2000

Partner abuse in gay male relationships: Challenging 'we are family'

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PARTNER ABUSE IN GAY MALE RELATIONSHIPS:

CHALLENGING "WE ARE FAMILY"

BY

JEFFREY AGUINALDO

BACHELOR OF ARTS. YORK UNIVERSITY. 1998

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the Master of Arts degree

Wilfrid Laurier University

2000

Abstract

The purposes of this study are twofold: a) to explore the material experience of partner abuse among gay male relationships and b) to explore the discursive conditions from which gay men must draw to negotiate the experience of relationship violence. I incorporated Standpoint epistemology and Queer theory to inform the theoretical basis of this thesis. To achieve the research objectives, I conducted a total of seven interviews with gay men. The findings from the interview data are presented in two phases. First, I presented three stories of gay men who had experienced violence and abuse at the hands of their same-sex partner. With these stories, I presented sites of intervention and community mobilization. Furthermore, I bring to focus the unique findings of this study that would otherwise be ignored through mass-survey style research. Second, I presented the constructions and negotiations of partner abuse among the remaining four participants. These participants drew upon a number of heteronormative discourses that produce the experience of gay male partner abuse. Implications of a discursive analysis are discussed. Briefly I consider community psychology as a means to coordinate multiple interventions throughout the ecological spectrum along with therapeutic implications in dealing with partner abuse among gay men. Finally, I take a reflexive approach to explore my own positions within the research process.

Acknowledgements

I must first give special acknowledgment to all my peers in community

psychology who were a source of refuge from the trials and tribulations of graduate work

and who made my experiences in KW a little less lonely. Despite our diverse

backgrounds and opinions, my colleagues willingly became my sounding board, self-help

group, and much needed distraction from the daily grind. I would especially like to thank

Purnima and Melissa for their helpful suggestions on previous drafts of this thesis.

Amen and alleluia to the dykenamic duo: Cherie who proudly and courageously

takes her stand within a discipline that I hate and love, and Wendy who inspired me to be

both troubled and troublesome in my work and without apologies.

I would like to thank Richard, my thesis supervisor, who waited for me to get my

act together and produce this thesis that you now read. Throughout the research process

and during my many moments of tension and despair, Richard's infinite patience would

let me know that he knew that I could complete this study, even when I thought I

couldn't. Much appreciation to my committee members, Susan and Carol-Anne, for their

constructive criticism and highly insightful and thought provoking discussion.

Finally, I would like to mention those community members whom I badgered and

harassed for their assistance at the formative stages of this thesis: Jan, from the AIDS

Committee of Guelph and Wellington County who faxed out my research ads, some of

which somehow ended up in California; Fran, who allowed me to post research ads in the

men and women's bathroom stalls in Club Renaissance; Laurie, who introduced me to

CASSPA members and invited me to join their meetings; and to all those who helped

spread the word about this thesis.

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Partner Abuse in Gay Male Relationships:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The lack of information on partner abuse in gay male relationships has led many

of us, both within and outside the gay communities, to believe, erroneously, that gay men

are somehow exempt from experiencing such violence. It is only quite recently that a

small minority of social researchers has begun to consider domestic violence among gay

males as a serious social problem that warrants immediate attention and intervention

(e.g., research and social support). I hope that the study I present here will continue the

current trend towards increasing public awareness about gay male partner abuse. The

goals of this study are twofold: a) to explore the material conditions of partner abuse in

gay male relationships through lived experience and b) to explore the discursive

conditions of "gay male partner abuse" through negotiation and "talk."

In researching marginalized communities, I must remain aware of the political and

social implications of the research that I produce. The next section, entitled "Setting the

Stage," focuses on my understanding of the broader social and political context to

emphases how it informs the ways that I can speak about and address violence and abuse

among gay men. Afterwards, I explore my own personal context that necessarily guides

and directs the research process. Making myself present helps the readers understand

who is doing the research and allows my own assumptions and understandings to be

open and apparent.

The literature review that I present is not an exhaustive index of all current

theories on the cause of domestic violence. Instead, I focus the literature review on the

emerging debate that has been forged by psychological researchers who encourage the

rejection of a feminist analysis on domestic violence and advance their own

individualistic "pathological" based models of battering. These perspectives dominate

the discursive landscapes from which gay men must come to understand the experiences

of partner abuse.

For the theoretical framework of this thesis, I draw upon Standpoint epistemology

and Queer theory. Standpoint epistemology allows me to organize the research findings

in such a way that affirms the voices of the participants that I interview while remaining

action-oriented (Ristock, 1998). Standpoint epistemology encourages me to look to the

interviews I conduct as a valuable source of knowledge that can be harnessed to benefit

those I research. Queer theory encourages me to take the research to another level.

"Queering" heteronormative discourses demands a postmodern critique of the language

(Honeychurch, 1996) that gay men must use to conceptualize partner abuse and how these

discourses regulate and obfuscate the experience of relationship violence among gay men.

In the methodology section I describe two separate research "phases" for this

study. Each phase included its own participant recruitment, data collection, and data

analysis and accomplished one of the research goals for the present study. I develop my

own definition of "sound" methods that I used to develop and guide the research

procedures, which entails accountability and responsibility not only to the participants,

but to the communities to which they belong.

I organized the research findings and discussion sections according to the

objectives of the research. First, I present the stories of three participants who lived with

an abusive male partner. With these stories, I conduct a cross-analysis to highlight

themes that emerged. The implications of each participant's experience along with the

their suggestions to alleviate the needs that result from partner abuse are discussed.

Second, I present examples of dialogue and negotiations of "abuse." Using these

findings, I discuss the implications of a discursive analysis on the current research on

domestic violence.

Given the complexities that arise in understanding and addressing partner abuse

among gay males, an interdisciplinary approach to intervention is discussed. I briefly

suggest Community Psychology as a potential model of intervention that can address both

the material and discursive domains of relationship violence among gay men.

Furthermore, I discuss therapeutic implications in light of the thesis research findings.

Finally, I turn the analysis inward to explore my place in the process of this research as a

whole.

Setting the Stage

From the start of this thesis process, I realized that I was opening up a discussion

about a topic that many believe to be fictitious, contentious, or "anti-gay." For example,

rereading my own journal I had written throughout the thesis process, I came upon this

particular entry:

> *September 17th, 1999. Over the course of this week, there had been a*
> *number of events held at the graduate pub to welcome new students to*
> *Wilfrid Laurier University. Two days ago, I was at the pub and there was*
> *a tarot card reader offering free "readings" so I thought, "Well, why*
> *not?" and I went to try it out. The tarot card reader and I started talking*
> *about things. Her skills weren't that spectacular nor in any way*

remarkable but nonetheless we did speak at some length. She asked me
what my thesis was on and I told her it explored same-sex partner abuse.
She looked at me and said, "So, you're going to "rat" on "us."
Obviously, she was queer. She went on to say that gay and lesbian
relationships are supposed to embody harmony between two people (or
among people for that matter). Maybe "we" have been telling some lies...
(Personal Journal)

I begin the research process by exploring my own understanding of the context in

which I conduct this research. In many ways, the broader social context defines the terms

with which I can research marginalized communities. More specifically, I identify the

political terrain that limits the ways that we can speak about and prevent same-sex partner

abuse. Within this context, I locate my own personal point of departure. I do this to

inform the reader about who I am as the researcher and why I have chosen to explore

partner abuse in gay male relationships.

Social Context

I proposed and produced this thesis in a relatively small conservative university

situated in a city with a population of nearly 180,000 residents. From my perspective, the

presence of a queer community within this university has been neither encouraged nor

welcomed. Unfortunately, I believe that the conservativism of this university reflects the

broader social and political context found outside the confines of the university walls.

Although conceived and written with input and dialogue from members of the gay male

communities about which I speak, this research may be read and evaluated by those who

do not align themselves with values that are emancipatory towards the gay and lesbian

communities. My concern is not that heterosexual persons will read about the issues I

explore in this thesis; I welcome any and all individuals who may find interest in this

study. Rather, my concern is for those readers who may hold *heterosexist* views. I take

responsibility for the information I "produce" and, like Ristock (1998), consider how

opening up any discussion of partner abuse in same-sex relationships could potentially

feed into a homophobic agenda.

Much like the emergence of AIDS, naming and identifying partner abuse among

gay men may continue to exacerbate the fears of an already homophobic society. Such a

concern, I feel, is very real. Despite its indiscriminate communicability with all people

and communities, AIDS has been used in North America as a means to oppose the rights

of gay men (Bersani, 1987). As "AIDS" became synonymous with "gay," much of the

talk surrounding the eradication of increasing HIV infections became a palatable

euphemism for the condemnation of gay men and the abolition of their so-called

"unnatural" behaviours (Sontag, 1989). For many people, HIV/AIDS legitimized their

hostility and violence directed towards gay men (Bersani, 1987) as is seen in the right

wing conservatives' and religious extremists' all too familiar slogan that "AIDS is the

cure for homosexuality." Unfortunately, speaking out against homophobia prior to any

meaningful discussion of relationship violence is in itself a difficult task.

A social context that constructs same-sex intimacy as an "unnatural" form of

social relation necessarily limits the ways in which partner abuse within these

relationships can be talked about and addressed openly. At a time when the gay and

lesbian communities are struggling to have their civil rights recognized by the mainstream

heterosexist public, I am cautious about presenting gay men and lesbians in a less-than-

perfect light for fear that it may serve to undermine such political aims. For example, I

believe the current strategies used to challenge heterosexual domestic violence would not

necessarily produce the same "effects" if used to address the circumstances of gay/lesbian

relationships.

On January 6, 2000 Media Televison (Znaimer, 2000) aired the newest campaign

produced by Crime Stoppers against heterosexual domestic violence. The television ad

begins with the image of a football player tackling a "dummy" followed by the depiction

of a rug beaten with a stick of some sort. Finally, a paper target is gunned down by

several bullets. Interspersed throughout these images are the solemn faces of women with

the text "This is a woman." This poignant ad campaign portrayed the escalating violence

that occurs within domestic violence from pushing to beating to shooting. Although

considered highly controversial among mainstream audiences, the concerns voiced by the

public about this ad concentrated on the following: a) the use of allegedly gratuitous

violent imagery and, b) the escalation of violence towards the gun as reflective of "real"

experiences of domestic abuse.

Despite this controversy, the ad had fulfilled its goal: to bring heterosexual

domestic violence into the public eye. However, appropriating such an ad campaign to

address domestic violence among gay men and lesbians, I believe, could produce

potentially negative reactions when disseminated among the broader heterosexist society.

For example, to display the image of a woman's bruised and battered face with an

accompanying text that stated, "This violence was done by her lesbian partner" or some

other choice words would likely lend credence to the heterosexist viewers' convictions in

the so-called "inherent" abusive nature of lesbian relationships.

My reason for considering the topic of this thesis in light of the broader social context is not to encourage our own censorship and silence. Doing so only deflects attention from the very real and immediate experiences of violence and abuse that can occur within gay and lesbian relationships. I feel that to know the context in which I conduct this research helps me remain cognizant of the potential hazards that are involved in researching marginalized communities and to ensure that the work that I do benefits rather than harms them.

Personal Context

Wanting to bring this research process to a different level. I make clear and obvious my localities, subjectivities, identities, and intentions as the researcher of this project. Because the researcher's role is constructive rather than objective (Gavey, 1989). it is necessary for me to describe my own positions: Why am I doing this research? Including myself in what I research is not merely an act of self-indulgence nor self-absorption. I wish to make my own assumptions known and for others to be critical of them. Making myself visible throughout the research process serves to inform the reader of how I came to the topic of inquiry, what I bring to this work, and how I affect the overall claims of this research.

In deciding on a research topic for this thesis, I wanted to speak from a community in which I gladly claim membership and to which I am deeply committed. For this thesis, I speak about a form of violence that is not "*done to us*" but rather "*done among us.*" My reasons to explore same-sex partner abuse have changed throughout the many revisions of this thesis. It was only after self-reflection that I realized how partner

abuse within our communities has served to undermine my own beliefs about a gay and lesbian identities and challenge the very notion of what the "community" represented to me.

As a result of our collective experiences with homophobia and heterosexism, I falsely believed that in coming together as a community we (as gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered, and transsexuals) embraced in our hearts and minds and through our actions, the fundamental ideology of "power among" rather than "power over." I thought that we created a safer space for ourselves and each other. Unfortunately, I realized these assumptions were far from true. For example, a very close friend once told me that her lesbianism was and is an expression of "women loving women." But her experiences with repeated physical and psychological abuse from her lesbian partner and having this abuse continued by a community that ignored her only served to challenge her own political beliefs of her lesbian identity. For me, the very idea of abuse that occurs among gay and lesbian relationships contradicts our collective Pride Day chants of "We are Family."

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Review of the literature revealed a wide array of terminology that was used to

describe violence that occurs within same-sex relationships. "Domestic violence,"

"abuse," and "aggressive relationships" were used interchangeably among the published

research but not without exception. For example, in exploring battering among lesbians,

Hammond (1989) described "abuse" as any behaviour that results in emotional,

psychological, physical, or spiritual harm to a victim. However, Hammond reserved the

term "battering" to refer to systemic physical force that is used to gain and maintain

control within an intimate relationship. Generally, most researchers on same-sex partner

abuse simply adopted definitions of domestic violence such as that proposed by Walker

(1999). Walker defined domestic violence as "a pattern of abusive behaviours including

a wide range of physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment used by one person in

an intimate relationship against another to gain power unfairly or maintain that person's

misuse of power, control, and authority" (p. 23). Researchers have not taken serious

issue with the adoption of the term "domestic violence" to label the experiences of

violence that can occur in same-sex relationships, even though psychologists have

generally used the term to refer to the battering of women by their husbands within

heterosexual relationships (Walker, 1999).

Experiencing partner abuse among gay men and lesbians is presumed to mirror the

heterosexual experience of domestic violence. For example, Evans and Bannister (1990)

described the cycle of abuse among abusive lesbian relationships with periods of caring

and loving, tension building, and finally, battering. Periods of battering consist of a

number of coercive behaviours such as isolation from friends and family, monopolization

of perceptions, threats, and degradation all of which remain consistent with the

heterosexual experience of domestic violence.

Much of the controversy in the social science literature on domestic violence

pertains to the supposed fundamental "cause" of domestic violence. More recently,

proponents of conventional psychology have used reports of same-sex partner abuse as a

means to debunk feminist theories that rely upon a gendered-analysis of relationship

violence (e.g., Dutton, 1994; Letellier, 1996). Feminist theorists have claimed that

gender inequalities have been the underlying cause of relationship violence: Wife

battering is a "natural" expression of men controlling women within a patriarchical

society (Yllo & Strauss, 1990).

Gender-based Theories of Domestic Violence

Gender-based theories of domestic violence remain the most dominant

orientation that has fuelled the battered women's movement and for some time was

advocated by most feminist researchers. Typically, proponents of gender-based theories

discount the traditions of other disciplines (e.g., biology, sociology, and psychology),

claiming that these conceptions excuse batterers and ignore the inherent inequalities

between the genders (Martin, 1981). Consistent with the macro-level analysis used by

many feminist researchers, gender-based theories of domestic violence look outward

towards the socio-political realms. These researchers claim that patriarchy forms the

backdrop in which wife battering occurs (Yllo & Strauss, 1990). Therefore, an analysis

of social institutions is necessary for any meaningful understanding of relationship abuse.

According to a gender-based analysis, the institution of marriage provides the conduit for the broader patriarchical gender inequalities into the private interactions of men and women. The institution of the family, according to feminist theorists, is not a "natural" order of relations, but a coercive means by which "men" and "women" are constituted and domination of women is enforced (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993). Men and women must subscribe to cultural expectations from a society that is stratified by gender where men hold significant power and women do not (Bograd, 1988). Violence, according to feminist theorists, becomes a logical mode for husbands to assert control over their wives (Hansen & Harway, 1993).

Feminist theorists have argued that men who batter women are simply living up to cultural prescriptions of their gender roles (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). According to these theorists, wife battering is an expression of political oppression. "Violence against women, including battering wives, rape, and femicide, is a natural consequence of women's powerless position vis-a-vis men in patriarchal societies and the sexist values and attitudes that accompany this inequity" (Martin, 1976, p. xii). It has come to be viewed that abuse by men within heterosexual relationships is a natural expression of the social order that "naturally" subjugates women (Bograd, 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hansen & Haraway, 1993; Martin, 1981).

Criticisms of Gender-based Theories of Domestic Violence

Gender-based theories of domestic violence illustrate the profound effects of the social and political context on individual and interpersonal behaviour. Moreover, the use of socio-political explanatory frameworks offers transformative changes to the social

conditions of women and therefore preventative of heterosexual domestic violence *by*

men. However, the use of a socio-political analysis in the absence of any recognition for

individual differences resulted in an gross over-estimation of "context" (Letellier, 1996).

Generalizations about both genders are exaggerated by Bogard's (1988) claim that

"feminists seek to understand why men in general use physical force against their partners

and what functions this serves for a given society in a specific historic context" (p. 13).

In their refusal to adopt gender neutral terms, proponents of gender-based theories insist

on an essentialized experience of domestic violence. Roles are seen to be polarized and

gender specific where males are perpetrators and female are victims (Bograd. 1988;

Dobash, & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1981).

Unfortunately, the use of gender-based theories of domestic violence to account

for all instances of abusive relationships renders these theories inherently heterosexist.

The continued assumption of male/batterer and female/victim preclude the possibility of

same-sex partner abuse (Elliot. 1996; Island & Letellier, 1991; Landolt & Dutton. 1997;

Letellier, 1996). In doing so, feminist theorists conceived of domestic violence as solely

a heterosexual phenomenon, thereby silencing the experiences of partner abuse in same-

sex relationships (Letellier, 1996).

Any attempts to include gay men and lesbians within a gendered-analysis on

domestic violence merely contributed to what Merrill (1996) outlined as the four popular

myths of same-sex partner abuse: 1) all men are violent and lesbian abuse does not exist.

2) domestic violence among gay male and lesbian relationships is not as severe as its

heterosexual equivalent, 3) abuse between members of the same gender is based on equal

power, and 4) the perpetrator of violence is the "butch" while the victim is the "femme,"

thereby attempting to model heterosexual relationships (see Martin, 1976 as an example).

Psychological Theories on Domestic Violence in Gay Relationships

Only within the last few decades have researchers decried the heterosexist nature

of gender-based theories of domestic violence. Island and Letellier (1991) were the more

vocal of these researchers and wrote the germinal publication entitled Men who beat the

men who loved them. They criticised feminist analysis of domestic violence and

advanced more traditional psychological perspectives to conceptualize partner abuse.

which would provide a theoretical framework that allowed for the inclusion of mixed-

gendered as well as same-gendered relationships.

To Island and Letellier, the invisibility of gay male relationships within a

gendered analysis of domestic violence warranted an outright rejection of feminist

paradigms. They argued that "domestic violence is not a gender issue. It is a power

issue, a legal issue, and a mental health issue" (p.16). Island and Letellier separated the

power/gender coupling that had long been argued by feminists and constructed a "gender

neutral" theory of domestic violence that focussed on power and control.

Although similar to feminist theories, Island and Letellier's conceptualization

challenged the assumptions of essentialized power imbalances between the genders.

Consequently, Island and Letellier relocated the "cause" of battering and domestic

violence from the cultural prescriptions of gender to the so-called "pathology" of the

individual batterer. They critiqued the inadequacies of then-current psychological

diagnosis and advocated for a "Battering Disorder Classification" (p. 69) and provided a

behavioural profile to diagnose "the batterer".

Criticism of Psychological Theories on Gay Male Partner Abuse

Island and Letellier's (1991) theoretical framework formed the basis for other,

albeit clinical, psychological research (e.g., Landolt & Dutton, 1997). However, Island

and Letellier's model did not easily account for all experiences of domestic violence. In

spite of their position to maintain a gender-neutral stance, they began their book by

stating that the vast majority of heterosexual domestic violence (95%) is committed by

men and they dedicated specific attention to the batterers' unclear understanding of

masculinity. If domestic violence is not a gender issue, as Island and Letellier contend,

then relationship abuse among heterosexual couples would be instigated equally by men

and women (Merrill, 1996).

By focussing attention on the clinical aspects of abuse, Island and Letellier

(19991) fail to account for the profound effects of the material and discursive contexts.

Violence is "discursively constructed, experienced, and perceived through the filter of

heterosexist thinking" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 58). The experience of violence and

abuse within same-sex relationships is unique as a result of heteronormative social

institutions that justify, and in some ways encourage, the violence done to gay men and

lesbians. Furthermore, by ignoring an analysis of the broader social context, Island and

Letellier (1991) cannot provide truly preventative interventions for partner abuse. For

instance, battering must occur first in order for a "battering" diagnosis that would warrant

social intervention. However, primary prevention would encourage intervention that

would target "causes" of abuse prior to its occurrence.

Conclusions or Delusions?

The insistence of each set of theorists to account for all experiences of domestic

violence threatens the "validity" of either theory. Such "grand narratives" are

problematized by findings from other researchers that appear to contradict any single

universal model to explain domestic violence and relationship abuse. For instance.

Kwong, Bartholomew, and Dutton (1999) explored gender differences in relationship

violence. Their findings challenged the fixed binary of male/batterer and female/victim

that has been largely proposed by feminist researchers. Kwong et al. found "62 % of men

and 52% of women who reported violence indicated that it was perpetrated by both

partners" (p. 156), although severity of violence was not accounted for. Nonetheless, they

concluded that male-to-female violence was not more frequent than female-to-male

violence in bidirectional cases. Cruz and Firestone (1998) further problematized the

batterer/victim binary most commonly assumed among gay male domestic violence

literature. They found that "while all other respondents (24) initially identified

themselves as victims, many of them suggested culpability in provoking violence. thus

becoming perpetrators as well as victims" (p. 165). Marrajo and Kreger (1996) identified

three possible roles in abusive lesbian relationships: primary aggressor, primary victim,

and *participant*. Participants, according to Marrajo and Kreger, exhibited behaviours that

are characteristic of both aggressors and victims: Participants have instigated and

experienced violence within the relationship and lend credence to the notion of "mutual

combatants," a highly controversial construct since its inception. Although Hart (1986)

points out the similarities between lesbian and male heterosexual batterers, she

recognized and asserted these psychological "predictors" are, in fact, fluid and highly unstable among lesbian batterers.

In summary, no one theoretical approach sufficiently accounts for the myriad experiences of domestic violence, even though proponents of both sides claim to uncover the "truth" about domestic violence. The theoretical (and political) tensions between the perspectives have been exacerbated by researchers, such as Dutton (1994) and Letellier (1996), who continue to polarize the debate that demands a prevailing theory at the expense of the other. For researchers, such as those cited above, the goal has been to resolve the theoretical contradictions among domestic violence theories. Research on gay partner abuse has been concerned with how to include gay relationships into existing domestic violence theory. Violence and abuse remain central to the analysis, while the simple addition of same-sex relationships into the model serves to strip away the social and political circumstances in which gay men and lesbians are positioned.

The research I present in this thesis departs from the objectivist social research that dominates the published literature. I do not look for a single totalizing model that "explains" all experiences of relationship violence and abuse. Instead, I view domestic violence as socially constructed and relative to the historical and cultural context in which it is situated. My role, then, as a queer researcher is to look beyond the terms of the debate: to look for multiple "truths" and experiences of relationship abuse among gay men and to recognize the discursive terrains that govern our explanatory frameworks of these experiences.

Through in-depth interviews with gay men, I explore: a) the material conditions of

violence and abuse in gay male relationship through lived experience, and b) the available

discourses that are used to negotiate and understand partner abuse among gay men. The

first of these research goals involves accurately presenting the accounts of gay men in

their own words who have experienced violence and abuse. These accounts can be used

to identify sites for intervention to prevent future occurrences of domestic violence

among gay men. The second research goal involves exploring how the objects I research

(e.g., partner abuse, victimization/victimhood) are produced by the broader discursive

conditions. In this second objective, I examine how the available language provided by a

heteronormative context produces and regulates the experience of violence and abuse

among gay men.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

I have incorporated Standpoint epistemology and Queer theory to inform the

theoretical framework of this thesis. Standpoint epistemology serves the purposes of

affirming the voices of gay men from multiple perspectives while organizing the research

in such a way that is action-oriented and responsive to material needs. Queer theory

provides a postmodern critique of the prescribed language derived from a

heteronormative context while remaining committed to the emancipation of the queer

communities about which I speak. A queering of perspective allows for a transgressive

appreciation of "culture" and a critical reflection of how heteronormative discourses

produce and regulate the experiences of gay men (Stein & Plummer, 1996).

Standpoint Epistemology

Standpoint theory has been most commonly associated with feminist

epistemology. Feminists have challenged the notion of "objectivism" touted by

positivists and instead, have pointed out the inherent biases in "scientific" research

(Harding, 1991). As a result, many feminist researchers have advocated for the use of

qualitative research designs (Reinharz, 1992) and specifically those methods that

appreciate multiple standpoints. According to Harding (1991), knowledge is dependent

on the social situation where the knowledge is constructed. For instance, the multiple

positions of women have provided a unique source of knowledge for feminist researchers

to draw upon. This knowledge has revealed forms of human relationships that are not

visible to men and, therefore, can be used as a means to subvert the dominant

androcentric interpretations of women's lives (Harding, 1991). This approach has gained

considerable attention among feminist ethnographers who research women as experts of

their own experiences. In the area of marginalized sexual identities, standpoint

epistemology has been used to understand the material experiences of gay men.

Some researchers have found feminist standpoint epistemology particularly

appealing, because it "deauthorizes" researchers who speak from the dominant

heterosexist perspectives, as "experts" to the experiences of gay men and lesbians. Other

researchers have drawn upon standpoint epistemology as a means to emphasize and

privilege the voices of marginalized sexual identities. For example, O'Neill (1994)

explored the experience of gay men in a social work graduate programme located in

Canada. Through a "gay standpoint," O'Neill revealed the overt and covert expressions

of heterosexism, as experienced by gay men within social work programmes that operate

within social institutions that presumably promote empowerment and well-being for

marginalized communities.

Standpoint epistemology is an effective means to explore the lived experiences of

violence and abuse among gay male relationships. My focus on gay experiences, as

different from those of heterosexuals, is important to challenge and resist homophobia

and heterosexism that erases the specificity and diversity of gay men within the dominant

domestic violence literature. However, focussing on experiences alone leaves much

assumed, and "the importance of language as a constituted process remains largely

unrecognized" (Gavey, 1989, p. 461) and ignored.

In researching the experiences of gay men, I am compelled to look beyond the

language and discourses that have been given to me, by the dominant heterosexist

discourses, to describe and constitute the communities that I research. In keeping to my

own values, my research must play an emancipatory role for the queer communities in

ways that are action oriented while remaining critical of how the broader social context

defines, and often silences, the terms with which we, as queer persons, articulate the

pluralities of our experiences.   Such an approach is the hallmark of queer theory.

<div align="center">Queered Perspective</div>

For this thesis, I chose to situate myself in what Honeychurch (1996) calls a

"queered position." All social inquiries, according to Honeychurch, presuppose a social

worldview that promotes certain ways of conceiving and experiencing.   The current

dominant heteronormative discourses guide the ways in which marginalized sexual

identities are conceptualized and researched.   Such a framework is inherently

heterosexist.   At the very least, these frameworks simply ignore or silence the differences

that make up the queer communities, while at worst they denigrate the lived experiences

of gay men and lesbians.

Rather than explore the queer subjects as separate from their context,

Honeychurch argued that we, as queer researchers, must explore the lives of gay men and

lesbians within a heterosexist context that has excluded, constrained, or constructed them

as perverse.   Honeychurch argued that queer researchers must interrogate the discursive

conditions of social research and must challenge the epistemological, methodological,

and textual assumptions and stipulations of compulsory heterosexualized discourse.

> "To urge the potential of a queered position in social research inquiry
> around homosexualities... [A queered position] is, rather an endeavour to
> query and obstruct heterosexist models long enough to engage the
> pluralities of desire and knowledge in ways that permit lesbians and gay

men, among others, to constitute ourselves more positively individually
and to contribute to more expansive collective cultural discourses" (p.
343).

A queer position, according to Honeychurch, is a critique of social inquiry that

inappropriately measures queer experiences by using the "un-queered" perspective as the

norm. Queering the grounds on which we stand stratifies and fractures the forced

homogenization of heterosexualizing models. Honeychurch insisted that a queered

position is not restricted to sexual categories but identified along gender, race, and other

constructions of differences and, consistent with postmodernist thought, it aims to trouble

false binaries: homosexual/heterosexual, men/women, black/white,

individual/community, etc., proposed by the modernist project.

Also, consistent with postmodernism is the queer researcher's interrogation of

language drawn from a heteronormative context. For instance, "scientific" research on

domestic violence provides a discursive context in which gay men, lesbians. bisexuals.

and other queered individuals must define their experiences of relationship violence.

These dominant discourses presume heterosexuality, and as a result, leave queers without

the words to bring meaning to their experiences of violence.

Research from a queered position refuses to reinforce and privilege a language

that subjugates queer experiences and it forces open a discursive horizon for queers to

constitute themselves on their own terms (Honeychurch, 1996). In the area of partner

abuse among gay male relationships, interrogating or "queering" the dominant discourses

include questioning pre-given truths about how violence is caused and experienced and

who can experience abuse. Rather than identifying a single, all-encompassing gay or

lesbian reality of partner abuse, a queered analysis entails multiple experiences and

explanations.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Within positivist-empiricist social sciences, "sound" methods generally refer to the degree that research adheres to "scientific standards," whereby the "results" purport to represent the true nature of that being studied.   Generally, ethical considerations are muted and in my opinion ignored. For me, the concept of "sound" methods represents my responsibility, as the researcher, to understand the social and political implications of the body of knowledge that I produce. Throughout this research process, I continually asked myself these questions: Why is this study being conducted? Who will benefit from the "findings"? How will the research affect the participants whom I study?

In response to feminist critiques of traditional social science methods (e.g.. Reinharz. 1992), I remain cognizant of the research relationships that I form with participants and communities about which I speak. Contrary to the positivist paradigm. I do not position myself as the dispassionate objective expert in the experiences of others. However, I recognize the inherent power I hold, as the researcher, and how that power is exercised as I ultimately initiate, conduct, and conclude the research process. For me. my responsibilities do not end at the conclusion of the written report. According to Foucault (1978), psychology as an agent of social control has been used to generate knowledge that reinforces existing power relations. Therefore, I choose to remain aware of the impact of the work that I do, particularly when the communities that I research are socially and politically marginalized. I begin the methods section by identifying the principles that have directed the methodological framework of this thesis.

Principles Drawn from Participatory Action Research

Participants taking active involvement and control in the research process, also referred to as participatory action research (PAR), minimizes or at least confronts many of the underlying issues of power and coercion that come into play within more quantitative psychological methods (Stringer, 1996). As a thesis student completing my degree in Community Psychology, I embrace PAR and other methods used by feminist researchers in an attempt to eliminate the "power over" research relationships that are pervasive among, and often ignored within, the more traditional social science disciplines (Harding, 1991). However, conducting the research within an academic setting presents a number of considerable barriers to implementing emancipatory research methods.

For instance, deadlines, minimal funding, and "scientific standards" imposed upon this thesis restricted the resources I could choose and the methods I could implement. Generally within a PAR framework, participants are asked to expend a great deal of time and energy as each step of the research process is negotiated among stakeholder groups. However, as a student, I had to complete the proposed research in the quickest amount of time possible to avoid ongoing tuition payments. Minimal funding also limited any compensation that I would need to offer, as I ask participants to take greater responsibility for the work that they carry out. Furthermore, the present research constituted my final requirement to complete my master's degree. Therefore, there would not be a shared ownership among participants, as is commonly encouraged within a PAR framework (see Barnsley & Ellis, 1992).

As a result, I was faced with a host of power issues as I carried out this research

project along more standard methodological designs. I alone had to determine what the focus of the research should be. I ultimately determined how the information was gathered and shared and how it should be used. Despite these hurdles, I incorporated many PAR principles to shape and guide the research methodology.

Participants as Experts

I believe people know what will help their own situation. I recognize the value of every participant's insights and how he came to understand his own experiences and. given time and patience, could give valuable suggestions to improve his physical and emotional well-being. Although relieving me of my position as an "expert," adhering to this principle does not relieve me of my responsibilities as a researcher particularly when I ask participants to share very intimate details of their lives.

Accountability and Responsibility to Those I Research

The information that I gathered and the analysis that I conducted should benefit the lives about which I speak. Research should be pro-active to fill a gap in the needs of the people that I researched (Barnsley & Ellis, 1992). Related to accountability to all participants is my responsibility to how the research "findings" will be disseminated and used. As an example, I must anticipate how the idea of violence and abuse in gay relationships could be used to undermine the political aims of the gay and lesbian communities.

Reflexivity and Transparency

According to Ristock and Pennell (1996), reflexivity and transparency are powerful means of negotiating power throughout the research process. Reflexivity refers

to my awareness of how my positions guide and affect the research process, while

transparency demands that I include myself in what I research. In this study, I recognize

and make present my own subjectivities and locations throughout the research process,

and I invite others to be critical of my assumptions.

Overview of the Research

Based on these methodological principles, I designed the research methods to

achieve the following objectives:

1.   to explore the material experience of violence and abuse in gay

relationships through lived conditions and,

2.   to explore the discursive conditions upon which gay men must

draw in order to understand and negotiate relationship violence.

In order to achieve these objectives, I conducted two separate "phases," each with their

own participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis, which I will now describe.

Phase 1: Exploring the Material Experience

Just ask them—and then listen. (Travis, 1992)

In exploring "lived experiences," I remained hesitant to set limiting criteria that

would exclude potential interviewees from this study. Recognizing the social

construction of "gay abuse," I purposefully used inclusive language to allow for diversity

and multiplicity of queer experiences. The very act of labelling same-sex relationship

abuse as gay abuse/lesbian abuse/bisexual abuse, etc., restricts the multiple dimensions of

the queer identities (e.g., How do transsexual/transgendered people problematize my

research inquiry?). Similarly, by labelling, and thereby restricting, particular experiences

as abuse/not abuse, I limit the expressions of violence that might warrant investigation.

For example: Should sado-masochism (s/m) practices be included as abuse? What about

a single instance of verbal or physical fighting? On the other hand, I ran the risk of

trivializing participants' experiences of abuse by embracing all-encompassing definitions.

I chose to explore participants' experiences based on their own terms and in their own

language. Thus, to remain true to the participants of this study, I listened to participants

as authorities of their own experiences. *They* provided the reason for their inclusion in

this study based on their own assumptions about their sexuality, identities. and

experiences.

Participants

I recruited research participants through a number of advertising methods. In

order to reach a broad range of queer identified persons, I posted research advertisements

(see Appendix A) in a number of well trafficked gay/lesbian friendly establishments

throughout Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, and Toronto. Such establishments included

bars, video rental stores, community centres, restaurants, and social service agencies (i.e..

AIDS organizations). Also, members of the Coalition Against Same-sex Partner Abuse

(CASSPA), Toronto received postings and a brief research synopsis during my attendance

at one of their monthly meetings. In addition to these recruitment efforts, I submitted a

small supplemental research advertisement (see Appendix B) to a local Kitchener-

Waterloo gay community newsletter for publication. Finally, my membership with the

Email Rainbow List provided the opportunity to forward research announcements to other

members of the list. The exact number of members on the Email Rainbow List is

unknown. The study was open to men and women of varying sexual identities (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual).

Initially, I was open to including the experiences of both men and women into the present study. As a result, seven individuals responded to these research ads. For four of these respondents (all women), I was unsure whether they were willing or able to formally participate in a one-on-one interview without negative emotional or psychological consequences. Although I made it known to these four respondents that their participation would be appreciated and would greatly contribute to the overall study. I remained extremely conscious of any attempt to "convince" these respondents to participate. The extent of my recruitment efforts with these respondents was to provide frequent research updates and to afford a level of participation that was comfortable for them. Ultimately, I did not include these four respondents in the final sample of Phase 1 because they did not voluntarily ask to participate.

The remaining three respondents (all men) were quite willing and able to formally participate in the study. These respondents requested minimal information about the study to come to a decision to participate in a formal interview. These three men constituted the final sample for Phase 1. Their ages ranged from early twenties to early fifties. All men were gay identified. Two of the participants were white, while the ethnicity of the third remained unidentified because I interviewed him on the telephone.

Data Collection

I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with all participants. Interviews provide an opportunity for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences

(Patton, 1990), while allowing participants to express their ideas in their own words

(Reinharz, 1992). I forwarded an initial protocol (see Appendix C) to all participants

prior to the actual interview session. I asked participants to review the protocol to make

certain that the questions were understandable and to ensure that I did not presuppose

participants' experiences. Review of the protocol also allowed participants to

emotionally and psychologically prepare for the interview. I encouraged participants to

revise protocol items in order for the interview to better focus on what the participants

wanted to say. I proposed, via email or telephone, possible interview times and interview

locations from which participants could select for their convenience. Two interviews

were conducted at the participants' place of employment and one interview was

conducted over the telephone.

At the outset of the interviews, I obtained consent through one of two methods.

In-person interviews required signed consent forms (see Appendix D), while the

telephone interview involved the reading of a consent script (see Appendix E) to which

the participant verbally agreed. In addition, I asked all participants for their permission to

audio-tape the interview session. During the interview, I allowed participants to deviate

from the initial interview guide and take active control of the interview direction. I

encouraged "conversational-style" interviewing, providing opportunities for participants

to ask questions. Upon completion of the protocol, I offered participants the opportunity

to comment on the research process (e.g., themes that I identified from previous

interviews or theoretical frameworks derived from the literature). I elicited feedback to

make participants aware of the context that framed the information they shared with me.

All interviews took approximately 45 to 90 minutes in length.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

It was my goal to speak about people's histories and locations–to explore lived

experiences of abuse based on each individual's assumptions and understandings of their

social world. My goal was not to define universal truths, but rather personal truths.

Given the final sample size, I decided to forgo a standard thematic content analysis.

Instead, I chose to reconstruct each participant's individual experience using case studies.

Case studies allow for an in-depth view of each participant's experience of relationship

abuse. I followed the guidelines outlined by Patton (1990) to reconstruct each individual

case story.

Reconstructing the stories of each participant began with a careful reading and

rereading of the interview transcripts. Personally transcribing the tapes allowed me to

become familiar with the interview data. All participants recounted their experiences of

abuse without chronological order. (This was, in part, a result of the order of the

interview protocol, but also a result of the participants need to speak about the "more

important parts" of their story.) Therefore, I found it necessary to construct a case record

(as described in Patton, 1990) for each transcript as a way to arrange events sequentially,

as well as remove duplicate observations of the same event. I arranged transcript data

within four broad temporal categories: "prior to abuse," "onset of abuse," "experiencing

abuse," and "ending the relationship." With the events properly placed in chronological

order, I constructed the case studies to recount the material tale of relationship abuse.

After the completion of each case study, I performed a cross-case analysis to

identify recurring themes and patterns. I used an inductive approach to allow for themes

to "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and

analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). These themes remain preliminary and cursory, however,

they provided possible avenues for future research and social action.

Phase 2: Exploring the Discursive Terrains

In exploring the discursive conditions of violence and abuse in gay relationships, I

turned my attention towards the "macro systems" and the relations of ruling (e.g.,

heterosexism) that impact the material experience of violence and abuse in gay

relationships. This phase of the research was conducted to answer three questions: What

are the available discourses available to gay men to understand instances of relationship

abuse? How are constructions of "same-sex partner abuse" negotiated and regulated by

dominant discourses within a heteronormative context? How does this context influence

the subjectivities of gay men, in relation to gay male partner abuse?

Participants

Because my goal was to elicit discourses that are available to gay men, I did not

set out to recruit participants who had necessarily experienced relationship violence. I did

not intend for them to speak about "lived experiences" of abuse nor was my discussion

meant to define "what abuse really is." Therefore, to recruit the final sample, I used a

combination of a snowball and purposeful sampling strategy based on the following

criteria: previous experience within a gay male relationship and the willingness to speak

about same-sex partner abuse at some length.

I included four participants in the final sample. Participants' ages ranged from

early twenties to early thirties and included lower and middle class white and Asian gay-

identified males. Surprisingly, all participants reported experiences with some form of

coercive relationship behaviours. However, unlike those in Phase 1, only two of these

participants labelled these experiences as "abusive." None of the participants described

themselves as a "victim" of the violence or abuse experienced.

Data Collection

Prior to the interview sessions, all phase 2 participants received a research

information letter (see Appendix F) and interview protocol (see Appendix G) for their

review. Before the interview commenced, I asked all participants to sign an informed

consent form (see Appendix D) and provided a copy containing my contact information.

Interviews were semi-structured and "conversational." Although I used the initial

protocol to guide the interviews, I encouraged participants to deviate from the protocol to

allow for the interview to focus on the participants' ideas. Many of the interviews were

concerned with the negotiation of labelling "abuse" not only in regard to their own

experiences but the experience of others. Following the steps suggested by Potter and

Wetherell (1987), I encouraged participants to negotiate abuse among a number of

contexts and scenarios.

Data Analysis

In taking the turn to language, I became concerned with how I would come to

specify a method of analysis. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) argued,

> "...there is no method to discourse analysis in the way we traditionally
> think of an experimental method or content analysis method. What we
> have is a broad theoretical framework concerning the nature of discourse
> and its role in social life, along with a set of suggestions about how

discourse can be studied and how others can be convinced findings are genuine." (p. 175)

Indeed, Potter (1997) identified four schools of discursive analytical methods that bear little or no resemblance to one another. For the present study, I have drawn upon poststructuralist theory that has been most closely associated with Foucault.

A Foucauldian discourse analysis explores linguistical frameworks that people use to organize their social realities (Miller, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Implicit in this notion is the idea that experience, or rather the meaningfulness of experience, is largely dependent on the available language we have to articulate that experience (Gavey, 1989; Kroger & Wood, 1998; Weedon, 1997). Discourses, then, are "conditions of possibility that provide us with the resources for constructing a limited array of social realities, and make other possibilities less available to use" (Miller, 1997, p. 33). "Objects" (e.g., same-sex partner abuse) are produced and by the discursive fields that give these objects life (Kroger & Wood, 1998; Parker, 1992; Weedon, 1997).

With these assumptions in mind, I approached the interview transcripts to answer the three research questions of phase 2. I first read the texts to identify participants' subjectivities (e.g., victim status, gender, sexual identity). Using the participants subjectivities to ground my analysis, I then searched for the participants' meanings of these identities (e.g., what does "victim," "man," or "gay" mean for these participants?). Finally, I looked for discourses (e.g., gender theory, domestic violence, biology, medicine) that were used by the participants to construct these meanings.

For me, a discursive analysis does not conflict with the principle of remaining accountable and respectful to participants' voices. I do not question each participant's

subjectivities. Instead, I focussed my analysis to the social discourses that are available to

the participants and how these discourses define and restrict their experiences within

same-sex relationships. Analysis of discourse can be used to look beyond the language

that has been given to us, as queers. As Honeychurch suggested (1998), confronting and

interrogating the dominant heterosexist discourses reveal new ways of constituting our

sense of self.

Ethical Considerations

Openness and communication with the participants avoided any serious ethical

dilemmas throughout the research study. Many participants did not feel the need to

respond to my requests for feedback nor research updates. Despite little or no feedback

from participants, I felt periodic contact via mail or email kept participants aware of the

research process, while providing them with the opportunity to make any of their

concerns known.

Participant Feedback and Verification of Data

Given the sensitive nature of this study, I took care to ensure that my analysis and

presentation of all the research findings remained true to the experiences of all

participants. According to Ristock and Pennell (1996), validity represents the integrity of

the research, which is achieved through the researcher's accountability to those about

whom I speak and to the communities that may be affected by the research. With this

definition in mind, I made every effort to elicit participant feedback throughout the

research process while remaining cognizant of the social backdrop of homophobia against

which this study was conducted.

After transcribing each interview for this study, I mailed a copy of the transcript to the appropriate participant. Based on the process of writing this thesis, I realized how personal experiences are neither fixed nor stable over time and are continually interpreted and reinterpreted upon self-reflection. I invited participants to change, omit, articulate, or simply comment on the interview information they shared with me. Of the seven participants, only one participant provided formally feedback on his interview transcript.

Based on my decision to construct three case studies focussing on the experiences of participants in Phase 1, I decided to have these three participants view and approve their individual stories before I shared them with the other participants. Because all other analysis was presented in aggregate form, all participants received a copy of the cross-case and discursive analysis to elicit feedback. At the conclusion of the study, participants received a copy of the final research report.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Although actively recruiting participants from a number of demographic locations (e.g., Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Toronto), I remained conscious of their locations within the gay/lesbian communities in which they reside. These communities are small, and my personal location in these communities (particularly those in Toronto) might place me in contact with the participants' social network. In order to maintain confidentiality, I chose not to initiate contact with any of the participants outside of mutually agreed-upon modes of communication (usually via mail or email). Furthermore, because descriptions of participants or their experiences might be easily decipherable within the research findings, I sought the approval of all participants before sharing the

research with the wider communities.

<u>Informed Consent</u>

In no way did I knowingly use deception or coercion to recruit participants for this study. As mentioned previously, I forwarded protocols and research descriptions to all participants prior to their interview sessions. As outlined by the Tri-Council ethical guidelines, I obtained informed consent using one of two means: taped verbal agreement or signed consent forms. Furthermore, I asked for each participant's permission to audio-tape their interview session.

<u>Risks</u>

In deciding to conduct one-on-one interviews with participant who were physically or emotionally abused, I constantly reminded myself of the potential risks that were involved. I remain aware of the broader social implications of the research that I am doing. And, as stated elsewhere in this thesis, the very notion of "gay or lesbian abuse" can quite possibly feed into the fears of an already homophobic society. Therefore, I took extreme care in presenting findings that promoted queer positive social action while remaining true to the participants' voices.

During each interview, I observed how participants were responding to the interview process, not to gain another source of "data," but to respect the psychological and emotional well being of the participants. I wanted to ensure that participants were not experiencing excessive discomfort when "rehashing" painful moments in their lives or "realizing" they had been abused. Fortunately, I did not observe nor did participants report any adverse reactions to the interview process that warranted discontinuation of the

interview or the research process. Although none of the seven participants in total

expressed any problems with the research process, I encouraged open lines of

communication through periodic updates to ensure participants could contact me with any

concerns.

Presentation of the Findings

The specific focus in this study on gay men was incidental and not by design.

Based on the gender and sexual identity of the participants included in this thesis, the

research findings clearly speak, albeit in limited range, of gay male experiences with

partner abuse. At times, the participants spoke at length of lesbian abuse. However, I

must state explicitly that these narratives are only *accounts* of lesbian abuse by gay men

and do not represent their "lived experience." Nonetheless, the participants shared a

variety of experiences and opinions, which I used as "research data."

The abundance of data gathered from the research interviews left me in the

position of reconstructing the diverse experiences and ideas of the participants, while

attempting to present such information in a responsible and ethical manner that is not

only action oriented but critical. To these ends, I organized the research findings in

accordance with the intended goals of the study: a) to explore lived experiences of

violence and abuse among gay male relationships, and b) to explore the discursive

conditions and linguistical devices used by gay men to understand and draw meaning to

relationship violence.

Some of the experiences I present in the following analysis are disturbing and

troublesome. Some who have read previous drafts of this thesis have expressed sadness,

discomfort, or even rage. In recounting each participants experiences, thoughts, and

ideas, I made no attempt to buffer the reader from experiencing his or her own emotional

response to the content of the research findings. As the author of this thesis, I welcome

these reactions. But, rather than remain and wallow in sadness, shun any discomfort. or

revel in anger and rage, I invite and challenge the reader to channel this energy in ways

that are productive and transformative to the social conditions of gay men in such a way

that prevents the occurrence of gay male partner abuse.

Chapter 5: Material Experience of Partner Abuse in Gay Male Relationships

I briefly jump ahead to a suggestion expressed to me by the three participants to present lived experiences of violence and abuse among gay relationships. For these participants, there was an overwhelming need for research that illustrates "what abuse looks like," "how is abuse experienced among gay men," and "what forms can abuse take?" In an attempt to put a "face" to "relationship abuse," I present the experiences of three participants as individual stories. These stories provide some insight into the lives of individuals who have been abused by their same-sex partner.

With these three stories, I will compare the experience of abuse by highlighting common themes. My goal is not to present a unifying theory of abuse. Although common themes emerged from among the interviews, I feel that the diversity among the participants' experiences is equally important to our understanding of relationship abuse within gay relationships. For me, experiences of abuse must be understood as multiple and fluid as are the lives of gay men. The three participants start from very different positions, experience differing forms of abuse, and come to different understandings of their relationships.

Stewart's Story

"Stewart" had been through a series of long-term relationships and felt fairly secure in his sexuality and experience as a gay man. He had a six-year relationship with one man, a two-year relationship soon after, and a number of briefer relationships. Stewart described these relationships as "really positive" and characterized them by the usual epiphanies of dates, commitments, and breakups. For Stewart, being gay

represented the ideological belief of "men loving men." Never before had Stewart

experienced psychological or physical coercion in any of his relationships. In

recollection, Stewart did not note any unusual signs at the beginning of his relationship

with "Grant," his third "main" relationship.

Stewart and Grant lived together for a while, but after ten months or so into the

relationship, they decided to move to a remote cabin in the woods just north of the city. It

was only after they had moved away that Stewart began to take notice of Grant's unusual

behaviour. Stewart recalled,

> *Well when we were first living together in [the city], I had no idea. I...*
> *remember him being mad at me about things but I thought, you know...*
> *that's got to be normal in a relationship. But, it's when we moved away to*
> *the... cabin in the woods that he began to reveal this side of him.*

Experiencing Abuse

In retrospect, Stewart regarded Grant as a dominant controlling person who was

verbally and, eventually, physically abusive. However, at the time of their relationship,

Stewart simply saw himself as having normal relationship problems. Stewart was truly in

love, and his emotional bond to Grant encouraged Stewart to stay in the relationship and

somehow resolve the problems they were having. In order to make the relationship work

Stewart would often try to reason with Grant when he became overly upset.

> *I was thinking that we were having relationship problems... and I was*
> *thinking that he had a problem with anger and I would, you know, try to...*
> *talk to him about it... I would call him on it. I would explain it to him*
> *telling him "You are angry unnecessarily" when it was clearly obvious*
> *that he'd gotten angry at something that was not true... I'd point it out to*
> *him and still he wouldn't be able to admit it or... get past it, you know.*
> *He's the kind of person who, if you back him into a corner about some*
> *behaviour... he would just get angrier...*

According to Stewart, Grant had quite a temper. He would yell excessively at

Stewart and repeatedly instigate arguments—sometimes about the most trivial things.

Grant's constant anger and jealousy were never provoked and were often random.

Eventually they served to breakdown Stewart's confidence; he came to question himself.

wondering whether he was constantly doing something wrong. Grant would openly and

viciously insult Stewart and Stewart would simply believe that he might be at fault.

Stewart did not see how serious his situation had become. Then one day in the

cabin, they were arguing and suddenly Grant started to punch Stewart in the chest. That

was the first time Grant had ever hit Stewart and Stewart immediately left and moved

back to the city. Not long after, Stewart was contacted by Grant's mother who convinced

Stewart to speak with Grant. Grant started to tell Stewart that he had experienced sexual

abuse as a child, which had not necessarily been dealt with. At that point, Stewart still

did not see his experiences with Grant as abusive.

> *I didn't know it was abuse. I thought he had a problem with anger and*
> *that once he realized that he didn't have to get angry about things we'd*
> *solve his problem.*

It was based on this belief, along with the promise that Grant would seek counselling, that

Stewart decided to give Grant another chance and moved back in with him again.

Grant remained the same dominant controlling person as when Stewart had left.

Nonetheless, Stewart chose to stay with Grant and tried to access more formal services to

address the "relationship problems" they were having. But these services ultimately

failed him.

> *I went there and I told them I was having problems with my boyfriend and*
> *I started talking about all the things that I'd done wrong and... I didn't*

say he abused me. I didn't say that he hit me. I said I thought he had a problem with anger... I... was downplaying it in my mind or in denial myself.

To this day, Stewart was not sure why these counsellors did not challenge him and ask more direct questions whether he had been abused or not. Stewart's lack of disclosure led his counsellors to make erroneous conclusions about Stewart's situation. Later, both Stewart and Grant attempted couples therapy, which in Stewart's recollection. was a complete disaster. Throughout couples therapy, Stewart had no way of disclosing information about his experiences without fear of retribution. Many times. Stewart would disclose his experiences in Grant's presence only to be yelled at by Grant after the session.

Ending the Relationship

Grant hit Stewart a second time after a heated argument during Pride weekend in the city. Once again, Stewart left immediately but this time for good. Stewart was not willing to accept physical violence in his life even though it was not until much later that Stewart would see his experiences as abuse. Fortunately, Stewart had many friends who provided him with places to stay until he eventually found permanent accommodation.

For a while, Stewart broke contact with Grant. Later, in the first phone call Stewart had with Grant after the breakup, Grant said, "Don't try to tell me that I hit you" and tried to make Stewart believe it did not happen. When Stewart would accidentally see him, Grant would attempt to engage Stewart in arguments. It was years later that Grant apologized to Stewart for what happened between them and stated that he should not have been treated that way.

<u>Coming to an Understanding</u>

After a two and a half year relationship with Grant, Stewart was left frightened, confused, and hurt. During his interview with me, he said, "...[my relationship with Grant] knocked me off my centre as a human being..." But at the time of his relationship, Stewart did not have the words to consider and articulate his experiences. Only through a slow process of self-reflection, professional assistance, and disclosure to friends and family did Stewart come to see and conceptualize his experiences as "abuse."

> *Well... I didn't really realize it till after I left. Actually, I didn't know to use the word abuse... I went to visit my family... they were at their cottage and on the way back, I was in a used bookstore. I looked around for some books and there was a book called "The Verbally Abusive Relationship" by Pat Evans. I started reading on the way back to [the city]. It described what happened to me. So... I had to read a book to understand. I mean, I knew something was wrong but I didn't know it was abuse.*

Soon after, Stewart began to read everything he could find on domestic violence, most notably, <u>Men who beat the men who love them</u> (Island & Letellier, 1991). Such books provided a clear and concise definition of abuse to which Stewart could compare and evaluate his own experiences. Furthermore, these books provided Stewart with a number of strategies to cope with the experience of abuse.

Stewart accessed professional services again despite his previous experiences with counsellors. However, by this time Stewart was much more willing to disclose greater information about his experiences with Grant. He called the Victim Assistance Program in Toronto and he was immediately put in touch with the David Kelly Program, a gay/lesbian positive counselling centre. He was fortunate to be paired with an "incredible" counsellor with whom he completed a number of sessions.

I'm really glad I had a great therapist because that helped me stay away from the guy. I remember thinking, "Am I doing the right thing... Am I doing the right thing?" With a therapist, I knew that I had confirmation that I was.

For Stewart, disclosing his experiences not only to his counsellor but to his friends and family served as an outlet for personal affirmation. Sharing his experiences with other people introduced him to others who had similar experiences.

Luckily I first told my friend "Michelle" and she said that somebody hit her once and I said, "You know, I feel hesitant to talk about it" and she said, "No you should be telling people." and that really helped me because that's true, we should be telling people. The more people I told the more I realized how many other people had the same experiences. And then I get over the feeling like I'm a bad person for having been abused. Or, having chosen a partner that was abusive. God! At first I thought, people are gonna think I'm an idiot because I not only chose a partner who had abusive behaviour but I stayed with him for a while. It's good to come out of that pattern.

He no longer believes himself to be the reason for the violence that occurred in his life. To say that he was in an abusive relationship does not articulate who is responsible and accountable for the events that took place.

I like to say that "I had an abusive partner" rather than saying I was in an abusive relationship... I don't think "abusive relationship" is as clear. I like to... lay the blame, I guess... I had an abusive partner. I'm not responsible for the way he behaved. I am responsible for how I behaved but it's OK for me to have been a victim of it. It's OK to be ignorant of what abuse is. There's nothing wrong with that, in fact. In a way I wished I spent my whole life and never heard of it, you know. But in fact I'm glad in a way. It has allowed me to help other people.

Presently, Stewart volunteers his time to assist other men who have experienced violence and abuse from another man.

Anderson's Story

"Anderson" was a nineteen-year-old gay male when he moved to the city. He

knew no one and was feeling lonely and isolated in his brand-new settings. At that time.

the gay community in this city was only in its infancy, leaving Anderson with little or no

social support or identifiable network. Years later, Anderson would characterize this

particular period of his life as the "just feeling lonely" story which generally describes the

familiar needs and sensitivities of newly out young gay men. He was vulnerable and a bit

lost, and longed for the attention and security believed to be provided by a romantic

boyfriend.

"Martin" was Anderson's first love and soon after meeting him became

Anderson's first "real" boyfriend. Martin was charming, funny, and attentive to

Anderson's needs. He was older than Anderson by a couple of years and the fact that

Martin had a job, an apartment, and seemingly, a lot of potential, added up to be "a good

thing" for Anderson. All outward signs indicated that Martin was "pretty together."

which Anderson was not. He believed that Martin provided a certain degree of stability

that was lacking from Anderson's life.

Anderson noticed some "peculiarities" about Martin, which Anderson didn't seem

to think all that important at the time. For instance, Martin was somewhat homophobic.

and he was out of the closet but only to a certain degree. They, of course, would go to

gay clubs and bars together where Anderson would later realize that Martin had few gay

friends, only acquaintances. However, Anderson did not feel these eccentricities were

terribly unusual, and he attributed Martin's discomfort with his sexuality to a strict

upbringing within a traditional fundamentalist family with whom Martin still had a lot of

contact.

Martin's family frowned upon the fact that Martin had sex with other men.

Therefore, to keep appearances, he kept a girlfriend who lived in the apartment above his.

Martin's girlfriend would constantly confront Martin and Anderson about their

relationship, but Martin would simply deny it. It was only upon reflection years later that

Anderson saw that his needs were so great and his position so desperate that he could not

see these peculiarities in Martin's life as any way problematic. Anderson certainly loved

the attention he received from Martin and for a time that was all that mattered.

Experiencing Abuse

Shortly after Anderson moved in, Martin began to isolate Anderson from the

small social network that he had developed. Martin claimed that Anderson's friends

"weren't good enough" and started to restrict Anderson from seeing them. As the

relationship progressed, Martin became increasingly dismissive of Anderson. Martin

understood Anderson's vulnerabilities and insecurities and certainly used them to

maintain control over Anderson. According to Martin. Anderson had "problems" and

Martin was the answer to those problems. However, the absence of any outward signs of

physical abuse led Anderson to believe that this was an otherwise normal relationship.

Years later, Anderson still could not pinpoint the exact sequence of events that would

eventuate in more aggressive psychological and physical forms of coercion.

Meanwhile Anderson would come to regard Martin's girlfriend as an increasing

source of pain. A number of times, Anderson would see Martin chasing his girlfriend

around the apartment and slap her a few times. She would tell Anderson that Martin was

psychotic and run upstairs to her apartment but in Anderson's account she would always

come back down for more. This, to Anderson, did not seem unusual.

> *I didn't understand what [Martin] was doing... I didn't... I thought... she*
> *was a pain in the ass for sure and... I guess that somehow, you know...*
> *maybe... because... clearly I thought the way he was treating me was*
> *something I deserved so she must deserve this too or something, you know.*

He would later recall that there was "no analysis that took place at all" of his experiences

with Martin. Anderson never drew a connection between Martin's abusive behaviour

towards his girlfriend and his behaviour towards Anderson. As time went by, both

Anderson and Martin's girlfriend continued to remain subordinate to Martin's demands.

> *I remember one day he had us [Anderson and Martin's girlfriend] both*
> *cleaning... scrubbing his apartment while he went out. Of all the weird*
> *things that happened that really stands out... He went out to a party and*
> *we were literally on our knees scrubbing the floor.*

Anderson's belief that his treatment by Martin was merely a sign of a "bad

relationship" allowed Anderson to endure more humiliating and physically controlling

experiences, which reinforced Anderson's low self-esteem. Sexual intimacy with Martin

became a source of humiliation for Anderson. The only time Martin and Anderson had

sex was when Martin would pretend to be sleeping. Afterwards, Martin "would begin to

tell me about the dreams in which he had sex with a dog." These tactics deepened

Anderson's insecurities and vulnerabilities that resulted in further isolating him from

friends. Anderson recalled,

> *...I remember running into friends of mine a couple of times... when I was*
> *on my own and I was... I couldn't talk to them... I was so... it was... many*
> *things... I was really humiliated... I was really... humiliated. I was just*
> *under his control so even though I was on my own, I wasn't able to-to*
> *reach out to my friends. So, I sort of believed what he... I don't know if I-*
> *I... I wouldn't say that I believe that he told me about them not... but I*
> *knew they couldn't be involved in my life anymore and... but I-I also*
> *remember being ashamed at that point.*

Martin took control over Anderson's life so completely using more direct

techniques. Sometimes, Martin would lock Anderson in the closet or, on other occasions.

he resorted to other much more coercive and far more dangerous strategies.

> *... he would literally hold me down and force me to... he would force*
> *downers down my throat... like Valium or whatever it was. So he would*
> *hold me down and he would, sort of, make me take these things so that*
> *would keep me quiet and calm... and pliable.*

Martin became very masterful at recognizing when Anderson would question their

relationship, at which point Martin would become uncharacteristically very loving and

affectionate. Such ploys worked to ensnare Anderson back into the relationship.

> *A few times I would try to leave so I would go... I would leave... I*
> *remember one time... I went home to my family and... but he would do the*
> *same thing which was... he'd phone and cry and... tell me... he would*
> *phone and cry and tell me that he loved me and sorry and that... and tell*
> *everybody about the truth about our relationship, so I went back... and*
> *that night I went back, I had a terrible flu, and he made me sleep on the*
> *floor. So... it started right from that moment. Again, I was... I was away*
> *from family and he was the only thing I had in the city so I was right back*
> *where I started.*

Anderson recalls one final experience in which Martin hit him.

> *I think I tried to go out. I don't know how I got out... Anyway, I went out*
> *for the evening and he tracked me down and that was the first time where*
> *he actually slapped me. And before the physical abuse was shoving,*
> *holding me down, forces pills down my throat, that sort of thing... God!*
> *He never actually smacked me. It was a smack right across the face,*
> *which... which was really interesting actually because I remember clearly*
> *this look on his face... the look of shock...*

Ending the Relationship

Despite Anderson's apparent need for intervention, his friends did not necessarily

see the abuse that he was experiencing. Given the fact that Anderson had effectively

withdrawn from their lives, he did not believe that his friends had the opportunity to see

just how controlling Martin was. And yet, without the intervention of a friend, Anderson

believed he would not have left the relationship.

> *I don't know how much longer it would have gone on if my friend...*
> *ummm... didn't... just came up and dragged me out... [my friend] said,*
> *"You're coming now!" and stuffed my suitcase and took me off*

Coming to an Understanding

Anderson's relationship with Martin lasted approximately one year. Throughout

his relationship with Martin, Anderson maintained that,

> *...it wasn't anything. It wasn't... I was just involved in a bad relationship.*
> *There was no... doubts... that's all it meant. It didn't mean anything*
> *bigger, which of course it does. Uhhh... but it... and-and I think most*
> *people thought that was it at the time so it was just... it's sort of private*
> *matter not in that you can't talk about it but private matter as far as it's*
> *just between two people.*

For Anderson, his experiences were simply the indications of a "relationship gone wrong"

and nothing beyond that. There were few resources to draw upon that would constitute

his experiences as anything more than the familiar young love repertoires that the

relationship was "fucked up" or that "the guy was a jerk." Anderson certainly did not see

himself as a victim of abuse, and at a time when the city devoted minimal support to the

interests of young gay men, he was not exposed to anything that would tell him otherwise.

Years later he would recall, "At the time, I remember there was nothing, nothing!"

Turning to the women's movement that was at the forefront of the social and political

scenes did little to help him gain a different perspective because the women's movement,

still in its infancy, had yet to build political alliances with members of the gay

communities.

After the relationship had ended, Anderson was left feeling depressed after a year

of living in terror and pain, and it was only after a considerable amount of time that

Anderson began to come to an understanding about his experiences.

> *I think it was a slow evolution rather than a realization and I would say*
> *that it... it had to do a lot with all the years gaining self-esteem and*
> *awareness and that sort of thing... Til' years later, I was able to actually*
> *look back and see it as an abusive relationship and... because part of it*
> *was learning about what is considered abuse... I never saw that... I didn't*
> *know that that was abuse... if anything, at that time [abuse] would have*
> *been just physical abuse and I was never beaten up.*

Robert's Story

"Robert" was a post-graduate educated gay male in his twenties. He was socially

informed and politically active as a member of the gay and lesbian communities. For a

while, Robert decided to remain single. His last relationship was "problematic" in the

sense that he realized how controlling he was of his partner. At that time, Robert was a

newly out gay male and he would attribute much of his relationship problems to

"internalized homophobia." Robert believed that once he resolved his own fears, he

would be able to maintain a healthy positive relationship. Until then, Robert decided not

to pursue another long-term partner. Upon meeting "Stephan," Robert was determined to

remain conscious of his previous experiences and made all attempts to ensure that he

would not be the cause of another "problematic" relationship.

In hindsight, Robert believed there was something wrong at the onset of his

relationship with Stephan. However, he recalled a "defining moment" when his

relationship with Stephan started to spiral downward. At that time, the relationship was

still in its infancy, nearly six weeks old. For a while, the couple would devote seven

nights a week to each other, which was generally typical of any budding relationship.

However, Robert began to feel overwhelmed. Then one evening when they were out for dinner, Robert asked Stephan if they could "slow down" to possibly spend four or five nights a week rather than the entire seven nights of the week together. But Stephan became unusually upset and accused Robert of somehow deceiving Stephan of his true intentions. A fight ensued calling the attention of other restaurant patrons, at which point. Robert left the restaurant. Years later, Robert remembered this fight as the starting point of something far more insidious.

<u>Experiencing Abuse</u>

Throughout their relationship, Robert never once believed that Stephan was being abusive. Fighting seemed commonplace in their relationship. During these fights. Robert would always be criticized, outright dismissed, or swiftly silenced by Stephan's rhetoric that would focus the cause of the fighting on Robert.

> *Anytime I expressed any kind of... part of really who I was... he would really quickly shot that down and... sort of assert that that wasn't OK, that I was immature...*

As a result, Robert began to doubt his own values, beliefs, and interests.

> *...he was very good at... manipulating my own insecurities about being the problem and I was very ripe to believe that maybe it was me... you know, that I wasn't ready that... you know, I couldn't maintain a healthy relationship and stuff and so... he was really good at manipulating that to make me feel like I was always the problem and... and I think when you're in that position of powerlessness to believe that you're the problem. Your whole... sort of focus is how to fix yourself or change yourself and you're not looking at the other... what the other persons doing, you know, because you just believe that it's because of you and everything they do is justified because you're such a fuck-up, basically.*

Such fights would form the basis of their interaction. Nonetheless, eight or so months into the relationship, Stephan demanded that they move in together or that they break up.

Although Robert was hesitant to move in due to their frequent disputes, he eventually

succumbed to Stephan's demand. Meanwhile, Stephan continued to criticize Robert

excessively and Robert began to internalize these criticisms.

> *And everything about me was fucked. He didn't like my job... he didn't*
> *like my friends... my mother... everything that I cared about or believed in*
> *was wrong. And he always had a reason why it was wrong and, you*
> *know, if I was going to be a healthy mature adult, you know, and have an*
> *adult relationship that's committed and all this kind of stuff, then I would*
> *see things his way, right? And I would get rid of all these friends, I would*
> *quit... I would change my job you know, I wouldn't trust my mother... all*
> *this stuff... like it was just... he basically attacked everything about me.*

Stephan continued to use criticisms as a means to isolate Robert from his friends.

> *[Stephan would tell me] basically my friends... I shouldn't talk to my*
> *friends because... they don't care about me. They're using me. And... my*
> *female friends are all bitches and... they're needy, overly needy women*
> *and they're just using me..."*

Such tactics would undermine Stephan's confidence in his friends. Eventually,

discussing Robert's relationship problems with friends was seen as a betrayal of Stephan.

> *So, I wasn't allowed to talk about anything with anybody. Everything was*
> *kept inside. Everything was a secret.*

Eventually, Robert lost touch with his once active and vibrant social network. Friends

simply stopped calling him at home. The only time he could see his friends was during

his working hours, when it would not "interfere" with his relationship with Stephan.

Robert would start to disengage from social activities and commitments from which he

derived self-fulfilment and satisfaction.

Only once did Stephan physically hit Robert, but the incident would serve as a

concrete experience that Robert would later draw upon to validate his abuse as real.

> *I can't even remember what we were fighting about. And I think it was... I*

can't remember... I can't remember what we were fighting about but we were in our apartment... his apartment... and uhhh, we were yelling or arguing and he came at me with his fist and I kind of pulled away at the same time so he just caught my face... but not full on because I pulled away at the same time. And then I was sort of cowering away from him and he was coming at me and then I think he realized... what he'd done and sort of, stopped and I kind of went into the bedroom for a few minutes and sort of waited and I was just scared... I still was with him for a while after that.

Robert would later consider this type of experience as a "physical sign... that's an obvious sign of abuse if somebody actually takes a swing at you."

Meanwhile, Robert's psychological well-being deteriorated.

"I was so stressed out... I was so anxious all the time. And my job was suffering."

However, the familiar self-blaming script that was reinforced by Stephan's harsh criticisms, repeated over and over in Robert's mind and served to obscure more horrific expressions of violence.

It was really... well the sex thing was really complicated, I think, as a gay man because... I have had shame around sexuality in my life because I'm gay, right. And I thought I was past that. I think I am past that. But, ummm... you know, it was so hard to have sex with him and there were times when... you know, I would never... I would never... I would never formally... label it this... but I would say it was a kind of violation, the sex that we had, like... I didn't sense, like... there was one time in particular when he basically insisted, you know. And I was... I, you know, I basically didn't say anything, I was kind of lying there like [a] dead person, you know because I was so uncomfortable and I didn't know what to do... and I said no so many times, I didn't feel like I could say no again, you know. And he was so insistent, and when I look at now, I think that's a kind of violation, you know, like... that's not a loving relationship and that's not a way to have sex with your partner, you know, like your partner is just lying there kind of scared and not participating essentially... you don't continue, you know... but I remember lying there feeling like... this... exactly in my head... exactly what I was saying to myself, "This is what rape must feel like. You know, this is what a rape victim must feel like. Emotionally, I don't feel like I want to be here. I don't feel good, I feel

scared." I felt tight in my stomach, I felt awful, you know. And what was fucking me up with that... "Is it me?" I guessed that's what it was... is this just homophobia, right? It's just me. And you know, here's a partner who just want to have sex which is normal and healthy in a relationship but I'm not able to do that. So it must be my problem. Right? And, I equated it to homophobia, like that was my only kind of understanding of why I would have a problem having sex right? Why I would feel emotionally uncomfortable, it must be homophobia, right?.

Ending the Relationship

During our interview, Robert tried to describe the psychological impact of living with an abusive partner, which hindered a final decision to leave.

It's hard to explain... it's... like you enter their [abuser's] world, you know, and that becomes your script and it's all about how dysfunctional you are and it's so-so... you can't... it's hard to move from that place... it's hard to make choices for yourself in that place because you really buy into the notion that you have a problem, you know. And the relationship isn't working because of you and-and that... if you don't make this relationship work, you'll never make a relationship work because this person is the best thing you can be, you know.

Robert unknowingly accessed two very important resources that would eventually help him regain his own sense of self and eventually leave Stephan. The first of these resources was a psychiatrist from whom Robert had sought help. The second of these resources was, quite simply, the friends from whom he had first been isolated.

Stephan accused Robert of sexual compulsiveness, sex addiction, and other forms of "sexual dysfunctions," causing Robert to look for professional help from a psychiatrist. However, his psychiatrist provided a perspective that had been silenced long ago.

And he said to me one session, "You know, if I had a partner that was treating me like that, I wouldn't want to have sex with him either." And that was like a paradigm shift for me. Cause all of a sudden it was focussing on Stephan. And I was like, "Oh! Wait a minute, like... maybe this is like a normal bodily reaction to a really uncomfortable unsafe situation... like... maybe I'm normal!" You know, it was a whole different

way of looking at it... and... so that started getting me thinking and try to look at what he was doing because I was always focussing on what I was doing wrong.

The perspective of his psychiatrist was a single voice among a chorus of factors that eventually encouraged Robert to leave the relationship. However, Robert's therapy sessions would provide a safe space for him to empower and validate himself, if only for a short while.

...Within two blocks of getting out of there... the script came back to me and everything Stephan saying to me... I would start to distrust myself and start to doubt myself. And by the time I got home, I was like, "You know, I can't leave him [Stephan] because it's me... like I have to figure out what's wrong with me.

Robert also called upon a previous experience in which he was speaking with a friend about Stephan. This friend had been previously abused by his father who had been an alcoholic.

I... I was telling [my friend] about Stephan but not in detail, like I wasn't really... but he said, you know, "I wanted you to know something. There's something in the way your talking about this that reminds me of my mother and the way she [was treated by] my father." And he just said to me, you know, "I want you to know that... if there's anything going on, you can talk to me about it and I want to know about it. And I'm not going to pressure you about it but I just want you to know..." And I never told him anything that time but then we got together several months later and he said it again and I started to open up a little bit. And, not-not fully. Not really... not how awful it really was. But, just letting him know that it wasn't all rosy and ummm... and I think that made a big difference.

A number of other friends made brief comments to Robert that they thought the way Stephan was treating him was wrong. It wasn't until he shared his experiences with a coworker that someone labelled his experience as "abuse."

I spent an hour telling him what was really happening and he said, "You know, I can't believe this guy... like this is abuse." And-and... I just sort of

realized that... I wasn't happy... I really wasn't happy... I wanted to leave Stephan so many times that I sort of decided, well if it's true, if Stephan is right... and it's because of me, then I'm a dysfunctional person and I can't have a healthy relationship then maybe your better off alone, because this isn't working. Like, I'm not happy, my job is failing, my friendships are failing, you know, my life is falling apart, and I'm not happy at home. ... So basically, I've come to the conclusion that if [Stephan] is right, I'm better off without him anyway.

The decision for Robert to leave was a "leap of faith". Many times, an internal struggle would ensue, in which he would question his decision to leave.

And so, I wrote him a letter here in the office [at work] cause I knew I couldn't just... I had to write it from the perspective because I knew that if I just... I just was afraid I would... a script would enter my head and I would... by the time I got home I would give it up or whatever so... I wrote it all down and I took it home and [Stephan] was sitting there and I gave it to him and he sat and read it. And... it was really clear like... and I said to him... you know...

Robert started to feel guilty as Stephan expressed anxiety and vulnerability.

I just knew that I had to be strong just long enough to get out of the place. Just get out of the place and then you can... you can doubt yourself, you can... do whatever you have to do... but don't doubt yourself in front of him. So, I just made it really clear like no matter what you say, no matter what you do to me right now, I'm not changing my mind. "You can hit me, you can yell at me, you can tell me that I'm fucked, it doesn't matter, I'm still leaving.

With the help of his friends, Robert packed his belongings and left the following day after one year in the relationship.

For a few weeks afterwards, Robert remained vulnerable to the "script" that he had lived with for such a long time. Everyday, he reaffirmed his own beliefs through constant journaling. But, disclosing his experiences to his friends and family helped Robert the most. Disclosure served the dual purpose of setting things in place that would make it much more difficult for Robert to return to Stephan and affirming his own

perspective.

> *So, telling my friends, telling my family, all that made a big difference, you*
> *know. And just keeping the perspective that I had that what I felt and what*
> *I believed is OK and it was legitimate and it wasn't immature or*
> *dysfunctional or... you know crazy...*

> *I really believed that if I wouldn't have had any external kind... if it would*
> *have gone on a little bit longer... if I would have totally lost touch with my*
> *friends and quit my job and have this sort of space... ummm... I don't know*
> *that I would have left him [Stephan]. I don't know what [it would] have*
> *taken. Like, I think it could have gotten a lot worse.*

Understanding the Experience

Robert had a long history of formal education in social issues, as well as his own

experiences working as a social service worker within the gay and lesbian communities.

However, Robert did not necessarily see his experiences as "domestic violence" till much

later.

> *I didn't know what a healthy relationship looks like. I didn't know... when*
> *is it too much. I didn't know the line. Like, I know that it wasn't good...*
> *Stephan was telling me that this is all normal... couples fight, you know.*
> *We're not going to disagree on everything like, this is normal. So, I didn't*
> *know what was normal, what wasn't normal so I would say to myself,*
> *"Well... if you want to be a relationship... maybe this is what a*
> *relationship means."... If you don't want to be alone for the rest of your*
> *life, maybe this is what you put up with... this is part of it, you know. I*
> *mean just because it's young and maybe you need to know each other*
> *better and it will be better in time. Like, so not having a really good sense*
> *of what is a healthy relationship... what does it look like...? What does*
> *healthy sexuality look life? You know... and... ya. So, I think part of that's*
> *a gay thing because we don't... we don't have any role models and part of*
> *it is just a relationship thing... it's society... healthy relationships or role*
> *models... And, I didn't know where the line was... I didn't know what*
> *crossing the line was. I didn't know when it was too much.*

Eventually, Robert began to see himself as one of two players within a

dysfunctional relationship.

*And... so I think it was the coming together of two people who's... who
created the dynamic that's very very destructive because it-it... just erodes
my confidence. I mean, I-I'm the one who came out of it a nervous wreck
and... you know... But, you know... I think.... I think Stephan is a really
good person at his heart and just he's very focussed on himself so he
doesn't have to understand... he doesn't see himself having a role in his
problems... He's always justifying, right? And [I was] somebody who's
ripe to believe that I'm fucked so the two of us together was just a
wonderful combination of this.*

Cross-Case Analysis

Through these individual stories, I wanted to demonstrate each participant's experience of relationship abuse as unique and deeply personal. It was not my goal to theorize a universal model that would stand to represent the "true" nature of abuse. Instead, I chose to explore the experience of gay male partner abuse as plural, multiple, and fluid. Recognizing the individuality of each piece, I must also stress that the three stories I have presented are by no means exhaustive of the experiences of gay-male relationship violence. When considered together, these divergent stories contain some consistent themes that I will report here. However, these themes remain preliminary and inconclusive. Any social action that is directed by these findings should remain tentative and open to new and possibly contradictory ideas. I will begin the analysis by highlighting the conditions during the onset of abuse. I will then explore the consistent themes that emerged from the three participants' experiences during and at the conclusion of the relationship.

Onset of Abuse

Prior to entering their abusive relationship, each of the three participants began from very different positions in their life. Anderson's "just lonely story" tends to be the

more widely assumed scenario in which relationship abuse is more likely to occur. For

example, young gay men "just coming out" are faced with minimal support and

experience and are often seen as more susceptible to entering abusive relationships.

Without housing or employment, Anderson was placed in a highly vulnerable position.

Anderson's abuser seemed to exude a level of charm and security, which is characteristic

of heterosexual accounts of abusers, who presumably afforded a level of stability that

Anderson did not possess.

However, to focus all our attention on newly out young gay men would ignore

victim/survivors such as Stewart and Robert. Both men had considerable experiences

within gay relationships. Stewart's experiences with several long-term partners did not

necessarily prevent him from entering an abusive relationship. In fact, his experience of

abuse was "shocking" due to his strong belief that gay men are "men loving men."

Stewart believed his experiences of abuse was a result of little or no previous experiences

with relationship violence. But Stewart's belief that previous experiences with abuse

would necessarily buffer him from accepting relationship violence in his life is

confounded by Robert. Robert had previous experiences in a "problematic" relationship

that, in time, primed him for future experiences of abuse. Despite the diversity of their

initial positions from which Anderson, Stewart, and Robert started their relationships, all

participants would recount isolation as their first "concrete" experience of abuse.

For Anderson and Robert, isolation took the form of their abusers using a variety

of psychological tactics to undermine the participants' relationship with their social

network. Anderson experienced constant humiliation and shame that would compel him

to avoid friends even in the absence of his abuser. Robert came to see his own social life

as a "betrayal" or disloyalty to his relationship with Stephan. As a result, Robert started

to withdraw from his friends' lives to the point were they would simply stop contacting

him. Stewart experienced isolation somewhat differently. It occurred in the physical

sense of moving far north of the city with his partner. Although Stewart would later

recall that the experience of abuse had been present much earlier during the relationship.

he would see his relocation as a marker for escalating experiences of abuse to come.

Experiencing Abuse

Isolation of the participants set the conditions for greater instances of violence and

abuse to occur. With little or no external influences on their relationships. participants

were only exposed to the perspective of their dominant controlling partner. Three main

themes emerged from the participants experience of abuse: a) control and power. b)

losing personal perspective, and c) not naming "abuse."

Control. The participants described their abusive experiences relating to issues of

control and power, much like heterosexual descriptions of domestic violence. For

instance, participants typically characterized their partners as a controlling person:

> "[My friends] wouldn't have been able to see how controlling he was..."
> (Anderson)

> "Like he's someone who's insecurities leads him to be very controlling,
> right?" (Robert)

> "...kind of like, dominant controlling person..." (Stewart)

In addition, the participants would often see themselves as a victim of their partner's

control.

"Stephan was manipulating me and controlling me and eroding my self confidence and my ability to act in my self interest... " (Robert)

"I was just under his control" (Anderson)

The participants regarded the violence and abuse that they endured as part of a larger behavioural pattern that their partners used to gain and maintain control.

"...the only kind of abuse that he would lean to was more kind of psychological control... " (Robert)

<u>Manipulated and monopolized perspective.</u> As a result of intense and constant psychological abuse, the participants began to adopt their abuser's perspective as their own. With little or no exposure to external perspectives, the participants came to believe their abuser's often excessive and belligerent criticisms. At the time of their abuse, the participants believed that they were the cause of their "relationship problems" and assumed that they were doing something wrong that warranted their partner's treatment of them.

"...clearly I thought the way he was treating me was [something] I deserved... " (Anderson)

Robert often spoke about the recurring "script" that would tell him how he was the one who was "fucking up" the relationship.

"...letting the script come back to me and everything Stephan was saying to me, I would start to distrust myself and start to doubt myself." (Robert)

This script led Robert into believing "what if [his abuser is] right...? What if I just can't see it?"

<u>Not naming abuse.</u> At the time of their relationships, none of the participants labelled their experiences as abusive. Within the social context of Anderson's abuse,

issues surrounding domestic violence were subsumed under the women's movement that

was at the forefront of the social and political scenes.

> *In a lot of circles it was still ok to smack your wife. So, same-sex [partner*
> *abuse]... it just didn't exist. Ummm... so there's some... there certainly*
> *nothing in the media... ummm... (Anderson)*

For Stewart, the ideological belief that gay men are "men loving men" would preclude the

possibility of male-male relationship violence.

> *One of the things I like about being gay is men loving other men so it was*
> *kind of shocking... (Stewart)*

Although Robert was well versed in women's issues and gender theory, he did not think

"abuse" was happening to him.

> *I didn't know where the line was... I didn't know what crossing the line*
> *was. I didn't know when it was too much. (Robert)*

For these three participants, not identifying their experiences as abusive led them to

believe that the experiences of violence were "normal" common occurrences within their

relationships. Such an understanding developed a mind-set that inhibited them from

leaving their partners. However, staying in their relationship did not eventuate in a

reduction of violence, but rather caused the participants to endure more, and often

escalating, abusive treatment.

Ending the Relationship

External influences played an important role in the three participants leaving the

relationship. Stewart felt fortunate enough to have friends who offered him a place to

stay after he left Grant. Anderson's friend physically intervened by packing Anderson's

bags and telling him to leave the relationship. Robert's friends would slowly provide a

different perspective much different from his own (and his partner's) that would allow

him to listen to his own belief that his relationship was "unhealthy" and to see his

partner's treatment of him as belligerent. Anderson and Robert both believed that they

would have stayed much longer in their relationships if there were no outside parties that

intervened. Robert stated,

> *I really believed that you know, if there's one thing I would say to anyone*
> *in a relationship, it's like maintain external ties. Keep your friends, you*
> *know. Have a place in the world were you could get a different*
> *perspective from the one your partner is giving you because... if you get*
> *locked into their perspective of things, you're-you're powerless.. (Robert)*

Given the hostile social context in which the men must speak about their

experiences of victimization, I must thank all participants for sharing their experiences

with me. It was my hope that telling me their stories and having them empathically heard

would open up a much needed dialogue with victim/survivors that would facilitate social

action. My goal in the following discussion is twofold. First, I will present the

participants' experiences with present community services and suggestions for social

action. Second, I discuss how the telling of the three stories provides us with a rich

source of information that would otherwise remain ignored within survey-style research

methods.

<u>Community Resources and Social Action</u>

It is here that I discuss the experiences with current available social service

agencies. I do this as a means to inform service providers how their support is received

by some clients. I then explore a number of concerns and barriers, as expressed by

participants, to existing social service infrastructures. Finally, I present the participants'

suggestions for social action and community intervention.

<u>Experiences with Formal Support Services</u>

Of the three cities in which I had recruited participants for this thesis, Toronto was the only city known to have formal social service structures in place that dealt specifically with gay male partner abuse. This became evident when speaking with gay men and lesbians, service providers and non-service providers alike, from Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph regions who simply did not know where to refer gay male clients in potentially abusive situations. In Toronto, some individuals I spoke with during the development of this thesis "knew of" agencies like CASSPA, and the Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project. However, none of these individuals knew what function these organizations served or what services they possibly provided. Of those organizations and agencies visible in Toronto, only two were commonly referred to during discussions with community members or formerly accessed by participants. These two programs were the Victim Assistance Program (VAP) and the David Kelly Program (DKP).

<u>Victim Assistance Program (VAP).</u> The participants viewed the VAP as their choice for "first contact" to attain formal support services. Originally, the VAP was founded to address the needs of men and women who have been victimized by anti-gay or anti-lesbian violence. However, in 1994, the VAP had broadened its scope to address issues of same-sex partner abuse. Although providing a number of functions such as education and community liaison with the broader social infrastructures, the VAP has served its individual clients by providing immediate crisis counselling and referrals to queer-positive legal, medical, and long-term counselling services. Interestingly, one gay

male I spoke with did not contact the VAP because he was "embarrassed" about experiencing abuse in light of his profession in the social service sector. This person's hesitation to access support is unsurprising, as the gay/lesbian social service networks are small and the possibility of crossing paths with service providers outside of the therapeutic setting is great. Stewart accessed VAP services and characterized the experience as "really really helpful. Immediately helpful..." Through the VAP, Stewart was referred to other support services such as the David Kelly Program.

David Kelly Program (DKP). Stewart was able to book an appointment on the afternoon he had first called. The DKP is a GBLT positive community counselling program headquartered at the Family Services Association of Toronto. This program offers individual, couple, family counselling, and group support services to lesbians, gay men, and related communities. Through the DKP, Stewart, initiated and completed a negotiated number of counselling sessions with an "incredible counsellor".

Other services. Services mentioned thus far are not an exhaustive list of services available to gay men and lesbian communities. However, the agencies mentioned above are simply those that are visible to the participants I spoke with. Moreover, gay man and lesbians may access more "mainstream" social support services that may prove beneficial to them. For instance, Robert had accessed the services of a psychiatrist, who was of great influence for Robert to leave Stephan. However, Robert did not state where he accessed the services of this psychiatrist (e.g., private practice, hospital, community centre) nor did he report any defining characteristics of the psychiatrist that increased therapeutic success.

Concerns and Barriers

A number of concerns were raised in accessing more "mainstream" services:

police, rape crisis centre, and therapists. Homophobia and heterosexism were at the

forefront of the participants' concerns and would effectively inhibit their decision to

access public services otherwise available to the heterosexual public. For example,

Robert stated,

> *I think... I thought about that... I thought about that when we were*
> *together... if he does really hurt me, now would I call the police? And I*
> *hope that I would, but ummm... I think that would be a really scarey thing*
> *to do because I would be so afraid of the police, you know. I don't...*
> *because I would be afraid of... it would all depend on which cop came to*
> *your door... if they had half a brain or not. If there was some homophobic*
> *asshole it would just be a disaster.*

Although experiencing similar patterns of abuse as heterosexual women,

Anderson expressed skepticism about accessing other services targeted for those

communities. He stated,

> *I remember a friend of mine... there was some experiences with men and*
> *sexual abuse... childhood sexual abuse... guys would call the Rape Crisis*
> *Centre and stuff and... were laughed at...*

One of the concerns voiced by one community service provider was to understand

the accessibility and efficacy for victim/survivors to procure therapeutic services from

"non-community members" (i.e., heterosexual men and women). Based on the responses

of the participants, choosing a therapist or counsellor is, for the most part, a personal

decision prompted by individual reasons. However, choosing gay affiliated/identified

services remained the most salient theme. For instance, Stewart made no mention of any

demographic information of his service providers that facilitated the effectiveness of his

therapy sessions. However, Stewart first contacted the 519 Community Centre (that

headquarters the VAP), which specifically serves the GBLT communities. Both

Anderson and Robert stated that they would have preferred a gay male as a potential

therapist. For Anderson, if the counsellor could not be a gay man, then it would have to

be a woman. He stated, "I wouldn't have been able to talk to a heterosexual man... but I

wouldn't mind speaking to a straight woman."

<u>Suggestions for Social Action</u>

The suggestions I present here are those expressed by the three participants.

These are, of course, particular to the participants' own experiences and should be

appreciated as such. Nonetheless, I feel that the participants' ideas provide a starting

point for community building and social intervention. Aside from greater support for

existing services, participants offered other innovative ideas that are both prevention

based and immediate to the needs of victims of gay male partner abuse. These

recommendations are as follows: increased public education, greater positive

representations of gay male relationships, stronger gay positive liaison with present social

service infrastructures, and safer spaces for gay men to retreat from abusive partners.

<u>Public education.</u> All participants voiced the need for greater public education

campaigns on gay male partner abuse. These interventions should be focussed both

within the gay male communities to reach victims of violence and outside the

communities to sensitize mainstream support services. Based on the interview data, the

need for public education is obvious. All participants stayed with their abusive partners

(despite the escalating violence that was experienced by all participants) for the simple

reason that the participants did not know their experiences were abuse.

For all three participants, there was very little to draw upon, within the immediate social context, that would constitute their experiences as "violent." As a result, these participants deduced that their "relationship woes" did not require greater reflection. Interview data were in agreement with Stewart's recommendations for greater information on "what abuse looks like" and "how it can be experienced among gay men." Having such information on-hand and readily available possibly provides what Robert called an "alternative perspective." It was my hope that the presentation of the three participants' story illustrates the "lived experience" of violence and abuse among gay male couples.

Positive representations of gay men. Robert suggested that more positive representations of gay male relationships would likely prevent instances of abuse. Indeed, positive representations of gay men are much needed particularly within a context that constitutes same-sex relationships as morally wrong, behaviourally abnormal, and biologically pathological. As a result, there is very little for gay men to understand their own relationship experiences. Robert suggested more direct interventions such as mentoring; for instance, providing a forum for gay men in long-term relationships to share their relationship experiences as a means of providing positive role models for younger gay couples and newly out gay men. I can also imagine advocacy for more diverse representations of gay men within the media and other social institutions.

Gay-positive liaison with present social infrastructures. One of the interesting findings from the research was that none of the participants contacted the police despite

their experiences of violence. As mentioned earlier, at least some of the participants'

concerns stemmed from their suspicion of homophobic responses to their needs from

service providers and the general public. One participant suggested the need for liaison

with the police, although other agencies (e.g., rape crisis centre, hospital emergency

rooms) were held under similar suspicion as well. One participant suggested a database

that details and documents negative and positive experiences with particular police

officers. Such information could be used by service providers, for example VAP. to

contact queer-positive police officers.

Safe spaces. Stewart best describes the need for safe spaces for gay men to retreat

from their abusive partners.

> *I know of a guy who's from out of town, who was really badly abused by
> his partner. He came to Toronto and had no money, nowhere to go, and
> we don't have anything in place for something like that. Women have
> centres that they could go to. There doesn't seem to be anything for gay
> men. That's sad... that situation... I was lucky enough that I had friends to
> go to but I'm sure there's a lot of people less fortunate who need to get
> away immediately to get perspective on there situation. They need
> somewhere to go and they need money and food and... counselling...
> immediately.*

Unique Findings

The experiences described within the three stories are reminiscent of those

experiences reported in the previous literature on domestic violence. For instance,

control and domination of victims that were accomplished by coercive relationship

behaviours such as isolation, monopolization of perception, lying, threats, and

degradation remain consistent with the previous research on gay male abuse (e.g., Island

& Letellier, 1991), lesbian abuse (e.g., Evans & Lobel, 1990; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti,

1992), and heterosexual women's abuse (e.g., Walker, 1990). Generally within the

psychological research, these claims have been substantiated through quantitative

methods. Unfortunately, the use of mass surveys usually erases the individual

contributions of each participant and the depth of each participants experiences.

The use of one-on-one in-depth interviews in the present study provided

opportunities to gather rich sources of information that could not be gained by traditional

mass-survey style research designs. Reflection upon the process of the participants'

interviews brought to my attention several key issues that have been ignored within the

psychological research on gay male partner abuse. Experiencing and reporting emotional

abuse, diverse understandings of the participants' experiences, and appreciating the

heteronormative context became points of interest that I feel warrant discussion and

further research.

Experiencing and Reporting Emotional Abuse

During my construction of the participants' stories, I became aware of the

difficulties in describing and portraying the experience of emotional abuse. This, in part,

was due to the difficulties for some participants in articulating the experience. In fact, all

participants reported that emotional abuse was the most predominant form of violence in

their relationship, however, physical violence was given equal, if not more, attention

during the interview process. For instance, participants would frequently describe the

same experience of physical violence on a number of occasions during their interview.

Robert provided an example of the difficulties in expressing the meaningfulness and

reality of emotional abuse. He stated,

It was more like... it's so hard to explain like... I'll give you an example, right? Like something that might sound really trivial but it really impacted me. Stephan was obsessed with alternative medicine. So, in alternative medicine, sugar is evil, OK? Sugar causes candida which is like a yeast infection in the intestines, it's really bad for you... refined sugar and it's in all of our... all of our foods that we eat. So he was really obsessed with not eating sugar. And I can remember early on like... I would go to the store and buy like a coke or something... and bring it back to the apartment. And-and it's hard to describe... but like, it just wouldn't be OK. Like, he would-he would just tell me why that was bad. And eventually I couldn't bring myself to drink pop. I couldn't drink it. I felt... I had a visceral reaction. It sounds crazy... but like... if somebody pushes into your head over and over and over... again about something and tied it to how you feel about yourself and... you know... you start to... have major reactions to those things so... even after I left him, for months, I couldn't have a pop.

Referring back to the literature, I found that emotional abuse was defined as "lie," "criticize," "mock," "insult," "blame," "call names," along with other non-physical, yet coercive, behaviours (Island & Letellier, 1991). Although morally questionable, these behaviours, by themselves, do not necessarily encompass or adequately articulate the experience of emotional abuse. Such behaviours can be common occurrences within otherwise healthy loving relationships. My claim is not to deny that the participants experienced emotional abuse, but rather that the realities of emotional abuse were contingent upon a greater constellation of behaviours that formed a specific context. For the three participants, this specific context was demonstrated by their experience of physical forms of violence, which was viewed, by some participants, as more "obvious" signs of abuse.

All participants felt that emotional abuse was as equally damaging as physical forms. I feel that Robert and Anderson would agree with Stewart's statement that;

...I think that [violence] doesn't have to be physical to be abuse. I think

*that the other things are just as abusive too... the verbal and emotional...
and all those things... they come from the same place of power over
somebody else...*

Despite Stewart's convictions, the belief that emotional abuse is somehow less damaging

than physical abuse is exacerbated by social structures that encourage us to respond quite

differently to physical and non-physical forms of violence. For instance, Robert stated.

*...the only kind of abuse that he would lean to was more kind of
psychological control so it's not something that you could just call the
police on and say, "Every time I speak, my partner puts me down, you
know, and calls me all these things... is undermining my life." you know.*

Furthermore, social science literature also contributes to the differentiation and

minimization of emotional abuse, as experimental methods focus on physical violence as

the primary dependent measure (e.g., Landolt & Dutton, 1997). The participants' reliance

on the experiences of physical violence to validate their experience of "abuse" may be

problematic. If physical violence was necessary to substantiate abusive experiences, how

would individuals who are not physically abused validate their own experiences of

emotional abuse?

Coming to a Personal Understanding

Presently, I feel there is no one theoretical model that can adequately account for

partner abuse among gay men. As such, the understandings of the experience of abuse

among the men who participated in this study were personal, specific, and unique to one

another. For me, this "finding" lends credence to my belief that the "cause" and

"experience" of partner abuse are plural, multiple, and beyond the scope of the modernist

project, which searches for one single universal model. As an example, Robert viewed

his experiences during his relationship with Stephan as a "coming together [of]... well

matched dysfunctions." Such an understanding stands in marked contrast to Stewart's

understanding that he was "with an abusive partner" where accountability of the violence

is emphasized. As the researcher, my ethical stance is not to dispute the legitimacy of

each participants' claims. Clearly, the experiences of abuse are best described and

explained by those who experience them. My goal as the researcher was to validate that

knowledge and use it in such a way that is and preventative and ameliorative to the needs

of victim/survivors of gay male partner abuse.

Heteronormativity and Context

For me, one of the most valuable findings that came out of the three stories was

the importance of the context in which abuse had occurred. Such findings stand in

opposition to researchers such as Island and Letellier (1991), Landolt and Dutton, (1997),

among others who choose to focus on individual traits. In this study I found that both

formal support systems and informal support systems played a major influence in the

intervention of the abuse. This finding that third party responses reinforce "escape"

behaviours remains consistent with research done on lesbian partner abuse (Renzetti,

1992).

Contrary to the dominant literature, context was shown to play a constitutive

rather than a facilitative role in the experience of abuse. Robert suggested that a

heteronormative context with an absence of positive representations of gay men, and

more specifically gay relationships, offer little for gay men to draw meaning to their own

relationship experiences. As was seen in Anderson's story, newly out gay men can be

more susceptible to violence as a result of isolation from gay peers and greater reliance on

their first boyfriend to understand what it is to live as a gay male. This dependency may

make young gay men, as was Anderson, much more tolerant of potentially abusive

treatment from their partners. Such findings are consistent with those of Ristock (1998)

who observed similar patterns of relationship abuse among lesbian women entering their

first relationship.

Much attention has been paid to the link between internalized homophobia and a

cornucopia of social problems experienced by gay men. For example, internalized

homophobia has been "demonstrated" to correlate with psychological distress and coping

styles to seropositivity (Wagner, Brondolo, & Rabkin, 1997), AIDS-related risk taking

(Meyer, & Dean, 1998), and psycho-sexual development (Dupras, 1995). As Kitzinger

(1997) described,

> "The concept of 'internalized homophobia' is used as an explanation for
> the many ways in which lesbians and gay men allegedly *oppress ourselves.*
> Unable to accept our own homosexuality, riddled with guilt and self-
> hatred, we deliberately seek out situations in which we can experience
> pain or failure" (p. 212, italics added).

Community members I had spoken with throughout the thesis process suggested a

possible link between victimization from partner abuse and internalized homophobia. I

remain skeptical, as does Kitzinger (1997), of invoking internalized homophobia as the

far-reaching explanation to all social problems associated with gay men and particularly

to gay partner abuse.

I feel that internalized homophobia is itself a heteronormative device. Such

"discursive techniques" deflect attention from the broader social conditions and the

systems of oppression that affect us, as queers, and places the root of the problem

squarely on the individual, thereby leaving the social conditions firmly in place. As aptly described by Perkins (1991), "oppression becomes psychologized as a pathological entity in the form of homophobia" (p. 326). Internalized homophobia, as a discursive mechanism, played a very profound effect on the experiences of the three participants, however, was most cogent within Robert's experience of what he called "sexual violation" (see pp. 53).

Within the heteronormative context, sexual assault among gay men is believed not to exist. Without interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) with which to compare and evaluate his experience, Robert did not believe his sexual relations with Stephan were outside the normal functioning of any gay relationship. Robert stated, "...here's a partner who just wants to have sex which is normal and healthy in a relationship," despite the fact that Robert did not consent to Stephan's sexual advances: "...[I] said no so many times, I didn't feel like I could say no again...". In the absence of non-heterosexist discourses on sexuality, Robert must turn to the dominant discourses of internalized homophobia to explain why he felt "emotionally uncomfortable." As a result, Robert focussed his attention away from the social conditions that were affecting him (e.g., what was done to him). Rather, he looked for the source of his "emotional discomfort" within himself. He stated, "So it must be my problem. Right? And, I equated it to homophobia, like that was my only kind of understanding of why I would have a problem with having sex right? Why should I feel emotionally uncomfortable, it must be homophobia right?"

Discursive readings such as the one performed on Robert's experience reveal the

profound effects of the heteronormative context on the experiences of gay men. Such a context erases the very real experiences of partner abuse that can occur not only among gay men, but lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals. It is here then that I turn our attention away from the "material" experiences of violence and abuse and focus on the discursive conditions with which gay men must come to define and explain partner abuse among gay men and lesbians.

Chapter 6: Discursive Conditions of Gay Male Partner Abuse

Lived experiences of domestic violence are most often used to identify the

immediate needs of victims/survivors so that we, as service providers and community

activists can intervene. For me, as a researcher, to sit down and fashion a model of abuse

with which gay men could compare and evaluate their own experiences simply ignores

the discursive terrains that gay men currently draw upon to construct those experiences.

"An idea is rendered meaningful not by its reference to a certain reality but by its

placement within a linguistic arrangement or structure whose parts give each other

meaning" (Bienveniste, as cited in Ristock, 1996, p. 85). This is not to say that abusive

experiences are not "real," but rather gay relationship abuse is made meaningful as part of

a greater constellation of available discourses.

Discourses are the building blocks that we use to construct our social world

(Parker, 1992). Social possibilities are determined by the assumptions, logic, and

categorizations constituted within discourses (Miller 1997). Through these discourses,

"objects" (e.g., physical abuse, psychological abuse, victim, abuser) are "constructed"

(Burman & Parker, 1993; Parker, 1992; Potter, 1997; Weedon, 1997). As gay men, we

must negotiate our subjectivities from a language drawn from a heteronormative

discursive terrain in which all forms of social relations are assumed heterosexual and all

other forms of sexuality are rendered silent or perverse (Brown, 1989; Honeychurch,

1996). Using interviews from four men, I explore the available discourses that are drawn

upon by gay men to understand relationship violence, how these discourses regulate their

constructions of same-sex partner abuse, and how the men negotiate their own

subjectivities.

Discourses on Same-sex Partner Abuse

Throughout the course of this analysis, I realized that identifying discourse

through "talk" is an extremely intuitive process. Many times, I found it a subjective call

to discern whether a particular discourse ended and another began. And yet I found

myself giving form to discourses as if they were fixed and stable entities to be measured

and quantified by the frequency of their appearance. My goal here is not to present an

exhaustive list of all discourses available to gay men in relation to partner abuse.

Discourses are themselves constructions, as they are fluid, multiple, and interwoven

within a single social reality. The discourses I describe here are those that I have

identified within the four participants' transcripts of Phase 2. I identify these discourses

to explore how they shape the construction and experience of same-sex partner abuse

among gay men.

When asked to describe a "typical" example of same-sex relationship abuse, all

four of the participants characterized the experience as essentially identical to those that

occur within heterosexual relationships. Relationship partner abuse was seen as a pattern

of physically or verbally coercive behaviours that were used to control or dominate within

a relationship. However, subtle differences among the participants' definitions would

result in labelling abuse on very different occasions.

> *Ummm... well for me relationship can be either... ummm... physical,*
> *emotional, verbal, or psychological. Ummm... I guess a typical... typical*
> *relationship abuse, I think would... involve one partner trying to...*
> *ummm... I think... [pause] degrade or denigrate the... the other partner*
> *ummm... for a number of reasons and... I know control has been stated to*
> *be one of the... the big reasons... seems to be the defining ummm...*

characteristic of relationship abuse but, ya know... (Evan)

For Evan, "control" was the "defining" characteristic of abuse. This definition stands in marked contrast with another participant who believed that any and all violence experienced is an indication of an abusive relationship.

> *Ummm... Verbal abuse can be anything from putting the person down... to calling them names when you get into an argument. Physical abuse is, I think, more obvious... I don't think there's any defining lines of what physical abuse is. To me simply it's... when somebody hits another person. So... whether it's a slap or a kick or doesn't... ya know... that doesn't matter to me. Abuse... physical abuse is physical abuse. (Myles)*

Physical abuse was seen as the more "obvious" form. Another participant stressed the prevalence and severity of physical abuse, but was open to forms of non-physical violence.

> *I've, you know... generally it's been physical... ummm... I think psychological abuse tends to be more downplayed in the sense of its severity. Ummm... you know, and these are strict kind of... you know, I'm sure, you know these have all... this is almost textbook case, you know, textbook example of what... what domestic violence is. You know, one of the ummm... major themes for domestic violence has been to control ummm... you know the partner... (Michael)*

Another participant characterized abuse as an unequal relationship dynamic.

> *Abusive relationship is umm.... not an equal partnership, you know.*
> *(Paul)*

During the interviews, all participants made some reference to a "textbook case" or "classic scenario," as if there were widely held cultural agreements about the nature and form of partner abuse. In fact, none of the participants voiced the need to question our present understanding of domestic violence. Generally, participants rendered gender as irrelevant and simply asserted that "abuse is abuse."

Well, you know as I... as I said, it was very... it's-it's textbook. Like, I'm going on-on general theories because, I think that ummm... the abuse and domestic violence... doesn't necessarily change because it's a same-sex relationship. Abuse is abuse regardless of if it's male-male or male-female relationships. (Michael)

One participant was quite adamant in stating that we need not look beyond present theories on domestic violence to understand abuse in gay relationships.

Jeffrey: Why do you think these things [relationship abuse] happen within our community?

Paul: Well like I said... it's not just indicative of the gay community. Gay/straight... it's the same thing... the same learned thing at home... that have been seen and have affected them in their youth and ummm... you know they carry it into a gay relationship just as if they could've carried it into a straight relationship.

Jeffrey: So you don't see a difference between the expressions of violence in same-sex couples and mixed-sexed couples.

Paul: No. No... I don't think... you'll find the same violence in either one, you know. The behaviour learned... you learned to write as a gay person/ you learn to write as a straight person... It's both writing. Whether it's a gay person writing a letter or a straight person, it's still writing.... it's the same thing."

This participant's belief that the cause of gay relationship abuse is "the same thing" as heterosexual experiences of domestic violence serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, equalizing the experiences of gay men and heterosexuals politically affirms that gay relationships are "just like heterosexuals" (i.e. natural/normal), which remains the dominant political strategy used among gay libertarians. On the other hand, affirming that our relationships are exactly the same as heterosexuals erases our specificity and restrict us from questioning present heterosexual models of domestic violence and their inadequacy to account for the unique and often plural experiences of gay men.

Despite the participants' beliefs that current heterosexual models of domestic

violence can be easily transposed to explain abuse in gay relationships, one participant's

description of his first exposure to domestic violence theory illustrates a number of

hidden assumptions that have actively functioned to exclude the experiences of gay men.

> *Ummm... well... I guess my previous experience with domestic violence has to do... I was good friends with a woman who ummm... who was raped and this played... such a profound effect on her life that she... you know... her... she's devoted her life to addressing violence against women. Ummm... and I think one of the... with that comes a whole slew of social problems ummm, you know... that's inclusive of violence against women... and one of them being uhhh... domestic violence ummm... which was... you know, which was one of her, I guess, "specialties" in addressing. She ummm... you know... she was a-a, I met her ummm... as an undergraduate student ummm... she ummm... you know... she knew her stuff and she spoke from experience ummm... at least as a victim/survivor of sexual assault ummm... you know, and she felt uhhh... some sort of authority in speaking about domestic violence issues or all violence against [women] issues and one being specifically domestic violence. And it was through her that I become very sensitized to umm... I guess the plight of women... you know... and... and she sensitized me to the feminist movement and... and issues of sexism... ummm... you know oddly enough... now in... way back when, I thought she was brilliant but... and she knew her stuff and she knew everything there is to know about women's issues... (Michael)*

For this participant, the dominant discourses impose a number of restrictions about who

can experience violence, what causes violent and abusive relationships, and who can

speak about domestic violence. This participant is first introduced to the issues of

domestic violence, but as a gay man, was immediately distanced from experiencing it as it

is subsumed by the overarching umbrella of "violence against women." Domestic

violence becomes a political expression of sexism and the "plight of women" and

therefore cannot be experienced by men. As one who experienced one of the most

horrendous forms of violence against women, Michael's friend becomes the authority

figure who knows "everything there is to know" about domestic violence, based on the

explicit assumption that domestic violence is, solely, a women's issue.

All four participants, at one time or another, drew upon gender-based theories of

domestic violence. When asked to describe a "typical" experience of heterosexual

domestic violence, participants could not imagine heterosexual abuse outside of the male-

abuser/female-victim dichotomy. One participant described the difficulties in

characterizing males as victims and females as abusers within a mixed-sexed relationship.

He stated,

> *I would define it as a man abusing a woman. I... you know, I have a*
> *hard... I read things about there being abusive women and I... I just have a*
> *hard time with that. I just have a hard time thinking that a woman could,*
> *for example physically abuse a man. Ummm... I know it happens, but I*
> *think it's rare. And I think... so in a heterosexual relationship I would*
> *definitely see the man as most likely, 90 per cent of the time, being the*
> *domineering abuser and the women being the victim. (Myles)*

My goal here is not to suggest an outright rejection of feminist perspectives, and

more specifically a gendered-analysis on domestic violence. Clearly, the overwhelming

reality of sexism in the lives of women cannot be ignored. However, to speak of

domestic violence as solely an expression of sexism form gaps in the "grand narratives"

that leave queers without the words to describe their own experiences and render certain

social possibilities as mute. Nonetheless, these grand narratives are complemented by a

host of adjacent discourses. For instance, the dominant discourses on domestic violence

have been sustained by the commonplace idea that men's aggressive behaviours are an

inevitable and natural expression of men's biology.

> *And males, I believe, often deal with their anger in many different ways. I*
> *was very much brought up and dealt with your anger by lashing out.*

*Ummm. Lashing out meant hitting something, throwing something,
ummm... ya know that whole testosterone thing getting in the way there.
(Myles)*

Participants' responses such as these reinforce the notion of the so-called gender

difference and have been given a form of support and legitimation even by some of the

most radical feminist frameworks that have simplistically dichotomized gender relations.

From this viewpoint, gender roles are viewed to be fixed and stable. In Western cultural

prescriptions of gender, males are generally believed to be "the stronger sex" and

characterized as independent, aggressive, and dominant. On the other hand, women are

viewed as the "fair sex" and characterized as dependent, passive, and subordinate. With

Western culture's increasing reliance on biological determinism, these gender differences

become essentialized and immutable. Constructions that men are fundamentally different

from women shape the knowledge that we can use to constitute their experience in violent

relationships.

These discourses have been fortified within, what Butler (1990) calls, the

heterosexual matrix. This matrix consists of corresponding discourses that interconnect

and give each other life and meaning. How do the participants construct and give

meaning to partner abuse among gay men within this matrix of assumptions and social

categorizations?

Constructions of "Partner Abuse"

Earlier in this analysis, I pointed out how the participants quite readily described

"typical" examples of same-sex relationship violence that echoed those of heterosexuals.

Here I explore how the dominant discourses available to gay men shape and form the

construction of "partner abuse." My goal is not to define what abuse "really" is, but

rather, how discursive patterns actively produce the social construction of partner abuse.

As you will see, constructions of abuse derived by the dominant discourses stifle rather

than enunciate gay male experiences.

Generally, the participants used "gay abuse" interchangeably with "same-sex

partner abuse," but not without exception. Sometimes, participants relied upon

biologized gender discourses to differentiate between "gay abuse" and "lesbian abuse."

> *Myles: You know what? And I almost hate to say it but, I think... I think
> there would be a difference. Ummm... and I'm, ya know, guessing.
> But, I do think there would be a difference. I think you have male
> aggression [as] much worse than female aggression over all.
> Ummm...*

> *Jeffrey: OK, now when you mean aggression...*

> *Myles: Testosterone levels... I think there's some actual physiological
> defining fact... like reasons why I think that. I mean, we have
> higher testosterone levels, ummm, generally the way we're brought
> up as men, gay or not, you're not brought up as a gay man I mean,
> most of your feminine qualities that you possess... well, I know
> mine where, ummm, the minute they would come out... they were...
> they were... they were frowned upon. So, you learn early on to... to
> try act someone like you are... But, I just think men... it would be
> much more violent.*

> *Jeffrey: Ummm... violent as in... like, specify "violent." Like you mean
> verbally violent, physically violent...?*

> *Myles: Well, actually I would define the two if I had to... I would define
> lesbian relationships as probably being much more verbally
> abusive because I don't think men have the capabilities often times.
> I don't think they, like, and I could be off the wall, I could be
> completely wrong here but, when two women would get into an
> argument I think it would escalate for a lot longer before physical
> abuse happened. Like I think verbal assaults would be spanned
> out in a longer time and then it would start... like physical abuse
> would happen. But, with men I think that verbal abuse would be*

much shorter and it would be much shorter lived and then boom it would jump right up into physical violence.

For this participant, men are believed to be fundamentally different from women due to physiological factors that are augmented by social conditions. Because aggression has been equated with "testosterone levels," men are much more violent than women due to the widely held assumption that men have higher levels of testosterone than women. The notion of men's aggression as "much worse" (read: physical) than female aggression (read: verbal) results in two different types of gender-specific violence that reinforces the biologized gender divide. Identifying oneself as gay does not necessarily make one any less of a "man" and therefore, equally capable of the "much worse" male-type aggression. As a result, female-to-female relationship violence was characterized by a long escalating period of verbal abuse and, if not intervened, would eventually erupt into physical abuse. In marked contrast stands male to male relationship violence that was characterized by very little verbal abuse and predominantly physical in nature and form.

Social discourses that constitute gay male relationship violence in this way mute other possible forms of abuse. For instance, all the participants in phase 1 reported that their abusive experiences were mainly non-physical in nature. Stewart experienced long periods of emotional or psychological abuse before physical violence emerged. His experiences were consistent with those of Anderson and Robert.

> *I was able to get out before any really severe physical abuse. It was almost all emotional psychological abuse although there was some. (Anderson)*

> *...it was very ummm... it was very much sort of verbal and sort of, ummm kind of, I guess almost psychology as opposed to like... he only really took a swing at me once. (Robert)*

The homogenizing effect of heterosexual discourse on domestic violence tends to conflate differences between the genders while simultaneously erasing differences among group members within gender categories. For instance, by focussing on gender as the cause of relationship violence, one participant could not envision the possibility of a physically abusive relationship between two males or two females. Although this participant could see the possibility of physical violence occurring, the possibility for long-term physical abuse remained highly unlikely.

> *Jeffrey: OK, you focussed a lot on psychological abuse. Ummm.... would you say that is the more predominant form [within same-sex relationships]?*

> *Paul: I'd say so yes. I think generally within same-sex relationships, I think generally, both men are physically equal in strength. There may be the odd case when the one guy is a lot bigger or whatever, but I think it's pretty much equal that ummm... that they could defend themselves. I'm not saying that's a hundred percent... but I think physically they can... usually even out and you know, they're pretty equal in that respect. I think there's a lot more mental abuse.*

> *Jeffrey: So... because they are two men... ummm... physical abuse.... if this is what you're saying and you tell me if I am wrong... but because they are two men or two women that, that precludes the possibility... or lessens the possibility of having physical violence within the relationship? Or that violence isn't abusive?*

> *Paul: I don't think it lessens it. I think it's always there. It depends on each individual. Whether one has more of a violent streak or not. It's just generally, I-I think you have a pretty good chance as a male of fighting back more than a male to a female. I think you have a better chance female to female or male to male, just in strength and body size.*

> *Jeffrey: So you think more... uhhh... physical violence occurs in mixed-sex relationships?*

> *Paul: Ya, I'd think so...*

For Paul, the likelihood of defending oneself against physical attack, thereby erasing the probability of a long-term physically abusive relationship, is much higher within same-sex relationships. As such, it is the inherent inequality of power between the genders that is believed to be the cause of physical violence among heterosexual relationships. Unfortunately, focussing on gender as the source of relationship abuse, as Paul had done, hides or invalidates other forms of power differences that may result in victimization within same-sex relationships.

Shared among the four men was the idea that victimhood was less an act of experiencing violence and more a loss of personhood.

> *What would I consider a victim? [pause] Ummm... a person who-who's in a relationship or leaving... or-or out of the relationship who still doesn't feel that their life is worthwhile. That-that they aren't anything on their own. You know, that they're not a person, you know. They can't be a singular person and be all right with themselves on their own. That they were never as good enough as the person they were with, you know. That there's some sort of self-esteem problem by leaving the relationship that... you know, uhhh... "Things are so much better with him...my life would have been better, you know, he would have told me how to do this, how to do that... helped me make this decision..." you know, you should be able to make those decisions on your own. (Paul)*

Nowhere in his narrative did this participant mention victimization as contingent upon the experience of violence. This sentiment echos with another participant who literally severed the relationship between the experience of violence and victimization. For this participant, a victim is someone who chooses to "take it".

> *[A] Perpetrator's someone who instigates the violence whether it's verbal abuse... or physical abuse... or whatever. Whereas a victim is umm... someone who takes it. Now when I mean someone who takes it, I don't just mean the receiver but someone who ummm.... knows that this is wrong and ummm... you know feels how they are being disadvantages by this*

person and yet continues to go on taking it. That, I think is a victim. I
think you can experience abuse without becoming a victim and that is
someone who changes the situation, so that they are not put at a
disadvantage by that other person. (Michael)

Non-victimhood is maintained by control and agency, qualities that are actively

and personally maintained. Or, as another participant stated, victimhood is a role you

"adorn."

> *Evan: I don't know, cause a victim, you know, you take on a... a role as a*
> *victim. You... you... you know, I think you lose... I don't know. I*
> *think that... as a victim you lost a certain amount of control over*
> *your life. Ummm... you lose that ability to change ummm... you*
> *know to actually... as a victim, but adorning a victim-identity you*
> *forfeit ummm... your ability to change your life.*

> *Jeffrey: Can you experience abuse without being a victim?*

> *Evan: I think so. Like, logically you would think that being a victim... or,*
> *sorry, being abused makes you a "victim." You know, for some*
> *reason I... I don't, I don't necessarily see that. You can be*
> *abused... ummm... you know, it's what happens to you afterwards*
> *that determines whether you are a victim or not. Ummm... You*
> *know, you're a victim when... you've lost the control you've had*
> *over your life based on your experience. You are not a victim*
> *when you can still assert yourself and change ummm... and take*
> *some agency in your life.*

Unsurprisingly, these three participants described victimization by the loss of the

very qualities that characterize male gender roles. For instance, Paul saw victimization as

the inability to be an independent "singular person and be all right with themselves on

their own." Michael and Evan characterized victimization as a deficiency in personal

agency and control. Constituting the "victim" label as a choice allows for the experience

of violence while resisting its consequences thereby providing a means of maintaining

"proper" gender roles.

Based on these constructions, it is difficult to see what these participants have to gain by constituting any of their experiences as victimization. When I asked why same-sex partner abuse remains a silent issue within our communities, one participant responded,

> *Ummm... because I don't think people want to admit that they're weaker. Or they have that view that they're gay and if they were to phone the police they would be looked on [as] "Oh that was the man and that was the woman" and that they would think, somehow you're gay and not as masculine. So if you where beat up by your lover, you're automatically sort of this woman or feminine or weaker role and it's a joke. That, it's looked on as a joke or they're not taken seriously by authorities when it's man to man or woman to woman. (Paul)*

According to this participant, gay men do not speak out due to the considerable negative social consequences that can occur. Victimization, from Paul's perspective, is viewed by many to be an admission of a supposed "weaker" position in a same-sex relationship where power is presumed to be equal. A violent gay relationship, for this participant, represents the impersonation of a heterosexual couple; the victim, of course, is viewed as the "woman or feminine or weaker role" = "joke" and not to be taken seriously.

My goal in this analysis was not to identify the participants' "attitudes" about violence and abuse in gay male relationships, as if the participants' attitudes were fixed and stable objects to be influenced. Instead, available shifting discourses constitute the fragmentary subjective sense of self whereby the participants' subjectivities are dependent on the language that is available to the gay men to articulate those subjectivities. How then do these meanings and constructions negotiate the participants' subjectivities and the subjectivities of others within the context of their interviews?

Negotiating Subjectivities

It is my hope that this thesis facilitates social awareness among those who may read this thesis. Some of the gay men who participated in the study stated that their interview with me was the first time they had openly discussed relationship abuse as a very "real" possibility in the lives of gay men and lesbians. Their interviews provided a space for them to discuss and evaluate the experiences of others as well as their own as potentially abusive. However, it was not my intention to delineate "real" instances of abuse "for" participants. Instead, I interviewed participants on their own terms and as authorities of their own experiences. My role was to listen intently and empathically and to understand how each participant's subjectivity was constituted by the social.

In order to discuss how the discursive conditions constitute the participants' subjectivities, I begin with the continuation of a previous interview quote where the participant was describing when he was first introduced to issues of domestic violence by his friend who had considerable experience as a feminist social activist.

> *I told her that I was being interviewed for your thesis... ummm... you know, and I told her that I would be addressing gay... that we would be speaking about same-sex domestic violence issues and her first question... her first question to me or her reaction was, "Does that actually exist?"... ummm ... you know for her, same-sex issues just don't exist, it [same-sex partner abuse] wasn't possible for her. And for a long long while I bought into that... and I don't even think she realized that and... you know, the very fact that she didn't think it could exist at all ummm... I think said something uhhh... and it forced me to reevaluate my own... kind of stance on the issue ummm... (Michael)*

Simply stated, the dominant heteronormative forces lead many to believe that abuse among gay male relationships does not to exist, or as another participant stated, victimization cannot happen among men.

*Jeffrey: Well can you see what a physically abusive gay relationship
would look like? Or could you imagine in anyway?*

*Paul: You know... I guess maybe I have... when I see abuse... I see more a
women with the black eyes and bruised wrist from where she's
being held and forced and forced through a door. Maybe I just
can't see a male looking that way in a relationship, you know. I-I
still see that sort of equal size and that even though I know that
some people can fight better than others or whatever. I can't seem
to visualize a male in that way.*

Paul's presumption that sexism is the "cause" of relationship abuse simply negates the

reality of male victimization that can occur within gay male relationships. He stated. "I

can't see a male looking that way in a relationship."

<u>Constituting the Subjectivities of Others</u>

While formulating the research questions for the interviews, I believed that asking

the participants to discuss abuse in an abstract manner would somehow distance them

from the highly sensitive topic. In trying to understand how participants "constitute"

abuse, I presumed that discussing "other people's experiences" would allow them to

negotiate instances of abuse without calling themselves victims. It was only after reading

the transcripts that I realized how the participants' own sense of self was very much

wrapped up in labelling other people's experience. For example, when describing his

friend's experiences within a relationship, one participant's reaction was dependent on

how he would constitute the experience.

*He started dating this one man and at the time was a little older than my
friend—well a lot older. I would say thirty and my friend was only nineteen
or twenty. Ummm... you know and they were very very abusive... well?...
verbally they were very mean spirited: a lot of put-downs, a lot of, you
know, just sarcasm and and... it was painful for me to see that happen. I
mean that I, maybe I'm just being sensitive but... and at first I thought,
"You know maybe it's just... maybe it's just ummm... you know just a lot of*

*attitude" which isn't unusual in the gay... among gay men. Ummm... you
know, people have sharp tongues here in the community ummm... hands
down. I know my friend started to tell me that it started to bother him and
yet he didn't do anything... ummm... and I think my... you know, like he
thought that that was just the way his partner was... very mean-spirited...
very ummm... insensitive in that way. Ummm... you know... but the thing is
my friend could dish it out as well... he can be equally as ummm... well...
for lack of a better word campy as his partner so... I guess they're both
kind of dishing it out so I guess, you know, it's nothing for me to be
concerned about. If they want to leave... if my friend wants to leave then...
then he'll end the relationship... (Evan)*

In the beginning of his description, the participant characterized his friend's relationship

as "very very abusive" where the couple would act "mean-spirited" towards one another.

The result of the relationship for this participant was "painful to see that happen."

However, this participant began to draw upon a number of discursive patterns to

formulate and derogate the possibility of whether the relationship is abusive or rather

"just a lot of attitude," which is not "unusual" "among gay men." Although his friend

expressed that "it started to bother him," both parties could "dish it out," which does not

fit the widely assumed heterosexual model of abuse in which there can only be only one

abuser and one victim. As a result, the couple's behaviour is reduced to mere "camp" and

becomes nothing for this participant "to be concerned about." For this participant, his

friend chooses to stay in the relationship or else "if my friend wants to leave then... then

he'll end the relationship..."

Individuals choosing to stay in abusive relationships somehow negate or minimize

the severity of violence.

Jeffrey: Did you consider [the relationship as] abuse?

*Myles: Ya, I did. I did at that point because it was just all the time. It
was constant, it was... it was more verbal. I never saw any*

physical abuse. Ummm, although I did say to my friend, you know, "Be careful, these things do lead to... you know often times they do, verbal abuse is, ya know, a sign for what's coming next... in terms of physical abuse.

Jeffrey: And how did he respond to that?

Myles: Ummm... you... you know, he wasn't... at the time I think he was in love and I this was gonna be his husband to be for the rest of his life and he was picturing the white picket fence and everything and he wasn't too happy... Ummm, now I think he could look at it from a different, ya know, view and say "thank you" but I don't think he did then? But, ya know, I didn't push it too much. I-I just... I brought it up a couple of times and I guess what I started doing is being the person I am is when he did it in front of other people. I would start making comments.

Jeffrey: Did you see this man as a "victim"?

Myles: I have a hard time with that because I... I often believe, you know, you can... you're the only person who could change something and... you know... by changing that it... you don't like a particular behaviour [then] leave. And, do you stay in the relationship knowing that the person is an abuser or thinking the person's going to change? I quite... I think they're silly. My personal view is I just think they're silly.

By identifying his friends experiences as "abuse", Myles felt compelled to warn of the escalating violence that may occur within his friend's relationship. However, his friend's decision to stay within the relationship led Myles to lessen the severity of his friends experiences. Despite his previous warnings, Myles finally dismisses his friend's experiences as "silly."

Negotiating Participants' Subjectivity

Many times during the interviews, participants evaluated their own experiences. Some participants gave abstract "generic" examples of abuse, but after the interview they admitted that the examples they gave were actually based on their own experiences from

previous relationships. Some participants simply labelled some previous experience as

abuse. Others simply described experiences of violence without characterizing these

instances as "abuse." Despite their experiences, none of the participants described

themselves as a "victim" of that abuse or violence. My purpose in this section is to

explore how discourse and constructions affect the subjectivities of the participants

interviewed.

The widely held belief that men, by nature, are physically aggressive served to

cloud the violence experienced by one participant within a previous relationship. (The

participant did not state whether these experiences were from one or more partners.)

> *I... I think that's just me personally. I've never been hit in a relationship.
> I think I've had lots of verbal abuse but I've never been hit. Ummm... I've
> gotten into arguments with boyfriends who push... ya know, who have
> pushed me and, yes, even see a push as physical abuse. I think what's
> hard for me... and I think I might be going into another question so stop
> me if I am... ummm... what's hard for me in same-sex relationships, I grew
> up with two brothers: so there was three boys in the family and physical
> abuse was just, I always thought, a part of growing up. You got into a
> fights with your siblings. You beat each other up. My family was a little
> different, I don't know how most families are, but we did actually punch
> each other. (Myles)*

Little or no repertoires of gay relationships for gay men to draw upon lead this participant

to look to other male-male relationships, such as his relationship with his brothers, to

compare and consider his own relationship experiences. However, using such

interpretive repertoires were aggression is commonly expressed and generally without

consequence, only served to justify aggressive behaviours between two men.

Furthermore, this participant also reported previous experiences with

psychological/verbal violence.

Well you know, the person would call me fat and say it in front of other people. You know so often times put me down, [this person was a] much older person. And uh, you know ah... you know after awhile I couldn't do anything right and... but you know, again I didn't see myself as a victim in that case. So, friends of mine told me they didn't like this person and you know, ya. (Myles)

Experiences of verbal abuse were seen as relatively minor, because the participant

believed he was able to maintain a certain amount of control over its effects.

For me <u>personally</u>, I've always been the type of person where as if, someone does put me down, if they call me fat or overweight or ugly or dumb or... I think... I'm a competent enough person where I can see that behaviour or recognize that behaviour and I'd get out of the relationship. (Myles)

The "effect" of verbal denigration was largely dependent on Myles's competency to deal

with such situations, the implication being that failure to fend off negative effects would

be characterized by incompetency.

Quite often, participants viewed verbal abuse as less severe then physical abuse.

One participant simply did not believe verbal abuse was "real" abuse nor did he see

himself as a victim of that treatment.

Evan: Well... see I did experience relationship abuse. [pause] But for some reason, I didn't call myself, and I still don't call myself, a victim. Ummm...

Jeffrey: Why is that?

Evan: Why is that? [pause] Hmmm... I guess in a sense I... I didn't... I don't see the abuse that I did experience as "real" abuse. You know, it was verbal abuse and you know... I already told you it was mean spirited and denigrating and all that. It was even controlling ummm... but it wasn't abuse in the sense that I was physically threatened and I guess for me that would count... as more.

For Evan, physical abuse was what "would count" and, like Myles, he believed that he

has a certain amount of control over the effects of verbal "abuse", as can be seen in the

following quote:

> *He [partner] started to become mean... ummm... in some ways. And I*
> *thought, you know what? And so I guess... I just never let it... ummm... I*
> *never let him... despite the emotional effects that it had, which were*
> *hurtful, you know. I never let... myself be victimized by him... ummm... no*
> *matter how horrible he got. Ummm... you know, I suppose if he hit me or*
> *punched me in some way... ummm... you know, I would have... I would*
> *have identified myself more as a victim because you know, I'm not a big*
> *guy, you know, I can't defend myself against someone who's bigger than*
> *me. I just can't. I can't... you know, I just can't, you know, protect myself,*
> *there's no... I take what... what this would give me physically. So, you*
> *know, in that way I would be considered a victim. But, because, I don't*
> *know... I guess I have some... some way of controlling how this effects me*
> *in terms of... or how verbal abuse effects me. Ummm... I don't necessarily*
> *see it... I don't necessarily see myself as a victim. (Evan)*

The experiences of Evan were, for the most part, personally determined. Victimization

by verbal assault, in whatever degree and despite its emotional effects, is a decision that

one allows to happen, "...no matter how horrible he got." The differentiation of physical

and non-physical (e.g., verbal, psychological) violence is exemplified by Evan's belief

that physical violence is the only type of violence that warrants victim status, but with one

exception. "I can't defend myself against someone who's <u>bigger than me</u>" suggests that

physical violence from a perpetrator of greater physical proportion is the only instance in

which "real" abuse can occur as oppose to the perpetration of violence by someone of

smaller physical size that would presumably cause little harm. Such discursive

techniques are reminiscent of gender discourse that presumes men are inherently stronger

than women.

Another participant simply does not see the possibility of physical abuse ever

happening to him.

Paul: For myself... I can't see anybody getting away with physical abuse on myself just because my personality wouldn't allow that... that I would... I would break a chair back... over their back when I got up... if they [inaudible]... ummm...

Jeffrey: OK wait. Just to be sure... ummm... you don't see yourself ever being able to experience physical abuse?

Paul: Ummmm... I could believe... I could believe that would... might happen with someone who would feel that they would get away with it, you know. That ummm... I would be in a relationship and they would try to take a shot at me or... or whatever. Ummm... but I don't think... well I know I'm not the type of personality that would say to myself, "Well, I deserved that. It was my fault."

Paul cannot see anybody "getting away with physical abuse" because "his personality wouldn't allow that." Based on the discursive practices of the participants, victimization within a gay male partnership is constructed as a form of subordination, which is most closely associated with the female gender role within heterosexual relationship violence. For Paul, refusing the possibility of abuse is to refuse the possibility of victimization–that he will be subordinated. In other words, Paul refuses to be placed in the female role.

In conducting a discursive analysis, we see the profound effects of the social on the individual. The gay men interviewed for phase 2 drew upon a number of discourses to constitute abusive relationships. Ultimately, these discourses served to produce the constructions of gay male partner abuse that were used to negotiate the subjectivities of the four gay men interviewed. With this discursive context firmly in place, the four men invoked a number of techniques to allow the men to actively exclude their own experiences as "abusive" or "victimization" thereby avoiding the very negative consequences that can occur from these subject positions.

Discourse analysis provokes three implications for the research and understanding

on partner abuse in gay male relationships. First, the four men interviewed were not necessarily "in denial" of their experiences–that they were "really" abused but would not admit it. Some participants' experiences simply did not fit the dominant constructions of "abuse" nor did the participants feel that their own subjectivities coincided with the constructions of "victimization" or "victimhood." Although I felt that some of the participants' experiences within previous relationships could be associated with those of "abuse," clearly the participants themselves did not constitute these experiences as such, or at least did not feel that there was anything that "needed to be done" as a result. As the researcher, my ethical stance was not to constitute the experiences for participants, but rather to explore how they came to their own constructions of previous relationship experience and how these constructions were determined by the social and political context. To answer the question, "were these participants really abused?" is dependent on the context in which a) the question is asked, and b) the relationship is situated.

Second, the discursive approach to the experiences of gay men subverts the dominant discourses that focus our attention on internalized homophobia as the "cause" of all their social problems. For the four men interviewed, heteronormative subjectivities were the logical result of the participants' positions within a social and political climate that espouses heteronormativity. Therefore, it is necessary to focus interventions outward towards the social and political contexts in order to change heterosexist subjectivities, and more specifically as they relate to gay male partner abuse.

There is, of course, one other disturbing implication that is revealed through a discursive approach. All participants negotiated their subjectivities as victims of violence

and abuse. For some of the participants, particularly those in phase 2, constructions and subjectivities of victimhood simply disappeared when the participants drew upon the hetero-dominant discourses. How, then, do these discourses serve to render silent the constructions of "perpetrator" and "abuser?" In other words, by rendering victimization among men as invisible or highly unlikely how do the dominant discourses serve to justify the violence being perpetrated by a gay man upon another?

In summary, a discourse analysis enables us to explore how the discursive terrains affect the experiences of gay men. For the four men interviewed in phase 2, "abuse" is a loaded term which entails multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings among participants. If we are to take seriously the notion that "it should always be the victim who decides if abuse is occurring" (Island & Letellier, 1991, p. 25), then we must move beyond the demand for one single definition and explanation of "gay abuse." Such a definition does not explain why experiences of "abuse," "denigration," "domination," or "subordination" are suddenly rendered harmless, for instance, within negotiated and consensual contexts such as s/m play. Nor does it explain why we are compelled to intervene during some forms of "abuse" (i.e., physical) and not others (i.e., emotional) despite the general agreement that all forms of abuse are equally damaging. Nor does it appreciate why partner abuse among gay male relationships continues to be silenced and ignored among social support agencies whose services are supposedly open to "everyone." What is needed, then, is a greater understanding of the complex discursive mechanisms that govern the experiences of partner abuse among gay men. These mechanisms, I have argued, are context bound and dependent upon the broader social and

political realms.

Chapter 7: Building Bridges

The discursive analysis above presents only a small number of ways in which partner abuse in gay male relationships are constituted. My goal in the discursive approach was not to offer my own "alternative" model of domestic violence that could stand to represent all such experiences. Constructions of abuse are fluid and unstable and, as stated elsewhere in this thesis, their negotiations are often inconsistent and fragmentary across space and time.

Despite the apparent tensions between a social action-oriented framework and a queer analysis of the language we use to mobilize our interventions, I do not necessarily see the two approaches as inherently antithetical. Although I feel this thesis is not the place to miraculously resolve such tensions, links certainly can be made as the discursive patterns illustrated in phase 2 resonate throughout the stories presented in phase 1. For instance, without any meaningful and readily available discourses on gay male partner abuse, Stewart, Anderson, and Robert rendered their own experiences as "not abuse," particularly when their experiences of physical violence were considered infrequent. Furthermore, their abusers, especially Stephan, drew upon numerous discursive practices that would serve to justify their behaviour. Certainly, as demonstrated in phase 2, any reference that would constitute Stewart, Anderson, and Robert's experiences as abusive easily could be thwarted and undermined by the dominant discourses.

Taken together, the research findings from phase 1 and 2 indicate that no one theoretical perspective can adequately account for partner abuse among gay men. However, maintaining that there is no one single "cause" of relationship violence and that

the experience of abuse is multiple and fluid does not mean that we must abandon all

hopes. Instead, I argue for multiple forms of intervention that span all fronts of the

ecological spectrum.

<div align="center">Community Psychology: A Model of Intervention</div>

In making a link to Community Psychology (CP), I do not mean to suggest that

community intervention and social action are somehow unique to that discipline. Rather,

CP is in a unique position to identify gaps in the current system of interventions and co-

ordinate the efforts across the material and discursive domains. In an attempt to

harmonize individuals with their communities, community psychologists adopt systemic

views of human behaviour and institutional interaction.

According to Levine and Perkins (1996), community psychologists conceptualize

social problems not only from the individual level, but also on the microsystemic,

exosystemic, and macrosystemic levels. However, unlike traditional scientific norms

(and much like feminist protocols), community psychologists principles encourage

collaboration with and accountability to those communities with which they engage.

Moreover, interventions initiated by community psychologists are aligned with the values

of empowerment, peace, diversity, sustainability, social justice, and prevention.

One characteristic of community psychologists is their awareness of the social and

political implications of their work and the work of others. Much like feminist

researchers who explicitly make known their values throughout the research process

(Reinharz, 1992), community psychologists strive to remain in an emancipatory position

with the communities they engage. For instance, in the area of marginalized sexual

identities, Grant and D'Augelli (1994) explored the social and institutional barriers that act to disempower gay and lesbian communities. Grant and D'Augelli called for greater collaborative efforts with gay and lesbian communities to address homophobia and heterosexism, mental health issues, HIV/AIDS, and civil rights issues. Although the most of CP research with GBLT communities have been positivistic in nature, some community psychologists are open to queer epistemology (e.g., Greene, 1999), although with some with hesitation (Hill, 1999). Nonetheless with a political stance that is anti-oppression, CP can be used as a vehicle to challenge the dominant heterosexist discourses that prevail among the social and political institutions.

Positions within the university setting allow community psychologists to make macro-level transformations to the social conditions of the gay male communities. For instance, community psychologists' locations as professors and academic researchers directly involve them in the production of knowledge and the movement of information. Such critical positions could be used as a means to subvert the dominant heterosexist discourses on gender, sexuality, and domestic violence that have rendered partner abuse among gay men invisible. Moreover, community psychology's interventions are not limited to the academy, as some practitioners choose to engage in political, economic, and religious institutions. Community psychologists' links within various communities provides a conduit to amplify the voices of marginalized sexual identities, such as gay men, within these institutions.

PAR methodologies, widely adopted by community psychologists, provide community-based and community-driven research that can alleviate the immediate needs

of victim/survivors of gay male partner abuse. Within a PAR framework, researchers are

displaced as the knowing "experts" of those that are researched and instead, are

facilitators to the research process (Barnsley & Ellis, 1992). In taking this position,

community psychologists perform as collaborators with gay male communities to

determine what is needed and what are the best ways to fill those needs. Communities,

such as those of gay men, taking active involvement in the research process will ensure

that the research will be relevant to them and on their own terms (e.g., Barnsley & Ellis,

1992). For example, by incorporating PAR principles in the present study, I utilized the

knowledge and experience gained by the gay men interviewed in this study to produce

research findings that are ameliorative to their communities.

Therapeutic Implications

By incorporating critical epistemologies (e.g., queer theory, postmodernism, post-

structuralism, social constructionism to name a few), we, as social researchers, strive to

look for transformative changes in the macro conditions of the communities that we

study. Through our critiques, we accuse conventional psychologists of providing mere

"band-aid" individualistic solutions to social problems that require a broader level of

analysis. However, Kitzinger (1997) reminds us that gay men, as well as lesbians,

bisexuals, transsexuals, and transgendered, seek help *as individuals* to deal with their

very real problems in living. If we do not engage in therapeutic discourses as we wait for

the "transformation" to happen, we run the risk of ignoring individuals immediate

material needs.

In speaking about "therapeutic implications" in light of the present study, I refer to

an ethical protocol that occurs within any and all social interactions that help in promoting social, emotional, and physical well-being and alleviating distress, and in particular distress that arises as a result of violent and abusive partners. By broadening its scope, "helping" is not designated to an esoteric group of professionals who counsel (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, clergy/priests, social workers, school counsellors), but includes the support and care derived from friends, family, co-workers, or other queers met by happenstance. In other words, I include, if not focus on, the types of "non-professional" relationships that could potentially and deeply affect gay men in dealing with abusive partners, as was seen in Stewart's, Anderson's, and Robert's stories.

One of my thesis committee members pointed out to me that gay men who experience partner abuse are "triply silenced" by embarrassment, homophobia, and heteronormative discourse. As a result, there is an obvious need to acknowledge openly the possibility of partner abuse among gay males relationships. However, I object to the development of a diagnostic criteria of victimization or battering that could be thrust upon individuals by diagnostic "experts." Such techniques can be quite harmful when used within inherently hierarchical-structured forums (such as therapy) in which a privileged perspective (therapist) cannot be contested by a subordinate (client).

Instead, I envision sympathetic dialogue and discussion with distressed gay men who seeks help about their relationships (or any other life problem). This dialogue is not to *determine for them* whether they have been abused or not, but to understand each other's sense-making strategies of relationship experiences. It is the social discourses and limited explanatory frameworks that are available to gay men that deserve challenge and

debate where each participant is presented with different points of view. This debate, I

feel, is better suited to the social interactions between friends, family, or other peer

relations in which power is presumed equal. To determine what gay men need to cope

with an abusive partner, my ethical stance is to ask what these needs are from those who

have these needs. In relying on "the communities" to provide practical assistance and

social support to gay men in need, I advocate the values that promote a greater sense of

community and responsibility. It is time that we extend our communities to

accommodate all members, including distressed gay men (of whatever "cause"), and help

collectively rather than relegating and marginalizing them to social institutions that I,

along with many politically queer minded individuals, may hold with suspicion.

Chapter 8: Researching Myself

In addressing the "limitations" of their research, positivist scientists restrict the discussion to a list of "extraneous variables" that "contaminated" the research procedures, thereby distancing their research claims from the truth. However, in the present study I do not assert any "grand narratives" to usurp the dominant discourses. In fact, I do not even suggest that the dominant discourses are necessarily untrue, but rather context-specific. In taking a relativist position to value differing accounts, specifically that the "cause" of partner abuse among gay men remains dependent on the material and discursive conditions, "truth" ceases to exist. What, then, do we have to judge the merit of the claims that I make in this study? How can we move forward? For this thesis, I have relied upon the argument that social research and theory should be evaluated not by its access to the "truth" but by its utility in achieving specific goals, defined of course within a political framework (Kitzinger, 1986).

It is here, then, that I turn the analysis upon myself to explicate my own political and social positions and subjectivities that have interplayed throughout the course of this study. However, as I now write this section of the thesis, I realize the difficulties in placing myself under the microscope. Indeed, as partner abuse in gay male relationships challenged the tarot-card reader's convictions that queer desires "embody harmony between two people" or Stewart's belief that being gay is "men loving men," my own assumptions that "our" experiences of heterosexism and homophobia would naturally result in "our" collective resistance to such oppressive systems was challenged as if a bluff had been called. However, I say this not to suggest that members of the GBLT

communities are not any of these things (e.g., harmonious, same-sex love, or community oriented), but that my position as the researcher gave me no special access to the "truth" of the matter.

As my thesis supervisor would attest, my multiple panic attacks and numerous nervous breakdowns at the onset and well throughout the analytic stages illustrated my own awareness of my constitutive role in the research process and the production of knowledge. In part, my hesitation to proceed during the analysis stage was needed to allow for self-reflection and critical analysis so that the performance of my role as the researcher remained consistent with my own values of emancipation. Although embracing the principles of PAR, I felt the lack of active involvement of participants left the onus on me to do justice to the information they had shared. As the researcher, I was more than aware of the power that I exercised, as I ultimately selected which quotes from the interview transcripts to bring forth and which simply to ignore, knowing that this process would eventually shape the conclusions drawn by the readers of this thesis. At times, this power, and the responsibility that came with it, felt too great and often debilitating particularly when the participation from the gay men in this study symbolized their overwhelming desire to help others.

Part of negotiating that power was in keeping a journal of the research process. My journal began by my writing sometimes desperate entries. But, it was only through voice recordings of my thoughts that I made during my drives to and from Kitchener-Waterloo, after meetings and discussions with community members and key informants, and immediately after interviews with participants, that my own subjectivities became

apparent. Reflection upon these journal entries informed the ways that my personal experiences affected the research process. For instance, after attending a meeting with CASSPA, I recorded the following entry,

> ...through social action we inadvertently begin to define "lesbian abuse," "gay abuse", what is this and that, and what you have to experience in order to be a victim and what you have done in order to be considered a perpetrator. And I think without any type of discussion before hand or within forums like this [CASSPA] we may be starting to define things in ways that we don't want them defined. We may be going down a road which doesn't necessarily speak to the entirety of experiences out there. I seem to notice that there's this "love/hate" relationship with heterosexual theories of domestic violence [among service providers of same-sex relationships]. Clearly it's agreed that there are very specific and unique qualitites of same-sex partner abuse that just is not dealt with within heterosexual theories of domestic violence. And yet when we're forced to act and when we want to promote some sort of action, for instance like an education forum or through therapy we somehow revert back to these heterosexualized theories for the simple reason that that's the only language we have. That's the only thing we can draw upon. (Personal Journal)

Through this experience, I became aware of the need to incorporate some form of postmodern critique into the thesis that would break through the liberal thinking that same-sex partner abuse is "just like" heterosexual partner abuse.

Releasing the postmodern hounds to critique the dominant discourses placed me in a precarious position. This position became more than apparent at the very beginning of the thesis process. An excerpt from the introduction of my proposal illustrated my dilemma:

> My second (third, and now forth) draft was an even more traumatic experience because I turned away from the voices of the "objective" science and looked to the subversive tendencies and shifting spaces of the postmodernist theorists in the hopes of finding a language that better articulated my own voice. Through their ideas, I became critical of my own assumptions and "truths" and came to realize that one voice does

not fit all. But alas, the process of deconstruction, discourse analysis,
and disruption, undermined my understanding of certainty and
consensus; my voice became paralysed by the fear that "nothing is real
and strawberry fields forever..."

A postmodern rejection of certainty left its political agenda uncertain. The postmodernist

project, formerly regarded as social constructionism, in its most "untamed" forms does

not inherently work towards anti-oppression and could very well work against queer

researchers who invoke it (Kitzinger, 1995).

Enter queer theory. Queering the grounds on which we stand offered me a

political platform to begin my process of deconstruction, but even then I found it

necessary to keep my values in check. As a postmodern derivative, "queering" resists

definitive methodological boundaries (Honeychurch, 1996). For instance, my first

experience with queering texts was to reread J. D. Salinger's (1951) The catcher in the

rye as a "coming out novel." Although highly compelling, it is within more literary

brands that queer theorists throw caution to the wind and, with deconstructive zeal, render

all social performances as "texts" or worse, "intellectual curiosities." As a result, queer

theory can become far removed from lived experiences of queers themselves. As Stein

and Plummer (1996) wrote, "What can the rereading of a nineteenth-century novel really

tell us about the pains of gay Chicanos or West Indian lesbians now, for example?

Indeed, such postmodern readings may well tell us more about the lives of middle-class

radical intellectuals than about anything else!" (p. 138).

Within the confines of this thesis project, I incorporated queer theory not to push

the boundaries of sexual identity (Epstein, 1994), but rather to emphasize the

heteronormative context and the relations of ruling in which queer subjects are positioned

(Ristock, 1998). In this respect, queer theory lends itself well to an ecological approach to human behaviour, as is commonly used by community psychologists. For me, queer theory simply provided a greater appreciation of "culture," which among conventional social scientists was limited to material institutions (e.g., religion, economics, political infrastructures).

By queering the analysis, I hoped to disrupt the presuppositions that conventional psychology endorsed. But, there were times throughout the writing stages when I was unsure when the queering should end and the action should begin. For instance, Brown (1989) argued that psychology reinforces the status quo where "white, middle class, North American, married, Christian, able-bodied heterosexuality is defined as the norm" (p. 447). As a gay man, I realized how "relationships" have been constructed along heteronormative biases (e.g., long-term, monogamous, possibly cohabiting) originally intended to fortify what Foucault (1978) called the biological imperative of procreation. Such constructions do not necessarily speak, if at all, to the entirety of queer interactions (sexual or otherwise) that transcend such, some would say constraining, definitions of "relationships." I must concede that my postmodern critique of the heteronormative context did not interrogate the dominant constructions of "relationships" in which "gay male partner abuse" can occur.

Similarly, as a person of colour, I became aware of how "our" constructions of partner abuse ignored a critique of racial subjugation. On the one hand, only one participant mentioned how he believed that ethnicity or one's cultural upbringing may influence one's "tolerance" to violence and aggression. On the other, I do not possess the

capability to conduct an analysis based on "silences, deflections of discourses, and not

naming as part of the work of researching the power dynamics reflected in personal

accounts" (Ristock, 1998, p. 147). Hence, the systems of oppression and the status quo

remain firmly in place.

Researching myself throughout the process forces me to remain cognizant of the

work that I do, which I claim to be emancipatory. In an attempt to produce information

that is "useful," I remain reflexive to ensure that I do not mistake the rewards for the

goals–that the process of "doing" research is intertwined and interwoven with its

"usefulness." For me, doing this study in a process oriented and reflective manner

represents one of the ways for me to reform the connections that had been broken by the

very social phenomenon that I researched.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the material and discursive conditions of partner abuse among gay male relationships. I first explored the social and personal context in which I had conceived and located this study. An account of the emerging debate that was largely provoked by conventional social science researchers on gay male domestic violence provided an opportunity for critical reflection on the discursive currents to which gay men must draw upon. I discussed the tensions that presently exist within the literature that will most likely remain unresolved, as the terms of the debate demand only one prevailing theory on domestic violence. Using Standpoint epistemology and Queer theory as the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, I constructed the methodological framework that prompted ideas for community action and critical analysis. This methodological framework kept me aware of the power dynamics within the research process as I initiated, conducted, and concluded this study. My role as the researcher was to remain accountable to those whom I researched. My accountability and responsibility throughout the research process involved the acknowledgement of each participant's perspective and the use of their own knowledge as a means to produce findings and promote social action from which their communities could directly benefit.

The research findings included three stories of victim/survivors of abusive partners. These stories provided in-depth views of their individual experiences of abuse. The telling of their stories allowed me to fulfill one of their suggestions for intervention by "putting a face to abuse" and letting other gay men know "what abuse looks like." Some of the men gave some indication of current support services, as they shared with

me their experiences of third-party responses. Furthermore, these men provided direction on which social action and community intervention should be focussed.

A "turn to the language" was taken using the interviews of the four remaining participants. The interviews from these participants revealed the dominant discourses of violence and abuse and how these participants negotiated their own experiences in previous relationships and the experiences of others. A discursive analysis challenges the current direction among psychological researchers to root the "cause" of violence and abuse within the individual and prompts for greater appreciation of context. Partner abuse among gay male relationships does not exist within a vacuum but is given form and meaning by the adjacent and complementary discourses. By focussing our attention on language, I hope to break open a discursive horizon from which gay men can define themselves and their experiences on their own terms.

Sites for intervention and future research were extrapolated from this thesis. Directions for social action, as expressed by participants, include the need for public education, positive representation for gay men and gay male relationships, gay-positive liaison with existing social services, and safe spaces for battered and abused gay men. I suggest future research to focus on effects of the heteronormative context that discursively produces and regulates the meaning of violent relationships. Specifically, I believe that greater research efforts are necessary to understand how the social and political context serves to obfuscate the experiences of gay male partner abuse.

Appendix A

Research Poster Advertisement

RESEARCH ON SAME-SEX PARTNER ABUSE

I am conducting a study that explores domestic violence among gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered, and transsexuals. I would like to hear from interested men and women who have experienced violence and abuse in a same-sex relationship. I would like to speak with people from Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, and surrounding areas.

What are the goals of the study?
The goals of this study are; a) to articulate experiences of domestic violence that are reflective and inclusive of queer experiences and, b) to promote queer positive social action and community mobilization.

What will I do with the information from the study?
I encourage participants' input throughout the research process to ensure that all participants remain aware of how I use the information they share with me. All participants will receive a copy of my final report, bibliography, and resource listing. I would like to share the research findings with queer positive service providers and community activists. *Confidentiality is assured. Participants will remain anonymous.*

Who is doing the research?
My name is Jeffrey Aguinaldo and I am a MA Candidate in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. For more information contact,

Jeffrey Aguinaldo, MA Candidate
Department of Psychology
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, ON   N2L 3C5

Tel: (519) 884-0710, ext. 2989
Fax: (519) 746-7605
Email: agui1816@mach1.wlu.ca

This MA thesis project has been approved by the Ethics Research Committee of Wilfrid Laurier University. Throughout this study, I will be supervised by Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers whom you may contact at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3630.

This study will conclude by the end of June 2000

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Appendix B

Research Advertisement Placed in Publication

STUDY OF VIOLENCE IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

I would like to interview interested men and women in Toronto and KW who have been in abusive same-sex relationships. I am willing to share my bibliography, community (mainly Toronto) resource list and my final report. For more information please contact: Jeffrey Aguinaldo, Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5 519-884-0710, ext. 2989 aguil816@mach1.wlu.ca

Appendix C

Interview Protocol Phase 1

Interview Protocol

Objective: Documenting and contextualizing the experience of abuse

1.   What was your first abusive experience?

2.   What types of abuse did you experience?
    ✓   For example, hitting, yelling, isolating you from friends, controlling personal finances etc.

3.   How long did these experiences continue? When did these experiences end?

4.   What prompted you to leave the relationship? Or, why did you decide to stay within the relationship?

5.   How have these experiences affected future relationships?

Objective: Understanding what gay men/lesbian draw upon to understand their experiences

6.   When did you realize your experiences were abusive?
    ✓   What made you realize there was something "wrong" in the relationship?
    ✓   Based on your experiences, how would you identify a) abuse and, b) victimization?

7.   Who or what did you turn to in order to understand your experiences?
    ✓   Did you attempt to find any resources?
    ✓   Did you speak to anyone about your experiences?

8.   What resources or services did you find most helpful?

Objective: Suggestions for social action

9.   How do you feel about present community efforts to address same-sex partner abuse?

10.   What do you think gay/lesbian/bisexuals need in the short term? Long-term?

11.   Do you recommend any particular service that you have accessed?

12.   What has helped/hindered the success of services you have accessed?

If time permits, I would like to get your input on the themes that have emerged from previous interviews.

Appendix D

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT
EXPLORING SAME-SEX PARTNER ABUSE

by Jeffrey Aguinaldo, MA Candidate
Department of Psychology
Wilfrid Laurier University

Tel: (519) 884-0710, ext. 2989
Fax: (519) 746-7605
Email: aguil816@mach1.wlu.ca

This letter confirms that I have been informed of the purpose and the methods of this research entitled, Exploring Same-sex Partner Abuse. Furthermore, I have been informed of what will be requested of me if I agree to participate in this study. If I choose to participate, I understand that:

- my participation in this study is entirely voluntary;

- I may experience some degree of emotional discomfort during the interview due to the sensitive nature of the research topic; *I may stop the interview or disengage from the research at any time and with no consequences;*

- my identity will not be revealed in the study;

- I agree to allow any data collected in this study to be used in future publications and/or presentations;

- quotes from my responses may be used in the research and subsequent publications;

- I will be provided with a transcription of my interview and a copy of the final research report.

- all interview tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked office; at the conclusion of the research (approx. the end of June, 2000), all taped and transcribed information from my interview will be destroyed.

- if I have any concerns about the research or the interview process, I can contact Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3630 or Dr. Linda Parker, Chair of the Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3126.

Name of Participant   Signature   Date
(please print)

Appendix E

Informed Consent Script

INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

You received and read the Research Information letter.

You understand that you are being interviewed for Jeffrey Aguinaldo's master thesis research project that explores same-sex partner abuse.

You understand that your name will not be used and that your answers will be confidential. Your participation in this study will not be revealed. All taped or written information you share with me will be kept in a locked office or the researcher's place of residents, both locations accessible only to the researcher.

You understand that you can refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer and that you can stop the interview any time you choose.

In addition, you also know that you can withdraw from the study at anytime by notifying the researcher.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me at (519) 884-0710, ext. 2989.

You can also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers, at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3630 or if you have any questions or comments on how the interview was conducted you may contact Dr. Linda Parker, Chair of the Research Ethics Boards of Wilfrid Laurier University, at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3126.

Appendix F

Research Information Letter

RESEARCH INFORMATION
EXPLORING SAME-SEX PARTNER ABUSE

My name is Jeffrey Aguinaldo and I am a Master's Student in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, ON. I am inviting you to participate in a study that explores issues of domestic violence and relationship abuse among same-sex partners. <u>Your participation allows me to explore what gay men and lesbian must draw upon to understand relationship violence and abuse.</u> It is my goal that this study will encourage queer positive social action and community mobilization and provide a means to articulate experiences domestic violence that is reflective and inclusive of queer experiences.

The completion of this study is necessary to fulfill the requirements for my MA degree in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. In spite of my academic incentives, I choose to conduct research that will benefit the communities that I draw upon and speak about.

Your participation involves one, 30 min to one hour (one-on-one or telephone) <u>audio-taped</u> interview. I would like to elicit input from participants throughout the research process. I do this as a means for participants' to have direct control over the information they share with me and to ensure that they know what I do with their data. I will transcribe your taped interview and mail a copy of your transcripts to you. With these transcripts, you are free to change, omit, or simply comment on the information you had shared with me. Or, you may keep your transcripts for your own personal record. You can mail (postage paid by me), email, or fax any changes or comments you would like to make.

The information from all interviews will be gathered together, organized, and written into a final report. No names (other than aliases) will be attached to the interviews so I can ensure that what participants share with me will be kept confidential. A copy of the final report will be shared with all participants of this study. The information from this research may be used in future publication and presentations.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, you may experience some degree of emotional discomfort during the interview. You are free to discontinue participation before and during the interview and throughout the research process. Aliases will be used in the final write-up of the research findings. Only I will have access to the taped

interviews and only I will listen to them. At the conclusion of the research (approx. the end of June, 2000), I will erase all tapes and destroy all transcripts from the interview sessions. *Please be aware that participants may stop the interview or disengage from the research at any time and with no consequences. I will return any data that participants have shared with me.*

The interview questions that I would like to ask during the interview are enclosed with this letter. Please look them over. If you choose to participate in this study, you are free to change or omit interview questions that you feel unsure about. You may also add questions in order for the interview to better focus on your experiences and ideas. You can forward any revisions to the interview questions via telephone, fax, or email.

I will contact you within the week to discuss the possibility of an interview for this study.

If you have any questions, you can contact me by telephone, fax, or email.

<div align="center">

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This MA thesis project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Wilfrid Laurier University. Throughout this study, I will be supervised by, Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers whom you may contact at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3630. You may also contact Dr. Linda Parker, Chair of the Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3126 if you have any issues with the research or how it was conducted.

Again, thank you for your interest,

Jeffrey Aguinaldo
MA Candidate, Community Psychology

Appendix G

Interview Protocol Phase 2

Interview Questions

1. Please describe a typical example of relationship abuse?

2. What makes this experience "typical"?

3. How do you define relationship abuse?

4. How would you distinguish between an "abusive" relationship and a relationship that "was not working out"?

5. How would you know if you or someone you know was experiencing domestic violence?
    a.   What is a victim?
    b.   What is a perpetrator?

6. Do you think there are differences between relationship abuse in same-sex couples and mixed-sexed couples?

7. Have you witnessed a relationship that you thought was abusive but others did not?

8. Have you witnessed a relationship that you did not think was abusive but others did?

9. If you were experiencing relationship abuse, where would you go?

10. What would you do to change the situation?

11. What would you suggest to a friend who you thought was experiencing relationship violence?

12. What do you think is the cause of gay/lesbian domestic violence?

13. Why do you think relationship violence happens in our communities?

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