

~ When Love Hurts ~

By Angela N. Parker



When word spread that R&B sensation Chris Brown (19) turned himself into the police after being accused of assaulting his girlfriend the reigning "Princess of Pop" Robyn Rihanna Fenty (20) no one could believe it. After all, Chris Brown is known for his incredible talent, good looks and squeaky-clean image. He wasn't the type to do such a thing. And Rihanna? She's on top of the world right now, this couldn't possibly happen to her.

Whether the allegations are true or not, we do know that Brown has a history of domestic violence in his family. In February 2006, Brown told *MTV News'* Sway that he watched his mother being abused by his stepfather. In 2007, Brown discussed with *Giant Magazine* the impact the abuse had on him. "He made me terrified all the time, terrified like I had to pee on myself," Brown told the magazine. "I remember one night he made her nose bleed. I was crying and thinking, 'I'm just gonna go crazy on him one day.'... I hate him to this day."

While it's the duos' celebrity status that is making this such a hot topic, on and off the Internet, it is important to realize that if you change their names and the location of the event, this could be a story about someone you know.

We do not know what really happened between Chris Brown and Rihanna, we do know that domestic violence can happen to anyone. Many kids grow up watching domestic violence happen to family members and friends, which leaves them vulnerable to repeating the same behavior, even though they hated seeing it happen themselves.

Teen relationship violence is not something we can afford to ignore. Forty percent of teenage girls ages 14 to 17* say they have been abused or know someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend, while another study ** revealed that 29 % of young men interviewed were victims of some type of domestic violence, be it verbal, mental or physical.

Clearly, relationship violence is on the rise between young people, but why? There are many influential factors for this trend including: imitating the behavior that they see at home; or what their friends are doing; or what they see in the media.

Unfortunately, we live in a culture of violence and many youth consider getting slapped around, yelled at, or even sexually abused as 'the norm.' Solutions to this rising epidemic lie in reaching

out to young people and teaching them that they deserve better. In other words, we must teach them to 'unlearn' what they have learned.

Our young people are paying a terrible cost for their of teens remaining silent about their abuse. We know the importance of teaching youth conflict resolution strategies and the necessity of parents paying attention to the relationship their children have with themselves and each other.

Youth need help identifying when they are in an unhealthy situation. Often times, young people do not recognize abuse when it is happening. They do not know what a healthy relationship looks like. Young women tend to justify it as their partner being "in love" or "manly," while young men don't believe that they can be abused.

Consequently, young people find themselves trapped in a cycle of violence that they do not know about or understand.

Scanning the blogs after the Rihanna/Chris Brown incident, we saw a troubling trend. Many young bloggers stated that Rihanna somehow "deserved it" or that "she provoked him." Others didn't care if it was true or not because "they loved Chris Brown and "was there for him." If Rihanna "wasn't woman enough to stand behind their man, then they would." Putting issues of guilt and innocence aside, these comments are disturbing and show just how much work needs to be done in educating the youth in our community about the fact that domestic violence is NEVER OK.

But these responses are not too surprising, considering that society often tends to blame the victim when things like this happen. This is why we as a community need to focus on raising the self-esteem of our young women and men so that they understand that abuse is never acceptable.

The other side of the coin is many people have expressed the desire to protest, ban and ostracize Chris Brown because of the allegations. While these impulses are understandable, let's not forget that Chris Brown is still just a kid. If these allegations against him turn out to be true, he, like so many young men with these issues, needs help. This not to excuse his alleged behavior in any way, but remember, he was exposed to violent behavior at an early age. He probably never got the counseling he needed or any help in learning how to cope with his anger. If the allegations are true, hopefully, he will get the help he needs now.

Too many of our young men and women need to be taught how to manage their anger. They need to know that there are alternatives to shouting at and/or hitting their partners when they become angry. More outreach needs to be done both to the abused and the abuser. At such a young age, all parties involved can benefit from therapy and can learn how to break the unhealthy patterns that are threatening to derail their futures.

Violence in teen relationships is not a phase. It is not okay. And yes, the statistics are shocking. According to statistics provided by the *Bureau of Justice Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence, May 2000*, seven percent of all murder victims were young women who were killed by their boyfriends.

It is important that we as a community keep the topic of teen dating violence in the forefront and let our kids know that they can talk to us, and make sure they get the help that they need.

**This is an op-ed piece. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of Jenesse Center, Inc.*