

A Nation of Victims

Amy Alkon interviews Dr. Ofer Zur

Amy Alkon: Hi, this is Amy Alkon, nationally syndicated advice columnist and host of the show, "Nerd Your Way to a Better Life!" with the best brains in therapy and research. As I wrote my syndicated column, there's this politically correct popular notion that intimate partner violence happens at random to random victims, kind of like an air conditioner falling out of a high window just as you're underneath walking the dog.

Now, that's actually not true nor is the politically correct warning that intimate partner violence can happen to anyone. The truth is, certain women especially, but people, are more likely to be victimized, and research shows a stew of contributing social, financial, and cultural factors. Poverty and prior experience of family violence are two biggies.

The model of political correctness, which is intended to protect the feelings of victims, actually makes people more likely to be victimized by stifling discussion about who becomes a victim and how they might prevent it. Tonight's guest, Dr. Ofer Zur, is anything but politically correct. He has some of the most eye-opening and breakthrough views on who becomes a victim or a victimizer and why, and what can be done about it. Hello, Dr. Zur?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Hello, Amy. Thank you for having me.

Amy Alkon: Thank you for being on. Now, I can tell from your accent that you're not from around here. Tell us a little bit about where are you from.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: What happened to my accent is it hasn't changed for the last 30+ years I have been here. Originally, my accent is from Israel which I left around 1979. Partly of why I left has to do with the topic of today, about victim and bystanders, et cetera. I lived different parts of the world, to Europe and Africa, visited the far East, et cetera; but my accent is originally from Israel.

Amy Alkon: Right. So, you've seen a wide variety of human behavior, not just in America. Let's talk about America, are we a nation of victims? Is that what we've become?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Compared to any country and any continent that I have visited around the world, we are a nation of victims. We live in a culture when everybody leapfrogged everybody else, just to try to get to this victim status where there are people who have been abused or people who have been mistreated, people with sexual orientation, women, disabled, LGBT's. We have a long list of people who have been wronged.

Some of them had been wronged. In my book, it doesn't mean necessarily they have to act as victims, but we have this culture that if we are not getting what we expect from the constitution, we are not happy, it must be somebody's fault. And of course, if it's somebody's fault, we might as well just sue them.

Amy Alkon: Well, they didn't actually read it. It says the pursuit of happiness, to allow the pursuit of happiness. It's not that we're going to just ... Everyone gets to be joyful as their right.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Yeah, but you know, when you go to the Philippines and they are hit with a hurricane or with typhoon or with the flood, nobody raise their rights to pursue happiness. So as the people who get the cold in Siberia and so as the untouchable in India. It is really an American phenomenon that the pursuit of happiness, but actually, people really translate it and read as "I'm entitled to be happy, and if not, it must be somebody's fault."

Amy Alkon: So, is that the American way of thinking about victims and victimization that, is it a sense of entitlement that they're coming from?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It is, and victims are ... Again, we need to separate before even we continue, that there are different kinds of victims.

Amy Alkon: Okay, we're going to get into that, the different kinds, because I love how you separate them. The different kinds of victims, the scale you developed. But I just wanted to talk a little bit of background about victims because it sounds like that we're kind of big babies in America.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: We are. It's an industry that is also being perpetuated by lawyers and by colleagues in my psychotherapy counseling social world. These are the two main industries that's perpetuating this kind of cultural victims. Of course, these two industries make a lot of money out of it as well.

Amy Alkon: Right. We're going to get into that too. And one thing I want to ask you, does it matter whether people feel like victims and feel entitled this way? Whether a culture is collectivist or individualist, that we're this individual

we have a very strong sense of individualism here. How come we're these big babies?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: You know, you're absolutely right. American, which is individualistic way of looking, is all what you need really is a horse, a gun, and heading West and you'll do fine. So, we don't have this kind of sense that, in most culture around the world and this is how human survived, is really what's most important is a communal sense of safety and communal sense of well-being. And that's not something that we definitely don't have a big emphasis here in the United States and less and less in the West as well.

So, you're absolutely right because if you have a sense of entitlement, it's individual entitlement, not necessarily a collective sense of how to survive and how to thrive as a group, as community.

Amy Alkon: Well, actually, this is something ... I'm in New York. I'm doing my show from the Hudson Hotel room because I'm here to be on Anderson Cooper's talk show tomorrow to talk about my book, "I See Rude People" and to talk about part of the problem is that we live in the vast strangerhood. We evolved to live in these small tribal communities where we look out for each other and now we're around strangers. So, people can behave badly and we don't have that, perhaps, part of this relates to what you're saying about the collectivism, that we don't have that collective culture and the support. People are these lone wolves out there, they're crying out to the legal system and psychotherapists.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: You are so right. I'm writing a book with my daughter at 27 years old who lives not far from here in Berkeley. And we talk about that when you don't know and you don't being seen and you're not being known to the other person, it's so much easier to be rude. For example, cyber-bullying. The heart of it is we are strangers to each other.

This may be online behavior but it's also happened in a big apartment, right there where you are in New York City, where people can live their entire life without knowing their neighbors. And rudeness tie to that. We are not known, we are not seen, we are not accountable, it's so much easier to be rude. It's harder to be rude if you live in the community where you have accountability, you have visibility, you have some consequences for rude behavior.

Amy Alkon: Absolutely.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: And top of what happened on the roads here. You can go into a rage road or you can be rude without really being known. Online culture

perpetuated it in an incredible way and this is, of course, relevant to all over the world.

Amy Alkon:

Oh, yes. And that happened to me where I've been attacked online in just sort of the rudest ways and it is anonymity but I found ... For me, the way to not be a victim is to act like you're not a victim and to at least try to go after people. I did this with the car thief and I did this with the people who were bullying me online and actually got some satisfaction. But, even if you don't, I think, and you will talk about this. I love your framing. But I want to get in to your five-level scale you developed for victims. This is very politically incorrect, you're very controversial on this but I think you're right, the five-level scale for victims. The first is what?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.:

I'm just so proud of this. My paper, 20 years ago, I tried to publish it. I've got over 18 rejections. It was so politically incorrect. Each rejection just let me know that I'm right on track.

So, what do I have in the typology of victim? The first, we need to acknowledge that some people at level one are true innocents. Belonging to this category are children who are sexually or physically abused, victims of murder or rape where their crime is unforeseen, unprovoked, and there's no relationship between the victim and the murderers or the rapists, severe mentally ill people who gets hurt or exploited. It's easier to remember the people who are children, that would be the most classic example of innocent victim.

The second level is the most controversial level. What goes in this level, for example, is a woman who end up in domestic violence and get up hurt. This is already an intimate violence. Women who get into this relationship often after working with me in therapy will admit that they knew he was violent with his former wife, with his former girlfriend, and they just thought he's going to change because he would love them.

Also, the history of many of these women is they were involved in other abusive relationships. In some regard, the said statement is that some of these women choose the men because he's abusive, not in spite of it. That takes a lot of courage to explore because politically incorrect, the only way to help the women, is will help them take responsibility.

When I was arrested in some far-away country, in Africa, where Israel did not have a political and diplomatic relationship, I told myself, "I shouldn't have been there." I didn't do anything wrong, but still I shouldn't have been there. So, if you go to a bad neighborhood at night with the wrong skin color and you get into trouble, guess what.

My son talked about a situation in college where girls get drunk regularly every Friday and Saturday night and then they are so upset that they end up in somebody's bed. They are not one. They are not innocent victims. They drank themselves knowing that this is an absolute clear risk that they are going to have sex with somebody that they don't know and they won't remember. They don't get an innocent victim. And, I know, you talk about it in this language but it's very politically incorrect.

Amy Alkon: I just love that you're saying this because this is what I do in my life and I think people need to do this. I have some guy in New York, I used to live here. I used to live on Greenwich and Canal which is near the UPS loading docks. And when I lived there, I was very street smart and I would only walk down Greenwich Street to go home when the guys were there at the loading dock but I came back from California and said, "How wonderful I'm in New York, I'll go see my old place." I forgot all my street smarts and some guys followed me and they just grabbed my boob. So, I wasn't horribly raped or anything but it was very upsetting and I screamed and he ran and I was so upset I had my first cellphone, I dialed 411 (laughs).

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Well, but you ask yourself what the hell were you doing there?

Amy Alkon: So, that's what I did afterwards. I said, "You idiot." You don't get to walk around New York like this and this is what I love about what you do. And this column that I wrote about ...

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: So, he's responsible to grabbing you ...

Amy Alkon: Right.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: He is not innocent by no means but you are dumb enough the same way I was dumb enough ...

Amy Alkon: Exactly.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: ... To put ourselves in a situation. We are not innocent victim. Let me give you the most provocative of all. You are Jewish, I'm Jewish, so we can talk this language, perhaps. How come 10,000 Jews in small concentration camps that were spread all over Europe cannot overcome 20 guards?

Amy Alkon: That is an amazing question.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Did the Jews organize themselves, made it kind of easy for the Germans? I can talk like that because Israel came out of the ashes of the Holocaust

and now, the motto of Israel is the Holocaust will never happen again. But when I look at my grandparents, I look at my grandparents of how they went as lambs to slaughter, and 10,000 Jews cannot overcome 20 armed ... And so what? That's 50 would have been killed. You can just walk out. As an Israeli, it's incomprehensible for me. I got more flak about the Jewish analysis than the battered woman.

Amy Alkon: Well, let me ask you, what is your theory on it? That's incredible. They had guns in these camps, but like you're saying, they're just 20 guards. I didn't really realize how few guards there were. That's factual, 20 guards?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Some of them were just almost all they will have and some of the work camps and stuffs that you can just ... Even if they have 500 guards with 20,000-30,000 people in the camp, you just walk out. So, some will be killed as they went. This is something that's very upsetting for me. My grandparents were there. So, I'm talking with my heart aching on that.

It's not an anti-Semitic. It's not anything like that but we need to think about when people get victimized, and whether it's our daughters if they go to college, or you and I being dumb enough to go to the wrong neighborhood in the wrong time, where would we take responsibility?

I got wounded in '73 war. I was a lieutenant in Israeli army. I was a paratrooper. And I asked myself, "Why did I want to go to war? What excited me about it?" I could have claimed the victim, somebody shot me in the calf, and poor me, blah, blah, blah, took me years to rehab and all those stuff. I asked myself, "Ofer, why were you so excited to go to war?" And I needed to own it. In some way, why did they go to this far-away country in Africa?

Amy Alkon: Let me just take you back for a second because I want to know, do you have a theory about why, what you're saying about the Holocaust. There are 20 guards and whole bunch of Jews, that why did they not do more? Why did they just stay there in the camps?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: I think that it was part of this theory that the Jews at time ... Again, Israel is exactly the anti-thesis to that, not to make wave. Because the programs will come any moment, so we'll try to make peace even though ... I think, it was kind of within the history of the Jews and being kind of more the people of the spirit or a people of the book rather than people of forces and guns.

The Jewish, my grandparents included, could not really handle this kind of organized Holocaust and to rebel where Israel will not tolerate this

day. So, I think, we have a long history of the Jews and the character we have more Nobel Prize but we don't have really great necessarily wrestlers. I don't know, I mean, I'm being crude here.

Amy Alkon: No, no. I agree with you. We're not Mohammad Ali's for the most part. There were like two boxers who were Jewish and they didn't do so well. Let me take you back to the scale because is fascinating. The five-level scale you developed for victims. So, first thing, ...

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: ... In number two, but you knew what you are stepping in.

Amy Alkon: No, no, absolutely. But let me just review those for anybody who just came on. I'm talking with Dr. Ofer Zur. He is very politically incorrect but I think he's got really eye-opening and breakthrough views on who becomes a victim or victimizer and why and what can be done about it.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It's so important to understand that this scale geared to help women who choose abusers. Because if a woman claims innocent, she'll just choose another one. I know women like that because he goes to prison, guess what, the next one is another abuser.

Amy Alkon: I just want to take a moment to point out too that men also are victims of domestic violence. You know this. You point this out. When I wrote this column, I looked at the stats for 2005. So, 513 women in the US were murdered by boyfriends who are men they were dating but not married to, and 164 men were murdered by girlfriends who are women they were dating but not married to. Men are victims of domestic violence and much of it goes unreported. We'll talk about that a little bit later. But, people often see, they think of like just the battered woman, and there are battered men and dead men who are killed in domestic violence, and these same points in the scale apply to them.

I'm just going to review your points just for anyone who just came on the five level scale. The first are innocent victims, children who were molested. They have done nothing to create the situation. The second is a very controversial one. The victims who contribute some to their victimization. And you say, your third one is shared responsibility. Tell us about that.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: You know, the people who played the ... the co-alcoholic will be a good example. The co-alcoholic, the complaint about the alcoholic guy or girl, whatever it is, but they're equally responsible. They're just partner into the dance of co-alcoholism. Men who contract sexually transmitted disease from a prostitute. Yeah, she transmitted it. He chose, he walked

into the situation and accepted the danger. He doesn't get much empathy for me. I mean, you'll get treatment but I'm not sure that I'll do a lot of 'ooh' and 'aah' with him. Youngsters who play the chicken game are people who do these kinds. They are equally responsible to the hurt inflict and to the hurt that they sustain.

Amy Alkon: Okay, and then number four is a person who is more guilty than the person who is being victimized.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Yeah, so this would be, for example, the women who battered their husbands and you're absolutely right. The numbers are shocking ... By the way, the numbers are more women are battering men than men batter women, but the problem is that the men do not end up in the hospital and do not end up dead in the same number.

Amy Alkon: Also, they minimize it. For cultural reasons, men are supposed to laugh it off if the woman throws a plate at you. And so, there's a lot of just shrugging it away.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: For example, I feel bystanders belong in number four. This is complex, like if you're standing in the sideline and you don't fight for justice and you don't do the right thing and you get hurt at the end of the day, you have also contributed some to victimization. So, if your country is doing something immorally but then you end up suffering, you contributed to that indirectly as being what I call a passive bystander.

Amy Alkon: I don't know if you know about this but I actually, I got a letter from a lawyer trying to get \$500,000 from me for a TSA worker who groped me some place, that you don't get to touch me unless you buy me a drink and tell me I'm pretty. And she touched me there four times abusively and I screamed, "You raped me, you sexually violated me," and I blogged about it, and I am shocked that there are very few people who do that who speak up. Our fourth amendment, our constitutional rights are so important. It's so valuable and I value them and so I feel compelled to be civilly disobedient at the airport. And all these other people are so polite as they're being bent over. Their hair is being groped.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: And you're right, the passive bystander and you took a stand. But, there are many people just chose not to. When they end up suffering, they don't get my empathy. Number five is the people who will just commit crimes, unprovoked, and not necessarily within the relationship. Rapists, mercenaries, and people who smoke and get lung cancer. They don't get a lot of 'ooh' and 'aah' for me necessarily. I mean, it's their prerogative to do that.

People who commit suicide, who consciously choose suicide. I don't know. I climbed Kilimanjaro and I'm not sure my heart after I had a heart attack. I took a risk because then I went on the glacier in Alaska and now I'm contemplating going with my son to Nepal to do some incredible motorcycle at 18,000 feet.

Amy Alkon: That was incredible.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: I'm going to take responsibility because I'm [inaudible 00:22:33]. I'm knowing what I'm stepping into it and nobody will need to do ooh and ahh for me either.

Amy Alkon: Right. In other words, you know the trade-offs and you accept them.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: I'm taking responsibility.

Amy Alkon: Yes. We have a caller. We're going to take this call but I wanted to first talk to you, I love this. You say you take the existentialist view to trauma and crisis. First, tell us what is existentialism, as it relates to this.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Okay, in one sentence or less.

Amy Alkon: Yeah, briefly.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: I think that perhaps without taking the big dive into the definition is that I think that trauma and difficulties in life and sometimes facing death is part of our existence. It's not a failure that you need to file a lawsuit. Part of our existence is to deal with suffering and to deal with traumatic events that happen as part of life. But again, in therapy is calling PTSD when somebody caused some hurt feelings even though real PTSD needs to belong when people encounter a death or in a situation that could have killed them, but now, everybody has a little hurt feeling or gets very angry, therapists give them PTSD because they get reimbursed for that. Soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq deserve to get the PTSD diagnosis because they encounter death.

Amy Alkon: Sorry, let me stop you in that because we're getting off track because we're going to talk about PTSD and because I love how you talk about what's legit PTSD and what's not. But we're talking about the existentialist view because I love this. So, existentialism, basically that there's no inherent meaning in our life, meaning we need to construct meaning and so you use this in therapy to ... You say that we need to embrace crisis to reconstruct meaning. And that's very important.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Very important. If I got a heart attack and I face death, it will be just a fantastic opportunity to construct my bucket list. And I did it rigorously. As you can see, I've been in summit of Kilimanjaro with my adopted daughter and my son. I went on the glaciers. I'm writing a book with my daughter because every day may be my last day.

So, I got this gift of facing death, that I'm going to give you everything I have right now because this may be my last interview. And I live my life because I face death both in war as well in Africa, as well as my heart attack. And these crises, I'm not complaining, I'm not kwetching about it, I'm not blaming anybody. I'm saying these opportunities of crises brought me to live life fully. And you're going to get the best of me right now, today.

Amy Alkon: Well, great. Well, I feel it. See, what I look at and found in your work that I do is that when I have something bad happened to me and this seems to be what you do at the reframing, that I look at it, I take a positive view. I say, "How can I, okay, this happened. That really sucks." But, how do I look at this so it's better. You know how do I look at this and say, "Okay, I'm going to learn from this. I'm going to be different." And that's the thing you do instead of the whining.

Now, we have a call here from Marc "Animal" MacYoung. And, Greg, can you put Marc on? Marc, are you there Marc?

Marc: I guess so.

Amy Alkon: So, what's your question?

Marc: Well, I work on the other end of this business. And that's the dealing with violence, dealing with the realities of it. And one of the things that I've seen is the commercialization of victimhood. I think, that would be a good way of putting it, that the idea of promoting the victim has actually become an industry. And I'd like you guys some feedback on it.

Amy Alkon: Well, actually, he talks a lot about this. It's the lawyers and psychotherapist. So, take it away, OZ.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: You know, you're absolutely right. It is commercialization of victimhood. We have therapists who give PTSD diagnosis to everybody. We have lawyers who would sue on your behalf, will file a lawsuit on your behalf. And it's a big business. You're absolutely right and I'm not sure what end you are working on that, but both of us are working on the same end.

That it's an industry and it has become a culture as well as commerce. So, I can't say anything more.

Marc: Well, the thing is, I got told to go work with women crisis centers. And I looked at them, I said, "I'm sorry, they don't have any money to pay me to teach." And his response was, "There's \$4 billion a year granted by certain acts of congress to this." And my first question is, "Where is all that money going?"

Amy Alkon: Well, also I hear you saying something important because I looked into this a lot, women's crisis centers. This is a big problem for me. There are many men who are the victims of violence and they are often not allowed in these shelters. I think that this is something that really needs to change and I don't think it's right that we are not looking out for them as well because they are victimized.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It's also with the complexity with the women shelter which I am highly supportive is a way for women who are under physical threat, to find a place for them and the children. The problem is that often, these crisis centers are stuffed with women who have been abused themselves and they still feel the victim and a lot of men-blaming that happened there. What happened when they come to the shelter, there is rarely somebody who say, "Did you know, you have been here with your former boyfriend, and the boy before this one, and the boy before this one. This is the fourth time that you come to the center each time with a different man. Do you think that this is something that you are choosing, contributing, creating?"

I'm very supportive of places for women to get physically safe. There is no doubt that we need something like that. My concern is that nobody or very rarely within these centers that will say, "Oh, hello, Ms. Blah, blah, you have been here before. This is the same man?" "No, no, this is different one." And different children from different men and it's like where are you taking responsibility for appearing again and again in the shelter rather than taking responsibility for choosing men or interacting with men that in a way will lead to domestic violence.

So, domestic violence is not an innocent person and a perpetrator. It's much more complex, you choose, to see each other from a distance. And it's tragic, no doubt about it. I have to tell the women that they are innocent victim doesn't help them. Sending into prison may be the right thing because you should not physically hurt the woman, but it doesn't necessarily help the victim not to choose another one.

Amy Alkon: Part of the problem here, as we talk about ... And thank you, Marc, for your call, is that exploring the victim, the psychology or the dynamic of victimhood has been suppressed and centered because it has been equated with victim blaming. So, we're not really allowed to talk about this but you deal with these people. How do you, when somebody's come to you and they're a repeat victim. They pick terrible partners, terrible women, terrible men who do violence to them and there's this diad, what's your solution there? How do you fix this?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It's very hard to work with them because people lack, the status of victimhood as you mentioned earlier, it's not something that people are ready to shed very easily in terms of the good time to talk, what's so hard about shedding it. So, it's very hard for me to deal with victims because what are the basic stance of victims? Victims, one, they are not responsible for what happened to them. So, they are blamers. Number two, they are morally right because he shouldn't hurt me or I shouldn't be hurt. They don't feel themselves accountable.

Amy Alkon: Wait, can you just go back to the morally right. So, you shouldn't be punched in the nose by your partner whether they are man or woman. So, when you say, they're always morally right. What do you mean by that?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: You know, they have their moral high ground. It means somebody hurt me and I didn't deserve it because I'm innocent. Something kind of moral high ground that they have.

Amy Alkon: And when you talk about before ...

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: ... immorally by hurting me and I'm not responsible. I did not contribute, I didn't do anything.

Amy Alkon: Okay, you're talking about before, how people choose, they are drawn to abusive partners. I'm sorry, that made me interrupt you six times.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Actually, I'm talking about the victim mentality. You asked me how do I work with them. So, I recognized that they don't feel responsible, many victims. They feel morally right. They feel completely unaccountable. They seek empathy, "Oh, he hurt me," or "She hurt me," and "poor me," it's a poor me approach. And they have this moral indignation for being wronged.

So, it's a high ground that many people ... I'll say something very outrageous but it's true... some people or many people will hold on to this moral high ground, will die and will not let go of that.

Amy Alkon: Right.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: I've worked with a woman who was hurt by her three husbands, originally by a brother and a step father, and married a few of them. Two of them end up in prison and then while I was working with him, she was dating an inmate on death row who killed his ex-wife. I knew where she's heading.

Amy Alkon: What's her attraction to these men? What's the attraction?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Attraction is that you get to be morally, in these five elements, because think about it, if you are not responsible, you are morally right, you are not accountable, you deserve empathy, and you have the sense of moral indignation, it's fantastic. It's terrible but it's also, they are not responsible and you're always right. So, some people will die, but will not let go of this element of being the victim, many people who would die.

So, working with the victim is not easy. I send them to my articles and if they don't call me back, I know it's not a good match, if they are ready to work on that, they will not get too much oohs and ahhs with me but I have people who say I don't want to be this victim. I read your article. It pissed me off but you're right. Now, let's do the work. But it's not very easy in this culture. I mean, it's just not even, I must admit it doesn't happen even too often.

Amy Alkon: It seems like a great attention source for the people who are into this, that their identities of victim, they get the sympathy. And so, I can see how that would be hard.

I want to talk about, you say that the incessant cry for empathy and justice by the victim industry reduces our capacity to deal with genuine victims, such as children who are molested, women who are raped and beaten, immigrants who are mistreated. Can you tell us about that?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Because we cast our net so wide, that everybody is a victim just because somebody cut in front of them on the road or somebody hurt their feelings, is that we are really missing on where children being abused, when women are being raped by strangers, not date rape. Date rape is

already, I don't condone it by no means. It's crime and together, date rape is already an interaction. She should have known the same way you should have known when you went back to New York and I should have known going to Africa.

Date rape is already moving it away from the innocent victim because there's a history there. It's relationships, there's interaction, there's tension between them. When we don't have any differentiation between true victims or people who thrive on being a victim, we treat everybody as the same, we can't do justice to the people who indeed need our help, who are the true victim; the children, the women who are being molested or attacked by stranger, the men who are truly innocent in certain situations.

We don't have the differentiation and then everybody is a victim and we don't help the true victim and we don't help the people who claim to be victims not to be a victim as we talked earlier about domestic violence.

And these women, perhaps, have been victims when they were young for sexual abuse. They were true innocent victim. But then some people, you ask me how do a victim being made or being born, we don't know the answer. Some women who have been sexually abused and becoming nicely sexually active adults and some women who have been sexually abused and become victims or man-hating or whatever it is.

Some of it is resilience. Some people come into the world with more resilience than others. But then, we have this culture that perpetuates this victimization that doesn't help people heal and empower but helps them stay with this victim mode. You sent the men to domestic violence but you don't send the women to domestic violence as if he was just punching the mirror.

Amy Alkon: Now, we have a question ... sorry, go ahead. I didn't mean to cut you off. Go ahead.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: No, go ahead.

Amy Alkon: We have a question that came by email. What about the men and women who lose a loved one, a parent, a partner and never recover. They become permanent victim, some of them.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: This is a game, just kind of, wake up, people die. People die as we speak in the Sahara Dessert. People die in Delhi as we speak. People die in Nairobi. People die and people lose loved ones and to move losing loved

ones to a trauma is wrong. Trauma is when you face death. It's an event that could change your life you lose a loved one, but it does not mean that you face your own death. Let's look at this, most of them, losing loved one is facing-their-own-death kind of opportunity. It's an opportunity to grow whether to feel closer to God or closer to life the way I survive, the way I look at death.

Losses and trauma can be fantastic venues to live with more joy, more fulfillment, more presence. It doesn't mean that grief is not part of it.

Amy Alkon: Right.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: ... Disabling grief.

Amy Alkon: This is what you talked about before about the existentialist take to trauma that you construct meaning out of things. I had a friend, a close friend who died and I'm grateful for her and I looked at the things she gave me and I put it in a perspective of gratitude for what I had instead of just focusing and whining about what I lost, which to me is considerable. But, I mean, she's gone. Like you said, it's such an Israeli view, people die.

This is actually the perfect lead into your views on PTSD. You think that PTSD is way, way over-diagnosed?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It's over-diagnosed for simple reasons. The diagnostic manual that we all use as the Bible for psychotherapy and psychiatry said that a person must experience weakness or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threat of death or serious injuries or threat to physical integrity. So, just losing somebody or watching September 11 on a television in LA does not mean that you face a potentially deadly threat.

The people who come from Afghanistan indeed may suffer from PTSD. Now, we need to remember that, that not everybody who confront death suffer from PTSD. I was in battle, I got shot at. I almost died. I did not develop PTSD. I tried to make it to try to work into peace in the Middle East. I tried to understand my attraction to war. I went all the way to Moscow to lecture about psychology of peace and war. I tried to make meaning out of me encountering death.

Many people who were in Vietnam went back to Vietnam to the same villages where they killed children and the women and help resurrect the villages there. This is to make meaning out of their trauma. They faced death and did horrible things, but they try to do good.

Amy Alkon: Now, you say that Israelis don't get PTSD so much.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: More and more, we see more of that in some regard. When you are in occupying capacity, you end up sometimes often hurting civilians or children and it can be really, really traumatizing as well or facing your own death not in combat. I think this is a lot of what we see right now, the difficulties of what's happened in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's not because they are bad soldiers, they got into situation that's horrible.

The Valley of Eloy is the best movie that described some of the situations that somebody either stopped their Humvee on the road or you drive over a 2-year-old. You can't win this one. If you stop, you die. If you run over, you have to live for the rest of life by killing a 2-year-old.

Amy Alkon: Horrible, horrible.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: This is a horrible junction that does not happen in regular combat but it's happened as part of occupying. And, I wish the military here or militaries around the world will understand that soldiers are being put in the situation that almost unmanageable as a human being. It's a fantastic movie, The Valley of Eloy.

Amy Alkon: What is the movie about?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It's about soldiers who're coming back from Iraq and they kill one of them. And the father tried to find out who killed his son and how. And he goes all the way back to riding this Humvee and a citizen put a little child on the road so their Humvee will stop so they can really blow it up. And you need to choose, are you driving over a 3-year-old or are you stopping? Now, this is trauma.

Amy Alkon: Yeah.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: When I faced similar trauma in my life, I asked myself why did I put myself in this situation? What's wrong with the situation? How can I not be a passive bystander to the situation? And created a whole slew of torment but meaningful. It gave me meaning and direction and become an expert on psychology of war and psychology of peace. I talked to soldiers who come back from this war or go to this war.

This is what you're going to face. There's no easy solution. It's horrible and there's very little you can do about it if you go there.

- Amy Alkon: And I think there's maybe sort of a key to why maybe Americans don't deal well with this that we don't see that introspective as a culture. Do you agree with that as a possible cause?
- Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Again, we don't understand the trauma and crises are just normal. In Israel, we have September 11 every few months of some sort. And as I've mentioned before, hundreds of thousands being killed in typhoons or in floods in the Philippines, in the Sahara desert or in Tibet. We see death as a failure of some sort, that somebody has to pay for it.
- Amy Alkon: Actually, with the whole TSA thing, part of my theory about that about why people don't speak up, our constitutional rights are so valuable and people do not speak up. And I think that part of the reason for that is that we are so physically comfortable in America. I mean, even people who are poor have TV's and iPhones and everything like that. We're not used to being uncomfortable in any way. I think, I don't know if you agree with me, but I think that might be part of the reason that people are these bystanders.
- Ofer Zur Ph.D.: I think it's kind of ... People succeed to get scared after September 11 to things that are completely do not make sense in my book. From security and from personal violation on all fronts. They do not make any sense. I don't think that what they do in the airport increase our security.
- Amy Alkon: I agree with you there. But people are not standing up and I'm hoping that they will.
- Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Because we are comfortable and there is incredible obedience to authority and got up, the people say, "Oh, there's a threat." The threat is kind of being used as a way for us to let us be victimized without being protesting.
- Amy Alkon: I want to talk about, there's this myth that a majority of women who end up killing their husbands are doing it self-defense. I'm just doing this from memory. Dr. Barbara Oakley who wrote, "Cold-Blooded Kindness," she has this great quote from the prosecutor who's saying, "Well, okay, I guess she self-defensed him in the back and then she self-defensed him in the head." And so, you talked about these women who killed their husbands...
- Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Actually, we do have the research on that. Most women who killed their husbands, it's not like a burning bed kind of image of innocent women who was. Most of the women or a huge percentage, about 50% of them, have been imprisoned before for other violent crimes. Many of them

committed crimes as teenagers. So, killing the husband was not the first felony.

Most of them were also abused as girls, so there was a time they were true victims. I'm inviting people to look at the complexity and not to look and not to do this gender split of innocent versus perpetrator, kind of some would perpetuate and is all guilty and the other one is victim. Every time there's domestic violence, there is an interaction of some sort. They had appeared that they dated before that so he and she got to see each other. They got to hear stories from the former partners and if they didn't get the stories, they should have gotten the stories.

I talk right now to young women who go to college and they're kind of surprised as if I take a very strong stance about, "Are you going to drink yourself into oblivion that you're going to get up in bed with somebody else? Are you going to take responsibility?" Because sometimes they get up in the morning, they're all indignant about it.

Amy Alkon: Camille Paglia talks about that too. That is like driving in New York City and leaving your keys on your car hood and then complaining that somebody stole your car.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Exactly, and in this case, actually, it's more because the way they get dressed when I was visiting colleges, it's more inviting than even leaving the keys on top of the car. It's actually putting in the ignition and starting it.

Amy Alkon: Yes.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: To be crude a little bit in this regard. How do you help these young women be responsible to what happens to them?

Amy Alkon: How do you?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: It's a huge part of the culture and it's very, very hard, as I said, because they like to do that and too often to get indignant. I do it with my children. I do it with my friends. I do it with my clients. "Are you going to think ahead of time? Are you going to leave the keys in the car in some parts of New York? Are you going to walk into this neighborhood whatever the neighborhood is?" I will tell my older son, "Is it a big truck or a small truck coming your way? I want you to think about it." Because he's a little bit like me, he's headstrong, really, really strong and powerful. I said, just realizing that big truck or small car coming your way and then you can make really informed decision. This is the kid that I

climbed in Kilimanjaro with. So, I want you to make risk assessment so he's not a victim when he encounters the big truck.

Amy Alkon: Right. So, you're helping this people explore this. I think my understanding they have problem. It's very important by asking what their contribution is and also I have a friend who is a police officer who works domestic violence and she said to do deal with the defensiveness of these domestic violence victims, she would send them to focus groups where they would hear other people talk because instead of saying, look, you have to leave this person, this man or this woman who was abusing you, you say that and the person said, "No." They instantly get defensive, that by putting them with other people and letting them hear other people and hearing how screwed up other people's lives are that that would help them see that their lives are screwed up instead of being faced front and center with it.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Some of the groups are fantastic because sometimes, when somebody will not take responsibility for themselves, they will hold other people responsible. They'll say, I mean, "Why didn't you leave him before you had children, not four children later?" "Why didn't you leave him when you saw his ex-girlfriend with a black eye?" Sometimes, but as I say, regretfully, it does not happen too much in the shelters. And my concern is that it doesn't help the women.

Amy Alkon: That they're in a sort of a hot bed of victimization, that it's all that thinking that nobody gets them out of it.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Yeah, yeah. And actually puts them at risk, in harm's way by not holding them, helping them to see their responsibility, the pattern.

Amy Alkon: Yeah, I think that it's very important.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: They have started when they were young people. They can be started when mother or father, or brother or whoever abused them as young, but to come out of this sense of victimization with sense of efficacy and sense of integrity and sense of wholeness. rather than I've been wronged and I deserved.

Amy Alkon: Yes. The accountability seems so essential to this. I wanted to ask you, when you work with couples where there's been domestic violence, you look at what the system is between them, you say. You say that violence is systemic.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Definitely in this kind of situation of domestic violence, I try to help couples see what do they bring to the situation and more importantly or what's the history in regard to violence, both the victim or perpetrator or bystander, and then I try to show them the interaction effect. When you say that, he's going to say that to think it and you're going to say that and he's going to do that. So, I'm going to show them the system of violence, I call it.

If they understand how each of them contribute, hopefully, they can understand how each of them can withdraw from that. What I found out that in many couples, one of them will get it and the other one often wouldn't, because the identity is a victim and they'll do anything in the world to continue to be victimized. So, often, the people, it's like a co-alcoholic, alcoholic system. When the alcoholic is still drinking, the co-alcoholic often they cannot tolerate not to be the super responsible, not to be the good one, not to be the blamer one, not to be the victim one.

This is why Alanon is good in some regard because it doesn't allow you much victimhood. So, when I work with this couple, I focus not on blame and not who is the victim with the perpetrator, but on the system of violence, how both contribute to what I call the dance of violence, which can be deadly.

Amy Alkon: Now, can you help the victim change their identity?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Sometimes, what do they say? How many psychologists it takes to change a light bulb?

Amy Alkon: I don't know that one.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: The light bulb has to want to change. So, I cannot say that my claim to fame will be to change victims because as I said, sometimes, victims will die but will still feel entitled to empathy and feel morally right. It's not that simple. But also, it's an American phenomenon. When I spent time in Singapore or China or Somalia or Kenya or Europe, I don't see the same kind of people fighting to get this, "I'm more victim than you are," kind of the American way of everybody leapfrogging over everybody else.

So, it is in some regard, in America, a unique phenomenon that you don't see in most parts of the world including Europe.

Amy Alkon: Is forgiveness a must in order to heal?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: That's a fantastic question. I didn't forgive the Nazis to what they did to my grandparents. I don't need to forgive them. If they feel guilty about it, it's a good guilt. It's appropriate guilt. It's not neurotic. It's not spiritual guilt, it's appropriate guilt. So, I don't need to forgive them or not to forgive them. I just don't want to be haunted by that. I don't want to do resentment. My definition of resentment is when you take the poison and you hope the other person dies.

Amy Alkon: Right.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: So, I don't want to do resentment because it will hurt me but I don't feel a big need to forgive them either but I'm not being haunted by that, if it makes sense.

Amy Alkon: Yeah.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: So, sometimes forgiveness can be very good and sometimes, I can do it without forgiveness. But the most important is that you don't carry resentment and victims hold resentment.

Amy Alkon: And I guess, tell me if I'm describing this right, that you put it behind you with perspective [inaudible 00:57:33] not repeat whatever mistake you've made.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Absolutely. I will learn from what happened. This is a huge part of why I study Psychology of Enmity with my friend, Sam Keen, for many, many years. We partner on this exploration. So, I studied it and I make it a game going back to the trauma that happened to my tribe, I tried to understand the meaning of that and to try to help people understand both system of violence and the psychology of hate. So, I took this upsetness that I had with what happened in the Holocaust of my grandparents and translated it to an exploration of the dynamic of hate and where I can go and teach or facilitate.

Amy Alkon: That's a wonderful example. We have one last question, we don't have too much time. If we run a little over, people in the chat room will be able to pick it up in podcast, you say that we can teach resilience. To increase resilience through therapy and you tell that's how to do this, to increase resilience or how to look at a story. Can you just tell us about that?

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: The short version is, I will help the person tell the story of their lives not as a victim but as a hero.

Amy Alkon: Wow.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: So, it's not poor me went to this country and got arrested. It's me really not evaluating the situation and wanting more adventure and more extreme stuff that I didn't realize that Israelis do not have diplomatic relationship and there's actually a lot of hostility between these two countries. So, how dumb I am? So, if you walk into East Oakland as any kind of folly person at two o'clock in the morning, you tell the story of why you chose to do that.

Amy Alkon: Right.

Ofer Zur Ph.D.: Why did they choose to do that? Not as a victim but help them tell the story of choices, conscious or unconscious choices, as a story of contemplation; again, conscious or unconscious. I wrote my story, I enacted my story and now, I'm taking responsibility for the next chapter. I'm the author of my story. An author is authority and author comes with responsibility.

Amy Alkon: Wow, that's really fantastic. Thank you so much, Dr. Ofer Zur for being with us today. This is a really illuminating show. This is Amy Alkon, Advice Goddess Radio.