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An Ecological Analysis of Same-Sex Domestic Violence between Gay Men

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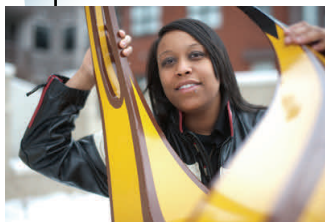
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I am a recent graduate of the University of Kentucky. I graduated December 17th, 2010 with a Bachelor's degree in Gender and Women's Studies. During my time at the University of Kentucky, I participated in the

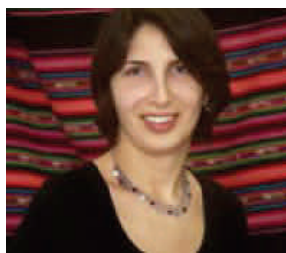
UK Feminist Alliance and was a dedicated volunteer for the UK Violence Intervention Prevention Center.

I spent the summer of 2010 in New York City volunteering with the NYC Anti-Violence Project for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, and Questioning (LGBTQ) community. This experience allowed me to actively combat violence in the LGBTQ community by educating the surrounding areas on the reality of violence in the LGBTQ community.

An Ecological Analysis of Same-Sex Domestic Violence between Gay Men is a piece that examines the ways in which the institutions that make up the ecological model of violence (culture, community, family, and individual) help facilitate and perpetuate intimate partner abuse in gay male relationships. The construction of this piece allowed me to explore facets of partner abuse that have been ignored in previous decades.

Writing this piece has opened my eyes further to the diverse dimensions of intimate partner violence, and has prompted me to continue working with and aiding those who have experienced this type of abuse. I have devoted and will continue to devote my life to educating people on the existence of intimate partner violence within both the homosexual and heterosexual communities. Regardless of race, sex, gender, or sexuality, we all deserve the right to live our lives safely and without fear of the ones who say they love us.

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Cristina Alcalde



Ericka's submission provides a careful analysis of the ways in which cultural norms, ideologies, and practices in the U.S. influence domestic violence dynamics within men's same-sex relationships. She situates her discussion within the frameworks of the community, family, and an

individual level that influence men's experiences of violence. She complements her research by also weaving in and reflecting on her own experiences working with the New York City Anti-Violence Project during the 2010 summer. Ericka concludes that ignorance and silence, heterosexism, isolation, and an absence of resources, among several other factors, contribute to men's experiences of violence. In identifying and analyzing the role of multiple contributing factors and in combining academic research with activism, Ericka cautions us against jumping to simplistic conclusions about the causes of violence and suggests that the topic is best approached through a combination of research and practice.

Ericka's comprehensive approach, her focus on a marginalized group about which there is little written, and her critical analysis of the multiple factors affecting violence within men's same-sex relationships, together with her use of activist as well as scholarly sources and experiences, position her work as a strong and solid contribution to undergraduate research in Gender and Women's Studies.

Over the last twenty five years there has been an increase in the research conducted on domestic and intimate partner violence. For this paper, domestic violence is defined as “any abuse in a relationship... It occurs when one partner coerces, dominates, or isolates the other partner” (Project, 2009). (The terms *domestic violence* and *intimate partner violence* will be used interchangeably in this work.) The majority of research surrounding domestic violence in the U.S. has focused on examining the circumstances that perpetuate violence in the heterosexual community where women are often the victims, and men the batterers. In the mid-nineties, academics and researchers began to look at its occurrences in the gay community. The last two decades of research conducted have introduced new aspects of relationship violence, one aspect being that of intimate partner abuse in homosexual relationships. Researchers are still in the early stages of developing methodologies and sample strategies to provide more in depth analysis of relationships in which intimate partner violence occurs between homosexual men, however progress has been made.

The analyses of intimate partner violence in homosexual and heterosexual relationships points to various common factors. Heterosexual women who experience domestic violence find themselves isolated in their abuse. The gender socialization of men as dominant and women as passive has normalized domestic violence and created a veil of silence surrounding it. In the U.S., anywhere between 2 and 4 million women are physically abused regularly by male partners (Dixon & Peterman, 2003). Battered women are met with numerous blockades when they attempt to either confront their abusive partner or leave the relationship. Research done on violence against women has found a staggering lack of resources for battered women attempting to leave abusive partners. In 2000, 50% of all homeless women and children in the U.S. were fleeing from domestic violence (AtHealth Corporation, 2009).

The degree to which intimate partner violence occurs in the heterosexual population is alarming. This being said, it is important to call attention to the fact that heterosexual women and couples are not the only ones who experience intimate partner violence at growing rates. In a study done by Dian Dolan-Solo, she found that “...88 % of gay male victims in 2003 and 91% of victims in 2004 reported experiencing prior incidents of abuse, with the majority (45% and 47%, respectively) reporting having experienced more than 10 prior incidents” (Dolan-Soto, 2005). Yet, due to cultural mores surrounding the deviance of homosexuality in North America, the social awareness of intimate partner violence in the lives of same-sex couples is scarce. Research has shown that when intimate partner violence occurs in same-sex relationships it takes many of the same forms as it does in heterosexual relationships with the same range of severity. However, gay men remain marginalized and susceptible to domestic violence not only because they diverge from the heterosexual norm, but because gay men violate the model of hegemonic masculinity. According to Robert Connell, hegemonic masculinity “...is distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities... it is not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it is certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required other men to position themselves in relation to it, and ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this paper I plan to explore the dynamics of intimate partner violence between gay men. I plan to utilize the ecological model which will allow me to look at institutions such as the culture that exists in North America, the rules that uphold it and how they play a role in facilitating domestic violence. Along with the breakdown of culture in the macrosystem, the ecological model creates a space for the evaluation of the gay community and its reactions to intimate partner violence. Accompanying the discussion at the macrosystem of the ecological model and the gay community, I will introduce a dialogue surrounding the role of power and control through the disempowerment standpoint for same-sex couples. This standpoint argues that gay men who batter use violence as a means to control their own lives by dominating their intimate partner (Mason, McKenry, & Serovich, 2006).

Gay men remain marginalized and susceptible to intimate partner violence not only because they diverge from the heterosexual norm, but because they may challenge the cultural ideas of dominance, power, and control imparted through patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity (Dutton & Landolt, 1997). The homophobia that gay men internalize as a result of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity experienced in the external sphere, may prompt gay men to seek more power in private and intimate settings. In attempts to restore the element of power and control stripped away from gay men in society, some gay men may use domestic violence as a means of control and a way to establish the right to power over their own existence. In a video interview with Judy Chicurel, writer of the *Dr. Joseph Olivieri Show* (a Manhattan-based physician who treats one of the largest Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transvestite patient-based practices in New York City), she holds a conversation with Michael, one of Dr. Olivieri’s patients. Through her conversation with Michael it is illustrated that some gay men who have experienced violence utilize it as a tool for their own empowerment.

Judy Chicurel: *When you hit him, did you have a feeling of power, or does it make you feel better about you?*

Michael: *In the beginning it did. I felt like I lost power from before; that I couldn’t take control of my own life; that somebody else was doing it for me. So, yeah I kind of felt like I was taking the power back this time by making him the victim (Michael, 2008).*

The concept of “taking the power back” that Michael presented in the previous excerpt brings up an interesting facet for the cycle of same-sex domestic violence. With his statement and the literary research I have conducted, I propose that the utilization of domestic violence for gay men is not merely an attempt to gain control over their partners, but serves as an attempt to reclaim some of the power and agency that has been deducted from them due to the external homophobia of the culture, and that which they have internalized in their personal histories. According to Mason, McKenry and Serovich, “...low-self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness may make individuals more susceptible to

violence” (Mason, McKenry, & Serovich, 2006). Therefore, violence becomes a source of self validation and self-empowerment due to the alienation that battered gay men experience. Dixon and Peterman conform this idea in their work, *Domestic Violence between same-sex partners: Implications for counseling* by saying, “...although abusers seek power and control, feelings of powerlessness might be present (Robertson, 1999; Robinson, 1999); thus, self-esteem issues can play a part in the behavior and thoughts of abusers (Dutton, 1995; Robertson 1999)” (Dixon & Peterman, 2003).

The fact that intimate partner violence can be used as a source of personal empowerment suggests a bidirectional aspect. In a calculated research study performed by Turrell in 2000, he reported, “...nearly all of these men (participants in the study) reported being the perpetrator of some emotionally abusive behavior” (Craft & Serovich, 2005). As I introduced with the interview between Judy Chicurel and Michael, violence was bidirectional in these relationships and it is possible that some men who reported themselves as victims may have also been perpetrators and vice versa. With the collective information gathered, it is my belief that the characteristics of isolation which create identities with intimate partner violence in the formation of young gay individuals, functions as a result of each facet of the ecological model.

It is a fact that the recognition of domestic violence for homosexual couples lacks due to research being in its early stages, but it has been proven that the presence of abuse in any given relationship, homosexual or heterosexual is a function of disempowerment for the victim and empowerment for the batterer (Duthu, 1996). As I mentioned previously, the disempowerment standpoint emerges for both same-sex and heterosexual couples, but research shows that for gay men specifically, the feelings of disempowerment and empowerment that accompany intimate partner violence manifest themselves differently through the intersecting categories of the ecological model.

Frames of the Ecological Model

The ecological model is made up of four levels of analysis: the macrosystem, the exosystem, the microsystem and the personal history. Each of these levels operates simultaneously to capture the intricacy of human interactions and relationships while allowing us to “conceptualize violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors.” With this model we are able to see the intricacies exhibited at each layer. The most outer sphere of this model is the macrosystem. According to Lori Heise, this level can be described as “male entitlement, masculinity linked to aggression and dominance, rigid gender roles and the acceptance of interpersonal violence and physical chastisement” (Heise, 1998). After the macrosystem, comes the exosystem, which according to Heise examines the socioeconomic status of the involved parties, the isolation from family and “delinquent peer associations.” At the third level, the microsystem, Heise directs our attention to “male dominance in the family, male control of wealth in the family, use of alcohol,” and conflict. Heise defines the last level of this model as the personal history sphere. This sphere examines childhood traumas that may have occurred to influence the attitude a child may develop towards violence due to past experience. The ecological system is broken down in such a way that we are able to look at each individual level for analysis while understanding that “...neither the framework, nor the figure should be interpreted as definitive because they are based on a tentative and incomplete research base” (Heise, 1998).

As I discuss the macrosystem, I look into the perceptions of same-sex domestic violence in the homosexual community and how the existence of intimate partner violence not only threatens the political and social image the gay community is trying to establish, but how male-on-male violence threatens hegemonic masculinity. This threat then prompts the culture to ignore the existence of domestic violence between same-sex couples. It is because of the controversy surrounding intimate partner violence that the gay community feels the need to place a veil of silence around it. This veil of silence ensures that the political and social goals of the gay community at large such as the headway being made concerning same-sex marriage, aren’t hindered (Knauer, 1999). As the levels of the ecological model dwindle from the all-encompassing macrosystem to one’s personal history, I draw attention to various experiences of young gay boys in their families and by doing so, I illustrate how issues emerge and elements of isolation begin.

The use of the ecological model in this work helps display the way silence is used to reinforce ideas of heteronormativity surrounding domestic violence. The model displays how “normal” or heterosexual relationships are valued and therefore recognized, while the violent circumstances that couples who deviate from the heterosexual norm experience are often silenced and ignored “...as a marginalized and stigmatized group within society, gay men are unlikely to be construed as ‘innocent victims’” (May & Richardson, 1999). When examining aspects of non-material culture, we see that it is people who perform gender and sexuality accurately according to the guidelines of non-material culture that receive recognition and resources. Dr. A. A. Jekayinfa defines non-material culture as “...abstract things; Man cannot see or touch them because they are not concrete things but man has learned them as part of the way of life, examples are language, religion, literature, morals and values such as freedom and justice” (Schmitt, 2001). Dr. Jekayinfa’s definition will be utilized as the workable explanation for the phenomenon that is culture and how it translates into domestic violence in homosexual relationships in the context of America’s beliefs and mores. It is a fact that when a problem exists in a culture depending on its severity, certain accommodations are created. In the case of domestic violence, this is true, however the accommodations seriously lack. For instance, shelters exist to aid women fleeing violent relationships, but gay male victims of domestic violence are often forced to depend on homeless shelters (in which they may experience violence due to their sexual orientation) or HIV/AIDS prevention centers as means of escape from an abusive partner. This issue exists not only because the intimate partner violence is silenced by the culture and therefore not seen as a problem, but also because battered women’s shelters are unable to aid battered gay men due to the safety concerns for the women present (Island & Letellier, 1991).

The isolation invoked by the culture's neglect of gay male domestic violence trickles down into the other spheres that make up the ecological model. As previously mentioned, the gay community isolates issues of domestic violence in same sex-relationships in order to prevent a social backlash against the community as a whole. It has also been argued that the family unit (which is examined at the microsystem and personal history levels), embracing the ideas of the culture, predisposes young gay boys to isolation surrounding their homosexuality. Therefore, even as adolescents, young gay boys have been cut off from the structural support of American culture and their families. Research has shown that the dynamics and characteristics of the heterosexual nuclear family as a social unit, predispose homosexual children to tension and conflict in the early stages of adolescence. Mason, McKenry, and Serovich (2006) examine the origin of family characteristics in British Columbia and how they function as outlying personality determinants. They state, "Individuals may theoretically resort to violence because it is their most readily understood and accessible coping strategy in dealing with loss of power" (Mason, McKenry, and Serovich, 2006). Within some family units it is clear that homosexual children often find themselves further isolated from society. By isolating young gay boys in order to prevent the destruction of the "nuclear families" image, the adolescents are disempowered and internalize the idea that their sexuality is harmful to the societal image of the family at large and therefore must be hidden or ignored at the personal level of the ecological model. This allows the ideas of neglect and ignorance to branch out in the other levels of the ecological model. This can be seen in the way that gender roles established in the macrosystem become rigid and ideas of dominance and control become more prominent in the microsystem. Given that the levels of the ecological model function simultaneously, we can see how the formulation of roles in the macrosystem can affect ideas of personal dominance in the microsystem, which then work to form an individual's personal history. Gay adolescents who suffer from feelings of familial neglect and abuse because they differ from heterosexual and hegemonic expectations discussed in the macrosystem, have the potential to transmit their experiences with violence into intimate partner settings later in life.

Ideas formulated in the macrosystem around gender roles and ideas of dominance in the microsystem create a space for the isolation of battered gay men in the exosystem based around the negation of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality. North American society by all extensive purposes can be viewed as a patriarch that creates two separate spheres of power – one for men and the other for women. These separate spheres grant men more cultural power and privilege than women, however, the supreme cultural power granted to men by the patriarch is only granted to men of the heterosexual orientation. Because gay men are stripped of some cultural clout due to their homosexuality and violation of hegemonic masculinity, the amount of persecution gay men face in American society is significantly higher. The persecution that homosexual men experience as deviants of the hegemonic masculinity, translates to lives of seclusion in which gay men are forced to depend more on their ascribed subculture for support in situations of violence, support which is brought into question because of the perceptions the gay community itself holds about intimate partner violence.

The shift in the cultural power between heterosexual men and homosexual men is clear. It is when added characteristics of a gay males life emerge which contrast the roles of hegemonic masculinity, that gay men are stripped of further social stature. Examples of these contrasting roles are that of homosexual victims of domestic violence and their batterers. Because of the rigid gender roles discussed in the macrosystem, men, both homosexual and heterosexual, are socially constructed under the umbrella of masculinity. However, in the case of gay men, their masculinity is often brought under scrutiny because of their sexual orientation. Ideologies surrounding gay men who do not identify as people with experiences of domestic violence are still awarded less cultural clout than those of heterosexual men. However, the belief that gay men are weak, or somehow inferior than when compared to heterosexual men exists, as previously mentioned, due to the social constructions of hegemonic masculinity, gender and sexuality. Another example of this functioning is discussed in Hickson and Davies work on sexual abuse. Hickson and Davies mention the cultural belief that gay men are too weak to assert any power over anyone by stating "...folk wisdom tells us... gay men are weak and effeminate and could not force themselves on another man" (Hickson & Davies, 1994). The sexual stereotypes surrounding the gender identity and the various types of masculinity gay men exhibit, creates a space for the culture to further ignore and isolate gay men. Another reoccurring theme in the isolation of battered gay men and the reasons by which to deduct them of their power, is the belief that whatever "bad" befalls a homosexual individual is deserved as punishment for his sexuality and denial of his masculinity. The U.S. in particular, values its reputation of equality for all, however, those who deviate from the norm experience unequal social, political, and moral biases found in our society.

"Considering of how we understand and explain violence differently in relation to who the victim is, rather than the circumstances in which the violence occurs, raises the question of the social recognition and worth accorded certain individual or social groups and... the degree to which they are considered to have 'lives worth living'" (May & Richardson, 1999).

The punishment that gay men experience as a reaction to their homosexuality and the assumed rejection of their masculinity is reflected in laws, or the lack there of, in the U.S. The inequality towards same-sex couples is exemplified by legislation that limits protective rights. Knauer writes, "...there are currently five states which specifically exclude same-sex couples from protection by affirmatively limiting domestic violence to opposite-sex couples: Arizona, Delaware, Indiana, Montana and South Carolina" (Knauer, 1999). This shows that the social power and recognition granted to homosexual men by society is much less than that given to heterosexual men. Due to the violation of rigid gender roles and violations of hegemonic masculinity, gay men are often met with adversity when they cry out for help, while they are stripped of their societal credits to personal power via religion, politics, and social recognition.

In the macrosystem, the narrative of domestic violence for homosexual intimate partners is a fairly new one in comparison to heterosexual couples. For decades, the idea of keeping the private and social spheres separate has been a mainstream culprit in silencing domestic violence for individuals of both orientations. Heterosexual women often have difficulty coming out about their violent situations because of impending cultural backlash. The same can be said of homosexual men. For gay couples, domestic violence affects the way one is viewed by society: "...the recognition of same-sex domestic violence is potentially politically damaging" (Knauer, 1999). Because the homosexual community has strived for so long to create a positive space for itself, the existence of violence between individuals in romantic relationships gives way for negative aspects of culture, like anti-gay organizations and anti-gay belief systems, to confirm fears surrounding peril homosexuality.

As I have pointed out, battered women and battered gay men have various elements that affect their situations of violence differently. The model of battery (Figure 1) helps delve deeper into the personal experiences with violence while prompting us to see the differences posed at the macro, exo, and micro systems. The base of the model of battery is representative of a heterosexual woman in an abusive relationship. The dome at the top is representative of society and culture. The arrows pointing up towards the dome reflect a woman attempting to leave her abusive situation and the arrows reflecting back down represent those societal forces that keep pushing her back into said abuse. An example of this model functioning would be a situation where a woman has made the decision to leave her abusive relationship. She makes it on her own for several weeks but decides to go back to her abuser because she has been so isolated from everyone that the few familial and friendship support systems remaining in her life are aware of the abuse but unsupportive of her escape by telling her that she must have provoked her batterer. Her religious supporters are telling her to go back to her husband based on the rules regarding marriage within her religion, and after enough coercion she returns to her abusive partner in hopes that everything will be different because those closest to her seem to agree:

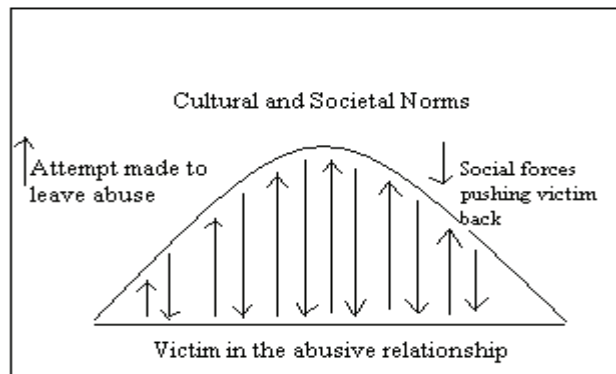


Figure 1

The model of battery functions similarly for homosexual men experiencing violence. Take the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the gay community for example. The cultural stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS (in 1986 GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency)) was placed solely on homosexual men until cases of the disease began to emerge in the heterosexual population. This disease has brought with it many complexities which have managed to create another facet in instances of domestic violence for battered gay men. More so for gay men than heterosexual women, the presence of HIV/AIDS has made them subject to forms of isolation. These direct forms of isolation juristically change the dynamics of intimate partner violence within a same-sex relationship. This next testimonial was taken from a Facebook note posted in March of 2007 about an urban gay man infected with HIV and his attempt to leave his abuser. "I got sick and my partner paid for my medication, but he would always hold my HIV over my head. The emotional abuse was so severe that I told him I was leaving, he told me that he'd let me die if I did" (MB, 2007). This is a prime example of how the ecological model functions as a whole. Due to this man's disease and the chastisement he experiences at the macro level, he suffers economically in the exosystem and then into the microsystem with the control over wealth and dominance his partner exhibits over him. This man not only financially depends on his partner for his medication, but like many other gay male victims of intimate partner abuse who become infected with HIV, his resources diminish and his attempts to leave his abuser fail.

This model is very effective when examining specific scenarios in which victims of intimate partner abuse attempt to leave, and how there are certain elements which vary across sexual orientations. Disease is only one of many factors that can complicate a relationship in which abuse occurs. For instance, the stereotype that men cannot be abused plays a major role in the way abuse is handled in one's community. "The idea of an abused man is so "far from our national image of men it is laughable" (Sherven & Sniechowski, 2005). An example of this emerges in the way police have responded to incidents of intimate partner abuse between gay men in the past. Let's look at a scenario where a gay man experiences a beating from his partner and calls the police. The police arrive but see the abuse as a fair fight between two men and do nothing to help the male victim. They leave and the victim has been left at risk of being beaten by his partner again. It is the construction of hegemonic masculinity and ideas about gender formulated in the macrosystem that teach the culture that men are not likely to be abused because they are anatomically male. Due to the construction of hegemonic masculinity, we see men as incapable of being battered, which often isolates gay men from 'coming out' about their abusive relationships, leaving them vulnerable.

It is in the macrosystem that we see how the rigid gender roles we hold can define and characterize aspects of homosexuality, which in turn effect the way intimate partner violence between gay men is viewed. The tendency in the macrosystem due to gender performance and the cultural construction of masculinity, is to deny the possibility and existence of gay domestic violence because it challenges the idea of hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchal norm.

When utilizing an ecological approach to study intimate partner violence between gay men, it is easy to see that these levels intersect one another. I established previously that the masculinity linked to aggression, the rigid gender roles, the acceptance of physical violence, and physical chastisement we see in the macrosystem are also present when looking at the associations gay men have in the exosystem. The examination of the gay community will aid in seeing how the systems of the ecological model function together. The gay community at large has struggled for a long time to establish an image that is comparable to any heterosexual relationship such that they marry, pay taxes, and have children. Essentially, the community has struggled to say that same-sex couples have many of the same desires as heterosexual couples in reference to the ability to be protected, and that they hold the same rights as the heterosexual community at large. Currently, the gay community is making many strides in their attempts to be recognized as equal rights partners in American society and there are many organizations working to validate gay marriage in the U.S. Several well-known institutions found in the U.S. devote a large portion of their efforts to the equalization of marriage movement. In New York City there is the non-profit organization “Freedom to Marry,” in Boston, Massachusetts, GLAD (Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders), and located in six states across the country, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force seeks to end marriage and partner recognition discrimination because “...same-sex families deserve the same respect, recognition and protection as all other families” (Hawes, 2010).

While these organizations fight for the legal rights of same-sex couples to be recognized, there is a strong sense of denial within the gay community in regards to the acknowledgement of intimate partner violence occurring in same-sex relationships. With the movement in support of gay marriage raging, any negative publicity has the potential to set the gay community’s efforts back. In *Same-Sex Domestic Violence: Claiming a Domestic Sphere While Risking Negative Stereotypes*, Nancy Knauer discusses the political hazards that the recognition of same-sex domestic violence could have on the gay community. She writes, “...the political downside of discussing same-sex domestic violence is obvious. By reinforcing negative stereotypes, the recognition of same-sex violence risks destabilizing the emerging positive image of same-sex relationships popularized by the media and the ongoing legal fight for equal marriage rights” (Knauer, 1999). Therefore, the denial of the existence of domestic violence by the gay community seeks to protect the efforts made towards political equality at the cost of isolation of the abused. I posit that domestic violence in gay male relationships is routinely suppressed and denied for fear of cultural and social backlash within the heterosexual community, thereby disempowering and isolating the victim while creating a space for the abuse to continue.

The denial surrounding the occurrences of domestic violence in the gay community makes it possible for the cycle of violence to remain. The lack of recognition creates a domino effect, which inevitably leads to the isolation felt by both victims and batterers who have experienced and continue to experience occurrences of domestic violence in their relationships. In an article by Linda Peterman and Charlotte Dixon, they state that “...because domestic violence is ignored by the homosexual community it fails to be recognized by the government and society” (Dixon & Peterman, 2003). Peterman and Dixon reinforce the argument presented by Oatley concerning the isolation of battered victims in the gay community. In *Domestic violence doesn’t Discriminate on the bases of sexual Orientation* Peterman and Dixon state, “...many persons who are gay [or lesbian] do not want anyone to know of the abuse for they fear society thinking that the homosexual community is ‘sick’, ‘violent’ or ‘uncontrollable’” (Dixon & Peterman, 2003). Fears of slander towards the gay community such as this, give anti-gay organizations the fuel to feed their homophobic propaganda surrounding gay lifestyles in mainstream culture. In doing so, anti gay groups attain another aspect of homophobia to place as a barrier for the fighters in the equal rights movement.

Isolation of the victims affected by domestic violence is a direct result of the denial surrounding intimate partner abuse in the gay community from the macro level into the personal level of the ecological model. Because the gay community lacks in its recognition of domestic violence, the possibility for research amongst gay men and lesbians experiencing violence is limited. McClennen, author of *Domestic Violence between Same-Gender Partners: Recent Findings and Future Research*, discusses the impact the element of isolation has on intimate partner abuse in the gay community.

“In America’s homophobic society, researching intimate partner violence between [lesbian and] gay male partners is at best, challenging as, in their efforts to preclude oppressive forces from gaining information that could be used to further persecute them, these individuals have created a conspiracy of silence about the existence of intimate partner violence within their homes. This silence results in many of these individuals being double closeted- entombed in their same-gender identity and in their personal pain of abuse” (McClennen, 2002).

The silence maintained by the victims of domestic violence in the gay community is fostered by the desire to prioritize the abuse occurring in the relationship below their desire to aid in the gay community’s overall social image of same-sex couples in the U.S. By remaining closeted about the violence occurring in their lives, the gay community is omitting any negative stereotypes political and social oppressors could use against the social image of homosexual couples. Though this weighs in as a productive political tactic, it is the victims of intimate partner abuse that suffer the most from the gay community’s silence. Letting domestic violence within the community take a back seat to the political and social image the gay

community wishes to uphold is counterproductive. Some would argue that at this time, gaining the right to marry is what requires the attention of the community, however, is this right worth the lives of those who are sacrificing “coming out” about their violence for the sake of the greater gay image?

Joan McClennen (2002) examines the phenomenon of denial in the homosexual community. While the denial attempts to protect the social image of same-sex couples, it refutes efforts to combat domestic violence in the gay community, leaving more people (gay men) without the necessary resources to seek help (McClennen, 2002). Without recognition of the intimate partner violence at the macro level with the development of gender roles, cultural norms, the construction of male dominance, and stereotyping in the microsystem, no change can occur. This negation of intimate partner violence in the social realm presents batterers with a unique opportunity to continue the power and control dynamics put in place by their use of domestic violence towards their partner.

Nancy Knauer discusses the necessity of intimate partner violence recognition regardless of the social consequences towards the gay community. “...it also seems clear that as public awareness regarding same-sex domestic violence increases, so too do the number of reported cases. A survey released in October 1998 shows a 41% nationwide increase in reported cases of same-sex domestic violence” (Knauer, 1999). This can be attributed to the fact that battered gay men see that they are not alone in their isolation. If the silence surrounding domestic violence is broken in the gay community and the public is made aware something is happening, said awareness means that the gay men reporting the violence are being validated and do not have to fear being ignored by the gay community or their social images manipulated by society. As history has exhibited, with awareness comes change. In the sixties, second wave feminism brought attention to the violence occurring in the private sphere of women. With this awareness emerged the development of shelters and cultural aids to help combat domestic violence for women. However, with the repudiation in the homosexual community, gay men have almost no where to turn. According to Knauer, “...for abused men, there are simply no shelters” (Knauer, 1999).

The lack of resources established for gay men, and the lack of funding to thwart domestic violence overall, is a result of the nation’s ignorance about it and though the risk of social backlash toward the homosexual community is great, there have been small steps made to refute the silence in the gay community. I spent the summer of 2010 working with the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP), an organization established in 1990 that opposes all forms of violence toward and within the LGBTQ community. With a 24 hour bilingual hotline in place and trained counselors to answer, AVP serves to assist anywhere help is needed. The New York City AVP has developed programs to break the silence. These programs send educated advocates to community events where they provide literature that addresses help-seeking behaviors for victims as well as a list of places to receive counseling for batterers. With this push to educate, organizations set up to combat intimate partner violence function to aid victims and batterers with their personal chastisement surrounding violence and with any adversity they may be experiencing for being homosexual, as well as put forth efforts toward shattering ideas of hegemony.

One of the greatest assurances to the continuation of domestic violence is silence. Based on research conducted over the past 25 years, it is blatant that silence is a factor for both the heterosexual and homosexual communities. Johnson and Ferraro wrote an article, *Research on Domestic Violence in the 1990’s: Making Distinctions*, which examines the communal characteristics that promote the silence of domestic violence in both heterosexual and gay male partnerships. Though denial is a discourse of domestic violence in the gay community, the research that has been done still closets the domestic violence occurrences that happen between gay men specifically. “...we still seem to know more about lesbian battering than we do about violence in gay men’s relationships, in part because of the important role of the women’s movement in generating research on domestic violence” (Ferraro & Johnson, 2000). Because silence is a factor in both heterosexual and homosexual abuse for different reasons, this analysis has sought to distinguish the various explanations as to why silence remains so prevalent for gay men experiencing intimate partner violence.

Silence within the community does not stand alone in the major factors that allow intimate partner abuse to continue. There is also the element of control sought by those who have experienced such intense degradation due to their sexual orientation and performance of masculinity. In 2006 Mason, McKenry, and Serovich discussed the idea that gay men who have both experienced and internalized homophobia throughout their lives have utilized abuse in a relationship as a way to prove that they themselves have the power and control over their own lives. In a study they completed, Mason, McKenry, and Serovich examined one’s personal history as outlying personality determinants. They state, “Individuals may theoretically resort to violence because it is their most readily understood and accessible coping strategy in dealing with loss of power” (Mason, McKenry and Serovich, 2006). Within some family units, it is clear that homosexual children often find themselves further isolated from society. By isolating young gay boys in order to prevent the destruction of the “nuclear families” image, the adolescents are disempowered and unconsciously told that their sexuality is harmful to the societal image of the family at large and therefore must be hidden. The same can be said about the closeting of homosexual violence for the gay community. It must be kept secret in order to protect a social image.

Conclusions

In this paper I have outlined the ecological framework and how the elements that make up the macro, exo, and microsystems, as well as one's personal history, prompt and maintain the isolation gay men feel when domestic violence becomes a factor in their lives. I have examined the intersecting spheres of the ecological model and come to the conclusion that the only way to put a stop to domestic violence in the gay male community is to break the silence. As a culture we must take apart the gendered stereotypes and we must transgress the rigid gender roles that deem men unable to be battered. We must remove from our cultural ideologies the idea that gay men are weak and cannot exert any sort of power over another individual. But most of all we must eliminate our tendency to value the sanctity of heterosexuality higher than that of homosexuality. By breaking down these negative ideologies, we are telling our citizens that discrimination and isolation based on sexual orientation is wrong. It will only be when we can reconstruct America's perspectives of homosexual men and the violence they experience, that resources will be created. Battered gay men will no longer have to be turned away from women's shelters or subjected to further abuse in homeless shelters because we will understand that this is a problem for citizens of our society, not people who are deviant.

I believe that it is with the destruction of stereotypes, hegemony, and rigid roles that more gay men will be able to attain help in leaving their abusive relationships. Gay male abusers will be able to construct a dialogue about their utilization of violence and truly get to the root of why they batter. With the transgression of old ideologies, gay men will be able to come out of the closet about their battering and walk into a place where help is waiting and people understand that intimate partner violence is not a problem that only exists for the heterosexual, but one that needs to be taken seriously across all sexual orientations.

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