

Celeb turns batterer too

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By Suzanne Dubus / As You Were Saying . . .

When children experience domestic violence, they may also learn to believe that it is normal behavior; that it is OK to control your relationship through demands, insults, threats and punches.

Until a pre-Grammy party hosted by music executive Clive Davis on Feb. 7, Chris Brown and Rihanna had been known for their respective musical talents and their loving relationship. But this couple has since earned renown as a high-profile example of domestic violence.

Brown has been open about growing up in a family in which he witnessed his stepfather beating his mother from the time he was 7 to age 13.

“My mom always used to try to hide it from me and my sister, but we knew what was going on,” Brown said in 2007.

Brown suffered too. He told television host Tyra Banks that he became a bedwetter because at night he was too afraid to go to the bathroom. He hid a Bible under his pillow and prayed to comfort himself. Banks commended Brown saying, “You’re brave to speak about it.”

Brown has been quoted confessing he grew angry enough that after seeing one bloody nose too many, he told his mother he was going to kill her husband with a baseball bat. That never happened. He also vowed never to become a perpetrator. Apparently, that didn’t happen either.

Advocates know that when children experience domestic violence, they are learning potent lessons about power, control and violence. Children who witness domestic violence may also learn to believe that it is normal behavior; that it is OK to control your relationship through demands, insults, threats and punches. Without intervention and support, many adults repeat what they have learned as children. Hours before the Grammy ceremonies, at which both Brown and Rihanna were scheduled to appear, Brown turned himself into the Los Angeles Police Department where he was booked and released on \$50,000 bail. A week later, he issued an apology.

“Words cannot begin to express how sorry and saddened I am over what transpired. I am seeking the counseling of my pastor, my mother and other loved ones and I am committed, with God’s help, to emerging a better person,” he said in a written statement.

As vague, non-committal and elusive an apology as that is, one thing is clear: The cycle of domestic violence is both vicious and pernicious. Tragically, there are many Rihannas and many Chris Browns. This couple may stand out because of their celebrity and the incident may have happened in a luxe Los Angeles neighborhood, but domestic violence happens to women from all income levels and does not discriminate on the basis of class, education, ethnicity, age, race or religion.

According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence, on a single day last September, services were provided to 60,799 adult and child victims across the country, including 1,553 in Massachusetts. Last year, the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center assisted about 1,200 women and children victims of domestic violence from nine Massachusetts communities.

Banks said that Chris Brown was brave to tell his story - and he was. But his true bravery will come by taking responsibility for any crime he has committed.

We all play a role. Prosecutors must charge batterers for the crimes they commit; judges must hold batterers accountable with appropriate sentencing and, with the support of the community, victims - adult and children - must have access to viable resources.

These resources change lives. They save lives. They stop the cycle of violence.

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