

About this book

## Imprisoned: Women in Extreme Controlling Relationships A key to understanding a new, hidden gender phenomenon

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This book is based on my PhD research, conducted over five years beginning in 2012, which identified a unique, gender-related phenomenon characterized by a harmful marital relationship that does not include physical violence.

In this book, I use language accessible to the general population to spread knowledge about this phenomenon outside the academic world. I also hope to provide tools and inspiration to Feminist activists who, through their own work and life experience, may embark on a journey to name new phenomena and help other women with their struggles.

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The first time I met Rikki—a pseudonym—was in a Zumba class I taught in 2012. I was a Zumba instructor for many years, teaching in various communities in the southern periphery of Israel. Rikki was a woman who always came on time, took her spot in the studio and waited. During class, she always tried hard to keep up, to learn all the dance moves and to breathe in the adrenalin of dancing freely. At the end of every class, Rikki came up to me and said, “Thank you for an hour of freedom.” Then she would leave.

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From a young age, I already knew I would become a lawyer. I also knew that I would fight for women’s rights. I did not learn about Feminism until later in life, but there was a feeling, for as long as I can remember, that my calling had to do with women's status in the world.

A lawyer studies and trains to know the word of the law. You learn what is legal and what is not, and how to best argue your case in court. You also learn, as your experience grows, how to translate a story into a “legal” story. By this, I mean that you learn how to transform a person’s feelings and the accompanying facts and details into the applicable laws, statutes and precedents. But what happens when the story you hear, the facts and the details, doesn’t match any existing law? What happens when you hear about a person’s hardships, so perverse, so destructive, so anguishing, but you realize there are simply no legal tools to fight for the justice this person so deserves?

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One day Rikki did not show up for my class. After a few weeks, I asked the other women if they knew where she was or what happened. Their response was that her husband would not let her come anymore. A few months later, I received a surprising phone call from Rikki. “You said you were a lawyer, right?” she asked. I always opened Zumba classes with my personal background, of course mentioning that I was a lawyer specializing in women’s rights, and Rikki apparently remembered.

“I want to break the walls,” she said. I will never forget that sentence because those six words took me on a five-year journey of research and discovery, culminating in my dissertation and now this book. Rikki told me a story of manipulation, degradation and abuse, but in a framework that the legal system was unprepared to address. I was determined to find a way to help Rikki and, as I discovered, many women like her, by legislating a brand-new law and legal framework to regulate a phenomenon that existed entirely outside the cannon of law.

“You see this car parked outside my house?” she asked the first time I came to visit her home and hear her story. “Well, I am not allowed to drive it or go anywhere without him, even though I have had a driver’s license for many years now.”

“You see this kitchen?” she continued, as we entered her house. “I spend many hours here—he likes food to be freshly made, he likes it hot and he likes there to be 'real' food for every meal. And I throw away half-full pots after each meal because he tells me to.”

"I go to the supermarket only with him. He waits at the cashier until I'm done with picking out the groceries, then goes over the cart, throwing out what he doesn't like, while asking me all the time—why did you take this tomato? Why did you take this chocolate? Why are you wasting money on that? When he is done, he pays with his credit card and he drives us home."

"I don't have any money; I don't even know which bank account our money sits in or how much money we have. If I need to buy bread and milk, he will give me 20 shekels. If I ask to take the kids for ice cream, he will give me a few shekels. He comes home unannounced, at different times of the day, asking what I did all day, who I talked to on the phone and makes me report even about my [length of] shower time. He doesn't like most of my friends and made me stop contacting them. He deleted most of their numbers from my phone and wouldn't let me visit my mom. I am not working and he wouldn't let me study either. I feel like I am his daughter. I feel like I can't breathe!"

Rikki described how her husband curses, humiliates, and degrades her. Her account included blaming, daily belittling, confinement, various restrictions and prohibitions and imposing sexual demands. Forbidden to drive the car, denied information regarding the family's financial situation, forced to report daily her activities and prohibited to work outside the house, Rikki was relegated to the status of a minor. However, her husband did not employ any physical violence, nor did Rikki express any desire to seek a divorce.

For the first time as a lawyer, I felt I was not able to translate her story into a legal story, into a story that matched what I know of the law. Israel's law against domestic abuse does not cover this story of slowly building, non-physical abuse that occurs in many areas of life. After hearing Rikki, I decided it would become my life's mission to name and define these behaviors and create a law prohibiting them.

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Rikki is, for all outward appearances, a normal woman, just like you and me. She could be your neighbor, your daughter, your sister, your mother, your best friend. The women I met and interviewed over my years of research were just the same: married women

who could easily be someone you know or even yourself. After conducting interviews, I settled on a name for this behavior directed against women: Extreme Controlling Behaviors.

Though based on academic research, this book will speak to everyone. The first section explains my methodology and tells the full story of Rikki. The second part presents the life stories of six different pseudonymous women with whom I conducted interviews. Reading their words with empathy will shake any reader and hopefully lead to introspection into the reader's own life and the lives of others. Whether male or female, I believe everyone will find something to identify with from these courageous stories. The remaining two sections provide a theoretical framework to understand the phenomenon, followed by tools and suggestions to battle it legally and otherwise.

Based on these women's stories and life experiences, I categorized the indicators of domination that exemplify extreme controlling behaviors into six areas of life in which they occur:

1. **Verbal and emotional domination:** yelling, cursing, swearing, insulting, humiliating, ridiculing, embarrassing, shaming, making false accusations and/or subjugating a wife to an atmosphere of fear and threat.
2. **Financial domination:** limiting, deceiving or blocking entirely a wife's knowledge of the family's finances.
3. **Sexual domination:** sexual coercion or making constant sexual demands that objectify and disrespect the free will of the wife.
4. **Patriarchal domination:** constantly relating to a wife as a minor confined to the patronage of an adult male, including tight supervision of time and space and surveillance that infringes upon her right to privacy.
5. **Social domination:** hurting a wife's ability to create, sustain or nurture close relationships with family and friends. This may include isolating her by preventing contact with the general public, eavesdropping on and recording her conversations, demanding reports about her whereabouts and actions and limiting her freedom of movement inside and outside of the home.
6. **Personal development domination:** limiting education, acquisition of knowledge and training and opportunities for working outside the home.

Social phenomena often start with the private, individual experiences of people who frequently believe they are the only ones experiencing it—what we now call sexual harassment is a well-known example of this. Therefore, the first step toward revealing a novel social phenomenon is **Naming**: to identify other, similar cases; create a category grouping them together; and giving it a name and definition, complete with examples and behaviors associated with the phenomenon. The next steps often include prohibition and other legal and civil remedies.

In the case of Extreme Controlling Behaviors, this book illustrates that first step, Naming: from the isolated cases of many women describing their experiences, I created a category that now has a name, a definition and a set of behaviors and practices that typify it.

As a feminist, activist and lawyer, I then proceeded to place those definitions and six areas of life into a law delineating extreme controlling behaviors and suggesting compensation to those who have suffered. As these are the first steps, it is my hope and dream that further strides will follow by activists and professionals in all facets of social life.