



**Zafar, Samra (with Meg Masters). (2018). A Good Wife: Escaping the Life I Never Chose. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.**

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Samra Zafar's memoir, "A Good Wife", is a riveting first-hand account of her arranged marriage at the young age of seventeen to an older man named Ahmed. In her book, Zafar vividly recounts the dramatic change in her life in an incredibly short span of time, going from being a carefree child in Pakistan who is relatively free, to being a wife and mother trapped in an abusive family in Canada. After seemingly endless traumatic events and years of marriage, Zafar rescues herself and her daughters, and finally reaches the freedom and education that she came to Canada in search of in the first place. Throughout her story, she presents readers with invaluable experience, knowledge, understanding, and inspiration.

Zafar provides valuable insights into the inner workings of an abusive relationship. From an outsider's perspective it can be mind-boggling to understand why victims of domestic abuse do not immediately leave the relationship. Zafar alleviates this lack of knowledge by showing readers the different sides and types of abuse. Typically, abuse is thought of in terms of physical violence such as hitting and kicking or verbal abuse through the yelling of hurtful names. However, Zafar sheds light on forms of abuse that are not as well-known. Particularly, the psychological and emotional sides of abuse as well as financial abuse are demonstrated in a well-articulated and detailed fashion. The emotional side of abuse is exemplified by her recalling that: "Almost as frequent as the arguments were Ahmed's tears and apologies, those emotional reversals that kept

me in such a state of uncertainty” (p. 256) and manipulation is shown by Ahmed’s repeating of: “If you love me, you’ll do this for me” (p. 254). Financial abuse is also explained as a method of control, as shown by the following: “Ahmed gave me no spending money of my own... ‘Why do you need money?’ he once said. ‘It’s not like you go anywhere without me’ ” (p. 147) and “I want to go home to my parents. But I don’t have any money” (p. 181). These insights explain the emotional and financial difficulties associated with leaving an abuser, which allows readers better understand abusive relationships and the frustrations and hardships that can prevent an escape.

Further, a prominent theme throughout “A Good Wife” is the notion of gender roles. As a young girl Samra is supported by relatively progressive parents who instill in her the confidence and beliefs that she is an equal and can do anything she wants in life. However, as she begins to grow up into a young woman, certain gender roles are strongly imposed on her. In tandem, cultural and religious expectations are at play, which reinforce these gender roles. Namely, Muslim values of modesty for women play a large role in the way Samra is told to behave, and resultantly, causes intense conflicts in her life. For instance, throughout the book Samra is constantly told to act shy, told what to wear, told when she is allowed to eat, told when she can go to her room, told when she must wake up to make lunch for her husband, and is discouraged from playing sports or pursuing education or a job because she is a woman. There is also a repeated assertion made by many individuals in the book that a woman's entire purpose in life is to be a wife, have children, and take care of the house. Thus, Zafar shows how binding gender roles can be, especially in certain cultural environments, and how they can expand to encompass every aspect of life.

Another essential aspect of the book is the importance of education. Education is an integral

element of “A Good Wife” as the reason Samra enters her toxic marriage is for the purpose of better quality education in Canada. She spends her entire marriage working towards achieving this, and ultimately she leaves her marriage to continue to pursue education and is able to do so because of the education she had received thus far. Zafar stresses and demonstrates the value of education as well as the resources and opportunities that become available along with it. She credits education as the reason she was able to change her life, as her degrees opened the door to a job opportunity that would finally allow her to achieve complete freedom, both financially and otherwise, as well as give her the ability to support her two daughters as a single mother. Her life accomplishments provide a real life and present example of why education is so valuable, and why it is necessary for it to be as accessible as possible.

Additionally, Zafar exemplifies the reality of immigration to Canada and the difficulties that newcomers may face. When she first arrives in Canada she is scared and intimidated by the unfamiliar landscape. This uncomfortableness leads her to avoid going out alone, by choice. However, this quickly changes, as the effects of immigration along with her abuse force her into social isolation. She has no friends or family in Canada and is prevented from going out and making any. This results in a lack of a support system, which is crucial for anyone, but especially for an abused woman. She demonstrates the loneliness and isolation that many immigrants may feel. Furthermore, the book shows certain cultural barriers in place that can impact immigrants’ experiences. Zafar exemplifies this through her thoughts: “... I wasn’t able to shake the feeling that the counsellor didn’t quite understand. They were both white people. They didn’t know my culture. They didn’t believe that the fact that Ahmed was not hitting me or cheating on me meant I was a lucky woman.” (p. 144). This provides useful insight into the circumstances of immigrants, and

particularly shows the dangers of social isolation.

Lastly, Zafar displays the significance of bravery and determination. Even in the utmost dire circumstances, Samra remained set on her goal of going to university, and escaping her abusive marriage. As an abused and exhausted mother of two, she continues striving towards this by taking school courses from home and working on them at night, showing extreme dedication. She also demonstrates bravery, as she builds up the courage to stand up to her husband and in-laws, and report her abuse to the police. In addition, her courage to ask for help and reach out to different resources such as the Student's Union Office and Housing Office prove to be crucial to her life's outcome. As a result of all these brave and determined actions, Samra shows she was able to "escape the life she never chose" and found a place to live, a job, opportunities, friends, support, and finally, freedom. The idea that courage and perseverance can so drastically alter one's life is of extreme importance and can apply to everyone.

I believe that Samra Zafar shares her story with the main intention of helping others, and she does this in a variety of ways. Primarily, the intent of "A Good Wife" serves to help individuals who are in similar situations to Samra. Her story can help people recognize that they are in unhealthy relationships, as well as inspire them to escape their bleak and dangerous circumstances. Additionally, she showcases the possibility of a better future for other victims, and exemplifies a way to work towards this future and the resources that may be available to help people with this. Further, her book and the story within it serves as a mechanism of spreading awareness about issues such as controlling relationships and domestic abuse. This can help the friends and families of victims as well as the general public to recognize the signs of abuse and subsequently intervene

and provide assistance. Evidently, the author also writes with the intention of encouraging others to reconsider their stance on arranged or child marriages, as she provides her example of a potential and horrifying outcome. In fact, the author has proven to be successful in this objective as she ends the epilogue by sharing an email she received from a man in Pakistan who had arranged a marriage for his seventeen-year-old daughter, but after reading her story he chose to cancel the wedding and send his daughter to university instead (p. 337).

I found this book to be astonishingly well-written and captivating at every moment. Further, this book is a memoir, and thereby details true events that can not be altered. Therefore, I have no suggestions for improvement, as there were no issues with the way Zafar and Master delivered this inspiring true story.

The aforementioned insights and intentions of “A Good Wife” would interest students, teachers, and enthusiasts of various disciplines, namely sociology, psychology, gender studies, and political science. In addition, this book would be of particular interest to all academics who subscribe to feminist ideologies.