

IN THIS ISSUE

FRONT PAGE

My Ex Gaslighted Me Throughout Our 9-Year Relationship

Page 2

FRONT PAGE STORY
cont.

Page 3

FRONT PAGE STORY
cont.

Page 4

Why Sexual Assault Victims Wait to Speak Out

Page 5

California Ends Statute Of Limitations For Rape

Page 6

One Million Women Living In Poverty in Britain Have Experienced Extensive Abuse

BACK PAGE HAPPENINGS

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FOCIS NEWSLETTER

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My Ex Gaslighted Me Throughout Our 9-Year Relationship

Conversations always ended with me feeling guilty about something and that he was doing nothing wrong, and that my emotions were crazy.

BY ANABELLE BERNARD FOURNIER, WWW.XOJANE.COM

He was way too attractive to be interested in me. The questions still nagged me, even after many years together: *What does a guy like him want with a girl like me?*

It's still a bit difficult for me to understand why this happened or to put into words what our relationship did to me. I still feel bad, a year after leaving him, for maybe having been too harsh to him. After all, he loved me, and he never physically hurt me, right? It took me months to put a name on it: *gaslighting*.

In short, gas lighting is a kind of psychological and emotional abuse that works by making the victim doubt their own sanity. It comes from a play called *Gas Light*, where the antagonist (the husband), who wants his wife's money without the wife, starts playing with the gas lights in the house. Whenever his wife would say, *Hey, did you see that?*, the husband would respond, *No, there's nothing wrong with the lights, you're crazy*.

And this is the essence of gaslighting: whenever a victim expresses a perception or an emotion, the abuser responds with something like: "No, you're wrong."

It wasn't very obvious, at first. I was eager to please and make him happy. But there was always a feeling of walking on eggshells whenever I expressed emotions regarding our relationship. When approaching him with issues in our relationship, we'd always finish the conversation with me feeling that I was guilty of something, that it was always my fault. That he was doing nothing wrong, and that I was crazy for having these feelings.

The first instance I can really put my finger on is about two years after I'd returned from studying in another city. I felt extremely guilty for having gone, and he never let me forget that I left him. Although he said he forgave me, somehow, it didn't feel like he did. So one day, I told him exactly that.

"I still feel like you're resenting me for having left. I still feel guilty somehow. I don't know how to deal with that guilt." "Oh, I've forgiven you and moved on," he said. "You're the one who's feeling guilty for no reason. You shouldn't feel guilty about this."

FRONT PAGE STORY cont.

It's subtle, but this kind of denying of my feelings was a constant in our relationship. No matter what I expressed, it ended up being "just me," and he didn't see it that way at all, so I must be wrong.

The second instance I can clearly point to, and the one that started to make me seriously question our relationship, happened about a year after the previous one. We hadn't had sex in over two years, and it was starting to really affect my ability to function as his partner. We'd had several talks about this problem, but nothing ever came out of them.

One evening, as he came back from work, I was really upset about our inability to find a solution. I talked to him for a half-hour, expressing all the feelings I had and the need that I felt to be close to him again. His response? He stood in the living room doorway, his arms crossed as if protecting himself from something, and said: "So, in that whole half-hour tirade, you said NOTHING about me."

I had no idea how to deal with that. How could expressing my emotions and my needs be about him? How could he still, after all this time, turn anything around and make it about him and about how wrong I was to feel whatever I was feeling?

I can only analyze what this emotional abuse did to me with a year's worth of hindsight. But the conclusion is certain: I was a shell of myself for all those years. I spent so much energy trying to explain his behavior, putting it on his stress, or my leaving him to study, or the death of his father, or the following depression he suffered from.

And yet, none of those things justify what he did to me. I don't know if he did it consciously; it's not for me to decide whether he was deliberately abusing me, or if that's just the only way he knows how to handle relationships.

FRONT PAGE STORY cont.

But the effect on me was unmistakable: I drank heavily, fell into the deepest depression of my life, and constantly gained weight, and just felt purposeless, rudderless, and without joy.

Those who've known me during and after also tell me of the amazing change: I have a spark in my eye now, and I'm full of joy and purpose again.

The friends who knew me before I met him tell me I changed; they tell me they never liked him, but they didn't dare tell me. Some of them stopped talking to me because they couldn't bear watching him continually abuse me.

The first step towards my escaping his emotional abuse was joining a Zen sangha. Meditation, and the truth that it enabled me to see, was essential to my recovery. At first, I joined it to get rid of this constant feeling of guilt, to try to repress those emotions that were so inconvenient to him. But it did the opposite: it showed me that my feelings were right and true, and that they had a purpose in my life.

Of course, the last thing I did was leave. It was the work of months, of several hours of meditation, and focusing on finding the kindest way to approach this breakup. Nine years, after all, is not something you drop with a text message.

During the past year, I've re-learned all about feeling my feelings. I've re-learned that I have a right to my emotions and needs, and that expressing them is not wrong. I've re-learned that expressing feelings and needs isn't "needy" or "naggy" or "demanding." I've re-learned that partners who really care *want* to hear about how you feel.

Leaving is a decision only you can make. But you can take an uncompromising look at your relationship. You can meditate on it and see its truth. That was enough for me.

Why Sexual Assault Victims Wait to Speak Out

By Sara G. Miller, Staff Writer of www.livescience.com

The New York Times, People magazine and The Palm Beach Post, have reported about sexual assault accusers reporting events that allegedly took place years and, in some cases, decades ago, leading some to question their validity.

But just because a victim doesn't come forward right away about sexual assault doesn't mean the accusations are untrue, said Yolanda Moses, a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Riverside and a consultant/trainer for preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault

Indeed, there are many reasons why victims of sexual assault may hesitate to speak out immediately after an incident. Society tends to blame victims, female victims, in particular for what happens to them, Moses told Live Science. In several recent rape cases, for example, the victim was accused of "ruining" the man who committed the assault, Moses said.

Instances such as these demonstrate that there's still a lopsided nature to our society and that women are devalued, Moses said.

There's also an outdated cultural belief that "good women don't get raped," Moses said. Such beliefs can lead victims to think that the sexual assault might have been their own fault, she said. People ask victims questions such as, "Why were you in that place at that time?" and "Why did you go to that person's room?" Such questions can shift the blame to the victim rather than the perpetrator, she said.

In addition, speaking out about an instance of assault can be very painful and cause personal embarrassment, Moses said.

A person may not want to relive the experience, Moses said. When a person speaks out, he or she has to relive the event over and over again, by telling the story of the assault to police officers and juries, for example, Moses said. This can be an even more harrowing experience if people don't believe the victim, she added.

And it's particularly difficult if a victim is accusing a high-power individual in society, or someone who has power over their life, Moses said.

Instead, for many reasons, the victim may feel that it could be easier to try to move on from the assault without speaking up, she said.

Moses noted that the majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the victim knows, which can make it harder to speak out.

The perpetrator may be someone a victim interacts with every day, and the victim may think the perpetrator is a good person in other areas of his or her life; as such, the victim may not want to "hurt" that person. Moses said.

There's a burden from society upon people who speak out, she said.

California Ends Statute Of Limitations For Rape

The law abolishes a 10-year limit for rape and child molestation charges.

Michael McLaughlin Reporter, The Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.com

Rapists and child molesters will no longer be able to avoid prosecution due to the statute of limitations in California.

The Justice for Victims Act, signed by Gov. Jerry Brown (D), abolishes the state's 10-year statute of limitations on rape, child molestation and other felony sex crimes, starting next year.

"Rape survivors face many barriers to reporting this crime, but an arbitrary legal time limit is no longer a barrier in California," said Caroline Heldman, an Occidental College professor who co-chaired the EndRapeSOL campaign that called for such a law. "This law will only affect a small number of survivors who have solid evidence that a crime occurred many years after the fact, but for these survivors, this law is life-changing."

Seventeen other states have already eliminated the statute of limitations on rape, the Associated Press reports, citing the California Women's Law Center.

The change comes after dozens of women have accused a famous comedian of sexual abuse. Except for one case in suburban Philadelphia, prosecutors couldn't charge him because the alleged incidents took place too long ago. He has pleaded not guilty in that case.

Some of the alleged incidents took place in California. One woman who sued the comedian said that she was 17 when he drugged and molested her at a party at the Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles.

Six of the comedians' accusers testified in favor of the California bill earlier this year. The new law is not retroactive, so the women won't be able to bring cases because of it. However, attorney Gloria Allred, who represents several of the accusers, said it's a positive step.

"It puts sexual predators on notice that the passage of time may no longer protect them from serious criminal consequences for their acts of sexual violence," she said.

One Million Women Living In Poverty in Britain Have Experienced Extensive Abuse

A new report details the extensive violence and abuse that many women living in poverty face.

By TOBY MELVILLE FOR REUTERS

One million women living in poverty in Britain have experienced extensive violence and abuse, a new report said, which makes them more likely to attempt suicide, face homelessness and have mental health disorders.

In what it says is the first report of its kind, Agenda, an alliance of more than 60 groups focused on girls and women at risk, said women in poverty are much more likely to face almost every kind of abuse and violence compared to other women.

“The link between violence and poverty in women’s lives is not surprising,” Katharine Sacks-Jones, director of Agenda, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “What’s really shocking is how difficult the lives of women who experience both can be.

According to the report, 14 percent of women in poverty have faced the most extensive violence and abuse, such as being victims of extensive coercive control and physical violence from a partner, or facing both physical and sexual violence.

This rate is more than twice as high as the rate for women not in poverty. Poverty and violence take a heavy toll on the victims’ lives, the report said.

More than a third of women who faced both tried to commit suicide, compared to four percent of poor women who have not been abused while more than one in two had anxiety, depression or other common mental disorders. A fifth have been homeless.

“Poor women have fewer resources to avoid violence and abuse,” Sacks-Jones said, calling for a cross-government approach to support women.

“Experience of violence and abuse can keep women in poverty. Poverty and violence feed each other.”

HAPPENINGS

ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Wednesdays, 6-7:30pm. Co-ed six week group, start date contingent upon sign-ups. must be a FRTH registered patient. Full attendance required for a certificate. \$40 fee for non-native clients. (No couples & NOT for Court Mandates). Contact Tom @ 532-6811, ex 270

POSITIVE PARENTING & POSITIVE PARENTING OF TEENS

is done on an individual basis as space and time allow. \$30 fee for non-native clients. For info or sign up, Contact Mark @ 532-6811 ex 249.

FOCIS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

Women's Support Group Tuesdays 3 p.m. to 5p.m. Self-validation & processing of abusive relationships. Intake assessments must be done before entry into the group. For info, contact Brittany@ FOCIS PROGRAM, 532-6811 ex 270.

BRAVE AT HEART CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

For anyone who has been touched by Cancer Meetings every 2nd Thursday 6:30 to 7:30 pm Call Ashley, 532-6811 ex.272

BOYS TAKE CHARGE GROUP

Thursday afternoons, 3:30 to 4:30 Teen young men are invited For info or sign-up call Ashley, 532-6811 ex 272

THURSDAY CRAFT GROUP

Explore both Modern & Traditional forms of beadwork. Thursday afternoons from 3:00pm to 5:00pm in the South Conference room, call Mark @ 532-6811 ex 249. for info or sign up.

Mothers Strong Support Group
New Moms Supporting New Moms
Through Baby's Challenging First Year!
Contact Brittany to sign up
(530) 532-6181

RED ROAD TO WELLBRIETY MEETING

For those that have suffered alcoholism and drug addiction and other forms of self-defeating behaviors, you can walk the 12 steps of the Red Road to recovery.
WEEKLY MEETINGS ON WEDNESDAY @ 6.00 PM @ FEATHER RIVER TRIBAL HEALTH
530-534-5394

LOCAL DV SERVICES

FOCIS PROGRAM SERVICES

Advocacy Services, Restraining Order assistance, court accompaniment, Community education and in-service training, Crisis intervention services, Women's Talking Circles, Resource information & referral service. Feather River Tribal Health 530-534-5394 ext. 270

Catalyst DV Services

24-hour hotline for DV intervention & referrals, Emergency Shelter, Children's Program at HAVEN, Transitional Housing & Household establishment Drop-in centers, Individual counseling, Support groups, Restraining Order assistance & Court Accompaniment, Community Outreach. 24-Hour Hotline 800-895-8476 Oroville Drop-in Center 530-532-6427

SHARP (Self Help and Referral Program)

Self Help center that provides general assistance to people who do not have attorneys. Assistance is provided in the areas of family law, guardianships, evictions, small claims, name changes, and restraining orders. 1675 Montgomery Street Oroville, 530-532-7015



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