

11-13-2015

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Domestic Violence: I Am Not a victim I Am Accountable

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A thesis submitted to the University Honors Program

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Honors Degree

Southern Illinois University

November 13, 2015

Introduction

It was only one time he won't do it again. My first encounter with domestic violence was complicated. I refused to accept the reality of my situation. It was only one time, he won't do it again. I felt lonely and unsure of what had taken place in my life. It was only one time. He won't do it again. I searched for approval, reassurance, and a simple answer to my situation. As a result, I received an abundance of varied responses to which I replied, "It was only one time. He won't do it again!" One day, the stress of the situation overwhelmed me and the frustration began to show. As tears unexpectedly began to rush down my face, three of my colleagues came to console me. I revealed to them my situation, ending with what seemed to be my mantra at the time, "It was only one time. He won't do it again." One of the ladies then held my hands and looked me in the eye and responded, "One time is all it takes." My colleagues then began to share their experiences with domestic violence. This was the beginning of my interest in exploring domestic violence.

We all came to three conclusions as a result of our collective stories. First, it is common for women to be victims of domestic violence in relationships. Second, some women cannot identify the signs of domestic abuse. Third, women are not sure how or where to go for assistance. As theater majors, we all contemplated an idea to create a play called *Battered but Not Torn*. This play would inform women about the signs of domestic violence in a relationship, display verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, and provide information on what to do as the viewer or victim of a domestic violence situation. We all had to do research before progressing with the show. My research started at The Women's Center.

The Women's Center does a training every semester about domestic violence. The training is a two week process, Monday through Friday, four hours every night where we discuss domestic violence. Before the training, I perceived domestic violence as physical, verbal, and/or sexual abuse that men do to women. Since the training at The Women's Center, my perception on domestic violence has

broadened. First, I learned that there are six types of domestic violence: physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, financial, and neglect. Second, I learned that domestic violence is a power and control tactic, which results in a systematic cycle of domestic violence. Last, I learned that domestic violence excludes no one.

The definition of domestic violence according to The Women's Center 2014 packet, "Surviving Domestic Violence," is, "a pattern of coercive control that one person exercises over another." The words "one" and "another" do not specify race, gender, or class. This means anyone can identify as the abuser or the victim. However, when The Women's Center defines the six different types of domestic violence, there is a disclaimer above, which reads:

95-97% of the domestic violence cases have women as the survivors and men as the perpetrators. For the purposes of this manual, male pronouns will be used to refer to the perpetrators and female pronouns will be used to refer to the survivors of domestic violence.

("Surviving Domestic Violence," 2014, p. 11)

According to Goldsmith (2013), as a society we often define domestic violence as heterosexual men attacking heterosexual women that are minorities, with low economic status. This definition is not complete. Domestic violence reaches every race, gender, sexual orientation, and economic class. Violence happens to everyone and most of society is subconsciously blind to the situation.

In the play, *August Osage County* by Tracy Letts, a Caucasian, middle class family engages in the six types of domestic violence. In this thesis, I set out to prove how art can imitate life and educate people on domestic abuse. The play *August Osage County* will be referenced throughout this thesis to provide examples of the six types of domestic violence according to The Women's Center's definitions. Moreover, this thesis will explore the domestic violence cycle. Furthermore, I will prove how violence can happen to societies standardized victims (female, minorities, and low class) and deviant victims (men, Caucasian, and middle class) by the standardized abuser (male) and deviant abuser (female).

Society forces people to submit to this systematic cycle where we are trained to adapt to certain environments and/or behaviors; making one race, gender, and/or class more or less culpable for domestic abuse. Overall, abuse is abuse and no one is excused! However, one way to decrease the victimization is to break the systematic cycle and start making people who have become comfortable playing the role of the victim, responsible for their domestic situation. “You can’t make the same mistake twice. The second time you make it, it’s no longer a mistake. It’s a choice” (Goodreads, 2015).

Six types of Domestic Abuse

Physical

In *August Osage County*, Letts (2009) provides two examples of physical abuse. Physical abuse is, “pushing, punching, choking, burning, restraining, locking in the house, raping, etc” (“Surviving Domestic Violence,” 2014, p. 11). The first example is from the standard perpetrator (male) and the standard victim (female with low economic status). In Act II, scene I, the character Violet Weston—who is 65 years old—was reminiscing about the time she and her sister, Mattie Fae Aiken, were physically abused. Mattie Fae and Violet were younger and considered low class at the time of the incident. One of their mother’s male friends was “attacking [Violet] with a claw hammer” (Letts, 2009, p. 71). Mattie Fae was coming to her sister’s rescue and as a result, she was also attacked. Violet said that Mattie Fae had, “dents in her skull from hammer blows,” trying to fight the man (Letts, 2009, p. 71). The play does not provide the reason for this act of violence; however, according to The Women’s Center definition, society would agree that these women were victims of physical abuse.

The second example of physical abuse is from the deviant abuser (female) to the half deviant victim. The character is a standard victim by gender and race (female and Caucasian), but a deviant victim by economic status (middle class). The character Barbara Fordham is Violet’s 46 year old

daughter. In Act II, scene I, Barbara physically abuses her mother. Letts (2009) said that Barbara pulled her mother out of her chair by her hair, which resulted in both women falling to the ground. Barbara then began to strangle her mother. Without knowing the cause of the abuse like the previous example, would society agree that this is an example of physical abuse? It should, because otherwise would suggest creating a hierarchy of who can and cannot get away with violence. Although the gender is not that of the typical abuser, the violence is still classified— according to The Women’s Center’s definition— as physical abuse, labeling Violet the victim and Barbara the abuser. Do you think their family history would prove otherwise?

Violet is a drug abuser. Violet’s husband Beverley reveals in the prologue of the play that she takes, “Valium. Vicodin. Darvon. Darvocet. Percodan. Percocet. Xanax for fun. OxyContin in a pinch, and of course Dilaudid” (Letts, 2009, p. 14). The Women’s Center’s perspective of a female drug abuser is:

Chemical dependent females suffer from depression far more often and far more severely than males. Female addicts usually become addicted later in life and often as a result of a significant “life stress” such as death of a spouse or child, possibly a physically abusive situation. Women are much more frequently “control-addicted” (abusing both drugs and alcohol) than men. A high percentage of chemically dependent women have been survivors of incest or other sexual abuse. (“Special Populations,” 2014b, p. 27)

Violet at this moment in her life has experienced life stress such as being a survivor of sexual/physical assault, having cancer of the mouth, and her husband’s recent death. This validates The Women’s Center’s definition of a female drug abuser. Every time Violet abuses drugs, it takes a toll on her family. She becomes verbally and emotionally abusive. Prior to the physical encounter between Barbara and her mother, Barbara tried to confiscate the pills from her mother. Violet had verbally abused everyone in her presence before Barbara demanded that her mother give her the pills. After her

mother's refusal of handing over the pills and continuance of verbal abuse, Barbara then attacked her mother. This is not the first time Barbara had to take the pills away from her mother. As revealed in Act II, scene IV when Barbara said, "Okay. Pill raid... You remember how to do this right?" (Letts, 2009, p. 73). There is an evident systemic cycle of abuse within their family. Violet and Barbara were both exposed to domestic violence in their childhood, and have been trained from generation to generation, mother to daughter, how to implement certain styles of abuse. Does this make Barbara the victim or the abuser? Society might argue that she is both.

Some individuals would say Barbara is the victim in this situation, because she was habituated to respond aggressively to her mother's behaviors due to her mother's drug abuse. This reason is not valid. In spite of The Women's Center's gender bias definition, Barbara is the abuser; and since she is not the standard abuser, we tend to justify her actions. This is a societal problem. She intentionally, physically attacked her mother. Abuse is abuse and there is no excuse. If we discovered the etiology of Violet's mother's male friend physically abusing Violet and Mattie Fae, would we call him the victim? No we would not because then we would have to make exceptions for all physical abusers. So why would we make the exception for Barbara? Because she is a female? Because she is middle class? Intentionally hitting someone is a choice. Therefore, the perpetrators should always be held accountable. Sexual abuse is another prevalent form of domestic violence where the perpetrators should be held accountable.

Sexual

In *August Osage County*, Letts (2009) provides two examples of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is the act of, "forcing sex, criticizing appearance, bragging about infidelity, forced cohabitation, forcing partner to have sex with a third person, etc" ("Surviving Domestic Violence," 2014, p. 11). The first example of sexual abuse is the inference that Violet's mother's male friend tried to force sex on Violet.

These are the facts. The male friend and Violet were alone together at one point. Violet was struggling to get away from him. Why she wanted to get away does not matter, because it is not acceptable for there to be forced sexual contact on an individual that does not want to be near another individual. According to the John Derbyshire (2011) article, “15 and 16 year old girls are more sexually alluring to normal adult men than a women in their late 20’s.” This is proof that society would agree that adult men would want sexual intercourse with younger girls. The second example of sexual abuse validates this inference.

Letts (2009) leads his readers to believe that an older man physically assaulting a female child is sexual by nature. In Act II, scene II, Jean (Barbara’s 14-year-old daughter) was sexually assaulted by Steve Heidebrecht (Barbara’s sister’s 50 year old fiancé). Here are the facts: Steve provides marijuana for Jean. The two of them are alone at night smoking marijuana. Once Steve feels as though he has gotten Jean unconsciously high, he tries to grab her breast. Once she rejects his offer, he compliments her body while teasing her about her half virginity. As Steve keeps trying to get intimate with Jean she responds, "What are you doing? You’re going to get us both in trouble,” to which Steve responded, “I’m white and over thirty. I don’t get in trouble” (Letts, 2009, p. 87). This is an example of how seduction can be sexually abusive. Steve is grooming a fourteen year old girl into believing she can indulge in adult activities with him by reassuring her that everything will be fine. Jean is not familiar with the mind games of an experienced female groomer of 50 years, and as a result, she is hesitantly, but slowly, falling into his trap. After a brief moment of Steve moaning, he is hit in the back of the head with a pot by Johnna Manavati (the house keeper). Hugo Schwyzer (2011) states, society socializes male’s desires as being sexually attracted to younger females. In these two examples this statement presents itself as more of a fact than an opinion. In both situations, the standardized male abusers were sexually attracted to the standardized younger female victims. Both females did not grant permission for the males to attempt sexual acts with them, which resulted in sexual assault. This is another societal

problem. Due to the socialization of the adult male desires to sexually long for younger females, it has been seen as normal for older males to continue in this culture

In U.S. American culture, White men, historically, have been able to escape the consequences tied to sexual assault, and in this play it continues to be true. In *August Osage County* when Steve said, “I’m white and over thirty. I don’t get in trouble” (Letts, 2009, p. 87), he was showcasing his ability to break the rules with no punishment. If this were a Black man in the same predicament, he would be treated differently. The U.S culture has created an interracial hierarchy within sexual abuse by, saying a White man can get away with sexual abuse, but other male minorities cannot. In reality, no human should be privileged to sexual violence. They should have to face the consequences of sexual abuse like everyone else. When Steve was trying to explain to Jean’s parents and his fiancé Karen that nothing had happened. Steve tries to validate his sexual assault to Jean by saying, “She told me she was fifteen” (Letts, 2009, p. 88). His logic being, because she lied about her age, she must have wanted to be sexually intimate with him. Lying is not permission. Although his fiancé Karen heard what happened between her fiancé and her niece, she defended her fiancé. Karen said:

You better find out from Jean just exactly what went on in there before you start pointing fingers, that’s all I’m saying. Cause I doubt Jean’s exactly blameless in all this. And I’m not blaming her. Just because I said she’s not blameless, that doesn’t mean I’ve blamed her. I’m just saying she might share in the responsibility. You understand me? (Letts, 2009, p. 89)

Letts’s (2009) decision to let Steve’s actions have minor to no consequence is a reality in society.

Women get sexually assaulted all the time and men like Steve get away with it. Why? Because he is not held accountable for his actions due to the socialization of males desires for younger females, his white male dominance/privilege, and high economic status. Continual sexual assault is sexual abuse, and no matter gender, race, or class, the abuser should be welcomed with consequences. Verbal and emotional abuse are also other forms of domestic violence were abusers should be welcomed with

consequences.

Verbal and Emotional

In *August Osage County*, Letts (2009) provides interconnected examples from the deviant abusers to the deviant victims of verbal abuse and emotional abuse. Verbal abuse is defined as “name calling, making demeaning comments, setting her up to be publicly humiliated, actively undermining her authority with children, etc” (“Surviving Domestic Violence,” 2014, p. 11). The examples provided in the play, have the women doing the verbal and emotional abuse, and the men are the victims. In the prologue, Violet is using derogatory language towards her husband Beverly in front of the new housekeeper, Johnna. After Beverly introduced Violet to Johnna, Violet almost fell to the floor, attempting to curtsy to show her false appreciation of Johnna. Beverly was frightened and said to Violet, “Why don’t you go back to bed sweet heart,” to which she responded, “Why don’t you go fuck a fucking sow’s ass” (Letts, 2009, p. 13). Beverly did not respond to his wife because he is used to her, “falling out and rambling,” (Letts, 2009, p. 11) as he mentioned to Johnna before Violet showed up. The author used the word rambling to justify Violet’s constant verbal abuse towards Beverly, moreover, to show the readers that Beverly has come to the acceptance of his wife verbally abusing him. The saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is false. Words cannot hurt an individual physically, but emotionally it can lead them to something as extreme as suicide. Emotional abuse is defined as “making threats of violence, controlling activities, killing a family pet, creating crisis, threatening to tell sexuality, etc” (“Surviving Domestic Violence,” 2014, p. 11). The action of Violet creating crisis throughout her and Beverly’s marriage, is what pushed Beverly towards suicide. The “Special Populations” (2014a) packet says:

A domineering and violent wife presents a parody of traditional patriarchal values. Men who are [abused] fear they will be accused of being weak, and unmascline. Out of embarrassment,

they often do not seek help. The few men who call are desperate or feeling they were at the point of ending their marriages. (p. 24)

Beverley was of those men who did not seek help and committed suicide. He hints at the idea of his marriage being burdensome and the thought of death in the prologue. Beverley said:

My wife takes pills and I drink. That's the bargain we've struck...one of the bargains, just one paragraph of our marriage contract...cruel covenant. She takes pills and I drink, I don't drink because she takes pills. As to whether she takes pills because I drink... I learned a long time ago not to speak for my wife. The reasons why we partake are anymore inconsequential. The facts are: My wife takes pills and I drink. And these facts have overtime made burdensome the maintenance of traditional American routine: paying of bills, purchase of goods, cleaning of clothes or carpets or crappers. Rather than once more assume the mantle of guilt...vow abstinence with my fingers crossed in the queasy hope of righting our ship, I've chosen to turn my life over to a Hiring Power...and join the ranks of the Hiring class. (Letts, 2009, p. 11)

After continued attempts to escape abuse through alcohol, Beverly committed suicide because of the repeated abuse, verbal and emotional, that he was receiving from his wife. Due to society's patriarchal demeaning values, when a man is abused by a woman, he is perceived as weak. As a result, Beverly took it upon himself to be trapped in his abuse until he grasped the courage to end his life.

Another form of verbal abuse intertwined with emotional abuse is the negative comments Mattie Fae makes towards her son, Little Charles Aikens. An example of Mattie Fae's verbal abuse towards Little Charles at its peak, is in Act III, scene I. Little Charles is secretly dating Violet's daughter, Ivy. Ivy and Little Charles are very fond of each other and in this scene, they are expressing their love for one another. Little Charles begins to play a song he wrote for Ivy until Mattie Fae's presence interrupts. Mattie Fae then begins verbally abusing Little Charles in front of Ivy:

Mattie Fae: Liberace. Get yourself together, we're heading back.

Little Charles: Okay...

Ivy: Are you all staying at my place?

Mattie Fae: No, we have to get home and take care of those damn dogs.

Ivy: You know you're welcome.

Charlie: Thanks, Ivy.

Mattie Fae: [*To Little Charles' father Charlie*] Oh, look, honey, Little Charles has got the TV on.

Little Charles: No, I was just—

Mattie Fae: (*To Ivy.*) This one watches so much television, it's rotted his brain.

Ivy: I'm sure that's not true.

Mattie Fae: (*To Little Charles*) What was it I caught you watching the other day?

Little Charles: I don't remember.

Charlie: Mattie Fae—

Mattie Fae: You do so remember, some dumb game show about people swapping wives.

Little Charles: I don't remember.

Mattie Fae: You don't remember.

Charlie: C'mon, Mattie Fae—

Mattie Fae: Too bad there isn't a job where they pay you to sit around watching television.

Charlie: Mattie Fae it's been a long day.

Mattie Fae: I suppose you wouldn't like TV then, not if watching it constituted getting a job.

Charlie: Mattie Fae—

Mattie Fae: (*To Ivy.*) Did I tell you he got fired from a shoe store? (Letts, 2009, p. 82)

As seen above, Mattie Fae is constantly directing verbal violence towards Little Charles to embarrass him in front of Ivy. Little Charles does not respond disrespectfully to his mother. He knows he has been

a disappointment to his mother and everyone in his life. He said to Ivy in Act III, scene I, prior to his parents entering the room, “I just want everyone to know that I’ve got what I always wanted. And that means...I’m not a loser” (Letts, 2009, p. 82). What Little Charles wants is the love that he never received from his mom, love that he is now receiving from Ivy. Little Charles has been emotionally abused by his mother in similar ways for several years (Letts, 2009, p. 84). Little Charles’ father watches this “meanness” towards their son and finally steps into the situation. Charlie tells Mattie Fae that there is no reason for Mattie Fae and her sister to verbally abuse people the way they do and that she needs to stop (Letts, 2009, p. 83). The abuser needs to stop! Mattie Fae has been drawn into her family’s cycle of domestic violence and she uses that as an excuse of her abuse towards others. Charlie’s defense of his son represents the stance society needs to take against all emotional and verbal perpetrators. Tell the abusers that they are wrong! No matter the history of the abuser, it does not give them the right to go around terrorizing individuals. Other types of domestic violence that people should not be terrorized for is neglect.

Neglect

In *August Osage County*, Letts (2009) provides an example of a common case of neglect. Neglect is “omitting or failing to do what a reasonable person would do. Including failure to provide food, shelter, clothing, and personal hygiene, failure to protect from health and safety hazards, etc” (“Surviving Domestic Violence,” 2014, p. 11). Letts (2009) shows how the neglect of a child can create negative consequences. In Act I, scene IV, Jean’s parents are arguing about Bill’s status as a father:

Barbara: And you really haven’t been much of a parent lately, so it’s tough to expect—

Bill: Just because you and I are struggling with this Gordian knot doesn’t make me any less of a—

Barbara: Nice, ‘Gordian knot,’ but her little fourteen-year-old self might view it differently, might consider it “abandonment”—

Bill: Oh, come on—

Barbara: Maybe she views her father as “absent,” or maybe “not present,” or perhaps even a “son-of-a-bitch.” (p. 57)

According to Letts (2009), Bill left his wife Barbara for a younger woman. He moved out of his home, leaving his daughter and wife behind. Bill lets Jean do what she wants, including smoking pot. This does not make him a good father, but more of a friend. In Act III, scene II, after Steve has sexually assaulted Jean, the effects of Bill’s absence as a father are apparent. After Steve is caught trying to sexually seduce Jean, Jean’s parents start to question her about what happened.

Jean: Look at you two, you’re both so ridiculous. It’s no big deal, nothing happened.

Bill: We’re concerned about you.

Jean: [*To Bill.*] No, you’re not. You just want to know who to punish.

Barbara: Stop it—

Jean: [*To Bill.*] You can’t tell the difference between the good guys and the bad guys, so you want me to sort it all out for you—

Barbara: You know what, skip the lecture. Just tell me what he did!

Jean: [*To Barbara.*] He didn’t do anything! Even if he did, what’s the big deal?

Bill: The big deal, Jean, is that you’re fourteen years old

Jean: [*To Bill.*] Which is only a few years younger than you like’em. (Letts, 2009, p. 89)

In the passage above, Jean is openly hostile towards her father. She points out to her father that he cannot even figure out who is to blame and who is innocent in the sexual assault incident. Bill has not been around his daughter long enough to understand her. This was a cry out for attention from Jean to Bill, and he did not recognize it. Jean rebels by saying there is nothing wrong with an older man wanting to do adult things with her, because her father can do adult things with younger women. This incident possibly could have been avoided if Bill were more involved in his daughter’s life. Bill put his

own pleasures in front of his fatherly duties when he chose to remove himself physically from the home where his daughter lived. As a result of Jean longing for the attention from her father, she was going into the arms of a fifty-year-old man who was giving her that attention she desired. Jean was not the only one in desire of attention. Beverly needed some attention from his wife, but instead of getting attention, he got financially abused.

Financial

In *August Osage County*, Letts (2009) provides two examples of financial abuse. Financial abuse is classified as “destroying property, taking her money, withholding medical treatment, not allowing her to work or attend school, forcing her to work, etc” (“Surviving Domestic Violence,” 2014, p. 11). Some forms of domestic violence are not as obvious as physical and sexual abuse. Sometimes, one has to read between the lines. In Act III, scene V, Violet commits financial abuse on her husband, Beverly. Previously, Barbara did not know that Violet knew about Beverly’s whereabouts leading to his suicide. In this scene, Violet admits to knowing Beverly’s whereabouts and his suicidal intentions. Violet said, “I called over there on Monday, after I got into the safety deposit box. I told you I had to wait until Monday morning for the bank to open so I could get into that safety deposit box. I should have called him sooner, I guess, should’ve called the police, or Ivy, someone” (Letts, 2009, p. 100). Violet was more concerned with collecting the money and did not intervene with Beverly’s suicide. Although this is not within The Women’s Center’s definition, Violet’s knowledge of Beverly’s intentions to kill himself and refusing to intervene for financial gain, validates that Violet committed financial abuse. She chose money over her husband’s life.

Another example of financial abuse is Violet’s decision to take her children out of her husband’s will. In Act II, scene I, Violet said to her daughters at the dinner table:

Bev made some good investments if you can believe it, and we had things covered for you

girls, but he and I talked it over some years passed and decided to change things, leave everything to me. We never got around to it legally, but you should know he meant to leave everything to me. Leave the money to me. (Letts, 2009, p. 69)

Violet is illegally taking away the inheritance Beverley wanted his daughters to have. Although her daughters agree to the illegal change in Beverly's will, this does not make it okay. Just because she has authority over her daughters, does not mean she has the right to take away their inheritance from their father. Violet needed to be held accountable for financially abusing her husband and her children. Violet needed to be held accountable for all the domestic violence she put her family through. The only way her family thought she could be held accountable, was by removing themselves from her life. Victims need to remove themselves from this systemic domestic violence cycle. Beverly removed himself by suicide. Violet and Beverly's children removed themselves by moving away from home.

Domestic Violence Cycle

Elements of the domestic violence cycle

The domestic violence cycle, also known as the cycle of abuse, is a similar pattern of behavior committed by the abuser. This occurs across all forms of domestic violence. According to Wellness Reproductions and Publishing (2001), "Although not all abusive relationships follow the same pattern, there is a cycle that is similar in many abusive relationships." The cycle of abuse consist of four stages: the honeymoon stage, the tension building stage, the blow up stage, and the back to the honeymoon stage. The honeymoon stage is when "many abusers act very sweet and kind, express a lot of love, and make their partners feel special and cared for." The tension building stage may contain "arguments, emotional abuse or minor physical abuse like grabbing or punching." The blow up stage is "when the abuse is at its worst, and it may include extreme physical or sexual violence." The back to the honeymoon stage is a transition from the blow up stage to the honeymoon stage. After the blow up

period, the abuser “may apologize, be very loving and kind, and promise it won’t happen again.” As a result, the abuser normally gains forgiveness from the abused individual and the cycle starts again (Wellness Reproductions and Publishing, 2001).

In *August Osage County*, there are multiple examples of the domestic violence cycle. The following paragraphs will highlight two of the scenes which demonstrate the cycle of abuse.

Examples of domestic violence cycle

Act III, Scene I

The Honeymoon Stage:

Violet’s mother asked Violet what she wanted for Christmas. Violet said she wanted some girly boots that she saw in the window of a shopping mall.

The Tension Building Stage

Violet’s mother was hinting to Violet that she had bought a gift that Violet wanted and wrapped it herself. The gift was “about the size of a boot box [with] nice wrapping paper” (Letts, 2009, p. 80). Her mom told her “Now, Vi don’t you cheat and look in there before Christmas morning” (Letts, 2009, p. 80).

The Blow Up Stage:

Violet ran downstairs Christmas morning, only to find that the pair of boots her mom had wrapped up for her were “men’s work boots, holes in the toes, chewed-up laces, caked in mud and dog shit”(Letts, 2009, p. 80). Her mom laughed at her for days.

The Back to the Honeymoon Stage

The author did not reveal what happened afterwards; therefore, I will infer that the cycle continued, because Violet was still in the care of her mother after the incident.

End of Act II-Act III, Scene I

The Honeymoon Stage

At the dinner table, the family was eating and enjoying each other's company.

The Tension Building Stage

Violet starts to verbally abuse everyone at the dinner table, which leads to Barbara and Violet arguing back and forth.

The Blow Up Stage

Violet charged towards her mother and both of them fell to the ground, while Violet physically attacked her.

The Back to the Honeymoon Stage

Barbara apologizes to her mother for attacking her and ask for her forgiveness.

Barbara: How's your head?

Violet: I'm fine, Barb. Don't worry about that.

Barbara: No, it's important that I say this. I lost my temper and went too far.

Violet: Barbara. The day, the funeral... the pills. I was spoiling for a fight and you gave it to me.

Barbara: So... truce?

Violet :(*laughs*) Truce. (Letts, 2009, p. 81)

Personalized example of domestic violence cycle

Although this is a play showing how the cycle of abuse is used, it also applies to real life. Here is an example of my cycle of abuse.

The Honeymoon Stage

December 25, 2013, my boyfriend and I was preparing for our first Christmas as a family. I cleaned the house and he cooked the food. We shared intimate moments here and there, trading off those three meaningful words, I love you. Our little boy played with his new toys, not knowing what to make of

this day because it was his first Christmas. We all took pictures enjoying the company within our little family, and there was nothing but love in the air.

The Tension Building Stage

Eventually, my friends came over for a Christmas dinner and we all rejoiced with drinks, food, conversation, and games. We all had a great time together. After our company left, my partner expressed attraction towards my best friend. We were both under the influence and began to argue. I questioned his intentions, revealing his attraction of my best friend to me. He then responded by talking about the negative elements of my past relationships, which I disclosed to him. He responded by calling me bad names, such as slut and whore. I argued back in my defense as he told me how worthless I was. I told him he was not the best partner either, calling him stupid, lazy, and jobless.

The Blow Up Stage:

As he was leaving the room, the last thing I remember saying to him is something derogatory about his mother's death. He came back with an anger so bold and slapped my face into the wall. My glasses hit the ground and I did not know how to respond. I began to hit back while he began to physically attack me pinning me to the ground until I gave up. I had never been in this situation before and I did what I thought was best. I called the police. The police came and took him away.

The Back to Honeymoon Stage:

Upon his release from jail, he told me he was sorry and he was drunk. He said I was wrong to bring up his mother's death, and he wanted us to be a family. He said he would not do it again. I accepted him back and the cycle occurred several more times.

I am currently with the same partner. Our behaviors have changed for the better in our relationship since that domestic violence chapter in our lives two years ago. We both had separate counseling sessions which pointed out how to de-escalate a situation instead of escalate it. With that information, we both created a contract that laid down the guidelines to our new relationship. Some of the statements

in the guidelines said, if there is an issue that needs to be addressed, we would talk about it when our son is not around. If I ever felt our son's life was in danger, my son and I would move away with no contact information left behind and a restraining order in place. We both had every right to call the police if the other partner is being abusive. If the conversation seems to be filled with anger and has no end point, one of us has to take a walk, but will return to the house before the day ends. If one of asks for space, instead of questioning or antagonizing the situation, respect that persons' wishes. When that time frame is over, if there is a need, we can talk about why the space was needed or just leave it alone. It's all about picking our battles. Instead of focusing on what to do if we become physically violent towards each other, we try to break that buildup before it gets out of hand. We wrote down a list of topics that are liable to trigger anger such as his mom's death, my past relationships, calling each other vulgar names, expanding on the negative parts of our relationship instead of the good, and social media journaling. We have been doing a lot better now that have a better understanding of one another. None-the-less, people may still classify me as a victim or think I should be ashamed. But I am neither. A victim is someone who has been abused by another individual, not knowing the other person is capable of violence. I am aware of my partner's capabilities. I feel no shame because I decided to stay and create a new relationship with my partner. I am not ashamed. I am accountable.

Future Actions

Everyone needs to be held accountable. Abusers and victims can be male, female, black, white, straight, gay, rich, poor, old, young, disabled, able-bodied, and more. Abusers need to be held accountable for their violent actions. Victims need to be held accountable for returning to the same situation and expecting different results. With this research, I hope to use this information to talk to places such as The Women's Center, to create a space for their victims to be held accountable for their domestic violence situations. I would like for them to conduct a class that involves defining an abuser,

a victim, and together come up with ways to end the domestic violence cycle with accountability.

According to Robinson (2013), it takes up to seven times for a person to leave a domestic violent relationship and never return. But every time the abused individual did leave and return to the abuser, society often makes the mistake of saying they are the victims of domestic violence. When you tell a person repeatedly that they are a victim, they start to play the role of the victim. They start to fulfill the characteristics as being weak, helpless, and as a target. Let us create a new dialogue. No one deserves to be abused. If you are not removing yourself from the situation, fine; but it is not an excuse for the person to be a victim. The individuals who are returning to a relationship with their perpetrators' are aware of the domestic violence that can occur. They are no longer victims. The abused inner dialogue determines their role. They can hold on to the title as victim, which makes them look shameful, foolish, and/or weak; or they can claim ownership of their lives and become accountable.

Death is not the only ending to a violent relationship. An individual can walk away and never return, like Violet's children did, or they can try to work it out, like Charlie and Mattie Fae. Let's create a new script: I was a victim, but now I'm accountable. He was a victim, but now he's accountable. She was a victim, but now she's accountable. We are no longer your victims, we are accountable!

August Osage County is a performance art piece that demonstrates real issues that are happening in society. Art can be utilized as society's teaching tool, and that is what Tracy Letts' did by displaying multiple variations of domestic violence and the systemic violence cycle in this play. *August Osage County* ended without a resolution to the domestic violence cycle, so the audience can choose what happens to Violet's family from that moment on. The author leaves the audience to finish the story because at the end of the day, we are our own author's. So let's make our story victim free.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *August Osage County* displays possibilities of actions in domestic violence situations,

even with the most deviant abusers (women and middle class) and victims (middle class, Caucasian, and male). This play exposes the signs of people in domestic violent relationships. The play teaches its readers that there are ways in which to escape a domestic violence situation via suicide, trying to work things out, or leaving the situation. *August Osage County* is a play that shows how art can mirror and educate its audience on real life situations such as domestic violence. None of the characters in the play were truly accountable for the part they played in the domestic violence relationship. Everyone wanted to point the finger at somebody else's victimization, which split their family apart. The overall lesson in this play is to be accountable in your domestic situation. Leave the situation alive before you're dead. Break the cycle of abuse, the sooner the better. Letts (2009) tells his readers there is no more feeling sorry for yourself. At the end of every form of domestic violence, there is always a choice. Stay in or get out!

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