

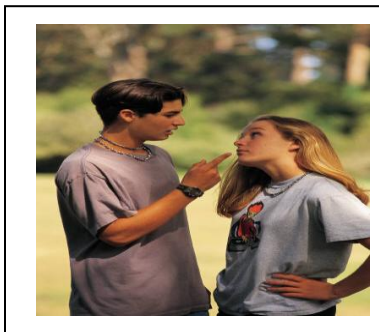
Violence (Verbal/Physical/Emotional)

Does it Feel Like Love?

Written By: G. Raymond McCullough

I caution the reader, what you are about to read may be upsetting and provocative. Also, I will ask you to imagine what it might be like to be on the receiving end of violence. For the purpose of clarity in this article, I define love as an enduring sense of interest, excitement, joy, enjoyment, and positive regard that we share with someone and it is embodied by mutual respect.

In my many years of counseling, and as a member of a family advocacy team, there is one phenomenon that intensely disturbs me. This is what I call the **“I’ll stay at any cost”** phenomenon. Women (and yes sometimes men) unconsciously or consciously make this their daily mantra. This mantra becomes an expression of a misguided loyalty to their lover (tormentor in disguise). These individuals have suffered at the hands of their significant other. The suffering or “love” (depending on perspective) has been delivered in one or more forms: outright physical violence (which could include having sex against one’s wishes



or feeling coerced to do so), and/or verbal threats that would make an enemy cringe and shudder in fear or outright terror. Initially,

the abuse may occur in the form of pushing, shoving, and the proverbial finger in the face that is accompanied by a look that could kill. Then one day the verbal assault escalates to a point that would make most people’s hair stand on end. The assault likely runs the gamut: from insults on intelligence to

innuendo about lack of sexual prowess, to aggressive questioning about suspected infidelity (cheating), and last but certainly not least a verbal salvo about an array of real, imagined or fabricated offenses committed over the duration of the relationship. The exclamation point in the final verbal barrage comes in the form of: “You stupid @%#* (the term used for a female dog); you are called a \$#@*% (a term reserved for women that provide sexual favors to men without compensation). The tormentor adds, “By the way I hate your dumb \$#@*% (the derogatory term that refers to your gluteus maximus) and you’re nothing but a crack *%\$# (defined previously), and by the way I slept with your sister.” This diatribe and verbal assault would remind most observers of one the most appalling and sensationalized episodes of the Jerry Springer Show.

By this point the abused is either on the verge of tears, sobbing uncontrollably, enraged and ready to fight, or totally oblivious to what just took place. If the latter is the case, the abused is most likely



accustomed to making excuses for their abuser who they tell themselves “is the love of their life”, or their “soul mate.” This notion is reinforced later in the day when the abuser apologizes for their earlier behavior. The apology is likely prompted because they want something in return (sex, money, validation, etc). What can be so confusing to the person on the receiving end of this abuse is that the tormentor’s demeanor can flip from charming

to despotic and controlling, back to charming all in the blink of an eye. Despite the fact that gut instinct and intuition says “get out while you can”, the abused finds every imaginable reason to stay. Let there be little doubt, the decision to stay is driven by a fear that is so complex that most outsiders can’t comprehend why anyone would remain in such a damaging relationship.

One of the saddest aspects of this entire dynamic is when there are children in the home. The suffering they experience because of their exposure to such a hostile, unwelcoming, unloving, non-nurturing, and spirit-killing experience will likely have long-term negative implications in regards to their self esteem and self image. It is one thing for an adult to choose and/or to feel stuck in an abusive and violent environment. It’s another thing to expose a child to this same environment, a child who has no real options other than to run away or turn to alcohol and other drugs to cope. Would a responsible parent knowingly send their child into a war zone...a battleground if they knew their child would likely be an emotional or physical casualty? Yes, I equate a home that is rife with verbal and physical abuse/violence a war zone. Have you ever heard of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)? This term was first used to describe a condition developed by soldiers who experienced emotional/ psychological difficulties in response to their exposure to the violence of war. It’s not unusual to see victims of domestic violence, child abuse/neglect, or other traumatic offenses in the human experience to suffer from PTSD. I contend: “If it does not feel like Love it then it isn’t Love.” When we contemplate the dangerous dynamics described above (emotional, verbal, physical abuse) and then we add alcohol or other drug abuse we have volatile cocktail that will inevitably lead to an episode of violence that may result in the loss of life. It should not be a surprise that alcohol and drug use is

involved in the vast majority of domestic violence cases.

Finally, you don’t have to accept verbal, physical, or emotional abuse in your life—it is a form of violence. With help you can have life-giving relationships that communicate love and respect. I know this is the legacy we all want for our children. Remember, if it doesn’t feel like love it’s likely not love.

It’s not easy to navigate the challenging dynamics that are presented in this article. However, there is help available through professionals that can assist you in getting the help and support you need.



Freedom is Possible

This article was originally written by the author on October 1, 2006. It was inspired by the women I counseled at Swedish Medical Center’s Chemically Using Pregnant Women’s Program. I honor them and women like them in their journey to freedom.