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Constructions of intimate partner violence in gay male relationships

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, November 2013

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ii Abstract

Although prevalence rates of gay intimate partner violence (IPV) appear to equal heterosexual IPV rates, gay male IPV does not feature strongly in public anti-violence messaging. This relative silence appears to hold even within the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) community. This study addresses this silence. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted and a critical discourse analysis informed by Ian Parker's (1992) perspectives, was used to analyse the results. A review of mainstream and critical discourses of violence show that IPV is usually constructed as an exclusively heterosexual phenomenon and these influenced participants' constructions. Findings indicated that a range of discourses intersect to produce constructions of gay IPV as 'not violence', normative, un-harmful, unintimidating, 'anti-gay', erotic, cathartic and intimate. All of these formations can result in gay IPV being silenced and it was shown that gay mens' constructions of IPV were inextricably bound in gendered, power asymmetry. The study demonstrates how particular configurations of discourse are necessary for violence to become intelligible at all. The implications of these findings are discussed and possibilities for important community intervention suggested.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, gay men, critical discourse analysis, hegemonic masculinity, violence, partner abuse.