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I Trusted You: Fully and Honestly Speaking of Gendered Assault and the Way to a Rape-Free Culture

Nadine Rosechild Sullivan Ph.D.

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* Do you have the vague sense, or the sure knowing, that there are sexual experiences that still haunt you? * Do you wonder if you're just one of the unlucky ones? * Do you wonder how this can happen in the United States? * How far is it okay to push someone sexually? * Is it ever alright to hit someone you love? Every day, millions face the emotional and physical horrors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, and their aftermath. In our rape- and male-violence-prone culture, millions of women (of all races and ethnicities), children (of all genders and ethnicities), and adolescent and (even) adult men (across all social divisions) are victimized – predominantly by male perpetrators enacting a hegemonic violent masculinity. The dual suffering of victims (the assault and its long-term aftermath) complicates both individual-level and societal-level mental health, and makes us all less safe. But this gendered violence is not an innate biological imperative of the human species. The anthropological evidence proves that our present culture of violence is not a genetic mandate. Men and women in other times and places have enacted gender and sexuality differently – demonstrating that our current relationship with gendered violence is cultural – not biological. We can redirect our culture. We – collectively – create it, and therefore, we can change our society. We can heal as individuals. Those who have been victimized can come to recognize that nothing in them caused their assailant to perpetrate. AND we can heal as a collectivity. We can learn to relate to each other differently. We can break our addiction to violence. Using a compelling mix of personal stories, pointed poetry, and the realities of social fact, "I Trusted You" guides the reader to grasp the magnitude of the problem, to understand the experience of sexual and interpersonal trauma, to recognize that the fault lies with the perpetrator (not the victim) of sexual or interpersonal violence, to see the importance of refusing to use sex and relationships to cause harm, and to conceive of different gendered interactions for our collective future. "I Trusted You" is a book to liberate those who have been perpetrated against – to heal their wounds and facilitate their transitions from victims to survivors. "I Trusted You" is a book to touch the hearts of (present, former, and would-be) perpetrators – to cause them to see – and be moved by – the shared humanity of their (actual or potential) victims. "I Trusted You" is a book to revolutionize the status of interpersonal, gendered, relationships in the early 21st century United States. It brings into focus the importance of the ways we think about each other – demonstrating that the beliefs we hold influence the actions we take. Grounded in the firm belief that we can change the social forces that still ail us, "I Trusted You" is a beacon of hope, illuminating the way forward.

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