset was just like Robin Given’s when she was with Tyson. That mindset nearly stole my mother’s life. Towards the end of their marriage, I began defending her because she couldn’t hit back, she couldn’t speak up. I could. On one occasion after he threw a solid glass ashtray at Mom’s head; like blinking, I immediately picked it up and hurled it back into his direction. It missed him and I remember feeling sad not from my choice of action but that it didn’t hit him. I can still hear the shatter of the glass bursting against the back door, the shards flying in every direction, and my voice being calm. Physically, I was far from calm. Beads of sweat began to collect within my palms, my entire body broke out into the shakes, and all I could see was red. I was so enraged though that my words flowed out gently, calm but deadly.

“If you ever hurt her again, I will fucking kill you Adrian.”

That was all I had to say. It is very much a possibility that had she never left him, I probably would have ended his life and I would have done it so Mom could live with peace. No one deserves to get hit, not even her former husband. When I watched him attack her though, that thought process disappeared and I wanted him to hurt like she did. It was his turn to feel the burn of a punch; it was his turn to cry.

After that incident, it brought us to the point where he would never get out of line when I was home, but when his temper exceeded his limit he would hit objects. Things, like pieces of wood which would eventually lead to the amputation of two of his fingers. I remember the night he struck that tree stump. He had an extreme addiction to meth and so our house was flooding

with junk. Other people's couches, clothes, wall decorations, and a tree stump were a few things that made it into our home. Mama was starting to regain a sense of courage (a backbone if you will), and I think she refused to give him money after he asked. She knew damn well where it was going and she knew we needed to eat. This man did not believe in jobs so his reaction to her solid "No" was to get mad. He got up in a huff and ran down the stairs; his feet could have gone through them had he stomped any harder. A few moments went by, probably a minute, when these loud, crashing, booms exploded from the basement. He was really mad. I remember looking over at Mom and her face was so empty, colorless, and joyless. That was her husband and the only reason it was not her face on the other end of his blows was because I was home. I became a watchdog for my mom in a way, ready to snap and ready to rip throats out. His throat.

Half an hour later he emerged from his hole, his left hand wrapped in duct tape and blood leaking out from the ends of his *bandage*. About two weeks later, his entire palm and pinky as well as his ring finger were black with trinkets of purple. It was almost as dark as the black eye he had given Mom a few months before. After a series of surgeries though, the doctors determined that they would have to remove the phalanges. This was from so much infection eating away the muscle and tissue. Isn't that interesting, an abusive husband having his ring finger tainted with toxins and cut off from his idiotic actions? It is rather hard to make a fist with three fingers.

"I was hit for the first time before I was married. And I did... what you thought you should do, of course. You know, you don't take any phone calls. Three days, absolutely not. Absolutely not. All of a sudden, you start taking phone calls... then all of a sudden, OK, let's meet and we'll talk. And then you meet and all of a sudden this person, this man that you love, that's claiming his love for you, is crying, you know? And then your consoling them... it just becomes, I'll never, ever, ever, do it again... I just love you so much... And it just begins." (Givens 3)

As I grew up and continue to grow I find these qualities of my grandmother and mother in myself in past relationships with mates and even friends. What has conditioned me to bend

over backwards upon command for the people I love? All I ever saw growing up were women putting themselves last. During dinner they were last to get a plate, coming home they were the last to walk in the door, and anytime someone needed help (personally and especially financially), the women in my family were approached first. They are the problem solvers, the improvisers, the ones who can take a little bit of nothing and turn it into something. They were also who you took your bad day out on. Is witnessing behavior like that what determined my way of showing affection? At one point I was transforming into a Suzy Homemaker for my southern gentleman. He actually had the nerve to request that I hang his shirts in the order that he favored them as well as by sleeve length. I actually did. Do I want to be controlled because so much of my childhood was watching the women do as they are told? But I hate the idea of someone making my decisions. I loathe the thought of dependence on someone when I know I can accomplish what I need on my own. What draws me to men who, if not at first, definitely later, are poor matches?

Braeden was the first guy I ever cohabitated with and he was the first to make me taste my own blood. Once upon a time, he treated me like a queen. Like Few and Rosen say, though, this was part of the relational risk factor (blinded by romance, thinking you are in love, and overlooking his flaws were all in a day's work). I remember that night like the whole incident had happened in slow motion. His fist whirling down, approaching my jaw and hoping to make contact, it did. I had never felt so much pressure and excruciating pain in one spot, at one time. I had never been sucker punched. Progresso soup became my main diet for nearly a week due to being unable to chew. I still have no idea why he hit me that first time, but I think it was from too much alcohol intake. According to Johnson's article, the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and

Alcoholism says that partners (abusive or not) who drink become four times more likely to attack their significant other. Oh.

I stand at five feet six inches and weigh about 115 pounds. Braeden was five feet eleven inches and weighed in at about 190 pounds, most of it muscle. He could have done more damage. I will never forget the blackness within his eyes. It was like looking through a telescope into space but all the stars and planets were gone. It was just black. I remember right before he struck my instincts were telling me to get out of there, get away from him, scream, do something! I didn't. I never called my mom to tell her I was coming home. The police did not seem like an option, even though they made frequent visits anyways due to noise complaints. Instead, I listened to his cries and apologies then, shockingly, I told him I was sorry and even let him touch me that night. When I say "touch," I mean I let him have sex with me. No, it was not rape either. Part of me really did want to and the other just really wanted him to love me.

Even now, I have not reached a conclusion for why I apologized to him, laid down with him, continued to "love" him. June Berlinger gave the best break down of why this is so common for victims to do. At the beginning, the abuser will reel his fish in with bait that consists of going on dates, cooked dinners after work, gifts, deep conversations where one thinks they are getting to know another, and the idea of unconditional love. The victim does not detect any sign that this person intends to control or hurt them. They see a lifetime companionship that could easily be shared with the abuser. The victim takes the bait and nevertheless becomes utterly committed to the abuser. Berlinger said that the physical abuse will come out over a period of one night or three months down the line. Snide comments, disgusting jokes about women are a few signs that should create caution. It is within those actions that can easily morph into shoves,

slaps, and even sucker punches. It is unexpected, unprovoked, and usually inevitable when victims are already drawn in by the fishing line. Braeden had worms, then he was the worm.

Eventually, I did tell my mom and the very day I told her what was really going on was the night I came home. Like Braeden, the other men I have chosen to spend time with prove to me more and more that I need to change my values for myself. I need to look more into myself before picking a partner; I need to notice all of his qualities and not just the ones I want to see. I need to be picky. The constant trend I have so far noticed is cheating, hard core drug addiction, and physical as well as emotional abuse. Those four all-star qualities happen to be the main character traits of my mother's ex-husband. What keeps this vicious cycle of seeking out bad men alive in the women in my family? I have an idea of what could prevent it in my life and that is what I choose to do from here on out when it comes to romantic relationships.

As a survivor, I can say with pride and honor that at least I am talking about it publicly now. This is just one person's journey, though; this essay does not speak for all the other women going through the same ordeal. This doesn't solve anything for them or society or the men who hit and get away with it. Although I am only one voice, perhaps this paper can break down the barriers for others to find their own and that in itself is the most important lesson to learn.

"... when you said the secret, the dirty little secret, you don't know how right that is. It's one of the reasons I wanted to talk about it. I'll talk about it anywhere. I'll write about it, talk to any woman, because it is in the darkness that it grows. As soon as you start talking about it and you say – a woman says, oh, you, too, or me, too..." (Givens 4)

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