

Zafar, S. (with Meg Masters). (2019). A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers.

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Samra Zafar’s book, “A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose” is a memoir detailing the complexities of her young adult life. These complexities included an arranged marriage to a man just over ten years her senior when she was just seventeen. The marriage began as a promise of a greater future and education in Canada, though, it revealed itself to be a turbulent and violent marriage of physical and emotional abuse. This book details the intricate complexities of cultural norms and what it means to be a family and a “good wife.” Zafar demonstrates the harrowing journey of a young girl forced to leave her family behind to start a new one in an unfamiliar place with a man she barely knows. Through this, Zafar details the importance of understanding the “cycle of abuse,” breaking the silence on abuse and the importance of education and self-worth.

Zafar defines her childhood in Pakistan as one that was rather progressive, she grew up playing squash and cricket, going out on her own and was encouraged to pursue her education, of which she was top of her class. Despite this, Zafar found herself pressured to marry by her family with the promise of a better opportunity of education in Canada. Within her culture, it was normal for a woman to not receive a higher education, but rather to find a good husband to provide for her. This was a defining factor for Zafar in which with this proposal she could gain a husband and

an education. However, those promises became to be broken ones and the life she was promised with her husband was not what came to be. Rather, Zafar was met with domestic abuse. Throughout the book, Zafar explicitly details what it means to be not just in a physically abusive relationship but an emotionally abusive relationship as well. Her book showcases the complexities of the abusive relationship in which Zafar is torn from believing that it is her fault as a wife, and that it is sometimes normal for a husband to be physical with his wife within their culture to understanding the abuse as being not her fault nor something she deserves.

Within her book, Zafar uses “The Cycle of Abuse “ and “The Power and Control Wheel” to understand the abusive relationship (p. 231). Not only does she make an effort to understand the charts and diagrams for herself but also for her husband. Through the use of the charts and counselling services Zafar sought out, she details the importance of seeking help and understanding that which you are going through. The book expertly details how complicated domestic abusive relationships can be, especially when there are kids involved. The “Power and Control Wheel” details different wedges of a chart which explain how an abuser can assert power over the abused. For Zafar, the wedges summarized the abuse she had experienced, from her husband controlling her through economic dependency, their children, isolation, fear, and assaults (p. 231-232). Zafar’s development throughout the book truly showcases the effects an abusive relationship can have, especially in regard to one’s self worth. Through this, Zafar demonstrates the importance of getting her self-worth back, to leaving an abusive relationship behind, no matter how complicated. Zafar’s book, as a means to understand an abusive relationship, shouts to everyone who may be in a similar situation that “you are not alone” and “if I can get through this, so can you.”

What becomes the most important aspect of the book is the journey of self-worth. Zafar shows what it means to build yourself back up from being broken. Throughout her childhood she was fearless, confident and determined, at the end of the book you see Zafar reclaim those aspects of herself through pursuing her education and leaving her husband to become a single mother of two. Throughout her marriage, Zafar uses her two daughters and the pursuit of education to push through the bad times, using them as a guiding force to a better way of life. Her book truly shows what it means to be a family and for Zafar that meant a family of a single mother with two daughters sharing a home, not a family with a domestic abuser sharing a house. As she stated in the book, her apartment and condo with her daughters were “true homes, where there was no shadow of abuse. Homes where my girls could grow up happy and free” (p. 317). Even though it was not easy, and Zafar faced many adversities through leaving her abusive husband, she did so because she knew it was the right thing to do, for herself and for her daughters. They were able to heal together and become a true family where before the house they lived in was just a house, not a home of love and care.

Zafar’s journey of self-worth takes the reader from a point where Zafar had no voice to a point where Zafar was winning awards and sharing her story. Through her education she was able to do this, throwing herself into her schooling, jobs and volunteer work. Her book stresses the importance of education in that Zafar pursued her dream even if it meant doing so at a later time in her life. A quote that truly stands out in explaining Zafar’s will and drive is “I will get from my life what I feel I deserve. And if nothing else, I’ll be happier being myself than trying to fit into a box to satisfy others” (p. 334). Through redefining her self-worth, Zafar was able to self-actualize

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and harness great achievements. She reiterates the importance of support and believing in one's self, as well as bolstering others. Through sharing her story, Zafar brings awareness to the complexities of domestic abuse and the importance of support and understanding. As well as through her drive for education and self-worth, she proves that you can get through it and begin a journey of healing after domestic abuse.

I believe that this book expertly represents feminist ideology in that men and women should be treated equal. The book showcases many feminist notions of the need for a woman's self-actualization and the complexities of domestic abuse. Specifically, in reference to the patriarchy in which the man is supposed to be the "man of the house" and in control. Due to this, I believe the book is an excellent feminist read in which all men and women should read. This book provides for a greater understanding of domestic abuse, especially in that it is not specific to any culture. Zafar's intention in writing this book is to share her story to provide awareness in the hopes that stories like hers do not have to be repeated. On the last page of the epilogue she writes of the necessity to break her silence, "because millions of silences are still waiting to be broken. And because, sometimes, just telling my story can prevent it from being repeated" (p. 337). This book should be included in all gender studies courses, sociology courses and even anthropology courses in understanding what Zafar went through in reference to her gender, culture, and experience of harm.

Zafar's complex story of arranged marriage, immigration to Canada, domestic abuse, parenting, and pursuit of education showcase her drive and resiliency as a woman throughout the book. Zafar proves herself to be a strong, independent, and incredibly intelligent person and mother

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in which despite everything, she persevered to become the person she is today. Her book “A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose” is a testament to her strength and drive. Zafar showcases the importance of self-worth, understanding abuse, breaking the silence on abuse, and the importance of education. She believes that everyone has the right to an education, in which she joined many organizations to help people do just that. Through this book and to this day, Zafar is bringing awareness to her story, to domestic abuse, and to the importance of support.

I would recommend this book to anyone and everyone.