

Silence Because of Fear

Sara Rolls

Wide eyed, the first hit, hits with shock.

The next couple secures the commitment

Or rather the fear of escape.

Denial, Dehumanized, Domestic Violence.

The need for control, undeserved consequences.

How to leave? How to find a voice again?

Screaming within thoughts but will never be loud enough.

Silence because of fear.

Mind and body held in two hands.

Mother, children, and family

All trapped under one roof.

Economic instability confines the love.

Define Love.

Bruises, cuts, Death?

Plan to buy running shoes

But how far can feet travel

When the body is shattered?

The body will be rebuilt with time.

Poet's Statement

I wrote this poem to express some of my own experiences with domestic violence. This poem not only voices my perspective, it encompasses the words of anonymous people affected by domestic violence in some way. Associated with my activist work in my women and gender studies senior seminar class, I hung posters with trigger words related to domestic violence in public bathrooms on campus, asking people to write what comes to mind as prompted by the trigger words. This rest room anonymous post/respond strategy helped to expose a diverse look at the widespread issue of domestic violence. Interestingly, the exercise revealed that some male responders felt less passionately about the conflicts surrounding domestic violence. Within a society that forces domestic violence to be solely a women's issue, it is mostly men that are the perpetrators (Levy, 2008).

Domestic violence occurs in varied contexts and degrees of severity but all infractions are placed under this one broad term. Legally, there are different levels of domestic violence ranging from emotional abuse to murder. Many people ask why a victim does not leave an abusive relationship (Ross, 2011). However, this is one crime that not only requires the victim be present to prove the crime; it also requires the victim to supply a past history of abuse. This often makes it impossible for victims of domestic violence to leave without fear of a chase. A victim may have to move thousands of miles away and still may be found and forced into a more violent situation than previously lived. This forces the victim into silence to avoid experiencing worse abuse than before she/he reported the crime. It also results in victims staying in abusive relationships because access to safety frequently appears inaccessible.

Women are more frequently victims of domestic violence, but this is not a crime limited to just women, men are affected as well (Ross). Even if a man is not being abused, he may witness abuse, which can be just as detrimental. Also, it is important to add that there has been a rise in incidences of domestic violence among and within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. For gay men in particular, this creates new problems because many shelters are only for women who have experienced domestic violence. Gay men, and really, all male victims in general, are therefore left to find some other means of support.

Abusers abuse as a need to maintain all of the control and power in a relationship (Ross). This means that the victim is controlled through many facets of abuse such as emotional, financial, and physical circumstances. This is just another reason the victim is trapped in a less than ideal lifestyle that is logistically challenging to break free.

Throughout past generations, women have been property to men, leading to contemporary culture today that allows men to still contain this property behind closed doors (Ensler, 1998). Violence against women is directly related to domestic violence because women are usually the victims. However, the term violence against women leaves out an important word: “men”, as in men’s violence against women. Sadly, here the word woman becomes synonymous with the word victim.

Victims of domestic violence are not the only ones affected or caught in a cycle of abuse. Family, friends and children also are greatly impacted. Psychologically, victims are frequently brainwashed into the thoughts of the abuser. This continues the cycle of abuse in the future if not corrected and this type of controlling love can only be defined as destroying other humans through forceful caring. But in circumstances of abuse,

defining love in terms of a healthy love is nearly impossible, because it is dependent on the abuser involved. Domestic violence love creates this imbalance in power and control, which leads to detrimental side effects that include psychological and economic dependency that further a cycle of abuse (Ross).

So how does the victim get away? An escape plan usually takes time to plan and requires the help of others to accomplish. The planning could include putting money aside, deciding on an exact date and time to leave a residence, identifying a place to stay or go to, and having the support of others. Even if the victim is able to leave the abuser, there are always risks of the abuser finding the victim again. Laws protecting victims from repetitive abuse are frequently inadequate. Fifty percent of all abusers that are in prison are serving sentences for spousal abuse that resulted in murder. This demonstrates the inability of the law to protect victims in the beginning steps of abuse. To complicate matters further, statistics regarding domestic violence often fall under scrutiny because the statistics measure only quantifiable characteristics. This means that many conflicts relating to domestic violence are not adequately researched and documented because abuse data cannot always be put into quantifiable terms (Levy). Women studies research attempts to break the boundaries that male dominance has forced on society by exposing the prevalence of violence against women, both in intentional and socially constructed forms.

Sadly, victims of domestic violence are often forced to stay in abusive situations until punishable crimes occur, such as murder. The criminal justice system needs to aid these victims in a better way to ensure their safety. Domestic violence is a difficult crime to prevent because it is hard to stop a major offense before it happens and even more

challenging to legislate personal interactions in the private sphere of home. People surrounding a victim can help her/him to leave an abusive environment but they must also realize that immediate rescue is not viable most of the time. The crucial part of helping a victim is knowledge. Making more people aware of the issue of domestic violence will only make it easier for them to one day help a friend in that situation.

My women and gender studies senior seminar activist project, where I placed posters with trigger words about domestic violence in public restrooms, is one small step to raise awareness about this worldwide problem. So is my poem, *Silence Because of Fear*.

Bibliography

Ensler, E. (1998). *The vagina monologues*. New York: Villard.

Levy, B. (2008). *Women and violence*. Seal Press.

Ross, R. S. (2011). Because there won't be a "next time": Why Justice Court is an inappropriate forum for domestic violence cases. *Journal of Law and Family Studies*, 13(2), 329-343.