

Rape

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“She flew off the handle. She beat me with an extension cord. And she told me, ‘Don’t ever accept anything from a man, they can’t be trusted, you don’t know their intentions.’ I’m six. I don’t have a clue what she is talking about.”

“She cried. When I got older and reminded her about the incident, she explained to me that she didn’t trust anybody, she didn’t trust any man. And she wanted me to be extra careful. She wanted to put that fear in me.”

It instilled both fear and confusion, blurring the lines of what was acceptable with the boys and men in her world.

“It’s just assumed whenever a woman gets raped, she never gets pregnant, or if she does get pregnant, the child is automatically aborted or adopted,” she said. “There’s this group of peo-

ple who’ve been conceived by rape and nobody ever discusses us. I want to talk about it because we exist. I exist.”

Unresolved trauma

New York-based author, activist, and scholar Ewuare Osayande wasn’t born of this violence, but also grew up in its shadow.

His mother spent her childhood at the mercy of a sexually abusive stepfather. The oldest of eight children, she was the only one who was not his blood-relative. The abuse was the family’s open secret. She grew up to date, marry, and divorce abusive men.

Justice Department data show that Black women are more likely than their White counterparts to be assaulted, sexually and otherwise by strangers and by family members.

“It was never the case where my mother covered

in the face of her abuse. She didn’t hold her tongue, she always spoke her mind,” Osayande said.

Today, Osayande is the creator of Project ONUS: Redefining Black Manhood,

“That processing has been life-long,” he explained. “I’m a divorcee. In that relationship, I found myself becoming like the men I swore for years I would never be. It never got to the

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point where I became physically abusive, but certainly emotionally abusive.”

As the son of a rape and abuse survivor, and as a formerly abusive person, he also realized he had to address his own internal conflicts and beliefs.

“It’s been a very real, clear determination on my part to make sense of the

life I’ve experienced as a Black man, in a gendered way,” he explained. “It’s been my desire to become an effective ally in that struggle, in that engagement in the world in which Black women exist, and experience.”

Secondary survivors need help

In the sea of services for survivors, most resources geared toward family and friends coach them on how to best support the survivor in their life. Although crisis centers and hotlines are equipped to aid and counsel family and friends of survivors, few resources address the challenges these relatives face.

The book, *I Will Survive: The African American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse*, cites a study that draws parallels between the emotions of boyfriends and husbands of women who have been sexually assaulted, and the

wives and girlfriends of war veterans.

“Not surprisingly, past or recent sexual trauma can present unique challenges for the survivor’s partner,” writes Lori Robinson, author of the book. “You are a victim too. Some experts call you the secondary victim. After all you are experiencing many of the same emotions sexual assault victims feel.”

Tiffany Perry’s breaking point came about 20 years ago. A probation officer contacted her out of the blue, looking for her father. He had given her name and birthdate as his next-of-kin. She learned that not only did he know about her, but he knew where she lived. To this day, the two live less than an hour apart. She has never contacted him, but has learned a bit about his life via a cousin and aunt on Facebook.

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