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Presentation Script

VERBAL ABUSE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Hello, welcome. My name is Anne Weltner and I am currently a senior here at the University of San Francisco. I am here to introduce my research study on the evolution of past verbally abusive relationships to current romantic relationship maintenance. As such, my research question is posed as the following: How do individuals in past verbally abusive relationships communicate with their present romantic partner?

In previous literature, the link of past verbally abusive relationships stem from attachments that one may encounter in childhood from their family of origin. Non-physical abuse may also take the following forms; verbal abuse; emotional abuse; and the most detrimental, psychological abuse which encapsulates both verbal and emotional abuse.

In my research, I conducted a qualitative study through an interpretive lens as a way to observe, interview and describe behaviors to understand this phenomenon. I also incorporated constant comparison, which I derived from all six participants' answers in my transcriptional data. Specifically, a phenomenological approach was used in order to gather data for evaluating the shared experiences around the evolution between past verbally abusive relationships to current romantic relationships. I conducted six interviews, which included five females and one male. Four of the participants are currently undergraduate students at the University of San Francisco, while the remaining two are professionals with graduate degrees. The ages ranged from 19 to 71. The research was conducted by incorporating 10 interview questions which alluded to the forms of the verbal abuse to how the participants communicated emotion with their current partner.

After the interviews took place, I outlined four overarching themes: (1) Verbal Abuse as a Form of Communication; (2) Insights After the Abuse; (3) Comparing Romantic Relationships; and finally, (4) Current Romantic Relationship Maintenance. When highlighting what is defined as verbal abuse, participants indicated it as a way to put someone down, belittle them and ruin their self-concept. They also suggested that once the verbal abuse has taken place, it is almost hidden, as if they did not realize it had just occurred until later when it was too late to say or do anything about it. One participant in particular stressed how doing something inane turned into a personal attack from their verbal abuser, “..then it would be about how I’m careless as a person, that I would be like that; rather than like, I knocked something off the table, which anyone could have done.” It is apparent here that this person unintentionally cased their verbal abuser to attack them when in fact they had done nothing wrong. Another participant reiterated how the verbal abuse almost turned into a physical attack, “He tried to physically hit me one time, but I was able to get away.” Often times, because verbal abuse is hidden, it can manifest itself in ways that may put one person into physical danger. Statistics indicate that people verbal abuse often goes unreported because there is not physical markers to prove otherwise.

After the verbally abusive relationship ceases to exist, participants were able to reflect on their own experiences to determine what they should do to better take care of themselves. For example,

“I didn't really love myself, so after that relationship ended, I completely focused on myself, like physically, mentally, emotionally, everything. That's something I learned that I have to keep doing. It is not that you do it and it's done for life. You have to keep doing it, keep working on yourself; nurturing yourself is a good adjective. The description then, I think what I learned is that you don't have to accept it, you know?”

Another individual stressed that she learned that they deserved a lot better and that they are worthy of whatever they want. They did not see this as a conceited gesture, but that they had decided to settle and marry their verbal abuser, “Then I realized I’d rather be single and happy than married and miserable.

When comparing romantic relationships, some of the participants suggested that their current partner provides them an opportunity to make their own decisions, as opposed to their past relationship that was only determined by what their verbal abuser wanted. Another perspective was that they were able to pinpoint red flags, which was an indicator that something did not feel authentic and to exit the relationship.

With current romantic relationship maintenance, it is deemed important to have an open platform of communication and to express love and admiration for each other. One individual suggested the book, “The love languages,” which stresses the importance of knowing your partner’s version of expression of love and to exercise those expressions in order to show their loyalty and respect for their current partner.

So why does this matter? Why study verbal abuse in romantic relationships? It is indicative that there is not a lot of previous literature on the topic, and many individuals often are not aware the abuse is taking place. It was my intention in writing this paper that persons who had been in previous relationships could gather insight into how to make their current relationships more meaningful and lasting. After all, after reminiscing on an unwanted or unhealthy encounter, we must reflect on our role in the situation to ensure we do not have a repeat of the past. Thus, this makes us stronger and ensures our growth as human beings.

Thank you for having me here and I hope that one can take this knowledge and pursue a happy and just life with their current romantic partner.