

WHY I STAYED

Janay Rice's story all too familiar, local abuse experts say

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REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Her fiance beat her up inside an elevator and then dragged her, unconscious, out of the elevator by her hair.

So what did Janay Rice do after such treatment?

She married the man.

The man is, of course, former Baltimore Ravens' star running back Ray Rice. He was initially suspended for two games after a video showed him dragging his fiance out of an Atlantic City elevator. After a second video of the incident, released by TMZ Sports, showed him hitting her in the elevator, rendering her unconscious, Rice was kicked off the team and banned by the NFL.

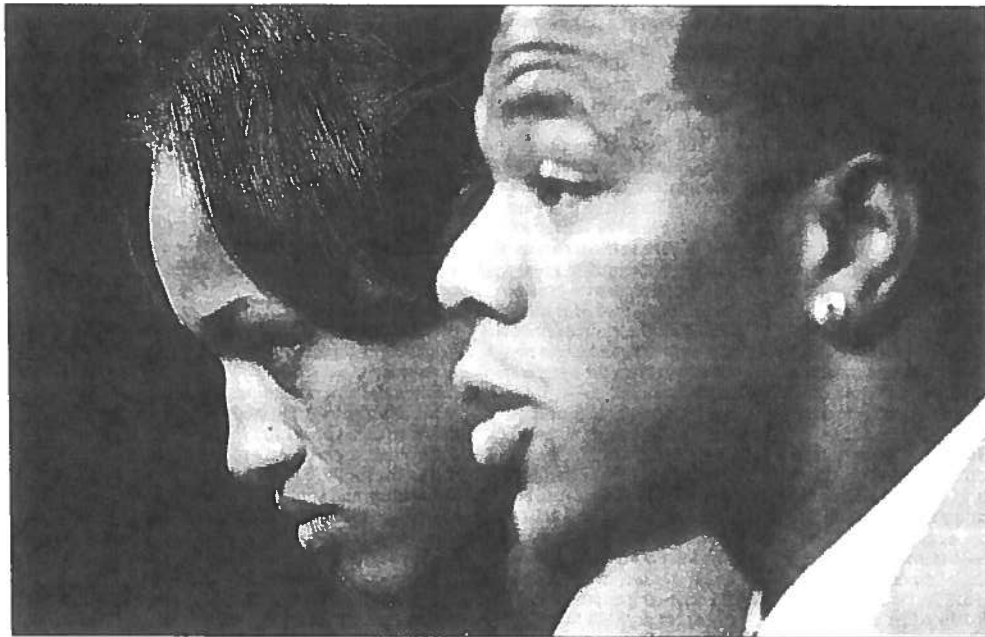
Both videos have made NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell the target of a firestorm of controversy.

But Goodell and Rice were not the only figures under attack. Several pundits and commentators on social media have criticized Janay Rice, not only for not leaving the man who beat her, but for marrying him. Some have accused her of standing by her husband just for his NFL salary. Others have said she is, in the words of one online commentator "a co-dependent doormat."

The controversy played out on social media, on which Janay Rice made comments that seemed to support her husband — both after the initial accusations and again after the second video surfaced.

"To make us relive a moment in our lives that we regret every day is a horrible thing," she wrote on Instagram. "To take something away from the man I love that he has worked his ass off for all his life just to gain ratings is horrific."

"THIS IS OUR LIFE!" she continued. "What don't you all get. If your intentions were to hurt us, embarrass us, make us feel alone, take all happiness away, you've succeeded on so many levels. Just know we will con-



In this May 23 file photo, Janay Rice looks on as her husband, Ray Rice, then a running back for the Baltimore Ravens, speaks to the media during a news conference in Owings Mills, Md.

tinue to grow & show the world what real love is!"

"I think the first word that comes to mind is that we're gold diggers, and that we don't have a true love for our husbands, and we're just in it for the money or in it for the fame or whatever," said Melani Ismail, the wife of former NFL wide receiver Raghil Ismail, on NBC's "Today Show." "The money comes and goes, and there is no amount of money that could even touch the injuries and the heartache and all the things that go with the NFL."

Still, the question persists: Why would a woman stay with a man who was so violent toward her?

"It is pretty typical," said Peggy Panagrossi, executive director of

Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, of the reaction to the beating. "It's sometimes difficult for the world to see why. I get it. If he's so violent, why would she stay with him? This is what we see all the time. He's going to try and tell her he's sorry, and he didn't mean to do it and he'll never do it again. He will say whatever it takes. She really wants to believe him. There are things about him that she loves. Maybe she was thinking about the financial resources he would bring. Clearly, until this happened, he was a big meal ticket."

That economic piece — that many women rely on their husbands for financial support — is often a reason

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"Nobody wants to be hit. Nobody wants to be abused."

PEGGY PANAGROSSI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SAFE HAVEN OF GREATER WATERBURY

ABUSE: Rice case echoes nationwide

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battered women stay in relationships, but it is not the only one, say domestic violence advocates. Lee Schlesinger, associate director for Safe Haven, explains that abusers sometimes put money in their own name, where the victim does not have access to it.

"He'll put all assets in his name and not allow her to touch it," he said.

Then, the abuser may put bills in the victim's name, without giving the victim the resources to pay them. That makes it difficult or impossible for the victim to get credit on his or her own.

"Nobody wants to be hit," Panagrossi said. "Nobody wants to be abused. We have women who are staying because she's on his insurance and she would never be able to get insurance on her own. And there's a shame to it. I can't tell you how many women we see who say 'I thought this was normal. This is all I saw growing up.' People are very hard to come to the fact that they're battered."

On average, more than three women die daily in America because of violence inflicted by their husbands or boyfriends, Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro (D-3rd District) reports.

Domestic and sexual violence are the most underreported crimes, but the National Coalition for Prevention of Domestic Violence estimates that 25 percent of women experience intimate partner violence and nearly 20 percent have been raped.

It takes a woman an average of seven tries for a victim to leave an abusive relationship, according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline. Barbara Spiegel, executive director of the Susan B. Anthony Project in Torrington, said she is frustrated by the media attention given to Janay Rice, which she said diverts attention from the perpetrator to the victim.

"The guy beat the crap out of her and he dragged her out of the elevator and there's a lot of talk about why did she stay, what's the matter with her? What about the guy?"



In this February 2014 file photo from a still image taken from a hotel security video released by TMZ Sports, Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice drags his fiancée, Janay Palmer, out of an elevator moments after knocking her off her feet and against the elevator's railing at the Revel casino in Atlantic City, N.J.

Spiegel said. "The guy is a violent, out-of-control abuser. ... The conversation should be about him. Why is this person who can act that way not in jail? The guy should be somewhere where he can be managed and he can't do that again. It's really disturbing to be in the victim service business and hear everybody say, 'Why did she stay?'"

On the "Today Show," Robin Givens, who was married to boxer Mike Tyson, echoed Spiegel's comments.

"Why is it that the victimizer becomes the victim?" Givens said. "Why is it that we want to protect these men? What is it about our society, what is it about us as women that we feel the need to protect them?"

In a 1988 interview with Barbara Walters, Givens said Tyson had times where he could not control his temper and that "he shakes, he pushes, he swings" at her.

Panagrossi and Spiegel say that domestic violence involves issues of control that many who are not in that situation are at pains to understand.

"It starts gradually," said Panagrossi. "This has been gradually building up to this kind of abuse. The mental abuse always comes first — 'You're not good enough, you're not pretty enough. Nobody will want you.' ... Most violence escalates to hitting.

It's controlling behavior. That's the underlying behavior. The other piece is they isolate you from family and friends and you don't feel you have anybody to turn to."

Spiegel said many women stay because they're afraid that if they make a move to leave the relationship, the abuser will try to kill them.

"Sometimes people stay because they want to stay alive, because they don't want to be killed. ... If a victim changes the situation, their risk of serious harm or possibly death increases by taking that step, by taking that initiative and taking the control away from the abuser."

She reiterated that the attention should be focused on the abuser — and not the victim.

"This is really about him and his abuse and our acceptance of that," she said. "The media attention on her is cruel. Sadly, she's in that video so it's hard for her to escape. That is horrendous. That is where I hope the press would be saying, this man said he loved her and we sit by and say, 'Why did she stay?' Sometimes people stay because they are in love and they believe it will never happen again. If we're going to sit by and judge, let's sit by and judge him."

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