



EPISODE 86: Crime Analyst Expert Laura Richards Joins Mandy To Shine Light on Coercive Control

Mandy Matney 00:00

Today's episode of COJ is heavy and incredibly important. This actually might be one of the most important episodes that we have ever done because I believe that this discussion breaking down coercive control could save lives, and maybe help change the justice system for the better. On today's show, we tackle coercive control with world renowned expert Laura Richards. Through her brilliant podcast Crime Analyst and her tireless work teaching law enforcement across the globe, Laura Richards has turned the lights on coercive control and help millions of people like me understand the issue and identify the pattern of high risk behaviors associated with it. As Laura Richards explains, coercive control is much more than emotional abuse. It is psychological warfare and the consequences are too often deadly. Coercive control has been a key phrase in the Mica Francis aka Mica Miller case to properly describe the level of abuse that Mica and her family allege JP put her through. For a reminder on April 27th, Mica Francis a 30-year old woman from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina was found dead with a gunshot wound in a state park near Lumberton, North Carolina. Her death was ruled a suicide by local police. A week later, however, we have confirmed with multiple sources that the FBI is investigating Mica's case, including details surrounding her death. That investigation, according to sources, appears to be heating up, which is a really good thing. While we still have so many questions about Mica's manner of death and the quick police investigation that followed, our podcast True Sunlight and Cup of Justice have focused more on exposing what led to our death and who, if anyone could be held responsible. Mica was in the process of divorcing her husband, Pastor JP Miller when she was found dead, and she left an entire paper trail documenting their allegedly abusive relationship leading up to her death. In March 2024 alone Mica

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reported three separate incidents of JP allegedly stalking and harassing her. She reported this to the court and to the police, and nothing was done. In fact, in April 2024, she reported another tracker on her car believed to be put there by her estranged husband JP police told her that it was a civil issue and they refused to even log it and to evidence the laws need to change and Mica's family is working on this with the recent announcement of Mica's law aimed at defining and punishing coercive control in South Carolina while educating officers on identifying these kinds of behaviors before it is too late. For women and Mica's position, Laura has dedicated her life's work to passing coercive control laws around the world, including the first federal law in the UK and 2015. On today's episode, we dive into everything that you need to know about coercive control and how our system must change to save women out there like Mica. And by the way, just as we started recording, a leaf blower decided to make a special appearance and hopefully you can listen through the racket. Check the links in the description to learn more about Laura Richards and the concepts we discussed in this episode. Let's get into it. Okay, I am here with the Laura Richards and I am a big fan of her. And I'm also proud to call her my friend. Laura, what we do at the beginning of Cup of Justice is we say, Cups up, so cups up, Laura. Thanks for joining us today. We have a lot to go over, as we have both been talking and covering a little bit the Mica Miller case, which I am now referring to as the Mica Francis case because she was trying to change her name and I want to respect that for her. Coercive control, which I know is your life's work in something that is you're the leading expert of course of control as far as I can see, and I've done a lot of research on it in the last couple of weeks, especially I was at the press conference last week. As soon as Mica's attorney mentioned coercive control I was just like, oh my gosh, how

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did I not hear this term until I talked to you? I hadn't heard of coercive control as a term and I think our conversation or listening to your podcast I can't remember but I have covered a lot of abuse cases in my life. As you know, I'm in this world. And I felt a little ignorant and behind but I'm also happy that with cases like Mica This is coming to the forefront. Tell me where you first learned the term A Course of control and how you define it.

Laura Richards 05:02

Yeah. So I'm so glad you're spotlighting coercive control Mandy, with Mica's case. And unfortunately, it's too late for Mica and many women across the world. Because we know that course of control does correlate significantly with suicide, with homicide and with Familie aside, and when I first started to realize that actually there was something much more insidious than what we understand, when we use the term domestic abuse, I was reviewing lots of murders of women, and some suicides, as well and murders of children. And I was understanding that actually, often women become entrapped. It's not just about a physical act that happens. It's about the psychological and the emotional entrapment, but also wider society that keeps her trapped in this, the gender inequality. And it was when I was working at New Scotland Yard that I became aware of it from reviewing lots of the murders, and realizing it was much more like the spider's web that kept a woman in trapped and that she, people would say, well, she kept going back, Laura, she kept going back to him, and I would look at the reasons for why she would go back. And I would see that on average, it would be about seven times that she would love that individual, but she wanted the abuse to stop. But it was all the other things that kept her trapped, i.e. that the abuse got worse when she left. And that people would tell



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her to go back, that she wouldn't have her own financial independence and that the children would also keep her trapped. So actually, I started to realize there was something far more insidious at play. And I read various books at the time and lots of literature about it. There were various academics writing about coercive control, Professor Liz Kelly, and Professor Evan Stark, and others, and I started to realize that we needed to change the law on coercive control, specifically after we had changed the law on stalking, because often people didn't see it as a pattern of behavior. So stalking law came first. And then I felt well, if we can create a stalking law in England and Wales that we show that there's a pattern, and that it's psychological behavior, then we can do something more with domestic abuse and coercive control.

Mandy Matney 07:25

So is there a particular case in your career that you remember? Wow, this is a textbook case of coercive control, like a light bulb moment? Or was it just a bunch of cases collectively, and then you were researching coercive control and saying that this all comes together and this all makes sense?

Laura Richards 07:46

There were a number of cases. I mean, I still remember the first domestic violence murder review that I did of a young woman called Christine Boswell. And she had two children. And she kept going back to the perpetrator, because he kept calling it the war of attrition. He made it so miserable for her when she left and so unpredictable, that she ended up going back to him. Because she said, in a sense, it was better to be with him, and the unpredictability would lessen. And, therefore, she felt that she was somehow safer to stay with him. I kept



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hearing that same sort of theme being brought up by women that it actually got worse when they left. And so separation I understood to become, I mean, I understood it for me in the research and all the cases that it was a high risk factor. And then, you know, seeing the spider's web asking the right questions about how and why, in terms of what was going on prior to the murder of what made her go back made me realize that this coercive and controlling behavior, this level of subordination, the brainwashing, the grooming everything that had gone into eroding the women's agency and her autonomy, and her confidence, but it was also wider than that. And I kept seeing, actually, that the systems were backing up the abuser. And that was something that is often invisible to people. And that's what I mean, when I talk about gender inequality, it wasn't just about what was going on in the relationship. And it was literally case after case after case that I saw where the murders were happening. And at that time, you know, I run the Sexual Offences section at New Scotland Yard. I'd also been running the homicide Prevention Unit. So I had, you know, a huge amount of cases that we were looking at and deconstructing, but it was the micro and the macro and similar with the Murdaugh case, pretty much every case that I look at now I see the same things going on. And that's why I felt that really we needed to do much more that we had in legislation in England and Wales, the physical abuse elements, ie if somebody physically assault you, it's an ABA chore, it's a GBH but when there was non physical things that were happening the thing 1000 cuts that went before that, that was invisible in terms of the questions that police would ask but also in legislation. And I realized we needed to close that gap and to modernize legislation to reflect women's experience of abuse. So it was really a number of things that came together. And I had a conversation with Professor Evan Stark, and he had actually said



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to me at a meeting, you know what, Laura, you should really think about your next campaign criminalizing coercive control. And I said, Well, actually, Evan, there's a group of us from women's groups, from the Sarah Charlton Foundation, and from Paladin, which is where that I found the palette in the national stalking Advocacy Service, that we wanted to create a new piece of legislation on coercive control. And I said, we've already started the wheels in motion. And I said, it would be great if you would sit on our advisory board. So that was the genesis really, if it really was from women's experience, and from the murders and from talking to survivors and to professionals and realizing our laws just won't, we're not fit for purpose.

Mandy Matney 11:04

And that's something that I see all the time as a journalist. And I think it really started when I just started looking through when I was a reporter at the local newspaper, one of my job at random jobs was going to the sheriff's office and every week looking through the stack of police reports, everything that happened on Hilton Head Island that week, and every call to service basically, and I just really started noticing a there's just way more domestic violence situations than anybody could ever imagine. And it is incredibly tragic, but the way that the reports were written and the way that it was the woman's fault. And a lot of the time and the man was in the a lot of the times the police officer was a man, I would look that up. And then the way that he approached it, a lot of times just seemed wrong, and claims of harassment and claims of stalking, and things just were not taken seriously. And the amount of times, I mean, I have no statistics, but I'll just probably nine times out of 10, they didn't end up in charges. It's just really upsetting. But it does take a while and it takes a lot of work to be able to see the whole



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picture of the problem. But I applaud you for being able. I mean, you were the first in the UK to get this law in the books. And that must have been an uphill battle. Can you explain how hard that was? And all the things that you had to do? And I'm sure you had to start with educating people on what it was and why it was important.

Laura Richards 12:46

And yes, I'm nodding along to everything that you just said before. Because often, you know, when men don't experience this behavior, they find it very hard to transport themselves into somebody else's shoes. And often it is a female experience, to be coercively controlled and to be entrapped. And the victim blame is rife. And it has been rife for so long, and it's still rife. And we're still trying to change that. So the question, you know, that people would always say, Why doesn't she leave Laura? And I'd say, well, often she knows that if she leaves, it gets worse. And if we ask the question, Why does he do what he does? Then we start to understand the problem of what's going on rather than victim blame. So I'm still saying that now man do all these years later. And yes, it's an uphill battle. All of it is an uphill battle, because you take Mike as case and you know, it's like an onion that you start to peel and you start to see actually, she felt so hopeless and helpless. And what she wanted was her freedom and her autonomy. And that's invisible to people because for most people, we have that. But when you're dependent on somebody else, it's very hard to explain all the things that keep you trapped in a situation because it is like a spider's web where it glints in the sunlight, you only see certain parts of it, but you don't see all of it. So when we started the campaign, it was a challenge to educate people about why we needed it. And I guess the best way that I could describe it was that we know that abuse isn't just physical.



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There's a power and control wheel, which many people have seen and I've got a copy here because I'm about to train people tomorrow on exactly this and this is from Duluth, Minnesota. Have you seen this before Mandy? The power and control?

Mandy Matney 14:33

Well, I believe I saw it on your website. Is it on your website?

Laura Richard 14:37

So yes, it is on the website and Duluth, Minnesota they had a project there a domestic abuse intervention project, and they basically show with this wheel all the behaviors in the middle of the wheel things like using emotional abuse using psychological abuse using isolation denying minimizing, using male privilege using financial abuse and coercion and threats and intimate Dacian and on the outside of the wheel is the physical and the sexual acts. So most people think that domestic abuse is a physical and or sexual act. But actually those two things only tend to be used when the other behaviors no longer work. So it's like 1000 cuts that go before all the things with manipulation. A perpetrator tries to manipulate the victim to have their needs met. And when those things don't work anymore, they may use raising the hand or physically abusing the victim or sexually abusing them or threatening to harm a child. They use other tactics to keep the victim controlled. And other tactics are things like charm as well and love bombing. There's other behaviors that now we will talk about like gaslighting, right, because we changed the law and coercive control that's now in the lexicon. People talk about that. So what I wanted to ensure with this campaign was that we made the non physical abuse, just as important as the physical abuse, because actually what victims



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would tell me and I interviewed 1000s and 1000s of victims and survivors, some who were still trying to make it out, they would tell me that the bruises would fade, and the bones would mend. But what stayed with them was the psychological terror, and the mind games, and everything that happened in terms of the psychological and emotional trauma, that's what stayed with them. So being able to tell people that they're the things that matter most to the victims, this, you know, sometimes it might be keeping the victim up through the night, forcing them to urinate or defecate in a bucket, not allowing them to use a toilet, not allowing them to work or not allowing them to leave the house to see people regulating their behavior. And these were the ways that men were behaving towards women, and people were seeing that as quite normal. And I mean, normal in the sense that well, it goes on behind closed doors. And sometimes the victims wouldn't talk about the behaviors that were happening. But it was those 1000 cuts, as I call it, that kept the victim and trapped that we wanted the law to be modernized to take account of because we know through women's experiences, you know, it's not just about the physical abuse and legislation. And as I always say, the criminal courts, the civil courts, the family courts, they've been created by men to protect men, they haven't been created to protect women and children and laws haven't been created based on women's and children's experience of abuse. And that's what I've been trying to change.

Mandy Matney 17:36

I was nodding very loudly, as you were saying in the last part that the laws are created by men for Ben, and, gosh, I knew I wish I knew that sooner in life. Because once you figure that out, kind of everything clicks into place, at least it did for me like, oh, that's why none of this has



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made any sense. And that's why, like in South Carolina, a majority of our domestic violence, laws in offenses are misdemeanors, and they're not felonies. You basically have to almost kill somebody in a domestic violence situation and show that physical abuse for it to be a felony in South Carolina, and who made that man. And it's just extremely frustrating when we talk about how important it is that we have women in positions of power. And once you realize that the laws are for men designed by men, you realize how important it is to get women in those positions to look out for women in cases like domestic abuse in cases like coercive control. And like you said, the psychological abuse to a lot of these victims is worse than the physical abuse. But our laws only take physical abuse seriously. And that has got to change. I have been really obsessed with this trend on social media and there. There's pluses and minuses to social media, I completely understand that. But one of the biggest pluses to social media is that women's voices are being uplifted and heard. And in a way that they really haven't before in history because men have also controlled the media for all of time. And the tick tock trend of I think it started on tick tock, I'm not sure of women saying I would choose to bear in the forest versus choosing the man. If it was a man in a forest or a bear. I'm going to choose the bear because if I'm attacked by a bear, then people are actually going to believe me. And if I'm attacked by a man, they're not going to believe me. And also men do all this other things like what happened to Mica psychological abuse, which is worse and like you said, it's the psychological breakdown of a partner, basically convincing you that you deserve this type of abuse. And that takes a really, really long time to recover from. That was my rant. I don't even know where I left off there. But you have said before that while you've been training law enforcement officers that domestic violence murders and stalking



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murders are the most preventable and predictable of all cases. Why do you think that is?

Laura Richards 20:22

Because they patterned their pattern of crimes. And that pattern, it's repetitive, and victims do tell the police about what's going on. So if you're being told what's happening, when I was looking at the Mets murders, 35% of their murders were domestic violence related. So I said to them, if we know this, we can reverse engineer the murders, and look at what was going on before the murder and analyze that information. And that's what I did. I took 56 domestic violence, murders and analyzed them backwards, reverse engineered them, I looked at the reports to police, there was a lot of information and intelligence about the behavior. And then I identified the high risk factors. So that's now in a process called the dash the domestic abuse and stalking and harassment and honor based violence risk model. So turning it on its head from a very reactive response. If you ask proactive questions of the victim, you're asking them because they know the abuser the best, they're having a relationship with them, and they're holding a mirror up to the perpetrator. And then you can gather that information and intelligence and understand what high risk factors are present. For example, separation, we know that 76% of victims when they leave, when there's coercive control, 76% of them are murdered, because separation is a high risk factor. And there's this notion of if I can't have you, no one can say separation is a high risk factor marker. And if there's children present, we have to assess the children too, because they might be harmed, or they might be used as a tool to manipulate the victim. So I came up with whilst working at New Scotland Yard 15, high risk factors. And now we have clustered behaviors, that when we see



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clusters happening together, like coercive control, separation, and stalking, these are three high risk factor clusters that tend to co-occur. And if you've got a victim who's terrified that's for, well, we know that when a victim is terrified, they're going to be killed or harmed, what they believe is often true. So when I reviewed the murders, most of the victims said he's going to kill me. That's what they told the police and then he did. Well, you know, it's a cold consolation really to be right about predicting your own murder. But I took these behaviors and what was said and put it into a proactive risk assessment tool to help the police get better at helping victims and understanding dangerous perpetrators. And that's why I say that they are predictable, and they are preventable, because we know they follow a similar pattern. It's not always exactly, you know, exactly the same blueprint pattern. But we know most domestic violence murders happen within six months of a victim leaving so we can even look at the timeline to murder. And as well as that Mandy, we now know from the research and analysis that suicides. Also, we understand that when someone feels so hopeless and helpless, and there's coercive control, there's a high correlation rate with when a woman takes her own life. And when children are killed to as a revenge kill to get back at the victim. Because often, we see in cases actually the children may be killed, to take revenge and to punish the primary victim, the mother. So that's why it's so important to understand these patterns and to ask proactive questions and what we did at New Scotland Yard and I worked with a brilliant team, Sharon Stratton, Simon Latchford, to police officers who I wrote the book with policing domestic violence, we were putting this into practice of identifying these high risk factors using the dash risk model training police officers. And for 13 years, we reduced domestic violence murders by 58%, which was 33 people less dead every year through turning what



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was a reactive response, just a domestic, into a proactive response. You must ask these questions, and then we can assess risk, and then we can manage the perpetrator and safety plan with the victim and the children.

Mandy Matney 24:31

I applaud you, just those numbers alone are unbelievable. And that is some incredible work, the amount of lives that you have saved, Laura. Just thinking about that. And that's just amazing. And also the staggering numbers that you were talking about with how dangerous it is when women leave. And that's just the saddest part of all of this is the world's big question is why don't they leave? Unfortunately, because they don't know. Because people always blame women for everything. And everybody hates women that later, but they ask, why don't they leave? And I mean, those statistics, look at the statistics that are dangerous. Did you say 76%? Yes, of women who are in abusive quarters who control relationships, when they leave, 76% of them are murdered.

Laura Richard 25:34

That's the data that we saw. Yes. And it's even higher. Now. There's further research that says that coercive control and stalking feature in 98% of the murders, the domestic violence, murders, and that's why it's so important to criminalize coercive control and stalking. They're the most dangerous types of behaviors. And right now they're invisible to many people. So that's why this really is about making the invisible visible, this power imbalance, which is at the heart of the offense, that's what you really need to make sure in any new offense that's created, it's very clear that that power imbalance should be at the center of it. Yeah,

Mandy Matney 26:13



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I'm just blown away. Thinking about that. Like, if there was a 76% chance that you were going to die every time that you got into your car, you would never get into a car, right? Like that's just a huge, hugely dangerous and horrific statistic. So I don't know why the world continues to ask, why does she? Why does she not leave? Because 76% is why that is just absolutely horrible. I'm just blown away by that. But we're gonna take a quick commercial break, and I want to talk more about this in a minute. We'll be right back. Laura, all of this is just really upsetting. Can you talk a little bit about what specific patterns of behavior that you look for? When identifying these coercive control behaviors? What are some things that people need to know to identify a course of control?

Laura Richard 27:24

Yeah, so I mean, it is really troubling Mandy, and I am glad that we're having this conversation, because there will be people listening, that relate to this. And that's why talking about it is so important. But it can be lots of different types of behaviors, you know, there might be behaviors where there's rules and regulations laid down and a fear of consequence, ie that she has to have a battery charged on her phone, and she has to call in or text message or send a picture of where she's at. To prove that she is where she says she's going to be at her mother's house or at a friend's house, it could be clothes, certain clothes being worn hair has to be in a certain way, it could be that she has to work two or three jobs, or it might be that she doesn't have to work and won't work at all, she's not allowed to work. It could be she's not allowed access to the bank account, or that she has credit cards, but he's running up the credit cards and getting her into debt. Or it could be anything where she may be subordinated or it creates a dependency.



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So you know, one of the cases she wasn't allowed her own social media, it had to be joint social media so that he could see everything that she was posting, it might be pseudo caring behavior, or where she's had a mental breakdown, and I'm the one that's caretaking for her and it in almost every case, there's isolation. So the perpetrator will try and ensure that the victim is isolated from her friends and her family. And with that, it means that they can monopolize perception, both perception of other people of her, but also he can talk to her in a negative way about her friends and family and drive a wedge. And that isolation is, is present in most cases, it could be threats, you know, if she were to be late, or if she was found talking to why, you know, it might be an old boyfriend or a new girlfriend or, but there are these rules and regulations and the perpetrator will use threats for the things that the victim cares about the most or the people that they care about the most. So it's very idiosyncratic behavior. It's nuanced and tailor made to the victim. It could be that they're not allowed to sleep, or they're not allowed to eat certain things or they have to do a certain amount of fitness. And that's being monitored and managed by the perpetrator. It might be devaluing. So I always listen very carefully as to how a perpetrator talks about the victim if they devalue them, if they try and make their world small, if they discredit them, if they belittle them, or equally, it might be that they are putting them on a pedestal. And there's this sort of the opposite effect, where they're saying these grandiose things that are almost too good to be true, but they're divorced from reality. So I look for both things. It could be I mean, really, it's about grooming and brainwashing. So I listened very carefully to how the victim talks about herself. And if her world has been shrunk down, and if I see a world being shrunk down, rather than when two people are in a healthy relationship, you want your partner's world to be



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as expansive as possible. You want them to enjoy everything in life and experience everything in life. That's a healthy relationship. So the converse is, if I see someone shrinking down someone's world, you know, then I know that there are red flags there. So I look for lots of different things, because every case is quite different. But you know that there's a list there of things that you can certainly like isolation, that will be present. And oftentimes the victim when you hear them talk, they will talk in the perpetrators words. So they might say, Oh, yes, well, we did move away. But that was because it was better for me and for my job prospects. And it was better for Derek because he wanted a brand new start. What she won't say is it takes her away from her friends, her family, her job, everything that she knows. So I have to listen very carefully to how a victim talks about what's going on for her but also how a perpetrator talks. And that's why the dash risk model is very important to make sense of what's being said, but every case is quite different.

Mandy Matney 31:57

Yeah, and we will absolutely be linked to that. So for people to look, I mean, your website is just full of really, really helpful information. And list two, like you said, break these complicated things down in a way that people understand and can relate to, and can identify with relationships in their life.

Laura Richards 32:17

The other thing, I'll just start doing Mondays. I always look at the start of the relationship too, because often with a coercive controller, you have love bombing, and you have a whirlwind. It happened oh, very quickly, and then, the coercive controller moved the needle very quickly, this



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whirlwind with love bombing techniques of, you know, these grand statements of I want to die in your arms, I want your face to be the last person I see. And within a week, I want to marry you and have children with you, you know, forcing intimacy, which for the victim might feel good, because we all want to feel special and connected. But the perpetrator will move it along, and will create a false impression of who they are to match what the victim wants. So again, you know, asking very specific questions about how someone met and the type, you know, how they got together and what happened within the first six months. And I often see this whirlwind and love bombing strategy, which is a clear campaign because perpetrators do pick out the victim in a sense of not you, not you, not you, but you they test boundaries, and whether someone's malleable, right at the start when they first meet the victim. Everything is a setup from the start.

Mandy Matney 33:36

Yeah and with love bombing. I have thought about this a lot recently. It's really unfortunate how much Hollywood has glamorized love bombing for many years to the point where I really had a screwed up idea of what a relationship was supposed to be for a very long time in my life. And I think a lot of other women who grew up with the same movies that I did, like the notebook, the notebook came out when I was in middle school, and it was like the ideal love story of my teen years and now I look back on it and like he's doing a lot of creepy and aggressive behaviors really, and that and like you said, and trapping this woman and making her feel in a whirlwind isn't supposed it's a whirlwind romance used to be this idea of this is what real love is it happens very quickly. And he just loves to bomb you and he's obsessed with you and that's all great. But it's only now that we're talking about



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the dark sides of that and how problematic that type of relationship usually is. It's usually a big red flag when somebody eats, and then it's a world when they're obsessive. And you've also said something that really hit, it hit me. A lot of these men are charming. They are not monsters all the time, monsters have two faces. And I've noticed this pattern and the cases that we work on, there's a reason why they're able to control other people, it's because of the charm, it's because of the face that they put on. They don't walk outside and say I'm a monster, I'm going to kill all these people and ruin lives and everything they put on a smiling face, and shake hands and hug old ladies and help them across the street and do all these things to make them look like they are powerful, and that they can be in that. And then they can be kind. And they do have these emotions. And those are just things that I've noticed, I know one case that we both are familiar with. And you are even more familiar with it, which is probably one of the most well known cases of course of control. And that's the Dirty John case. Liz and I are rewatching Dirty John right now and seeing all of the similarities between Dirty John and JP and here, unfortunately, are many. But I want to get back to Mica Francis for a minute and her case, what red flags Did you see when you started looking into this? And you started watching videos of JP and his behavior?

Laura Richards 36:35

Yes, I mean, there were many red flags I saw from the start, even with his announcement, that Mica had died, and that her death was self induced, which which is what he said, which was a very strange thing that he announced her death at the end of a sermon as sort of a postscript which struck me as very odd straight away when I saw that, but the fact that he then said that she had mental health struggles,



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those two things self induced, that she died and that she had struggled with suicide, she had mental health struggles, immediate red flags for me. Why would you put that out there on Sunday, when you've just found out that your partner, your wife has died? That's before I knew anything of what had gone on. And then as I started to dig into it, I think you and I were both digging into it at the same time, because we saw that being said, and it was an immediate red flag. And him telling his congregation not to discuss it made me feel very uncomfortable. And then finding out that she had separated from him, well, that's another red flag, then finding out she was trying to divorce him. So with finality. It's not just separation, it's also with finality, that that's within the high risk clusters, that she wasn't going to go back to him and then finding out there was some back and forth going on. And then she called it and said absolutely. She was not going back and that there was adultery there. Well, then I started digging into his background and found out that he had been married before and that he did have a previous conviction for running over a woman at high speed running over her twice. Well, huge red flag how you treat a woman. But literally in this case, the more you start digging, the more red flags appear. And that's what's the concern to me of finding out that yes, it's believed that she pulled the trigger. Well, I know with many suicides, the A woman may well end her life like Justine Reese and Kelly Sutton and Chloe Holland, these are cases in the UK. But what if he made her life so unbearable, that she felt she had no other option? And that was the question that I had, you know, what if her mental health struggles were from him, and that she didn't have them before? And so that was another question that I wrote down. When did the mental health problems in inverted commas start? Why was he talking openly about them? I felt that that was very disrespectful. And it was almost like he



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was weaponizing. And trying to corral the church. This is before I knew all the details that I now know. But these are the sorts of things, the questions that I have in my head when I see something happening, like what he did JP announcing to his congregation that literally, you know, the day after he had been told that she had ended her life. And I was sure that the police probably would have told him not to say anything at that point because they still had an investigation. And that was another red flag for me, the fact that he was saying things when I'm sure that the police would have told them not to meet him not to make it public because they still had the autopsy right to be done, that hadn't been completed. So why did he feel given that she was trying to leave him and divorce him, that it was his right to tell other people what had happened. He still felt in his mind that she was his property. And so that was another red flag. And then, of course, when you start to look on social media, you would see on Facebook that she had done a number of videos where she clearly was upset about things. And so that was a red flag for me when you look at other images of her where she looked so carefree, and then some of these videos where she seemed very burdened with troubles, and she talked about domestic abuse. And she talked about what God would think, would it be better for someone to live without the abuse and the abuser? And I felt that she was putting out a message there. So these red flags, you know, just unfortunately, he continued to accumulate because it was sounding to me once I realized when she got married to him, she met him when she was very young, and he was much older. So there's a power imbalance right from the start, Mandy? And that's what I look for. Was there a power imbalance? Is there coercive control. And for her to be, I think 15, when she met him in the church setting, I wondered whether he started to pay her attention from early on, I still don't know in detail how much



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attention he paid her. But she was married before. And then she ended up marrying him at 23. And he had five children. So the fact that she's 23. I mean, you're still very young at 23 inches, walking into the stepmother role of five children. That's a huge undertaking, a huge power imbalance. And then it seemed to me that things started to unravel, in that, you know, hearing that she had been sectioned in a mental health institution in 2022. Again, I wondered what preceded that. And then I heard your episode was Charlotte, talking about a big argument, and her leaving him going to stay with her sister. And then him sending countless messages threatening her, you know, listening to that interview that you did with her. And I'm so glad that Charlotte spoke out. You guys got a real sense about how he was using Charlotte. He was saying that it was for accountability. But it was for manipulation, in my opinion, that he was using her to gang up against Mica, but also to threaten Mica, and to say he was going to go round to the sisters home. He had six guns, because he got a pardon on the offense where he ran over a woman and he requested that pardon, and you covered that in your episodes. But that was a huge red flag, that action and that behavior, him then having six guns and threatening to go there armed and ready. I mean, I had chills listening to that of Charlotte describing what he was saying. And Charlotte was aware of it. But he was trying to twist the narrative to make himself look like the victim. When Mica, it seems to me just wanted time out at that particular time in the relationship, had gone to her sisters to get some perspective and headspace and there he was threatening her and threatening her sister and the six year old boy who lived there. Well, that told me he was a man who was unstable, unhinged, and potentially dangerous. And then when she's not giving him the reply that he wants, I think he had sent her many messages trying to manipulate her into responding. And she



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just said, Why are you acting so crazy. He then says that he's going to put all her possessions into goodwill by 9am. And that she has to do the right thing and be a godly wife. And he's using all these different levers. So on the power and control wheel, I can see all his tactics trying to manipulate and control her. And then understanding she didn't really have any money. And she didn't have access to a car and then he's putting razor blades while she goes into a mental institution after that. And I wondered how much he played a role in that. And then when she manages to separate from him, it escalated again, and the razor blades we know that he was stalking her because he admitted it to Rich McHugh so I've continued to track the case and everything that I've heard just makes me feel very concerned about the coercive and controlling behavior of devaluing her demeaning her, isolating her from her friends and Family and telling them not to contact her when she was in the hospital, he was doing everything that he could to drive her into being more dependent on him when she came out. And that, for me wasn't someone acting in her best interests, everything that he did appears, in my opinion to be acting in his own best interest. And he stacked the deck in favor of himself and against her, even with the church. And I've been led to believe through Charlotte and, and others that I've heard that Mica was very popular there. And yet he was trying to corral everyone against her with these allegations of mental health issues, which I still don't know if they've been substantiated. And even if they were, it would be understandable that she felt her world was upside down with all the gaslighting, and how hopeless and helpless he made her feel when she was trying to separate from him. And the ante was up, as I often see the stalking. He hired a private investigator. He did everything that he could to wear her down, I call it the war of attrition. And he was relentless. So there were many red flags. And I knew that



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the diaries she had written the diaries and the journals, I knew that they would play a huge part. And the penny dropped for me when I heard that he had gone round to her apartment and was trying to gain access to her Park apartment after she died. And I wondered, was he trying to get her diaries and journals? Because we know that he had already gone through her phone when she was in the hospital. And we know that there was a half naked picture that was uploaded on April the eighth, I believe it was of her from there was from her devices, but it was linked to her old Facebook account. I'm sure that that was probably him, given the totality of everything that has gone on. And that's why Mandy, I always look for the pattern and the totality of who else would it be when you've got all this drip, drip drip of behavior, the insidious 1000 cuts? So for me, there were hundreds of red flags that point in one direction, of this man, Pastor JP Miller, just making her life so miserable. And just so awful. That perhaps answers why she ended her life and why she felt that she didn't. She didn't have any hope. Because he was taking it away with every act, even with the divorce. And with the stalking. The police said, well, there was nothing they could do, because it was a marital car. Well, that's absolute nonsense, because there's no piece of legislation nowadays that says, you and the car are the property of the marriage, and therefore this law doesn't apply. It's about how you apply the legislation. But I do believe the coercive control law is needed to and therefore if it were in place, it would have been much clearer if those officers were trained. But the point I'm making is just how everybody backs up the abuser, that Mica tried to get her freedom, and it cost her her life.

Mandy Matney 48:23

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Yeah. And I think that's something that people try to brush off with this case, but it's not the point and how exactly she died doesn't matter a whole lot to me, I'm more focused on what drove her to that point, where she was, and what drove her. Whether or not she did I mean, there are lots of theories, there's lots of a lot of tick, tock and social media is focusing on could he have forced her to do it, etc, etc. But I'm just like, let's look at this pattern of abuse. And let's expose this man for this pattern of alleged abuse, because I'm afraid if all of this alleged abuse is true. And like you said, I'm looking at the totality of it. I don't see how a lot of these things couldn't be. I am afraid that this is going to happen to another woman. He's still dating. He's still out there. He's been seen in pictures with lots of women. It's just horrifying. And I want to get back to something you were saying earlier, the breakdown of a person and with Mica, you can tell that I would not be surprised if he started date if he sought her out as when he was a youth pastor and she was 15 years old, and just started gradually breaking her down from that moment. but she was also his babysitter and you see a power dynamic there as well. It's just all horrifying when you look back on it. And with that interview in that big, big fight with Charlotte, another big light bulb is going off in my head as when you were talking about isolation and driving a wedge in the person's life between them and everybody else. I wonder what happened? I think I believe that JP saw Charlotte as his biggest threat, I think because he saw Charlotte as Mica as best friend as Mica as somebody who he was competing with and somebody who would empower her and somebody that she trusted and somebody that Mica was getting joy from and getting a fuller life and they would work out together and tell each other their deepest secrets and things. They just had a really good friendship. And it is not surprising at all to me that JP tried to ruin that by the reason that the



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whole big fight blew up and November 22 was him badgering Mica about who would you kiss if you were to kiss a woman. And I think he knew that she was going to say Charlotte because Charlotte was her best friend and whatever. And I think that he used all of that as a reason to try to separate those two. And you see now too, if Charlotte is on fire, she's not backing down at all. She got a cease and desist letter the other day, and she's proud of it. She's posting it on social media, she is a friend than an abuser would be afraid of. Have you noticed that as a pattern that they seek out people in their lives who would be helpful and try to drive a wedge between them?

Laura Richards 52:05

Yes, they do. Very much. So Mandy, and you know, for Mica, obviously, she's spending time with Charlotte. And for someone like, well, for a course of controller, they weren't like her attention being monopolized elsewhere. That's how they see it and intimacy elsewhere, and secrets being confided elsewhere. So they look to circle the wagons and they look to try and destabilize those relationships. So I thought that was a very interesting part that he brought her into the text messages. And he called it for accountability. And he knows what he's doing. He's very manipulative, just the language choice. And using God and using religion, which might have used everything Mica cared about, to control her. And that's why going around the power and control wheel, it's very idiosyncratic to each case, whereas ForMica, he took the things she cared about: her family, her friends, religion, I do think that she wanted children. And he used that as leverage over her and tortured her about it. So they take the things you care about the most. And they manipulate and they chip away, and they take the joy. And it's like, literally a psychological undoing of you. And the person becomes a



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shadow of their former self. And most likely he saw her as a target when she was 15. When you're young, and you're malleable, for grooming, and really coercive control is manipulation and grooming. And what I found interesting was seeing a picture of Allison, his first wife and I doing a double take, because I thought it was an older Mica. So there's something that isn't there written in the victimology? Because I always look to victimology. And how and why someone was targeted and Mica seem like to me from what I understand of her pure joy and sunshine. And he literally stripped everything good in her out. And from what I could see, he was the one that was having the meltdowns and was acting in the way that was, you know, much more psychologically unstable. The Mica she seemed quite measured in responses, but yet he calls her the things that he is. And that's a classic tactic of a coercive control are to flip that script. Don't look over here, look over there. So now everyone's talking about Mica and her mental health and they're not focusing on him. And as Charlotte describes him, and I've seen some videos of him melting down, you know, he's a pretty frightening person when he goes into that mode, and you wouldn't want to be on the other end of it, but he seems to be the one that needs needs the I wouldn't even say hell He needs some serious intervention from from all that I can see.

Mandy Matney 55:03

Absolutely. I have a couple more questions for you after this break. One of the most recent allegations that has come out was that JP allegedly drugged Mica and forced her to take lithium, convinced her that she had bipolar disorder and convinced her to take lithium and testosterone. Her lawyer calls it medical abuse. Have you seen that also in coercive control cases? And is that unique?



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Laura Richards 55:53

Well, I have seen it before. I've had cases where someone's forced to take medication. And I've also had cases where they're given things without them knowing that they're being given things. And that's equally confusing, because they report things like they're falling asleep, or they're not being able to retain information. And it's a form of gaslighting in both situations, obviously, one, or both have serious repercussions because you can become addicted to a substance that you're being given. You may not even have a need for it. But it gives the perpetrator the ability to control even more in every respect. If they're publicly saying, you know that she wasn't well mentally or isn't well, mentally, it puts them under the microscope. So yes, I have seen it before Mandy, and even if somebody does have some form of mental health issues, well, I would expect that when they're being abused, it's very rare actually, to be abused. And to maintain your sanity. Right. When your world you're being gaslit. You're, you're literally upside down. And so that's when we see victims who might self medicate, they may take drugs or alcohol to cope with what's going on. And the three things together alcohol and or drugs or mental health, what the perpetrator does is use that to discredit the victim. So that they're the ones that are believed. So yes, I do see medical abuse and financial abuse fairly frequently in cases.

Mandy Matney 57:30

Yeah the financial abuse is another thing that I really try to stress to listeners, and something that I wish I knew earlier in life. And it's just that financial independence is so important for women in their safety. To be able to have your own money is so huge in a situation like this.



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And to be able to have a fallback plan is so huge. In a situation like this, like you said, you're in a spider web, and there's no way to get out. Money is a big part of that spider web. And if you don't have money, and if you don't have access to living somewhere else, and if you don't have a car, everything just spirals. So when these women are pushed into these positions of being housewives because they're told by their husbands that that's what they're supposed to do. And that's their godly job. And that's what that's the way that women are supposed to be housewives and not meant to have any of their own money. And Mike is case, JP allegedly told Mica you're bad with money, you can't handle it. So I have all the access to the money. And so she didn't have access to money. And that's, that's a breakdown of power. I mean, that's another huge. So I always try to warn, especially younger women, that when they are entering a relationship, that money is important. Financial independence is extremely important.

Laura Richards 59:07

It is the number one thing that we can teach young girls and women to be financially independent and to retain independence in a relationship. Yeah. Because that's healthy, it's healthy to have your own money and combine some parts of your lives but keep some parts separate. And the other part that you mentioned weaponizing religion, and subordinating through religion, and all religions, subordinate women. And so saying it's your godly duty to give me sex when I demand it, these sorts of things. That's what we have to educate people about and that's why I say coercive control isn't just about what's going on with two people. It's the bigger societal inequalities for women that keep her entrapped and coercive controllers are just a notch along from there So that's why when you hear wedding pronouncements in



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traditional Western marriages, they pronounce you as man and wife, or he's the man and you're just the wife. You're nameless, you know. So these things that teach us when we're at a traditional wedding, she's walked down the aisle by her father, the man who hands her over to the next man. And she doesn't speak at the wedding breakfast, but it's all the men who speak. So these are the cues that we're told all the time that our job is to be quiet, compliant, malleable, and polite. All these things that play into the coercive control is pocket. Yeah. And that's what we've got to lift the lid on, because it's not for girls and women to be silent and to be handed around like we're property, and that we have to do these godly duties whilst he is able to live his life how he chooses and have double standards cheat, be adulterous do all these things. And yet he's not held to account for it. So it's, it's the double standards within coercive control as well.

Mandy Matney 1:01:07

I was just thinking, it's almost like society is subconsciously coercively controlling women. Um, it's things like, like you said, the transfer of the bride, which I refused, I didn't refuse it, David, and I decided, at my wedding, at our wedding, we're going to walk down the aisle together, my dad, and my parents will walk before us, his parents will walk before us, but there will be no transfer of property because that's the tradition. That's what it used to be. It was a property transfer from one man to the other. I paid for her and now you pay for her. So David, and I were like Scratch that, let's just X that. And I know that it's tradition. And I know that correct. A lot of people do it, just because it's a heartwarming moment for your dad to walk you down the aisle for people. But for me, as somebody who's seen a lot of these horrific abuse cases in my career, I just really want to do away with all of those subconscious beliefs that



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we have, that women are property, and women are less than men and, and talk about them openly. Instead of just saying, though, well, the woman should take the man's name just because and that's the way that it's always been like, no, that puts us on a different playing field.

Laura Richards 1:02:41

And we have to question it. And often people don't know, the same as when you have a baby, why should you do the hard work for nine months, and then it pops out and then the baby takes the man's name. It's just so bonkers when you break it down. And I think most women don't always think about that, because it's just culture. It's custom, it's traditional. But we have to break these traditions to modernize where we are, you know, it's each to their own really in choices, but just make sure those choices are in our informed, right, because you are equally a whole person. And as I always say to every woman, you matter to yourself on your own. And why would you erase your own identity? When will you get married? You've been Laura Richards for 40 years, why would you suddenly take on a new name? That's not you? You know, and I understand what children change again. But these are all subtle cues of women's positions in society, even medical misogyny in 1993 was when they allowed women in medical trials before that women were not used in medical trials because we had periods and hormones. And so they said, We just messed up the trial, rather than women have different biological needs, and therefore, women matter and irrelevant and should have our own trials. We go through the biggest life changes in terms of biology and bodies, periods and pregnancy and menopause, and yet we were raised medically, and we're still trying to catch up. When you look at literature on pregnancy and neuroscience, I read the two papers on what happens to a woman's



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brain when you're pregnant, to papers. So it's all these things that you know, you think you're 52% of the population. And that's, you know, sadly we joke about it but that's how someone ends up in a coercively controlling relationship because it just touches the dial up just a little bit on where women are in relationships that we are the homemakers we are meant to be the nurturers, we run the household, the children we work as well. And you know the traditional job of the man is to go out and make money but now women have to make money and do all those household chores in the cave that look after the children and do the social calendar, and women are exhausted. And in this we take Stop and look at, you know, you may be in a healthy relationship. But where's the equal balance? Where's the equality, where you're both adults, you're both responsible adults, so it should be 5050. So, you know, if you're at 20, that's why women are exhausted. And if you've got someone who's abusive, she's so overburdened, and maybe doesn't have her access to a bank account, or whatever it is. And these are the ways in which women become entrapped. So it's trying to shine a light into the spider's web to look at, you know, where are the behaviors that are healthy, what's unhealthy, and what's actually abuse, because we know 51% of women don't even realize they're being coercively controlled and abused.

Mandy Matney 1:05:45

Exactly. And that's another very sad statistic when you think about it, and something that I hope these conversations are really going to change. I'm tired of even saying mentally abused, to like couch it, you know what I mean? People like JP. JP has been quoted many, many times, saying Mica was never abused, meaning physically, and I am so tired of that, and men using that as a cop out of I'm a good guy,



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because I've never hit her. But instead, I've ruined her life and gave her zero options to the point where she drove herself to suicide, because she felt like she had nothing going for her in her life. That is so much worse than a punch to a face. And I am, I'm angry that it's taken us so long. Like I look at all these things that JP has been alleged to do. And I'm angry that it makes my blood boil. As you know, I'm obsessed with Taylor Swift. She has a great song called The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived. And there's a line in it that says, you deserve prison, but you won't get time. And that is how I'm feeling about JP and it's like, yeah, a lot of these abusers deserve prison, but they don't get time because we are in a patriarchal society that protects them over women. And that just makes me angry to my core.

Laura Richards 1:07:29

You're not alone. Mandy, this is a fight that I've been fighting for a very long time. And you know, I am glad that people are waking up to the inequality and the systems that backup the abuser. And that left Mica unprotected and feeling disempowered and devalued. Yeah. And that's what we have to change when someone feels so devalued and psychologically undone that they lose all hope. Yeah, for the future.

Mandy Matney 1:08:00

It makes me so angry. Do you ever do just get angry?

Laura Richards 1:08:04

Frequently.

Mandy Matney 1:08:07



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It's just a lot of rage. This story in particular is almost enraging me more than Murdaugh because it's just insidious. A lot of these things are just the psychological breakdown of a woman and to see the pattern over time and to see like you said, just the light goes out of a woman and it just makes me so sad and angry and upset. But changing legislation is one thing. That's a huge step. What else do you believe needs to happen to save other women's lives who are in a position like Mica was in April of this year, finally divorcing their husband finally, seeing the light and about to get away, but also in that most dangerous period of their lives?

Laura Richards 1:09:05

I think changing the law on coercive control and codifying coercive control, I want to see it all across America. And in my view, it should be a federal offense, the same in Australia, in the UK. Now, every part of the UK has criminalized coercive control and I want to see laws, not just family law, but criminal laws, so that we start to even things up and we ensure that the behaviors are visible and that there is a language and that victims recognize what's happening to them. So before any law comes in Mandy, we you need training, so making sure that all professionals are trained, but the other part to that is educating people via podcast media like Dirty John, that was the first step of educating people on coercive control Dirty John the Dirty Truth, the docu where we talked about coercive control and when I interviewed Chris Gotthard, so I want the moms and the dads and the brothers and the sisters, the best friend needs to be educated because the victim will talk to them first before they talk to advocates and law enforcement. And then the other part to it that I would love to see much more of is education around financial freedom. And you know, I love the work that



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Tori Dunlops doing on financial feminist of educating and empowering women. I think that that's such an important part that, you know, be your own boss, be your own rescuer in your own movie, and do these things for you. And, you know, now we have got more of a challenge going on with the Hollywood movies and the shows, thank goodness, where we're not seeing the Disney's, you know, the princess being rescued by the guy, we're starting to see a change in that narrative. And that, you know, I would love to see more education of age appropriate education for young boys and young girls, for young boys to understand how to deal with rejection. Because I think that pretty much all the murders I've been reviewing of late have young girls murdered by boys and young men. It's at the point of rejection and finality and separation. And something's going horribly wrong, because the femicide rate is the highest it's ever been. And I think for young girls, we need to educate them and empower them that jealousy doesn't equal love. And so it starts very early on, you know, when they're toddlers, of how we value boys and girls, and the conversations that we have with them have to be age appropriate, but ensure that they understand not just the mechanics of sex, but what a healthy relationship looks like. And I think about Gabby Petito in so many cases that I've been involved with having just recently met Nicole, her mom, you know, and too often people just don't think about the healthy relationship. They might call it a toxic relationship, but it's controlling, and it's jealousy. And boys and men are not able to handle rejection. And we have to tackle that head on. Because there's, you know, what I was taught when I was younger, there's plenty of fish in the sea. That doesn't seem to be something that's being said over and over to young people. So we've got to start young and not just deal with the murders and talk about those. And with that, I hope we'll have some emotional



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freedom. You know, boys don't have to be boys. They can emote, and they can share how they feel. So you know, it's a bigger program, which is why media, you know, TV shows, Hollywood movies, podcasts, it matters that we talk meaningfully about coercive control, and the unfreedom that so many women experience. And we try to ensure that we give people options for how they can leave safely. Because it can be done, you can survive and thrive out of an abusive relationship. But we do have to focus on the men who are doing this and hold them to account. So accountability is important. And what we know about coercive controllers is that prison time works for them, because they don't like the power and control being taken away. They don't ever want to go back. So there are a subset of perpetrators that prison works for, and this is them. And that's why we need coercive control.

Mandy Matney 1:13:21

Absolutely. And I was just thinking, how world changing it would be if coercive control is taught in high schools. And right along with sex ed, I think it's just as important and it is a missing factor in our education system that we are just ignoring. Like you said, all of these things could be changed if we knew how to address them and we were educated starting from a young age. I can't imagine how different an entire generation would be if they started using words like coercive control. And I'm also with social media, it's good to see things like gaslighting terms like that being spread among young people. I heard a 12 year old say the word gaslighting the other day and was like, wow, I didn't know that term until I was like, 25. That's amazing. Um, so I do think there's a lot of hope. And you are a big part of that. So Laura, cups down. Thank you so much for this amazing episode. And all of your knowledge and



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insight. It is life changing and extremely important. And your work is powerful. And thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Laura Richards 1:14:41

Thank you, Mandy. I really value you and certainly all your unraveling of Mica Miller's case and so much more. So thank you for having this important conversation. Cups down, Mandy.

Mandy Matney 1:14:54

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