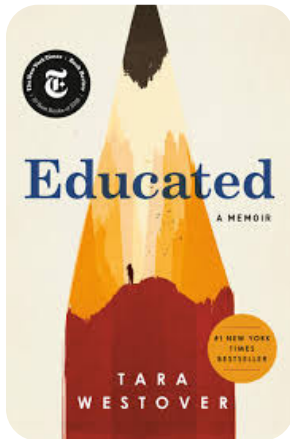


A WISE book discussion *Educated* by Tara Westover



In her memoir *Educated*, Tara Westover does an incredible job illustrating how hard it can be for survivors to leave. Violence can happen within relationships that may be meaningful and sometimes sweet. Often it is not just about one relationship, but whole communities, life beliefs, and one's sense of self and family. **How did the book make you think differently about how hard it is for survivors to extricate from violence?**

Shawn, in addition to using physical violence against his sisters and girlfriends/wife, was intent on humiliating and degrading women. He used violence as a way to set up a power dynamic and set of rules that women were required to follow.

How did the non-physical abuse contribute to the power and control dynamic?

The family and community knew – to some extent – about Shawn's abuse, and many chose to ignore or minimize what he was doing, even people who directly experienced the abuse. Tara often tried to hide it by appearing to be in control or as if she was an equal participant. **What was happening that worked to hide or justify Shawn's behavior? Why would victims want so badly to rationalize or cover up the abuse they experience by a loved one?**

While Tara's parents had a relationship in which Gene was the head of the household, Faye had her own ways of being autonomous – running businesses, raising kids, etc. **How did the power and control dynamics in their relationship give permission to Shawn's abuse? What made their relationship different from the clearly abusive ones?**

None of the people who were helpful to Tara told her to leave her family and community. Instead, they helped her to have a different perspective about what was normal about herself and her family, and gave her access to resources and experiences. The impact of each individual was not immediately apparent, but each person and action to help was critical. **How can this help us think differently about ways that we can support survivors in our own communities?**

There are many factors in the book that are associated with abuse – mental illness, religious beliefs, substance use, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injuries, culture, etc. None of these things were the direct cause of violence, but their intersections created a ripe environment for abuse. **Why does Tara want to believe the violence she experienced was caused by something other than the individual being violent?**

The relationship between Tara and Shawn changed dramatically when she hit adolescence. It seems clear that gender was a deep part of the experiences of abuse within the family, and there are also ways that Tara identifies being treated just like her brothers. **How does gender factor into the experiences of violence within the family?**

Isolating victims from people and information, creating an us versus them mentality, and describing a relationship as special and misunderstood by outsiders are common practices by abusers. In the book, a similar dynamic is created by the family and greater community as a whole. **How do you think this enabled the abuse Tara experienced to continue for so long? What might have been different if the family had been more connected to others? Why do you think Tara's parents were so committed to shaping their children's access to education?**

Would you like a WISE educator to help facilitate a conversation with your book group? Please contact Kate at 603-448-5922 ext. 111 and we can explore these and other thoughts together.