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Factors Contributing to the Social Acceptance of Domestic Violence: A Systematic Review

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Factors Contributing to the Social Acceptance of Domestic Violence:

A Systematic Review

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissert

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Abstract

Domestic violence has been occurring for centuries. Although we have policies and laws that prohibit this type of violence, it continues to occur at an alarming rate (Ahrens, 2006). The purpose of this systematic literature review is to identify common factors that contribute to the acceptance of domestic violence within the broader society. The studies included in this systematic literature review included empirically based, qualitative, and quantitative studies. The search terms for this systematic literature review included the following, which had to all appear either in the title, article, abstract or key word index for each article: “domestic violence” or “domestic abuse” or “domestic assault” or “intimate partner violence” AND “social acceptance” or “silence” or “approval” or “secrecy”. After an extensive and exhaustive review of the research, it was determined that the most important factors contributing to the social acceptance of domestic violence included: Religious Beliefs (Fitness, 2012), Patriarchal Beliefs (Shehan & Cody, 2007), Past Exposure to Abuse (Walsh et al., 2007), and Media Portrayal (Lindsay-Brisbin et al., 2014). Future research can provide important information to professionals, policy makers and law enforcement in how they work with people affected by domestic violence and determine methods to educate communities about the realities of domestic violence.

Keywords: violence, abuse, assault, reactions, acceptance, approval, shame

Introduction

Family violence within the home has been a long-standing problem that the judicial system, society and social research have had little impact in eliminating (Duplantis, Romans, & Bear, 2006). Domestic violence has been occurring between our friends, families and neighbors around the entire world for centuries and unfortunately, it continues to be a wide spread issue in our society. “Society and culture are, together, the sea of people and institutions all around us that we sometimes call our ‘community.’ In a wider sense, our whole country is one big community” (Jewell, 2012).

The reason our society should be concerned about domestic violence is because “domestic violence because it is prevalent in every community and affects all people regardless of age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality” (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Statistics, 2015). In fact, “physical violence is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior as part of a much larger, systematic pattern of dominance and control” (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Statistics, 2015). Domestic violence can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and even death. “The devastating consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and last a lifetime” (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Statistics, 2015).

This type of violence results in nearly 2.0 million injuries, more than 550,000 of which require medical attention. In addition, intimate partner violence victims also lose a total of nearly 8.0 million days of paid work—the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs—and nearly 5.6 million days of household productivity as a result of the violence. Additionally, “the health-related costs of intimate partner violence exceed \$5.8 billion each year. Of that amount, nearly \$4.1 billion are for direct medical and mental health care services, and nearly \$1.8 billion are for

the indirect costs of lost productivity or wages” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). These statistics show the magnitude of how common domestic violence is and the importance of understanding it and researching it further.

Unfortunately, it has only been within the last 40 or 50 years that domestic violence gained broad public attention. The Women’s Movement of the 1970’s was an attempt to end domestic violence. However, since then, there has been little progress in changing the laws to ensure they effectively protect victims of domestic violence. According to the National Coalition against Domestic Violence (2015), approximately 1,200 women die each year at the hands of their abusers in the U.S alone. Studies indicate that the legislative policies have had little impact on decreasing the actual numbers of domestic violence incidents (Pearce, 2005). The ineffective response by policy makers may be a reason why thousands of incidents of domestic violence are never formally reported (Ahrens, 2006).

There has been little research done to determine what factors actually contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence. Instead of focusing on why domestic violence continues to occur at such high rates, the research tends to focus on what interventions are most effective in protecting the victims. The intervention focus is typically applied to law enforcement and the judicial systems response to domestic violence. Although this research is helpful, it fails to consider the victim’s perspective of what causes the challenges in leaving a violent relationship. Research shows that leaving a violent relationship is one of the most dangerous times for women (Violence Prevention Alliance, 2015). There is also qualitative research available, which measures and compares the numbers of domestic violence cases that occur from year to year. The qualitative research is also helpful, however it fails to include the cases of domestic violence that are never reported or discovered.

In order initiate social change surrounding the reoccurrence of domestic violence, more research needs to be done to discover the underlying influences on whether domestic violence is accepted or rejected by members of our communities. Community expectations, the laws and policies have put most of the responsibility on the victims to escape the violence or stand up to it. Without victim action, there is no intervention planned and the abuse is not addressed. Therefore, as a society we continue to allow perpetrators of abuse to continue the cycle of violence.

When it comes to intimate partner violence, our laws and policies expect that the victims will seek out help and hold the perpetrator accountable. When making the laws and policies meant to protect victims of domestic violence, society and the law makers have forgotten to consider that because of the abuse, victims of abuse often experience a negative view of themselves as no longer respected and having nothing to contribute (Walsh, Ploeg, Lohfeld, Horne, MacMillan, Lai, 2007). This is just one reason why it is difficult for victims to self-advocate and ask for help.

Many women who experience sexual assault, which is a form of domestic violence, rarely share their story primarily because of shame and fear because of no promise of protection (Pearce, 2005). Despite reaching out for help, victims seldom find support from the people in their community. In 2006, Courtney Ahrens completed a study in which she interviewed 102 female rape survivors to uncover what type of response the victims received when sharing their story to others. This study determined many victims of domestic violence are “silenced by a range of negative reactions including blaming, ineffective, insensitive, and inappropriate responses” to their abuse (Ahrens, 2006, p. 270). This is a very disheartening truth as to the experience of victims of sexual assault.

The research shows that there is a lack of empathy from society when victims do open up about the abuse they have sustained (Ahrens, 2006). Ahren's (2006) finds that when a woman discloses a rape, they are often rejected by the people they turn to. It is found that "anywhere from one-quarter to three-quarters of survivors receive negative social reactions from at least one member of their informal support" (Ahrens, 2006, p. 328). It is worrisome to know that victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are receiving negative social reactions from anyone, let alone their supports. Instead, victims should be receiving nothing but support and security when reaching out. The Ahrens (2006) study provides examples of real life stories of what victims of rape experience when they find the courage to ask for support and assistance. It is important for us to determine the cause of this type of reaction by society.

In the Ahren's (2006) study, one woman reported her rape to her priest and he responded, "Well, what did you expect? If you stay over at somebody's house like that you barely know, that's an open invitation." In the same study, a woman talked about her experience when she was raped by her ex-boyfriend. She contacted her church's prayer line and received a response of "that situation could not have occurred unless she'd attracted it by thinking about it." The response suggests she was to blame for being raped. Another woman interviewed, confided in a friend that she was raped, and the friend took it very hard. Her friend took it so hard that the victim reported that she felt guilty for sharing the information. None of the women who had just experienced a very traumatic event were supported or provided with tools to recover from it.

Instead of receiving any kind of support, victims report feeling insecure, powerless and silent in our society (Ahrens, 2006). The psychological effect of abuse on the victims can affect their self-worth and confidence. Victims of abuse need to feel safe and supported when

reaching out for help. The reaction victim's receive have caused many women to remain silent, and unfortunately, "silence is emblematic of powerlessness in our society" (Ahrens, 2006, p. 263). When society fails to intervene or provide support to victims of domestic violence, the victims feel imprisoned and without the support to seek help (Ahrens, 2006).

In another recent study, Susan Pearce (2005) analyzed how domestic violence is viewed and seldom publically confronted. Pearce (2005) examines many of the complexities of the psychosocial, cultural and political factors in private-life violence. She finds that the majority of people believe it is a "moral duty to help victims of private-life violence, however 50% oppose intervening in family affairs" (Pearce, 2005, p. 11). The study confirms that many people feel an ethical dilemma at the thought of holding an offender accountable because they feel it is not their business. Our community members appear to believe it is the government's responsibility to "provide resources for education, shelter, and legal, psychological, and medical assistance for victims" (Pearce, 2005). It is as though people are fearful to intervene and expect the laws and policies to keep victims safe.

Pearce (2005) also finds out of 1 million cases of domestic violence when police intervened, only 10,000 went to court. There is reluctance from the victims to come forward and testify. They fear of further abuse/retaliation and are unsure of the protective measures that have been put in place (Pearce, 2005). It is believed that "victims are not confident that there is yet a rule of law that has their interests as citizens at heart" (Pearce, 2005, p. 8). This research confirms that women are silenced because of the lack of community support and laws to protect them. Some feminist scholars believe domestic violence and rape reinforces a victim's powerlessness and "keeps them in their place" (Pearce, 2005). If a victim of domestic violence

does not advocate for herself, there is a good chance there is no protection and the violence will continue.

Walsh et al. (2007) interviewed 77 older adults, 43 caregivers to find any themes that may connect abuse throughout the life span. Many victims of domestic violence commonly share are feelings of “shame”, “worthless”, “not important”, “isolated” (Walsh, et al., 2007). These same victims also claim they did not “want to put blame on their families”, are “embarrassed,” “loved my children” and “have no one to talk to” (Walsh, et al., 2007). It appears from the study that it is common for victims of violence to feel as though they are alone, are lacking the support and self-esteem to advocate for their own safety.

Just like the Ahrens (2006) and the Walsh, et al. (2007) studies, Arokach (2006), finds it is common for victims to feel they are unconnected and not thought of as valuable to our society. Arokach (2006) researched the victim’s experience of alienation and loneliness. This study compares 80 women who were victims of domestic abuse to 84 women from the general population. It was determined that the women who had experienced domestic violence had significantly different scores in three areas. The women who had experienced domestic violence were found to need connection with others at a much higher rate than those who had not (Arokach (2006). This study shows the importance of connecting with others for those who had been isolated by abuse.

Society needs to change their perspective of domestic violence in order to provide the essential services and support for victims who are trying to leave destructive and abusive relationships (Arokach, 2006). It is important for members of society to take a deeper look at exactly why domestic violence continues to affect thousands of households each year. Therefore, the intention of this systematic review is to determine the common factors that are

influencing and contributing to the ongoing social acceptance of domestic violence that have been preventing our communities from connecting with the victims and supporting them through change.

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence means different things to different people. Officially, it is the law that establishes the meaning of domestic violence. Therefore, it is important to consider all the different forms of abuse when making a law that is responsible for keeping victims safe, and holding offenders responsible. Each state can choose how they enact the laws regarding domestic violence for the purpose of prosecuting offenders and protecting the victims. For example, the state of Minnesota has a law called the Domestic Abuse Act that attempts to define domestic abuse for judicial standards.

Minnesota law defines domestic abuse as one of the following acts committed by a family or household member against another family or household member:

infliction of physical harm, bodily injury, or assault; infliction of *fear* of imminent physical harm; terroristic threats (MN Statutes § 609.713); acts of criminal sexual conduct (MN Statutes sections 609.342, 609.343, 609.344, 609.345, 609.3451); interference with an emergency call (MN Statutes § 609.78).

A family or household member is one of the following:

spouse or former spouse; persons involved in a significant romantic or sexual relationship; parents and children; persons related by blood; persons living together (this can include roommates) or who have lived together in the past; persons who have or had a child in common (born or in utero), regardless of whether they were living together or ever married (Minnesota Statute 518B.01 subd.2).

As you can see, the Minnesota Law regarding domestic violence covers a wide range of violent acts and relationships. However, the issue of domestic violence is not as clear-cut as this law reads because there are many added emotions, behaviors and factor that are involved in domestic violence.

Another, less formal definition of domestic violence is “a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control” (Hanson, 2015). This definition takes regard to the fact that domestic violence can be emotional, psychosocial, verbal, physical and/or sexual. The wide variety of violent tactics and that is partially what makes domestic violence so difficult to define and understand. The research also shows that, “the risk of experiencing violence from a family member far outweighs the risk of experiencing violence from a stranger” (Arokach, 2006, p. 327). As a society, it is important to have a full understanding of why abuse occurs, so the best practices of intervention can be established.

Additionally, research shows that power and control is one of the major factors in domestic violence. Power and control are two elements that allow for the cycle of violence to continue within a relationship and within the generations. In 1984, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) spent hours researching and interviewing people who were involved in violent relationships. From their efforts, the DAIP designed the power and control wheel framework emerged (Figure 1), which illustrates how the strategies of violence can instill fear on the victim, making it difficult for domestic violence victims to leave the relationship (The Duluth Model, 2015). There is also clear illustration called the Cycle of Abuse (see Figure 2), which shows the four different phases of a violent relationship. This cycle becomes predictable as it typically begins from the building tensions, then the incident of abuse occurs and will move to

reconciliation and lastly to the calm/honeymoon phase. There is obviously plentiful research surrounding domestic violence, however still, little of this research focuses on the communities beliefs about it.

Prevalence

An estimated 5.3 million intimate partner violence victimizations occur among U.S. women ages 18 and older each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). In 1996, The National Institute of Justice and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a survey, which included a randomized sample of 8,000 women and 8,001 men in the United States. This survey was called the National Violence Against Women (NVAW) survey and was to gather comparable data on women's and men's experiences with violent victimization. The data collected, shows that violence is more widespread and injurious to the health of women and men than previously thought. The results of this study show that one in five women is a victim of intimate partner violence compared to one in fourteen men. This is an important finding for legislators, policymakers, intervention planners, and researchers, as well as, the public health and criminal justice communities (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1996). Acknowledging and understanding how prevalent this issue is could impact and may even influence the response to domestic violence.

This information gathered in these studies might challenge opinions held by professionals in the field about the frequency and injurious consequences of violence against women. Many of these study's findings point out the frequency with which women are victimized by intimate partners, which confirms previous reports that violence against women is primarily intimate partner violence. The NVWA study makes it clear that violence against women, particularly

intimate partner violence, should be classified as a major public health and criminal justice concern in the United States (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1996).

In order to begin solving the problem of domestic violence, a “heightened social recognition to domestic abuse, an understanding of its devastating effects on the abused, and the dire need to provide essential services and support for those women who are able to exit those destructive relationships is needed” (Arokach, 2006, p. 328). Domestic violence is a social issue that needs to be researched further, in the hopes of determining the most effective way to decrease the number of domestic violence incidents. To reduce the number of domestic violence cases, there may need to be a more thorough awareness of the complexities involved in the relationships where violence exists and how society currently perceives domestic violence. This systematic review will unveil some of the common themes as to why domestic violence appears to be socially accepted by society, which may contribute to the prevalence of this issue.

Justice

In our society, people who commit violent acts against others are only held accountable by the consequences handed out in the court of law. Just like in many states, the state of Minnesota requires that there is a victim in order to prosecute for violent crimes. Although challenging, there is a possibility of conducting evidence-based prosecution. This is very rare, and typically only used for very intense cases of domestic violence. The victim is usually required to testify against their abuser in court. It is found that one in five women experience domestic violence. Evidence suggests the numbers are probably higher because research indicates many cases are never reported to authorities (Pearce, 2005). If the victim chooses not to testify, it is difficult for the Court to convict someone of committing a violent act against another, unless of course the victim is deceased.

In order to make changes surrounding these policies, the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women want to “secure survivor safety and ensure batterer accountability through the criminal justice system by changing the policies around probable cause arrests and victim notification” (Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, 2014). This would allow victims to feel a sense of safety and more confident in our systems who they depend on for protection and intervention in the abusive situation.

There are also groups of people who were promoting GPS technology to monitor offenders who are released to the community after they have served a sentence for a violent crime. Although programs like these promote safety for the victims of domestic violence, they do not address the fact that many adult victims of domestic violence are afraid to testify against their abuser, therefore are never reported and/or tried.

Most policies that are being promoted are only successful if the offenders are convicted of a domestic violence related crime. Unfortunately, when victims choose not testify against their abuser, the charges are all too often all together dropped or result in a lesser charge, like disorderly conduct. A disorderly conduct charge would not be significant enough of a crime to enforce a sentence to GPS Monitoring, victim notification.

There has been research that suggests “no-drop” policies would allow for witness testimony but would also allow alternative forms of evidence such as pictures, and officer testimony credibility in the Court of Law. It would allow this type of evidence enough reliability that would support a conviction of a domestic assault or 1st degree assault in some of the most violent crimes against adults (Curtis, 2008). Unfortunately, society does not always understand the effects of the violence on the victims. Frequently, even adult victims of abuse are terrified to even be in the same room as their abuser, let alone testify in open court. Society should

understand that protection for the victims of domestic violence is just as important as the offender's presumption of innocence.

Methods

This research is formulated as a systematic review to determine common factors that contribute to the social acceptance of domestic violence. A systematic literature review is an extensive synthesis of literature that uses current research to analyze and answer a research question. The research that was reviewed for this systematic review can provide important information to society, professionals, policy makers, and law enforcement guiding how they help those people affected by domestic violence. If society begins to understand the common reasons why domestic abuse occurs and how it is viewed within our society, it could be the change for the many victims who choose not to report it.

The search terms for this systematic literature review included the following, which had to all appear either in the title, article, abstract or key word index for each article: "domestic violence" or "domestic abuse" or "domestic assault" or "intimate partner violence" AND "social acceptance" or "silence" or "approval" or "secrecy".

Using the Academic Search Premier, this study consists of articles from SocINDEX, Social Work Abstracts and Blackwell References. From the search results, the qualifying articles were systematically reviewed for themes that appear to contribute to the social acceptance of domestic violence. This thematic analysis outlines the relevance of each theme and discusses each theme for the purpose of answering the original research question to determine what factors contribute to the social acceptance of domestic violence.

Peer-reviewed, full text articles were accepted from the above listed databases. All of the articles were collected during the last quarter of the year 2015. The articles chosen were written

within the last 11 years, included both nationally and internationally conducted studies. The data collected was systematically sorted by relevance to the research question of what factors contribute to the social acceptance of domestic violence.

In order to answer the question of what factors contribute to society accepting domestic violence, many types of literature were examined. The literature included empirically based, qualitative, and quantitative studies. Gray literature, a type of information that is produced by researchers that is not academically published was also reviewed. Gray literature, although not considered scholarly, is important in providing background information that has been found on a given topic in the form of working papers, government documents, and evaluations.

Any articles that did not discuss the reaction of domestic violence, assault or abuse were not included for this study, mainly because the research topic is about the social reaction, or lack of reaction to domestic violence incidents. Any article not published in the English language was also excluded.

Research Synthesis

Using the inclusion and exclusion criteria named above, 63 articles were found in the database search. However, many of these articles were not empirical articles nor did they provide any insight surrounding community reaction to domestic violence and could not be used for this current research. Several of the articles focused exclusively on the victim's experience with domestic violence without including the reaction they received from others. Many of the articles were also excluded because they only discussed mental health interventions at a professional level, rather than at the societal level. Additionally, two articles were excluded because they were not published in the English Language.

After following the inclusion and exclusion process, 14 of the original 63 articles were found to be relevant to the research question and were chosen for this systematic literature review (see Table 1). These articles were chosen based on the research that was summarized within them. All 14 articles included information about domestic assault and society's perspective about the abuse. The articles that were reviewed contained information that pertained to the presenting research question, addressing society's beliefs, reactions to, and/or the victims experience with disclosed incidents of domestic violence.

All articles were written in the English Language. Although the majority of the articles were originated from research in the United States, three of the articles represented other countries; one being Poland and the other Canada. One article provided research from a "worldview" perspective. Therefore, this systematic literature review is not exclusive to the United States view of domestic violence. Another noteworthy point is that the articles chosen for this research included articles from both the victim's viewpoint in addition to the aggressor's viewpoint of the research topic.

Overall, four themes/factors were found to be significant in nearly all of the articles when the victims addressed the reaction they received from people from whom they were seeking support and protection. First, research will highlight how victims of domestic violence were turned away by the church, which is a place where many seek refuge in difficult times. Second, the research also indicates that patriarchy continues to play a role within our society, which is affecting the power differences between men and women. Which the research indicates is a strong indicator of society's acceptance of domestic violence. Third, the research also indicates that there are a large number of people who feel past exposure to violence has influenced their own perspective of domestic violence. Lastly, the research frequently indicated that the way the

media portrays domestic violence also appears to have a role in what society believes about domestic violence.

Therefore, in reviewing and analyzing these research articles, many themes presented themselves in the literature. However, after a comprehensive review of the research, it was determined that the most important factors contributing to the social acceptance of domestic violence include: Religious Beliefs, Patriarchal Beliefs, Past Exposure to Abuse, and Media Portrayal.

Table 1
Studies Included in Systematic Review

Database	Title	Author(s)	Summary
SociIndex	Alienation and Domestic Abuse: How Abused Women Cope with Loneliness.	Ami Arokach	This study compared 84 women from the general population who experienced no domestic violence with 80 women who did experience domestic violence in order to determine who abused women cope with loneliness. A 34-item yes/ no questionnaire was utilized.
	Missed Opportunities: Newspaper Reports of Domestic Violence	Jenna Lindsay-Brisbin, Anne P. DePrince, and Courtney Welton-Mitchell	This study examined 187 articles published in Colorado over a one year period to determine what themes the media used to provide the public information about domestic violence.
	Breaking Domestic Silence in a Changing Public Sphere: Private-Life Violence in Contemporary Poland	Susan C. Pearce, PhD	Examined primary research in Poland to determine how private-life violence is experienced and publically confronted in a post-communist society. It analyzes the political, economic, religious and cultural environments.
	The Role of Men of Faith in Responding to Domestic Violence: Focus Group Themes	Tricia Bent-Goodley, Zuleka Henderson, Lavar Youmans, and Christopher St. Vil	This study discusses the outcomes of focus groups conducted with men of faith to account for their perceptions of domestic violence and how they felt men and boys can be engaged to address the issue of domestic violence.
	Lifting the Domestic Violence Cloak of Silence: Resilient Australian Woman's Reflected Memories of their Childhood Experiences of Witnessing Domestic Violence	Kristy L. O'Brien, Lynne Cohen, Julie Ann Pooley, Myra F. Taylor	This qualitative study consisted of 6 random sample's who volunteered to be interviewed for the purpose of recollecting their experiences as a child who witnessed domestic violence within their homes.
	Persistence in Domestic Violence Treatment and Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, Risk of Alcoholism, Level of Abuse and Beliefs About Abuse	Amanda D. Duplantis, John S.C. Romans, Teresa M. Bear	This quantitative study examined 313 males from a domestic violence agency. The purpose was to determine how domestic violence treatment affected self esteem locus of control, alcoholism and their beliefs about domestic abuse.
Social Work Abstracts	Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape	Courtney E. Ahrens	This study consisted of 8 samples of women who had experienced at least one negative response when disclosing a rape. The sample was originally 102, however only 8 were chosen for the purpose of their study. The subject were included because the disclosed the assault within 3 days and received at least one negative reaction and did talk about the rape for at least 9 more months.
	Violence Across the Lifespan: Interconnections Among Forms of Abuse as Described by Marginalized Canadian Elders and their Care-givers.	Christine A. Walsh, Jenny Ploeg, Lynne Lohfeld, Jaclyn Horne, Harriet MacMillan and Daniel Lai	This qualitative study is the account of 77 older adults and 43 caregivers to determine the interconnected forms of abuse across the lifespan.
Blackwell References	Betrayal and Forgiveness in Couple Relationships: Exploring the Roles of Pain and Punishment in Relational Breakdown and Repair	Julie Fitness	This article was chosen from the Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Couples and Family Relationships to examine the nature of betrayal, forgiveness, punishment and the process of relationship repair.
	Managing "Men's Violence" in the Criminological Arena	Adrian Homwe	This was found in the Blackwell Companion to Criminology as it determines factors that contribute to men's violence.
	Families, Violence, and Abuse	Daniela J. Owen, Lauren Knickerbocker, Richard E. Heyman and Amy M. Smith Slep	This article was chosen from The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Family Psychology. This article provides insight into the impact of witnessing domestic violence and the impact of the learned theory.
	Inequalities in Marriage	Constance Shehan and Susan Cody	This article was chosen from The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology as it discusses the impact of gender inequality and the impact of power and control.
	Companion to Gender Studies: Domestic Violence	Madelaine Adelman	This article was chosen from the Companion to Gender Studies and discusses the socialization of gender roles and how it has impacted domestic violence.
	Partner Violence in World Perspective	Emily M. Douglas, Denise A. Hines and Murray A. Straus	This article was chosen from the Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families. It discusses the prevalence of domestic violence in addition to factors that contribute to the prevalence of it existing in society.

Religion

While religion and faith is a common tool that many victims turn to after an incident of domestic violence, it has been found that the effects of domestic violence are often times minimized by some religious organizations. Research shows the Catholic Church has expressed the view that domestic violence services are a threat to family unity (Pearce, 2005). The faith community believes “the family must remain together” and “the family is viewed as sacrosanct – as a private world in which outside forces must not interfere” (Pearce, 2005, p. 12). Some faith community’s have given advice to society to “turn the other cheek” (Fitness, 2012, p. 261). Unfortunately, the faith community is one of the places victims look for support is often times a resource that can minimize and underestimate the significance of what may be happening for a victim of violence.

“Women are at risk of not getting the help and support they need to make life-empowering decisions to end the violence in their lives, despite their continued search for support and refuge within faith community’s walls” (Bent-Goodley, Henderson, Youmans, & St. Vil, 2015, p. 281). Forgiveness is a virtue that many faith communities speak of, however the Fitness (2012) study finds that “too much forgiveness is potentially as dangerous for humans as too little (p.262).” The prime reason for this is because evolutionists believe those who do not retaliate or threaten to retaliate would have become extinct in a dog eat dog environment. (Fitness, 2012). It questions “how much and what kind of retaliation is potentially functional, and when is it wise to ‘shut the book’ on an interpersonal offense and forgive an offender” (Fitness, 2012, p. 262). It appears that society may support the idea that forgiveness for our neighbors is more valuable than providing justice for victims.

The literature shows that until recently, the faith community's popular perspective is that the family element is to stay together and forgive each other for any sins committed (Pearce, 2005). It appears that it is common for some faith communities to expect people to mind their own business (Shehan & Cody, 2007). It is only recently that some faith communities have begun to promote accountability and support for families involved in violent relationships (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015). Many faith communities understand the importance of forgiveness and healing. However, it seems the faith community may need more education on the difference between simple forgiveness and holding abusers accountable while providing guidance and support for the victims.

Conversely, there are some faith communities have identified a more assertive approach to handling the aggressor. For example, a faith group called The Black Church has a mission to be a "steward of hope and social justice within the black community" and has been involved in many social movements (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015 p. 281). The Black Church and has taken a stance and feels men need to break the "male code of conduct" and begin holding men accountable to end violence (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015 p. 282). This faith community believes "men of faith need to create a sense of accountability among men to address domestic violence and to combat sexism and gender inequity even within the church" (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015 p. 282). "Instead of abusing scripture and religious writings, the church can be a place of safety, offender accountability, and reinvigoration of building healthy relationships within the church and broader community" (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015, p. 281).

The Black Church believes "now is the time to acknowledge and accept how male privilege and socialization has played a role in domestic violence," and that "it is time to engage men and collectively claim responsibility for the impact it has caused society and begin to be a

part of the solution” (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015 p. 282). The Black Church has engaged fifty-four men in a focus groups in order to find an individual, faith-based, and community level of response to engage men in preventing domestic violence. This faith community is one of the first to consider alternative ways to respond to victims of domestic violence, other than solely promoting forgiveness for the assailant and minimizing the victim’s experience. This faith community in particular has found their way of handling domestic violence successful in supporting both the victims and offenders of domestic violence.

It can be difficult to know exactly how to handle the issue of domestic violence within a marriage because many faith communities view the marriage as a sacred bond between a man and a woman. Our faith communities need to remember, “Marital power often favors husbands insofar as men, on average, are larger and stronger and earn higher wages than their wives” (Shehan & Cody, 2007). These faith communities need to consider any patriarchal beliefs, which are found to be a leading theme to why domestic violence is seldom addressed.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy influences the perception of domestic violence in many areas. The concept of patriarchy has been central to the women's movement to analyze the principles underlying women's oppression (Beechey, 1978). Patriarchal beliefs are based on the power and control of another person and can be physical, mental, and even economic. A major social barrier to rejection of domestic violence is gender inequality (Pearce, 2005). Male perpetrators of violence typically use some sort of “power and control tactics” (Owen, Knickerbocker, Heyman, & Smith Slep, 2009, p. 731). The tactics of power and control could be a factor in why victims feel powerless and are afraid to speak out. “Battering is the reflection of the inequality between women and men and is a conscious strategy used by men to control women and to maintain the

system of gender inequality” (Shehan & Cody, 2007). If men began to engage other men in domestic violence, it could change some of society’s patriarchal beliefs (Bent-Goodley, Henderson, Youmans, & St. Vil, 2015). Literature suggests that although patriarchal beliefs are not as significant as they used to be, they do continue to play an influential role in domestic violence (Shehan & Cody, 2007).

Patriarchy is a significant issue because it is a common belief worldwide, not just in the United States. Studies show that “European and European based cultures have known partner battering as a historical norm” (Pearce, 2005). According to some traditions, “a woman should obey whatever your husband says... you should be in your husband’s home until you die” (Walsh, et al., 2007, p. 504). According to Chinese communities, it is believed that when abuse occurs, it is a silent matter, and “you do not go outside and spread it to other people.” (Walsh, et al., 2007, p. 505). Afghan or Iranian cultures also believe “it is the husband’s right to punish his wife” (Walsh, et al., 2007, p. 505). These antidotes point to the worldwide perception that supports patriarchy and the beliefs surrounding it, which affects women all around the world. The U.S being a multicultural society must recognize specific cultural realities.

In the Walsh et al. (2007) study, one victim of domestic violence is quoted “I couldn’t tell anyone anything because they (the men) are so strong and they don’t think that we should say no because they don’t believe that a woman is something, that they are the owner of the woman” (p. 504). Marital power also comes into play when considering the influence one partner has on the other (Shehan & Cody, 2007). This could quite potentially be an indicator of why “men’s violence at home against ‘their’ women and children is greatly underestimated in official surveys” (Homwe, 2003, p. 274). There is a possibility that these beliefs could extend beyond only the people involved in violent relationships.

In a 1999 study, it was found that out of all the domestic violence calls police responded to from January to March, 95% of the victims were women (Pearce, 2005). This is a significant number of interactions that women have with police after a violent situation. Therefore, one factor to consider is how law enforcement, a male-dominated profession, is responding to domestic violence calls in a response to victims, mostly women. Some female victims have reported an unsupportive reaction from male officers. In order to change the beliefs of society, and doing away with patriarchy, men need to become involved in preventing domestic violence by holding other men accountable (Goodley, et al, 2015).

As Ahrens (2006) reported, one rape victim points out how the police had a lack of sensitivity. In an interview, the victim recounted how she felt the police doubted her story and held her responsible for the rape (Ahrens, 2006). She reports, “one officer actually laughed” and she no longer wanted anything else to do with the police. It is possible that an unsupportive reaction from police in sexual assaults and incidents of domestic violence is partially to blame for the unreported incidents of violence (Homwe, 2003). The police are often times the first line of response to the victims of domestic violence, and research indicates that their reaction to the victims could influence whether or not they will ever report another occurrence, should one occur.

Past Exposure

Past exposure to abuse can be a predictor of domestic violence within families. Research shows previous exposure can lead to ongoing family violence. This is not only true for the aggressor, but also the victim. It is determined that “One of the most consistent findings in research is that partner violence passes through the generations” (Douglas, Hines, & Straus, 2014, p. 327). In the Walsh, et al., (2007) qualitative study, an elderly woman reported, “I can

remember my father when he had a knife, and I was ahh... eight years old;" she went on to experience intimate partner violence in two of her own subsequent marriages (p. 502). Children who grow up in families where they are exposed to violence are more likely to perpetrate or be victimized in their adult relationships than children who are not exposed to familial aggression (Douglas, et al., 2007). Unfortunately, it is estimated that "133 – 275 million children witness domestic violence each year," and this number is continuing to rise (O'Brien, Cohen, Pooley, & Taylor, 2012, p. 96). Effective intervention and a change in social attitudes is critical given the levels of general violence.

When children are exposed to domestic violence within the home, there are risks for their developmental growth. O'Brien et al., (2012), interviewed six females who had witnessed domestic violence while growing up. These women described some repercussions of being witness to domestic violence as a child. The women shared feelings of shame, confusion, self-blame, insecurity, powerlessness, hopelessness, loneliness, as well as fear and anxiety (O'Brien et al., 2012). Furthermore, in Walsh et al., (2007) states that victims who have been exposed to long-term violence begin to accept it as a way of life where keeping the peace and/or family solidarity are most important for them and their family.

People who experienced violence in their families of origin are more likely to include violence in their expression of anger as an adult (Douglas et al., 2007). It is also reported that men who were being treated for abusive behavior, were more likely to believe that violence in a marriage is completely acceptable because they were raised in a family where they were witness to violence (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015). Not only does past exposure affect the views and beliefs of the abuser, but also the victims (Bent-Goodley et al., 2007). One participant from the Walsh

et al., (2007) study reports “abuse that occurs in the past just continues into later life because it is a vicious cycle” (p. 506).

On a larger level, research has found that individual perceptions of domestic violence can also be consequence to living in a community with a higher level of violence (Owen et al, 2009). The participants of the Black Church focus group grew up in communities where they were exposed to violence. They have dedicated their efforts to becoming role models for other men in order to stop the cycle of violence. They speak of how the violent experiences within their communities have affected their sense of right and wrong related to domestic violence and how they try to understand why a man would be abusive to a woman (Bent-Goodley et al., 2015). Therefore, it seems an individual’s experience with past domestic violence is a factor in how it is perceived, whether it is personal to them or even in the neighborhood in which they live. Although the communities we live in and past exposure to violence can affect us, another common theme found to influence our beliefs about domestic violence is the media and how women and violence are portrayed.

Media

The media provides information to our society in many different forms. Some ways that the media relays information is through television, newspaper and magazines, social media, radio and internet. The media influences our society by what it reports and how the information is reported. The media has the opportunity to report an accurate picture of what is happening in our society. However, the media seems to miss the mark when they report because they often times do not do enough research before they report stories. Research shows that the media fails to accurately report about domestic violence (Lindsay-Brisbin, DePrince, & Welton-Mitchell, 2014). Lindsay-Brisbin et al., (2014), examined 187 articles published in Colorado over a one-

year period to look at how the media informs society of domestic violence incidents. It was determined that the most common stories the media reports on are typically only stories of homicide by domestic violence rather than injury, which is far more likely to occur in our communities (Lindsay-Brisbin et al., 2014). Therefore, society does not have an accurate picture of how many cases of domestic violence are actually occurring within our community. This can mislead people into believing domestic violence is only occurring on those occasions when the media reports a death by domestic violence (Lindsay-Brisbin et al., 2014).

Many of the stories blamed the domestic violence incidents on some other factor than the abuser. For example, in a 2008 issue of *Colorado Springs Gazette* reports “The March 6 fight...was triggered by a text-message she received on her cell phone from an ex-boyfriend.” The media blames a text-message, without acknowledging any wrongdoing by the abuser. In another article, alcohol seems to be the excuse rather than the perpetrator. The *Pueblo Chieftain* reported in a 2008 that “Porter and his 21-year-old common-law spouse were drunk and argumentative with each other” (Lindsay-Brisbin et al., 2014, p. 214). These examples demonstrate how the media publish a number of external factors that may have contributed to the violence, rather than holding the abuser accountable for his/her actions.

Unfortunately, there are forms of media that are mainly aimed at the male population that have minimized the seriousness of domestic violence. For example, a 2000 edition of *Playboy* magazine, which caters mainly to males, printed an article titled “How to Beat Your Wife without Leaving any Traces” (Pearce, 2005, p. 10). The editors defended the article by saying it was an April Fool’s Joke. However, “Jokes of cruelty have been sociologically analyzed as pressure valves in emotionally difficult social crisis” (Pearce, 2005, p. 10). The media can

widely affect how people perceive domestic violence, which is not always an accurate picture of how things actually are.

Conceptual Framework

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory provides the conceptual framework for this study. This theory is based on the idea that people behave in a way that has been influenced by what one has observed with an expected desirable outcome (Bandura, 1971). Social learning is a combination of both the cognitive theory and behavioral theory. When one observes behavior in a social setting and cognitively identifies what outcomes may occur based on the observed behavior (Bandura, 1971). It is important to understand how the social learning theory can influence the ongoing cycle of domestic violence because of the magnitude of people affected by this social issue. Understanding how witnesses of domestic violence are affected may allow for more studies aimed at preventing the cycle of violence from continuing. It is just as important to consider how society as a whole is affected by what is published and witnessed within the communities we live. The social learning theory supports the belief that domestic violence is cyclic and seems to follow each generation.

The way society perceives and reacts to domestic violence is something that will be passed on generation to generation unless there is a drastic change. Just like in the social learning theory, what people see is what becomes acceptable and/or even desirable. If people do not hold offenders of violence accountable, it will become the common practice amongst our society. Without intervention from members of our communities, it indicates that domestic violence will continue to occur behind closed doors and people will continue to assume it is private matter.

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory has been taken into consideration for the purpose of this research because it is important to understand how the interactions between individuals, relationships, communities and society can influence the issue of domestic violence. Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory to detail how human development is rooted in five different layers of the environment. These five layers are as follows:

- The microsystem, which is the person's immediate environment;
- The mesosystem, which is the relations between the immediate environment;
- The exosystem which is the relations between the microsystem and the system in which a person is not directly involved like laws and policies;
- The macrosystem which is the culture we live in;
- The chronosystem, which is the change/transition an individual goes through over time.

The Ecological System Framework is based on evidence that no single factor can explain why some people or groups are at higher risk of interpersonal violence (Violence Prevention Alliance, 2015). The ecological framework takes into consideration the individual biological and personal history, the individual's close relationships, the individual's community, and the societal beliefs in which we live. The ecological framework believes the interaction between the five layers, at different levels will indicate the likelihood one will experience domestic violence.

Discussion

This research was done through a systematic literature review focused on what are the most common factors that lead to domestic violence being viewed as acceptable in our society. It is obvious that domestic violence is a common occurrence all over the world and should be viewed similarly as a wide spread issue that has yet to be resolved or effectively addressed.

The findings of this systematic literature review show that society's reaction has affected the number of occurrences of domestic violence. Research shows that even faith communities, one of the entities in which victims seek solace has contributed to the society beliefs about domestic violence. Due to the fact, many faith communities discuss and teach forgiveness and often times fails to acknowledge the victims traumatic experience. Some victims have been shamed by the very faith communities in which they seek support. In fact, some teachings supported by the church give the impression that what happens between a husband and wife, is not the business of others. Some religions have strong beliefs that the family is "sacred" and it is not to be divided, for any reason. It appears that the way a faith community views and reacts to domestic is a major factor in how domestic violence is viewed by members of our society. Many people study the Bible and want to lead a life guided by the biblical ways. Therefore, it is quite understandable why our Religious beliefs could be a factor in how domestic violence is viewed by society.

Although some faith communities have failed to protect victims of domestic violence, not all have. Those, like the Black Faith Church are taking an approach of promoting the good all and supporting those in need. This type of faith communities are finding ways to connect with the victims of domestic violence in addition to the perpetrators of abuse through education and support. Although this seems to be a new idea, it appears it could be a successful way to change

society's perspective of domestic violence. It seems as though some newer faith communities are beginning to take a stand with domestic violence and promote restorative justice, which gives power and control back to the victim.

This systematic literature review also finds that society has had a long-standing patriarchal belief system, which seems to be continuing. Research suggests how people in our environments view the element of power and control in relationships can influence their decision to intervene with domestic violence. Due to the fact women are often times the victims of abuse, the beliefs that society has about the differences in gender is an important factor. If women continue to be viewed by society as less valuable than men, the way domestic violence is dealt with will not change. Most of our criminal justice system and policy makers are men. Therefore, until society changes our patriarchal beliefs, little will change in how domestic violence is addressed. Very few policies and laws ask for society as an entity to stand up for the victims promoting zero tolerance for family violence. The law should reflect the societal standards; however, it is questionable if the law truly do as they fail to take into consideration the many factors that play a role in violent relationships.

Another common contributor to how society accepts domestic abuse is what we learn or witness in our own lives. Past exposure to domestic violence seems to be a very common theme in the way people perceive domestic violence. If people were witness to violence growing up, research shows that they believe that violence is just a part of life and it is to be expected. If people continue to normalize domestic violence as a part of life, they are much less likely to intervene in any abusive situations. It seems as though society does not see the need to intervene. The cycle of violence seems to play a major role in how people view and respond to abuse.

The research indicates that it is common for victims of abuse to experience feelings of shame and rejection when they seek out help from the communities in which they live.

Therefore, the question must be asked if victims felt more supported, would there be as many cases of domestic violence in our society. The research shows that it is common for abuse to occur generation after generation. Often times, there is no intervention that ever stops it.

However, the research indicates a form of restorative justice and education could bring people together to change the pattern of abuse within the family, just like what the Black Church is beginning to do.

The last factor that appears to influence society's perceptions and acceptance of domestic abuse is the media. Today there are many forms of media reaching nearly everyone. How things are written, broadcast, or portrayed in the movies contributes to how domestic violence is viewed. When society is routinely exposed to violence, it tends to minimize the impact and severity of the issue. It appears the more society is exposed to these situations in the media, the less likely it is to be viewed as unacceptable.

The research done in this systematic literature review indicates that much of society is unsupportive of victims and does not intervene in abusive situations. The research shows that victims are commonly afraid to share their abuse, because there appears to be no promise for protection. It appears that until society changes the way domestic violence is viewed and until there is more protection and support for the victims from society, the cycle of violence will continue. However, it is also reasonable to ask whether raising the level of awareness surrounding domestic violence would change the way it is viewed or how society reacts to it.

All of the articles that were systematically reviewed for the purpose of answering the research question included one or all four themes outlined as factors contributing to domestic

violence and how it is perceived by society. The themes were easily identifiable within the literature and they support the view that domestic violence is acceptable by many people in our community because of our Religious Beliefs, Patriarchal Beliefs, Past Exposure to Abuse, Media Portrayal. Therefore, the validity of this research appears to be high. Especially because of the consistency within each of the articles, many of which included interviews with human subjects about their personal experiences with domestic violence and how society reacted.

Limitations

While this review is a complete analysis of the relevant literature surrounding the research question, there are limitations in this study. First, many of the articles found failed to examine same sex violence, which is seems to be becoming a growing issue. The current research is primarily focused on male on female violence. As a result, this study has limited information on same sex relationships and society's perspective on those potentially violent situations. More research needs to be done in order to include same sex violence or female on male to determine society's reaction to this type of domestic violence and the prevalence of it.

Another limitation with this study is that the literature that was systematically reviewed was from only three different databases that are listed above. This limits the research because there are numerous other databases available that will not be examined due to the time constraints of this study. Due to the fact only three databases are being researched, the amount of literature and the variety of literature that was available on the research topic may be limited.

It is possible that with the above listed limitations, the themes identified as possible factors contributing to the social acceptance of domestic violence will be limited and not include all themes in all available research. By expanding the search terms and including more databases, this study could result in more themes than the ones that have been identified. By

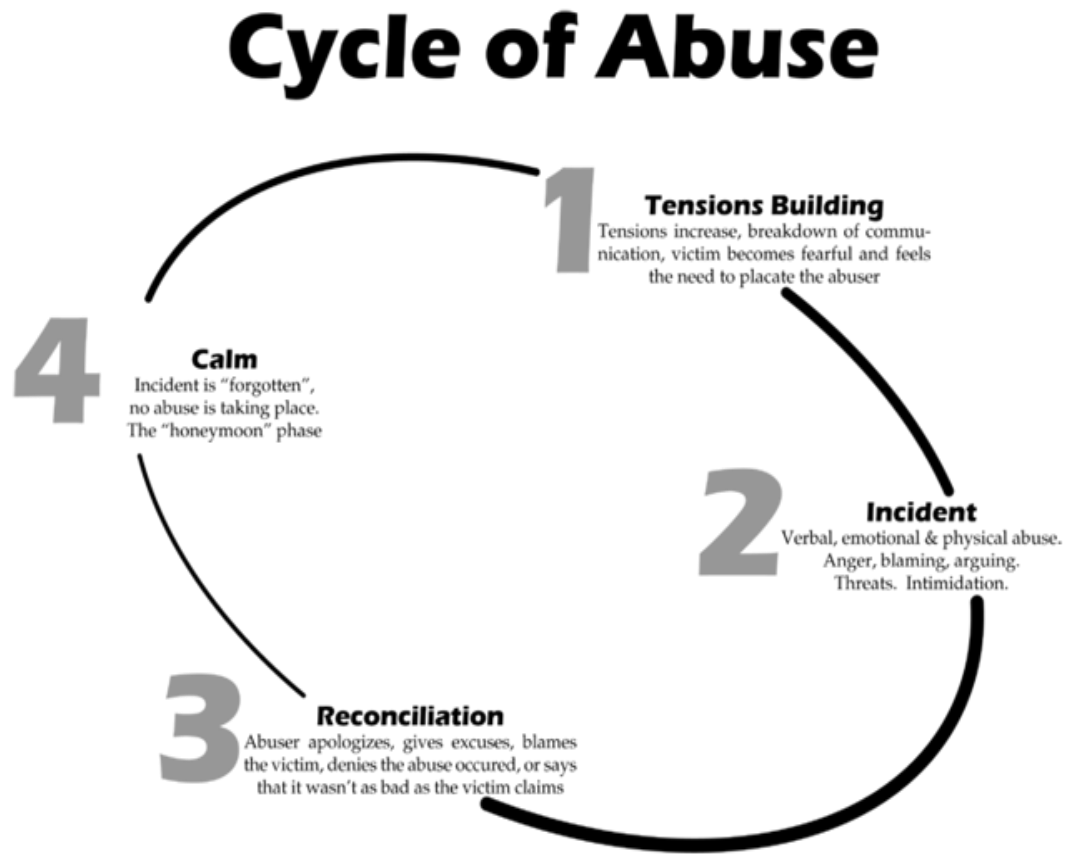
researching the social acceptance of domestic violence further, it could affect the way policies are written which would encourage victims to be more empowered in leaving violent relationships.

Another limitation of this study that is being taken into consideration, the research did not indicate if there was a different response from community members with physical abuse vs. sexual assault. Therefore, there should be further research conducted to determine if there is a difference in society's reaction based on what type of violence is perpetrated. It is unclear as to whether or not there is a different level of awareness with different types of violence. It would be interesting to see if sexual assault is viewed differently than physical assault.

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



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