

## Script of Debra Warner TEDx Palo Alto College Talk

~Hello everyone, thank-you for being here today. I want to bring up a difficult topic, but an important one. It seems the news is littered lately with stories of sexual assault.

Harvey Weinstein, Roy Moore, and Bill Cosby. (Pause after Bill Cosby) When you picture these names in your head, I'm sure you recount news articles which discuss the accusations women have said against them. Women have been stepping out of the shadows, and talking about their abuse and assault. And this is important, the #metoo movement is long overdue. But, when we think of victims of domestic violence, or victims of rape, you probably think of a male perpetrator and a female victim. But there is another population that is incredibly overlooked...male survivors of trauma. Statistics show that 1 in 6 men will experience sexual abuse in their lifetimes. And it is my work with that population that I would like to share with you today.

~Now (go up), before I go much further, I want to give a trigger warning. This talk will discuss graphic topics of sexual assault, physical and emotional abuse so if you feel uncomfortable, please feel free to leave the room.(Care)

~Please allow me to discuss with you a topic that is my life's work. I am a Forensic Psychologist and a professor in Los Angeles. My research focuses on violence and trauma related to males, and I use psychology in the legal environment to help with offender treatment. Some days I teach, but other days I go into prisons and evaluate offenders. Because of my experiences in this field, I am able to speak for these male survivors, because I have bared witness to many of their stories.

~In 2017, The Bureau of Justice Statistics stated that men have an equal chance as women, of experiencing a violent crime. (pause) Does that shock you? It shocked me, and yet after hearing hundreds of stories from male trauma victims, I am no longer in disbelief. Let me tell you a true story, and a man I interviewed, name Robert.

~Robert is 49, and today stands 6 feet tall and weighs 300 pounds. His size makes him sound tough, right? Well, even the biggest and strongest men can be victims. As a child...Robert was molested by several perpetrators at 3 different points in his childhood. At 4, at age 7, and lastly by his maternal aunt by marriage when he was 15. Each time he was abused, he stuffed his pain down, because he was always taught "Suck it up" and "Be a man." On the last occasion his aunt convinced him they were to get married and live happily ever after. Sometime after, he was so distraught he slit both his wrists. At this point he told his mother of the abuse by her sister-in-law. Imagine if your 15 year old daughter told you that (get angry) her older uncle was touching her. Would you believe her? Of course you would! And you would be beyond furious! Cops would be called, arrests made, and families split. But how do we respond when a 15 year old boy tells us they were sexually abused? Robert's mother didn't call the police, and she wasn't outraged. She told him that no woman could force a teenage boy to have sex if he didn't want it. (Put on a bit of a different voice...) "You can not take sex from a teenage boy." His mother assumed he had consented. He was 15 years old when his aunt started molesting him. Such (pause) is the injustice of what (pause) has been done (pause) to our men. (huge pause). While women are applauded as the heroines they are, when speaking up about assault, men are not believed, are ostracized, or are called weak if they speak up. Our culture does not validate men

who speak out, but silences them. Perhaps the reason why is because of how we indoctrinate our children.

~**Who has ever heard someone say to a little boy, “Don’t hit girls!”** By singling out little girls in this way, we are teaching our little boys that women are weak. Why don’t we just say “**Don’t hit anyone?**” Men are conditioned to protect women and think of them as less powerful than men. However, we never (draw this out) think of our men as needing protection. We think of them as powerful. (pause) In my story, Robert’s mom thought of him as a strong grown man, not the 15 year old child he was. In our culture, men are one of the MOST silent victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse because we rarely believe they can be the victim. (pause)

Remember, research gathered from the 1 in 6 organization shows that on average, 1 in 6 men are sexually abused. 1 (pause) in (pause) 6. (pause)

Richard Gartner, a psychologist who treats men with trauma histories, says that our society has the false belief that men cannot be victims of sexual abuse. But men CAN and Robert is not alone, it happens more than it should.

~Perhaps another reason why, is illuminated in the documentary “The Mask You Live In,” sheds light on why we rarely hear men discuss their abuse. The film discusses how men cannot live up to the masculine views of society. No man can be all the things society says are masculine: the star athlete, (pause) financially successful, (punch), the top executive. Television, and the cultural narrative of societal gender norms encourages men to be masculine and strong. Societal gender norms are the unspoken rules of what it means to be masculine and feminine. When men cannot be “strong,” their perceptions of themselves might be painful and self-rejecting. We teach little boys to not cry, be tough, “Suck it up” and “Be a man.” These responses teach little boys was a blueprint or an interpretation of what it means to be masculine. However, this is

dangerous, because it teaches boys that they can only be one way, tough. So when 1 in 6 men are abused, they literally don't know how to tell anyone about their trauma, because admitting vulnerability would bring to much inner shame. This is why Robert didn't say anything for years about his abuse, and why many men stay silent, and in the shadows. (pause)

~ Here is a story about a man that greatly impacted me. It is about how male trauma affects men and their spouses. I am changing the name and a few details to protect this man. I was called to a prison once to evaluate Marco, and who was incarcerated for domestic violence, and the day before he had slit his own throat from ear to ear while in prison. When I evaluated him I could not understand why he was incarcerated, and internally in so much pain. He seemed like a gentle soul. His wife visited weekly and he had no other history of depression or violence, that would make him want to slice his throat. It takes a lot of depression and self-loathing to slit your own throat. I thought "there has to be a trauma or something that caused him to act out and get arrested." So, I sat down to interview him. I sat across from this grown man, and softly asked him: "So what happened to you" (make us feel the gentleness in your vocalics and body). He eyes-widened in surprise, and answered " Nothing, Nothing," but then, his eyes to become downcast. After 2 minutes of sitting in silence, and him looking at the floor, (pause) he told me he was raped when he was age 5 by an uncle then again at 21 by a rival gang. (pause) Many survivors of sexual assault have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. (pause) Similar to veterans coming home from war. But instead of being triggered by loud noises, sexual assault survivors can become triggered by words, scenarios, or touch. (pause) Marcos says the day he was arrested, his wife and him were in the shower, and she touched his butt, and it triggered his

PTSD, and all of a sudden, he wasn't with her anymore in the shower, he was back in the moment with his perpetrators.

~His PTSD, and those trauma memories were materialized in his mind, all spawning from that touch. He felt victimized, and in that moment he assaulted his wife. He had never told her about his rapes. As he sat there recalling his story, he cried and violently shook with emotion. Once he was done with his story, I told him what I say to all my survivors, "This assault was not your fault" and "thank-you for telling me your story." Like many men, his story was guarded, because men have been taught to protect. Like a dragon protecting their gold. Later, Marco called his wife at my prompting and shared of the assaults. He had never anyone because he felt ashamed and feared being viewed as less than a man.

~Men like Marco often do not disclose their abuse for years. Researchers O'Leary and Barber found 44% of men wait more than 20 (TWEN-TY) years (be strong on 20, like indignant surprise) to disclose child sexual abuse. Imagine carrying that kind of shame and pain, alone, inside of you for all those years. Men often feel responsible for their sexual assault, because they believe they should have been able to stop it. Those gender roles kick in, and Marco's blueprint for masculinity told him that he was to blame for his assault, and that it was his fault. He felt that he should have been "man enough" to stop it. Our society allows womens to be vulnerable, but it does not allow men that same luxury, because of the stigma of being sexually assaulted as a man. And it is this atrocity of men not being encouraged to speak up, that has inspired my research of working with male trauma survivors. Hashtag metoo is important, but what about hashtag mentoo? (Pause)

~And while some male survivors do come forward, it is verrrrrry (draw out) few. One such brave man that I had the pleasure of hearing speak, was Greg Holtmeyer, an educator at Lincoln University, and male survivor himself. He spoke and discussed how disclosure can be a freeing experience for men, and can help them not feel so invisible in the world. By encouraging men to talk about their assault, we can break the culture of silence, and free men to come out of the shadows. For men to feel comfortable disclosing, they need support. Think about all the funding that goes into creating shelters and programs for women of abuse, but there is very little for men. And why would there be funding for it, when even our media ostracizes male assault? (sarcastic)

~ A few years ago, I was watching a popular news pundit tell a satirical news story of a female teacher who had had sex with a male child in her school. The comedian joked how “lucky” the young man was. Lucky? Lucky? (indigent vocalics). Why was he lucky? Consent does NOT change because of your genitalia. It’s this very dichotomy, of favoring female victims over male victims, that creates so much shame for male trauma survivors. This shame usually turns to pain, which they never disclose, because of the stigma about manliness and strength.

~And so, because of men like the inmate Marco & survivor Robert, I created an annual [conference to help bring awareness to this issue. The at Summit on Community Resilience, Intervention, Prevention, and Training (SCRIPT). Every year in July, in Los Angeles, we celebrate the resiliency of men who have experienced male violence and trauma. This conference is open to the community and was created so we come together as a community to discuss all issues related to trauma and leave the conference with something to implement in our own individual environment. So far the conference has had over 800 attendees and provides a place for male survivors to tell their stories. This last year, we had four brave survivors disclose their

abuse for the first time. They were immediately embraced with love, support, and put in touch with resources that will help them.

~The rest of the year, I continue my work, going into prisons, and working with male trauma survivors. At some point I have realized something sadly profound: very few people are talking, writing, or researching about male trauma victims. Because of this, I wanted to write a book about this issue. It's called His History, Her Story, and its written for spouses of male survivors of sexual abuse and trauma. (pause) Remember that story of Robert I told you about? Well, I interviewed him for my book.

Once, he and his wife and their son were spending her birthday in Orange County, CA. Robert hated Orange County, but, he never really told anyone how much he disdained it. As the day was ending, and the family was driving back to their home, the normally calm Robert became angry when a car cut him off. Instead of calmly allowing the driver to pass, he revved on the gas, and seemed like he was going to hit the other car. His wife, freaking out, yelled "STOP IT!" (pause) before the near accident. He looked at his wife, and yelled " Don't tell me what do!!!" with disdain and resentment. She started sobbing, and stayed silent the rest of the way home. She felt terrified. She was so fearful for her son in the car or he would see his father arrested.

Robert was in a rage that day in the car. His wife could not understand what had happened. In time Robert began to disclose to his wife more of his childhood. She realized that the Robert's rage in the care that day was being trigger by the entire day by being in Orange County. You see, Orange County is an incredibly wealthy area, and Robert grew up incredibly poor and his mother had to work which left him minimal supervision at times. He used to dream for a life of privilege so he could feel not alone. Being in Orange County reminded him of his childhood, the solitude and all abuse he sustained from a lack of supervision. His wife yelling at him to STOP! made

him feel he had no control, reminding him of how he had been abused, and no one had helped him. Robert had stuffed his pain down deep, and fell into the shadows. Over time, his wife learned his story, and it troubled her how he still felt so much pain from his molestations. And I should know his pain, because I am Robert's wife. (long pause) He is here today, supporting ME!.

## Conclusion

If I could dream up a world where wonderful men like my husband were never abused, I would. But until we get there, for now, let's listen and pay attention to how we socialize our boys and adolescents. Let's get rid of traditional gender roles, and teach boys that being vulnerable is not weakness. Let's stop tying emotions to genders. It's not feminine to cry, it's human. By limiting the range of emotions we let our boys, and later men feel, we are setting them up for failure. Stop limiting the emotional expression of our men and boys, creating an expectation of masculinity they can not live up to. And this is my mission, to stop the culture of silence. And my mission, started with love, love for the men who suffer in silence, and love for my husband. ~My experiences mean I raise my son, who is also in the audience today, with the full range of emotions he is allowed to express in his pocket, and his ideas on gender are not set. Let's allow men to be vulnerable. Let's allow male trauma and violence victims to come into the light, and not have to suffer alone. Let's listen. Let's love. Let's break the silence together.

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