

Gay and Bisexual Male Domestic Violence Victimization: Challenges to Feminist Theory and Responses to Violence

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This article demonstrates how same-sex male battering challenges contemporary feminist domestic violence theory. The author shows current theory to be heterosexist and therefore insufficient to explain the phenomenon of battering among gay/bisexual men. Domestic violence theories that integrate a sociopolitical and a psychological analysis of battering are presented as more inclusive of same-sex domestic violence. Differences between battered gay/bisexual men and battered women are illustrated, focusing on how these men conceptualize and respond to violence against them. The author also examines the social context of homophobia in which same-sex battering occurs; the impact of AIDS on gay/bisexual men as it pertains to battering; the misconception of "mutual combat"; and the difficulty of seeking help. The article highlights the need for empirical research on same-sex male battering.

Through the influence of the feminist movement of the mid-1970s, domestic violence came to be understood primarily as a heterosexual, sociopolitical phenomenon with its basis in sexism, that is, gender (Schechter, 1982). As a result, the domestic violence movement historically has focused almost exclusively on the battering of heterosexual women. The feminist political view of the male-female dyad has been the basis of the movement's core philosophies, shaping everything from batterer treatment policies (Frank & Houghton, 1987; Sonkin & Durphy, 1989) to victimization theory (Browne, 1987; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1976; Schechter, 1982; Walker, 1979), to current domestic violence law (Sonkin, 1987). The feminist analysis of gender socialization and its role in domestic violence has been tremendously effective in illuminating the relationship between discrimination and violence against women in society at large and the at-home version of that "gender oppression": battering (Pharr, 1988).

Unfortunately, feminist theory, with its doctrine of male victimizers and female victims, has also contributed to the invisibility of gay and lesbian domestic violence because it precludes the possibility of such violence occurring. Indeed, the movement to stop domestic

violence has been extremely reluctant to address and work to prevent same-sex battering (Lobel, 1986), in large part because of the fundamental challenge to domestic violence theory that gay and lesbian battering represents (Island & Letellier, 1991). The existence of female batterers and male victims defies the strict gender categorizations of victims and perpetrators that are central to a feminist analysis of domestic violence (Schneider, 1992). The dearth of knowledge about same-sex battering, particularly concerning gay and bisexual men, allows much of the current work in the field, both in theory and in practice, to remain heterosexist. Without a wider dissemination of information about same-sex domestic violence, there is little hope for a more inclusive approach to the topic of battering in general.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how gay and bisexual male battering (and, though not directly addressed, lesbian battering) challenges the current ideologies about victimization. While acknowledging the importance, and drawing on certain aspects, of the feminist analysis of gender socialization as it pertains to domestic violence, it will be shown that such an analysis is fundamentally heterosexist and is furthermore insufficient to explain the phenomenon of same-sex battering. This article begins with a brief examination of the current gender-based theory of domestic violence and an overview of more inclusive theories. These latter theories integrate an analysis of the sociopolitical perspective with an examination of the role that individual psychological factors play in the dynamics of domestic violence. The author then illustrates several ways in which battered gay and bisexual men differ from battered women and shows how current theory fails to account for male victimization. The role of homophobia in same-sex male battering as well as the difficulties battered gay and bisexual men have accessing help will also be discussed. The article ends with a call for a more integrated domestic violence theory based on an understanding and inclusion of same-sex battering.

It is important to emphasize from the outset that no empirical research has been published about gay and bisexual male victims of domestic violence. Hence, many of the ideas and examples described in this article are based on the author's clinical experience with this population as well as his own experience as a victim of gay men's domestic violence.

GENDER-BASED THEORY

Documenting the central role of sexism in domestic violence, Dobash and Dobash (1979) assert that, "The use of physical violence against women in their position as wives is not the only means by which they are controlled and oppressed but it is one of the most brutal and explicit expressions of patriarchal domination" (p. ix). According to these researchers, and virtually all feminist-identified writers and experts to follow, men who assault their partners are following cultural prescriptions that dictate male dominance and female subordination. Being a victim of domestic violence is equated with, or seen as the natural consequence of, being a wife. As Pharr (1988) points out, battered women are "victims of sexism at its worst" (p. 9).

A more specific analysis of the role of gender in domestic violence victimization is put forth by Walker (1979), who writes that the battered woman is a "traditionalist about the home", who has strong convictions about family unity and the socially prescribed feminine sex-role stereotype (p. 35). As children, battered women "were expected to be pretty and ladylike and grow up to marry nice young men who would care for them as their fathers had" (p. 35). As adults, they believed that a woman's place is in the home. According to

this doctrine, relationships in which violence occurs are extreme examples of the traditional marriage that is characterized by male supremacy.

Throughout most of the 1980s, battering was regarded almost exclusively as a political phenomenon. Succinctly expressing this view, Graham, Rawlings, and Rimini (1988) contend that, like hostages, "battered women are political prisoners. Battering ... is a political act since it reinforces the existing structure of male dominance" (p. 228). Like other theoreticians in the field, Graham and colleagues rely exclusively on heterosexuality as a fundamental assumption in their work.

Almost without exception, domestic violence theory has been established solely on an analysis of heterosexual relationships where batterers are viewed as "oversocialized males who rigidly adhere to sexist patriarchal values" (Hamberger & Hastings, 1988, p. 763), and victims have one singular unifying characteristic: They are female (Browne, 1987). These gender-based theories inherently exclude same-sex relationships where both perpetrators and victims of battering can be either male or female. As a result, same-sex domestic violence has been rendered almost completely invisible in the mainstream domestic violence literature, receiving only token mention in several books and articles. When gay and lesbian battering is mentioned, the challenges it presents to heterosexual domestic violence theories are simply not addressed. Instead, same-sex domestic violence has been tailored by theoreticians to fit the dominant paradigm of male/female sex role socialization and sexism, or it is referred to as a so-called "exception to the rule" (Geffner, 1992).

Martin (1976, p. 67), for example, claims that battering occurs in same-sex relationships when lesbians and gay men act out masculine and feminine (butch/femme) roles, but is less likely to occur in couples who do not imitate these "Mom and Dad"-type relationships. Although Martin made this assertion 18 years ago, little has changed. As late as 1991, experts were still trying to conform lesbian and gay male experiences of domestic violence into theories developed about heterosexuals. Walker asserts that "most lesbians and gay men were raised in heterosexual homes where power differences between men and women fueled the sex-role socialization patterns that they model in their own relationships" (Island & Letellier, 1991, p. xix). She, too, defines same-sex relationships as imitations of heterosexual relationships, and implies that lesbians or gay men affected by domestic violence are actually acting out heterosexual male or female sex roles. This attitude persists despite widespread evidence that the vast majority of lesbians and gay men actively reject heterosexual sex roles as models for their own relationships (Peplau, 1991).

INTEGRATION OF SOCIOPOLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

Recent exceptions to this pervasive heterosexism, however, reveal an integration of social and psychological domestic violence theory that challenges gender-based assumptions and allows for the inclusion of same-sex relationships. For example, in an article on cross-cultural aspects of battering, Campbell (1991) points out that there is not, as most feminist theory would contend, a linear correlation between female status in society and rates of wife abuse. Campbell proposes that "individual psychological factors within a context of cultural tolerance" predict individual incidents of domestic abuse, while cultural, political, and economic factors may lead to increases in its frequency and severity (p. 19). Thus, the individual is examined psychologically and in the context of the social milieu, regardless of gender.

In an article on the social-psychological model of battering, Merrill (in press) also argues that feminist theory that sees cultural misogyny as the root cause of domestic violence contributes to the denial of same-sex battering. Merrill asserts that domestic violence must be understood as both a psychological and social phenomenon in order to satisfactorily explain the occurrence of same-sex battering. He writes, "Feminist theory and psychological theory are not necessarily mutually exclusive; one does not have to negate the other, and in fact, if synthesized and placed together, they can enhance our vision" (p. 5).

Hamberger and Hastings (1988) also integrate sociopolitical and psychological theory in their work, stating that "psychopathology must be considered part of the picture for a majority of identified batterers" (p. 769). These researchers point out that although sociopolitical theory helps to focus attention on societal factors in spouse abuse, such as legislation and public policy, the psychological characteristics of individual batterers must also be taken into account.

Obviously, battered gay and bisexual men do not have that single quality that has been the focus of the domestic violence movement: They are not female. By definition, they cannot adhere to the profile of the passive or submissive woman who is in a powerless position in relation to men in society. Sexism and misogyny cannot be the root cause of violence against these men. Their sexual orientation and gender may influence their reaction to the violence and their ability to escape from it, but they are not battered because they are men, nor because they are fulfilling a feminine sex-role stereotype.

The integrated theories of battering that combine an analysis of the social context in which domestic violence occurs with the psychological characteristics of the individual perpetrator are inclusive of same-sex battering. Such theories account for victims and batterers of either gender and they allow for the inclusion of the social context of homophobia and heterosexism in which same-sex battering occurs. Although there are similarities between battered men and women, under this more inclusive theoretical model, battered gay and bisexual men do not have to be examined as mere versions of battered women. Instead, they can be understood as men who have a similar experience of being battered, but who conceptualize and respond to violence against them differently from battered women. Battered gay and bisexual men also face an array of different problems in their attempts to escape from their violent partners.

MEN AS VICTIMS

One of the major distinctions between battered gay and bisexual men and all battered women is that gay and bisexual men are often unable to see themselves as victims simply because they are men. Many of the battered gay and bisexual men with whom the author has worked view battering as something that happens only to women and they are extremely uncomfortable identifying themselves as "battered." Illuminating this point, and drawing on a feminist analysis of sex roles, Lew (1988) reminds us that "our culture provides no room for a man as a victim. Men are simply not supposed to be victimized. A 'real man' is expected to be able to protect himself in any situation. He is supposed to be able to solve any problem and recover from any setback" (p. 41). As is the case with male incest survivors (Hunter, 1990), many battered gay and bisexual men do not conceptualize their experiences as abuse and see victimization as inconsistent with their male identity. As a result, many gay and bisexual men who have experienced considerable violence by their partners

do not assign a "victim" label to their own experience because they cannot see themselves as men *and* as victims.

Studies of male sexual assault survivors show that high levels of physical harm or injury to their bodies must be present in order for men to feel self-approval for their emotional or psychic reaction to trauma (Evans, 1990). In other words, men's internal reaction to trauma is often validated through their physical symptomatology. Shifting this feminist analysis of gender socialization into the realm of domestic violence, we see the battered gay or bisexual male who may need to be physically injured in order to see himself as victimized. The common psychological reactions to violence, such as fear, vulnerability, shock, and depression, in the absence of a black eye, a fractured rib, or a stab wound, may not be sufficient for the man to associate his experience with the concept of victimization. In many cases, even physical symptomatology is not enough. A recent article on same-sex battering described a gay man who had been physically battered by his partner for more than a decade. A clinical social worker working with him reported, "After being assaulted with a lead pipe and almost killed ... this man was still able to seriously ask the question, 'Well, do you really think that was domestic violence?' " (Snow, 1992, p. 61).

It is likely that many, if not most, gay and bisexual men lack the awareness and language to describe their own victimization, and therefore fail to take the steps necessary to leave their violent partners, particularly early in the relationships when the violence is just starting. Given the virtual silence about same-sex battering by the domestic violence movement (Tuller, 1994) and the gay community (Szymanski, 1991), these men may never have heard of gay domestic violence *per se*. As the cultural "problem solvers" described above, they are less likely than battered women to tell anyone about the abuse, and less likely to seek help. Instead, they stay to "take it like a man" or to "stand their ground," putting themselves at risk for more severe and frequent violence. It is, in part, their inability to see themselves as victims that may contribute to their staying in a relationship in which they are likely to be further victimized.

ADVERSE EFFECTS OF HOMOPHOBIA AND AIDS

To understand how battered gay and bisexual men code their experience of victimization, it is necessary to examine the context in which that violence occurs by looking at the role that homophobia plays in the lives of these men. In the United States, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals are continually bombarded by homophobia (Blumenfeld, 1992; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Pharr, 1988). Despite the progress of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement of the last 20 years, mainstream society still views most lesbians and gay men as sexual perverts, criminals, a danger to children, and pathologically disturbed (Margolies, Becker, & Jackson-Brewer, 1987). The hatred and denigration of lesbians and gay men in American society take many forms: skyrocketing rates of anti-gay violence and harassment (Berrill, 1990); legal, sanctioned discrimination against gays in housing and employment (Harvard Law Review, 1990); laws against same-gender sexual conduct in 24 states (Rivera, 1991); policies that prohibit gays from many of the life activities that heterosexuals take for granted, such as serving in the U.S. military (Shilts, 1993), securing the custody of their own children (Herek, 1990), or simply holding hands in public. Indeed, the refusal of the government to prevent or even oppose the violence, discrimination, and prejudice directed at lesbians and gay men makes them among the most threatened of American minorities (Arriola, 1992).

Given the extreme levels of animosity that gay and bisexual men experience in their everyday lives, it is not surprising that it takes a tremendous effort for many to maintain feelings of self-worth and dignity (Isay, 1989). Nonetheless, research indicates that the majority of lesbians and gay men in this country are as healthy and well adjusted as their heterosexual counterparts (Isay, 1989), and that they experience the same rate of relationship satisfaction (Peplau, 1991). Despite this healthy majority, significant mental health problems plague large numbers of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. For example, suicide rates among gays and lesbians, particularly gay and lesbian teens, are estimated to be three times the national average (Gibson, 1989). Alcoholism or other substance abuse is believed to be a problem for as many as one third of all homosexuals in this country (Kus, 1990). The poor self-esteem and sense of inadequacy many gay and bisexual men feel contribute to the difficulty they may have in developing committed and trusting relationships. As Isay (1989) points out, many gay men describe the differentness they feel as homosexuals in terms of "being defective" (p. 25), as if there is something fundamentally wrong with them.

For gay and bisexual men, the AIDS epidemic is adding another dimension to the problem of low self-esteem because "some healthy young adults now perceive themselves as potential carriers of death" (Isay, 1989). Odets (1990) elaborates on this point in his assertion that "the homosexual man, often considered psychologically 'sick' for his sexuality, and who homophobically concurs with this conclusion, is now sick with AIDS, an apparent physical validation of the moral and psychological judgments against homosexuals" (p. 1). Odets's research revealed that so pervasive was "internalized homophobia" that many gay men he studied were more comfortable with their identity as people with AIDS than with their identity as homosexuals (p. 2).

Although not empirically validated, the correlation between the homophobia described above and the phenomenon of gay and bisexual male battering seems clear. Compound the insidious effects of homophobia with the virtual absence of healthy gay relationship role models, and the stage has been set for a group of men who tolerate violence from their own partners. For example, the author recalls a battered gay male whose partner would shout, after a violent attack, "You might as well get used to it. This is how gay relationships are." The victim in this case had no frame of reference other than his abusive partner: This was his first relationship, and like other victims of gay domestic violence, he was extremely isolated from the local gay community. The impact of homophobia is also made clear in the words of a battered lesbian: "I basically accepted my relationship as common to the 'gay experience' ... it seemed to be normal. Although I didn't like it, I saw no acceptable alternatives" (Breeze, 1986, pp. 51-52).

As is the case with victims of anti-gay violence (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1992), battered gay and bisexual men may actually associate their victimization, and the pain and confusion that accompany it, with their homosexuality. The battering may lead to feelings that they are being rightfully punished for being gay—feelings all too often reinforced by homophobic family members. They may feel defective on some fundamental level, and are often told by their partners that it is something about them (the way they talk, how they behave, who they are, etc.) that causes them to be hit. Battering may simply reinforce their feeling that as homosexuals they are acceptable targets for abuse and violence (Herek, 1990).

"MUTUAL COMBAT"

Although many battered gay and bisexual men may feel that they deserve to be abused because of their sexual orientation, this does not necessarily mean that they stand by pas-

sively while their partners assault them. Quite to the contrary, it is often assumed that in same-sex relationships both partners are equally violent and abusive, perhaps because both partners are the same gender and may be approximately the same size and weight. This idea of mutual combat, or reciprocal violence, maintains that both partners are equally capable and willing to commit violence, that each partner is both a victim and a batterer, and, consequently, that both partners are equally accountable for the violence.

Many of the battered gay and bisexual men with whom the author has worked employ the concept of mutual combat to initially describe their own experience of domestic violence. That is, they say, "I hit him, too. We both batter." Mutual combat is also how the police and criminal justice system in California tend to view same-sex domestic violence. The author has seen the words "mutual combat" written directly on police reports by responding officers, further reinforcing for the victim, the batterer, and the rest of society the misconception that same-sex battering is mutual.

Research shows that up to 71% of heterosexual battered women use violence against their partners at least once (Saunders, 1988), most often in self-defense. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume that battered gay and bisexual men, who are certainly socialized more than women to use physical force against an attacker, are at least as likely, if not more so, to respond to violence against them with violence of their own.

Supporting this contention in a feminist analysis of sex-role behavior, Browne (1987) points out that when confronted with violence in their relationships, heterosexual women are most likely to respond with attempts at peacemaking and resolution because, culturally, these responses are the most deeply ingrained. Conversely, Browne asserts that, "When threatened with a perceived loss of control in an adult relationship [such as a violent attack], men raised in violent homes may follow the early models by resorting to violence themselves, in an attempt to maintain control and prevent the potential of further victimization and pain" (p. 34). Although Browne is describing men who witnessed or experienced violence in their family of origin, her hypothesis about how some men respond to violence can be more generalized. I hypothesize that battered gay or bisexual men are more likely than battered women, including lesbians or bisexual women, to respond to battering with violence of their own, either in self-defense or in retaliation for prior abuse. As Renzetti (1992) makes clear, however, this does not mean that same-sex battering is mutual.

Based on her research on lesbian battering, Renzetti (1992) challenges what she calls the "myth of mutual battering" (p. 107). Renzetti writes that, "A major weakness in the mutual battering perspective is the underlying assumption that all violence is the same, when, in fact, there are important differences between initiating violence, using violence in self-defense, and retaliating against a violent partner" (pp. 107-108). Renzetti's point here is crucial: Motivation for the violence must be examined within the context of the relationship in order to understand who has the power in the relationship. It is not enough to know who strikes first, because a battered person may resort to violence in an attempt to prevent another attack against him or her. With gay and bisexual male battering it is also not enough to know which partner sustained the more severe injuries because both men in the couple may have the physical capacity to injure the other.

For victims of domestic violence, striking back can have debilitating effects on their understanding of the violence and on their motivation to seek help for themselves. Hart (1986) explains that a significant number of battered lesbians question whether or not they are actually battered if they responded even *once* to violence against them with violence of their own: "... especially if it worked in the immediate situation to stop the batterer, they are compelled to see themselves as equally culpable—as batterers" (p. 184). For many battered lesbians then, and, it is hypothesized, for battered gay and bisexual men, there is no

perceived distinction between self-defense and battering. Victims identify as perpetrators regardless of the motivation for their violence. This may be particularly true for battered men, given that being a perpetrator of violence is a more socially acceptable role for a male than being a victim.

Battered gay and bisexual men who strike back against their partners may believe they have stooped to the level of physical violence. Having been victimized in the past, they feel they should have known better. They are also vulnerable to the perpetrators' insistence that the violence is really a "relationship problem," or "our problem." Consequently, they may feel they do not have the right to seek help for themselves because now they have become part of the problem.

HELP SEEKING

Another difference between battered heterosexual women and battered gay and bisexual men involves help seeking. Those battered gay and bisexual men who decide to seek help are likely to encounter a severe problem: the utter lack of resources available to them. One conservative estimate is that in the United States, half a million gay men are battered every year (Island & Letellier, 1991), yet there are only approximately six agencies or organizations in the entire country that exist specifically to help them. With no shelters for battered gay or bisexual men in the U.S., there are literally hundreds of thousands of battered men remaining with their male partners because they have nowhere to go to escape their violent attacks.

There are numerous reasons for this void in available services. First, as stated earlier, the domestic violence movement has focused virtually exclusively on the development of services for heterosexual women. Second, domestic violence is still not acknowledged as a serious problem in the gay community itself (Island & Letellier, 1991; King, 1993; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992). This community denial will continue as long as gay leaders continue to believe and publicly state that gays and lesbians are "a very non-violent group of people" (Epstein, 1993, p. 1), despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary. The community-wide denial only contributes to the violence because so little is done to stop the battering and hold perpetrators accountable.

In addition to the lack of services, the police are perceived as off limits to many, if not most, gay and bisexual men because of the institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism of most police departments. According to studies on anti-gay violence, the median number of gay men and lesbians who experienced anti-gay victimization committed by *the police* was 20% (Herek, 1990). This victimization includes verbal and physical abuse, entrapment, blackmail, and the deliberate mishandling of anti-gay violence cases. Distrust of the police, and of the criminal justice system in general, may be high among lesbians and gay men, with good reason. Gay and bisexual male victims of domestic violence have reported to the author a variety of dehumanizing and illegal responses by the police to their calls for help. Victims have been harassed and ridiculed as "fags" and "queers who should learn to beat each other up." Responding officers rarely arrest the batterer, or conversely, they arrest the victim, although he may be physically injured. In other cases, both victim and batterer have been arrested and held in the same jail cell where the victim was reassaulted. One battered gay man who called the police for help reported that an officer told him that they "only arrest in these gay things if it gets bloody."

Many domestic violence laws are also discriminatory against gays and lesbians in that they contain opposite-sex language that requires same-sex victims of domestic violence to

sustain greater injuries than their heterosexual counterparts in order for an arrest to be made (Island & Letellier, 1991a). For example, in California the domestic violence criminal statute (273.5 Spouse Abuse) specifically excludes same-sex partners by dictating that it applies only to opposite-sex couples (West's California Codes, 1993). The following example from case law highlights this heterosexist discrimination. In an analysis of the 273.5 charge in the case *People v. Cameron*, the presiding judge states, "Some other offenses (besides the 273.5 charge) do require higher degrees of harm to be inflicted before the crime denounced by them is committed ... *But the legislature has clothed persons of the opposite sex in intimate relationships with greater protection by requiring less harm to be inflicted before the offense is committed*" [emphasis added] (California Appellate Reports, 1985, p. 952). Thus, according to California law, a battered gay man or lesbian must sustain greater injuries than a heterosexual woman or man in order to have their partners arrested and charged with spouse abuse.

A battered gay or bisexual man interacting with the criminal justice system also faces negative consequences that are unrelated to the violence he experienced. For example, discrimination against people with HIV by employers, insurance companies, and the criminal justice system is well documented (Schulman, 1991) and is widely discussed in the gay male community. Many battered gay men understand that reporting a violent attack by a same-sex partner will almost certainly require them to reveal their sexual orientation, thereby risking unwanted publicity, job loss, and terminated health insurance: a calamity for anyone, particularly someone living with HIV. Thus, homophobia in the criminal justice system forces many gay and bisexual men to choose between the negative and potentially sweeping consequences of revealing their sexual orientation and the help and safety that same system is supposed to provide (Wertheimer, 1992). Hence, calling the police may not even be seen as an option for most gay men.

CONCLUSION

Battered gay and bisexual men differ from battered women in how they respond to and conceptualize domestic violence, despite the similarity of the abuse they experience. As this article demonstrates, it is perhaps best to understand battered males by examining the literature, albeit scant, on how men respond to violence and trauma in general, such as sexual assault, rather than assuming that gay and bisexual men are male versions of battered women. This article also clearly highlights the need for empirical research on the topic of same-sex male battering.

Men most often cannot see themselves as victims, even if they have experienced considerable violence against them committed by their partners. Their perception that only women can be battered may cloud their abilities to evaluate their own experience and assess the danger they may be in. It is hypothesized that gay and bisexual men are more likely than their female counterparts to fight back against their abusive partners, either in self-defense or in retaliation for past abuse. Their violence may further decrease their ability to acknowledge their own victimization, which, in turn, decreases their help-seeking behavior. Those who do seek help are likely not to find it. The gay community and the domestic violence movement have done remarkably little to help battered gay and bisexual men. Additionally, the homophobia and heterosexism of society's institutions, such as the criminal justice system, rule out many of the sources of help to which heterosexual women have access.

The differences between battered men and women have implications for current, mainstream domestic violence theory. The feminist sociopolitical analysis of domestic violence may be helpful in understanding heterosexual battering, where, given the stark inequalities between men and women in society, gender *is* power, and men have explicit power over their female partners. As made clear throughout this article, there are many aspects of the feminist analysis that are useful in explaining how and why men and women respond the way they do to violence, regardless of sexual orientation. This model, however, is fundamentally heterosexist and cannot be used to explain the phenomenon of same-sex battering. It is an insufficient framework through which to understand gay and lesbian domestic violence. Rather than gender, the use of violence to maintain power and control over one's intimate partner, regardless of sexual orientation, must become the focal point of discussion and analysis for all forms of battering.

More integrated theories incorporate the gender-neutral experience of same-sex battering, focusing instead on power imbalances, both on the societal and interpersonal levels, and on the psychological characteristics of individual perpetrators. Although it is important not to disregard the benefits of feminist scholarship in the understanding and analysis of domestic violence, domestic violence must be regarded as both a social *and* an individual psychological problem, requiring social and psychological interventions. Only then will domestic violence theory be applicable to the wide variety of relationships that compose modern society.

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