

SUPPORT XAVIER!

Written by Darren D. Moore
Monday, 29 April 2013 14:53

Many of you watched the episode of "Iyanla Fix My Life" which featured rapper/super star DMX (Earl Simmons) and his son Xavier. When the show aired, I became bombarded with text messages, phone calls, facebook messages, etc.

Everyone wanted to know my opinion of the episode, as people are aware that addictions is one of my areas of specialty. While I missed the original airing, I did manage to catch the re-run and will share with you some of my thoughts/reflections. However, first let me share with you, what some of my peers have said about the show. Many of my therapy friends and non-therapy friends alike critiqued the show and expressed some negative feelings about what was depicted. People questioned Iyanla's intentions, her ethics, her interventions, and many reported feeling as if DMX was exploited. I think some clarification is needed. First and foremost, Iyanla Vanzant is not a licensed mental health professional. She is not a psychiatrist, psychologist, marriage and family therapist, clinical social worker, or a psychiatric nurse practitioner. She is a life coach. I say this not to throw "shade" at her. I say this to explain to you that what she does is different than what most licensed mental health professionals do. I do not want you to get the idea that what she is doing is therapy, while it could be therapeutic and it definitely is entertaining.

With Iyanla being a life coach, she has more flexibility in terms of the way that she interacts with clients and she is not bound by the ethical guidelines of any of the mental health licensing boards. Now that I have clarified a few things, let's get into the good stuff. While many of the folks I know dislike Iyanla, I like her. I actually think she is interesting to watch. Would I do some of the things that she did in her meeting with DMX...absolutely not. I think she can be a bit harsh, abrasive, and tends to blame people for their problems. While this makes for good television, I am not sure that it makes for good therapy. However, as I mentioned before she is not doing therapy, she is "coaching." When working with clients, it is extremely important to develop a solid therapeutic rapport. In order to do this, one has to be careful about how they interact with clients. Blaming clients is not the way to get it done, even if the client actually is in the wrong. I would have started off with just getting Mr. Simmons perspective about his problem, with less focus on blaming him for not being the father and husband that he should have been. In addition, I would have focused on what DMX wanted to get accomplished during our time together as opposed to projecting my own desires onto DMX.

One of the things that stood out to me was Mr. Simmon's demeanor during the session. Throughout the entire episode, I was wondering if DMX was in fact, high or intoxicated. He appeared to not be of a sound mind. If he in fact was high then it would have been futile to have a therapeutic session. If a person is intoxicated, they need detox prior to any real work being done in the therapy room. If I was working with DMX, I would focus on Detox through a long-term residential treatment facility where he could get intensive rehabilitation. I would focus substantially on, one-on-one sessions, before getting anyone else involved.

I personally do not believe Iyanla should have met with DMX. He obviously is not ready to change. I am not blaming him; I am simply saying that when a person becomes addicted to a drug, it is very hard for them to make that decision to get off drugs. DMX is what we call in the therapy world, somewhere between the pre-contemplation and contemplation stage of change. He has not yet necessarily identified that he has problem and he is not interested in changing.

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Until he is ready to change there is nothing that any person can do to help him. I am an avid believer that addicted individuals must find something inside of themselves to motivate them to change. External forces such as ultimatums given by friends and family typically do not work. I have seen individuals lose jobs, people get their children taken away, and people lose their marriages, among other things, and still continue to use. Unfortunately addictions can be extremely powerful. Addictions are difficult to break due to the fact that they not only affect individuals mentally, but also physically. Through repetitive drug use, the brain is altered, which contribute to increase cravings and the need to use.

During the session, Iyanla made the mistake of thinking that DMX was going to declare that he would stop using drugs by waving his son (Xavier) in his face. While she thought this was going to help DMX make the decision to get off drugs, it actually backfired in her face. The horrible part of this situation, is that she "drug" his son into a volatile situation. I think she had good intentions by getting the Xavier to verbalize his perspectives about addiction. However, she ended up making the Xavier solely responsible for Mr. Simmons motivation for change. I think that this is too much responsibility for any young person to have to bear alone. The message that a child gets when their parents refuse to get off drugs, despite their plea, is that "I am not good enough or worthy enough, for you to change." This type of message can destroy a person. While Mr. Xavier appeared to be ok after the intervention, I promise you he will need to continue getting help to deal with the harsh reality of his father's addiction. After the show everyone was talking about #Support DMX...what about #Support Xavier?

I imagine that there are some remnants of this situation that play out in Xavier's life...in his interpersonal and/or intimate relationships. I can almost guarantee that unless he gets additional help, Xavier's experiences will haunt him...the need for approval, the need to be loved, the need for acceptance, etc. will play out into his adult life. During the session, Iyanla made reference to the Xavier, teaching his father. While that sounds poetic, once again I do not agree with that perspective.

In my opinion a son should not have to teach his father, how to be parent. This should not be his responsibility. To be honest, I feel bad for the young man. I can identify with him on a certain level in terms of the phenomenon of what Iyanla refers to as "growing up fatherless." I'll be sure to explain what I mean by this in one of my future articles.

In summary, I want to say, I like Iyanla, she is fun to watch, dramatic at times, but this makes for good television ratings. She does things with clients that I definitely would not do. However, I will give her credit...she speaks her mind. She sometimes says things that I might be thinking in my head, but cannot say due to general professional standards. I also want to reiterate that she is not a licensed mental health profession, but she has talent. When people were contacting me, everyone was asking me about how I would work with DMX. It is hard to tell you exactly how I would handle the situation...I can show you better than I can tell you. Perhaps, you will get a glimpse of how I would work with DMX and other clients when my television show comes out! Please stay tuned... and until then, "stick around, there's MOORE to come."

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couples, and families regarding mental health and relationship concerns. His research, teaching, and clinical interests include general mental health, obesity, weight loss, eating disorders, and addictions, within couple and family relationships, with an emphasis in working with men, African American families, and marginalized populations. He is a north Minneapolis native, obtained his Bachelors' degree in African American Studies from the University of Minnesota, his Masters' degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Valdosta State University, and his Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Virginia Tech....Want "MOORE?" Dr. Darren D Moore can be reached by email at ddmoore@vt.edu or via talk/text at 612-296-3758....THE MOORE THERAPY MOVEMENT!