

2012

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCACY IN THE RURAL CONTEXT AND DISCOURSES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

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DISCOURSES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

by

Sarah Pitcher

B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2010

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2012

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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in the field of Sociology

Approved by:

Jennifer Dunn, Chair

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Graduate School
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April 9, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

SARAH PITCHER, for the Master of Arts degree in SOCIOLOGY, presented on April 9, 2012,
at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCACY IN THE RURAL CONTEXT AND
DISCOURSES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jennifer Dunn

This project explores domestic violence advocacy in a rural setting, using a critical feminist-informed social constructionist approach. Analysis considers how the rural context specifically affects advocacy work, victims' experiences, and perceptions of domestic violence victims and ultimately aims to give voice to the experiences of advocates and domestic violence victims located within the cultural and social context of a rural area. Analysis also focuses on discourses that arise within the interviews related to gender and sexuality, most often surrounding the victims but also related to abusers. Results indicate that the rural context affects advocacy and the experiences of domestic violence victims through its characteristics of small, overlapping social networks, a dearth of privacy, and traditional ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project, and all of my success, to my dear mother and the McNair Scholars program. My mother gave me the love, support, and encouragement to excel, taught me to strive to achieve my highest possible potential, and the McNair Scholars program helped make all of that possible during my academic career.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes out to Dr. Jennifer Dunn, Dr. Rachel Whaley, Dr. Michelle Miller, and Dr. Janet Fuller for all of their assistance throughout the research and writing process. Their recommendations and guidance made a significant difference and were vital to the completion of a quality research project. Thank you to my mentor, Dr. Jean-Pierre Reed; your guidance and support have been invaluable throughout my academic career thus far. Additional thanks to my friends and family, who have offered undying encouragement and enthusiasm for all of my academic endeavors, and a special thanks to David Owens, Lorna Ferguson, and Aaron Goldsberry for all of your support and assistance in proofreading and revisions.

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This project researches the role of workers and community members who serve as advocates to domestic violence victims in a rural setting. The exploration is an analysis of interviews with key members of a Latino community that serve as informal advocates through their roles in the community as well as interviews with individuals in formal advocacy positions in the rural context. This project also analyzes some of the discourses that arise within the interviews related to gender and sexuality, most often surrounding the victims but also related to abusers. Using a critical feminist-informed social constructionist approach, this project considers how the rural context specifically affects advocacy work, victims' experiences, and perceptions of domestic violence victims and ultimately aims to give voice to the experiences of advocates and domestic violence victims located within the cultural and social context of a rural area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I will open this project with an exploration of the theoretical and empirical literature related to my topic; while the literature on domestic violence issues is vast, I hope to demonstrate the importance of cultural, social, and communal context in relation to this issue. In order to do this, I will begin by examining the theoretical approach I employ to study this issue, followed by studies of culture and findings from empirical studies done on domestic violence victimization (and, more specifically, domestic violence in rural areas), and lastly I will include research focused on how the intersectionality of class, setting, immigration, and Latino ethnicity affect this issue in particular. I will also tie in relevant literature on discourses of gender and sexuality that are related to this topic.

Gibbons (2011:12) defines domestic violence as “the use or threat of physical, sexual or emotional force by spouses, partners, relatives or anyone else with a close relationship with their

victims.” Additionally, Rodriguez, Quiroga, and Bauer (1996:153) define domestic abuse as “abusive and controlling behaviors between people in intimate relationships...[including] physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; they are generally repetitive, and often escalate.”

Although the term “domestic violence” refers to many forms of abuse, this project focuses solely on intimate partner violence. Research on domestic violence—also referred to as wife beating, spousal abuse, battering, courtship violence, and intimate partner violence—is plentiful.

However, many of these studies are quantitative, focusing on how much it is occurring, when, and to what degree. These studies are often based in criminology and use crime statistics as their data. Qualitative research, while often times not as easily generalizable as quantitative work, has many benefits in exploring this issue at the ground level by directly talking to people, which can be beneficial in exploring relevant factors that may otherwise go unnoticed. Qualitative work also allows for the researcher to apply a critical framework.

Martin and Nakayama list some of the characteristics of the critical theoretical approach: “[Critical researchers] believe in subjective (as opposed to objective) and material reality,” going on to state that researchers working from this framework also “emphasize the importance of studying the context in which communication occurs—that is, the situation, background, or environment” (2010:65), as well as power relations. Gannon and Davies note that the goal of this approach is to emancipate, stating that “current critical theory uses discourses of equity, inclusion, and social justice that are familiar and compatible with feminist agendas” (2007:76). Additionally, critical theory is aimed at “overturning oppression and achieving social justice through empowerment of the marginalized, the poor, the nameless, the voiceless” (Lincoln and Denzin in Gannon and Davies 2007:67). This perspective also acknowledges the influence of history and ideology in relation to current power and privilege inequalities, noting that

relationships are affected by capitalism, thus certain groups have more privilege than others (Gannon and Davies 2007). Ultimately, the goal of the critical theory approach is to promote social justice and spark social change through empowerment of the oppressed and voiceless.

My goal with this research is the same as the above stated goals of critical theory; however, in addition to critical theory, I also hold a feminist perspective and believe in the importance of researching what have historically been deemed “women’s issues,” although they are very much more accurately known as social issues since they take place at the level of the entire society and affect all of society. Additionally, women often have the *least* agency in these types of issues and social problems; they are often victimized in such a way that they are denied basic rights and, thus, “robbed of their existence” (Carretta 2008:27). Thus the term “women’s issues” *itself* is problematic, further adding to the “terminological sensitivities...in the field of domestic violence and abuse (Madoc-Jones and Roscoe 2011:10), but for the time being this is the most common term that describes the areas that I am interested in as a researcher.

Feminist theory seeks to develop knowledge and understanding of the situation of women in society. Feminist theory also emphasizes a female-centered perspective, and often focuses on the need for counter discourses to the discourses found in society that negate women’s agency and voice. By focusing not only on women, but on minority women—many of which are immigrant women, in this case—I hope to give voice to an issue that is often ignored or downplayed in many communities. Inspired by the work of Patricia Hill Collins, I hope to examine how “intersecting oppressions” compound the problems that domestic violence victims must deal with in order to seek help or improve the situation they are placed into. This perspective is rooted in “social realities” and considers “lived experiences” (Collins 2000:266) as

specialized, expert knowledge to assess and understand the issues affecting these women and the various forms of oppression relevant to them.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in her fundamental work *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture* (original 1911), points out how culture is androcentric and misogynist, citing cultural norms such as the medicalization of discontent, the failure to support women's education or independence, and the view of women as passive objects as evidence of this particular cultural context. While society has changed in the past century and women have become more empowered—to a certain degree—the effect of an androcentric culture on women's status and social realities is still very visible and relevant; in rural areas, which will be the focus of my paper, traditional perspectives on gender and women's roles are still often reinforced in the dominant ideologies of this context (Hancock and Ames 2008; Websdale 1998). Panelli, Little, and Kraack (2004), studying domestic violence victims in New Zealand, argue that cultural and spatial characteristics of a particular community must be considered when designing and providing victim services. Websdale's work demonstrates that rural cultures tend to often be characterized by patriarchy, particularly “private patriarchy” (referencing Sylvia Walby's [1990] work) and that this creates a very specific “sociocultural milieu” (1998:35) in rural areas.

Gilman (1998) is also credited with defining the concept of the “sexuo-economic relation” between the sexes, in which women are only valued for the ability to produce children and are expected to remain within the home, with their highest potential identity being that of a mother. Additionally, women are subjected to male violence because of their inferior position in society and their dependency on men. Although society has changed considerably since Gilman wrote these fundamental works, various scholars of gender and rural areas find these ideologies

to still be present and affecting the experiences of women in this context, especially in relation to victimization and violence (Websdale 1998, Gagne 1992).

Gilman (1998) describes how an androcentric culture essentially means that gender violence is part of the experience of being female, which radical feminists have expanded to further argue that patriarchy and androcentric cultures *are* violence. These ideas are relevant to the population being studied in this paper; as previously noted, although culture has changed over the past century, many immigrant and rural women are located in a cultural context that maintains antiquated gender roles and values which further worsen the problem of patriarchy being preserved (Websdale 1998, Walby 1990). Additionally this cultural context may actually condone—or at the very least, accept as normal—domestic violence and gendered victimization of women.

The effect of a misogynist culture on “women’s issues” is even more visible in its effect on women of color. Viano (1992), referencing Levinson’s 1989 cross-cultural study, states that spouse abuse against wives is the most common form of family violence worldwide. Additionally, Heise (1998:277) finds that masculinity is cross-culturally constructed with associations of aggression, often in the form of “dominance, toughness, or male honor.” Ayala-Carrillo states that, although it is important to recognize the existence of multiple masculinities, power is a defining characteristic of masculinity in multiple societies, which (referring to Connell 2003) she defines as generally “the subordination of women and the dominance of men” (2007:742). While some black feminist authors have argued that family- and housework-related chores may be less alienating for minority women than for white women (hooks 1982, 1984 and Carby 1982), Walby (1990) argues that the household is still a site of oppression and exploitation of women of color. In addition to exploitation and oppression, Carretta argues that the

household is often the most dangerous realm for women; “home is a place where terror exists and violence is experienced at the hands of somebody close whom they should be able to trust” (2008:27).

The widespread occurrence of violence against women is also compounded by the fact that women tend to occupy a lower social status in most countries, especially lesser developed countries and in rural areas (Yihong 2011; Coleman 2010; Haddad 2006). Yihong (2011) demonstrates that even in a context that potentially creates “de-traditionalization” of a traditional patriarchal family structure (particularly amongst immigrant, peasant families), traditional patriarchal structure is still recreated in some form and reinstituted. Patriarchy continues to be an institutionalized form of gendered oppression that affects the experiences of women to this day; not only are women often dependent on the men that abuse them, but they are also frequently located in a cultural context that denies agency, normalizes their victimization, and decreases empathic responses to their victimization in favor of victim-blaming (Carretta 2008; Benson and Fox 2004; Heise 1998, Lipsky et al. 2006, Holloway in Sunderland 2004). This is especially true when society judges the woman to certain standards of behavior and morality, in which case many individuals are deemed unworthy of the status of victim (Dunn 2010) and thus have to work to “accomplish victimization” in order to receive any type of respect or credibility (Dunn 2001). Additionally, cultural attitudes about victimization also impact help-seeking behavior and/or assistance (Hook, Murray, and Seymour 2005). Dunn (2010) argues that survivors of various types of victimization are often stigmatized in our society; thus even if the status of victim is “accomplished,” it may still work against the individual in some ways as a stigmatized or devalued identity.

Some Latino cultures tend to hold rather traditional, somewhat rigid views of gender and gender roles, especially the more rural areas of Mexico, which is the specific cultural context that many of the individuals in the Latino community in question come from. Heise (1998) claims that this cultural characteristic of traditional, rigid gender roles is closely linked to domestic violence. While this may lead to a higher occurrence of domestic violence within the particular population, it also correlates with a resistance to seek help due to views on family and the role of women (Fife, Ebersol, Bigatti, Lane, and Brunner Huber 2008; West, Kantor, and Jasinski 1998). Additionally, Celaya-Alston (2011) finds that this particular population can be very defensive about sensitive issues such as domestic violence and that approaches to dealing with these topics need to be framed in a way that shift the focus; they also emphasize the importance of the community in relation to Mexican male immigrants' sense of masculinity, perceptions of domestic violence, and attitudes.

Holloway identifies the related "have/hold discourse" in which women and female sexuality are repressed using the justification of "Christian ideals associated with monogamy, partnership, and family life" (Holloway in Sunderland 2004: 59). She goes on to describe how women are then divided into two categories, also known as the Madonna/whore, wife/mistress, or Mary/Eve dichotomies (ibid.). Additionally, Holloway notes that even if women are not divided into one of these two categories, they are often expected to be both, simultaneously (ibid.). While this discourse suggests the idea that female sexuality is dangerous if present or lacking if the woman has the ideal heteronormative family life, it ultimately provides the idea that female sexuality can and should be controlled through female subservience and submissiveness (ibid.).

The effect of religion and the “Christian ideals” that Holloway refers to are an interesting factor in relation to domestic violence and help-seeking behavior. Alumkal (1999) correlates religion with the preservation of patriarchy in Korean immigrant communities. Focusing on second-generation immigrants, who many scholars presume to be “more Americanized” and thus more egalitarian, Alumkal (1999) notes that even though the support of patriarchal ideas may not come from ethnic or cultural influences, religion can still create or maintain that commitment to patriarchy. “The literature on American evangelicalism describes its adherents as holding patriarchal norms advocating male headship in the church, family, and sometimes even secular spheres of work and government,” (1999: 130) Alumkal states, noting that many Korean-American immigrants identify with this religion and thus maintain the connection to patriarchy because of religious ideas even when the cultural connection to patriarchal ideology may not be a relevant factor. The Catholic Church, which is the church that many Latinos belong to in the community in question, has notoriously emphasized the importance of maintaining marriage and the evils of divorce, regardless of the situation. Hancock and Ames (2008) specifically investigate the role of religious leaders in relation to domestic violence in Latino communities; they argue that religious leaders and the community are vital to the Latino culture and that, specifically in relation to domestic violence intervention, the role of the religious leader cannot be ignored.

Some churches are even more conservative and extreme and place such value on maintaining traditional gender roles that they endanger the well-being of their followers, mostly those that are women. Referring to the Catholic Church in Chile, Lehrer, Lehrer, and Krauss state that the Church has used its power to “shape the legal and social landscape in ways that ironically were often deleterious to women – victims of gender-based violence in particular”

(2009:635), the opposite of the popular expectation that religious institutions should serve as sources of strength, shelter, and support in a time of need. The Church also worked to keep divorce illegal up until recent years (Lehrer et al. 2009). Lehrer et al. find that with Catholicism in particular, higher religiosity is linked with “theological views regarding gender inequality, the centrality of male authority in the home, and the sanctity of family unity” which are all factors correlated with domestic violence occurrence and resistance to seeking help (2009: 642). Additionally, Ames, Hancock, and Behnke’s (2011) study of religious leaders in a Latino community in the United States revealed that the religious leaders they interviewed knew of domestic violence issues taking place in their community, but they were opposed to separation or divorce “and did not view abusers as being responsible for their violent behavior” (161).

It is noted that immigrant women are less likely to leave their abusers (Walter 2006; West, Kantor, and Jasinski 1998), if help is sought at all. While there are varying reasons for the lack of help-seeking behavior, this resistance can be somewhat common even in the direst of situations: “a fifth of Latina/Hispanic women reporting a severe or life-threatening incident did not seek any help, formal or informal” (Block 2003:6). Perhaps this is due to a cultural ethos that emphasizes family and marriage, and increases the desire to maintain that at more extreme costs (Heise 1998). This value placed on family is present in Hispanic females and males, both perpetrators and non-perpetrators (Walter 2006). Additionally, Ames, Hancock, and Behnke’s (2011) work demonstrates the importance of the cultural and religious value placed on family and the desire to keep families together in this population. The authors argue that, in order to deal with domestic violence issues in this population, service agencies and advocates should “build on the positive aspects of traditional male/female roles in Latino cultures” (Ames, Hancock, and Behnke 2011:161).

Isolation and low socioeconomic status are also strongly correlated with domestic violence (Benson and Fox 2004; Heise 1998; Hook, Murray, and Seymour 2005). Isolation includes both social isolation and locational isolation; this element is often accompanied by low socioeconomic status, since rural areas are the most locationally isolated and are also frequently impoverished (Hook, Murray, and Seymour 2005). This suggests that rural populations may be affected even more strongly by many of the factors correlated with domestic violence. Once abuse has occurred, it can also work to create or perpetuate social isolation as well (Heise 1998; Nielsen, Russell, and Ellington 1992). Peek-Asa et al. (2011) find that intimate partner violence is more common and more severe in rural areas, yet rural women often have far fewer resources compared to women in urban areas. Additionally, Walter (2006:¶1) demonstrates how immigrant Latinas may also be resistant to seeking help or leaving their abusive partners because “immigrant women often have so few options other than to remain living with the men who abuse them.”

First-generation Latinas may also be socially isolated to some degree by language barriers; not only are monolingual Spanish speakers disconnected from the larger society in some ways, but they are also confined to certain services and social networks. Indeed, if help were to be sought, these individuals would be forced to find a translator or would be confined to services that offer a translator, assuming they were even aware of what services may be available (Hook, Murray, and Seymour 2005; Kernic and Bonomi 2007). Because of this particular aspect, it is important to examine the use of informal advocates in this community, an approach that is practically non-existent in the literature on domestic violence advocacy.

The lack of literature that exists on informal advocacy is part of what guides this project’s questions. There is a gap in our knowledge about community members who serve as informal

advocates and the peripheral staff to the Latino/a community. Butler emphasizes the need to consider patriarchy and various forms of “...gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists” (1990:3) rather than in generalized or static terms. By combining a study of informal advocates with other, formal advocates in a very rural area, I hope to shed new light on domestic violence in the rural context and bring attention to the discourses affecting the experiences of victims and advocates in this specific context, as well as add to the body of literature on domestic violence in rural areas.

METHODS

Analysis of data comes from pre-existing data in the form of two groups of interviews. The first group of interviews is primary data that I gathered during a study that focused more specifically on informal advocacy in a rural Latino community. The second group of interviews is secondary data conducted by two other researchers for the purpose of a different project but still focused on domestic violence advocacy. The secondary data contain a broader scope of interviewees, all of which are formal advocates; out of this set of interviews, only the interviews conducted with formal advocates in rural areas will be part of this study (in order to maintain some sense of uniformity in the cultural and geographic context of the two groups). The interviews were all conducted in the same state and general area in various counties.

Informal advocates in the Latino community were selected based on the researcher’s own knowledge of the community and people within the community who may could potentially fulfill this role or serve as advocates in some way. Interviews were solicited based on the researcher’s social connections in the community and further interviews were gained snowball style with recommendations from the previous interviewees. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. They were conducted in a location chosen by the participant (usually in an office in a

public building) and were audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher, with some translating done by the researcher from Spanish to English when necessary. There were four interviews total conducted with informal advocates that make up this group of data. These individuals were all key members of the rural Latino community and had various social connections to different institutions affecting this community. While they do not occupy formal advocacy positions, they are frequently placed into the role of advocate through their work in the community and the various roles they fulfill. In this sense, they frequently serve as unofficial advocates for the individuals in their community in relation to many social issues. They include a protestant religious leader, an English as a Second Language instructor, a daycare worker, and a staff member at a housing complex. The clientele served by these four informal advocates are majority Latino, mostly Mexican.

Formal advocates were selected based on their title and/or position; these are all individuals who are in some type of formal advocacy position and include individuals who work with shelters, law enforcement, state's attorneys, and a volunteer advocate. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by one of the two researchers for the purpose of another study. There were five interviews conducted with formal advocates in rural areas that were selected from the group of secondary data.

Human subjects committee approval to conduct research for this project was requested and obtained before the commencement of any data gathering or interview solicitation. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and all participants signed informed consent forms. Interviews consisted of qualitative questions based on a reviewed guide. The questions relevant to this paper examined factors that hindered advocacy or help-seeking in this particular population, focusing on a rural setting. Some themes that were targeted were issues that

advocates stated as obvious barriers to victim assistance, as well as issues that arise with the perpetrators. Data was analyzed using various rounds of coding for relevant themes or repeated themes.

Questions with both sets of advocates focused on how they perceived victims (e.g. “Please describe the people you work with”, “Do you feel that victims of violence are misunderstood?”) and what they did as an advocate to assist victims (e.g. “So what do you do when someone comes in here and talks to you about experiencing domestic violence?”). Questions also focused on what the challenging aspects of advocacy were (e.g. “What are the barriers you face as an advocate?”, “What are the frustrating aspects of your job?”). These questions led to descriptive, exploratory data that provide insight into the daily experiences of advocates and victims. This data also inform the researcher of the ways that advocates construct victims and the methods they employ to counter harmful discourses or perceptions of victims.

While nine total interviews is a somewhat limited set of data, the interviews provide rich data that demonstrate the complexities in question for this study. Although the formal and informal advocates tend to have different frames of reference for the work they do, each of these individuals is involved in assisting victims in some way and is therefore be a viable source of information related to the relevant discourses constructed about victims and abusers.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to disclose as much or as little as they were comfortable with. However, the use of follow-up questions and probes brought about additional information and helped the interviews flow in such a manner that more nuanced information was given that illuminates the complexity of the topic being investigated. It is through this rich, detailed information that the research questions for this project can be answered and the constructed discourses can be explored.

Two rounds of coding were used to conduct the analysis of the interviews. The first round of coding was open coding searching for any themes, followed by a round of axial coding for themes and issues that were specific to the research questions of this project. The analysis was focused on discovering both the most evident issues at hand as well as deeper, more subtle implications and meanings as interpreted by the researcher.

My Position as Researcher

Domestic violence is often a highly emotional and sensitive topic that can potentially be difficult for any individual to examine. Because of this, researching domestic violence can be considerably difficult at times. Perhaps this is part of the reason that I find it easiest to work, at least partially, from a more social constructionist perspective that attempts to step away from the idea of a factual reality with objective conditions and instead examine *how* things are constructed, talked about, or defined. However, I do believe in the importance of a critical approach to research when studying marginalized, voiceless, or disempowered groups and, therefore, strongly feel the need to bring in a feminist perspective at some point in this research. By incorporating both a social constructionist analysis of discourse and a feminist approach to examine how these constructions can be problematic, I feel that I am able to study this data set from a more inclusive perspective that still does justice to the people that these discourses are centered around, at least to some degree.

I believe that reflexivity is very important in doing social scientific research and feel the need to acknowledge my own background and biases in doing this project. After growing up in a rural area and being exposed to the cultural norms, values, and attitudes for many years, I began to formulate an interest in how this context could affect social issues. Additionally, after having read, thought about, and witnessed the overwhelmingly high occurrence rate of violence against

women (both in U.S. society and globally), I feel compelled to bring attention to this issue by demonstrating the ways in which individuals (women in particular) are often categorized or typified by numerous groups and systems in our society. These categorizations are often dichotomous and can be harmful to victims, yet the social institutions and systems that construct these categorizations are rarely acknowledged as actors in these processes of social creation.

Throughout my time in higher education, I have also come to notice the ways in which minority voices can often be silenced through institutions; this is observable in the ways that priority and renown are given most frequently to dominant voices and groups throughout history, even within our own discipline, which should at the very least *acknowledge* that they are actively re-creating the oppression of women and minorities through their constant emphasis on literature, studies, and concepts that are rooted in an educated, white, male experience and understanding of the world. While this has changed some in recent decades, we still tend to emphasize a basis in our discipline that is strongly rooted in the classical figures. By studying “women’s issues” and the negative ways in which women are socially constructed—surrounding an issue which creates even more vulnerability and marginalization—I hope to help balance some of this inequality of where attention is focused. Ultimately, I believe that by acknowledging these discourses and categorizations as *social constructions*, I can help bring about the idea that these dichotomies and typifications are not only subjective and based in something other than reality, but also demonstrate that they are extremely harmful to an already-disempowered and voiceless group. This last point is a particular concern of mine; although domestic violence is a widely-acknowledged social problem, it tends to be a problem that is still brushed under the rug in many ways or forgotten. Additionally, the feminist approach emphasizes the idea that different life experiences and social locations lead to different types of

knowledge, and that we need to take these different types of knowledge seriously and recognize the ways in which they can contribute to our understanding of the world.

Since domestic violence is frequently not a visible, public issue it tends to “lose out” in the competition of which social problems are prioritized and actively targeted for improvement. The fact that it is often silent, private, and stigmatized—as well as being thought of as a “women’s issue”—also allows for victims to be constructed in many different and harmful ways which are not always challenged or confronted, and I see this as being problematic. Because of my view of this as problematic, I feel that pairing my social constructionist perspective with a feminist approach justifies the way in which I can summarize or present my findings. Since feminist approaches not only acknowledge but welcome a subjective approach to analysis, and given how strongly I feel about the topic, I believe that a feminist approach is fitting and appropriate.

In order to keep subjectivity somewhat limited I conduct my analysis in a way that is data-driven rather than theory-driven and I work inductively in order to let the data and the participants speak for themselves; this will help ensure that I am only looking at what is actually being presented by the advocates in the interviews rather than using the data to find support for my perspective. While I believe that subjectivity is acceptable in social research to a certain extent, I also believe that biases or agendas should be kept to a minimum during the data analysis stage of the research project and that the focus should be on analyzing the data as it is rather than manipulating the data to find support for a particular perspective or goal.

RESULTS

I will present the results of my research project by first exploring the relationship between domestic violence advocacy and the rural context as it surfaced in the data; this was one of the factors that advocates most frequently brought up as having a significant effect on their work. Additionally, other themes that emerged were the effect of social networks, barriers to help-seeking and advocacy work, and perceptions of domestic violence issues in the community. After examining the effect of a rural area on advocacy work, I will then move to a discourse-focused analysis of constructions of victims and abusers.

DV Advocacy and Rurality

In this section I will discuss the most prominent, reoccurring themes that emerged from the data in relation to rurality or advocacy work in a rural context, using quotes to illustrate specific manifestations of these themes. Interviewees are referenced by pseudonyms, usually self-chosen.

Among formal advocates, one of the most frequent issues mentioned was the interaction between victims and individuals in the service world and legal system. Formal advocates commonly cited instances of police being reluctant to help (especially in the case of repeated DV calls to the same household) or helping only to a certain extent. Additionally, examples of police, judges, and other workers in the legal system saying inappropriate, judgmental, problematic things to victims once they had sought help were somewhat common. These problematic interactions were frequently exemplified by instances of victims being shamed or blamed for their victimization in various forms. Advocates discussed this type of interaction as problematic for victims, many of whom are already resistant to seek help in the first place. All of these issues related to problematic interaction between victims and legal workers seemed to

indicate a commonality of small communities having close, overlapping social ties that created issues for advocacy work. These social networks were often described in terms of a “good ol’ boys system” in which those in power maintained close ties that were characterized by very little diversity or change; advocates described some interactions with individuals in law enforcement and the criminal justice system as problematic or challenging because of this characteristic. Additionally, advocates also described these limited social networks as problematic in terms of individuals in law enforcement or the legal system often having some sort of social tie to the victim or perpetrator.

Alice, a shelter coordinator, described several examples of these interactions, even with individuals who viewed her agency in a positive manner:

“The chief judge right now has been a wonderful judge about walking, or talking the talk and kind of promotes our agency but he still revictimizes once in a while... you know, ‘I know [the perpetrator] and he doesn’t mean anything.’ It’s still a little boys system out there you know, I see that with some of the judges, like one of the judges here in [Name] county who is just as bad.”

Explaining further, she gave examples such as “‘I know [the perpetrator] and he, just let him sleep it off,’ ‘keep your mouth shut and you’ll be fine,’ or ‘I can’t believe he [the perpetrator] would do that’.” In reference to a judge that she described as uninformed in regard to DV laws, she stated “...we try to talk to him...and before we can say anything to him, he has comments out of his mouth like, ‘You know you’ve been married for 24 years, can’t you just work this out, what is wrong with you?’ to the victims.” These overlapping social networks also created problems for victims in relation to privacy, as discussed further below under “Monitoring Discourse.”

Compounding the issues of limited, overlapping social networks, many of the advocates indicated the idea that law enforcement and individuals in the legal system did not show a great

deal of concern in relation to either (a) the victims, particularly repeat victims or (b) the victim services agencies and victim advocates. “There are certain judges in our county that really, really come down hard on victims if they have seen them in there before. I see their point somewhat but I think anything, every incident is a different incident [and] should be treated as such. But if they’ve seen [the victim] before...,” stated Verna, a crime victim advocate for a Sheriff’s office. Alice echoed Verna’s concerns about judges that feel unfavorably towards DV issues, demonstrating that this can be particularly problematic in a rural context with a limited number of judges: “We have part time judges in [Name] county so we almost always have the very same judge and if that person does not particularly care for DV victims then we are up a creek.”

More specifically to advocacy work itself, formal advocates often described inter-agency problems when trying to assist a victim or connect with another agency for some reason. Several of the advocates described instances of not being taken seriously, being seen in a negative light through the eyes of police and/or the legal system, or a lack of inter-agency communication and cooperation. Felicia described an incident in which her agency needed police assistance for an individual to be taken to another agency, “...and we met them outside, told the officers the situation, and they just act like we are some big joke.” Several advocates described the misuse of their services, both by the public and by the police. In this instance, Felicia was describing an individual being improperly placed in their care when the individual needed psychological services that her agency did not provide. She mentioned that the police tended to leave people there at times as an easy way to rid themselves of these individuals and that she felt that “the police are so disrespectful to us as an agency.” Sue, a legal advocate, also discussed a type of misuse of her services by perpetrators who had engaged in mutual battery with their partners: “...we find that men now try to beat women here to get the order, once we do an OP [order of

protection] for [the] man. Because of conflict of interest, we can't do the woman and sometimes the woman is the victim....”

In addition to misuse of their services, the formal advocates described their perception by the community as positive, but they described law enforcement's perception of their agencies as negative at times. In addition to the previously mentioned example from Felicia (“they act like we are just some big joke”), Sue also indicated that domestic violence issues tended to be taken lightly at times by certain people in law enforcement. In reference to a training session she attended, she described a lengthy example of the person leading the workshop making a joke to explain the difference between battery and domestic battery:

“‘This was to show you what's the difference...if he hits her, it's battery; if Mr. [Name] hits Mrs. [Name], it's domestic battery.’ And he laughed through the whole scenario, you know, it was jokes, jokes, jokes, and I thought, you know, you got to take domestic violence a little more serious, cause it was just laughter.”

Sue indicated that this individual was retired now; several of the advocates who mentioned this type of problem indicated that this demeanor was more characteristic of older workers in law enforcement and the legal system, many of which had retired or would soon do so. Sue noted that her experiences with the police were generally positive, thus suggesting that newer generations of law enforcement and legal system workers may be more sensitive to this issue, or perhaps DV training has become more successful over the years.

The repeated theme of domestic violence issues being taken lightly at times seems to demonstrate a pattern in these rural advocates' experiences which suggests that a rural context may create somewhat more tolerance for domestic violence as compared to its urban counterparts or may create circumstances in which domestic violence issues are not taken as seriously as they should be. Nearly all of the advocates at some point indicated that working in a rural area was problematic for different reasons, often because of the characteristics of many

rural areas (“good ol’ boys” systems, traditional ideologies that promote corresponding expectations of gendered behavior and male-female power relations, the “norm of women’s deference to men” (Gagne 1992:398).

More specifically in relation to domestic violence possibly being viewed differently in rural areas, Alice explained how negative perceptions of victims or the perception that domestic violence is, in some ways, less important than other crimes could be problematic at different levels of help-seeking:

“Some of the judges think that we are cluttering their system and we have a State’s Attorney right now...in [Name] county that scorns a woman for coming in and asking to press charges, and basically says, ‘If you keep this order of protection, [and] you keep it through the plenary, then I’ll consider pressing charges at that time, but I know that you will turn around, kiss and make up; everything’s going to be fine.’”

While this particular example may not be specific to rural areas, the previously mentioned characteristics of a rural area and its criminal justice system may result in fewer repercussions towards this type of behavior from those in authority. Bev, a victim services coordinator at a State’s Attorney’s office, suggested that police often use subjective decision-making when it comes to arrests in her area, but implied that this personal discretion was appropriate a lot of the time. However, Bev also implied that not only is sentencing lighter in these areas, but also that this light sentencing is well-known and, thus, an ineffective deterrent. “I think that the police arrest the people that they think need to be arrested and I think that the majority of the people in [Name] county know that if it is the first time you get off on battery with 12-month supervision and a \$300 fine. And that is a bad reality,” said Bev.

The main rurality-related concern for most of the advocates was a lack of available services for victims, although this theme was more strongly voiced in the interviews with advocates in the Latino community. Several of the rural advocates mentioned the large distances

between help services as being problematic, especially for individuals who did not have access to transportation. Public transportation tends to be somewhat uncommon in rural areas, and limited in its services and distances when it does exist in these areas.

Apart from transportation to formal services, spatial issues in rural areas themselves can be problematic. Pastor, a religious leader and an informal advocate for the rural Latino community, described how the abundance of private property in rural areas can create *too much* privacy when he is trying to assist a victim in immediate danger. Describing a small shelter that his church lends out to people in need (in this case, potentially to the DV victim), he stated: “The problem is that [the shelter] is on the corner of the property. The building here is where people kind of move around, but during the night there is nobody here. You’re going to be alone in that building, you know? I live on the other side of the property. But eventually, if I leave for another reason, there is nobody here.” Because of the location’s physical isolation from other buildings and people, Pastor was emphasizing the idea that it can be dangerous for a victim to stay there at night were her abuser to arrive, and even if help (in any form) were called, it could take a considerable amount of time to arrive at the location. While this seems to indicate that too much privacy can be problematic for victims, a lack of privacy also surfaced as an issue for victims (elaborated on more under “Monitoring Discourse” below).

All of the informal advocates in the Latino community mentioned their knowledge of formal services and shelters in nearby towns, but these towns were often at least ten (or up to forty) miles away from their current location. Many of these advocates indicated that victims’ use of the shelters was often very limited because of their distance, a lack of transportation, or even a lack of the services that the shelters themselves offer (namely translation services). All of the informal advocates mentioned having to fill in as translators in various situations, even when

dealing with formal victim services agencies and even when their own English skills were somewhat limited; they often discussed how a lack of services in Spanish affected victims negatively. Barb, an English as a Second Language instructor, mentioned that translation services were lacking not only in shelters and formal service agencies, but in other services that victims and their families could potentially benefit from (namely counseling and psychological services). Barb and Maria (a daycare worker) stated that there was only one mental-health specialist in the area they worked in that spoke Spanish, and they both feared that she would soon retire, leaving people in their area with no one to turn to for these important services. While this was not a concern that came up with the formal advocates, the informal advocates in the Latino community strongly emphasized how problematic a lack of translators could be.

When translation services were available, several of the informal advocates felt that the shelters still tended to lack cultural sensitivity or enough cultural knowledge to be able to really reach out to Latina victims. Funding and budget cuts tend to be problematic for services in rural areas; with smaller numbers of people residing in the area to begin with (and, thus, fewer people being served compared to more urban areas), funding for more urban areas may have priority over services in rural areas. Understaffed services came up frequently in interviews with both sets of advocates, in some form or another. Several of the formal advocates mentioned being the only advocate in the office or locations where they worked, or stated that they worked with only a handful of others. Additionally, transportation costs for shelters in rural areas would likely be considerably higher since their choices tend to be more limited and those options which are available are more expensive (private, individual transportation rather than use of a mass transit or public transportation system). It is easy to see in these circumstances how it may be difficult

to justify the expense of a full-time translator when budgets may already be stretched thin or the number of advocates themselves has already had to be cut down.

Assuming that a translator were even available for hire in these areas to begin with and that funding were available to hire that person, shelters may lack options as far as hiring someone with the correct cultural knowledge or sensitivity (or sensitivity to victimization in general). Pastor indicated that even when these services do have a translator available, they lack cultural sensitivity and most Latinas in the community do not feel comfortable staying there due to being exposed to norms, customs, and procedures that they are not accustomed to. Examples of these include different types of food, different communication and interaction styles with some of the people there, and the shelters themselves being ran very institutionally and bureaucratically, such as locking the doors of each individual room and the rules that are in place for people staying there. Pastor indicated that most Latinas he knew would be much more comfortable staying with a relative or another Latina woman they know even though it may potentially expose them to more dangers. In this sense, we can see how minority victims (specifically Latinas in this case) may be underserved in various ways, thus compounding their victimization with other characteristics of their social locations that may create further barriers to seeking or receiving adequate help.

Discourses of Gender and Sexuality

“Monitoring Discourse”—One of the largest issues related to the rural environment that advocates described was the occurrence of monitoring, or at the very least, the perception of being monitored. This mainly related to victims being monitored by their abusers, but also included community members monitoring victims, especially victims that had separated from their abusers. Barb stated that, as a victim herself, this had happened to her—upon the sight of

an unfamiliar truck at her house, people began speculating that she had a lover or had found a new partner. This speculation led to her abuser attempting to increase his control over her by intentionally harming himself, then attempting to harm their children as well: “The way he got back at me, or tried to get back at me, is that he had a car accident; he tried to hurt my kids next. That’s probably when I said, ‘This is definitely over.’ I mean, it’s too much. I tried to give him chances and he would just end up, whatever place, stalking me there, showing up drunk, screaming at me, trying to hit me again. His family would come [and] start shooting up a bunch of things.”

While this specific, vivid example was experienced by the advocate when she was a victim of domestic violence herself, Barb also stated that this expectation of monitoring created problems for her as an advocate; the lack of privacy or anonymity in rural areas affects her work as an advocate because “if you already know the history of the family, when we try to help...I mean, there’s always fear that they’ll come after you next; they show up at your doorstep.” She also stated that backlash of batterers is a common fear, both in advocates and victims, stating that “they come after me next because I’m trying to get [the victim] away from the situation.” Clearly advocacy and help-seeking are both more complicated in a rural area where privacy is lacking and there is a possibility that someone could report what was seen back to the perpetrator, who may then—as Barb indicated—come after the advocate or the victim, or both.

While I have previously mentioned spatial and transportation issues associated with monitoring as problematic (or even, at times, a lack of monitoring), I now turn my focus to a more discourse-centered constructionist approach to analyze discourses that arose in the interviews related to gender and sexuality. While advocates most frequently described monitoring as problematic in logistical terms (a tool with which abusers maintained more control

over victims and in some cases even advocates), it also strongly arose in the interviews as a recurring gendered discourse centered on social control and victim blaming. Although monitoring was strongly tied to discourses of victim shaming or blaming, discussed further below, this was a gendered discourse that seemed to more strongly indicate a difference in how men's and women's behavior is judged according to gender-specific criteria, thus more strongly indicating the belief that women's behavior should be (or is) monitored and socially controlled.

The advocates' descriptions of a lack of privacy for victims, victims being monitored, and abusers reacting to the knowledge (or supposed knowledge) gained in that process demonstrate not only a discourse of monitoring, but the larger implications of that discourse; while the monitoring of victims by their abusers was commonly cited as problematic, many of the advocates described the process of monitoring (either by one's partner, family members, or the community in general) as a very normal, expected occurrence in rural areas. However, it was not simply expected and occurring, and especially not in the case of domestic violence cases. The advocates' descriptions of monitoring all indicate that women tend to be held to very different standards in relation to their behavior, and most especially in relation to their romantic and sexual behavior. While a gendered double-standard of expected/acceptable behavior is not new to our society, the presence of this discourse in the interactions was surprisingly strong and frequent. This discourse most strongly reveals strict sexuality norms and expectations for victimized women by reinforcing the idea that they are often sexually deviant (or even "out of control"), and thus points to a presumed possible reason for their partner's abusive behavior (and, for some, a potential justification of victimization); this is discussed further in the next section.

“Female Sexuality as Dangerous and Problematic” – One of the most repeated discourses was the discourse of female sexuality being problematic. This was mostly mentioned in terms of victims’ sexuality as being deviant from the expected cultural norms. This included the repeated idea of victims who leave their abusers as being promiscuous or as only being interested in finding a new partner. As Barb stated, “You’re seen as a bad person if you leave your husband in that culture, that all you want to do is just run around and fool around with somebody else.” Additionally, this discourse went hand-in-hand with the discourse of victim-blaming in relation to sexual deviance or infidelity. Barb stated that “the woman’s usually seen as, well, she must be whoring around on her husband, that’s why it happened” or that “she must have been seeing somebody else.”

This discourse arose frequently with the formal advocates when they described how they often have to prepare the victims how to deal with legal officials such as judges who may ask intrusive questions about a victim’s personal life, often related to her relationship with her abuser or with other partners. Verna described these officials as making “extreme moral judgments” of victims based on their sexual history in some form or another, thus further demonstrating the discourse of female sexuality being problematic or potentially even justifying the victimization:

“They are in there asking for help they are not wanting [judges] to you know to victimize them again. And yeah, ok, (speaking from a victim’s point of view) ‘I made a bad judgment call, I have two kids, and I’m not married and both of my kids are by two different guys and the guy that just beat me is neither one of my kids’ dad,’ but I don’t think that’s the judge’s place to say shame, shame, shame on you. And that happens. It absolutely happens...”

Verna’s description of victims having to explain their family situation and their relationship with both current and previous partners suggests that the judges she has dealt with see this as a relevant factor in relation to serving victims in the court system. More importantly, it suggests the idea that this may be some sort of indicator of their worthiness as victims and thus should not

only be provided when making a decision but is something that should have to be *justified* by the victim to a certain degree. In other words, females are *by default* expected to conform to traditional gendered expectations of sexuality that dictate being conservative in their choice and number of partners, and if these expectations have not been met at the time they enter the court system as victims, their identity as victim often comes second to the very negative identity of a “loose woman” (and, as stated, may strongly undermine their attempts to seek help). This strongly reiterates Holloway’s descriptions of female sexuality as somewhat absent or unnoticed if “normal” and strongly focused on as problematic if it is deviant to this norm in any way. (For further discussion, see “Victim Shaming Discourse”).

“Victim Shaming Discourse” - Barb repeatedly stated that the largest barrier to seeking help for most victims was the fear of shame, losing respect, and in general “what the community would think.” This is also related to privacy, since “everyone knows your business.” Many of the other advocates echoed these concerns for the victims they assist, although none as strongly as Barb (potentially because of her own first-hand experience with these emotions). Ironically, she stated that victims often go out of their way to try and cover up their abuse in order to avoid the shame it will bring them, which can further lead to victim-blaming if one *does* decide to seek help. Barb explained this in terms of the lack of privacy causing an assumption that if any type of abuse really *were* occurring, everyone would know about it. “[He’s] seen as the perfect person, nobody [knows] what’s going on” (Barb 2008).

Several of the informal advocates in the Latino community also stated that they saw culture as being related to this; not only do most of the immigrants in this area come from extremely small towns in southern and central Mexico, where it is normal for everyone to know each other and know what’s going on all the time, but also that the cultures in their countries of

origin often do not promote the use of law-based intervention as a viable source of advocacy or help. Instead, indicated Pastor, it is the norm to rely on family members or religious leaders to solve problems like this, and the availability of these individuals may not be very extensive when families are separated transnationally and social networks are limited. Thus one can see how victims' help-seeking behaviors or desires may be impeded by a lack of viable sources available to them, either through the family or through the community, and law enforcement is often not even considered as an option. Because of this, the reliance on family and social support may be considerably stronger in rural areas where formal sources of help are limited or in communities such as this Latino community where law-based intervention is not a norm. While the effects of this aspect may be debated logistically, it seems to reinforce the discourse of victim shaming in many ways.

Maria, describing the rural Latino community she is a part of, noted that “in our culture, when you marry someone by the church, it’s something that you always [hold in very high regard].” She went on to indicate that this often feels like a contract that one should not—or could not—break, and that it is strongly constructed this way through their culture. Additionally, Pastor noted that—although he personally condones divorce or separation in the case of abuse or mistreatment—many women are reluctant to leave their husbands because of the vows they have taken. Jose and Maria both indicated that Catholicism (the religion of choice for many of the people in this community) tends to teach rather conservative, traditional stances on marriage and that this can create confusion or guilt for victims who do want to seek help for themselves through separation or divorce. This guilt was most often tied to discourses about the family and the parents' role (or mainly the *woman's* role) in the family, namely that families should not be

split up and not only that the children would suffer, but also that the women were immoral for leaving their abusive partners.

Victim-shaming and -blaming was a major discourse that also became apparent independent of particular religious beliefs, and often in relation to perceived sexual deviance or out-of-control sexuality for females (as discussed earlier in this paper). Barb stated that victim-blaming was frequent and widespread. She described this as a strategy that was a “cop out” for men, indicating that communal victim-blaming not only further harms the woman who has been victimized but can also help to shield the abuser from any type of responsibility or fault. When asked how the abusers were viewed, she only spoke in terms of the victim’s perceived accountability: “She must have made him mad; she must have been seeing somebody else or she must have been out too late or she must not have listened to what he said to her....” Once again, although victim-blaming was done for multiple reasons, it was frequently related to the uncontrolled/problematic sexuality discourse discussed above. In this example, this is evident in the idea that the victim was seeing someone else or the idea that “she must have been out too late.” Although this phrase is not explicitly linked to sexuality, it implies promiscuous activity with the idea that a woman would only be out of the house alone if she were doing something immoral, and would only be out “too late” for a truly horrendous (and, thus, blame-worthy) reason.

In relation to issues of the rural environment and a lack of privacy, Barb also stated that victim-blaming rumors were problematic for female victims. “There’s always rumors, all the time. There’s always rumors saying, ‘Well, she must be with her boyfriend. Look, there’s her boyfriend’” (Barb 2008). This discourse clearly goes hand-in-hand with the discourse of female

sexuality as problematic or deviant, and they strongly work to reinforce one another to such a degree that they are often times inseparable.

“Hegemonic Masculinity Discourse” – While the previous discourses have all inadvertently focused on how hegemonic femininity is reinforced for domestic violence victims, hegemonic masculinity was a strong element that affected the experiences of advocates and victims.

Although it was not always overt, it surfaced somewhat blatantly at times during the interviews, especially with the informal male advocates in the Latino community. The formal advocates’ interviews illustrated how abusers often used violence, the threat of violence, or the perception of potential harm as a means of maintaining control over victims. The bulk of gender studies in the U.S. (and nearly worldwide) have revealed that hegemonic masculinity tends to not only allow for violence but, in many ways, be defined by it. In the case of the discourse in question in my data, advocates talk about male violence in ways that are alarmingly normalized and expected. While this is understandable to some degree since these are all individuals that deal with it on a regular basis, they also indicated that people with more authority (police, criminal justice system workers, judges) sometimes take domestic violence issues lightly at times or even in a joking way.

While this may be a reflection of individuals’ own perceptions and viewpoints, I believe that it also points to a larger cultural ideology of what is “normal” behavior, what is “masculine” behavior, and what we expect of men under certain circumstances. In the case of domestic violence in rural areas, we see traditional, hegemonic gender roles being quite strongly reinforced through cultural norms of labor in rural areas, which tend to be more economically depressed than their urban counterpart; thus men in these area tend to have more blue-collar, manual labor jobs that reinforce a lower-class version of masculinity. Traditional gender

ideologies are also reinforced through expectations of family structure and obligations (many advocates alluded to the idea that the woman's primary role is or should be focused on motherhood and caring to her children), and especially romantic relationships and sexuality norms (as previously discussed).

Hegemonic masculinity came up in a more evident fashion in the interviews with the informal male advocates. Jose described how violence has decreased somewhat during the time that he has been an employee at this location, stating that it used to be a popular scene for fighting, drinking, and other illicit activities. He indicated that domestic violence issues were also escalated during that time, and that when he would try to step in to help, the perpetrators would get angry: "Many times it's difficult for one to insert himself into the business of another family, many times the man gets angry—he says, 'what's it to you? What business is it of yours?'" Jose further indicated that sometimes it was better for him to send a victim to someone else in the community, namely a female, or to avoid interfering altogether in some circumstances, because it was sometimes perceived as an indicator of some type of relationship between him and the female victim.

Jose's experiences suggest that hegemonic masculinity may frame men in a way that portrays them as threats to one another, or to one another's masculinity, since he seemed to allude to the idea that his advocacy was often perceived as over-stepping some sort of boundary line or acting outside of his accepted role. Although Barb mentioned potential repercussions of her advocacy in the form of threats or harm, none of the female advocates indicated that their role as advocate was ever out of place or crossing a [gendered] boundary the way that the male advocates did. This seems to be strongly tied to the discourse about female sexuality being

dangerous since nearly any type of male-female interaction was perceived in relation to a sexual relationship.

Pastor also indicated that his identity as a male had the potential to be problematic, not necessarily in terms of sexuality but more so in terms of causing problems for the perpetrators by treading on their masculinity. He stated that, in order to avoid these problems, it was sometimes easier to use his wife as an advocate or as a proxy in his place, and described the use of all-female reading groups in order to reach out to female victims. Again the discourse of hegemonic masculinity surfaces in this sense, insinuating that any type of intervention from a male, even a religious leader, could be a threat to the abuser's masculinity.

DISCUSSION

While many studies on domestic violence have demonstrated the frequency with which victims tend to become socially isolated (often carried out purposefully by their abusers, but conceivably done by the victim herself for reasons such as embarrassment, shame, or fear), the interviews from this study seem to indicate how rurality can create a very specific type of physical isolation for victims as well. Not only did the advocates mention a lack of services or transportation to those services as problematic, but also the common characteristic of rural areas that adjacent towns (with different resources, social circles, and potential support) are often somewhat far apart physically. In the most rural areas, individual houses or residences themselves can be miles apart or physically isolated in various ways that could potentially compound social isolation with physical isolation to create even more barriers to receiving help for rural domestic violence victims. Future studies of domestic violence in the rural context could further examine logistical and spatial issues that affect domestic violence intervention and advocacy.

With this paper I hope to have shed more light on domestic violence advocacy in the rural context, including informal advocacy and domestic violence within a Latino immigrant community. While my data are consistent with the existing literature on domestic violence, immigrant women, and help-seeking behavior, they also give insight to the “cultural ethos” (Heise 1998) specific to this community that create resistance to help-seeking behavior. I also hope to have demonstrated the need for culturally-specific approaches to intervention, particularly in relation to religious and cultural values and norms in the rural context and within the Latino community.

Additionally, I feel that this data set suggests that Latinas, and especially immigrant Latinas, face the “intersecting oppressions” described by Patricia Hill Collins that create distinct forms of oppression for women of color and, as my data suggests, often create additional barriers to help-seeking behavior. Gender, culture, family, and often (but not always) religion tend to reinforce the oppression that these women face, as well as other characteristics of their social location. Advocates frequently described how this multifaceted oppression becomes problematic when dealing with domestic violence issues and help-seeking behavior. I feel that this data set, although limited, demonstrates that domestic violence is clearly not a “women’s issue” but rather a cultural and societal issue that affects everyone in some way. When dealing with domestic violence issues, I hope to see a push towards approaching this social problem as a “masculinity issue” (rather than a “women’s issue”) since the perpetrators of this gendered violence are, by and large, men trying to maintain dominance, control, and superiority over their female partners (Ramirez Hernandez 2006; Websdale 1998; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Walker 1979). I believe that this study further demonstrates the type of patriarchy that is often maintained in a rural context which is unique from its urban counterpart, as Walby (1990) and Websdale (1998) argue,

and thus warrants a different approach or focus in studies of domestic violence within this context.

All of the discourses that surfaced in this study were strongly connected with each other and the data often demonstrated examples of multiple discourses within the same excerpt of dialogue. Additionally, the discourses in question in this study seem to build off of each other in many ways; for example, the negative female sexuality discourse works to strengthen the shame discourse and vice-versa. Overall, though, the discourse of victim shaming most frequently reinforces the idea that the victim is somehow to blame for her abuse or, at the very least, this particular discourse often works to construct her as an “unworthy victim” and potentially leading to revictimization in varying forms.

The discourses and ideologies identified in this paper also demonstrate the cultural influence on thought and action that effect domestic violence victims, as well as perpetrators and the communities that they live in. All of the identified discourses are problematic for victims, and the need for counter-discourses is clear. Although I do not have any particular suggestions for these counter discourses at the time, I believe that this paper is a step in the right direction for bringing a feminist perspective and a critical approach to domestic violence victimization and the problematic discourses surrounding this issue.

There are still unanswered questions in relation to this topic. While several of the advocates implied that younger generations of law enforcement and criminal justice system workers are more helpful and sensitive to domestic violence issues, the strong cultural ideologies and discourses surrounding victims and their abusive partners seems to be much slower to change. In order to change the negative experiences of victims within the rural context, the cultural context itself must change; how this change could be brought about, however, is

puzzling. Some linguists have argued that the way we talk about subjects affects not only our perceptions of those subjects but it can also work to actually change those subjects' lived experiences and our social world. A linguistics-based study of gender equality, advocacy, and domestic violence issues in a rural context could provide additional insight into how these negative discourses are maintained as well as how counter-discourses may be created or implemented.

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