



U.S. | NYT NOW

Seeing Abuse, and a Pattern Too Familiar

Janay Palmer, Ray Rice's Wife, Implied the Assault Was Taken Out of Context

By JODI KANTOR SEPT. 9, 2014

Until recently, Janay Palmer Rice was a little-known figure, the 26-year-old partner of Ray Rice, the star running back for the Baltimore Ravens. But after Mr. Rice's contract was terminated by his team on Monday, she became the most famous battered wife in the country, a fierce defender of her husband and, to domestic violence experts and survivors, an extraordinarily public example of the complex psychology of women abused by men.

"Just know we will continue to grow & show the world what real love is," she posted on her Instagram account. "To take something away from the man I love that he has worked" for all his life is "horrific," she said. "Ravensnation we love you!" she added.

Her post implied that the assault was taken out of context, and it is not at all clear that she views herself as a victim of abuse. But thousands of others, including domestic violence survivors and the therapists who counsel them, have drawn upon their own experiences to try to answer this question: A man strikes a woman with such force that she collapses, unconscious. He appears to spit on her body. Why would she then exchange wedding vows with him and, after a video surfaces showing the world the violence, stand by him?

Beverly Gooden, a human resources manager in North Carolina, logged

on to Twitter to explain. “I tried to leave the house once after an abusive episode, and he blocked me,” she wrote about her ex-partner, adding the hashtag #whyistayed. “I thought that love would conquer all,” she added in a subsequent message. Other domestic violence survivors picked up the hashtag and offered their own reasons for staying with men who had made them suffer.

“I believed I was the only one that could love him and heal him,” read one post from Chicago.

“Star athlete with a nice guy rep,” said another from New Jersey.

“You tell yourself, maybe the last time was *the* last time,” said another from South Africa.

After her post on Tuesday, Janay Rice retreated from social media because of what she called negativity. (Her lawyer declined to comment.) But her own biography may help explain her actions: In public appearances and prior interviews, Ms. Rice appeared devoted to, financially dependent on, and completely invested in her husband, now 27.

They met as teenagers in Westchester County, N.Y., but when they started dating during Mr. Rice’s first season with the Ravens, in 2008, she followed him to Baltimore, enrolling at nearby Towson University. Baltimore was an unfamiliar city for her, the adjustment was difficult, and in 2010 she pleaded guilty to shoplifting. But before she graduated, Mr. Rice surprised her by giving her a new Acura with an engagement ring inside.

“I almost passed out when he told me the car was mine,” Ms. Rice said in a profile written by a fellow Towson student.

Before she finished college, she was pregnant with his child, a girl they named Rayven — a name that suggests just how invested they both were in his football career. Though Ms. Rice returned to classes and graduated with a degree in communications, it was unclear whether she developed an independent career. In 2012, Mr. Rice signed a five-year, \$35 million contract with the Ravens.

Several experts in domestic violence cautioned that much was unknown about the Rice case, starting with whether the football player hit his partner

more than once. But they added that economic reliance was a leading predictor of whether a woman would leave her abuser.

“It’s incredibly difficult to extricate yourself when you’re financially dependent,” Jacquelyn Campbell, a professor of nursing at Johns Hopkins, said in an interview.

In February, a year after the Ravens won the Super Bowl, Ray Rice rendered Janay Palmer unconscious in an elevator in Atlantic City. (The video that surfaced this week appeared to show Ms. Palmer pushing or hitting him as well, which experts said was not uncommon in domestic violence cases.) He was indicted in March on an assault charge that carried a potential jail sentence of three to five years.

Testifying against Mr. Rice would have meant ending his football career, embarrassing the team and possibly sending her daughter’s father to jail. Instead, Janay Palmer married him the day after the indictment.

“Many times a victim becomes so dependent on her partner for everything that she can’t even entertain a reality without him in it,” Ramani Durvasula, a psychology professor at California State University, Los Angeles, said in an interview. “I don’t know that any of us would have been strong, brave or courageous enough to push back on a billion-dollar organization and a man that she loves.”

In May, the couple appeared at a news conference, arranged by the team’s press operation, to say that they had healed their relationship. “We continue to work through it together, and we are continuing to strengthen our relationship and our marriage,” Ms. Rice said. They celebrated their vows in June at an idyllic-looking reception that was featured on the team’s website: the bride in a sparkling strapless dress, a football-shaped cake for the groom, and their toddler daughter twirling on the dance floor to the song “Happy.”

But now that the video of the assault has circulated, Mr. Rice has been cut from the team, his football career is in peril, and millions of dollars in salary are gone. Karma Cottman, executive director of the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said she feared that public questioning of the

couple's relationship could backfire for Ms. Rice. On Tuesday, women collected stories on how they left abusive relationships under the hashtag #whyileft.

When a new victim comes for help, Ms. Cottman said, "the first thing we want to rush to say is, 'Why don't you leave, why don't you get out?'" she said in an interview. But that's exactly the wrong approach, "because isolation is part of the cycle of violence," Ms. Cottman said. "Generally we see people five to seven times before they leave or have left for good."

Take another case on the same football team: In 2012, Candace Williams, the girlfriend of another Ravens player, Terrell Suggs, filed a protective order against him claiming that he had punched her and dragged her alongside a car he was driving. Previously, she had accused him of pouring bleach on her and her son, and breaking her nose.

A few weeks later they wed. "Last night I married my best friend and the love of my life," Mr. Suggs posted on Facebook.

Alain Delaqu erie contributed research.

A version of this article appears in print on September 10, 2014, on page A1 of the New York edition with the headline: Seeing Abuse, and a Pattern Too Familiar.