

The Intersection of the Socialization of Control in Males and Generational Violence with
Violence Against Women

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In 2009, just one day before the 51st annual Grammy Awards ceremony, an incident occurred between pop stars Rihanna and Chris Brown. The media and public learned that Chris Brown had physically assaulted his girlfriend at the time, Rihanna, a black female pop artist. Research has demonstrated that approximately 45.1% of black women experience some sort of violence or stalking on the part of an intimate partner in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2016). The violence against and objectification of women, especially women of color, is an issue that is and has always been very prevalent in our society and one that is a direct result of the hegemonic masculinity that dominates society. It is very well known that men are often the ones that are responsible for the different types of violence that women tend to be wrongly and unjustifiably subjected to. This paper aims to explore the ideas of the socialization of emotion in black males and the issue of generational male violence in the home. Additionally, this paper aims to identify how these two ideas connect or intersect with the very pressing issue of black female body politics as it relates to falsely perceived control of and violence against black women. I argue that, in the case of Chris Brown and Rihanna, the intersection or interaction of these two factors serves as a partial explanation, although not necessarily an excuse, for Brown's abusive actions.

In 2009, the public became aware that hip-hop artist, Chris Brown, had physically assaulted pop artist, Rihanna, who was his partner at the time. The news of such domestic or intimate partner violence sparked conversations not only among fans and members of the media, but among scholars as well. The topics of discussion as they related to the incident were many. However, one of the main conversations that arose from the incident regarded the factors that may have potentially contributed to Brown's violent and abusive actions towards the black female artist, Rihanna.

In his 2017 documentary, "Welcome To My Life," Chris Brown recounts the 2009 incident between him and Rihanna, relaying the details of the situation from his point of view. After discussing the incident, Brown talks about his traumatic childhood and the fact that he was exposed to male violence from a young age as he witnessed his mother's partner's aggressive behavior towards her for years. When discussing this aspect of brown's childhood and how it relates to his abusive behavior, Samuel Aymer states:

Admittedly, the public has scant information about Chris Brown's early childhood. What is known, however, is that he was raised in an urban setting plagued by poverty and community violence, and he was exposed to IPV. Highlighting this limited dimension of his life should not be interpreted as a justification for his abusive behaviors; but it is one way to focus on the ways in which exposure to IPV affects children within familial contexts (Aymer, 2012).

Aymer makes the point that Brown's childhood environment, especially his exposure to intimate partner violence, which we know from the documentary includes male violence on the part of his mother's partner, possibly could have had a psychological impact on him. Such exposure could have also influenced the way that Brown deals with his own anger and the manner in which he composes himself in heated interactions with his own partners in his adult life, such as in his interactions with Rihanna during the argument that, in the documentary, Brown describes to have taken place in the car the night that the abuse on his part occurred. Rachel Leah, a journalist for the magazine, "Salon," recounts Chris Brown's accounts of the abuse that his mother faced at the hands of her male partner and further writes:

Brown then brings it back to his own actions. "It's learned behavior," he continues, "so me, having to see my mom look at me through that light, I just saw him." While Brown's

description of his childhood and the abuse against women he witnessed does not absolve him of his terrible actions, it underlines the way male violence can be taught and passed down from generation to generation (Leah).

While stressing that Chris Brown's account of the male violence that he witnessed towards women throughout his troubled childhood does not diminish or validate his own actions towards his female partners, Rachel Leah also emphasizes the very important point that male violence can also become a generational phenomenon. This is due to the fact that at least some of the children that are continuously exposed to such behavior may tend to emulate it in their own relationships and interactions with women in their adult lives. When talking about his violent actions on that night toward Rihanna in the documentary, Brown himself says that "it's learned behavior" (Chris Brown: Welcome To My Life). Although this in no way validates his behavior, it serves as a means of recognizing the way in which anger and violence may be unintentionally socialized in young males who witness such behavior in the men that they are expected to regard as role models in their lives for their own future behaviors.

However, not all scholars were in agreement with the idea that exposure to male or intimate partner violence as a child is sufficient grounds to explain Chris Brown's behavior. One scholar regarded such an idea about the perpetration of abuse as a myth and critiqued media outlets who used such language in their coverage of the incident stating that such language "reinforces the idea that perpetrators of dating abuse are "set off" (*i.e.*, like a bomb), and also the widely-held but erroneous belief that witnessing interparental partner abuse is the strongest risk factor for dating abuse perpetration" (Rothman et al., 2012). Although the author is not necessarily in complete disregard of the impact that one's exposure to such violence throughout their childhood has on their adult psyche and behaviors, the author emphasizes the point that this

factor alone should not be the core focus in such incidents of male violence or domestic abuse. I agree with the author that this factor alone should not be regarded as the focus of such incidents. However, I do not necessarily agree with the labeling of exposure to violence as a child having a role in abusive adult behaviors as a myth. It is undeniable that not every person who is exposed to violence as a child grows up to be abusive in romantic relationships. However, the very fact that there have been documented accounts of this being the case should eliminate the possibility of labeling such an idea or perspective as a myth. One scholar even went as far as to state that:

Having witnessed violence and having been battered as a child are often reported in childhood histories of male batterers, and in fact the finding that exposure to violence during childhood is associated with later male-to-female violence is almost universal. However, observing abuse may be a more powerful indicator of future marital violence than experiencing abuse directly, and observing paternal violence may be the best predictor (Stewart, 2014).

Therefore, Stewart's statements demonstrate the fact that the generational violence, or one's exposure to paternal violence during his or her childhood has a rather powerful influence or impact on that individual's behavior when they grow up in the future. Specifically, this is a very strong predictor of marital violence. Although Chris Brown and Rihanna were not married to each other, this is still applicable to their situation. Additionally, Stewart's statements further debunk the idea that Rothman and other scholars have with regard to childhood exposure to paternal violence being an indicator of an individual's behaviors as an adult as a myth that people tend to perpetuate.

One thing that is important to recognize, however, is the fact that the information about Chris Brown's exposure to male violence or intimate partner violence as a child originated

mainly from the documentary. Therefore, given that this was a documentary solely about Brown, it is entirely possible that any information presented throughout the documentary could have been framed in such a way as to ensure that Brown was portrayed in a very positive, and even biased, manner. Therefore, this is precisely why it is important to explore the manner in which the socialization of emotions in males, especially males who grew up with the unique circumstances of fame, such as Chris Brown, contributes to the development of the mindset that women are simply objects on which their anger can be released in times when they may need to do so.

With regard to the idea of perceived control and/or power amongst males, it has been noted that the conventional socialization of males prepares them to expect and desire positions of dominance, which leads them to use controlling behaviors, such as violence, maintain positions of power in relationships (Giordano et al., 2016). What these scholars are emphasizing is the fact that, because males have for decades been socialized or conditioned by society to expect positions of dominance, power, or control in all aspects of their lives, this has resulted in them finding ways to have that power in circumstances in which it is not directly in their grasp. This can be applied to Chris Brown as well since, during his documentary, boxer Mike Tyson made the comment that “when you’re really successful, you are taught that ‘can’t’ should be a foreign language to you. ‘No’ should be a foreign language to you” (Chris Brown: Welcome To My Life). Essentially, Mike Tyson appears to be relaying the idea that when men possess positions of great power and influence, they tend to develop the mindset that they should be given whatever they desire to have in their lives. Furthermore, in the event that they fail to be handed whatever it is that they desire, they believe that it is justified for them to use aggression, abuse, or violence to obtain it.

Such an idea of using violence as a means of demonstrating one's power or dominance is further supported by other scholars and other theories regarding intimate partner violence. Anderson, in discussing this idea, brings up interactionist gender theory and the fact that it proposes that violence, such as intimate partner violence in relationships, is a "compensatory method" of emphasizing control and masculinity in circumstances when men feel that these very things have been threatened in one way or another (Anderson, 2005). Therefore, although it is almost impossible for any member of the public to know for certain about the specifics of the situation between Chris Brown and Rihanna, it could be argued that this is probably what occurred during that moment when Brown physically assaulted Rihanna. During his documentary, Brown made the comment that during the moment of the incident between him and Rihanna, he was constantly provoked, hit, and bitten by her. Although there is not really any way for any person who was not there on the night of the incident to confirm that this is actually what took place (unless Rihanna comes out and confirms this herself), it could be deduced that because he was being provoked, hit, and bitten by Rihanna, Brown felt as though he was being emasculated. As a result of this perceived emasculation at that moment, he may have also felt as though his own perceived power, dominance, and/or control were being stripped away from him as well. Therefore, he may have felt the need to assert his power and control in that situation by turning to using violence with Rihanna.

Intimate partner violence, particularly violence against women in relationships, is a rather pressing issue throughout society. Although the majority of these situations do not receive a lot of public and media attention due to how common and normalized it has become, there are some cases that tend to catch the attention of the media, such as the 2009 incident between Chris Brown and Rihanna. Understanding the root causes and/or developmental progression of

violence against women is rather important if it is ever going to be an issue that is resolved in society. This paper explored the ideas of generational violence and the socialization of perceived power and/or control among men, and the manner in which these things intersect with violence against women. Through a close study of these ideas and the Brown-Rihanna domestic abuse incident, it was concluded that the intersection of these two ideas may serve as a partial explanation, although not at all a justification, for Brown's abusive or violent actions.

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