

Good morning all.

I consider it a wonderful honour to have been asked to speak to you – thank you very much for the vote of confidence, Isabelle. It would have been lovely to have been there physically with you all, and having read the program, I'm a trifle envious that I won't be. I've kicked myself a few times for not getting on a plane and coming over; indeed, family and friends think not having grabbed that opportunity implies something about my sanity. Next time – and I hope there will be one – I'm so there.

First things first: I want to congratulate Rape Crisis Scotland on this Intimate Partner Sexual Violence conference – we think with the same mind about the hidden nature of this issue and I am truly delighted to be a part of this initiative in raising awareness and breaking the silence. It's fantastic. And while this may sound somewhat melodramatic, it also has the potential to save lives. I'm going to speak more on that soon.

As you'll have seen by the program, I'm coauthor of the book *Real Rape Real Pain* with Dr. Patricia Easteal. I also operate the support website *Aphrodite Wounded* for women survivors of intimate partner sexual assault. It's a great privilege to have made a contribution to this field, certainly in terms of validating the experiences of survivors of INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE, which, as we know, does not happen frequently enough and hence the need for conferences such as this. This is particularly true with the issue of sexual assault falling off political agendas everywhere, and they say we're living in a "post feminist era."

It is particularly true given the statistics disseminated by The this is not an invitation to rape me campaign that a significant number of people still believe that rapists are strangers. Congratulations as well on this important campaign, sisters.

I'm going to tell you why I decided to write about intimate partner sexual violence, and a little bit about my work and women's responses to it.

I've already said that I'm honoured to speak to you. But I am also fortunate to be doing so. Let me elaborate: 22 years ago I became I became free of a relationship that almost cost me my life.

I lived with a man who thought love equalled ownership, and who retaliated brutally when challenged. He had beaten me, he had threatened me with weapons and terrorized me in other ways. The threats tended to get worse when I made noises about ending the relationship – so much for those people who assume that a violent relationship is easy to just walk away from, and who blame women because they do not do so.

Other things had happened in that relationship too. This man forced sex on me and did so many times, when he was angry, when he needed to assert power over me, or just because I presumed the right to say no. At the time, the beatings seemed the most threatening issue because of their physical danger, and much of my time was taken up

avoiding or surviving these as best I could. I was not to realize until some years later the severe and prolonged damage inflicted by the repeated rapes.

At the time I practiced pretending they hadn't happened. I pretended they didn't hurt, and became so adept that I almost convinced myself that this was true. This was necessary for survival not only psychologically but also physically; the reality was that any attempt to address the sexual assault was extremely dangerous.

I mentioned the trouble I was having with it to him once, and he gave me one of the severest beatings I can remember, saying, "if you ever mention that again, I will kill you."

And, I was a product of my socialization. I'd heard the myths, and to a certain extent, I subscribed to them myself. The social mythology of rape also meant that I had internalized the sure knowledge that even had I wanted to admit what happened or say that it hurt, I would get little empathy. He was my partner. Real rape was committed by demented strangers with hairy palms and glazed expressions lurking in alleyways, not by somebody one has willingly had sex with in the past. And didn't a sexual relationship imply limitless consent, meaning that it was not wrong for him to assume he could take it by force? I stayed, and therefore it couldn't have done me any real harm. It was my fault because I didn't run half naked and screaming into the streets and call the police. No, it was not real rape, and my pain was not real pain. I discovered that there are ways that one can simultaneously know and not know a thing; the knowledge of my violations was there but immediately scrambled by the mythology. And where to go with it, anyway? The attitudes that I knew about represented entrapments.

However, I didn't want my children to continue to grow up witnessing violence, so I did finally escape despite impregnation by rape, ongoing violence and threats to my life. This fortunately drew to a close when I met my current partner. Grateful for a "new life", I applied the non-wisdom that the old life was best forgotten.

When my ex-partner was charged with murder 18 months after the end of my relationship with him, what I had tried to forget began to come back. Those of you familiar with trauma will understand what I'm saying. My awareness was flooded with memories of the violence and most particularly - and disconcertingly for me - the rapes - though I hardly dared give them that name at the time.

It daily made me sick when I began to relive these things. And still I was alone with it, my pain the legacy of choosing the wrong man. Still I believed I had no right of naming what he did to me.

Three months after this, the struggle with memory and feeling compelled me to seek counselling with a sexual assault worker. This was helpful to an extent; she believed me but seemed a bit lost within the context of intimate partner sexual violence. However, she was a factor in my embracing feminism and anti rape activism

I became angry at the injustices suffered by other women experiencing sexual and domestic violence. But with respect to my own experiences, I had an almost pathetic sense of hitching my wagon to these issues in order to validate something that I knew was not quite valid. I noticed that while sexual and domestic violence were being addressed in some corners, there was little said about sexual assault in relationships – and this even by some feminists whom I trusted more than wider society to have a degree of sensitivity. I became a sort of foot soldier for the anti-rape movement; I loved it and wanted to serve it but didn't feel I could ask for it to serve me.

In some respects, I felt as if my experiences had little in common with those of other survivors, and I felt deeply ashamed to even conflate my experiences with theirs. Even if certain details were similar, my rapist had been my partner, which I believed made me somehow less raped. Worst of all, I think, I felt that if most people preferred to ignore partner rape, there must be something fundamentally wrong with me for feeling as broken as I did.

And how could I say I was raped if I remained with him? Wouldn't other survivors feel insulted? Also, I'd kept it secret for so long – how could I come out so belatedly and say that he raped me? Would that portray me as one of those unstable women who changes her story repeatedly? Or worse, a liar?

Nevertheless, I decided to go to university and get some professional qualifications with a view to assisting abused women. As I worked to gain an Associate Diploma in Welfare Studies, I had opportunity to study Intimate Partner Sexual Violence. Thankful for the handful of texts written on the topic of marital rape, I leapt to. I was driven by a desire to better understand what had happened to me, and to look beneath the general silence. I remember the nights I spent shoving my textbooks and pens away from me (computers weren't part of general usage in those primitive times), and crying as my studies cemented the fact that what happened to me was *rape*. It was something I had always known, but had I been just so confused by the social view of what constitutes real rape. And as I studied and thought and cried I began to ask myself whether those social views might in fact be wrong? What if there was actually nothing wrong with me for feeling as I did?

That was a major turning point. I could acknowledge, even if only to myself, that I was *raped*. The acknowledgement hurt, sometimes very badly. But at last, I knew that there were reasons for me to feel the levels of trauma that I had. In the acts of defining, naming and feeling, I began to heal.

As I healed, I developed outrage at the lack of recognition given girls and women sexually assaulted by their partners.

I knew that I was not the only woman who had experienced the isolation. I was angry at a society that allows some men to rape with impunity and tells the victims of those rapes that they have no right to call their violations a crime. And one way or another, it was the woman's fault: I was blamed because I stayed with my abuser, but I saw other women upbraided by church, family and friends for *leaving* men who rape them. I found out through the study of Browne and Campbell that men who batter *and* rape their partners are more likely to kill them than men who batter but do not rape their partners. So the problem is potentially lethal. Yet wider society, where it took any notice of partner rape

at all, still equated it with sex rather than the act of power and control that it usually is – even when the conclusion of that control for some perpetrators is to murder their partners.

The literature established partner rape as common – and they had been telling us this for twenty years

Many of you will be familiar with the 1980's landmark studies of Diana Russell and Finkelhor and Yllo. (Those of you who were fighting for the criminalization of marital rape in the UK 20 or so years ago were also telling us about it; I wish I could see the show of hands for those of you who were there ☺)..

And we have no reason to believe the scenario with regard to prevalence has changed in the new millennium. Most of you will also know that in the year 2000, the British Home Office conducted a survey into sexual assault with 6,944 women. 45 percent of rapes reported to the survey were committed by present partners, with a further 11 percent committed by ex-partners.

The same study also found that partner rape entailed the highest occurrence of multiple rape and degree of physical injury. The researchers concluded that the myth of the safe home is just that: a myth.

I also knew that even where partner rape is acknowledged as a crime, it is very often believed not to be a real or serious trauma. Yet studies were indicating that partner rape carries longer and graver implications than for women raped by strangers. Despite twenty years of studies, the myths about real rape and real trauma were continuing to thrive and partner rape survivors still largely felt – and this statement I have heard beyond count through my website – that they were “making a mountain out of a molehill” or as if their trauma was an “overreaction.”

In turning my attention to available rape recovery literature, I saw that it was more focused on stranger or one-off acquaintance rape and was not scoped to capture the complexity of issues partner rape survivors often face.

Finkelhor and Yllo write about the “special traumas” of INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE and tell us, “It is these special traumas that we need to understand in their full and terrible reality”. Survivor Linda articulates:

And they say marital rape is not as bad as stranger rape. I don't know. I have never been raped by a stranger. But I think being raped by your husband in your own home must be worse in some ways. At least if you're attacked by a perfect stranger it is not so personal. Your husband is the person whom you should be able to turn to for comfort, who should protect you. When it is the person you have entrusted your life to who abuses you, it isn't just physical or sexual assault, it is a betrayal of the very core of your marriage or your person, your trust. If you're not safe in your own home, next to your husband, where are you safe?

Domestic violence literature tended to view sexual assault as just another abuse and did not go into the special wounding of rape by a partner. While a significantly higher proportion of men who batter are likely to rape their partners too, Diana Russell's study,

Rape in Marriage makes the point that totally subsuming partner rape under the heading of domestic violence runs the danger of excluding women who are raped but not battered. Indeed, rape can happen in relationships that are otherwise egalitarian. Natalie, one of the women who lent her voice to Real Rape says it best:

There was absolutely no indication in the seven years of our relationship that he could be violent, and I know he adored me. I simply couldn't reconcile the man who attacked me with the man that I had known all those years.

Raquel Kennedy Bergen, in her 1996 study, *Wife Rape*, found that women raped by partners want to be treated for the rapes and have experienced frustration at the sexual assault being labelled as domestic violence. To be sure, INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE is domestic violence, and all domestic violence, be it physical, emotional, sexual or otherwise is usually aimed at control and subjugation. But sexual assault attack may attack a woman's psyche in different ways. Women who have been raped as well as battered may suffer greater damage to self-esteem and body issues – and this effect has been measured as separable from battery in the study of Sheilds and Hanneke. In my experience, the battery was aimed at getting me to do what I was told or hurting me for not doing so, but the rape had a far nastier and more contemptuous message.

My rapist intended it as an ultimate insult, and that is how I experienced it. While I was ashamed of being battered – certainly in terms of the blame it accrued from others – the shame of being raped was more deeply excoriating; I did not think I would ever tell anybody. And now I tell the world ;)

Numerous women have written to me through my website with apologetic tones because their partners didn't beat them "like so many other women." Yet women shouldn't need to be beaten to undersnad that they have been sexually assaulted and deserve as much empathy as any other survivor of rape.

Women who don't identify as domestic violence victims because they aren't being hit, or whose sexual assaults are more coercive than physically violent (i.e. the perpetrator withdraws affection or verbally badgers to get what he wants) may continue to fall through the cracks when INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE is not clearly defined and given a prominence of its own.

As Finkelhor and Yllo state, "When treated as battered women, the wounds left by the sexual abuse often go unaddressed"

I was finding out that other women besides me felt that their rape by partners was too "other", too difficult to be catered for by available literature and more conventional approaches to rape and domestic violence.

But rather than just sitting and moaning about the scarcity of resources for survivors of partner rape, I asked myself what I, Louise, might do about it. I was thankful to the writers, researchers and sexual assault workers and activists who had gone before, but how could I be part of further change? I wanted to do something that would hold INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE aloft and give it special prominence. The studies were telling us about the problem, which was and is an important function, but because of their academic nature were inaccessible to many survivors.

It appeared that there was a gap in the available literature. Thus, I decided I decided to write a book not *about* women sexually assaulted by partners, but *for* them.

And I knew that in order for it to be a truly comprehensive resource for different women, such an undertaking would need to go well beyond a simple recounting of my own experiences, which are not certainly not representative of all. I wanted a range of perspectives, so I placed a number of requests on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault message boards on the internet, inviting women sexually assaulted by boyfriends or husbands to share their stories. Nine wonderful women, four from the US, three from the UK and two from Australia agreed. Together with our stories, I made use of the studies, my professional knowledge, and recovery literature.

Because I knew of the tremendous work on violence to women by my co-author, Patricia Easteal, I acquired an email address from her place of work and, somewhat timidly requested a foreword for the book. I was delighted when she said yes. At the time, Patricia was collecting stories from women sexually assaulted by partners for a study. Over four years of battling emails back and forth in mutual encouragement of each other's work, a solid friendship developed. In 2005, we decided to throw our lot in together and merge manuscripts.

Now, I'll give you a bit of a rundown of the book.:

The voices of thirty survivors appear in the book, the authors included.

We come from a variety of backgrounds and lifestyles: our occupations include psychologist, lawyer, sex worker, teacher, student, public servant, homemaker, social worker, and unemployed pensioner.

We range in age from late teens to late fifties. Some are self-identified alcoholics, recovering alcoholics and addicts, Anglo-Australian, Asian-Australian, American, Canadian, English. Some survived years of physical violence; others were not beaten. Some of us experienced repeated sexual assault, for others the rape was a 'one-off.' For some, the perpetrator was our husband, others an estranged husband, de facto partner or boyfriend. Some of us were teenagers for whom rape was the first sexual encounter we had, and some of us were long-married adult women.

Different voices with one commonality: each identifies as a survivor of sexual assault by an intimate partner and each wanted to be heard so that their painful experiences and trauma can serve a purpose. These women open up their hearts. They reveal their lives to date in as honest a way as they are able to do. They recognise that telling their stories or just identifying has been a part of their healing. Liz says:

I wanted to... tell my story because my self-expression was so squashed for all of those years. One of the real healing things for me is to express it and to face it and stop internalising it because you get locked in a world and wherever you go to the perpetrator is so strong in his manipulating controlling ways that he somehow has manipulated you into thinking that he doesn't mean it.

We have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible in terms of situations and problems that victims/survivors of partner rape may face.

Chapter One prepares the survivor for what may lie ahead as she reads, such as the emergence of feelings or memories she may have suppressed in order to survive. We open with the important proviso that the book isn't a substitute for professional help but should be an adjunct to it. We look also at choosing a counselor, and safety as a prerequisite of healing, as well as the promise that healing can hold.

Chapter Two moves onto defining sexual assault by partners to enable survivors to take stock of their experiences. We believe that although identifying that sexual assaults have taken place in their relationships can be frightening, it can also validate what women already know at deeper levels about what happened to them.

We define acts that constitute sexual assault, and we look at what consent is or more appropriately is not, including submission because of badgering or other emotional blackmail. Included also is a definition of other sexually abusive behaviours such as degrading namecalling, denial of reproductive choice and leaving pornographic material around when a woman's partner knows she finds it repellent.

Because partner rape is surrounded by so much social mythology about what real rape is, the first several chapters contain information that confronts and deconstructs myths, reframing them with truth.

Chapter three explore the historical and social backdrop of partner rape. We believe it can benefit survivors who may have internalized social views of partner rape (as many of us do) to look at what contributes to the denial of partner rape as real rape or a real trauma.

Some of the issues we look at and challenge include Rape myths – particularly those about partner rape – eg. A prior sexual relationship with a man means that a rape by him isn't harmful. We look at how myths about partner rape are fuelled in the courts, and by church as well as other social institutions. We believe it's helpful to survivors to understand that messages they may have been harmed by have a context that goes beyond themselves.

Chapter Four explores common myths about there being a "type" of woman who is sexually assaulted by her partner – such as basic victim-blaming ideas that brand women as "weak" or "masochistic." Ideally, women can begin to look under myths they may have internalized, or that have been forced on them by church, family, friends or society at large. They may also develop compassion for themselves as survivors of sexual assault who deserve support and healing.

Having just challenged myths about the “type” of woman who is raped by her partner, we turn our attention in Chapter 5 to risks that may expose women to danger from abusive partners.

However, we open by saying that understanding risk factors in no way implies that the assaults are the survivor’s fault - rather, it can help her make sense of her responses to her partner’s violence and promote compassion for herself.

We discuss what Judith Herman calls the “indisputably real” phenomenon of adult revictimization in many women sexually abused as children, but moving away from what, to quote Judith Herman again, reflects the crude social judgment for too long promoted by psychiatry that women go looking for men who will hurt them and that they derive gratification from the pain.. Rather, a history of child abuse may increase vulnerabilities that abusers are quick to exploit.

Chapter 6, I believe appropriately, turns the focus away from the women onto the Men who rape their partners – and I’m going to spend a few minutes on this. Carol Adams writes, ‘Our language has a tendency to mask violence. It may highlight someone’s victimization while simultaneously cloaking the agency and actions of the perpetrator. When we use terms like ‘battered woman’ or ‘rape victim,’ there’s a danger that we make battery and rape into something that is a *woman’s* problem, which then generates theories that blame her, while the perpetrator and his actions are forgotten. This chapter is intended to be a reversal of that process. Since the sexual assaults on the women in this book are something that *men did to them*, we explore social and psychological factors that operate in the mindset of men who rape their partners. We tell the survivor that these are not excuses and not caused by her, rather they are patterns shared by many men who rape whatever the context.

Another aim of this chapter is also to challenge myths about who rapes – there are no demented, glazed expressions, but mostly men whose professions and lives are what we would consider to be fairly normal. Motives for rape are also explored, for which we drew on the work of Nicholas Groth, and Finkelhor and Yllo, and we provide examples from women’s stories. The motives are as follows:

**Power rape**, which a man may commit to show his partner who’s boss, or to force a reconciliation after an argument. This what happened to Jennifer, who says:

“And after the physical pain always came the demands for intimacy. I hated it. I hated it all. In my experience it is used to reaffirm their ‘love’ of the victim and that ‘now everything is back to normal.’ As if nothing has happened. As if the sexual act itself wipes out all unpleasantness

**Anger rape** – which is often retaliatory and brutal, with the victim being forced to take part in their own humiliation, like Summer who was forced to do a “striptease” before being raped and beaten at knifepoint as punishment for leaving her partner.

**Sadistic rape**, which, like anger rape, is brutal but rather than hurting his partner to punish her, he causes her pain to arouse himself. It may involve cutting burning or urinating on the woman. Here is a little of Adair's experience, which contains features of sadism:

“When I came to, he was inside me, saying, ‘I thought maybe I was fucking a dead chick.’ He had the switchblade at my breasts and kept asking if he could ‘slice one for a souvenir.’ Then he stood up over me and asked why I was shaking? If I was cold? He stood straddling me and urinated up and down my body, to ‘warm me up.’

**Obsessive rape**, The obsessive rapist shares similar aspects with the sadist, but his arousal is fuelled less by causing suffering and torment, and more by specific perverse acts he forces his partner to engage in. This type of partner rapist is preoccupied with certain types of sex acts that may be bizarre or unusual Linda, whose husband anally raped her so frequently she developed health problems, shares an example of an obsessive partner rapist.:

“He looked forward to it. Drove round in his van and looked forward to it, even after it was definitely without consent, when it was rape. I told him, told him time and time again, please not so often, please not tonight, please do it normally. I explained that it was not comfortable, that it hurt... I told him this, asked him just not to do it so often. I can't remember it making any difference. It would go on, often two, three, four times a week. I remember asking him to do it less, that it was happening more than normal intercourse.”

We then move on to social myths men who rape their partners may subscribe to, such as that they are entitled to sex, that force is part of real manhood, or that they can't help themselves. On that last, we make the point that rape is not the act of a man losing control, it's how he takes control

Chapter Seven tackles other aspects of relationships in which sexual assault happens. We think it's important that survivors are able to recognize other forms of abuse, especially if abuse has become normalized or is adding to their entrapment. For example, emotional abuse may be adding to consequent feelings of worthlessness that tell them they don't deserve any better, and social abuse may isolate them from avenues of support and possible escape. It is just as important, though, to affirm that there are also good parts of these relationships which may have sustained women's hope.

Nichole says:

I was never bored with him. He was attractive and smart. At first, I was very attracted to the way he seemed to take care of me. When he wasn't abusive, we had a good time together. He was talented and could be very sweet and funny. (Nichole)

To many women, the sexual assaults may not be the biggest part of the relationship. For some women, the assault comes out of left field, Some women are also not raped until after the end of the relationship. We are unequivocal, however, that it is never okay for anybody to sexually assault her, no matter how good a partner he might be in other ways.

In Chapter Eight we move on to looking at strategies perpetrators employ to evade responsibility for the assaults, such as denial, minimization or claiming loss of control.. Linda's husband used a common rape-myth to deny the nature of his assaults: 'He had said it wasn't really rape; 'Rape is when you're grabbed by a stranger in a dark alley and raped.' Marg's partner also denied that the act could be rape since they were married. Jodie's partner blamed her by saying that she couldn't expect to turn him on and say no.

Survivors are often confused by some of these tactics, and again, they can deepen entrapment and prevent addressing the issue. We want to assist survivors in seeing these tactics for what they are, and in being able to stand on their reality despite what the abuser might say or do.

We also focus on strategies employed by women themselves; often in order to survive the abuse and to avoid dealing with the implications that sexual assault by their partners may hold for them. For example, a woman may believe that if she acknowledges the rape, she'll have to leave. It can also be very daunting to identify the partner she loves as a rapist. Or some women prefer to think of it as a one-off aberration because the thought of it happening again is too frightening.

Chapters Nine and Ten are concerned with the physical and emotional effects of partner rape. We look at Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and effects as they specifically relate to partner rape. We think it's most important for women to identify the damage so they can know where they need to heal, and we want to assist them in "normalizing" feelings that may be frightening or that they, like many survivors of partner rape, may have had minimised as "overreactions". Commonality with the effects and feelings of other women can also be a comfort.

Before moving into healing, however, we believe it's important that safety has first been established, because women who are still facing threats find it hard, if not impossible, to heal. Therefore Chapters Eleven and Twelve are concerned respectively with staying with a partner who has been sexually abusive, and leaving a sexually abusive relationship. It isn't appropriate of course to tell women that they should or must leave, and the book is also for women who choose to remain and who want to heal (which some women choose to do if they aren't in ongoing danger). Certainly we don't recommend staying in a dangerous situation though, and we look at common emotions or dangers facing women who may want to

leave, and at strategies which may decrease the danger of further risk to them. Importantly, we explore the snares that men who don't want to let go may set, from ardent wooing and promises to suicide threats – as well as threats against her.

Chapter Thirteen concerns healing from secondary wounding, which is what happens when a survivor experiences responses by others that compound the trauma.

As Summer says: “The secondary wounding that was inflicted post-trauma was almost equally as degrading as the assault itself.”

Aphrodite Matsakis reminds us that survivors of abusive relationships experience more secondary wounding than survivors of any other trauma.

We look at examples of secondary wounding such as disbelief, siding with the perpetrator, being denied assistance or in fact getting no response at all.

The aim is for survivors to acknowledge what forms of secondary wounding they've experienced, before we move on to methods of turning the damaging messages away from her.

Sexual assault by a partner is a criminal act, and we therefore provide information about the criminal justice system in Chapter Fourteen for women who may want to prosecute.

We don't paint an idealistic picture, but, working on the premise that forewarned is forewarned, we hope that knowledge of what happens in the criminal justice system can prepare women for, and protect them from, to some degree the wounding involved in the nastier parts of the process. Lisa and Samantha, two of the women in the book who attempted unsuccessfully to prosecute their partners for rape, share their experience, as does Kuriah, whose partner is still serving time for the rape of her some years after she left him.

Chapters Fifteen to Nineteen deal with healing topics such as sexuality, future relationships, and dealing with the feelings left by partner rape. Importantly, Chapter Fifteen addresses problems that women have with naming it. Traditionally, because of social myths, they have had no name to give it. But there may also be other reasons such as the unpalatable implications of calling one's partner a rapist. Although in earlier stages, the name of the acts of forced sex matters less than getting support, we've observed that naming partner rape is an important part of owning it and healing. However, Carol Adams writes, ‘A problem inadequately named cannot be adequately addressed.’<sup>3</sup> Naming Intimate Partner Sexual Violence is critical to ending denial and with it the end of the violence – both at personal; and social levels. When we name rape we give responsibility back to the perpetrators.

Let's hear from **Nichole**:

“It has helped for me to define what happened as rape because I now accept less responsibility for what happened. I can be angry instead of depressed about it.

**Chapter 18 goes into relationships after partner rape.** Women who have been traumatized may have trouble forming accurate assessments of danger and may give trust before it's earned. Other women believe they will never trust anybody again, and may be limited by that fear.

This chapter discusses future relationships – at the same time acknowledging that after leaving abuse, some women grow to love their independence so much that another relationship feels like the last thing they want or need. This too, is an affirming choice and not something that needs to be “healed.”

Because the characteristics of a partner rapist aren't always apparent at the outset of a relationship, we don't promote the idea that if women look for a list of characteristics they are certain to avoid being harmed again. However we present red flags that *may* indicate a controlling and potentially dangerous personality.

We also ask survivors to challenge patterns of control they may be exercising from a place of fear. Adair, for example, says “I am hard to please ... my way or the highway and I am trying to ease up through counselling.” Control may also take the form of trying to second-guess all of a new partner's needs.

Other things we look at are safe dating tips, and an overview of what a safe relationship looks like.

Sexuality is a major area of damage for women sexually assaulted by partners. Sexual dysfunction is common in many survivors of rape, but the research of Shields and Hanneke finds that sexual dysfunction is greater in survivors of marital rape. When we think of how the touch of a woman's husband or lover has become a weapon for her, this is hardly surprising. In Chapter 19, we draw on the work of Wendy Maltz on sexual healing and the survivor.

We look at automatic reactions that a survivor may experience in relation to sex and sexuality – just some of which are panic, numbness, or even sexual arousal when thinking about the abuse. We focus on mastering automatic reactions so that the survivor can have a response that is truly hers rather than based in rape.

We suggest ways of reclaiming her sexuality and body image just for her too with things like forms of dance, erotic music and self pleasure.

We hope that the survivor can emerge with the understanding that her body and her sexuality are beautiful despite what her partner's acts might have implied.

Chapter Twenty addresses those who may be approached to support survivors of partner rape. We cover issues like how to respond without inflicting a secondary wound – for example, even well-intentioned supporters may state with certainty that a woman should be thankful the rapist wasn't a stranger, or entreat her to consider that he's a good husband to her and that it's up to her to save the relationship. Importantly, we do stress that supporters should steer clear of trying to control the survivor's choices as this can replicate dynamics of abuse.

In Chapter Twenty One, *Breaking Down the Bedroom Door*, we discuss what needs to be done to create a climate more favourable to survivors of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence. Issues focused on include flaws in the criminal justice system and improving service provision to survivors of partner rape. For example, more services could be explicitly naming Intimate Partner Sexual Violence and offering support as part of their outreach.

Finally, we have appendices that look at women's experiences of restraining orders, and what somebody may do if she is sexually assaulted by her partner. Additionally, we direct readers to further reading material and/or websites

So there you are! I had initially been going to be more comprehensive about what each chapter entailed but found that it ran on a bit – so please feel free to ask me anything you think is relevant in q&a.

In my downtime from writing the book, I built Aphrodite Wounded because I felt an urgency about making some information available to women who had experienced sexual assault by a partner. Raquel Kennedy Bergen writes that what survivors of partner rape most crave is peer-support, or support groups specific to INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUAL VIOLENCE., as generalist sexual assault or domestic violence groups may not always be appropriate. One avenue of such peer support has been made possible by the numerous partner rape survivors who have, through Aphrodite Wounded and the book, joined Pandora's Aquarium, the online survivor community I co-moderate. Being incorporated as a non-profit organization recently has enabled us to reach our goal of supporting survivors both online and offline. We have recently received funding to host a retreat for survivors. Since 2001, we estimate that more than 12,000 survivors have registered on the message board & chat room. Numbers like that are bittersweet. But we have at least one place where survivors of partner rape can feel understood by other survivors.

The aims of my work are manifold but chiefly those of encouraging survivors to seek freedom and heal, and activism for social change; it is a statement that partner rape is real rape. It's sad that this should be such a shocking statement, but through the book, and through my website, it's apparent that this is just what many women have been waiting to hear. Defining their violations and having that affirmed kickstarts healing and change for women. Here are some quotes:

I bought the book you co-authored, and it was as if someone had lifted this huge burden off me. I can FINALLY name what happened to me (in both marriages 🙄). I am so amazed how helpful both this site, and the book are. I did not know how much pain I was trying to "stuff", until I realized what had happened to me.

Another:

I appreciate this site. I think I just realized that what my ex husband did was indeed rape. I was so confused about it, and this has provided some much needed clarity and has aided in starting my healing progress.

And another

A year ago, I was part of a sexually abusive relationship. So many sites don't address the issue of partner sexual abuse. Until I opened this site, I felt like I really didn't have a reason to feel the way I did. The site validated all the pain, confusion, and feelings that I have been going through, and made me realize that something really DID happen that wasn't right, and that what I experienced is NOT the way a relationship should be.

And:

I've heard countless times that my rape wasn't "real rape" because it was done by a boyfriend. Thank you so much for your book, it has wonderful information and is truly helpful.

And from another reader of Real Rape:

Thank you for all your amazing efforts. Denying myself as a victim in my opinion has been my greatest obstacle to healing.

A few quotes on commonality with other survivors:

thankyou for the support i have felt knowing there is someone knowing what i survived. Xx

i didnt know there were others like me

I would like to say, I think it is great that you have set up this site, It is vital for us to know we are not alone.

Your book has made me realise that i am not the only person to have been continually raped and severely beaten constantly by her husband. Thankyou.

I think these comments are quite sad, really, because the subject of rape has been spoken and written about at some length over the last three decades, and yet partner rape survivors still don't know that they're not alone.

One quote on the benefits of normalization:

I have been confused for such a long time. I often think that the incidences that happened between me and my ex were not "really" rape. Sometimes I still think that I could have had it so much worse since he never really beat me that bad. I also feel so guilty because sometimes the forced sex made me feel good. I have often wondered if these are some of the reasons I stayed quiet. Thank you so

much for helping realize that these feelings are normal for a person who has experienced partner rape

Lastly, this quote from a reader of Real Rape is really very special to me:

Looking forward to your book release date was a beacon of hope, and reading it enabled me to speak up to the right agencies to get help for myself and my five kids. I had no idea that so much damage was being done. I don't think I had a month left to live. He's been charged and removed from our home. Your book saved my life..

This survivor's courage saved her life, of course, but what an honour to have put a tool in her hands to assist her in doing so.

Of course there's been feedback accusing me of male-bashing, encouraging vindictive women to file false charges (funny how exquisitely rare that actually is for such paranoia, isn't it?) and threatening family values. Well, where family values lock women into sexual assault, I have no problem threatening them. I've also been asked by people why I persist; isn't it too upsetting? Aren't we all better putting it in the past and forgetting about it (notwithstanding that sexual assault by a partner is part of some women's present, and sadly, future?) One relative who has been at me for 20 years along those lines suggested I take up a Chinese cookery class instead. I recounted this to a friend who said "Yes! Perfect. While you're at it you could cook her a new brain! Incidentally, this friend is from Scotland, and I have to say that Scottish wit certainly defused my irritation.

Why oh why is writing about sexual assault and working with it so much more ignominious than writing about tree-frogs or lace-making?

I have grown quite used to being perceived as a little bit odd because an intimate partner sexual violence conference is more exciting to me than a Prada handbag sale. And if rape isn't nice for people to hear about, well, it's not nice for those who are experiencing it.

We've seen how rape and child sexual abuse, once surrounded by silence and the belief that they were rare, are now much more open for discussion. We've seen survivors of rape and child sexual abuse heal and reclaim power in their lives, and we know what a difference they have made as they transform not only themselves but also the world around them.

It is my deepest hope that my sisters around the world who have survived partner rape or who are living with it still, will continue to benefit from other voices to contradict the myths and secrecy. I also hope they'll have a less lonely and confusing journey than I had – even though I'm not one bit sorry I made it.

The feedback from survivors - and some workers too, is just a small representation why I feel so privileged to do what I'm doing. But I also did it for me too. Judith Herman, author of the classic Trauma and Recovery writes that survivors of trauma who become engaged in meaningful social action to challenge and overthrow the forces that have

harmed them find this one of the greatest expedients to healing. This has certainly been true for me. Using my experiences instead of the other way around has been incredibly enriching.

Writing my book, building my site and interacting with other survivors, although emotionally tough at times, has aided my own understanding of my own experiences immeasurably.

And look, to be honest, there's been a tiny bit of revenge in my actions, and I think there are good revenges. I'm talking to great people in Scotland, and the last I heard of my ex-partner was that he physically assaulted a drugs associate but was unable to attend court because he had a stomach full of exploding ulcers. Forgive me my Schadenfreude, but I know who is the winner and who is the loser. There's a much younger Louise who had to pull herself together and survive every time he hurt her. Little did she dream that one day she'd be talking to people in Scotland.

Thankyou so much for listening, it's been a great pleasure.