



Gender and Violence

A Reflective Sociology of How Gender Ideologies and Practices Contribute to Gender Based Violence

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Abstract: Gender based violence can be viewed—using the sociologist C. Wright Mills’s conceptual vocabulary introduced in his book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)—as both a personal trouble and a public issue. Gender based violence was most often seen in the past as a personal trouble, a private matter between couples. Of course for the women who endure this violence it is very personal and very troubling to their safety and damaging to their whole sense of being and self-worth. Only recently has gender based violence come to be seen as a public issue. In the 1980s domestic violence was found to be the leading cause of injuries to women, and the Surgeon General deemed domestic violence, “the most serious health risk facing women” (Disch 2006:471). It is not only domestic violence that is an issue in gender violence but the trafficking of women and girls through countries as sex slaves and prostitutes, and governments’ inaction to stop this. This writing has allowed me to learn from my own personal troubles with domestic violence, and to see the ways in which gender based violence is a bigger social issue. Putting this paper together helped me to see that it wasn’t just my own personal “defects,” or just his insecurities, that caused me to experience a violent relationship, as “the individual abuser and the victim do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are nested within the supportive circles of social institutions and culture.”

Gender based violence can be viewed—using the sociologist C. Wright Mills’s conceptual vocabulary introduced in his book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)—as both a **personal trouble** and a **public issue**. The **Sociological Imagination** is the ability to see the link between history and biography and to shift perspectives from the sociopolitical to the psychological (Mills 1959).

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the women who endure this violence it is very personal and very troubling to their safety and damaging to their whole sense of being and self-worth. Only recently has gender based violence come to be seen as a public issue. In the 1980s domestic violence was found to be the leading cause of injuries to women, and the Surgeon General deemed domestic violence, “the most serious health risk facing women” (Disch 2006:471). It is not only domestic violence that is an issue in gender violence but the trafficking of women and girls through

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countries as sex slaves and prostitutes, and governments' inaction to stop this.

I became a victim of an abusive relationship during my junior year of college when I was twenty years old. It was not my first relationship, but the first real relationship that I had had during my college years. As the abuse continued and worsened, I thought I was alone in a personal struggle. At the time I did not realize the extent of violence towards women. After getting away from this relationship I decided to take classes in psychology and sociology, with the intentions of figuring out "what was wrong with me." Asking myself why I had allowed myself to become a victim, and why I stayed even when the abuse became physical, I used my education as a way of empowering myself with knowledge.

Through taking classes I did learn things about myself that may have contributed to my own personal situation. But I also learned that this same experience was all too common for women around the world. I have started to understand that it is some of the ideologies of masculinity and femininity that contribute to domestic violence. Violence against women is a product of the oppression of women in most facets of life in most places in the world. Feminists see that there is a "continuum of violence," meaning that all violence is interconnected, coming from the same social root of gender inequality and the resulting sexualization of women's bodies (Marchbank and Letherby, 2007:270). In this paper I will explore some of these ideologies and of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, the practices people engage in to maintain these gender differences and inequalities, and some of the oppressions of women in different faculties of life. I will use the sociological imagination to apply these issues to my own life and my own experience of gender, focusing on ways in which these ideas relate to gender based violence.

Gender based violence is much more

than just a personal issue between couples; it occurs because of some of the basic ideologies we hold about men and women, and the structures used to enforce these ideas. First of all we must examine the ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and femininity that create separate dichotomous spheres for men and women. If we see the ways in which men and women are viewed as different we can begin to see how women are devalued and oppressed, and how this leads to the continuation of violence against women. The ideas of what constitutes masculinity and femininity are not only different, but are essentially in opposition to one another. According to class discussions and handouts in two courses I am taking on Sociology of Gender and on Family Violence, feminine characteristics include softness, cooperation and concern for relationships, being emotional (absence of control), love and nurturing, dependency, intuition, harmony and connection. Masculine characteristics include reason, rationality, intellect, self-control, autonomy, toughness/strength, competition, aggressiveness, and separation.

It is not that these characteristics are in-born, but they are socially constructed. In the article "The Social Construction of Gender" Judith Lorber explains the ways in which everyone is "doing gender." Lorber defines gender as a process, a stratification, and structure. By a **process** she means that gender creates social differences that define what it is to be a "man" or a "woman." Creating these differences is something we continue throughout the lifespan through behaviors, norms, and expectations which are enforced or sanctioned by peer groups and authority. **Gender as a stratification system** means that men are ranked above women within the same race and class (Lorber 2003:116); this is what creates the inequalities between men and women.

As a **structure** "gender divides work in the home and in economic production, legitimates those in authority, and organizes

sexuality and emotional life” (Lorber 2003:117). This structure is an important component in the stratification system. “When gender is a major component of structured inequality, the devalued genders have less power, prestige, and economic rewards than the valued genders” (Lorber 2003:117). In our society men have “more power, more prestige, and more property than the members of the disfavored group” (Lorber 2003:117)—the disfavored group in this case being women. This stratification is important in the idea of gender violence; the power men have and the lesser status of women are reasons it continues to occur. Violence within personal relationships is about power and status. I know that in my own situation, I knew that I had less power, and that he was in control of the relationship, possibly because he felt that he didn’t have control in other aspects of his life.

Holly Devor’s article “Gender Role Behaviors and Attitudes” is especially useful in explaining how the differences between masculinity and femininity are based on unequal status. She states that **masculinity** is a competitive thirst for power which can (but doesn’t have to) lead to aggression, and that **femininity** involves a “quest for harmony and communal well-being, which can, but need not, result in passivity and dependence” (Devor 2003:485). Here again, traditional masculinity reinforces aggression, and femininity can lead to dependence and passivity, both characteristics leading to the maintenance of a violent relationship. She takes it further than this though, saying that the United States’ “patriarchal gender schema” (2003:485) gives valued attributes the quality of maleness, while leaving for females the characteristics that maintain heterosexuality and nurturing (2003:486). Power in this system is a masculine attribute. The practices and **roles** of femininity “expressed through modes of dress, movement, speech, and action which communicate weakness, dependency, inef-

fectualness, availability for sexual and emotional service, and sensitivity to the needs of others” (Devor 2003:486). Thus, femininity, Devor states, is most fitted to satisfy “a masculine vision of heterosexual attractiveness” (2003: 486).

The way women hold their body and move, they take up small spaces and use small steps, they don’t look back when looked at, they are more likely to smile, they wear clothes that show more bare skin and inhibit movement, all of these practices serve to “communicate subordinate status and vulnerability to trespass” (Devor 2003: 486). Anything that is masculine must remain untainted of any femininity, and projects the opposite, male practices serve to maintain dominant status, and physical power. In practicing femininity women are conveying vulnerability and low status. Men want to convey power and aggression.

One can see how these presentations of self can lead to an easy situation for violence. When women appear vulnerable and dependent and of a lower status they are more easily taken advantage of by men. Within my abusive relationship I was constantly trying to appease, concerned with maintaining the relationship more than my own well-being. I didn’t think of myself as dependent, but I see that I was presenting myself that way by constantly trying to fix the relationship to keep it going. I see that by engaging in all these feminine roles, I, like other women, was an easy target for violence. Later in this paper I will engage with some of these individual practices that actually cause women to be more vulnerable to violence.

Growing up, I learned that there were differences between boys and girls, but also was taught to believe in the **myth of meritocracy**, that I (along with every other citizen of the U.S.) could “do whatever I wanted as long as I set my mind to it”—that rewards were based on accomplishments. I wasn’t taught to see that maleness was the norm and that femininity was “Not A” as Lorber

puts it, in the same way that I was not taught to see the privilege that came with being born white. In noticing that males were often unwilling to admit that they were over privileged, Peggy McIntosh realized that whites also only chose to see racism as a disadvantage for others, but not as a privilege for themselves. In her article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" she tackles these issues. McIntosh defines **privilege** as unearned assets that put one at an advantage (1988). She states that whites are taught to see their lives as normal and morally neutral, that they aren't taught to see themselves as oppressors. This is true. I was taught that racism was "bad," but that nowadays it stemmed from individual hatred, not from cultural dominance of a group. I was blind to the **interlocking oppressions** in their "embedded forms" (2006:75). Within this system of interlocking oppression I didn't see my racial advantage, just as I didn't see my gendered disadvantage, all to maintain the myth of meritocracy.

My early education taught me that racism and sexism were problems of the past that had since been overcome, that now everyone was equal. Not until taking college level courses did I begin to see the fallacy of this myth. Also, being white and therefore privileged, I did not think that I could take advantage of typical resources that were available for battered women, I felt that they were created for those who "had less" than I had, who needed it more, that I would be turned away. Again, I didn't see myself as the image of a stereotypical battered woman, being that I was middle class. When I finally turned to my family, they did have the means to help, which may not have been available otherwise. My parents paid for me to see a therapist, who helped me to see that it wasn't just me, that all abusers are the same, and who slowly coaxed out of me what was really going on and encouraged me to leave. She said that it would be hard, there would be a mourn-

ing period, but that I should do it as long as I could know that I would be safe.

At almost the same time my aunt and uncle offered me a place to live at their house in South Carolina. My uncle offered to enroll me in community college in their town and help me get back on my feet. The fact that my family and especially my uncle could afford to help me like this is one of the major reasons I was able to leave the relationship. I didn't have the money to enroll in school again myself. I knew that I could be safe because I would be living over a thousand miles away. This made me realize some of the unearned privileges of class. If I had had no one with the available funds to help me, if I had been dependent on my boyfriend for income, or if I had had children, I probably wouldn't have been able to leave the abusive relationship.

Although early education doesn't teach us to see the bigger picture of the systems of oppression, there are practices which teach/reinforce gender roles and segregation in elementary schools. This problem is discussed by Myra and David Sadker in their article "Missing in Interaction." They describe how elementary school teachers inadvertently give more attention, both positive and negative, to boys in the classroom, and that the girls, although appearing to be doing better than boys in terms of better grades and less punishment, are "reinforced for passivity" (2006:355), maintaining a feminine quality that in the future does not help them retaliate against violence directed towards them. **Gender segregation** occurs also at this age, boys play with boys and girls play with boys; it is almost taboo for them to play with one another. When allowed to choose where to sit, children sit with members of their own sex, and the boy who sits with girls is generally outcast by members of his own sex, or forced to do so as a punishment from the teacher. In "He Defies You Still: The Memoirs of a Sissy" Tommi Aviccolli describes being taunted for being effeminate

and being called a sissy, a faggot, and a girl; he recalls that these terms made a boy

Vulnerable. Feminine. And feminine was the worst thing he could possibly be...no boy in his right mind wanted to be like them (girls). A boy was the opposite of a girl. He was not feminine. He was not feeling. He was not weak. (2006:150)

Important in this gender segregation are **pollution rituals**, in which children treat members of the other sex as “germ carriers” (Sadker & Sadker, 2006:358), that by touching one you will be polluted, and more often it is girls who are the “cootie carriers.”

As one can see from Avicelli sentiments, and these rituals, the girls are made to be a lesser subspecies. The Sadkers state that “it is boys who work hardest at raising the walls of sex segregation and intensifying the difference between genders. They distance themselves, sending the message that girls are not good enough to play with them” (2006:359). Boys then take up more time in the classroom and space on the playground, and this is not questioned or fixed by the teachers to make things more equal, reinforcing the girls’ inferior status. The Sadkers conclude that gender segregation “is a major contributor to female invisibility” (2006:360).

I remember clearly these types of pollution rituals in elementary school, frequently started by the boys; girls generally tried to maintain their relationships with the boys, while the boys tried to become distant to prove themselves to the other boys. For myself, I remember it was a privilege when the boys allowed me to play with them. To be allowed to do so you had to prove that you were good enough or tough enough, you had to conform to their ideas of play. If you got hit hard, you couldn’t cry, or if you couldn’t hold back

your tears, you couldn’t tell on the boys or they wouldn’t let you play again. Then again, the girls were always thrilled when the boys wanted to play with us.

I also remember that the loudest troublemakers, which in my experience were always boys, took up much of the classroom teacher’s time. This frustrated me. I can see how a lot of little girls got lost or forgotten about in the classroom. The most important thing to take away from this is that in elementary school years there is segregation which creates the superior status of boys and the inferior status of girls. This sets up the lower status of women for the rest of their lives, although it isn’t always in plain view. But this lower status, and the “reinforced passivity” is what allows for violence to take place and why it isn’t made an issue by the majority. I think another important aspect of the attention that little girls do receive, which the Sadkers mentioned, is that when little girls receive praise from teachers it is often based on their appearance, on how “cute” they look (2006:357).

Girls and women are first and foremost judged by their appearance. **The Beauty Myth** has imposed harsh standards of attaining beauty on women in what Naomi Wolf says is the last effort to “keep women under control by imprisoning them in their bodies” (515). Most women struggle the effort to reach these unattainable measures of beauty. In the film “Killing Us Softly 3” Jean Kilbourne states that “the body type that only 5% of women naturally have is the only one that is seen as beautiful” (2000). She says this is about teaching women that they shouldn’t take up space, and not be too powerful, or be too full of themselves. In relation specifically to gendered violence, Elayne Saltzberg and Joan Chrisler point out that the styles and body types that we consider beautiful often leave women vulnerable to injury or attack, such as long hair or dangling jewelry that have gotten caught in machinery, and high heels

and tight skirts and dresses which prevent women from running away from danger (163). The current body type that is part of attaining the beauty ideal is one that is extremely thin. Sandra Bartky in the article "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" states that this gives women no help in fending off violence:

An aesthetic of femininity, for example, that mandates fragility and a lack of muscular strength produces females bodies that can offer little resistance to physical abuse, and the physical abuse of women by men, as we know, is widespread.... A woman may by no means develop more muscular strength than her partner. (2003:35)

In my own life I have subscribed to this "culture of thinness." I was naturally thin as a child, and I engaged in sports, cross country, track and field, which maintained and promoted and almost required the thin body type. I liked my thin body, enjoying the compliments I received. But it is telling that at the time of the most severe physical abuse in my relationship, I was at the lowest weight I had been in years. I didn't feel that I could fight back, I was much too small to defend myself against attacks. Although, it didn't happen for me, it must also be understood that not only does this prescription of thinness lead to easier victimization, but victimization can also lead to eating disorders, which then lead to thinness. Trauma has often been linked with eating disorders, sexual abuse being the most common relation to the origin of an eating disorder. Eating disorders give some women a sense of control over their own bodies and also a way to anesthetize the negative feelings that come with victimization (Thompson 2006:181). So the pattern can be that thinness and maintenance of the beauty ideals lead to victimization, and/or

that victimization leads to eating disorders, and subsequently thinness.

There are other features of living in America that facilitate gender-based violence. One of these is the privatization of the family. In foraging and agricultural societies the work of all family members was important to the group's survival, but as societies evolved, especially Western capitalist societies, this also changed. In the last hundred years "there was a clear understanding about the obligations and entitlements each partner took on when they married. He was obliged to work outside the home; she would take care of life inside" (Rubin 2006:305). This life inside included not only the domestic tasks or cooking and cleaning, but also the maintenance of family's well-being. But the fact that the male was bringing in the income, and the devalue of the feminine tasks, set up an inequality within the home. This is reflected in the fact that domestic violence is the number one cause of injury to women, and that women are 9 times less safe in the home than out of it (Marusich-Smith, class notes 2/5/08). The privatization of the family means that "family business" is private, what goes on in the home is behind closed doors and not talked about with "outsiders." My boyfriend, for instance, didn't want me to discuss our relationship at all with anyone because it was private, it was ours, and others "wouldn't understand." I think really he didn't want anyone else to have any influence over me, or others to know what he was doing.

As society industrialized, men began to have less control in their work lives, and began to take it out on their families exerting control. As family life was their domain, many women tried to project the perception that they had a perfect family life and relationship, because they were socialized to think that this was the most important part of their lives (Marusich-Smith, "Family Violence" class notes, 1/29/08) and so wouldn't admit to abuse or talk

about it. After my own relationship became abusive, I didn't want to admit that anything was wrong, because admitting it to others meant it was true, and I felt that I had failed, or that something was wrong with me because it had happened. I tried to give the image that everything was fine, that our relationship was perfectly happy. Also, since he didn't approve of any places where I could work, I became in charge of "domestic" life, while he brought in a paycheck. I often ended up stuck inside the apartment all day, afraid to go anywhere else and trying to at least keep it clean, and do things to try to make him happy. Our relationship lost any sense of equality. Abuse is less likely to occur when the relationship is egalitarian, or the woman earns more than the male (Marusich-Smith, "Family violence" class notes 1/29/08) As women have entered the workforce, things have started to change, but there are still barriers in employment which make it harder for the woman to be an equal earner, and which maintain the patriarchal structure of the family and of society.

Women's domestic duties play out in the fact that "women's family responsibilities [are] certainly the most important ... cause of sex differences in earnings" (Crittenden 2006:418). These differences in earnings are significant, "The average earnings of all female workers in 1999 were 59 percent of men's earnings" (Crittenden 2006:417). This stems from the fact that women with children often work part time, or have taken leaves in their careers; the differences in wages for these reasons is termed the **cost of motherhood**. It is also caused by the fact that jobs which require the feminine quality of nurturance (which also are the occupations with the highest percentage of women) are devalued by our patriarchal culture which gives value to masculine traits, and are "the most systematically underpaid, relative to their educational and skill demands" (Crittenden 2006:421). This makes it hard for women to

find equality in the workplace, and therefore difficult to find equality in the home, the equality which, as I mentioned before, would lessen the likelihood that violence against the woman would occur. Another issue of inequality of power that plays out in the workplace is that women are often sexually harassed, and sometimes blamed for their own harassment (Allen 2006:501). Women who hold jobs in traditionally male fields and who are assertive and competitive are often targets of sexual harassment, because they challenge their male co-workers' masculinity and have stepped out of their feminine roles (2006 1995:506).

Another arena in which the inequalities between males and females are played out is in the way we use sex acts to define our masculinities and femininities. Don Sabo says that often, "Sexual relationships are games in which women are seen as opponents, and his scoring means her defeat" (1994:276). So sex is seen as the man wins, the 2006 loses. How unequal is that? In the article, "How Men Have (a) Sex" John Stoltenberg states that there are no discrete singular differences between what we call males and females, but that sexuality creates a gender (2006:270). That "the act of fucking makes their sexual identity feel more real than it does at other times" (2006:269) "and it's expected that if you're the man, you fuck. And if you don't fuck, you're not a man" (2006:273). This means that the male must be masculine in the sex act, and be the one "acting" while the female is passive, and is "acted upon;" this helps to maintain the "lie" that there are innate differences between the sexes. Stoltenberg describes this type of sex:

Violence and hostility in sex help the lie a lot too. Real men are aggressive in sex. Real men get cruel in sex. Real men use their penises like weapons in sex. Real men leave bruises. Real men think it's a turn-on to threaten harm. A brutish

push can make an erection feel really hard. That kind of sex helps the lie a lot. That kind of sex makes you feel like someone who is powerful and it turns the other person into someone powerless. That kind of sex makes you feel dangerous and in control (2006:271).

These actions are examples of the characteristics of aggression, strength, and control in masculinity. This “acting” and being “acted upon” even plays out between members of the same sex in sexual acts. Within prison culture, a smaller less powerful male may become the “woman” (submissive partner) of a dominant tough male inmate (Kubler, 500). In the novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg, the main character Jess, who identifies herself throughout much of the novel as a butch lesbian, can’t handle the idea of a former fellow butch friend, Frankie, dating another butch, Johnny. Her main issue with their relationship was “Who was the femme in bed?” (Feinberg, 1993:202). Even for Jess, someone who was challenging gender assumptions, in sexual acts she felt that one person (the butch, masculine partner) had to be the aggressor, the one acting, while another person (the femme, feminine partner) was the one taking, or being acted upon. Many men that I have been with have felt this way or acted in these ways (which Stoltenberg described above) during sex, and I have heard many male friends recall incidents (and probably exaggerate) times in which they have acted like this. I know that personally, I generally don’t enjoy this type of sex as it makes me feel used, disposable, and takes away a sense of power over my own body. But then again, I am sometimes uncomfortable with voicing this issue; perhaps because I am a female, and not used to asserting myself, perhaps because I am concerned with the relationship, and am possibly afraid that the male will feel demasculinized if I bring

up the issue. In this way I am complying with sex that reinforces my gender role, that does not create mutual respect and enjoyment. I feel that these type of sexual relationships may have led in part to my maintaining an abusive relationship. Many of my previous college relationships had been purely of a sexual nature, and I was trying to hang on to anything that had some emotion attached to it.

Also, pornography which socialized many adolescents and boys to the ways in which sex acts are “supposed” to be played out, often objectify women and “sexualizes their inferior status” (Disch 2006:472). The film *Killing Us Softly 3* also portrays the ways in which women’s bodies are sexually objectified in pornography and in advertising. Often only one part of the body is focused on. Jean Killbourne states that this creates a climate that allows for violence. She says that turning a human being into a “thing” makes them inhuman, and is the first step in violence (2000).

All of these gendered ideals and inequalities lend themselves to a culture in which gender based violence is pervasive. This violence plays out both outside the home and within the home. Outside the home women are being trafficked and sold into prostitution, 200 million people worldwide suffer this fate (Goodwin, 2006:492). Inside the home, women are ten times more likely to be abused. This is what happened to me, the abuse occurred in private, and I tried to hide it. I was ashamed. I didn’t think that this was supposed to happen to someone like me, it was something that happened to someone else. I was intelligent, college educated, middle class, white, an athlete. I didn’t picture myself as an “abused woman.”

I remember seeing a presentation on dating violence in middle school and thinking if anyone ever hit me, I’d leave him for sure, and I’d probably hit him right back. So what happened? Why did I stay, Why didn’t I hit back or defend myself? I stayed

because of emotional attachment; wanting the relationship to work; feeling that I had failed especially as a woman; isolation from others; and embarrassment of admitting what happened. I did try to hit back sometimes and defend myself, but found that because I wasn't strong enough or trained in fighting/defending myself, it only made things worse. Like Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz mentions in her article "Women, Violence, and Resistance," many women won't even think about using violence, because they think it's wrong, or they are afraid to (479). I can understand this. I know that when I used violence, it worked against me, and many women are afraid of that happening. Most women tend to see violence as masculine, and not in their domain, and therefore wrong (479). I see Kaye/Kantrowitz point, that women need to have the ability to use violence in order to protect themselves and not comply with their own oppression (**the violence of rebellion**) (479), but then again I wish that there was a world in which we did not have to use violence, one in which males did not have to use violence. However, I suppose that, being realistic, Kaye/Kantrowitz is right for the time being. To resist violence, women need to be able to use violence to protect themselves. Maybe if men see women as equal threats in violence, they will be less likely to attack them.

Feminists say that men gain from this culture of violence because it "leaves women in a constant state of fear" (Marchbank and Letherby, 2007:272). They say that this fear can come either from experiencing beatings or harassment, or from a general anxiety of incurring the former or sexual assaults. Women cannot know which male is a potential attacker (Marchbank and Letherby, 2007:273). Although men as a whole may gain from this culture, not all male individuals do; in fact this culture of violence and the construction of masculinities also hurts males. In the essay, "Just Walk On By: A Black Man Ponders His

Power to Alter Public Space," Brent Staples soon learns that when walking late at night he is viewed by other pedestrians, and particularly women, as a threat. A woman ran away from him in fear once, which made him feel embarrassed and dismayed (2006). He says he felt like "an accomplice in tyranny" (2006:191). He was not a threat, he knew that, but he began to take precautions to make himself appear less threatening to others (2006). But he knows that this contradicts ideologies of masculinities, that "it is only manly to embrace the power to frighten and intimidate" (2006:193). This masculinity also restricts males in the ways they are taught to communicate.

In the article "Real Men Don't Cry And Other 'Uncool' Myths" Phil W. Petrie maintains his masculinity through remaining "cool" in the face of crisis. He states that men must be rational, able to make decisions, and that in particular, for black men, being "cool" is a "metaphor for power" (2006:224). Cool on the outside, inside he was pained, "I was frustrated and wanted to scream...cry...I needed to be soothed as well as she" (Petrie 2006:221). According to Petrie, men must give up some of their power, and lose their fixed role of masculinity in order to come to terms with and express their feelings (2006). It doesn't help that men feel that the only emotion they are allowed to or encouraged to express is anger. My abusive ex-boyfriend would hold emotions in until he would erupt in rage, and he would try to appear rational and maintain control when his demands were totally irrational and nonsensical. The model of hegemonic masculinity also encourages men to perform acts of violence on each other, to find out who is stronger and who is weaker. This ideal of dominant masculinity, along with the idea of submissive, dependent, femininity, must be changed in order to curb gender-based violence.

This writing has allowed me to learn from my own person troubles with domes-

tic violence, and to see the ways in which gender based violence is a bigger social issue. Putting this paper together helped me to see that it wasn't just my own personal "defects," or just his insecurities, that caused me to experience a violent relationship, as "the individual abuser and the victim do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are nested within the supportive circles of social institutions and culture" (In class handout, "The Power Wheel"). The Power Wheel diagram allows one to see how abuse plays out in the micro world of the individual relationship. The abuser gains power through use of intimidation, coercion and threats, isolation, male privilege, minimizing denying and blaming, using male privilege and emotional and economic abuse coinciding often with physical abuse. The power Wheel then displays how this individual relationship is in the center of a surrounding macroworld. That abuse exists in a society where the culture consisting of values, rituals, language, and norms lend themselves to the institutions of education, economics, work, government, media etc, which then allow for the individual acts of gendered violence (Class handout, "The Power Wheel"). Gendered violence is an issue of unequal power and inequality and this difference in power is seen in the way that society has constructed masculinities and femininities (through values, norms), and the practices that enforce these constructions. Estelle Disch sums up these institutions that are blamed for violence against women:

They include the system of gender inequality that creates an image of women as inferior objects worthy of disrespect; pornography, which sexualizes women's inferior status and presents women as fair game for sexual abuse; privacy since it encourages a lot of violence to remain behind closed doors, [and] women's unemployment and pov-

erty, which keeps women from leaving abusive men. (2006:472)

These institutions along with the subscription to women of the current beauty ideal, the invisibility of girls in school, and the fact that most women do not even consider using violence to protect themselves, contribute to the violence against women that occurs worldwide. Many feminists view violence "not just as a product of women's subordination but as actively adding to that subordination—in other words, women can never have equality until gendered violence has ended (Marchbank and Letherby, 2007:273).

The issue is very important, both for the individual position and psyches of women who have experienced, are experiencing and/or will experience gender based violence, and for the situation of equality for women as a whole, because until the structures of inequality, based in the power of patriarchy and subordination of women, are destroyed, the destruction of women's lives through violence will continue.

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