

Bent But Not Broken: A Case Study

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Biography

The person I decided to interview is Georgina. Georgina was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in the 1940s into an upper middle class, Roman Catholic family. Georgina has five siblings and was raised with both her mother and father. While reading, you should note that all identifying information has been changed to protect the identity of the participant and her family. Georgina comes from a wealthy Puerto Rican family and grew up with financial stability. However, Puerto Rico in the 1950s was extremely oppressive towards Puerto Rico's darker-skinned residents. Georgina and her siblings were all fairly darker in skin tone.

Georgina lived in a wealthy neighborhood with fair-skinned residents; having this minute difference in complexion from her community meant that she and her siblings had to deal with racism. Many neighborhoods and shops would deny access to her and her siblings, and they would be followed, ridiculed, and verbally abused. Georgina stated that she and her sister Rose had objects thrown at their heads while walking home from school one afternoon.

Throughout all the oppression that Georgina went through, she managed to meet her soulmate. He was 17 while she was 14, and Georgina was clear that their love was forbidden. Her soulmate was a next door neighbor, and through secret meetings and his charm she managed to fall in love. At 16, Georgina married him and because she was so young, she was exiled from most of her immediate family. She and her husband moved to the South Bronx. Two years later, she gave birth to her first child, José; the couple then had two daughters.

A definitive part of Georgina's life was when she had a miscarriage in 1973. Georgina was a very religious person and this was the first instance that made her question her faith. She couldn't understand why this would happen when her faith in God was so strong. The doctors also discovered a small mass in her uterus. After a biopsy, the doctors found it was early stage uterine cancer, and performed a hysterectomy on Georgina at the age of 27. This was a very dark time for Georgina, and her husband did not take it well. He became verbally abusive, which ultimately led to physical abuse. Georgina felt trapped as she noticed her husband was becoming more verbally abusive towards their children. As a woman who knew very little English, had very little education, and truly nowhere else to go, Georgina felt scared and confused. Georgina told me that even though this was one of the darkest times in her life, her faith and beliefs helped her persevere.

In July of 1978, Georgina's husband was shot right in front of their apartment building. The most traumatizing factor of this event was that he was shot directly in front of their kids. The children had to undergo many years of extensive

therapy to move past seeing the death of their father. Georgina also had to move past many hurdles. She quickly learned English, and she entered a trade school and became an accountant so she could provide for her family. Her love life flourished, as she entered the dating pool for the first time. In 1984, Georgina remarried and then divorced in 1990. She told me that she rushed into this marriage to feel “complete” again. Georgina noticed her new marriage going the way of the old marriage with constant verbal abuse. Georgina realized she was now a skilled, independent woman and no longer needed a man to feel complete or safe. While the marriage to her second husband did not last romantically, they remain close friends. Georgina has not remarried since. At 48, Georgina took an early retirement due to a heart attack. As Georgina grows older, she deals with many serious medical conditions both physiologically and mentally.

Story

When prompted for a story, Georgina became very somber and quiet before saying anything. She told me that she wanted to tell a story that would help her relieve some of the guilt she has held her whole life. Georgina began to discuss her sexual abuse by an uncle when she was eight. Georgina stated that the abuse happened when her parents would allow him to babysit when her parents worked late. He would wait for her to get ready to shower for bed, and during that time he would make his attempts on her. Georgina went through this until she was 14 years old. Georgina said that she never said anything because she was afraid of getting in trouble. A young girl and her “purity” was a big deal during that era, so she didn’t want to be deemed a “puta” or “whore.” She also stated that her abuser was very well trusted in the community, and was the source of the family wealth because he helped create multiple businesses within the community.

Georgina said that he abused all of her sisters during that six-year span. Georgina stated that this was her biggest regret: she felt that since she was the oldest, she should have done something to protect her sisters. She felt like there was no escape from the abuse and things would never get better. Georgina said that she never told her parents fearing that she would be reprimanded for not being a virgin. As she reflects on her life, she feels that nothing would have changed if she had said something about the abuse. The abuser provided so much wealth for so many that her story would have done nothing but shine a negative light onto her family. God was used as a mask to shield people from things they didn’t want to see or experience. Georgina states that her faith is still strong in God, but her belief is different from that of her parents. She states that God allowed her the will to get out of that situation and made her the woman she is. God also allowed her to forgive the abuser in order to move on with her life. She no longer has to live in fear because of her strong faith and the belief that God had a plan for her.

When Georgina and her sisters got older they discussed all the things that happened to them during that period of life. The meeting was an eye opening experience because she discovered they all felt guilty for what happened to them. Each and every sister felt like they could have prevented or stopped the abuse in some way. And although all her sisters shared this horrid experience none of them

had spoken about the abuse. Georgina told her sisters about her suicidal thoughts and discovered she wasn't alone. She told me that she was astonished that all her sisters felt the same way. Georgina said that if she had taken her life, she couldn't imagine how that would have affected the trajectory of her sisters' lives.

I asked Georgina if she could remove that part of her past, would she? She said that she wasn't sure that she would. Georgina was clear that although this experience was traumatic and caused her so much heartache, that incident led her to be the woman she is today. At 14, while trying to leave the house to avoid her uncle she met her future husband. Without that incident she would have never found her "soulmate" or have any of her children. Georgina also mentioned that because of her experience, her faith is stronger than ever.

Personality Analysis

When assessing Georgina's life, Freud's view on psychoanalysis gives an interesting perspective on how her experiences affected her life. Freud believed that many of your childhood memories and your unconscious mind mold you into who you will become in your adult life, and in many aspects this is true for Georgina. Many of the traumatic experiences Georgina had as a child had a profound impact on her adult life, whether she was conscious of the event or not.

Many of the decisions Georgina made in her lifetime reveal aspects of her personality and mind that directly correlate with some of her life's occurrences. A great example of how Georgina's experiences have affected her life directly is her marriage. In Georgina's childhood, she was molested by an older man who was trusted by her family and community. She was fearful that her family would discover the incident and kept quiet. According to Freud, this incident would've been pushed into her unconscious mind. The unconscious mind can make a person make irrational decisions because it allows the id part of the personality to take control. An example of this would be a 16-year old girl getting married to a 19-year old (whom her family despised) and moving to New York, instead of dealing with the abuse she suffered from an older man who was loved by the community. This is exactly what Georgina did. She never admitted what happened to her, thus letting her instinct speak for her. She permanently escaped the abuse without ever having to face the issue head on. As a survivor of sexual abuse, Georgina had to deal with many battles between her id, ego, and superego early on in her childhood. Since Georgina was the oldest, she always felt her duty was to be the most responsible and to handle the situation. Georgina's conscience gave her immense guilt for not going into action. Georgina's superego was the reason for all those thoughts. Deep down, Georgina truly wanted to hurt her abuser and tell everyone what he did to her and her sisters. Georgina wanted to take matters into her own hands and make sure he couldn't hurt anyone again; she was willing to do anything. Georgina's id was on full display during those emotions. Ultimately, Georgina decided not to take the risk and kept her mouth shut. Although that wasn't an easy decision, she felt that at the end of the day her choice would benefit her and her sisters the most. Georgina wanted to be sure that change would happen, and

exposing the abuser couldn't guarantee that. Georgina's ego allowed her to make these rational, but tough, decisions.

Georgina also displays many of Freud's ego defense mechanisms. Georgina suffered a lot of heart-wrenching trauma in her life, and ego defense mechanisms helped protect her emotions. An example of a defense mechanism in action is, once again, her marriage. As a person who suffered severe physical and psychological trauma as a child, Georgina decided to repress what happened to her and attempt to move forward with her life. Instead of dwelling on her difficult past, she tried to escape the situation altogether and get married.

Another example of Georgina's defense mechanisms in play happened after her husband's death. Instead of allowing herself to grieve, she immediately went into "mom" mode. Since her children were witnesses to their father's murder, she made sure they were psychologically taken care of. Georgina also immediately began to learn English, and went back to school to get a financially stable career and support her family. Georgina even went as far as dating and attempting to find love again. When Georgina eventually was able to get her family life settled, and remarry, she realized she married someone who was just as abusive as her first husband. She found all these socially acceptable ways to mask her emotions and ended up being in a similar, unhappy marriage once again.

When talking to a person like Georgina you can't help but remain in awe of the wisdom she displays. Together we discussed many of the difficult and trying times of her life, and she displayed nothing but poise and strength when discussing those experiences. Georgina and I laughed, cried, and reflected in order to understand her and her story better. Allowing yourself to hear another person's life story truly is the best way to understand someone as a whole and is significant to understanding how they live their life.

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Cite as: Vazquez, B. (2018). Bent but not broken: A case study. *City Tech Writer*, 13, 74-77. Online at <https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/city-tech-writer-sampler/>