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Healing the Unseen Wounds

The term “abuse” is frequently in use in everyday conversation, but what exactly is meant by it? How does one determine that they are abusing someone or if they are being abused? The definition of abuse is relatively straightforward. Abuse is defined as an intentional act of harming or injuring another individual. In other terms, someone who maliciously harms somebody in any way is abusing them. People are subjected to different types of abuse including physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse and verbal abuse. In this manifesto, I will be buckling down to emotional abuse with a little pinch of psychological abuse. This manifesto is also a friendly reminder from my past self to my future self.

Emotional abuse is when someone uses their emotions to control, humiliate, shame, blame, or otherwise manipulate another person. In general, a relationship is considered emotionally abusive when there is a pattern of abusive phrases and bullying behaviour patterns. Furthermore, while most common in romantic and marriage relationships, psychological or emotional abuse can occur in any relationship, including friendships, family members, and coworkers. Emotional abuse is one of the most difficult types of abuse to identify. It might be subtle and underhanded, or overt and deceptive. In one way or another, the victim's self-esteem will shatter, and they will eventually begin to question their perceptions and reality.

According to my perception of the world, every single human being is entitled of love and deserves to be treated with kindness and respect. However, it appears that love alone isn't always enough of a purpose to stay in a relationship if you feel like you have to walk on eggshells. Don't get me wrong, loving someone or caring profoundly about them is a wonderful feeling, trust me, I know. Even so, having these feelings can also complicate a relationship. Based on my previous experience, I was highly aware that I was being mistreated and yet, I found myself still deep in love with this person so I decided to stay. Yes, it is possible to have feelings of love for someone even when they are mistreating you.

Based on a meta-analytical review by Carney and Barner (2012), emotional abuse does indeed have a high prevalence rate, with an average around of 80%. 40% of women and 32% of men claimed to be emotionally abused. Psychological aggression was measured by combining questions based on both expressive aggression (e.g. name calling) and coercive control (e.g. isolation tactics or threats of harm). Psychological aggression by an intimate partner was reported by 48.4% of women and 48.8% of men. Additionally, according to new findings from Black et al. (2011)'s National Intimate Spouse & Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), approximately 50% of Americans have encountered lifetime emotional abuse by a partner. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, in accordance with an article, the Malaysian law recognises the impact that emotional abuse has towards a person. Therefore, the article also stated that the Malaysian Domestic Violence Act was amended in 2017 to include emotional abuse in the definition of domestic violence, as well as to provide equal protection for men and women. Besides that, it is also common for children to make up the headlines here in Malaysia. Unfortunately, it is concerning that incidences of emotional abuse, particularly among men, would remain undetected. Realistically, I believe that an estimated of 80% of emotional abuse cases are unreported in Malaysia due to the fact that it is not a widely spoken topic. It can be seen from above that emotional abuse victims are not limited by their age. As a matter of fact, it affects people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and social backgrounds.

Moreover, studies by Hart et al. (1996) revealed that emotional abuse can be the most damaging sort of abuse, that may cause developmental repercussions that seem to be or even worse than those caused by other types of abuse. In other terms, victims of emotional abuse experience worst mental health issues than those who have been physically or sexually abused. Even though being abused emotionally does not leave physical scars compared to physical and sexual abuse, it however has greater ratings for anxiety, stress, depression, and neuroticism personality. It does not make emotional abuse any less real or relevant, just because it does not leave visible scars. To me, any forms of abuse are equally damaging to a human being and it should not be compared because, at the end of the day, abuse is still abuse. These invisible wounds, on the other hands, might cause misery for a lifetime. Emotional abuse is an issue that concerns the society as whole. Which is why everyone has to look out for one another. Thus, if you or someone around your circle is a victim of emotional abuse, kindly do not hesitate to reach out and seek for assistance. If you are hesitant, telling yourself that “It is none of my business”, or that you might be mistaken, or that the victim does not want to address it, remember that by showing your worries will remind them that you care for them and you may even be their life saviour. Bishop Desmond

Tutu once said and I quote, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.” I personally believe that it is all of our responsibility to speak up in the face of injustice.

There is definitely hope to heal from the pain caused but however, it requires time. Indeed going for therapy can help you recover, but it also requires a lot of effort and dedication to get back on your feet. Many people have a hard time admitting they were or are being abused in the past or present. This can be due to a mindset like “I am ashamed of having been abused” or “What I went through wasn't all that horrible.” Other times, people bury their past abuse in the hopes that it would go away if they don't address it. One thing is for sure, the longer someone hides their agony, there will be more negative consequences coming their way in life. I am certain because I was one of the walking wounded, a survivor to be exact. The one mistake I made in life was that I did not cooperate with myself to get back on my feet. I have gotten all the support I needed from my loved ones but unfortunately, instead of speaking up for myself and asking for help, I bottled up my emotions because I was too ashamed to be telling them the same thing over and over. I brought that upon myself for bottling up my feelings. So it had me thinking, “What if I am my own abuser?” “Was I my own enemy all this while?” “Why do I put myself in such situations?”. These negative thoughts are voices in my head that was implanted by my abuser. My abuser told me lies about myself and about the world until I believe that his lies might be the truth. After time, it affected the way I see myself. Anxiety, depression, and feelings of shame, guilt, and blame have all been associated with negative thought patterns. These messages will continue to hold sway over your life and mind until you begin to call them out for what they are and replace them with new and healthier patterns of thought. According to an article by MindWell Psychology NYC, to begin the process of healing from your emotional abuse you will need to rediscover who you used to be and who you want to become. People who have experienced emotional abuse frequently carry a great deal of shame when it comes to being their true selves. Yes indeed, it is easier said than done, at the end of the day, your abusive voice hovers above and distances itself by externalising the perceived flaws.

Keep in mind that it is absolutely normal to feel the same emotions you felt when you were in that abusive scenario. These emotions are a normal part of the healing process, and there is no need to rush through them. They are yours, and it is acceptable to sit with and experience them. Having and experiencing painful emotions does not transform you into anything other than a

braver and stronger person. Learning to accept and deal with your challenges in a realistic, rather than abusive manner not only heals, but also integrates your disparate parts into a unified whole. The prize is well worth your time and effort. Though it was all in the past, you could still feel so much pain. Those unpleasant feelings have lingered inside you, and you will only be able to recover from them when you accept and move past them. “Like a knife that cuts you, the wound heals but those scars remain.”