Domestic Violence: A More Inclusive View

One issue that was a mixture of viewpoints is Domestic Violence. Some women and men have either themselves or someone close has been a victim. Some simply do not understand why a person would stay and continue to be abused. Others wonder why anyone would hurt someone that they reportedly loved. Many feel that it is private issue and not to be addressed. Recently some are wondering why we are focusing on the victim rather than the perpetrator.

First let’s consider how women have been regarded over time. In prehistoric time they had female and male gods who were seen as equals. Somewhere along the line that had changed. Many read that the Bible has the male as the head of the household. Even in the 20th Century wives in the United States were considered as property of the male. He could treat her as he would any other property. Slaves and animals were beaten by some owners. When our country was founded women were not given the right to vote until the 20th Century.

Now let’s listen to some of the experiences of women who have stayed in violent relationships. Many were daughters who grew up where they heard and saw their mother being abused. Some were victims of not only physical but sexual abuse by their father. There are pockets of communities in our country where this is common. Other daughters from an early age were thrown into a caregiver role for a sick or weak mother for the entire family. Still others were neglected and ignored at home or bullied at school.

Perpetrators are wonderful early dates. The women is truly treated as the most cherished person. He is always wanting to know her wishes and readily agrees with her, creating the impression that they share the same interests, beliefs, and goals. There is absolutely no evidence of any type on unkind behavior. Perhaps the only sign of possible abuse is he increasingly is wanting her time, but then that is generally true in the early stages of love.

But once that bond is sealed usually after being married or moving in together, everything changes. The cycle of violence begins. One day seemingly out of nowhere, he becomes irritated and most likely he angrily raises his voice and verbally attacks her. Sometimes it can also be a physical act. She is very upset and does not know what to do. Soon after he apologizes profusely, saying it will never happen again. He does manage to say some things that imply some wrongdoing on her part, but admits that he should not have responded in that manner. In general women do own up to mistakes and are more willing to accept some blame as well and will accept an apology. Plus remember many are ones who saw this happen in their childhood. Now we have the honeymoon cycle, just like the dating time. Then there seems that the woman may sense a tension building, second cycle. Finally there is the violence again, third cycle.

Meanwhile there are any number of changes going on in the women’s life that he has orchestrated. Most often he will manage the money and determine what amounts will be spent on the family needs. While she may continue to work for a time, soon children come and he wants her to be able to stay home and raise the family. A move may be made that removes her from often no only her peers and family, but from near neighbors. Perhaps they have only one car and he needs it for work. He tries to organize her time so she has little opportunity to be with anyone else but him. Then there are the verbal attacks with the same message, she is absolutely incompetent, worthless and is lucky that he is willing to stay married to her. As the children age, being afraid of him and mad at her for not leaving, they can begin to treat her in some abusive ways. Truly she sees no way out.

Let’s now take a look at some the experiences of men who are now perpetrators. Some sons lived in a family where the only person in charge was the male. That control was maintained by any means possible. He continually heard his father degrade and tell his mother how useless she was. She was often hit. He could see her fear. She would try to do everything exactly the way that he wanted. She would further try to have he and his siblings do the same.

His father might at an early age include him in activities that he felt were entirely male, told not to let anyone tell him what to do, and to fight back in any situation. If he was not the type of son his father expected, he would abuse him in any number of ways. One example of that is making him do something that scares him. He would also tell his son how he should treat a woman.

His mother would most likely make excuses of his father’s behavior and take the blame for the outburst. She would tell him how much his father loved him. As we know for the son, his father is his role model, but his mother is also encouraging that same behavior.

For both daughters and sons they are either told or simply understand that what happens in the home is private and not to talk. Silent is their world about violence. They are made to believe that this is normal family life. They have no friends to their homes and go less frequently to others. They will feel uncomfortable with what is going on, but they have nowhere to expound on their own thoughts.

I hope these insights can allow for all of us more inclusion.

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